

Concordia Evgenievna Antarova

Concordia Evgenievna Antarova was born in 1886 April 13 in Warsaw. She lost her father when she was eleven years old, so then she was living with her mother. When she was fourteen years old, being in the sixth grade of a secondary school, she also lost her mother, but she continued her studies and finished the school. Having finished the school, she decided to enter a nunnery. She learned a lot while being in it, and the church choir helped to develop her inborn musical talent. However, she was always feeling that the life of the cloister was not for her. She met Saint John of Kronstadt, and he told her that she was fated to work and live among other people.

She decided to go to St. Petersburg where she entered the faculty of history and philology and graduated it in 1904. She was offered a job in the department of philology, but her dream was singing and theatre. She decided to devote her life to the art. The lessons of singing were expensive, so she had to work hard.

In 1907 from 160 candidates C. E. Antarova alone was accepted to the Mariinsky theatre where her career as an artist began. In one year one of the actresses of the Bolshoi theatre of Moscow had to move to St. Petersburg. C. E. Antarova was offered her place in Moscow. She moved to Moscow and at once the entire complicated repertoire of contralto was offered to her: "Ruslan and Lyudmila", "Eugene Onegin", "Sadko", "Jolanta", "Werther", etc. She knew F. I. Chaliapin, S. V. Rachmaninoff and other famous Russian intellectuals of that time. She was the student of K. S. Stanislavski in his studio of opera which later developed into the Opera theatre of K. Stanislavski. Being fascinated by the personality of K. S. Stanislavski and his artistic ideas, she wrote a book about him "Conversations with K. S. Stanislavski".

C. E. Antarova was performing a lot with symphony orchestras. Her artistic and social activities broke suddenly when she lost her husband in the Stalin's Gulag.

She was dismissed from the theatre and in this way she lost all of her future. However, a life's chance saved her this time, too: Stalin didn't like the voice of the singer who had replaced her, so C. E. Antarova was returned to the Bolshoi theatre...

Concordia Antarova was living two lives of equal value: a creative life of an opera singer and an inner spiritual one... Everyone who knew C. E. Antarova-singer knew almost nothing about her spiritual path, and on the contrary, those who were naming her as their spiritual leader didn't pay lots of their attention to her theatrical creative activities. Her work "Two Lives" is dedicated namely to those disciples of hers who were close to her in spirit. After her death in 1959 her closest disciples were left with four handwritten copies of the novel.

The novel "Two Lives" first of all is an esoteric novel, revealing the esoteric knowledge which is transmitted to the heroes of the novel by the Great Teachers of Mankind. C. E. Antarova herself had her own Teacher and a connection to Shambhala.

About “Two Lives”

This novel will help everyone to reflect on his own place in today's complicated life and his relations to it. Great examples in this book reveal how people are boiling in their own passions, how they are enslaved by them. Later the paths for the reader are revealed along which the Teachers of Life are leading people from their passions to liberation, from weakness to fortitude, from fortitude to power, from power to beauty...

Popularity of this novel written by C. E. Antarova was fated by the successful synthesis of both Eastern and Western esoteric traditions.

We can find lots of information about these Teachers in the works by Helena and Nicholas Roerich in which their cooperation with the Great Teachers is also reflected. The same Teachers were the guardians of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky – the author of “The Secret Doctrine” and founder of the Theosophical Society in 19th century.

The conception of integrity of the Universe, the principals of creative work of cosmic evolution, creative work of man's spirit as the most important factor of development of cosmic evolution are revealed in “Two Lives”. The real time disappears in the novel, the historical personalities of various epochs meet and cooperate here, because neither time nor space nor physical separation is existing for man's spirit...

Concordia Antaro

TWO LIVES

Part I

Chapter 1

At my brother's

The events that I now remember are sending me back to the days gone a long time ago, to my faraway youth. Everybody is calling me a little old man for almost a quarter of an age, and only I myself don't feel to be old; my appearance, which makes the people surrounding me give up their place to me or pick up a fallen thing, isn't going so much with my inner cheerfulness that it is simply uncomfortable for me to see such a respect to my grey head.

I was twenty years old when I came to stay for a while with my brother, the captain of the regiment N, to one big industrial city in the Central Asia. The heat, bright and blue sky, broad streets, not seen up to then, with their shady alleys of tall and spread out trees were surprising me with silence. From time to time, a trader would ride by slowly to the market on his donkey, a little crowd of women would go by, who cover their faces with black nettings and even wrap themselves up in white and black cloaks, hiding all forms of their bodies.

The street where my brother was living was further from both the centre and the market; there was a nearly absolute silence prevailing in it. My brother was renting a small house with the garden; he was living alone with his messenger and he was using only two of the rooms, so he let me have the other three. One of the rooms had all of its windows to the street, while the other one – only two of them. So I chose this room to be my bedroom, although up to now it was loudly called the sitting-room.

My brother was very educated man. The walls of the rooms were furnished with bookcases and book-shelves, loaded with books. This library was completed perfectly, stacked up in order and, according to the catalogue made by my brother himself, it was promising me lots of joy in my future unusual life of a recluse.

During the first days, my brother was taking me to the city, market and mosques. Sometimes I alone would walk about the huge trade galleries with their many-coloured pillars and little Eastern restaurants-kitchens at the crossings. Being in this scurrying, tattling crowd of the locals who used to wear their bright motley oriental robes, I would feel as being in Baghdad and I would wait that suddenly Aladdin with his magic lamp would come out from somewhere, or not recognized by anybody Harun al-Rashid would march past. And all of these Eastern people with their grand calm, or on the contrary – with their too great exaltation, seemed to me to be mysterious and attracting.

Once, when so absent-minded I was lounging about from one shop to another, I suddenly gave a start as if with electric current I turned around unwittingly: a very tall middle-aged man with absolutely black eyes and a thick, short, black beard was looking intently at me, while next to him a youth of unspeakable beauty was standing, and his dark blue, almost violet eyes were also looking intently at me. The tall brunette and the youth were wearing white turbans and motley oriental robes made of silk. Their carriage and manners were distinctly different from the surroundings, and many of the passers-by were cringing to them insinuatingly.

Both of them had already gone to the exit a long time ago, while I was still standing as enchanted, not possessing any power to overcome that impression of their wonderful eyes.

Having come to myself, I pounced after them, but I left the gallery only when the strangers who had surprised me so much were already sitting in their light carriage and moving away from the

market. The youth was sitting on my side. Having turned round, he gave me a ghost of a smile and told something to the older man, but the cloud of the dust lifted by three donkeys covered everything, I wasn't able to see anything anymore and I didn't have any strength to stand there in the heat of the direct sunbeams.

"Who could they be?" I was thinking, coming back to where I had met them. I went past a stall several times until I dared to speak to the owner.

"Please tell me who those people are who have just been here with you?"

"People? Many people are coming to me today," he answered, smiling cunningly. "But you want to know not about people, but about one tall black man, right?"

"Yes, yes," I was quick to assent to him. "I saw a tall brunette and a beautiful youth with him here. Who are they?"

"He is our great rich landlord. Vineyards – oh, oh, oh – vineyards! Big trade with England."

"But what is his name?" I continued.

"Oho," the owner laughed. "You are all burning with impatience to become acquainted with them? He is Mahomet Ali and the young man is Machmed Ali."

"So they are both Mahomets?"

"No, no, Mahomet is only uncle, while the young man is Machmed."

"Are they living here?" I kept asking him, while examining the silks on the shelves and thinking what to buy, so that I could linger more and find out something else about that surprising couple.

"What are you looking for? Do you want an oriental robe?" the owner asked me when he noticed that my look was rummaging through the shelves.

"Yes, yes," I was glad under the pretext. "Please show me an oriental robe. I want to make a present to my brother."

"And who is your brother, what is his taste?"

I had no idea about my brother's taste for oriental robes, because I had seen him only in his tunic or pyjamas.

"My brother is captain T.," I answered to the owner.

"Captain T.?" the trader shouted with an Eastern excitement. "I know him well. He already has seven oriental robes. Why does he want more?"

I became worried, but having hidden my excitement, I rattled off boldly.

"He has donated all of them."

"Well, well! He must have sent them to his friend to Petersburg. Buy a good oriental robe! Look here, Mahomet Ali told his niece to send it. Oh, oh, it is great!"

The trader pulled an excellent oriental robe with reddish hues out of his stall. It had mat greyish violet edgings.

"Such one isn't good for me."

The trader laughed merrily.

"Of course, it isn't good for you. It is a womanly oriental robe. I will give you this, blue one."

With these words, he unwrapped an excellent violet oriental robe, perhaps a little too motley, but its warm and soft hues should satisfy my brother's refined taste.

"Don't be afraid and take it. I know everybody. Your brother is Ali Mahomet's friend. We cannot sell a bad robe to his friend. Your brother is a good man! Ali Mahomet himself respects him."

"So who is he, that Ali?"

"I have already told you. He is a great famous trader. He is trading with Persia and Russia," the owner answered.

"He doesn't look like a trader. He must be a scientist," I spoke again.

"Oh, oh, oh, a scientist! He is such a scientist that he knows all your brother's books. Your brother is also a great scientist."

"And do you know where Ali is living?"

"It seems that you haven't been living here for a long time. Ali's house is in front of your brother's house," the trader tapped on my shoulder unceremoniously.

"There's a big garden, fenced with a high brick wall, in front of my brother's house. There's always a deadly silence there, and even the gates didn't open at least once."

"Silence is silence, but today there is no silence. Ali Machmed's sister is coming. She has agreed to marry somebody. If you say that Ali Machmed is a very good-looking man - oh, oh, oh, - then his sister is the star from the sky! Her plait reaches the floor, and her eyes - oh!" the trader was throwing up his arms and he even gulped.

"How did you manage to see her? According to your customs, women aren't allowed to take their cloaks off, right?"

"They aren't allowed to do so in the street. We aren't allowed to do so at our home, too. At Ali Mahomet's home all women are walking without any covers. Mullah was talking a lot, but he stopped. Ali said "Leave", so Mullah is now silent."

I said good-bye to the trader, took my oriental robe and went home. I was walking for a long time. I took the wrong direction somewhere, but finally, with much trouble, I was able to find my street. My thoughts about the rich trader and his nephew were mixed with my thoughts about the girl of unearthly beauty. I only was unable to decide of what colour her eyes were: black as her uncle's or violet as her brother's. I was going with my eyes cast to my feet and suddenly I heard a cry.

"Lovushka, where have you been? I was already about to go looking for you!"

The voice of my dear brother, as well as his eyes, were full of humour. He was both my father and my mother to me during all my life. His white teeth, beautiful red lips, golden curly hair and his dark eye-brows were shining in his softly tanned, cleanly shaven face - for the first time I saw what a handsome man my brother was. I have been proud of him and I have been admiring him all the time, but now, like a small child, for no apparent reason, I threw myself on his neck, covered his cheeks with kisses and shoved the oriental robe into his hands.

"Your oriental robe and your Ali – that's the reason why I am so surprised and lost," I snapped out, laughing.

"What oriental robe? What Ali?" my brother was questioning me, amazed.

"The oriental robe No. 8 which I bought for you as a present, and Ali No. 1 – who is your friend," I continued.

"You remind me of the little stubborn Lovushka who loved stunning everybody with his riddles. I see that this liking of yours is still hiding in you," my brother was speaking, smiling with his broad smile that changed his entire face so much. "Well, let's go home, we won't be standing here until the night comes, right? Although we don't see any passers-by, but I cannot guarantee that there isn't any curtain secretly drawn somewhere, and that no prying eyes are watching us."

As soon as we stepped forward, keen brother's ear heard a horse come rumbling.

"Wait," he uttered "they are coming."

I didn't hear anything. My brother took my hand and made me freeze below a big tree, exactly in front of the gates of the silent house where, according to the trader's words, Ali Mahomet was living.

"It could be that now you will see something staggering," my brother was speaking to me "only stand so as nobody could notice us behind the tree, neither from the side of the house nor from the side of the street."

We were standing behind the trunk of the huge tree where two or three more people could freely hide. Now I also was able to distinguish the running of several horses and the sound of the rattling wheels on the unpaved road. In a few minutes, the gates of Ali's courtyard opened wide. The yard-keeper went on the road, looked round to all sides, waved to someone in the garden and stayed there, waiting for the carriages. There were three of them already.

The first a simple cart was rolling. Two wrapped up women and three children were sitting in it. All of them were buried in packets and boxes. A small chest was tied at the end of the cart. An old man was bringing two elegant suitcases in the old light carriage after them. And finally, in quite a long distance – apparently, protecting from the dust – one more carriage was driving, which I was unable to make out because of such a distance. In the meanwhile, the first two carriages had already disappeared in the garden behind the gates.

"Look intently, but keep silent and don't move, so that we wouldn't be noticed," my brother whispered to me.

The carriage came nearer. It was an elegant calash, harnessed by an excellent black horse. Two women with their faces covered were sitting in it. They had muffled themselves up in mantles. Ali Mahomet dressed in white came through the gates, and after him was Ali Machmed who was also dressed in long white clothes. It seemed to me that the black eyes of the older Ali pierced through the tree behind which we were hiding. I even had time to see how a ghost of a sneer slipped in his lips. Even the sweat stood out on my face. I touched my brother, wanting to tell him that we've already been uncovered, but he put his finger to his lips and kept watching the approaching calash intently. One more moment and the older Ali went up to the stopped coach. And ... a small, white, wonderful hand of a woman drew the mantle off her face.

I had seen a lot of women – both on the stage and other recognized beauties, - but only now for the first time I understood what was beauty. Another woman, evidently an old woman, was explaining something to Ali, squealing at him, while the embarrassed girl was smiling, and she was already prepared to let down the mantle back on her face, but Ali himself carelessly cast it on the girl's shoulders. Because of this gesture, to the great resentment of the old woman, the disobedient curls of her dark hair came out. Not paying any attention to the squealing old woman, Ali lifted the girl who had pressed herself to him. He brought her home like a child. In the meanwhile, the young Ali respectfully landed the old woman on the ground, who was still grumbling. A silver laughter of the girl came flying through the open gates.

The young Ali with the old woman had already disappeared, the coach had driven through the gates, the gates had been closed, but we were still standing, having forgotten where we were, how long we were standing there, that we had gotten hungry, that it was hot, that it was indecent.

I turned to my brother, wishing to share my fascinations with him, but I was simply shaken: the face of my always smiling brother was pale, serious and even austere, his blue eyes had gotten darker somehow, and they were sparkling like the eyes of the cat in the night. Even his eye-brows had changed their usual form, and they were strictly set into a nearly continuous line. In no way, I was able to recollect myself, so I only kept looking at that strange man whom I didn't know.

"Well? Did you like my niece Nal?" suddenly I heard a strange metal voice above me.

I gave a start - because of unexpectedness I hadn't even understood what I had been asked – and I saw the huge figure of the old Ali, standing in front of me; He was stretching his hand to me, smiling. I took that hand automatically and I could feel some sense of relief, even a sigh slipped out of my breast, and a warm stream of energy flowed down my hand. I kept silent. It seemed to me that I had never held such a palm in my hand. Only thanks to my effort, I was able to take my eyes off the burning eyes of Ali Mahomet and I looked into his hands: they were white and tender, as if the sun-tan wouldn't be able to touch them, their long slender fingers ended in rounded, prominent, reddish finger-nails; his entire hand was narrow, subtle and artistically charming, it was telling about his enormous physical strength, while his iron-will, spark-casting eyes fitted to these hands. It was possible to easily imagine that at any moment one could see a warrior in front of one's eyes, routing his enemy – it was enough for Ali Mahomet to take off his white clothes and take the sword into his hands.

I had forgotten where we were, why we were standing in the middle of the street, I even couldn't tell for how long Ali was holding my hand - I was as though fallen into a light slumber while I was standing.

"Come, let's go home, Lovushka. Why don't you thank Ali Mahomet for the invitation?" I heard my brother's voice.

Again, I couldn't understand what invitation my brother was talking about, I only stuttered some obscure word while saying good-bye to tall and slender Ali who was smiling at me. My brother took my hand, and I was going with him, not feeling my feet. Having looked into his face fearfully, I was able to see my dear, close and well-known from my childhood brother Nikolaj again, and not that strange man to me, whom I had been watching below the tree and who had affected me so strongly. My childhood habit to find support, help and patronage in my brother, which came even from those days when he was raising me, my habit to address my brother-father with all my complaints, grievances and misunderstandings came out now from the very bottom of my heart, and I uttered with my plaintive voice.

"I want to sleep very much, I am so tired – as if I had walked twenty versts."

“Very good. Now we will have our dinner, and then you can have a nap for a couple of hours. Then we will go on a visit to Ali Mahomet. He is almost the only one here who is living in a European way. His house is furnished in a very good taste, it is really an elegant mix of Asia and Europe. The women in his family are educated and they are walking without their burqas at home. This is a real revolution in these lands. Many times, Mullah and other high-rank religious fanatics were threatening him with all sorts of repressions for such violation of the local customs, but he keeps fighting against the enslavement of women and the entire nation. His servants are all literate, every day they have their own hours of rest, and that is also a revolution. I heard that a massacre is being organized against him, - and that is a terrible thing in these savage lands.”

We came home talking, then we washed ourselves in the lavatory which was made of mats and tarpaulin in the yard and then we sat down to have our dinner. Good, refreshing shower and delicious dinner restored my liveliness. My brother was merrily joking, he scolded me a little for my absent-mindedness and he was telling me all kinds of comic scenes that would often take place between the Russian soldiers and local Muslims. He was delighted with the quickness of wit and ingenuity of the Russian soldiers. The local slyness would rarely overcome the Russian quick-wittedness, and if an Eastern trader would deceive a Russian soldier, he would have to pay dearly for that: in order to punish him, the soldiers would play such tricks on him that any artistic director could envy their fantasies. It must be said that the soldiers wouldn't do anything vicious, but then the ridiculed, sly trader wouldn't decide to deceive them for a long time.

We finished our dinner imperceptibly. My wish to take a nap had already been gone, and I asked my brother to try the oriental robe that I had bought him. Having thrown his tunic off, my brother put the oriental robe on. The deep violet hue suited well his blond hair and tanned face. I was admiring him unwillingly, and somewhere deep within me a jealous thought flashed that I would never be such handsome man.

“How did you manage to buy this oriental robe?” my brother uttered. “Indeed, I have many of them, but I had already tried all of them at least once, and I like this one particularly, I haven't yet seen such one. I will certainly put it on tonight when we are paying a visit to our neighbour. Listen, let's go to my dressing-room – and we'll choose an oriental robe for you.”

“Why?” I gave a shout, amazed. “Are we going there like to a masquerade?”

“Why like to a masquerade? We will simply dress ourselves like everybody, so that we wouldn't be striking. Today not only Ali's friends, but also many of his enemies will be visiting him. Let's not irritate them with our European clothes.”

When my brother opened the biggest wardrobe in his cloak-room, it seemed to me that there were not eight oriental robes in it, but around twenty different ones, made of all kinds of material. I even exclaimed to my astonishment.

“Are you surprised with such amount of oriental robes? But it is usual here to wear seven oriental robes at once, starting with the cotton one and ending with the silk one. A richer man is wearing three or four silk robes, while a poor man is able to wear only cotton ones, but they are putting them on one on another, several of them at once without fail.”

“Oh, my god,” I was unable to remain still, “but in such heat you can feel like being in the crater of Vesuvius when you are dressed with several oriental robes at once.”

“It only seems for you to be like this. The fine material is light, and if you put them on one on another, they will stop the direct sunbeams, then the sun won't be burning your body. Come, try to put

these two oriental robes on and you will see how light and even cooling they are,” my brother gave me two white oriental robes, made of very fine silk, while he was talking to me. “We won’t try to stick to their customs fully and very diligently, but we will put four oriental robes on. I beg you, for the time being, put these two white oriental robes on and walk for a while, dressed in them. Get used to them, otherwise tonight, with your absent-mindedness you will really look like being in a masquerade and you will disgrace both of us,” my brother continued, smiling and seeing that I was still holding the oriental robes in my hands in hesitation.

Not wishing at all to dress myself in Eastern style, but also not wishing to upset my beloved brother, I quickly undressed and started pulling the oriental robes upon myself.

“But they are tight! What kind of oriental robes are they? These are poor gloves!” I was screaming and I started getting irritated.

“You have to button them up; here’s the hook, and here’s the button,” my brother was explaining to me calmly, and with his flexible fingers he quickly buttoned my oriental robes up himself. “Now, Lovushka, calm yourself and put this green oriental robe on, too. It is looser and it also needs to be buttoned up. It also has pockets. And on top of them, put this wide and grey one on with red edgings,” and again he helped me very deftly to dress myself.

“Now it’s time to do your feet,” he kept talking. “Usually, so many friends are visiting Ali, who acknowledge half-Asian clothes, so that we could go with our own shoes. We’ll only have to put leather galoshes on them, which are usually left at the door. Otherwise, we would have to stay in our bare feet, because one is going neither to a mosque nor home with the same foot-wear that is used on the street.

I chose the galoshes according to my feet. It turned out that my brother possessed several pairs of them, too.

“Now we will go to the bedroom, and you will choose a turban.”

“Why a turban? How will I look like? I’m not radiating too much beauty anyway! Have pity on me. Nikolushka, you better go alone,” I was begging my brother.

My brother was laughing loud and merrily speaking to me.

“You aren’t going to conquer the heart of the wonderful niece of Ali, are you? And your friends will not see you like this. So why are you worrying that the Eastern clothing won’t give you a lot of beauty? By the way,” he added, after having thought for a while “if you wish, I could make you absolutely unrecognizable. I will glue a grey beard for you, and you will look like a famous trader.”

“The further the better!” I gave a shout, laughing. “If so, then I will have to remember that I once was a rather good amateur actor.”

“If today you succeed to play a limping old man, then you will be able to see a lot of interesting and rather unusual things. It is only a pity that I don’t have another white turban.”

At the same moment, a light knocking on the door was heard. My brother went to the door, and I heard his pleasantly surprised voice.

“Oh, that’s you, Machmed! Come in, I was just busy with the clothes of my brother for tonight. I want to turn him into an old grey-bearded trader.”

“And I brought a white turban and a jewel. My uncle is asking your brother to accept it as the present on the occasion of Nal’s majority,” and he gave me a packet and a case.

“And this is for you from Nal,” and he gave two packets and two cases to my brother. “Don’t forget that you must be lame in the left leg and lean strongly with the walking-stick with your right hand. And if you really want to look like an old trader, then you should stroke your grey beard with your left hand as soon as possible. I really happened to know such famous trader who is living in B.,” the young Ali was explaining to me.

He was smiling, his bright lips uncovered his wonderful teeth, and the couple of his violet eyes were looking at me seriously, which was not suited for his age. Having bowed his head a little and, according to the Eastern customs, having touched his forehead and heart with his hand, he left us as quietly as he had come.

I unwrapped my packet, and a scrap of the finest white material fell out of it. My curiosity was so great that, not even having lifted the silk, fallen on the floor, I opened the case and I unwittingly gave a shout out of surprise and fascination. A fastener of excellent work with a prominent, large ruby and several brilliants, which were wound round by the dark-gold snake decorated with pearls, were so shining in the rather dark room that I was unable to take my eyes off it. My brother picked up the fallen silk and, examining the fastener together with me, he explained to me.

“The older Ali in the name of his niece is sending you the white turban as the symbol of power and the red ruby as the symbol of love. In this way he shows you that he accepts you to the company of his friends.”

“And what is he sending to you?” I was interested.

My brother unwrapped the bigger packet. There was a very fine white oriental robe. It was made of the material which I had never seen before. It was similar to the white suede and it was finer than the paper of cigarettes. There was a note in Arabic next to the robe, which my brother hid in his pocket without reading it. There was the same turban as mine in the second packet, only there was an inscription, some kind of a phrase woven in Arabic letters with blue silk on its front end across its entire width – and it was exceptionally wide. I didn’t pay any attention neither to the note nor to the Arabic phrase. I wanted to see as quickly as possible what in my brother’s case was hidden. “If he is sending greetings of love and power to me, then what is he sending to Nikolushka?” I thought for a moment. Finally, my brother rolled up his turban with care, hid it in the drawer of his writing-table and opened the bigger case. Large brilliants laid out in a triangle began to glitter in it, and in the middle of them an oval, prominent emerald was shining with bluish green light. There was a ring lying in the smaller case, which had the same emerald set in the platinum frame.

“Well, this is some Nal’s majority!” I was almost shouting. “If Ali is sending such presents to all of his friends on the occasion of this day, then it will probably cost him a half of that vineyard, which the trader was so praising me behind his stall. And why do men need those fasteners at all? They are wonderful decorations for women, but Ali knows that we are single, doesn’t he?”

“We will buckle these fasteners on our turbans above our foreheads. It is the great honour to receive such a present and not at all everybody in the East are granted with it,” my brother answered. “Ali has been living here for ten years. He is descended from somewhere deep in the Himalayas, and at his home, all Eastern customs of hospitality and honour to friendship are respected.”

The time was passing unnoticed. Twilight was already getting thicker. The night always coming so fast here was already about to flood everything with darkness.

“It is time to start making you up, otherwise we may be late and show ourselves impolite.”

As soon as my brother said those words to me he pulled out one of the drawers of his writing-table and ... I was taken back once again.

“Wow! Why haven’t you mentioned in any of your letters that you were playing in amateurish performances?”

The whole drawer was full with all sorts of make-up, beards, moustaches and even wigs.

“It is impossible to write about everything, and I could tell you even less during those several days,” my brother gave me a smile, answering.

He sat me down on the chair and like an experienced make-up man he quickly glued a beard and moustache for me, having moistened my entire face with a colourless liquid before doing so, which was smelling pleasantly and refreshed my sunburnt skin. Below my eyes he drew with a brown pencil, gave several light strokes through my cheeks that were uncovered with the beard, sent some pearl liquid through my thick black eye-brows, smeared my lips with some cream and told me.

“I will level your curls a little bit more, so that your black hair wouldn’t come out of the turban. Change your seat over here,” and he sat me down on the stool.

I have to confess that I was feeling sorry for those curly hair of mine. In my opinion, it was the only thing that I could be proud of, but it is so nice to walk in the heat with short-cut hair that I asked my brother myself to make it short with the clipper. My hair was soon trimmed, and I already wanted to stand up off the stool.

“No, no, remain seated, Lovushka. I will wind your head round with the turban in a second and I can do it only when you are sitting on the stool.”

I remained seated. My brother uncoiled the turban that seemed to me much longer than I could imagine. He started twirling it into a twist without mercy and quite soon quickly, strongly, but without the smallest tightening he wound my entire head round.

“It’s all done with your head. We still have to do your feet. Put on these long socks and shoes,” he uttered, having taken the white socks and shoes which looked quite bad out of the box.

I put them on, stood up and instantly felt that my left shoe was uncomfortable. Unawares, I limped with my left foot, and my brother obligingly shoved the walking-stick into my right hand.

“Now you are exactly like that deaf-mute, lame old man that you will have to play,” my brother was laughing.

I got angry. It was hot because of the unusual beard. The liquid with which my face was smeared was pleasant in the beginning, but now it was contracting my skin badly. It was inconvenient to my foot, and besides, I was also deaf and mute. With the impatience that was characteristic to me, I wanted to yell and declare that I wouldn’t go anywhere and I already was about to tear my beard and turban off me, when the doors opened without any sound and the figure of the older Ali emerged in them, which looked like hollowed out. I was simply paralyzed by his two sparkling eyes. My turban was so pressed to my ears that I couldn’t hear anything what he was talking about with my brother. Ali was dressed in almost black oriental robe – so rich was its blue colour. There was another oriental robe under it. It was bright crimson and it was tightly pressed to his body. There was the white turban on his head with the brilliant fastener which portrayed the peacock with its stretched out train.

Smiling pleasingly and mildly, he went to me with his stretched out hand. When I gave him my hand, he squeezed it, and again the warm current ran across my whole body, only this time I was feeling joy, not laziness. Ali took the ring with red jewel off his finger. There was a lion cut in it and some hieroglyphs around the lion. Having bowed, he whispered to my ear.

"This ring will open all the doors of my home for you today, wherever you would like to get. At the same time it will help you, if some day in your life you are wounded or if your wound is bleeding."

Admiring the ring, I didn't even notice how another tall, slender, Eastern figure had shot up next to Ali. I didn't understand right away that that was my brother, dressed in the oriental robe that I had given to him today. I only was able to see the slender, dusky, Eastern man with the bright beard and moustache, in whose turban there was the triangle of brilliants and emeralds attached. My brother was rather tall, but next to gigantic Ali he seemed to be of the medium height.

"Look into the mirror, Lovushka. I think that you will hardly recognize not only me, but yourself, too," my brother said to me, laughing and clearly seeing my puzzlement.

I turned to the mirror, limping absolutely naturally because of the inconvenient left shoe.

"You are an excellent artist," Ali told me, giving a smile, but his entire figure was showing such an infectious humour that I burst out laughing.

While laughing, all of a sudden I saw in the mirror a dark complexion, nearly black, lame old man. I looked round and suddenly I heard such a sound of laughter that I turned back once again with reluctance and I was looking up and down both laughing Ali and my brother with surprise. They started laughing even more, and I cast a glance into the mirror accidentally and again I saw that old dark-skinned Arab. With difficulty, but finally I grasped that the blackened Arab – that was me. I lifted my hand towards my eyes, made sure that I wasn't sleeping and asked my brother why I was so black and how it could have happened. To my question he answered like this.

"Lovushka, this is because that liquid did its purpose, but don't worry. Tomorrow you will be white-skinned again, even whiter than ever before. Another, the same pleasant liquid will wash away the whole blackness of your face."

"And now, my friend, don't forget that during the entire evening you will be lame, deaf and mute," Ali told me, laughing."

With these words, he fixed my turban, pulling it on my ears so much that now I really couldn't hear anything. I only understood that he was offering me to take his hand and to go with him to his house. I looked into my brother – he even had had time to put the room in order, - he gave a nod and we went to the street.

Chapter 2

The feast at Ali's

Ali was going first in the street, I was in the middle and my brother was after us. Because of the stuffy heat, unusual clothes, the beard which I kept touching and checking out if it was holding well, because of the inconvenient left shoe and heavy walking-stick, I was feeling myself as if I had gotten into a fog. My head was absolutely empty, I didn't want to talk and I was glad that I would be playing the deaf-mute during the whole evening. I don't understand the language anyway, and now no one will prevent me from observing this new, unknown life. We crossed the street, but we didn't enter through the gates which as always were firmly closed, but we turned behind the corner, and Ali himself unlocked and locked again the little metal gates of the garden.

I was surprised by abundance of unusually beautiful flowers. The scent of the flowers was strong, but it didn't make me dizzy. Already walking one next to another along a rather wide avenue, we turned into the depth of the garden and went to the lit up house. The windows were wide open. In the big long sitting-room one could see lots of little, low, rounded tables which were moved to the low, wide sofas, laid out along both walls. From the other side of the little tables, there were two low, wide pouffes placed, which looked like big pillows, put crosswise. If one wanted one could sit down on the pouffes in the Eastern style, too, by shoving one's feet under oneself.

The house was lit up by electricity of which not everybody was aware even in the capitals. Ali was passionately propagating this kind of energy. He had sent home the machines from England and he was trying to connect to this quite powerful network at least the houses of his friends, but even the closest of them were not ready for such an innovation. Only my brother and two more doctors were using the electricity.

While we were still walking along the avenue, young Ali and Nal joined us. She had put on a luxurious reddish oriental robe which I recognized right away. She also had a very splendid burqa which was cast on her shoulders. I had never seen such womanly head cover that was woven with pearls and jewels; her black plaits twisted round with pearls were almost reaching the floor, and her red lips with a smile were telling something to Ali... I already wanted to lift my turban a little, so I could hear the girl's voice, but the quick Ali's glance as though commanded me "You are deaf and mute, stroke your beard."

I was angry within me, but I was trying not to show my irritation as much as I was able to. I was slowly stroking my beard, feeling happy that at least I wasn't blind. I looked old visually, so I could examine the beauty and admire her without any interference. The girl wasn't paying any attention to me, but one didn't have to be a psychologist in order to understand that her entire attention was focussed on my brother.

Now we were standing in the big terrace that was tangled round with the blooming climbers, not known to me. The chandelier was shining as bright as in the day-time – even the pattern of the carpet could be seen clearly, on which there were lots of feet simply buried.

What about the girl? She was of medium height, slender, slim; her miniature, white little hands were holding two red roses with their thin long fingers, which she was often smelling, but it seemed to me that by doing so she wanted to cover her embarrassment. Her big, almond, green eyes didn't remind me of the eyes of an earthly creature by anything. One could imagine that only angels, geniuses or some

kind of higher creatures could have such eyes; but neither these eyes nor their expression didn't absolutely go with the apprehension of a woman that is usual in our lives.

Ali offered me to sit down on the soft sofa, while the girl and young Ali sat down on the pouffes in front of me. I kept staring at the face of Nal, which was changing like the wave, chased by the wind. Not I alone was looking at her like this – the eyes of all three men were glued to her, only their expression was so different!

The young Ali was sparkling with his dark eyes, and a devotion, simply adoration was shining in them. I thought for a while that he is ready to die for her without any hesitation at any moment. Both of them were very similar: the same narrow nose with a hardly noticeable little hump, bright red lips and an oblong form of the face, but one could feel that Ali was dark brunette with the temperament of the tiger, that his thought could be biting, his word and hand – injuring.

Nal's face was so tender and harmonious, it was smelling of such kindness and purity that it even seemed that the prose of this ordinary life with its sadness and suffering were not meant for her, that she wouldn't be able to utter a bitter word, to cause a pain. She could be only peace, comfort and joy for everybody who would be fortunate to meet her.

Her uncle was looking at her with his piercing black eyes so intently and with such kindness that I was unable to imagine it in him in any way. The depth of his eyes seemed to be bottomless, and a tender stream was flowing from them to Nal; but it seemed to me that deep inside of him there was a hurricane of anxiety, torturing grief and doubts for a successful girl's fate hiding behind this love flow.

Finally I started examining my brother. He was also looking at Nal intently. His eye-brows – as then, below the tree – again were contracted into a continuous line, and because of the widened pupils, his eyes seemed to be totally black. He was sitting straight; it seemed that all his feelings and thoughts were stretched like a string. He was all covered with his gigantic will, as with an armour, through which no word, nor movement could cut their way, and I was almost physically feeling the ring of that iron will.

The girl was mostly casting looks on my brother. It seemed that in her understanding there wasn't any place for such thoughts that she was a woman, and that there were men sitting around her. She was expressing her feelings straightforward, easily and with joy like a baby. Several times I caught the look of passionate love, which she cast on my brother. And again, there was only pure love shining in that look without the slightest womanly feeling.

All of a sudden, I was able to understand the big drama of these two hearts, which were being broken by the national, family and religious superstitions...

The older Ali looked at me, and now in his so kind eyes I saw a little old man's wisdom, as if he wanted to tell me "You see, old fellow, how wonderful life is! How easily the people who love each other should be living, and how painfully the superstitions are separating them. You see, what the religion could turn into, which as though is leading us to God, but in reality it is overflowing the life of the people who love each other with misfortune, suffering and even death."

All of a sudden, an apprehension of man's freedom and independence opened in my heart. I could feel the whole power of the religious slavery, hanging over the girl, over both Alis and all of their advanced friends, and first of all – over my brother. I was feeling so sorry for my brother and Nal! I saw how hopeless their fight for their love was. I estimated my brother's will which hadn't let a single more lively word slip away, and which was keeping a respectful, chivalrous tone while talking to Nal.

The girl who had been joyful like a child in the beginning became noticeably sad, her surprised and pleading eyes kept glancing at her uncle more and more frequently. The older Ali took her hand and asked her something which I was unable to hear. Because of the sudden girl's movement, when she quickly pulled her hand out of her uncle's hand and hid her blushed face in the flowers, I understood that they were talking about the flowers. Ali told her something again, and the girl who was blushed like a guelder rose touched her lips and heart with the flowers and stretched them out to my brother.

"Take them," Ali told to my brother so clearly that I was able to hear it, too. "The women of our country are presenting the flower to their closest and dearest friend on the day of their majority."

My brother took the flowers and squeezed the little hand which gave them to him.

The younger Ali jumped on his feet like a tiger. His eyes were simply casting sparks. It seemed that he would fall on my brother and strangle him. The older Ali only cast a glance at him and drew a line in the air with his index finger downwards from top – young Ali fell down to his former place, sighing, as though he had absolutely lost his strength.

The girl turned pale as a ghost. Her eye-brows frowned, and her entire face was reflecting her spiritual suffering, almost physical pain. Her eyes were sadly now at uncle now at young Ali. Ali Mahomet took her hand again, he stroked her head tenderly, took my brother's hand, joined then and said.

"Today you turn sixteen years old. According to the understanding of the East, you are an old woman already. However, you are still only a child in Europe. From my point of view, you are man already and you have to step into life. That cruel conspiracy which you aunt has started so foolishly will not be taking place. You are perfectly educated, so you will be going to Paris and studying there. When you finish the medical department, you will travel to India with me, to my little estate. As the doctor, you will be of more service to mankind over there than marrying the local fanatic, where the rude religious superstitions would trample your heart. Yours and my friend captain T. will not refuse his chivalrous help, and he will help you to escape from here. Exchange your rings, like the Christians are exchanging their crosses."

It was strange to me that not hearing a single girl's word I could clearly hear what Ali was saying.

My brother was wearing our mother's ring on his little finger. I was totally unable to remember our mother. That was an excellent, ancient ring made with subtlety from gold and blue enamel with the large diamond. Not even taking thought, my brother pulled his ring off and put it on the fourth finger of Nal's right hand. In her turn, she untied her ring-snake off her belt. It was hanging on a little chain. The snake had mouthed a large, turbid, colourless jewel up. She put the ring on the fourth finger of my brother's left hand.

I didn't have time even to think for a while "What an unlovely stone! As ugly as the snake, holding it", and suddenly I nearly gave a shout out of astonishment. Having been only a piece of glass a moment ago, the jewel began to glitter in all colours of the rainbow. Not the purest, the most faceted diamond had ever shimmered with such long beams. Only the sun light is able to break such beams in the crystal pyramid.

A moan, almost a cry escaped from young Ali. Uncle's look made him calm down again. He hung his head again.

"This is the stone of life," older Ali said, "and it comes to life again as soon as a man's energy comes through it. You, my fellow Nikolaj, - you are in full blossom, and your heart is pure, that's why the stone is sparkling so blindingly. While you are growing older, the stone will be going out, too, unless your

wisdom and spiritual strength replaces your sinking physical strength. You gave the very dearest that you possessed to my niece – love of your mother, which she had given to you with the ring. Nal gave you the gift of her great-grandfather who was a man of wisdom. He told her to give the ring to that person whom she will be loving so strongly and faithfully that she would be ready to die for him.”

I cast a glance at young Machmed unwittingly. Not a blooming youth was sitting in front of me, but a ghost with the deadly pale face and the eyes which were gone out, not seeing anything. I thought for a while that he was fainted away and that he was sitting only thanks to his balance.

“Today,” Ali Mahomet said, “is the great change in your life, about which I was talking to you a month ago, my Nal, and for which I have been preparing you for five years. Captain T. and two of your loyal servants will lead you to his house. Ali will be going together with you. There you will find European clothes, suitable to yourself and your servants. You will put them on and give your oriental robe and cloaks to Ali. He will come back here, while all of you with captain T. will be going to the railway station. Rely upon captain’s honour and love. He will take you to such city and such place where you will be really safe and where you will be able to wait for me or my messenger. Don’t bother about anything, only value your faithfulness to only law – the law of peace. Be strong and wait for me without any fear and worry. Sooner or later I will come. Rely upon captain T. everywhere and don’t be afraid of staying without him. If he leaves you alone somewhere, it means that it needs to be so, but he will leave you with his loyal friends if such necessity arises. And now let’s go to the garden all together.”

We rose. Young Ali gave me his hand, helping me to go downstairs of the terrace. All of a sudden, everything was lost in the darkness – the plugs had burnt out somewhere. Taking advantage of the darkness, my brother, Nal, Ali and two more figures came out of the garden through the little gates silently. At the gates, Ali whispered something else to the ear of his nephew, and he gave a nod. Some people were running about in the darkness, the servants lit up the candles here and there, and because of it the darkness seemed to be even blacker. In this way, a quarter of an hour passed. It seemed to me that I was seeing Nal with her reddish oriental robe again and the cloak put on her face, and as if Ali Mahomet had put his arms round her shoulders. However, due to all today’s impressions I was unable to grasp anything clearly anymore, so I thought for a while that the beauty was simply appearing to me, whose charm had been engraved into my consciousness so deeply.

In the meanwhile, the light became bright again, it blinked about three times again and then it kept shining peacefully.

“The get-together begins,” Ali Mahomet uttered clearly, and again I was able to understand his words very well. “Don’t forget: you are lame in your left leg, you are deaf and mute. People will be bowing a lot and respectfully to you. Don’t respond to anybody’s bows, only give a little nod to mullah. Don’t take anything from the common table, eat only what I will give you directly. When the supper is over, the time will come for Nal to show up. She will be wrapped up in the luxurious cloak. Everyone’s attention will be focussed on Nal’s stealing which has been arranged with the groom beforehand. My friend will come up to you and take you through the garden’s gates. Show my ring to the servant who will be standing there and come back home along the totally different way. At home you will find your brother’s letter. Change your clothes and hide everything in such a way as it will be written in the letter. You will have to do some work with the mess left at home, because it is necessary that your brother’s messenger who is sleeping now wouldn’t notice anything special in the morning when he is putting the rooms in order,” and Ali hurried away towards the guests who had just entered through the gates.

The host was standing head and shoulders above his guests. He would respond respectfully to the greetings of some of them with a bow, and they would continue their way into the house, while the others would stop close to him and greet him in European way by squeezing his hand. The guests kept

gathering and soon the avenue and veranda were full of many-coloured oriental robes. Talking, laughing, strained waiting of delicious feast, some stories that seemed to be cheerful were creating high spirits. However, having observed more closely, I noticed that the guests were standing in separate little companies. Those who were dressed more freely, not according to all rules, were keeping aloof, while the rest of them kept turning back to look at mullah like musicians at the conductor. Then I started examining everybody even more attentively: perhaps, I will notice another face made up as mine or an artificial beard which I kept stroking with such dignity.

The time was passing unnoticed. An Eastern music was heard from somewhere, and several servants invited the guests to come inside. In the depth of the sitting-room, next to the door to adjacent room, Ali Mahomet was standing with an unseen man who was very tall and well-built. He was dressed in white clothes and turban. His beard was blonde with a golden shade, his big and beautiful eyes were dark green. He was young, about twenty eight thirty years old, and his extraordinary beauty was very striking. He was only a little bit lower in height than Ali, but he had much broader shoulders and was well-proportioned – the real medieval knight. My imagination depicted him dressed in the clothes of Lohengrin at once.

The host was greeting the guests coming into the sitting-room with a low bow. All guests sat down on the sofas and pouffes, still keeping the same breaking up into separate groups. Everybody was leaving his leather galoshes or shoes at the door, while the servants were placing them on shelves. There wasn't a single woman among the guests. I kept standing, observing how the guests were taking their seats, and I was unable to decide where I could find a shelter myself. I already wanted to go back to the garden when I sensed the look of Ali upon myself. He told something to a boy servant, and he came hurriedly to me. Having bowed respectfully, he invited me to follow him and he took me to the table that was close to the host's one. There were two middle-aged men with motley oriental robes and coloured turbans already sitting at the table. They had the foot-wear which seemed to be ordinary to me, and on top of their European suits, they had only one silk oriental robe. They bowed to me low and respectfully, but having remembered the words of Ali, I sat down on the place shown to me, not giving a nod to them.

When all guests were sitting, only then Ali and the tall handsome man sat down. The music began to play somewhere closer and louder. At the same time the servants started bringing us hot, evaporating dishes, placing them at once on all tables. The boys delivered china piyalas and silver spoons for each guest.

Only not all guests were putting the rich, evaporating pilaf into their piyalas and eating it with their spoons. Majority were thrusting their hands simply into the common bowl and eating from their cupped hands. This was inspiring such an aversion to me that I was nearly sickened. I wanted to run away, although the never soon before mixed crowd was promising an extraordinary and interesting view of Eastern colours and customs. I didn't touch the pilaf that was put on our table and I was waiting for the dish, promised by Ali. And indeed, the tall blonde handsome man rose from their table and stretched out a silver piyala with a small golden spoon to me.

It seemed that the honour given to me was very highly estimated according to the Eastern customs, because suddenly all talking stopped, and the exclamations of astonishment rolled along all tables in this silence. According to the guests' mimics and gestures, they were asking one another who I was. Some of them were casting looks on me very seriously. They were telling something to their neighbours, while they were nodding their heads in agreement. Exactly at this moment, the new dishes were brought in, and their scent distracted everyone's attention off me.

I stood up before the tall handsome man unwittingly, who was stretching out the piyala to me. He smiled, put the dish that was brought on the table and bowed in Eastern way. Because of that smile

of his, the look of his kind eyes and the purity that was simply blowing from him, I was embraced with such joy as if I had seen an old, loyal friend. I bowed low to him, too. The neighbours from my table were asking me something which I neither heard nor understood, I only saw their moving lips and questioning eyes. I was saved by the boy who showed them his mouth and ears. They only nodded their heads, looked at me sympathetically and started eating the pilaf with relish, thanks God at least not with their hands.

I was surprised when I saw a stewed fruit in my piyala, because I was already quite hungry and I would have eaten with pleasure a much more concrete dish. I looked at Ali Mahomet with disappointment. He met my look as if he had been waited for this disappointment. The same piyala was in his hands, he lifted it as though wanting to clink it with me, and he gave me a tender smile. In order not to look like an impolite and ill-mannered guest, I took the spoon and ate several never seen before pieces of the fruit, floating in juice that was similar to red wine. My thoughts about the more concrete dish vanished at once: the taste and scent of the fruit were wonderful, similar to pineapple, while juice were giving me cheerfulness and cooled me off. I was eating with such pleasure that I even stopped looking round.

In the meanwhile, there was something to observe. Both of my neighbours took off their oriental robes and coats. They were left with only fine silk shirt and wide, black woven band, serving as waist-coats for them. I already noticed the impact of the heat at the other tables as well, especially among the European guests. The Muslims, who began to sweat and who were wiping the sweat off their shining faces with their sleeves, kept eating diligently, bespattering their costly oriental robes time and again, but they didn't undress. Having grown heavy because of the food and heat, they simply became feeble. The postures were absolutely free already, the talking was loud, there were arguments starting here and there with such gesticulation and such wild spirits that they were more similar to quarrels.

The stewed fruit given to me by the handsome man must have had some magic features: I wasn't hot anymore, I didn't want to tear the turban off my head anymore, I was brisk, and my body wasn't feeling any tiredness, as though there hadn't been any of today's troubles. It seemed to me that I could easily cover ten versts on foot. My thoughts were focussed, and I started looking round more attentively.

The guests seemed to be even ruder, and they reminded me even more of the beasts. I was feeling full of self-control and peace, I was surprised by my self-confidence that showed up and I could sense a not yet experienced power of the grown-up man. I remembered my brother, Nal and younger Ali. Somehow I wasn't worried about the first two at all, but I started anxiously looking with my eyes for younger Ali among the guests. In my memory emerged Nal's figure with her reddish oriental robe next to older Ali in the garden. I was ransacking every table with my eyes, but I couldn't find Nal's cousin over there. By chance my look met the host's eyes, and I as if was reading in them: "Control yourself and remember my words – when you have to leave this place and what you have to do at home."

A wave of anxiety ran through me like a gust that makes the flame of the candle flutter, and my absolute self-control came back again.

During that time the dishes on the table were changed many times. The fruit and sweets were already being served. My neighbours were eating relatively little, but they were simply exterminating the melons by pouring some pepper on them. I was afraid of showing my astonishment of such taste more clearly, but I saw that almost everybody was eating them with pepper, too.

The tall, golden-haired handsome man rose from Ali's table again and gave me the piyala with different kind of fruit now, which seemed to be similar to the rice grain in honey. He shoved a note into my hand imperceptibly together with the piyala, bowed low again and came back to his place. I also wanted to respond with a bow to him, but I couldn't rise from my place, my legs disobeyed me completely. If I hadn't had my glued beard which was so firmly contracting my cheeks, then because of the

laughableness that was characteristic to me, I would have roared with laughter at the top of my voice. I unrolled the note. The following words were written in it in English: "First of all, eat that what I have brought to you now. Don't try to stand up until you have eaten the whole dish. You are not accustomed to our piquant meals, and because of them, as well as because of some wine brands, your legs disobey you. However, thanks to this dish it will be over after some time. Don't forget that you have to leave by the end of this feast. I myself will bring you to the little gates. As soon as the racket kicks up, stand up and come up to the host's table immediately. I will give you my hand, and we will go into the garden."

I didn't want even to consider those hundreds of mysterious, not comprehensible to me events of today, but I wished very much to be able to control my legs again, so I hurried to eat. The meal's taste was similar to some blobs of the sweat porridge, which were in the sauce made of honey, wine, vanilla and some other odorous spices. My neighbours had already stopped paying any attention to me for a long time. It seemed to me that they were following the always growing racket and excitement of the guests with an increasing anxiety. I tried moving my legs, I lifted them up slightly as if fixing my oriental robe – hurrah! – my legs were strong and supple again. The racket in the sitting-room was already like the hum in the square of Sunday's market. Fierce quarrels were boiling here and there behind the tables. The guests were swinging their hands widely and, with the expression that is characteristic to the East, their squealing voices were clamouring some incoherent words. I could hear "Nal" and "Allah". The noise in the sitting-room kept growing and it was already turning into the roar of the animals. I didn't have time to grasp anything when I suddenly remembered that it was time already for me to stand up and go to the table of Ali. I wanted to stand up quickly, but my inconvenient left shoe made me come to myself and continue playing the limping old man. I could evaluate my brother's foresight and intellect! If not that shoe, heavy turban and the beard that was restricting the movements of my lips, I would have already forgotten a hundred times that I was mute, deaf and lame.

Having looked at Ali, I saw that the handsome man had already stood up and he was coming towards me. I crawled out of the table quite quickly, on which I left both piyalas and the spoon. Having noticed my efforts, the golden-haired handsome man came to me in a flash, and the boy ran up to us with the sheet of white, soft paper. He wrapped up both silver piyalas and the spoon in a moment and, having stretched them out to me, he bowed low and he was mumbling something. Seeing that I wasn't taking the little bundle and that I only was looking at him with surprise, the boy was respectfully poking the dishes into my left hand which was free from the walking-stick.

"Take it," I heard the voice over me. "Such is the custom. Take it as soon as possible, so that no one could notice that you don't know the local customs. The boy is bowing to you so zealously, because he thinks that you are an important person who isn't happy with such poor present on the occasion of majority. Let's go, it's time," he finished the English phrase, holding me by my left hand.

I could hardly go. The inconvenient shoe had made my foot so much sore that I was even hopping. I was afraid that without help of the handsome giant I wouldn't have managed to go downstairs to the garden, although the little stairs were low, but they were steep.

As soon as we walked several steps down the avenue, the lights were out again. A buzz of joy, joke or indignation could be heard in the sitting-room. Someone's shadow slipped close to us and threw a light, thick cover on my attendant, which covered me, too. My guardian took me in his hands like a child and suddenly turned into the very depth of the garden. We came across the watchman by the little gates, to whom I showed the ring given to me by Ali Mahomet, and he, not having uttered a single word, let us go to the street. My attendant told him several words, the watchman bowed respectfully and locked the little gates.

We came into the absolutely empty street. Our eyes had already gotten used to the darkness which kept floating the noise from the garden. The stars were shining in the sky. My guardian put me on the ground, took my inconvenient left shoe off, pulled the turban off my head and, looking attentively into my eyes, told me.

“Don’t waste any time. Life of your brother, Nal and yourself now depends very much on your actions. If you fulfil all indications given to you in the letter that was left in your room on the pillow, then everything will be all right. Now forget that you were mute, dumb and lame, but remember during your entire life how you were playing the old man in the Eastern feast. Good-bye. I will visit you tomorrow morning, but today don’t leave your home, don’t go even into the yard, no matter whatever you may hear.”

Having said it all in English again, he squeezed my hand and disappeared in the darkness.

While I was already unlocking the door of my brother’s house, I saw that the lights in Ali’s garden came on again. “It means that the lights will be on at our house, too,” I thought for a moment and I saw a narrow streak of light from behind the door of my brother’s study. I was taken aback because of the mess that I found here when I entered, because I knew my brother’s neatness very well. It seemed that at least several people were changing their clothes here, but I didn’t pay any attention to this external mess. All my thoughts were occupied with my brother’s destiny. Having closed the door firmly, I also locked them up, pulled the heavy portiere on them, put in order its fall on the floor, so that the light wouldn’t pass through the cracks. “First of all,” I thought for a while, “I have to read the letter.” Having made sure that the shutters were closed, the blinds were down and the portiere was firmly drawn, I went into my room. A little lamp close to the sofa was also on in the room, while the windows were firmly covered, and the strong heat was getting unbearable. I wanted to undress, but the thought about the letter as though bewitched me.

I threw off the walking-stick, I took off my top oriental robe and, having come up to the sofa, I saw a big blue envelope on the pillow. The following was written with my brother’s hand: “Testament.” I snatched it, opened it carefully and took a note and a couple of letters from it. On one of them there was written with my brother’s hand: “To Lovushka”, while on another one there was written with unknown, rounded, still childish, womanly handwriting: “To comrade L.N.T.”. First of all I opened the note. It was short, and I read it greedily.

“Lovushka,” my brother was writing, “there’s no time. You will know everything from the big letter. Now don’t delay. You will find a liquid on your table. Clean the make-up off your face and your hands with it. All clothes scattered in the room, including yours, hide in that wardrobe in the cloak-room, which I showed to you today. Hide the bottle with the liquid for make-up removal in the wardrobe, too. When you firmly close the door of the wardrobe, push an absolutely invisible button on the right, which is located upwards on the ninth flower of the wallpaper. A thin wall with the same wallpaper will come down from above and it will hide the wardrobe. Only be sure to inspect everything attentively, so that there wouldn’t be any unhidden items left.”

I remembered in a flash that my attendant had pulled the turban off my head and taken my left shoe off, so I got worried if I hadn’t lost them on my way home, but having looked at the bundle with pialas given to me by the boy, I could also see the turban with that mutilating shoe next to it. My attendant must have put all of that into my hands, and I took everything and flung it down on the table as soon as I entered the room, not even thinking about it.

I took some cotton wool. First I moistened my hands, and they turned white instantly. I was thinking that I would have to bother with my face and beard for a long time, but similar to milk, smelling

pleasingly liquid removed the whole blackness at once, my beard came off easily, and I could feel better at once, and it wasn't so hot anymore. I took another one of the oriental robes off, I took my remaining shoe and socks off, I put light slippers on and I started cleaning my brother's room.

One could still feel a certain system in this mess. All oriental robes were gathered together into one bundle, the other items were also sorted out and tied up into parcels. I only had to take all of that into the cloak-room. Now a thought about my brother's messenger struck me, too, but I remembered that he was sleeping as a hero, and my brother used to say that even the thunder of the cannons wouldn't wake him up. And indeed, having gone out into the corridor, I could hear such snoring that I only smiled and calmed down that my light steps would really not disturb his sleep.

Several times I had to come back to my brother's study for the parcels. Finally I brought all shoes, only the turbans were left. I recognized my brother's turban from the triangle of emeralds. I saw a case on the toilet table and I already wanted to leave the adornment after taking it out, but I decided to obey fully my brother's order, so I took all turbans, cases and put them in the wardrobe. At the same time I also took all my clothes off, I picked the beard, walking-stick, piyalas, the unbearable left shoe and I hid everything in the wardrobe. I came back once again and inspected all rooms attentively. I found the case of my brooch, so I brought it to the wardrobe, too.

Again and again I kept inspecting all corners of my brother's room and finally I decided to press the button that wasn't so easy to locate in the ninth flower of the wallpaper. There were many ninth flowers counting upwards, but finally I succeeded to find something similar to the button in one of them, which really wasn't the closest to the wardrobe. I pressed the button, but nothing happened. I had already started getting irritated, I was calling myself a fool when the light rustle above drew my attention and made me lift my eyes up. I almost jumped up from joy: the wall was slowly coming downwards and in a few minutes, always accelerating, it touched the floor softly. "True miracles", I thought for a while, because if I hadn't brought everything to the wardrobe with my own hands, I would have never thought that this room could ever look differently.

However, I didn't have time to reflect on that. Everything that I had seen and experienced today merged into such chaos that I already was unable to answer myself where the reality ended and where my fantasy began. I put out the light in the cloak-room, closed the door and came back to my brother's study. There were several papers and some rests of the letters and newspapers lashing around on the floor. I picked everything up carefully, including the blobs of dirty cotton wool from my room. I cast everything into the fireside and set fire.

Now I was able to calm down. I put out the light and came into the sitting-room. I was thirsty, but the desire to read my brother's letter overcame the physical thirst. I read the note once again, made sure that I had done everything precisely and burnt it with the match.

I heard a noise in the street, as though somebody was hollowly firing several times, then everything settled down again.

I lay down and started reading my brother's letter. The further I was reading it the more surprised I became – my brother's picture emerged before my eyes in an absolutely different way than my imagination had gotten used to see him.

Many years passed since that night. Not only I became old during that time, not only my brother and many other participants of Nal's escape are gone, but the whole life had changed around me; one, two, three was swept by, thousands of meetings and impressions ran by, but the letter from my

brother Nikolaj is still standing before my eyes the same as I was able to grasp it with my entire consciousness on that faraway, unforgettable night. Here it is, that letter:

“Lovushka,

You will be reading this letter when the hour of my great test is striking. But this hour will also be the hour of your destiny; you will have to test and prove with your actions your loyalty and devotion to your brother-father, like you used to call me in exceptional moments of life.

Now I’m addressing you like my brother-son. Concentrate your whole courage and show your entire honour and fearlessness, which I was trying to train in you.

My life has split in two: I, Christian, officer of Russian army fell in love with a Muslim. I understand perfectly well that this love isn’t fated to end happily. The net of religious, racial and class superstitions can build such a wall that the will of the whole regiment, not only the will of one man, may be destroyed after striking against the wall.

How did I meet the one whom I love? How did I become acquainted with her? You will find out everything if the end of the story isn’t sad, to be precise, if the story is created at all and not the deadly end. Now I will tell you only the main point, that what you will have to do for me if you want to protect my life and happiness.”

There were several missed lines in this place and the follow-up was already written with another, fresher ink and in a more nervous handwriting.

“You already know Ali Mahomet and younger Ali. You have seen Nal. You will have to play the guest in the feast and... there’s a local custom when the groom has to steal the bride, and at that moment when that happens, you will be suspected of stealing her. If you don’t want to betray me, if you perform your role well, which older Ali and his friend will explain to you, then I and Nal might be lucky to escape the horror and threats of persecution of the religious fanatics...

Pay a visit to colonel N. and tell him that on occasion I left for hunting earlier and that as usual I will be waiting for him at our friend forester; if he doesn’t find me there, it means that I left and expect to meet him at trader D. and to bring back a considerable catch with myself; tell him to bring along one more gun and more bullets. Go to him at eight in the morning, tell him everything as precisely as possible and don’t be late.

Later be sure to rely absolutely in everything upon Ali Mahomet. I’m pressing you to my heart. Don’t think about the danger threatening me, but think only if you want to become the protection or maybe the salvation for me and Nal freely, easily and at your own will.

Good-bye. Either we will meet each other with joy and happiness again or we will not meet each other at all. Always be brave, fair and honourable.

Your brother N.”

I looked at the clock. It was almost four in the morning. I heard the noise in the street again, as though a flicking of whips, it seemed to me that somebody was knocking on our gates, too, but I remembered the instructions of my night attendant on my way home, so I put out the light and I was listening attentively. Several carts drove by in the street at high speed, some voices began to scream, several shots rang out again, some songs would be sung and then they stopped at once.

It seemed that some kind of a scandal was taking place in the street. I wanted to cast a glance at this at least through the crack, but I didn't dare to, so that I wouldn't arouse any suspicion on my brother's house.

I didn't want to sleep at all, I also didn't feel any tiredness. I put on the light again, read my brother's letter once again, kissed it and took another one.

"My friend and brother," the letter started with these words, I'm only a weak woman. You hardly know me, and as you can see, there's a danger breaking into your life because of the unfamiliar woman.

My brother, my uncle Ali Mahomet who has brought me up is the most wonderful man whom life could ever create. If you want to help me to escape the marriage with a rude, terrible man who is fanatic and mullah's friend, then I'm sure that my uncle will always be thankful to you for doing so, and in his turn, he will be protecting you from all dangers threatening you.

What can I say to you, my friend and brother? I can only ask you to help me, not being able to promise anything in return for doing so. We, Eastern women, we love only once if life gives us a chance to. You are brother, brother-son of that man whom I love. Let my love be love of sister-mother for you. I bow you low and I kiss you. Let the wonderful picture of your brother-father always remain in your heart, and at the same time also loving both you and him

Nal."

There was the noise in the street again. It seemed that several pairs of feet ran close by the house, the carts were rattling again. I put out the light and I was listening attentively again. This time again, as though a little bit further already, the shots rang out, one heavier cart drove by rumbling, and everything settled down again. I struck the match and looked at the clock. It was half past five already, hence it was absolute light outside, but I still didn't dare to open the windows.

I put on the light in my brother's room, took the letters and the envelope, I read them once again and, having cast them into the fireside, I set them on fire.

How peculiarly they were burning! Having blazed up suddenly, then they were almost out. My brother's letter stood apart and curled up, and I was able to read the following word clearly: "Brother-father." Then all of them blazed up brightly again, and in Nal's letter the rounded letters "Nal" were revealed. They were as though on the white spot, surrounded by the fire.

Having blazed up brightly once again, the letters turned into red things scattered about and were out, so that nobody could see them again in this world with these united signs of love, hope, fear, grief and loyalty.

I don't know if I was sitting in front of the fireside for a long time. I was unable to grasp everything that had happened during the day, and this fabulous, fantastic night shook my nerves loose once and for all. I was trying, but I was unable to focus my thoughts in any possible way. Such burden fell on my heart, which I hadn't ever experienced in my life. "My brother-father," – I was repeating in my thoughts in hundreds of the softest nuances, and my tears themselves were flowing in streams from my eyes. It seemed to me that I had buried everything what was the best in this world and, having come back from the cemetery, I started the life of lonesome, lost and not needed by anyone creature. I didn't feel any fear in my heart for at least a moment, it seemed absolutely natural and simple for me to sacrifice my life for my brother. But how could I protect him? How could I help him by being such unexperienced and incapable of anything myself? I was unable to imagine that in any possible way.

The time was slipping by, while I was still sitting without any thoughts, decisions, only with a huge pain in my heart, and I was unable to stop the streamlet of tears from my eyes in any possible way. The cock had its crowing somewhere near. I gave a start with fright and looked at the clock. It was fifteen minutes to seven. I made up my mind: it was time.

I needed exactly that much time in order to dress myself and visit colonel N. with my brother's assignment. I went to my room, drew the portiere and opened the shutters. It was quiet in the street.

When I was going to the bathroom, I saw the messenger who was already setting the samovar. I told him that he didn't have to hurry with the tea, because my brother had left for hunting late in the evening, and that I was going to report about that to colonel N.

It seemed that my brother had used to leave for hunting unexpectedly, because the messenger wasn't even surprised. He volunteered to run to colonel himself, but I answered him that I wanted to go for a walk at the same time. Then he explained the nearest way through the gardens to me, and in a quarter of an hour I was already dashing out of our garden to the adjacent street. I was hurrying. It was hot. While going through the holiday market, I was working my way through the lively and dense crowd of people, and I was trying not to think about anything, so I could concentrate on the main and most important moment – the assignment of my brother; even my passion to observe things had fallen into a doze in me.

"Hello!" suddenly I heard a voice behind my back. "Well, are you interested in the market? I have already been running after you for five minutes and I could hardly catch up with you. You must have picked something out and wanted to buy it?"

Colonel N. was standing in front of me, smiling joyfully.

"Why, I'm in a hurry to visit you," I became happy. "My brother asked me to tell you that he didn't wait till you came and he left for hunting on occasion."

And I named everything what I had been entrusted to in detail – about the meeting, gun and bullets.

"Very well!" colonel gave a shout merrily. "My nephew just arrived to see me. He's a passionate hunter, so he's asking me – simply begging me – to take him with me. If I went with your brother, then there wouldn't be enough place for him, and now I can take him. However, I'm not leaving today, but tomorrow at dawn.

While talking, we crossed the whole market square. Exactly on this end of the square, next to the ruins of the old mosque, a considerable crowd of locals had gathered. I noticed several Muslim monks

among them. They were dressed in yellow oriental robes and had pointed dervish caps with fox brushes on their heads.

“Well, it seems that these yellow monks got very angry with Ali Mahomet,” colonel told me.

“Why?” I asked him. “What did Ali Mahomet do to them?”

“Why, haven’t you heard that they are preparing a massacre for him? And this night, these yellow dervishes undoubtedly have played dirty tricks on Ali themselves. Haven’t you heard anything?” colonel kept asking me.

I flinched inside, but I pulled my shoulders calmly and answered him.

“What I could hear if you are the only person whom I know here and I’m seeing you only now, while my brother left yesterday in the evening.”

Colonel gave a nod to this and told me that this night at Ali Mahomet’s place there should have been the stealing of the bride, Ali’s niece, that this was the part of the ceremonies discussed beforehand. Usually the groom accompanied by the company of his friends breaks into the house with gunshots, noise and, staging the stealing of the bride in every possible way, he seizes the bride, and everybody dashes out with all their might, always firing back in the air, although actually the bride is found in the place agreed beforehand, and she is brought there by the old women.

I remembered the gunshots that I was hearing in the night, the noise caused by the carts and I didn’t understand whom they had taken away instead of Nal. Seeing that I was silent, colonel decided that I wasn’t interested in his story.

“Of course, you, a man from capital, don’t care about our business, but when you are living here, when you see the darkness in which the locals are steeped, clenched in mullah’s fist, then willy-nilly you start feeling for that wonderful, obedient nation and you are accepting to your heart with passion the fight against religious fanaticism of such great man like Ali Mahomet. This is an example of man who is devoted to his nation.”

Immediately I made colonel believe that I was very interested in his story and that the cause of my absent-mindedness was such colourful, surrounding from all sides Eastern beauty that I hadn’t seen up till then.

“Well, so I’m telling you that they,” he gave a nod with his head towards the yellow robes, “have played the most horrible story to poor Ali. They stole his niece, hid her somewhere and now they are accusing him of organizing her escape with help of some old, limping trader whom nobody knows here. In short, the fact is that this night the groom and his companions stole Nal from the feast, and when they came hurrying home they found only the reddish robe of the bride in the cart, as well as her luxurious burqa and a couple of her miniature shoes, while the trail of the bride herself had already been lost. Having drawn down such disgrace upon himself, the groom came running back to Ali’s house. The whole house had already fallen deeply asleep. As soon as they woke Ali up, they sent somebody to the women’s side to ask the old women to come. When the old women were told that the bride escaped, Nal’s aunt nearly scratched the groom’s eyes out. Ali himself had to suppress the old witch. Of course, these fanatics hid the girl in a safe place where no one would find her, so that they could insult Ali and accuse him of Nal’s escape and announce the massacre for him. It is very well that your brother left yesterday in the evening. Everyone whose relations with Ali were great may be in danger, because the massacre is the best pretext to kill any unwelcome persons and to pay off any personal scores.”

I was going close to colonel in silence, immersed in my joyless thoughts about my brother, Nal, both Alis and the disasters menacing to all of us. Only now I was able to understand how great the danger was. I remembered the deadly pallor of younger Ali several times, as well as his suffering of jealousy and seizure of his anger, which he managed to overcome. Which turn the youth will take? Has really no one seen where the limping old man disappeared from the feast?

We came to colonel's house; he invited me very heartily to drop in, but I refused this, complaining of a headache, and I hurried back home.

Chapter 3

Lord Benedict and a journey to Ali's house in the country

I clearly remembered that the handsome giant had promised to visit me in the day-time. Having come home, first I saw the messenger who was talking to some melon seller by the gates. Now it already seemed everything to be suspicious to me. While passing by, I cast a glance at the melons and the seller, then I went to the garden in silence.

I sat down under the tree where I and my brother, we used to drink tea in most cases. The messenger shut the gates down and came running after me with two melons. Having put them down on the table, he brought the samovar, some bread, butter, cheese and then he stopped, waiting patiently. One could see from his entire behaviour that he wanted to tell me something.

"Pour me some tea," I told him. "It seems that you bought great melons."

"Yes, indeed," he answered to me. "Have you heard that there was a scandal at our neighbour? Windows were broken in the night, there were fights and gunshots."

"How could I hear it? I'm not sleeping as soundly as you are, and still, I didn't hear anything," I contradicted him.

"Yes, of course. I didn't hear it myself. The seller just told me about it and he kept asking me where my master was, whether he spent the night at home. I told him that he had left for hunting yesterday. He still kept asking me when he had left and where. So I told him that he had left at five as always, to Ibrahim."

There came a rather strong knock at the front door. The messenger hurried to the gates close to the front door. I followed him and thought for a while that I should take the pistol. The gates opened, and I recognized my yesterday's guardian at once.

"Forgive my rather strong knocking and that, apparently, I frightened you, but nobody opened the gates after my two bells, so I had to knock," he was speaking pure Russian, smiling charmingly.

The guest's beauty was striking me even more in the bright light of the morning: his regular features, irreproachable teeth, small ears and big, almond, emerald green eyes were fascinating me. My look which was full of admiration simply stuck to this so charming, so manly beauty that was youthfully tender at the same time. I invited my guest to have breakfast together. He smiled and told me.

"My morning has already passed long time ago. We, Eastern people, are used to get up early. I have even forgotten when I had my breakfast, but if you permit, I will sit down at your table and eat a little piece of the melon with pleasure. The custom of our native land says that one isn't eating only in the house of one's enemy, but I am your loyal friend."

"Oh!" I gave a shout. "I was always thinking that this was the custom of old Italy, but now I will know that this is also characteristic to the Eastern belief."

"Well, I am Italian and my homeland is Florence. Don't think that all Italians are brunettes of dark nature. It seemed to the women in Venice that it was even indecent to be dark-haired and they used to have their hair dyed in golden colour, although, of course, they used to take not a few pains over it," he was talking, smiling. "But the colour of my hair is natural, and I don't have any trouble because of it."

"Yes, it is easy for you when you are so handsome, so proportionally and with such harmony built – you can even not care about your large stature which becomes surprising only when a normal person shows up next to you and he turns into a dwarf," I was talking, while giving him the plate, knife and fork for the melon. "Forgive me for being so rude and for not taking my eyes off you. I don't have enough strength to look into the eyes of Ali Mahomet, because they are piercing me through, and his slender figure is stunning because of its height. Although you and Ali are almost of the same height, you aren't only oppressing me, but also you are simply attracting me to you like a magnet. Oh, if I could be with you forever and work for some goal!" these words slipped out of me in such an exalted and childlike way.

He laughed merrily and asked me for permission to eat the melon without any knife and fork.

Only now I saw, or I grasped to be precise, that my guest was wearing a simple, European, sand-coloured suit. The expression of my face must have betrayed my entire astonishment, because he blinked at me cheerfully and told me.

"Don't give yourself away by any chance that you had ever seen me wearing other clothes. You also, having put the turban with the snake on your head, were limping, deaf and mute, right? Couldn't I, just like you, change my clothes only for the feast?"

I burst out laughing. Although one could easily mistake my guest for English, but... having seen him once with the turban and oriental robe on, I was unable to refuse my belief that he wasn't a European anymore.

As though having guessed my thoughts, my guest said.

"I can assure you that I'm really Florentian, although I have been living in the East for a long time."

I burst out laughing again. I could clearly see my guest's wish to make fun of me! This nicely looking man could be twenty six or seven years old at most, and only "over the full measure" like people are saying.

"So how old were you when you left Florence, if you've been living in the East for so long?" I asked my guest. "You are a little older than me, although your appearance, in spite of your youth, wins one's respect. You looked much older to me yesterday, but now your European suit and your haircut revealed your age."

"Yes," my guest answered to me, looking at me with his eyes full of humour, "your European suit and haircut finally revealed your age, too."

I was rocking with laughter so much that even my brother's dog started barking.

My guest stopped eating the melon, he washed his hands in the stream of the fountain and, still smiling, he offered me to come inside for a short, intimate conversation. I finished drinking my tea and took my guest to my brother's room.

He ran his eyes over all corners quickly and, having pointed his hand to the ashes in the fireside, he told me.

"Not good. Why your servant is cleaning so carelessly? There are burnt shreds of the letter left in the fireside."

I took a newspaper from the table, tucked it under the letter which wasn't burnt till the end and set it on fire diligently.

"I see that you did everything very carefully," he continued, looking round in the room. "By the way, have you taken the decorations out of the turbans?"

"No. It wasn't mentioned in my brother's letter. I left them in the turbans and hid them in the wardrobe, to be precise, I buried them, because I won't be able to lift the wall up," I smiled to my guest.

"I can help you easily," he contradicted.

The messenger came in and asked for permission to go to the market. I gave him some money for dinner and told him to buy the most excellent fruit. When he left, I locked the door from the yard's side, I put the key in my pocket, and we turned towards my brother's cloak-room.

"These doors were left unlocked like this?" my guest reproached me. "And if the messenger had had a look out of curiosity?"

He nodded his head, and I saw my absent-mindedness again.

I put on the light; my guest bent down and showed me one more hardly noticeable button in the fourth flower. It was in the same row of the wallpaper where I had found the ninth flower upwards. He pushed the button, straightened himself and was waiting calmly.

As it had happened to me when I pushed the button, only after several minutes a light rustle was heard, and a crack showed up between the floor and the wall; the wall kept rising, always accelerating and disappeared in the ceiling, as though it had never been here.

I opened the door of the wardrobe and took the turbans out, which were cast on the bottom with disrespect. The guest took both brooches out skilfully, found the cases himself quickly, put the decorations in them and put them into his pocket. Then he found the bottle with the liquid, which I had put there and put it into his pocket, too.

"Haven't you taken the things out of your brother's dressing-table?"

"No," I answered him, "It wasn't indicated in the letter, so I didn't even have a look."

"We better take a look if there isn't left anything valuable that could come in handy to your brother or yourself later on."

We came back to my brother's room, having a chat. The whirls of thoughts were swirling in my head: why do we have to look for the valuable things? Why should something come in handy to us "later on"? Isn't my brother coming back here? All these questions were burning my brains, but I couldn't find an answer to any of them.

It was strange that a total stranger was rummaging my brother's drawers with me, and I firmly believed in his honour and goodwill, not doubting at all that he was doing exactly what was necessary to do at that time.

The guest took several bottles more out of my brother's drawers, which we shared in our pockets. The guest found a plain silver case among different boxes which we didn't even looked at. There was a peacock engraved on its coloured enamel. The stretched out train of the peacock was decorated with jewels. This was a jewelry masterpiece. There was a tiny golden key next to the case, which was hanging on a thin golden chain.

"Being in a hurry, your brother has forgotten this thing which he received as a present and which he valued very much. Take it, and if life is favourable to all of us, some day you will give it to your brother yourself," my wonderful guest was talking to me.

While giving me the case and the key, he touched my hands with both his hands tenderly and amiably. There was such love shining in his eyes that my irritated imagination and excited heart was overflowed with peace and belief that everything would end well, that I wasn't alone, that there was a friend with me.

Could I think back then how much pain I would still have to suffer, how much misfortune would fall on me, what mature and tempered man I would become in three years when finally I would meet my brother, and both of our lives would really be going on well.

Having taken a good look, I saw that it really wasn't the case, but a note-book with a lock. I hid it in the side pocket of my jacket. We picked out this and that more, what seemed to be important to my guest, we locked the drawers, took everything what we had taken out of them into the wardrobe of the cloak-room and closed it firmly; then I pressed the button in the ninth flower again. The wall came down quickly, we locked the cloak-room, I put the key in my pocket, and we came back to the garden again.

Here my guest explained to me that I should introduce him to everyone as my friend from Petersburg and that I should tell the same to the messenger. Then he handed me Ali's invitation to come to his country house today where they both, he and his nephew had left early in the morning. The guest didn't mention the night's events with a single word, and I was feeling shy for some reason and I didn't make bold to interrogate him.

I became so happy that I would still be able to stay with my new friend, so I agreed to come to Ali's at once and willingly. We kept waiting for the messenger in the garden, and my guest's charm was attracting me to him more and more. Grief in my heart and thoughts about my brother were clearing away and stayed calm when I was close to him. The messenger came back in an hour and a half. I told him at once that I would be going to the country with my friend from Petersburg. My friend himself also added that we might be not coming back till morning and that he wouldn't care about us. The messenger gave a smile roguishly and answered as always.

"You can be sure."

We came out to the silent street through the little gates of the garden. The street was buried in verdure and dust. Then we turned into a blind alley that leant on a big shady garden. I was following my new friend, and all of a sudden it became strange to me that it was almost twenty-four hours since I knew this man, I experienced so much with him and I didn't even know his name.

"Listen, friend, you told me to recommend you as a close friend from Petersburg and I don't even know how to introduce you to others or how to call you myself."

He smiled, took my arm – I think that it would have been more convenient for him to put his hand on my shoulder, so small I was next to him – and told me silently in English.

"It doesn't mean anything. Your acquaintances will think that I'm really an English lord, but since they haven't seen a lord in their lives, so it will be very easy for me to play him. By the way, I even have an eye-glass which I can use quite well."

He put the eye-glass into his left eye, pressed his lips together somehow comically, separated his short blond beard into two parts, and... I burst out laughing, because he became so puffed-up, haughty, and his elegant, intelligent face now seemed inane and stupid.

"You see how funny it is," he uttered in a wheeze through his teeth, "I can play the puffed-up blockhead none the worth than you – the limping old man. Among the strangers I am the lord Benedict, but you can call me Florentian, like everyone is doing."

As soon as we stepped into the garden we met a couple of my brother's friends who were officers. It turns out that they were coming to visit us and they became very disappointed when they found out that my brother had left for hunting. I introduced them to my friend from Petersburg, the English lord Benedict. The lord was examining the poor clumsy officers with pride, from the height of his gigantic stature. He was murmuring through his teeth to the questions asked: "I don't understand", several times he dropped and quickly snatched the eye-glass with his eye-brow. By doing so, he finished the officers completely off, who had never seen the living lord with the eye-glass and who were staring at him with their eyes opened wide. Finally, he spoke in a patter that the horses were waiting for us, and that I should tell them that I was going to the country to visit his uncle, also an Englishman.

We said good-bye to each other. I still kept suppressing the laughter that was suffocating me, but when I heard their resentment which they cast after us: "He is an English face!" – I couldn't bear anymore, I was rocking with laughter, and the thunderous, deep voices accompanied me behind our backs.

Lord Benedict, like a real Englishman, didn't even gave a wink, and because of that I wanted to laugh even more.

We crossed the park in silence. There wasn't a single person, a total silence was reigning which was being disturbed only by the babble of the fountain and the chirring of the grasshoppers.

A perfect light carriage was waiting for us by the gates of the garden, to which the real English horses were harnessed in English style. They were unable to remain still, and the old coachman had quite a trouble to hold them. He was wearing a tail-coat, spats and bright brown shoes, he was holding an English whip in his hand and he looked exactly as the one whom I had seen in the illustrations of the fashionable magazines.

I cast a glance at the lord in astonishment, he elegantly gave a little nod to me and offered me to be the first who gets into the carriage. I pulled my shoulders, got into the carriage, he quickly made himself comfortable next to me, he told something to the coachman, which I didn't understand, and we dashed off.

We left the town quite quickly. I hadn't seen its environs up to now. The vineyards, gardens of fruit-trees, fields of water-melons and melons were extending from both sides of the road. The people of different age with turbans kept riding on backs of their donkeys in front of us. Often there were even two riders sitting on one donkey. We also used to meet the women who had wound black nettings and cloaks round their heads. Sometimes two of them were sitting on one donkey, too.

Everything was buried in dust; the sun was glaring, the heat was burning, and it seemed that there would be no end to this rich and fertile land.

We were riding about an hour like this. Finally, we turned to the left and after a quarter of an hour we got into the steppe.

The view changed at once, as if we had gotten into a totally different land. The luxuriant, fertile verdure was left behind us, and in front of us, the wilderness of the steppe with burnt grass was extending as far as our eyes could take it in.

I was lulled by the rhythmical running of the horses, soft rocking of the carriage-springs and flickering of the heated air. I didn't even noticed how I fell into a light slumber.

"We'll be there soon," my attendant began to speak in Russian.

I awoke suddenly and... I was stupefied. My night guardian was sitting in front of me, wearing a white turban and white clothes.

"When did you have time to change your clothes?" I gave a shout, being almost irritated.

He laughed merrily, lifted the front seat that was upholstered with velvet, and I saw a box in which one more oriental robe and a turban already rolled up were lying.

"I changed my clothes as it is required by the Eastern politeness," – my attendant answered me, "because if we arrive dressed in suits, then Ali will have to give to each of us an oriental robe. I think that you aren't inclined to wait until somebody will give you something, and this is your brother's oriental robe."

"Not only I want any Eastern presents, but after the last night's masquerade and miracles, I think that I lost any wish to dress myself in Eastern style forever," I snapped out not at all politely and quite sharply."

"Poor boy," Florentian told me and stroked my shoulder tenderly. "You see, my friend Lovushka, sometimes man is destined to mature at once; and almost instantly after his youth he must become a mature man. Be strong! Take a good look at your heart: whose picture is living in it? Be loyal to your brother-father, as he was loyal to you, his brother-son, during his entire life."

His words touched my most sensitive wound-attachment and heartache. I could feel the nagging sorrow of separation with my brother so strongly again that I was unable to hold back my tears and I was simply choking with my grief.

"I made a resolution to help my brother, so why am I thinking only about myself? I must go till the end. I started the masquerade, - so it must go on. My brother himself wanted me to change my clothes in Eastern style. So be it!"

Having swallowed my tears, I took the turban out, put it on my head and then I put the motley oriental robe on my student uniform.

The house and the garden could already be seen in the distance. The vineyard started in both sides of the road, and bunches of grapes in it were already turning yellow and red, ripening in the sun.

"Now your guessing will not be tormenting you for a long time anymore," – Florentian uttered. "Ali will tell and explain you everything, my friend, and you will understand yourself how serious and dangerous the situation is."

I nodded my head in silence. It seemed to me that I already understood that quite enough. I was feeling such heaviness in my heart, as though by leaving the town I had closed an easy and joyful page of my life, and a new stage of storm and danger would have waited for me in the future.

We drove in through the gates and drove up to the house along the long avenue of high poplars. As soon as the carriage stopped, and we entered rather spacious hall, Ali Mahomet came hurriedly to meet us with his quick and light step. Wearing a white turban and linen clothes which were buttoned up under his neck and which were falling to the ground in wide pleats, he didn't seemed to be so slender and seemed to be much younger to me. His dark face was smiling, while his burning eyes were looking at me with a paternal kindness. He was stretching both of his hands towards me from the distance already. Having surrendered to the first impression, being exhausted with the anxiety which was tormenting me during all that time, I dashed at him, as if I was only ten and not twenty years old.

Having forgotten that one should be strong and hide one's feelings while being in front of a little familiar person, I pressed myself to him with a childish confidence. Any formalities were gone, my heart was pressed to his heart, and I could feel with all my essence that I was at my friend's home, that I had one more friend from now on and that I would always be quite at home here.

Ali put his arms round me, pressed me to himself and told me amiably.

"Let my home bring you peace and help. Step into my house not like a guest, but like my son, brother and friend."

As soon as he told these words to me, he kissed my forehead, embraced me once again and turned me towards young Ali who was standing behind my back.

I remembered this man's suffering when Nal gave her flowers and ring to my brother. Could I expect something else besides hatred from him when he was so envious of his cousin to the European?

But young Ali, like his uncle, stretched out both of his hands towards me by greeting me. His eyes were looking at me boldly and respectfully, and I could see in them nothing else but friendliness.

"Let's go my brother, I will take you to your room. There's a shower, clean clothes, so you can change your clothes if you want to. Forgive me, but we don't have any European clothes here. I prepared some light Indian clothes for you. If you want you can stay with your uniform. The servant will clean it, while you are taking a bath."

Young Ali took me along the whole pretty big house and showed me an excellent room which had windows to the garden and parterre.

"The gong will ring out in twenty minutes, and I will drop in at you. The bathroom and the shower are behind this door," he added.

As soon as Ali was gone, I threw off my student uniform which I was so proud of with pleasure, I opened the door of the bathroom and, having noticed that the bath was full of warm water, I dashed to splash about with joy. I also wanted to refresh myself with the shower. I didn't have time yet to dry myself well, and the servant was already knocking on the door. He brought me a refreshing drink which I drank off and was feeling like a camel in the desert: I didn't even know I was thirsty until I had the drink.

I was trying to make the servant talk in every language that I knew, but he didn't understand anything, he was only shaking his head in the negative and throwing up his arms sadly. All of a sudden he became quiet, he started nodding his head while mumbling something, he ran to the wardrobe and brought me the clothes as white as snow – he probably thought that I was asking him exactly about that. I wanted to stay with my uniform, but the servant was so glad, he was so happy by having understood what I needed, that I didn't want to upset him. I laughed joyfully, patted his shoulder and told him.

"Yes, yes, you have guessed it."

He responded to my laugh with even more joyous nodding of his head and repeated as though he wanted to remember it.

"Yes, yes, you have guessed it."

He was uttering the words in such a funny manner that I was shouting with laughter like an urchin, and suddenly I heard the gong.

"My God!" I gave a shout, as if the servant was able to understand me. "But I will be late!"

But he understood my confusion very well. He quickly gave me white silk briefs, long shirt, white silk robe and another white linen piece of clothing similar to the one that Ali was wearing.

When I started putting my clothes on, young Ali knocked on the door. I asked him to come in.

"Are you ready, my brother?" he asked. "I thought that your short-haired head may be burnt by our sun, so I brought you a turban."

"But I don't know how to put it on," I answered him.

"Just a moment. Only sit down – I will roll the turban up for you."

And indeed, he wound my head round with the turban faster than my brother did. I was feeling myself easily and comfortably. I put the fabric shoes without heels on my bare feet, and we hurried to have our dinner.

We went out to the garden, and behind the huge horse-chestnut in the shade I saw a rounded table. Older Ali and Florentian were already sitting behind the table. I asked them pardon for being late, but the host asked me to sit down next to him and, having smiled pleasingly, he explained to me affectionately.

"When we are living in the country, we aren't observing etiquette so strictly. If you ever don't want to, you are allowed not to show up at the table at all. Feel absolutely free and behave yourself as plainly, easily and merrily as you can. I will be glad if you stay here for a while. Get some rest and concentrate your forces before your subsequent actions, but if life decides differently, then take all love and help from this home and remember me, your eternally loyal friend."

I thanked him, sat down in the place shown to me and looked at Florentian. He had also changed his clothes and was wearing white Indian garments. Once again I was stunned by his blooming beauty and youth which were not obscured by any little wrinkle of grief or anxiety, and his entire essence was as though spreading happiness to life itself.

He also looked at me, smiled, suddenly pressed his lips together, gave his left eyebrow and eyelid a little lift, and I could see the naïve face of lord Benedict again. I burst out laughing like a child, both Alis gave a laugh, too.

The table was laid excellently, but there wasn't any luxury. The dishes were European, but neither meat nor fish nor wine couldn't be seen. I was hungry and with relish I was eating the soup and the vegetables with the most delicious toasts, which were prepared somehow specially. I also didn't forget the most wonderful fruit. I was so engaged in eating, I was taking such a rest from all my experiences that I almost wasn't looking at my neighbours of the table.

A refreshing drink was served in pyalias, but it didn't remind me by anything of that one which Florentian had brought me during the feast. The dinner passed without any special talking. The older men were consulting about something in a language that was unknown to me, while younger Ali was explaining to me the names of the flowers which were put in the china vase on the table. I hadn't seen many of them, I had seen some of them in the pictures, but all of them were fascinating me. Ali promised me to show his uncle's greenhouse after dinner, where the most exotic, rarest and special flowers were growing.

Although I wasn't looking round, I noticed anyway that younger Ali was eating everything bit by bit, but little, as though only out of politeness, so that I wouldn't be distinguished for my appetite,

however, no matter how many times I was glancing at older Ali, I could see only fruit, honey and something similar to milk in his hands.

The dinner was over unnoticed. The change that had happened to young Ali was stunning me from the beginning, now it was striking me even more. His pure, careless youth was gone. It seemed that he was suffering so deeply that his psyche had jumped into the next level. Unawares, I was comparing our destinies and I thought for a while that I had crossed the threshold of my quiet childhood, too. The door to it had closed. Another life started...

Since that moment when Ali Mahomet embraced me, I always wanted to ask him about my brother, but my words were always as if frozen to my tongue and I was unable to utter them in any way. Now the sharp pain of yearning pierced my heart again and I looked at the host with a pleading look. Ali stood up, as though he had heard my silent question. We followed his example and thanked him for the dinner. He squeezed everybody's hand and, having held mine a little bit longer, told me.

"My friend, would you like to walk to the lake with me? It is not far off, it is by the end of the park."

I became glad that finally I had a chance to have a talk with Ali Mahomet. We moved into the depth of the garden. For a while I could hear the steps of Florentian and younger Ali after us, but then we turned into the dense avenue of plane-trees and we were covered with silence that was disturbed only by birds and grasshoppers. I couldn't see any flowers in this part of the park, the trees here were branchy, their trunks were of unseen thickness, their leaves and blossom had unusual colours. Two groups of the trees stood up in a special way: black maples and reddish magnolias. Wonderful, big, bright reddish blossom was covering the foliage so densely that the trees looked like gigantic reddish eggs. A strong, but soft aroma was spreading from them. I stopped unwittingly, filled up my lungs with odorous air and, having forgotten all my terrible thoughts, I gave a shout.

"Oh, what a brilliant, what a wonderful life is!"

"Yes, my boy," Ali assented to me in a low voice. "Pay your attention to these two groups of the trees that are growing close one to another. Black maples and reddish magnolias close to them, - and although being so different, all of them are growing in harmony one close to another, not disturbing the harmony of the symphony of the entire universe. Man's entire life is the chain of black and reddish pearls. It is the real trouble for that person who cannot carry this chain of his life quietly, strongly and faithfully. There are no people whose chain, made of their ordinary, grey days, would have only reddish pearls. Both colours are changing in every chain, and people are stringing them on the string of their spiritual strength by carrying everything within themselves. You are not a boy anymore. The time has come for you to open your honour, fortitude and loyalty within yourself.

We kept walking. We could see the lake already. We turned to the avenue of high cedars again and went to the arbour made of the drooped down branches of the elm. It was shady here, and the lake was breathing of cool.

It seemed that nobody was disturbing the calm of my life, but Ali's words aroused the storm in me. My thoughts were swarming; I was feeling that now I would hear something fatal, but I was unable to concentrate myself in any way.

"I saved two lives last night, although it may seem to you that I doomed them to suffering and deadly danger. I've been dedicating my work to waking up the consciousness of this nation, destroying the horror of fanaticism and making a breach for at least the slightest culture and civilization for a long time already. I have established several schools here – separately for the boys and men, for the girls and women,

so they could learn writing in both their own and Russian languages, so that they would receive the most elementary knowledge of physics, mathematics and history. All of my endeavours are being met with bayonets, not only from the side of mullah, but also from the side of the czar's government. Both of them are calling me a revolutionary, unreliable man. I'm telling you of all of it, so you could clearly see the situation in which you find yourself and you could foresee your further action after evaluating the situation. I'm warning you in advance: you don't have any obligations and you are absolutely free to choose your path. Whatever you would hear from me, you will have to decide everything with your own will anyway. What colour and size of the pearl will be which you will string on the chain of Mother-Life with your own hands will depend on your selfless love and work. If you want to withdraw from the fight for your brother and Nal, your lord Benedict," Ali gave a smile, "will take you to Petersburg where no danger will be threatening you. If you remain loyal to your brother – then you will decide yourself what help and role you will take upon yourself in this fight. I was educating Nal myself. We've been observing the Eastern way of living only for the sake of appearance, and besides, not so strictly at all. Nal is rather educated, her abilities allowed her to acquire the education much higher than that which another person would get in any other European university. Five years ago I persuaded your brother to give Nal lessons of mathematics, physics, chemistry and foreign languages, because I was unable to teach her regularly myself due to my often trips. All those oriental robes, beards, moustaches which you and Florentian hid in the wardrobe of your brother today are also related to this. Stupid duenja, Ali Machmed's mother, whom once I saved from misery and death, turned out to be ungrateful and vicious. Only by changing all sorts of oriental robes and make-up, your brother was able to get into Nal's working room as the teacher, while the weak-sighted old woman was certain that she was letting always another teacher in. She used to snore so comically when she was guarding Nal during lessons that sometimes the girl would give in and laugh loudly, but the rather deaf duenja wouldn't even wake up."

Two great youths showed up in my imagination at once, who were guarded by the half-blind, half-deaf old woman; for some reason I remembered how I was acting the deaf, limping, dumb person myself and I burst out laughing like an urchin.

Ali stroked my shoulder and told me.

"The time was passing. I understood long time ago what feeling had sprung up between Nal and your brother. It was meaningless to appeal to Nikolaj's honour and wisdom: he had proved that with his behaviour anyway. I wasn't disturbing their feelings, because I didn't see any other way out for Nal as only escaping from this pressing fanaticism and I was preparing her for this beforehand. The old fool ruined my entire plan. She started intrigues with the mullah and dervishes behind my back. Finally she agreed to give Nal in marriage to the most furious and wicked religious fanatic of everybody of them whom I knew. Now the massacre is being declared against me, because I didn't agree with the marriage, besides I was a guardian to the Christians and revolutionaries. I won't burden you with the details, you could see yourself that I didn't succeed in avoiding the marriage. At that time when Florentian took you out of the garden, the feast on the women's side continued. The women gathered to their side through another entrance and over there everything was prepared for the legal stealing of the bride. Ali, my nephew, was acting the role of the bride. Having changed into Nal's clothes, he slipped through to the women's side in the dark and, while the confusion with the lighting continued, he was in time for taking the bride's place. The light on the women's side was out for a little bit longer. Everything was happening as needed. The old women took the bride to the garden and over there, by passing her from one's hands to another's, the groom "stole" her. The stealing was done, as it is accustomed for a famous trader, according to all rules – with the noise, gunshots and hubbub. On the way something happened to one of their horses. While the whole band at the head of the groom, armed with the knives, were repairing the harness in the light of the torches, Ali threw his oriental robe and costly cloaks off, left Nal's shoes which he had taken with himself in the cart,

jumped out silently – he can do it very well – and vanished in the darkness. Both of us, me and Florentian, we were waiting for him at the little gates and all of us together, we returned to the house which had already become calm and sleeping. Ali suffered a lot. You should have noticed the change that happened to him during one night. He was worshipping his little sister since his childhood. He and Nal, often they also used to learn with your brother. Nal – that’s his second “I”, and probably this second “I” is more costly to him than his own life. The storm of jealousy, heavy burden of superstitions, dreams about his happiness with Nal befell on Ali so much that everything had either burn down in him or crush him. He didn’t expect that he wouldn’t become the best Nal’s friend and guardian. He didn’t expect that I would take your brother’s side and give my blessing to this love which Ali was always considering to be pure and chaste. It was unbearable to him to let another man have Nal, and besides that man was the European, as well as because this time she took the path without him, which was full of danger. So first, all of it finished Ali off. Only his total loyalty to me saved him. In the beginning it was a child’s loyalty and love, later – a youth’s, from whom I have never had any secrets. His true love to Nal, which has seized him, forced him to forget himself and think only about her. Actually, his love saved not one, but three lives which would have stopped because of his hand if his loyalty to me hadn’t overcome everything within him. Tonight, in his free will, he choose his path of life and strung the pearl of renunciation on the string of his chain – the black pearl like those leaves of the maple, - in order to help the woman live, who looks pretty much like the reddish magnolia... I have already mentioned that not today – tomorrow the massacre would be declared against me. I’d rather not explain to you what it means... When, having driven to the groom’s house, everybody noticed that only Nal’s clothes were left in the cart, they reported about it to mullah and dervishes at once and, having talked things over with them, they came back to our house. I was surrounded by the crowd that was clamouring disgustingly, outraging and threatening. Having taken advantage of one more quiet moment, I commanded my servants to ask the old women to come. They had to take Nal from the house to the garden, to the place that was arranged with the groom. The crowd was waiting. It seemed that everything around was filled with the energy of their anger. The passing minutes of waiting became hours. Undoubtedly, the confusion had woken everybody up on the women’s side, too. Soon six old women with Nal’s aunt in front of them were already standing next to me.”

“These people,” I told them, “are accusing you that you didn’t take Nal to the garden, but you gave only her clothes to the groom.”

“An inconceivable howling rose in both groups – among the brutalized men and the women who were shaking with fear and who were angry because of such accusations. Both sides were ready to catch hold one of another. Swinging her arms, mumbling some maledictions, the old aunt was insisting that she herself put Nal’s hand into the hands of the groom. The rest of them were insisting that they saw how the groom took the bride in his hands and he didn’t even noticed that she was too heavy for his weak hands. I looked at the groom, he cast down his eyes and was confessing that he hadn’t carried any women in his hands up to then and that Nal seemed to him heavier than he imagined. When I asked him if he himself took her in the cart, he showed two of his friends who were tall, strong and he explained that he himself hardly carried Nal to the little gates, and then one of his friends carried her to the cart; both of the strong men were putting her in the cart. I also had to interrogate those men, if there was Nal or only her clothes which they put in the cart. Both of them were insisting that nobody else than Nal could be so slender and elegant.”

“Where have you taken her to?” I asked them. “The women are stating that they gave her to you, you are stating that you took her from them, in the meanwhile you come to my house to look for that whom you have taken away from it. Well, so where is Nal?”

“Again there were questions asked, they were accusing me and my nephew that we stole and hid Nal in my house, that apparently, she ran away at that moment when they stopped because of the

harness. They were insisting that Nal was in my harem. There were no limits to the rage of the old women and aunt who was absolutely furious already. Finally, the mullah with two dervishes stepped forward and asked for permission to inspect the women's side. The crowd which was attracted by the noise of the night and curiosity was terrified by such a decision, but I asked them to fall silent and everybody to remain in one's place. I gave permission to the old women, mullah and dervishes to look for her in my entire house, wherever they wanted to. The noisy crowd had already raided my entire garden without any permission; the cellar, ice-house, coach house, barn where the machine of electricity was installed received their attention, too. It was dawning already. The search continued for a long time. There were even the ones in the crowd were drowsing already, when finally, the mullah and the monks were back. Their sullen faces were telling about the results of the search without any words. Flabby, short groom, irritated by the experience misfortune, was hardly able to drag his legs along already. The mullah understood that it was the best to play a comedy of sympathy to me, so he told a fanciful speech how the old women failed to protect the girl from under uncle's very nose. The howling could be heard again, and who knows whether the mullah had saved his beard if Ali Machmed and me hadn't stopped the old women who were totally furious already. The wiser monks were trying to persuade the crowd to break up, so that it wouldn't draw Russian government's attention to the domestic scandal. I could see a deadly hatred in their eyes and I didn't have any doubts that they would finish me, Ali and many of my guests and members of the family off if there wasn't light of the morning already and if they didn't have fear of being responsible before the Russian justice. As the locals could see it, the groom made a fool of himself the most. He looked at his strong men angrily, some suspicion flashed in his eyes, all of a sudden he turned his back to them, cursed rudely and quickly ran to the little gates. His friends, mullah and the crowd were standing for a while, stunned and quiet, then they dashed after the groom, stumbling, knocking one another down or pressing one another at the narrow gates. The groom kept quarrelling with his friends and mullah behind the fence, then there were cries, several gunshots could be heard once again, the racket of the leaving cart – and then everything lapsed into silence. The old women were finished off by shame, and they were really unhappy. They were sincerely making a vow and swearing that Nal and her friends were really sitting at the table during the whole evening, that they had put the black cloak on bride's expensive mantles, that... I told everybody to break up. I told them that I myself would be looking for Nal and that nobody would go in and out of the house during the day.

Now I received the message that your brother and Nal are successfully going to Moscow by the fast train, but it doesn't mean that they are saved. Their lives are in danger until they reach Petersburg and get on the ship that is sailing from the Neva port to London."

"Now let's proceed to your role," Ali Mahomet continued after reconsidering something briefly. "You are entangled into this story not because of your free will, but as Nikolaj's brother, because all my friends, as well as the people who are more or less close to them became enemies to the blind religious fanatics. On the other hand, the dervishes have decided that the old limping man who was unknown to them stole Nal. The tracks may lead them to you, and without any doubt, they will lead them to Florentian. I am repeating to you: decide everything yourself on your own free will. You can tell me right now if you don't want to join this entire affair, then you would have to leave to K. immediately," Ali was referring to a large commercial city, "with a letter to my friend. You would live there for two or three weeks and then you would come back to Petersburg. If you want to help me to fight for your brother's life, then make up your mind and start acting."

Ali finished the conversation with me in this way.

Chapter 4

I become the dervish

My heart calmed down, everything was very clear to me. I didn't worry about myself at all, even my anxiety for my brother's destiny had vanished. Ali's closeness, his power and energy inspired me self-confidence and cheerfulness.

The more I was going deep into the terrible discord of nations with my thoughts, the clearer I imagined the darkness of the ignorant, poor and almost always hungry nation – the nation which itself is unable to choose even its religion independently, but which slavishly submits to fanatics from its birth, - it became clearer to me that I couldn't remain unmoved by the destiny of the people who perhaps were strangers to me, but they had the same blood colour and they were suffering as much as my native Russian nation to which my brother had moved me nearer and which was being oppressed by the czar.

And the longer I was thinking about the strange coincidence which now had tied me together with the destiny of the strange nation and drawn me into the whirl of superstitions, the clearer I perceived that there were no accidental events, but there was a harmony of the powers prevailing, which is always working naturally and accurately, which is uniting all people – the harmony of the black maples and reddish magnolias.

Taking strength from the bottom of my heart, the tranquillity in me wasn't only growing already, but it was simply consolidating, it seemed that I had comprehended my heart itself for the first time.

"Don't think that you have to answer me right away, although of course, we don't have much time. I think that the events will be developing rather quickly."

"I can answer you right away," I told him. "I am so peaceful, my decision is so clear to me that I can remember neither similar and wonderful state nor similar inner peace during my entire life. I don't have any doubts and I cannot imagine that I could take a different path where I should separate myself from my brother, you, Florentian and all your friends. If my brother was here, then he would unite his life with yours, wouldn't he? And he would fight for your nation's liberation together with you, although you are an Indian, and this nation isn't native for you. I don't need any reflections in order to take my decision. I am going with you, I am loyal to my brother-father and I am ready to give all my strength for his life and fortune, as well as for the freedom of this nation to which you are serving with such a devotion and selflessness."

"My dear friend, your tranquillity convinces me more than any vows and promises. Let's go back home, there may be some news already."

With these words Ali stood up, he embraced me, put his hand on my head and looked into the depth of my eyes with his black and infinite eyes. I was covered with the trembling of some kind of joy, I as if lost my consciousness for a while and I came to my senses only in the avenue of cedars, admiring the reflection of the sun on the surface of the lake.

The only attendants of our thoughts on our way home were the chirping of the birds, chirring of the grasshoppers and aroma of the trees. I had never felt myself so oddly. It seemed to me that all external facts had to crush my spirit, but in fact, for the first time in such majestic silence of nature, next to

the man in whom I was feeling an exceptional power and purity, I discovered another, yet unknown life of my heart. I was feeling like a little part of this infinite universe in which I was moving and breathing. It seemed to me that any difference between me, the sun, shining water and rustling trees had disappeared, that everybody of us was an individual note of that symphony about which Ali was talking.

As though I began to understand the meaning of things where all revolutions, the fight of individual men, boiling passions of the entire nations, all wars and horrible elemental forces – everything was prompting the mankind to develop, to strive for equality and brotherhood, harmony and beauty in combined work, where freedom of new life had to make an opportunity for man to give all the best for the welfare of other people and in return to receive what was necessary for his development and individual happiness...

I was immersed in my thoughts. I was filled up with joy and I didn't even notice how we reached the house where younger Ali and Florentian were waiting for us.

Having exchanged some insignificant phrases about the beauty of the park, we came inside and sat down at the table in the open veranda. The table was already set for the tea. The heat abated. The tea was served in big tea-pots with beautiful colours and original Chinese pictures. As soon as we finished one cup of tea each, the servant came in and told several words to the host silently. He asked us pardon and left. We kept sitting in silence. We were gone deep into our own thoughts, and none of us was restricted by this silence: everybody was as though concentrated within himself, everybody was getting ready for the upcoming events in his own way.

It seemed to me that I hadn't even been living up to this day, that only today I felt the real bond with all people – familiar and unfamiliar to me, distant and close to me, and I evaluated the life newly by discussing the question what it meant to be strange, close, who were strangers, who were own people.

Due to this absent-mindedness that was characteristic to my imagination I didn't even notice how almost an hour was gone.

The servant came in and said to younger Ali that the host was inviting everybody to come to his study. We stood up, Florentian put his arm on my shoulder, pressed me tenderly to his heart for a while, and we went to another side of the house which I hadn't seen yet.

We entered a big Eastern room, Ali Mahomet's study by crossing the hall which I and Florentian already knew. He was sitting at the writing-table, and in front of him, in the deep arm-chair, upholstered with carpets, there was a dervish settled. He was wearing a yellow oriental robe and a pointed cap, decorated with the brush of the fox.

It seemed that the surprises of the recent days had affected my nerves so much that I almost gave a shout out of unexpectedness. I could expect everything, but to see the dervish, sitting in Ali's study – that was already beyond my powers. I could feel such irritation that I was ready to attack him.

Young Ali cast a glance at me and, having understood from my face what was going on inside of me, whispered to me.

"Not everybody who is wearing a yellow oriental robe is really a dervish. This is a friend."

I was trying to control myself and I started examining the imaginary dervish from head to toe intently. And again, I was ashamed of such intemperance of mine and lack of delicacy and attention. If I had looked at the face of this man from the beginning, if I had turned all my attention to him and not to myself, then there wouldn't have been anything why I could become irritated.

The youth was sitting in front of me. He wasn't any older than myself or Ali Machmed. His dark eyes out of his pulled cap were twinkling softly like the stars, his nose had excellent lines, his face was oblong, his hands were excellent and their form was refined, although they were sunburnt and numb. His figure was blowing of nobility, even if he was wearing the robe of the beggar. Great wisdom was reflected in his face. I wanted to pull that ugly cap off his head so much, so that his forehead would open – it must be the one of the real thinker.

The dervish was speaking in a language that I didn't know, and to my shame I wasn't even able to define what kind of language it was. I knew that everything what they were talking about then, would be explained to me, so I was only watching.

Florentian was sitting with his back turned to the window. He was sitting in front of the young dervish on whom the direct light was falling down. Although a light curtain of ivory colour was drawn across the window, there was enough light, so I wouldn't let the slightest movement of the muscles of the stranger's face slip off.

The truth is, he also was a very good-looking man. He was higher than middle height, broad-shouldered and he reminded me my brother of something. Ali Mahomet's face was so serious that I remembered all danger that was threatening my brother at once, and a sharp pain pierced my heart.

The stranger began to speak again. His original, deep, baritone voice which sounded like a metal would have made many opera singers famous. It seemed that he was proposing something. Everybody was silent, as though reconsidering his words, and finally old Ali, having looked at me, told.

"I beg your pardon, my friend. You didn't understand our language, and I will tell you the essence in brief. The mullah and the groom, ostensibly referring to the testimonies of the guests and servants, are stating that Nal was stolen by the guest to whom I was passing the dishes during the feast. They are telling that it was a famous old man, limping and grey, who rose from the table exactly at that moment when Nal was stolen. The mullah has declared that there was a witchcraft used and he's charging with it me and that limping old man whom they are looking for everywhere. They have already started the massacre against me. They levelled to the ground two schools that I had built. Isolation from belief threatens to those women by whom they can find books, and that in these dark, wild lands is more terrible than death. It is rumoured that somebody has seen how the old limping man hid himself in your brother's house. It is possible that the wild horde will attack my and your brother's house, they even might burn them down. I must go to town at once and save the rest of the people from real destruction. You together with Florentian, you have to go to the railway station and try to reach Petersburg, so you could help our fugitives over there. I don't have any doubt that all of us are being spied upon. The czar's government isn't meddling into any religious massacre, it doesn't see or hear anything until it's convenient for it. If the massacre of my house begins and if anybody finds you or your brother, then you will be dead. Everybody knows about our friendship, and if you were caught, then you would be responsible for everybody. This friend is proposing you to change your clothes to dervish's ones, and Florentian will change his clothes to ordinary trader's ones, then you should go to Moscow with the third class train. On your way, you will decide how to save yourselves, while I will be sending you telegrams poste restante to every stop and let you know about the course of events by doing so. Don't forget that you have to think not about yourself, while saving yourself imagine that you are only additional two arms and legs, dedicated to save life of your friend, brother-father. Concentrate the entire heroism and fortitude of your heart, so that in the moment of danger you wouldn't give yourself away neither by your absent-minded look nor by any movement. Look straight in the eyes of those who will seem to be suspicious to you. Become a deaf-mute again for a while and watch the lips of those who will be talking to you with the attention which is characteristic to the deaf-mutes. This will be leading the persecutors away. There isn't much time. If you want to accept this

proposal, Ali and your new friend will help you to change your clothes. In the meanwhile, I will hand Florentian all the things needed for your journey, and we will make arrangements about the telegrams.”

He rose and left with Florentian. Young Ali and my new friend started dressing me with dervish's clothes, and I agreed with that, unhesitating at all.

As if all misfortunes weren't enough for me, they smeared me with that colourless liquid again, and this time they did it to my entire body, while my hands, legs and face were coloured with a double layer, that's why they wrinkled and became as though sunburnt. Visually I looked like a forty years old man, but this time I didn't worry about my gone youth and white skin. Talking was not about a masquerade, but about lives of my dear brother and myself. I was trying to remember all those movements and manners which my new friend was showing to me and which were characteristic to dervishes.

As soon as I got dressed, Florentian came in. I couldn't recognize him: he had a long black beard, bluish grey turban, motley cotton oriental robe which was tied up with a kerchief, and on his legs he had put soft, black high boots. It seemed that a mediocre trader got ready for his goods. His face and elegant hands were just as black as mine, while his nails and teeth were terribly dirty.

If this had happened before, I would have been rocking with laughter, but now I evaluated such change properly.

“Have you stuck the cap to his head?” Florentian asked. “It is possible that somebody might try to pull it off.”

He pulled a dark skullcap out of his huge pocket himself and pulled it on my head so firmly that one could pull it off my head only with my skin. He smeared the inner side of the pointed cap with glue and pulled it on my miserable head. It was so hot that I could hardly stand on my feet, the cap was too tight, and I was feeling bad.

Older Ali came in and it seemed that he could understand my state. He took a little box from the drawer of his writing-table, opened it and put a white pill into my mouth. He closed the little box and gave the rest of them to Florentian.

“The horses will be waiting for you on another side of the lake. You will leave from there,” Ali explained. “There's hardly enough time to reach the station.”

Having said good-bye to both Ali and my new friend in a hurry, the two of us, me and Florentian, hurried to the lake along the shortest way. Here we boarded a boat. Florentian paddled to another shore quickly, and in a few minutes we saw an ordinary light carriage that was coming running towards us. Not having said a single word to the coachman, we boarded the carriage and dashed off to the station.

The station was three versts away from the town, so we drove round it from another side. We found a couple of bundles in the carriage, which were tied up in the cotton shawls, as well as two miserable chests made of wood. Florentian was behaving as though he had never been wearing anything better than the cotton oriental robe and as though he hadn't had any understanding about elegant suitcases.

Having driven to the station, we jumped out of the carriage and got into the noisy, excited Eastern crowd. Seeing a miserable trader and poor monk, nobody was paying any attention to us. Everybody was staring only at richer new-comers.

An old man approached us and volunteered to carry our belongings. Florentian gave him my bundle and chest. He thrust his own chest under his arm, took his bundle into his hand as if it was only a little bag of cotton wool, he told something to the old man, and we went to the station.

Another old man was waiting for us in the station. He gave two tickets to Florentian. As soon as we came to the platform, the train drove up.

We found our third class carriage and sat down on the dirty bench. Slices of bread, shreds of paper, gnawed bits of melons and peels of bananas, oranges and water-melons were rolling round us.

As soon as we took our places, there was a noise on the platform. All that crowd which we crossed in the station broke into platform, yelling. Having pushed aside the gendarme who was trying to hold them, the people were dashing to the first class carriages, swinging their arms. They were also trying to get into the international carriage. The crowd swept away the station master, gendarme and the guards in a flash. A few people, looking for something, shouting one to another, managed to slip to this carriage anyway.

Then not numerous passengers who were frightened and who didn't understand anything started shouting, too. The gendarme with the whistle was proclaiming danger, while the group of armed soldiers, carriers and gendarmes were already running to help him. Having had time to raid the international carriage, the crowd was dashing to the first class, some of them also managed to run to the second one, but the gendarme caught them here. He drew the soldiers up in a fighting position with his sonorous voice, and the whole Eastern crowd scattered to all sides in a flash, not succeeding to force their way through to the third class carriages. Everybody was gone as if they hadn't been here. They were scuttling as much as they could, getting through the carriages which were standing on the side-tracks. By the way, perhaps they weren't interested in the third class carriages at all: looking for Ali himself and his friends, they couldn't even imagine them to be in these sweepings.

The train kept standing, although the time for it to leave had already passed long time ago. I broke into a sweat so much that I kept wiping my face with the big motley handkerchief which the dervish gave to me. I was using exactly the same movement as I was shown by him. Although I believed firmly that it was impossible to recognize us, but I noticed an anxiety that all of a sudden flashed in the eyes of Florentian. Having cast a glance to the platform, I saw that the mullah came up to the old man who was carrying our parcels and who now was staring with his wide-opened mouth in the doorway of the station, but exactly at this moment the station master waved his hand, a deafening third bell was heard, the senior conductor gave a whistle, the whistle of the railway engine echoed it, and finally we were off.

We hadn't even left the station yet, when a young sarth jumped like a cat into our carriage from the opposite side of the platform. He was breathing frequently and heavily, apparently because of the fast running. Having stepped into the carriage, he didn't sit down, but simply fell down next to us. I thought for a while that he would faint away in a moment.

Florentian inspected him, he rocked his head for a while and addressed two old sarths who were sitting in the depth of the carriage. I didn't understand his language, but one of them stood up and gave the panting youth water from the jug made of pumpkin. He quenched his thirst, but was still unable to come to life.

Finally, he calmed down a little and asked Florentian, who was sitting next to me and who was almost covering me with his broad shoulders, if he hadn't noticed who boarded the train in this station.

"Of course, I noticed. I boarded it myself, my nephew did, and you did," my friend answered him, laughing and also added "In fact you didn't board, you jumped in."

Somebody in the carriage gave a laugh, after hearing this. Young sarth had already come to himself.

“Whom are you running from? Perhaps, the czar’s government is persecuting you?” Florentian asked him.

“No,” he answered. “I was chasing for the train, so I could give a very important letter to one of our traders. I was told that he was travelling with his nephew namely in this carriage.”

He stood up, went the whole carriage round, thanked the old man who gave him to drink, talked to him for a while and came back to us again.

“No, there’s neither uncle nor his nephew whom I’m looking for here. And there’s neither their red-haired friend nor the limping old man in the first class carriage. I will have to jump out at the bend and wait for the next train.”

Florentian was nodding his head with dignity, and by doing so, he was expressing his compassion, because he would have to jump out of the running train.

Young sarth was explaining to Florentian and the curious persons who had gathered round us that he was looking for a trader, his benefactor, and if the people here told him who else boarded this train, not including me and Florentian, then he and his rich benefactor would repay them for their service.

One old man let it out that he saw how two women and a youth boarded the last carriage of the train. The face of the sarth brightened up, his eyes flared up, he pushed the travellers who had surrounded us and dashed to the next carriage at breakneck speed.

He came back to us again in about twenty minutes, and his long physiognomy explained without any words how it went for him there. Nobody was interested in his coming back. Some of the travellers were already getting ready to get out of the train in the nearest station.

The sarth sat down next to Florentian again and started whispering something to his ear, being afraid that I could hear him, but my friend calmed him down, showing to his ears. Anyway, he glanced at me a couple of times suspiciously, but having seen that I was attentively watching his mouth, he turned away and calmed down. Having thought for a while that there was no use of watching him, I also decided to turn away and look through the window.

The train was driving fast, it seemed that the engine-driver wanted to win some time. As far as my eyes could take it in at a glance, the grey and hungry steppe was stretching everywhere: there was neither a tree nor a bush nor a house. I started thinking about the troubles of the locals unwittingly. They were making the richest vineyards, growing wonderful fruit and flowers by irrigating the fields artificially. In the meanwhile the train slowed the speed down considerably. We were driving round a deep ravine. There was a thin stream in its ground. It seemed that the network of artificial irrigation canals started here, because the whole landscape changed here at once, too. The gardens of kishlaks, big trees of figs, nuts and chestnut were looming before my eyes.

We started driving even slower, and suddenly I saw the sarth jumping out of the train, who vanished in the ravine by calculating his jump skilfully.

He disappeared just in time. As soon as I turned my face to Florentian, two conductors showed up at the door of the carriage, asking to prepare the tickets. Having checked the tickets, the conductors went to the next carriage. I was thinking that now I already would find out what the sarth was

whispering to Florentian, but my friend put his finger to his lips imperceptibly and stretched out a little note which he had clasped in his hand.

That was the telegram poste restante. It was written in Russian, sent to town S. to trader K., reporting that trader A was alive – and full stop.

I didn't quite understand how the note got into the hands of my friend, although I thought that sarth left it.

The train stopped in a quarter of an hour, but nobody boarded our carriage here. Florentian took two books out of his parcel and gave one of them to me. His book was written in Arabian, while mine reminded me of a thick and worn out prayer-book. I could understand its cipher as well as that fragment from the Koran, which my brother was showing to me on the wall of one of the mosques.

Having estimated the foresight of that person who was preparing our belongings, I gave a smile. What other book could be in the hands of the dervish if not a worn out prayer-book which has seen everything in the perpetual journeys of the homeless monk?

One pious old man brought me a melon and a slice of bread. Another one stretched out two lumps of sugar. Once again, in my thoughts I thanked my new friend for the lessons of good manners and expressing gratitude of the monk, especially when he is getting food. Florentian was explaining to everybody that I was deaf, but real saint and that my prayers were always reaching God. In the meanwhile I, looking down, pressing my hand to my heart, nodded my head several times, not even looking at those who were giving alms to me. Some of them, having heard that I was saint and even loved by God, were extending me money, too.

We were going like this until evening; the night fell suddenly again. Everybody became calm in the carriage. Florentian put my soft parcel under my head, told me to go to sleep and sat down by my feet.

I don't know if I was sleeping for a long time, I only felt that somebody was shaking me strongly. I was unable to wake up in any way, although I comprehended that somebody was waking me up. Finally, someone's strong hands got me on my feet, and I inhaled some ammonia. I sneezed and woke up. Florentian was standing next to me, both of our chests were tied up and put on his shoulder, one of the parcels was already sticking out of his arm. He took the parcel on which I was sleeping in his hand, showed me the door with his other hand and pushed me a little towards it.

It was almost dark in the carriage. The candles were already burned down in some of the lanterns. There were not many lanterns and they were hanging quite high.

Although I could grasp a little because of my sleepiness, but I turned towards the door. I imagined that we would jump out of the train like the sarth did. By the way, the train was going at full speed now. I became horror-struck, because my inconvenient clothes of the dervish, which looked like a sack, were restricting my movements. A thought flashed without any logical connection that my cap was also glued to my head only because it shouldn't fall down from such jump.

We left the carriage in silence, and I had already grasped the grip of the outer door, wishing to open it.

"It is still early," Florentian uttered to my very ear silently.

"So we are going to jump out of the train that is running at the full speed?" I asked him silently, too.

“Jump out of the train? But why should we jump out of it?” he was laughing. “We are coming to the big city. We will get out in the station, hire a coach-man for ourselves and go to my friend who is living here. But you still remain the dervish who is indifferent to everything until I tell you to stop, and whoever would address you, keep showing to your ears. The train is already slowing down. You go first and give me your hand. Don’t step back off me for a single second neither in the station nor at the house of my friend. Keep holding like this either by my hand or my belt, as though you were blind and couldn’t move without my help.”

The train was coming up to the poorly lit platform. The night was reigning all around, and it seemed that there was no living soul, but then we could see the red cap of the station master on duty, the hefty figure of the gendarme – and the train stopped.

We alighted from the train, crossed the empty waiting hall of third class and went to the place of the station. A sarth came up to Florentian and volunteered to take us to the nearest kishlak. Having found out that we needed to get to the city, to a commercial district, the sarth became glad that he was going the same way and that he would earn good money.

However, he was wrong. Florentian like a real Eastern trader was bargaining with him with heat. He was sputtering words like peas, rolling his eyes and gesticulating in every possible way. The coach-man kept up with him. They were bawling like this for some ten minutes, finally the coach-man gave a deep sigh, rolled his eyes up and asked Allah for help. It seemed that Florentian was waiting exactly for this. He was also calling for Allah with his folded hands, pushed me forward, and the coach-man saw the dervish. Now he fell silent at once, bowed to me and invited us to his cart. We climbed up and went to the city which was two versts away.

Chapter 5

I am playing a servant interpreter

We were going in silence. The sarth was trying to speak to Florentian, but having heard only short answers uttered in a sleepy voice, he decided that we were tired, so he concentrated his entire attention to the horse which was peacefully trotting along the soft road.

The stars were twinkling above us. After the sound sleep in the carriage, my thoughts were drowsing during all that time, but now they began to move again.

I had never heard the silence of the night in the steppe. As in Ali's park, I was embraced by perception of nature's majesty again, I was bowing to it. I was looking at the stars scattered in the sky, and for the first time, I could see those constellations which I had seen only in the books until then. These celestial bodies didn't remind me of the north by anything. They were much bigger and lighter, they were shimmering like lamps; now I could understand the poets who were writing about the shimmering light of the stars. And the sky itself, cut by the wide Milky Way, seemed to be lower, it was shining in the contrasts of the light and darkness.

In my thoughts I came back to Ali Mahomet and his affairs. Once again I was pierced with joy of meeting him. I was contemplating about harmony and beauty of nature. I was thinking about that power of love and happiness that is streaming from nature to man, about that huge grief and the tears with which he himself is filling the world by justifying all his actions in the name of Almighty Creator, and in order to protect Him, he is inviting cruel fanaticism to help, and he persecutes people, not leaving even the right for them to their personal lives.

Even pattering of the hoofs and light shaking of the cart wasn't lulling me to sleep this time; but suddenly in the silence of the night I was feeling lonely, unhappy and helpless... This weakness continued only for a moment. I remembered Ali's words that the time came to show my fortitude and loyalty. A wave of cheerfulness and even joy rolled over me. I wanted to fight as soon as possible not only for happiness of my brother and Nal, but for everybody who is suffering from the yoke of fanatics, from oppression of really mad people who are obsessed with religious superstitions, who consider their belief to be the only truthful and who are destroying everybody who is dying to be free, who is longing for knowledge and independent life...

I moved closer to Florentian, I pressed myself to him out of gratitude and I was met with his pleasant and tender look which as though was saying to me: "There's no loneliness for those who love people and who want to dedicate all their strengths, fighting for their happiness."

We drove into the city already. The entire city, from its outskirts to its centre, was similar to a continuous garden. The night didn't seem to be so dark anymore. A mosque and a market-place came to light in the tangle of green streets.

Florentian told the coach-man to stop, we got out, paid him and moved along that market-place which was guarded by the night watchmen here and there. Several times we turned now to one now to another sleeping street and finally we stopped by a little house with the garden. Some time passed after Florentian's knock, then the little gates opened and a surprised yard-keeper looked us up and down. Florentian asked him in Russian if the master was at home. It turned out that he had come back only about an hour ago and that he hadn't had his supper yet, although he told him that he was very hungry.

Florentian asked him to tell the master that lord Benedict was sending us and that we would like that he would accept us immediately if that was possible. The yard-keeper was delighted with the coin that slipped into his palm imperceptible: having let us come into the garden, he broke into a run to tell his master about us. We stayed alone. While we were waiting, Florentian carefully thrust his finger under my wadded cap and pulled it off quickly; having torn my glued skullcap off quickly, he put the dervish cap back on my head.

It was difficult to describe what I was feeling after becoming free of that bandage. I wanted to give a shout loudly out of joy, but being afraid of giving myself away, I kept it to myself. I only jumped up a couple of times.

“What Lordict? You are always mixing everything up!” the words reached us.

“Remember that you are still deaf until I tell you,” Florentian whispered to me.

In the meanwhile I was puzzling over where I could hear that special voice, but I couldn’t remember.

The yard-keeper came back and invited us to enter the veranda. We followed him into the depth of the garden. The verdure with its huge blossom which were like clusters was so dense that we could see the light in the veranda only when we turned to the left.

A servant, still almost a boy, was labouring at the table by laying it in European way. He was bringing the dishes which were covered with the plates and fruit which were covered with netting.

Florentian put our belongings in the corner. We sat down on the little wooden bench next to our things. The servant would come in and go out, every time taking a peep at us with disdain and unfriendliness. Finally, he told us rather carelessly that the master was waiting for us in his study. Having left our leather galoshes next to our belongings, we came from veranda along the corridor into a big room. A grand piano and soft furniture were standing here, but the floor was bare, not like at Ali’s, where the feet were simply buried in carpets.

Having crossed this room, we got to the closed door, from under which the light was penetrating. The servant was going first and he wanted to knock on the door, but Florentian pushed him away, he squeezed my hand strongly as though reminding me that I was deaf and knocked on the door himself in his own way.

The door opened quickly and... it was great that Florentian squeezed my hand strongly, otherwise I would have given a scream at the top of my voice.

In front of us was standing the same stranger who gave me the clothes of the dervish in Ali’s study. Florentian bowed low in front of the master by pulling me down, too. I understood that I had to bow even lower until the same hand gave a tug at my shoulders upward.

Florentian told to the master something loudly, he gave a nod, drew low pouffes close to us and commanded something to the servant who had entered with us, only I didn’t understand what he told him. Servant’s physiognomy fell out of amazement, and only the look of the master forced him to bow down respectfully and silently close the door when he left.

Now our friend extended his hand, smiled and his look wasn’t so strict anymore. Tiredness and sadness could be seen in his wonderful face.

"Haven't you recognize my voice?" the master said to me, while holding my hand and smiling tenderly. "I told several words to the servant in a high tone on purpose, so that you wouldn't be so surprised later when you hear me. Judging by your forehead and cheek-bones, you are very musical, right?"

I wanted to answer him that I memorized the timbre of his original voice, but in the garden I couldn't remember whose it was. I started talking, but then I was feeling very tired, and suddenly I was dazzled, the floor slipped out of my feet and I dived into the darkness...

I don't know for how long I was fainted away, but I came to myself because of the pleasant cool on my head and something chilling on my heart. Florentian gave me to drink, after several sips he also made me to swallow one of the pills which Ali Mahomet had given to us. I was feeling better pretty soon, I calmed down and I was sitting firmly on the low pouffe. The master was writing a letter. Florentian took the cold compress off my head and heart and whispered to me.

"Soon we are going to rest, hold tight."

But now I was ready to keep travelling again, I was feeling so much strength as though I had just climbed out of the cool swimming pool.

Having finished writing his letter, the master called his servant, told him to bring this letter to the addressee immediately and to come back with the response. It seemed that the servant didn't like the place very much, which he was sent to, and he wanted to contradict already, but having met the attentive and strict look of the master, he bowed low and left hurriedly.

We went to the veranda. We washed our hands in the wash-basin which I hadn't notice before. My hands didn't become any brighter and, having sighed, I thought for a while that I was so tired of the make-up, strange clothes and constant adventures which were becoming like the fairy-tale about one thousand and one night.

We sat down at the table. Fruit, vegetables, refreshing juice drinks and the bread of several kinds were waiting for us here. Everything was very delicious, but I hardly wanted to eat. Both of my older friends weren't eating much, too.

"I have written the letter in my servant's language, because I'm sure that he not only will read it himself, but he also will take it to mullah. The news about the massacre against Ali has reached us here, too. In that letter I'm writing to my familiar donkey trader that tomorrow evening my friend who is also a trader will visit him to buy up donkeys. I'm asking him to take care of as big herd as possible, because my friend might buy it all. Our local mullah who is using this trader's name as a cover is carrying out a large-scale trade of donkeys and cattle. Now he undoubtedly will be occupied the whole day, he will be giving instructions what to drive from where and what price to ask. He will finally find some time for his feat against Ali only in the evening. That familiar trader of mine is living rather far from here, and we have about three hours. During that time both of you need to take a bath, change your clothes, become Europeans again and come back to K. There's a railway intersection there. You will take an international train travelling in the opposite direction, and I think that you will come to Moscow successfully. This time you will not avoid an unusual suit, too," he addressed me. "You will be the servant-guide of the lord Benedict who doesn't know a single Russian word. You have to come back to K., because there's a fair taking place over there, and the train is swarmed with the foreigners who are coming there to buy astrakhan, carpets and still not harvested cotton. Lord Benedict will interblend among them easily. By the way, they are already pursuing you. Somebody betrayed that you were dressed like a dervish. I believe that there was no fear in your heart and that there is no fear in your heart now, but you have to act not only bravely, but also

accurately. Let's go to my bedroom. I will try to help you to wash yourselves and to change your clothes for the new roles."

It was dawning already. We rose from the table and followed the master into his bedroom. It was a wonderful, white room. There was a very simple furniture, upholstered with light grey silk, but it had an elegant form, there was a soft, light carpet there... but there was no time to look over the room.

Having drawn the folding door aside, the master took me to the bath. He poured some liquid into the bath, and because of the liquid the water simply boiled up. When the surface of the water settled down, he explained to me.

"Now the whole make-up will come off your body. You will get off the water like a white-skinned youth again. Here's the soap, brushes and everything what you may need," he showed them to me and left me alone.

I took off my clothes quickly and dived into the water. It was very pleasing to feel how the whole blackness and the dust of the travel were coming off me like a skin. I could hear the murmuring water somewhere close to me, it must have been Florentian taking the shower.

I didn't linger in the bath, I muffled myself up in the bathing sheet and started thinking what I should put on. There was a light knock on the door, Florentian came in. He also had wrapped himself up in the sheet, he was smiling merrily, and again I yielded to the charm of this wonderful beauty – to the charm of the great and loving man. I understood that I was attaching myself more and more to my wonderful friend.

"Let's go to pick up some clothes," he invited me merrily to the bedroom of the master.

I still didn't tell you how the imaginary dervish looked like this time. He was wearing a light, grey suit which fitted him perfectly, a white silk shirt with an open wide collar, he had white fabric shoes on. I couldn't recognize him: his eyes-stars had a certain original expression of wisdom, they were shining with fire, and that metal timbre of his voice was characteristic only to him. His upper lip which was as though hewed by the sculptor's chisel was telling about his huge temperament, and his forehead – high and noble forehead of a wise man – had such elevations above his eye-brows that it seemed that the entire power of his thought was concentrated exactly here, like it is characteristic to the famous composers.

I couldn't help but recognize him, but not his European appearance was surprising me, I didn't understand how he managed to come home almost at the same time as we got here. This showing up of his seemed to be unreal in the mess of my thoughts, but in fact he was travelling in a much simpler way than we were. There was less than half an hour way from Ali's estate to a little station before K. Having changed his clothes as a simple man, he got into our train, but he didn't show himself to us. He reached his home earlier, because Florentian, as it is accustomed for the petty traders, was bargaining himself hoarse, and that comedy took lots of our time, in addition our horse looked more like a donkey.

While we were dressing ourselves, the master told us about his journey and about Ali's affairs. Ali left to town, so he could protect and save his family, but what his subsequent fate was, we still didn't know. Then he told us that he would be going to Petersburg with the next train, where he would prepare a flat for us and collect information about my brother. He also explained to us that one of the servants who was coming together with Nal was her uncle. He had a large life experience, he was a loyal and very educated man.

While he was talking, he helped me to put the suit of the servant on: a brown jacket with silver buttons, the same long trousers and a cap with silver galloons. Of course, I didn't become a very good-looking man, but I looked elegant to myself after the black-skinned dirty dervish.

Florentian put the blue suit and the white silk shirt on. He tied the grey silk tie into the bow-tie. In fact – whatever he would put on, he would always look perfectly, as though it wouldn't be possible for him to look better. He smoothed his curly hair without any mercy, parted it with the parting in the middle from his forehead down to his neck, put the pince-nez on – and he was still a handsome man.

The time was passing, it was broad daylight already. We heard the horses snorting, and the yard-keeper gave a shout that the cart was already here.

The master commanded to the yard-keeper silently through the window.

"Go to our neighbour. If he's not at home, run to his shop to see him. Remind him that today he promised to deliver two oriental robes and the carpet to his aunt. When I am going to the station, I will drop my night guests to the cattle market on the way. If they want to spend the night at my place in the evening again, let them in, even if I am not at home."

The yard-keeper ran to the neighbour, and we took our belongings from veranda, which seemed to be only a mere show. We took several books from the chests and left them empty in the corridor. Having untied the parcels, we found pillows there. We put the shawls of the parcels in the wardrobe.

We left the house in several minutes. I habituated myself to be a servant, so I was carrying my master's light coat. I helped him to sit down on the back seat and I settled myself on the front bench. The master sat down on the coachman's seat and took the reins into his hands. When we crossed the gates, I jumped out and closed them. We turned towards the station.

The city wasn't awaked yet. The sarths on duty were toiling at their horses here and there, because the artificial irrigation was always changing its direction, and these people were strictly adjusting the flow by releasing the water now to Bukhara now to Khiva now to Samarkand or somewhere else.

Now we were going quickly, but I had time to observe the houses, gardens and market-places. The market-places were different from the ones that I had seen in the streets of K. and they didn't remind me at all the market of Bagdad. They looked like big barns, but anyway their style wasn't European. The number of little shops and all kinds of market-places showed the richness of the city.

It was my passion to observe everything. I plunged into it again. The motion round us became more intense, and we left the city, the view simply enchanted me with its flamboyance. I hadn't yet seen a big caravan of the camels; and here from several sides, the caravans were moving to the city in lines slowly and with dignity, swinging their loaded humps, guided by the small donkeys on whose backs usually a cameleer was riding. The donkeys loaded with fruit, vegetables, fowl and other wealth were moving to the market, pressed one to another and raising dust on all the roads that led to the highroad.

Peaks of the mountains covered with snow were showing white in the distance. The sky was somewhere purple, somewhere violet and green, above us – it was bright blue; a breeze was refreshing us because of the quick driving – and I exclaimed again.

"What a wonderful life!"

This exclamation was so unexpected to both of my friends who were delved deeply into their thoughts that for the first moment they were only looking at me surprised, but having seen my fascinated physiognomy, they laughed loudly. I also burst out laughing.

We were close to the station, and my master lord Benedict explained to me in English.

"A good servant is always serious. He never meddles into his master's conversation, he doesn't show his presence in any way and he only answers the questions asked. He is deaf and mute until his master needs his services."

The tone of his speech was serious, but a humour was glittering in his eyes. I restrained my laughing, put my hand to the peak of my cap and answered him absolutely seriously and also in English.

"Understood, your highness!"

"We are approaching the station," the lord continued. "Here's a wallet for you. Get out of the cart first and hurry to the booking-office. Buy two tickets in the international carriage to K. We will walk slowly to the platform and we will meet there. The train is coming soon. If there are no tickets to the international carriage, buy first class tickets."

I took the wallet, jumped out of the cart as soon as we stopped and ran to the booking-office.

I found my master in the platform and informed him that I got the tickets to the international carriage. He nodded his head to the porter with dignity. The porter was holding two elegant suitcases. I couldn't understand in any way how the suitcases got here, and only later I comprehended that they must have been tied to our cart in advance.

"Here's the new trouble," I thought for a while, not knowing what to do with the wallet and tickets. Since the train was already coming, I put everything into the inner pocket of my jacket.

"To the international," I growled out carelessly to the porter and followed him to the very end of the platform.

When the train stopped, I gave the tickets to the conductor and got into a small two-seater compartment. I put the things together and dismissed the porter. The conductor even swept the floor of the compartment hurriedly, which were clean anyway and cleaned the dust a little. It seemed that he was judging about the master's tip from his servant's uniform. I jumped out onto the platform to let my master know that everything was ready.

The second whistle was heard. Lord Benedict and his friend slowly turned towards the carriage, and with the third whistle the kind lord slowly lifted his foot on the footstep of the carriage. I even wanted to push him from behind, because I could understand in no way such slowness of his.

Having said something more to his remaining friend, finally he got on the carriage. Now the whistle of the engine was heard already, so not even waiting until my master is kind to keep going, I bowed to our master and jumped into the train that was moving already.

Only when his friend remaining in the platform couldn't be seen at all anymore, the lord turned round and went to the compartment. The conductor addressed him with some question, but he showed him his face, not understanding anything, and looked at me.

"My master is Englishman," I explained to him very kindly, "and he doesn't understand a single word in any other language. I am his interpreter."

The conductor repeated his question if we would like to have tea. I translated that to my lord, and the conductor received an order for tea, biscuits and two bars of chocolate. In addition I gave him a large bank-note and asked him to buy the best melon, some apples and pears from the dining-car. Being certain of the future tip, the conductor promised me to buy the fruit not in the train, but in the next station which was famous for the fruit.

In several minutes he brought us the tea and lemon, the biscuits and chocolate, closed the door and we stayed alone.

Regardless of the fallen thick, dark curtain and the ventilator which was spinning under the ceiling, there was a scorching heat hanging in the carriage. I took my cap off and I was glorifying my light cool jacket which was made of the material similar to Chinese silk. My lord took his jacket off and lay down on the seater. His feet didn't fit in and they remained hanging.

"My pal, I am very tired. If you have strength, protect my sleep for two or three hours. If I don't wake up until that time, then wake me up. There will be no possibility to get any sleep later on, and we will still need lots of strengths. Don't worry that we won't be discussing all events. When I wake up, we will eat and you will have to go to sleep. Open the little suitcase, you will find there something that was left in Ali's house, what young Ali found when he was putting your clothes in order. That nice friend, whom we just said good-bye to, brought these suitcases from Ali to us."

With these words he turned to the wall and fell asleep at once. I was sitting, being afraid of making a move. I decided to open the suitcase only when we reach that station where the conductor promised to buy us fruit. I went to the corridor that was in front of our compartment, so I could sit there and the knocking of the conductor wouldn't wake Florentian up.

Several men with tired faces in the corridor were cursing heat. They were getting ready to get out in this station and buy some fruit. Some of them were darting glances at me, but I buried myself in the book which Florentian had put on the small table in our compartment.

It was a novel about the period of the middle ages. The beginning of the novel seemed to be rather boring, but knowing well that epoch, I decided to get to know its English translation.

The travellers were gathering together in the landing of the carriage. Some of them had their heads covered with a cap, some – with a panama, and some – with an English helmet "hello – good-bye" – so this cap with two peaks was called in Russia, - and some had no cover at all. The train came to the platform and stopped.

I opened the window and started observing the crowd... There was more life in this station than in the other ones which I had seen before. The sellers with big baskets of fruit were running in all directions. The figures of women with covers were flashing, they were standing in little groups, but I couldn't understand in any way what they were doing here. They didn't sell anything, they only would go from one place to another one. Respectful sarths of different ages and positions were crowding in several places and casting glances at the public that was coming. Noisy and boring Jews with their typical half-length coats and black little caps were true contrast to the impressive Orientals.

All travellers came back to the carriage quickly. Their hands were full of fruit. It seemed to me that their purchase was good, but when the train started off, the conductor came to me. He gave me the basket of fruit and even merrily winked at the side of the travellers who were nibbling their apples. Having looked at his purchase, I understood how the real Eastern fruit should look like: the apples were huge, their form was flat or oblong, and they were transparent. One could see every little seed through

them. Yellow pears looked like an amber. There were two small melons. I was feeling dizzy because of their scent. Besides, there were wonderful yellow and blue plums in the basket.

“That’s the fruit,” the conductor said to me. “One has to know where to buy and whom to sell to. I have a friend here, who prepares two such baskets for me every time when the train is passing by.”

I was delighted with his friend who was growing such fruit. I thanked the conductor, paid him generously in the name of my master and treated him to an apple.

He was very pleased with such hospitality of mine. He leant against the wall and started eating his apple. I tucked away a juicy divine pear. I was trying not to let a single drop of its refreshing juice to fall down. The conductor was inviting me to his compartment, but I answered him that my lord was very strict and that he couldn’t manage without my help, because he absolutely didn’t know any other languages, that I was going to give him the fruit and that both of us were going to sleep. I answered to his question about our breakfast and dinner that my master was a very noble lord and that lords were dining only to a special order.

I said good-bye to the conductor, thanked him once again and came back to the compartment. I was trying to move as silently as possible, but soon I noticed that Florentian was sleeping like a log, and if I had to wake him up, I really would have failed.

All muscles of his body were completely relaxed – only animals were resting like this, - and he was breathing so silently that I couldn’t hear him at all. “Well, well,” I thought for a while, “That stupid cap of the dervish damaged my hearing, too. I could always hear so perfectly, but now I didn’t hear the breathing of the sleeping man.”

Being distressed about my lost hearing, I gave a sigh and pulled out the little suitcase.

Chapter 6

We don't come up to K.

It was so dark in the carriage that I raised the curtain a little and made a little crack. I sat down at the table and tried to open the suitcase. There wasn't a key, but having turned the locks to all directions, I finally managed to open it, although I had some trouble with it. Carefully rolled boxes with figs, dried pressed apricots and dates were placed on top of the suitcase. I took the boxes out and under several sheets of clean paper I found the letter addressed to me. The handwriting was unknown to me.

I wasn't afraid of rustling the paper anymore, because Florentian kept sleeping like a log. Having opened the envelope, first of all I looked at the signature. The following was written there: "Ali Machmed". It was a short letter which started with the usual salutation in the East "Brother".

Young Ali was writing that he was sending to me the things that were left in the student jacket, as well as the replacement shirt and the suit which I would find in the big suitcase and which, of course, would come in handy to me. Asking to accept everything sincerely as the present, he added that in the little suitcase I would find all writing-materials and some cash from his personal savings, which he was brotherly sharing with me. In another section of this suitcase there were placed only womanly things, cash and the letter which he was asking to give to Nal when we first meet, wherever and whenever that would happen.

Then he continued that Ali Mahomet had also put a little parcel which I would find among handkerchiefs. Young friend was asking me very much not to feel shy concerning any financial questions. He was writing that we would see each other soon and that we might need to change our roles.

I was moved very much by such care and friendly tone of the letter. I leant my head on my hand and started thinking about young Ali's life and the wound of his heart. The bluish violet eyes of the youth, his slender figure which was so delicate and slim that one could take him for a girl, his light and graceful step – I was imagining everything very clearly and even felt his charm. I had no doubt that he was perfectly educated, and since he was close to old Ali who was full of fire and whose wisdom was flowing with his every look and word, only a noble and intelligent man could be living with him.

I thought for a while that since his childhood the boy Ali was surrounded by the atmosphere of fight and action for his nation's liberation, and that probably, according to his understanding, man's life was nothing else but an action and fight which would always come to the first place, while his personal life was in the second place. I couldn't make up my mind in any way how old he was, but I knew that he was much older than Nal. Visually he was so young that I couldn't give him more than seventeen.

I read his letter one more time and I didn't understand again what Ali could find in my pockets. I started looking for it in the suitcase and, having lifted the towel, I shouted out of astonishment: something began to shine in the dim compartment, and I recognized the wonderful peacock on the notebook of my brother.

Now I remembered how we were putting in order my brother's writing-table and how I put this book into my pocket. Having taken it out of the suitcase, I started examining this miracle of jewelry work. The longer I was looking at it the more I was surprised by the subtle and graceful work of the master. The stretched out train of the peacock seemed to be alive and moving because of the brilliance of the

gems. Its head, neck and body were made of white enamel and were astonishing me with the proportions of forms and harmony. The whole bird was alive!

"How man needs to love his job, to know the anatomy of the bird in order to express it like this!" I thought, while admiring the work. A bitter thought flashed that I was twenty years old already, and I still hadn't achieved anything in any field, so I could create something to make people's lives easier or decorate them.

I was still holding the note-book in front of me and I wanted to know its history. Maybe my brother bought it? I drove this thought off instantly, because my brother couldn't buy such treasure. Maybe this was a present? Who presented it to him?

In my thoughts I flew away to my brother's life. I could see myself such short and mysterious period of it. I connected the figure of the peacock to Ali Mahomet's head decoration during the feast. There was also a peacock, wasn't it? It was totally white and made only of big gems. "This bird must be some kind of an emblem", I kept thinking about it. Curiosity was burning me, I was about to open up the note-book and read what my brother had written there, but that honour which he had infused in me stopped my entire heat. I kissed the note-book and put it back in its place.

"No", I was thinking, "If you, my brother-father, have any secrets from me, I won't be reading them until you are alive. Only when life separates us for ever, and I cannot hand this treasure to you, only then I will open it. Until there's any hope to see you, I will be a loyal protector of your peacock."

The heat was simply suffocating me. I ate another juicy pear and decided to look for Ali Mahomet's parcel. Soon I found a little pile of elegant handkerchiefs, and there was an envelope among them, in which I could feel a hard square.

I opened the envelope and was dumbfounded... There was a little box with a white peacock wrapped in the envelope. It had his train stretched. It wasn't made of the most precious stones, but of gold and even enamel, and the colours of its train were like the ones of the real peacock. The box itself was black, only its brims were studded with small pearls.

I opened the box: its inside was golden, there were white small pills similar to peppermint pastilles put in it. I put the box aside and started reading the letter.

It surprised me with its conciseness, the power of expression and an exceptional calm. I am keeping this letter until now, although I haven't seen Ali Mahomet for twenty years when he left for his homeland.

"My son," he was writing. "You've chosen your path with your own free will. And this path is your love and loyalty to the one whom you yourself acknowledged as your brother-father. Don't give up to any doubts or hesitations. Don't ruin your activity with any doubt or sadness. Meet any test cheerfully, easily and merrily. Spread your joy to everybody. You've chosen the path of work and fight, so walk it by asserting, always asserting, and not negating. Never think: "I will fail", but believe: "I will succeed". Don't say to yourself: "I cannot", but smile to the childishness of this word and say: "I will win". I am sending you the pills. They give cheerfulness. When you have to concentrate all your strengths or when sleepiness torments you, especially in the stuffy rooms or when you are rocked – swallow one of the pills. Don't overindulge in them, but if one of your friends, and especially your current attendant, asks you to protect his sleep, and you feel totally weakened, remember my pills. Always be vigilantly attentive. Love people and don't blame them, but also remember that the enemy is vicious, he doesn't drowse and he will always want

to take advantage of your absent-mindedness and lack of your attention. You've chosen that path where heroism of feelings and thoughts isn't a dream, ideal or fantasy, but simply it is your daily activity. I am squeezing your hand. Accept my handshake full of cheerfulness and energy... If some day anxiety gets into your heart – remember me. And let this white peacock become for you an emblem of calm and work for the sake of people's wealth and happiness."

The letter was signed with one letter "M". I understood that it meant "Mahomet."

Since we boarded the carriage, a couple of hours passed, if not more. It seemed that it couldn't be any hotter. I took my jacket off, unbuttoned the collar of my shirt and still I was feeling that my eyes were drooping and I was about to faint away. I looked at Florentian. He was still sleeping like a log. Nothing was left, but only to try the effect of Ali Mahomet's pills.

I took one of them and started chewing it. Nothing special happened in the beginning, I still wanted to go to sleep, but in some time I felt as though light coolness, as though a trembling ran through my nerves, my sleepiness was gone, I was sitting cheerful and totally revived, as though after the shower.

I started examining the part of the suitcase which was assigned to me. I found a puffed out, crammed wallet, some excellent washing requisites and writing-materials. Having admired them for a while, I put everything in order again and fastened the suitcase, not even peeking at that section where the things assigned to Nal were placed.

As soon as I started reading the book, there came a light knock on the door of the compartment. Having opened the door, I saw a tall mister in the corridor. He looked like a merchant. He asked me in French if somebody from our compartment would like to scatter about his boredom by playing a game of vint. I answered him that I was only a servant interpreter and that I didn't know how to play vint, and that my mister Englishman didn't know a single word neither in Russian nor in French and that I had never seen any cards in his hands. The visitor apologized for disturbing us and disappeared.

Perhaps, everything was real and very simple in this situation, and this mister was one of the gamblers who could sit at the table of cards during day and night. The kaleidoscope of the last days' events was stirring up my fancy so much that I seemed to see a spy here, too, and unwillingly I was asking a question if he wasn't as much the merchant as I was the servant.

"Great," I thought for a while, "that would be the last straw if we got to a desert island and found a guardian, for example, captain Nemo. I am living like in the fairy-tale."

It would have been better if Florentian hadn't been sleeping. I couldn't bear this long silence with its single accompaniment anymore – the creak of the walls and even noise of the wheels.

I read the letter of old Ali one more time. I was imagining his fiery eyes and his tall figure. In my thoughts I thanked him not only for the pills, but also for the words of his letter, which were refreshing me. I stroked my wonderful peacock and, like the best friend, I put it in the inner pocket of my jacket, then I threw the jacket on my shoulders.

I wasn't feeling any pressure in my temples anymore, my pulse was even, and I took the book into my hands, wishing to read it.

I raised the night curtain of the window a little higher and examined the district which we were crossing. Once again there was a hungry steppe, apparently, it wasn't irrigated. The scorching sun and burnt down, bare soil – that's the whole landscape, for as far as my eyes could take in.

"Yes, the God's grace has avoided this land," I was thinking to myself, while looking through the window. "Apparently, the people here are painting the domes of the mosques in blue and decorating their walls in mixed colours, they love striking clothes and carpets, because they want to compensate themselves this greyness of their hungry soil, this yellow dust, in which the camel is dragging himself along up to its knees."

The train wasn't going that fast, it would stop seldom. I went deep into the book. The plot of the novel was seizing me a little at a time, I was so plunged in it that I forgot everything around me. I was reading for about two hours when I felt that both of my legs and hands had become numb already. I stood up and started rubbing them. Soon Florentian gave a start, stretched himself, gave a deep sigh and sat up immediately, as though he would be made of rubber.

"Well, now I had a good sleep," he said to me. "Thank you very much for protecting me. I see that you are a loyal watchman," he gave a laugh, flashing his teeth. "But why didn't you wake me up earlier? I must have slept more than four hours."

And I was still standing with my eyes opened wide and I was unable to utter a word, because I was so surprised at such a waking up of his.

"I hadn't seen such strange man as you during my entire life," finally I uttered. "You are sleeping like dead, and you wake up like a cat that sensed a mouse during its sleep. Did I need to wake you up? But I aren't a giant that could stand you up on your feet as you did to me. Even if I had shaken you until I've fallen down, that could hardly help, too."

Florentian was rocking with laughter because of both my physiognomy and my annoyance.

"Listen, let's be reconciled," he proposed. "If I've hurt you because I'm sleeping in my own way, not as it is accustomed according to the rules of good style, then you, too, admit that you've chosen not quite pleasing epithet that would suit well for the good servant of the great master. You could tell "tiger", but no, you told "cat"."

He stood up, inspected the fruit and praised me.

"You are quite a lad! That's the fruit! One could think that you've gathered them in California."

"Well, I didn't have enough time to run to California, but I paid the conductor generously for them," I answered him. "While you were sleeping, our neighbour had dropped in, who's as if a French trader, and he was inviting us to play vint."

Florentian was eating the melon by nodding his head to my reports and suddenly, he noticed the letters which were put on the table.

I read both of them loudly to him. He also asked me where I've hidden the box, and when I showed him the inner pocket of my jacket, he explained to me.

"No, that's not good. There's a deep, leather pocket on the right side of your trousers, from inside. Put it there."

I felt the pocket on the right side, close to my waist, and I put the box in it. Florentian bent at the window, examined the district and told me.

“Soon we’ll reach a big station. See the trees over there – that’s the station already. You will have to get out, stretch your legs and buy some newspapers. Buy all of them, whatever you can find, not only Russian ones, but also the local ones.”

I put my jacket on, hid the letters in the book and I was already about to go.

“Wait a little, do you want to save the letters?” Florentian asked me.

“Yes, of course,” I answered him.

“Then hide them in the suitcase. And not only now, when we are being followed, but never leave an unhidden letter in the future, too. It is the best to keep everything in your head and your heart, but not on the paper.”

I hid the letters and left the compartment, because the train was slowing down already and coming to the platform.

“Just in case, ask if there’s a telegram post restante for the lord Benedict,” Florentian added.

I put my hand at the peak of my cap and hurried like a zealous servant to fulfil my master’s command. Having met the conductor, I inquired him where the newspapers were sold, in which platform there was a telegraph, and if the train was going to stand here for a long time. The conductor explained to me everything in detail. He was sorry that he couldn’t come with me, because this was a big station and there were many travellers. He told me that the train was going to stand for twenty minutes, and that I could be in no hurry.

As soon as the train stopped, I jumped onto the platform. There were lots of people. Guttural shrieks and noise of the crowd which was boarding was mixing with the jokes and loud laughter of the travellers who were pouring out of all carriages. The people were sunburnt and dusky-faced. They were pushing one another. They were carrying all sorts of bottles, tea-pots and jugs.

The heat was blazing down here, too, but after the stuffiness of the carriage the weather seemed simply wonderful to me.

Having called at the telegraph, I received two telegrams for my master, I bought a pile of newspapers whatever I could find and I came back to the carriage. As soon as I boarded I met two new travellers. One of them had Eastern clothes on and seemed to be quite handsome man with tender expression. Another one had a white jacket of the road engineer and uniform cap on. He was short, his face was meaningless and tortured by the heat.

I entered our compartment and gave everything to Florentian. He read the telegrams and held them out to me. In the beginning I didn’t understand anything, until it turned out that English words were written in Russian letters on them. It was written in one of them that the horses would be waiting for us in the station P. It was written in another one that two houses flamed up in K. The cause was unknown, the people and cattle were saved.

I looked at Florentian who was reading a local newspaper. It was delivered in the morning from K. It was written in it about the fire at Ali’s place, which also spread to the captain T.’s house, leaving only ashes. The messenger alone managed to escape, while captain T. himself, his brother and the limping old man trader couldn’t jump over the wall of the flame, because the old, dry house flamed up instantly from all sides like a cardboard. In addition, there also was a stock of petrol in the house, which flew out in the air in the colossal columns of fire.

Florentian translated this message to me and added that, according to the telegrams, everything was getting on well for us until now. They had agreed with Ali that if we got revealed in this train, then Ali Mahomet would send us horses to the station P. from his farm-stead. We'll get out there and, having driven one station back, we'll board the train to Moscow. We received the telegram, and P. was close already.

My heart was troubled. A thought was bothering me that my brother could come back and get in danger. I let it out to Florentian.

My friend's face was very serious.

"You already know that your brother is in danger. The threat of religious fanaticism will be hanging over their heads all the time, until they board the ship and reach London. What is real is that at least he isn't in K., as you weren't there, too, during the fire. Let's not waste our energy in vain for all kinds of phantasies and notions, but let's accumulate it, so that being full of self-control, we could give the part of our help to the fugitives. Now you will have to organize our dinner. Give an additional tip to the conductor and ask him permission to meet the cook of the dining-car. Order a vegetarian dinner for your eccentric master, but ask him to serve the dinner here and not later than in one hour. Soon you will be tired, you have to eat and have a good sleep. We'll have to cover those thirty versts in a very short period of time. The horses will be perfect, I guess the cart will bear us, only your health is poor."

"Although I'm thin and short, but I'm tough. From my childhood my brother has tempered and trained me. Several times I went with him to the field camps, I even went to one trip, so it is easy for me to ride even forty versts. If I fainted away and if I often feel unwell, this is only because of the unusual heat, but Ali's pills will help me. Don't think about me, your terrible sleep worries me more, because if you feel asleep in the cart like you did it here, then until one wakes you up, one could really be burnt down."

Florentian burst out laughing merrily again.

"Nevertheless, how you've been intimidated by my heroic sleep! Well, I'll have to ask you for one of Ali's pills and not to sleep like that again."

"You have your own pills. Ali gave you that little box, from which he was feeding me in his study," I answered him, joking.

"I do have it, but you've already eaten one pill from that box at my friend's, so it follows that you owe me."

Having laughed some more at my stinginess, he told me that to all those questions about Ali and the imaginary dervish, which he's been reading in my eyes for a long time, he would answer me only in Moscow.

I left to take care of the dinner. Generous cash did everything itself, and in an hour a folding-table was already standing in our compartment, while the man-servant from the dining-car was bringing us wonderful vegetarian dishes. My master asked him to render thanks to the cook both in monetary and verbal way and to give the conductor to eat.

After the dinner was over, I fulfilled the last assignment of my master. I told the conductor that the telegram to my lord told him about the possible great deal in station P., that he would wake us up in advance and would help me to take our belongings onto the platform. He was glad that he could help us for the wonderful dinner and kept repeating that such great and lucrative travellers were a rarity.

Having entered the compartment, I found the bed that was already prepared for me by Florentian – he had taken a soft pillow from the big suitcase. I was even moved to tears by such a care of his. I remembered that he was sleeping with his head put right on the settee and I reproached him a little.

“But why so much care? I could also sleep like you did and I doubt if I am going to fall asleep at all. My nerves are irritated, and a trap seems to me everywhere.”

“It’s all right! I will give you some drops, your irritation will be gone, and you will fall asleep, not worse than I did.”

While he was talking like this, he took a little bottle out of his waistcoat and poured some drops into the water.

“Homoeopathy. I don’t believe in it very much,” I answered him, but I drank the water anyway and I lay down.

I still could hear the laughter of Florentian and then I dived in some abyss...

I woke up because of a knock at the door as it seemed to me, but in fact that was Florentian who was waking me up. This time I woke up easily, I was feeling rested perfectly. As soon as I got up, the real knock at the door was heard. Having looked at the corridor, I saw the conductor who had come to announce that we would reach P. in twenty minutes, that I should pick our belongings up and he would take them onto that landing, because the train would stop there only for eight minutes.

I didn’t need to pick our belongings up, because Florentian had already put everything in order, and while I was talking to the conductor and dressing myself, he even put the pillow and bedsheet in place. He had already put another suit on and told me to put a light bright suit on the same clothes that I already had on, and instead of my cap I had to put a panama hat on. He also threw black cloaks which were similar to the ones of the naval officers on top of both himself and myself.

As soon as the train stopped, both of us, me and the conductor, brought our things onto the platform. One of the travellers from the carriage called the conductor, he squeezed my hand hurriedly and ran back.

This time the whole Florentian’s slowness was gone. He took his travelling-bag and big suitcase quickly and gave the smaller suitcase to me. I seized his hand, and we walked not into the hall, but totally sideways, towards the water supply tower, going round the little garden of the station. As soon as we turned behind it, two dervishes jumped out from the opposite side of the garden. They were looking round in the dark of the night. A sardar came running to them from the platform and, having said something quickly to them, he shoved the tickets into their hands. All three of them rushed to the train with all their might and managed to jump into the last carriage with great difficulty, because the train had already moved.

We were standing behind the tower in silence. Florentian was strongly squeezing my hand. We waited a little, until the train was gone. When everything around calmed down, he told me silently.

“We must cover a half of the verst very quickly. Take my travelling-bag, give me your suitcase and hold my hand tight.”

I wanted to contradict him, but he whispered.

“Don’t say a word. Quickly. We are in great danger. Be strong. If we are in time for the Moscow train, then we will foul the trail.”

We went to the right of the station. The darkness round us was totally black. We were walking not along the road, but along a narrow path, and so quickly that I was almost running, while Florentian was pacing with his long legs, not feeling any weight of the suitcases, not noticing my running.

We were hurrying like this for about twenty minutes, and suddenly somebody called us. My friend answered him, and I discerned the silhouettes of the horses and the wheels in the darkness. The coach-man took the big suitcase, Florentian pushed me into the light carriage, he jumped in when we were already moving, and we dashed off. I had to ride many times since then – both with the trotters and the horses of the firemen, - but I still haven't forgotten that mad running, that black night and, apparently, I will never forget it.

I had to take my panama hat off instantly, the wind was howling in my ears, the horses were galloping like a whirlwind. I lost any keenness of my wit. Only Florentian's words couldn't get out of my head and that "be strong" of his had pierced my heart. We were scuttling like this for about an hour. The horses were snorting badly and running slower already. The houses and trees flashed, and all of a sudden we stopped.

"Disaster," I still had time to think a little.

Florentian jumped out, seized the suitcases, took me out of the carriage with the travelling-bag like a child and commanded in English.

"Quickly. Grab my hand."

We ran across a yard and, having seen a light carriage on the other side, we got into it in a flash. The coach-man gave a shout, and we dived into the darkness once again.

Florentian asked the coach-man about something, and he answered him in a calming way. He was dressed in Eastern way, and I was angry with myself, because I didn't know so many foreign languages.

"I'm not deaf, I'm not mute, but it turns out that I'm both deaf and mute," I was thinking so and I made a vow right there that I would learn that ill-fated Eastern language.

"It's nothing!" Florentian said to me, squeezing my hand tenderly and as if reading my mind. "What do you care for? You can learn a hundred languages more. Soon we'll arrive. The coach-man told me that the tickets are already waiting for us in another kishlak and that we'll be in the station five minutes before arrival of the train."

The horses kept dashing, and if Florentian hadn't held me by my waist with his strong hand, then the first stronger shake would have knocked me down out of this light carriage.

Soon the houses glimpsed, at one of them the horses started running a little slower, and from my side a human figure jumped onto the foot-board. I jumped back out of unexpectedness, but having seen his smiling face, I understood that he was our friend. The stranger quickly took the seat on the rim, he gave an envelope to Florentian and tattled something merrily to him, apparently about the cause of his laughter. Soon he jumped out of the light carriage which was still running at the same speed and vanished in the darkness.

"Here are the tickets. We can see the station already," Florentian explained to me. "We were running like this for almost two hours. Here are the lights of the station. Remember that now you aren't my servant anymore, but my cousin. My Russian is poor, because I was raised and educated in London, and you

are my guide and assistant in all my affairs, I cannot manage without your help. We will be speaking only English among ourselves.”

We arrived at the station. We sincerely thanked our coach-man. As soon as we stepped onto the platform, the train’s whistle was heard.

We had first class tickets. The carriage seemed to be empty, but perhaps everybody was sleeping. Our four-seated compartment was empty, too. The conductor was sleeping. He didn’t even ask us to show him our tickets and left all boarding worries to ourselves. It seemed to me that he wasn’t absolutely sober and wanted to hide it from us.

To my remark about the strange behaviour of the conductor Florentian answered that every cloud had a silver lining, because our tickets were valid starting from the next station. We should explain this to him if he was sober, make arrangements about it, and now he won’t even remember where we boarded the train.

Having put our things, we locked the compartment and stretched ourselves on the sofas which were upholstered with red velvet. Florentian explained to me that he won’t be sleeping, because he needed to read the letter and reconsider something. I was thinking that I also wouldn’t sleep, I wanted to hear about the causes of this night’s difficulties, but soon I fell deeply asleep, not even finding time for any question.

The rest of the night didn’t give any surprises. In the morning I woke up brisk and first of all I saw the smiling, dear face of my friend. I was feeling so happy that I didn’t see him strict or worried, but nice and loving! It seemed to me again that I knew him for a very long time...

“Indeed,” I gave a shout, “I could even argue that I knew you for a very long time! Being close to you I feel such love, self-confidence and determination that I would like to share your activities and danger with you, to follow you during my entire life. Now I cannot even imagine my life without you!”

Florentian laughed, thanked for my love and friendship and told me that his life wasn’t only difficulties, fight and danger, that he would be glad to share it with me if I really wanted to live close to him.

It was eight o’clock. The sun up in the sky kept burning. We couldn’t see the hungry steppe anymore, but the grass, although it was burnt out. Settlements could be seen more and more often. Tents of Kirghiz or Kalmyk wanderers were sticking up by every little lake and river, but I was unable to discern the form of their lodgings.

“Life still exists here,” Florentian noticed. “At night we’ll reach the zone of the deserts and we’ll be driving down it for more than twenty-four hours. People are living here in misery. Mostly those are the families of the railwaymen. Quicksand doesn’t give them any hope to have a kitchen-garden or a garden. The water from the wells of the stations is salty, it isn’t suitable neither for drinking nor for watering. The drinking water is brought here in the tanks, but this is far from being enough, so these unlucky persons are stealing it one from another, and there’s always the sand which is squeaking between their teeth.”

I could imagine such way of living and I thought for a while – how much difficulties we still have to overcome, so that life would become fairly good for everybody, still how far our dreams were about equality, brotherhood and satisfaction of everyone’s most necessary needs.

There came a knock at our door. That was the conductor. He apologized for not taking our tickets at night, which always had to be with him, because there would be an inspection soon.

Florentian gave him our tickets.

"Breakfast, tea," my friend asked him with a foreign accent.

I explained him that my brother wanted to eat in the compartment, and not in the dining-car. The conductor volunteered to bring us the breakfast himself and added that a great dining-car would be coupled only in Samara, and now their food was rather poor. To my question about fruit he answered that he could get it and it was quite good.

I gave him some cash. I was thinking how much of it he would spend on drink. I decided that until we reach Moscow our journey would not be decorated with a high service culture and I doubted whether the breakfast would be edible at all.

I was wrong. The conductor who overslept turned out to be honest. Soon he brought us an excellent coffee with cream, some appetizing bread, butter, cheese, fruit and the whole change to the last penny.

When we finished our breakfast and cleared the table, Florentian started a serious speech.

"Now get ready to hear me out what danger we have escaped and what storm is gathering above Ali's head. The people with dervish clothes and that third one with the tickets, whom we met at night by the water supply tower, were chasing us. With the help of abundant monastic sects and organizations of espionage, which unite them, fanatics and mullahs tracked us down. The sarth with the tickets, who came running to the dervishes, told them that we were travelling to K. in an international carriage, that you had a servant's clothes and that you should be killed in the crowd of the platform in K. When there's a scandal because of the murder, they had to try to take me alive. Now they are approaching K. In that station where we got out, they had already checked everything and they were sure that we weren't there anymore. They have been spying upon Ali's farm-stead all day long. Having made certain that we weren't there, too, they asked the coach-man to take them to the station, so that they would be in time to catch the night train. He agreed with pleasure, because otherwise he wouldn't have managed to get there because of us, so that he wouldn't arouse their suspicion. Having brought them to the station, he turned as though towards home at once, but actually, he was waiting for us in the place which Ali indicated in his telegram. And now we fouled the trail so much that it is difficult for them to track us down. Nevertheless, they are looking for two of us, so we have to send telegrams to two of my friends, so that they could join us as soon as possible, while we are still in this train."

I volunteered to send the telegrams, but Florentian explained to me that this had to be assigned to the conductor.

Giving the telegrams and cash to the conductor, Florentian told him.

"Keep for yourself what is left after you send out the telegrams." And, having held his callous hand in his wonderful palm, he added silently and sincerely. "Only don't drink anymore. This won't ease your pain, but only will call even more disasters."

And then an unseen thing happened: the conductor seized Florentian's hand, buried himself in it and burst into tears. This touching lament was breaking my heart. I could hardly suppress my own tears.

Florentian helped the conductor to sit down next to him on the sofa. He mopped his tears with a wonderful, sweet-scented handkerchief and told him.

“Don’t grieve, your girl is dead, but your wife is alive. Both of you are young and you will have more children, but you have to live in such a way that your children would be born healthy, so don’t drink anymore. The children of alcoholics are always sickly and unhappy most of the time.”

Having poured some drops, he gave him the glass of water. When the conductor calmed down, he began to speak.

“I wasn’t drinking up to now, but when I came back home and saw my dead baby and wife, and I even didn’t have any time, because I had to go – so I didn’t refrain and started drinking on my way in the train. I told you, mister, about my misfortune this night. Everything got mixed in my head. I was thinking that I was talking to an Asiatic. Such person was walking in the carriage, looking for his friend servant in brown uniform. He didn’t want to believe me in any way that such man wasn’t travelling here. I’ve mixed everything up. It seemed to me that he went into the international carriage, and I fell into a light slumber for five minutes, but it turns out that I overslept two stations. It’s okay that the inspector didn’t board at the time. Oh, how a drunk person is mixing everything up. I was thinking that I was telling my story to that person,” he was shaking his head out of astonishment. “What a sin! In this way one can start seeing ghosts.”

Florentian squeezed his hand once again and assured him that his wife had only fainted away, and sometimes this happens during a child-birth. He advised him to send home a telegram by paying the response to Samarkand at once *poste restante*.

“So you, mister, are a doctor. One can see that at once. Only a doctor may be human with everybody, although that one may be poor. You didn’t show any pride and squeezed my hand,” the conductor was speaking like this, while neatly folding and returning the handkerchief to Florentian.

“Keep it as a keepsake about our meeting. When you come back, give this to your wife. Let her drink one drop of it before every meal. When she’s drunk all drops, she will fully recover. And let her keep this small bottle as a keepsake about the doctor. When your life becomes difficult, look at the small bottle, hold the handkerchief in your hand and think about my words how I was asking you not to drink anymore.”

He squeezed the hand of the conductor once again, held it for a while, smiled and added.

“We’ll meet again. Be strong. A drunk man – isn’t a man, but a two-legged animal. Don’t grieve that you’ve lost your baby, but be glad that your beloved wife is alive. Run, we are coming to the station.”

The conductor left, we remained alone. I was in low spirits. I knew perfectly that Florentian didn’t talk to the conductor. How could he know about his misfortune, about his wife? A kind of grievance, irritation was growing in me – again those hated secrets!

“Lovushka, don’t be angry,” Florentian said to me, putting his arm round my shoulders tenderly. “There aren’t any secrets in the world, I can explain to you everything very simply. At night I went into the corridor and I could hear – someone was crying, simply weeping. I turned towards that direction and found that unlucky person, sitting in front of the bottle of vodka, to which he was complaining and pouring his paid because of his dead wife and baby. One doesn’t have to be a doctor in order to know that a woman who is ill with kidneys and who is giving birth to a baby may lose her consciousness for a long time. I believe that this is exactly the case and that his wife has recovered, but the poor person didn’t have time to make sure that she was alive. You aren’t a child anymore,” he continued by seating me next to himself. “You have to forget your habit to be vexed when you don’t understand something. If you hadn’t been irritated, but if you only had concentrated your will and observed everything what seemed to you to

be secret or inconceivable miracles during these days, you would have made sure yourself that there were no miracles, but there was only one or another level of knowledge.”

Both his voice and expression of his nice eyes – everything was so fatherly sweet and tender that I snuggled to him, and again the wave of joy, self-confidence and peace ran through me. I was happy.

The conductor came back quickly. He brought us the receipts of the telegrams sent and a bunch of flowers which he used for decorating our little table. Florentian told him that in Samara he was waiting for two of his friends to board the train. He asked him to leave the adjacent free compartment for us and to take all four places in our compartment, so that he could rest as befits him. The conductor explained to us that if we pay for the remaining two places, then we’ll have the right to the whole compartment, and if we order the places for our friends starting from Samara, then we’ll have to pay in advance both for the order and for the tickets. We did exactly so.

We kept travelling nicely. We had to arrive to Samara at night. I was very tired, I wanted to sleep and asked the conductor to lay the bed for me. Florentian told me that he would be waiting for his friends and he didn’t take the bedding, but asked the conductor to lay the bed in the adjacent compartment.

I asked the conductor why our carriage was so empty. He explained to me that now everybody was going to the fair in the depth of the country and that the trains to those directions were crowded with the traders from the whole world, so they were coming back from there empty, but in two weeks one couldn’t get even a third class return ticket.

My bed was already ready. I washed myself as befitted me and changed into a clean linen with joy. In my thoughts I thanked Ali Machmed for it and promised not to leave indebted to him for taking care of me. I wished good night to Florentian and fell asleep at once.

Chapter 7

New friends

Having woken up, I saw that Florentian was gone. Apparently, there was rather late morning already; suddenly I was surprised by the big and clear raindrops that were knocking at the windows. That was the first rain since that time when I came to my brother's to K. It never rains in summer there, and one, being stuck round with dust and sweat, is dreaming of such raindrops as of manna from heaven.

I jumped to my feet immediately and started laughing, remembering how I was amazed by the sudden moves of Florentian when he sat up just like I did after waking up. I dashed to the window like a cat to the mouse and I drew the curtain back.

The rain seemed to me no stranger and nice. A forest, the real green forest, was looming through the grey rain's veil, and the heat was gone.

I sensed a tender feeling for my motherland, as if a remorse, that I had valued her so poorly up to now – its forests, green water-meadows, grasslands of lush grass... I was happy that I got to my own land, that there was no that greyish yellow landscape, no those blue domes and minarets of the mosques, which were bulging like the mountains.

As soon as this thought flashed in my imagination, the train of the last days' events, people, separate words and episodes came to the surface instantly.

My joy faded away, my movements became sluggish. I started dressing myself slowly and I was thinking what kind of salad had mixed in my head. I was unable to relate all events consistently in any way: what had happened yesterday, today or three days ago – everything was tied into one big knot, and I was unable to pull anything out of my memory.

Suddenly my ear caught a word that flew in from the corridor, and the timbre of the voice seemed to be familiar again.

"It's strange," I thought for a while. "I could always remember faces and voices so well, but now it seemed that I'd lost that gift, too. The damned cap of the dervish and the heat must have damaged not only my hearing, but my brain, too."

At that moment a baritone of unique beauty was heard again. I even sat up out of amazement, the sweat stood out on my face due to the heat, although it was pretty chilly in the compartment.

"I really got out of order, as the messenger of my brother used to say," I continued my thought by wiping the sweat off my forehead. "That dervish couldn't get here, could he? The one who gave me his clothes and whom we had stopped at in the night." My head was spinning so much because of everything that I could feel nausea which was seizing me even physically.

I thought for a while that now even in the presence of death penalty I wouldn't be able to tell about all events, because my mind refused any logical thinking. I was sitting sadly, hanging my head down, while in the corridor I could distinguish two voices already, which were speaking in English. One of the voices was Florentian's, and another one – the same wonderful metal baritone, smoothing and soft, but it seemed that if only temperament was given to this voice, then it would become severe like an element.

"I cannot be such lost little child. I must go and make sure whom Florentian is speaking to." While thinking like this, I was trying to grasp in vain when we parted with the imaginary dervish, how much time had passed since that moment, if he could have time to get here.

As soon as I decided to leave our compartment, the door opened and Florentian entered. His wonderful face was fresh as one of a youth, his eyes were shining, a smile was playing in his lips – I would have gazed at this incarnation of energy and kindness and I would have never believed how strictly serious he could be sometimes.

From the expression of my embarrassed face he as though read all my thoughts, took a seat next to me, embraced me and told tenderly.

"My dear boy! All these events of the last days could also violate not so delicate organism like yours, but everything that you had to experience, you have withstood heroically. Fear or a thought about the danger threatening you didn't disturb your heart at least one time. You were so loyal, you were striving to save your brother as much as possible. Now I know already what is the fate of Ali and his family."

And he told me how Ali and his nephew came back to the town after he saw us and the dervish off. First of all he led all people out of his house and hid them in a deep concrete cellar below a stone barn in the very depth of the garden. He also brought some more valuable carpets and other things here. He disguised the entrance, so that nobody could find them. In this way Ali and his family spent the terrible night in the deep cellar, because the whole crowd of dervishes and muslims were playing the master above them.

Florentian didn't tell me in detail about the inevitable terror during such events. The government, having found out that the massacre was taking a large scale, - and that wasn't included in its plans, - sent the patrols across the entire town, but the patrols started their job only when Ali's house was already set on fire from all sides.

The fanatics did the same to your brother's house. The old and dry like a chip house soon turned into ashes. But here the misfortune was bigger. The bribed messenger let some people into the house in the evening – as if to take a look at your brother's library. They tried to treat him to some wine, and it turned out that he liked it very much, so they had a good time. Nobody knows exactly what happened next, but the fact is that the messenger jumped out of the burning house through the window, and the visitors burnt down. When he jumped through the window, its frame injured his head. A patrol who was going by found him when he was running through the little gates of the garden. He was half-naked, blood-stained and in shock. The patrol took him to the hospital. The messenger was raving and kept repeating.

"Captain... master... brother... They tried to break in," – and then again. "Captain... master... brother... I didn't let them in... they set in on fire..."

The medical officer, having found out from the soldiers that they knew the patient, that he was the messenger of captain T., became worried and sent someone to inform the general of the fire in the captain T.'s house. He also ordered to tell the general that nobody knew where captain T. was, perhaps he and his brother burnt down in the fire; that he didn't manage to find out something more from the messenger, and it seemed that he would die, without recovering his consciousness.

Awakened general who was ill disposed towards the local people and who didn't like if his night rest was disturbed dashed off to the governor. He arranged such a show over there that everybody was awakened instantly. Haven't seen or heard anything up to now, having considered the religious

questions of the locals not to be worth of any attention of the czar's authority, the officers began to see things clearly and started to put out the fire of religious fanaticism by declaring the massacre to be a riot.

Having paid authority for not interfering in their affairs, the raging crowd of fanatics was surprised when they saw the fire-brigade and a troop of the army. The mullah was persuading the dervishes and the crowd that it was only a dramatization, that nobody would touch them, but having seen the soldiers formed and ready to shoot, he was the first who started running, and after him the whole wild crowd ran away in all directions.

Ali's house was partly saved, but my brother's house was burning like a bonfire, the flame was raging so much that it was impossible even to come nearer to it. It seemed that from the ravings of the poor messenger an opinion was formed that captain T. and his brother burnt down with the house.

While Florentian was telling me about all of it, a single thought was tormenting me: "Whose voice did I hear? What's the name of that man?"

Not for the first time during our short acquaintance, I was surprised by the stunning ability of Florentian to answer the questions that I was asking in my thoughts. And now, too, he explained to me that in Samara two of his friends boarded our carriage, whom he greeted on the platform.

"You already know one of them," he uttered these words with such unique humour, he blinked an eye at me so comically that I burst out laughing. "He's an Indian and his name is Sandra Kon-Ananda. You aren't mistaken by deciding that many singers could dream about such voice. He sings amazingly, he knows music perfectly, and here you will have a lots in common, if you aren't attracted by other characteristics of this peculiar, interesting and well educated man. My other friend is Greek. He's also an extraordinary man. He's a great mathematician, but his character is more complicated: he's gone deep into his science and he's less associative, sometimes he's strict and even stinging. Don't worry if he keeps silent; he isn't talking much, but he's kind-hearted, he has suffered a lot and he's ready to help everybody in his misfortune. Don't draw a conclusion according to his appearance. If you want to talk to him, overcome your shyness and address him like you're addressing me."

"Like I'm addressing you!" I gave a shout, being even excited. "But can anybody be equal to you? Even if there were thousands of wonderful people drawn up in front of me and I was offered to choose a friend, a guardian, a brother – I wouldn't like anybody else, but you. And now, when everything what was dear and close to me – my brother – is in danger, when I don't even know when I would see him again, whether I save myself, I'm glad with life only because I'm next to you. The whole new horizons open up for me through you and in you, as though everything would take another meaning. Only now I understood that life's value and beauty – that's not only love to those with whom we are connected through the bonds of our blood, but joy to live and fight for happiness and freedom of all people. And I understood this only by staying next to you. What would have happened to me during all those days if you hadn't been next to me? It is unimportant that I would have died from the hand of a fanatic, but only that is important that I would have left my life not living a single day without fear, not grasping what happiness is to live when fear isn't squeezing my heart. And I understood that only by staying next to you. Now I know that life is leading everybody to such altitudes to which the perception of his own work as a work-joy, as a work-sincere help can rise, so that the darkness round him would be overcome with joy. All coincidences which pushed me into the vortex of the passions now seem to me like blessed, and they happened only because I could have met you. And nobody, nobody in the world could be equal to you in my heart!"

Florentian was listening to my passionate speech in silence; his eyes were smiling kindly, but I could see in them a shadow of sadness and compassion.

"I'm very happy, my dear friend, that you have evaluated our meeting and my presence next to you so much," Florentian was talking to me with his hand placed on my head. "This proves that you possess a sense of gratitude, which is a rarity among people. Only don't be excited. If your consciousness has widened during these days, then certainly your heart should have opened up, too. The limits of conditionalities should have disappeared both in your heart and your thoughts. Now you should look at every man with absolutely different eyes, searching in him not for what everybody can see at once, not for striking characteristics of his mind, his beauty, wit or anger, but for his inner strength and kindness of his heart, which only may become the light for all surrounding people who are buried in the darkness of their superstitions and passions. If you want to carry the light and freedom to people's lives, then start looking at them in a new way. Start to distinguish vigilantly the differences between the poor and accidental in man and between his great qualities which were born in his work, fight and entire chain of victories against himself. Start now, not tomorrow. Reject the superstition that man is such as he looks like, but make a decision about him only from his acts, always trying to enter his situation and to find a justification for him.

Both of my friends hardly know your brother and Nal, but as soon as Ali mentioned such possible outcome a month ago, both of them quitted all their affairs and as soon as they received an invitation they came to help Ali, and so did I. Try to look at their faces differently for the first time. Let love to your brother become the key to your new perception of man's heart. With help of this key, comprehend that power of loyal love which is uniting all people, independent of their nationality, belief or class differences. See only people in them for the first time, whose colour of blood is the same red as yours."

He embraced me and explained that they with Sandra Kon-Ananda have already drunk the coffee in the dining-car, and now I should be polite and offer my service to another guest. Greek's name was – Ilofilion. His Russian is poor and he feels shy to talk in the surroundings which are unusual to him.

"Overcome your shyness," Florentian added, "remember how I was leading you by the hand in the most difficult moments of your life. Imagine that those are unpleasant minutes for him, too, and help him. He's speaking German perfectly. If you are tired of his efforts to communicate with you in your native language, ask him to tell you in German about his student life. He graduated the faculty of nature in university of Heidelberg and the one of mathematics in London."

With these words he suggested to tidy myself up. He took a cap from the travelling-bag and put in on my head instead of the panama. Having sighed deeply, I left to become acquainted with the Greek who was no less shy than myself.

I hadn't the honour to be in society many times during twenty years of my life. I was living with my brother for fourteen years without a separation. I was learning according to the program of the secondary school, and my brother was guiding me. That was a nomadic life. I even participated in R.'s deed, but when my brother's regiment was transferred to the Middle East, he decided to send me to the secondary school of Petersburg where our aunt was living. He was hoping to settle me at her place, but the old puffed-up lady didn't want such a sullen companion like myself, and my brother had to search for a boarding-school.

During my entrance examination to the sixth grade, the level of my knowledge surprised the teachers. I passed an examination of languages and mathematics perfectly and I stunned everybody with my written work about a fairy-tale in the creative work of the great writers. The subject was given from the Russian literature, and I understood it on a scale of the worldwide literature and, with the passion characteristic to me, I wrote so much that I ran out of paper. When I asked the teacher for some extra paper, he answered to me in amazement that this was the first such case during his entire life that a schoolboy would need more paper which was meant for both the rough and clean copy.

He showed my work to the principal who approached us at that time and explained to him that I had been writing my work for nearly three hours already, without stopping. The principal started reading my written work, he read over nearly every sheet of paper and asked me, looking intently.

“Are you a son of a writer?”

“No,” I answered him, “I’m the son of my brother.”

Having noticed stunned both the principal and the teacher, how the teacher could hardly restrain his laughter, I became totally lost and babbled.

“Excuse me, Mr. principal. Of course, I just told an absolute nonsense, but I don’t remember neither my father nor my mother, and as long as I remember my life – my brother was raising, educating and teaching me. I got used to seeing my father in him. That’s why I told you this so badly.”

“It is very good that you love your brother so much, but who was preparing you for your examinations? Your knowledge is so profound.”

“My brother helped me to learn according to the program of the secondary school, I didn’t have any other teachers.”

“And who is your brother?” the teacher asked me, smiling.

“He’s the officer of N. regiment,” I answered them.

They only exchanged glances, and the principal still with his amazed eyes, but smiling with his kind, oldish smile told me.

“Either you possess some phenomenal talents or your brother is an exceptional educator.”

“Or yes, my brother is not only an educator, but he’s such a scientist that there’s no other such like him,” I snapped out with enthusiasm. “Here he is!” I gave a shout after seeing the kind face of my brother through the window of the class door.

Having forgotten where I was, who was standing in front of me and why I was here, I darted out into the corridor and wound my hands round my brother’s neck. As now I remember that hot feeling which I experienced back then – the feeling of love, gratitude, grief before our future separation, joy of such usual caress...

Having undone my hands in silence, my brother stepped into the class, drew himself up in front of the principal and told him.

“Your excellency, forgive my brother. During my nomadic life I succeeded to give him that little knowledge that I possessed, but I failed to teach him good manners and discipline. I hope that your lucid management will correct this mistake of mine.”

The principal stretched out his hand to him, introduced him to the teacher who was examining him curiously and said a lot of compliments about the level of my knowledge and my excellent abilities, but the first splinter showed up in my heart. I understood that I brought a disgrace upon my brother. I remember how he always used to repeat to me that I had to be reserved and tactful, to go deep into every situation, always to perceive where I was and who was in front of me, and only then to act.

All of it, this episode from my childhood rose in my memory, summoned by the same spasm of my heart like back then. I met a stranger for the first time, who became dear and close to me like a real brother, - and once again I was feeling like an unexperienced child who didn’t know how to approach a

stranger, who didn't know what to say to him and how to behave, so that I would fulfil Florentian's wish and make him happy with my behaviour... I was standing in the corridor, not bringing myself to knock upon the door of the adjacent compartment, and as if lit up the lightning this first childish lesson of tact flashed in my head.

Having pressed my lips together, I remembered the lines from Ali's letter: "I will overcome" and I gave a knock upon the door.

"Come in," an unfamiliar strange voice uttered.

I opened the door and I almost ran back to Florentian, as back then when I ran from the class to my brother.

Two tall men were sitting on the sofas one opposite to another, but I could see only two pairs of the eyes: the eyes of the dervish, which had stuck in my memory from our first meeting – the eyes-stars, and the attentive, nearly black eyes of the Greek, which remembered me of the piercing look of old Ali.

"Let me become acquainted with you according to all rules of politeness," Sandra Kon-Ananda told me, while he was standing up. "Here's my friend Ilofilion."

Ananda squeezed my hand, and I bowed to the Greek, modestly rumpling my cap in my hand. I snapped out like a bad schoolboy would do with his by heart learnt lesson.

"My friend Florentian sent me to you. Would you like to drink a cup of coffee with me in the dining-car? I can accompany you there."

Suddenly the Greek's eyes stopped pricking me with his awls, a humour lit up in them. He rose quickly, squeezed my hand and spoke up in Russian with a strong accent. He must have been choosing his words, but he was speaking absolutely correctly.

"I think that in this place birds of a feather flock together. You are also timid like I am. Well, then let's come together. Of course, we don't find two and we'll lose four, but anyway both of us are fitted one for another, and probably, until we decide to order our breakfast, - everything will be eaten from under our very nose, and we'll stay hungry."

He made such sad face and then laughed so merrily that I forgot all my shyness and, not holding anymore, I started rocking with laughter, asserting him that I'll be even impudent if needed, but I will feed him to satiety.

We left the compartment, accompanied with a merry laughter of Kon-Ananda.

When we entered the dining-car, I quickly found a small table in the nonsmokers' area, ordered the breakfast and tried to occupy my new acquaintance by addressing him in German. He answered me willingly and asked me if I had been in Greece. I answered him regretfully that I hadn't been anywhere else except Moscow, Petersburg, Northern Caucasus and K. where I had been for the first time and for a very short time.

Our coffee was brought, and I, by taking advantage of the right to eat in silence, was observing the Greek secretly, but intently.

Apparently, at the moment destiny was rewarding me so plentifully for my monotonous childhood and youth by sending me so many events and people – they were not only exceptional, but they didn't even fit in my consciousness. It seemed to me that it would suffice to put on the head of this Greek a

wreath of roses, to throw a Greek chiton on his shoulders, and here's a model standing in front of you: one could shape a god of Olympus, a king of ancient times, a prophet from him, but being in modern clothes he surpassed the boundaries of my consciousness. His European suit didn't fit him, German language didn't sound in his lips – some Italian or Spanish dialect would have suited him best. The harmony of regular features of his face wasn't worsen neither by his rather low forehead with the thrust up elevations above his eye-brows which were thin, curved and long – until his very temples, nor by the tenderness of his skin near his black blue hair, nor his hardly revealed moustache... One could really say about him: "Beautiful like a God."

However, he didn't have that charm with which Florentian was attracting me so much. If I wasn't feeling any formal obstacles between myself and Florentian, although I understood the difference that existed between us and his enormous superiority when compared to myself, then Ilofilion seemed to me to be retired into the circle of his own thoughts. As though he had fenced himself off me, and it seemed that no one could manage to penetrate into these thoughts unless he wanted it himself.

Having waited for the next stop, by walking along the platform, we went to our carriage. The Greek thanked me for my attention shown and added that I was a very pleasant guide, because I could be silent and I wasn't curious.

I answered him that I spent my childhood close to my brother who was very serious and rather silent, and that my youth didn't spoil me with such meetings where anyone could be interested in me, so on the contrary as it seemed to him, by being very curious I learned to think to myself in silence as he did.

He gave a smile and noticed that mathematicians – if they are really devoted to their science – are mostly demure persons and they can go so deeply into the logical course of things in their thoughts that they perceive even the universe as a stretched out geometrical plan, so they are frightened and feel shy when they are facing a vanity, a tasteless and unconsidered expression of thoughts or a noisy jabber instead of a really deep thought out conversation which should prevail among people. Then they are escaping the crowd and the racket of the cities, which is alien to the logic of nature's life.

He also asked me if I liked a country-side and how I was imagining my future life. I answered him that until now my entire life flew past by sitting on the secondary school and student benches. I told him laughing how I performed during my entrance examinations. I also told him about my first sadness – the separation with my brother and my life in Petersburg, and then I said to him as though drawing a conclusion to myself of a certain period of my life.

"Now I'm in my second year of the university, and the trouble is the same – I'm a mathematician, but the studies haven't yet revealed any understanding what I would like to choose in my life, where I would like to live, and I still don't grasp at all what place I'm taking in the universe."

We were standing in the corridor, and my companion proposed me to drop in at his compartment. I didn't even notice how our conversation acquired a warm and friendly nature. I wasn't feeling shy anymore of the strictness of my new acquaintance, on the contrary, I was feeling as though a rest and relief from him. My thoughts were flowing calmly, I wanted to find out more about the universities of Berlin and London – it was simply great to sit with my new friend.

And at the same time I wanted to cast a glance at Florentian and to tell him that I didn't disgrace him by fulfilling his assignment, that the Greek was really an interesting person.

I already wanted to tell him that I would drop in at my compartment for a minute when the door opened and Kon-Ananda entered. He explained to us that Florentian fell asleep and if it was interesting for me to talk to Ilofilion, then he would be glad to protect the sleep of my dear friend.

I already knew well what kind of sleep that was and agreed with pleasure to exchange the places with Ananda for some time.

I and Ilofilion continued our interrupted conversation. The more he was talking the more I was surprised by his knowledge, observation, and most importantly – by the power of his general conclusions.

I also was thinking that I had some synthetic talents, I knew logic perfectly and was reading quite a lot. And now, compared to my companion's expression of thought and language, all my so called amazing talents seemed to be a pitiful rubbish, dumped in the common pile of a flea market.

"I'm feeling so strange today, as if I had entered a new university and heard a row of the most interesting lectures." And I asked him "Perhaps, you could tell me more about the students' lives, the level of their education and about their interests."

And again our conversation was flowing, besides my companion drew me a parallel between the students from Greece, Germany, Paris and London, because he had an opportunity to observe all of them in his own time.

I was devouring every word. He was speaking so simply and at the same time so picturesquely that it seemed to me as though I was travelling with him myself and watching everything with my own eyes.

A passionate desire for knowledge, a wish to see the world, the people, to get to know their customs aroused an ecstasy in me. I lost the perception of time and space, I forgot that I acquired my whole education only thanks to my brother, a poor Russian officer, and I decided that I would certainly see the entire world, I wouldn't leave a single little corner unvisited.

"Would you like to travel?" I heard I.'s question.

As if I had fallen from the moon, only now I could understand that I wouldn't be able to travel the world, but I even didn't have enough means to travel my native Russia, because I was a poor person and up to now I could earn only pennies thanks to my lessons and translations.

"I would like to travel very much," I sighed, "but I don't have much luck with travelling. Having graduated the secondary school and entered the university, only now after five years of separation with my brother, I got ready for a journey to Asia to visit him. I was dreaming about seeing that new world to me, another nation – and here's how it all ended. And I even lost my brother," I added, silently remembering with what joy I was going to the distant K. to see him and with what pain I was coming back from there.

I. bent down by me, looked into my eyes extremely tenderly and told me silently.

"I sympathize with you from the bottom of my heart, dear friend. I've also gone through the same moment of my life when in one day I lost everything and everyone whom I loved, but my state was much worse than yours, because I was unable to help anyone from my family. I was severely wounded and when I regained my consciousness I could see only cold corpses of my family members, and everything what was connected to my hopes, ideals, aspirations, searching of truth and honour – all of that was also

rooted out of my heart and turned into ashes, because the murderers seemed to be hypocrite fanatics who were pretending to be friends...”

Hi was silent for a while and then he continued with even more sincere voice.

“Your situation is much better than that segment of my life. You haven’t lost your brother yet, you’re only separated from him. You can still help him and you’re already started doing so. When I dropped in at Ali’s on a short visit five years ago, I became acquainted with your brother. Ali told me about the pure life of the great self-educated scientist, about his selfless devotion for the freedom of his nation. I remember how I was moved by such uncharacteristic features of the Russian officer. Already during our first meeting I could perceive so much in his wonderful face and at once I became his loyal friend. Even from the observations of your short life you know that the characters who are consistent and balanced are unable to give others only a part of their heart or friendship. We used to see each other with your brother back then. That was me who used to supplement his excellent library by sending him a rarer book. It is amazing how a nomad officer’s life didn’t prevent him from carrying with himself the chests loaded with books everywhere he was going. When he settled in K., then he really collected a real value – the library of a wise man. It is so sad that everything was lost...”

He was silent for a while again, then he moved a little nearer to me and added.

“I know your state from my own experience. What I’m going to tell you now, I decided to say to you only because I’ve passed myself all stages of human sadness which you’re experiencing right now. One shouldn’t think, as the youth loves to, that the whole life’s value is its offered personal happiness. Don’t think that the essence of your current state is the suffering and the dangers which you’re experiencing because of your brother. Reject your personal feelings and thoughts about yourself. Think only about the safety of your brother, about that your action and energy which you have to dedicate to him now and in the future, so that he would come out of all dangers alive and free. Fanatics and the czar’s government are scheming dozens of traps for him. They don’t love very much the intellectual officers. If you didn’t meet your brother...”

“What,” I gave a shout out of horror, “you think that he’s dead?”

“Oh no, I’m sure that he’s alive and he’s in Petersburg already,” I answered to me. “I’m talking only about one of the possible chances that now you won’t be able to see your brother and that he’ll be unable to take you with him.”

“Oh, how terrible that would be! We haven’t spent even two months together during all those five years, only those rare meetings when he used to visit me in Petersburg for short periods of time. I was hoping so much. Finally my dream came true and I had to spend all summer with him, even a part of autumn – and I’m alone again...”

Once again I was devoured by sadness, irritation, protest. It seemed to me that some people have interfered between me and my brother, attracting him to the interests of a foreign nation, while I, his brother-son, was abandoned, forgotten and unwanted. The whirls of passions, a storm was breaking my heart! Jealousy like a wild horse was dragging my thoughts from one event to another, from one kind of people to another one...

My friend was silent. I was silent for a long time, too. Finally my irritation started settling down. I stopped wringing my hands, and my loyalty to my brother, my gratitude for all his love and worries overcame the difficult thoughts of my egoism and despair.

I remembered my brother's face on the road, below the big tree, when Ali landed Nal from the coach. I was surprised by that face of a stranger back then – of the man of an exceptional will, even his eye-brows had stretched themselves into one line. That wasn't my kind brother whom I knew, that was a stranger whose flow of energy was sweeping everything on its way like a lava. I was only surprised back then and I didn't draw any conclusion which, of course, a more experienced person would have drawn, or perhaps, the uncommonness and speed of the following events buried that conclusion in my consciousness and only now it came to light for me: I understood that I didn't know my brother at all, that everything what he gave to me, the total orphan, was only a little part of his consciousness, that he was trying to make up for the misery of my childhood spent without love of my mother...

And suddenly I burst into tears like a small child. I was feeling deceived by the wonderful illusion which I had created myself and because of that I became even more lonesome. My brother-father was that person who belonged only to me, whose only worry was me, whose only meaning of life was also me.

Up until this moment I was imagining that he also, like myself, used to start and finish his day with thoughts about me and that he was living only thinking of a possibility to meet me some day and never separate again in his life.

Now, while fighting against my own illusion, I could also see another person in my brother, a stranger, I could perceive a row of his interests which weren't related to me, his solidarity with other people whom I hardly knew.

For the first time the following question rose in my consciousness: "Who is a brother at all? Who is the real brother? What role the blood kinship is playing in people's lives? What is bringing people together more: harmony of their thoughts, feelings, interests or the fact that they were given birth by the same mother?"

I couldn't feel the river of my tears, but now it already wasn't a passionate lament of my jealous despair, now everything rose in absolutely another importance: as if I had buried my childhood and its beauty; as if I had rooted my old habits out of myself to perceive people only like a support to myself. As if I was entering the new life of a mature man, which was still unknown to me, in which the words "mother", "father" and tenderness connected to them were drawing to the second plan; or maybe it simply was only a sweet dream about the family which I didn't have a chance to know during all my life, the family in which I could become a support myself.

Now it is difficult to put into words all those experiences of the youth, but apparently the perception of how young, how childish and unexperienced in the matters of life, how uneducated I still was, also added a drop of bitterness.

I was trying to suppress my tears with all my strength. I was feeling ashamed of weeping so relentlessly next to a stranger. Only when my thought from remorse turned to my brother, I remembered Ali's letter once again and Florentian's words uttered to me not long ago. I mopped away my tears and, not lifting my eyes to my companion, I told him silently.

"Excuse me, I lost my self-control."

I was waiting for a usual, perhaps even friendly sympathy, but what I heard showed me once again that I absolutely didn't know people.

"I was crying as bitterly as you are now many times. Believe me, it isn't easy for anybody to part from his childhood. The illusion of beauty and love created by our own imagination is torturing us for

as long as we gain a victory over it. Only then our illusory desires to live in the dream of imaginary beauty clear away when the real beauty which is hiding within ourselves comes to life. All blows of grief, losses and disappointment are teaching us to understand that there's no happiness in the conditional illusions. Happiness exists only in a free and voluntary work which doesn't depend on any praise or reward that are being poured upon us for doing it – in that work which we are carrying into our daily routine as an activity of love and joy by dedicating it to people's welfare and happiness."

I. embraced me and started telling me the story of his life.

Having come to himself after a long fainting-fit, he saw that he was lying in the pool of blood among his friends and family members. Everyone who's been with him since the very start of his childhood was dead. He didn't know neither where to go nor what to do – all his family was killed. He remembered that an old nurse was living in the mountains not far away from this valley where the house of his parents was standing. Of course, he didn't know which political party she was in sympathy with, and the yesterday's like-minded people – today's enemies could have killed her, too, as well as several families from this valley.

There was not time for thinking. I. descended by the sea, took a swim, put someone's clothes on, which were dropped or lost on shore and moved along a solitary path towards another side of the island to his nurse, while shedding his tears.

"I won't trouble you with the details of that wandering," I. continued. "I will only mention briefly that with the help of the little old woman and her money I boarded the ship which was going to Rome where her son was living, a gifted jeweller, as she told me herself. I must have died on the ship out of grief and hunger if Kon-Ananda whom you know already hadn't found me. Having lost all my strengths due to fever, losing my consciousness again and again, I heard an Italian talk over me, which I knew from my Italian nurse. A young, clear and charming voice was speaking.

"Whe is he, Nika? A boy is lying here."

Another hoarse and rough voice, as though with reluctance, was straining his words through his teeth.

"It's not a boy. It's an ordinary boozy drunkard."

I didn't have any strength, although I wanted to give a cry from the bottom of my heart that I wasn't drunk, that I was dying out of hunger and cold, and that I was asking for help. I had already been ready to die, and this hope of salvation which flashed and disappeared seemed to me like only one more jeering of destiny. The heavy steps moved away by taking the grumble of the hoarse voice with them. I thought that another voice would vanish in the distance, too, when suddenly a strong and tender hand lifted my head a little, and a grievous "oh", like a sigh, escaped someone's lips.

My weakness didn't allow me to open my eyes. The stranger who had bent over me gave a scream to his attendant. The attendant again came to me unwillingly, he could hardly walk. An insistent tone of the young voice, in which an unshakable will could be heard changed the mood of the grumbler in a flash.

"Bring the stretcher right now and call the doctor, old sluggard! So this is how you were protecting our belongings in the hold that you didn't even see how a man was dying here."

"It is my fault, master. This pilferer must have showed here only now. I've been checking the boxes all the time, all of them were in order."

“Stop pattering nonsense. What pilferer is he? He’s a sickly boy! Get the stretcher and the doctor as soon as possible! Do you want to feel my stick again?”

Where his tired legs were gone? “Understood”, the servant uttered only this with his sonorous voice and ran like I had never run even when I was healthy.

“Poor boy”, I heard the same sincere voice; and how tender that voice was, it reached my heart like a mother’s caress, while his tears burning like a fire were pouring on my cheeks.

“Do you hear me, poor boy?”

I wanted to answer him, but only a moan escaped my parched lips: I was unable to move my tongue, it was as though lifeless, rough, as a foreign body that didn’t want to obey my will.

“I will save you, I will save you at any price”, the stranger continued. “My uncle is a doctor...”

But I didn’t hear anything else, I fell down into an abyss...

I came to myself in a spacious and bright room. The windows were opened. There was a soft bed and clean bedding, so I thought for a while that I was at home. My memory had carried away my entire experienced terror, and I was waiting for my mother to come and scold me for my laziness. Being a Greek, she was in the habit of talking to me in German, because her nurse was talking like this.

I was still waiting for her sweet “Lolion”, but for some reason she was lingering. Then I decided to scare her slightly, as I used to do it in my early childhood by shouting at the top of my voice, and she would pretend to be very frightened, she would put her hands pleadingly and speak to me in German jokingly.

“Oh, mister hunter, the crocodile will indeed devour me. Please don’t waste your time for your scream, kill it as soon as possible.”

I gave a shout with all my might, as it seemed to me, but only a small voice came out, which was similar to a prolonged moan.

“Well, he’s come to himself,” I could hear a voice over me. “Uncle, you are not a doctor, but a wonder-worker.”

With these words, two men who were absolutely unknown to me came to my bed. One of them, as you’ve already understood was Kon-Ananda, whom I don’t need to describe to you, while the other man was still not old, but he was much older than him. His kind-hearted face, his kind brownish eyes and some nondescript nobility, his manners which I hadn’t seen before revealed to me instantly that he was a man of aristocracy. One can read about such men only in novels, but usually a man of middle-class cannot reach them. I understood that I was seeing a nobleman for the first time.

“So, my friend, now we can be sure that you’ll recover completely,” the nobleman told me in Italian. “Could you tell me, what day is today?”

I was looking at him, not understanding anything. My memory hadn’t yet come back to me. He poured some liquid into the glass, which was smelling sweet and strong, and he helped me to drink it. I looked at Ananda’s face, but of course, I didn’t recognize my rescuer. I was drowsy again.

When I woke up again, it seemed to me that a woman was sitting by my bed. I thought that she was my mother. This time I remembered everything about my previous waking up and I wasn’t surprised at all when I saw Ananda, I only began to speak in German unintentionally.

"I saw my mother next to me. Why did she leave?"

"She got tired very much," his answer followed. "If you agree, I will give you something to eat. Although what you will get cannot be called a dinner, but the doctor is very strict and he allowed only thin gruel and pap to eat for you."

He helped me to sit up in my bed, and I almost fainted away, although he was trying to help me as carefully as possible. He quickly gave me a gulp of wine. He had to feed me with the spoon...

Such life continued for about a month. When I used to ask him about my mother, she either was sleeping or tired, or she was gone for shopping. To my question whose room was here, he always used to answer: "Yours". Once I asked him why my nurse wasn't coming to visit me. He answered that if I remembered her address, then I could write her a letter, so she could come.

"How could I not remember her address?" I was indignant. "This is the same as though I wouldn't know my mother's address."

I dictated him my nurse's address instantly and asked her to come tomorrow. He gave a laugh, saying that if he succeeds to get a flying carpet, then he would fly himself to visit her. I couldn't understand anything again.

One more week passed. The nobleman doctor visited me several times and he allowed me to get up. That was the real comedy when I was trying to stand up for the first time with the help of Ananda. I was fifteen years old and tall, and now I grew up so much during my illness that even the doctor was surprised.

"My friend, well, how is it possible to grow so much?" he was laughing. "If you keep doing so, then nobody, even your nurse won't recognize you."

This time I somehow managed to perceive that there was quite a lot of time gone, but still there was no nurse, my mother was still hiding. I looked at the doctor, but he, as though not seeing my pleading look, helped me to put the dressing-gown on, and both of them with Ananda brought me to the window. The high arm-chair with the foot was standing here in such a way that I could admire the view behind the window while I was sitting in it.

Not taking my eyes off, I was looking at the sea that extended in the distance and at the garden that was going down its coast. Not recognizing the landscape and not being able to perceive anything, I asked the doctor why I was living here. Our home was in the valley, while I had never been here, high in the mountains and I didn't know these places.

The doctor's face was very serious, although it was absolutely calm, too. He took my hand and he was holding it in such a way as though he would have counted my pulse, but I was certain that he wasn't counting it, he wanted to transfer a part of his energy and cheerfulness to me.

"If you want to see your nurse," he told me silently while stroking my hair with his free hand, "I can ask her to come. I only want to tell you, my boy, that you are almost a man already, while your nurse is weak and old. It seems that she will have to tell you about something unpleasant. Try to remain calm, think how to make this difficult moment easier for her. Forget about your pain if it stuns you, try to control your tears with all your strength, so that the old woman would see that she has raised the real man and not the milksop with the trousers."

He turned towards the door, commanded somebody to bring the nurse and kept stroking my hair while speaking to me calmly.

"Everything in life is changing, my boy. There may be not a single moment of respite in a man's life. All sorts of affairs and meetings are forcing the man to move, in this way he's growing and changing continuously. Everything what consciousness is presenting like a logical thought, everything is changing and broadening together with the coming wisdom. If the man fails to accept the changing circumstances wisely, fails to become the power that controls them – then they destroy him, like cold destroys the mushroom's life, like drought destroys the mould's life. And of course, the man who fails – by changing himself – to carry the life of new circumstances on his shoulders easily and simply, will become only like that mushroom or mould, and not the radiance of his thought which is growing in creativity and hardening itself in fight."

Not taking my eyes off him, I was listening to him greedily and drawing his every word to myself. His kindness which was spurting out of his face and his hand which was stroking my hair tenderly were as though giving me love and fortitude. All of a sudden I understood that there was a friend next to me, such a grand friend that his hand was the support for me not only during this moment; it was so strong that even my entire life would fail to cause trouble to that flow of love which was burning within that man.

I was flooded with some respectful and refreshing joy, gratitude, the feeling of courage and self-confidence which I hadn't yet experienced before. I pressed the hand that was stroking me tenderly to my lips, kissed it and answered him.

"I will always try to be strong. Oh, how I would like to be like you – so kind, intelligent and strong. I'm feeling exceptionally well being next to you. As though I've grown up and changed."

He embraced me, pressed to his heart, kissed my forehead and told me.

"Be strong now. Exactly how you'll overcome this meeting with your nurse, so you'll start your new life."

After saying this he left me, and in a moment my nurse came into the room.

She was an old woman already, but whom I was seeing now were total ruins. She also was surprised by the change that had happened within me.

Not even having time to come to me, she only clapped her hands, gave a groan, began to cry, knelt on the foot of my arm-chair, grabbed my hands and started weeping so much that the fortitude in my heart was melting like a wax.

Although I had grown up in the country where people often used to reveal their feelings with cries and gestures, although from my childhood I could remember perfectly the pure Italian exaltation that was characteristic to my nurse, which would catch fire suddenly like a match and then it would go out suddenly, too, but this time I could hear in her lament so much heartbreak and despair that I couldn't find any words of comfort for her. Like a refrain between her tears now and again the following words stood out: "My poor boy! My dear orphan, you don't have even your own motherland."

Some obscure memories started oppressing me. My thoughts were spinning sluggishly and with difficulty like a cumbersome millstone. Up to now I can remember that unusually strange feeling in my head, which I never experienced again. It seemed to me that I could simply feel some purely physical movement that was taking place in my cerebral hemispheres, which I could perceive like my thoughts moving with difficulty. Apparently, all blood from my heart flowed into my head; I felt a stinging pain in my heart like a prick of a long needle, and all of a sudden, like in the fire of a flash, I could remember everything at once.

I don't know if I fainted in that moment, but I could understand clearly that in my memory all my experiences floated past one after another...

When I could already align my thoughts again, I could see Ananda standing next to me, and only now I could understand that it was him who was whispering in the hold of the steamer: "I will save you, boy."

Ananda was looking at me focussed and he gave me some kind of a drink. Having drunk it, I told him.

"Thank you. Thank you for saving my life. No, I don't need it," I pushed away his hand with another medicine. "No medicine can cure me now, but only that example of your and your uncle's love and care of the stranger who was hurled away by fate, which I found here. I don't understand how I could forget everything. I remembered only when my nurse's voice and her tears took me back to my childhood, when I heard that I didn't have even my motherland – then I could remember everything at once."

I still was unable to summon up my strength for a long time; my breathing was so heavy, as though a short breath of asthma had pressed my lungs. Ananda persuaded me to drink some drops, he put a pinch of yellow and dry grass into the plate and set it on fire. Soon a strong aroma pervaded and I was feeling better.

"Where am I now? Is that your house?" I asked Ananda.

"This is Sicily," he answered to me. "You're safe here. This is the doctor's house. The slaughter of the revolted parties in your motherland continues and the misfortunes are falling down on innocent people. The fanatic politicians are killing not only one another, but even the foreigners, and this promises the war for your entire country. You can find out about the details from the newspapers which I've saved for you. You've been ill for more than two months. Every day during the first month my uncle was afraid that he would be unable to snatch you from the clutches of death. Only during the second month of your illness he announced that the danger was over, and two weeks ago he fixed the exact day when you recover your consciousness. The loss of your memory could affect the entire course of your thoughts. In doctor's opinion, the meeting with your nurse had to be the turning point, what has happened exactly."

Then he told me how they took me to the cabin of the steamer, how both of them, he and his uncle in turns kept watching me by my bedside, how many times in my ravings I was telling all my story up to the moment of my boarding of the ship. Now he asked me how I had gotten to the hold of the steamer, but I didn't remember, or perhaps I simply didn't know what that hold was. I only remembered that I was looking for a peaceful place where I could hide from people and cry my disaster out.

"Then my story is absolutely simple," I continued. "I won't be telling you of how many times the storms of despair, resentment and hopeless heartbreak were changing within me, how many times I was breaking the hearts of my benefactors and nurse with my relentless lament. I only will stress that not a single of such attacks of my irritation gave rise to any resentment or reproach of my new friends. Gradually, the atmosphere of constant tenderness and respectable culture prompted me to step into the self-control. I could see and understand clearly how uneducated I was, how indelicate my behaviour was, because I was disturbing the quiet rhythm of lives of my rescuers, which were always filled with the scientific work of the doctor and Ananda's activity by his thesis.

I could already walk in the garden, I even used to go down by the sea, but the doctor didn't allow me to read yet, saying that if I can spend at least one week without any tears, then he would give me

a book. My wish to start learning and to read was so big that I showed my character and I didn't demonstrate my pain publicly, but only entrusted it to my pillow at night.

On one of the red-letter days the doctor commanded to harness the horses, and we left for a ride, so I could admire Sicily. The nature here was like a real fairy-tale.

While we were riding, the doctor asked me if I knew well the history of my country. To my shame, I had to admit that I didn't know it at all. When we came back, the doctor took me to his study. There were so many books here that I even sat down out of amazement. Not only the walls were built all around with them, but the shelves of the books were formed along the entire room from the ceiling down to the floor, leaving only the narrow corridors where in each of them a light collapsible ladder was standing. In one of these corridors the doctor took the history of Ancient Greece from the shelf. It was written in German.

My studies started from that day on. Each of my new friends used to find a possibility to break away from his occupation, so they could help me. I was trying with all my might, and my old nurse had to complain of her solitude; only that would make me break away from the books and lessons and go to the sea with her.

My talents for mathematics were revealed, and jokingly I was nicknamed Euclid. Both of my guardians were calling me like that, only my nurse kept calling me Lolion.

I was totally cured during my six months of work and peaceful life. I grew up even more, but I remained as thin as I was before and the heartbreak kept eating my heart out.

During one of our dinners the doctor told us that he was preparing himself to go to Rome in one week where he would spend a month, then he would go to Berlin with his affairs.

"Would you like to come with me as my secretary?" he addressed me with the question.

Being in doubt, I took a look at Ananda, he gave me a tender smile, but kept silent.

"What is stopping you?" the doctor asked me again. "Don't you really want to look around the world about which you are reading so intensely at the moment?"

"I want to see it all very much, especially Rome. Besides, I would be happy if I could show gratitude to you for everything that you've done for me, but I'm afraid that I wouldn't be able to be such secretary whom you need. Anyway I will try to be your diligent and honest servant. I'm also worried how my nurse is going to sustain this separation, because she doesn't have anybody except me, right?"

"She has a son in Rome. We will take her there. You will already orient yourself in the itineraries of the trains on your way back, so you can come to Rome and take her here again. Make up your mind. One day you will have to step into life anyway and to acquire a corresponding education. You will be able to choose the university that you like during this journey, and you don't even have to worry about your future now."

Wishing to end the story of my life in a few words – only happy words from now on – I will add that in a few days the doctor, me and my nurse left to Rome. We left the old woman in Rome. You can imagine yourself what I experienced by getting to know this city, its monuments, galleries, museums... While I was running about in the city and fulfilling the doctor's assignments, I was thanking my nurse in every of my steps, because she had taught me Italian language.

Not two months, but half year flew past while we were travelling from one place to another. I took care of the program of Berlin's secondary schools and received it, so I could continue my regular

studies. Every day I was getting up at six o'clock in the morning and I was preparing myself for my examinations for all seven classes at once.

Once I revealed this idea to the doctor. He verified my knowledge and he was happy with it. He recommended me to come back home, to work with Ananda for a while and to take a school-leaving certificate examinations at once in Heidelberg where Ananda would maintain his thesis and he would be living there for at least a year.

I accepted this proposal with pleasure. We went together to Vienna and then we parted there. I came back to Rome alone via Venice, while the doctor decided to spend a year or two in his estate in Hungary, having explained to me that I, Ananda and my nurse would spend the summer at his place.

My life has been passing like this from that time on. I was learning a lot and had time to see lots of the world: I was travelling in Egypt, India, I saw all kinds of wise men and scientists, artists and painters, but I didn't have a chance to meet a more superior man than the doctor. Accidentally, one of his assignments brought me together with Ali and Florentian, in whom I noticed the knowledge, power, kindness and honour that was equal to my great friend's. The strong friendship that was uniting them among themselves opened up for me and Ananda, too.

Now in my story I'm proceeding to that period of my friendship with Ali when I came to K. to stay at his place for a while and when I became acquainted with your brother. Of course, you know your brother better than I do. I can only add that his power of spirit, his will, his love to man, his great mind and knowledge raise this self-taught officer higher than all wise men and scientists whom I've met, and he's almost equal to those great friends of mine about whom I've just been talking to you.

Don't feel shy of me. I've endured all my sufferings myself, I understood the abyss of mankind's grief, and the heart which has blown in its disaster once cannot condemn another man or feel burdened by his tears and troubles. I've learnt to see my brother in another man.

Our conversation has been continuing for a long time more. We missed our breakfast, and now we were already invited for dinner...

I forgot to think about myself, about my life. I's picturesque story when it seemed that he was striking every episode like a sculptor with his chisel – so precise and clear were his words and thoughts – drew me into the vortex of another boy's life, who was much more unfortunate than I was.

I. offered me to wash myself and to have our dinner. I didn't object, understanding that now it would be easiest for both of us to sit down at the dinner's table in silence for a while. When we came back to the carriage, we found Ananda and Florentian in the corridor, who were having a chat with some travellers.

I was so glad seeing Florentian, as though I hadn't seen him for the whole year. I understood once again how I got attached to him with the entire heat of my childish heart during this short period of time. He extended both of his hands to me with joy, which I squeezed immediately.

"How I missed you," I uttered him merrily.

"And I thought I would ingratiate myself with you, because I hasn't yet learned to sleep according to your taste," he answered me merrily, too. "Only you aren't very polite with respect to I. I hope, Euclid, that you haven't tired my little brother with mathematics?"

"No, no, your friend I. helped me so much with his conversation that I've become ten years wiser instantly."

Everybody gave a laugh. Florentian embraced me by my shoulders, put the comic expression of the lord Benedict and asked me.

“Is it possible that in my company you kept standing in one place or even grew stupid?”

Once again I felt how one should follow every of one’s words. I gave a sigh and, not knowing what to answer him, I turned my eyes towards I. He stated immediately that everybody knew well his unique florentian talent to cavil at every word, and that not without reason he, Euclid, was a better mathematician than he was and that one time he would somehow catch Florentian himself, maybe even in a subtler way.

I proposed to organize a dinner for Florentian in the compartment. Hungry Ananda responded to that especially joyfully. I hurried away to demonstrate my administrative skill.

Soon the best vegetarian dishes which could be made in the train were served. Although me and I. had already had our dinner, but we didn’t refuse to dine now.

We had to go one more night to Moscow, and in the morning I could already hope to see my brother. My thoughts migrated to the joy of upcoming meeting so quickly, I was imagining so vividly with what new perception I would be looking at my brother now that I broke away from my surroundings completely, I wasn’t seeing or hearing anything what was going on around me.

All of a sudden some kind of moisture on my hands which I had put on the little table made me to give a start. That was Florentian who moistened the corner of the napkin in the water and put it on my hands. Having come to myself, I looked round and was instantly dazzled. Three pairs of eyes were looking at me – they had totally different colours and forms, but they were looking at me all absolutely intently. I was so embarrassed when all of them laughed that I even blushed up to the roots of my hair, I got irritated and nearly angry, but the laughter of my friends was so kind-hearted – I was afraid that I looked funny to them by being so dreamy – that I burst out laughing, too, remembering that I was Lovushka – the catcher of the crows.

“Your dreams about Moscow, Lovushka,” Florentian was talking to me, “are rightful and needed very much. Only you should be disposed that your goal isn’t your personal luck to meet your brother, but to help him.”

I was surprised once again that Florentian could read my thoughts. When I told him that I was surprised at his ability to answer my unvoiced thoughts, he ensured me that there wasn’t anything special here, like his night conversation with the train’s conductor. And he told me that his wife was alive, that he received an answer to his telegram in Samara.

I felt how shallow my attention towards other people was in comparison to the deep attentiveness of Florentian. I had already forgotten both the conductor and his troubles.

A conversation among the three of my new acquaintances started about our future actions in Moscow. Florentian was sure that our stay there would be burdened by the fanatics from K., that all their efforts would be directed to catch and force me to tell where my brother was and if he kidnapped Nal. He was sure that the persecutors didn’t believe the legend about the people who were burnt down in my brother’s house, or they burnt down somebody there themselves on occasion out of revenge. Therefore, he was proposing all of us to stop at a single hotel. I and Florentian should take one of the rooms, while Ananda and Euclid had to stay from both of our sides. He told me strictly that I shouldn’t go anywhere alone and in the hotel I should be only together with one of them three. I didn’t quite understand how any disaster could threaten me, but I promised to follow Florentian’s instructions. The time until the night

passed unnoticed. I. told us something from his travelling in India, while Ananda remembered a terrible night when he became a witness of a massacre in S. and where he succeeded to save one of the persecuted women whom they intended to kill with stones.

The night came. I was feeling tired from many new impressions and thoughts, so I went to bed earlier than others. I woke up, because Florentian was awakening me and I heard the words that surprised me, although it seemed to me that I had gone to bed only an hour ago.

“We are approaching Moscow.”

Chapter 8

One more sore disappointment and departure from Moscow

When we climbed out of the carriage, the whole crowd of various employees met us. Having lined up in one long row, with the names of the hotels on their uniforms or their ordinary caps, with the liveries or without them, they were inviting the travellers, offering them coaches, calashes, light carriages...

The first, as though looking round, was going Ananda, in the middle I was going with Florentian, while I. was following us. Our walk was ended by the porters with our suitcases.

Everything was so interesting – the harsh cries of the hotel names being called, the bargains between the travellers and the whole crowd of coach-men who were dressed in blue long-waisted coats, with the whips in their hands. Dozens of them were thronging round a traveller, so once again I forgot everything, I was only observing everything with amazement and I was already about to give a laugh and stop. Florentian pushed me slightly, I stopped gaping at sides instantly and noticed that one of the employees of the hotels separated from the crowd. On his cap there was a French hotel inscription “National”, he greeted Ananda like a familiar guest by raising with respect his hand to his cap.

In several minutes we were already sitting in an excellent landau and rolling towards the city centre.

I hadn't seen Moscow for a long time and, having compared it to Petersburg, I could see only a dirty provincial city with rather low traffic. The streets along which we were driving were narrow, curved, most of the houses were wooden and low. Lots of orthodox churches and chapels with the sound of their bells echoing from all sides seemed to me to be patriarchal. I thought for a while unwillingly by looking at that great number of orthodox churches that Russian nation was very religious. I was asking myself if with its belief it could be so rudely fanatical like muslims were, who could only see their merit before God in their brutal behaviour.

Unwittingly, my thoughts turned towards myself – what God meant to me, how I was living with Him and within Him, my religion was impeding or helping me? With the whole secondary school going to an orthodox church once per week, I could see this only like a variation from our monotonous lives, I never tried to seek for a facilitation of my troubles there, I didn't complain to God, but while being in an orthodox church I used to observe everything.

We were driving in silence, exchanging some insignificant remarks from time to time, but I was feeling instinctively that in everyone's head the only thought was spinning – about my brother and Nal's destiny.

Having entered the lobby of the hotel, we ordered our rooms as we had decided beforehand. Florentian asked if there was any correspondence in the name of the lord Benedict and, to my great amazement, a respectable and well-built porter gave him two telegrams and two letters.

“The letters for Your Lordship are waiting for two day, while one of the telegrams was received at night and another – just in this moment,” he added politely.

I was impatient. When we settled in the room, as soon as the servant finished dawdling with our things and finally left, I rushed at Florentian and asked him if the letter wasn't from my brother, because it seemed to me that I recognized his handwriting on one of the envelopes. He gave a smile and

was astonished, because by being so absent-minded I could recognize the handwriting of my beloved brother from such a distance. Seeing my impatience, he took one of the letters, extended it to me and told me.

“When Ali was talking to you in the garden, he warned you that not only help for your brother, but also your, your brother’s and Nal’s lives depended on your courage, loyalty and self-control. Now, when you are reading the letter, think not about yourself, but only about that help which you can give to him.”

My heart was broken. My presentment was telling me that although I was hoping so much, I wouldn’t see my brother today.

I read the letter once, I read it one more time, but my thoughts were still scattered, I was unable to draw any conclusion.

My brother was writing that they managed to leave K. unnoticed, that their servants dressed themselves in Eastern women clothes, Nal – in European ones which were prepared by Ali, and that my brother himself was travelling in the suit of a civilian. They were travelling in separate carriages until they reached Moscow. Here they changed their clothes and kept together from that moment on.

In Moscow they changed their trains to Petersburg successfully, because their friends had warned them that they had to hurry, everything was already prepared, and the ship to London was leaving on Sunday. So we didn’t have time to see each other in Moscow.

My brother was sending me his love and asking me to forgive for those troubles and disappointments which he had given to me instead of a rest, he also was asking Florentian not to leave me if I miss the ship which he would be leaving with.

“Miss the ship,” I kept repeating this with sadness and vexation in my thoughts.

“Sunday – that’s today,” finally I uttered to Florentian.

Against my will, I uttered this phrase with such a tone, as though I had returned from the funeral and announced him about that.

“Yes, that’s today. They managed to make off only because Ananda’s and Ali’s friends were trying to distract the attention of the leaders of fanatics to deceptive tracks in every possible way,” Florentian answered me. “But here’s the letter from Ali and two telegrams. We are being pursued. Mullah and the leaders decided that you would certainly go to your brother, so they want to find your tracks even if they are at the end of the world. If there’s an opportunity to seize you, they will hold an inquest about your brother. By estimating your youth, they want to frighten and threaten you, and to find out everything what they need.”

“So, even if there was a possibility, I couldn’t come with my brother anyway. In this case there’s no need even to think about that,” I uttered, trying to drive away any outside thoughts and to think only about the danger threatening my brother. “Now what we, and specifically me, are going to do? I’m feeling great with you everywhere. Now all my life is only you. You will save my brother, I don’t have any doubts about that. Dispose of my life as it seems to be necessary to you. I repeat once again, everything in my life now – that’s you.”

“You are the real brother, the real son of your brother-father. Believe me, you will be repaid with great fortune in your life for this moment of heroism. The one who can act by forgetting himself, wins the victory in the battle,” Florentian answered, embracing me tenderly. “In the letter, Ali warns us through

his friend who is living in Moscow that he would let us know via telegram if you are pursued. And indeed, the first telegram is about that, while the second one informs us who are following us. That's two young traders who are ostensibly going to Moscow for goods. One of them doesn't know any foreign language except Russian, while the other one knows German and English. Ali is writing that both of them are friends of Nal's groom. One can predict their future actions and goals. Those things which Ali Machmed has given to Nal through you are not just things, and we must give them to her as soon as possible. I propose the following plan for you. I myself will bring Nal's things to her; today I will board the express Moscow – Paris and I will be in London sooner than they will be. Right now, in a couple of hours, I propose you with Euclid to go to Sevastopol, so you could come by sea to Constantinople and then you could travel to India, to Ali's estate. I want to propose Ananda to justify himself with work and stay here for entire month, so he could keep the connection with all of us and watch the enemy. I myself will be useful and even needful for your brother and Nal who might get into a helpless situation without an experienced friend in the surroundings completely unknown to them. Besides, everyone needs to be convinced of your brother's death, so that the danger of pursuit wouldn't threaten his life all the time. I also will come to India in three or four months, and after some time all of us will come to Paris where I intend to settle our fugitives when everything will settle down."

I was listening to him in silence. No, that wasn't even a petrification. It was rather similar to that feeling which I had experienced in my brother's room by the fireside, it was similar to what people experience when their beloved die. I was as though standing by the deep grave and watching a coffin in it.

I rose automatically, opened the suitcase where Nal's things were placed and I started taking out my own things – every one of them was hurting me like a knife.

"In all likelihood, you will want to take everything like Ali himself had put it. He gave this money to me. I don't need it, because it's not enough that much money for such a distant journey which you are sending me to. Let it be the present to my brother. Buy a great case, a golden or silver little box in Paris for the money and put his note-book in it, which I had forgotten in Ali's house so carelessly," I told Florentian by giving him the wonderful note-book of my brother with the peacock. I'm ready for the journey already. Only let me go as the servant of I., so I could earn my bread which I was eating from my brother's hands up to now."

"My dear boy," Florentian answered me, "when you come to India, you'll be learning there. You will know a lot and you will understand. Rely upon me up to then. Be not Euclid's servant, but his friend. Your talents for mathematics and music – that's not everything what is hiding in you. You are feeling a talent of a writer within you, aren't you?"

I blushed so that I even began to sweat. I never thought that he would notice my most sacred and hidden wish, too.

There was no time for any further conversation. Ananda and I. came in, and Florentian told them about his further plan. I was very surprised, because they didn't utter a word, both of them accepted his proposal as not worthy of any discussion.

Ananda called the servant of the hotel and asked him to order two tickets to Sevastopol and to take care of two people to get them to the train, and to bring breakfast to the room for everybody.

"And get one ticket for the evening train to Paris, too," he added.

All of us put my things to Florentian's travelling-bag which he gave as a gift to me.

“Here you will find a surprise from me,” he was explaining to me merrily. “As soon as you start feeling a burial mood, then start looking for the surprise. And here’s my last precept: remember that joy is an invincible power, while melancholy and denial will destroy everything whatever you would set to do.”

Our breakfast was served, and the porter came, too. He told us that he had two tickets left to Sevastopol in the international carriage, which he was about to return already when he heard about our order. We took the tickets at once, passed our things to the servant and sat down to have our breakfast. In half an hour I and I. had to go to the station already.

I was fighting against myself as hard as I could, but I couldn’t swallow anything, although I hadn’t eaten anything from yesterday’s evening. My heart was aching. I became so attached to Florentian that now, parting with him, I was as though burying my second father-brother. Everybody was trying not to notice my sadness. A thought was spinning in my head – from where these people had so much selflessness and self-control? Why they were so restrained by helping so resolutely a totally stranger to them, my brother? Where the axis of their lives was hiding, where that confident peace of them was coming from?

And again a thought pierced my heart – what was “his own” and what was “a stranger” for a man. Florentian’s words were flashing that all people’s blood was of the same red colour and therefore, all of them were brothers, everybody had to try to carry beauty, peace and help.

In the kaleidoscope of my thoughts I didn’t even notice how our breakfast ended. Florentian stroked my head and uttered.

“Lovushka, live in joy that your brother is alive, that you are sound and you can reflect. A thought-creation – that’s the only people’s happiness. Man who carries creation into his daily routine is everything. With your heroic love to your brother you’ve built the bridge not only to my heart, but here are two more of your loyal friends – that’s Ananda and Euclid.”

I looked at him, but I couldn’t hold back my tears. I twined myself round his neck, he took me like a kid on his arms and whispered to me.

“The lessons of life aren’t easy for anybody. But here’s the first lesson to those who want to win a victory – learn to smile carelessly while you are among people, although your heart is being pricked by needles. We will see each other, and Ananda will send you the news about me.”

He let me go by answering the knock at the door merrily. That was the porter who came to invite us to go to the station.

I and I. said good-bye to Florentian and Ananda by squeezing their hands sincerely, we followed the porter down-stairs, climbed into the coach and rolled towards the station. We were driving in silence. Only when the coach stopped due to some event, I. asked the coach-man if we weren’t to be late. Instead of an answer, he only lashed the horses. As soon as we stepped into the carriage, the train was off.

Chapter 9

We are going to Sevastopol

During this entire journey I spent so much time in the carriage that now, as soon as I got into it, I felt such strong dizziness that I had to lie down. I took a little bottle out of his travelling-bag, poured several drops out of it into the glass of water and told me by giving the glass to me.

“When I was ill, Ananda always used to give me these drops.”

I drank the water. I was feeling better and I didn’t even notice when I fell into a light slumber.

When I woke up, I was standing by me and laughing that he was dying out of hunger and I was sleeping for so long that he was already about to besprinkle me with water. It seemed to me that I was sleeping only for several minutes, while in fact it was already seven o’clock in the evening. We had to hurry to take our dinner, because everybody who had ordered their dinner in the second shift had already hurried and we could stay hungry. I dressed quickly, the conductor locked our compartment, and we went to the dining-car.

Here was a totally different public than the one in the train coming to the border of Asia. The newly opened line, express Moscow – Sevastopol was taking the rich public with great speed. They were coming to the stylish resorts: Yalta, Gurzuf, Alupka and others. When we entered into the dining-car, everybody was already sitting in their places. The man-servant, having looked at our dinner order numbers, took us to the little table where two ladies were sitting already.

I became embarrassed at once, because I wasn’t used to ladies at all. Having looked at I., I was surprised, because he was acting as if he had made court to them during his entire life. He took his hat off, bowed politely before the older lady and asked them in French.

“Can we join you at your table?”

The lady gave a friendly smile, responded to his bow and answered him in an excellent French language with her low and pleasant voice.

“Yes, please.”

I took our hats, put them into a little meshed shelf above the table and, having let me sit down by the window, he sat down by the side, next to the aisle. I was feeling very uncomfortable, I was trying to look through the window, but anyway, I was examining our neighbours stealthily.

The older lady who wasn’t yet old at all was dressed perfectly and elegantly. She had dark hair and dark eyes which were a little goggled, she must have been short-sighted. She was a little stout and, judging from her white and tended hands, she had never done any work with them, she could also hardly play piano, because fingertips become wider due to constant work with the keys, and their skin becomes rougher. These hands were simply the hands of a lady. Her face wasn’t radiating neither intellect nor inspiration. I took a look at her teeth and lips – everything seemed to me to be a banal beauty, but that beauty was poor, purely physical. She wasn’t interesting for me anymore.

At that moment a meat soup was served for us. I. explained to the man-servant that he had ordered two vegetarian dinners. The man-servant apologized and hurried away to have it out with the maitre d'hotel.

This misunderstanding served as a pretext for the conversation between the older lady and I. It seemed to me that I. had made a strong impression on her. While the older ones were discussing about the cons and pros of the vegetarian food, I focussed my attention on the second lady.

She was an absolutely young girl, almost a child. Visually she was no more than fifteen years old. She was blonde, her hair had the same golden hue like my brother's, thus only because of this resemblance I had a liking for her. I was looking at her by taking advantage of her downcast eyes: her face was thin, she had regular features and her forehead was high with the elevations above her eye-brows.

"She has a musical talent," I thought for myself.

It seemed that the girl was having the dinner in the dining-car for the first time. She was trying very much not to spill the soup out of the spoon, but she had difficulties in doing so.

Having noticed that I was staring at the girl so tactlessly, I. asked me a question. He wanted to draw me into the joint conversation and to liberate the embarrassed neighbour from my looks. He looked at me eloquently, and I understood at once that my behaviour didn't suit the manners of a well-bred person.

It turned out that the older lady asked me to pass her the mustard that was standing by the window, and I didn't hear her words. I. repeated her words to me, I got totally flustered, I passed the mustard to her and apologized in French, remembering my brother's teaching that a courteous person should answer in the same language which he was addressed with.

Thoughts flashed in my head not for the first time that it was very difficult to be a well-bred person, lots of conditional knowledge was needed for this, but it was the essence of the great politeness.

I. apologized to the older lady for my absent-mindedness, saying that I had just had a difficult disease and that I hadn't yet fully recovered. The lady was shaking her head sympathetically and she was thinking that I was I.'s son. She made me laugh because of this, and I. explained to her that I was his friend and a distant relative.

I already wanted to ask her if the young lady was her daughter when she said herself that she was taking her niece to Gurzuf where her sister, Lisa's mother, had a villa by the sea.

The girl still kept silent. She didn't raise her eyes, while her aunt kept telling us that Lisa had just graduated the secondary school, she was very tired after the examinations and that she had to have a rest peacefully.

"Lisa is very gifted," the lady continued, "she is very gifted for music and possesses an excellent voice. She's studying by the best Moscow's professors, but her father is against the professional musical education, and that's the entire drama of Lisa's life."

And then something unbelievable happened. All of a sudden Lisa raised her eyes, looked at everybody of us and fastened her eyes upon I.

"Don't believe a single word of my aunt. She doesn't understand what she's talking and she's ready to blurt out everything till the end to the first person that she meets," she told us with her trembling and silent, but so melodious voice that I understood at once that she should sing really nicely.

Spots began to shine in Lisa's cheeks, her eyes were full of tears. It seemed that she hated her aunt and that she was struggling with her temper. At once I. poured some drops into the water from his little bottle and gave it to her by whispering silently, but very masterfully.

"Drink it off. This will soothe you instantly."

The girl obeyed him instantly. She really calmed down in several minutes. The red spots vanished from her cheeks, she gave a smile to me and asked me where I was going. I answered her that at the moment I was going to Sevastopol and that I didn't know my future itinerary. Lisa was surprised and she explained to us that she thought that we were going to Alushta or Feodosia, because the Greeks were living namely there in most cases.

"The Greeks?" I was very surprised. "What the Greeks have to do with it here?"

In her turn, Lisa opened her grey eyes wide and told us that my relative was so typical Greek that he could be a model of a Greek statue. Me and I., we were laughing merrily, while her aunt gave a sour smile and told us that Lisa, like all people who were gifted for music, had no balance and that she had too wide imagination.

I. was arguing with her, trying to prove her that talented people were not any patients of nerves, but on the contrary, they would be able to create and they would be valued by their contemporaries when they find within themselves so much fortitude and loyalty for their idolized art that they would be able to absolutely forget themselves, their nerves and their personal striving for honour and then they would joyously spread their talent to the people surrounding them with great peace and self-control. The aunt stated that those things were too high for her, while Lisa pricked up her ears, her eyes began to glitter and she told I.

"Now I can understand so much. Your words are so clear and close to me, as though I had told them to myself many times."

One could see that she wanted to ask him many questions and that her young heart has set on fire. She was a total contrast to her aunt: in the beginning of the dinner she was so pleasant, she kept peeking at I. coquettishly, but now she could hardly suppress her boredom and annoyance.

"You should become acquainted with my sister. She always has her head in the clouds and she doesn't see or notice anything in her life except her flowers, music and books," and she added a little more silently, but more stingingly, "she doesn't notice even what is going on just around the corner."

Envy distorted aunt's face, it seemed that it was eating her heart out for a long time.

Lisa turned pale so much, - even her reddish lips, - that I was frightened and I quickly extended a glass of water for her, but the girl didn't even notice it. Her darkened eyes became hollow at once, dark shadows appeared below them, and there wasn't even a single sign of her childishness left. Looking straight into the eyes of her aunt with hateful look, she began to speak silently, clearly, as if cutting with the knife.

"One can do shabby tricks if one has a turn for it. One can be stupid if something is missing in one's brain; but to reveal your envy to the first person that you meet - you have to be more than stupid in order to do that. You've poisoned my mother's youth and my childhood. You've been trying to interfere between my father and us during all your life. You failed to do that, because my father is an honest man and he loves me and my mother. Have you really accepted my and my mother's delicacy and sympathy for you as our short sight or stupidity? I would have kept it to myself now, too, but your impudence is simply revolting."

It is difficult to render how aunt changed. There wasn't a single sign of her entire beauty and her outer brilliance of a "lady" left. At once an old woman who couldn't control her fury anymore and who was spitting nasty words in silence was sitting in front of us.

"You girl, fool, wicked spy, good-for-nothing. I will avenge you. I will tell everything to your father and grandfather."

The girl took a pleading look at I. In spite of the rumble of the wheels and the noise of the ventilators, the curious looks were already turning to the direction of our table. I. invited the man-servant, paid up, took our hats, looked at the aunt up and down masterfully and told her very silently, but in a commanding way.

"Stand up and let your niece go by. Now there will be a station, we'll go to the platform with her. Come to your compartment through carriages. Recover a human semblance, because you aren't yourself anymore. Try to hide your fury behind a smile from the strangers."

While he was talking like this, he was standing in front of her in a respectful posture, handing her the fallen handbag and gloves.

Not uttering a single word to him, she stood up and went to the exit by manoeuvring among the tables and not waiting for us.

I. helped Lisa to come out of the table, because it was quite narrow here. He went forward and let the girl go through the door. By following them I lagged behind a little: I wanted to be alone, I wanted to make sense of that strange life, the curtain of which was lifted so unexpectedly and in a nasty way for me, but I. stopped, he waited for me to come closer and explained to me.

"My friend, don't retreat a step from me. Whatever dramas or pleasures happen along our path, we mustn't forget our main goal."

He took my arm, and the three of us walked along the platform a couple of times, boarding the carriage after the second bell already.

How I was surprised when in the corridor of our carriage I saw the aunt who was merrily flirting with a not too old general. It turned out that our places were two compartments one from another.

As if nothing had happened, the aunt addressed us, saying that she already started worrying if we didn't kidnap her niece. I. answered in her tone that neither he nor I were similar to the romantic kidnappers, but that we were very happy if, according to her opinion, we had an appearance of the philanderers.

Having bowed very politely, we said good-bye to aunt and her niece. I also tried to sparkle with elegance of my manners. I. told Lisa that he would give her the promised book through the conductor.

It seemed that it was very terrible for the poor girl to part with us. Her little face that was thin already fell even more.

When we stepped into our compartment, I wanted to talk about our new acquaintances, but I. interrupted me.

"It is not worth talking about them now. Both of us who've suffered lots of pain in our lives have to reconsider every uttered word. There are no such words which man could let into the world without any effect. Man's entire life – that's the eternal movement; and that movement is created by man's thoughts. A word isn't a simple combination of letters. It always transfers the power of man's action.

Even if man himself doesn't know anything about the powers hiding within himself and if he doesn't think what kind of volcanoes of passions and evil he can create and awaken with his incautiously slipped word – even then there are no sounds released to the world without any punishment. Beware of any slanders not only with your words, but even in your thoughts try to justify people and to pour peace onto them at least in that moment when you meet them. Let's rather think what our friends are doing right now. Perhaps Florentian is already boarding the Paris train, while Ananda is accompanying him."

It seemed that he projected himself into the distant Moscow, his look became vacant, while he was sitting motionless with his head rested against the back of the sofa. I thought for a while that every man probably had his own habit to sleep, while up to now I hadn't even paid any attention to which way everyone was sleeping. Florentian was sleeping like a dead person, I. was sleeping with his eyes opened, but also as deep as Florentian.

While thinking that it also was impossible and it didn't make any sense to wake up I., I projected myself to Moscow in my thoughts, too.

Now, for the first time during all those days having said good-bye to Florentian for a long time, to whom I had attached with my entire heart, I felt the power of disappointment and blow of my life delivered to me with this separation. From my very birth until that moment when I parted with my brother, I could see the only light in my way, my only own home, my only loyal friend – my brother Nikolay. Now I'm separated from my brother – my light is put out, there's no my home left and my friend disappeared. While I was next to Florentian, in spite of the danger threatening to me or sorrow because of my brother, regardless of being homeless, I still was feeling and I perceived that he was the light, home and a friend to me. When I was next to him, a feeling of absolute security and peace in my heart would always arise even when I used to cry or to be in a rage. I was certain, I was sure during every moment of my life that Florentian wasn't only a home to me, but that by studying and improving in that home I would be able to live in such a way that I would be worthy of my friend.

Now, while thinking that Florentian was going to Paris and I was going to the East, although to other places, but still to the same East which has given so much pain to me, I perceived how homeless and lonely I was, flung down by the destiny to the whirls of passions. I could be only a little toy in the hands of those powers, because I hadn't only seen or experienced anything, but I hadn't even succeeded to educate and prepare myself for life.

Not a single string in my organism was in tune as much as that I could rely upon it. I used to cry and to be lost like a small child from every stroke into my heart. My body was weak, not tempered by any kind of gymnastics, any tension would stir my feebleness and fainting-fit, and taking into account my self-control and endurance, precision of my thoughts and lucidity – there was even less discipline within me here.

I was looking through the window. The dark was getting thicker. Nature was spurted with its powers. Green grasslands, floating fields of crops, picturesque little villages were flashing before my eyes. Everything was telling me about the real life! All those fields, gardens and kitchen-gardens were close and dear to somebody. People were working here in the entire families, finding love not only for their loved ones, but also the joint feeling for this land, its wealth and its creative work.

And I was so lonely, so lonely... lonely everywhere I go! And I don't have neither a corner nor a heart in the entire world where I could feel a shelter for myself.

While being immersed in these bitter thoughts, I forgot both I. and where I was, I projected myself into the world of the dreams, I started thinking how I would try to become worthy of Florentian's

friendship, how I would become as strong, kind and always self-controlled as him. Unwittingly my thoughts skipped to his friends I. and Ananda. I was stunned by their great nobility, by their deeds full of self-denial when they left off everything after hearing Florentian's invitation and came to help me and my brother – the people who were total strangers to them.

All of a sudden a racket in the corridor interrupted my dreams. I could hear the cries: "Doctor, doctor quickly!"

Having broken away from my thoughts, suddenly I jumped up, because I wanted to help the womanly voice which was crying for help. I caught my foot on the suitcase that was standing by the little table, and I would have measured my entire length on the floor with my face down if the strong hands of I. hadn't seized me by my shoulders from behind.

"Lovushka, you'll hurt your nose," I. told me by imitating a pretty old mumbling in a very funny way.

It was so unexpected and ridiculous, it didn't suit I.'s seriousness so much that I roared with laughter, having forgotten where and why I was running.

"Wait for me here, my friend," he said to me already with his usual voice. "I'll go alone with my drops. I recognize the hysterical voice of our older neighbour. I may be delayed there, but you don't leave the compartment until I come back. Think only about our main goal during all that time. Florentian left to Paris already. According to the time, his train started ten minutes ago," he told me, having looked at the clock. "Florentian left only because of you and your brother, right? I'm going only because of you and him. Ananda stayed in Moscow only because of both of you. How could you name yourself lonely and homeless?"

It was heard a knock at the door of our compartment at this moment. I. kissed my forehead tenderly and opened the door.

The general, whom Lisa's aunt was flirting with when we were returning to the carriage, and a youth were standing behind the door. The general apologized for disturbing us and asked for doctor's help for the young girl from the adjacent compartment, - he was clearly taking I. for the doctor, - because her aunt was unable to bring her to her senses for more than half an hour already, although she was using all possible means.

Not denying that he wasn't a doctor, I. asked them why they didn't take his advice up to now. He took a travelling first-aid kit from the travelling-bag which Florentian gave to me and left with the two passengers who were asking for his help.

I took a peep at the corridor. It was full of men and women, split from all sides. They looked funny: everyone's face was lost and asking questions, while everybody was holding a little bottle in their hands. It seemed that before looking for a doctor they were trying to help the poor aunt to revive the girl.

I closed my compartment and the suitcase on which I caught my foot so awkwardly, I lifted it up on the shelf and started thinking about the girl who fainted away so strongly.

I remembered her thin little face and her slender, almost childish figure. It seemed to me that her health wasn't too strong, as mine, that she also was unable to control herself and that she was poorly educated, in other words, she didn't have any self-control, like me. "Well," I was thinking, "she has both her father and mother, she has home, even two of them, because she's going to the villa by the sea, and her life is hardly any happier than mine if she has to live with her hated aunt while she's travelling."

I was trying to imagine her house, surroundings, even her inner life, I wanted to understand how a child living with her parents could come to such heartache; how the way of living of her parents had to oppress her day by day if Lisa could lay bare her soul before the total strangers like today.

I was comparing her with myself. Having remembered the words which I. recently told me, I was trying to throw her troubles over onto my own shoulders, from the bottom of my heart I was looking for a justification for her deed. I remembered my own tears of the last days, how bitterly I was crying in presence of the strangers to me, and I was a man, at least five years older than she was.

And again a boring question was turning round in my head, which was flashing through my mind like a leitmotif during all these days: "Who were your own people to you? Who were the strangers to you?" That distracted my thoughts from the girl's life.

After some time I came back to her. Did I like Lisa? I had never been in love during my entire twenty years. I was so occupied, I had to do so much homework, to write so many compositions, to read so many books. My brother was sending lots of programs in his letters to me – what I had to read, what museums and galleries to visit – all of that would fill up my brains and I always used to be occupied. I didn't have any acquaintances, except my old aunt, and in her home I would always meet only old and dignified ladies, and each of them would always teach me good manners by extending their perfumed and wrinkled hands to kiss, being unconcerned about the morose boy's life, which of course, I looked like to them. All of their talking were only about aristocracy's life: which ball they had visited at one or another countess and which duke had invited them for tomorrow.

I had never had a chance to sit down with the girls at one table or to dance with them, like my friends used to tell me about it. Lisa was the first girl with whom I was sitting at one table for nearly an hour. She was an ordinary, everyday girl, while Nal had opened a higher beauty, a higher and not everyday life to me, with whom fate had brought me together. And I could look at both of them not only like at my well known acquaintances, but I could also see a little of their spiritual life that was invisible to others.

The whirls of thoughts were spinning in my head, the scenes were changing like on the screen: "Lisa was reproaching her aunt for telling about her troubles to the first person she met, but didn't she say even more than her aunt?"

I felt tenderness for Lisa. A wish was growing in me to help her as much as I could, to ease her life.

Apparently lots of time had passed while I was busy with these psychological etudes. The night was already showing black behind the window, the candles were burning in the carriage, but it was dark in the compartment anyway.

I stood up and wanted to take a peep at the corridor, but suddenly there came a knock at the door and I saw I. who was taking Lisa into our compartment. It seemed that she was unable to walk herself; her aunt was standing behind them with a plaid in her hands.

"Lovushka, Lisa had a strong heart attack. Until the bed is being prepared in her compartment, she will have to lie at our place for a while, because she cannot sit down," I. was talking to me, while laying the girl down on the sofa.

I wanted to go to the corridor, but he squeezed a crystal bottle into my hand and told me to give it to Lisa to smell every five minutes. I sat down on the suitcase at the bed-head and started playing a doctor's assistant. I. showed to aunt the chair by the little table, took the plaid from her hands, covered the girl with it and sat down by her feet.

The silence prevailed for several minutes. I didn't see the aunt, because while being occupied with my medical mission I was sitting with my back turned to her. Taking advantage of Lisa's state, I could inspect her attentively.

Of course, she was a beautiful girl, but I was stunned mostly because one of her cheeks was as pale as the wax, while the other one wasn't only burning, but its redness was already turning into a big bruise that I could see clearly now, because I found the travelling candle-stick and, having lit the candle, put it on the little table.

"Why are you crying now?" all of a sudden I heard I.'s voice.

Having turned round, I saw aunt's face that was wet because of her tears; her nose, lips and cheeks – everything grew fat and flabby, and she looked very repulsive.

"I'm crying not because of the girl, but because of my own fate. What will happen to me now? She'll be persuading everybody that I pushed her, but in truth she hurt herself..." the aunt answered him with an angry voice, while sobbing.

I was surprised when I looked at I., because his expression was very austere. He was looking at the crying woman so intently that he reminded me the burning eyes of Ali. I would have never believed that I.'s face could be so austere and his eyes so strict, because I. was always so restrained, he was mostly radiating kindness.

"It would be best for you to tell the truth. Both of us know very well that neither Lisa has hurt herself nor you have pushed her – you've hit her, not evaluating your strength, and I can show you all five fingerprints of yours on her face. If you had struck her a little higher, it would have been deadly for Lisa," I. was speaking with a sonorous voice.

Aunt's sobbing stopped, and her voice in a furious wheeze could be heard in silence.

"You may be a doctor, but you can hardly understand what you are talking now. I'm a weak woman, how could I hit the girl so that she could even faint away? I'm telling you that she's fallen down herself, and I didn't have enough strength to lift her up."

"That's why you've pinched her entire chest and her hand," I. was talking. "So because you're denying that you've beaten her up, I will have to take some pictures and to give the photographs to the jurists as soon as we come to Sevastopol."

The silence didn't continue for a long time. The aunt whispered.

"How much will you take for your silence?"

I. gave a laugh, I also couldn't help but to give a laugh and I screamed.

"But this is the real novel!"

My laugh must have irritated the lady very much, who looked so ugly and old now, because when I looked at her – I was as though bitten by a snake – so angry her eyes were.

"I'm not trading with my conscience and I don't take any bribes for my services. You've affected the girl with your blow both physically and morally. You'll be responsible for your moral blow before your life, it will respond to you from that side from where you're expecting it the least. You'll get the same slap in your face from your own child like you've done it to the stranger, and for your physical blow you'll be responsible in the court and you'll get what you deserve," I. was speaking so by taking the camera from the suitcase on which I was sitting.

"Take a pity on me. I don't know why this angry girl told you about my son, but he's the only treasure in my life. Don't kill me. I've hit her for the first time, because she betrayed me to you. Take a pity on poor mother," she was mumbling with a changed voice.

"Why didn't you take a pity on the only child of your sister? Your sister is unfortunate, because her only misfortune up to now is you," I. continued, still looking at your strictly.

"You are still very young. You don't know poverty. You cannot neither understand nor judge me," the woman was talking pitifully. "But if you don't betray me to Lisa's parents, then I swear by my son's life that I won't touch this girl again."

"And you'll keep eating your sister's bread, you'll keep living from her favour by pretending to be a mistress of their home and you'll prick and hurt your sister's and Lisa's hearts uninterruptedly? Oh no, you value too much your son's wellbeing and you don't value the lives of three of your relatives at all. Only then I'm able not to betray you if you can leave your sister's home."

"Where will I go? You are talking like this, because you've never seen any misery and you don't understand life. What will I live on?" the irritated aunt was asking him.

For the second time already, a hardly visible smile slipped through I.'s face and I, like before, thought that this was only a play of the shadow of the candle's flame.

"You have to get to work," he answered her silently.

"To work? One can see at once that you haven't earned a penny in your life, as well as your brother who's been a burden to your parents, and you don't understand what you're talking about," the woman was snorting in anger.

"I repeat to you once again," I. contradicted her emphatically and calmly, but with an unshakable will, "that the only condition under which I will agree to hide your sin and at the same time to accept a part of your crime to myself, - you have to leave your sister's home immediately and get to work. You must earn your living yourself and teach your son to do the same."

"I'm not a cook or a governess so that I would earn my living myself. I'm a lady, do you hear me, a la – dy! I was, I am and I will be a lady!"

"It would be enough for you to take a look at yourself in the mirror now, so that you would make sure that you aren't a lady in that sense in which one should understand the privileges of this word, that is in the sense of high culture, self-control and inner discipline," I. answered her.

"You are very impudent and self-confident man. I won't go anywhere and I'm not afraid of you," the aunt was screaming.

"Oh, if you could understand that you should be afraid only of yourself. Then you could protect your son from all misfortunes, you would lead him to people, and he wouldn't have, in your example, to become a dependent and later a good-for-nothing person. You are afraid of losing the shelter of your sister, which you've poisoned yourself, but understand at last that I'm not threatening you, I'm not frightening you, I will only let your relatives know everything about you. They won't bear you in their home themselves, and you will stay on the street. If you leave at your own will, I promise to find a job for you. You have to understand at last that everyone must work, and especially you."

"But I cannot be a governess," she screamed again.

"Nobody would even think about allowing you to approach children. You don't possess even a primary understanding about what tact is, and a tactless person, even if she's the best, is hurting a child like a bad, poisoned weather. I could give you a letter to Moscow to one of my friends. He's in a very broad literature business and he needs translators. He's paying very generously. By the way, his institution occupies the whole house in which there may be a little flat for you and your son. Until you haven't eaten a single bit of your own earned bread, you cannot even understand what happiness it is to live on the earth. Only an honest job can bring happiness."

The aunt remained silent. I turned around several times, and it seemed to me that I's words had really calmed her down a little. Her eyes weren't pouring any hatred anymore, her irritated and distorted by anger face calmed down, even a nobility flashed in it, like a sunbeam penetrating through the grey veil of the rain.

Lisa was still fainted away. I. stood up, bent his head over the girl and wiped a lock off her burning cheek. Her cheek swelled up, the marks of the beating could be seen on it and the bruise had turned black. I. took the camera, but when he wanted to open it already, the aunt hold his hand and uttered silently.

"I agree to start working."

I was stunned. Several times during these days I became a witness how passions, drunkenness, parasitism, fanatical hatred, envy were spoiling people, splitting them and making them enemies, how they would lose their human form and would become the victims of their own anger and rage. I was reflecting with bitterness that my own self-control and discipline were absolutely poor, too, and how I used to calm down solely when my brother, Florentian or my new friend I. were close to me.

I. didn't utter a single, even the most bitter word in a high tone, not a slightest hint of contempt to the aunt sounded in his speech. Only the greatest benevolence was both in his face and voice. Even the angry screams of the aunt, which insulted me for my friend, so that I even wanted to meddle into the conversation and respond in her intonation, didn't disturb the noble peace of I. and his sympathy to the woman.

I. looked at her. That look must have touched the best strings of her living being; she covered her face with her hands and whispered.

"Forgive me. I have such a mad character that sometimes I don't understand what I say or do myself. But if I pledge my word, - then I keep it honestly. And that may be my only value," she was talking through the tears that were pouring again.

"Don't cry, but take a look at everything what has happened now as seriously as possible. Thank fate that Lisa didn't fall down from your blow and that she didn't hit her head into a sharp corner of the table; if this also had been added to your blow, then you would be a murderess now, and you understand perfectly what that would mean to you, your son and Lisa's parents," I. answered her.

A terror was reflected in the woman's face. Now she was so unhappy that even my heart became softer. I was trying to find a justification for her, I was imagining how a person was decaying, gradually not noticing it, solely because of the trap of envy, which she was making every day.

"Don't come back to the past in your thoughts," I. began to speak again. "Think about your son, that he could have gotten into such situation like Lisa. There's nothing what a mother's love couldn't overcome. I will cure Lisa's cheek, there won't be a single mark left from the bruise in several hours, but you'll have to keep watch by her till the very morning by changing the compresses with the liquid that I

gave you. Take these strengthening drops, and your sleepless night will go by easily. In the morning I will write a letter to my friend and give you some money, so that from this moment on you could start a new independent life and leave with your son, not running into debt to your sister anymore. When you are earning good money already, you can repay your master, and he will send the money to me. Don't fall into despair when you want to scream again: "I'm a lady, I was, I am and I will be a lady," but go to another room, so no one could see you, and remember this night. Remember how I was telling you that for all your created evil your son would return a hundred fold to you, but also every moment of your true kindness, endurance and self-control would build a bridge to happiness for your son."

All kinds of feelings were probably breaking the woman's heart and her strength were abandoning her already. I. told me to pour some water into the glass, he put some drops into it and gave it to the aunt.

Once again Florentian took a bottle from the same travelling-bag, a big glass and asked me to bring some warm water from the conductor.

When I came back into the compartment, aunt had already come to life and helped I. to wake up Lisa. Her movements were careful, even gentle, while her thin and older face had taken the expression of great sadness and determination. That wasn't already that woman at all, whom I saw during the dinner, and not that one whom I had just left when I left the compartment. In truth I didn't find the conductor instantly, because he was busy with the passengers' bedding, I also didn't get the water instantly, because it had to be cooled off, so maybe it took me some twenty minutes, - and after that much time I didn't recognize the girl...

So many different events had happened during those days, and I was changing the most of everybody, because I wasn't surprised by this change anymore, it seemed to me that it had to be like this.

I. gave some medicine to drink to Lisa, he and her aunt laid her again and in several minutes she opened her eyes. In the beginning her eyes were without any expression, then having recognized I., she became radiant with joy, but having seen her aunt, she gave a shout as though someone had burnt her.

"Calm down my friend," I. addressed her. "Nobody is going to hurt you again. I'll soon put the compress on your cheek and until morning any tracks of beating will be gone. Don't look at your aunt with such horror and hatred. Don't think that the greatest man's nobility is to fence himself off those who seem to be angry to us, whom we are calling our enemies. The enemy must be conquered, but we must do it not passively by retreating from him, but with an active fight, with a heroic strain of our thoughts and feelings. A talented person whom life has fated to bring the drop of his creative efforts into the whole activity of mankind, mustn't take pleasure in being idle, not to experience any storms, suffering, he must fight both with himself and the people living in the neighbourhood. Now you are stepping into life so that you would become a valuable and full member of the society. If now you aren't able to find the great nobility within yourself not to betray your aunt for her evil, you won't bring that great capital of honour and sympathy into your own life, which would help you to create a new and joyous life both for yourself and your loved ones in the future. Don't judge your aunt as the judge would do, but think about the passions that are hiding within yourself. Remember how often you were hate filled for her and her son, although he really isn't to blame for your bad luck and relations with your aunt. How often you used to repay her for her roughness with even greater roughness, how during all that time you used to find a chance to put her to shame publicly by "putting her in her own place" in your thoughts. Not a single kind feeling for her has ever flashed within you, although you are kind to others, very kind. The youth is sensitive. You are still unable to imagine the entire life's complexity, the whole power of man's passions, which is laying traps in every step, but to understand that man's power - that's not his anger, but his kindness, that nobility which he's pouring from himself into his daily routine and with which he ties people together with himself - that you

can do, because your heart is pure and receptive. Since you are talented, you play violin, then you understand that the sounds – just like the kindness – are fascinating people with their beauty and uniting them with you. By playing the violin, you are inviting them into beauty, you don't feel any fear. Exactly so, now go to your compartment without any fear and doubts. When the heart is really opened to beauty, it doesn't feel any fear and it is singing a wonderful song – the song of love defeating everything. You are so young and pure that your heart is unable to sing any other song. Don't think about the past; live in this "now" moment with your heart full of the best feelings and you will create a wonderful life both for yourself and your loved ones. If today you are unable to find the strength to open your heart to real love and honour without any compromises, then your "tomorrow" will be polluted with your own remains of bile and bitterness. Your aunt will leave instantly as soon as she takes you home. She has found a place for herself and she would be living in Moscow with her son, and you are planning to move to Petersburg, right? You feel better now. Lovushka will take you up to your compartment and he will give you to drink this mixture that will help you to have a good sleep and tomorrow you will be as graceful as the rose," I. added smiling.

Lisa was very surprised by everything what she heard. It was clear for everybody that now a confusion was in her head, but I.'s words weren't uttered in vain.

"I understood you very well. However strange it may sound, but my mother would often talk to me in a very similar way, therefore your words surprised me mostly, because they absolutely matched my mother's ideas, although you expressed them in a totally different way. I really hate my aunt, I don't believe in any of her words. You cannot even imagine how she can lie."

"And are you so irreproachably correct?" I. asked her silently.

"No," Lisa answered him, blushing very much. "Not at all, but... But why should I rummage in the past? If you told me that she would leave," she put a strong stress on the word "she", "then I believe you. That's all we need."

"No," I. told her again, "that's absolutely not all what you need, so that you would be happy. You are so used to always have a live pretext to complain of your misfortunes that it has already become your habit. Instead of observing yourself you were observing your aunt by searching for causes of your disasters within her, not even noticing that not only her, but yourself, too, Lisa, have become a tormentor of your mother, father, aunt and... even yourself."

Having heard the last I.'s words, Lisa lowered her head.

"That's true," she uttered finally by looking straight into I.'s eyes.

I. helped her to stand up, he gave me the big glass for compresses and the small one with mixture and offered Lisa to go to have a good sleep by leaning on my arm, so that she could meet her grandfather in the morning refreshed and with a smile.

It was after midnight already. I and aunt took Lisa to their compartment, I gave her the mixture which she drank off instantly, I left the big glass for compresses to her aunt and, having wished them good night, I came back to I.

I found him in the corridor, because the conductor was making the bed for us. I stood next to him, he explained to me in English that I should go to sleep, because tomorrow would require lots of strength from me, and I looked tired. He still had to write a couple of letters and he could go to sleep only after finishing them.

I already knew from my short experience that he wouldn't start any conversation about the latest events, so I gave him a bow not contradicting, I perched on the upper shelf and as soon as I took my clothes off, I fell sound asleep.

I woke up from the knocking at our compartment's door and I.'s voice, answering the conductor that we were already getting up and that we were thankful for his care. When I got down I saw that I.'s bedding wasn't touched, three sealed envelopes were put on the table, and he had put a light grey suit on.

He asked me to collect all of our belongings, having told me that he would visit Lisa again, whom he visited a couple of times at night. He also explained to me that the girl's organism was strong, but her nervous system was so weak that she would still need a constant and careful supervision, therefore he asked her aunt to tell him their last name and he wrote a letter to Lisa's mother, countess R. with the instruction on how she had to treat and educate her daughter.

I don't know if I was standing like this for a long time with my characteristic absent-mindedness and ability to forget everything around me in one moment, but suddenly the door opened and I heard the merry I.'s voice.

"You will ruin us, Lovushka! We must get everything as soon as possible, we are in Sevastopol already."

I became ashamed, I dashed to collect our belongings, but I. was doing everything faster and better than me, so I just had to give him our things. We didn't have time to close our suitcases, and the train was already standing in the platform.

I saw Lisa and her aunt in the corridor. Both of them had white splendid dresses and elegant hats on. Lisa really looked like a life-giving rose, and a joy was shining in her eyes. Her aunt was pale, her face was sad, a new wrinkle had cut in between her eyes, although yesterday her forehead was still flat; her lips were pressed together tightly, but it was strange – now I liked her much more. There was nothing left from her yesterday's vivacity, she had become an elderly woman with the face marked by suffering.

I greeted both of them from the distance: I didn't have any want to take a deeper look into the drama of these lives. Sevastopol reminded me at once that here we would embark a ship and travel to the East. At the same time also my thoughts about my brother and his destiny at this moment came back to me.

A well-dressed public was descending from our carriage, and not worse dressed people were greeting them on the platform... There were merry voices, laughter, embracing. A thought pierced me through again that there was no one in the whole world who could meet me, to press me to his breast, although there were millions of people living on the earth.

I. took my arm and looked into my eyes reproachfully as it seemed to me. In a moment we were already following the porter to the platform where Lisa was waiting for us, holding her grandfather by hand. That was a very handsome, proud and elegant man. He was tall and he had a short, grey, pointed little beard.

Lisa brought him to I. and explained to him that she tumbled so unfortunately in the carriage that she bruised her left cheek and temple, while doctor I. helped her so much with his mixtures that there wasn't a sign left from the bruise.

Being frightened of his granddaughter's ailment, the grandfather thanked I. very much, he was asking where we were going and told us that here he had a reserve coach and that he could take us to Gurzuf. I. thanked him and explained that we were staying in Sevastopol.

"In this case let my coach-man to deliver you to the best hotel," he told us by lifting his hat up a little.

I saw that I. didn't want to accept grandfather's gratitude, but we didn't have anything to do. He also lifted his hat up a little, took a bow and thanked him for the service.

Chapter 10

In Sevastopol

All of us left the station's building. Grandfather told our porter to find Ibrahim from Gurzuf in the crowd of the coach-men.

Soon a great coach harnessed in English with the seats covered with a white cloth drove up; the coach-man had a white livery with the blue bands and a white top-hat with a blue hatband on. The English clothes and his broad Tatar physiognomy looked comically. Once more I thought that that person who had dressed Ibrahim like this had a little tact.

Moreover, this little word would slip out of me in every suitable and unsuitable moment, it would always come out from some little corner of my consciousness to which I hadn't yet managed to close the door properly.

Till we were saying good-bye to the ladies, till we were getting on the coach, grandfather kept explaining to Ibrahim where he had to take us, whom to ask to come in the hotel, so that we could get a wonderful room with the sea view, and he himself had to stay at our disposal during the entire day in order to take us to Balaklava and only tomorrow, having carried out some other assignments, he could come back to Gurzuf.

I took a look at Lisa. She couldn't take her eyes off I. and she was looking at him so intensely as though he was a fairy-tale prince and she was Cinderella. Having turned my eyes to I., I thought that he was handsome like God, but also strict as God.

Regardless of all our protests, the grandfather's command to take us to Balaklava remained to be in force. Aunt was standing with her downcast eyes all the time and she looked even more pale in bright sunbeams.

I was feeling sincerely sorry for her, and it seemed to me that I, lonely and homeless, could understand her pain and uncertainty for her future new independent life more than others. When I was saying good-bye to her, I squeezed her hand firmly and bent down to kiss it not prompted by my good manners, but from the bottom of my heart, guided by a sincere impulse.

It seemed to me that she felt the warmth of my heart, she squeezed my hand and looked into my eyes. I was even stupefied for a moment – such an abyss of despair had opened in her eyes.

"My God," I was thinking to myself while sitting next to I. who was talking about something to Lisa. "Is there really so much suffering in man's life? Why life is created like this? Why there are so many tears, murders, poverty and misery? How one can understand I.'s words that man himself creates all of his sorrows?"

The station was rather far away from the city. I got to Crimea and this historical city for the first time. Everything was wonderful for me here. I could see only redoubts and towers, like alive Kornilov, Nachimov, Tottleben and the real hero of the terrible battles – an ordinary Russian soldier – emerged in my imagination.

I. was talking to the coach-man who turned out to be born in Sevastopol and who had buried his grandfather not a long time ago. His grandfather took part in the battles of the fourth bastion.

He volunteered to take us to the upper boulevard from where we could see the places of the battles with the shelters and bastions, and in Balaklava we could see the port where the huge ship, the eminent English "Black Prince" went down.

Most of all I wanted to see the Nachimov's kurgan, but I didn't want to poke my nose into the conversation. My heart was so full of the pain which I had met and experienced that my usual carelessness and attention to new places moved to the distant plan, and all people's sufferings were shining like the sun that was scorching us without mercy.

In truth this city has survived only thanks to such victims and such unspeakable sufferings, thanks to the death of thousands private soldiers whose names were never kept in history, so they are called in the general folk name – Ivan One Hundred Thousand.

The crowned emperor Nikolay emerged in my imagination, who didn't have common sense to send at least sufficient supply of food and army to this place. Instead of this, he was concentrating the troops in Caucasus and waiting for the enemy there. And besides him, there were so many villains and noble fools who helped those thousands of Ivans to perish here like unknown heroes, to die simply and without any curses.

I. interrupted these thoughts by asking me if first of all I would agree to drop in and find out about the tickets to Constantinople. Now Ibrahim interfered, he was trying to persuade I. that there was an agent of the liners' company in the hotel where he would take us, who would get us the tickets and arrange our foreign passports. In general at the moment there weren't any problems regarding this yet, because there were few passengers, but in a month there would be "a great mass" of them as the coach-man stated.

I. agreed to go straight to the hotel, but I saw that he was worried about something. In spite of his entire self-control, his face was strict and gloomy.

If I hadn't known my friend better, how unhappy I would have been by connecting my destiny with such a man like he was now! As though having read my thoughts, I. turned his face to me and smiled affectionately.

What a strange instrument a man's heart is! One of his smiles and an easy squeeze of his hand were fully enough for me, so that I could feel easy again, so that all those powers of joy and feelings which I had put away in the shadow of my soul would awake in my heart.

I. told Ibrahim to go to the general post-office and to have the letters sent. Exactly at this moment we were driving next to the historical cathedral where once a coffin was standing with the remains of Kornilov who was killed while being in defence. This time my imagination was drawing not only the sadness of his family and the entire nation, but also a perception that our nation was unbeatable while such admirals were being born in it...

We stopped by the post-office – the building was poor and ugly because of its dirtiness. I. sent the letters, took the telegrams and, having noticed the posters and announcements of the liners' companies stuck on the wall, he asked where we could buy the tickets to Constantinople.

An old watchman who had an old and dirty uniform on explained to him that the agent from seaside hotel was still waiting for the passengers to come, but in general no one wasn't even asking about the tickets yet.

All of us took our seats in the coach again and turned towards the hotel which was absolutely close already. Ibrahim's boss must have been well known here, because soon the manager was invited, and we settled in the best room.

The liners' agent sent by the manager entered our room in several minutes. He explained to us that an excellent new English ship would cast off for its maiden trip to Smirn and Constantinople tomorrow at three o'clock in the afternoon, and tonight an old and dirty Italian trough would also be off, but the new ship would still outrun it, besides there still was a free luxurious cabin in it, in which nobody had ever travelled yet.

I. agreed to take the tickets to the luxurious cabin, he gave him our passports and money and agreed that we would be taking our dinner here at the hotel at eight o'clock in the evening, and that he would bring the tickets to us, but he would be able to deliver our foreign passports only tomorrow at one o'clock in the afternoon, because nobody was doing it here so quickly.

I. took care of feeding Ibrahim, while we washed ourselves, changed our clothes and descended to the cool restaurant's hall to take our breakfast. I. told me that there was a telegram from Ananda. He informed us that everything was going well, that Florentian had already left to Paris, that he would be sending us the news both to Sevastopol and Constantinople and that we should write him about our trip to Moscow, to the same hotel.

Having taken our breakfast, we took our seats in the Ibrahim's coach and left to look around in the city, relying on our coach-man's taste and knowledge.

Most likely he often used to show the city to the friends of Lisa's grandfather, because he chose the itinerary very skilfully by paying attention to the newest buildings and he explained to us that he would be taking us back through another road, so we could get to know the whole city.

The higher avenue made a great impression on me. We went round these historical places of fame for a couple of times, although many were calling them the historical pages of shame.

Having been nowhere, seeing the sea for the first time in my life, I was simply melting out of fascination, while looking at the raging waves at the foot of Balaklava's precipices. I forgot everything, only the sea and the sun existed for me now, and it seemed to me that already nothing else could be better.

I. was jeering at me, saying that soon I would see such beauty that Crimea would seem to me like a miserable little corner. He was also sneering at my fascination by the sea, stating that already the first storm which I would experience would change my temperamental fascination into maledictions.

We returned to the hotel only at eight o'clock. Having paid Ibrahim generously and having taken the tickets from the agent, we went to our room and from there – to the restaurant to take our dinner.

I wasn't feeling neither tiredness nor hunger nor the scorching sun while I was out of doors. Now my face was burning, I wanted to eat, to drink and to sleep – everything at once. Having looked at I., I pulled my shoulders in my thoughts. It seemed to me that this man only now left his study where he was calmly reading the newspapers all day long. In truth he was beaten by the sun and the wind a little, there was a little white stripe on his forehead left from his panama, but his face wasn't burning like mine anyway, I couldn't see any tiredness in him, he probably could stand up and keep travelling, while I was simply fainting out of fatigue.

There were little people in the hall, but several tables were occupied. I was so absorbed in myself and my appetite that I wasn't even looking round.

I was surprised that I wasn't eating much. To my question if he wasn't hungry he answered to me that one shouldn't eat much while travelling: the less you eat the easier you travel and grasp the surroundings.

I didn't hear any reproach or hint at me in his voice, but I felt uneasy instantly. Moreover, I distinguished myself with my great appetite, I even used to amaze my friends with this in the secondary school. Although I wasn't feeling like a glutton, but now I attributed this sin to myself at once.

The food lost its taste, I pushed the plate away. Having noticed that I stopped eating, I asked me why. I told him straight and clearly that my appetite was gone, because I became ashamed of my gluttony in comparison to him.

"It seems to me that one shouldn't compare oneself to anybody at all neither to one's appetite nor to anything else in one's life. Everybody has his own circumstances, and you cannot live another person's life not for a moment," I was talking to me. "My dear, eat to your health as much as you can. The time will come when you are of my age and then the need for food will remain only as the necessity and not as the relish. It is really my fault that I've spoiled your appetite with my thoughtless answer," and he gave me a tender smile.

"It is so strange that you consider yourself to be much older than me. Soon I will be twenty one and you really aren't older than twenty six or seven, maybe even younger. And regarding my appetite, I thank you for those words, as well as for everything else what I've heard from you."

Then I kept talking in English.

"What would have happened to me if you hadn't gone with me? What would I have done? How could I help my brother if you weren't with me? I already told Florentian that I couldn't live while being in someone's debt, and your words that a person who was unable to make his bread couldn't understand the meaning of life have convinced me even more that it couldn't go on like this. Since that ill-fated night when I changed into fancy suit for Ali's feast I cannot come out of my spiritual fancy ball. Now I'm a servant-interpreter, now a nephew, now a cousin, now a friend – the servant's role would suit me most. Let me be your servant, because I cannot be useful for you in anything else. Perhaps, in the beginning that'll be difficult for me, too, but I will try to be a good servant," I was talking to my friend silently, trying to remain calm, but with a trembling heart.

"My poor boy," I answered to me. "Let's put off this conversation until our sea trip. Maybe there, having broken away from the earth and all its conditionality, you'll understand better the great responsibility of this moment for your brother's life, his happiness and his further destiny. I'm not going to dissuade you from working, only you have to understand what that your job is. Perhaps, life which opens and lets you see so close the grandeur and horror of man's paths so intensely during the last days will open for you the deeper meaning of your own life, too. Perhaps, your job isn't to be my servant, perhaps you have to be the servant not only of your nation, but of the entire boundless life that is ringing round us. We'll talk about this in the ship, and now eat your ice-cream, because soon it'll thaw," I finished talking and smiled again.

His voice was so unspeakably sincere, he was looking at me helpless, homeless, lonely and lost so tenderly with this black eyes that unwillingly I remembered that moment when he was dying in the hold of the ship, and Ananda saved him.

I wasn't lying in a death-agony, but to tell the truth those were really difficult days of my spiritual agony.

We finished eating and went upstairs to our room. Our beds were already made, we still admired the dark sky, the lights of the ships in the port and went to bed.

Having woken up in the morning, I didn't find I. in the room, but until I put myself in order he came back. He was fresh and merry, he had a white linen suit and the same shoes on, and there were parcels in his hands. It turned out that he woke up very early and decided to take a walk in the city. He stumbled on a great shop where he bought two white suits for me and himself, because otherwise we would fry in the ship.

He unwrapped the parcels. I tried the white suit on and I looked very ridiculous to myself, but I stayed in it anyway.

Then I. told me that on his way back to the hotel he met yesterday's agent of the ships, who was going with the captain of our ship. He became acquainted with the captain, and he offered us to move to our luxurious cabin before the whole stream of passengers, he explained exactly where the ship was standing. I. treated the captain to an excellent wine at the restaurant of our hotel and received from him a note to the captain's assistant on duty that we were allowed to occupy the cabin at any moment. It was a pity for me that we had to leave the solid ground at least an hour earlier, but my inner voice was telling me that I. wouldn't hurry without necessity, and I had no objections. When I was ready, I. examined everything and proposed to drink a cup of coffee, then I had to go to the same shop and buy two more suits made of dark pongee or similar.

I was happy, because I could spend one more hour on the land and I decided that I was one of those amateur unfortunates who were breaking into the sea by standing on the shore. When I thought about my first such long trip by sea, even a nostalgia made its appearance.

Soon we arranged the rest of the affairs on shore and found the suits which I. wanted. I liked the dark grey suit so much that I stayed in it. Having come back to the hotel, we settled accounts with it, and the agent brought us the passports sooner than we were agreed. We took the boat from the quay of the hotel and rowed to the steamer.

We were circling among lots of different ships for a long time until finally we rowed up to such vast thing that was exactly our ship painted in white and red. Our boat and ourselves, we looked only like small beetles in front of it.

Having climbed the deck through companion ladder and given the captain's note to his assistant on duty, we went to our luxurious cabin. It was on the upper deck, next to the captain's cabin and separated from it only by a wooden partition. Such unusual neighbourhood of our cabin gave us also an especial superiority in comparison to the other passengers. We had a little area of the upper deck, which belonged only to us, where nobody from the passengers had the right to enter, except us. Moreover, there was an excellent bath in our cabin. The walls of the cabin were upholstered with the grey silk, there were two soft coaches in it, a lamp with the lamp-shade fixed to each of the coaches and a mat lantern fitted into the ceiling.

All holders which protected the belongings from tossing were made of nickel. The grey carpet with reddish flowers covered the entire floor and went very well with the wall upholstery. I had never seen such luxury before, so I was standing like always – with my mouth and my eyes opened wide.

I. didn't allow me to dream for a long time, he took my hand and brought me onto the deck. The view to the city was very beautiful, but the bare hills surrounding it and the yellow, dry and sun-cracked soil wasn't alluring my eyes.

Having looked at the clock, I was surprised how fast the time had flown past – it was two o'clock already. Soon we'll put out to sea.

Finally, the sailor from the boat brought our last things into the cabin and, to my great joy, attached all of them. We said good-bye to the agent who was always trying to help the sailor, but in truth he was only dashing here and there without any meaning and use.

A thought flashed that my life of the last days was also similar to the actions of this agent. I was also assisting other people in their actions, but in fact I couldn't see neither logic nor meaning nor essence in my behaviour.

I thanked the agent, he gave him some additional money, therefore he was pouring his gratitude around and, having pulled out his visiting-card, he was persuading us that it was enough to write him a letter or a telegram to Sevastopol and all of his services would be guaranteed. I took his visiting-card, he told him my last name and agreed that it could happen so that we would still need his services. He asked him as though by the way if a similar fast steamer wasn't cruising to Constantinople during the next days.

The agent laughed and answered him that none of the ship companies had anything similar to this great ship, and that during the next two weeks only the old freight or freight-passenger ships with all their stops on the shores would be cruising, while our steamer would be cruising without any of these petty stops, the first one would be in Odessa, then to Constantinople at full speed.

The sailor was the last one who left us. He was a deft and cheerful chap serving our cabin from the team of ship servants who was running up and downstairs like an acrobat. He showed us the buttons of all the bells, explaining their purpose, although there were English notes below each of them anyway.

He became even more pleasing after receiving a good tip, and he revealed one more of the qualities of the luxurious cabin to us – we didn't have to go downstairs at the joint table, table d'hôte, instead we could ask the food to be served upstairs, in our cabin.

In several minutes, on his own initiative he brought us the breakfast, dinner and supper menus. Having taken a look at them, I told him that we were vegetarians, so if it was possible he would like to make arrangements about our food with the cook.

The sailor dashed downstairs and after some time he came back with two impressive persons who were dressed in the suits of irreproachable whiteness. One of them was maitre d'hotel, while the other one was chef. The chef was stout and proud, while the maitre d'hotel was tall and thin, his attitude showed the understanding of his value and politeness.

We made arrangements very quickly. The chef stated that he had a great assistant, an expert vegetarian, that there was a big reserve of the greens and vegetables in the stockroom, while the maitre d'hotel offered us himself to take our breakfast and dinner a half of hour earlier. Having received a large banknote each, both of them became even more pleasing, and the chef asked us if we wanted to take our breakfast already in a half of hour, while the public was still only starting to arrive, and the joint table was at half past three. I agreed, both gentlemen left and finally we were left alone.

I was stunned by all that noise, cries and squeak of the cranes which were lifting the loads. I had never seen how a huge steamer was loaded. Moreover, I had seen a ship only from the distance, but I had never been on it.

Huge bundles were thrust into an open deep hold which from above seemed to be simply without any bottom. Lots of porters with the loads on their shoulders were dashing in one line through the

long little bridges which were stretched through several barges and which reached the shore. These two lines of people were moving without a break: they were running from the steamer to the shore and then they were slowly coming back, stooped heavily.

All of a sudden my attention was focused on the cow that appeared in the air for a moment. The frightened animal was bleating terribly and breaking out of the strong belts which were tied to the crane. Soon, one after another the cows disappeared in that bottomless hole of the hold. Then the turn of the horses came. They were suffering, neighing and dying to be free even more than the cows.

Everything was amazing me. It seemed to me that I knew everything – I knew that the steamers and the holds existed, that alive animals were loaded in them, but when I saw with my own eyes how complicated everything was, it seemed to me that human mind which created all this technology was a real miracle.

I shared my thoughts with I. He gave a smile and answered me that not for the first time during these days I was astonished at the miracles of human sagacity, but in truth there weren't any miracles in life. Whatever field they would belong to, if they were obvious or imaginary, felt with one's thought or intuition – all of them were only one or another level of knowledge.

"We should take our breakfast as soon as possible," I. kept talking to me. "Soon they will finish loading the goods and the flow of the passengers will spill. I would like to watch them with you, only I don't know if the heat doesn't impair your health."

I answered him that I would be watching the passengers with the greatest pleasure and attention. To my question why he wanted to observe this crowd now, although he was always trying to avoid any greater racket, I. answered me that he wanted to be certain if there weren't any of our persecutors in the ship, that if we succeeded to cast off without them now, then we could be calm until we reach Constantinople, and that then Ananda's friends would meet us there.

Exactly at this moment the sailor brought a collapsible table and two chairs in, then the man-servant with the tablecloth, napkins, plates and dishes stepped in. To the question what we were going to drink, I. ordered a bottle of wine and some fanciful drink with the ice. I heard the name of that drink for the first time.

Soon we were already sitting at the table, and I was enjoying it, sucking the cold reddish, exceptionally delicious and aromatic drink through a straw.

While we were taking our breakfast like this, the captain came onto the deck. He greeted I. like his old friend, he was very pleasing with me, too, and with his elegance he reminded me of Florentian. He didn't refuse the wine that was standing in the little silver bucket full of ice. The captain was treating us like awaited guests, he kindly offered us to use the whole deck, not only that little area next to our cabin.

"Soon the passengers will start boarding the steamer," the captain was talking to us, while sipping the wine. "Although the season hasn't started yet, although there's still no real flow of the passengers and most of the ships are empty, but all tickets to my ship were sold out already a month ago. You are so lucky, because completely by chance, on the eve of your arrival, the countess R. from Gurzuf refused this cabin."

I was trying to hide my confusion, I was trying to imitate the undisturbed and calm I.'s appearance, so I could remain at least "a well-bred" person, but I was shaken by such a coincidence very much. Lisa's mother must have had to cruise in this cabin, or maybe even her miserable aunt was hoping for this journey.

"If you aren't going to do something serious," the captain continued, "then I would advise you to arm yourselves with the binoculars and observe the spectacle of the ship boarding. This is such an evident arena of manifestation of people's politeness, characters, manners and self-control that it can become not only an interesting view, but also a lesson of life. There's a stretched tent with the curtain in front of my cabin, so that you wouldn't have to sit in the heat. You can pull down the curtain, so that nobody would see you, and observe in the shadow how some of them are rushing about, while the others are saying sad or cheerful good-byes, sometimes there are those who can hardly walk. Some comic situations happen, too."

Seeing that we had already finished eating, having tossed off the whole bottle of wine like a glass of juice, the captain offered.

"This way please, I will show you myself how you can settle better. You can sit here until the ship casts off. Only when we go to the open sea and my assistants with their reports start coming to me, then – as well as every time when we cast off – I will have to meddle in other businesses myself, and it wouldn't be interesting for you."

While talking like this, he seated us under the dark blue curtain and gave us excellent binoculars.

"Feel yourselves like at home. See you later. When we cast off to the sea and I come here, only then you will have to leave my domain."

He put his hand at the peak of his cap and went downstairs.

"Well, everything worked out even better than you wanted," I was talking to I.

He bowed his head, took the binoculars and started observing the public that was crowding on shore. Seeing that he wasn't inclined to talk, I didn't have anything to do but to follow his example.

Our steamer must have been sunk deep into the water, because the passengers were accepted not from the common quay, but from the side of the port. Exactly now we could see well several elegant carriages with the ladies dressed up in white dresses with white umbrellas and men in white suits and panamas.

The lines of the hired carriages kept coming from both sides, in which the most mixed public was sitting, which from the distance looked like a white spot, too.

The little bridges were still vacant. The sailors on shore barred them with two partitions with turns. At each of the partitions an officer and two sailors were standing for the ticket control.

Our binoculars were so great that we could see clearly even the faces. I was mostly interested in the public that was going along the left bridge, apparently to the first and second classes. The flow of dark dressed people was moving from the right side. They were lugging their parcels and chests. Both fezzes and bright robes were flashing. Women with their children of different ages were going in groups. From their head to foot they were muffled up in black burnouses, their faces were covered with black nets.

"What a joy, what a success!" suddenly I heard I.'s cry.

He showed me two tall men with red fezzes. They had already climbed on the bridge and they stood out in the white and elegant crowd with their dark clothes and red head covers.

I started observing them. One of them was older, he was about forty years old. Another one was absolutely young, he was of my age. Both of them were dark-haired, dark-eyed, handsome and very slim.

I. rose and warned me not to leave this place. He explained to me that he was going to meet the Turks. They were Ananda's friends whom we were going to visit in Constantinople. We were lucky, because unexpectedly we could cruise with them in the same ship already from Sevastopol.

As soon as I. was gone, the captain came onto the deck. He was very surprised at finding me alone; I had to explain everything to him that I. saw his friends on the little bridge and that he went to meet them.

"It means that you would be travelling merrily," the captain was speaking to me. "Tell your brother that his friends will be welcome guests on this deck by transgressing the first rule that forbids the passengers from the first class to get up here."

I thanked him for such pleasing words, our looks met.

Apparently, during the last weeks I was simply lucky to meet people with exceptional eyes, and I was vexed by my most simple dark eyes.

The captain was young, about thirty two or three years old. His slender figure, very swift movements and light step – everything was telling about his great physical strength and endurance. His neatly shaved face and quadratic chin were telling about his great administrative skills. His nicely outlined lips were tightly pressed together. His facial features weren't so regular like the ones of Florentian or Ananda, but he was handsome and he must have been great success among women. His strength and strong character were gushing from his entire elegant figure.

Only when I met his attentive look I thought for a while if it would be pleasing for me to be his close friend. His eyes were yellowish like an amber, while his pupils were strange, oblong like the ones of a cat. These amber-coloured eyes which seemed to me to be even cruel didn't vanish from my imagination until I. was back.

I came back very joyful. I hadn't seen him like this. He was telling me that our friends Turks left Moscow after us, they met Ananda and had his letter for us, which they expected to hand us only in Constantinople. They will bring us the letter as soon as they have their breakfast and put their belongings in order.

To my question how they got the tickets to this ship, I. answered me that they ordered them together with their train tickets while they were still in Moscow and that they took them from the central bureau of an English sea company.

It seemed to me that he already wasn't interested in observing the public boarding the ship anymore, he sat down with reluctance and he was glancing over the moving lines of people now and again.

In the meanwhile the view was striking with an extraordinary many-coloured mixture of clothes, all sorts of national costumes and the contrasts of the people's behaviour. There were those who were rushing about, pushing one another and shouting, so everything turned into a one continuous buzz. Then suddenly the hooter of the steamer was heard; and if not the sailors who were keeping back the pressure of the whole human crowd, there would have formed the real jam.

I was observing the moving flows of people for a long time. Finally the little bridges were lifted, the distance between the steamer and the shore was increasing and the captain's command was heard. He was standing at the wheel himself and he was leading the ship into the open sea.

Chapter 11

On the ship

We were still sitting under the blue tent, and I was rejoicing at the opportunity to finally see the real sea, the endless spaces of water, where the shores weren't flashing in the distance even when looking through the best binoculars.

I wanted to talk about it with I., but to my great surprise, he wasn't rejoicing with me. On the contrary – he was looking at the horizon attentively and, although we were cruising through the surface of the water plain like the glass, he was predicting the furious storm in the Black Sea, which was rare in this time of the year. I was also looking at the horizon through the binoculars, but I couldn't see anything except the sea and the clouds merged into one grey band.

"As soon as the captain shows up, we will give him the binoculars back, thank him for his hospitality and go to our cabin," I. was explaining to me. "Until the sea is still calm, we have to search the travelling-bag everywhere, because Ananda must have put some tablets from the tossing for you there. If, as I think, the hurricane falls on us, the signs of which I can see already, then you must hurry to take the tablet three times before the beginning of the tossing. We will have to do a lot of work in the third class during the storm. The privileged public will have more conveniences, although they also will have to undergo a lot, but the third and fourth classes will suffer the most and they will need our help."

I fell to thinking. I. hadn't told me a single time about the dangers of a sea trip, while for me this cruising also seemed to be only a pleasant amusement.

Soon we left the port and put out to open sea, but my eyes could still distinguish the bare, yellow and totally unlovely shores.

The captain showed up on our deck. We gave him the binoculars back, thanked him for his hospitality and wanted to leave already, but he looked at us vigilantly and asked us if we were sailing often in the sea. I. answered him that he was used to the sea, while I was sailing for the first time.

"I'm afraid that your first acquaintance with the sea won't be very pleasing for you," the captain told me. "The barometer is showing an absolute untruth for such time of the year. If I hadn't chosen it myself I could think that it was a charlatan's work. I think that we'll experience not a simple storm, but an absolutely rare element. Although my ship is excellent, I think that tonight we'll have to fight a lot against the wind, the sea and the heavy shower. You must shut yourselves tightly in your cabin. I also will tell my sailors to cover your cabin with the protective shields, because I think that the waves will reach this deck, too."

I was terrified. I could compare the ship from our deck to the great three-storey house, so I didn't think that such waves could also exist.

The captain's face was very resolute and cheerful, but it was austere. This man of iron will probably didn't even understand what the feeling of fear was. It seemed that he was rejoicing at joining the battle against the element. I thought for a while that he probably loved the sea itself only because of that battle, and if anything was still worrying him now, it was only the responsibility for the people's lives, for the ship and its freight, which were entrusted to him, and in this grey mass of water he was the full master.

I. expressed his opinion that the storm would probably start at night, while the captain was saying that he was expecting only the stormy sea and tossing at night, from which mostly the people and the cattle would suffer, while the real storm should fall on us only in the morning, most likely at dawn.

The captain's assistants with their reports started approaching him. They were waiting for his commands, so we said good-bye to him and went to our cabin.

I started searching the travelling-bag which Florentian gave to me. I didn't even expect it to be so capacious. There were many partitions in it, and one of them was dedicated to the travelling first-aid kit.

I asked I. that perhaps I should swallow one of the magic Ali's pills – they gave lots of strength and they refreshed, - but I. answered me that this wouldn't help to avoid the sea tossing and that we had to find the special tablets which could calm giddiness and vomiting, because Ananda couldn't fail to foresee the tossing while he was putting the things into the travelling-bag.

I allowed I. himself to keep searching for them. And indeed, very soon he found the tablets and made me to take one of them at once.

"My dear friend, you'll have to lie in bed for a while. Now you will feel a slight dizziness and nausea, but the tablets will help you to withstand the tossing," I. was talking to me, while putting the things back into the travelling-bag and at the same time extending the pyjamas and slippers to me.

I was feeling very well, but I understood that I would have enough time to admire the sea, so now it would be not bad at all to lie for a while.

It seemed that it was high time for me to lie down. As soon as I thought how wonderful my bed was, everything started drifting before my eyes, my temples were beating and I was sickened. I even uttered a groan. I.'s hand touched my forehead, he mopped the sweat that suddenly appeared on my face from somewhere. Then he bent down and tucked a soft pillow under my head carefully.

"That is a very good sign, Lovushka," I heard such his voice, as though he hadn't been next to me, but somewhere far away from me. "Everything will be gone in several minutes, then you won't feel even the strongest tossing. If the storm starts only at dawn, as the captain is thinking, then you will be in time to temper your organism with this medicine and you will be my great assistant when we have to give help to the suffering passengers from the third and fourth classes. You told me that you wanted to work. Well, now the life has sent you an opportunity to become a selfless servant to the whole crowd of the people who aren't tempered and prepared for the suffering that is waiting for them tonight. If you don't feel any fear, if you don't yield to any disgust, but you will try to render assistance and cheerfulness to the frightened children and grown-ups – you will lay such firm foundation for your new life of love and activity that all your subsequent tests will look unworthy of any feeling of fear to you."

I could hear his words, I understood their meaning very well, but I simply couldn't move even a finger.

I don't know for how long I was lying like this, but finally I felt that my temples stopped beating, my nausea was gone, but the terrible state of my dizziness when everything was drifting before my eyes left an unpleasant impression in my organism, and I was still afraid of opening my eyes, so that I wouldn't feel that unpleasant faint of my heart. I was feeling better and better, finally I rose from the bed, looking merrily at I., having forgotten instantly about the just experienced troubles.

"You are the hero, Lovushka. I didn't believe that you could get rid of everything so quickly. I remember how I myself was getting used to this antidote against the tossing, so I kept lying motionless for quite a long time," I. was talking to me joyfully.

"Yes, that didn't last for a long time, but anyway I have to like a hero in order to take the rest of the tablets and to get into such an experiment for tempering my strength. God forbid that tempering if it can be reached with such amount of efforts," I answered him.

"It is so strange to hear such words from the person who already started to understand the complexity of life and all of its unexpected turns which are called coincidences. It seemed to me that during this time you, Lovushka, made sure of how much heroic strain from man could suddenly require the evening of that day when in the morning he woke up joyful and careless like a baby, and when the day was closing in he became the grown-up already and the destiny invited him for such a feat about which he had read only in the fairy-tales."

"That is true, as well as everything what I hear from you," I answered him while dressing myself. "It may well be that I could do something more – not only swallowing such a nasty tablet, - if I could always stay in the sphere of my focussed attention, but I'm so absent-minded that I'm unable to use everything what I could understand from you and Florentian. I cannot think about those who need me at once, first of all I'm thinking about myself. Well, this time I also didn't take into account that I might still experience the storm in the ship not for a single time while I would try to distract the attention of the persecutors from my brother, I also didn't take into account the help to those unfortunate people who would be suffering during this storm already and who would need your care."

"Of course, I'm ready to swallow that nastiness right now," I added after being silent for a while.

I dressed myself, I. embraced me merrily, having noticed that he didn't doubt my real feelings not for a moment. He offered us ourselves to come down and visit his friends Turks from the first class, to become acquainted with them and to take the letter. Moreover, he offered me to see the steamer, its many sitting-rooms, the reading-room, the library, the great hall and the dining-room, but I was already waiting for the storm and I had lost any curiosity to all that luxury, so I agreed to see only the third and fourth classes where we would have to do some work at night.

I. agree with my opinion and he called our sailor. He demonstrated his masterly jumps through several steps again. I. gave him the note to the Turks from the first class.

The sailor didn't linger with an answer, because the red fezzes of the Turks soon showed after him.

I. met them by the stairs and asked the sailor to bring some chairs for us. In the twinkling of an eye, he brought us four woven arm-chairs which seemed to be very light, but in fact I was unable neither to lift nor even to push them.

I started to inspect my new acquaintances.

Even without the fezzes, their typical Turkish appearance wouldn't have misled anybody. The older Turk to whom I. presented me like a brother of his friend, thus also like his own brother, smiled to me pleasingly. He introduced the youth to me, having said to me that he was his son, then he gave me Ananda's letter. He also pronounced his name which sounded so strangely and was so long that I didn't even understand it. The Turk was a handsome man, but now he looked older than he looked to me through binoculars, and especially when he was next to I. who was gushing his youth and beauty.

I noticed that both Turks were especially respectful to I. They were listening for each of his words so irreproachably as I. himself and Ananda were listening to Florentian.

I was very surprised by the blue eyes of the younger Turk. In the beginning both Turks looked like dark-eyed to me, only when the sunbeam touched the bronze face of the youth, I made sure that they looked so only because of his long black eyelashes and his big pupils, but when his pupils contracted in the sunlight, I could see his blue, attentive and kind eyes.

I was so impatient, because I wanted to read the letter. I even was feeling how my cheeks were turning red, but the rules of courtesy didn't allow me to do that, so I sighed and put it into my pocket.

The conversation about the upcoming storm started, and the older Turk told I. that in spite of the strict captain's instructions to keep silence, the rumours about the possible storm had already partially reached the first class, and everybody as worried there, especially the ladies. The younger Turk added that the posters were stuck in all halls and corridors of the steamer, which prohibited to go out to the deck after ten o'clock in the evening, everybody had to be in his own place or cabin, because all exits to the deck from all classes would be shut down in order to be protected from the tossing.

I. shared his thoughts about serving the lower classes of the steamer during the storm. The Turks assured us that they would certainly join us, but we needed to get the captain's permission for this, because he was about to shut ourselves down tightly and even to put round the protective shields.

The older Turk volunteered to find the captain and to get his permission, but I. himself wanted to go with him, so I was left face to face with the youth.

While I was thinking about what I should talk to him, he let it out that he was very tired because of the examinations, that he was studying the science of nature in university of Petersburg and that he entered the third course. I was very surprised and I confessed that I was the student of the second course in the same university, but I was a mathematician, and that I was amazed at my absent-mindedness, because I didn't see him there up to now. He explained to me that he saw me several times and that everybody knew my reputation very well – not only as the one of the mathematician, but also as the one of the great writer.

I was embarrassed, I blushed and I was begging him not to mention my literary tries, because I had given them to read only to the closest friends of mine and I didn't understand how everybody knew about it.

According to the words of the Turk, it happened very simply. During the charity party organized to help one sick friend, somebody from the students read my short story. The public liked the story so much that they were asking to announce the surname of the author. They were inviting me for a long time. They didn't believe that I wasn't in the hall and they calmed down only when my friends told them that I had left for Asia. Then they decided to send that story to one of the magazines and to surprise me by doing so when I came back to Petersburg.

I don't know what prevailed within me now: an author's pride or a resentment how the people could do that without my permission.

We were interrupted by the voices that could be heard, and both of our friends and the captain showed up on the stairs.

"I cannot forbid you to help the poor persons who will experience the worst if the storm really falls on us," the captain was explaining to them in his metal voice, "but why these children should get there?" he continued by pointing at both of us. "Let them sleep or sit in their cabins. They will still have

enough time to see the storms in their lives, and if they can be protected from at least one of them – then thank God.”

“If the storm rages, these children will become the merciful brothers, because it isn’t easy to pour a drink of rum in the mouth of a stiff person or to thrust a tablet between his teeth when the tossing is turning over the ship on its side. Our children are tempered and they won’t be afraid of the storm.”

The captain shrugged his shoulders and noticed that he wasn’t responsible if anyone of us was washed away by the wave, that we didn’t understand what dangers were lurking during the storm even for the experienced sailors, not only for the boys who hadn’t seen anything, that once again he was offering us to stay in the cabins.

I. was pursuing his aim. I was already thinking that there would be an argument, but once again, to my great astonishment, the captain looked at I. attentively, lift his hand at the peak of his cap and, having laughed, told him.

“So, tonight you want to be the captain in the fourth class. I agree to entrust it to you. You will become the hospital attendants there. But I cannot give you a single sailor to help you, unless that red-haired who is serving your cabin. He is strong, only a little silly, but he is very kind-hearted, and his strength will come in handy to you.”

On the word, he pressed the button of the telephone and ordered someone to bring four pairs of rubber boots and four mackintoshes with the hoods. Our sailor also showed up on the deck after his call. The captain gave him a special instruction to be on duty on the deck at our cabin during the entire night, and if we were going somewhere – to be next to us. That was mostly important regarding me – he couldn’t retreat a step from me; since it was the first time for me to cruise in the sea, the great sailor had to understand what the captain’s instruction meant not to retreat from an unexperienced person.

I was stunned because of such a nurse, perhaps I even took offence a little, but the captain looked at me merrily and explained to me that this servant would come in handy to me while I would be tending the patients, and that I would thank him for that, even I myself would want to treat him to some wine if the battle against the element would end happily.

In the meanwhile, he ordered the sailor to start his duty from nine o’clock, and at the moment he had to eat and to have a sleep.

They brought us the mackintoshes and the boots which didn’t seem to be made of rubber at all, but when I put them on I felt how elastic and warm they were. The mackintoshes suited well the others, only I was drowned to my heels in mine, while the Turk had to change his boots three times till they fitted them to his big and wide feet. They also changed the mackintosh for me.

Having chosen our clothes, we said good-bye to the captain and the Turks. We arranged that they would come to us at nine o’clock, and if there really was the storm, we would share the medicine and the responsibilities.

The captain visited us one more time and tried to convince I. once again to leave at least me alone in the cabin, but neither I. nor I didn’t agree with that. Then the captain invited us to go downstairs to the fourth class and to get to know the place of our future work. We accepted this proposal with pleasure.

The sailor who was on duty at the end of the stairs received the strict captain’s command to not allow anybody, even the senior assistant, to come to the upper part except us.

We were following the captain, but he asked us to walk next to him. Two more officers to whom he introduced us and a couple of sailors joined us. In this way a considerable group was formed. The captain ordered to find the chief medical officer of the ship and to give him an urgent command to join us.

I was surprised not only by the number of the people in the steamer, but also by the length of the corridors, the height of all rooms and the luxury that was prevailing everywhere. Everything was buried in flowers. The public from the first class was sitting in the deep arm-chairs and deckchairs which were placed in the shadow of the deck. The life here was wonderful and splendid, the aroma of perfume and cigars was hovering in the air...

Finally, we went downstairs to the third class. I was expecting to see the same dirtiness as in the trains of this class, which I experienced while going from Asia to Russia, but I understood at once that I was highly wrong.

It was very clean here. The truth is, only the wood could be seen around everywhere, and our feet weren't buried in the carpets like in the first class, but the floor was covered with the linoleum of the beautiful pattern with the vivid flowers. The tickets must have cost rather expensive here, too, because there weren't any poor persons here. The student caps struck the eye, the whole families were travelling, which according to their clothes didn't feel a shortage of anything. The hall of the dining-room was beautiful with the wooden swivel chairs. It was abundantly lit by the electricity. The joint sitting-room was also here, as well as the reading-room and the smoking room. The sitting-room wasn't separated by the corridor as above, so it looked especially long.

We came down even more and got very close to the water. The fore-deck of the steamer was assigned to the fourth class, its ceiling was made from the rooms of the third class. There wasn't a separate deck in the third class, only the sidelong, rather wide passageways to the cabins which were arranged along the entire length of the steamer.

There weren't any cabins in the fourth class at all. The travellers here were the real poor persons – most of them were the families of the workers who were resettling, the wandering musicians, the whole groups of unfortunate farce conjurers and comedians. The real Gipsy tribe was located in the separate corner. All sorts of dialects and talks were spreading from all sides. The traders were also here, who were carrying their goods and therefore, apparently, they wanted to stay closer to the hold. The stablemen were also here, who were accompanying their horses – in short, I was dazzled, I opened my eyes widely and forgot everything else.

"Keep up with me," I heard the commanding voice of the captain and at the same moment I felt that I took my arm, having whispered that I should try to remember the allotment of the steamer instead of admiring the views.

I gave a sigh. There were so many possibilities to observe here, but I had to go by and to think only about the storm, when it was still not clear at all if it was going to be at all, because the sun was shining, we were cruising through the surface of the water, which was as even as the mirror, and the only waves were only those which our gigantic steamer was raising.

Our group suddenly stopped. A young, totally exhausted woman who was holding a wonderful two years old boy on her knees, as blond as herself, was sitting in the most uncomfortable place, in the very spike of the ship, among the boxes and barrels. Even now the wind could blow her through already. A pale, about five years old girl who seemed to be sick was lying next to her mother with her head put on her knees. It seemed that she might be unconscious.

"Why you've chosen such uncomfortable place?" the captain asked her, addressing the woman whose beautiful face was distorted with terror and her eyes were flooded with the tears.

"Oh, only don't throw us out," she was begging in French.

It seemed that she didn't understand English and was frightened by the commanding and metal voice of the captain. She was looking at him simply pleadingly. He turned towards us, asking if somebody from us could speak this language better than him, because his French pronunciation was poor.

I pushed me forward, I bowed to the woman and interpreted the captain's question.

Her tears came pouring like the peas together with her answer; she was explaining that that was the only place where the brutal fellow-travellers stopped pushing and persecuting her. A compassionate sailor seated them here and even threatened those two Turks who were nagging at her and who didn't leave her in peace.

"My girl isn't sick, we are just hungry. Don't throw us out. We are going to my uncle in Constantinople. My husband died. A mechanism pressed him at work, but the French company didn't agree to pay us anything without the court of law, but I couldn't wait for the trial, we would have starved to death. I sold out everything, and somehow we reached Sevastopol. I bought the tickets for my last money. I don't know how we'll reach Constantinople, but I do have the ticket," the unfortunate woman was speaking to us. She was totally lost and she was extending her ticket to the captain with horror.

It seemed that the hardship had befallen on her absolutely unexpectedly, like a bolt from the blue. Her clothes looked still like new, they were only dusty and stained; her children's clothes were also new, but already dirty during the journey. The small legs were stuck out of the little skirt of the little girl. She had little lacquer shoes on, which didn't suit at all for such a distant journey.

Entreaty and fear, terror for her children whom she kept pressing to herself, feebleness, disappointment – so many different feelings were reflected in the eyes of this creature that, with a heavy heart, not even thinking what I was doing, I stooped and took the girl in my arms.

"We cannot leave her here," I told I. "Let's give our cabin to her."

"That won't be of great use," the captain answered me. "She and her children need the medical aid. There are paid wards in the hospital of the first class in the steamer. If you can afford to pay for her journey in such a cabin, then you would give her a possibility to rest, to summon up her strength and to leave the steamer healthy already. She's going to faint away soon, isn't she?"

He hadn't finished his talking yet, while the doctor was already dashing to help the woman who was bending to one side. The captain blew his whistle two times, which was hanging on his chest, and a strong sailor simply shot up in front of us.

"First of all, disperse everybody who has gathered round us," the captain commanded him.

As if after waving with a magic wand, all passengers who had crowded round us sat down in their own places, not waiting for the second command of the sailor.

"Now get the stretcher!" the captain commanded again.

Until the stretcher was brought, I asked the captain where and whom he had to pay for the separate ward of the hospital for this unfortunate woman. The captain wrote a note, gave it to the doctor and ordered to hospitalize the mother and her children in the best ward of the hospital – the cabin No. 1A.

He offered to pay the money to the cashier of the ship in the first class. Young Turk volunteered to do it on the spot.

Two employees of the hospital brought the stretcher, and a trained nurse came with them. The woman was still unconscious. They laid her on the stretcher. The sailor stretched out his hands and wanted to take the girl from me, but she threw her arms round my neck firmly and burst into tears loudly. I pressed her to myself and told I. that I would bring her myself and stay there till her sick mother recovers, but I. shook his head in disagreement and explained to me.

“Bring the child and instantly give the drops from this little bottle to her mother. Then come back to me as soon as possible. We still have a lot to do, but we won’t forget this unfortunate woman. Leave a note to her, explain how she can find us and promise her that we would drop in at her soon. Give her the drops to drink in such a way that nobody could see it,” he still managed to whisper me, and I followed the stretcher.

We were walking for a long time, I guess for no less than twenty minutes. We were climbing the stairs, twisting through the corridors and we were doing so only through auxiliary rooms.

There was everything in that sailing house! There were laundries, drying rooms, stockrooms, the swimming pool, many kitchens and the ice-house – I was simply lost and I wouldn’t have found my way back in any way.

That cabin which we finally reached was all white, it had three beds: two beds were below and one was above. Everything here smelt of luxury and cleanness. While the nurse was gone to get a dressing-gown for the patient, and the doctor had hurried to the pharmacy, I quickly poured some I.’s drops into the small cup with the water and put it to the patient’s lips. She opened her eyes, took her medicine and put her head on the pillow again.

I noticed at once that the blood had already come back to her cheeks, she moved, sighed, and when the doctor was back, she already rose and asked with a firm voice.

“Where am I?”

I gave her the girl and explained to her that she was in the hospital of the steamer where she would continue her journey. In the name of the captain, I asked her not to worry about anything and added that I and my brother would still call on her.

I told her how to find us if she needed to, I interpreted the doctor’s request for her to go to the bedroom with her children and to change into the hospital’s clothes, because such an order was valid here.

Having said good-bye to her, I thought for a while that I was helpless to find my way back, but at the end of the hospital’s section I saw that tall clumsy sailor who was accompanying us with the stretcher and now he was waiting for me.

This time we reached the fourth class quickly, because this tall clumsy sailor was running up and down the stairs not worse than that red-haired sailor who was introduced to us at our cabin.

I found the captain and the whole group working seriously. The entire mixed crowd was divided into men and women. The women and the children were placed in the middle of the deck, because the sides of the steamer formed good walls here, in addition the sailors separated the very spike with the metal sticks, so that the draughts wouldn’t blow.

The men, especially the Gipsies, raised a protest against the captain's command to place the women separately. Then the captain gave a whistle in a certain way, and soon four armed sailors appeared suddenly. The captain ordered them to be on duty here by changing every two hours.

About ten other sailors received the instructions to fasten the freight and even the passengers firmly, and one of the officers was left to observe this job.

We went down to the hold which also had several floors. The lower floors were loaded to the top with the boxes and parcels, while the cattle was standing on the upper floors. The captain ordered to hobble all cattle and the horses. I noticed that all pens were hewed with the thick, straw mats.

Having ordered and instructed lots of more, the captain went up to the fourth class again, while all of us were following him.

Here he addressed the men in a language which we were interpreting into other languages; the Turks had most of work to do, because they knew many Eastern and Balkan dialects. The captain explained to them that everyone who would be caught drinking hard or dicing tonight, would be instantly sent into the solitary where he would spend at least twenty-four hours, getting only the water and bread. He addressed those who were carrying vodka with them and ordered them to give it to him instantly. It seemed that no one wanted to get into the solitary, so without any protests the men were bringing the bottles of vodka and even the wattle, big, glass balloons from all sides, and if anyone was still lingering, then expressive looks of the neighbours were affecting them so that their hands were extending their hidden bottles reluctantly.

Now one shouldn't have feared anymore that anybody would succeed to hide even his flask. Especially the Gipsies were showing their worth. Having taken offence and being separated from their women, having given their vodka out of fear, they gave vent to their anger on the passengers; not a single bottle was left hidden from their vigilant eyes.

Soon the big basket was filled to the top with the bottles, and the sailors took it out. The captain explained to them that everyone had the right to put his money for safekeeping in the cash of the ship, independent of its sum's size, and to get it back whenever he needed, that if there were those who wanted to do that, he could send the cashier to the third class, and in addition they could also put their documents for safekeeping.

Several voices expressed such a wish, because apparently they expected to dice during their drinking-bout. In this way we finished our examination. We said good-bye to the fourth class and turned to the stairs. Having climbed up to the first class, we separated from the captain who still had a lot of business to do and from the Turks with whom we agreed to meet at our cabin at ten o'clock. We came back to our cabin.

Not waiting for anything, I gave to me the nasty tablet to drink. This time I wasn't dizzy, but nausea, beating in my temples and shivering of my whole body was even stronger than for the first time. I was sitting in the bed, and it seemed to me that something was going to explode in my head or back. Not only my face, but my whole body broke into a sweat, I couldn't move. I could hear some talking, but I couldn't understand neither who was talking nor what they were talking about.

I don't remember again for how long I was lying like this, but suddenly I started feeling an easiness, my body became lithe as though I would have slept for several hours. It seemed to me that only twenty minutes had passed. I told me that our dinner was coming and that we had to hurry, because I still had to take the third tablet. I answered him merrily that already now I wanted to move the mountains, so what was waiting for me after the third tablet?

We really had to hurry with our dinner, but Florentian's letter was already lying in my pocket for so many hours that it was simply burning me, and I declared to I. that first of all I wanted to read it.

He agreed with my impatient desire and went onto the deck where our dinner table was already served. The sun was hanging low, hence it could be around seven o'clock.

I pulled out the letter and forgot everything around me, because the words of my wonderful friend were full of love and tender, they moved me very much.

Florentian was writing to me that he was following my every step in his thoughts and that although we were separated by the physical distance, we were always firmly connected with his friendship and love, in the loyalty of which I had a chance to be convinced several times during these days. He kept writing that this time he would keep the letter short, because there was very little time left before his train's departure. He was asking me to be very attentive during our sea trip and to stay close to I., as I used to stay close to him before, because our enemies managed to find our tracks.

Wishing me absolute peace, he was writing to me that I should avoid any disappointment in every step of my own destiny and that I should see only one goal everywhere – my brother's life, and that I should be as loyal to him as he, Florentian, was loyal to me with his friendship and assistance.

I wanted to read this great letter one more time, but I. took me for the dinner, saying that it was late already. We ate quickly. I. wasn't eating much and he couldn't take his eyes off the coming sunset. He offered me to leave the letter in the cabin, not in my pocket. Then he made me to lie down and told me that in half an hour he would give me the third tablet.

I fell into a doze. I woke up somehow automatically from I.'s voice. I swallowed the medicine almost not noticing it and I fell asleep instantly again, not feeling how the tablet was affecting me this time.

I woke up from the blow as it seemed to me, but in fact that was only I. who slammed the door while entering. I got up from the bed and was surprised by looking at I., because he was standing with the rubber boots and the mackintosh on already.

"Dress quickly, Lovushka. The captain informed me that the storm would start and rage before the dawn. The tossing is so strong already that majority of the people in the steamer are already lying with sickness. We must come down to the fourth class, the assistance is already needed there."

I pulled on the boots and the mackintosh, while I. took two trip first-aid kits in leather cases with strong straps; he flung one of them, the smaller one, over his shoulder himself and gave the bigger one to me.

"You will have the reserve medicine. Be sure to take Ali's pills and also these which were in your travelling-bag. Florentian is sending them to you."

He gave me the box made of the green enamel, which had the white peacock on its lid.

"Memorize how everything is placed in the first-aid kits," he unfastened the stout case, opened the cover, and I saw three rows of bottles and several clear rubber drips with the marks: two drops, five, ten...

I was amazed at such clarity of the rubber, but I had no time to reflect on it. I also had no time to admire the green box with the peacock. I put both boxes into the first-aid kit quickly and fastened its cover. I was feeling excellent physically, but it seemed to me that I was swinging. I. offered me to move my legs apart wider, because the tossing could already be felt.

We came out of our brightly lit cabin, and I was surprised how the weather had changed. It was raining, the wind was howling, the indiscernible darkness was around us. The dark shadow appeared next to me, it turned out that that was that tall clumsy sailor. He as though stuck to me. I felt that I. took my arm, and we went towards the only light spot – the stairs downwards.

Not having exchanged a single word, we started climbing downstairs.

Chapter 12

The storm in the sea

I hadn't come down even five steps, when somebody gave a strong push on my back, and I would have fallen with my head down off the steep stairs if my clumsy sailor hadn't caught me with his hands, like children were usually catching the ball. He appeared on the landing in a flash and stood me on my feet.

I couldn't understand in any way what had happened, but I saw that I. was holding the younger Turk by his shoulders, while his father was trying to release the youth's leg from the crack between the wall and the handrail. While he was trying to move his legs apart wider, somehow he stepped into the crack and, having stumbled on the handrail, he fell down and pushed my back with his head, hence I flew down.

It didn't suit to the importance of the moment very much, but it was so funny, the younger Turk seemed so unhappy and ashamed, that I, having forgotten about all the "tact" of the world, burst out laughing. Apparently, the clumsy sailor didn't dare to laugh loudly, so he was only snickering and choking, which made me laugh even more.

"Hello," I could hear behind my back. "Where did such a brave spirit come from in the steamer, who can meet this terrible tossing with his joyful laughter?"

I recognized the captain's voice and I saw him below, on another landing of the stairs. He was wearing a wet mackintosh.

"So you, youth, are this hero? I can be calm that you will become a great sailor," he added and blinked at me.

We were coming down. I offered the younger Turk to go first, but he looked at me so pleadingly that I kept following the clumsy sailor. I was still laughing and soon I caught up with the captain.

"I'm not a hero, but this fine fellow is," I explained to the captain by showing our sailor to him. "If not him, now you would have to send me to the hospital."

"Well, if you had to get there, then I would try to place you next to the strange beauty. The little girl liked you very much, so probably her mother would follow her example, too."

I could see his smile, but only his lips were smiling, while his eyes remained attentive and austere. Somehow I could feel with my entire body how great the danger was.

All of a sudden, we were rocked so much that the younger Turk almost fell down again. The captain looked at his father and told him that on the lower deck he should hold his son by his hand and that he would call a sailor who would help them to climb downstairs. The captain gave a whistle and the sailor came running. Having received the captain's order, he put his arms round the younger Turk's waist. It was really difficult to come downstairs, but to my great astonishment and to even greater joy of my nurse – clumsy sailor, I was walking with a more and more sure step, while the Turk still had difficulties; but as soon as the youth felt that there were no more steps, his step became more sure at once, only he kept limping.

Downstairs we stopped to discuss our actions among ourselves. The real hell was already here! The wind was wailing and whistling, it was ruffling gigantic waves. The people were moaning, the

women and the children were panic-stricken and crying. In the holds the horses were neighing and beating, the cows were mooing and the sheep were bleating – one was unable to separate anything, everything had blended into a continuous wail, buzz and roar.

I. gave a tug at my hand, and we went to the women's section. Having seen us, the whole crowd of them dashed at us, but most of them rolled back, because at that moment the steamer dived up and then down again as though to an abyss. I. was coming to more sickly and suffering of them in rotation; I was pulling the medicine, which he was indicating to me. With the help of the sailors, he would lift the heads of the sick a little, and I would pour the medicine into their mouths.

There was such a stench that if not the wind, I couldn't have endured here.

Little by little we made the round of everybody, and the people started calming down or even falling asleep. Two sailors were washing the floor with the hot water, brooms and floor-cloths.

We left the women's section and went to help the Turks who had done only a half of their work, because there were more men who needed help; several of absolutely sound people volunteered to help us. Soon the moaning and curses fell silent here, too, and everybody started falling asleep.

I. gave several tufts of some dry grass to the stablemen and told them to tie them in several places in the hold. He explained to them that the grass would affect the horses in the same way as the medicine did to the people, and they would fall asleep.

The Turks stayed on the deck, while we and the stablemen came down to the hold where I. himself showed them in which places they had to tie the packets of the grass.

Having come back onto the deck, I. offered the sound people to take our medicine, too. He told them that several hours of sleeping would strengthen them and then they could help him more when the storm started.

"The storm? So isn't this the storm yet?" the screams were heard.

"No, this isn't the storm yet, but only an easy tossing," suddenly we heard the voice of the captain near us. "So take the medicine and have a sleep if you are really brave men. Every strong hand and brave heart will be needed when the storm starts."

An unexpected appearance of the captain and his firm, sonorous voice affected the bold spirits who were helping us. They became silent, opened their mouths and swallowed our miraculous drops.

The captain asked I. for how long the effect of this medicine was going to last, and I. answered him that the people were going to calm for at least six hours. The captain pulled out his watch, pressed the watch-spring – and twelve loud strokes echoed.

"The storm will start in a couple or three hours at the latest. I decided to send a part of the passengers from the third class to the sitting-rooms of the second class and to place the whole fourth class in the third one," the captain was explaining to us. "The move upstairs will end soon. We'll have to distribute the women, children and weaker men among free cabins of the third class by laying straw mattresses on the floor. I'll send a part of my team here. I'll ask you not to leave until everybody would be moved upward. Somebody might need your help."

And he disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared. Now he was everywhere: he would climb on to the captain's bridge to his chief assistant, he would have time to dart a glance at every little

corner of the steamer, he would give instructions everywhere, he would cheer up and calm everybody and he would have a good word prepared for everybody.

Soon several sailors and an officer came to us. They woke up the women and offered them with their children to move to the cabins of the third class. There were screams and hysteria, too, but soon they moved, and there were still several free cabins left for the sickly and weak men.

The children started crying in the cabins of the women again. We had to give them the medicine again, but now I. was watching every face attentively, he was listening for their breathing and only then when they really needed he would tell me to pour some drops. I. would stop by some older workers for a longer, he would give them some sweets, too, by thrusting them right behind the cheeks of those who were drowsing.

We passed to the sitting-rooms of the second class to visit the passengers from the third class, who had moved there. Here everybody needed our medicine, too, because there was the same panic, the children were crying, even the men were moaning. Soon I.'s help calmed everybody down. We wanted to stay on duty here, but the messenger of the captain came hurriedly and asked I. to come to the first class to help some dying girl.

We left the Turks downstairs and hurried after the sailor to the first class. We were met by the screams from all sides, the stewardesses and man-servants were running about, and I'm afraid that the view of human suffering was more repulsive here, because the disgusting cries in which a demand, an anger and egoism could be heard, used to grow into the curses and bad behaviour with the ship's team that was already run off their legs.

We were taken to the cabin in which a mother with long, loose and tousled hair was on her knees at the bed-head of her daughter who seemed to be fainted away. The mother herself didn't perceive anything anymore. She was sobbing and shouting some Italian words off and on, she was tousling her hair and wringing her hands. I. with the help of the sailor lifted her off the floor, he put her to bed and told me to count off five drops from the indicated bottle, while he himself bent over the girl who couldn't be brought to her senses by the ship's doctor for more than an hour already.

As soon as I gave the mother the medicine to drink, she fell asleep instantly, and I went up to I.

"A difficult case, Lovushka," he told me.

At this moment the steamer began to swing so much that I hardly had time to seize the wall supporter, while I. with one hand was holding the girl who was rolling from the bed, with another one he leant against the clumsy sailor.

"We must bring her to her senses immediately, then we have to drop in at the hospital and to hurry to help the captain," I. was talking to me. "Lift the girl and hold her in sitting position," he addressed the sailor, "and you, Lovushka, pour five drops from this dark bottle straight into her mouth. Wait until I open her mouth. Get the medicine ready, so that you could drip it quickly."

I. pulled some strong smelling drops out of his first-aid kit and dripped one drop into each of her nostrils. The girl sneezed strongly in a minute. I. opened her mouth deftly, while I gave her my drops to drink. The sailor had to lean against the bed with his feet and to hold me by my waist, otherwise I would have fallen down on my back from the new blow onto the side, and the girl would have rolled down on the floor.

"Now everything's all right here, let's hurry to the hospital," I. whispered to me.

We passed the patients to the doctor who returned. He was very surprised that the girl was sleeping and breathing calmly, equally, but I. was hurrying and he didn't even hear the doctor's words.

Soon we reached the hospital through the shortest way and some winding stairs. The moaning and sobbing could be heard here, too. Not paying any attention to them, we rushed into the ward No. 1A. Here the poor mother didn't know how to calm her crying children. She was about to break into tears herself in this hell raging round her. Every bolt of the steamer was squeaking and screeching in its own voice, the whole ship was shaking and trembling as if it had been made of the sheet of the thin iron, while at times the passengers would feel themselves to be head over heels, or they would rock from one side to another, moaning and their screams mixed with the wail of the wind seemed to be like the howls of the devil.

We gave them the medicine to drink in a flash. I. gave a pill to the mother, too. He asked her to be brisk, saying that everything would be all right, that we had to send the energy of vivacity to the captain, that we had to strengthen his power in his fight against the element instead of crying and grieving what was only draining any energy. The mother was looking at I. so pleadingly that he squeezed her hand slightly and told her.

"Be strong. A mother must be an example to her children. Lie down next to them and sleep."

Again through the shortest way we were scooting onto the deck to the captain on the bridge. I have to admit that I. was holding my arm, while the sailor was simply pushing me from behind, and only in this way I was able to jolt through all those stairs and passageways. If I hadn't had this double assistance, I would have fallen down at breakneck speed tens of times, and probably been killed to death. When we went onto the deck, we got into the real hell. The lightning was flashing and it was thundering. The thunder was blending with the wail and howling of the wind and reminded me of a cannonade. The lightning dazzled us instantly, we had to stop, because it was difficult even to breathe in this freezing atmosphere of the storm.

We reached the captain's bridge with great difficulty. I didn't even notice how the cold water flooded me from my head to foot, I even had to close my eyes. I was shaking myself like a dog, I was rubbing my eyes with my hands and I could hardly open them, but anyway I couldn't see anything in the dark and on the deck which was being flashed by the lightning.

I felt that I was dragged by the strong hands and I was going, if one could call those movements of my body and legs "a going": now I was lifting my leg and wanted to put it on the deck, but I fell on my "nurse", and my leg would hang in the air; now I would fall back and hear I.'s voice: "Duck", I wouldn't be in time for ducking, so I would fall on my side again. Those several tens of steps which separated us from the captain's bridge seemed to me as long as the road to an unreachable happiness.

But suddenly, I heard how the clumsy sailor screamed something and yanked me forward; in his turn, I. with all his strength was dragging my body which could hardly keep its balance – and in an instant we got to the wheel, next to the captain and his assistants. One more moment – and we were flooded by the water. It pressed us to the walls of the wheelhouse, but we survived, because this gigantic wave didn't have time to wash us away.

I cannot even describe what happened next: the wall of the water fell on the steamer so much, it hit the wheelhouse so strongly that it trembled, while I. and the sailor dashed to the wheel, because the captain with his assistants were unable to hold it.

"Lovushka," I. was screaming, "quickly pull a pill for everybody out of the green Florentian's box, first of all – for the captain!"

I was squeezed into the corner by the strong wind that was blowing into my legs and I was feeling very steady. That helped me to find the box easily, but I understood very well that if the wave was going to hit again, I wouldn't keep my feet. I summoned up my strength, Florentian's figure flashed in my thoughts, because I was always thinking about him, my heart started beating joyfully, and my friend was so close to me at this moment that I even saw him next to me. Of course, if I was lying, I would think that I was dreaming, but now I was certain that I saw him not in my dream – my dear guardian Florentian dressed in white had emerged in my imagination so clearly.

I felt such fresh surge of strength, as though that charming friend of mine had really been next to me. I pulled the pills out of my first-aid kit easily, I became merry and laughing, I leant towards the captain. He even opened his mouth out of amazement, seeing my laughing face in the moment of the deadly danger. I took advantage of this immediately and thrust the pill into his mouth.

The wonderful hand of Florentian was as though holding me – I didn't feel the blows of the waves to the side or the trembling of the ship, I forgot about the death brought by every gust of the wind – I was giving out the pills to everybody and I swallowed the last one myself. My eyes got used to it, it became as though brighter around, but one was still unable to discern where the sky and where the water was.

Now all men were holding the wheel with their hands. It still seemed to me that I saw the tall and white figure of Florentian who now was next to I. As though he had put his hand on I.'s hands, and that everybody, including the captain, was obeying to I.'s commands. We were sailing like this, or to be precise we were going up and down, for quite a long time. Everybody kept silent and was fighting against the menacing death.

"One more such heeling over of the ship, and the steamer will fall on its side, so that it would never rise again," the captain gave a shout.

I don't know what happened to me, perhaps the swallowed pill encouraged me, but I cried into the very ear of the captain.

"It will not fall on its side, not for anything, we will survive!"

He only shrugged his shoulders, and I understood that like his indulgence to my childish incomprehension of the menacing death. In the meanwhile it was as though getting brighter. Now I could already see the living hell of the water in which we were sailing, if one could name the horror of falling down into an abyss and rising up into an unseen height "a sailing".

The sea turned into a whole, white and boiling mass. As though hollowed out walls of the green water with the peaks of white foam would rise from time to time. They were threatening to flood us from all sides right away, but the captain's command and deft hands of the people were piercing through the barriers of the water, and we would dive downward, so that then we could get upward successfully. But then I noticed that the captain pulled his head into his shoulders, he shouted something to I. and leant on the wheel with his entire body. The tall and white Florentian's figure appeared to me again. He touched I.'s hands and then he turned the wheel exactly so as the captain wanted it to, but was unable to do it in any way, even with the help of all of his assistants. And now the steamer turned obediently with its front to the right. I had my heart in my mouth: the highest mountain of the water was drawing nearer straight to us, on the top of which a column of the water was whirling. It was so high that it seemed that it was really supporting the sky.

If this mountain had hit the ship's side, then it would have capsized inevitably. Thanks to the swift manoeuvre, the steamer pierced through the gigantic mass of the water with its spike, and the whole

weight of the water fell on its stern. The thunder was heard, as though the cannons had fired; the ship trembled, its spike rose upward as on the swing, but in a moment we were sailing in the foam of the roaring sea again, where the waves were still terrible, they would flood the deck, but they didn't menace to crash us anymore.

Having come to myself, I started looking with my eyes for my wonderful friend Florentian, but I understood that it was only a mirage, the mirage of my love to him. I was so immersed in my thoughts about him, I believed in his help so much, that he appeared to me even here.

"We are saved," the captain uttered. "We've sailed across the zone of the hurricane. The tossing will still continue for a long time, but there's no deadly danger anymore"

He offered me and I. to go to the cabin and to rest, but I. answered him that we were less tired than him and that we would stay with him until we sail out of the danger zone once and for all, that he could offer his chief assistant to rest, who was the most tired and that he could invite somebody else here.

The captain sent his chief assistant to find out how the passengers were feeling and told him to change places with any of the assistants on duty for a couple of hours, and that the person who would change him would bring an answer about the ship's condition.

I don't know how much time had passed. It became brighter. The storm was still violent, but it seemed to me that the captain's face became brighter, too: he was worn-out, his eyes had sunk, his face was blue pale, but the sternness in it had already been gone.

I. turned to me and gave a cry that I should give a pill from Ali's black box for everybody. I thought that the tossing wasn't so strong anymore, I came out of my corner and I would have fallen down for sure if I. hadn't held me.

I was surprised very much. Several hours ago, in the full swing of the hurricane, I was serving out the medicine to everybody so easily, and now I was unable to do it without I.'s help, although the element had already abated. It was difficult for me, but I gave a pill for everybody. I made lots of efforts until I swallowed it myself and then I could hardly come back to my previous place.

Only now I noticed that there was a pull-down chair in this corner. I pulled the chair down and sat down on it, perplexed. Why when Florentian appeared to me, in the moment of the greatest danger, I could move easily, and now I couldn't even take a step, it wasn't easy even to sit down, I had to hold on the grip?

Did only the thought about my dear friend whom I was calling for help from the bottom of my heart during the whole night help me to focus my will so much? I remembered what a joy had filled me up back then; how I perceived that I was strong; how I was laughing by giving the pill to the captain, and now I got absolutely absent-minded and I became the ordinary Lovushka, the catcher of the crows.

I was looking at the sky, and it seemed to me that it wasn't so grey anymore. The difference of the colours came to light between the white, bubbling sea and the grey sky. The wind wasn't so strong anymore. The whistling and rumbling, as though the ordnance was firing, could be heard always rarer, while the people who were standing at the rudder were already exchanging some words one with another, not shouting at the top of their voices.

The heavy steps could be heard, and the shift marched in to change the chief assistant and our clumsy sailor.

But our sailor was still feeling so well that he didn't agree to change, while every man was needed downstairs. The captain passed the management to the new assistant, he took the sailor who had just come and, having told us that he would be back soon, he came down. He offered me to go with him. He called me the bold spirit and the hero, but I knew better what kind of a hero I was when I was left with myself, so I refused his offer resolutely.

I wanted to stay upstairs also because I remembered the stifling air of the lower decks, besides the sea was changing so much that it was really a pity to leave this view.

The truth is, it was still cold. And if the sun hadn't been scorching so much when we were boarding the steamer, now I wouldn't believe that we were sailing across the southern sea.

All of a sudden it was broad daylight round us; the wind ripped open the black clouds, and here and there one could already see the little patches of the blue sky. The tossing was noticeably decreasing; at times the wind would totally abate, and only the murmur of the sea was heard. The sea now was absolutely black, only the crests of the high waves were showing brightly white.

It was easier to steer the rudder already. I. came to me and told me that when the captain was back, we would go downstairs and, having done our mission of compassion one more time, we would go to sleep. He offered me to go to the stern and to take a look at that hell from which we had just escaped. The clumsy sailor wanted to go with us, but I. told him that we were going only for a walk on the deck and that then we would come back, but when we go downstairs, we would certainly take him with us.

The tossing was still strong, at times a wave used to come howling, but it wasn't menacing our gigantic steamer anymore. Nevertheless, it was still difficult for me to go along the deck, and I was wondering how everything was easy for I.; whatever he used to do, he would do it splendidly. For no apparent reason I was imagining him to be a tailor. It was so funny and stupid that I burst out laughing.

I. was surprised, he looked me up and down and told me that for the second time already I was demonstrating my heroism with a laughter.

"No, heroism isn't the cause of this laughter," I answered him, "but only my stupidity. All of a sudden I was imagining you to be a tailor and I decided that you would do that job perfectly, too, but the very fact that you were with the needle and the thread seemed to be so comic to me that I lost my self-control and I burst out laughing."

When we approached the stern, my laughter stopped at once and I even felt that I remained like this – with my mouth opened.

It seemed as though someone had cut the sea with the knife into two unequal parts. Relatively small space across which we were sailing was black, it was foaming with white foam, but it didn't excite any horror. The huge mountains of the water were stretching behind this black zone; the walls of the green water with the white crests were breaking when they hit one another, like the giants who were wrestling in the arms of the death; having wrestled for a moment, they would fall down into the abyss from which the new water monsters kept rising.

"Have we really escaped this hell?" I was asking I. "Is it really possible to survive in these waves?"

I wanted to ask I. very much if during the most terrible moment he also was thinking about Florentian, but I was ashamed to unbosom my naivety, the play of my fantasy, which had taken the shape of my dear friend – of my friend who had saved my life several times during this short period of time. And

now I was also calling him with all my heart, I was thinking about him more than about my brother or even about myself.

I. was standing in silence. Such serene peace was in his face, such deep purity and joy was shining within him that unawares I asked him what he was thinking about now.

“My boy, I thank life which today gave us one more possibility to breathe, love, create and to serve people with all our strength, nobly and irreproachably. Bless your new day, too. Perceive well that we could die tonight if life’s grace and the people’s selfless heroism hadn’t saved us. Think a little that his day – that’s your new life already. It is new, because it could happen so that you might not stand here today. Get used to meeting your new breaking day as the day of your new life where only you, you alone are making the record onto the clean sheet of your day. During the entire night you didn’t feel any fear at least one time, you were thinking about the people whose lives and health were in danger. You forgot about yourself because of them.”

“Oh, how wrong you are, Lolion,” I gave a shout by calling him in this diminutive name for the first time. “In truth, I was thinking neither about myself not about the danger, besides only now I understood the danger when I looked at that horror left behind us, at that zone of the hurricane from which we escaped. I wasn’t thinking about people, because I was thinking about Florentian, about what he would say about my behaviour if he was next to me. I was trying to do everything as though he had held my hand. I was so full of these thoughts that in the most dangerous moment I saw my dear friend. It seemed as though I could see him, I was feeling his help, and that’s why I was laughing so cheerfully by surprising the captain and perhaps you, too. So your opinion about me is probably better than I deserve it.”

“Your laughter didn’t surprise me tonight, neither your joy nor your cheerfulness. I understood that you were seeing Florentian in front of you, and I understood how great your attachment and loyalty is to him. I think that if this loyalty of yours to him doesn’t begin to stagger – you will achieve a lot in your life by following him. And some day, you will become such help, such support for people, as he is for you at the moment,” I. answered me.

Here, at the stern one could see well that the storm was still raging. The murmur of the sea still reminded me of the shots of cannons time and again. We still had to speak rather loudly by bending close to one to another’s ear.

The distance between us and the zone of the hurricane kept increasing, and now that view which was horrible when we were close to it was incredibly terrible from the distance, too.

If a painter had been standing on the deck next to us and if he drew this unaccustomed range of the sea colours, which was as though artificially divided into the black, menacing, but not especially dangerous waves and the mountains of the green water rising behind the waves and bringing the real death – then everybody looking at such a painting would think that the painter was delirious and that he was painting the delirium of his sickly soul.

It was difficult to tear away from this severe view. The lightning and the heavy shower in the zone of the hurricane had ceased already, too, but the sky was still black, - and the little patches of the bluish velvet were stunning very strangely, they were flashing between the black clouds here and there.

The voice of the captain was heard behind our backs.

“I’ve been cruising for twenty years, I’ve crossed all oceans, I’ve seen lots of storms – including the tropical ones, - but I haven’t experienced anything similar as tonight and I have never gone

through such a power and so many columns of the whirlwind. Look!" suddenly he gave a shout loudly, turned to the left and he was pointing in the direction of his hand.

Two white and bubbling columns of the water, the peaks of which disappeared in the clouds, were standing on the gigantic mountain of the water.

The captain rushed to the wheelhouse, I wanted to run after him, but I stopped me, saying that these columns wouldn't harm us anymore, that they were moving sideways and that there wasn't any deadly danger.

Indeed, the columns were moving sideways, but all of a sudden, I saw how the peaks of the water wall on the right started rising upward and at the same time the stream of the water was turning round, and in a moment one more gigantic column of the water grew from it. With great speed it hurried towards the columns on the left, which were approaching it, and suddenly all of them collided one with another, there was a roar heard, as if the loudest thunder had struck right here – and an abyss appeared in the place of the collision.

The line that separated the sea into two parts cleared away, and the wall of the water was as though chasing us. That was so terrible that I was surprised and I looked at I., not understanding why he didn't hurry to help the people by the wheel. Being in silence, he took my arm and turned my face forward. I was amazed when I saw the clear sky and the outlines of the shore, which were revealing in the distance.

"The captain is right that he rushed at the wheel. The waves will be hitting us strongly again and they won't allow us to reach the shore. If there's enough of coal, water and food reserve on the steamer, it might be that we even won't drop in at the first harbour and that we'll keep sailing. The sea isn't menacing us with death anymore," I. was talking to me. "Such hurricane could hardly repeat one more time, but by judging from everything, the sea will remain stormy for at least a week."

I also could feel the stronger tossing already; the sea began to boil again and it was rustling wrathfully; the wind used to fly towards us in whistling squalls, but the waves weren't reaching the height of the previous mountains anymore.

We went to the captain who was examining the shore through his binoculars. He changed the ship's course. He ordered to call urgently his chief assistant with the report about the reserve of coal, water and food on the ship.

When the chief assistant came, it turned out that the reserve of everything on the ship would be sufficient for two more days, the captain commanded to sail to the open sea again, not turning in at the harbour.

I was convinced of I.'s foresight for the one hundredth time.

Although the strengthening medicine of Ali and Florentian was taking a miraculous effect, not only mine, but everyone's strength was exhausted already. Everyone who had spent the night here, on the deck, looked more like the ghosts than people in the grey light of the gloomy day. Only I. alone was pale, but brisk. The captain simply could hardly stand on his feet.

Having passed the operative management to two of his assistants and to the navigation officer, the captain ordered to distribute a stronger ration of food to his sailors and to go to sleep. He invited us to his cabin where we saw a perfectly laid table.

As soon as I sat down on the chair, I felt that I wouldn't have enough strength to stand up again. I don't remember absolutely anything what happened next.

I came to myself in our cabin. I was strong and cheerful, I had forgotten absolutely everything and I didn't even comprehend where I was. Having lain for about a half an hour, little by little I started remembering and perceiving the surroundings.

The horror of the previous night returned together with my memory. Now the sun was shining already. I got up and put on a white suit which must have been prepared by the careful hands of I. I already was about to find and thank him for his care and attention. Only I was unable to line up all events into one line in any way and to understand how I got into the cabin.

I was ashamed that I was sleeping for so long, while I., apparently, was giving help to people for a long time already.

Exactly at this moment the door opened, and my friend entered the cabin. He was radiating with cheerfulness. I became so happy, as though I hadn't seen him for a year and I fell myself on his neck.

"Thank God! Lovushka, at last you got up," he told me, smiling. "I was already getting ready to drag the fire-hose, because I know your weakness for the waves."

It turns out that I was sleeping for more than twenty-four hours. I couldn't believe it in any way, I kept asking what time it was, when I fell asleep. I. told me how he had to bring me to our cabin in his arms and to put me to sleep, being hungry.

I wanted to eat awfully, but I didn't have to wait for a long time, because the radiant clumsy sailor showed up in the door and reported that the breakfast was served already.

Showing his teeth, with his gaze fixed on me, he gave me a note and whispered to me that it was from the cabin No. 1A of the hospital, from the beautiful lady who was asking me to visit her.

I was very embarrassed. That was the first secret note from a woman to me. I knew perfectly that there was nothing in it what I couldn't read to the first person that I met, not only I. I was angry with myself for such an inexperience, inability to control myself and to remain a person of culture, not turning red like a lad.

Once again that short little word "tact" which the storm had blown out of my head came back to my consciousness. Having sighed, I was greeting it like a distant, unrealizable dream.

The stupid expression of the sailor who was scratching his chin and looking at me mischievously looked very comic, as though he was thinking: "Well, look what a bite he has grabbed, and when did he have time to do it?"

I was always reacting to humour sensitively, so also this time I burst out laughing, the sailor was sniggering, and I. was also laughing when he read all thoughts that were flashing in my face, because he could do it perfectly. The comicality of this scene must have made the sternest person laugh. When I calmed down and looked at I., he looked like a roguish conspirator and he was glittering his eyes not any worse than the yellow-eyed captain.

I put the note in my pocket and declared that I would die of hunger if I don't get any food right now. I was absolutely stunned with the news that it was two o'clock already.

We left the cabin and sat down at the table on the deck. I was eating everything what I. was giving to me, while he himself was laughing, because he said that he was feeding a tiger for the first time in his life.

The captain approached us. He greeted us cheerfully, called me a merry hero, stating that for the first time in his life he saw a person who was rocking with laughter from the bottom of his heart in the presence of the deadly danger.

"I'll create a new sea legend," he was speaking. "There's a legend about the Flying Dutchman. It is a spine-chilling legend, bringing death to every person met. There's a merry legend about the White Brothers who are saving ships and lives, but there's still no legend about the merry Russian who is rocking with laughter in the moment of the menacing death and who is serving out the energy pills to the people fighting against the element. In the report to my operative management I will inform them of all that help that you and your brother have provided to me and everybody on the ship at night. About you, my young hero, I will report individually to both my leaders and everybody on the ship, because the example of such wild fearlessness is an extraordinary event."

I was sitting, totally blushed and embarrassed. I already wanted to tell the captain that he was wrong by estimating my heroism so much, that I. was still guiding me by hand and that, apparently, I was still a burden and not an assistance for him, but I. stealthily squeezed my hand and answered himself to the captain that we were very thankful to him for such appreciation of our night assistance. He also reminded him that the Turks accomplished no less than we did during the storm.

"Oh, yes," the captain answered him. "Undoubtedly, I won't forget about them in my report. They were also acting in a heroic and selfless way, but there's a great difference to be inside of the steamer, protected from the waves, and to be on the deck where a wave could sweep you off at any moment. You've achieved a great deal, youth," he addressed me again. "If you wanted to change your career and to become a sailor, I could make a protection for you in England. With such courage you would become a captain quickly. Now you will be accompanied by the glory of the fearless man in the water, right? And that is the guarantee of the high career in seafaring."

He was glittering with his yellow catlike eyes and extending the glass of champagne to me. I couldn't refuse it and show myself impolite. The captain poured some champagne for I., too, and proposed a toast to the health of the brave ones. He tossed his glass off at a draught and wanted to pour in the second one for himself, but one of his assistants called him with some urgent business.

I., just like me, didn't have any wish to drink the champagne. Without any prearranged plan, we extended our glasses to the clumsy sailor who brought us some ice-cream. I didn't even have time to take my portion, and the glasses were standing empty already. I. told him to take the silver bucket with champagne to the captain's cabin, then he told me.

"We should visit our friends Turks, so that we wouldn't be impolite, if they don't think of visiting us here. They had already visited us for a couple of times and were asking about your health, you also could be more polite with respect to the lady. Read her note at last," he added, after giving me a smile.

As soon as I had time to feel the letter in my pocket, I heard the voices, and both Turks came up to our table.

They greeted me amiably and were glad that the storm hadn't made me ill. The older Turk lifted his son's fez a little, and I saw his shaved skin and a bandage stuck under it. It turned out that when the wave tossed the ship upward, he tapped his head onto the beam. It turned out that I. was dressing his wound. His ointment was functioning so well that today he could only stick his wound and not dress it anymore.

Having stayed with us for a while, the Turks went downstairs to have their breakfast in the joint dining-room.

Finally, I pulled the letter out and opened it.

Chapter 13

The unfamiliar lady from the cabin No. 1A of the hospital

The letter was addressed “to mister junior doctor”. The salutation in the letter was the same. It was written in French.

“I’m very embarrassed to trouble you, mister junior doctor, but I’m worried about my girl; besides, for some reason my boy is crying very often, too. I understand the tactlessness of my addressing to you, but my God – there isn’t a single heart in the whole world, to which I could address in this hour of my suffering and pain. I’m going to my uncle from whom I haven’t received any news for half a year already. I don’t even know if he’s still alive. What is waiting for me in the strange city, not knowing their language, not knowing to do anything else except the hats for the ladies. I’m driving the sad thoughts away from me; I want to be brave; I want to be brave at least for the sake of my children, as the mister senior doctor has told me to. The whole steamer is talking about your courage already. Stand up for me. A majestic, old, Russian duchess has settled in the cabin next to mine. She is indignant that somebody dared to move me, as she has put it “a beggar from the fourth class” into the best cabin, and she demands the doctor to throw us out. I don’t dare to trouble the mister senior doctor or the captain, but I beseech you to protect me, don’t let her to throw us out. Persuade the majestic duchess to allow us to continue our journey in our cabin. We aren’t even leaving our cabin. Everything, even the bath is separate from her, and we aren’t troubling the peace of her majesty with anything. With the great hope that your young heart will hear my entreaty, I Joan Moranjer remain always thankful to you.”

I was trying to read this naïve and exciting letter calmly, but my voice trembled a couple of times, and I saw the face of poor Joan with the tears pouring from her eyes like peas in front of me.

I raised my eyes to I. who was sitting next to me. I recognized that austere wrinkle on his forehead, which I was observing several times when I. had decided to do something.

“Our silly clumsy sailor must have carried this letter during the whole day, hiding it from me and thinking that it was a little love letter,” I. was speaking to me, lost in thought. “Let’s go now, at once. Let’s find the captain, you will interpret the poor woman’s words to him. Take our first-aid kits, too. We will make a round of the whole steamer at the same time, too.”

Having thrown the first-aid kits on our shoulders, we hurried to look for the captain. We found him in the office and explained to him what the matter was. I saw how his eyes flashed and how his lips twisted, but he told us only this.

“Give me ten more minutes, and I will go with you.”

He showed us to sit down on the leather sofa next to him and kept listening for the reports of the chiefs from all the steamer’s subdivisions about the storm’s consequences and for what has been done by repairing the steamer and rendering assistance to the passengers according to his instructions.

Exactly in ten minutes – precisely, clearly, not uttering a single unnecessary word – he dismissed everybody and went with us to the hospital.

Once again by climbing the winding stairs, already familiar to me, we went straight in front of the cabin No. 1A.

Lots of people had gathered in the corridor; a clear and firm voice of the doctor was heard, it was as though contradicting somebody, and a squealing womanly voice stood out, which was speaking English terribly.

“If you don’t want to send her away from here, then I will do it myself. I don’t wish some nasty being cruising next to me. You have to do everything, so that the passengers who have paid such money for the journey wouldn’t have to worry.”

“I repeat to you one more time that such is the captain’s instruction, and he’s the God on the ship, not me. Besides, she isn’t a being – I’m totally amazed at the culture of your language – but she’s a kind and wonderful woman. She has paid in full for her journey in this cabin, while you keep excusing yourself with your nerves disturbed after the storm and you still haven’t paid for your cabin,” once again the calm doctor’s voice was heard.”

“How dare you to talk to me like this? You are a rude fellow. I won’t be waiting until you are so kind as to send the girl that you like away from here. You want to make yourself comfortable and to have an amusement at your hand, on official account. I’m going myself and I will make her leave!” the duchess was squealing.

The doctor became excited.

“God knows what is going on here! You are talking not like an aristocrat, but like...”

The captain stepped forward and blocked the door of the cabin No. 1A with his back, which the old, awkward woman was coming nearer to. She was painted like a doll, she had a wig with the blond curls on. She had smartened herself up with grey silks, she had golden chains, a lorgnette, a medallion and a watch on. Her fat fingers had some expensive rings on.

This old woman who was trying to look younger than her age was even uglier, because she was unable to stand firmly on her feet. Still a young man with an elegant suit was holding her from one side. His face was very sad. From another side – apart from the stick on which she was leaning – a housemaid with a bluish dress, a white elegant apron and a white hood on her head was holding her.

It seemed that she didn’t know the captain and, seeing only a sea officer with two youths at the door of the cabin, she began to squeal in even a thinner voice and, tapping her stick to the floor in a threatening way, she gave a scream.

“I will complain to the captain! What kind of a guard is here at the door of the lewd being? My husband is young, there are lots of young girls here. This is a lewdness! Let me go immediately. I will take care of it myself...”

She didn’t finish her speech, the captain interrupted her. He raised his hand at his cap politely and told her.

“Be so kind as to show your ticket for the cabin No. 2 in which, as I can see, you have settled. I’m the captain.”

He whistled in his own way, and a couple of strong sailors ran into the corridor.

"Make sure there are no outside persons left in the corridor, who aren't cruising in the cabins of the hospital," he commanded them.

The captain's command that was uttered in his metal voice was fulfilled immediately. The crowd of the curious persons disappeared immediately, only the old woman with her assistants, the doctor, the trained nurse and me with I. were left. The old woman was looking at the captain impudently with her small and angry eyes, apparently imagining herself to be such a peak of majesty, in front of whom everybody had to fall in prone position.

"It seems that you don't know who I am," she kept speaking in a squealing and arrogant way.

"I know that you are cruising on the steamer entrusted to me, in the cabin No. 25 of the first class. When you were boarding the steamer, you read the rules that during the journey all passengers, as well as the team, obey to the orders of the captain. There were also the posters put that there were the cabins of the hospital available on the steamer for the separate price. Now you are exactly here. Please show me your extra ticket," the captain answered her.

The old woman threw her head back proudly, stating that they shouldn't be speaking about her ticket, but about that woman from the adjacent cabin.

"The doctor took his friend out of the hold and settled her in the best cabin with all separate conveniences. I, the brightest duchess, demand to move her back to her previous place immediately, exactly where it suits her best," the old woman was demanding with her terrible English in a high tone.

"Do you, dear, understand what I am asking you? I'm asking you to show me the ticket for this cabin. If you don't show it to me right now, soon you will be moved back to the cabin No. 25 for which you have paid, in addition you will have to pay a triple fine for sailing without the ticket in the hospital."

It seemed that the captain's voice and especially the threat of the fine touched the most unpleasant string of the greedy old woman. She blushed, her head began to shiver, she wanted to say something else, but she was only panting out of anger and she had a suffocating cough.

"In addition, the breach of the determinate rules and the captain's orders, the contradiction to his instructions on the ship is called a riot. So if you allow yourself to utter at least one more word, at least one more tapping of the stick which is disturbing the peace of the patients, I will command these strong men to send you into the solitary like a rebellious element."

Now the old woman herself was already frightened, not to speak of her young husband who must have been absolutely stunned at his situation in this scandal and who couldn't understand the mean behaviour and the whole shame of the old woman, his wife.

The captain ordered to open the door of the hospital's cabin No. 2 in which the old woman was travelling. The view which opened up in front of my eyes made even me to double up with laughter. The widest feminine pants were hanging in the most visible place, not the cleanest at all. The beds were muddled up, as if somebody had twisted and rolled in them. All sorts of the clothes, even the most intimate, were scattered everywhere – on the tables, chairs and on the floor.

"What kind of the Gipsy encampment is that?" the captain gave a shout. "Nurse, how could you allow such a mess on the steamer, and even at the hospital?"

The nurse, an elderly Englishwoman, who was full of understanding of her value was explaining that she was in the cabin three times herself, she sent a servant to tidy up the cabin two times, but in half of hour everything looked as though after a massacre again. Everybody was asking the duchess

about her ticket, while the cashier even went looking for the captain, but apparently, they had missed each other.

The captain whistled again, and a junior officer came hurriedly. He received the captain's command to move the duchess back into her first class cabin instantly, to demand and obtain the triple price from her for taking two places in the hospital as the fine for travelling without the ticket and to wash the cabin immediately.

"I will complain to your operative management," the old woman spoke in a wheeze.

"And I will complain not only to my operative management, but also to the Russian authorities. Also I will tell about your behaviour to His Majesty grand duke Vladimir who will board our ship in the next harbour."

Then the junior officer went up to the old woman and offered her to follow him to the first class. It was clear that the old woman was ready to scratch the captain's eyes out. Being so helpless, she gave vent to her anger to her husband and housemaid, calling them asses and idiots, not knowing even how to hold her properly. Being like a Dante's inferno creature with the shaking head, covered with lather, coughing hoarsely like an old dog, the old woman disappeared in the corridor, accompanied by her assistants.

The captain said good-bye to us, asked to assure the lady Joan Moranje in his name that there was no danger for her on the steamer and that English laws were protecting her. He also asked us to make the round of the passengers of the third and fourth classes, because after dinner, in the evening they would be moved back to their previous places which now were being washed.

Having told to wash and tidy the old woman's cabin once again, the captain ordered the doctor to accept only those passengers in it, whom I and I. would decide to send here. While saying good-bye to us, the captain added that his duty was starting at six o'clock in the evening and that we could find him at the wheel. Soon he disappeared on the winding stair through which we had come down.

We knocked at the cabin No. 1A. A melodious female voice invited us in French: "Come in", and it seemed to me that I could hear the tears in her voice.

First of all, when I entered the cabin I made sure that the tears were really streaming down the mother's cheeks, while her children had buried themselves on her shoulders. As though being frightened to see a scarecrow, they had put their arms round her and pressed close to her.

The mother was sitting squeezed into the corner of the sofa. All of them were so horror-struck, they were so disappointed that I simply became rooted to the floor and turned into Lovushka – the catcher of the crows.

I. pushed me and whispered to me that I should take the girl in my arms and soothe her mother, like the captain had told me to.

Having made sure that we were wishing her happiness and that we brought her only joy, the mother kept asking us if she really could stay in this cabin with her children up to Constantinople. It seemed that there was no end to her happiness. She was looking at I. like one is looking at the saint's picture during one's prayer. She addressed me like a brother who could protect her on the earth.

The girl wound her arms round my neck and didn't listen to any persuasions of her mother anymore to get off my knees. She was kissing me, stroking my hair and she felt sorry for it to be so short. She was telling me that she was dreaming of me and that she would never part with me, that I was her true

uncle, that she knew exactly that the benevolent fairy would certainly send me to her. Soon the little strong man also settled on my knees, and the pranks started, which I was enjoying, too. I would even excite them with all sorts of tricks.

In the beginning their mother was trying to take the children from me, but now she was only laughing merrily and she probably wanted to romp a little with us, too, but the presence of I. to whom she was simply praying put her in a much serious frame of mind.

I. asked her what they were eating. It turned out that they hadn't had anything in their mouths since the early breakfast, because from that time their raging neighbour was always demanding to throw them out, while we came only to the finale of this tragicomedy.

I. told her that she had to feed her children immediately and to put them to bed, that she also had to eat herself, to take a bath and to sleep a little if, of course, she wanted to, so that her and her children's health would recover until they reach Constantinople.

I. diagnosed that the girl had a slight, intermittent fever, that today she was healthy, but tomorrow she would have an attack again. Her mother's eyes became widely opened out of horror. I. was soothing her, telling her that he would give the girl some medicine and that they would have to spend as much time as possible on the deck of the hospital, lying on arm-chairs, then they would recover faster from their utter physical exhaustion.

He asked Joan to take care of the food immediately, he calmed her, explaining to her that we would make the round of the passengers of the steamer and would come back to her in a couple of hours. Then we will give the medicine to her and her children to drink and we will talk.

When we were leaving we also asked the trained nurse to feed the children and their mother more substantially. She must have been a kind woman: the children were reaching for her immediately, and we left calm about their destiny at least at this day.

We hadn't made several steps when the doctor met us and asked to visit that girl and her mother from the first class, whom we cured.

"They passed the whole storm sleeping, now they are as fresh as roses and they would like to see the doctor who has helped them so much, so that they could thank him personally," the ship's doctor was telling us.

We followed him to the cabin and saw two very elegantly dressed brunettes who were sitting in arm-chairs, reading books and who didn't remind of those helpless creatures of the stormy night at all.

When the ship's doctor introduced us to them, the older woman stretched both of her hands out to I., sincerely thanking him for saving them.

She was sputtering Italian words so quickly, with all expansiveness which was characteristic to that nation that I didn't understand half of that flow of her words, although I myself could speak that language well; I only understood that she was thanking us for their saved lives in the name of both of them.

The girl wasn't a beauty, but her big, black eyes were so gentle and kind that they suited any classical beauty. She also stretched both of her hands out and asked us for permission to show her gratitude in something.

I. answered her that personally we didn't need anything, but if they wanted to show their kindness, we wouldn't refuse their help. Both ladies expressed their ardent wish to help us. I. told them

about the unfortunate widow Frenchwoman with two small children, who had lost her husband in an accident, who was saved by the captain from starvation and the storm by giving shelter to both her and her sick children in the hospital.

Both women were touched by poor widow's destiny and they pulled their wallets out, but I. told them that we would get the money for them, but that the poor lady needed some clothes and at least a complementary linen.

"Oh, this is absolutely simple," younger lady was speaking. "Both of us can sew perfectly, we will find the material and will dress them up smartly. Just introduce us to them and don't worry about anything else. We'll try to repay you by giving help to your friend."

I. warned them that the poor lady was frightened. He told them in a few words about the nasty experience of the old duchess. Both woman felt vexed through tears. They told us that not all ladies were feeling and thinking like gorgons.

We agreed to take them to Joan when we come back after making our round of the steamer.

While we were saying good-bye one to another, I. told me to pull Ali's box out. He divided one of the pills into eight parts, melted one of the parts in water, gave it for the girl to drink and told her to lie down for a while until we came back.

We came down to the third class. Everything here was already put in order, there weren't even any tracks of the storm left, but the people were still lying down, not having enough strength to move. Only several Turks looked brisker, while the Gipsies were worthy of compassion. Now the sea was provoking such a horror for them that they crushed into several cabins and were frightened even to take a look at the water.

In the beginning they were afraid of us, too, but when the first ones of them decided to take our drops, when they stood up and started walking on the deck, the rest of them were asking themselves for the wonderful homoeopathy.

Soon all cabins became empty, and when an officer came and asked everybody to come back to their own places in the fourth class which was already put in order and prepared for them, the passengers dashed downstairs. They were joking, often they were doing so rather dirty.

The women themselves decided to settle in that shielded part of the deck where they were moved before the storm. They pushed all men out of there, and that was also accompanied with obscene and indecent jokes of the Gipsies.

Unwittingly, I thought about calm and tender poor Joan. The captain saved her from so many menacing dangers!

Having left everybody recovered downstairs, we went to the third class, but here we met both Turks who had already had time to make the round of it. Then together with them we passed on to the second class where everybody was healthy, only there were many weak ones. Majority of them were still lying, not having any strength even to eat, and our medicine really came in handy here.

When we went up to the first class we found everybody annoyed here. It turned out that the duchess who went into overdrive in the hospital was pouring her helpless anger on her husband and housemaid, so the neighbours from the next cabins lost their patience and expressed their opinion about such a behaviour. Word after word and there was a scandal into the very height of which we stepped.

Having seen us, the old woman thought that the captain was also with us. She was frightened, so she shut the door of her cabin loudly and hid herself there.

She was accompanied by the joint laugh of everybody. The public here was feeling better, but the weak patients were lying in some of the cabins. An elderly man approached us. He must have held out the storm with difficulty. He was sallow, he had bags under his eyes. He asked us to visit his daughter and his grandson, the state of whom worried him very much.

Having entered their cabin, we saw a pale, red-haired woman with long plait and a pale, thin, about eight year old boy who must have been seriously ill. They were lying in their beds.

The elderly man addressed his daughter in Greek, she opened her eyes, looked at I. who had leant over her and told him in Greek.

"I won't survive until the end of this terrible journey. Don't pay any attention to me. If you can, please save my son and my father. If I die, my son won't have anybody left from our relatives, except my father. I become horror-struck when I think how they will be living," and the tears started running from her eyes.

I. told me to pour some drops from the dark bottle and answered her in the same language.

"You will be absolutely healthy tomorrow. You had a heart attack, but the storm has subsided, your attack stopped and it won't repeat anymore. Take these drops, turn round on your right side and sleep. Tomorrow you will get up earlier than the others, you will be strong and you will nurse your son and your father, and we'll do this for you today."

He raised her hand that was as pale as an antique statue and poured the medicine into her mouth. Then he helped her to turn round, covered her and went up to the boy.

He was so weak that he could hardly open his eyes; it seemed that he couldn't even perceive anything. I. was holding his thin, little hand for a long time, he was listening for his breathing and finally, asked the man.

"Has he been in such a state for a long time?"

"Yes," he answered. "The ship's doctor gave him all sorts of medicine several times already, but unfortunately, his state is growing only worse. He's as though fainted away from the beginning of the storm, and nothing can help him. Is he really going to die?"

The old man's voice began to quiver, tears showed up in his eyes and, having turned away from us, he covered his face with his hands.

"No, there's a long way till his death. But why haven't you tempered his body with gymnastics and games? He's sickly and weak not because he's ill, but only because he's become feeble due to the poor routine. If you want your grandson to live, always keep him in the fresh air, teach him to ride on horseback, to row, to swim, gymnastics. In fact you are killing your child," I. was explaining to him.

"Yes, yes, you are right, doctor, but we are son unfortunate, nothing goes right with our lives, we have lost all of our relatives so suddenly and now we are trembling one for another," the old man was speaking always with the same bitterness.

"If you keep protecting one another like this, soon all of you will be dead. You, a man, should find strength and energy within yourself, which namely your daughter lacks so much, and you should start educating your grandson in another way. And besides that, all of you must start a new life. If you agree with

my method of treatment, I will be responsible for your grandson's life and I will be treating him. If you aren't going to follow my instructions, I won't even start," I. continued.

"I stake my life on it that everything will be done as precisely as possible," the old man interrupted him.

"Well, let's start then."

I. uncovered the boy, pulled the warm socks off his thin feet, as well as his sweater and asked for another shirt. While he himself was changing his clothes, he told me to melt a part of the pill from the green Florentian's box and even a smaller part from the black Ali's box in the half filled glass of water. When I put the part from the black box into the solution with the part from the green one, the water in the glass as though boiled up and became bright red.

I. took the glass from me, put some more special drops from three little bottles into it and started pouring the mixture into the child's mouth with a small spoon. While I was holding his head, I was thinking that the boy wouldn't be able to swallow even a drop, but he did swallow the mixture and also drank the last sip from the glass himself.

I put the child's head on the pillow carefully. I. told me to take the biggest bottle out of the first-aid kit. He washed his hands, and I followed his example. Then he told me to stretch out the boy's hand with his palm up, while he himself was rubbing and massaging his hand up to his shoulder with the liquid from that bottle, every time rubbing his palm powerfully. His hand turned from absolutely white into reddish one. It even reddened. In the same way he rubbed his another hand, too, then his legs and finally his entire body. He oiled the boy's temples, behind his ears and his vertex with the liquid from another bottle.

Now the boy was all reddish, suddenly he opened his eyes and told that he wanted to eat very much. The old man called the man-servant and ordered the hot chocolate and white bread, as I. had indicated him.

While they were bringing the chocolate, I. gave the old man the medicine to drink and advised him to eat, too. He was refusing in the beginning, but when they brought the food for the boy, he decided that he could drink some chocolate anyway.

I. offered him rather to eat some semolina porridge and to drink some coffee. He told him that the chocolate didn't serve him very well at the moment.

When they brought the food for the old man, and while he was eating, I. didn't take his eyes off the boy. He was observing him and kept asking him if he wasn't cold, but the boy answered him that his entire body was burning, that he had never felt so warm. To the question if he had any pain, he answered that there was a bolt in his head and therefore his forehead and his eyes ached very much, but now it seemed that the doctor had taken that bolt out, because it wasn't screwing or griping pains in his eyes anymore.

I. gave him some more drops and advised him to try to fall asleep. The boy agreed willingly, and indeed, he was sleeping in ten minutes, breathing equally and peacefully.

"And now it's your turn," I. told the old man by extending the medicine to him.

He drank it with no objections. I. offered him to go to bed. He explained to him that we would look in again in several hours and that now all of them should sleep peacefully.

We left this cabin in which we had stayed for so long. We passed by the crowd of the smartened up ladies and gentlemen who already started to take their proudly elegant appearance and who were even trying to wisecrack and to flirt.

Our new acquaintances Italians were already waiting for us impatiently. They had prepared many bundles of linen and clothes for Joan. I. was thanking both ladies, but he asked them to postpone their acquaintance and help till tomorrow, because today both the mother and her children were still very tired after the storm, they were even sickly weak. The Italians were very disappointed, they felt sorry for the poor children and they said good-bye to us till tomorrow.

Not lingering anywhere else, we went straight to Joan.

If I hadn't slept all day, I would have probably already fallen down on the ground with tiredness due to this trip up and down the stairs and this constant encounter with different people, with the sickly, passionate outbursts of their anger, fear and disappointment.

In Joan's cabin we found her children still sleeping, while she was sitting in the corner of the sofa. She had her cleaned dress on, with combed hair, but her face was so sad and pale that my throat was squeezed.

"I have already stopped waiting for you," she was talking to us, while her lips only gave a ghost smile, because her eyes were already full of tears.

"We were delayed, because we had to help one boy," I. answered her with such tenderness in his voice, which I hadn't heard from him up to now. "But why do you think that we could break our word and not to come? Are you really so suspicious and do you trust people so little?"

"If you knew how I trusted people up to now and how cruelly I was disappointed in their generosity and benevolence, then you wouldn't blame me for my fear to make a mistake this time, too. I'm afraid even of thinking about this magic help given to me. I'm still waiting that maybe my journey in this cabin is only a dream, that maybe it will clear like a fog and the only consequence of the fog will remain – the dew of my eyes," Joan was talking.

"I feel for you from the bottom of my heart," I. was talking to her, "but every man must remain energetic and fight instead of falling into a gloom or drowning in his own tears when the storm of life befalls on him, even if it is as horrible and unexpected as this storm of the sea. Think for a while, what would have happened to the people of this streamer if the captain and the ship's crew had been confused and if instead of fighting against the hurricane, they would have surrendered to the element and allowed themselves to be seized by fear? Your situation isn't helpless. It is true, you have lost your husband, love and welfare at once, but you still have your children, this goal in your life was left. Why do you go back to your past in your thoughts, which doesn't exist anymore? It is impossible to lose your past for the second time. Why do you think about your future with a horror, about which you don't know anything and which is impossible to lose as well. The future doesn't exist, too. Only the present can be lost, this hurrying now, and that depends only on man's possessed energy and cheerfulness. Remember your behaviour and think for a while how much unnecessary suffering only because of your fear about your future you've experienced. Did this fear help you by anything? And did at least one of those terrible scenes which your mind was creating come true? Arrange your inner world exactly as you have tried to arrange your exterior. Throw out of your head your thoughts about poverty and helplessness. Search for strength for your new life, activity and fight for your own and your children's lives and happiness in your faithful love to your dead husband. Don't cry so badly. Remember that you bemoan only yourself, your loss, your ruined egoistic happiness. You think that you bemoan your husband and his broken life, but what can we understand and know about the

destinies of the people which are passing us by? Think from your hard lot that your life could also stop suddenly as it has happened to your husband. Live your life as if every moment you would give the last responsibility of your care for your children and all those people with whom destiny brings us together. Don't give up to sadness, be the master of yourself, forget yourself and think only about your children. Fill your day not with your gloomy thoughts about poverty and helplessness, but try not to cry with all your loyalty and selfless mother love, no matter how difficult that would be. Hide your tears and fear from your children, with your example teach them kindness and to meet every daybreak with joy. Don't be afraid of anything now. Even if your prediction proves correct that your uncle isn't living in Constantinople anymore, don't lose your courage, put all your hopes not to other people, but rely upon yourself. Tomorrow we will introduce you to two wonderful, very kind-hearted ladies. They will help you and your children to renew your toilets with great pleasure. And concerning your job and a possibility to make a living in Constantinople for you with your children, then two our friends are cruising here, on this steamer, who own a rather big enterprise in Constantinople. Even if they don't need a person who can speak French as perfectly as you do, they will help to find a job for you. Perhaps, you will have an opportunity to open a studio of female hats or anything else what would allow you to provide for your own and your children's lives. But it doesn't matter in what way you would have to solve your problems, always try to remain absolutely calm, concentrated and cheerful, your tranquillity and selflessness are the most important. One more time I'm asking you, please stop crying. Don't look back and try to think only about this now passing moment and about what you are doing right now at this moment. Your children's health is the most important for you now. I think that your daughter has caught a nasty form of fever, and you will have to be rather tired of nursing her."

I couldn't take my eyes off Joan, just like she couldn't take her eyes off I. I had never observed a woman's face for so long. Now I had seen so many expressions in it that it was simply impossible to describe all of them.

First of all, an endless astonishment was reflected in this face. Then a resentment and a protest slipped. Such a disappointment and sadness replaced them that I already wanted to meddle into the conversation and to explain I.'s words to her, which she must have understood wrongly, but little by little her face was clearing up and her weeping was dying away. The expression of a bliss was revealed in her eyes, which I had already seen when we visited her for the first time, and she was looking at I. like at a saint painting.

I. was talking to her in French. His speech was correct, but only with a little accent which I had never noticed when he was talking in any other language. I thought for a while that he must have learned French when he was already a grown-up.

"I cannot express my gratitude for your and apparently, I won't be able to understand everything what you were telling me here," Joan was talking in a quiet and musical voice. "But I feel a wonderful change in my heart. That what you told me, that the loyalty of my love to my husband mustn't be the tears by bemoaning him, but it must be an activity for my children, that lit a light within me, it gave me an unspeakable self-confidence. I'm not a lady of leisure. I married my husband who was an ordinary worker against my parents' will. My parents were well-off farmers, and I was their only daughter. They loved and spoiled me in their own way, but they insisted on me marrying our neighbour who was an elderly, rich and very stingy landowner, and I had an aversion for him. My parents were persuading me for a long time. I was only sixteen years old and I was almost about to agree with this terrible marriage already, but by chance, at the party at one of my friends I saw my future husband – Michel Moranjer. I understood instantly that even death was unable to frighten me, and that I wouldn't marry the rich old man. I was dancing with Moranjer during the entire evening, while he was begging me to keep a date tomorrow. Nobody could distract my thoughts off Michel. I went through the real hell at home for six weeks. Both my

mother and my father were nagging me so much that I remember that time with a terror up to now, although eight years have already passed. And then an opportunity offered me to come to Russia. We got to the factory of rubber products of a French company in Petersburg. We were living perfectly. I was working at the French hat shop where the ladies were simply buying up the products of my job. We were so happy and then..." and the poor lady burst into tears again.

Having accumulated her strength, she finished her story in a voice that we could hardly hear.

"An accident happened, because the machine by which my husband was working was in bad order, but the manager kept dragging out the maintenance until an irretrievable disaster happened."

"Don't reopen your old sores. Wipe your tears. Your children are waking up, you have to preserve your nerves. Your strength is also overtaxed," I. kept talking to her tenderly like before. "Set yourself the nearest task of restoring the strength of your children. You must give the medicine to your girl, so that the new attack would be weakened, and tomorrow, in spite of the children's weakness, you have to lay them down on the deck. We'll come to you after the breakfast and help you."

Joan was listening to I. like one is listening to a prophet. Her cheeks were shining brightly, her eyes were burning, and so much strength and determination showed up in her entire weak figure that I was stunned by that contrast of how she looked when we found her here and now when we were leaving.

We said good-bye to her and left, accompanied with the shouts of joy of the awaked kids, because they didn't want to let us go in any way. When the door of the cabin closed after us, I felt an utter physical exhaustion. I took the tragedy of the sincere Joan's story so deeply to my heart, I was swallowing the tears which were squeezing my throat so many times that I lost all my strength during that hour.

I. took my arm, gave me a friendly smile and told me that he sympathized with me in the meeting of the first difficult tests of my new life.

I could hardly reach our cabin. We changed our clothes and sat down at the laid table where my nurse clumsy sailor was already waiting for us.

I didn't want to eat anything for the first time and I didn't want to talk about anything. In comparison with the morning waves, the sea was calm, but the streamer was still being rocked strongly. I. gave me a sweet from his orange box. Because of it, my cheerfulness returned, but I still didn't want to talk about anything. I refused I.'s proposal to visit the Turks in an hour categorically and I told him that I already had enough of people and that I simply needed to be alone and to be silent for a while.

"My poor Lovushka," I. was talking to me tenderly. "It is very difficult to pass from the naïve childishness to the stormy life of a man, which instantly demands him to open and strain his every nerve and energy. Lately you already had many possibilities to observe the people's destinies yourself, to hear them talking about them. You see how unexpected the blows of life can be, how free a man in his consciousness should be, with what flexibility he has to switch and join his new life, and how it is best not to wait for something from the future, but to act in every moment. He must act with love and overcoming, thinking about the general wellbeing, and not only about his personal success."

I. sat down on the arm-chair next to me, but we weren't fated to be silent for a little longer, because suddenly the captain's steps and his voice were heard on the stairs. He had already made friends with us once and for all, he was simply idolizing me and calling me a merry fellow and a bold spirit, although I was trying to deny this as much as possible.

I. rose and came to meet the captain, so I could stay alone. He invited him to come to his cabin.

I really needed to be alone. My soul, my thoughts and feelings looked like the stormy sea, and the waves of my spiritual storm were attacking one another, they collided one with another, they broke, foamed and bubbled, not bringing any calming to me, not drawing me to any conclusions.

From hundreds of the events that had befallen on me unexpectedly I was unable to distinguish a single one of them, in which a logical connection of things would have been completely clear to me. It seemed to me that I could see only some unreal mysteriousness everywhere, and I couldn't tolerate neither secrets nor miracles. The words of Florentian often used to come to light in the chaos of my thoughts: "There are no miracles, there's only one or another level of knowledge," but I couldn't understand them, too.

From all my feelings, all my impressions, two of them were prevailing in my soul: love to my brother and love to Florentian. I had never loved a single woman. Not a single hand of a woman had ever caressed me, I hadn't experienced neither my mother's nor my sister's tenderness, but what love was, what the real devotion was, not criticizing, but idolizing one – I perceived that, because I loved my brother-father so much that I was carrying out all my matters, all my deeds and actions in such a way as though my brother had been next to me and I had consulted him for every move of spirit. There was only one thing that I had kept to myself – that was my talent of a writer, but in this case I was following my desire to protect my brother-father from his poor scribbler brother-son.

This love to my brother was the essence of my whole life, it was its foundation. With this love I was creating my present and my future, besides I was looking at the present from above, for me it was only the introduction to that wonderful life which we would start living together as soon as I would finish my studies.

Now I had an opportunity to see my childish loss of sight. Earlier I wasn't reflecting who my brother was, how he was living. Now I could see the part of his life – both personal and social, - in which I didn't exist. It was the real disaster for me, almost as painful as Joan's misfortune. And when I was crying for her, I was also crying for myself...

I didn't understand anything: what role Nal was playing and is playing in the performance of my brother's life, what place my brother occupied in the revolutionary movement, how he was connected with Ali and Florentian? The truth is, everything seemed like a miracle to me here, I perceived my great ignorance and how I wasn't prepared for that life which I had to step into now.

I was thinking that one heart could love only one person and only once in its life, like I loved my brother, and I didn't notice at all how my heart broadened and let one more man in, who surrounded it as though with a bright ring and occupied it completely, leaving the images of my brother Nikolay in the centre of that ring.

I didn't see double in my love to Florentian and my brother – I united both of loves within myself, often merging both objects into one painful sigh of longing and a wish to meet them...

I had never experienced such power of charm with which Florentian had enslaved me. A new and strange understanding of the word "enslaved" showed up in my consciousness. Actually, the captivity of my heart and my thoughts used to merge with some kind of charm and joy which that man was spreading round him. The entire atmosphere round him was breathing not only of the power and self-confidence, but having gotten into it, I used to rejoice at my happiness to live one more day, one more moment next to him.

While being next to him, I wasn't feeling neither fear nor doubts nor thoughts about tomorrow – this man was spreading only creative energy of an action into his surroundings.

With the absent-mindedness that was characteristic to me, I forgot about everyone and everything, I forgot the time, the place, my perception of the space disappeared – I was flying to my wonderful friend in my thoughts and I was so full of him that once again, like at night during the storm, it seemed to me that I could see him.

As though a round window opened in the dark clouds, and I saw the mirage of my dreams, my Florentian with white clothes and his curly, golden hair.

I rose from the arm-chair, ran to the border of the deck and as though I heard his voice: “I’m with you, my boy. Remain loyal to me and you will reach your goal, you will help your brother, and we will see each other again.”

A stormy joy took hold of me. Some kind of a power flowed into my entire body, it became like iron. I felt happy and unusually calm.

“Well, how is my young friend, bold spirit – merry soul?” I heard the captain’s voice behind me. “It seems that the wonderful clouds of this evening are alluring you to the sky?”

I was unable to understand what was going on right away, I also didn’t turn around right away, but when I did, it seemed to me that not only the captain, but even I. was surprised by my changed face, because both of them were looking at me wonderstruck...

As though wishing to protect me from the captain, I. embraced me and pressed to himself powerfully.

“Well, the Russians can make surprises! What has happened to you? You are radiating beauty like a jewel,” the captain was talking to me, smiling. “Well, here’s whom you can be! Now I’m already not surprised at all that not only the beauty from the hospital, but also the young Italian and the Greek are asking only about you. Now I understand what the powers, besides your courage, are hiding in you.”

Having looked at the dark clouds regretfully, in which the mirage of my love vanished, I answered the captain silently.

“You are extremely wrong. I’m not a hero or a Don Juan at all. I’m an ordinary Lovushka, the catcher of the crows. Namely now I was catching my dream, but I didn’t catch it.”

“Well,” the captain made a helpless gesture with his hands, “if it’s too little for you to disturb the hearts of three women during three days – let’s not forget the storm, too – then I only have to add my old sea-dog’s heart which is riddled by life on the scales of your victories. Young friend, I’m your captive, let’s come to drink brotherhood.”

I was unable to refuse such a sincere invitation of the captain in any way, but it seemed to me that the obligation of politeness had never been so difficult for me.

“Think about Florentian,” I. whispered to me. “It’s not always easy for him, too, but he’s always charming. Now try to render his charm to the people round us.”

These words urged me for the new use of joy that was boiling in me. After some time both the captain and the Turks who were present here were rocking with laughter from the play of my words and the causticity which I succeeded to express well.

Soon the evening turned into the night, and early in the morning we already had to sail into the B.'s harbour to replenish the water, coal and food supplies, and to unload the cattle and a part of the horses, too.

Having excused for being tired, we said good-bye to the company and went to our cabin.

We still couldn't sleep for a long time. I was sharing my thoughts, my longing for my brother, my loyalty to Florentian, my mirage and the hallucinations of my hearing with I. I. was telling me that I shouldn't think about the mirage and illusions, that I should think only about the main point of the words that reached me. It wasn't important how I received the news, it was important what kind of the news it was for me and what powers it aroused within me.

"Remember well the feelings of self-confidence and joy, which came into being within you today, memorize that peace which you felt deep in your heart when you seemed to see and hear Florentian. If you ever have to start any great job, never doubt your success when those feelings are within you. An absolute man's loyalty to an idea, as well as his loyalty to love, will always lead him to victory."

I embraced I. powerfully and I kissed him. From the bottom of my heart I thanked him for taking care of me and I went to bed, being reconciled myself to myself and to the whole universe, thanking life for its light and beauty.

Chapter 14

Stop in B. and unexpected impressions in it

In the morning I woke up brisk and rested. I was dreaming of Florentian, and the feeling of this meeting him and talking to him was so real that I even smiled to my ability to live with images.

The sun was shining, the tossing could hardly be felt, and the first thing that surprised me was the shore in the horizon, which was decorated with subtropical plants. The clumsy sailor shot up next to me and he explained to me that soon we would sail into the small bay of B., showing the rather big and charming town, stretched out in the distance.

I. climbed up onto the deck, he greeted me very joyfully and offered me to hurry to drink my coffee, so that we could still have time to drop in at Joan's and to prepare her for meeting the Italians.

We sat down to have our breakfast. The captain went up to us, he was laughing and he gave me a perfumed letter.

"My friend, you can tell others what a modest boy you are. The daughter was asking me to hand you this and she was always trying to avoid her mother seeing her," the captain was talking to me, while tapping me on the shoulder.

I was laughing, as I probably would have been laughing from anything today, because everything inside of me was laughing and rejoicing. I gave the letter to I. I told him that I was so hungry that I couldn't tear myself away from the sandwich and I asked him to read the content of the letter for me.

The captain was indignant at such a light-mindedness of mine and he was persuading me that only now he understood my childish inexperience in love affairs, and that I had to read the letters from women myself, because women were mysterious creatures and they could play me the most unexpected tricks.

Nevertheless, I convinced I. to read the note, besides I asked him to read it loudly, so that the postman would hear it himself.

"Well, what an interesting boy," the captain uttered, laughing and he took a seat at our table.

As I expected, the letter was from the young Italian and it was very matter-of-fact one. She was writing that both of them, she and her mother, were asking us to introduce them to our friend as soon as possible, because there were many good shops in B. where they could buy clothes, linen and foot-wear for the children. Before doing so, they needed to fit the children and to dart a glance at their mother's figure. The letter ended with the post-script that we, of course, wouldn't refuse to accompany them, that they knew the town perfectly, but they would be glad to have a company of men who knew the local language, because they might have trouble with the Russian language.

The captain was a little disappointed with the content of the letter, but he kept trying to make me believe that it was only an innocent pretext, and that the sequel of the love story was foreseen both tomorrow and on the day after tomorrow, because he could clearly see my reflection in the girl's eyes.

We finished our breakfast. I was joking that the black eyes of the Italian would go well with the yellowish eyes of my new friend, while I myself would rather wait for the blue ones, - I might be lucky.

While joking, we were going downstairs and turned straight to Joan. Instead of a friendly moral, the captain only rocked his head and shook his finger at me.

We found Joan worried. Both of her children were tossing, they were in fever. She told us that her children woke her up at seven o'clock in the morning, they were very joyful, they drank some chocolate, but then all of a sudden, about half an hour ago, the youngster complained to her of a headache. Then her girl was also complaining of a headache. She didn't even have time to put them to bed, and both of them were already raving in fever.

I examined the children carefully, he pulled a very nice, cut bottle out of his pocket, which I hadn't yet seen, and gave children the medicine to drink.

"Don't worry," he addressed Joan. "It could have been even worse. The fever will be gone in a couple of hours, and the children will feel well again, but that doesn't mean that they will be recovered. I've warned you that you would still have to take a considerable care of them, right?"

"I'm ready to take care of them during my entire life, I only wish that they would be healthy and happy," Joan answered him by holding her tears heroically.

I noticed a change that had happened within her. One cannot say about such young woman that suddenly she became old, but my heart was aching from the thought that only now she was really starting to understand her entire situation, and a grief was already taking root within her.

I asked her to bring the children on the deck, to tuck them in blankets and to leave them until our next visit. He offered Joan to lie down on the little wicker bed next to them. He warned her that the children would wake up absolutely healthy in two or three hours, but she had to hold them in their beds, to feed them and to keep them amused with the toys which we would bring her from the town.

Having helped her to lie down next to her children, we told her that we would be back soon with our friends whom we had already mentioned to her, but that she had to stay in her bed and to talk with the guests in a lying position.

We hurried to the Italians whom we found already prepared to go to the town. Having warned them that Joan and her children were still sick, we accompanied them to her.

Having entered the Joan's cabin, both women embraced her sincerely, they went up to the children on their tip toe and carefully and almost fell into tears, because they were so touched by their beauty, weakness and their feverishly burning little cheeks.

Both Italians and Joan were very tactful and attentive. Contrary to the temperament and the tattle that was characteristic to this nation, they were speaking little, but their every word and movement were telling about their respect and sympathy to the pain of the poor mother.

The young Italian fitted the feet and the little bodies of the children very tenderly and carefully; of course, I helped her. The spasms of pain distorted her face several times, her heart must have already experienced the drama of love and heartbreak, too.

In the meanwhile, the senior lady fitted Joan, although she was insisting that personally she didn't need anything, that all children's clothes were instantly stolen on the steamer, as soon as she turned away from the suitcase.

The ladies said good-bye to Joan. They asked her to take care of her health, to think only about her children and to leave the worries about the clothes to them. Having smiled to Joan tenderly, the

Italians left. I followed them, while I. still lingered by the children and he caught up with us only on the lower deck where the little gangways to the shore were already stretched out.

The steamer had to stop at the harbour during the entire day and to cast off only at nine o'clock in the evening. We didn't need to hurry anywhere, but I. wanted to buy the toys for the children as soon as possible, so that after waking up, they would stay in their beds until the evening.

The town to which we came was very cosy and beautiful, it was all buried in verdure. The rarest trees were growing in parks, houses were mostly one-storeyed and white.

Soon we found a toy shop, picked out a pile of different toys and sent them to Joan whose sad look kept following me.

I wanted to bring the toys to her myself, but I. whispered to me that we would buy the clothes for Joan and her children together with the Italians and accompany them back to the steamer, then we would have to hurry to visit one of Ali's and Florentian's friend, where some news might be waiting for us and, depending on those news, we would either had to continue our journey by the steamer to Constantinople or to ride on horseback towards the Turkish border and to try to get there by land, and that would be more difficult and would take more time.

I was terror-struck. I wanted to shout out: "And what about Joan?", but I. only put his finger to his lips, took my arm and answered to some question of the Italians.

I was stunned by the possible separation with Joan. Her destiny without us was like a splinter stuck in my heart. I turned into Lovushka the catcher of the crows in a flash, everything went clean out of my mind, and if not the strong I.'s hand which was controlling my mechanical walking, I must have been standing like hammered in one place.

"Think about Florentian. Could he be so absent-minded, ill-mannered and disobliging? Go, offer your hand to the young lady and be such a cavalier as if you were next to Joan if you had to accompany her. Politeness is obligatory for a friend of Florentian," I heard I.'s whisper.

During these days which were passing so quickly, again and again I used to make sure how I was lacking experience, how I still couldn't control myself, how it was difficult for me to learn the art of self-education. The picture of my brother flashed in my mind; his iron will and his chivalrous politeness while he was talking to Nal in the garden. I used simply inhuman efforts, even physically I felt stress from my head to toe, I let I.'s hand go, went up to the girl, took my hat off, bowed to her and offered my arm to her.

Her small face with big eyes brightened up, she gave a smile and she all changed somehow, she became kind, and I understood instantly what this face was lacking in order to be attractive: the sadness which was reflected in it and disappointment was covering it like a dead mask.

"It seems that in this case mother-life asked a black pearl in her string, too", I remembered Ali's words in my thoughts.

My pity for the girl helped me to forget my own mood, and I started looking for possibilities to dispel her sadness.

I started by telling her my surname, I explained to her that I was a Russian, I apologized to her that in confusion of the storm and dangers, me and my brother forgot to observe the etiquette and we hadn't introduced ourselves to her up to now.

The girl answered me that she found out my surname from the ship's journal of the passengers, and that it wasn't difficult to do at all, because there was only one luxurious cabin.

She told me that they descended from Florence, but they've been living in Petersburg at her mother's brother for two years already, that after her experienced big disaster her mother took her for a journey, so that she would forget Italy and all her memories related to it.

Then she told me that her name was Maria Galdoni, while her mother's name was Giovana Galdoni and that they were going to Constantinople to visit her mother's sister, signora Terez, who married a diplomat, hence the destiny moved her to Turkey. She asked me where I and my brother were going. I answered her that first of all we were going to Constantinople, and that I didn't know our next itinerary.

In this way we went up to the main street and entered the shop of the knitwear. Here I and I. gave the initiative to signoras Galdoni, but at the shop of the readymade clothes I decided to meddle in the shopping of the Italians. Both of them were picking out bright and light-coloured items, while I chose a blue costume made of Chinese silk, a white batiste blouse and a small English hat made of the rice straws with a blue band for Joan. I. bought a grey coat and a flannel dress for the girl and a coat and a flannel suit for the boy. The Italians were stunned by our taste and choice, but we held out their pressure by explaining to them that there would be not only sunny days.

We still had to buy the foot-wear for them, and I showed the fortitude of my character by buying a pair of the travelling little shoes on the high sole of Joan. I. was laughing and he let the ladies buy the foot-wear according to their taste by saying that otherwise we would buy up all goods. We bought two suitcases, put all our purchases into them, except the hats, of course, got on a hired coach and rattled off to the steamer.

I had a seat next to signora Maria again. The conversation was turning upon the storm and its consequences, as well as upon my courage which the captain had already turned into a legend.

While we were approaching the steamer, we encountered the whole crowd of cheered up and rested passengers from all classes, who were hurrying to the town.

The group of the dressed up ladies from the first class were demonstrating the smartness of their clothes, they were making their eyes at men, while the men were trying to parade their wit, swiftness and aristocracy of their manners. They were trying to display their qualities in every possible way after I had seen the wrong side of them during the storm. That aroused the feeling within me that was close to nausea.

We were acquainted with many of them, we helped many of them during the storm. I saw how impatient they were. Their rude behaviour with the crew of the ship, an absolute sluggishness of these dandies in a moment of danger hadn't yet died out of my memory.

In no way I could throw out of my head a thought about a herd of two-legged beasts who had a new chance to demonstrate their physical qualities, so that they would excite passions and, having become involved in this tempting game, they would spend their day on land pleasantly.

We accompanied the ladies up to Joan's cabin, said good-bye to them, and to the question when we would see each other again, I. answered them that most likely only in the afternoon when we continue our journey; they became sad after hearing that, because they were expecting to spend the whole day in our company.

Having gone upstairs to the first class, we met the Turks and together with them we came back to the town.

This time we turned to the opposite direction, not to the centre, but to the outskirts of the town. We were going along a wonderful boulevard of the sea-shore, which was buried in blooming

mimosas, reddish and yellow acacias and palms. We went into a peaceful, little street and gave a ring at the door of a beautiful, white house which was surrounded by a garden.

The way was short, I was going next to the younger Turk and I had time only to ask him how the wound in his head was healing.

“My head is almost healed, but my leg still hurts,” he answered me.

“Why don’t you show it to I.?” I asked him.

He answered me that he still didn’t have a chance to speak to I. alone, without his father, because he didn’t want to worry his father and he was hiding his hurting leg from him. I took a good look at his face and I understood immediately that the youth was seriously ill. Not having uttered a word, I whispered to I. that our young friend had a serious wound in his leg, which he was hiding from his father.

I. nodded his head, but the door opened right at that moment, and we entered inside.

The white, little house with mezzanine looked quite modest from the outside, but inside it was a realization of cosiness. The big antechamber that looked like an English hall was separating the house into two parts. Half of the walls were boarded with the decorative boards from Karelian birch; the peg-board, chairs, armchairs and tables were made of the same tree. The remaining part of the walls was papered with blue Morocco-leather. Large branches of mimosas were stretching down from above. The floor was covered with the bluish carpet, decorated with white and yellow flowers. I stopped like charmed. It was so easy to breathe here, as though... I turned into Lovushka the catcher of the crows instantly and I even couldn’t perceive in which place of the terrestrial globe I found myself. I was unable to hear anything, I only was looking and rejoicing at the harmony of this room. I hadn’t seen anything like this before.

The door made of the same Karelian birch with the blue grip opened upstairs, and a white dressed woman was going downstairs.

I was so perplexed when I saw that the woman’s face, her hands and her neck were absolutely black. She went up straight to I., extended both of her black hands towards him and began to speak in English.

Unexpectedly, having seen the black woman for the first time in my life not at the circus, but who was speaking in English, who had excellent manners, who’s figure was like a statue, with the beautiful face, fine lips and with plait, not the black felt of the curls on her head – I was simply frightened. My fear wasn’t gone even when I. pushed me slightly. My entire inner confusion must have been reflected rather clearly in my face, because even I. who usually was restrained gave a laugh, while I hurried to hide myself behind his broad back.

My heart started beating so strongly, as if I had survived two storms in the sea. And I was prepared to withstand at least two more of them, only that if I didn’t have to touch the hand of this black-skinned woman.

Now I even don’t know why I was so frightened back then. The truth is, she was rolling the white of her eyes perfectly, she was speaking with a guttural voice and very quickly, but there was nothing repulsive in her. She was even tender and womanly in her own way, perhaps she was even wonderful.

However, I was terror-struck because of her.

I kept moving backwards, I let both Turks go forward, who, apparently, were familiar with her earlier, and I was even shaking out of terror.

Having arranged something with I., the black-skinned woman hurried to the room on the right in a light and springy gait. I. turned to me, while I was working by the sweat of my brow and I couldn't soothe my beating heart. He went up to me laughing, but, having looked at me more attentively, he stopped laughing and told me tenderly.

"I should have warned you that you would meet the blacks' family at Florentian's friend, whom he saved during his journey across Africa. This woman was still a baby when she together with her two juvenile brothers and her mother were brought to Russian. She is perfectly educated and very devoted to Florentian and Ananda. I didn't pay attention how your nervous system has suffered during those days of tests, and I relied on your strength too much. I beg your pardon for such a lack of understanding, eat this sweet and your heart will stop beating."

I was unable to calm myself still for a long time. I sat down on the chair, I. also gave me some water to drink. I started thinking about Florentian with all my might, so that I wouldn't faint away as it had happened at Ananda's.

Soon I got better. I.'s eyes were looking at me with such tenderness, both Turks were trying to help me so much that I brought myself to overcome myself once again, I gave a smile and explained to them that the woman with her movements on the stair reminded me of a snake, and I was afraid of the snakes terribly.

The younger Turk laughed merrily and agreed with me that the snakes were terrible, but he didn't see anything resembling to the snake in this slender and tall figure.

Exactly at this moment the black figure appeared in the doorway once again. With my thoughts about Florentian I fenced myself off as with a barrier and now I was already looking at the black-skinned woman absolutely calmly.

And indeed, one could be frightened only out of surprise. There was nothing ugly in her. On the contrary, with the perfection of her forms and her elegance she reminded more of a statue. Her face was interesting, too, only her big, bulging eyes with flashing whites were affecting my nerves rather unpleasantly.

I couldn't get used to her blackness put into a white batiste in any way. The contrast between her black skin and the irreproachable whiteness of her clothes in this perfectly bright room in which my imagination had already tenanted golden-haired angels was oppressing me. With all my might I seized Florentian's hand in my thoughts and once again I understood how I didn't know life, how I was lacking experience and how intemperate I was.

"The enemy is never drowsing and is always trying to take advantage of every moment of your confusion," – I remembered the words from Ali's letter.

All those thoughts didn't have time to flash across my mind, and the black-skinned girl already went up to I. and told him that the master was asking him to enter his study alone, and he was offering to this companions to look round the garden where he and I. would join us in a quarter of a hour.

I. went to the master. He must have known the way. The girl took us to the garden by opening the revolving, mirror door which I mistook for an ordinary, mirror set of the walls.

Through this door we got into the library, from here we went to the veranda and descended to the garden.

What a flower garden was laid out here! How beautiful the range of colours from the flowers that I didn't know at all was flowing! The birds were chirping, fantastic shadows of the trees were stretching on the little walks. Such peace and silence were hanging in this little corner that it was difficult even to believe it that the sea was right here, because the murmur wasn't heard at all. It was also difficult to believe in the former storm, in all its terror which we had just experienced, so that we could get into this poetical kingdom of undisturbed tranquillity.

As if during a dream, I could hear how the girl was offering us to look round the garden in which we could find the plants from all over the world and to admire the almond tree in its belated bloom, but I didn't want to move, I wanted not only to be silent, but not even hear a man's voice. I stayed in the flower garden, I sat down on a small bench under the flowering pomegranate and I devoted myself to my thoughts about Florentian and about his friend whose both house and garden – everything was filled with such peace and beauty.

I forgot about everything. My thoughts flew me off to the world of the dreams, I was thinking about the happiness of all people, about the possibility for everybody to live according to his own spiritual and physical needs. Florentian's friend wasn't creating this little corner only for himself, was he? How many storms of hearts, how much discord should calm down in a man's spirit when he finds himself in this peace and harmony. In this place every small board, every blossom was as though saturated with love. It seemed to me that I understood how an earthly dwelling of those should look, who loved a man by choosing him not for pleasure, but by seeing in everybody the same man like himself, by trying to give help and comfort for everybody.

In my thoughts I was creating the external portrait of the master of this house, because it seemed to me that I could understand his internal one already. I connected him to an extraordinary beauty of Florentian and suddenly I felt a new flow of strength by imagining my friend with white clothes and a white turban, like I saw him for the first time at Ali's feast. "My dear Florentian, will I see you again? Oh, how I love you!" I addressed him in my thoughts, from the bottom of my heart and... I heard his voice clearly, as though he was speaking straight into my ear: "I'm with you, my friend. Keep calm, spread your calm everywhere and you will meet me soon."

The illusion of my hearing was so clear that I stood up and wanted to run towards that voice, but how disappointed and astonished I was when I saw I. in veranda, who was calling me poor Lovushka – the catcher of the crows.

A man with an ordinary, light European suit was standing next to I. The contrast between the voice of my dreams and the one of I.'s, between my idolized Florentian and the master who was standing next to I. was so clear that I couldn't refrain from laughing at myself. All surprises – and the black-skinned, snake-like woman instead of the angels, and an ordinary man instead of Florentian – everything together provoked only laughter within myself from my own childishness.

I was coming nearer to them, laughing and absolutely not comprehending my indecent behaviour.

"What is entertaining you so much, Lovushka," I. frowned and asked me.

"Only my own foolishness, Lolion," I answered him. "It seems that I will never grow out of my childishness and I won't be able to take those qualities, the living example of which is next to me. It makes me laugh, because I always fall under the illusions of my eyes and ears. It's always that nasty, tight cap of the dervish, which has done so many troubles for me and even ruined my hearing."

“No, my friend,” the master of the house told me. “If your illusion is leading you towards kindness and merry laughter, then you can be at ease about yourself that you will achieve a lot in your life. Only angry people don’t recognize laughter. They are trying to overcome everything with persistence of their will and that’s why they lose. Those people triumph who are moving forward with love.”

I stopped dead. A whirl of thoughts swept through my brain. What was common between this man and Florentian? Why my heart was overflowed with bliss? I was looking at this man of middle height, with dark, a little curly chestnut-coloured hair, covered with a small cap that looked like a tyubeteyka. His charming, blue eyes were looking at me tenderly, with love, although an expression of an exceptional power was hiding in them.

Namely this expression of strength, energy and inner power surprised me by calling in my memory Florentian’s reflection and the burning power of Ali’s eyes.

I was moved very much by his pleasant speech and his attention showed to me, which I hadn’t yet deserved at all. Unwittingly, I thought for a while that during some time already I was living among the strange people who were showing their attention to me, which I hadn’t deserved at all, they were my guardians, they were even saving my life, giving me shelter, food, while I... I hung my head unhappily and I thought about my helplessness to help my brother, while tears were already oozing through my eyelashes.

The master came down to the garden, he embraced me silently and tenderly and took me to the house. I couldn’t suppress my tears. The pain, helplessness, an unspeakable kindness of the people who were protecting my brother, my respect to them and an absolute inability to perceive that guardianship and friendship, the fear of being left alone without them – all of that was breaking my heart so much that as soon as we sat down on the sofa, I buried myself in the shoulder of this kind friend and I kept crying bitterly.

“You see, my friend, what kind of contrasts are boiling in man’s life. In the most terrible moment of the storm, when death was menacing the whole steamer, you were laughing merrily and by doing so, you surprised and raised the spirit of brave people. Now your great love and devotion to your friend made you laugh, and what’s the result from all of it – you are crying, you are thinking about the horror of solitude and you are distressed about the future that still doesn’t exist. How one can lose that what doesn’t exist? Did you know that you would be crying now several minutes ago? You lost your laughter, tranquillity and joy only because you lost your loyalty to your friend Florentian whom you would like to accompany you during your entire life. Where’s your cheerfulness? Don’t give in to any doubts. The more energy you will put for chasing away your sad thoughts, the faster and better you will educate yourself, while your inner discipline will become your habit, which will be easy and daily. Don’t think that we, your new friends, are supernatural and happy keepers of some secrets. We are the same people like everybody else. One can divide people only to those who possess awareness, so they are free from passions and prejudices that are oppressing them – therefore, they are kind and joyful, and those who possess unawareness, so they are fettered in their passions and prejudices – therefore, they are angry and dismal. Learn, my son. There’s only one path in life – that’s the knowledge. The knowledge liberates man, and the freer he is, the more important for the universe he becomes, the more meaningful his activity for the universal welfare becomes, the more spacious the atmosphere of his tranquillity becomes, which he’s radiating round him. Take this medallion, there’s the portrait of your friend Florentian in it. It’s great that you are so devoted to him. Now you can see yourself that you love your real brother as much as untrue one whom you met just recently. The freer you will become by throwing the commonly adopted, conditional understanding of love out of yourself, the more real, human love will awake within yourself.”

He gave me rather big, rounded medallion that was hanging on the thin, golden chain. There was a dark sapphire put in its cover.

"Hang it and in the moments of doubts, danger, sadness or bitter reflections, take it into your hands by thinking about your friend Florentian and about me, your new friend, always loyal to you, and you will find strength to suppress your tears in all situations of your life. Each rolled down tear is weakening man's strength, while each defeated tear is leading him upstairs onto the new level of strength. It is written here in one of the oldest languages of mankind: "Defeat by loving."

While saying this, he opened the medallion, and I saw a wonderful portrait of Florentian.

I wanted to thank him, I was feeling a great respect for him, I was full of happiness, but somebody knocked at the door. I hardly had time to hang the medallion, and the words of my gratitude remained unvoiced. He must have read the unsaid thoughts in my head, he smiled at me and went to open the door.

At the doorway I saw the white dress and the black figure, but now this silhouette wasn't frightening me anymore. A sense of power which I had already experienced several times during these days took hold of me again. It was the sense of rebirth of my whole organism, as though all of a sudden I had become older, self-confident and restrained.

"Sir Vomi, may your friends come in already?" the girl asked him.

"Yes, Chava, they may. Here, become acquainted with one more friend of mine. While I'll be talking to the Turks about the subjects that doesn't interest him at all, take him to the library and show him the shelves with the works about self-education of the philosophers from all over the world. Let him choose anything he wants and put those books into the briefcase for him in memory about yourself," the master was talking to her with a smile, while his eyes were flashing with such a humour which I used to see in the eyes of Florentian.

"I will take the young guest to the library and show him the books with pleasure, but concerning the memory about myself, I'm not sure if he remembers me with pleasure. It is difficult for Europeans to tolerate the black skin," Chava was speaking, smiling with her entire mouth and as though lighting up the whole room with the glow of her white teeth.

I was feeling totally ashamed, while sir Vomi, as Chava called my new friend, added, smiling.

"Here's the first lesson for you, my friend. Defeat your prejudices for the black skin by remembering that the same red blood, like everybody else's, is flowing under such skin."

I followed Chava and in the next room I ran into I. and the Turks who were going to sir Vomi's study. My appearance must have seemed to be unusual for them, because both Turks looked at me surprised, while I. gave me a smile and passed his hand tenderly over my hair.

Chava let them come into the study, closed the door behind them and invited me to come with her. We crossed several rooms which were darkened with the shutters from the sun, came into the excellent hall once again and got into the library through the mirror door which was already familiar to me.

Now I could already examine this room. How wonderful and artistic the surroundings were here! Dark bookcases made of mahogany with big, mirror door stood out nicely in the background of the blue carpet. The blue ceiling was decorated with perfectly painted white peacocks, forming a ring and a youth, playing the little pipe to them.

"This way," I heard Chava's voice. "You'll have to climb up this ladder a little. On the upper shelves of these two bookcases you will find those books which sir Ut-Vomi has recommended to you."

I thanked her, tried to remember that my friend's first name was Ut-Vomi and I started reading the titles of the books.

Up to now I was thinking that I had read many books while my brother was guiding me and that here I would find at least several titles known to me, but the books were written in all languages of the world, even in Russian, and I didn't know a single one of them.

"I will leave you here for a while, until I bring the briefcase from above," Chava told me. "I will try to find such one that would remind you of this day and of sir Ut-Vomi."

I was left alone. The door of the veranda and all windows were thrown open, and a wonderful aroma of the flowers was blowing from the garden. This silence was exceptionally pleasant after the incessant murmur of the sea and the wind. I was tempted to go out to the garden and to have a walk on the soft grass, but I was afraid of becoming absent-minded and I started looking over the books diligently.

Being disappointed, I already wanted to pass on to the next bookcase when all of a sudden I turned round awkwardly, brushed against something, and two books fell down on the floor. I climbed down the ladder, lifted the books and, having opened the thick, leather cover of one of them, I read the title: "Self-discipline and its significance in man's personal and cosmic life", author Nikolay T., publishing house Firs, London.

I rubbed my eyes and read the title page one more time. I seized the second book with the same leather cover – "Man's path – the path of liberation. Man – a part of the eternal movement". Publishing house Firs, author Nikolay T.

I stopped doubting that both books were really written by my brother. It was impossible to describe what this discovery opened within myself, what contradictory feelings surged me up! Who was that brother of mine? Who was educating me? Why was I separated from him? These questions arose to Lovushka the catcher of the crows; I wasn't searching for anything anymore, I only sat down on the ladder and started reading.

Now I already cannot tell for how long I was reading, but I came to myself after the loud laughter of many voices. I gave a start with unexpectedness and I was so confused that not at once I could perceive why I, both Turks, Chava and sir Vomi were standing here, where I was and what was going on with me.

Sir Vomi came up to me, embraced me tenderly and whispered.

"Enjoy your find, but be a gallant and courteous youth to the others".

Having looked at the books and me, I gave a joyful laugh.

"Lovushka, now you can see that not only you were hiding your literary talent from your brother, but he also kept his books from you. You found them. Now you must become a writer as soon as possible, so that your books would get into your brother's hands. Then you will get even with him."

"Well, well! Is captain T. your brother?" Chava gave a shout. "In this case, it will be very interesting for you to read his newest book, there's even his portrait in it."

She opened the bookcase on the right wall quickly, moved the ladder up to it, pulled out the book with blue covers and opened it at the portrait of my brother. He looked very real here, only his face was very strict, serious, and a clear expression of renunciation was reflected in it.

I read the title: "Not life is creating man, but man is carrying his life and creating his destiny". To my shame, I must confess that I didn't understand anything from these titles. I sighed heavily. I took all three books and went out to the garden where sir Vomi and the rest of his guests were sitting already.

I came up to him and told him sadly that my brother's books were very dear for my heart, but unfortunately, they seemed to me to be as Chinese script. I asked his permission to take them to Constantinople from where I could send them back to him.

"Take them, my friend, and keep them to yourself. I will always be able to replenish my library, while it would be difficult for you to acquire them at the moment. Concerning the contents of the books, now you have such a teacher and master in I.'s personality next to you that he will explain everything whatever you won't understand to you. He will tell you everything about us, too," the master added in a more silent voice, so the Turks couldn't hear us, to whom Chava, having taken them a little farther away from us, was telling about the flower beds.

"Don't be sad so often for your ignorance and intemperance," sir Vomi continued. He seated me on the little bench between I. and himself. "I you want to save your brother's life, develop your heroic feelings not only for this goal, but live your every, ordinary day in such a way as though it was your last day. Don't leave any reserve of your strength and knowledge for tomorrow, but deliver the completeness of all your thoughts and feelings today, now. Don't try to develop the power of your will, but live your life in such a way that during every passing moment you would be simply kind and pure."

The Turks and Chava with an excellent, green leather briefcase in her hands approached us. She extended it to me, gave me a mischievous smile and asked me if this green colour didn't remind me of someone's eyes.

"And inside," she added, "you will find the portrait of sir Vomi."

I was moved by such attention of her and I told her that it must have been very well for everybody who happened to be next to her because of the warmth of her heart and her tenderness which she was radiating so simply, that I would always remember her obligingness and that it was very sad for me, because I was such a poor cavalier and I didn't have anything to give her in order to remember me.

"And if I find something that belongs to you? Will you sign an autograph for me?"

I was deprived of speech. Was there my thing in this house? I passed my hand over my forehead and checked if I wasn't sleeping in a heroic Florentian's sleep. Chava laughed loudly and told me in her guttural voice.

"Cavalier Lovushka, I'm waiting for your answer."

I was so confused that sir Vomi answered her instead of me.

"Chava, bring your treasure here if you have it and don't embarrass the man who still doesn't know himself that he has given a pearl to the world and clarified the lives of many people."

I lifted my eyes up to sir Vomi and I was expecting to see the flashes of humour in his face, which I had seen already, but his face was serious, and he was looking at me affectionately. In my heart I felt the well-known irritation from all these riddles and I was already about to begin to scream when I saw Chava at the door with the thick magazine in her hands. That was "The news of literature". Having opened

the magazine, she let me to read the headline of the story – “The first loss – and the light went out”. That was namely my story which fascinated the audience of the student party in Petersburg and some author so much, and now it was already published and spread across the world. Chava opened the end and showed me the signature. “Student T.”

“Well, sign your autograph,” I. told me, “and we already have to get ready for the steamer.”

I took the pencil out of Chava’s hands, looked at her, gave a laugh and wrote: “The new meeting – and the light began to shine”.

The whole company was surprised by my autograph no less than the story itself.

“You still don’t understand yourself what you’ve written in the story and what the words of your autograph mean, my young man of wisdom,” sir Vomi was talking to me, while saying good-bye. “On our next meeting you will already have made progress in your path of knowledge, and now go as I. will be guiding you, and while being next to him, wait for coming back of Florentian.”

He embraced me and passed his hand tenderly over my hair. Chava extended both of her black and wonderful hands to me. I bent down and kissed them one after another – these wonderful, black hands, - as though asking to forgive her for my fright and disgust which she had stirred within me in the beginning.

I felt how those hands began to tremble. When I raised my head I saw how the expression of Chava’s face had changed and I heard the whisper.

“I will always be your loyal servant, the light will be travelling from you to me, too.”

I. separated us when he came up to Chava to say good-bye to her.

We left sir Vomi together with the Turks who also wanted to visit their relatives. I was surprised how the time had flown past. It seemed that we had spent only an hour at sir Vomi’s, but it was almost seven o’clock already.

I was happy that the Turks left us, because I didn’t want to talk at all. I. took my arm, we turned into some street and called at the bookshop. I. asked them if they had the latest issue of “The news of literature”.

“No,” the sales-man answered him, “this time everything was sold out.”

But a hoarse voice from another end of the shop told us that they could take the last issue from the shop window if we were really going to buy it. I. assured them that we would certainly buy it, the sales-man took the magazine from the shop window, I put it in the briefcase, we paid and left.

“Oh, how I don’t want to come back to the steamer, Lolion,” I told him. “I would stay here forever, in the sir Vomi’s garden.”

“Well, who can trust you! You wanted to stay forever with Florentian, to share your activity with him during your entire life, and now you already want to live in the sir Vomi’s garden,” I. was smiling.

“Yes,” I answered him, “my words may seem like a treason for Florentian, I myself also cannot explain well enough to you what is going on in my heart. My heart is like made of rubber, it has widened even more, and now not only my brother and Florentian is living in it. I haven’t yet perceived completely what all three friends of yours have in common: Ali, Florentian and sir Vomi, but I see within them some higher nobleness, some power that I hadn’t seen up to now. I’m even thinking that you and Ananda also have very much in common with these friends. Only I still cannot comprehend why all of you

are so utterly compassionate and selfless to me! By helping my brother who, of course, is worthy of every kind of assistance and protection, you are doing so much for me, what I really don't deserve at all. And you, personally you, Lolion, how can I ever repay you?"

"Lovushka, man doesn't have to wait for a reward and praise for his behaviour in his life," I answered me. "Life is only a string of causes and effects; and the entire universe is obeying to this law, not only a man's life; but we will still have lots of time to talk about such personal subjects. Would you like to do your duty to courtesy now and to buy flowers for our ladies, because they were trying so much and helped us to dress Joan and her children?"

"No, as you have just said, I don't want to repay for a good work at all. Courtesy? It seems that I'm a poor cavalier, but what I want to do from the bottom of my heart – that's to bring roses for Joan, and I would do it with such a joy that even the coming back to the steamer wouldn't be so difficult."

"Great, here's the flower shop. I will do the duty of courtesy with respect to the Italians, and you give the flowers to Joan, but be careful, Lovushka. You don't have to see a woman as an object of love in any of the women whom we meet now, but only friends whom we must help if we can. Now both in our hearts and thoughts we must retain such virtue and purity, as though we were marching to a sacred feat. All of our strength – both spiritual and physical – must be directed purposefully only to that affair which Ali and Florentian have entrusted us to do. Be strong and don't be angry with me. The poor, destroyed Joan's heart, with all its might is ready to attach to that one who will show attention and sympathy to her. Now your goal is not to calm and comfort any woman personally, but to serve loyally to that affair which you've accepted voluntarily. Now you aren't allowed to want to save your brother and at the same time to find a woman for yourself."

"It didn't even occurred to me to overstep the limits of the most ordinary friendship in my behaviour with Joan. I'm very sorry for her and I want to help her from the bottom of my heart. Lolion, believe me, neither she nor Chava could ever become the heroines of my romance... If you have any doubts, I agree to hand the flowers to signoras Galdoni, and you give my flowers to Joan from both of us."

We called at the flower shop, at the window of which we have already been standing for a while, talking.

I picked out white and red roses for Joan, put them on a leaf of a palm and, having tied everything up with a white and red ribbon, I made a bouquet. There were two bouquets in the hands of I. already – one of them was made of reddish, another one of yellow roses.

To his question why I'd chosen such colours of the roses and ribbons, I answered him that I didn't know any meaning of colours at all, but the presents which were sent to me from Ali before the feast were of white colours – the one of power, and of red colour – the one of love.

"Now, in my turn, I want to send the greetings of love and power to Joan, and I hope that she won't feel anything objectionable here."

We went out onto the embankment by bringing the flowers. All of a sudden, the hooter of our steamer was heard, and although we still didn't have to hurry, we quickened our step anyway.

Having climbed up to the first class, we separated: I. went to Joan, while I turned to the Italian's cabin and handed the reddish roses to the daughter, and the yellow ones to her mother. The girl accepted the flowers with joy, and a light flush flooded her face and neck.

Her mother gave a tender smile and asked me if I had already seen madam Joan with the new clothes. I answered her that my brother went there, because the children needed his help, and I would see all of them at once tomorrow.

I was feeling full of new, unexpected impressions, the briefcase with my brother's books was pulling me back to the cabin, so that I alone could quietly inspect my brother's portrait as soon as possible, but in the meanwhile I had to stand among the crowd of smartened up ladies and cavaliers and to keep up an easy, saloon conversation.

Having taken an advantage of the first occasion, maybe even showing myself not at all polite, I went onto the deck.

I already wanted to go to take a shower, then to lie down peacefully for a while and to reflect, but it seemed that today I wasn't destined to be alone. I didn't even have time to take off my jacket when my nurse – clumsy sailor came in and delivered a small parcel and a letter in a very elegant, long envelope to me. He was very interested in my trip to the shore, he complained that he wasn't allowed to come with me, and he must have been of use to me. To his question about our dinner, I answered him that we would sit down at the table when we put out to sea.

I could hardly get rid of this man, then the Turks came. I hardly had time to hide the parcel and the letter. The Turks told me how joyfully they spent their time at their relatives where they found out about the consequences of the storm. It turns out that only our ship had overcome this element successfully. Two steamers cast off after us from Sevastopol. One of them was an old Greek steamer and a French one that decided to sail when the storm had already started. Both of them perished. The storm is still raging in Sevastopol, although with less power already.

They heard about our ship from the chief mechanic himself that it had to be repaired seriously in Constantinople and that it would stay there for quite a long time.

I was trying to be polite and restrained with all my might, but the irritation was already poking at me from inside, because I was unable to live my life as I wanted to, because I was chained with the rules of conduct that were accepted in society.

"Have really all the people whom I met during these days and who surprised me with their great self-control, as well as I. with whom I was travelling, acquired their excellent politeness and endurance in such a difficult way like I did?"

I was already about to cry out at the Turks and to tell them to leave me alone, I could hardly control myself already when I heard the voices of I. and the captain on the stairs of our deck.

I.'s face stunned me. I hadn't yet seen him such radiant, as though some light was burning inside of him – it seemed that he all was radiating with joy.

A whirl of thoughts blew over my head one more time. Among those thoughts there were some of them that were bad and disgraceful. I thought for a while that I. lingered at Joan for quite a long time and he was radiating, because he loved her, while he was telling me that at the moment we couldn't have any personal feelings. Both envy and a retrograde thought about my dependency on the man whom I hardly knew flashed in my head. A protest against such a state of mine and a great irritation arose within myself.

I almost couldn't hear who was talking around me and what they were talking about. I looked at I. one more time and I felt ashamed of such unkind feelings of mine. I.'s face kept radiating his inner fire, while his eyes were shining, reminding me of the Ananda's stars.

“No,” I told to myself, “this man cannot be a hypocrite. Since he’s radiating like this, then his thoughts also have to burn with honesty and love, otherwise from where that light could start, which is giving out warmth to everybody and which has melted even such a mirage in which I had just been mixed up.”

In my thoughts I was already flying into the memories what I. had told me about himself, what I had experienced and seen while being next to him during that short time, I also was flying to that extraordinary man to whom he introduced me in B.

Bit by bit the surroundings stopped irritating me, I forgot everything, turned into Lovushka – the catcher of the crows, I moved into the sir Vomi’s garden and immersed in my thoughts about him so much that as though I could hear his voice.

“Be strong, your childhood is over already. Learn to live not only for your brother, but take a good look at everybody whom you meet. If you met a man and failed to find a word of comfort for him – you lost a moment of happiness in your life. Don’t think about yourself, while you are talking to people, but think only about them, then you will neither get tired nor irritated.”

I gave a start with a terrible roar, I gave a jump from the sound that hit my ears, I was confused of everyone’s joint laughter and I couldn’t grasp at all where I was, until I finally understood that it was the ship’s hooter roaring.

I. put his arms round my shoulders tenderly and told me that my nerves got totally loose during these days.

“Yes, Lolion, they got totally loose.”

I already wanted to tell him about one more hallucination of my hearing, but he just put his finger at his lips unnoticed and whispered to me: “Later,” surprising me a great deal by doing so.

The hooter died away, there was a sense of a racket in the steamer, as always before casting off. We separated from the pier slowly. The band of water between B. and the steamer was widening, and finally the shore passed out of sight. One more page of my life was closed, one more bright picture entered firmly into my heart, and once again I didn’t notice what an important place it took there.

Chapter 15

We are sailing to Constantinople

After some time the clumsy sailor showed up. He was bringing a collapsible table and a tablecloth, and the man-servant with the plates and the set of table tools was following him.

The Turks remembered that they still had to change their clothes before taking their seats at the table d'hôte, and they hurried downstairs.

Once they left, it became easier for me instantly. I.'s harmonious atmosphere embraced me like the pure air of the mountains. All trifles, my irritation, thoughts and feelings which were leading me to hopeless, personal suffering as though came off me. An interest in his inner world rose to the first plan, a wish to understand the cause of this extraordinary radiance of his. Unwittingly, I yielded to the charms of his tranquillity and even to some grandeur of his mood. In my thoughts I came back to his childhood, to his suffering and I was reflecting upon that power which he'd achieved now.

I was sitting next to him in silence and only now, for the first time I noticed that the whole outer noise wasn't disturbing me, that as though I wasn't noticing people by seeing them clearly with my eyes.

I didn't turn into Lovushka – the catcher of the crows, I perceived where I was and I even exchanged a few words with the captain; although everything inside of me was as though buzzing – I was calm. I had never experienced such tranquillity and perception that all of it inside of me was because of that inner harmony which Lolion who kept smiling was spreading around himself.

"Here's how man can be with his inner state. Here's where the power of help for people is, without any words, any sermons, only by his own living example," I was thinking to myself.

Even my impatience to find out from whom I received the parcel and the letter stopped; I began to think about the letter that I received from Florentian. Only now his words that I had to go to India reached me. I was interested in this country for a long time already, maybe because I had read many books about it at my brother's and seen many illustrations, but now when I met such people like Ali, when I found out from I. that all of them, including sir Vomi, were living in India, my interest in it came to life again. I wanted to see that country myself. My fear and protest against the East settled down a little. I began to perceive the separation with my brother from a new angle, it wasn't only a tragedy for me anymore, but it was also the beginning of my endurance.

We finished our dinner. Unfortunately, I had to ask I. for his help instantly, to take his drops, because there still was a strong tossing in the open sea, and I was unable to feel strongly. As the captain had foreseen, the echoes of the storm continued, only now this somehow was affecting me very strongly.

"I can see for a long time already that you want to tell me about your impressions from the stoppage at B. I also have some news for you," I. was talking to me.

"First of all, I want to find out from whom I received the parcel and the letter, and to share its contents with you," I answered him.

A derisive smile slipped across I.'s face, he stood up and offered me to come back to our cabin. I pulled the letter and the parcel from under my pillow. The signature "Chava" which I read first of all surprised me most.

I was so surprised that instead of reading the letter, I extended it to I. I was thinking that the image of the black statue with the white dress only flashed like a butterfly and disappeared, but now it came to life again and affected me rather unpleasantly.

I. took the letter, looked at me with his shinning eyes and started reading it loudly.

"I don't know in which words to address you. If I was a white-skinned woman, I would know how to evade the conditional rules of conduct of the society, which were formed by the prejudices of ages, but my black skin doesn't admit me even to the rules of politeness and conduct, which the white people are mostly applying only to themselves. I can address you only like that eternal, little part of light, which is living in every man and which doesn't depend on the place, time, nationality or religion. Only knowledge dispels all prejudices and opinions which are rammed into people's heads. Therefore, by addressing your love, I dare to say "Friend" to you.

So, Friend, - for the first time in my life, a white man showed his politeness and compassion to me by pressing my black hands to his lips. If I were to live for thousand years more, I wouldn't forget these kisses, because my heart responded with a kiss to them. Perhaps love, about which women are talking and expressing it with their actions, has many forms, but for me only one form of it is accessible – that's a limitless selflessness, not demanding anything in return to oneself. I give my entire heart to you, which doesn't know any doubts, and I will follow you faithfully wherever you may go, it doesn't matter if it would be a heaven or hell, fire or water, a success or failure. It is clear to me why I must live exactly so and what eternal laws are binding us to together. One day in the future, it will be clear to you as well, but now I will pass them over in silence. I understand what you may think of such an attachment of mine to you, which now is so unnecessary and limiting to you, but the time will come, you will choose a friend of life for yourself and then you will need the black nurse for your white-skinned children very much. My devotion that I'm offering to you now is simple, easy and joyful, if we look at it from the position of conditionalities. If a thought could rise to the spaces of the movement of the entire universe and would catch a free note of love over there, of love which isn't oppressed by the illusionary understanding of the daily routine that it is a test, a duty and a desire to acquire as much as possible personal wealth, then we could see there not the grey daily routine oppressed by sadness or heartbreak, but a happy opportunity to pour love from our hearts – free, pure, unselfish love – and that is exactly what the true human happiness is. And let life forgive my certitude, but I know that I will find my quiet harbour in your home by educating your children. I know how my black skin frightened you, so I appreciate the nobleness of your heart even more, which has sent a kiss to my hands. Wishing to remind you not of my blackness, but only of our meeting, I'm sending a small box to you, which I hope you will like. Accept it as the greatest present of my devotion. Sir Vomi gave it to me on the occasion of my majority. He explained to me that I had to give it to that person for whom I would be ready to die. I've already told you – my path is after you. In order to not show myself to be sentimental, I finish my letter by bowing low before your friend I., your brother and your great friend Florentian.

Your servant Chava"

I had already read the letter long time ago, while I was still sitting with my head put on my hands and I didn't know what I should think about this unexpected coincidence, too.

"There are no coincidences," I heard my friend's voice. "Everything what we encounter obeys to the law of the causality, and there's no effect in life without a cause. The more man liberates from the prejudices, the more he may know. Chava is right when she writes that knowledge dispels all prejudices and opinions rammed in one's head. We will still have lots of time and we will be able to talk about all of it. I can tell you that the sarths who were following us died during the storm in the old Greek ship. Their hatred forced them to board the ship, although they knew about the upcoming storm. Now we are free from any persecutors until we reach Constantinople, and there we will find out what happens next. Maybe you shoot a glance at such a sacred Chava's present, because the tossing increases, and we certainly need to make the round of the whole steamer. The people are much more sensitive to the tossing after the experienced storm. First of all, we have to visit Joan, then Italians and so on..."

I unwrapped the small Chava's parcel and I took a small dark blue square box out of the leather case. On its cover, on the oval made of enamel I saw the portrait of sir Vomi, which was set in a frame of small, but nicely shinning brilliants, and instead of a lock, there was a large, prominent, dark sapphire fixed.

"During my entire life I hadn't seen so many precious things as lately when I was able to hold them in my hands," I said, while being lost in thought.

"Yes," I answered me. "So many people would like at least to hold the portrait of sir Vomi in their hands, not only to receive it as the present, but hide everything in the travelling-bag, it is time for us to move already."

As I was told, I put all the things and books in the travelling-bag, I took the first-aid kits. We didn't even have time to put the first-aid kits on our shoulders, and the clumsy sailor already came hurriedly to us. This time he came as a messenger of the captain with the request for us to hurry to the hospital's cabin No. 1A, where the children and their mother were very ill.

We dashed away to via the nearest way, while my nurse clumsy sailor saved both my nose and my ribs from breaking many times, because once again I was unable to keep my balance. To my question if the new storm wasn't starting, I answered me that nature couldn't rage so much two times in a row, while the clumsy sailor was laughing and he stated that it was only the ripples of the sea surface. Maybe it was only the ripples, but I must admit that it was a very nasty ripple.

Having entered the Joan's cabin, we found almost the same scene of despair once again, like the first time. The mother was sitting on the sofa, squeezed herself into the corner of it. Both of her children were in her arms. An absolute confusion was reflected on her face.

When I bent down and wanted to take the girl from her, so he could put her in the bed, Joan seized his hands and she was shouting that the girl was dying and that she didn't want to let her die on the cold bed, let her rather die at her mother's heart. She seized I's hands so strongly that if I hadn't rushed to the boy, he would have rolled down from her knees onto the floor.

Having taken the boy in my arms, I was already going to give a shout and reproach the mother for such behaviour of her, but... sir Vomi's reflection which had entered my heart firmly helped me to control myself, and I told her tenderly.

"So here's how you are keeping your promise to take care of your children selflessly. Is it more convenient for them to be on your knees and not in their beds?"

Joan was crying. She said to me that she didn't see me for so long time that she lost her self-control, while the children's illness was breaking her heart. It turned out that, according to her, I had absolutely forgotten her. I reproached her that both I. and the Italians visited her, that I sent the flowers and books to her, only that she shouldn't think that my presence or absence could have any influence to her children's health.

"I'm still so young and I know so little, I need an all-round education and guardianship myself," I continued my thought, "that if not my brother I., then I would have died ten times already. You must stop being sad. Don't think how lonesome you are, you'd rather help the doctor to give your children the medicine to drink."

I don't know very well myself what I was talking to poor Joan, but the intonation of my voice must have rendered the entire tenderness of my compassion to her. She wiped her tears instantly and... nobody could have found a better nurse.

I. was delayed by the girl for quite a long time, because she was terribly sickly.

"Today she will feel so bad for several hours more, but tomorrow she will really start recovering," I. was explaining to Joan. "Tomorrow let her stay in the bed during the entire day. If there's no tossing, take her on the deck, and your little boy will ask you for something to eat in an hour already."

We were already going to leave, but Joan addressed I. pleadingly.

"Let your brother stay with me. I'm always afraid of something, a new disaster appears to me all the time, also it always seems to me that my children will die."

I. nodded his head. He told me to stay here, until the clumsy sailor comes. Only if anyone called for a doctor, I would have to explain to him that I. was the doctor, while I could help only while being next to him, that I was helpless alone.

I. left us. I was left alone with Joan next to the little beds of the children. The girl was calming little by little, her breathing was becoming even, her suffocation stopped. Joan kept silent, she didn't cry, but I saw that not only her girl's illness was to blame for this new attack of her despair.

"What has happened," I asked her, "that you are like this again?"

"I don't know myself why all those terrible memories and the images of my husband's death rushed into my memory. I felt such fear of the future... I cannot even describe to you what dreadful dear seizes me when I'm thinking that we will arrive to Constantinople and I will have to part with you and your brother. I will die of loneliness and hunger."

"You will die of loneliness and hunger? And your children will outlive you? Who is going to work for their sake? Do they have anyone closer to them than you? You are thinking about what has happened and what will happen. And how about now? Aren't you thinking about that moment when you almost dropped your boy and that you harmed your daughter by keeping her not in the bed? Up to now I, just like you, also was always thinking about that what had happened and what would happen. One of my beloved and wise friends, as well as my current brother in arms I., showed me with their examples that one must live only with that what is happening now, and that the most important thing is namely that "now". You, too, try not to cry, but to nurse your children cheerfully. Your tears are disturbing their peaceful sleep, and they will be sick for a long time. Give them your smile, and their health will improve faster. As far as Constantinople is concerned, I. told you that he would help you to settle, and his words never differ from his deeds. If your goal is to help your children to rise to their feet, then why you should think if you are alone? You know from your own experience already how everything is unsteady in life. Don't think about

that what will happen, but think about and ask I. to teach you how you could start educating your children. As far as I am concerned, I cannot help you in any way. I don't have neither my own family nor home myself, I still cannot earn my bread, because I don't possess neither knowledge nor talents to do something. I am sure that I. would help you."

"I'm afraid of him very much and I feel shy," the poor woman answered me, "but I'm not afraid of you and I'm very glad to be with you."

"This is because I am the same child without any experience like yourself, but if you could take a better look at I., you would rejoice at every moment that you are spending next to him."

"You've just told me that mother's smile could help her children. I'm trying not to cry, but it is so difficult. I don't think that I. could teach me how to educate my children. He's so strict, he never smiles. Being next to him, I feel like being in an iron cage, and while being next to you, I feel easy and well."

"It is easy for you to be with me, only because I'm the same light-minded person like yourself. You'd better concentrate and think for a while what great energy you could give to your children if you really loved them! Then not the tears would be flowing from your eyes, but the whole flows of energy. You are crying for yourself, right? And you have to think how to protect your children."

"I still cannot understand you," Joan began to speak very silently after a long consideration, "but it becomes clear to me that I'm really thinking too much about myself. I will try to delve deeply into your words, perhaps they will help me to live differently."

I was truly sorry for the poor woman. I was trying not to cross the limits of our friendly conversation and not to pass to the tone of an educator. Joan was simply changing in front of my eyes. That smile which was always shining in her young face when I used to be next to her wasn't already playing on it, but her disappointment was gone, too. Her sadness, a strict resolution – as though all of a sudden she had become older than me – separated her from me with the ring in which she retired into herself.

We were sitting next to the little beds of her children silently, and my thoughts came back to Chava. What a strong and brave woman she seemed to be for me now! And how her black hand of assistance would be needed for this fragile and delicate mother now!

"Don't think that I'm weak and I'm afraid of word," all of a sudden the trembling voice of Joan sent me back from the world of the dreams. "No, no, I'm not afraid of work. Simply I loved my husband too much and this loss mixed my love to him and my tears for him with my love for my children and with my fear for them. I feel that I begin to grasp that fear is draining my energy, it is leading me to disappointment, and with that I harm my children. Only now it becomes clearer to me to what a horrible life I will doom myself if I don't find the courage and strength to live only for my children, to be their protection, if I am only mourning over my sad destiny of the woman who has lost her husband."

There came a knock at the door. The radiating clumsy sailor entered and told me that I. was inviting me to come to the first class where the Italian fell ill again. I said good-bye to Joan and I felt that as though with my words I had hurt and disappointed her. Her hand-shake was sincere, but her face remained strict.

I found I. in the cabin of signoras Galdoni, where the mother had burst into tears, while her daughter was lying like a corpse.

"This is namely that difficult case about which I was telling you still for the first time. Such faint of the organism will happen after every strong excitement, until signora Maria learns to control herself perfectly," I. addressed me.

"No, no, I didn't tell her anything special," signora Giovana was irritated and she was speaking loudly in a raised voice. "I only wanted to warn her about the new disaster. One misfortune was already enough for us."

"Why are you trying to turn your neighbours' attention by speaking loudly?" I told her silently. "Now we need to help your daughter to recover her consciousness, right? It isn't so easy to do that. If you keep screaming like this, my efforts may be of no use at all. If you cannot find so much love in your heart that you would be thinking about your daughter's life and concentrate all your strength to help her instead of thinking about your experiences, then leave the cabin. All egoistic thoughts and irritation is only hindering in the moment of danger."

"Doctor, please forgive the eclipse of my mind. I will be praying for her from the bottom of my heart," the mother was speaking to I. by trying to hold back her tears.

"Then forget yourself, think only about her and stop crying. One is always crying only for oneself," I. answered her.

Like the first time, he asked me to lift the girl a little and, having opened her mouth, to give her the medicine to drink. He injected one more medicine, and both of us started doing the artificial ventilation to her.

All our efforts were unsuccessful. Then he strewn some bitterly smelling powder on the paper, rolled a tip from it, set it on fire and put it to the very nose of the girl. Having inhaled, she gave a start, sneezed, expectorated, opened her eyes and fainted away again.

Then I. besprinkled her face with water, put a hot warmer at her neck and set the herbs on fire again. She gave a start again, uttered a groan and opened her eyes. With my help I. seated her up and, while holding the burning herbs close to her face, he told her.

"Breathe with your mouth and as deeply as possible."

I was holding the girl over her shoulders and I felt how her entire body was starting with every deep inhalation.

We couldn't step aside from her still for a long time. Only when she had already recovered completely, I. ordered to give her some warm milk to drink, he forbid her to talk at all and covered her with a warm blanket. He explained to her mother that the storm wouldn't happen again for certain, and that the sea would subside completely in a couple of hours.

We went out on the deck where the whole crowd of people was waiting for us. The unhappy husband of the vixen duchess was standing in front of the crowd. The youth seemed to be very grief-stricken. A dark blue bruise was visible on his left cheek, his right eye was all swollen and with a bruise, too, as though he had participated in a fight.

His appearance was so deplorable that even the funny contrast between his elegant suit and his crooked, coloured physiognomy wasn't making us laugh, while his only pleading eye was telling about the vast tragedy experienced by this man.

"Doctor," he addressed I. with his trembling and weak voice. "Be pitiful. To tell you the truth, I'm not to blame for my wife's escapades. The ship's doctor refuses to visit us by excusing himself of the great amount of patients. He is thinking that the duchess is partially pretending and is unwell out of fear, but I can assure you that she's really dying. I had never seen her like this. She can neither scream nor rage

anymore. She's very very old. Be pitiful," he was mumbling. "It will be a terrible drama for myself and others if I fail to bring her to Constantinople..."

I. was looking at this unfortunate man in silence, while the ruined life, sold for money to the disgusting old woman, drifted past my eyes. I don't know what I would have done myself, but I. told him silently.

"Take us to her cabin!"

"Oh, thank you," the duchess' husband uttered, and we followed him to the cabin No. 25.

"I will be back soon," I. was speaking to the people who had surrounded him from all sides. "I will examine everybody who needs my help. Don't follow us, but wait for me here."

Having entered the cabin, we saw a really horrible scene. In the hopeless mess we discerned an ugly, repulsive, grey, not breathing creature with the toothless, protruded jaw, who was lying on the bed and who now didn't remind of anything the raging, fat old woman with red-haired wig, making a racket in the corridor of the hospital.

I. went up to the bed, touched the hand, forehead and neck of the old woman who looked more like a corpse and directed his look at her husband whose only eye was showing all his fear while waiting for I.'s verdict.

"Your wife is alive," finally he told him, "but we already cannot expect anymore that she will fully recover. She's half-finished by the paralysis and she will be unable to move anymore, and as far as her speaking and hands are concerned, I will be able to tell you only when I bring her to her senses, and you do all my prescribed procedures."

"I'm determined to nurse her with all my might, only that her life wouldn't die out and she would make it to Constantinople. She must meet her son, my cousin, there. Let happen what has to happen there, only that nobody would suspect me that I have done away with her on our way," the man was speaking so, and began to cry bitterly like a little child.

Now it is difficult to say, which feelings were stronger within me back then: a contempt for the man who radiates health, but has acquired the title, because he didn't want to work, or a compassion for the man who has lost his way to comprehension what a value an independent activity was.

If lately I hadn't been living among the people of such high moral like Florentian and I., I probably would only turn away rudely from the duke who was exciting disgust. However, now there wasn't any place left for condemnation in my heart anymore, I only felt my helplessness to help him once again.

"Be strong, my friend," I heard I.'s voice.

The duke raised his face which was wet because of the tears and answered I. in a strong voice which I didn't expect from him.

"Oh, doctor, doctor! How much horror I had to endure during these three years! How much shame and suffering of humiliation I had to bear for that reckless mistake of mine. This life of an idler has exhausted me more than any suffering. Only save her life. I will hand her to her son from hand to hand and I will start working. I will try to retrieve the respect of honest people with my new life, which I have lost now, it doesn't matter if I had to become a beggar because of it."

And he covered his disfigured face with his hands again.

"Be strong," I. repeated one more time. "It is never too late to start a new life and to earn your bread. You don't even have to go begging, we will help you to find a job if you want it, but I think that at the moment you must stay by your wife. She knows about your honesty and she doesn't trust anyone except you, but she didn't tell the truth even to you about how fabulously wealthy she was. Now, without her legs, and maybe without her hands, she won't agree to stay without you even for a moment. She trusts only you. First of all, do your duty of the husband and the executor of the testament, and then already start your new life. And if you want to work, I will explain to you where and how to find me."

I. took the syringe out of the first-aid kit, he was drawing the medicine from several little bottles for a long time and injected it in four times to both of her legs and hands. Besides, he told me to lift her ugly and terrible head a little and poured some bitterly smelling and colourless drops into each of her nostrils.

In the beginning it seemed as though the medicine wasn't working, but after some ten minutes a groan slipped out of her opened mouth. Then we started doing the artificial ventilation to her.

We had to work for a long time. The sweat was simply streaming. The duke didn't have any strength to watch this cruel gymnastics of the dying body; he turned away, sat down and began to cry bitterly.

All of a sudden, the old woman opened her eyes, gave a sigh and had a fit of coughing. I. didn't step back from her, he told me to lift her head and to give her a part of Ali's pill to drink urgently. I fulfilled this instruction of his. I. put the duchess' hands on the warmer, he covered her with the blanket and told us to bring some warmed up red wine. After some time consciousness flashed in the old woman's eyes.

"Do you hear me?" I. asked her.

Only a moo was heard instead of her answer. Having poured some warmed up wine into her mouth, I. gave her the remaining part of Ali's pill to drink.

"Stop worrying. Not only you will take your wife to Constantinople, but you will also get tired of her a great deal over there. She won't be able to move her legs anymore for sure, but I guess that her right hand and her speaking will recover," I. was explaining to the duke. "Here's the medicine for you. Now she will be sleeping for good three hours. Then give her these three medicine in turn every half an hour, very accurately. In the evening, before the sleep, I will still call at you."

We said good-bye to the duke and came back to the passengers from the first class, who were waiting for us impatiently, because there was quite a lot of time gone by. A Greek boy was waiting for us most of all. Having seized I.'s hand, he was sputtering his words, and I could only understand that he was feeling well, the medicine had helped him, but his mother and his grandfather were very weak.

We found his grandfather really weak in the Greek's cabin, while his daughter was very excited by his bed.

It was becoming clearer through her crying that she was obsessed by fear of death. When I. addressed the young woman, his voice was breathing of undisturbed calm, compassion and kindness.

"Is it really so difficult for you to understand that your excitement, your fear for your father prevents him from being healthy. He's not a patient, he's only tired, very tired, because he gave all strength for nursing you. How are you paying back to him now? You are only disturbing his rest with your tears and moaning. Control yourself, in truth all three of you are physically healthy now, only your spirit is ill. Instead of rejoicing, you are destroying all my efforts of love and energy with your sadness and fear. With my

efforts I show the way to your recovery. Leave your father in peace. Let him sleep, while you and your son could go out onto the deck, take a walk, concentrate and reflect about all last events of your life, which seemed to you like a Gordian knot, and thank life for their happy outcome.”

An unusual astonishment showed up in the Greek’s face. It seemed to me that I. was reading in her spirit like in an opened book. She was standing like a statue, she was growing red and pale, while her look was simply fastened to I.’s face.

Not uttering a single word anymore, I. gave the grandfather the medicine to drink. He turned him on another side, with his face to the wall, and we left. I turned around on the threshold – the Greek kept standing, motionless.

We visited several more patients, dropped in at Joan’s where everything was all right and came back to our cabin.

Here I. told me to take out the round leather box with bandages from the Florentian’s travelling-bag. Having taken some ointment and liquid, too, we climbed down to the Turk’s cabin where we found the younger Turk who was lying on the bed. He was pale and he must have been suffering a lot.

“Your behaviour is unwise, Ibrahim. Why are you hiding the pain of your leg from your father? You risk to become lame by doing so. I’ve been watching your walk and I think that the bone would be either split or even broken. It’s the real madness to be afraid of upsetting your father!”

Having examined the leg with the big bruise, I. put the plaster bandage on it and forbade Ibrahim to walk. He told me to find his father in the billiards-room and to tell him that his son was lying with the broken leg which has been already bandaged and put in plaster.

I found the older Turk with much difficulty. It turned out that there were even several billiards-rooms. He was playing in the second class, he was merry and he was routing all of his opponents.

When I entered, exactly at that time he had won the new game against the doctor who was considered to be the champion of England. There was no limit to the Turk’s joy. His eyes were shining with joy, and he was happy with his victory like a child. It seemed that for him the whole world had concentrated in the billiard stick and the balls.

However, as soon as he saw me, his entire joviality was gone in a flash.

“Has something happened?” he asked me, worried.

“Nothing special,” I uttered him by trying to put an untroubled face. “I. sent me to you, because neither him, nor I are able to sit next to your son at the moment...”

I couldn’t even finish the sentence. The Turk threw the stick, ran from the billiards-room like a deer, and through several steps he was already leaping to the top.

I hardly had any time to shout to the clumsy sailor who was accompanying me: “Hold him!” Sadness squeezed my heart – once again I failed to fulfil the task that was entrusted to me.

When I. was sending me to Ibrahim’s father, he reminded me of his mad love to his son. He told me to try to predispose him against his son’s illness and to send him to the cabin only then when he was able to look at his lying son calmly and not to disturb the patient’s peace with his cries. Although I understood everything well, but it turned out that my understanding was only theoretical, while in practice I proved to be helpless to influence a man’s heart and to pour a little peace into it.

I was running upstairs, too, but no matter how I was hurrying, I reached the top only when the clumsy sailor who heard my request blocked the way for the Turk with his extended hands and spread legs.

The scandal was already guaranteed: the Turk looked like a furious bull and he was ready to attack the clumsy sailor. Ibrahim's father changed very much – his face became pale, his eyes opened wide, his lips were trembling. He raised his fists and was so dreadful that I almost turned into Lovushka the catcher of the crows. It seemed already that I got confused, but suddenly, as though pushed by some power, I rushed through the Turk's armpit, leaped one step up and turned my face to him... At the same moment, his fist that was as heavy as the hammer landed upon my hand and in this way it protected the clumsy sailor's solar plexus where the deadly Turk's blow was aimed. This blow was strong, but it reach my head already weakened by someone's hand which seized the Turk's fist in the last moment.

Having taken a look at the man who was fighting against the furious Turk, I recognized my rescuer – that was the captain. He was already prepared to give a whistle and to summon his crew, so that they would tie the furious man up when I. seized the Turk with his strong hands and told him only a couple of words silently, but clearly and insistently in the language that I didn't know.

As if struck by the lightening, the Turk hung his head and hands. His face grew deadly pale, and two by tears rolled down his cheeks.

Having turned to the captain, with the entire politeness and tact that was characteristic to him, I. was sincerely asking his pardon for such an attack of fury of his friend Turk. He was explaining to him that this paroxysm was summoned by his care for his son who was really seriously ill, but his father imagined that his son was dead and that he wasn't allowed to approach his corpse, so he lost his head completely.

"I can understand that an ill-mannered person's untameable temperament can disturb his equilibrium, but to start a fight against a child – that's the limit behind which the grown-up man must be judged like a criminal," the captain answered with an absolutely calm and sonorous voice, although he was all pale and strained like a string.

Now already I started explaining to the captain that the Turk didn't have even a thought to beat me. I told him the whole situation from the beginning to the end. I acknowledged that it was my fault that I failed to prepare Ibrahim's father for his son's illness and that by doing so I gave rise to all this incident.

"My young friend, that isn't called an incident, but a little bit differently," the captain was talking to me by tenderly stroking my poor head. "Lovushka, please come to the young patient and stay with him until we clear up this event in my study."

"I beg you, captain," I seized the captain's hand and I was whispering to him. "Don't attach so much importance to this event. I told you everything clearly that the cause of this was I myself, right? Now help me to get out of all this mess, because the public is already starting to pay attention to us. You were drinking brotherhood with me, so does your love to me look like those flowers which fade as soon as they are touched stronger?"

Apparently, both my appearance and my voice were asking for sympathy, because it seemed as though the captain gave a smile. He told the clumsy sailor to accompany me to the Turk's cabin and to stay there until I. came back.

He invited the Turk and I. to follow him.

It seemed that the captain's hand had stopped and diminished the blow to my head to the minimum, however it was difficult for me to walk, I was leaning firmly upon the clumsy sailor and I could sit down on the arm-chair with much difficulty. Everything was drifting in front of my eyes, I was sickened and only now I could perceive that I could hardly stop myself from moaning.

Now I cannot tell exactly for how long I was sitting in that arm-chair. It seemed to me that the storm was starting once again, that I was being cast by the waves, that I was seeing the face of my wonderful friend Florentian who was bent over me...

I woke up and I felt myself strong and sound. First of all, I saw the sad, pale and sorrowful face of the older Turk. He was sitting next to me.

"Has something happened?" I asked him by having forgotten the former circumstances.

"Glory to Allah!" he gave a shout. "Finally you came to yourself, and I won't feel to be a murderer anymore!"

"What do you mean a murderer? What are you talking about? Why am I here?" I kept asking him, having seen that I wasn't lying in our cabin. "Where is I.? What has happened?"

I was trying to get up while talking and I already started worrying.

"In the name of Allah, lie calmly and don't talk," the Turk told me. "Because of that ill-fated blow of mine to you, you shiver with fever, you nauseate, you are delirious, and we have brought you here. My son is lying here, too. The gangrene has started for him. I. didn't move from both of you for three days. Three hours ago he declared that there were no danger for your lives anymore and he left me here to protect you. Don't try to get up, you are tied to the bed with belts, so that there would be as much peace as possible. I. told me to slacken the belts a little if you woke up until he was back, but you weren't allowed to get up by any means. Lovushka, will you ever forgive me for such a dreadful act of mine? Not for the first time in my life, I'm absolutely losing my self-control, and every time the cause of my fury is love. When the captain wanted to send me into solitary for the fight on the ship, and I was trying to explain to him that love to my son had made me lose my mind, he asked me ironically: "Who needs such love which is sowing jealousy and scandals everywhere, and which only causes so much trouble instead of causing joy and making life easier?" I understand everything. Now I also understand the whole horror of that situation when my adorable son is afraid of me and he's even hiding his pain from me – hence, he doesn't see a friend in me..."

"You are thinking wrongfully, daddy," all of a sudden a voice was heard from the adjacent bed. "I was a fool, because I was hiding my wound from everybody, thinking that everything would soon be over. Knowing well how you were praising an absolute self-control above all man's qualities, I wanted to protect you from an unnecessary disappointment in yourself, because I also knew perfectly how any anxiety for your loves ones was driving you mad. Namely my loyal friendship to you, to the man of extraordinary qualities, and my love to you as my father made me hide my wound from you. I had to make sure many times that I was unable to treat you in such a way that wouldn't irritate you. Daddy, you know that I don't lose my self-control, I never raise my voice, and despite that, I cannot put into words my love and friendship to you in such external forms which wouldn't excite your annoyance. Only my mother alone can talk to you in all moments of life..."

The younger Turk fell silent, and in his face which I could see clearly now showed up a dreamy expression, while his eyes were wet and shining. It seemed that the picture of his adorable mother flew his thoughts to the distant memories about the great spirituality of the woman who was living a heroic life.

I was trying to imagine that woman who had lived her entire life next to such a barrel of powder like the older Turk. Unwillingly, I started comparing my own character with his and, by taking a detached view, I understood how quarrelsome the unrestrained and ill-educated people were in everyday life.

I turned into Lovushka – the catcher of the crows, and my thoughts flew to the unknown distances. I was imagining a woman who was unknown to anybody, but who succeeded to educate her son Ibrahim so well in the daily chaos, while the storms of passions were raging. “What kind of a woman that mother was? What was her belief? What was her nationality?” All of a sudden the voice of the older Turk brought me back from my dreams.

“Mother, mother! Oh my son, if you knew how much your mother has suffered when she was young because of my frenzied jealousy! How many times I was threatening her with the knife! But she never had any fear, she was only protecting you, so that you wouldn’t see anything.”

The door opened suddenly and widely. I saw how the captain and I. entered the cabin. As always, the faces of both of them were energetic, only they were unusually pale and strict. I. bent over me, stroked my head and asked me tenderly.

“Can you hear me, Lovushka?”

I gave him a smile, I wanted to raise my hand and greet him, but the belts didn’t let me to move. It seemed to me that I was even laughing loudly by answering him: “I can hear you,” but in truth I hardly whispered these words and I felt very tired.

“Can you see, Lovushka, who came with me?” he asked me again.

“I see the captain who has drunk the brotherhood with me,” I answered him, “but I’m just tired for some reason.”

And against my will I started yawning so madly that I didn’t even have any strength to press my lips together.

“I asked you to sit with the patients for a while in absolute silence. I explained to you how dangerous the slightest agitation for these patients was, “I heard the strict I.’s voice. It was so strict that I had never heard it like this before. “And you, my friend, failed once again. Again you were thinking about yourself, and not about them.”

Now I asked them to help me to turn on another side and let me fall asleep. I wasn’t expecting this from the captain, but he bent over me and started to persuade me tenderly to lie on my back for a while, because now we were sailing into the bay, we were approaching the harbour, and the ship would toss a little, but soon we would sail up to the shore, then it would be calm, they would untie me and sit me up.

He extended his hand, took the glass with the medicine from I., put it to my lips and raised my head so carefully, as though it had been made of a friable mass.

I drank it and wanted to smile, but my yawning overcame me, then all of a sudden I disappeared somewhere, or perhaps, I fell into a doze.

I woke up in our cabin. The clumsy sailor was sitting next to me, and suddenly I saw a leaving woman who crossing the cabin’s threshold. It seemed to me that that was Joan. From the rather silly and sincere expression of my nurse – the clumsy sailor I understood that that was really her. There was so much

humour in his face, so much jolly happiness that some beauty was worried about me that I couldn't hold it anymore and I burst out laughing. This time it was really a loud laughter.

"Oh! The coming back to life of my bold spirit also manifests itself with a laughter," I heard the ringing voice of the captain. "Hello, my friend! Finally, you are recovered. Wait, wait! How fast you are! Lie down until I. comes," he continued, not allowing me to get up.

But I kept laughing and I was fighting with him. The captain started begging me not to fuss, I saw anxiety and worry in his face.

"Dear, you understand yourself that after such serious illness you must be very careful. Lie calmly, I will send somebody to invite I., and then you probably will be able to get up."

The captain ordered the clumsy sailor who was as drawn as the string to find I. and to ask him to come back to the cabin immediately.

During that time the captain was answering to my questions and he explained to me that today was already the fifth day of my illness and that we would reach Constantinople towards evening.

I became totally confused. My thoughts couldn't draw up the events, I couldn't remember anything from those five days, except the episode on the stairs, the blow, one more episode in the hospital – and that was it what remained in my memory.

The captain was entertaining me, he told me that I. was very worried about my vision and hearing. He was even sending the telegram to lord Benedict to London and to some doctors to B., asking for help and advice. He received an answer from B. very quickly and calmed down partly, but he received an answer from London only yesterday. After I. received this telegram he stopped worrying about my recovery at all and took me here.

It became peaceful and clear in my heart. I understood that I. was sending telegrams to sir Vomi and Florentian. This undeserved care summoned the great respect within me for the attention that was simply poured before me.

I wanted to ask the captain if I. was telling him something about my brother, but the thought about the little word "tact" which Florentian kept repeating to me stopped me.

I heard the quick and light steps which I recognized immediately, and already nobody could stop me anymore. I jumped like a cat from the bed and fell myself on my rescuer I.'s neck.

"Lovushka, don't be mad! You will suffocate me!" I. was crying to me, and both of them with the captain put me back to bed.

"What are you doing, really? I cannot lie down anymore!"

"And now your heart is beating like a hammer, because you have tired it," I. answered to my protest. "You can only sit down in the arm-chair on the deck for a while, but even when we are in Constantinople, you still cannot walk for two or three days. If you want to be my assistant, if you want to help me to put Joan's and her children's lives in order, you have to show your character and to fulfil the doctors' instructions obediently. And the instructions are exactly such!"

He looked me up and down meaningfully and added that it was important to visit not only Joan, both signoras Italians and the Greek family, who wanted to see me as soon as possible and whom we would need to help to put their lives in order somehow, but also the young duke who needed our guardianship and help mostly at the moment.

"You understand yourself that I alone won't be able to do all that. In order for you to be my true assistant, you will have to forget your personal wants and to think only about those miserable people. Everyone of them is unhappy in his or her own way, but all of them are equally suffering from their own passions."

The captain frowned. Finally he asked I.

"Tell me, friend, according to which laws of God and people you cross out the personal happiness from this young life? Does he really have to keep roaming about only with the troubles of the strangers when he could have a good time and live a happy life of the family father or the scientist? He possesses all the qualities that are needed for an excellent career, doesn't he? He will be my brother, my heir. England is a wonderful country where everyone is living for himself and doesn't trouble himself to pick other people's disasters into their pockets, doesn't hinder the lives of others."

"Lovushka is a grown-up and a free man. He has every right to choose any way. If he expresses his desire to go with you and not with me, then you can move him to your own cabin right now," I. answered him.

"Lovushka, move to my cabin. We will go to England. I'm single. You will be rich. My family is one of the best from the old landlords. My mother and my sister are charming women. They adore me and they will accept you like their own. You will be able to choose your career freely. Don't be afraid, I won't thrust the sailor's career on you, neither a bride whom you won't want, don't think that England cannot change your motherland for you. You will love it when you know it better, and then everything what you want – the science, arts, travelling, love – then you can reach everything. You will be happy and free from all those obligations with which you are being educated now. Man lives only once, and the value of life is his personal experience, and not that you should forget yourself and think only about others," the captain was talking to me, while walking slowly in our spacious cabin.

"I could give so much, oh how much, if I could be in London during these days," I answered him. "But I would like to get there namely because I could forget myself and think about others, my dear friend. So, you can see yourself how it is impossible to coordinate our lives, although I love you very much, I like you very much. And I like you not because I respond to you with gratitude for such wonderful feelings with respect to me, but because you have grown firmly into my heart, as well as your great nobleness, courage and honour. My path is next to I. Only this path can bring me happiness. I met one great man not so long ago, I have become fond of him and now I'm loyal to him forever. Oh, if I could introduce him to you, I would be so happy! I know that you would evaluate him immediately, and then we could walk the same path, in a brotherly way and inseparably. I thank you for your tenderness and attention. I know that you are offering me the liberation according to your own understanding, because you think that I'm pulling the yoke of high ideas, that I'm entrapped in them. No, I'm absolutely free; I. was telling the truth. Now I feel happy that every moment of my worthless life up to now is dedicated to save my dear brother-father, my brother-educator, the only being in the whole world with whom we have the same ties of blood. Death and persecution is threatening him, while I'm trying to mislead the persecutors and to get them off the track with the help of his friends and myself. I will walk this path till the end, even if my death was close and inescapable. While I'm still alive, I will try to see the suffering of people and, as you have put it, I will be picking it into my pockets."

The captain kept silent and he was looking at me sadly. Finally, he extended his hand to me and told me.

"Well then, put my bitterness into one of your pockets, too. Everything what I'm trying to achieve in my life is falling down. I had a fiancée – she broke her oath. I had a beloved brother – he passed

away. I had luck in my family – my father left us. I had a desire for honour – a duel prevented my respectable career. I met you – we didn't become brothers. Your pockets must be bottomless. People are egoistic beings: if they only see that someone is ready to throw their troubles on his shoulders, they sit down on his hump and even seize him by the hair..."

He was silent for a while and then continued silently by addressing I.

"If I could somehow help you and your brother, take advantage of my offered help. I don't have such attachments in my life which would fill it up fully. I was striving for them, seeking after them during my entire life, but they were always running away from me like an illusion. I'm absolutely free. I love the sea, because I don't expect any stability and faithfulness from it. You are faithful to your love for your brother and to some friend. You are happier than me. I don't have anybody who would need my faithfulness. My relatives manage without me easily."

"You are very wrong," I. exclaimed in some especial voice. "Don't you remember the little Russian girl who loved you to the total renunciation? The talented violinist named Lisa?"

The captain stopped like thunderstruck.

"Lisa?! Lisa was fourteen years old. It would be naïve to think that it was serious. There was also her aunt there, who was simply haunting with her love. She seemed to me like a funny old fairy, and I was admiring the little jealous girl, but I never allowed myself to play with her feelings and I put the coolest armour of my courtesy and politeness on. I won't argue with you, if the circumstances had been more fortunate, I could have fallen in love with this living being."

"And this living being cannot leave your portrait and she's searching for all sorts of possibilities to meet you. Not her fault, but only a huge tragedy of her family prevented her from cruising on this steamer and namely in this cabin."

"It cannot be the truth, Lisa's surname was different, and the countess R. from Gurzuf bought the tickets to this cabin."

"Yes, but Lisa was using her aunt's surname while she was staying in the seaside resort. Please believe me that countess R. is nobody else, but Lisa. And if you perceive honestly that you fall in love with that girl, then go to Gurzuf and meet Lisa. Her life is worth to be saved, and you have an opportunity to help the woman to live a happy life, not renouncing yourself. There are people who can love only once. Lisa is one of them. And nothing – neither riches nor her talent – can give her happiness if her heart doesn't have a response. Don't be cruel and light-minded. You were only playing with the girl's feelings, thinking that her love was transitory, weren't you? But actually, it turned out that her life was already broken. If you delay, her health may break down, too."

There were no limits to my amazement: I was thinking if I loved Lisa, what she felt for me. Now I remembered some of the details of her behaviour, her attentive look when she said good-bye to I. in Sevastopol. She must have confided the secret of her heart to him.

The captain kept silent for a long time. No one from us was disturbing this silence.

"Strange, everything is so strange," finally he sighed. "How it is wonderful that everything in our lives is happening so fast. So fast! Less than an hour ago, it seemed to me that my life without Lovushka would be futile. He won me over to his side with his heroism. When he answered me several minutes ago, I was going through the tragedy of disappointment and loss, and now as though I begin to see things clearly. Doctor I., I trusted you from the beginning, I excluded you from all meetings of my life in a special way, but in this moment your words as though took a screen off my thoughts and heart, I start hoping for real value

life for myself. What an egoist I am! I have already unrolled the flying carpet of my dreams in my thoughts, but I have forgotten what Lovushka was just telling me. No, I won't start creating my new life until I haven't helped the business of Lovushka and yourself."

"Everyone has to walk his own path, and it is impossible to walk a stranger's path even for a span," I. told him. "We will meet you and your future wife Lisa – if you listen to the real voice of your heart – many times, and every time you will be able to render us your friendly and rather significant assistance. Let life lead all of us in such a way as it is doing so. And believe me that everyone of us is walking in such a way how better, easier and faster it is for him to reach the happiness of knowing. We'll be writing to you, I think you also will be doing so. And if you permit, I have a great favour to ask you now. Help us to settle the duke and his wife in some quite good villa in Constantinople. It will be very difficult to carry her out of the ship, because we can carry her only in our arms, and you know the curiosity of the crowd and how it will be difficult for the unfortunate husband to bear the mockery of the public when they see such a decrepit wife next to him."

"It is more than simple to arrange everything," the captain answered him. "A Greek family is cruising in one of the cabins – but actually, you know them, too, you were treating them during the storm. They have a quite big house with the big garden in which they don't reside themselves, but they are only letting it. The boy mentioned to me that the house is free at the moment. If it is really so, then I will give you some people, and they will carry the old woman over to that house at night by using the stretcher. She will feel well there, while the duke will have a chance not to feel embarrassed of the strangers and to live alone, not accepting any other tenants in the house or garden. I will clear this up and let you know by sending someone to you. Now I have to go, because it is high time already."

And having squeezed our hands, the captain left.

I didn't want to talk at all. I. went up to my bed, sat down on the chair that was standing near, took my hand and checked my pulse.

He had already counted my pulse long time ago and made sure that my heart wasn't beating anymore, but he was still sitting next to me by holding my hand.

"My dear boy!" he told me silently. "We have just started our real path, and it seems to you that you've already been suffering for the whole century. Is really everything what you have to experience so unexpectedly bringing only suffering, bitterness and worries to you? Imagine that now you are happy next to your brother and you are provided with everything. Then would you have met Ali, Florentian and sir Vomi? Then would you have known that there were not only the town-dwellers who were looking for benefit only for themselves on the earth, but there were also the people who have set the spirit within themselves like the fire of their hearts' creation, like the everlasting activity of love and calm for the people's welfare? Take a look at your current heart and you will see how its limits have widened in comparison to the past! Oh, if you could take a look at Florentian's heart, you would see such a tremendous lot of beauty in it! Your grey daily life next to him would brighten up with such light and charm! The whole man's happiness depends on the power of his spirit, on that altitude to which he can rise and cast a glance. If a sensitive string of desire for a body and passions sounds within yourself, then your dreams are hovering only over charming and desirable bodies. If your thought is raising you to the heights of spiritual love, and you can already hear the voice of another man's heart, then this accord arises not from the material choice, but from the influence of that power of vibrations which the power of your creative heart is sending to the surroundings. Fly to Florentian in your thoughts, and if you are capable of perceiving the grandeur of his thoughts and spirit, then his love will be able to respond to your love, to the needs of your thought and to the creative work of your heart in your grey daily routine. The easier and more sincerely your thoughts will be trying to merge with his great wisdom to live in the simplest kindness

every day, the calmer you will stay in all circumstances of your life, in all menacing dangers, - the easier it will be for your great friend to unite with you.”

I still was unable to understand everything what I. was telling me. Many things seemed to be unclear to me, something seemed to be even impossible, but I didn't want to interrogate him.

I obeyed to I.'s instruction to lie on the deck willingly, because I didn't want to see anybody, my brother's books were drawing me. The clumsy sailor settled me on the deck perfectly, I. sat down next to me to write his letters, and I laid out the books and instead of rejoicing at them... I fell asleep.

We reached Constantinople without any adventures. Only parting with the captain was so exciting that it moved me to tears. He gave me his portrait in an excellent frame, left his London address and assured us that he would come to our hotel in the morning and, if I. was busy with his affairs, he would be glad to stay next to me for a while. We hugged one another heartily, and with the help of the clumsy sailor and I., I was one of the last ones climbing down the stairs of the steamer.

Chapter 16

In Constantinople

The late evening in Constantinople was one of the impressions that surprised me most. An unusual dialect, the racket, the fezzes which were flashing in front of my eyes, the employees of the hotels who were carping at the people going shore from all sides, the guttural voices, the noise of the strange, unseen fiacres – all of it fell over me, and I probably would have been confused if Joan with her children hadn't drawn my attention. She was accompanied by the ship's doctor and both Italians who were met by their relatives with high posts, - and all of them were waiting for us on the shore.

Joan hurried towards me, she was asking I. kindly to allow her to nurse me until I recover and to repay us for our entire attention to her at least with such a small service.

I gave a laugh and answered her that I was absolutely healthy and that I obeyed his instructions and I was pretending to be a patient only because of my love and respect to him.

Then the Italians introduced me to their relatives. A respectable ambassador offered us to settle me in his remote house, but I. refused his offer categorically by assuring everybody that the hotel's noise would be even useful for me, because I wasn't allowed only to walk for a while.

The Italians were sorry, because I wasn't coming with them. They said good-bye to us and promised to visit me tomorrow in the hotel and then they left.

The hotel wasn't far and we were going on foot together with Joan and her children very slowly and not for very long. The Turks were already waiting for us at the hotel. They had time to order the rooms on the same floor for us and Joan.

As soon as we reached our floor, I noticed how Joan pined away and changed. She whispered to my question what was making her so sad.

"While you were ill, I went through such horror, such horror that also now I still cannot fully recollect myself, often I'm crying and shaking during the whole hours."

"Well, you see how ruinous a fear can be," I. interfered. "I was explaining to you many times that Lovushka would recover. Now he's healthy, and before you start your job, I will have to treat you."

"No, I can assure you that you won't have to treat me! If you like, I can start my job tomorrow, only that if I knew that Lovushka is healthy and cheerful," Joan answered I.

We went to our rooms. I thanked the clumsy sailor heartily for his care. I. wanted to repay him generously, but the kind-hearted lad didn't take the money. He attached to us during that short journey and asked us to let him visit us, while the steamer would be repaired on the shore.

Although I didn't want to confess that I wasn't absolutely healthy, but it wasn't easy for me to undress. Everything started floating in front of my eyes again.

I don't know if I was sleeping for a long time, but I woke up from the voices in the adjacent room. Having looked at the clock, I saw that it wasn't an early morning, but ten o'clock already. I was trying to dress myself silently and I touched the chair clumsily. I. heard the noise. He opened the door immediately and asked me if I didn't fall down.

Having made sure that everything was all right, he offered me to drink a cup of coffee with the captain in the balcony, because he was already waiting for me, and then to have breakfast with Joan, while he and the Turks would be running about with Joan's affairs.

I understood that at the presence of the captain I didn't want to talk about our business because of which actually we had come here, and I didn't doubt that he was going to find out about my brother's destiny.

While being together with the captain, I had an opportunity to make sure of this man's versatility and culture once again. Besides that he had seen the whole world while sailing around the earth several times already – he also knew each country's characteristic features and could speak almost every language. His unusual observation and purely sailor's vigilance and attention which were developed in the dangers of the insidious sea had taught him to observe people and to estimate them nearly impeccably. I was surprised how accurately and subtly he described I., how he guessed some of the features of my character, and what he told about Joan simply stunned me. In his opinion, now Joan almost reached the limit of the mental disorder because of her experienced shock.

"A woman," he was telling me, "can rarely survive alone in the moments of the greatest disaster. Not sensing it herself, she's pressing herself to the man who has shown her attention and tenderness in order to put out the fire of her passions a little, which are raging after loss of her beloved. Therefore, a man, an honest gentleman must be very careful, very attentive to each of his word and action in order to avoid an ambiguous situation. I had a chance to observe many times in my life how a man who was comforting a woman in her bad luck would get into a hopeless situation. The woman would fall on him with the whole burden of her suffering, would attach to him so tightly that he would have either to marry her or to run away from her by arousing the new suffering for her."

These words were hurting me. I. was telling me the same or almost the same. Unawares, I fell silent and I fell to thinking how it was still difficult for me to orient myself in people's feelings, how simply everything seemed to me, but in fact the thorns and splinters were hiding everywhere.

We started talking about Joan who had to have breakfast with us. The captain sent for the maitre d'hotel, he ordered him to bring a subtle French breakfast to my room, which looked like a dinner for three persons. He ordered him to decorate the table with roses, and I asked them to be of red and white colours.

At one o'clock the table was already laid. I wrote a note to Joan by asking her to come to have breakfast. There came a knock at the door, and the slender Joan's figure with the white dress came to light in the dark background of the door.

I met my guest at the threshold and, having kissed her hand, I invited her at the table. I still hadn't seen Joan such radiant and joyful. At once she started asking me a lot of questions about my general condition, about I., for how long we would stay in Constantinople – I didn't even know to which one of the questions I had to answer in the beginning.

"I'm so glad, so glad that I will be able to spend this moment with you, because I have a thousand of things to tell you and another thousand questions to ask you – and there's always no time to do that."

"Let me introduce you to my friend whom you know as the ship's captain, but you don't know what an excellent company and a wonderful cavalier he is," finally, I took advantage of the pause and interfered in her speech.

As soon as Joan stepped into the cabin, she fixed her gaze on me so much that she didn't even notice the captain who was standing aside by the table. The captain went to her, smiling. He handed the white and red roses to her. He bent down towards her hand, he was greeting her like a duchess and, having offered her his arm, he accompanied her at the table.

When we sat down, I couldn't recognize Joan anymore. Her face was cold and strict, I didn't even know that it could be like this.

I was embarrassed, I took a look at my friend, because I felt confused, but I was unable to read anything in the captain's face. His face was also unknown to me – it was the face of the courteous and gallant man who was doing his duties at the table and taking care of the lady out of courtesy. He was smiling, his yellow catlike eyes were looking at her kind-heartedly, but I was feeling that Joan was fettered by the armour of his gallantry and she was unable to overstep those limits which he had defined for her instantly.

All her hopes to see me in solitude and to share her thoughts about her new life with me from the bottom of her heart broke from the presence of the stranger – and even of such a grand one who possessed the halo of power and authority, with which each captain was covered in the sea.

Joan's monosyllabic answers, her appearance and lack of culture would have turned each breakfast into a funeral dinner, but the captain's moderation, the mastery of his speech made me laugh through tears. Joan had difficulty to understand humour, but when the breakfast was coming to the end, she became cheerful and more sincere, too. The captain apologized and went to order some special coffee in the cups, which we would be drinking in the balcony.

Having taken advantage of this possibility, Joan told me that tonight she had to meet the Turk who would provide her with the premises for the shop and for the flat in one of the central streets where she could open the hat's atelier. She kept telling me how frightened she was, how terrible her solitude was and what fears she had because of the destiny of her children.

I had time to tell her that I would never leave her, that both of us were her eternal friends wherever we would be. I failed to comfort her very much, because I was afraid of telling her some imprudent word.

The captain came back and brought us some excellent oranges. Soon the famous coffee was served, too, but Joan was sitting like dragged out of the bog, she refused the fruit and left. I could hardly convince her of taking an orange of each of her children, while the captain's roses were left on the table. The captain accompanied her to the door, he bowed low, let her forward and closed the door behind her.

He came back to me to the balcony, took both roses given to Joan, breathed in their aroma, laughed and told me.

"Not often in my life I used to suffer a defeat at the front of ladies, but today even my flowers, not only I myself have experienced a fiasco."

"And it influenced me so much," I answered him, "that I even have a headache. For some reason I think that the poor lady is crying now. And indeed, it is a pity that I'm so helpless and I cannot help her."

"Not your helplessness is here to blame, but the lack of real culture and politeness. Exactly this could help a woman in the difficult moment of her life's tests. She must become a woman-heroine, while at the moment she's only a woman-wife, a townswoman. It doesn't mean that in the future she won't be able to rise to the circle of other thoughts and ideas, but the battle of her personal happiness, for

her personal life will be horrible. While she's unable to refuse love for herself and to start living for her children – she's going to wade across the torments of hell. So I bowed so low to those torments today," the captain was talking to me, lost in thought.

"Is it really so that if you loved once, if you loved till an absolute oblivion, but you have lost your heart's heaven, then you have to search for it again? I think that either you should love a hundred times, but not seriously, or love with your entire essence once, but in such a way that you could never approach a single woman again," I answered him.

"I cannot judge that. Perhaps, I've already lived the greater half of my life and I still haven't waited till that moment so that I could tell: "stop, moment." Everywhere where people are obsessed with their passions and cannot become the rulers of their thoughts and hearts, I could see only inexhaustible amount of suffering..."

The captain's speech was interrupted by the knock at the door, and the duke showed up at the doorway when we invited him to come in.

Having the patient's right, I remained lying on the couch, under the screen of the curtains of the balcony, while the captain was smiling to him warmly, he met the guest, squeezed his hand in a friendly way and seated him next to me.

The duke explained to us that he already visited the ship where he was looking for the captain. He wanted to thank him for his help provided to his sick wife, he was also thanking us, but he wanted to ask me and I. to visit the patient.

He looked rather badly. He was elegantly dressed, but his face was sallow, his eyes were feverish, and everything within him was telling about his utter physical exhaustion and mental derangement.

The captain was smiling and he told him that he was very sorry that he wasn't the doctor, because then he would prescribe the bed regime not to his wife, but to himself. I assured the duke that I. would certainly visit him, but I doubted if he had time today, because he left early in the morning and promised to come back only in the evening, but he also had lots of affairs to do in the evening.

Having spent another hour with us, the duke asked us for permission to visit us tomorrow in the morning in order to find out when I. could visit his wife.

We didn't have time to exchange our impressions about Constantinople when there came a knock at the door again and signoras Galdoni with the bouquets of roses in their hands entered the cabin. Both of them were radiating with joy. Their speech was cheerful and lively, they invited me, I. and the captain to visit them in the wonderful palace of embassy. The captain explained to them that at the moment he was nursing me, that I. was asserting him that I still had to stay in bed for two or three days, but then he promised them to present me to them himself.

The good manners and noble company were blowing softly from the Italians, while the charming, bottomless and kind eyes of the young Galdoni were arousing the best feelings in my soul, her charming womanhood was penetrating till the bottom of my heart.

"This is what the poor, sweet Joan lacks," I told the captain. "She's better than many others, but she cannot control herself, just like me. Only because I'm ill-bred, I'm always irritated, right? Maybe that's why I can understand Joan better than others."

"No, my friend. There's nothing in common between your and her ill breeding. You are only unexperienced and you cannot control neither your temperament nor your thoughts, but the circle of your wants and ideas, the world of your high aspirations in which you are living, - everything is guiding you to the space of those happy people who achieve an ability to be of use to their brothers on the earth. Sooner or later you will find your individual, unique path that is impossible for another person and you will bring something new to your life, I'm sure that it'll be great and significant for the common welfare. And regarding Joan, well - thank goodness if her endless personal suffering would release at least a mother's love within her and could help her to become a mother-helper, a mother-assistant to her children, and not a mother-tyrant. There are many cases when a mother's suffered pain becomes a despotism for her children! In the meanwhile, it seems to her that her love is the greatest deed."

I was looking at the captain with my eyes opened wide. His face was wonderful. Such a deep concentration was reflected on it, which I used to see only on the faces of I., Florentian and Ali.

My silence made him turn around.

"Why are you looking at me like this, my boy, my brotherhood brother? What new have you seen within me," he asked me by touching my shoulder easily and tenderly.

"Not only I saw something new within you, but I also understood that you really need to become acquainted with my friend Florentian. He's such a great man that I haven't met another one like him up to now. Even I. whom you exclude from others cannot compete with him, although I admit from the bottom of my heart that I. is an ideal of unreachable height and kindness for me. You don't know my friend Florentian, but you uttered those words that I used to hear from him two times already. Oh, if such happiness came, and I could introduce you to him!"

I even didn't notice I. who came in.

"It seems that you're having a good time together, but why I don't see Joan? I agreed with her that she would be waiting for me here with you, Lovushka, and that I would be able to let her know immediately about where and how she would be making arrangements about her job. Did two such gallant cavaliers fail to dispel the storm of sadness of one lady?" he asked us by squeezing our hands cheerfully.

"No," the captain answered him. "The lady has taught me obedience. She even left my flowers, while the perfectly selected menu was unsuccessful at all. I think that I'm namely that reason which took the appetite and good mood from the lady. If I hadn't received your instruction to stay with Lovushka, I'm afraid that I would have run away from the battle-field."

"I., Joan upset me very much. Once again I failed to remain tactful, I brought disorder in her life again, although I wanted to bring in peace. It seems that the perspective of a sincere and joyful contact with such a gawk like myself is supposed only for black women," I was complaining ironically to I.

"What kind of black women?" the captain gave a shout.

"This is the first and memorable Lovushka's acquaintance with the black-skinned woman in B. For the first time in his life, he saw an educated, elegant, black-skinned woman not in the picture, but while he was visiting the family of one of my friends, so he was shocked," I. answered him. "For some reason you are pale, Lovushka. I would like that you would come down carefully to the garden with the captain and would sit there for a while in the shadow. However sorry I feel for you, but you will have to take part in my conversation with Joan before that trader who gives the premises to her comes. Captain, I also would like to ask you very much to stay with us during that hour, because I guess that it will be very difficult for Joan to start the new life of the single, working woman. It is a pity, but I failed to find out

anything about her uncle. There's an information that he fell ill and moved away to his relatives in the provinces, but there aren't any further tracks of him."

The captain agreed willingly to stay with me in the garden and then to come back. I. asked us if we protested to miss the dinner and to have our supper only late in the evening. We assented to him. While we were going downstairs to the garden, we met both Turks. The younger Turk joined us, while the older one went to I.

The youth was still walking with difficulty. He was using the stick, but he wasn't feeling any special pain in his leg and back anymore. He had worked out the whole plan what we had to see in Constantinople. I was fascinated by his mentioned, historical places both in the city and in its environs, but I thought that probably I wouldn't have time to see at least a half of it.

I wanted to hear from I. about my brother and our future destiny very much, but... already not for the first time during these days, I was learning patience and self-control.

Towards evening, the servant in the name of I. asked us to tea. The table was laid no less carefully than the captain's one during the breakfast. The table was standing in the big I.'s room, it was glittering with silver and loaded with all sorts of Eastern sweets.

When we entered, I. hurried away to invite Joan. He didn't come back for quite a long time. I already started worrying and getting irritated when finally they came by continuing their conversation which obviously wasn't very pleasing for Joan.

She had a modest, blue dress on, which especially emphasized her paleness. Having bowed to me and the captain, she greeted both Turks and sat down on the seat which I. showed to her. I. sat down next to her, me and the captain – in front of them, the Turks – from their right side, and there was a free place left from the left side of Joan.

We didn't have time to take our places when a tall, slender, absolutely grey, elderly man with rather sharp and beautiful facial features knocked lightly at the door and entered the room.

I. rose to meet him, he introduced him to everybody and invited him to sit down next to Joan. He presented him to us as Boris Fyodorovich Stroganoff.

I took a good look at Stroganoff and I wouldn't have called him a Russian in any way. His face was the one of a typical Turk with a hooked nose, big black eyes and black eye-brows. It was smoothly shaven, which suited more for an actor rather than for a trader.

The joint conversation started, in which Joan wasn't taking part at all. I could see the traces of tears and powder on her face. I sympathized sincerely with the poor woman and I was tormenting myself, because it was so difficult to transfer energy from one heart to another one. I was sure that everybody who were sitting at the table had gathered only to help her. And nevertheless, everyone's joint will could hardly help her self-control. I was looking so intently at Stroganoff that he started laughing and told me.

"Young man, I bet that you are a writer."

Everybody gave a laugh, and I asked him, wonderstruck.

"Why did you draw such a conclusion all of a sudden?"

"Because I've seen all kinds of people during my long life and I noticed that only the eyes of talented writers were such awls that one becomes uncomfortable because of them. I absolutely don't want

to say that your showed attention is unpleasant to me. I want to assure you that I'm not a secret personality at all and you won't find any crime hidden from justice in my past, so I'm not that interesting," he was smiling and he extended his cigar-case to me.

"Thank you, I haven't learned to smoke yet," I answered him. "Forgive me for such an attentive look of mine, this is only my ill breeding. I'm extremely absent-minded and from my childhood my nickname is Lovushka – the catcher of the crows. I hope that you can forgive me and that you won't be strict for such a rude curiosity of mine."

I was totally distressed, because I directed the guest's attention to me so unsuccessfully.

He rose from his chair, bowed easily before me and answered me politely that his remark wasn't a challenge, but only a bad compliment, and that he got even with me in this.

I. asked him if he was living in Constantinople for a long time already.

"Yes, I've been living here for a long time. I was born here," Stroganoff explained to him. "My father was the captain of the commercial ship and he often used to come to Constantinople. So one time he became acquainted with a half-Russian, half Turkish family and married one of their daughters. I resemble my mother very much, that's why my family name doesn't correspond to my appearance so much. My other family members are blond and corpulent. I was born in that house where the premises of the shop are free now, but back then that street wasn't one of the main ones like it is now. From whom would you like to rent them?"

"We would like to rent them for your neighbour, so that she could open the hat atelier," I. answered him.

I. noticed that Stroganoff turned to Joan, so he warned him that his neighbour was French and she was talking only her language.

The guest began to speak in French. He was speaking easily, with a little accent, but absolutely correctly.

My heart started beating out of excitement. I was so afraid that the rude Joan's behaviour would make Stroganoff to change his mind and would cause difficulty for the rent, but he, as though not noticing anything, was explaining the advantages of the street, house and interior design to her in a very business-like and pleasant way. According to his words, there was a small villa downstairs – the shop with the antechamber, while upstairs there was a two-room flat with the kitchen, which had a way out to the yard and the wonderful garden.

Seeing that Joan kept silent, he offered to take her tomorrow in the morning and to show her the premises. If the repairs were needed, then it would be possible to do it quickly.

I. thanked Boris Fyodorovich, he explained to him that Joan was the niece of that man about whom he was searching the information in the morning, that she would have to stay in Constantinople alone with her two little children, because all of us would leave, except the Turks.

Stroganoff turned to Joan again. The tears were rolling down her face.

"Don't upset yourself, madam," he was talking to her. All of us are fighting in our lives and all of us start with a very little – only to make our bread. It is your fortune that you met the people who turned out to be the real people and who are taking care of you now. This is a rare luck. It seems that you've deserved an exceptional favour of fate with something, because I will be glad to help you, too. I have twenty-seven years old daughter who lost her groom when she was seventeen years old, then she didn't

want to marry again. I always wanted to begin an independent business. If you could teach her to do your trade, then to accept her as your companion, then both the shop and its installation would cost you half as much."

Joan's face became brighter. The smile showed up in her lips, and with the childish confidence she extended both of her hands to Stroganoff.

"I will be happy to have a companion. I know my trade very well, the ladies usually lose their minds for my hats, but I absolutely don't know the book-keeping and accounts, and this side of the business even frightens me. I would be happier if you could just hire me, while the whole business would be yours."

"I think that this won't correspond to your friends' plans," Stroganoff answered her. "As I understood from your friend's speech and as I would wish it for my own daughter myself, you have to live independent, you have to work and to bring up your children. Only be brave. My daughter doesn't know anything about financial accounts, too, but she's intelligent, diligent, and I will be guiding you in your financial operations from the beginning. It is everything easy for a man if he doesn't cry, if he isn't afraid of anything, but if he starts his job easily and fearlessly. I noticed many times that in business not those who have lots of money win, but those who have started their business easily."

Everything was decided. Joan, I. and Stroganoff had to meet in the future atelier tomorrow at eleven o'clock.

I was looking at I. pleadingly, not daring to ask him for permission to come with him, but I., foreseeing my want, explained to Stroganoff that I was very ill and that I wasn't allowed neither to walk nor to jolt in the coach. So I. asked Stroganoff if it was possible to cover a part of the way by water. Boris Fyodorovich answered him that we could go to the old defensive tower by boat, then in two blocks there would be the shop, but we would have to row at least for half of hour.

"We'll do exactly this," the captain said to Joan by looking at her, "if the whole company is inviting us."

Joan gave a laugh and told him that she would be happy, but whether Lovushka himself would want to do it. This looked so funny for everybody, because my evident desire to see everything by myself was simply writ large on my face.

Stroganoff finished drinking his tea and said good-bye to us by smiling benevolently. The old Turk volunteered to accompany him, because the urgent matters were waiting for him in his house, too.

When they left, I. handed two big batches of bank-notes to Joan and explained to her that they were meant for her children. If now she had to spend some of the money for the beginning of the business, then as soon as there would be some profit, she had to lay it aside, because his friends had given the money for education of her children.

"Probably I should only thank you and your friends, mister senior doctor, but I cannot understand in any way – is really my entire life only for my children? Don't I really signify anything at all, because during the whole journey no one has told me personally a kinder word, and all the troubles are running only on my children?" Joan was asking I. "I'm very dedicated to my children, I want to work and I will be working for them, but is it really everything over for me, because I have lost my husband? So I'm not allowed even to look at people? I'm stunned with such a tyrannical attitude."

Hysteria rang in her face, and I remembered the captain's words that Joan was on the boundary of a mental disease.

"One day," I. answered her, "you will probably perceive how terrible it is that what you are talking about now. You are very ill, very unhappy and you are unable to estimate the entire tragedy of your disposition. Everything what we could do for you we did, but nobody can give peace to your heart, and that is the first condition of your successful work. You see happy and restrained people among us, and it seems to you that we are exactly such how you are thinking about us, but in truth, my dear Joan, you cannot imagine how many tragedies some of us have gone through. I don't ask anything from you now, only don't give in to the sorrow of this moment and don't think that if Lovushka and I are leaving, then you won't have any comfort anymore. You will find comfort in your successful work. Only for now don't think about love like the only possibility to restore your balance. Trust my experience that life without work is the unhappiest one, but when there's a work, then the whole life is already half-happy."

Joan didn't answer him any word, but I understood that a husband and love had taken the first place in her psychology, and only then her children followed, while work was only a necessary addition to it.

The younger Turk promised Joan to bring her an old nurse Turk who was living in their family for many years.

In this way Joan's life was being put in order as if a fairy had waved her wand.

I. interrupted our not so absolutely happy drinking of the tea by offering us to depart and by reminding everybody about my condition. While Joan was saying good-bye to me, she told me that she would agree to rent the house only in this case if I assented to it. I didn't have time to answer her more exhaustively, I only had time to utter her that I myself was following I.'s advices and I offered her to catch each of his words, not mine.

The captain and the younger Turk went downstairs to the restaurant. I. and I refused the food categorically, and finally the two of us were left alone.

We went to the balcony. It was the dark night already, which seemed to me like the real fairy-tale: I had never seen such wonderful sky and unusual stars. This strange and extraordinary city with its lights seemed to be unreal to me, like a panorama of a fairy-tale.

"I don't have many new news, besides the ones which I have already imparted to you. Our persecutors died in the sea, but I received the letter from Ali, in which he asks us to stay in Constantinople until Ananda comes here. Then all of us together will be moving to India, to Ali's estate. I received the telegram from Florentian. He's writing that your brother and Nal came to London, but I think that they would have to go to New York where Florentian himself would accompany them to," I. was speaking to me.

"Am I really going to India with you and my brother to America, not even seeing one another before our separation?" I asked I. sadly.

"Lovushka, if you saw your brother in front of you now, could you, after your first meeting with him, ask him all those questions which have appeared in your soul, which still are living there and to which you would like to get some detailed answers? You have been living with your brother for so many years and only now you understand that your and his spiritual lives are spinning around the different axes. Not the physical meeting is important, but that you could understand your brother without any questions and tears, that you could find the answers to all of it within yourself. You have to learn a lot, so that you could understand your brother's books. You will find an excellent library in Ali's estate, while young Ali will be your friend and assistant. You can still choose at this moment. If you want to go to your brother, Florentian will take you with him, and Ananda will take you to him. However, if you, knowing from your experience how it is difficult to be living with the people who are superior than you, not being able to

understand them, want to stay with me and Ali, then you'll be able to become a strong assistant both to Florentian and your brother who will still need your help many times. You are free to choose your path yourself, but for some reason it seems to me that both your intuition and your talent are already telling you themselves that you cannot leave that what you've already started. While we are living here and signing in your name, those who are persecuting your brother will certainly come here as soon as they receive this message, and while we will be their target, your brother and Nal will have time to move to America. I won't hide from you my anxiety, too. Although the mad Turk's blow haven't killed you in place, it shook you so much that it affected your whole organism anyway. With the help of your cheerful will, you have to try to keep your balance all the time. Every time when you begin to get excited or to irritate, think about Florentian, remember his perfect self-control which have been saving you many times along your path. Also think about Joan whose behaviour you understand perfectly as inappropriate. The more and more thoroughly you will be going deeper in your circumstances, the easier it will be for you to perceive when you are more valuable for your brother and Florentian – now, when everything seems to be secret for you, or when you acquire some knowledge and understand that there are no secrets in nature, and that there's only one or another level of knowledge.”

We went to our rooms, but I couldn't fall asleep. Now I could understand Joan who was seeking for her personal happiness so perfectly...

Now all my happiness could go into meeting with my brother and Florentian. It seemed to me that I didn't want anything else. Even if I wasn't suited for anything else, I would agree to be their servant, to clean their shoes and clothes, only if I could see their dear faces, hear their voices and not the moans of my heart because of the separation with them. I was already about to burst into tears when all of a sudden I remembered Stroganoff's words that he could often see that those who used to start their paths easily would win. I even became red in the face. I compared myself to Joan once again and I saw that so many people were helping me, just like her, and that I had also seized the desire for my personal happiness blindfold, just like her.

I tried to forget myself, I directed my thoughts to Florentian with all my strength, and suddenly the familiar face emerged next to me again and I heard my dear voice: “Be strong. Not always man receives that much as you do now. Don't miss the opportunity to learn; man receives a call for knowledge only once in his life and there's no another time. Learn to love people well, and for the real love neither separation nor time exists. Preserve peace and your place next to I. without any fear, any lie, but with joy. Always remember: joy is an unbeatable power.”

An unusual silence fell within myself. As though with inner insight, I understood easily and simply how I should keep on living. I fell in an undisturbed sleep and I was really happy.

I woke up in the morning only when I. was waking me up. He was telling me that the clumsy sailor and the captain were waiting for me downstairs in order to boat to the meeting's place and that I had to breakfast on the boat.

I put my clothes on quickly, but I didn't have time to put on my coat, while the clumsy sailor was already here and he was explaining to me that it wasn't a great sailor's way to dress himself for so long. He didn't allow me to take my coat, he told me that there was a raincoat and a plaid on the boat, but it was also warm without them.

He was showing me the way through some yards, and although we were walking slowly, soon we reached the sea where I got on the boat successfully.

Chapter 17

The new life of Joan and the duke

The sea was peaceful, and I could hardly feel the waves. The weather was unusually cold for Constantinople – the captain was explaining this as the influence of the storm. He was telling us that the storm had crashed many big and small ships, while the boats and the fishermen were still being counted.

“Yes, Lovushka, many of lucky persons were saved in my ship due to the heroic efforts of my crew and boundless courage of yourself and your brother. Now we are admiring this fantastic panorama,” he kept speaking, “but how many people didn’t make it to come here. Well then, how you could guess your destiny an hour ahead and how you could ever tell that you are happy thinking about tomorrow. Hence, I’m right by telling you that we are living only once and that we have to live in this moment, to catch that happiness which is flying past us in a twinkling.”

“Yes,” I answered him, “I also was thinking that I had to catch only my personal happiness up till the last moment, but when I got to know my new friends more closely, I understood that happiness to live isn’t hiding in my personal happiness, but in that absolute self-control when man himself is able to bring joy and harmony to others. Like you, I. is also talking about the value and meaning to live only in this moment which is flying past us now, but by saying so, he foresees man’s ability to embrace the whole, the entire world, all surrounding people, his activity for them and with them by perceiving himself as the little part of the entire universe. I still understand him a little and badly, but the new notes have already begun to sound within myself, my heart has opened for love widely. I’m feeling as though I had graduated some special university which helped me to perceive each new day as the whole string of the spiritual universities. I stopped thinking at all about that what was waiting for me in my life, while earlier I was living with that what would happen in ten years.”

“Yes, Lovushka, my universities are worse than yours,” the captain answered me. “I’m still living in my tomorrow or my past, because my present doesn’t satisfy or fascinate me. Now I’m thinking about Gurzuff tensely and I’m dreaming to meet Lisa. Somehow I cannot estimate the present enough.”

By taking advantage of the fact that the sailors couldn’t understand French, we continued our conversation by interrupting it time and again, because the captain knew the city perfectly and he was naming separate buildings, palaces and mosques to me. I hardly had time to admire them.

When our trip on the water was coming to the end, my thoughts came back to Joan again.

“I still cannot forget your low bow to the great suffering of Joan,” I assented to him.

“Poor woman, she’s a girl-mother! How many questions she will have to solve for her children. Educating a man from his very childhood is such an important beginning, and what Joan can give to them? She doesn’t know anything herself and she cannot read a single book about education, so that she could understand anything from it,” the captain was speaking to me, lost in thought.

“We also won’t understand much in those books about education if the man who has written it would be much more creative than us. Everything depends on those vibrations of man’s heart and thoughts, in which he’s living. One can understand only what is close to oneself. There is such general language that unites both the Beduin and the European, the Black and the Englishman, the Saint and the Robber – that’s the language of love and beauty. Joan is able to love her children; to love them not in a

brutal love as her body and blood by being proud of their advantages or disadvantages, or suffering because of them," I interceded for Joan.

"But at the moment, she can love them only as her duty, as the lesson of her life, and lots of time will pass until her consciousness is able to perceive her life as the circumstances which are unavoidable, the only ones in the world sent only to her and nobody else. Only then there will be no place left for her grumbling or her tears, but there will be only her joyful work and gratitude," the captain answered me.

I began to stare intensely at him, having forgotten everything in the world. His face was tender, kindness was gushing from his eyes. A charming wave of tenderness extended from my heart towards him.

"You certainly have to meet Florentian," I mumbled. "At worst, you should at least talk to I. seriously. Forgive me, because I'm only the boy in comparison to yourself and your experience, I don't know anything, but it seems to me that there's the same mess in your head and your heart as within myself."

The captain gave a joyful laugh.

"Bravo, bravissimo, Lovushka! If there's a mess within yourself, then there's the real muddle, only the pap within myself. I'm always searching for an opportunity to talk to your mysterious I. myself, but I still have no success. Well, here we are," he added by ordering the sailors to row to the shore and to stop at the end of the pier.

We got out of the boat and we were climbing up the road to the city with the help of the clumsy sailor. Soon we reached the necessary place and we saw from the distance how our entire company of friends went inside through the door.

We caught up with them while they were still in the antechamber. To everyone's amazement, the house was well established and furnished. The antechamber was bright and it had a big window. Judging from its furniture, it was a waiting-room, and the door from it was leading to a big room which resembled a Turkish sitting-room.

Stroganoff was explaining to Joan how he was planning to construct the glass ward-robres for readymade hats, plumes, flowers and bands, so the buyers could see Joan's aristocratic talent and taste, and could instantly choose the item which they liked. There were also the premises behind the big room with two long tables for the studio, and from here one could get to the yard through the porch.

Joan's children hung on me immediately, but I forbade me to raise them up. They took offence and calmed down only when the clumsy sailor seated both of them on his powerful shoulders and went out to the yard and garden with them. There was a small fountain, and several big Eastern tanks with long narrow mouths were standing there.

Having examined everything downstairs, we went out to the antechamber once again and went up the winding metal stairs to the second floor.

There were three little rooms here. One of them was furnished like the dinning-room; two new childish beds and a sofa were standing in the second one; a splendid mirror in the bright frame, a wide Turkish sofa and several chairs were standing in the third room.

Tears were rolling down Joan's cheeks. She extended both of her hands towards Stroganoff again and uttered silently.

"You taught me perfectly yesterday by saying that that person wins who starts his business easily. Today you showed me how really kind you were, how easily you did everything, so that you could help me to start my business easily. I will never forget your kindness and I will try to show gratitude to you with everything I will be able to. I'm your devoted servant forever now only because of these charming childish little beds, about which I didn't dare even to dream."

"Madam, these are only the details. I already wanted to tidy up the house a long time ago, because as I have already mentioned to you, I was born here and I value it both for my memories and for the lessons of life that I have experienced here. I'm glad of this excellent opportunity to arrange it for working woman and her children. And here's my daughter," Stroganoff was speaking to her, while stepping towards a woman who was going upstairs.

A tall woman was standing in front of us. She had muffled herself up in a black silky cloak with the black veil pulled down on her face.

"This is my daughter Anna," he addressed Joan. "You are Joan, she's Anna. It would be great if you could strike up a friendship, then it would be fascinating in your atelier," he continued, laughing. "Anna in Hebrew means 'attractive, fascinating', right? My beloved, fascinating daughter is very easy to be dealt with..."

Anna cast the black veil off her face... me and the captain rooted to the spot from amazement and fascination: her oval-shaped face with big black eyes was pale, her black plait was extending over her shoulders below her waist, her charming mouth was smiling and her teeth were white like the porcelain...

Anna was extending her long and white hand to Joan and speaking to her in a deep, kind and soft voice.

"My father wishes very much that I could learn to work not only with my head, but also with my hands. I've been resisting his will for four years, but this time, after I found out that my teacher would be a woman with children, who has experienced a terrible disaster, I agreed easily and with joy, I even didn't know myself why I did it. I cannot tell that hats or ladies would fascinate me," Anna continued, laughing, "but some kind of intuition is telling me that I will be useful here."

Her French language was clean and correct. She took the black cloak off and remained only in an ordinary, white, silky, elegant dress and black, patent-leather shoes which were unusually small in comparison to her height.

I don't know with what – with her long plait, the grace of her figure or some elegance of her manners, - but Anna reminded me of Nal with something. I couldn't hold out and I began to whisper.

"Nal, Nal."

"What's wrong? What are you speaking here?" the captain asked me silently.

I took my arm and asked me, too.

"Lovushka, what are you whispering here? This isn't Nal, this is Anna. Come to yourself and don't disgrace us when she's introduced to us. Don't kiss her hand, but wait until she extends it to you herself, otherwise you might get scared like you did by meeting Chava," I smiled to me.

"Scheherazade! Now my whole life is a fairy-tale, and the women are fairies," the captain was talking, "but who is that man whom this Pallas Athena has been loving, if she's still loyal to his remembrance? You could give half of your life, so that such woman would love you for at least one night."

Anna's father was introducing her to everyone who was present here. She was looking intently at everyone's eyes, she was extending her hand to everyone and smiling lightly, but her entire attention was focussed on the children who were riding on the clumsy sailor's shoulders. Anna went up to them by extending her hands towards them. The little ones were looking at her with their eyes opened wide. Having touched her plait slightly, the girl asked her.

"Aunt, why are you so black? Have you been painted with the soot?"

"No," Anna gave a laugh, "my father gave such black colour of hair to me, but soon I will become grey, and you will stop being afraid of my plait."

Finally, it was our turn.

First, the captain was introduced to her. He bowed low and squeezed her extended hand by looking straight into Anna's face, because this time she was looking down; her cheeks turned slightly red, and it seemed to me that even an annoyance flashed in her face.

Anna looked at I. very intently, and her black eyes began to burn like torches.

"Of course, you are that Ananda's friend about whom he was writing to me in his last letter? I'm glad to meet you. I hope that until Ananda comes here, you will have the honour to visit us at our home."

"I will be glad to visit you, if your father doesn't have anything against this," I. answered her.

"Do you think that my Turkish appearance has anything to do with the Eastern education? I can assure you that it doesn't. It's impossible to find a more understanding and freedom giving father in the whole world. He is the first friend and assistant of both myself and all my sisters and brothers. Everybody of us is absolutely free to choose our acquaintances. There's only one thing that my father doesn't like – that's one's life without working. In the entire family only I still don't earn my living, but now I also understand that I have to communicate and unite with people by bringing in help to daily routine according to my strength," Anna was talking to us by taking an opportunity that her father with Joan kept examining the rooms.

"Let me introduce my cousin Lovushka T. to you." I. told her. "He, just like me, is Ananda's and Florentian's friend, and he's thinking about the last one both in the day-time and at night," I. added by pushing me forward a little. "Perhaps, you will allow me to visit you with him, because we are almost inseparable, especially when Lovushka is a little unwell."

"I will be glad to see both of you at our place," Anna answered him pleasantly by extending her hand to me, which I squeezed a little.

"Oh, you fell into her hands, young man," I heard Stroganoff's voice behind my back. "Anna must have absolutely sensed the writer in you. She's also a quite good poetess. She's writing wonderful fairy-tales for children, but she doesn't agree to publish them, but her work is known in Constantinople anyway. I bet she has already enslaved you. Only don't believe her, she's as though a hard-hearted."

"Father, you've put the young writer to shame so much – if he's really a writer – that he would certainly avenge you by describing you at least as the celebrity of Constantinople," Anna gave a laugh in a very melodious voice.

Joan approached her, and both women stepped aside by the window in order to discuss something. Anna was standing with her profile turned to us, and the eyes of all four men were looking at her.

I remembered the evening in the odorous garden of Ali, I remembered not so dark Nal's plait, her green eyes and the faces of three men who were looking at her intently, but with different expressions.

It was the same now – the captain strained his look and he saw only the physical charm of her turned forms within her. The expression of the cruel beast of prey which was already well known to me was hiding in his yellow eyes, he strained himself like a sting and reminded me of a tiger that was lurking for the prey.

Tenderness and kindness got stiff in I.'s face, he was as though blessing Anna, and the word "charming" flashed in my consciousness.

Her father was looking at his daughter with sad and thoughtful eyes, as though he was suffering because of some secret pain of his daughter, but he was unable to do anything about it, no matter how much it was breaking his heart.

I was all burning. Thoughts were flashing in my head, they were bubbling and breaking like waves by hitting one another. I could see Ananda next to the tall figure of Anna in my thoughts and I was pondering that no one else could ever become her chosen one if she knew such charming and handsome man with his eyes-stars closely.

I forgot absolutely everything; I could see only Ananda, I remembered his exceptional voice, and all of a sudden that voice was heard in my ears: "Not every love ties human bodies together, but that love which ties their spirit in a slavish way isn't real, too. Only that love will be real, which will open all man's talents and skills for his creative activity, which will liberate his spirit."

The illusion of the sound was so strong that unawares I dashed forward, because I wanted to see Ananda through the window, but the iron I.'s hand was already holding me tightly.

The captain turned to the noise made by me.

"Do you feel unwell, Lovushka? You've turned so pale! It is stifling here, let's go home," he was talking to me by taking my arm from another side and trying to help me out tenderly.

Having heard these words of the captain, Joan went up to us quickly and told me.

"Don't leave, Lovushka," but, having noticed my paleness, she added silently. "What an egoist I am! I'm thinking only about myself. You certainly need to go home. Do you feel unwell?"

I was unable to utter a single word, because some sort of a spasm was squeezing my throat. I. answered Joan that now the captain would take me home, and in the evening we could have dinner with her if she made herself free from her business until seven o'clock. I. himself will help her to settle here if she has nothing against it.

Now the Turks, Stroganoff and Anna who've been silent during all this time interfered by protesting categorically against any help of I., by making him sure that everything would be done without him.

We said good-bye to the whole company and went out to the street, accompanied by the clumsy sailor.

I. wanted to accompany me to the boat, but the captain offered him to wait and sit on the bench with me for a while until he and the clumsy sailor would arrange one business not far away from here.

I was glad that I could sit in the shadow for a while and stay with I. I asked him to give me one strengthening pill of Ali, but he answered me that in this case no pill would help me.

“Lovushka, there are some people who can see and hear that what thousands of others can neither hear nor see such things. They are rewarded with an exceptional power of inner sight and hearing, which is operating on a totally different frequency of vibrations, which has nothing to do with the frequency with which most people are receiving their impressions and feelings. You possess that gift within yourself – to hear and to see through the distance, only you value it like a hallucination of your absent-mindedness. If you hadn’t received the blow to your fontanel so untimely, these talents of yours would have developed consistently. In the meanwhile, now your entire organism, your entire spinal cord is shaken so much that that still unawaken fire which is living in every man – that hidden reserve power – has forced its way through, it destroyed all obstacles on its way by exposing your hidden spiritual powers. When you recover from the concussion, I will explain everything about that what I have just mentioned to you in more detail. I want you to understand that you aren’t ill, you aren’t losing your mind, simply the powers, the frequency of vibrations which are much higher and stronger, it is of another nature than that to which you had been used to up to now, have opened earlier within yourself. Keep your self-control. Lie down for a while more often and with all your might try not to get irritated. Don’t mention this conversation of ours to anyone with a single word,” he added by seeing that the captain and the clumsy sailor were coming back already.

I saw an unusual view and I was unable to understand in any way who was approaching us. Only I. started laughing instantly.

“Congratulations, Lovushka! Now you will be travelling through Constantinople like a beauty of a harem.”

Finally, I also could see the big palanquin with the downcast curtains which was carried by two tall Turks. I was filled with indignation so much, I started stamping my foot with anger so much that I. who was just laughing so joyfully suddenly seized me with his strong hands, seated me and told me very strictly.

“I have just asked you not to get irritated, I warned you how serious the state of your health was. Do really my words and all possibilities of your future mean so little to you? And finally, don’t you have any sense of humour?”

“I understand humour and I highly appreciate every possibility to come closer to my knowledge, but I absolutely don’t want to be a figure of fun even in the eyes of those sailors who are carrying the stretcher,” I answered him in excitement.

“First of all, control yourself. Feel the great joy to be the master of yourself. Value the efforts of the captain, too. Be polite and try to educate yourself in such a way that you could always find a gentlemanly expression with which you could cover your feelings even if they are very unpleasant. Search for that tact about which Florentian is talking to you.”

The procession came nearer. The captain waved his cap joyfully.

“As you can see, I invented the way how to avoid shaking. This stretcher belongs to one of my legless friend. Mostly he prefers travelling like this. But, oh my God! You feel even worse, Lovushka! You were pale, and now you’re all with red spots,” the captain exclaimed.

I overcame the strong attack of my irritation and I already wanted to thank him for his efforts in an emphatically cold and polite way, when I. interfered and addressed the captain very tenderly.

"No, captain, Lovushka isn't feeling any worse. This is still his reaction to the blow, but he will go to the boat on foot with you perfectly. This is even more useful for him now, and if you agreed, it would be the best to send the stretcher with the clumsy sailor to Joan's children. Joan will have to go to the city to do some business, and the children will be only restricting her. If you agreed to use the stretcher in such a way as it seems to me, then I would return to children right away."

"If you allow Lovushka to go on foot, then I will be glad to let you have this stretcher," the captain answered him merrily, not even suspecting what a storm I was experiencing within myself because of this care of his.

I. squeezed my hand a little, asked the captain to put me to bed as soon as we return and also added that he would be back at six o'clock and, if I stayed in bed calmly during the whole day, he would take me to the duke's.

We said good-bye to I. and went towards the boat. I was glad of getting rid of that idiotic palanquin, but an annoyance by myself and the captain was still boiling within myself.

"I don't understand what kind of men are living in Constantinople," the captain was talking as though to himself. "If such a woman like Anna is still free, then not the blood, but water is flowing in the veins of the local men. She would have already had time to marry somebody two or even three times in England, and at least ten duels would have taken place for her. She's an incredible beauty, isn't she?"

"I know a little about the womanly beauty," I answered him, "but I think that Anna is indeed a rare beauty. I think that the men who haven't enslaved her heart aren't to blame, because only those women can be enslaved who want it. Men are courting and fighting only for those women who are trying to present themselves in a more useful and favourable way. Such women like Anna are searching for the real love, they always choose the most modest path if their talents or ambitions don't betray them."

The captain even stopped – he was so amazed by my thoughts.

"Well, that's Lovushka! Well, this is how you put it!" the captain was throwing up his arms. "How old are you then? Fifty or twenty? Where have you had time to draw such conclusions?"

"I don't understand, why are you so amazed? It seems to me that my uttered words are the simplest. In Russia we have lots of wonderful women without any coquetry, and the admirers are choosing not the most beautiful, but the most coquettish, right? My brother used to repeat this alphabetical truth to me in every right moment."

We were deep in our own thoughts and kept silent during the rest of the way.

Having reached the hotel, we felt that we were hungry, so we ordered a light breakfast which I was eating in bed. After the breakfast, the captain lit up a cigar and returned to Anna once again.

"It is so strange," he uttered. "I would really give a lot if I could love such goddess like Anna for a while. Namely only for a while, absolutely not imagining that I could be her husband or a constant knight. Something is hiding within her, which would hinder me to come even nearer to her."

"For me Anna is distinguished for her spiritual culture. If you are still not leaving Constantinople soon, then you will meet one of I.'s friends who is also close to Anna at the same time. If she loves him even without his response, then nobody could ever compete with him and turn her attention to him. The eyes of that man are shining like the stars, while his voice enslaves one only while he's talking. It is impossible to forget him if you see or hear him just once, and people say that he's singing like a God." I answered him.

"How can you know what is drawing one man to another? Anna could be a distinct episode of my life, but never my epoch. But if life brought me together with the girl Lisa again, then she could probably become my epoch."

I started remembering Lisa, her manners, speech and I asked him.

"And what is your opinion about a wife artiste? How would you estimate her talent in a general way? People say that Lisa is exceptionally talented, don't they, and you have so many superstitions. How would you feel setting in the front row of the concert hall, while your wife violinist would be playing the violin?"

"I have never thought that the stage or the place behind the scenes could play any part in my life at all. I was always avoiding the women from the theatre. All of them seemed to me to be soaked with social climbing and a desire to sell themselves as costly as possible."

"But haven't you met a single woman during your entire pithy life, who was really dedicated to the art, who didn't have another life without that art to which she was serving, which she was breathing?" I was asking the captain again.

"No, I haven't met one," he answered me. "I knew some so called great actresses, but none of them seemed to have the divine gift of talent. I knew some high culture artists, and it seemed to them that the secrets of nature had already opened up to them, but... they turned out to be absolutely shallow in their everyday life."

In this way our meeting was finished, because several business visits and work were waiting for the captain on the steamer, and in the evening he also wanted to go to see his friends. We said good-bye to each other until tomorrow.

I took a nap, because I was tired of today's meetings and I woke up only from I.'s voice that was waking me up loudly. He was hurrying me to change my clothes, to take the first-aid kit and to go to the duke.

He gave me some bitter drops to drink. I was soon ready, and we went to the duke's villa on foot, which was not far away at all. I was very interested in this meeting. Although his old wife seemed to be very wicked to me, anyway I was feeling a pity for her, for her nearing death and for her stiff body.

Unawares, I started thinking how it was difficult for every man to die: "And what Florentian was thinking about death? How was he going to die himself?" And all of a sudden, in the middle of the day, in the continuous noise and uproar of the street I heard his voice: "There's no death. There's only life – the only one, everlasting, and there are many of its external forms." I stopped dead, and if I. hadn't given a pull at me, I would have gotten under the wheels of the coach.

"Lovushka, I simply cannot let you alone to take a single step," he told me by taking my arm.

"Yes, Lolion, you cannot leave me alone," I was complaining to him in a plaintive voice. "The damn fist of the Turk has turned me into a madman. I'm making progress to madness so much that I cannot stop. The hallucinations keep growing stronger."

"Not at all, Lovushka. Only today you were very irritated. What has excited you now?"

"A thought occurred to me with what difficulty the old duchess was dying. I thought for a while how it was terrible and not easy for everybody to die. I only thought what Florentian was thinking about death, and suddenly I heard his voice: "There's no death. There's only life – the only one, everlasting,

and there are many of its external forms.” Isn’t this the absurdity that I started to hear?” I kept complaining to I.

“My friend, you’ve heard the great wisdom. I will explain everything to you later. We are coming nearer to our goal. Forget yourself and your state. Think only about those unfortunate persons whom we are visiting. Think about Florentian, about his bright love for man. Try to see the Florentian’s goal within the duke and his wife, try to bring in that peace and light to this house, which is pulsating in the heart of your great friend. Think only about him and about them, and not about yourself, then you could be my loyal and useful assistant in this house. Then it will be easy here for both of us.”

We entered the duke’s house that was surrounded by the shady garden. The housemaid met us, whom we already knew, because she was cruising with them on the steamer. She told us that the duchess was still as though sleeping, while the duke was waiting for us impatiently.

We crossed several absolutely empty rooms and heard the quick steps following us. The duke caught up with us.

“I’m so glad that you came,” he addressed I. “I’m so worried about the duchess’ condition that I was already ready to go to you. I need both your help and your advice myself no less than my wife,” he continued by smiling sincerely and squeezing our hands.

“Why are you so worried about the duchess? I have warned you, haven’t I, that her returning to life would be very slowly and that she would be sleeping most of the time.”

“Yes, I remember all of that – and it is very strange for myself – I believe your every word unconditionally and completely. Even the very belief in you is somehow special, incomparable with anything,” the duke was speaking in his silent and musical voice by letting us pass the third room in a row, which was furnished a little and reminded of a study.

He pulled the chairs to the table for us, sat down himself on the Eastern style stool and continued.

“I wouldn’t be talking to you about my state if it didn’t seem to be so strange to me. Now the feeling of belief in you gives me strength to live. As though some power had flowed into my spine and held my entire body on its strong axis by forming the basis of my self-control. As soon as I imagine that you will leave soon – the whole power disappears, and I’m feeling helpless before the nearing difficulties of life.”

“Don’t worry, dear duke,” I told him. “First of all, we aren’t leaving so soon, and second – my good friend will come here with his close disciple and friend who has already graduated all medical sciences. Both of them will help you, too. Maybe that friend of ours, the young doctor, will even stay with you for longer. As you can see, sometimes the destiny takes a very good care of us.”

“I cannot describe how I’m moved of your kindness, and most importantly – of that simplicity and easiness which are leading your actions, that everybody can accept all your greatest services as easy as if it was a trifle.”

Having lit up his cigarette and kept silent, the duke continued.

“My state worries me. My wife’s son must come here to meet his mother. He wants to receive a part of his property now, while she’s still alive. I was hoping very much from this meeting, thinking that the division of the property done now by my wife herself would liberate me from many trials and suffering after her death. That son of hers, although he’s a famous general, although he occupies a high post in the czar’s palace, - he’s a greedy liar, a selected crook and he loves to litigate. Namely today I

received the telegram that he wouldn't come, but he would send two of his lawyers with full warrants of attorney from Moscow. You can imagine what a horror will be here when those two dandies come here and find my wife who will only mumble obscurely, who won't be able to use neither her hands nor her legs..."

"I have already told you," I. interrupted the duke, "that your wife's speech and hands would recover pretty soon. Unfortunately, she probably won't be able to use her legs until she dies, but her death itself won't happen soon as well. Her heart is very strong, so you will have to take pains over tending her for two or even more years. Don't look at this perspective menacing to you like a punishment. The great and wise life doesn't recognize any punishments. It gives an opportunity for each man to mature and gain strength in exactly such circumstances which are needed for everybody personally – and only to him alone. In this case you should think not about yourself, but only about your wife. Try to open her eyes with your kindness from the bottom of your heart. Explain to her that there's no death, exactly as there's no a separate and only earthly life. Only an eternal, the only one life of heaven and earth exists for common welfare – the spiritual life of light and joy, which is tied in the human bodies made of hard and solid earthly matter. And the whole man's life on earth isn't only a final existence from his birth till his death, it is the whole string of his existences, the string of his visible material forms; in them there's always the only one, eternal life which is unchangeable, and it is changing only its relative, temporary earthly forms. If you are interested in this, we can still analyse this endless subject many times. Now I would like you to perceive the grandeur and meaning of each man's earthly life, to understand how clearly he should see everything both inside and outside of him; what a power is hiding in everybody if he has already learnt to control himself, if he is able – during the only one moment that has opened up to his knowledge – to forget himself like a temporary form and to find the boundless love within himself, so that with its help he could bring help of peace into another heart. Let's go to visit your wife. From now on you will have to become her devoted and compassionate servant. Soon I will be able to tell you when she begins to recover, then she can spend her days in the arm-chair."

With these words I. stood up. I was devouring his every word attentively by trying not to miss any of it, but all of it was so new and unexpected to me that I didn't understand anything fully and I couldn't put all of it into a logical chain of thoughts. From the perplexed face of the duke I decided that he also hadn't understood much more than I had, although he was listening for I.'s words in some respectful ecstasy.

I and the duke stood up, too, and the three of us went to the duchess's room.

How this room was different from what we had seen in the hospital's cabin when the captain ordered to open it during the scandal. The windows were fully opened, the curtains were drawn, so there was a dusk. There were many flowers delivered, they smelt wonderfully, and the order was simply exemplary.

The duchess was lying on a high, excellent bed, dressed with a beautiful, batiste robe. The trained nurse was sitting next to her, she stood up in order to meet us.

The duchess turned her head towards the sound of the steps. That meaningless and idiotic expression had already been gone from her face, only the bruise was still left around her mouth.

One could feel consciousness in her eyes which were fastened upon I. She was trying to raise her hand, but only a spasm ran through her body from those efforts. She fixed her gaze on the duke pleadingly, and the tears came pouring from her eyes on her flabby and pale cheeks.

The duke went up to the bed, lifted his wife's lifeless hand, kissed it and asked her.

“My dear, do you want to greet the doctor?”

This time the patient’s lips smiled a little, I. went up to her and took that absolutely dead hand from the duke.

“Duchess, don’t make any efforts,” I. was talking to her while he was feeling her pulse. “Everything is all right. Danger doesn’t threaten you anymore, and if you are following my instructions carefully during the day and night, I guarantee that your hands will recover completely, that your memory and your speech will come back entirely. However, you will have to learn self-control and patience. You didn’t know what self-control was during your entire life, so now you’ve reached such a sad end. Stop crying. Now you certainly need to accumulate all your thoughts not only to your wish to recover, but you also have to try to make the people that are near you happy, joyful and satisfied. Only the atmosphere that will be filled only with your joy and peace can help me to cure you. If your thoughts and feelings will be radiating anger or irritation, I will be helpless to help you. You have to unite with everybody who will be close to you with love and benevolently.”

The streams of tears kept rolling down the old woman’s face, which the duke who was totally confused was wiping carefully. All of a sudden the words “forgive me” in a wild, horrible and whistling voice slipped off her lips which were always trying to say something. These words – like the sound of a broken string – flashed across the air, and then a deadly silence followed. I felt the well-known nausea and dizziness instantly. I. put his arms round my shoulders and whispered.

“Be strong. Think about Florentian! Call him to help you.”

It was silent in the room for some time. I. was standing next to the duchess, still holding her hand. Her face was calming down little by little, her eyes got dry, and she already looked like a living person, not like the horrible mask pulled by the spasms.

I. told me to take a couple of medicine from the first-aid kit. He mixed them and melted the red powder from his bottle in them. I had never seen this bottle up to now, and it seemed to be golden to me. The liquid began to boil, and its colour turned into bright red. I lifted the duchess’ head a little, and I. gave her the medicine to drink carefully.

Finally, the duchess swallowed the last drop of the medicine, drew a sigh of relief, closed her eyes and fell into a light slumber. Having warned the trained nurse that the patient may be sleeping even for the next twenty-four hours, we left the room.

We returned to the duke’s study, sat down on our previous places, and I. continued.

“Duke, I should like to ask you a favour. You are always trying to show gratitude for me and my brother for the help provided to your wife.”

“Oh, you are helping not only my wife, but you’ve become the new meaning of my life for myself, too. I was already considering my life to be ruined,” the duke exclaimed. “You even don’t know what flight of imagination made me to marry my current wife. I was imagining that I was saving her from a thousand of her new mistakes. I didn’t save her from any of them, I only understood that I was weak and in this way I found myself into this misfortunate situation of contempt. You don’t know...”

“I know,” I. interrupted him, “I know that you are noble, very honourable and very kind man. Now I want to address exactly this kindness of yours. You’ve probably heard that we and the captain helped one poor French woman with two children to reach Constantinople. She was expecting to find her relatives here, but I think that she would fail to do it. We’re leaving her under protection of one wonderful family here, but the poor lady is so young, so unexperienced and so ill-bred that, of course, she will create lots of

difficulties for herself, which she could hardly overcome. Her character is very quick-tempered and peppery, while your tact and kindness could help in her life very much. Soon we'll leave. You will have to spend here up to two years, because to move for your wife would mean death. If you agree, let's come to visit Joan Moranjer. We will introduce you to her, and I can be calm that Joan will have a reliable and noble guardian."

"I will be happy with the possibility to show gratitude somehow to the madam Joan," the duke answered him, "but I have so little self-confidence myself and I experience parting with you so painfully. I'm ready to visit her right this moment. I will try to see only her heart within her, to which I must render all gratitude that I feel for you, and I will bring all my devotion to you into her heart."

We said good-bye to the duke and agreed to visit Joan tomorrow at noon, after visiting his wife.

We came back home, and I was so tired that I went to bed immediately, because I couldn't perceive anything anymore. All my thoughts interlaced, and I didn't even remember how I fell asleep.

I heard the knocking at my door on rather late morning of the next day, and the sonorous voice of the captain was shaming me for such laziness.

"I have already done a hundred of workings. My steamer has already been brought to the dock for repairs, the sun has already had time to heat the streets, while you, the great man of the future, are still sleeping! I'm hungry like a gun dog. Lovushka, get up quickly, I will order the breakfast, we will wipe it out in your balcony if, of course, you admit me to your company," the captain was talking loudly behind the door.

I answered him that I agreed, I dashed to the bath quickly, and we were already sitting at the table in a quarter of an hour.

I. had left not leaving any note for me, and I understood that he would be back soon. And so it was, soon I heard his steps, and he came to the balcony himself, somehow especially radiating with freshness and beauty. Having greeted us, he asked the captain about the steamer's destiny.

The captain's face frowned. It turned out that the steamer was in need of serious repairs; this delay when the big part of the travellers and freight had to continue their route gave him lots of worries and difficulties.

"But your nearness, doctor I., is very dear to me. I value the meeting with you as the most important event of my life and I'm ready to overcome even greater difficulties only if I could stay with you for longer, if this doesn't cause you any trouble," the captain finished his sentence in an absolutely silent voice by looking at I. sadly.

He already wasn't that strong-willed captain, he wasn't that "God and the Master" of his ship anymore, in front of whom the whole ship's crew and the travellers were trembling. I saw the totally different side of the man's soul once again and I made sure again what an immeasurable difference was between that what you could see and that what was hiding within a man.

"I'm also glad that we met, dear captain," I. answered him, "and communicating with you isn't causing any trouble for me – on the contrary, I feel a great brotherly friendship for you in my heart. Today I received some excellent news both from Lovushka's brother and from my close friend Ananda for whom I wasn't expecting here so soon. Lovushka, your brother and Nal got married in London at the presence of Florentian and his friends, while Ananda should be here no later than in ten days. Captain, I wish very much that your troubles would still detain you in Constantinople. Ananda surpasses any man so

much that even meeting him, even understanding what a man who is made from the same body and blood like is able to achieve on earth would lift you up to the higher level of ideas in comparison to the one on which you are living today. I can see lots of questions within your soul, and you have even more of them every time when we meet. If we could lay out your spirit's bubbling in a literary form, we could make not only selected works of your questions and answers, but even a serial "The daily reader". All these questions of yours are concentrating within you only because I haven't reached such heights of spirit and knowledge as Ananda. The typical sign of the real wise man showing himself in the people masses – the string of questions isn't growing any longer, but disappearing. Not an activity of mind is growing in people's consciousness, but their intuition. The subconscious harmonizes the work of their hearts and minds, because the vanity and illusion of their own achievements and desires opens up for everybody in the atmosphere of the wise man. I'm sure that your meeting with Ananda will destroy the entire caravan of caste and national prejudices within yourself. There are so many true values and real beauty within yourself that neither your friends from your surroundings nor other acquaintances of yours can be equal to you."

The captain's cigarette went out, he didn't finish his wine and he was sitting motionless, as though hypnotized, staring at the charming I.'s face. Only the city noise and the scattered guttural cries of the Eastern carriers could be heard in the established silence.

Every one of us immersed in himself, we didn't want to disturb the silence and, apparently, every one of us was trying to imagine the wise man in his own way.

"Well, if you are talking about another man like this, you who are the highest man that I have ever met, then what kind of a man should be that Ananda of yours?" the captain was rubbing his forehead and kept speaking in the same silent voice.

I wanted to tell him that I have seen even a higher man than Ananda, my friend Florentian, but all of a sudden I felt that special lightness in my whole body, that concentration of my entire attention into one spot which was always accompanied by the hearing of the voice or seeing of the scene of the man who really wasn't present next to me.

Suddenly my body began to tremble, as though an electric current had run through it, and I saw Ananda who was sitting at the table in the same posture like that night in his home. "Don't be afraid and don't worry. I. has forgotten neither Florentian nor sir Vomi, but now there's no need to talk about them. Try to keep silent for as much as possible. The value of a word is so big that sometimes an untimely uttered word could make the whole ring of people to perish. Wait for my arrival and we will talk." Now when I'm telling you about this, everything seems to be long-winded, but then it flashed with lightning speed.

I extended my hands towards Ananda, I even must have said something to him, because the captain got next to me in a flash and he was stretching out the glass of wine to me.

"My poor boy! Do you have a headache again?" he asked me tenderly.

I. also went up to me and smiled; and I understood from his sparkling eyes that he knew the real cause of my anxiety.

This imaginary ailment of mine distracted the captain's attention from our conversation. Having stayed for several minutes more, the captain ran out to put many of his affairs in order. Since he was occupied in the evening, we agreed to meet tomorrow, at five o'clock. He wanted to take me to some famous confectionery "Bagdad" very much. He was trying to persuade me that I would see the surprises which would surpass even a living black woman there. I agreed with everything, because I wanted to stay alone with I. as soon as possible and to hear from him about my brother and Nal in more details.

Having seen off the captain, I. came back to me in the balcony and sat down next to me on the couch, because I was still lying down and I was really feeling unwell.

“My dear friend, you will be disappointed, because I also know about your brother and Nal only as much as I have already told you. In general, Ananda doesn’t like speaking much, and this time he particularly reconsidered every word sent to us. You look like as though you had been disappointed in their fulfilled marriage?” I. asked me.

“No, I’m not disappointed,” I answered him, “but if my brother’s and Nal’s happiness is in their marriage, then the goal of their lives – which is the most important for them now – has already been achieved. However, I was expecting for something more important, more significant than an ordinary marriage from this entire situation.”

Unexpectedly, I. gave a joyful laugh, embraced me, stroked my unwise head tenderly and told me.

“Where did you get it from, my dear philosopher, that marriage was such an ordinary and absolutely insignificant matter? The marriage depends on the people who get married. Marriages may have an exceptional meaning and touch not only those people who get married. Each marriage, a future birth and education of people in a new cell of society – family – is an exceptionally important and responsible matter. If the people – future fathers and mothers – have risen to a comprehension of themselves as the only one little parts of the whole universe, if their working day ties in the unified activity of all people with its beauty, then they are prepared to educate their new lives, too; they will be introducing this new comprehension by educating them not with their words, but by implanting a beauty with their living example in their children. If they have risen to the great heights of creativity, then they form such cells of society with their marriage, in which the future famous people, creators and genii may be incarnated, whose inspiration gives a name to the entire epochs of life of mankind.

Harmony of a family – that’s not the same way of thinking of all its members, not their available or unavailable interdependent secrets. That’s the love which is being raked up in a majestic way; here no one is demanding any obligation from anybody, everything is soaked in nobleness, there’s no even talking about selflessness here, but only thoughts about help, about joy to be helpful exist. Lovushka, all of this has caused only the flood of questions for you, but I have already told you: Ananda will come and he will awaken the creative spirit in you, and not the Niagara Falls which are running in question marks. You still must reconsider only one thing very much: the snake of jealousy has fluttered in your heart not for the first time already. One cannot even imagine the greater horror than life that is poisoned with the attacks of jealousy.

Even if your daily routine is diluted with jealousy, you can poison both the life of yourself and your beloved ones, and even the whole long life may lose its meaning. You can possess a great talent, you can lead mankind to new distances of literature, music, arts and at the same time, you can make such an iron cage of passions in your personal life that the entire centuries will be needed until you are able to clean out those toadstools and mould from your spirit, which you have grown with your jealous family life. And on the contrary – one man’s day lived in peace and harmony flies over him like a purifying atmosphere through the entire centuries, like an invisible assistance and his protection.

Today you shouldn’t reflect on your brother’s marriage. Still much water will have flowed under the bridges until you understand the great meaning of his life, until you can penetrate into his spiritual world. He was only a tender, loving nurse, a teacher, a father for you up to now, wasn’t he?

Get up, my friend. Here's a half of Ali's pill for you. Let's go to the duke whom we have promised to introduce to Joan today. When you are thinking about your brother, believe that he was unable to behave neither light-mindedly nor sacrifice himself for saving Nal's life. This marriage is one of the most important moments of his life. You must respect and even glorify it."

I took my pill, took the first-aid kit and followed I. in silence.

We found the same oppressive atmosphere in the duke's house. While the duke was accompanying us to his wife's room, he was telling us about her efforts to smile and talk. It was a real torture for everyone to see these efforts, besides she didn't make any progress.

"Good afternoon, duchess!" I. greeted her. He bent over the tortured, old, withered face of the patient; while she was lying like a heavy, decrepit mass among the wonderful, fragrant flowers.

The duchess opened her eyes with difficulty, but having seen I., she changed completely. Consciousness lit up in her eyes, her lips smiled without any grimace.

"You are doing perfectly. I'm very contented with you," I. was talking to her by taking her hand. "We could even draw a part of the curtain and let some sunshine into the room," he addressed the trained nurse.

When the sun lit up the room, I was surprised how carefully and with what taste it was furnished. It seemed that having forgotten his study which was furnished only Gods knew how, the duke focussed all his attention to this room, so that he could ease the patient's suffering. How high the inner culture of this man had to be if he was wasting his kindness and care for the half-dead body of his terrible wife.

Could I ever reach such a level that, having forgotten all bitterness and humiliation of our joint life, I could care so much for my wife who had poisoned my young life so much?

I shuddered even to think of what an existence the duke's life had turned into. My thoughts led me out of reality. Lovushka – the catcher of the crows was sitting next to I. instead of an attentive assistant of the doctor. I came to myself only when I. touched me. He was looking at me with a reproach.

"Lovushka, the duke is standing in front of you with the glass of water for several minutes already and waiting for an Ali's pill. In this way we will be delayed here for a long time, and Joan will become wax angry at the mister young doctor for his being late again," I. was talking to me and smiling only with his lips, while his eyes were looking straight at me attentively and strictly.

I blushed and thought that once again he read all my thoughts while I was rummaging in the duke's life.

In several minutes I. gave the patient the red bubbling medicine to drink, he told all instructions to the trained nurse, and together with the duke we left his house.

It wasn't very far to reach Joan's house, but there was simply an unbearable heat in the city compared to the cool of the duke's shady garden. Although we were walking along the central streets, they were dirty and smelling bad. The dust was making my throat smart and I always wanted to cough.

Finally we entered Joan's house and we got straight into the surroundings of a merry scurry, work and childish laughter.

We could hardly recognize the flat. Yesterday the antechamber was still empty, and now an excellent wooden rack was already standing across the whole wall. There was a mirror, little table and high chairs placed next to another wall.

Glass cupboards and elegant counters were being mounted in the shop. Boris Fyodorovich himself was a chief for everything, consulting Joan and his wonderful daughter Anna. Only one couldn't feel any joint "charm" in today's job.

The wonderful face of Anna reminded me of an icon – there was so much tenderness and kindness in it. I couldn't even imagine such a divinity and simply inhuman kindness in this pale face that was covered with the halo of her bluish black plait.

But Joan... she was sullen, as though unhappy with something, she could hardly utter any words through her teeth by answering Stroganoff. I couldn't bear anymore, I turned straight to her and I was feeling as though I would attack a bear with only a club in my hands.

"So here's how "easily" you start your business! So you disgrace I. so much with your ill breeding out of your gratitude to him? Smile as quickly as possible and try to be as kind as possible to these wonderful people, and you should be especially polite to that new friend whom I. has brought to you now," I pattered everything straight into her eyes in French, like from a revolver.

Joan must have waited for me to come to her and greet her tenderly, now she was looking at me with her misty eyes. Not allowing her to recollect herself, I pattered one more French series to her.

"Control yourself as quickly as possible. Remember the steamer and the hold from which we dragged you out. We didn't return you back to life so that you would demonstrate your poor character, did we? Where did your promises to think about your children disappear?"

"Lovushka, you are dissatisfied with me? But you were gone for so long! Everyone is strange to me here, it is so horrible and sad for me," Joan was mumbling, while her face simply seemed to be childishly helpless.

"Strange!" I gave a shout with indignation. "But you are blind! Look at Anna's face – which mother could radiate more love and kindness? Wipe your eyes immediately and give a pleasant smile to the new friend, because I see that I. is already coming here with him."

"If you knew that this new friend is not anybody else, but the husband of the duchess who was persecuting you in the steamer!" I thought for myself exactly at that moment when I. introduced the duke to Joan. The whole comedy of this acquaintance manifested itself so clearly in my imagination that I couldn't bear anymore and I was rocking with my urchin laughter.

"Oho!" I heard Stroganoff laughing. "We aren't in the steamer, and as though the storm isn't menacing, but it seems that the brave writer is declaring the danger in the style that is characteristic only to him."

I couldn't stop laughing in any way, even Anna laughed in her deep and ringing laughter.

"I will still have a serious talk to that captain," finally I answered Stroganoff. "He's making a reputation for me, which absolutely isn't true. I'm especially ashamed of it before you, Anna Borisovna."

"Why do I make you feel shy so much?" Anna asked me silently and tenderly, while helping her father to put the chairs.

"That isn't the right word. You don't make me feel shy, I respect you very much. I saw a perfectly furnished room in B. not so long time ago. I imagined that some higher beings should live in it. I think that you would be in your place in that room," I answered her.

"Well, what a writer! He knew how to enslave the old father's heart for ages! You haven't yet had such a passionate admirer, Anna," Stroganoff gave a shout.

"Allow me to take out one capable of working member of your atelier for a half of hour," I heard I.'s voice. "If you don't mind, I and Joan will take a walk in the garden. By the way, let me introduce one of our friends to you," he addressed the father and his daughter by letting the duke go forward.

Anna was looking intently at the duke's eyes, who was completely confused of meeting such a beauty. She smiled, extended her hand to him and told him tenderly.

"I'm pleased to meet one of I.'s friends. I will be glad to see you in our home if you wish to visit our family."

"Doctor I. called me one of his friends out of his infinite kindness. For him I'm only the first person whom he met. He has poured me over with his favours, and I haven't yet repaid him for all that help, but if you allow an ordinary and weak mortal to be next to you one day – I will be happy to. It seems to me that you, just as doctor I., give people strength and self-confidence."

"You are absolutely right," Stroganoff answered him. "Anna isn't only my daughter, but also a friend and the meaning of my entire life. I will be glad to see you at any time. I and Anna are spending our evenings at home and almost always just the two of us. Our family is big, and everybody loves to have a good time. Only I and this nun of mine are always sitting at home."

I., the duke and Joan with her children went out to the garden. I wanted to follow them, but as though a longing or a boredom made me stop and I sat down on the chair which somebody had left in the dark corner behind the cupboard.

Stroganoff and Anna were talking in the antechamber, I almost couldn't hear them, but then the door slammed and they went to the room.

"Why are you so sad, Annushka? Perhaps, it is difficult for you to get down to business, because your soul is woven into arts? But what could we do, my child? You know how ill I am, don't you? I can die at any moment. I will be at ease if I leave you provided with some independent work. You don't want to write for the press. You don't want to play in public. Only those two talents might provide for your life, right? The earth requires work from us – unskilled or privileged, - therefore, if you don't want to serve it with arts for money, you need to get down to a trade.

But maybe I made a mistake by offering the companion for you? I thought that the disaster which Joan has experienced would urge her to work and she would appreciate you properly, but it seems that I made a mistake," Stroganoff was talking to Anna, it seemed that they continued their started conversation.

I wanted to give them a sign that I could hear everything, I wanted to stand up and go out of my corner, so that I wouldn't become an unwanted witness of the strange secrets, but an apathy, a drowsiness and irresistible doze took hold of me so much that I couldn't move.

"No, father, I'm not sad. On the contrary, thank you very much for this meeting. My role is absolutely clear next to these wonderful, but neglected children. Their mother adore them, but it seems that her kisses and claps are the only system of her education, her only duty. You know well that I will

never have my own family. I will be an aunt-nurse for them, until..." her voice trembled a little, she was silent for a while, "until I leave for India where I will be learning a lot next to Ananda's friends, but I have already promised you that this will happen only after your death."

I didn't see Stroganoff, but I could feel with my entire being that there were tears in his eyes. And I wasn't wrong, because when I heard his voice again, it was through tears.

"Just think! How much beauty, how many talents you've got! What a mind, what a heart, and all of it must die, not reaching neither the earth nor people."

"Just on the contrary, father. Since I love people, I want to work for them from the bottom of my heart. I want to be absolutely free, not tied up with any personal bonds. I don't want to choose people for myself according to my taste, but I want to serve those suffering people whom life will bring to me. In this case your loving hand has given that meeting and those people to me, who may need me the most. It won't be difficult for me with Joan, because she's still a child, although the age difference between us isn't great.

You were in my life, while she was educated by the greedy French farmers. And you, although you were laughing at my attraction to India and my searching for some higher wisdom of life – you are the most striking example of that person whom people call the great blessed.

Not knowing anything and absolutely not wishing to know anything about any "blessings", you were showing me an example of the active kindness during your entire life. You haven't gone past a man by not giving all your attention to him, not thinking what you could do for him. You used to help people, not waiting for them to ask you for your help.

I was following and I am following in your footsteps with my loyalty to those precepts which I can see in your activities. I know how difficult for you my love for Ananda is, which even seems for you to be without any response and killing me. Understand me now and forever. I'm talking about it for the first time during my entire life, but this time will also be the last one.

That love has brought not an undergoing, but a rebirth for me; not death, but life; not misery, but happiness. I understood the whole meaning of love when you aren't asking anything for yourself, but you give everything and you don't impoverish your spirit by doing so, but you become stronger.

That highest selflessness in which Ananda is living isn't already an ordinary human creativity – that's the power of pure spirit, the spirit that is capable of turning every man's daily routine into a shining reality.

And if you have created the joyful and happy life for me next to you, then he has taught me to value every moment of my life as the greatest wealth, when all man's strength must be dedicated not to live an egoistic happiness, but to work for all people's welfare. I'm walking my path easily, simply, joyfully, being free and loving."

There were voices heard in the porch, their conversation stopped. Joan entered the room, the duke and I. followed her. The duke was cheerful, and Joan didn't look gloomy anymore. She started placing small boxes joyfully.

There came a knock at the door, everyone pricked up one's ears, I took advantage of this moment and slipped off into the garden.

I heard somebody calling me in several minutes, but instead of coming back inside, I stole into the furthest corner of the garden.

Soon I saw the duke among the trees. He had a letter in his hands. He was searching for me by addressing me "Lovushka", because he probably didn't know my patronymic. I also didn't know even his family name due to my absent-mindedness.

I was glad that it was him. Now it was the easiest for me to see him. The duke gave me the letter and told me that one clumsy sailor had brought it.

The captain was writing to me that he couldn't dine with me today as agreed, because his affairs had changed. He was asking for my permission to postpone that Eastern idyll and to visit us tomorrow at ten o'clock in the evening.

I came back inside with the duke. I retold the contents of the letter to I. Stroganoffs were inviting us to stay with them, but I. thanked and told them that he wanted to use this extra time to write some letters, while I would have a chance to rest from the stress and running about.

We said good-bye to Stroganoffs, and I. offered Joan to spend the evening with us, but the old man reproached him categorically. He announced that Joan would dine with them and that at eight o'clock in the evening he would take both Joan and Anna to our place.

"That's great," I. continued. "Perhaps, you will join us, too?" he addressed the duke.

The duke blushed, became embarrassed like a boy and agreed with joy.

We left. I. was guiding me along the new road. He saw that I was catching crows, so he laughed and took my arm.

"And so," he told me, "the new life of Joan and the duke has begun."

"I see that the new life of the duke is clearer than Joan's."

"Maybe you are right, but if there's any new life to begin here – that's for Anna, not for those two," I reproached him.

I. stopped so suddenly that two elegant ladies who were following us ran into me. They broke the panama off my head with their umbrellas not in an elegant way at all and they didn't even think to apologize.

I got angry and gave a cry after them.

"That's the real Turkish behaviour!"

Maybe I looked comically being mad, because the Turk who was going past us gave a laugh, and I became totally furious.

I. took my arm tenderly once again.

"Well, what a riddle you asked me... Well, that's Lovushka," I. was laughing.

We came back to the hotel successfully. I was glad that I. didn't have a habit to throw reprimands around, which I pattered to Joan today, because I deserved namely this mostly.

Chapter 18

The dinner at Stroganoffs'

The whole week of our uneasy life in Constantinople with the daily visits to the sick duchess, to Joan, to some passengers who were sailing with us flew past – and I not only had any time to read something, but I could hardly escape to see the city or some of its sights for an hour or two.

My head was still working with difficulty. I could see how the duke's face was brightening, while his wife's health kept improving. When she spoke up for the first time after such a long bellow – although not very clearly, but completely correctly, - and moved her right hand, he threw himself on I.'s neck and couldn't find any words to express his gratitude.

It seemed to me that "the charming" reigned in Joan's apartment – the children were following only after Anna. Under the leadership of Stroganoff and his older daughter who was very cheerful and practical personality, Joan was running to shops and packing the cupboards and counters with ribbons, plumes, sparkling threads, all sorts of silks and rice straws from which Anna's hands were putting not just examples, but wonderful works of art.

In the beginning it seemed to me that this medium filled with the fuss and all sorts of elementary trifles of life were absolutely not meant for Anna. Only when I saw with what taste, beauty and nobility this entire room began to small when every entering person's face used to change from Anna's calm and kindness, I understood what her words about the daily routine that was turning into a shining temple meant.

It seemed that the children were dressed with Anna's taste and care, too. A tender Turkish nurse was looking after them perfectly, and here they were feeling safe from their mother's hot-tempered love that was always suddenly jumping from a caress into a scream.

Joan already made several hats, and the shop's opening was planned in three days.

The duke used to visit Joan daily, but it seemed to me that the real tone of friendly relations hadn't yet settled between them, while the duke was idolizing Anna simply purely an joyfully as a being standing higher than himself.

In his new life which I could see so clearly, a kind man with a strong character who sometimes simply stunned me with his unexpected persistence was maturing, or perhaps to be precise, was revealed.

Anna was always evenly tender to me, but my overheard conversation which always used to emerge unwittingly exhausted my self-control so much that each time I used to become ashamed. A hundred of times I gave my word to finally confess everything to her, but everything used to end so that I only would stand in front of her, blushed like a schoolboy who was caught playing pranks improperly.

One time, having noticed such a state of mine for several times, I. looked me up and down more intently, gave a smile and told me tenderly.

"Here's the lesson for you how to live in compromise. If self-respect is pulsating in man in a living thread, then he will feel the greatest suffering when he wants to sift that respect with powdered sugar and to hide the fallen drop of the tar. You are suffering, because the integrity of your nature cannot

tolerate any falsehood. So is it really so difficult to find the way out of the situation if the truth that is hiding in your heart is demanding it?"

"I haven't told you anything, Lolion, and once again you found out everything, but if you are such a clairvoyant, then you should understand how difficult it is for me now. How could I confess to Anna that I heard everything and that I know her secret? How to confess to her that I was sitting hypnotized like a rabbit in front of a snake and I couldn't make a move? Who else, except you who believe in my honour, would believe in it?"

"Lovushka, you don't have to tell anything to anybody at all. You will never know what secrets a man knows about another one's life. I have already told you one time that there were no coincidences in life. If you had to see another's wound or an open heart hidden from others in one or another way, be a well-bred person, and that means – don't show by anything that you know something. If your own conciliation of honour is tormenting you, then learn to carry on your suffering in such a way that the others wouldn't suffer from it and take out of this lesson an understanding how you shall act next time if you ever get into such a situation."

We were talking, sitting in a small, shady public garden on our way home. The state that was tormenting me didn't stop from these I.'s words, but I understood my false behaviour with Anna. Now it was clear to me that in such cases one needed to summon up one's strength and not to become a listener of secrets.

"I think that no especial tragedy has happened this time, and if there was something wrong, then it was only your absent-mindedness. If you had imagined that Florentian was standing next to you, then you would have found enough strength to stand up and leave."

"What a horror!" I gave a shout. "If Florentian found out that I was listening secretly! That would be the limit! I hope you won't tell him?"

I. laughed infectiously.

"Lovushka, but did you tell me anything? Just imagine how many times Florentian's thoughts and strength surpass mine, and you will understand the whole naivety of your question. Calm down. This little fact is only a small part of your spirit's universities which happen to everyone who is seeking for discipline and who wants to educate himself..."

I received a telegram and a letter from Ananda. He left Moscow today. If his journey is successful – which I don't doubt, - then we'll meet him in six days. I would like you to read one book which I have prepared for you until that time. Having read that book, you will understand better what Ananda is seeking for, what Ali and Florentian have achieved already and hopefully, what you and me will achieve some day," I. was talking to me, while lifting me gently off the bench.

"Oh, Lord! You are so kind and generous, Lolion. How you can compare yourself to the ill-mannered, unbalanced lad. If only I could ever be like you at least somewhat at something..." I answered my friend, nearly in tears.

Having left the public garden, we got straight into the heat and the crowd of the fesses, red like fly-agarics.

"Today we are going to dine at Stroganoffs'. Anna wants to celebrate the beginning of her work in her family circle," I. was talking to me. "We must be the real cavaliers. We have to order the cake and flowers for the table, and to hand the bouquets of roses to both young owners of the shop – Anna and Joan, and to the mistress of that house – Stroganoff's wife."

"I feel very uncomfortably," I answered him. "I have never been in society, I have never seen the dinner-party and I don't know how to behave at all. It would be better if you came there alone, while I could read the book at home."

"It's impossible, Lovushka. You need to habituate yourself to the company of people and to become an example of tact and politeness everywhere. Remember Florentian, find strength within yourself and let's go."

"I cannot imagine how I'm going to enter the room full of strangers. I'm certainly going to brush against something, to forget myself or to start laughing if something seems to be funny to me," I was mumbling through my nose, being not happy.

"It is so strange, Lovushka. You possess a great literary talent, observation and sensitiveness, but having met people, you cannot concentrate. When you enter the sitting-room where everybody will probably be gathered already, don't tramp the threshold absent-mindedly, searching for whom to greet, but look over everyone calmly, with your eyes find the mistress and go straight to her. This time follow me and believe that there's nothing for you to feel shy of in that house."

We turned around the corner and ran into the captain face to face. The mutual joy of the meeting showed what great friends we had become already. Having found out that we were searching for the flowers and the cake, and that we wanted to find Anna's favourite violet pansies very much, he only nodded his head.

"There are lots of cakes, with or without an ice-cream, but to find great flowers off season – that's a serious task," he uttered. "Since you are searching the flowers for the beauty whom one can see only once during one's lifetime, then it is worth trying to find them. Let's drop in at my friend confectioner. He'll be fascinated with this order, because he owes me for a lot of things, then we will take a light carriage and rush along to visit one of my friend gardener. He's living outside of the city, and if it is at all possible to find great flowers in Constantinople – and even the pansies, - then we will get them."

We walked across two streets quickly, as if at the word of command, and entered a rather unappealing confectioner's shop. I was feeling disappointed. I wanted the orders to be fulfilled by some excellent, extraordinary shop, and I already wasn't expecting anything great here.

And as always I was wrong. While the captain and I were ordering some fanciful cake, the mistress of the shop who had wrapped herself up in a black cloak from head to foot brought me a pastry and a glass of a dark red, cold drink. I wasn't charmed at all neither with one or another, but as soon as I bit off a piece of the pastry, I thrust the rest of it greedily into my mouth immediately. And when I took a sip of the cold drink I was able to utter only this.

"Captain, this is Bagdad."

The captain and the owners laughed, my friends also ordered this miracle of Bagdad, and I quickly ate up the second portion, too.

The captain was hurrying us. We boarded our light carriage and rolled across the deserted city which was lazily drowsing in the burning sun.

"Well, you cannot decide by appearance," I said to the captain. "I wasn't happy that you brought me to such dismal confectioner's shop, but it turned out that in the evening someone might even swallow his tongue because of your cakes."

The captain was laughing and telling me with humour how he was struggling with the steamer's repairs. He mentioned modestly that he settled all the poor from the steamer in several second-rate hotels from his own pocket.

"Everything would be all right," he sighed, "only the pretensions of the first and second class ladies have tired me. And why they were created at all," the captain was throwing up his hand comically.

"I would like to take a look at you without any ladies. There would be no occasion for your yellow eyes to become the eyes of the tiger, and it would be hellish boring for yourself to give orders only to men."

"Lovushka, you hit straight to my heart for the second time, but my heart is strong and it'll hold out, besides soon we'll come to the place. You know, doctor I., if you allowed this young man to go to England with me, I guess he would take me in hand properly."

I. smiled to both me and the captain and began to talk how Joan's destiny has taken a favourable turn. The captain was listening to him attentively, and then he kept silent for a long time.

"How can I know, I'm only a sea-dog, but in my imagination hats don't suit Anna in any way. Anna is a goddess... and the hats!" the captain kept repeating.

"But a crowd of people will be wearing those hats," I contradicted him.

"Oh, Lovushka, what kind of people they are. They are ladies, but not women. Well, we have arrived already. Pay your attention to this view. Here all ladies will dash out of your heads."

And indeed, there was a lot to see, I even couldn't make up my mind from which side the city looked better.

However, we couldn't look round, because we stopped at a blank, high fence. The captain rang the bell at the gate, and a young Turk opened it immediately.

Having talked a little to that Turk who was showing his teeth merrily, the captain took us into the depth of the garden. The beds of all sorts of flowers were extending along both sides of the walk. I had never seen many of them. On the way the captain plucked off a little white blossom and extended it to me.

"All gentlemen in England cling such blossom to the lapel of their jackets when they are preparing for a dinner. This is a gardenia. When you are going to dine, cling this blossom to your jacket, remembering me. You can even give it to the lady whom you will like the most," he was speaking to me by taking my arm.

"I can really cling the blossom to my jacket in honour of yourself, but this dinner isn't an Eastern ball, and there will be no woman who is meant for me, although only the beauties would gather there. Only Florentian is living in my heart, and I will leave your blossom at his portrait."

The captain shrugged his shoulders, but he didn't have time to answer me anything. A hefty, sluggish Turk was already going in front of us. He was so broad-shouldered that it seemed that he could lift the terrestrial globe. He was the owner of the greenhouse. He greeted the captain like a good friend. I thought for a while one more time that I would really beware of him deciding by his appearance, and I would even go round him from the distance in the late evening.

Wonderful orchids, as well as Parma violets were growing in the greenhouse. I. and the captain ordered some fanciful, fantastic baskets from orchids, some reddish gardenias and roses. We had to bring the violets with ourselves and hand them to Anna, while the roses were for her mother and Joan.

Burdened ourselves with the light, wicker baskets where the flowers were placed on the moist grass, all three of us came back to the hotel. We had time only to change our clothes. The captain was sitting in the balcony, and only the fragments of his conversation to I. used to reach me. I. was telling him that Ananda would arrive soon, whom he had promised to introduce to him; besides he promised to take the captain to the Stroganoffs' house, so that he could listen to the wonderful playing and singing of Anna.

"I will be very thankful for this, doctor I. The evening spent with you in the company of the beautiful musician maybe will give me strength to value the talent differently than I got used to by seeing the performers going on the stage only for money. One time Lovushka gave a little scratch to my heart by joking how I would value my wife if she played for the wide public. I haven't found an answer to this question up to now," the captain was speaking, lost in thought.

"Lovushka's eyes are like awls not without reason. He has drilled a hole in my soul, but hasn't put a bandage of peace on it," I. laughed.

"No, nobody can teach me peace. Only the storm – it doesn't matter on land or sea – is kind and pleasant for me, but everywhere with me and around me is only the storm."

And then I showed myself: with the white, fine silk suit ordered by I., the black bow-tie, black wide belt-waistcoat and with the captain's gardenia on the lapel. My already grown hair was beautifully curled.

"My God, but you are really handsome today, Lovushka! Be pitiful, Joan will be fascinated by you completely," the captain gave a shout.

Neither his irony nor the attentive I.'s look disturbed me. Only my thoughts about Florentian and my brother were within myself. Today I had firmly decided to turn into Lovushka the catcher of the crows not for a single time.

We went downstairs, said good-bye to the captain and got into the light carriage by holding the baskets with the flowers carefully.

Several coaches were already standing at the Stroganoffs' house. I understood that besides us, there will be more guests. One more time I gave my word to be worth of Florentian and, having concentrated all my attention, to think not about myself, but only about each of my company.

There were hall-stands across the walls in the spacious and bright Stroganoffs' antechamber. On them many summer cloaks were hanging and the whole pile of all sorts of hats were placed.

Two Turks took our hats, too, and helped us to take out the flowers. I was surprised, because only now I saw what a miracle of beauty – two wonderful boutonnieres of violets – was covered in my basket. I. was already holding three bunches of long-stemmed roses tied up with great Eastern ribbons in his hands. He gave me the bouquet of reddish roses, took one of the violet boutonnieres from me and told me.

"Lovushka, follow me. I will hand the bouquet to the senior mistress and Anna. You give the violets to Anna and the roses to Joan. Don't feel shy, feel free and remember how Florentian is conducting himself everywhere."

The comparison of such tall and grand figure of my idolized friend to my own medium height and small constitution, of his simple, but noble manners to my swiftness, a thought of how I would look like

by imitating his grandeur seemed to be so comical to me that I could hardly hold my laughter, but I couldn't suppress my smile and I entered the sitting-room smiling.

Only men were here, and the sitting-room reminded me more of a smoking room – so much smoke was here.

"Well, finally you are here," I heard the Stroganoff's voice, who was coming to meet us. "I think that my ladies have already started worrying about the culinary fancifulness and they are in a bad temper. We were waiting for you in a family way, a little earlier, and you, dandies of the capital, arrive by observing etiquette, a quarter of an hour before the beginning," he was laughing by squeezing our hands. "Let's come, I will introduce you to my old woman, and there's no need to acquaint with the rest of the guests, because you will mix all ogly and pashas anyway," he continued by taking I.'s arm.

The master brought us to a grand, elderly, but still not old woman with the black, silk dress which was very ordinary, but it looked well on her shapely and somewhat stout figure.

I was stunned when I saw the lady's face: her plait was surrounding her head in a heavy crown and, to my great amazement, it was ash-coloured; her black eyes, the oblong oval of her face, her dark skin and wonderful hands – as though Anna herself was standing in front of me. Everything in her mother reminded me of her daughter, but... what a difference, what an abyss was between these two undisputed beauties.

"I'm glad to see you at our place," she said to I. by taking the flowers from him and thanking for them. "My husband has told me so much about you."

She had a deep voice just like Anna, but here was an abyss, too. It was a little hoarse, and notes of a spoilt beauty were ringing in it, who was used to win victories with her beauty and to crush everybody. She gave me only a little smile and immediately directed her eyes towards a tall Turk with a fez and a European suit by continuing their already started conversation. I didn't have time to reflect on the master's wife, because Anna was already coming in front of us; only some icy stream ran across my heart, and I felt sorry for Stroganoff.

Anna had a white, muslin dress on, her plait as usual was extending through her shoulders, her eyes were radiating by calling the memories to me about the Ananda's eyes-stars. She extended her wonderful hand towards I., which he kissed, and twinkled her eyes merrily by taking the violets from him.

"At last," she uttered. "I could expect all kinds of surprises from you, but that you could hand me violets..."

When in my turn I also gave her the bouquet of violets, then as though it took her breath away, such great her astonishment was.

"You, too, you, too, managed to get my favourite flowers for me," Anna was speaking by taking my arm and bringing me out of the room's centre where we were standing and drawing everyone's attention. "You and your brother are spoiling me too much. Oh, if you knew what an emblem of happiness these flowers are for me!"

"I know," I uttered without thinking.

"Only when I saw an exceptional astonishment in her face I understood how foolishly I was caught and, not allowing her to come to her senses, I asked her to show me where Joan was sitting among so many people. Finally a laughter changed the astonishment and anxiety in Anna's face.

"You are so strange, Lovushka," she told me, "you almost stunned me," and she laughed even merrier. "Here's Joan and the duke for you. Have a good time and I'm going to continue the duties of the hostess. You will be sitting next to me at the table, to be precise between me and Joan, because neither of us agreed to give you to somebody else," and having smiled to all three of us, she left us.

I handed the roses to Joan and sat down next to her on a low Turkish arm-chair.

I couldn't examine the big room properly, which was darkened with the drawn down curtain and lit up with the great number of lamps, I also couldn't observe the guests who were walking in the room, talking joyfully and loudly mostly in Turkish, because Joan was sputtering a hundred words per second, demanding my entire attention and even answers. I understood that mostly she was unsatisfied because I was going to sit on her right and not on her left where the duke had his seat planned.

Finally I succeeded to interrupt her and ask the duke about his wife's health.

"Everything's all right, Lev Nikolayevich. The duchess is already trying to hold a teaspoon in her hand and she's happy like a child," he answered.

The door of the sitting-room opened, and the host standing on the threshold invited everyone at the table.

Anna was already hurrying towards me. One of the boutonnieres of the violets was fastened on her chest and it stood out brightly on the white background of her dress by putting stress on the paleness of the skin of her face and her neck even more.

Having offered her my hand, I was walking in the row of couples, seeing in front of me Anna's mother with that elegant Turk with whom she was talking when we came.

When I sat down on the Anna's indicated place, I got not only between her and Joan, but also in front of the young Ibrahim. He was dressed very elegantly in European style. We bowed one to another pleasingly. A young Turkish lady was sitting next to him. Joan whispered to my ear that she was Stroganoff's niece, the daughter of her sister; that Stroganoff herself who in any case was kind and joyful person was seeing the future Ibrahim's wife in her. I felt sorry for my friend sincerely, because the girl's face, although it was graceful, was rather dull. He could hardly expect such wife to enrich him with the moments of inspiration.

The guests were seated at the long table. The room was established in Eastern style, it was decorated with many-coloured inlaid work, and two blue hues were prevalent. There wasn't any furniture here, except the low sofas which were covered with exceptionally luxury carpets and placed along the walls.

Having looked at Anna, I saw that I. was sitting next to her, on another side of her, and the senior Stroganoffs' daughter was sitting next to him. I felt for I. from the bottom of my heart, because I knew perfectly, to put it mildly, the light-mindedness of this practical personality.

Anna wasn't eating much, but she was trying to acquaint me with the Eastern dishes very much. The guests didn't have time to be sated with the snacks when two men brought in our ordered, fabulous flower baskets. Besides our flowers, there was also an original, very refined bouquet of orchids which was put in a wonderful, crystal vase and placed right in front of Anna.

"Undoubtedly, this is the captain's greeting, because we were choosing the flowers with him," I whispered silently to Anna's ear.

"If my heart today wasn't pulsating with love so strongly, I would become angry, but today I can't be angry with anybody," she answered me.

"But why? The man bows before your beauty so much, he expresses his fascination so sincerely. Just look, how high his culture has to be in order to put the orchids in such a way. This is the whole symphony of colours – from reddish to black, isn't it? And you are talking that you could be angry with him," I gave a shout, being excited and offended for my friend.

"Lovushka, you didn't understand me. I have put it in a wrong way. Of course, the man who is able to present the flowers in such a way must be very artistic, but the captain is squandering that subtle taste everywhere and for everybody like a toy of beauty. However, only that beauty is dear to my heart, which reflects the subtlety not only of one's taste, but also of one's spirit. Which blossom would you like to bring home – one of these wonderful, sumptuous pearl orchids or a little, fragrant violet?" she asked me.

"One cannot formulate a question like this. The violet which you are holding in your hands and which you have called an emblem and your favourite flower isn't a blossom or a thing for me anymore, but a symbol. In the meanwhile, the captain's flowers are simply the present of the fascinated man, his gratitude for meeting you," I answered her. "I have noticed that the captain has made a rather poor impression on you. I'm very sorry for that. Of course, he's a tiger, but he possesses so much high nobleness, so much courage and... sometimes in his words I find so much resemblance to that what the most wonderful man whom luckily I was acquainted with is telling. I promised to introduce him to Ananda and to give him a chance to listen to his singing."

The sparkles began to rain from Anna's face, her face turned pale. She turned to I., not answering a word to me.

"Lovushka, your neighbour on the right also wants to talk to you. Explain to us. The duke is laughing at me and he doesn't want to tell me the name of those flowers in front of Anna. They are artificial, aren't they?" I heard Joan's voice.

"No, Joan, these are orchids. Do you like them?"

"Not too much, Lovushka, your roses are much more wonderful and they smell sweet. Look at madam Stroganoff. Today she's dissatisfied with everything. She doesn't like very much that today everything is done for Anna here."

"Why is it so?" I was astonished.

"Because Anna is the reason of the inner split in their family. She doesn't want to accept her mother's proposed perfect perspective to marry, but she's living in her dreams and she's friends with all sorts of poor persons. Besides, I suspect that her mother envies Anna's beauty," she added silently.

I didn't like this jabber of Joan. According to my understanding, it wasn't very noble to slander those people who have helped her to start the new life so sensitively.

"Are you going to sing today?" I asked Anna who turned to me again.

"I wouldn't like to, but most likely I will have to. There are several persons among our guests who understand and value the music profoundly. My mother isn't artistic, but the guest who's sitting next to her is musical, he's even considered to be a good singer," she answered me, smiling mischievously.

"Oh, what a pity, really what a pity that the captain won't hear your singing. For him that would have been more than necessary – maybe even an enlightenment of his spirit," I gave a shout.

"You are a perfect dreamer, Lovushka. It seems that I. wants to please you, so when Ananda comes, I would have to organize a musical evening for a little circle of people. If you succeed to hear Ananda's singing – then all other sounds will seem for you to be poor and unnecessary. Every time when I hear that voice I make sure of my insignificance."

"One can justify these words only with the grandeur of your talent and spirit. Only the person who understands the radiance of the peaks can be unhappy with such talent as yours, which I. calls great."

"Lovushka, today you must have decided to talk to me in riddles..." Anna laughed.

"No, no, only if you knew how guilty I am before you..."

Not even having finished my sentence, I saw I.'s head coming out behind Anna, and his look reminded me of our conversation in the public garden. He asked Anna of something, while I turned to Joan by saving myself.

The dinner was going on as it was meant to be. I caught the look of the tall Turk of whose musicality Anna was telling me several times. His fire, some demonic eyes would often turn to Anna. Sometimes a brutal expression of hatred used to flash in them, especially when he was looking at I., talking to her.

"Well, well," I thought. "Is my dear I. going to be responsible for Ananda's sins?"

I didn't even have time to think a little longer about it when the tall Turk stood up, took the glass of champagne into his hand and bowed before his neighbour, the mistress of the house with dignity and even solemnly. She smiled to him and tapped the knife into her crystal glass.

All voices hushed immediately, everyone's eyes turned towards the Turk who wanted to propose a toast.

After a long and exhaustive glorification of the parents – it must have been accustomed to do so in the East, but it seemed to be hypocritical for me – he proceeded to the hero of the festivities, their youngest daughter. He was talking in French, stating that there were some people at the table, who knew only that language. He uttered that in the most innocent tone, as though he had satisfied the most elementary demand of politeness, but there was such acidity and insulting jeering in his eyes, face and his entire figure that all my blood flowed to my head. I didn't doubt that he was mocking Joan from inside, although everything seemed to be normal outwardly.

Anna who was looking down, now looked at me with her extremely deep look as though confirming the vanity and senselessness of the current surroundings. I had to put some effort in order to listen attentively to the orator's speech. His voice was picturesque, imperious, his speech was correct, he was pronouncing every letter extremely clearly.

Since I was observing the man so attentively, I lost the thread of his speech, and I managed to focus my thoughts only in the end of his long toast where apparently the main point was hiding.

"You aren't just a pearl of the Bosphorus for us, which could decorate any harem or palace, but you are the woman whose beauty and talents don't have enough space on the earth. And what do we see? This woman wants to work independently, prick her wonderful little fingers with needles and pins. Shame on us, the men of Constantinople who were unable to win the heart of the most beautiful beauty of the whole world.

If we didn't succeed to do that up to now, then let's announce ourselves to be jealous guards and don't allow anybody other than a Turk to take this treasure from us. I propose a toast to eternal womanhood, beauty, passion, woman who embellishes and supplements a man's life, but not to a worker. To royal beauty – a royal place in life!"

Having finished his speech, he clinked glasses with Stroganoffs and turned around the table towards Anna.

I didn't hear what Anna told I., but I could see her pleading look, his return smile and a nod of his head.

The Turk was coming nearer to us. All guests were standing up to clink glasses with Anna and the hosts by prolonging the Turk's toast with play of their words. His face took an expression of a satanic impudence, anger and jealousy, as if he had decided to do something, to risk of something even if that was menacing to become a scandal.

I began to quiver. This satanic physiognomy was terrifying me.

All of a sudden, when there were three or four steps left before us, the Turk turned all pale, he turned pale so much that even his lips became pale. He began to stagger, touched his heart with his hand. Everybody hurried to help him, but he had recovered already. He was trying to smile, but it was obvious that he didn't understand what had happened.

When he touched his heart, a bracelet fell out of his hands, and as I understood, it was made of reddish corals. Later I. explained to me that it was made of reddish corals and the same reddish brilliants. It was an invaluable thing.

It seemed that he wanted to put this treasure on Anna's hand secretly from everybody, but the sudden pain betrayed this want of his. Somebody lifted the bracelet from the floor and gave it back to him, which he put into his pocket in vexation. He went up to Anna. Now he could hardly walk, he was stooped and looked old at once, almost ugly.

He hardly had any strength to clink glasses with Anna who stood up to meet him. He didn't utter a word to her, although his eyes were going upward onto his forehead from his efforts, then suddenly he turned round and went back to his place.

I was observing him without stopping. It was strange to me that he could hardly walk towards our side, but now he found strength for such a sudden turn away from us, and his later behaviour seemed even stranger: the closer he was coming to his place, the lighter his walk became, and when he sat down in his place next to the host of the house, he was already mocking himself joyfully, saying that apparently, an attack of angina pectoris had started for him.

I still didn't have time to perceive everything what had happened when the clinking of a knife to the glass interrupted the talking and laughter of the guests: it seemed that this time the host of the house rose for the return toast.

"First of all, I want to thank the guest for such high glorification of the "pearl's" parents, although I absolutely don't feel being worth of such high praise and I see only the guest's Eastern politeness in those words, while his mentioned differences between the pure-blooded Turks and Europeans, between the working ones and those who are living at the expense of somebody else, then..." here he blinked an eye in a funny way and continued, "Well, our honourable orator calls himself to be a Turk. His name is Alphonse. Is there such Turkish first name? His family name is da-Bracano. Could there be such Turkish family name?"

The laughter was heard all around.

“His family name tells us about Spaniards, Moors, even Italians – anything you want, but not about the Turks. The psychology and politeness of our honourable friend might be pure Turkish – this is the matter of his taste and liking.

If we are talking about my Russified family, then everyone in it is working, and when I close my eyes, all the members of this big family will be standing firmly on their feet and go through life in material independence.

This day is the happiest one in my life, because my youngest daughter, the only adult member of our family, who hasn't yet worked independently up to now, became independent and started a big business. I also congratulate all women who are educated and working; not those women toys and women dedicated to entertainments, but the women who are friends of their husbands and children. Long live the happiness to work, the only one real man's happiness!”

And Stroganoff, just like the Turk, was going round the entire long table towards Anna by kissing his wife's hand on his way.

This time I noticed that Stroganoff was very excited when he bent his head over his wife, when he clinked glasses with da-Bracano and with his younger son who was taking advantage of an exceptional guardianship of his mother.

By appearance he was a handsome youth with ash-coloured hair, black eyes, dark-complexioned like his mother, but some repulsive bestiality was felt in this beauty of his. It was clear that the Turk was an example of good style for him, who showed an exceptional attention and tenderness to him. It was obvious that his mother had spoilt him, so he was extremely haughty.

I turned into Lovushka the catcher of the crows, I forgot everything in the world and suddenly I saw some degenerated grey being behind the youth's back. That was as though him, as though not him, but only his portrait in twenty years. His forehead and face were wrinkled, there were some lumps on his hands, his deep and sunken eyes were gaping like hot coals. His mouth was distorted with anger.

I could neither separate that second figure from the youth neither merge them into one. I already raised my hand and wanted to shout to him: “Beware of the villain behind your back, drive him away,” but somebody took my hand, and I heard Stroganoff's voice.

“Whom now are you sharpening your writer's awls at? Ah, you are interested in my youngest son. Well, he isn't working yet. His mummy wakes him up in the morning and herself brings him the chocolate to his bed. The youngest one is usually considered to be a baby, although with his experience he already outrivals the old men, too.

Let's hug one another, Lovushka. I see that my royal rose of the Bosphorus accepts you to her heart, and this is a rare occurrence.”

I could hardly hold out this hug of his, and this happened only because I. went up to Joan, squeezed my hand and whispered to me: “Think only about Florentian.”

When everybody took their seats and our ordered cakes and ice-creams were brought on the table, the cries of gratification were heard. It seemed that the owner of the confectionery knew well the taste of the public in Constantinople.

Anna stopped talking silently to I., turned to me and looked at me attentively with her black eyes.

"Oh, Anna, how unhappy I am. I wish this endless dinner to end as soon as possible. And why people eat so much? It seems to me that since we came to Constantinople I always only eat and sleep. To tell you the truth, I also see clearly how I am losing my mind," I was complaining to Anna pitifully.

Her tender hand stroked my hand put on my knee, and she told me friendly.

"Lovushka, hold tight somehow. I feel for you from the bottom of my heart. I would like to help you very much somehow. Look at me only like at the closest and loving sister."

Her voice was so tender, such kindness was spurting from her eyes that I couldn't hold out anymore. The tears were already gathering in my throat. All of a sudden I saw I.'s hand extending towards me, and in it there was an Ali's pill placed on the napkin. I quickly grabbed the medicine like a lifebuoy and swallowed it. To my great joy, I heard the noise of the chairs being pulled away from the table.

The guests dispersed in balconies and sitting-rooms where the black coffee made in Turkish style was waiting for them.

I was begging I. not to leave me alone and to go home as soon as possible. We went to the balcony with the duke where the stars were already twinkling like diamonds in the dark sky. It looked like there was a rain, because the drops were still quivering on the leaves of the trees here and there, and the flowers smelt extremely strongly.

"Here it is, the sweet-scented night of the South, but you are wrong if you think that you see the rain-drops. Only by Stroganoff's order, the trees, flowers and lanes were watered, so it wouldn't be so stifling. You want to leave, but don't you want to listen to Anna's playing and singing? Don't be an egoist," I. told me in a more silent voice. "You understand that it would be even more difficult for Anna here today without us, don't you? Didn't you understand that great power of pure love and will has helped me to protect her from that satanic Turk?"

"Doctor I., I have a great favour to ask you," all of a sudden the duke spoke up, who was immersed in his thoughts up to now.

"I'm glad to be of service for you," I. answered him very vividly.

"You see, I've been always looking for an opportunity to repay you for all your kindness for me and my wife, but all the ways that I was analysing in my thoughts seemed to be vulgar to me. But it seems that I've found something anyway, although in this case you could blame me of egoism even more than ever before. Your friend has to come to you. I wonder if a hotel's confusion is pleasing for him. In the meanwhile there are two rooms with an absolutely separate entrance in my big and empty house.

There are three empty rooms more next to these ones. I have already made arrangements with Stroganoff and started repairing them. Everything will be finished in a couple of days, the furniture will be delivered. I have already bought an excellent piano, too, so that your friend and Anna could play at my house if they only wanted to.

There's a room on the second floor for the youth who is coming with your friend. It has separate stairs to the rooms of Ananda, Lovushka and yourself. As you can see, I have already thought about everything. In the presence of the quick separation, don't refuse that happiness for me and be my guest," the duke was speaking silently, almost pleading.

I. went up to him, extended his hand and told him.

"Whatever form I would give to my gratitude, I will make you glad mostly with the words that it is rare when man's help is such timely and needed as this proposal of yours. I and Lovushka have

already gotten tired of the hotel's racket, while our friends need to rest for a long time already. I thank you on our behalf. We will be glad of the possibility to live in the quiet house for a while, because it seems that we will still be delayed here for almost a month."

"What a happiness this is!" the duke exclaimed.

Joan came to the balcony to invite us for a coffee drink. She surprised me with something, and only in the light of the room I understood that she had changed her dress. To my question why did she do it, she answered me that there was such a fashion in Constantinople, and the ladies were changing their toilets during the festive dinner.

I also saw madam Stroganoff here. She had a light, lilac dress on, which suited her hair, but made too strong contrast to her skin. Maybe it was beautiful, but I didn't like it.

With my eyes I was searching for Anna by deciding which colour I would like to see and I wanted to imagine her charming figure only in a white background.

I was glad when I saw that she was wearing the same dress. Having taken a good look at Joan who was buried in green ruffles, suddenly I gave her a piece of my mind.

"I'm not a Parisian, I'm only a lad who hasn't seen the world, but in your place I wouldn't have put such a vulgar dress on in any way. Your previous dress was modest and nice, it only made you more distinct, while this greenness overshadowed you and besides it just shouts about your bad taste to everybody. For God's sake, just don't make your hats of such style, because then you will push away the noble ladies and attract the market public to your atelier."

"That's because," Joan was talking to me nearly in tears, "I chose the first dress myself, and madam Stroganoff gave me this one."

The duke and I. went up to us, and we sat down in the corner to drink our coffee. Anna was sitting on the sofa at the central table, and the ill-fated da-Bracano was sitting on the chair next to her.

He was telling her something with his eyes fastened upon her. Anna's face was unfeeling, as if with a mask that didn't allow to see the depth of her soul. She lifted her eyes only once, ran her eyes over the room and looked at her father pleadingly. He stood up immediately and sat down on the sofa next to her.

"Well, my daughter, I want to drink a cup of coffee poured with your kind hands," her father was smiling to her.

Anna stood up in order to take the coffee-pot. I saw fury and hatred in the eyes of the Turk once again; but he was controlling himself perfectly and sipping his coffee with a smile.

"Lolion, please don't step back from me, but I'm strong already, as though Ali himself was here and not only his pill in me. It seems to me that if that Satan stays longer next to Anna, then she won't be able to sing. Could you curve him so much that he had to get out of here?" I was whispering to him.

I. laughed and answered me that he relied on my strength and self-control, and that he would certainly go to Anna's table; but he was asking me to sit down next to him without fail as soon as the music would start, and he would take the place for me. It would be even better that as soon as the talking about singing starts, I would come to him instantly. Having talked a little to the duke and Joan, he went to Anna's table where the whole company of men had gathered as though to the magnet.

The drinking of coffee continued.

"You know, duke, I couldn't live in the East. Once I participated in a wedding feast. The guests there were strictly divided into a manly and womanly sides, and I, of course, could see only the men's feast. They were eating with their hands, they were eating till the falling down, till the ninth sweat, while the dismal Eastern music was playing. That was terrible, but picturesque, although barbarous. Everything here is already as though covered with culture and civilization – and there's a gluttony till the sweat anyway. The only difference is that they are working by the sweat with their perfumed handkerchiefs and not their greasy hands.

Well, tell me, isn't it a barbarism to be so exhausted, to sprawl so much because of eating like these ones who are sitting in front of us," I gave a nod to the guests who were sitting on the sofa and chairs, and who had gotten absolutely befogged because of the grave digestion.

The requests to sing and to play were heard. Many were asking Bracano to sing; he was putting on airs and – imagining himself to be a hero – he was answering that he wasn't completely well, but that he would try anyway. "You'd better not try to," I thought for myself venomously and I decided to ask I. to give him some drops at any price, so that he would get hoarse and, as it is said, he would "let out a squeak" while singing.

Being excited by this desire, I forgot about any politeness, I left my friends and ran to I. Having seized his hand, I started asking him to make it so that this Turkish intriguer would make a fool of himself and would let out a squeak while singing.

"What a kid you still are, Lovushka," I. was laughing at me.

"Lolion, my dearest, my best, my kindest, don't allow this villain to torture Anna. His voice is probably good only for singing Satan's couplets," I was whispering to him.

"Stop, Lovushka," I. answered me very seriously. "Observe everything attentively, capture, remember everything well what you see and hear today. You'll understand a lot much later. Today here an hour will strike for Anna and for some others, which will determine their entire life. Be serious, don't play pranks like a kid."

He looked at me almost sternly.

The host invited all guests to go to the big hall, not to that one across which we entered the house from the street, but to another one inside of the house. There we went down the wide and beautiful stairs and got into a big, round sitting-room that belonged to Anna personally. Ah, what a wonderful room that was: its floor and walls – a continuous mosaic of wood, in the middle – a grand piano, along the walls – small chairs, several vases placed on pedestals, several paintings and marble sculptures.

As soon as Anna went up to the grand piano, I forgot about everything. A smile was shining in her face, her cheeks were burning, her eyes were radiating. That wasn't that Anna whom I had already been used to see, that was a fairy, an unearthly being. If up to now Anna already looked like an especial for me, not that one whom the earth is carrying, then now I understood that unearthly beings were still walking among us by bringing the sky down onto the earth.

She started playing. I recognized the Beethoven's sonata immediately.

I cannot understand up to now how not only me, but all of us could withstand that music. A furious tempo was breaking out from Anna. It seemed that a supernatural force had inspired her. Passions were replaced with a call for something unreachable, unknown; a sudden insight – and then questions once again, an inevitable voice of destiny was heard once again...

I was crying with my face covered with my hands. I heard how the duke was crying next to me. "Here it is, the grey daily routine turned into a shining temple," I was thinking.

The sounds died away, no one was disturbing the silence. I squeezed my hand slightly as though by reminding me of self-control. And he did it just in time.

"You, Anna, as always just make everybody nervous and spoil the celebration with your play," and unpleasant, nasal and capricious voice of her younger brother was heard. "You'd rather play Chopin, show your perfect play, but you've just eclipsed everybody with that Beethoven."

I wanted to beat that future wrangler and pugnacious fellow.

"You can leave if you don't like it. And I will thank you very much for doing so," his father uttered silently, but such a menace was seen in his face that the ill-mannered urchin hid himself behind his mummy's back like a cowardly dog.

His mother smiled and shook her finger coquettishly at him like at a five-year-old toddler.

This unpleasant incident was unable to dispel the great impression created by Anna.

She couldn't resist the requests and started playing again, but we didn't hear any serious musical compositions anymore, and it seemed that some little part of her being had flown out with her first composition. There wasn't any supernatural inspiration in her play anymore, too.

I wanted to crush that good-for-nothing urchin for such a rude escapade.

Anna stood up and announced that she wouldn't play and sing anymore, but if there was anybody who wanted to sing, she would accompany him.

Bracano rose and told her that he couldn't refuse such miraculous accompaniment.

I looked at I. His face was strict, oh how strict it was, like before the storm in the steamer. He looked at Anna, as though he would have sent her strength.

The Turk straightened his collar, pulled his waistcoat and announced that he would sing a song which would open the secret of his heart.

Everyone became quiet. He announced that he would sing a serenade by Schubert.

I gave a deep sigh. I looked round horror-struck, looked at the duke and at the singer who now looked more like a toreador breathing with hell's fire than a tender lover inviting us to listen to the meaning of the nightingale's song, to the prayer, to the heart's vibration. I could hardly refrain from sniggering.

Anna didn't need any notes. She looked at I., raised her eye-brows a little, her fingers touched the keys gently.

"My songs are drifting softly in the silence of the night..." all of a sudden a strong bass began to roar like the ship's hooter.

Now I already sniggered, huddled up and hid myself behind I. When this roar reached the highest note, an absolutely unexpected thing happened: suddenly the roaring bass turned into the highest and such hideous falsetto that loud laughter was immediately heard in all corners. I and the duke were laughing, too. Even Anna was looking at the singer amazed, although not a laughter, but an unpleasant annoyance was revealed in her face. Apparently, first of all an insulted soul of the artist reacted within her.

“No, I cannot sing, I’m ill today,” the singer told us, trying to smile. And he left the room, not taking a look at anybody.

The hostess of the house and her beloved son dashed after him, while the rest of the guests who were confused and choking with laughter started breaking up, too.

We, Anna, her father, the duke and Joan were the last ones who left. We said sincere good-bye to the hosts and promised them to call at the shop tomorrow at around six o’clock and inquire about their first working day.

Chapter 19

We stay at the duke's house

To be continued...

Chapter 20

To be continued...

To be continued...