

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 Antarova

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 pyialas, 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 sarthas 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 sarth 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 shining 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 coach, 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-robberies 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 dining-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 curse 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

We spent two more troubled days at the hotel – there was always the same running about: daily visits at Joan, at the duke, walks with the captain in the city by seeing its sights.

Regardless of the worries that had befallen on the captain from all sides, because of which he even became lean, and his yellow eyes were revealed even more, this kind man used to find two or three hours daily in order to show the city to me.

I met many kind and attentive people later in my life – I was always lucky in this, - but I have never experienced such sincerity from an absolute stranger. Of course, I'm not talking here about my friend Florentian and his friends – I., Ananda, Ali – I mean only other people of high culture.

In the morning of the third day, as soon as we sat down to breakfast, the duke entered and explained to us that he arrived with two servants dedicated to us, who would help us to move.

I. became glad, while I was unable to understand my feelings. As though I didn't want this change. Now I perceived here a reason because of which we would be delayed even for longer in Constantinople. Now it seemed to me that it would cause trouble for the captain to visit us, because it would be further from the centre. Undoubtedly, the cause of this dissatisfaction was only that I was feeling the easiest with the captain; as though I used to rest while being next to him and I was afraid of the separation with him.

Namely at this moment of my doubts, the captain entered. Having heard about our move to the duke's, he seemed to be sad.

I didn't even have time to evaluate that in my thoughts and I already wanted to go to pack my things when I heard the duke's voice.

"Captain, I want to address you with a request very much, only that I don't know how you will react to this. Our joint friends are moving to my place, and if you desired, there's one more empty and wonderful room left next to Lovushka's room. It wouldn't take a long time to furnish it, and in the evening almost a domestic surroundings would wait for you."

"Thank you very much," the captain answered him, "but our friends are moving to you by escaping from the racket, while I'm exactly the biggest racket and unrest."

"Come on," I. interrupted him. "The duke's house is big and convenient. There's a big garden with arbours there, and generally speaking, that who will lack peace will always find it there. Besides, you will stay in Constantinople for some days, while we will be here for some weeks, and it will be much more convenient for you to become acquainted with Ananda, to talk and to keep company with him if you are living with us.

Don't forget," he added with the well familiar flames of humour in his eyes, "that the grand piano is standing in the duke's house. I will try to persuade Anna to play for us in some evening by celebrating our modest house-warming even before Ananda's arrival. Lovushka was persuading you that Anna's play would reveal to you the great role in society not only of music, but also of the woman who's endowed with the musical talent, wasn't he?" I. finished by looking at me.

I blushed, I wanted to reproach my friend for mocking at me, but my desire to persuade the captain to move with us triumphed.

I fell myself on his neck and, apparently, I was begging him to agree so sincerely and childishly, in his turn the duke repeated his invitation one more time, I kept persuading him that finally the captain only made a helpless gesture with his hands, nodded his head and said.

"Doctor I., but the move to the strange family and even to such serious neighbourhood of yours is like entering a certain monastery! But I'm used to living grandly."

"Well, captain, if you really are interested in our inner life, as you were kindly talking about it several times, if you want to reconsider that what you've been keeping in the distant corners of your heart and mind, if you want to talk to the real wise man, and if your intentions are serious, then several days of pure life won't become a tragedy for you," I told him firmly while rising from the table.

"Of course, doctor I.! I wasn't talking about the tragedy of abstinence, but simply I don't feel to be worthy of that attention which all of you are showing to me here."

"But that is already a trifle!" I exclaimed. "Agree as soon as possible – this is the most important thing, so I could go and pack my things, because you don't know I's tempo. I won't have time to fold a single suit, and he will come running with all his things packed and accuse me of catching crows."

Everybody laughed. The captain bowed to the duke gentlemanly, thanked him, accepted his proposal and promised him to come to his house at seven o'clock in the evening with the help of the clumsy sailor.

I was satisfied and I ran to pick my things. With the help of the duke's servants, I was soon finished. We paid for the hotel, got into the duke's light carriage and left our things for the servants to take them home.

We made quite a big detour through the city, because at the same time I. decided to visit signoras Galdoni whom we hadn't yet visited by justifying ourselves with my illness.

I was glad that they weren't at home. Having left our visiting-cards to them, finally we reached the duke's home. I. asked us to take care of his things in such a way as it would seem to be necessary for us ourselves and went straight to the duchess.

When I looked at the rooms which were given to us by the duke, the first impression was stunning. My room had a big balcony to the garden, there were lots of flowers in blossom under it. The furniture made of mahogany stood out in the background of the light grey wallpaper. Here were both my bedroom and my study at the same time.

I was very anxious to see I.'s room as soon as possible. It was yellow, while its furniture made of black wood, carved in Gothic, middle-aged style with high and pointed forms reminded me of a temple's interior, besides it was upholstered with the yellow, silk, Gobelin tapestry with a brownish black drawing. The floor was also covered with the same carpet.

I even gave a whistle. A crystal vase with yellow roses was standing on the yellow cloth of the writing-table, and a letter written in a beautiful and rounded handwriting was placed on it.

It seemed to me that this room was absolutely not like sir Vomi's one in B., but it summoned those memories in me by something, perhaps by its yellow colour. Harmony of the forms and colours, the taste in which the things were placed – everything was an example of the real and high artistic value, and that stunned me.

"So you have arranged I.'s room like this?" I asked the duke who entered the room.

"No, Lovushka, Anna was occupied with this room. All this furniture was standing unused at one of her acquaintance. She offered me to buy it, while she was leading its placement herself. Do you like it?" the duke answered me.

"Do I like it? – That's the wrong word. The superiority of her entire taste in comparison with all of us is reflected here, just like in her playing, in her style of dressing," I was speaking to the duke, having forgotten about everything and by turning into Lovushka the catcher of the crows.

I don't even know for how long I've been sitting at the writing-table, examining the room which cast a spell over me. Only one thought was spinning in my mind: "How had Anna arranged Ananda's rooms? The rooms of that person whom her heart had chosen for ages, if only his friend's room is a temple already, and you can feel a divine respect when you enter it."

Having forgotten about everything in the world, being obsessed by this thought, I was thinking: "And what is love for these beings who are higher than us? How do they love? Where do they see the meaning of love? Why has my brother married Nal, but Ananda doesn't marry Anna? Wouldn't it be the beginning of a new and higher race if such a couple of beloved married?"

All of a sudden, as always unexpectedly, having trembled from head to foot, I saw Ananda – although somewhere far away, but absolutely clearly – and I heard his voice: "People's ties, their love and hatred – it isn't the fruit of this only life. Both man's body and his surroundings – everything is the effect and result of his personal activity and achievements during his entire centuries. There's no a single man's spiritual improvement path which could be separated from millions of lives that surround him. Only when he rises to the beauty that unites everybody, when he learns to join everybody with his love, only then he can reach the top of that altitude of spiritual power in which the people who have surpassed us are living. Then man's heart opens up, a new love comes to life in it, and he understands that the entire universe is connected, it breathes and is always moving forward only with the help of this real love."

Everything disappeared, and Ananda's voice fell silent.

"Don't worry, duke," I heard a voice next to me and I felt that I. was holding my hand. "Lovushka still has the attacks of nerves after that blow in the steamer, but they aren't dangerous. If this ever happens to him when I'm not with you, give him these drops which I'm asking you to pour from this bottle now."

The duke gave me the medicine to drink.

"Put them in this fine dresser," I. continued, "then you will know where to find them if needed. I repeat, this really isn't dangerous, don't worry. Now you need even more help than Lovushka, you are all pale. Well, why do you feel so nervous?" I. was comforting the duke.

"Oh, thank God, thank God! Lovushka was sitting absolutely motionless, with his eyes fixed on the space. He wasn't answering any questions, and I was frightened to death," the duke was speaking, excited.

I pressed myself to I.'s shoulder, he was stroking my head tenderly, and I was unable to control the trembling of my whole body in any way. Finally, I calmed down so much that I could stand up.

"That's what a shame I drew upon myself, my dear Lolion. I frightened you and the duke already on the very first day. I'm so sorry, please forgive me. This is who I am – an unfortunate catcher of the crows. As soon as I get into a very wonderful, I start gaping."

"Everything is going to be all right, Lovushka," the duke was comforting me tenderly. "Perhaps, you also would like to examine those rooms which are prepared for your arriving friend?"

"Oh no, for God's sake, just not now," I was begging him, being afraid that my recent experiences might repeat.

Both of them looked at me, amazed. An attentive I.'s look as though drew some curtain within me; as though everything what I had just experienced was reflected in me like in the mirror, and it seemed to me that I. saw all this exactly in such a way as my irritated imagination had presented to me.

"All right, we'll postpone this if you feel unwell. I will go to take care of furnishing the captain's room. I want that at seven o'clock in the evening he would enter the cosy and already completely arranged room. The truth is, his name is sir James Retedli, but I don't have any idea how I will have to address the noble lord anyway," the duke asked I.

"It will be better if we pay less attention to all kinds of conditionalities. Keep addressing him "captain", because we address you "duke", don't we, although you also have both your name and your patronymic," I. answered him, smiling.

"That's fine! So I go as soon as possible. The dinner is at half past seven," the duke told us and, having nodded his head to us, he left hurriedly through the door.

The two of us were left in silence. All of a sudden, my look felt a letter that was placed on the table. I thought that it would be more agreeable for I. to read it alone. It seemed to me that both the letter and the flowers were from Anna.

I moved out through the door silently, turned in at my room, but I was afraid of being plunged into that unpleasant state of illusions, so I decided rather to stay in the garden.

Most likely, the garden was a part of an old and neglected park. It was separated from the neighbours by a high fence behind which the same old and shady trees could be seen.

I sat down on the bench and I was glad with the rest in such secluded place. In my memory, which was overloaded and exhausted with all the experiences of the late days, only the scenes of this near past were swarming. I simply could think separately neither about one man nor about a fact, so that they wouldn't unite in an entire chain of my feelings and thoughts, which in the end turned into a joint jumble.

Only the clear picture of Florentian prevailed over my whole essence. My brother somehow stepped back, as though he had walked down into a shadow. I thought that now he had the honeymoon. I started reflecting and what people were calling that honeymoon when they admired it so much? All of a sudden, some new and never experienced feeling of shame broke into my thoughts.

Then, absolutely without any relation, I started thinking about Lisa and the captain, about Joan and the duke. All these relationships of them seemed to be sinful for me, too, not so pure that only beauty could unite them...

"Lovushka, where are you?" I heard an especially joyful I.'s voice.

I rose to meet him. I saw a letter in I.'s hands. I recognized that large and masterful handwriting instantly, which I memorized when the letter was lying next to the roses on I.'s writing-table.

"I received a message that Ananda would be here already on the day after tomorrow in the evening. What a joy!" I. was telling me by embracing me. "But you seem to be still like not recollected yourself. Or perhaps, you aren't happy that Ananda is coming?"

"I'm glad to see Ananda only because I have to thank him for the happiness to meet you, Lolion. If he hadn't saved you, what would I do now? Who would be searching for me and in which hold of life?" I answered him, having understood to the end for the first time how much, how extremely much he had done for me.

I. gave me a tender smile, the little flames of humour sparkled in his eyes, and he told me.

"And don't you see the meaning of our interrelations in those words which Ananda has just told you, - that there are no other relations, but only the cause and effect of our own life and activity? Maybe I, just like everybody else, only pay my former debt to you?"

I even rubbed my forehead.

"Wait a little, my dear I., but you don't want to tell me that there was even a drop of truth in that hallucination? How could Ananda talk to me, being a thousand of versts away from here at the same time?"

"Exactly like Florentian could talk to you, while being far away from you. You are almost crying, you worry and you are searching for some supernatural explanations, but I have already told you that no madness was menacing you, that a great happiness to achieve knowledge was waiting for you in the future if only you wanted to improve and achieve an absolute self-control. You have forgotten my words, or maybe you simply didn't pay a proper attention to them. I have already explained to you that in every man the creative power of his higher consciousness was hidden. It is drowsing within some people, while in others it comes to life. Also it comes to life in every man differently, depending on his general purity and development level of his culture – from a weak-minded person up to a wise man."

"Oh, Lolion, it is still so far to the wise man for me that I doubt whether I will ever achieve this, but judging from everything, it isn't much honour and joy to be a weak-minded person," I was bitterly sorry and I was pressing myself to my friend as though searching for a patronage.

"What a baby you still are, Lovushka," I. gave a laugh. "On the one hand, you are a baby, a wonderful baby, on the other hand, you are a great power. How will you be able to settle your life which only you alone can create? How will you hold out everything on your shoulders what already now requires your response and action? And nobody, except yourself, will be able to carry out your own individual tasks, characteristic only to you alone," I. was talking to me silently and seriously.

"But you won't leave me, will you! You will help me to live and to learn until Florentian comes? Oh, Lolion, don't leave me; I know what a burden and trouble I am for you, but I won't have enough strength to go through one more separation now," I could hardly hold back my tears and I seized his hands.

"My dear boy, my brother, I will be with you for a very long time. Our friendship is very dear for me and it absolutely isn't any burden or trouble. Only believe that every man's hearing and eyesight can suddenly become sharper because of all sorts of reasons which you don't understand up to now. Be calm, now you are so happy, no obligations are oppressing you, observe other people's lives easily and protect everyone from any trouble as much as you can. Let's go, we'll see how our host has arranged the rooms for Ananda."

My fear for the rooms had already been gone, we climbed up to a rather high lobby and instantly got into the Eastern world.

A soft Persian carpet was covered in the antechamber, low silky sofas with little pillows were lined along the walls, the narrow and pointed windows were covered with the coloured glass shutters. A

heavy and luxurious portiere separated the antechamber from other rooms. I. lifted the portiere, and we entered the room.

"My God," it slipped out for me, "but this is a room for the prince here, and not for several months, but for many years."

"It is exactly like this, Ananda is the prince, and he will be living here for at least a year," I. uttered these words so silently that I could hardly hear them.

A range of violet tones was simply poured in the room that was kingly luxurious and simple at the same time. That was the study and the library; I didn't understand its style back then, and I don't understand it now. As though someone's will had flown all this furnishing from the Middle Ages straight into the duke's house. I had never seen such armchairs – they were massive, high, made of some light greenish wood with the black pattern and upholsted with the light violet silk.

"Where could Anna get these things from?" it slipped out for me unwittingly.

"They were standing in her father's stockroom unused for many years. Now they will be used properly," I. answered me. "But let's keep going."

We went to the adjacent room and... from amazement I plopped myself down on the tabouret which was standing next to the door. I could expect everything, but not what I saw.

There was a simple, collapsible, linen bed without any pillow, covered with a soft animal fur. There was a small white table, two or three wooden chairs and the simplest wardrobe.

"Now you can see the most real needs of the prince. Here will be his most secret temple, and only few people can cross this threshold."

I kept silent and with the nod I showed a table to I., on which the same crystal vase was standing like in his room, and in it... was one of our pansy bouquets. He gave a nod to me, and we left Ananda's rooms after drawing down the portiere and closing the door.

Everything had lost the real meaning for me. I was going like through the mist and I came to myself only when we reached our side, when I. reminded me of my duty of hospitality and friendship for the captain who had to settle next to me already today in the evening.

"We have to try to ease his life here during these days. He will have to suffer a lot. Your tender love can help him more than everybody else's care," I. was talking to me. "Think about him. Call Florentian for help with the power of all your thoughts and you will always find the necessary word for the captain."

I decided firmly to concentrate my attention and to take care of the captain during all that time while we will be living here together, so as soon as I heard the duke's voice and the bustle in the next room, I came running for help instantly.

The duke was tormenting himself that he couldn't find anything great so quickly. Beautiful, antique, original furniture made of palm-tree was brought into the room. I. also came here and calmed down the duke that this furnishing was really nice and that the captain would be very grateful and satisfied.

The duke and we still had to visit Joan at the shop, so all three of us were busy with the furniture, and the room soon became cosy. We changed our clothes and hurried to visit Joan.

Here we found the real crowd of Babel. Stroganoff put an advertisement about the opening of the new French shop in the newspaper, and the ladies poured in like from a bag; even both Galdoni arrived to order the hats.

The young owners were happy with lots of orders and the number of the sold hats. Joan was cheerfully excited and felt like in her own element, while Anna... was smiling tenderly, she was calm, but I didn't see any happiness in her face.

"Anna, don't refuse to help me," I addressed her. "Me, Lovushka and the captain moved to the duke's house. Please play for us tomorrow in the evening, at nine o'clock. I would pick you up. I want so much that you would unite us with the language of beauty and music, which all of us understand, before Ananda comes."

"I'm always ready to play for you, although the captain's participation seems to be strange for me," Anna answered him. "All right, I will play for you," she added after being silent for a while. "Of course, I will also play for your captain," she uttered after being silent even for longer than in the first time.

All of a sudden Anna laughed, her face brightened up because of it, and I was happy that the captain would hear her playing, which I hoped would help him to look at the talented performer woman differently.

The time was flying, and I started worrying that I wouldn't have time to buy flowers for the captain's room and I told this loudly.

"Don't be sad, I also won't leave the captain for his flowers unanswered. Here, put on his table this small Japanese vase and this delicate orchid," Anna was talking to me by taking down a fantastic, small vase with the orchid from the shelf. "Only don't blurt it out that this is from me."

I jumped up with joy, clapped my hands, kissed both Anna's hands and, having left everybody, I hurried back home with the duke.

As soon as I put the orchid on the table, I heard the voices and the steps, among which I instantly recognized the light captain's step and the heavy clumsy sailor's walking.

The duke brought our friend to the room and asked him pardon if anything wasn't according to his taste. He explained to the captain where the bath was and disappeared, because he remembered about the dinner at half past eight.

I was like intoxicated: I was rejoicing at the captain and I couldn't come to myself from the contrast of Ananda's rooms, which surprised me so much; Anna and Joan, Anna and the shop also seemed to me like the same incompatible contrast...

The dinner and the evening passed joyfully. Our friendly conversation lasted well after the midnight. The captain was telling us about his journeys and meetings in such an interesting way and at the same time so simply and cheerfully that I could only catch the crows and shout with laughter uncontrollably.

Finally, I reminded us that tomorrow the captain had a working day full of troubles. We said good-bye to the nice host, thanked him for his care and attention one more time and dispersed to our rooms.

As usually, it seemed to me that I didn't want to sleep at all, but as soon as I took off my clothes I felt asleep instantly.

On the next day I woke up so late that I was hardly in time for the breakfast table where only the duke was waiting for me. He explained to me that I. would come back home only in the evening, with Anna, straight to the musical evening.

I was sad. For the first time I. left me alone for so long, to stay with myself. I cannot say that I didn't know what to do, I could read a book, go to the city or to the shop..., but some feeling of uncertainty without I., some longing was oppressing my heart.

"Oh my God! How childishly attached and unexperienced I still am," I thought. The duke saw my confusion and offered me to go to the city with him to find some sweets for the evening. I contradicted him that Anna wouldn't be eating anything in the evening, except the fruit, so it wasn't any need to take care of the festive table, but the duke disagreed with my opinion and left alone.

I sat down on the sofa in my room, started reading the book which I. gave me and soon I was plunged into an absolutely another world.

A knock at the door woke me up as though from a sleep. It seemed that I was reading for a long time, because my legs and hands became numb and I could hardly straighten myself.

The captain was knocking at the door. He dropped in at home accidentally in the middle of the day. The captain offered me to go with him, and even if I had to wait for him for about ten minutes in one place, then we could look round in the Asian district of the city and search for something in curiosity-shops...

I agreed. All of a sudden, a thought struck me to order at the captain's friend confectioner some sweet cakes which I was calling "Bagdad" for Ananda secretly from everybody, also to buy some fruit and to put everything in his room tomorrow before his arrival.

I shared these thoughts with the captain, he nodded his head cheerfully in agreement, and we left hurriedly to arrange his business first of all. Having looked at the sunburnt captain's face, at the merry little flames in his tiger eyes, I decided that my friend's affairs improved. He confessed himself that he was waiting for Anna's playing impatiently, that he was very excited and that he hadn't experienced any similar feelings for a long time.

I already wanted to tell him that he wouldn't have to experience anything similar to a public amusement, but I remembered I.'s words about the captain, about his suffering and about that transformation that had to happen within him soon, so I gave a deep sigh and fell into thinking about helplessness of us all before our upcoming storms.

"And why all of us have to suffer," I was protesting in my thoughts. "The captain is joyful now, he's happy. Will he be happier if something new will burn down that understanding and images within his mind and his heart, with which he was living up to now?"

"Well, Lovushka, here's the confectioner's shop. Let's drop in, I will drink something and leave you for a quarter of an hour. You won't even have time to enjoy the "Bagdad" to your heart's content, when I am back here again," the captain interrupted my thoughts.

He tossed off a glass of some drink with the ice and vanished like a meteor, while I became completely lazy because of the heat and, while I was waiting for the delicacy, I was observing the public out of idleness.

The owner himself was serving me. He was asking me if the guests enjoyed his cakes. I told him how successful they were and added that I had a personal favour to ask him, which I wanted to keep in secret from my friends.

He gave a mischievous smile, took a drag of his terrible pipe and, in all likelihood, he was ready to hear the name of that woman to whom he had to deliver the sweets. Having found out that I wanted to order the cake and patties for a wise man and even for a prince, he even gave a little rise.

“The business to be serious,” he was talking to me. “I do it for you. I do it well.”

He explained to me that the wise man needed a very simple appearance of the cake, but when he put it into his mouth he had to feel the paradise, while the prince – the prince also needed as simple appearance as possible, only the cake had to be placed on such dishes which a mere mortal wouldn’t dare even to touch.

He advised me to drop in at two curiosity-shops where ancient, porcelain dishes were sold. He sent me to buy fruit to the market at his friend, but he advised me to order only the melon, some pears and grapes, because in his opinion a wise man without a melon wasn’t a wise man, while the good peaches were still unavailable.

He asked me to send those dishes and the fruit to him and promised me to compose everything himself and to deliver it to me in time. I left my address to him, and we agreed at which exact hour I would be waiting for his messenger by the gates of the garden.

When the captain returned, I surprised him pretty much when I explained to him that I wanted to buy a couple of antiquarian dishes.

We were walking for a long time, not finding anything right. Finally, as though by chance, I uttered the address which the confectioner had given to me. We went there, and while the captain was examining some item in the jewelry department, I gave my benefactor conditioner’s note to the owner.

He was pondering for a long time, then he took me upstairs and pulled out a plate from some special cupboard.

It was violet, all plane with a narrow golden, thin border, while in the middle of it, on the white background, an upper half of a woman with a baby on her hands was drawn. Her black plait was falling down her shoulders on the orange chiton; her black eyes were looking at me like alive; her wonderful hands were holding a golden-haired boy.

“Oh Lord! Isn’t Anna drawn here?” I nearly gave a shout.

The owner turned the plate upside-down and showed me the date – 1699. He climbed up somewhere even higher to get the second dish and asked me to wait for him. I was fascinated, but at the same time I was afraid. I was obsessed by the feeling of great honour, I wanted to give this plate to Ananda so much, because the picture reminded me of the wonderful Anna’s miniature, but wouldn’t it be an impudent present? Will it be understood as the purest present of my fascinated soul?

The owner came back with a crystal plate that was gushing in all colours of the rainbow. Its brims were breaking the light like the purest opals.

“That’s Venice,” he told me by giving it to me. “An old prince bought it. And this is Florence,” he stabbed his finger to the violet plate. “It’s also old. A cardinal bought it.”

“It must be very expensive,” I uttered with a clear fear.

He gave a smile.

“My friend is writing to take very little from you. But no less than a hundred roubles. He is writing,” he stabbed his finger to the confectioner’s note again, “you give it to the prince, so you have to pay. I will wait if you don’t have that much with you at the moment.”

I paid a half of the price with joy now and promised him to drop in with the rest tomorrow.

“Leave the cash to the confectioner, he will send it to me, and I will hand the dishes to him today in the evening. He’s writing that we need to keep silent. All right.”

The captain was already looking for me all over the place, downstairs.

“Lovushka, since you left me, I won’t even show that pearl to you, that exceptional rarity which I found here, and in such a proper time,” the captain was talking to me enthusiastically.

“Very well! Both of us will have our own secrets. But don’t you dare to say a single word! Don’t ask any questions!” I answered him.

Evidently, I also was radiant no less than the captain, because he looked me up and down wonderstruck for the second time, but he didn’t ask me anything.

We left the shop. The captain carried out his secret in his pocket, while my secret was left on the counter.

We still had to order the fruit, but it didn’t take us long to do so. We told them to deliver the fruit to the confectioner’s shop tomorrow at three o’clock.

On our way back home, I asked the captain not to utter a single word about the sweets to anybody, because all of it was for Ananda, and I would want to put them in his room just before his arrival. It seemed to me that the captain was very disappointed in this.

“And I thought that all of this was for Anna. My secret was also adjusted to the feast’s table,” the captain was sad.

“The duke is taking care of Anna, and she’s eating only as much as the sparrow. It is not worth even taking care of this,” I was comforting him.

He gave a laugh and asked me if my secrets for Ananda weren’t calculated for a lion’s appetite.

“But the lions are also different, aren’t they? I’m also the Lion. I hope that it will be enough for all – the lions, the princes, the wise men, the sparrows,” I answered him, while meditating if I acted with tact, if Florentian assented to me.

“As they say in our fleet, you are an interesting boy, Lovushka. It is a pity that it’s too late already to go for the flowers outside of the city, but let’s drop in at this place anyway, I can see the white lilacs here,” he took my arm and took me to a spacious and excellent hothouse.

The captain picked out two white lilac bushes. I was sorry that I was a poor boy and I couldn’t buy the same violet lilac for Ananda’s room decoration. I already decided to address I. with that question, but I remembered the younger Ali’s money and I made up my mind. I picked out quite a big lilac bush, full of big, fragrant, dark violet clusters with the wonderful, velvet blossom. The captain laughed, but having heard my request to send the lilac tomorrow, he almost dropped his wallet out of his hands.

“Lovushka,” he told me, “I will keep silent about everything, but tell me, what do you respect that man for so much?”

“I won’t be able to explain it to you now, but if after Ananda’s play you would still repeat this question, then it would be easier for me to explain this reason to you. That respect isn’t only to him, but to the entire path of his love and suffering, which he has turned into the light for people.”

When we came back home, it was already getting dark. We sat down to take our dinner quickly, and I felt again how I was missing I. I was absent-minded, I failed to answer the questions and I kept thinking how I was missing I., what he was doing, whether he and Anna would be here soon.

Having taken our dinner, we put the sitting-room in order. We moved the grand piano in such a way as it was standing at Anna’s. We placed the white lilacs in such a way that they wouldn’t hinder her, but that the pianist could admire them. We brought the roses, too. The captain and the duke were preparing the table for the tea in another end of the sitting-room. I didn’t want to do anything else, I was only expecting I., expecting Anna, expecting the music with such a stress that I was unable to keep my place.

Finally, the rumble was heard, and I dashed through the rooms like a poodle that smelt its beloved master, ready to smash any obstacles on its way.

As soon as I saw I., I forgot about everything and hung on his neck. He laughed, pressed me tenderly to himself, but then he undone my hands instantly and turned me towards Anna who had a black cloak on.

“Your first duty was to greet the guest,” I. told me silently, but his eyes were looking at me tenderly, his face was smiling and his reprimand didn’t sound strictly.

I took Anna’s cloak. Her father helped her to take it off. I kissed both of her hands and stepped aside, so that the duke and the captain could greet her.

The duke was radiant. He was worried and he thanked her for the honour to come here, while the captain bowed to her in a chivalrous manner, he had turned into a tiger more than ever before.

Anna refused the tea, she told us that she would eat a pear, rest a little and sit down at the grand piano.

She had a dark orange, mat dress on, she had pinned several of our daisies on her chest, formed like a huge diamond. Her plait was extending through her shoulders.

I even gave a start. There was the same woman with an orange chiton and the same plait on my plate... What have I done? Will Ananda really take offence?

I became so nervous that I came to myself only from the sound of the chair that was pushed to the grand piano.

Anna sat down. An inspiration was already seen in her face. The light was shinning from her eyes, her cheeks grew somewhat red and her lips opened a little by showing her white, small teeth.

The very first sounds of “The sonata of the moon” already tore me off the ground, from my surroundings.

Yes, I really didn’t understand this musical composition up to then, although I had heard it many times before. What did she do with it? Where those nuances were coming from? Those weren’t the sounds of the grand piano anymore. Life, hope, love, suffering, cry were breaking into the sitting-room;

they were breaking into the room by tearing me and uncovering the people's joy and pain to me, which were hiding in them under their clothes, under their words, under their hypocrisy. The sounds fell silent, but no one was disturbing the silence. I was crying and I couldn't look at anybody.

Not allowing us to go through this sonata till the end, but having noticed the impression made on us, Anna started playing Schubert songs, arranged by List.

I was trying to control myself, I felt I.'s look on me. His face was pale, strict, as though he had to pour a lot of spiritual power from his heart. His look as though was telling me to forget about myself and to think about the captain.

I wiped my eyes and I started looking for the captain. I noticed some stranger sitting next to I. two times already, but only from the third time I perceived that that was the captain.

His face was pale and stiff like a dead person's one; his eyes were out, although they were gushing energy and will just an hour ago. He was sitting without any signs of life, like paralysed, and he reminded me of I. by something, who once was sleeping in the carriage with his eyes opened and surprised me by that. I was already about to dash at the captain, because it seemed to me that soon he would fall down, but I.'s look held me back, and I remained seated in my place...

And then once again the music lifted me up from the ground, once again everything disappeared for me. I moved into an absolutely different world: as though I could see the broad-shouldered Ananda next to the captain, who was holding his hand on the short-cut Englishman's head. The captain was on his knees. He was extending his arms towards some bright light with suffering, which was taking the features of a tall figure. The figure became more and more apparent, and having recognized Florentian, I myself got onto the limit of fainting-fit. The music stopped, I could hardly breathe, I could hardly understand where I was, but then a chord was heard again, and suddenly a song rolled away through the room.

Anna's contralto reminded me of a boy's alto or a young tenor. Something special was in this instrumental voice.

A song of love was heard, the Eastern colouring of which was telling now about the suffering of separation now it was offering to be happy together.

This song ended, too. The next one was heard. It was about the motherland, glorifying self-sacrifice and heroic deed, while I still couldn't comprehend how the slender and delicate woman could possess such power, such deep voice. Could a sinful being of the earth sing with such an inspiration which only some angel could bring onto the earth?

The song stopped. Anna stood up.

"No, Anna, my baby, don't leave us so excited. We have perceived our weakness and insignificance so deeply. You can see that all of us are shedding tears. Sing us some Greek songs which you perform so perfectly well, take us back onto the earth, otherwise we won't survive till the morning," I heard Stroganoff's voice in which one could feel his efforts to smile, but evidently, to no purpose.

Anna looked at all of us, her face brightened up with the smile of happiness, she sat down again and started singing a Greek folk song, a love song of a girl in love who adored her motherland, her family and her beloved.

I looked at I. Oh, how I was experiencing his childhood now! As though I had been lying myself among his exterminated family members on the sea-shore. I wanted to shout out to Anna that she

would sing something else. I already wanted to stand up, but I met such kind and bright I.'s look that I perceived the grandeur of this man's spirit for the first time. And this man was living next to me, he was taking pains over my ailments... and he didn't loathe me, such a weak and helpless know-nothing, but rendered assistance joyfully both to me and everybody whom he met.

Anna started a Greek lullaby. Oh, Lord! My whole soul turned over from that tenderness and warmth with which she was lulling the baby to sleep... And this woman was neither a mother nor a wife?

"She's a mother, a wife, a friend; but everything is without any personal choice, because she has already crossed the stages of her personal life. The highest man's happiness isn't his personal life, but his liberation from it," as though Ananda's voice thundered in my ears.

I wanted to see Ananda and I stood up, because I decided that he arrived already. I. was already next to me, he grasped my hand tightly and he was taking me to Anna to thank her.

It seemed that my catching of the crows lasted longer this time, because the duke must have already thanked the guest, because he was toiling at the feast's table.

When we went up to Anna, the captain was standing next to her, but he already wasn't that friend of mine whom I knew well and he wasn't that paralysed person whom I saw here not long ago. He was an absolutely different man with a pale face, radiating and obedient golden eyes.

"Today I understood not only what was art and woman, but for the first time in my life I understood what was life. It seemed to me that your music forced the spirit to leave my body, and for one moment I could clearly see a strange, great wise man who was leading me along the path of light and he told me clearly: "Come with me, you are mine. Remember this and come." This is what your music has done to me. I will never be able to live as before again. Now I will have to find that wise man whom I saw so clearly. I won't be able to calm down until I do so," the captain was talking to Anna.

I didn't recognize even his voice. That was a silent, sincere voice which belonged either to a man who has risen from the arms of death and who was thanking for his saved life, or to a man who has just married a pure girl and who was praying before starting his new life.

I already wanted to escape from I.'s arms, to hang on the captain's neck and to tell him that he saw Florentian, but I.'s look as though fettered me.

"And you will find him," I heard a silent voice, almost a whisper from Anna's lips when the captain bowed to kiss her hand.

I. left me, gave his hand to Anna and accompanied her to the table. I and the captain exchanged our smiles each in our own way – and we also went to the table.

Only Anna and Stroganoff were talking. I and the captain couldn't take our eyes off Anna, we were drowning in that beauty which was spreading from her on everything whatever she would do and with which she had covered us while she was playing.

Soon Stroganoffs left, the house as though became deserted and deadened; all of us went to our rooms, not possessing any strength to utter a grey, everyday word or thought, trying to keep that higher world of feelings within ourselves, to which the sounds of Anna's music had raised us.

Chapter 20

Ananda's arrival and the music one more time

Tonight I was sleeping badly; I used to wake up as often as never before, and it always seemed to me that I could hear somebody's voices in I.'s room. I wasn't even trying to perceive whose those voices were, I kept drowsing, and everything in my imagination started mixing up. Now it seemed to me that the howling of the storm in the steamer was muffling Anna's music; now once again I could hear the noise of the train when I and Florentian were standing ready to get out of it, while I was thinking horror-struck that we would jump out of the train that was going in full speed; now I could feel how a caressing hand of my mother was stroking me tenderly, although I didn't remember her alive...

All of a sudden, I woke up from the creak of the opened door of I.'s room and I saw I. who was squeezing the captain's hand. I understood that the voices were real, that it wasn't a delirium, that both of my friends were speaking all night and that they didn't sleep.

I didn't see the captain's face, while I.'s face was serious, bright and peaceful. An unshakable will and loyalty to his once accepted decision were clearly reflected on his face. I had already seen this decisive expression of his many times and I knew it well. As always, a sleepless night didn't leave any signs of tiredness on his face.

I rose a little, and exactly at that moment, having closed the door carefully, the captain turned to me. I almost gave a cry, he was so pale. The wrinkles had tightened his forehead, his eyes became hollow, and there was so much pain in them as though he had just buried someone or something that was the dearest to him. He seemed to be aged.

I remembered how I myself was sitting by the fireside in my brother's room in K. and I felt lonely, exhausted by the pain of separation. I didn't know whom or what the captain had lost, but from the bottom of my heart I leant towards him and extended both of my hands to him, holding back my gathering tears of love and compassion with difficulty.

Having seen that I wasn't sleeping, he approached me, sat down next to me on the sofa and squeezed my extended hands tightly.

"Since you, my friend, aren't sleeping, please dress yourself and have breakfast with me. I have a big favour to ask you," he said to me while he was standing up and he left the room, not looking at me.

I dressed myself quickly. I was trying to concentrate my whole attention and strength.

I found the captain who had already refreshed himself with the shower and changed into his white uniform. He didn't seem so old and sallow to me with his white tunic.

The clumsy sailor handed us the coffee and hot rolls with nuts. He put the newspapers and the mail on the table in front of the captain. We were left alone, we were sitting in front of the evaporating cups and each reflecting on his own aspiration in silence.

I still couldn't understand in any way why man had to suffer so much. A week ago the captain was still gushing energy and happiness, and now he was drowning in a deep grief and sorrow which made

him look ten years older through the night. Why? For what purpose? What's the use of it? Is this really called to go easier and in a simpler way through one's day?

"Lovushka," the captain interrupted my thoughts, "there's a ring in this case," and he put it on the napkin. "I bought it for another purpose, for other hands, for other look, but... that was yesterday's me. Today that me has died, and that one who wants to rise from ashes – although I don't assert that he will really return to life, - is asking you: run a napkin through this ring and put it next to the cake which you have ordered for Ananda. Only don't say whom it is from to anybody. If someone asks you, answer him that you know, but you cannot tell him. Now I must run. I have a lot of business to do. I promised me that you would take me to Ananda after dinner in the evening."

I took that case with the ring, said good-bye to the captain and came back to my room, not even having touched the meal, just like him. I sat down on the chair and, of course, I would have dived into the state of catching the crows by holding the case in my hands if I.'s voice hadn't pulled me out of it.

"Lovushka, the clumsy sailor is complaining that you didn't eat anything. This is very serious already," he smiled, "because you keep the same appetite in every case of your life. What is here in your hands?"

"Lolion, that is a strange secret, and I cannot reveal it to you, but in order for me not to have too many secrets, I will reveal my own secret to you. I don't know what I could give, only that I wouldn't have to hold this thing in my hands," I told him by lifting the case. "It seems to me that the whole life, turned upside-down is hiding in this thing which I didn't see myself, but I know that it is so," I continued, nearly crying.

"All right, my friend, let's go to the city, but first let's visit the duchess. Take the first-aid kit. Then we'll visit Joan. Today is the holiday, the shop is closed, but we are invited for breakfast. I will leave you there and load you with a difficult and sad task: to restore the balance for Joan. She has fallen under old Stroganoffa's influence, and that might end pretty sad for her. You can help her the best of all of us, as well as the captain – with your sincere and loving soul."

I gave a deep sigh, hid the ring, took the first-aid kit and followed I. to the duchess room.

"You are sad and give sighs, because I have put too heavy burden on your shoulders?" I. asked me.

"Oh, Lolion, if at this moment I could die for you, I wouldn't even have time to be frightened, and I would be a dead body already, but I'm helpless with Joan, and especially with the captain," I was speaking to him, while suppressing my tears with difficulty. "Your burden isn't heavy for me, it is making me glad."

I. didn't have time to answer me anything, because the radiating duke was already rushing in front of us. His face was telling us about such happiness that I was taken aback after the sad captain's appearance and all those contradictions within myself. What could have happened to him that he could be so radiant?

"Doctor I., I still cannot land onto the earth after yesterday's music. I spent all night in the garden and came to myself only at daybreak. Now I know already how to turn my future life. Still not so long ago, I was thinking that it was ruined, that everything was lost already, I was afraid of everything, but now I have found a balance within myself. My fear has disappeared. Even if the duchess had five sons and all of them were rats, I wouldn't be afraid of anything anyway, because even the perception of fear itself has vanished through the night – and I think that I did so forever.

If you asked me how this has happened, I couldn't answer you, but when the music was playing, I saw you shining like a big fire column. I can even swear to you that I really saw it. A little part of your fire, doctor I., touched me. Namely this little part shocked me so much that I as though escaped from the clutches of grief and fear, I made myself free from the oppressive burden. Now everything is easy for me, and every man's life seems to be very important and necessary for me.

Besides, the duchess started speaking absolutely clearly today, and while she was drinking her tea, she was holding the cup herself, without my help."

We entered the duchess' room. Her sluggish face was revived, she greeted us joyfully and drank the red, frothy medicine herself, which I. used to give her to drink up to now.

I. allowed the duchess to sit in the arm-chair for a couple of hours and to talk to the duke about their business a little.

We came back to our rooms, changed our clothes and went to the street that was hot already.

"Well, lay your secrets, Lovushka. We meet Ananda at five o'clock, and up to that time I have a lot of business to do."

"Lolion, if you leave me at Joan's, then let's agree to meet in Ananda's room at half past three. I won't even tell you everything over there, but I will show you my secrets."

"All right, but in this case, go to breakfast at Joan's alone, and I will use that time for my own business. Besides, we also should buy some fruit for Ananda."

"Well, just don't do it! And in any case, don't worry about the material side of the meeting," I told him by blushing strongly.

"Ah, so that is namely your secret?" I. laughed.

"Yes, yes, we'll talk about it when we meet. We part here, because I already have to turn aside."

"Yes, Lovushka. Only don't forget to hand a flower to Joan and try to penetrate to the very depth of her soul. Give all your love and peace to her. Think not about your helplessness, but only about Florentian. Then your talking to Joan will comfort her."

We separated. I bought several roses, dropped in at the confectioner's shop, reminded him of my order and handed my debt for the antiquarian.

The confectioner showed me the dishes which were polished already. One of them was shining in all rainbow colours, while the other one was breaking the rays of light from bluish and yellowish to purple and violet ones. A Venetian jug of unusual form with three mugs was standing on the tray next to them. A sunbeam which had come by chance was playing on them like on the brims of the blood-coloured ruby or brilliant.

"My friend sent them with the plates. He will give you everything cheaply. One can pour a red drink here. It'll be nice," the owner was talking to me, while admiring the wonderful dishes not less than me.

I agreed to buy the jug and the mugs, because I decided that misfortunes never came alone. I asked him not to be late at three o'clock and went to Joan's.

It was still early. Joan opened the door for me herself, evidently not expecting that it was me who was coming for the breakfast. She even jumped up with joy when I apologized for being so early and she took me upstairs, to her rooms.

There was a perfect order everywhere, and Joan explained to me that she got up at dawn, because she wanted that I. would see her flat polished more than a palace.

I joked that she was already punished for so clearly demonstrated difference between myself and I., because I. apologized to her for not being able to have breakfast with us, because a very important business disturbed him, and I would have to evaluate all her efforts alone.

In the beginning Joan was distressed, but soon she clapped her hands, jumped up with joy one more time and told me.

“Well, now finally we will talk about everything. You know, Lovushka, I’m living not so nicely, as it may seem on the outside. Of course, my job is successful. Undoubtedly, Stroganoff is very nice, but there’s a split in their family.”

“And what’s your business what is going on in their family?” I asked her.

“Well, one cannot say like this. Madam Stroganoffa asked me to try to convince her husband to attach one more room next to our shop where we could sit for a while, drink a cup of coffee, invite some friends. As I understood, she wanted that Bracano could drop in here, but Anna and the old man categorically forbade not only Bracano, but even her herself to show here. Now she’s trying to recruit me to her side. That so horrible Turk is also trying to please me in every possible way.”

“That would be the last straw!” I exclaimed with indignation. “How can you think about the similar kind of villainy? Was I really mistaken about you? Are you really a wicked, light-minded being that is unable to appreciate all generosity and kindness showed to you? After all, what do you have in common with the old woman? I don’t understand how Stroganoff could marry her, but it is clear to me that she’s losing any honour out of envy of her daughter. But how about you, you for whom I. and Anna with her father have done so much!”

I had no control over myself, I became excited, I got irritated and I couldn’t concentrate neither my thoughts nor my self-control.

“Lovushka, I understand myself that something is wrong here, but is it really so bad that Anna will marry that Turk?”

“And would you marry him?” I asked her.

“I don’t know. Of course, he’s ugly, but nevertheless, perhaps I would do so.”

“Well, that’s how it is! So, you aren’t that Joan already, who wanted to marry only Michel Morenjer? So, if now your parents insisted, you would already exchange your love to the Turk’s physiognomy and his millions?” I was even shouting.

“I don’t know, Lovushka, I don’t know. I don’t even know what is going on with me. I’ve changed so much, I’ve suffered so much.”

“Oh, no. You haven’t yet suffered much, Joan, if you’ve forgotten about everything so quickly. Life sent you I., the captain, Stroganoff, the duke in vain, although they have surrounded you with the circle of their kindness and protection. They were saving you and your children from fever and hunger

in the steamer to no purpose. It is better to die in poverty, but honourably, rather than to live with such mean thoughts like yours now," I kept shouting, not being able to control myself.

Joan was sitting still, with her eyes wide open.

"Lovushka, I will do everything as you want, but you know that the Turk... As soon as I see him, as though some kind of burden falls on me. A laziness takes hold of me instantly, my eyes as though fall asleep, my legs can hardly move, while I am ready to obey his commands. Now as though some difficult dreams have fallen off me, I can breathe easily. But why, why have you forgotten about my completely, Lovushka?" Joan was talking to me, starting with fright.

"You should be ashamed of your words. Who have forgotten about you? All of us are next to you, while Anna is working with you six hours a day without stopping. My God, so when do you still have time to see the Turk? And where?"

Joan looked round, frightened and she explained to me silently that Stroganoffa was trying to arrange everything in such a way that every time she had to meet the Turk at her place. She even asked Joan to deliver a letter to his office, and only an accidental return home of her husband prevented her from handing that letter to Joan.

I fell into despair, but anyway I understood that only my self-control could help me to explain to Joan the whole villainy and treason of her behaviour.

Takin advantage of my silence, Joan slipped out of the room.

I concentrated all my thoughts to Florentian by begging him to hear me and to send me assistance. I was imagining my friend in my thoughts, who saved my life so many times during that short period of time. His image as though gave me peace, my thoughts cleared up. I felt self-confidence, the strength arose to fight for Anna's and her father's peace and happiness.

"Lovushka, the breakfast will be ready soon. Perhaps, you would like to see my children? They are in the garden," Joan asked me, while entering the room.

"No, Joan. If you really feel a friendship for me, like you were stating many times before, then we have to discuss about your whole behaviour in the future. I cannot sit down at your table until I'm not sure that there are no thoughts about treason and ingratitude left within you already."

"Oh, my God! That's how unfortunate I am! I was so glad that no one would disturb us to be alone for at least a while, and now I'm ready to cry, because doctor I. isn't here."

"If doctor I. had heard at least a half of what you've told me today, then he would probably take you aboard of the next steamer and send you out of Constantinople. But that isn't the most important thing. It is important that you would take a look at your heart. Isn't an envy for Anna hiding there? Why, understanding the high level of Anna's spirit, do you decide to take the part of such villain like the Turk?"

"I don't envy her at all, and it would never please me if people looked at me not like at an alive, hot woman, but like at an idol," Joan answered me, excited. "Of course, I can see all excellent features of Anna, but we are so different that the friendship between us is out of the question. At the same time, I of course, feel how much I owe to her father, and my duty is..."

"About what kind of duty could you speak," I interrupted Joan, "if there isn't an ordinary respect for another person, for his life, for his soul in you? Of course, you can be rude, uncultured and you can even see nothing except your egoism. But are you really that kind of person? Have you really forgotten

about all those tears and suffering that you've experienced in the steamer as soon as you could feel the ground under your feet?"

"No, Lovushka. Now I begin to understand that some sort of a power is forcing me to obey the Turk against my own will. I can see how horrible he is, I want to protect Anna from him, I don't want him to become her husband at all, but something comes over me, my mind stirs up, and I obey the Turk, not even wishing to."

"Some people stronger than you will show up and protect Anna from all schemes which are being woven against her. We are talking not about her, but about you. The whole evil that you are going to do to her will turn around against yourself, my poor dear Joan. Look round. Whom else do you have in the world, except that handful of people who have saved you? And how could you be living like this? You dissemble and embrace Anna, but at the same time, you are weaving the net of treason around her."

Joan kept silent and she was thinking about something tensely. I was crying for my distant friend again with all my heart.

"Lovushka, I understand everything, but you understand me, too. As soon as I see the Turk, I become stiff instantly and I always leave him with the only one intrusive thought that I must take him to Anna in such a way that no one would know about it and that she would be alone. Now I wouldn't do this for anything, but as soon as I see him, I forget about everything and I'm living only with that single thought."

"But that's the same kind of hypnosis! Just think, could the Turk command me, the duke or somebody else to act like this? One should possess lots of evil within oneself, so that the strange will could take advantage of it."

I was still persuading Joan for a long time, but all her promises not to meet the Turk again seemed to me insecure and they didn't inspire me confidence.

Somehow I spent the whole breakfast by bringing myself to swallow something out of courtesy and I went home by deciding firmly to tell I. about everything.

I met the flower seller at the gates, took the little, wonderful, dark lilac bush from him and brought it to the second room of Ananda. Here I placed it perfectly on the low and heavy bench which looked like a violet stone.

Soon the servant brought my artistically packed secrets in the cart of Constantinople. I unwrapped them and put them on the table in the first room. Now they seemed even more beautiful to me. I went to my room to take the ring and to the duke's for a napkin.

The duke was very surprised that I needed only one napkin, he offered some plates and a tablecloth to me, but I answered him that I would ask I. about it and that I would come again if needed.

Having entered Ananda's room, I opened the case and I nearly dropped it from my hands out of fascination and amazement.

Amethyst pansies were cunningly inserted on the sides and at the bottom of the golden, open-worked ring, while at the front of it, a letter A was laid out from the same, protruded amethysts, which was all strewn with small brilliants. Furthermore, the amethysts, exchanging with the brilliants along the whole brim of the ring, formed some kind of an inscription in the language that I didn't know.

I understood that the captain bought the ring for Anna; but the yesterday's captain-tiger wanted to give it to her, and not that captain-martyr whom I saw today.

While I was holding this ring in my hands, I fell into thinking about the incomprehensible changing of people's destinies, about that unavoidable earthly end about which nobody ever knew anything, but which nobody could escape and, having lived their entire lives differently, everybody was born and died alike.

I. entered silently and woke me up from these sad fancies.

"Well, that's the real secret, Lovushka! Ananda will be really surprised! You don't perceive yourself what these presents of yours will tell him. Who gave you this ring? You were unable to buy such treasure, right? My God, where did you find it?" he added silently, while examining the ring.

"I can't tell you anything, Lolion. The ring isn't from me, and I can't tell you who gives it to Ananda in any way. That's not all. A woman of unspeakable beauty is drawn here, on this violet plate, under the cake. Only the whole trouble is that she looks like Anna, like two peas in a pod. I don't know how you value accidental coincidences, you understand that I really didn't want to bring any secret emblems to Ananda; but that's still not all. Shoot a glance at another room."

I.'s face became a little gloomy. I opened the door and showed him the lilac bush, the aroma of which had already filled up the whole room. I sat down on the tabouret next to the very door and waited for what I. would tell me, and he went up to me, embraced me tenderly and kissed my head.

I don't know what happened to me, but I burst into tears and I was sobbing so much like never again in my life. Everything had accumulated in those tears. All my suffered experiences, fear, disappointments, the bitterness of my last conversation to Joan – everything was flowing out of me, as though it wasn't tears, but the blood from my very heart.

"My dear brother, my friend, stop crying. You are in your twenty second year already. Your infancy, childhood, youth have flown past already – you are already stepping into your maturity. Only the first three seven years is a man's youth, and you have lived it by perceiving little of the value of your life, but after twenty-eight years, no one can say that he's young anymore. Today's tears of yours – that's the fire in which three seven years of your half-conscious life have burned down. Your maturity is starting, your full consciousness is opening up, you are entering the highest stage of your power and activity development.

A doubt whether a man needs suffering, so that he could become purer, so that he could rise higher, so that he could advance a little in his creative work will never glimpse within you again. Turn back: would you exchange your current perception about happiness and life into that happiness and the meaning of life in which you were living for twenty-one years? Perhaps, the captain with whom you sympathize so much at the moment still has many more reasons for disappointment, because he was living a half-bestial life longer than you, even not perceiving where his real meaning was, he was spending his time in vain by breaking the monotony of his life with the raging of passions now and then.

Of course, not everybody is waling the path of suffering. Take a good look at the duke and you will see that he's walking the path of joy.

Let's go out of here. Now your tears have burned down the consciousness of boy within yourself, and your new path of man begins with them. Let the fire of them always burn within you not like the flow of tears, but like the great power of love when your heart opens up more and more, ready to find room for the whole world within itself with all its suffering and joy."

We left Ananda's room, changed our clothes, visited the duke to tell him that I. wouldn't have his dinner, and we left for the pier. On the way, I had time to tell I. about my meeting with Joan and my entire conversation with her.

When we came to the pier, the steamer was already finishing to moor at the embankment. With my eyes I was searching for Ananda among the passengers who were ready to land, but his voice was heard from somewhere above. And I saw him on the upper deck, he was waving his white hat to us. A tall, rather lean, handsome youth was standing next to him. He looked like a blond to me from the distance. I remembered that Ananda's friend doctor was coming with him.

While we were waiting for Ananda, I felt some sort of shyness before him and that friend of his, some sort of fear that now I would be a little further away from I. I pressed myself timidly to I. As though having understood that childish feeling of mine, he smiled tenderly and pressed my hand slightly.

As soon as Ananda landed on shore, he enslaved me with the simplicity of his behaviour. He embraced I. and me so sincerely, his eyes-stars flashed and he asked to accept his friend to our friendly company, too; he whispered to my ear that he had brought a new dervish cap as the present for me so comically that I burst out laughing, I took his coat and travelling-bag from his hands and told him that the cap must have been placed here and I was asking him not to deprive me of rights to bring it myself.

The captain, that friend who had time to think about everything, sent the clumsy sailor to the pier, who took all belongings of our friends and assured them that he would deliver them to the house himself.

We came back home on foot, without any luggage. Ananda was glad when he found out that he would be living not in the hotel, but in the quiet and peaceful house with us. Having interrogated about all people surrounding us, he also asked about Anna and her father. Having heard about the shop, he only shook his head, but he didn't say anything.

Then he and I. started talking in an unknown language to me, while his friend went up to me and asked me if I had been in Constantinople before.

It turned out that he, like myself, hadn't seen a lot of the world; he told me that he was an Englishman, but he was living and studying in Vienna where he became acquainted with Ananda several years ago.

All of us went up to the stairs to Ananda's porch, but his friend went up the steep, winding stairs to his room instantly, while the clumsy sailor who caught up with us followed him with the belongings.

Having looked round in his room, Ananda looked at I. reproachfully.

"I haven't lifted a finger here. Our host and Anna arranged everything, also this pranky boy took part in this. You will find his greatest prank on the bottom of this plate when you finish eating the cake," I. answered him.

Ananda looked at me, the plates and the jug attentively, extended his hand to me and kissed me, thanking for the attention and delicacy of my taste... only he scolded me a little for wastefulness.

"I'm not a price to meet me with such royal things," he was talking and smiling with his charming and tender smile, but at the same time he was shaking his head.

"There are some people who consider you to be both the prince and the wise man," I plucked up my boldness to answer him.

Both I. and Ananda gave a joyful laugh.

"But what's here? How could this thing get here? Once my uncle gave me exactly the same ring, but already on the next day it disappeared without trace, and nobody could find it. That's the same ring. Here's the inscription in pali language and the letters S.G. Where did you find it?" Ananda kept asking me by looking at the captain's ring attentively and being amazed more and more.

"Everything what I can say is that the person who gives you this ring bought it at an antiquarian, but I don't have any right to tell you his name."

"Oh, I thank that man very much indeed. Tell him that now I owe him very much, and if I could do something for him, I would be glad to show my gratitude to him. He can't even imagine with what a strong chain this vanished thing, which was returned back to me with his own hands, has tied up my and his destinies. Lovushka, give him this little ring from my little finger, and if he ever wishes, he can meet me at any convenient time to him."

"He will want to meet you, even tonight if you permit..., but he asked me to keep his name in secret, didn't he? What should I do now?"

"Do nothing, only give him the ring. If he doesn't want to be recognized, he won't put it on."

"Well, he will put it on! He will do it in such a way that he can never take it off," I was speaking to Ananda by imagining the captain's amazement and joy. "But can I put it on for a while until I see that man?" I was unable to hold back my amazement by looking at this present.

The ring was made of the heavy platinum and it was very proportionate. There was a big, oblong and prominent amethyst placed in the middle of it in an English style, while from sides it was made distinct by two pairs of brilliants.

Ananda laughed and told me that he would be glad seeing it on my fingers, because he was considering me to be a great prophet and he was feeling grateful to me.

"Only not me, but your great friend Florentian will give you the ring that belongs to you, and its stone will be green," he was speaking to me by embracing me tenderly.

"Come here, Ananda. Also here everything was arranged without me. This lilac bush is the present to you again from the same Lovushka of mine," I. opened the door to the next room and let Ananda come in.

When Ananda came in, I. closed the door silently behind him and asked me to go to the duke and to ask him to give me a tablecloth and several plates which the clumsy sailor should bring here.

He also asked me to keep Ananda's friend, Henry Oberswade amused, and only after dinner, at nine o'clock to invite the duke, the captain and Henry to come to Ananda's room.

I promised him to do everything precisely and, being glad for my dear captain, I ran to the duke with joy.

As soon as the duke sent the clumsy sailor with the tablecloth and the plates to Ananda, I decided to drop in at Henry's and to offer him my services if he needed them, and at the same time to warn him about the dinner.

When I found Henry, he was placing his belongings. I hadn't seen his room and once again I bowed to the duke's taste in my thoughts. The room was big, almost white, the furniture was bluish, the carpet on the floor was also bluish, the wardrobes and the table were made of pure walnut, and – what

was really missing in other rooms – the flower-pots with blossoming roses and gardenias were standing on two wide windowsills.

Henry's first words with which he met me were thanks for the flowers. It turned out that he was very fond of them, because his mother used to grow namely roses and gardenias. To his question who had arranged his room so carefully, I answered him that it was the duke. I told him that I would visit him after seven o'clock, then I would introduce him to the host and show him where we were dining.

Henry was complaining to me that this was his first journey to the aristocracy, that he knew little about etiquette and was afraid of being ashamed in this company and society which Ananda has brought him to and which he didn't know at all.

I answered him that my situation was the same, the only difference was that I started my journey a month earlier, but all advantages were on his side, because he was a doctor already, while I was still only a student, besides I was very absent-minded and I was deservedly nicknamed Lovushka – the catcher of the crows. I also added that the host was very lenient and that he wouldn't condemn him if he missed something in some detail of etiquette.

"Ah, so you are that Lovushka?" Henry smiled to me. "Ananda told me that you were very talented. I didn't expect you to be so young."

I became embarrassed. I didn't know what to say to him, I only sighed and made my new acquaintance laugh by doing so. Having repeated him one more time that I would call at him after seven o'clock, having moaned of such an amount of the books that he had brought with him, I got down.

The captain was still not here, but according to the clumsy sailor who was already preparing his suit and the water for shaving, he had to come back soon.

I heard the captain's steps from a distance, so I ran out to meet him and announced him with dignity that he had to change his clothes quickly, because a very serious conversation with me was waiting for him.

The sad captain's face brightened up with laughter – evidently, I looked very comically to him with that seriousness of mine.

"Don't laugh, captain. That what I have to give to you is very serious, but you are so dusty and sooty that I not only will give anything, but won't even talk to you."

"At your service! I go washing myself, dressing up, combing my hair," the captain was laughing, "but I ask you to keep your reputation, too! If your news aren't worthy of my acquired appearance – then hold tight!"

The captain disappeared behind the door of his room, while still laughing. He also shook his fist of his elegant and strong hand at me.

While I was admiring the amethyst, shining now in purple, now in violet fire, I was thinking how I had to start my conversation with him. And as always, in the most serious moments when I was getting ready for a meeting, my entire prepared speech went clean out of my mind in a flash and only the simplest and the most unexpected words were left.

When the elegant captain came in, I extended the ring to him and asked him.

"Is this ring enough for your tidied up personality?"

The captain took the ring, looked at me surprised and asked me.

“What does it mean?”

It seemed that the ring had made a strong impression on him. I put it on his little finger and admired how it suited that hand of his, which was sunburnt, hardened, but which had an excellent form.

“Some time I will also get the same ring,” I told him.

The captain roared with laughter and he already wanted to rumple my hair for those riddles, but I asked him to have some patience, to sit down and to hear me out in the same way like he was hearing out the reports of the steamer.

“No, that boy will make me die,” the captain was speaking to me, while he was sitting down and still laughing. “I have travelled all over the world, but I haven’t met a more interesting lad!”

“Please don’t call me a boy anymore starting from this day on, but if you sober down, then I may be able to pass Ananda’s message to you correctly.”

Having heard this name, the captain turned pale a little, his face became earnest instantly, and the more I was speaking to him, the paler and calmer he became.

“Captain, forgive me if I haven’t done everything as needed, but I didn’t utter your name, and you can choose how to act. I am certain – and I told this to Ananda, - that already no one could take that ring from you. I was right, wasn’t I?” I asked him by falling myself on his neck.

I also added that I told me to bring the duke, Henry and the captain to Ananda at nine o’clock. Having darted a glance at the clock and seen that it was ten past seven already, I persuaded the captain to visit Henry together and to help me to introduce him to the duke. The captain didn’t want to do it, but finally, he agreed to go to Henry with me.

Only the duke and Henry were having a chat during the dinner, and we weren’t delayed at the table for a long time, because the duke found out about Ananda’s invitation and he was in a hurry, because he still had an urgent business to do till the evening, but he promised me to be in my room at ten to nine o’clock.

Henry decided that he could continue arranging his belongings and books till nine o’clock, and then he would come down to Ananda’s room himself. We were left alone with the captain, so we went out to the garden.

The captain was interrogating me several times again and again in detail when and what Ananda told me, and he couldn’t understand in any way with which chain he could tie himself up with Ananda by returning the missing ring to him. I didn’t know anything more just like him, and both of us were waiting impatiently for nine o’clock to come.

The time flew past really fast. The duke didn’t find us in our room, so he decided that we were in the garden. When he came he told us that it was ten to nine o’clock already.

We found Anna, her father and both Turks at Ananda’s. We ran into Henry in the doorway.

I was standing aloof and observing everybody. First of all, the captain went up to Anna, bowed low to her and kissed her hand. Then, having looked over everybody, he approached the owner of the room Ananda. I introduced him to Ananda like a man who helped us a lot during our journey.

Ananda extended his hand to him and, having held it in his for a while, he looked at him attentively, as though he scanned him with his eyes.

"I'm very glad to meet you," he told him in his unique voice.

It seemed to me that he tied some especial meaning into those words. He wanted to add something, but he was only looking at the captain in silence, let his hand go, pierced him with some unusually sharp and strange glance and addressed the duke.

The conversations were taking place in several places at the same time: Anna was talking to the older Turk, his son as though glued himself to Henry, the duke sat down next to Ananda, and the captain went up to me.

We stole into the corner, sat down on the low sofa, started observing everybody and admiring Anna. Her face wasn't darkened by any shadow. How old was Anna? Her age as though had stopped in the seventeenth spring; but I knew that she was already more than twenty-five years old – and that was already an old age for a woman in the East, not only for a girl.

Ananda was listening to the duke attentively, and it seemed to me that he knew everything what he would say. A word "wife" came flying to us, and I understood that the duke was telling him about the duchess' bad luck. I was very surprised when the duke stood up, made excuses because of an important matter and began to say good-bye to him. Later I found out that he had a meeting with some Moscow lawyers.

"Duke, you worry without necessity," I heard Ananda's voice. "According to I.'s words, I'm sure that your wife will recover, while the sharing with your wife's son," he smiled a little, as though taking a good look at something, "you can't even imagine how easily it will happen, and what a clever and quick-witted woman, the real businesswoman your wife is! I and I. will certainly call at her tomorrow."

"Thank you. Your music has helped me to understand life and find myself," and he left.

"Your music has helped me to lose myself," the captain whispered unexpectedly.

I could hardly hear that whisper of his and I saw how he got absent-minded and covered his face with his left hand with the ring, which he was hiding all the time. The ring flashed, and the vigilant Ananda's eyes noticed it. I was certain that his whisper, too, reached the subtle and musical Ananda's ear.

"That's exactly what I thought, that's exactly what I thought," Ananda uttered suddenly and, having stood up, he went straight to our corner.

"My friend, I owe you so much. You can't even imagine what a service you've done for me by finding my ring," Ananda was talking to the captain by taking his left hand into his own ones. "You are very exhausted. It seems to you that the music has mixed up your entire soul, but believe me that when me and Anna will play and sing for you, you will feel absolutely differently. You will find that highest meaning of life to which our entire earthly life with its grey daily routine is guiding us."

"Your face is so sad," Ananda continued, "as though you had buried your most wonderful dreams. Anna, we have to play tonight. I show my own egoism by asking you for this when you haven't yet expressed such want, but if you desire to help me to show gratitude to the man who has returned my uncle's present to me, then don't refuse to accompany me," he addressed Anna by approaching her.

"What uncle's present?" Anna asked him, and I could read that question in everyone's face.

Ananda extended the ring to her, which travelled round by exciting everyone's delight. Then there was my and the captain's turn. I took it into my hand, admired it one more time and when I gave the ring to the captain, I told him jokingly.

"Well, nobody will give me anything like that one anymore."

"But your flower isn't a pansy," all of a sudden Anna told me.

"Well, well?" I shouted in amazement that in the joint racket of all voices she could hear my words that were dedicated to the captain. "And is a pansy the captain's flower?"

"Maybe it isn't a pansy," she answered me, smiling, "maybe it is from the orchid's breed, but it is violet without fail, like an iris."

The captain was looking at her, being unable to take his eyes off her, still keeping the ring in his hands. I was unable to answer the question whether somebody else present here suspected like me that the captain brought this ring for Anna. I wanted to ask her what my flower was, but at that time the clumsy sailor brought in small, evaporating cups of coffee which were placed on the big, silver tray, while Ananda bowed to Anna and asked her to be the hostess by moving the violet plate with the cake closer to her.

Anna became interested in the plate and the jug, she even asked I. where he got them from.

"That's not me. That's Lovushka who got them from somewhere, as well as the fruit and this cake, but if its content doesn't correspond to its appearance, we will think of a punishment for him," I. added by flashing his eyes in humour.

"Everyone present here, if he's a wise man, he will feel the heaven from his first bite," I was laughing and I blurted out that what I had on the tip of my tongue, "and every prince will find a divine beauty in the dish, he will appreciate it and won't jump on searching for an insidious punishment for me."

Everybody was laughing merrily. Stroganoff even caught hold of his head, always repeating: "Well, that's the writer," while Anna was surprised and she was looking now at me, now at I. with Ananda. Both of them were also looking at me and smiling.

"Well, my dear hostess, quickly give us that baked miracle. We have to decide who's the wise man and who's the prince here," Ananda told her, while still smiling.

"Whom should I start from? Perhaps, from the youngest?" Anna laughed.

"Yes, that's me who's the youngest, and since I know that this is the heaven, don't count me and start from the oldest one," I answered her.

"Great. Father, please taste it as soon as possible, so that I would know if you are the wise man," Anna was talking to Stroganoff by extending the plate to him.

"Me and Dzhel-Mabed are the persons of the same age," Stroganoff answered her. "Give it to him, too, so that we could take the examination of the wise men together."

The cake soon appeared in the Turk's hands, too. They bit off some of it and... both of them exclaimed.

"That's heaven, heaven! There are no free places left for other wise men!"

"Why, not," Henry uttered, "I won't give up so easily. Wisdom manifests itself not only in a honourable age. Please give some of it for me and Ibrahim, too."

Anna gave some cake to them, she also shook her finger at Henry for the riot.

As soon as they bit off the cake, Henry announced with dignity that they would have to dispute the right of precedence to the wise men, because they had already swallowed their heaven up and that the cake may not be enough for everybody for another try if others were eating the wisdom of heaven in such a speed.

When Ananda's turn came, I didn't have any doubt anymore who the real wise man was here. Ananda bit off some of the cake, bowed to me and told me.

"If I was the wise man, then at this moment I would lose a part of spiritual heaven, because I entire would dive into the bliss of food. The cake is wonderful and deceptive. It looks very modestly, but its taste is extraordinary. If the same secret which charms people is hiding in the plate, too, then you will achieve a lot in your life, young man. The captain showed us his subtle taste, while you revealed your secret talent of a wonder-worker, too. I can't wait to see the bottom of the dish."

Soon the plate became empty, and I saw that Anna couldn't take her eyes off the bottom of the plate.

I was so frightened that I rose and wanted to disappear.

"Stop, stop, Lovushka!" I. gave a shout. He got next to me in a flash and took my arm. "As soon as your prank was revealed, you are running already?"

"Very interesting," the captain stood up, too, "Lovushka was keeping everything in such a secret..."

He went up to the table, looked at the plate, at Anna, at me, he ran his left hand over his eyes and sat down in his place in silence.

"What can it be there?" Stroganoff asked us loudly. "Everybody hurried to be wise men with a fuss, but when the turn came for the princes, then everybody swallowed their tongue. I guess everything should be the other way round."

He rose a little, bent towards the dish and, having looked at everybody, he told us.

"It looks as if I become the prince."

Henry and the Turks dashed to the table.

"Finally, let me and Ananda take a look at this," I. was talking to us by forcing his way through to the table.

I was ready to vanish into thin air, while the captain was squeezing my hand tightly and whispering to me.

"Well, that's a boy! Why didn't I find it? I could have..."

"I agree that a royal beauty is drawn on the plate. If the same spiritual beauty and mind was shining in the face of this deceased beauty like in this alive princess who's certainly her prototype, I would agree to recognize you the prince-father," Ananda was speaking. "The youth who succeeded to evaluate the porcelain, the painting and resemblance, is worthy of my passionate gratitude."

Having said this, Ananda came up to me, embraced me like a small child, lifted me up with his powerful hands and kissed me powerfully.

"Lovushka, you have to fence, do exercises, ride on horseback, harden your organism. Your spare frame isn't normal anymore. Henry, doctor, be occupied with my friend Lovushka."

“And now – let’s play,” he added.

Having left Ananda’s rooms, we met the duke in the central hall, who was returning. Having found out that all of us were going to listen to the music, he became very happy and hurried forward by showing us the way.

I was surprised when I saw a violoncello in Ananda’s hands, because I hadn’t noticed it among his other belongings.

Anna had an even, white dress made of a glittering, soft silk on. As always, her plait was flung over her shoulders; she was so beautiful tonight that it was already impossible to squeeze that beauty into any understanding of the physical woman’s beauty.

“We’ll play several old-time, national songs of Venice for you, which now are almost forgotten or drowned with the new vulgar and poor refrains,” Ananda presented to us.

I was sitting next to I., while the captain was sitting from his other side – exactly in front of the performers.

What their faces were! Ananda’s eyes were twinkling like the stars by throwing sparkles round him. The roses were in bloom in Anna’s face, her upper lip gave a slight lift again by revealing her small, white teeth.

There weren’t any earthly passions left neither within him nor within her, both of them were connected with the flight of the highest creative ecstasy.

The first Anna’s sounds flew up in the vortex instantly, as though they broke away and disappeared somewhere. All of a sudden, an imperious sound pierced them. The sound of the violoncello was now blending, now moving away, then once again it was flowing into the harmony and destroying it anew by subordinating the grand piano to itself, by enslaving all of us, and it seemed that it was holding even the surrounding space in submission.

I couldn’t believe that the strings were singing this. It was a voice, a human voice of an unknown being.

The sounds died away. Oh, it became so sorrowful all around! Life seemed to be so sad without these sounds. “Once again, once again,” – I was begging with my entire soul and I felt that everybody was asking for the same, although nobody disturbed the silence.

A song began to sound again. It seemed to be even more charming and more colourful to me. The very power of life was flowing from those sounds. I couldn’t perceive how these people of unreachable talent, who had ascended to a higher level, could be walking among us, how they could endure the vibrations of the ordinary people like me or the ones similar to me. Why they were here, among us? They needed Olympus, and not an ordinary daily routine, filled up with work, sweat and tears...

“But namely they dispelled the grey daily routine tonight, they turned it into a shining temple,” I continued my thought by wiping the big from my face one after another, while one song was changing another one, and I didn’t know which one I preferred anymore.

All of a sudden, Ananda stood up and said to Anna.

“And now, Anna, Bach and Chopin in honour of my uncle.”

Anna smiled, adjusted her dress, the chair, she thought for a while and began to play.

I was excited, I was sitting in the mist of tears, nestled up to I., and it seemed to me that I wouldn't bear this new flow anymore, which was piecing the whole of me through – as though a new being whom I didn't know up to now had begun to awaken within myself because of these sounds...

As soon as the music ceased, Ananda approached Anna, kissed her hand respectfully, but so tenderly that my heart was even melting, and he told her.

"The old one, Hungarian, the last ones which I have sent to you."

Nobody had time to recover and to prepare, and the new song was heard already. But can this be called a song? Was it a human voice? What was it? It was some unknown instrument to me, or perhaps it was a mountain's echo? It was some element of beauty. I was so shell-shocked and confused that I was gaping at Ananda with my mouth opened wide and I could hardly breathe.

He was singing in a language unknown to me. I didn't understand a single word, but I perceived the song's content perfectly: a Gypsy was mourning over his ruined life, his dead love. Jealousy, anger, fury – all human suffering, the whole precipice of passions and suffering – everything was in this song and it was penetrating into the very heart, but then as though the sounds changed, the maledictions that were heard turned into forgiveness, reconciliation, blessing, peace...

I was unable to get rid of a bothersome question: "And why was this man among us? His place was higher, not among the mortal people."

All of a sudden, Ananda whispered something to Anna and began to sing in Russian:

I'm only a wanderer of this earth.

Between work, passion and suffering

My destiny is going like this:

I'm weaving my song only for the saint Beauty

From my love, will and power.

I trembled out of surprise: as though he answered me. That wasn't a song anymore, but a hymn of victorious love... When the final word was heard, I could hardly stand up, although I. was holding me. Having looked round at all my friends, I almost didn't recognize them, even I. himself, who was pale, serious and nearly strict.

When Ananda said good-bye to us, he said to the captain tenderly.

"I will be waiting for you tomorrow, at five o'clock."

I already could hardly perceive the surroundings; I ran into Henry's eyes which were full of tears, I couldn't bear anymore and I asked I. that the clumsy sailor would help me to get back into my room, because I was unwell. I only remember that when I was falling down, the strong captain's hands seized me.

Chapter 21

My illness. Henry and the test of my loyalty

Finally, I came to myself in my bed. First of all, I saw I. who had bent over me, while Ananda was standing next to him with a small cup of medicine in his hands.

Before I could say knife – I. lifted my head a little, and Ananda poured so bitter and pungent medicine into my mouth that I nearly suffocated.

For some reason I was still weak, I wanted to sleep, I closed my eyes, although both of my friends bent down over me as though wishing to ask me something.

Some stoppings of my consciousness, gaps, awakenings by feeling weakness, and someone's figure which was always next to me – that's all what remained in my memory from those days.

When I woke up one day and saw I. sitting next to me absolutely clearly already, it seemed to me that I had gone to bed only yesterday in the evening. I wanted to get up, but his hand stopped me.

"Don't get up, Lovushka. That was an acute condition of your illness. Ananda feared that this concussion of your brain would put your organism out of action for a long time, but thanks to his efforts and our joint nursing, now you are saved already. I feel guilty before you, because I didn't protect you from too strong and exciting impressions. Will you forgive me, because you have spent two weeks lying in bed through my oversight?" I. was talking to me by looking at me tenderly.

"I have spent two weeks lying in bed?" I was completely perplexed.

I was trying to remember something; where my conscious life had ended and where my delirium had started; when I was feeling conscious and when I used to disconnect again? When I fell ill? But the noise in my head and the tingle in my ears didn't let me to perceive anything.

I could understand only one thing that for some reason I. was feeling guilty before me. And this thought seemed so funny for me that I extended my hand to him and told him.

"And whom should I ask to forgive me that I fell ill for the second time and ruined your life by taking so much strength and time from you? Ah, Lolion, suddenly I remembered everything. I fainted away again, like back then at Ananda's. Right? Such especial music as though forced my spirit to fly out of me. I couldn't express that state in any other words. As though I flew out and found myself at Florentian's. I know that I was dreaming about everything that as though I was visiting him. He had long, white clothes on and he was telling me something. I saw a room. It was all white, but I forgot about everything what I was doing there, what Florentian was telling me. I forgot about everything hopelessly, although my only thought was to tell you about this entire dream and his words. And now, I forgot about everything, I couldn't remember even any meaning. I only know that Florentian repeated me this several times: "You are healthy. You are absolutely healthy, but if you want to connect your life with me and to become my loyal friend – you must achieve fearlessness. Only fearless hearts can ascend to this height and go along this path." I can remember only this."

"Now, Lovushka, don't talk so much. You have to try to recover as soon as possible. There was so much of everything with our friends during those two weeks.

The captain was very sad, because he had to leave without saying good-bye to you, or to be precise, he kissed only your visually unfeeling body. This hardened man was crying, because he thought that you were dying, while I had to give medical herbs to drink to the clumsy sailor and to persuade him that you would stay alive. He was like a sensitive young lady.

You see, my friend, in one way or another, while you were sleeping or delirious, in the reality or in your dreams, but your consciousness has taken the truth out of this illness that if you want to march forward you must become a fearless person, - you must do everything in order to achieve that. This is the nearest and the most important lesson of your path, while I and Ananda have to help you to achieve this goal, because as you know, we have walked the difficult path of horror and sadness.

Therefore, first of all start striving for your full physical recovery in an accurate, strict and consistent way. Soon great tests will be waiting for me, you, Anna and somebody else. To be precise, we have to help Anna and Stroganoff to clean their family from that evil which is killing Stroganoff's wife and their son due to her carelessness. It is also reaching out for Anna with its dirty hands.

Now you must become a man, because you have already mourned over your childhood and debts with your bitter tears. Recover, acquire resolution, courage and help me and Ananda in this hour of very difficult suffering in Stroganoffs' family.

Let's observe all the details of Ananda's treatment – and well, here he is."

And indeed, I heard Ananda's steps and his voice in the adjacent room where the captain was living. As I found out later, now Henry was living here, who was sharing all the difficulties of my nursing with I.

Ananda came in and illuminated the whole room with his eyes-stars. As though he had brought in the atmosphere of joy, peace and trust with him.

"Well, Henry, wasn't I right when I told you that this illness would disappear from Lovushka without a trace, like the water from a goose?" his question to Henry was heard, whom I didn't even notice, because I was so fascinated by Ananda.

Henry was embarrassed and he was smiling. He told him that this was an exceptional case, that he didn't find such treatment which Ananda was using in any of books.

"Henry, knowledge in the life itself and life cannot fit in any book. If you can't read life in your patient, but you will be searching for the description of an illness in books, you will never become a creative doctor, a talent, but you will be only an artisan. You cannot treat an illness. You must treat the patient by taking into account the whole of his possessed qualities and spiritual development.

If you can't renew the balance of all man's strength, you won't be able to cure him. I don't even ask you how you feel, but I explain the way of recovery to you: to get up from the bed in three days, to go to the garden on the fifth day, to go for a ride with Henry on the sixth day, to be healthy and start doing all daily work, including the listening to the music and writing letters to my dictation in a week, to help me and I. to do one important business."

Henry clapped his hands and even gave a whistle. He was indignant. In spite of my weakness and the noise in my ears, I gave a laugh and promised Ananda to comply with these demands if he had enough of Ali's pills.

"Henry was terrified not of Ali's, but of my uncle's medicine, although it helped you to recover. Henry even tried to disobey me and one night he didn't want to give your dose of medicine to you,

because he was frightened that I could do away with you. Luckily, I visited you before going to sleep and rectified his mistake. Otherwise, he would have sent you rather far away by protecting you from me,” Ananda was clanking in his metal voice by looking at Henry with humour, and I caught some kind of a heartache in his voice intonation, especially when he was looking at I.

Having examined me thoroughly, Ananda removed the ice off my head, he told Henry to take the warmer off my feet and told me.

“Of course, everything is over already and you are absolutely healthy. If it wasn’t so hot outside, I would allow you to get out of your bed today.”

Henry sniggered something once again, and I understood that he didn’t assent to Ananda’s method again.

“Henry, my friend, please bring this medicine to the duchess. Give the medicine to the duke, but give the first dose to the duchess yourself, no matter what the duchess condition is, and how this would contradict your academic wisdom. All right, all right,” he smiled when he saw changed and pleading Henry’s eyes. “I don’t punish you two times for the same thing, but... if you gave your word to obey my instructions – here’s the real example for you that you were wrong when you wanted to change Lovushka’s treatment. In the matters where you don’t know everything well enough, at least try to fulfil that what is told to you precisely. A wise man isn’t suited to plan cleverly; not to speak of your broken pledge of loyalty, besides you could entangle the threads of many lives and perish yourself.”

Ananda wasn’t strict when he was talking to Henry, his voice was tender, but I didn’t want to be in Henry’s place and I couldn’t have withstood this radiating look so calmly. Henry bowed and left with the same stunned face expression and distressed, but I wasn’t certain at all that he obeyed and recognized his mistake.

“Now, Lovushka, if you want to walk with us and follow your loyal friend Florentian, you will have to solve one complicated and very important task.

You have already noticed yourself that in life many powers and features exist which you hadn’t thought about before. Once, just like you now, me and I. held out many storms in our lives, too, we were searching for realization of our wants, not understanding that happiness wasn’t in them, but it was in knowledge and serving to our nation; happiness is in the liberation of all man’s powers that are hiding within him by directing them to helping people, by training of his skills, so that he could invite people to unite in beauty.

I won’t b talking much. You have to recover and decide whether you want to obey and go where I and I. will invite you to; whether you want to obey us easily, simply and with your free will, having only one goal – to become a close friend and assistant of Florentian.

If you want to stay faithful to his loyalty from the bottom of your heart, then understand how much you have to know and how high you have to advance in order to come nearer to him. While you know so little, but absolutely believe in him and us – you have to obey us, not even thinking about it. Because if I hadn’t been in time, Henry would have made you die, right? Not possessing enough knowledge, he started changing my instructions and he would have deranged your heart work and nervous system, and then nobody could have make you come back to the earth.

Soon we’ll have to fight a man who possesses the great power of darkness, he’s a big egoist and cruel murderer of other people’s lives. If you want to come nearer to Florentian, join this fight, but in

order to do that, you have to overcome your fear. Now this condition emerges before you like a new lesson.

This is one of the tasks that you have to solve during these three days, while you are still lying in your bed.

And here's your second task: when the captain was leaving, he was very upset that he couldn't talk to you. He asked me to give his letter and this little packet to you, but at the moment you cannot read it, you cannot unwrap the packet, too, because not even the slightest excitement may disturb your heart during all those three days. Live like the monks are living – as though you were living the last day of your life, think about Florentian and about that what I have just told you if you want to work with him.

You will give your answer to me in three days. Then, depending on your decision, I and I. will prepare a plan of action and help you to recover and harden yourself sooner or later," he smiled and squeezed my hand. "Then you can also read the captain's letter."

A wave of warmth and peace trickled to my heart from Ananda's hand. I can say that his words excited me, but the more he kept talking to me, the calmer I became, and my thoughts grew clear. And now, because of him, I was all covered and filled with the feeling of happiness, peace and trust, exactly in the same way like back then when Ali took my hand in my brother's room.

Exactly like back then, now also the feeling of superiority of this man in comparison to myself disappeared from my heart. I wasn't asking myself anymore why such people, so much higher and more perfect than us, were walking on the earth among us, through its suffering and tears, through the passions and evil by soiling their bright clothes...

It seemed to me that I all melted into that kindness and compassion which Ananda was pouring into my heart, into my such unstable and excited soul so simply and easily.

"Here it is, love," I wasn't only thinking so, but I was feeling Ananda with my entire essence. "Oh, if I could learn to love a man like this! The main point is to understand what love is with your heart, and then you can't condemn anybody anymore..."

I almost didn't feel how Ananda and I. left my room. It seemed to me that I was still drowsing like during the previous days when I was feeling as though some doubling of my being. I knew that my body was lying here, but at the same time I knew that I – like a thought and consciousness – was flying somewhere, that I was both in my body and not in my body, and I was unable to capture my state in any way. As though I became weightless.

But now, I could clearly feel my body's weight, my weakness, the cost of my every movement and I understood that I began to recover, that my delirium was over.

I wanted to ask myself whether I was glad or not that I had returned from that unusual delirium back onto the earth, but Henry entered my room, brought in the breakfast and explained to me that I. himself prepared everything with his own hands, while Ananda told me to eat everything without fail.

I frowned, because there was so much of everything on the big tray, and I didn't want to eat at all. Henry helped me to sit up. He placed the tray on the low little chair made of bamboo, right on the bed. I started with the chocolate; in the beginning, I was sipping it with reluctance, but all of a sudden, I saw the "Bagdad" on the little plate. Not hesitating for a long time, I thrust it into my mouth, then I felt like eating so much that I gobbled everything up without choosing anything, in any order and I even declared that it tasted good, but it wasn't enough for me.

Henry was looking at me, horror-struck.

“Lovushka, I lost a serious bet to doctor I. I was betting that you wouldn’t drink at least a half of that chocolate, not to speak of the other shady dishes, because I. was only trying his cook talent while preparing them for you. You have run me aground one more time with your illness.”

Henry’s voice was sad, and he seemed to be completely confused.

“Henry, I am very sorry that I upset you, because in truth, I only wanted to express my gratitude to you for that nursing and help during my entire illness.”

“No, Lovushka, you didn’t upset me, but I did it myself. Somehow not even noticing that, I fell into a nasty net of intrigues, and only today Ananda’s words as though woke me up from my dream.

Why, all of a sudden, I rose in revolt five days ago and I didn’t obey him, I didn’t give that medicine to you? Now I don’t even know what to say, but at that night – without any cause and basis, as it seems to me now – such a protest rose within myself that I was condemning and criticizing Ananda, because he didn’t pay attention to any medicine rules! It seemed to me that it was a real compulsion, a violence to demand from me an unconditional obedience in the field where I understood something, besides I have a medicine doctor’s degree and a printed scientific work exactly from the same type of brain fever like yours.

And namely this example of yours showed to me that I didn’t know anything, that Ananda was treating not the illness itself, but he saw and perceived your whole organism, as he always was claiming. In the meanwhile, I could see only the course of the illness as described in the books, but not you.

When I. was preparing breakfast for you, the revolt within me was gaining strength. I could hardly refrain from rudeness and a childish want to run and complain to Ananda, and to demand a cultured behaviour with the patient. I. only looked at me, smiled calmly and told me: “Let’s bet that Lovushka will eat everything and that he will say that it’s not enough? But please don’t give anything to eat till dinner to him. When I come back, I will have dinner with him in his room myself. No medicine and no visits!” And he looked at me one more time in such a way that I cannot come to myself up to now. If it was a strictness, a command or condemnation, I could bear them easily, but it was a compassion, such a compassion that I understood that he had a foreboding of all my thoughts which I didn’t want to confess even to myself.”

Henry fell silent, hung his head and continued after a while.

“And that’s not all. Still in the morning Ananda told me that you would recover today, that you would have enough strength to talk and to eat, but that I couldn’t allow any stranger to come to you, but I promised to Joan who used to come and inquire about you every day that I would allow her to come stealthily to you, Lovushka.”

“How did you dare to act so hideously?!” I cried so loudly that hasty steps were heard from I.’s room, and I. himself came to me quickly.

“What happened, Lovushka?” he asked me by taking my hand. “Why is the tray still standing next to the patient? To allure flies?” his voice was silent, but strict. “We absolutely cannot rely upon you anymore, can we? Henry, you don’t want to obey to a single instruction of Ananda. Why are you hiding Joan’s letter in your pocket? Who has told you that we would torture her by not allowing her to visit Lovushka not?”

“Look what you have done,” I. told him by pointing at me, while I was panting, I was nauseating and I knew that now I would faint away again.

“Have kindness to leave as soon as possible,” I. told him, and those were his last words already, which I could still hear.

It seemed to me that I was sinking into some kind of an abyss; as though I could still hear a strong-willed I.’s cry inviting Ananda to come, I saw how he came running into my room, but I’m not sure if that wasn’t a delirium.

When I woke up, evidently it was the night, or maybe the curtain was simply pulled down. In the twilight I could discern the awkward figure of Ibrahim’s father next to my bed.

I began to move and I asked him to drink. He called I. who gave me to drink himself, smiling joyfully. He thanked the Turk for the night which he spent next to me, he also thanked me for overcoming such deep fit so quickly.

To my great amazement, this time I could remember everything perfectly. My weakness was already gone, but I felt such an appetite of the wolf that I asked for some food and light, as much light as possible.

The Turk was laughing. He was throwing up his arms, he pulled up the curtain – I even screwed up my eyes from the intruded light – and he added that the captain was right when he called me a joker.

“I almost mourned over him tonight, I. asked me to be a trained brother and I was proud of my duty next to the dying person, while he took this privilege from me instantly. Will you command me to feed this wolf?” he asked I.

“I’ll go to Ananda and ask him what to give to his wolf majesty to eat,” I. was laughing. “And maybe you will help him to wash himself? Don’t you dare to get up,” he added by threatening me with his finger. “Until I come back with Ananda, imagine that you are a hopeless case and accept Dzhel-Mabed’s care with the proper grace for such patients.”

He left quickly, not even waiting for my answer. I obeyed to the Turk. My lean figure surprised not only him, but also myself. I didn’t even think that I could get lean so much during two weeks. The Turk was shaking his head and mumbling.

“Now how to fatten up such an ascetic? Is it really possible to be alive only with the skin and bones?”

I demanded him to give me a mirror. I was insisting that I couldn’t comb my hair by memory, but the Turk didn’t give it to me, saying that the mirror was inedible, and now I should be interested only in food.

I didn’t have time to prove the significance of the combed head to my appetite, while both doctors were already standing next to me and laughing. They asked me what was more important to me: food or beauty.

Not answering anything, I extended my hand greedily towards I.’s cup which he had brought in. The Turk assented very much to such practical decision and volunteered to go to the kitchen and order great breakfast for me.

When he left with I.’s instructions and my remark “he’d better bring it faster to me”, I told Ananda that I was completely healthy and that I could get up. Ananda allowed me not only to get up, but even to go to the balcony, but only in the evening when the heat would cool off and under one condition: I had to eat the breakfast in my bed and to lie down for three hours in the twilight. If after three hours he

can be sure of my self-control, if I don't become irritated about anything and stay calm – then I will be able to get up, and tomorrow in the evening he will accompany me carefully to listen to the music himself.

I was fascinated.

"I can assure you of my future unshakable peace, because the most of all in the world I want to listen to your and Anna's music. I give my word that I will be calm, and I can keep my word. And after all, if it wasn't because of the dervish cap of yours, I wouldn't have been shouting yesterday. When it squeezed my brain back then, so I was left childishly silly. I only needed to tell Henry that I didn't want to see anybody for three days, until I was well fed and looked like a man – then everything would have been all right. The dervish cap is to blame for everything."

"Yes, soon you'll make certain for sure what a really malice bearing cap means, how terrible it may be; how sometimes in general a given item may harm one," Ananda was talking very seriously. "An item placed on a person by a vicious hand may deprive him not only of his mind, but also of his life."

At that moment I didn't understand his words, but what terrible their meaning was I made certain for sure in several days already.

Having given a very pleasant, refreshing and frothy drink to drink to me, both of my friends left me for the Turk's care. He fed me to my heart's content and he didn't forget himself.

I had to admit that Ananda was right, because after eating I felt like sleeping and wanted some dusk. The Turk drew the curtain across the window again, he also lay down on the sofa, and both of us were fast asleep.

My second day of recovery went perfectly. From time to time, I used to cast a glance at the captain's letter and parcel, but I didn't have even a thought to break Ananda's interdiction. Of course, I was also waiting for the music, I was waiting for it very much, but now there wasn't that passion in this waiting anymore, which would always push me into the constant irritability like a swing. I felt as though I had really cried out the part of me with my tears in the secret Ananda's room.

It was interesting to me where Henry was, because the captain's room was empty again; it was interesting to me how the duke and the duchess were doing, what was happening in Joan's shop, what was new at Stroganoffs. If Henry or the duke were next to me, I could have asked them about everything, but I didn't dare or want to ask I. about anything if it didn't seem to him that I had to know about it.

I spent the whole day alone. That task which Ananda gave to me – the unconditional obedience, - over which Henry had stumbled, didn't even worry me. Apparently, on the one hand, in comparison to Henry I had so little knowledge and talent, and on the other hand, I could see so clearly so much human kindness and nobility in such people like Ali, Florentian, I. or Ananda that it didn't even occur to me to doubt my modest place which I occupied in the universe in comparison to them and their knowledge.

The more I perceived the incomparable height of my friends' life paths, with more obedience and gratitude I was looking at their love and care for me.

While I was thinking like this, I. came, and of course, I was so happy that I fell myself on his neck like a child again.

"You are so funny, my dear Lovushka, one could learn only bones anatomy on you! You've changed so much. In spite of your childish figure, as though you grew up and reached manhood. The expression of your face is completely different already. Not only Anna and Joan – everyone of them in their

own way, - but also Florentian won't recognize you," I embraced me and he was talking to me like this, while stroking my curls.

We sat down to have our dinner, and he told me how perfectly the duchess was feeling. With Ananda's efforts they succeeded to do that what he alone wouldn't have brought himself to do. Ananda got in touch with his uncle and received a permission to use his method of treatment. So now the duchess could walk even better than before her illness, although the method was risky.

To my question, whether the duchess remembered what I was telling her during the first days of her illness, how she was trying to shout: "forgive me", I answered me that a couple of days ago, when she finished the partition of property between herself and her son and when the happy lawyers left back for Moscow, she asked Ananda and I herself to spare some time for a conversation with them.

He didn't tell me the contents of their conversation, he only mentioned that now the mad fear of death of the duchess had already been gone. All her relations with the people surrounding her, which improved with her health, now had changed even more, like her natural, grey hair had changed her red wig, and her natural face had changed her previous painted mask. Her thoughts had become free of the iron clutches of greed and stinginess, she saw and believed for the first time that not everything in the world could be bought and sold.

"Nevertheless, I feel sorry for the duke. No matter how he understands the meaning of his life, but an old wife is a great horror," I told him, while being in thought.

I smirked and told me that he would ask me this question about the duke's happiness in three years when my life's experience and knowledge took me much further...

"I see that the task of the unconditional obedience doesn't excite you much," I told me with his well-known sparkles of humour in his eyes.

"No, Lolion, this task doesn't excite me at all, I also don't pay any attention to the second Ananda's task. I don't have and I cannot have any choice, any other decision – with you or without you, because my life without you, Florentian and my brother cannot even exist. I didn't notice what place in my heart Florentian occupied, but only when we parted, I felt the whole power of love to him. I didn't have time to perceive in what miraculous way sir Vomi occupied so much place in my heart, but I know exactly how, for what, when and why your image has settled there, and my entire changed being is breathing with gratitude to you. My greatest desire, my most secret thought is to be your servant, to be your loyal disciple and to help you. And now I suffer for my ignorance, intemperance and inexperience more than ever before."

"My dear boy, the further, the higher everyone of us is walking, the clearer it becomes that there are no limits for perfection. It isn't important what height, what limit you will reach today, it is important only that you would move forward with that eternal movement in which the whole life is moving forward. You can step into it only with love. If you didn't decorate someone's day with the eternal movement with which the whole universe was living during that day, you separated from people, consequently you were unable to rise to any perfection. There's only one way to it – that's love to man."

Ananda interrupted our conversation, while I still had so many questions, I was worried about Henry.

"Lovushka, I see that you really are the master of your word. I didn't even expect that you would look so well," such were the first Ananda's words. "Your lean figure worries you, but... you will see

Anna, you will see how she and her father have changed during that time... Try to remain a well-bred person, don't show how surprised you are when you see this sad change."

"I will be well-bred and tactful," I answered him with dignity, "although I have to admit that these words worry and excite me very much since I became acquainted with Florentian. I'll try to do my best, but I still cannot promise you that I won't disgrace you."

My friends stood up, ready to go to the sitting-room. I remembered Florentian's words, took the captain's letter and the parcel, put them into the travelling-bag and shoved it into the ward-robe.

"Whom are you hiding the things from?" I. asked me.

"From anybody, but Florentian told me never to leave my dear things thrown anywhere, so I put them in good order. Besides, you have also taught me the order several times," I answered him.

He smiled, but he didn't answer me anything. Ananda took my arm, and we turned to the sitting-room.

I was feeling well, but it was difficult to go upstairs. Both of my friends were holding me from both sides, but my legs still could hardly bend. It seemed to me that we were walking for the whole eternity until we reached our goal.

The sitting-room was still empty. Soon the duke came in. The servants lit up the lamps and the chandelier. The duke's dear face which I expected to be radiating, as it remained in my memory before my illness, surprised me by the worry and sadness that were reflected on it.

I already wanted to ask him what had happened, but I remembered in time how a well-bred person had to behave, not showing his surprise, so I started waiting for those stunning changes in Anna and her father, about which Ananda was talking; at the same time, I concentrated all my thoughts to Florentian.

While the duke was talking to I. and Ananda by the grand piano, I sat down on the deep armchair next to the wall and I was trying to concentrate myself. I was surprised myself how easily I managed to concentrate my attention this time. I felt to be in Florentian's atmosphere instantly, as though I had been holding his hand. So when Ananda's voice: "Lovushka, Anna has come" sent me back into the reality, I became glad, stood up and went to meet her by following I., but my legs were still disobedient.

"Lovushka, do you remember Ananda's words?" I. whispered to me.

"Yes! I will be happy to test my self-control," I answered him.

As soon as I saw Anna, the duke took the usual black cloak off her shoulders, and I moaned inside of me.

"You probably don't recognize me from these bones and skin, Anna," I told her in a cheerful mood, while kissing her hands.

"Lovushka, now you surprise me not with your skin and bones, but with something else which I still cannot grope. It isn't in the physical level at all. Your spiritual change surprises me. As though some new power and even something else is awakening within you..." Anna was telling me.

"Yes, and here's an invalid in front of you," Stroganoff was speaking to me by giving his hand to me. "I had a very strong heart attack, and both of our doctors could hardly snatch me from it. I will have to admit that I wasn't expecting to see this house and to hear the music anymore. Live, live more cheerfully, my dear writer! Bore the life that surrounds you with your eyes-awls and pay attention to everything what is going on in the hearts of the people who surround you. Run from any compromises as

far as possible, break out of them if they have touched your heart: "The claw stuck – the bird perished," the old man was panting while he was talking to me, evidently he remembered his own experiences.

Having taken my arm, he was walking slowly and with difficulty towards the sofa that was standing next to my chosen armchair. We didn't have time to sit down when Henry entered the room, bowed to all and retreated to the most distant and the darkest corner.

"How many reasons I would have to moan if that had happened before my illness," I thought when I looked at Henry.

Henry was lean, but now he had meagred as though after the fast. He not only became lean, he also changed, as though he was disappointed in something, he became angry, frowned. His spiritual riot must have been growing, and not ceasing.

Anna sat down at the grand piano, and she really surprised me with the change that had happened within her. Last time she was sitting here young, as though she had stopped in her seventeenth spring, and now I would have given her thirty years. Not wrinkles had made her older, but now instead of that kind, calm and sweet Anna's face to which I had already got used, I saw her painfully and firmly pursed up lips which were always twitching, I saw her suffering eyes which kept flashing now and again – I cannot describe it otherwise.

Her father also didn't remind me by anything of that joyful and cheerful man who came to visit us for a cup of tea a month ago and to help us to put Joan's destiny in order.

"We will take you back to the beginning of the seventeenth century and we will start from the monk Mateson. Then you will hear Back and Handel," Ananda announced.

Suddenly, with the first sounds, I saw the former Anna, even more wonderful, who was playing with even greater inspiration, only without the former tranquillity, but she was swift, passionate, she could explode at any moment.

Like the last time, not the sounds of the violoncello were flowing from under Ananda's bow, but a living man's voice which was bringing down all partitions between one's heart and one's surrounding life. That voice was flowing into my soul, but it didn't reopen its old sores, it gave me strength and calm.

The wonderful sounds were streaming, they were changing one another, while I couldn't see anything, except the faces of the musicians. Not their beauty and even not the inspiration that was reflected on them surprised me. If I felt their union in ecstasy of the creative flight last time, then today I was taking part in that ecstasy myself, I was creating the new still untold prayer to God myself by taking part in those sounds with each of my nerves.

And I wasn't thinking anymore – like back then when I was going through Moscow, - whether I believed in God or not, how he looked like that God of mine, and what my relations with him were. The God was inside of me; while the music was playing, I was praying him, I was worshipping him, I was glorifying the whole life as it was, while melting in happiness.

Anna started playing alone. The Bethoven's sonata was gushing from under her fingers like a storm. I lifted up my head and I didn't recognize Anna again. She was all changed, her eyes were fixed to some kind of distances. It seemed to me that she could see what we were unable to see, she was addressing somebody and she was playing to that one who was listening to her not being present here; the tears were rolling down from her eyes, but she couldn't feel them...

But then suddenly her eyes got dry, happiness lit up in her eyes, as though she was heard. The smile showed up in her lips, which was reflecting that happiness, nearly the bliss; the sounds settled down, they turned into a tender melody and fell silent...

Henry was sobbing in his corner, he was sobbing so helplessly, just like I back then in Ananda's room.

I wanted to stand up and come up to Henry, but I saw that Ananda himself was already standing next to him and stroking his head tenderly.

This time neither Anna nor Ananda were singing. Ananda told us that after such music we could only bow to the talent that gave us such grand moments of happiness and we could disperse.

I kept looking at Anna. What happened to her again? Did her tears really burn down the entire pain of her heart in those sounds of the music? The seventeenth spring was radiating on her face again, her eyes were shining with kindness and renewal again. She went up to her father, embraced him tenderly and told him.

"Don't worry anymore. Everything will be all right. Everything is all right already, and what's still going to happen – that's only an inevitable consequence, and not the punishment of Bracano."

It seemed to me that he understood those words which I was absolutely unable to solve, he became glad, kissed her and directed his eyes to Ananda who was approaching them.

"Please stop suffering, Boris Fyodorovich," Ananda addressed him tenderly, but it seemed to me that there was some reproach in his voice. "I've always been telling you that fear is killing you. If you had really believed in me, as you were telling me, then you wouldn't have been ill, and Anna wouldn't have suffered so much. Now you are absolutely healthy, aren't you? And you don't have any pain. If my uncle was here, next to you, how could you look at his eyes? Haven't you promised him that you wouldn't allow any fear to enter your heart anymore?"

"Yes, it is my fault," Stroganoff was talking to him, panting, but when my greatest treasure is affected – Anna who is threatened by terrible danger for ten days already, - please understand me, Ananda, my great, kind-hearted friend and helper! This is my only vulnerable spot where I'm unable to overcome my fear."

"This is exactly how men's lives are going on in the continuous error. Look at those ten days. What has happened to her? She's alive, healthy and... now she's happy already. Haven't you made her suffer so much with your fear? And if you want to know..." Ananda became silent for a moment, as though listening attentively to something, "Anna – or to be precise, you, because you could have lost her, - were threatened by danger here and now, while she was playing, and you didn't even suspect it, as you don't suspect the fact that you've brought her to the limit of utter physical exhaustion with your fear yourself..."

Ananda felt silent, he took both Anna's hands tenderly, lifted them up to his lips, smiled, embraced her with his left hand and kissed her forehead.

"There's no place for doubts within a loyal heart, and when they get there, then the revolution is taking part, which destroys the harmony. Remember, my friend Anna, that I won't be able to pull you out of that storm for the second time anymore, which you had gotten into now, being absolutely not ready. Think about your path not like the path of renunciation, but about the paths of all the people who are close to you with their spirit, to whom you are the power and peace if you are living in harmony. If doubts and compromises settle within your heart, then where you will stumble yourself, your beloved will stumble, too. This is the first link; then fear follows it, and then... you will get into that storm again, which

you have experienced now, and – I repeat once again – I won't be able to pull you out of it for the second time anymore."

He kissed Anna's forehead one more time. Only now I noticed how pale and worn-out he was, as though only his shadow and not Ananda himself was here.

I didn't understand anything again, only my heart was squeezed: "What could have exhausted Ananda's strengths so much? Why did the wrinkle cut his flat forehead across? Why was I. so austere and sad?"

All these questions were left unanswered, and my devotion to my friends increased twofold within my heart.

Nobody wanted any tea anymore, but in order not to insult our sincere host, we drank a cup of tea and dispersed.

I was looking for Henry, but he had disappeared, and I wanted to ease his suffering with something so much.

"Everyone has his own path," Ananda told me when we ran into each other in the doorway, while we were leaving. "You need to prepare your answer now, which I will come to hear tomorrow in the morning. Even if Henry wanted to talk to you until that time – I forbid you to. You saw where one's disobedience could lead. You have perceived something now, at least where doubts could lead. Realize all of it well, don't seek for any help, solve your task alone."

I came back to my room. I was happy. Nobody was disturbing my heart, my decision was clear, I perceived my path with my every nerve, everything within me was rejoicing. I knew my answer firmly and I was calm. I already wanted to go to sleep, but I imagined how Henry was feeling now. I would have given a lot if I could soothe him, but my inner voice was telling me that now I wouldn't be able to help him in any way, because I was still too weak. I understood Ananda's prohibition for me as his want to protect both of us from any unnecessary suffering which wouldn't help neither of us.

I went up to the door, locked it and put out the light. I decided firmly to remain loyal to Ananda's prohibition. I called my dear Florentian and went to bed, but I could feel with my entire body that Henry would come to me. And I was right. As soon as the steps of Ananda and I. fell silent after they accompanied Stroganoffs, somebody knocked at my door. My heart rumbled, as though responding to it.

The knock repeated; then everything calmed down again. I don't know why, but I ran to the door leading to I.'s room and locked it up, too. I didn't have time to come back to my bed, and I already could hear how Henry was turning the handle of the door.

"Lovushka, open the door. It's an extra case. Quickly. I must give an exceptionally important assignment to you. Lives of two men depend on it. Quickly, until I. isn't back," I heard a twitching Henry's voice.

I was lying in my bed silently, not moving. If he had told me that he was burning, that his life depended on our meeting, that I would die – I wouldn't have betrayed Ananda and I. anyway and I wouldn't even move from place.

Henry started knocking at the door so strongly that I was afraid if he didn't break the lock of this old house. I stood up silently, put the robe on and I already wanted to go to the captain's room when I heard the front door open and I understood that my friends were coming back.

Henry was hitting the door with fury already, he was calling me loudly and rudely, he already didn't hear anything, even the steps of Ananda and I. who started running.

Everything lapsed into silence in I.'s room. Then I heard Ananda's voice, who was talking in an unknown language to me, I heard the quick steps of the duke, his question whether a noise on our side didn't seem to him. Then everything lapsed into silence again. After some time, I heard the dear I.'s voice.

"Can you unlock the door, Lovushka?"

I unlocked the door; I. lit the candle to my face, smiled tenderly to me and told me.

"My dear boy, you have passed your first test of loyalty. Keep on going so bravely, honourably and you will become a friend and an assistant to those whom you've chosen as your ideal."

Chapter 22

An unexpected arrival of sir Vomi and his first meeting with Anna

As soon as I woke up in the morning of the next day, I. was already inviting me to Ananda.

We went upstairs; it still wasn't hot, and I was drawing in the aroma of the flowers with fascination. The duke had planted many of the flowers here.

The noise of the city was heard in the distance. It seemed to me that over there, behind the fence, the people and the passions were raging by winding up into the ball of suffering and unstable happiness, while here, next to I. and Ananda, the atmosphere of the firm tranquillity was dominating.

The worn out Henry's face, his furious voice and the breaking of the door flashed in my memory immediately. I gave a sigh and once again I perceived I.'s words that nobody could be lifted up to the next atmosphere if he didn't possess it within himself.

First I saw Henry in Ananda's room, who was sitting at the table sullenly.

"Hello, Lovushka," Ananda told me. "Please tell me why didn't you open the door for Henry in the night, although he was shouting to you pleadingly that two people were threatened by death?"

"Only because I gave the word to myself to keep my loyalty to you, while Henry came to me after I had given my word to you not to see anybody for three days. That's why I didn't take the letter from him, too. Even if he had told me that he was burning in the fire, still I would have believed in you, and not in him; I would have believed that what you knew and what you were able to do, Henry was unable to know and to do – at the same time, I was certain that Henry knew and he was able to do much more than I knew and I was able to do myself.

I don't have and I didn't have any doubts, and if, in your opinion, I did something wrong, please forgive me. And still, if you, I. or Florentian would give me some assignment or forbid me something to do, I wouldn't break my promise for anything.

I wouldn't dare to condemn your instructions by comprehending my ignorance. You saved my life from death, I know your selflessness when Florentian called you to help my brother, and you came hurriedly – only from my gratitude and loyalty I would rather decide to share any sad consequences with you if something wrong could happen, than I would break my given word of loyalty to you."

"What can you tell to this, Henry?" Ananda asked him.

His voice stunned me. Not a single father would have addressed his guilty son so tenderly and with such compassion. I became ashamed inside of me: I was really proud of myself, because I had passed my lesson, because I hadn't stumbled over some kind of conditionality by seeing the essence of the matter.

Now I had the possibility to understand that I loved my great friends, I was loyal and grateful to them, but did I love Henry? Ananda's voice in which there wasn't a single drop of a reproach, but there was only a boundless compassion, revealed to me how the real love had to sound.

Henry lifted his head, looked at Ananda's eyes and told him in a hoarse voice.

"I can't understand myself how I could act like that."

"I had told you not to take any letters from Joan, hadn't I? I warned you not to become acquainted with Bracano. I was explaining to you that you had karmic relations to him and that you would have to help him, but only when you saw his misdeeds and when you made certain of them. I forbade you even to see him without me or I., while you went to him and you even took Joan with you."

"No, Joan didn't step over this threshold."

"That was only because you met Stroganoff and you didn't dare to take her out from the shop during working hours," Ananda continued, "but now we aren't talking about that. Henry, you've lost the possibility to square your accounts of many centuries with that man. With my and I.'s help, with your kindness and love you could pay that man for all evil that once he caused to your mother and yourself. You haven't passed the easiest test which could have allowed you to move forward in knowledge and science.

Now you will have to part with me not because I'm angry with you or because I'm dissatisfied with you, but simply because now, with the riot in your heart, you won't be able to live in the atmosphere of my vibrations in which I'm living, in the vibrations of the waves of that frequency and altitude, in which I can breathe easily.

Throw out the letters, they are oppressing you. The evil was holding the hand which was writing them under control. The hand was hypnotized by the strong, dark and deceitful being. Throw out that pendant of the clock's chain, too, which Bracano hung for you. Look what that pearl has turned into, which you were admiring so much."

All blushed with shame, Henry took the clock from his pocket and unfastened the pendant from the black agate with the trembling hands. He wanted to put it on the table, but I. held his hand and told him.

"You shouldn't stain the table with this nasty thing. Is there a blue pearl in its centre?"

Henry turned the pendant over in his palm and exclaimed.

"But yesterday I could still see myself how it was flowing in blue and red colours! Now there's only a sticky and red tar, like a drop of blood!"

"Throw it and the letters into the fireside and maybe you will be convinced of something," Ananda extended the burning candle to Henry slowly, as though overcoming some kind of resistance.

Henry doubted, but two pairs of eyes directed such a fire of will to him that he put the letters into the fireside, the pendant onto the letters and set them on fire.

As soon as the paper flamed up, a bang was heard, as if there was a shot. The pendant scattered into tiny pieces instantly, while they turned into the sand. The room was filled with the stinking smoke. I had a fit of coughing and I was gasping, while Henry was staring at the fireside. The sweat stood out on his face, as though he could see something in the fire, while the fire was unnaturally big from only two letters.

All of a sudden, he gave a shout, fell on his knees before Ananda and whispered.

"What a horror! Oh my God, what have I done? What's going to happen to me now?"

"You will come back to Hungary. From there, you will go to one of my friends if you want to start searching for the path to self-control again and for the new meeting with me some day. Don't think about the distant future at the moment. Search for the strength and love for solving your question only

today and now. If you don't want, if you aren't interested in our new meeting – go your own path, as you understand it and as you want it to go. You are free, as you were free when you were living next to me, but if you decide to go to my friend, you will have to leave in three hours with the first streamer.”

“Will I have to live without you? There's no life for me where you aren't present, but I understand that I'm guilty and there's nothing to think about. I'm going. I don't even have to say something. Not because that I don't rely upon my strength, but because I know the faithfulness of your love, I know that you will call me when I'm ready and worthy of it. You took me here by my prayers and you – against your own will – took pity on me. I won't be begging you anymore, I won't be wasting my time in vain. I will be acting and living in such a way, as though I was always next to you.”

“Go, pick up your things, don't talk to anybody about anything and come back here again. I will explain everything to the duke myself, I will give you a letter and accompany you,” Ananda told him and stroked his head.

Although with difficulty, but Henry controlled himself, bowed to us and left. Oh, how I loved Henry in this moment! How I wanted to embrace him, to ask him to forgive me for my egoistic thoughts, to tell him from the bottom of my heart that I understood his difficulty of paring with us, but I didn't dare to interrupt the silence of my friends.

After some time, Ananda stood up and invited us to the white room. Here he sat down at the table, seated I. by himself, while I settled under the new lilac bush, because mine had lost its blossom, and somebody's loving hands had changed it.

“Lovushka, you still will see lots of people's pain in your life, you will suffer yourself quite a lot, too. And every time, whatever pain you see, you will make certain that the beginning of every pain is fear, doubts, jealousy and desire for money and ambition. All other passions that kill people are growing from these roots. Another part of man's pain is brought to him by his blindness and thinking that his life is only that short period between his birth and his death, squeezed into the frame of his personal life and separated from the rest of the world. This essential superstition is preventing him from seeing clearly the entire universe and understanding his place in it, in its activity, in its harmony.

Don't think that we are some higher beings, like you sometimes do. Once both me and I. were walking just like you are walking now – our hearts were awakening from our pain and lament, our consciousness was expanding from suffering and dangers.

Your talent and your previous searching for the higher spiritual life, which you can't remember right now, have brought you to such situation in your life that you can continue your path of improvement. Namely this searching of yours has brought you together with Ali, Florentian and us, and it will bring you together with many more people in the future. I'm happy that your nobility, honour and unshakable belief didn't stagger, but moved you even nearer to us.

You see, partly I have come here because of Henry, Anna and Stroganoffs who have fallen into the fine and mean net of Bracano both in the past and now. As far as Henry is concerned – you've seen and heard everything yourself. He had to help himself to disentangle his own and his mother's heartache which is coming from remote ages, but he failed to pass the very first and the easiest of the tests. In the meanwhile, he had already overcome a lot and he even had fulfilled his tasks successfully several times.

Your path is different. You are endowed with supernatural powers in which you still can't orientate yourself. You feel the joy and the meaning of life intuitively, to which the sceptics - experimentalists are coming for entire centuries, because they are used to touch everything with their own

hands and they consider only that to be real, which they can grope. Only the earth is real to them, and everything else are some abstract conceptions.

I. will tell you everything about what has happened in Stroganoffs' house during that time. You will gain strength and temper your organism during ten days, and then you'll come with us to fight for Anna's, her father's and her mother's lives and freedom, as well as for her younger brother who's already dying in Bracano's slavery.

Please don't see Joan for two more days. She's terrorizing the duke by asking him to meet you, but he's holding out just like you, although he's suffering very much, because it is difficult for him to refuse her because of his kindness.

Don't be amazed that we still have to wait for the day of fighting against the evil for so long. If Henry hadn't betrayed us, he would have helped us very much. Now you will have to play his part to a certain extent, while the captain will play another one. Today I received a letter from him. He finished his trip successfully and he will be here in eight or nine days. So we will be waiting for him.

Good luck to you, my friend, in your future spiritual path, strive for an absolute fearlessness. Don't forget that fearlessness – that isn't an absence of fear, but that's an absolute calmness and the ability of the whole organism to be fully capable of working in the atmosphere of danger. You need to learn to live in such a way that by holding Florentian's hand in your hand, you could feel not only any fear, but not even the slightest trembling of the nervous system of your physical conductor."

Ananda saw me and I. off, and I could still see his eyes-stars before my eyes.

We went to the city. We were going slowly, through the shades and we went up to the confectioner's shop with the wonderful "Bagdad". Having confessed to ourselves that we were hungry, we asked the owner to give us something to eat at his own discretion. He took us to the small, shady balcony and asked us to wait here for fifteen or twelve minutes. He added that we would be rewarded for our patience. I. reminded him that we were vegetarians and that we agreed to wait for up to half an hour.

When only two of us were left, I. started telling me what had happened during that time while I was ill.

The first news – Stroganoffa visited Joan and took Bracano with her, secretly from her husband and her daughter.

"It wasn't difficult for Bracano to turn Joan into his own subject, while Stroganoffa managed to lure Henry easily and even to bring him together with Bracano himself. Henry came to believe that Stroganoff envied his daughter and that he didn't allow her to marry, that Anna was the victim of her father's and Ananda's despotism and that the greatest martyrs were her mother and her youngest son.

While Henry was visiting Bracano, he surpassed him with his powers and he suggested Henry to lure me to him in any possible way. Bracano is holding Stroganoffa and her son under a complete control and he's going to kidnap Anna. He's afraid only of Ananda, because with the help of his bad he hopes to deal with me alone easily by killing me," I. gave a smile. "However, he doesn't know that sir Vomi is already coming to us. And you will have the pleasure of meeting Chava. Bracano has already forgotten," I. added after being silent for a while, "how he lost his charmed bracelet which, to tell you the truth, was stolen. I regret that I allowed him to draw himself up before time back then. I didn't evaluate that he would forget everything so quickly and I didn't understand immediately how strong that villain was."

Then he told me how Stroganoffa pushed her husband into such a fear with her scandalous home scenes. She made him to experience such a heart attack which nearly cost him his life.

“But how about Anna?” I interrupted I., not being able to hold out anymore. “Could Anna really still doubt whether she had to marry Bracano?”

“No, her doubts weren’t hiding here, which nearly took her life away, too. It seemed to her that Ananda wasn’t active enough, so she decided that he didn’t see how the Turk was persecuting her and she asked Ananda to help her to become free. Ananda answered her that the cause of all her suffering was within herself, that first of all she needed to find out whether she didn’t doubt the path of her chastity which she had chosen voluntarily and ignoring Ananda’s advice; that she needed to answer herself clearly to the question: whether she was walking the path of joyous love by striving for liberation, or she had chosen the chastity only because her beloved couldn’t become her husband? If she was walking the path of renunciation, denial and isolation instead of asserting life where she could win and create the victory only with joy, then she wouldn’t reach those paths where she could unite with her beloved in their creative work and activity.

Anna didn’t go deep into the meaning of Ananda’s words, she decided that her beloved didn’t really love her. She became obsessed with doubts whether she was living rightly at all up to now; she was rebelling, demanding, she was jealous, she started doubting that person whom she loved. You saw the final of the drama of this soul at the grand piano,” he finished his story.

Our breakfast and coffee were brought to us. When we were left alone, we resumed our conversation.

“You saw the external side of the drama here. I will tell you that what you were unable to see. With her doubts, tears, jealousy and bitterness Anna destroyed the atmosphere of her unshakable purity and calmness, in front of which Bracano was helpless.

In order for his vicious will and foul words to become effective, he needed the cracks in Anna’s soul and thoughts, to which the evil could hang. Namely her inner contradictions were of service to Bracano. By controlling the power, attracting the currents of the same evil of other people to him, he entangled the entire net of dark powers and thoughts around her, which were asserting to her that her beloved was a charlatan, that there wasn’t another real life and joy except the physical life and passions, that people were living not for some abstract truths, but for their relatives in ties of blood with them. While Anna was playing the first part of the sonata, her contradictions reached the denial even of God, of his paths, of all enlightened people with their unreachable nobility and honour. She was already prepared to recognize everything with what she was living during these long years as the fiction. Then Ananda had to concentrate his entire attention and will in order to summon the image of his uncle – the doctor and nobleman about whom I’ve been telling you already.

You already know from your own experience that you can hear and see Florentian if you concentrate your entire attention, all your pure love to him, but it is a difficult task for man’s physical body to transfer that view to another person if he doesn’t possess this psychic power. Ananda did it for Anna, he saved her, he returned her the strength to live and to recover her spiritual balance.

I will tell you about Stroganoff’s wife and his son later...”

The owner came in, we thanked him sincerely and we came back home.

“I think that now it is time for you to read the captain’s letter, and I will drop in at Ananda’s. I would like you not to leave our rooms until I come back,” I. told me.

I promised this to him by deciding firmly not to go anywhere. I took out the captain’s letter and the parcel. I locked up all doors and sat down on the sofa. I caught the thought that for some reason I

was waiting for Joan; not that I would be waiting for her, but just like back then, at night, when I was certain that Henry would come, now I was certain that Joan would.

I started reading my dear captain's letter. Only now, by trying to make out this big and visually clear, but not easy to read handwriting, I understood how much I loved him.

"Lovushka, bold spirit – merry soul, it is so sad for me, because I have to leave you neither alive nor dead.

Of course, I'm taking out some peace in my heart, because both of your friends told me that you would be living. Only I was missing you so much during those days, as well as your incessant laughing and lad pranks.

I lived three stages of my life in Constantinople. In the beginning, I buried everything, then I came to life and saw that lots of things had been gone already, but my life wasn't lost yet.

Now, as though joy is heard within myself, as though I had found a new calmness. I'm already perceiving my day, as well as my passions and wants which accompany it, not only with my brain, but my heart is also responding to every move of the brain; a benevolence is awakening for every man within myself, while my passions and wants keep silent, not possessing their former power of pressure. This is so new for me, as well as my attachment to you, because I was always so cold and indifferent. I think that you've hit my weakest spot with your wild courage (excuse me, but I cannot find another name for it).

Since my early childhood, I was obsessed with the idea of a fearless courage. Fearlessness was my life's incentive. And suddenly, I met the boy who scored me off so easily, as though it had been a child's play!

According to the strict logic of things, I should envy and hate you, but instead of this, I ask you to accept the little greeting from me, like the proof of my eternal love and memory, of my loyal friendship and desire to live next to you.

Your sincerely,

The captain"

I was excited by his letter, his tenderness and wishes which I didn't deserve at all in my opinion. Finally, I undone the little parcel that was packed very nicely and cunningly. I found a leather case there, I opened it and jumped up out of surprise.

In front of me, on the white satin of the case, the exact copy of that ring which I gave to Ananda from the captain was placed. It only had the letter "L" and green jewels on it.

I took it out. There were wonderful lilies made of emeralds and brilliants inserted on its side and the bottom, instead of the pansies like on Ananda's ring. There was a note lying on the bottom of the case.

"Anna told me that your stones were emerald and brilliants, while your flower was lily. So I did exactly like this. Did I please you?" I read the energetic captain's handwriting.

I was very glad and I became embarrassed very much. I remembered that when we were sitting in Ananda's room and admiring his ring, I told him: "Well, nobody is ever going to give such ring to me."

I was still sitting with the ring. I was all immersed in my thoughts where the captain was now, what he was doing and who was next to him, how I would be glad when I saw. And all of a sudden, I heard some kind of a bustle in the next room, as though some argument and the duke's voice which I could hardly recognize. Usually, he used to talk silently, and I couldn't even imagine that he could ever talk so loudly, with such indignation and raised voice.

"I've been telling you for two weeks already that he was ill, that nobody could excite him, because you would cause another, repeated attack of his illness – and then nobody could ever help him," the duke was shouting, while fighting with somebody. "While you, stating that you adore him, are always thrusting yourself with some letters and assignments which make me sick from the distance. Who do you think you are after becoming the toy of that villain?" he was talking in French, hardly breathing.

"You are heartless! Namely you are the villain! You did away with your wife, madam Stroganoffa told me everything. Now you are taking part in this plot, so that you could do away with Lovushka," Joan was shouting in a squealing and vulgar voice, not being able to control herself.

"If I hadn't seen you before acquainting with that villain, if the people whom I'm grateful not only for my poor wife's, but also for my own life hadn't told me about you – I would throw you out of here, not even thinking about it, so that I could never see your befogged face in my house again. I think that you've lost your mind! I think that an evil power has obsessed you and therefore, I repeat one more time to you: please leave this place yourself. You won't see Lovushka, unless there's a knife behind your wrap, and you will decide to slaughter me."

It was silent for several minutes.

"Oh my God, oh my God! What will they do to me?" I could hear Joan crying and pleading again. "Please understand at last that I must give this bracelet and this letter to Lovushka. All of this is for Anna. He must put the bracelet on her hand himself, because I cannot do it, I don't have enough strength to approach her. Please understand, I cannot do it and that's all! As soon as I take the bracelet and come to Anna, something is stopping me. There are no obstacles, but I cannot approach her! And Lovushka can do it. Understand that if I cannot fulfil this assignment – then I'd rather not come back home. Here, I'm begging you on my knees – have pity on me and my children," Joan was weeping behind the door.

My heart was breaking, but I understood that I had to call for Florentian with an absolute self-control. I concentrated on him with all my strength and – like a lightning – the answer struck my ear: "Call for Ananda this very moment, immediately."

Almost fainting away from the stress, I concentrated my entire attention on Ananda and as though I heard his voice in the distance: "I'm coming." I calmed down instantly, somehow I felt silent inside of me and suddenly, I understood the degree of Joan's madness completely clearly. I understood that she had a knife and that she would injure the duke. I dashed to the door, but another strong hand was already holding the ill-fated Joan's hand in which the blades of the narrow and long knife were sparkling...

Ananda shook Joan's hand, and the knife fell onto the floor.

"Don't touch it!" Ananda shouted to the duke who wanted to pick up the knife. "Lovushka, lock up the door of this room, so that nobody could come in from the duke's rooms," he addressed me.

"And you, my poor," he said to Joan in French, "put your good-for-nothing bracelet on the floor, next to the knife."

Joan was like a sleep-walker. She didn't lift her eyes to anybody and put the case next to the knife.

"Clean your hands, face and neck with this wad," Ananda gave a wad of cotton to her, which was soaked with the liquid from the bottle which he pulled out from his pocket, while he was speaking to her.

This bottle reminded me of that one from which my brother moistened my skin, and it turned black before Ali's feast. I was frightened that despite of all that, now the poor Joan would turn into Chava.

Fortunately, it didn't happen so, and I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that the colour of Joan's skin didn't change, although she was rubbing it very sincerely. When Joan fulfilled this command, she thought a little, looked all of us round surprised, as though not recognizing us, asked in a weak voice.

"Where am I? Why am I here? Is this really the steamer? Oh, captain, captain, don't throw me out," suddenly she addressed Ananda.

She was silent for a while again, then rubbed her forehead with both of her hands.

"No, no, you aren't the captain. This isn't the steamer; but where am I? Oh, my head, my head is going to split soon," Joan was talking, as though being delirious.

Ananda took her hand, the duke pushed the armchair to her and seated her, while shaking his head.

"She has gone crazy, just like I thought," he told us. "I admit, she nearly drove me mad, too. I could hardly withstand her hysterics of the last days."

"Lovushka, let I. in, he's at the door already," Ananda told me.

I didn't hear the knock because of the bustle and I let I. in.

Ananda stepped aside from the armchair and showed Joan to I. I. went up to her and put his hand on her head.

"Do you recognize me, Joan?" he asked her.

"Mister senior doctor, how could I not recognize you?" Joan answered him silently and absolutely calmly.

"Why did you come here, Joan?"

"I came here? You are wrong, I didn't come here and I have never seen this house," Joan answered him silently again. "I want to go home."

I. took his hand off her.

"Oh, no, no, I don't want to go home, some horror is waiting for me there... But my children are there. My God, what does it all mean? How it aches... my heart aches," all of a sudden she cried out loudly.

Ananda went up to her quickly and took both of her hands.

"Look at me, Joan. Have you seen this thing?"

He gave her a typical Eastern wallet that was embroidered with beads.

"Yes, madam Stroganoffa gave it to me yesterday in the evening. She told me that Bracano gave it to her youngest son, but several beads fell out and damaged the pattern, and only Anna possessed such beads; that I had to take them from her box and fix the pattern, but I was unable to take them in any way. I don't know why, but I was unable to do it," her voice had turned into a whisper already.

I. brought me to Joan who didn't see and recognize me up to now.

"Lovushka, Lovushka, how I need you! It seems to me that I've been looking for you for the whole year already. I wanted to tell you something important, but now I've forgotten everything. Where have you been during all that time? Here's," she started delving in the pockets of her wrap, "no, I'm ill, Lovushka," she told me when she didn't find anything in her pockets and hung her hand.

I. raised Joan's hand that didn't have any signs of life and took the ill-fated woman to his room with the help of the duke. He rubbed her face and her hands one more time, poured something into the glass and gave her to drink it. Joan drank it greedily. Her face came to life, flushed up. The former Joan was still sitting before us after a while, Joan from the purest and the best moments of her life.

"Now you have to remember the whole life of your past days and to tell us what has happened to you. We want to help you, but you need to remember everything yourself," I. addressed her.

"Oh, finally I can breathe easily, I can see you and Lovushka alive. If I wished to tell you what has happened to me, I could tell you only this: I was dead – and now I came back to life. A single thought was oppressing me, as though I had to do something, something like a crime... Yes, yes, I remembered, Bracano told me to persuade Lovushka to put his bracelet on Anna's hand; he could be sure that she would marry him only if Lovushka put that bracelet on her hand. Now I remembered everything. He took me here, told me to go to Lovushka's room and to give this terrible bracelet to him, even if I had to kill the ones who would prevent me from doing it. You know, this bracelet is simply burning my hands when I take it..."

She lapsed into silence, rubbed her forehead, looked at all of us and asked us.

"Didn't I do anything terrible here?"

"No, everything is all right. Now forget about everything and don't be afraid of anything. Soon we'll take you home," Ananda was speaking to her.

"How terrible it is! Bracano will be waiting for me there. He will kill me," Joan whispered and simply cowered into a ball.

"Don't be afraid of anything. Now we are going to meet one of our friends. His secretary is coming with him. She's black-skinned. We can settle our friend here, but there's no place for her. Could you give shelter to her for one night? She will draw too much attention to herself in the hotel, and we wouldn't like it," Ananda was asking her.

"Oh, I will be so glad! Now I'm so afraid of being alone."

"If you permit, I will spend the night downstairs of your shop, then you won't have to be afraid of anything at all," I. was talking to Joan, while giving her cloak to her.

"We have to hurry. Duke, we are taking advantage of you, but I found out only an hour ago myself that today that wise man from B. about whom I was telling you was coming," Ananda was explaining

himself to the duke by squeezing his hand. "Allow me to move to the captain's room and to let the guest have mine."

"But why? There are enough rooms in the house," the duke wanted to protest, but Ananda achieved his goal.

We said good-bye to the kind host and hurried to the pier.

Joan was walking between I. and Ananda, while I. was walking arm-in-arm with me. I grew so stupid from today's events that I turned into Lovushka – the catcher of the crows.

When we turned behind the corner of the last empty street, we saw Bracano who was going towards us and examining us impudently. His hellish physiognomy was showing an exceptional irritation.

When there were only few steps left to us, suddenly he bent down almost by half, got down from the roadway and tried to cross the street.

"Go," Ananda told us, "I will catch up with you soon."

He got to the Turk in a flash, and we could clearly hear every word of his metal voice.

"There's still time left for you to change your mind. Crawl home doubled up and don't dare to draw yourself up for three days. Reflect on everything what you've planned. Consider whom you've challenged to a duel. You still have time to redeem your fault. Sit silent, still and think. Come to yourself or blame yourself for all further consequences. Compassion addresses you for the last time, gives you the chance to mend your ways."

Ananda caught up with us. He let I. to accompany Joan, while himself embraced me tenderly and told me.

"Be strong, my dear. So many tests are raining upon you in one go. Aren't you frightened?" he asked me.

"Chava frightened me a month ago, but now I wasn't afraid of the Turk, and in general, I don't feel any fear when I'm next to you. I'm only begging Florentian to help me in the moment of danger – if such one would come, - to help my organism to calm down and be capable of working."

"Bravo, my friend," Ananda gave a laugh. "You reminded me of the captain's story how you surprised him with your courageous laughter in the most terrible moment of the storm. Now I'm also joyful because of your courage."

I didn't have time to answer him anything. Sir Vomi and Chava were already standing next to us in several minutes. They were coming from the pier towards us themselves.

After the first joy of meeting, we seated Chava, Joan and I. into the carriage. Sir Vomi's servant who was following him with two big suitcases put one of them into the carriage. The driver lashed the horses, and the carriage rattled off to the city quickly.

Sir Vomi seemed to be a little different than in B. for me now. He had a grey, light suit on and a white hat on his dark, curly hair. He was walking next to Ananda who was arm-in-arm with me and he had a stick of an especial form and made of an especial wood in his hand. He refused to go in the carriage. Sir Vomi told us that it would be a pleasure for him to go on foot with us, he only asked his servant whether it wouldn't be difficult for him to bring the suitcase. The servant smiled, put the suitcase like a toy on his shoulder and answered him that with such a burden even ten versts would mean nothing for him.

The duke met us even at the gates of the house. He was unusually confused, although he greeted sir Vomi very joyfully, with enthusiasm that was characteristic to him.

We let sir Vomi and Ananda go forward. I understood that the duke wanted to talk to me.

"Duke," I whispered to him, "we really need a melon for dinner. The Eastern wise man isn't the wise man without it," I was repeating the conditioner's words to him, because I believed in them like in the eternal truth.

"Oh my God! I've absolutely forgotten about it! I'm going to tell them to do it immediately," the duke began to bustle, "but we can correct this quickly, while these damn things are still placed in the room. I'm carrying the key in my pocket, so that nobody would drop in there. Ananda told me not to touch them, and since I'm afraid of not listening to him, I cannot throw them away."

We were standing by the stairs of the Ananda's entrance hall and we must have looked like conspirators, because we heard his merry laughter and the words addressed to us.

"Friends, what are you whispering about so secretly?"

"About the things left on the floor," I answered him.

Ananda's face became earnest, and he told us: "Wait", and he came back to sir Vomi.

About ten minutes flew past. The duke had time to take care of the melon and to come back during that time. Finally, both of our friends showed up on the stairs.

"Duke, don't worry. All of it is very unpleasant for you, but neither you nor your house is threatened by any danger. Here I see a spade rested against the wall. Take it, it will come in handy," sir Vomi told him.

The duke was surprised, but he took the spade without saying anything to him.

In several minutes we were already standing by the reddish bracelet and the narrow knife. Sir Vomi took the spade from the duke and raked up both things on it. He pulled a box similar to the snuffbox out of his pocket and bestrewed the bracelet and the knife with some powder from it.

"Lovushka, step aside and stand behind my back," sir Vomi told me, "and you, duke, stand behind Ananda."

When we fulfilled his assignment, he put the match to the spade and stepped aside.

The powder blazed up brightly, soon the crackling was heard, then the knife flew asunder into small pieces like a breaking glass, with some moan. The smoke and stench pervaded across the whole room. Ananda opened the door to the balcony till the end.

"Well, that's all. Now these things aren't dangerous for anybody anymore. The poor Bracano decided that he was a sorcerer and that he could control the secrets of the Middle Ages, in which the invincible powers were hiding. And as always, the secrets of evil clear away like the smoke when they encounter the real knowledge, because there's nothing more in them, except one or another power of hypnosis," sir Vomi was talking to us, while looking at us with his thoughtful, almost violet eyes.

"Lovushka, now you can take the bracelet, it is absolutely not dangerous anymore, but it is simply an exceptional beauty," he gave a laugh and continued with his unique humour, "you can even put it on the wonderful hand of Anna. You should only clean it, because it is sooty. Take this bottle and give a rub to the jewels."

He gave a little bottle to me, I soaked my handkerchief in it and cleaned the bracelet. I didn't have a chance to see such thing in my life anymore. Bracano must have robbed one of the Pharaoh pyramids of Egypt. I think that the crowns of the European kings didn't have neither similar jewels nor such frames.

I picked up the little rests of the knife with the spade, threw them out of the balcony to the garden and extended the bracelet to sir Vomi.

"No, my friend, this thing was meant to be handed through you. Take it to your room, wash your hands, and let's not delay our dear host with the dinner," sir Vomi told me tenderly, "and we'll see later what's the future destiny of the bracelet," he added and gave a smile.

I went to my room quickly, hid the bracelet with disgust, which gave suffering and troubles to many people, I washed myself and came back to the balcony where my friends were.

I got into the end of their conversation. Sir Vomi was talking to them.

"All so called powers of darkness are nothing else as ignorance. The people who are trying to reveal the powers of nature secretly, only by using the certain efforts of their will, achieve their goals. Usually, their psychic powers are developed better than the ones of other people. Since their goal is to satisfy their egoism and passions with the help of knowledge by evading the whole society, they unite into separate groups, they call themselves by pretentious names. They choose their companions who are certainly strong-willed and who possess the powers of hypnosis.

This is a very long story that cannot be told in a couple of words. It is coming from the ancient days, and there are lots of centres of its lie and hypocrisy, which are known as the names of all sorts of sorcerers, alchemists, prophets, clairvoyants and similar ones.

Without going into details, I will explain our case to you. Why did the dagger splinter and explode? Because the so called "charm" was done by using the efforts of one's will by commanding one rather to die, but to do it. In other words, if the man to whom this dagger was given met an obstacle by fulfilling the suggested command, he would kill everyone who would hinder him. Not only the internecine will was charmed in the bracelet, but also love. And the goal of this bracelet was to draw love of that person whose hand it would embellish to its master.

The knowledge which can win not with the efforts of will, but love, the part of which is known to me, too, helped me to defeat and destroy all efforts of vicious will in a flash, which the knowing had dedicated to those charms during long years of his life and considered his black magic to be the grandeur and the top of knowledge."

The servant came to invite us for dinner. Only the milk, bread with honey and fruit were the whole sir Vomi's dinner. I was waiting impatiently when he would start eating the melon, while being afraid of making a fool of myself before the duke. Finally, he ate a slice of it and looked at me roguishly with his eyes of immense kindness and love. I had my heart in my mouth. It seemed to me that he opened my skull and that he was reading all my thoughts there how I was afraid whether he would eat the melon.

"By the way, Ananda, you and I. stole Chava from me and sent her somewhere at your discretion. You left me alone to idle away my time without the secretary, at least you could have asked me what I was thinking about it," sir Vomi was laughing merrily, while his laughter reminded me of the jingling of well tuned bells. "And now I would like – not even asking your permission – to steal your young writer for a temporary job of my secretary."

"Oh, I would be so happy if I was worthy of such an honour!" I exclaimed, while being extremely fascinated.

"Sir Vomi, it is my fault, but this is only for one night, isn't it?" Ananda told him, "and if you need a secretary, I'm at your service."

Sir Vomi only nodded his head and told him.

"Chava will have to live there for much longer. You and I. will be very occupied, while the boy could be with me. Today I don't need anyone of you, my servant will go to bed in the entrance hall, and tomorrow, Lovushka, if you aren't afraid of becoming the secretary of such bad-tempered master, come to me at nine o'clock and you will be working until three or four o'clock."

Sir Vomi stood up, thanked the duke and added that he, I. and Ananda would visit his sick wife at five o'clock, and we could have a talk with the duke himself tomorrow in the evening.

I was like in the seventh heaven. Everything was ringing inside of me. We accompanied sir Vomi to his rooms and came back to our own ones. Ananda settled himself in the captain's room. I couldn't hold back, I twined myself round his neck and asked him.

"My dear Ananda, help me not to make a fool of myself. What are the duties of the secretary?"

Ananda put his arms round my shoulders, gave a laugh with his metal voice and teased me for a while.

"You see, if you weren't afraid of Chava, you could ask her about it."

"Why, I have made friends with her long time ago already! This is the story of my childhood."

Ananda gave even a merrier laugh.

"Wait a little," I told him after listening attentively to his laughter. "It is so strange. Now you laughed two times, and both times I felt that your thoughts weren't here, but they were somewhere very far away from here, that you were thinking about somebody sad, even aggressive. When sir Vomi was laughing, as though I could hear the jingling of silver bells. Back then I also knew that his thoughts were far away from here, but how shall I put it?" I paused by searching for the right words for my thought. "You see, sir Vomi's thought was some encompassing everything, living at the same time here and there, while yours was somewhere there, while here it was only skimming."

"Yes, Lovushka, you really love solving riddles," Ananda told me, while smiling and looking attentively at my eyes. "You made me sober instantly. I was really doubled in my thoughts. That what you noticed, that difference between my and sir Vomi's thoughts, wasn't my absent-mindedness, but my personal pain that forced its way through me because of one soul in whose loyalty and fortitude I believed so much, but I was wrong. Of course, I am to blame myself, because I saw only that what I wanted to see and not that what was in that person's heart. And I am doubly to blame that I accepted that with my feelings as a personal sadness, while sir Vomi is unable to feel anything personally anymore. His love forces its way through the man and raises him, makes his situation easier in all cases of life.

You made me sober... You also made me glad – both yesterday with Henry and today with Joan. You've suffered a lot, but therefore, you've made progress. And it doesn't matter how far a man would move forward, with what heavy suffering he would strive for knowledge, if he's noble, honourable and loyal till the end, if no compromises entice him – he will achieve his happiness to live easily and joyfully. Live easily, promise to yourself never to cry," Ananda embraced me, and we went to our rooms.

For the first after leaving Moscow, today I was left without I. I had a chance to reflect one more time upon everything what this man had given to me. I was full of gratitude and tender love to him. Now I was lacking that guardian and educator of mine so much. It was sad to me that now I was unable to do anything for him and that I wouldn't see him tomorrow in the morning when I woke up. Having decided that after my work I would ask sir Vomi for permission to run to I., I went to bed happy and joyful. However difficult this day was, but now I was really living "easily".

Next morning, exactly at nine o'clock, I was already knocking at the door of sir Vomi.

"You are very punctual, my friend," he met me himself by opening the door for me.

I was surprised that nothing had changed in the room, as though Ananda was still living here, who was always keeping an exemplary order. And now I couldn't see any traces of breakfast anywhere, any dust on the furniture – only several letters, some writing-book and still wet pen were lying on the writing-table. It seemed to me that sir Vomi was already working for a long time.

I compared this room to mine in my thoughts, and I was ashamed, because I remembered that I was in a hurry, I left a mess in my room and I swallowed the last piece of breakfast only in the doorway, while I was running.

I gave a word to myself to be worthy of my master in this respect, too. For the first time when I. wasn't next to me, I left my room in such order! I felt bad, unpleasant, I was nearly sickened.

Evidently, my face was reflecting all those moods, because sir Vomi gave a mischievous smile and asked me whether this perspective to work with him wasn't frightening me.

"How could you think about it, sir Vomi!" I even jumped up from the chair on which he had seated me. "Simply, as soon as I came in to your room, I saw one more of my features which enlarged my understanding how unworthy of that happiness to be your secretary I was. But why should I be afraid of you? Love is simply flowing and pouring from you. I still could be afraid of Ali, of his piercing through and burning eyes, but in the light of your eyes, one can only drown like in a bliss."

Sir Vomi laughed, while I could hear the jingling bells again.

"The winter, the carriage drawn by three horses... the tender jingling of the bells..." it escaped my lips unawares.

"What are you muttering there, my friend? One can thaw here because of the heat and the dust, while you are raving something about the winter?"

"You see, sir Vomi, I have already gone completely crazy from all those meetings and experiences which lately have befallen on me so abundantly. I never suspected that such people like Ali, Florentian, you, finally I. and Ananda could be living in the world. By the way, I didn't even think that such ladies like Anna and Nal could be living.

I used to hear what these people were talking to me, but in most cases, I couldn't understand them. To be precise, my thought wouldn't be in time to comprehend their words, but still, they would get into me and stay there until a certain time came.

I know that I'm not talking very coherently, but I want to express my thought that I get the most information from a man's laughter and intonation of his voice. Like a tuning-fork, they allow me to perceive the most secret thing within the man instantly by evading any logical connection of thinking.

Ananda is talking and laughing in the most fascinating voice. I doubt if one could find another such voice which isn't only beautiful and original, but which also has such a metal ringing. Once you hear it, you can never forget it anymore, but in my heart – in that place to which my entire perception of the world gets after evading my thoughts – I know that at any time, his voice may thunder austere, like the thunder in the sky, everything may fall down from it.

His eyes are like celestial bodies. When he gives a laugh, as though I can hear the clang of the swords; but when you are talking – the streamlets of the spring are babbling, one becomes so joyful, one wants to live! And when you laugh – it takes my breath away, as though I was running in the carriage drawn by three horses, accompanied with the magic jingling of the bells."

"Well, that's the secretary! If I didn't know your brother, I would say that someone has taught you perfectly to make compliments to me! Just you wait! On that day when we have to fight against Bracano – and that won't be so simple as it was with his bracelet and dagger," all of a sudden, after his merry laughter he continued very seriously already, "I hope that you will see me absolutely different, too. Then you can decide about my streamlets and my bells."

"I guess that if I was fated to see you austere and to hear an anger in your voice – that would still be a chime of the bells which only would invite the sinful ones to regain consciousness," I imagined sir Vomi to be different and I was talking him while being even grief-stricken.

Sir Vomi laughed again.

"Nobody knows when this will happen, and it is still too early to grieve over the jingling of my bells. You'd rather move your winter into our atmosphere, and let's start working."

And he started dictating the letters in English to me, while I had to write them in French. I knew that language perfectly, so there weren't any difficulties for me.

In the same way we succeeded with the Italian and Russian languages; but when we started with the German language, I started making mistakes in every sentence and I even began to sweat.

Sir Vomi gave a laugh.

"Well, Lovushka, did the winter make way for the heat of Constantinople? Never mind! Several days of practice, and everything will settle down."

He helped me in several places with pleasure, but I was firmly determined to ask I. to talk to me only in German and to overcome this language that had always been unpleasant to me.

I didn't even notice how the time flew by. We heard the knock at the door, and Ananda entered the room.

"Ah, hello, 'clang of the swords'," sir Vomi was joking by meeting him and extending both of his hands to him.

Ananda looked at him surprised, grew pale, gave a sigh and, having taken both of sir Vomi's hands, kissed them one after another.

"No need to be worried, Ananda," sir Vomi embraced him and he was talking to him tenderly, with the smile. "This boy was trying to explain to me that he could hear a clang of the swords in your laughter, while me, in his opinion, - was the charm of the spring and the winter, everything at the same time. He only was silent about Chava, but I still would find out what he could hear in Chava's and I.'s laughter.

Sir Vomi's voice was kind and tender.

I was standing, all blushed. All of a sudden, I felt tiredness and I answered him that I didn't remember Chava's laughter, but that I. was always laughing like a naughty child, and that only Anna's laughter seemed to be mysterious to me. I rattled off all of it quickly, with no relation at all and I ended unexpectedly.

"Sir Vomi, I should like to ask you a great favour. Please allow me to run to I. for at least an hour. Not only because I have missed him, but maybe he needs something, because he's been there for so long already, hasn't he?" I was begging sir Vomi by wishing to see I.

"No, my dear. Don't go there alone. We'll go together. To be precise, we'll be going in the duke's light carriage. Only before doing so, let's breakfast with the duke and Ananda. Go, wash yourself, change your clothes, so that we could leave right after the breakfast. And come straight to the dining-room where evidently today, we'll be competing seriously for the melon."

I left and I laughed, I jumped up with joy, and I took with me the unique humour of sir Vomi's eyes in my soul. It seemed strange to me that I had already been living for so long here and I didn't know that the duke had a horse, too.

After the breakfast where mostly I was catching the crows, sir Vomi stood up and told me to take the bracelet with me.

"Roll it in this headscarf," and he gave me a silk, dark blue headscarf, the edges of which were decorated with very beautiful, small, white flowers that looked like suns, and in the middle of it there was a white peacock, embroidered in silk and with an exceptionally smart, extended train. The big and bluish bells were surrounding it.

I fulfilled his assignment, put the rolled bracelet in my pocket and sat down next to sir Vomi in the light carriage, under the white canopy. Ananda left with his own business, but he promised to come straight to the shop in an hour.

It was silent in the shop to celebrate the occasion. Chava opened the door and explained to us that Joan was unable to get up from the bed because of the strong headache since yesterday's evening, and that I. spent a difficult night by her bed.

Sir Vomi nodded his head in silence, he told me and Chava to stay downstairs, while he went up the stairs to the patient.

Now Chava wasn't already frightening me with her blackness, although she seemed even blacker to me because of her light, peach-coloured dress.

"You've changed a lot, Lovushka. As though you had grown and graduated at least two universities during that time," she smiled and seated me on the arm-chair by showing all her excellent and small teeth.

"Ah, Chava! How I wish I hadn't graduated any of those universities of mine, which now I have to overcome. I'm living such a wonderful life. I'm so fascinated with those who are next to me now. On the one hand, I'm living with a hope to meet Florentian again, while on the other hand – I'm ready to burst into tears from a single thought that the time will come, and I'll have to part with everybody who can tolerate my being next to them so pitifully. I have never seen neither tiredness nor irritation in them, although I always felt how they surpassed me."

“Lovushka, everybody is walking his own path by starting from the lowest stages. While living his day, man himself is carrying that confusion within him, which then encircles him without fail. And everybody is thinking that life sent him those complications which now emerged before him,” Chava was talking to me silently. “It is painful for you that you will have to part with somebody sometime, but everybody is fated to be born and also to die inevitably, isn’t he? And that isn’t the people’s drama, but that they are unable to prepare for that parting with their loved ones in any way. If a mother could understand instantly that her children are only the jewels given to her to protect – to protect them temporarily – then she, by seeing the gift of God in them, which she will have to return improved and polished, could search not for herself within them, but for that higher, the only power of love that is creating everything in the entire universe. And by uniting with them in that love, she would understand that life doesn’t end with death, that the child leaving his life simply leaves his form of the earth which isn’t needed anymore and that he’s going to another, much more perfect life.

The same is with you. You have the task to help your brother, and only this main goal is shining before you – so it isn’t important in which forms, in what kind of the earth you will be living up to that time when you acquire an absolute self-control and when you expand your consciousness so much that you could understand people’s thoughts without any words, calm down their outbursts and spiritualize their creative powers. Only when you reach such level, you can stand up on the same step next to your brother and to become his assistant.”

“Chava, now I understand much more which earlier seemed to be only the delirium of my soul to me, but I still don’t understand so much and I’m so afraid to ask questions.”

“Lovushka, it is the best not to ask any questions. The people who are next to you are so estimable that they themselves will tell you everything what you need to know and they won’t encourage you to those tests for which you still don’t have enough strength.”

“I don’t know, Chava, maybe you are right, but Henry, poor Henry has failed.”

“No, not Henry was to blame. Henry forced his company upon Ananda himself. He begged him successfully to take him here, and sir Vomi was telling Ananda that he couldn’t satisfy this request; while Ananda believed not in sir Vomi’s wisdom, but he submitted to the youth’s entreaties and vows because of his divine kindness – and now he took Henry’s blow and responsibility for this treason upon himself.”

“Oh, Chava, I thank you a thousand times for these words. I will never ask anything from my friends. By the way, I’m such a know-nothing that it is easier for me to stay where I am, not trying to poke my nose anywhere.”

“The higher and more modest a man is, the better he can understand the highness of another man and he can walk his way faster. Here are our friends,” Chava told me and stood up to meet sir Vomi and I.

I was surprised how tired I. seemed to be to me.

“Oh, Lolion, I’m ready to protect your sleep for a year, only let’s go to have a sleep as soon as possible,” I rushed at my friend, being confused of such appearance of his.

He was always so young and fresh, but now it seemed as though he had lived twenty years during one night.

“Don’t worry, Lovushka. Chava will give coffee for us soon, and I will become cheerful and strong again. Simply I had to sit down in one position for a long time, because I had to hold compresses and therefore, I’m tired a little.

Having told him all my regret for not being next to him and helping him, I seated him into my convenient place in the corner, I gave him the coffee myself and whispered him.

“You can sleep with your eyes opened, while you are sitting, can’t you? I will cover you, and nobody will see you. Have a sleep at least for an hour. I won’t even move from my place.”

I’s laughter was so infectious that even sir Vomi inquired whether he didn’t want to take the privilege to the laughter of the jingling of the bells from him. And soon he told him the whole our conversation about this subject.

In the meanwhile, Ananda and Anna entered the room.

When she took off her usual black cloak, I could admire her stunning beauty again. Every time when I used to see her, she seemed always more beautiful to me: she was dressed in white, she was some exciting, renewed, as though purified – it even took my breath away because of this beauty, these bottomless eyes, all those forms and harmony of her body lines.

“Indeed, the real harp of God,” – I thought when I remembered her playing, but a strange Anna’s behaviour interrupted my thoughts. It was so strange that it didn’t go with her royal beauty at all.

Anna fell on her knees before sir Vomi instantly, she pressed herself to his hands and burst into bitter tears, while talking something to him between her wails and sliding down to his feet.

My heart was beating. I was so amazed that I was unable even to make a move. I was expecting her joy and happy laughter, I was expecting that she would be calm and happy next to this love radiating man who was making everybody happy and calm around himself.

“Stand up, Anna,” I heard sir Vomi’s voice. “Now you don’t have another choice anymore. You have to go till the end. I warned you one more time a year ago. I gave you a specific task. You lingered and delayed. So why are you crying now? Because you’ve made all of us leave everything and come here to save your family which has sunk into darkness? But you could have done everything yourself a long time ago, without any stress if you had listened and fulfilled what Ananda and I had told you to.”

Sir Vomi’s voice was unusual. I could hear the hardness of metal in it, which was always heard in Ananda’s voice. He was standing next to I., and both of them surprised me. Their faces were calm, bright and tender, but sir Vomi’s face was pale and hard like a marble, while his eyes were pouring beams like the biggest amethysts.

If earlier I was thinking that nothing could be more beautiful than Anna, now I saw such a beauty that didn’t belong to the earth anymore. That was the God who descended from another planet and not that sir Vomi with whom I was working this morning.

“Now keep walking without any tears and regrets. They are only melting the cement that is connecting that bridge of love which Ananda and his uncle have built from their hearts. With joy, only with joy you can start rebuilding that part of the bridge which you have destroyed yourself with your disobedience and lingering. The voice of compassion doesn’t repeat two times. Your journey to India is out of the question now, but it depends only on you whether a year or a moment could bring you nearer to that dream. You were waiting for some special tests without necessity. Your most ordinary days were slipping by, and you didn’t see the main task in them – love and its primary sign: living your daily routine

easily. You could have lived your life with the simplest matters, you could have put the greatest generosity and honour, peace and unselfishness in them. One man's love to another isn't hidden in his dreams or vows, in ideals or fantasies; man who's walking along the path of love has to become the link of union with all people surrounding him in his most common daily matters. Leave your dreams about higher life. Work here, in your daily routine and... always remember the broken vow of your voluntary obedience."

With these words, he helped Anna to stand up and waved me to go up to him. I understood everything in a flash – I already started foreseeing lots of things without any preliminary thoughts lately – and gave him the blue headscarf with the bracelet.

As soon as sir Vomi took Anna's hand with which she had covered her face and put Bracano's bracelet on it, she gave a shout, as though she had been injured.

"Don't be afraid, my baby," I heard sir Vomi's voice again. "Now this bracelet isn't the symbol of marriage anymore. Nothing bad was left in it, it's only a wonderful work of art. It isn't charmed and it won't get you into the traps of love of the villain. Only you have woven your bond with the villain due to your lingering, doubts and hesitations. He will have either to change or to die, because he has sunk into such dirt and horror from his love to you where no single living being is able to survive anymore. Many centuries may pass until you meet him again under such conditions that you could help him with your firm faithfulness, decisive love and joy, and you could have enough strength to undo this dismal knot which you have tied with him so carelessly now.

Go home, Ananda will accompany you. And think not about yourself and your pain, but about Ananda's pain who has warranted for you and think about your family's pain which has stuck into the evil. Be calm and blessed. Wait for me until we come to your home on one pleasant evening for a very difficult fight against the evil. Develop your strength every day and therefore, learn to act, and not to wait; to create, and not to encourage yourself constantly. That person who thinks about his friend and brother, that one forgets about himself," he wiped away her tears with that wonderful blue headscarf with the peacock and gave it to her.

Sir Vomi's voice was soft again, it was penetrating into her heart, as though the light was flowing from his face and from his entire figure.

Anna bowed low to him, he embraced her and pressed her to himself. And I saw how she all trembled in his hands. When she turned her face to us again, as though she had taken a part of his radiance for herself.

"Don't forget to be at the duchess' at five o'clock," I whispered to Ananda when he was leaving.

Sir Vomi and I. were also getting ready to leave by leaving the patient to me and Chava.

"Always stay by the patient. If any uninvited guests come to Chava – she will handle them, while you, whatever you hear downstairs, protect the patient, don't leave her and don't allow anybody to visit her. If Chava needs any help, we'll send it to her. Can I trust you?" sir Vomi was asking me by looking at my eyes, as though by drilling a hole through my skull.

"And if anybody tries to kill Chava? Should I still sit down and not help her?" I asked him terror-struck by remembering Joan and the duke.

All three of them laughed so merrily that I understood how foolishly and pitifully I looked to them.

“Don’t worry. It isn’t so easy to kill a man, but here’s the bottle for you. If the noise becomes really big, throw it down, it will break in pieces and frighten the uninvited guests.”

Sir Vomi put his hand on my head, and the wave of happiness and power ran through me. He gave the bottle to me, left me and Chava, and got into the light carriage next to I.

I was rolling the bottle in my hand. I was unable to perceive anything completely, I only understood that Anna, just like Henry, didn’t fulfil something and caused pain to Ananda. Anna who seemed such a perfection to me! Anna whom I hardly considered to be earthly!

“Oh, my God!” I thought, “could Nal, too, to whom my brother sacrificed everything, gave his life to her – could Nal, too, be unfaithful to him, break her oath and cause pain to him?”

“Why are you moaning so much, Lovushka?” I heard the tender voice of Chava.

“Was I moaning? Well then, I seemed to see something, because I’m Lovushka – the catcher of the crows, right? So I’m catching the crows instead of sitting next to Joan. Please take me to her. I must think only about her and to protect you only with this bottle. It must be some stench here.”

Chava gave a laugh and told me that apparently, I would have a chance to make sure of that, and we went up the stairs.

Having entered Joan’s room, I didn’t notice the patient instantly. Everything was rearranged here; Joan’s bed was standing in an absolutely different place, behind the partition, in the end of the room, and it was separated with a very beautiful, white curtain.

“Chava, did you rearrange this room so beyond recognition?” I asked her.

“I confess that I would like to say that I did so very much, but I. himself did everything here with his own hands, even this excellent curtain. Me and the nurse were only a couple of his assistants. I was examining this curtain for a long time, but I was unable to understand in any way what it was made of. It is thin like a paper, soft like a silk and mat like a suede – well, understand it if you can. I wanted to ask I. where he found this material very much, but I didn’t dare to.”

I went up to the curtain and recognized that material instantly. My brother’s robe was made of it, which Ali sent him before the feast.

“Undoubtedly, Ali sent it to him,” I answered her with dignity by being proud of my knowledge.

“Ali?” Chava gave a shout, surprised. “Was it really Ali? Why do you think so? Indeed, before our journey here, a man visited sir Vomi with a parcel from Ali, but I don’t think that the curtain was from there. I. left somewhere early in the morning, before dawn, and then I saw this curtain.”

“I can hear the rumble,” Chava interrupted our conversation. “Here it is, the carriage has already stopped by the shop,” she continued. “The bell began to ring! Oh my God, it is a knock! One may also wake up the dead by doing so,” the black-skinned girl was talking to me merrily, while going downstairs. She told me to close the door of Joan’s bedroom.

When I was left alone, I took a good look at Joan. Her little face was charming, exactly as I saw it for the first time in the steamer, in the corner of the fourth class deck, between the boxes. Evidently, she had a temperature, because her sleep seemed to be difficult.

It was relatively quiet downstairs, I could hear the conversation, but I was unable to distinguish the words.

"Can you understand what she's telling you?" all of a sudden, I heard the nasal, irritating, raised voice and I recognized the youngest, dearest son of Stroganoffa from it.

"I don't need you, I need your mistress. Who knows what a fantasy could have come to her mind! The mistress could have hired you for the reasons of her own that somebody would have pleasure to see such a lure once again and that one or more hats would be sold, but we don't need any hats. You won't understand our business. Call the mistress immediately," the brazen-faced youth was shouting.

I was imagining his curly head covered with the fez, his handsome and capricious face, his disdainful look, although his appearance was repulsive anyway.

While I was listening to what was going on downstairs, I was always trying to decide when I had to meddle with my chemical obstruction which, as I could understand, was hidden in this bottle.

I didn't understand Chava's words, who evidently was standing with her back turned to the stairs, but her voice was calm, joyful and it was enraging the youth pretty much.

Now another, womanly voice began to speak; it had a risen tone instantly. I didn't recognize the voice, but soon I understood that it was Stroganoffa.

"My friend gave several of his jewels to your mistress to protect. He wants to receive his things back without fail today, with our help. He was very ill during these days and he was unable to ask us to do it earlier. Today is the last day; the things must be given back to him instantly. Here's the letter for your mistress, but only I will give it to her myself, straight into her hands. Go and ask her to come. Don't force me to go upstairs, because it will really be bad for you because of this," the woman was talking to Chava.

"Why should we talk to her at all? Go away, step aside!" the son was screaming.

"Don't you dare to touch me with your dirty hands, because then it will really be bad for you," I heard such strong, calm and imperious voice of Chava that I even opened my mouth.

Something fell down in the shop, Stroganoffa uttered a shriek. I decided that it was time for me to take action, I rushed at the door, opened it and I already swung my arm with the bottle when suddenly, the silence fell downstairs.

I leant over the rails and I saw the figure wrapped himself in a black cloak, standing in the door of the shop. I was unable to discern the man in the twilight, but as soon as I heard the voice, I recognized I.

"Sit down, young man, and be silent if you are ill-bred and if you don't know how the youth of your age should behave in other people's home, besides it's the home of the single, working woman. Later you will apologize to miss Chava for your rude behaviour, and now sit down like a dumb beast, because you are exactly the one."

Oh, how austere I. was looking at him, while his voice was thundering.

"Why and how did you come here, madam Stroganoffa?" he addressed the woman who was hiding behind her son's back. "Your husband, Anna and Ananda forbade you categorically to visit this place. Why have you decided not to obey them?" I. was asking her.

"What is wrong with you, doctor I.? I hardly know you. One can say that you are the first met passer-by to me, and suddenly, you dare to ask me some questions. I'm not a little girl for you! Please be so

kind and ask Joan to come. If she doesn't want to go downstairs immediately, I will know that she has stolen my friend's especial, valuable things. I will have to address the police for help."

I. gave a laugh.

"What do you value more: the bracelet or the knife which you gave to Joan, so that she could stab me to death? Man's life doesn't have any value for you if it doesn't interest you personally; that's why I don't ask you how much you value the lives of poor Joan, Lovushka, the duke or mine. I'm asking you: what are you going to search for with the police, for the knife or for the bracelet?"

Stroganoffa tumbled onto the arm-chair heavily. Her beautiful face turned pale so much that her dark skin even got covered with the white coating.

"I won't tolerate your impudence," she whispered. "You can be absolutely certain that I won't leave from here without the things. Therefore, don't waste the time and bring them here," Stroganoffa began to roar like a wounded tigress, always raising her voice.

"You will leave not only without the things which fortunately, don't belong to you, although you don't understand it, but you will also put that amulet on the table, which Ananda gave to Anna and which you stole an hour ago."

"Your villainy..." Stroganoffa didn't finish the sentence.

I.'s eyes flashed like two topazes, he extended his hand towards her and told her.

"You can take a look at your sissy. If you don't want to look like him, bite your tongue and keep your manners within the limits of decency."

I looked at the sissy. He looked like a mad dog. An unusual anger was in his eyes, his tongue was hanging from his mouth involuntary, and the saliva was stretching on his dazzling white waistcoat. His fez slipped down on his forehead; he was so horrible that I couldn't look at him.

When his mother saw such son of her, she didn't dash to help him and she didn't tell him a single kind word; she was thinking only about herself. Having pulled out the amulet from her handbag, she put it on the table and told I.

"Take your amulet. Just think what a treasure! And don't you dare to push me into such a hideous state like my son. Give me the bracelet, and we are leaving."

An excellent golden medallion was lying on the table, and there was a pansy made of amethysts stamped on its cover. I recognized instantly that the ring which the captain gave to me was also made in the same way.

"The bracelet is in your own home now. It was given to that person to whom it belonged," I. answered her.

"This is the most outrageous lie," Stroganoffa gave a shout. "That person to whom it belonged demands to return it immediately. Do you understand that I cannot leave without it? I gave my word to Bracano to bring his jewel to him instantly."

"You have given many words and oaths during your life. You have taken an oath at the altar to love your husband – count how many times you have broken your fidelity. Three years ago, you promised Anna not to persecute her anymore and not to bother her with your demands to marry Bracano.

Now you are afraid of breaking your word given to Bracano only because he has threatened you and your son with death. Yes? Take a look at yourself. Whose pearls are on your neck? Whose rings are embellishing your hands? Whose dress are you wearing? Where did you get this handbag from? Miserable woman! Come to your senses, throw those things off you and you'll understand at least a part of that horror which you have pushed yourself into."

I.'s look forced Stroganoffa to put her handbag on the table, but I. told Chava to take the medallion away from the table instantly, so that it wouldn't touch Stroganoffa's handbag anymore, from which it was taken out. Stroganoffa took the pearls, earrings, rings and bracelets slowly and lazily off her, as though being drowsy. According to the Eastern fashion, tens of the bracelets were clattering on her hands.

While this pile of gold and jewels was growing, the woman became more lively. Finally, as though having overcome some final obstacle, she pulled a thin, platinum chain out from her corsage, on which a huge, black pearl and the same huge, reddish brilliant were hanging. Having put them on the table, she gave a deep sigh and looked round, surprised.

"What does it mean, doctor I.? Was I feeling unwell?" she asked him.

"Oh, yes. You were feeling very unwell, but now you feel better already. You are already breathing easier, aren't you?" I. answered her.

"I'm breathing easier and I don't feel so restrained anymore, but why all my things are lying on the table?" she asked I. and she was already extending her hand, wishing to put everything on herself again, but I. stopped her.

"Wait a little, recover completely. Drink some coffee," and he extended a cup of coffee to her, but I noticed that he had time to fuse a part of Ali's pill in it.

Chava went upstairs to me and took sir Vomi's bottle from me. I was already prepared to smell a terrible stench and I was very surprised when I saw that Chava picked up all Stroganoffa's things on the tray and opened the bottle. As it turned out the same yellow powder was in it, with which sir Vomi sprinkled the knife and the bracelet in the duke's house.

I. sprinkled Stoganoffa's jewels with the powder, set them on fire and told me.

"Give Joan to drink from the glass which is there and change her compress."

I fulfilled his instruction quickly. Joan woke up and drank the drink. She didn't even recognize me. She turned over on another side and fell asleep again.

When I came back to my observation post, the powder was already finishing to burn. The whole room was full of smoke and stench; the things on the tray were bursting, as if somebody was shooting from a small revolver; all of a sudden, something exploded with a huge power, and Stroganoffa slipped off a shriek of horror.

"Now you don't need to be afraid of anything," I. told her. "It was terrible to wear these things. Now they aren't harmful anymore. Lovushka, you are the specialist of jewel purification. Here's the liquid and the handkerchief for you," he waved to me by pointing at the jewels.

In a flash – faster than the clumsy sailor – I got next to I. and went down to work. Stroganoffa's jewels looked so sadly! The wonderful, black pearl was scattered into small pieces like a glass, a split black lump of coal was lying instead of the reddish brilliant. Only about ten great things were left from all that pile.

"Take a look," I. said to Stroganoffa. "It turns out that the things which you considered to be golden were only copper and silver. The gilding moulted, and you can make sure yourself what they are worthy of. All jewels, except the ones that were left intact, were only the perfectly polished rock crystals, while you were wearing those false things by taking them as fantastic values."

Stroganoffa was nodding her head in silence.

"My husband gave me all those things which were left intact, while Bracano gave me all that junk by persuading me that the value of these things was so big that one could buy the whole duchy for them," she was moaning and talking with vexation, in an irritable tone.

"Perhaps, these things were valuable for Bracano, but now you won't understand what you consider to be a value, but soon you'll find out. You can put the rings and the bracelets that were left intact without any fear. There is much rubbish in your handbag, too, so throw it out as well."

Stroganoffa put the jewels on, opened the handbag and gave a shout. The letter from Bracano which she had to give to Joan was charred and it fell to pieces.

Having seen the letter that had turned into ashes, Stroganoffa's son mumbled and started moving on the chair.

"Shut up, clean the saliva, recover the human appearance and bring your mother home," I. addressed him in a commanding and austere way. "Don't you dare to disobey this order of mine and remember this moment, but not your fear against Bracano. You are still young and you can correct everything what you have done because of your naivety. I believe that you can still become an honest man, and not a nobody and a villain.

Remember this hour, your appearance here and feel a wish to break away from the charlatan's arms, who has entangled you and your mother in the bonds of hypnosis," I. was talking to him by looking at the miserable youth.

After some time, the youth and his mother left, I helped Chava to put that rubbish of the false jewels in order, I washed myself and came back to I. All of us went upstairs to Joan. She was still sleeping. She was breathing calmly, I. bent down to her and told us that the fever subsided.

He didn't tell us anything about all those events, and I wasn't asking him anything. It was interesting to me where Joan's children were, because it was silent in their room, too.

"Chava, Lovushka will stay by Joan, and we will go to Anna who has given shelter to Joan's children, and we'll bring them here. By the way, Lovushka, I wanted to tell you still in the day-time that the captain was back already. I've seen him already. He's running about with his business, but he promised me to come here at eight o'clock. I'm sure that he will keep his word, and you can rejoice at meeting our nice friend. I don't put a veto upon your tongue, Lovushka. On the contrary, you will do me a great service if you tell the captain everything what you have experienced during that time. He's such a nice man, God knows how he was rushing in order to come to Constantinople one day earlier and to spend it with us. According to the timetable, his steamer will be standing here for five days. Both of you wait for me. You, my poor boy, haven't eaten anything for a long time, but therefore, then we would go to the confectioner's shop, and I personally would order the most excellent "Bagdad" for you."

"My dear Lolion, I'm ready not to eat and to drink for two more days, only that I shouldn't see your and Ananda's sadness and such tiredness. I would give everything, only that it would be easier for you," I was hanging on my dear friend's neck and whispering to him by hardly holding back my tears.

“Well, that’s the bold-spirit! Have you seen this? He’s the grown-up man – and he’s almost crying!” suddenly, I heard Chava’s voice next to me. “Would you be so kind as to save your bold-spirit – merry soul’s reputation as soon as possible, because otherwise, you will turn my eyes into the streams of tears, too.”

She was laughing, but I heard not a bitterness, but something that surprised me especially and what I was unable even to describe in that laughter.

I looked at her amazed and told her.

“If sir Vomi asks me one more time how Chava is laughing, then I will answer him that not the crystal is heard in her laughter, but the sound of the split vase made of china.”

“Oh Lord, mister tracker, I beg you, please don’t name my laughter in such a horrible name,” Chava was protesting, “you better answer him that the laughter of black-skinned people is disharmonious for your ear.”

“I cannot tell him like this, because my great friend Florentian once explained to me that the blood of all people was red, while I. has taught me to understand what was love for man. Our rights to life and work make both of us equal. How can I tell that I’m unable to unite with you in harmony? I can overhear the pain of your heart, keep silent and not tell anybody about it, but I’m unable to take myself out from that atmosphere in which your heart is complaining to me, while you are laughing.”

Chava made a helpless gesture with her hands and turned towards I.

“Have pity on me, I. This youth cuts without any knife.”

I. gave a joyful laugh, tapped on my shoulder and told Chava.

“Quickly, please hurry, I want to come back here until nine o’clock in the evening. I’m very glad and I can only add that the truth is speaking in the lips of babies.”

Chava put on the wrap, and both of them left. I locked up the door and I was left alone in the shop.

A strange flow of thoughts brought me thinking about the curtain of Joan’s bedroom. It began to seem to me that that material was meant for Anna, that sir Vomi was taking it for her and that he himself was going here because of something very important and significant in Anna’s life. His words about India, about the fact that she didn’t have any hope left to go there – everything was telling me that Anna’s life had to change in essence, but that she did something wrong herself and disappointed not only herself and Ananda, his uncle, but also sir Vomi and Ali.

“If it is so difficult to keep that height even to such advanced people like Anna, then how should such a boy like myself struggle through that path of life?” it was flashing through my mind. “And what could have broken Chava’s heart? Why isn’t she fully satisfied with her life, although she’s living with sir Vomi and she associates with him directly,” I kept thinking.

Those several hours which I spent working with sir Vomi gave me so much happiness and joy. How could one live next to him and carry at least the smallest pain in one’s heart? I was unable to understand that in any way.

I went upstairs to Joan, made sure that everything was in order here, then I went downstairs again and I started waiting for the captain by walking slowly from one corner to another one.

Soon the bell rang, and I got into the arms of my friend who had the big bouquet of sweet-scented roses for Joan.

We poured one another with questions. We were surprised how we had changed – and then we were already sitting on the sofa in the corner, and I was telling the captain about all the events of the last days.

While I was talking to the captain, sometimes he used to jump up like the tiger; sometimes he only used to look at me more tenderly than my mother; but there were moments which he was unable to perceive at all.

When I reached Anna's tears in my story, he stopped me, and I had to repeat all sir Vomi's words to him several times. Every time when I used to mention the name of Bracano, he was squeezing his fists furiously.

In the end I told him about Chava, about her letter and the present for me, I also didn't forget to mention her laughter.

The captain was laughing. He told me that he was never so joyful in his life.

"The split vase of the black-skinned! Wonderful! Who else would think of it than you?"

"Well, and who else could think and give me such ring than you?" I asked him by thanking him from the bottom of my heart. "She's back! Please don't betray me to Chava. Be gentleman and don't forget that she doesn't like her blackness very much."

"Don't worry, Lovushka. I will be as kind as the ointment for her wound."

I even doubled up with laughter and I met the children, Chava and I., laughing.

Having lingered in the shop for a while, we left to the confectioner's shop. We tried to appease our hunger there as soon as possible and soon we were home.

The captain settled in his room again, and the duke offered a room for Ananda downstairs.

This is how my first day of secretaryship ended. I went to bed with a thought about what kind of surprises tomorrow would prepare for all of us.

Chapter 23

Evening at Stroganoffs' and unmasking of Bracano

Other two days flew past like a happy dream for me. Working with sir Vomi; the letters which I was writing to the strange people, while he was dictating them to me, used to shake me so much that I could hardly hold back my tears and the trembling of my hands. There was so much love and comfort in those letters! The letter written to one mother who had lost her grown-up son made an exceptional impression on me. I couldn't listen calmly to that tenderness, respect to her relentless pain and at the same time to the great wisdom that was conveyed with every sir Vomi's word; the tears were flowing down my cheeks themselves.

How much he needed to suffer himself in order to understand other people's pain. He had to wade across the whole abyss of earthly suffering in order to be able to perceive and comfort the man drowning in his grief so well.

Sir Vomi invited me to drop in at his room in the evening of the third day. Having come to his room, I found I. and Ananda here. Sir Vomi explained to me that now they were going to visit the duchess and if I wanted I could go with them.

If sir Vomi had been getting ready to walk not through ten rooms, but through ten deserts, then I would have blessed every moment spent with him, too.

"I invited you and I'm also waiting for the captain to come. Both of you have seen only the ruins left from the old duchess body and spirit. I don't say that now one could compare her to a blossoming apple-tree," he smiled a little, "but I think that it will be a good lesson for both of you to see how sometimes a man could return to life.

The duchess isn't waiting for us, we will take her by surprise, without any embellishments with which man surrounds himself when he's preparing for a dreamt meeting, even if he's spiritually matured and truth-loving. A meeting – if a man was preparing for it – is nearly always covered with hypocrisy. The most valuable people's meetings are unexpected ones.

Let's go. You and the captain will stay in the room next to the duchess bedroom. When the time comes, if needed, I will invite you."

We left, I dropped in at the captain on my way, and in several minutes we were already standing in the room next to the duchess bedroom. It was dark here, but the lamps were shining brightly in the duchess room, and we could see and hear everything well.

The duchess was sitting in the armchair. Her face was so changed after that time when I saw her last time that I wouldn't have recognized her. Now neither cruelty nor imperiousness could be seen in her face.

The duke was sitting next to her with the book in his hands. Evidently, he was going to read for her.

Having heard our steps, he asked us: "Who is here?", but having recognized sir Vomi, he brightened up and went to meet us quickly. Having seen who came, the duchess tried to stand up, but sir

Vomi forbade it for her. He sat down in the duke's place, I. and Ananda – at the table, while the duke was standing behind his wife's back. He was radiating like a chandelier.

"I didn't expect to see you today, sir Vomi, although I wished to see you. I didn't even dare to ask you to visit me one more time, but now you are here, and I'm so confused that I forgot about everything what I wanted to ask you," the duchess was talking to sir Vomi.

Even her voice changed. Neither rudeness nor screech were left in it, which were so unpleasant before.

"You don't need to ask me for anything, duchess. That's me who came to thank you for the poor children for whom you made presents. I didn't tell you anything about them, I only reminded you that you had caused pain to their mother in the steamer, while you not only understood your mistake, but you also corrected it creatively by allocating ten thousand roubles for every child. Your present is valuable namely because nobody was asking for it from you, but you provided such help for the poor children yourself. If you had asked for an advice from ten wise men, even then you couldn't have acted more wisely and correctly."

"Oh, sir Vomi, your assistants have given so much to me not only in the physical sense during this entire illness of mine. From their conversations with me, which were so patient, sincere and wise, I understood the whole horror in which I was living my entire life. And now you are talking about gratitude to me when I'm thankful to them and you more than my life itself – I simply cannot bear it."

The duchess covered her face with your feeble, sinewy, disfigured hands and began to weep loudly.

"Duchess, don't cry. Only that is irremediable what man didn't understand until his very death and left this earth like this. Hear me out. If you understood that you have caused pain to Joan, then invite that nice, but very unfortunate woman to your house and ask her for forgiveness. Kindness of man's heart – that's all what he must tie in his work every day. And if it seems to you that you are old and sickly already, that your time to work has already flown past – all of that is only a superstition. Man may be doomed to be without hands and legs, or not to move, but anyway, he can not only work, but inspire the masses with creation of his love and thoughts.

The highest work form of wisdom that I know is carrying the inspiration and energy to the world only by using the power of its thoughts, staying absolutely motionless visually, but the thought of this sluggish wisdom forms an enormous part of the movement of the universe. And it is important for every man – including you, too – to live not disconnecting himself from that eternal movement, to live unstoppably by going forward in it all the time, - inseparably, like the sun and its beams are inseparable.

Your daily work is very simple. Delight everybody who visits you. If he comes alone – give him all your heart's love, so that when he leaves, he would know that now he has a friend. If he comes sad – light up his life with your joy. If he comes weak – help him to perceive the new meaning of life that has opened up for you. Then your life will become a blessing for people.

Hide your tears, my friend. Try to reflect on that what I'm going to tell you calmly, without any offence, shame and irritation. I'm not preaching sermons for you, I'm not teaching a conditional code of moral of the earth to you, but I want to help you to step into the new stage of your life where you could make yourself free from all those passions in which you have spent your life and from which you are suffering mostly now.

Now you turn away from the views that rise in your memory with disgust. Only once you believed in an immaculate man's nobleness and honour during your entire life – in your husband's nobleness and honour, who's sitting here. Now I won't go deep into details whether it was really so that you used to meet only dishonourable people, or you were looking at people and life, at their honour and dignity like this yourself, but even in this single case – did you believe in man completely and till the end? Haven't you hidden anything from him? Does he know the real truth, for example about your money business? Believe me, like that stingy knight, you are afraid of revealing the secret of your real idolized wealth to anybody, although it seems to you that you have already overcome your greediness and stinginess.

Why are you still keeping the lie to yourself? Until you can't understand once and for all that there isn't only the earthly life that is separated and closed from the atmosphere of the whole universe, but that there's only the only life which is an indivisible essence of the spirit and the matter, that there isn't a separate, single, working earth, but that there's only the joint circle of the working and alive heaven, and of working and alive earth, which unites with the help of common principles for the earth and for the heaven, which don't tolerate any lie and hypocrisy, which don't submit to people's wants and will, but which have an effect on the whole life of the universe accurately and naturally – you won't be able to find joy in your life.

It doesn't matter how long you would still be living, the fear will persecute you inevitably if you are thinking about your every day only as about the moment of the single and separate earthly life.

If we cross out our understanding of this life's connection to the cause and effect that comes from ages from our lives – then this entire earthly life will be equal to zero. It is impossible for man to live creatively if there's one or another mixture of passions and wants in his life, if there isn't the knowing that the light is burning in every man of the whole mankind of the universe. The one who is living without perceiving this light within himself, that one is leaning against the vicious will which thinks that she is able to take possession of the whole world and to force it to serve to her passions and pleasures."

When sir Vomi's voice fell silent, the duchess still kept sitting with her face covered with her hands.

"Sir Vomi, how could you find out everything about me, as though I had told you about my life myself?" we heard the duchess' voice.

What a voice that was! As though she had needed some unimaginable efforts for every word to utter. It seemed that the tongs were pressing her heart, and that she was talking by overcoming the pain.

"Duchess, it doesn't matter how I found out about your secrets. It doesn't even matter that I brought the message to you, only the message itself is important, which has reached you, and how you accepted it. It is said in the East: "If there's need – even an ant will be the messenger", sir Vomi answered her. "It is late already, and you have got tired. Take the medicine which I will give to you, sit for a while with your dear husband and reflect on everything what I have just told you. We will still be staying in Constantinople for a while, and I will come to talk to you one more time. Only remember that a regret, just like any other living with the past, doesn't have any sense, because you are unable to put any creation of your heart from it anymore.

Life – that is living "now". That isn't "tomorrow" or "yesterday". The first isn't yet known, while the second doesn't exist anymore. Try to learn to live with that flying "now", and not with the dreams about tomorrow which you don't know."

Sir Vomi stood up, said kind good-bye to them and left through our room. We and the captain joined him and all of us went to his room.

Here we also didn't linger for a long time. Sir Vomi told me and the captain to change our clothes quickly and explained to us that we would visit Stroganoffs immediately. He asked us whether we still were firmly determined to help him to unmask Bracano and to liberate the poor Stroganoff's family members from his hypnosis. We confirmed that we remained loyal to our given words and told him undoubtedly that we would devote ourselves to his disposal completely.

"My friends," sir Vomi told us gently, "such stages of man's spiritual growth exist where the certain, rough earthly actions are impossible for him because of his high spirituality; in the same way, the certain spiritually high actions when the spiritual vibrations are much higher than the usual, earthly ones are inaccessible for rather rough people.

Today, exactly the same situation will occur when neither of us can touch the details of other people's clothes without risking to deliver a very strong blow to them by touching them with our much higher vibrations, with such ones which their bodies would be unable to withstand. They might fall ill or die from our touches.

And therefore, you will have to take action instead of us by saving those people. You will have to be very vigilant, very concentrated. You will have not to be afraid of anything, only listen what I will tell you or what I and Ananda will give you silently. You will have to act without any delay, as soon as you get an order, to fulfil it accurately and to think only about what you will be doing in that moment.

Now, please go. The horses are harnessed already. Come back in twenty minutes."

We hurried away, changed our clothes and came back to sir Vomi in a quarter of an hour.

Our friends had their cloaks on, while I and the captain didn't take them, but sir Vomi's servant gave the same cloaks to us, smiling.

A specious carriage was waiting for us at the gates, we got on it easily and went to Stroganoffs.

I was hoping to see lots of carriages by their house, but only one light carriage was standing there, from which Ibrahim and his father climbed out.

The house was lit up, but the guests didn't crowd, and the rooms were empty. I and the captain looked at one another and decided that evidently, it was still early.

We found the whole Stroganoffs' family in the sitting-room. There were lots of them – I knew all of them by sight, but I didn't remember their names in any way.

Stroganoff's wife had a dress on, the colours of which were changing like opals. She had muffled herself in a white, silk shawl. She was explaining to us that she was suffering from the humidity of the rain, but it seemed to me that she was simply trying to hide her hands and her neck on which there weren't any previous adornments left anymore. She seemed to be confused to me.

Anna with her bluish dress and the white laces reminded me of sir Vomi's kerchief. I was surprised by her pale face. She was absolutely calm, and some kind of a new resolution was felt within her. Bracano's bracelet was decorating her wonderful hand.

Stroganoff looked like a patient, to be precise, like the person who has just risen to his feet from his illness. The sissy who looked so terrible in the Joan's show now was looking at us all with his

indulgent contempt and he seemed to be carelessly brave again. Only a slight spasm used to cross his face now and then, and he was always feeling his fez, as though by checking whether it was still in its place. I noticed that fear or even a horror used to flash in his eyes when he used to look at sir Vomi.

In one word, I turned into Lovushka – the catcher of the crows completely, and I grasped my arm firmly.

I came to my senses and saw Bracano entering the room. His hellish physiognomy was so brazen-faced and self-satisfied, as though he had said to us: “Well, so who’s going to win? Was I really ever crooked or deprived of speech?”

He entered the room at ease, as though feeling himself in his own home. While he was kissing Stroganoffa’s hand without ceremony, he was surprised a little for her indifference, but soon he tried to become the lord of the highest gallant manners and turned towards Anna: “Oh, if you could see lord Benedict,” it flashed through my mind.

Having bowed to Anna, he was looking at her impudently, as if she was his personal property and he was waiting for her to extend her hand to him. She didn’t do it, so evidently, he wanted to conceal his vexation, because he gave a false laugh and told her.

“My dear Anna, you were educated in European way, and I’m not going to establish a harem in my house, although I’m Turk. Extend your charming hand to me, on which I can see the sign of your agreement to become my wife, my happiness.”

“First of all, I’m not Anna for you, but I’m Anna Borisovna, and regarding some sign, I didn’t take anything from you and I didn’t give you any words,” she interrupted him so sharply that this villain was deprived of voice.

I don’t know how this would have ended if Stroganoffa hadn’t interfered.

“Bracano, why don’t you greet sir Vomi and introduce your friend to us?”

A tall and broad-shouldered man had come with Bracano, only his head was so small that he looked like a python. His face was read, maybe because of his unhealthy skin or because of alcohol. It was almost like his fez, only with a violet hue on his nose and on his cheeks, while his small, black, piercing eyes were running and rummaging everything on what they stopped.

When Anna retorted Bracano like this, it seemed to me that a malevolence flashed in this repulsive face.

Bracano introduced his friend Tabeld Bond to the hostess and to all the guests by stating that Anna’s beauty unsettled him so much that he even forgot the rules of courtesy and didn’t introduce his friend to us immediately.

“By the way,” he added by looking at Anna and Stroganoff, “today is such a day in my life when I win not only the victory of love, but my power has grown like never before. I’m so glad that there’s no meaning to observe the etiquette so strictly.”

He wanted to come up to Anna again, but Stroganoffa stopped him by telling him that everybody was waiting only for him for more than half an hour, that he was late more than it was acceptable, although he knew that in this house, the host of which loved the order so much, everybody sat down at the table punctually.

Bracano was used to see Stroganoff only like a slave who was submitting to his every whim unconditionally, so now he got stiff out of amazement and fury.

Not he alone was so stunned. Stroganoff was looking attentively at his wife himself and finally, he fixed his inquiring gaze on sir Vomi. He answered him with a smile, but only his lips were smiling. His strict and attentive eyes with some different expression, not that daily kind one, turned towards Bracano.

Having turned pale with anger, Bracano hissed and answered the hostess.

"I'm not used to listening to any remarks anywhere at all, especially at your home."

He was able to control himself by putting a great effort, he tried to smile, but it was only a grimace instead of a smile, and he told us in a calmer voice.

"I caught cold and was ill during these days."

All of a sudden, he met Ananda's look, he cleared his throat as if being choked with something, but then he continued.

"I felt better only a few hours ago, and that's only thanks to the efforts of my doctor. I have already had the honour of introducing him to you, Yelena Dmitrievna, that's my friend," he bowed to Stroganoffa. "Let this sad situation be instead of my apology for being so late. Please change your anger into mercy and..."

Now he turned straight to Anna, being ready to accompany her to the table and he was already bending his right arm by trying to offer it for her, but he had bad luck again. The little Stroganoffa's doggie came out from somewhere, and Bracano wasn't looking down. He fixed his gaze on Anna and was coming towards her, but he stumbled over the dog and almost went sprawling on the carpet.

It was so funny, his stout figure stooped by half in front of Anna, the skirts of his tail-coat heaped on his head. He was falling down and trying to keep the balance but he caught on the leg of the chair that was standing next to him awkwardly and he was unable to draw himself up in any way – I was unable to hold out anymore and I started laughing, while the captain, both Jel-Mabeds and the host himself accompanied me, and then all the members of the family were rolling with laughter. Only sir Vomi and both of my friends remained serious. Sir Vomi went up to the hostess, bowed to her and offered his hand to her in order to accompany her to the table.

I looked at the captain and wanted to share my impressions about sir Vomi's manners with him, which were grand, full of tranquillity and perception of his value, but the captain was undoubtedly fascinated with sir Vomi himself and he couldn't take his eyes off him anymore.

While the doctor Bonda was helping Bracano to draw himself up, and that wasn't so easy to do, Ananda went up to Anna and bowed to her in exactly the same way as sir Vomi did to her mother. He remained emphatically straight, he only bowed his head and offered his hand to her.

How charming both of them were! They were as charming as in that first evening of music at the duke's when Ananda arrived. I fell into oblivion, and suddenly I heard Florentian's voice.

"Now you can see the grandeur and horror of people's paths. You can see that every man walking his path may achieve the real knowledge only then if his loyalty has already become not his personal quality, but one of the axes of his entire existence – his main axis on which the whole man's creativity is existing and developing. Learn to distinguish people's paths and remember that nobody is a friend to you, nobody is a brother to you, but every man is a Teacher to you."

I already wanted to dash forward where the voice was coming from, but I. was holding my arm firmly, while the captain was looking at my face, surprised.

“Are you unwell, Lovushka? What has excited you?” he asked me silently.

“Well, you see how attentive you need to be. Clasp Florentian’s hand in your hand, as if he was here, next to you,” I. whispered to me.

“No, captain, I’m absolutely all right,” I answered my friend. “That’s God who punished me for laughing at Bracano’s misfortune.”

“Well, if God has to interfere here,” the captain contradicted me, laughing, “then only to punish that villain and charlatan, and not the pure babies for their innocent laughter.”

In the meanwhile, sir Vomi was already going through the sitting-room’s door, the other couples were following him, while Bracano and his doctor were still standing aloof.

Bracano was gasping, he was explaining something to his friend vigorously, while he was trying to calm him down.

“Your medicine can hardly help me,” suddenly he uttered in Russian, mocking, “but they say that doctor I. has the real miracle cure,” Bracano was looking at I. impudently. “Could you give me your miraculous herbs, too? The whole Constantinople is talking about the new, fashionable doctors – wonder-workers who have come here.”

“I don’t know if those slanderers have tried the influence of the new medicine on themselves, about which they were telling you, but I think that you had a chance to make sure of my friend Ananda’s and my own power yourself. I would feel very sorry for you if you had to try sir Vomi’s power. That would be catastrophic for you,” I. answered Bracano very politely and nicely, as though not noticing Bracano’s impudence.

“You think so?” Bracano smiled crookedly. He was going to the sitting-room with us. “Today I will have an opportunity to prove to you how wrong you are by relying on the great sir Vomi’s authority. I came here namely to exchange a few words with him. I will leave this pleasure for the dinner, it’ll be a great amusement for everybody.”

While he was looking at I., a hellish hatred could be seen in his eyes, as if he had wished to burn I. into ashes.

We stepped into the dining-room. Sir Vomi was already sitting next to the hostess, Anna and Ananda were next to him. The sissy and his older sister were sitting on another side, next to their mother, while all five sons, their wives and both Turks were sitting behind them. I. seated me and the captain in front of sir Vomi, he sat down next to me, while Stroganoff sat down on his right side. He showed the seats on the right, narrow end and of the table for Bracano and his friend.

Having seen where he would have to sit, Bracano gave a laugh, as if the hinges of the damp door had begun to creak.

“Today everything is different than usual. Yelena Dmitrievna, perhaps you know why everything is the other way round today?” he addressed the hostess by trying to hold out within the limits of decency and still controlling his fury. “Oh, what I see! You aren’t wearing your pearl today? You also took off the bracelets? But you love jewels so much, don’t you? What does it mean?”

"I loved wonderful jewels up to yesterday, until I made certain of how disgracefully one man deceived me by persuading of his friendliness. I paid big money for his jewels to him, which turned out to be only some copper and glass," Stroganoffa answered him coldly and with contempt. "From this day on, I made a vow to wear only those things which my husband gave to me. Only they were the real, valuable things."

Perplexed and indignant voices were heard from all sides.

"What are you talking about? You don't understand what you are talking! I picked out all jewels for you myself, didn't I? And I'm the expert, right?" Bracano answered her impudently and threw his fork on the table.

Stroganoff stood up, he wanted to interfere and ask the guest to be politer, but sir Vomi showed him a sign, and the host sat down on his seat silently and obediently.

"Perhaps, you are an expert, but you deceived me," Stroganoffa answered him silently, but clearly and firmly.

"This is a childish talk. One could buy a duchy for your jewels. Perhaps, you are going to state that this jewel is also unreal?" he stabbed his fork to Anna's side by showing to the bracelet that was glaring on her hand.

"This thing is real, but it has never belonged to you," the calm sir Vomi's voice was heard. "It was stolen, and you know perfectly who, when and from where stole it. That didn't prevent you from giving it to one of the charlatans who was making a fool of you, so that he would cast a love spell upon it.

Judging from the charming hand of the owner of this bracelet, I think you can make sure yourself what sympathy she feels for you and what your chances are to become Anna's husband," sir Vomi still continued calmly.

Bracano ground his teeth so abominably that I stopped up my ears.

"What kind of a public prosecutor has lodged a complaint against me for you? And why I'm not arrested if I have sheltered the stolen things?" Bracano gave an impudent shout. He blushed with anger.

"The owner himself told me that you stole this thing, and concerning the arrest, majority of the members of your band are already arrested, while the leaders are running from Constantinople; the most important of them – you – are unable not only to move your legs, but you cannot draw yourself up in a human way, too."

Bracano turned from red purple into pale white, then from his efforts to stand up, he turned red and white again, but he was sitting down like glued, motionless, bent over the table. He was turning his head terribly, which he was still able to control.

"Here's the end of your criminal life," sir Vomi continued. "You have crept into a wonderful, friendly and honourable family. You were hypnotizing Yelena Dmitrievna, the woman of unstained honour day by day, more and more. Having taken advantage of her shyness and kindness, you have turned her into a quarrelsome, capricious woman who was poisoning her entire family's life. You have corrupted her youngest son by luring him into the snare of your friendship, you have turned both of them into the servants of your evil.

Ananda gave you three days for consideration. You still had a chance to escape the hell of your passions, there's no other way to call your frenzied life.

The woman's beauty captivated you, and you decided to lure her into the net of your love by challenging the whole purity and light which were protecting her.

Having heard your challenge, we came here. And now we prove to you what all that power created with the help of evil, fraud, theft, murder which you were trying to achieve so much is worth.

Everything what you gave to Yelena Dmitrievna as the talismans of your knowledge and power is trifle which can be destroyed by using the real knowledge of light. The rubbish of your exorcism has turned into smoke by revealing the copper instead of the gold. You were persuading Leonid that his fez wasn't burning in the fire, that his black pearl and his brilliant were the real jewels."

"I still insist that they are real," Bracano was shouting by interrupting sir Vomi and looking at him impudently.

"Do you want to try the power of your knowledge?" sir Vomi asked him.

"At once, if you want to," Bracano was shouting like a furious bull with his widened nostrils.

"Lovushka, take the fez off Leonid's head, and you, captain, take the ring off his left hand and put everything on this silver plate," sir Vomi told us. He took the crystal jug off the silver tray and extended it to me.

While me and the captain were going round the whole table, the doctor next to Bracano was worried on his chair and he was telling him silently.

"Leave everything, let's get out of here. No need for any tests, you have stooped again, haven't you?"

"Shut up, or I will shoot you down right here," Bracano began to growl by answering him.

I went up to Leonid whose name I have just found out. I took the fez off his head without any trouble and put it on the plate.

It seemed that this surprised Bracano very much, because he must have expected that the fez would remain on the youth's head. I remembered how Florentian put the dervish cap on my head, which I really was unable to take off my head, and I gave a laugh unwillingly.

Bracano lost the last remains of his self-control because of my laughter.

"We'll see if you are laughing in an hour," he hissed at me.

For some reason, the captain was unable to take the ring off the Leonid's finger for a long time, and this made Bracano laugh, but sir Vomi leant over the table, looked at Leonid attentively, and the ring was placed on the plate immediately, next to the fez.

Sir Vomi told me to put the plate into the wide, Eestern hearth. He went up to it, sprinkled the things with the familiar powder and set fire to them.

The bright flame blazed up, as though a big sheaf of straw had been burning, and not the little fez. And absolutely not the smell of the burning material, but the real stink of carrion made us cover our noses with handkerchiefs. Two not too much loud explosions were heard, and the flame was out instantly. I told me to open the window. The stink soon vanished, I gave the tray to sir Vomi, and he told me to bring it to Bracano. I did as I was told to by placing the plate on the table, in front of him.

I came back to my place and asked the captain why he was unable to take the ring off for so long. He answered me that if not the commanding sir Vomi's look, he would have failed to do it. The villain's look was burning his hands like a flame, while the ring was like glued on the Leonid's finger.

Only unfortunate splinters of the turned over copper, shivers of black glass and a little piece of cut glass instead of the brilliant were placed on the plate, in front of Bracano.

Only a little heap of ashes was left from the fez.

"Bracano, please let's go, or at least let me leave and bring help for you," his friend Bonda kept pleading him.

"You are real fool. Can't you see that all of it is a charlatan's job? What can all these blackmailers do in comparison to my amulet?" Bracano gave a shout and pulled a golden triangular out of his waist-coat with his trembling hand, in which a huge, black brilliant was glittering.

As though a current ran through sir Vomi's face, his eyes became bright violet again.

"Perhaps, you want to try the power of this talisman?" Bracano asked sir Vomi by holding the wonderful jewel in his hand, which was sparkling in the lights of lamps and candles.

"Bracano, think about your life one more time – think about all your life; and think about what you are doing now. You know perfectly that this thing was stolen from one Venetian. You know that a cross and a star – the symbols of love – were placed on the top of the triangular. You know who has desecrated this thing and jeered at it by chopping the cross and the star off it, and what his fate was," sir Vomi's voice was firm, calm, almost tender, while his eyes were looking at Bracano with compassion.

In the meanwhile, the supper was over, and almost nobody had eaten anything.

"What his fate was? His own foolishness was his fate," Bracano was triumphing in anger. "Fools need namely this! Isn't your god going to help you to fight against me now?" Bracano kept roaring, he was unable to control himself at all anymore.

He put his jewel on the plate. Its beams spread to all sides by changing in all colours, from white to red one like blood. Unawares, everyone's eyes were pierced to this extraordinary play of light of the wonderful brilliant.

"Ha, ha, ha! Here's my deposit for the power. If your fire turns my jewel into the same ashes," he was mocking us by pointing to the plate, "then I will sell my soul to you. If this thing endures its power – my power, - then you won't go anywhere, then you are my slave," Bracano was shouting. He was covered with lather, spasms were pulling him.

Sir Vomi's face became stricter, his eyes were casting sparks, just like the jewel.

"Poor man, I ask you to change your mind for the last time. The time is counting the last minutes when you still can avoid the irretrievable evil, but then neither me nor anybody else will be able to extend a helping hand to you."

"Ah, you are scared, sir rescuer," Bracano was shouting with laughter. "You are helpless, so you are bleating like a little sheep! Well, call your pastor, perhaps, he will be stronger than you."

He still didn't finish his abusive phrase, while Ananda was already extending the plate to sir Vomi. He bent over it, threw the jewel over to his own plate with the help of some thin, wooden stick, took a little bottle and poured the jewel from it. He put the candle to that liquid and set fire to it. It was burning piecefully like the spirit.

Bracano fixed his eyes on the fire. He was silent, but such suffering got stiff in his face, as if he had been burning himself.

I looked at sir Vomi and I was surprised by his compassion which I saw in his face.

The fire was out. Sir Vomi told me to clean the jewel which was absolutely unharmed and to give it to Bracano.

“So now what? It remained sound? Who is going to be whose slave?” Bracano was speaking in a wheeze by snatching his treasure with his trembling hands from me, but as soon as he touched it, he gave a shout in a wild voice and dropped it on the table.

“Damn! What did you do to it?” he gave a scream like a beast.

“Silence! I have warned you, poor man, that now no power of light would be able to save you anymore. You cannot withstand the touch of light and love, and you will die in an instant. All that I can do for you – I can destroy the nasty bond between you and those vile, profane beings who have lost their human appearance and sold themselves to the black magic, to whom you promised to give your life for power, glory and riches.”

He gave the stick to me and told me to take Bracano’s fez off his head by using it and to throw it into the hearth. I sprinkled it with the powder and I came back to my place, because I. told me to do so.

“I didn’t do anything to your jewel,” sir Vomi began to speak again. “Simply that incantation which as you believed had to be stronger than all the powers of light turned out to be a worthless fraud, and not the real knowledge. You have committed two grave crimes. You gave two stolen treasures to the sacrilegious charlatan who gave the jewel to you and you promised him to be his slave for seven years. Now you can see what outcome this has brought you to.”

Sir Vomi went up to the hearth and set fire to the powder.

I will never forget what happened in that moment. A thunder was heard, as if a charge had been exploded, the black smoke rose, and the wind began to howl in the hearth. The women gave a scream, but everything lasted only for several short moments.

“Please be calm. There’s no danger,” sir Vomi’s voice was heard.

When the smoke cleared away, everybody’s look was directed to Bracano. The expression of his face was absolutely idiotic and bestial.

“Lovushka, take this bottle and mop the face, forehead and the neck of the unfortunate man with this headscarf,” sir Vomi was talking to me by handing the bottle and the headscarf to me over the table.

I fulfilled this instruction with a heartbreaking compassion and by overcoming my disgust.

The unfortunate man’s face calmed down after some time, the lather disappeared from his lips. He was looking round, and every time when his look used to touch that wonderful brilliant, the spasms used to bend him, an aversion and horror used to flash in his face, as if he had seen something horrible in the reflections of that jewel.

Only the interrupted Bracano’s breathing was heard in the prevailing silence for some time, which was interrupted by his moaning and deep sigh time and again.

"Young man," all of a sudden, he addressed me, "take this stone away from me. Only in your heart there was a compassion for me, and you didn't have an aversion for me. I'm not talking about these people," he showed to sir Vomi, Ananda and I., "I would have died from their touch, but some people are sitting here whom I was spoiling, like for example, sissy Leonid, but I can see only horror and fear in his heart that my destiny wouldn't ruin his life. Only in your heart and in your eyes I can see a tear of compassion. Thank you. Take this thing, let it protect you in your life by reminding you how I died."

"Oh, no, no! This cannot happen! If a man met sir Vomi, then he cannot die, no matter what he has done. I will be praying my great friend Florentian, finally I will ask Ali to help you. Please, don't be dispirited, don't lose hope," I burst into tears and I rushed at him like lifted by a whirlwind.

No one had time even to recollect himself, while I embraced Bracano's neck and kissed him. I went down on my knees in front of him by calling Florentian and praying him for making this unfortunate man's fate easier.

Two tears slipped out from Bracano's eyes.

"This is the first pure kiss to me," he uttered silently. "Set me free, take this jewel away, it is pressing me awfully; I cannot live while it is pressing me so much."

I looked at sir Vomi and remembered his words that I needed to be very careful before taking somebody else's things.

"Lovushka, now the adornment itself isn't harmful anymore, but by accepting it, you take the pledge to take compassion on all unfortunate people who are dying in the clutches of evil. And by accepting it today, you will have to walk not only along the path of fighting against evil, but also you will have to become the protection for all the martyrs enslaved by passions and by darkness," he answered to my look.

"When Florentian was running through the fields with me by saving me from death, he didn't need any request; when Ananda gave me the clothes of the dervish, he extended the very compassion to me, which I didn't ask from him; when he and I. came to help my brother, they, just like you, sir Vomi, were going easily and simply. I'm only a little know-nothing, but I will be glad to be able to serve Bracano who has been liberated by you, and I don't see any heroic deed here; I will try to protect and comfort everyone who is stumbling over the heavy burden of his passions in the same way."

While I was speaking, I saw how the red hand of Bracano's accomplice was stretching towards the jewel. The view of the doctor Bonda's red, hairy hand, his protruded, something whispering lips, his goggled eyes which were greedily fixed on the brilliant with some hidden fear and his disproportionately little head which was stretched forward were so disgusting and at the same time so repulsively ridiculous that it drew everyone's attention, and somebody even started laughing unwillingly.

Having noticed that he had already drawn everyone's attention to his behaviour anyway, Bonda rose a little, stretched his hand even more, but he was unable to take the adornment in any way. Having looked round the table with his black and ransacking eyes, he uttered.

"Bracano, stop joking, give me the jewel. I will hide it and then I will give it to whom needed, and everything will be all right again."

Obviously, he wanted to change his uncomfortable pose, but he didn't have any strength to draw himself up.

"This is my last request, sir Vomi. Please let the boy to take the jewel and set me free from this horrible Bonda. I'm not guilty by anything before him. Most likely, he was pushing me into always new misfortunes," Bracano was talking.

"You are already free from all those nasty snakes which were hissing round you. Remember when you were carrying this jewel after becoming its owner for the first time and you met a tall, fair-haired man, what did he tell you?" sir Vomi asked him.

"I remember perfectly how he told me: 'That what is seized with blood and suffering, sacrilege and robbery, will always bring the fate of the slave, poison and death to its owner, but no happiness or power. If the pure kiss of the compassionate heart doesn't dry the tear from your cheek, then your end will be terrible.' I didn't attach any importance to those words back then and I was laughing at his eyes. Now it has happened," Bracano ended.

I looked at sir Vomi, but he wasn't looking to my side. I's and Ananda's, Anna's and Stroganoff's eyes were downcast. Nobody wanted or could help me in this difficult moment. Only the captain's eyes, full of tears, were looking at me so encouragingly, so tenderly that it became easy for me instantly. I accumulated my whole strength, I was calling Florentian and... I gave a joyous laugh, took the jewel into my hand and I said to Bracano.

"I will fulfil your wish easily and joyfully, but I don't have anything what I could offer to you in exchange. I will be glad to do everything for you what my modest strength will allow me to."

An angry disappointment distorted Bonda's face and finally, he pulled his hand back.

"Get out of here," sir Vomi told him silently, "and you, captain, help Bracano to reach his home and come back here again," he addressed my great friend.

"Bracano, everything what I can still do for you is to help you to hide in Tirol, at my friends'. If you wish, the captain will provide a cabin for you in his steamer and deliver you to S. My friends will meet you there and take you to such a place where your accomplices won't dare to persecute you," sir Vomi said to Bracano.

"I don't have another choice," he answered him. "I agree, but my former accomplices will find and kill me there anyway," having been silent for a while, Bracano added helplessly and hung his head.

"Go fearlessly and don't be afraid of anything. Be afraid not of your outer, but of your inner fall," sir Vomi kept talking to him silently and firmly.

The captain went up to Bracano, helped him to stand up and took him out from the room by holding his stooped and hardly moving body with all his strength.

When they left, everybody rose from the table and the part of the guests went to the Stroganoff's study. When everybody took their places, I saw that in addition to my friends, both Stroganoffs, Anna and Leonid came here.

"Anna, partly you are to blame for everything what has happened here today," sir Vomi continued. "Two years ago, Ananda told you to leave this house and burn Leonid's fez. You failed to do neither one or another, but you have overcome yourself elsewhere, and Ananda still had a chance to take your family's protection upon himself. Now when he came here with joy to take you to India where you had to start your new period of life, he found you plunged in your doubts, jealousy and thoughts about your fading youth and beauty without any personal happiness. I cannot give you that scarp which Ali has sent to

you. In India they are making chitons from that material for people who see their happiness of life only in liberation from passions and not in becoming entangled in them, and you started craving for passion.

Everything else – that storm from which Ananda has dragged you out and in which you allowed Bracano to draw you to – that's only your secret, and I won't be talking about it here.

Now work, learn and do your best in the simplest commonness of your grey days for the next seven years. Help Joan to acquire self-control and protect her children for the time being. Help the duke, don't avoid people and don't dream about the life of the chosen ones; don't grudge the music, rake up the riches of your talent for people, play and sing for them, but don't accept any money for your music.

There are no restrictions of time and space along the path of man's eternal improvement. Be glad that the test has come namely now and revealed the instability of your heart.

Don't cry, Yelena Dmitrievna. Your difficult and terrible lesson has shown to you how one can start from the slightest compromise, sink in it deeper and deeper, and then finish with the fall.

Bring peace to your family which you have scattered yourself, help your youngest son to start working, try to be the kind and careful trained nurse to your husband, because he feels unwell only through your fault, although in truth, only eternal fear has infected him and showed up as the symptoms of this illness in him."

Those were the last words of sir Vomi.

The captain showed up at the door of the room. Sir Vomi smiled, he said good-bye to everyone, and we came out to the street after refusing the Stroganoff's carriage. I was happy, because I could escape from this house into the fresh air. Having seen the sky and the stars, I remembered Florentian, how we were going to Ananda through the steppe, in the night. How lonely and abandoned by everybody I was feeling back then, and now, feeling how tenderly I. and the captain took my arms, how lovely sir Vomi and Ananda were looking at me, I felt like being within the ring of their protection, in the unbeatable fortress of joy.

One more time, I thanked Florentian in my thoughts for the opportunity which he gave to me to become acquainted with these people and to live next to them.

Chapter 24

Our last days in Constantinople

In the next morning, exactly at nine o'clock I was already knocking at sir Vomi's door.

But how I was surprised when I found sir Vomi in his working place, dressed in his travelling clothes, while the tied up suitcase was standing in the entrance hall.

The captain was also in the room, he brought the tickets for the steamer to sir Vomi. Evidently, he had come not long ago, too. His face was pale, as though he hadn't slept the whole night, while me, as always, I fell soundly asleep as soon as I went to bed and I didn't even know how my friends spent the night.

Having seen that I became distressed, sir Vomi stroked my head and told me tenderly.

"Lovushka, lately you had to experience so many separations with those whom you were devoted yourself to, whom you were attached to. And you experienced and still experience all those separations with difficulty. On the one hand, it shows your love and gratitude to people, while on the other hand, it shows that you haven't yet perceived firmly what the man's life on the earth is and how he has to value his every day, not wasting time for tears and sadness.

Soon, in a few days, you and I. will leave for India. Both the new countries through which you will be traveling, even stopping here and there, and the new people with their customs and their ways of life unknown to you – all of it will help your consciousness to expand and advance your thought to the new perception of things.

Several years will fly past, and we'll meet again; and those years – your happiest ones – will fly past like a dream. Lots of that what you have seen and heard during this short period of time, now is hiding in your subconscious like the reserves in the stockroom, but finally, you will understand not only what you are accumulating so much now, but you even will bring the biggest part of it into your creative work from there.

Before parting, my dearest secretary, accept this chain from me, string Bracano's jewel which was cleaned with the power of love on it and carry it on your chest like an eternal memory about compassion, the pledge of which you have uttered yourself voluntarily. Everywhere where it is possible, always be compassionate and don't condemn anybody. Let love know only help, and there's no place for a punishment or condemnation in it. Man is creating his life himself, while love – even when it seems that it is punishing him by appearance – is only leading him into the higher form of life.

Here's my precept to you: never delay anywhere and for anything. It is unimportant who of us will send a message to you – fulfil the instruction which it'll bring to you immediately, don't start any reasoning, don't wait for anything to mature within you. These delays – that is only the proof of an incomplete faith; you have seen already what Anna's reflections have brought her to, how her doubts have smelted the entire bridge which she had built into already shining and new path of liberation.

This jewel which has brought so much troubles and tears for people was cleaned with such power of love and compassion that it pushed you into the arms of that villain and forced a tear to tremble in his eyes which didn't know what compassion was up to now. Your kiss has brought the greeting of the eternity's law to him – the greeting of the compassion's law.

There are words written in the unknown language to you on this chain which seems to you like a wonderful work of jewelry. Their meaning is: "Win by loving". I see," sir Vomi laughed, "that you've already made up your mind to learn this language."

"Ah, sir Vomi, there's such a jumble and so many disappointments in my head. One of them is especially painful for me: that's the separation with you – I understand perfectly what a know-nothing I am. Once I already gave my word to learn the Eastern languages when I was unable to understand anything from Ali's and Florentian's conversations. Now life has confirmed again that I have to keep my word," and I bent my neck for sir Vomi, on which he hung the chain with the jewel himself.

"This jewel was stolen from Florentian. There were also the cross and the star made of emeralds put on the pointed triangle. When you are able to control yourself and your tact completely, then most likely, you will receive them from the hands of Florentian himself. Now he asked me to hang this symbol of compassion on your neck. Let my chain unite you with me.

Every time when it seems to you that it is difficult to educate yourself, that an absolute fearlessness is out of reach – touch the chain, think about my love and loyalty to you and you will see instantly how it is easy to overcome that what seemed to be unconquerable to you by uniting in beauty and love."

He embraced me, while I could hardly suppress my tears, but at the same time, I was full of such tranquillity, silence and bliss within myself, which I used to feel only in rare moments next to Florentian.

I. and Ananda entered the room. Their faces were absolutely calm; Ananda's eyes-stars were shining in the same way as the stars should do; and it seemed to me that they weren't excited because of the separation with sir Vomi at all.

I was unable to understand it in any way. Having looked at the captain, I saw the reflections of sadness of my separation with sir Vomi in his face. I was estimating my great friends very highly, but I was always feeling that I was getting on better with the captain. It seemed to me that an insurmountable boundary was extending between me and them; sometimes, as though a wall would separate me from them, in the meanwhile, none of them was building any obstacles for me anywhere.

Ananda looked at me – as though he opened my skull again – and told me laughing.

"One wall is different from another one."

I blushed up to my ears, I. and sir Vomi smiled, while the captain was surprised. He was looking at me, not understanding neither my embarrassment nor those smiles nor Ananda's remark.

Sir Vomi's farewell words excited me, and I was unable to express my gratitude in some visible way to him. I pressed my lips to his elegant, wonderful and small hand. In my thoughts I was begging him to help me to keep my loyalty to everything what he was talking about to me here forever.

Sir Vomi's servant came in and told him that the duke sent him to ask him whether he could see him. Sir Vomi dismissed us until twelve o'clock. He told us to come one more time to say good-bye, because his steamer was leaving at one o'clock.

He told his servant to invite the duke whom we met at the doorway.

It was difficult for me, and I was pressing myself instinctively to the captain whose heart was suffering as much as mine was. Among all those contradictory feelings which were tearing me apart back

then, I was unable to refrain from not condemning my friends' indifference when we were parting with sir Vomi.

How little I understood about people's souls back then! And how much I understood later: what tragedy Ananda's heart overcame during this meeting with sir Vomi, what faithful help were I. and Ananda to my brother during the entire period of my illness in Constantinople until the very last evening at Stroganoffs' where the meeting with Bracano reached its final.

I. didn't tell me anything that the persecutors were still chasing us, that all the threads of the persecution were in the hands of Bracano and his gang. As I found out later, in that night before sir Vomi's departure, all my friends spent the sleepless night by dedicating it to the captain, by casting a light on his future and also by discussing about where and how he had to take Bracano.

I. didn't tell me a single word, while such a thought hadn't even come into my mind, how he was worried about the future life of Joan and Anna, as well as the future of the whole Stroganoffs' family, because by participating in those events he was shouldering the responsibility for them.

"Never mind, Lovushka, don't worry. You've seen many times already how that what only seemed to you didn't correspond to that what it really was," I. told me.

I looked at his eyes – and as though a curtain fell off my eyes.

"Oh, Lolion, how could I feel some alienation for you just a moment ago? And I dared to think that you were indifferent to sir Vomi in your heart!"

"Lovushka, life is moving forward not with indifference, the fits of bitterness or sadness, but only with joy. It is moving forward with that highest joy in which there's no more personal evaluation of the flying by moment, but in which there's only the power-love of one's heart where neither time nor space is playing any part anymore. Love doesn't condemn anybody. It is happy of being able to help one. If I was unable to forget about myself, if I only moaned and grieved that my loyal friend won't be next to me when I part with sir Vomi – I wouldn't have any time to think about you, your brother, Joan, the duchess and about a thousand people more, about whose existence you don't even suspect at the moment, at the same time."

The living example of my great friend sir Vomi when he didn't contradict any of his thoughts on himself for a single time during the entire time since I knew him, when he was doing only that what he was talking about to others, was leading me to that circle of active love where indifference, sadness, grief and fear didn't exist as the concepts at all.

The captain and Ananda turned into the garden, while me and I. went to our rooms. I told him everything what sir Vomi was telling me, I showed him his given chain which he hung on my neck himself after running the jewel through it.

"Lovushka, here's the real example for you what the difference between that what seems like an evident justice to people and that what is happening according to the real law of purposefulness is. Thousands of people are wasting their time for many years in order to get such chain. Sometimes they are trying to overcome some of their inner characteristics which hinder them to move forward during their entire life; they are searching, toiling, fighting, falling down – and finally, they reach their goal as it seems to them and to their loved ones, but in fact, they are standing in one place in the presence of the real laws of life.

You, my boy, according to the outer laws of people's justice, haven't deserved that happiness at all, which is pouring upon you as from the horn of plenty. You were feeling lonely and unhappy several times during this time, although you were surrounded by the highest happiness."

The captain visited us, but having noticed that a serious conversation was taking place here, he wanted to go to his room already.

“My dear captain, you won’t disturb us at all, but I will be glad that you will stay with Lovushka until sir Vomi’s departure. Neither you nor him should see him off, because he still has to accept many people, while Chava who will stay here for a few more days and who might come back with your steamer will have only those several minutes to go from home to the pier. I don’t have any doubts that it is difficult for both of you, but you’ve already been rewarded with happiness. Keep it and allow others to have at least a little of it.”

I. left, while me and the captain were left alone.

It was equally difficult for both of us that we wouldn’t be seeing sir Vomi off, that we wouldn’t see him until the very last moment of his stay here. The captain kept smoking one cigarette after another. He would cross the room and tousele his standing crew-cut time and again.

We were cleaning our inner worlds in silence, as though we had prepared spiritually to see sir Vomi for the last time at twelve o’clock.

Finally, I decided to break the silence and I said to the captain.

“Captain, my dear friend, don’t be angry with me, because I disturbed the silence. Although I can see that you don’t want to talk at all, but I have to share those thoughts with you, which have come to my mind and how they helped me to calm down.

Each of us received so much from sir Vomi. Personally for me, even his presence here allowed me to feel even a physical state of bliss, not counting an absolute inner peace when everything seemed to be understandable, and I only needed to follow him. Now I understand that I would be able to follow him only when I solve the tasks of my life independently, when I learn to stand on my feet independently, not looking for help for those solutions from all sides as I was doing now.

Some time had to pass until I could find my own creative path and strength to control myself – then sir Vomi might need me, like he needed I. and Ananda now.

I’m glad that this first and easy test doesn’t disturb me anymore. More or less time will pass until I meet sir Vomi again – and I will b thinking only about one thing: to live every minute after parting with him properly, not wasting a single moment uselessly.”

“You are absolutely right, my friend, one needs to be worthy of everything what we have received from sir Vomi, Ananda and I., but you lose only the first one of them, while I lose not only all three of them, but you, too. Now whom will I be able to share my new thoughts with when I understood the deepest meaning of life? Up to now I was always reserved, too, and they nicknamed me a “chest of secrets”. Now whom will I be able to say my thoughts to and how will I be looking for that uniting path which my new friends were talking about?”

“Captain, of course, I don’t know anything yet and I understand a little, but I noticed that you began to understand the language of music. You already have a new foundation to perceive both Lisa and her mother. Once you told me yourself that you were thinking a lot about Lisa and that you wrote a letter to her.

That’s one thing. Second – is there any open abyss between you, me, hundreds of other ordinary people and our honourable friends? Have you seen at least once that they would have an aversion to any meeting? So, we also have to try to follow their example.

Third – if I lose sir Vomi and Ananda by keeping I.'s closeness, then I understood only one thing from the separations, disappointments and heartbreak of the last months: till the end, be loyal till the end, don't be afraid till the end – and your life would reward you as you haven't even expected, and from there where you haven't expected from at all."

"My boy, my philosopher! Up to now I haven't loved till the end for a single time, I haven't been loyal till the end, I haven't been bold till the end, but I have already received comfort from your curly head," the captain burst out laughing merrily. "Here's what I will tell you. It's eleven o'clock soon. Lovushka, let's visit the gardener and let's take some flowers."

"Oh, captain, there are such flowers in the sir Vomi's garden that we'd rather not disgrace ourselves."

The captain pulled the hat over my head, gave a naughty laugh and pulled me out to the street.

We found a light carriage very quickly and dashed off to visit our friend gardener. The coachman chased by the jingling of the coins forgot his laziness characteristic to Constantinople, and soon we reached our goal.

The captain left me under the peach-tree, the owner offered me pleasingly to eat as many peaches as I wanted to, while both of them went to the hothouse.

I didn't have enough time to relish the most wonderful peaches, while the captain already left the hothouse with the flowers wrapped up in the wax paper. The owner put them into the basket with wet grass, tied them round and gave them to me. The basket was rather heavy.

When we were coming back, I asked my friend why he didn't show the flowers to me, as though that was a charmed beauty.

"These flowers are real beauties. They are so tender and so wonderful that if I showed them to you now, you would turn into Lovushka the catcher of the crows instantly, and we don't have much time."

"Well, at least tell me the name of those secret beauties of yours," I was asking him, almost annoyed.

My irritability made the captain laugh, and he told me.

"Philosophe, they are called freesias. They are the flowers of the mountains, their homeland is India, but if you are angry, they will turn from white into black ones."

"Well, then you will have to give them to Chava. One black beauty is enough for sir Vomi, so he doesn't need any more of them," I answered him in the same tone.

The captain was laughing merrily. He told me that I was still afraid of Chava and that my saying "don't be afraid till the end" was dedicated to Chava.

"Anything is possible," I answered him when I remembered Chava's letter sent to me to the ship, "but even in this case, if she is living in my home sometime, I will be afraid of her less than you are afraid of Lisa and everything what has happened between you and her now," I blurted out like one of those parrots which are carried in Constantinople. They draw the lottery tickets of "destiny" and give the future to a curious person, which is written on the paper, rolled into a tube.

The captain was petrified with amazement.

I don't know how it would have ended if at that moment we hadn't reached our home and met Ananda with Chava who were going to see sir Vomi.

"Take your beauties," I said to the captain and gave the flowers to him.

"What beauties?" Ananda asked us.

"White beauties for sir Vomi if they haven't turned into black ones yet, and if they did..."

"Will you shut up, philosopher!" the captain gave a shout.

Chava became very interested in what kind of the beauties sir Vomi still needed.

"The beauties of the mountains," I whispered to her.

"No, this is intolerable anymore! Have you brought a goatling for him?" she was laughing by demonstrating all her white teeth.

"Yes, yes, it is from the very India if only that goatling haven't turned into black one yet when it saw the colour of your skin."

"Lovushka, but there are limits for any patience," the captain gave a shout. He was almost starting to be angry.

Ananda shook his finger at me, took the basket from me and unwrapped it. Having pulled them from the paper, he gave a shout himself. He was both surprised and fascinated.

"Freesias, freesias!" Chava gave a cry. "Sir Vomi wanted to get them very much and to plant them in his garden! That will be very pleasing for him. Oh, they are in flower-pots, in the soil and in moss! That one of you who thought of such a goatling is happy. If I knew how to envy, I would certainly envy that fortune's favourite."

"Please don't envy us, otherwise they will really turn black," I told her by admiring the luxurious flowers which I hadn't seen up to now: the white, big, waxen bells had an unusual form, as though cut out with the fine cutter, and they filled the entrance with their aroma.

The captain took one of the flower-pots and gave another one to me. I was refusing it and I tried to persuade him that the idea and the find was his, but he only smiled and whispered to me.

"One freesia – that's me, another one is Lisa. You are the grooms-man. Go and shut up at last."

"Well, Lisa is freesia, that's all right, but you... You are so beloved, but you are only a physiognomy, if you wish so," I also whispered to him.

"Those two Japanese will do their ceremony here and make no headway until they are late," Ananda uttered with such a note of humour that it seemed to me that his keen, musical ear overheard our whispering.

I couldn't bear anymore and I roared with laughter. Sir Vomi's laughter responded to mine, and he showed himself in the doorway.

Having seen us with the flower-pots and most likely looking rather comically, sir Vomi told us.

“But there’s the real wedding here!” he invited us to his room pleasingly, took the flowers from each of us and embraced both of us by thanking and telling us that he would make two flower beds for freesias by calling them the sea and the dry land.

Having inspected the flowers very attentively, sir Vomi called up his servant to him. Both of them packed them back into our basket, watered abundantly both the flowers and the grass covering them. He also told his servant to wrap the basket with several layers of the paper and with a thick, wet cloth. The servant fulfilled this instruction. The clumsy sailor came out from somewhere, both of them took the flowers and one suitcase each, and they walked away to the pier.

There were lots of people in the room. There were also absolutely strangers among them: some of them I had seen in passing; and only the Turks, Stroganoff and the duke were well familiar to me.

Sir Vomi found a nice word for everyone. He told the following words to me.

“Search with joy – and everything will respond to you. Integrity of your feelings and thoughts will take you to Florentian. Don’t worry about your brother. Try to remain restrained with respect to him. Nal – that’s not Anna.”

I pressed myself to his hand. I was stunned with those words which as though answered my most secret thoughts.

Everybody accompanied sir Vomi to his light carriage. I., Ananda and Chava sat down next to him. I asked I. whether me and the captain should visit Joan, he agreed by telling us that he and Ananda would visit her as well on their way back.

The carriage turned round the corner and disappeared from everyone’s eyes which were following it. A sigh of regret slipped out from everyone’s chest, while the duke was crying like a small child. I went up to him and offered him to visit Joan with us, telling him that I. and Ananda would come there after they saw sir Vomi off.

He agreed and asked us to wait for him a little. Obviously, he became glad of the opportunity to leave his house now. I could understand him perfectly, because a lament was stuck in my throat as well, which I could hardly suppress. Although my mind was telling me that we had to switch to another, not so sad mood, the soul sense embraced me again, which was very similar to that one which I experienced while I was burning the letters in my brother’s room.

“What a horrible thing separation is,” I heard the captain’s voice like the echo to my thoughts.

“Yes. We still need to understand something, some meaning still unknown to us of all of that what is going on here. We need to accept all of that in such a way like sir Vomi is doing and telling us to do: “Not that day call the lucky one which has brought you something pleasant, but that one when you have given the light of your heart to people.” Only all of it is still so far away for me,” I told him by giving a sigh.

“It is far away for you,” the captain answered me, lost in thought, “while it is absolutely beyond my comprehension, I’m afraid.”

The duke came, he apologized for the delay, and we started walking along the streets which were hot like a heated stove, looking for a shade everywhere, but that also could hardly help us.

It was exactly the time after lunch in the shop – or how they say in the entire Constantinople – the break of the heat hours. Anna was downstairs, she was sitting in the arm-chair next to the wardrobe

and working, while Joan was still in the bed upstairs, although sometimes she already used to get up and she was trying to work.

Anna was pale and lean, but there wasn't that expression of breakdown in her eyes anymore and that despair which I saw in them here when she was talking to sir Vomi.

She responded with a pleasant smile to the captain's low bow and extended her left hand to him by saying to him that she couldn't drop the flowers which she was holding in her right hand.

He kissed this wonderful hand with respect. The sparkling bracelet was put on the hand. "Oh, my God," I was thinking, "how suffering and contacts with the people who are awarded with the highest powers of knowledge are changing us! Still not so long ago, I saw this proud beauty who was indignant at the openhearted and manly fascination of the captain, while now he was also standing in front of her with such a respect, he was looking at her with such meek and kind eyes. Where did the captain-tiger and Anna from the icon disappear? They were gone already, they disappeared completely, they were rooted out, while the new them instead of the dead ones were living now..."

I became Lovushka – the catcher of the crows, my thoughts began to bubble in my head by jumping one over another, by bringing one another down, not being able to think out of anything till the end, as though still by solving the question: whether it was better, whether people needed to change like this – to die and then to turn into the absolutely different people? Why?

It seemed to me that I could see and hear the screams and moaning of the entire thousands of the souls who were diving in the chaos and mourning over their delusions, irremediable mistakes and begging to help them.

"Lovushka, what happened to you?" I heard the tender and weak voice of Joan.

"Ah, that's you, Joan?" I gave a start and came to myself. "I wanted to go upstairs to you, but as always, I fell to thinking and I made you to come down here," I answered her by greeting her.

"Oh, that's nothing. The duke helped me to come down. Ah, Lovushka, how you've changed after your illness. You don't resemble that mister, junior doctor at all anymore, who was comforting me in the steamer. The children are sleeping, and I guess they couldn't recognize you, too. You are completely different, but only I'm unable to explain in any way what that change is," Joan was talking to me, while offering seats to me and to the duke in the corner of the shop.

"It seems for everybody that those people who he sees in front of him have changed, because it is the most difficult for man to notice the change within himself. And only when something grandiose breaks into his life – only then he perceives how he's changed himself, how his strength has grown, how his spirit has made itself free.

Joan, you seem not only changed to me, but as though all of you have burnt down, and I can see only the suffering woman instead of the previous Joan. What is going on, my dear? There aren't any reasons for you to be so sad and to cry so much, are there?" I was talking to her by kissing her childish, miniature hand.

"Ah, if you knew, you wouldn't be kissing that hand," Joan answered me by wiping her rolling down tears. "I am to blame and before the duke, and before Anna, and before I. Ah, what have I done and how could I correct everything now?" she was mumbling through her tears.

"I would be healthy if a regret didn't torment me. I cannot find peace for myself anywhere; only when I'm lying in the bed, from the curtain with which the doctor I. has isolated my little room, the

peace as though was blowing to me. When I feel very unwell, I press my forehead to it – and it becomes peaceful in my heart!”

I looked at Anna accidentally and I was surprised by the change that had happened to her: bent forward, she couldn't take her eyes off Joan, as though begging her to shut up. Her hands were rumpling her work, while her tears were pouring on her chest one after another. I understood what a suffering she was experiencing now, she was mourning over the chiton which was meant for her, but which she didn't receive, as well as over our departure without her and over her wrong behaviour in this moment.

“Anna,” I gave a shout, not possessing enough strength to withstand her suffering. “Postponement – that isn't a loss yet. Anna, don't cry, I have no strength to see these tears; I know what it means for you to weep so madly in sadness by seeing yourself nearly in the graveyard.

Don't think about yourself now. Think about Ananda, about that huge grief, disappointment of his and about his responsibility for your mistake, with what a burden everything has befallen on him,” I was talking to her by falling on my knees in front of her. “Soon Ananda and I. will be here. Is it possible that you will meet them with such a pitiless disappointment after they saw sir Vomi off? Can you express your love, gratitude and joy that they are living with us only with the tears about yourself?”

“Get up, Lovushka,” Anna told me by embracing me. “You are absolutely right. Only a bitter thought about myself made me cry again, but in truth, I understood everything already, I have blessed and accepted everything.

My dear friend, Lovushka, sit down here for a while, next to me. Believe me, I have already calmed down within myself. It was only the echo of that storm which you helped me to overcome in time. I was thinking for many years that only the bright love was living in me. I made sure that the snake of jealousy and doubts was still lying there, coiled up.

Thanks God that it straightened itself here and showed its sting. Ananda received the blow, but anyway, he was able to keep me next to him in such a way that I didn't lose his hand. You reminded me that my tears hurt him, that he felt them like the tears of pus and blood. I won't cry anymore. Thank you for your words, they helped me.”

She wiped her eyes, went up to Joan, embraced her tenderly and wiped her tears with sir Vomi's kerchief.

This nervous strain almost exhausted my strength. I was sitting motionless; my heart was throbbing like a hammer; the fire was flowing along my entire spine; I was panting and, as it seemed to me, I was sinking into the abyss.

“Lovushka, you frightened all of us here,” I heard Ananda's voice and saw him next to me. “Here, drink it. I thought that you were stronger, but you are still weak,” he gave the glass with drops to me.

Soon I recovered completely and asked them where I. was. I found out that he was at Stroganoff's and soon he would come here, thus I calmed down completely.

Having looked round at everybody, I noticed that Chava was observing me attentively, while everybody else was like perplexed. I took Ananda's hand and kissed it, although he didn't expect that at all, and I told him.

“Forgive me, Ananda. I was catching the crows here for a while by spoiling everyone's mood with that, so now they look like drowned people. Now, you also were thinking that I was stronger, but I

didn't justify your confidence. Therefore, I'm suffering very much and I'll try to be stronger, but anyway, everything has started from your cap of the dervish."

"No, my boy, you haven't disappointed anyone's confidence here. And nobody could disappoint me and nobody did so. Everything happened differently here than I was expecting, because I owed these people and I wanted to pay my old debt to them quicker and over the full measure. I didn't notice that I didn't need to push them forward too quickly. A call is given one time; while I gave it two times and I will have to answer for that."

I didn't understand everything. What call was given, when and why? I only understood that he gave the second call to Anna and that he shouldn't have done it.

Ananda's voice which was always uniquely charming, this time was sounding so tenderly, comfortingly and with such an ordinary kindness that everybody fell silent, it became so nice, easy and joyful for everybody. Everyone's face brightened up and became kind. As though everybody had absorbed the part of Ananda's energy into himself, and when I. and Stroganoff entered through the door after some time, there weren't any traces of sadness or tears left in a single face.

Having divided into small groups – me and Joan, the duke and I., the captain and Stroganoff, Anna and Ananda – all of us were like raised and revived, we were telling the simplest words one to another; but these words acquired some new meaning from the new radiance and peace in everyone's heart.

"My friends. The captain and Chava will leave us on the day after tomorrow. I would like to organize a musical evening tomorrow in order to say good-bye to them. May I use your sitting-room, Anna?" Ananda asked her.

"Why are you asking this? Your songs and playing give so much happiness to everybody! Sir Vomi told me to play and sing to people as much as possible, and I'm not even talking about the joy to play with you," she answered him.

The break in the shop was over. We left it by rejoicing at tomorrow's evening. Only Boris Fyodorovich was left with the owners.

I., Ananda and the duke didn't worry about the heat at all and they were going quickly, so me and the captain dropped behind them considerably. I could hardly move, I was exhausted by the heat which I still was unable to adapt to, while the captain stayed with me, because he wanted to talk to me.

"I have a big favour to ask you. I received so much money from my home that I don't know where to put it. I would like to give a part of it to Joan, but only under condition that she never knows who gave it to her. I know that I. has already provided for her first year, that the duchess has taken care of her children more or less, and I would like to inspire some self-confidence for that poor woman who was suffering, who are suffering – and I don't know how, why and from where, but I perceive clearly – who will still be suffering very much.

I have seen many such people during my nomadic life, who were suffering during their entire life according to some incomprehensible laws to me, even when there even weren't any visible and especial reasons for this.

I won't have time to put the money in the bank under her name, because at least two hours are needed for that operation, besides a lot of unfinished business require my attention while I was walking here.

Please spend the rest of the money at your discretion. I will be glad if you meet some people for whom you can provide my help with your hands.

Well, here we are at the gate. See you, my friend Lovushka. It seems that we'll see each other only tomorrow in the evening, at Anna's. Take the money."

I found I. in the room. He advised me to refresh myself with a shower, but I was feeling so tired because of the heat that I could hardly walk to the armchair and I fell down onto it helplessly. I was still holding the packet in my hands clumsily and I didn't know what to do with it.

To I.'s question why I don't put my packet somewhere, I told him that it was the captain's money and what he told me to do with it. I also added what he was thinking about Joan.

"That captain of yours is good lad, Lovushka. He guessed sir Vomi's wish, who has entrusted me to provide for Joan. The captain guessed sir Vomi's thoughts about freesias, and this time he also realized his second thought, not encouraged by anybody. My friend, I think that the captain simply wanted to give the money to you, so that you could feel independent in the future, at least until you start making your living yourself."

"Oh, no, my dear I. The relationship between me and the captain is very simple, and if he had wished to give it to me personally – he would have done it, like the young Ali did by leaving it in the envelope. I absolutely don't doubt about it and I would never take it for myself personally. I think that I'm still absolutely unexperienced and I won't be able to use it properly, but since you are next to me, everything will be all right. Only one thing is absolutely clear to me: I will use the money – in honour of Lisa and Anna – to buy musical instruments for talented poor musicians if I meet them until I see the captain next time. If I don't meet them, or if you don't show me how to use it differently – the money will go back to him. Lolion, I would like to hear your opinion about it very much."

"Lovushka, do it as you understand it yourself. There isn't any prohibition here, but why have you decided that you don't need to keep the money for yourself? Won't your brother need it?"

"My brother is a man and an exceptionally noble man. If he decided to marry, then he isn't so poor that he wouldn't be able to provide for his wife. And if I knew that he has not got money enough, then I would perform my most difficult corvee, but I would send him only that what I was able to earn myself.

I'm already an eternal debtor of yourself, Florentian and the young Ali. Of course, I owe to my brother, too, but if I still can hope that I can pay my debt to him some day, then I will never be able to repay at least the one hundredth share to you."

"Lovushka, all of it is only a superstition. Man turns himself into the slave of debts and obligations. Sometimes, he is also absorbed in thoughts about his moral debts that he becomes like the slave who is pursued with the whip of debts from all sides. The goal of life is to make oneself free. Only that part of man's kindness and his good work reaches the creative result what he has done easily and simply.

Accept everything what life is sending personally to you. Attain perfection, learn and look at yourself like to a channel, like to a uniting link between ourselves whom you raise so high and the people whom you take compassion on. Pass and pour everything what you will understand from us and through us to everyone whom you will meet. Bring onto the earth all of it what is higher which you will touch and you will fulfil your life's task, but that won't be your difficult and boring duty, that will be joy and peace of your own ringing love."

“Lolion, all that wisdom which I hear from you and see in you is still far away for me. I still cannot do the simplest things. Everything is irritating me. Sometimes I give my word to myself to remember you, Florentian and to behave myself in such a way as if you were standing next to me, but I trip up, become excited, and everything falls head over heels with the first trouble already.”

“While you keep repeating to yourself that I’m next to you only with your mind – your self-control will be only the barrel of gunpowder. However, as soon as you feel that your heart is living in my heart, that your hand is in my hand, then you won’t be thinking about your self-control as your own set goal anymore. Simply, you will be developing it within yourself, so that you would be always ready to fulfil the task set for you and you won’t have any time to think about yourself anymore...”

I. was silent for a while, he thought about something and continued.

“Today we won’t have our dinner with the duke who needs to talk to Ananda about lots of things. If you have rested already, we can go to our friend confectioner, order the pie for tomorrow’s evening and to eat there. Only it would be great if we could stop at the bank before doing it. I have a friend there, who will settle everything quickly for us, and tomorrow Joan will receive the message that she has become the owner of this property. Because of her French bourgeois psychology, it will be a big facilitation in her life.”

I was grateful to I. for his continual kindness to me. The questions about Henry and Bracano were always spinning on my tongue, I also wanted to find out something about Chava, but – not asking about anything – I ran to take the shower, and soon we were already sitting in the huge hall of the bank where even hundreds of the fans on the ceiling were unable to reduce the heat.

We put one portion of the money under the name of Joan with the right to use it at her own discretion. We transferred the second portion of the money to I.’s indicated address under my name. The address had a very fanciful, Indian name which I hadn’t heard up to now.

While we were sitting in the bank and waiting for the fulfilment of our order, I shared my sadness with I. by telling him that I didn’t have anything to give to the captain who gave such a wonderful ring to me as a keepsake.

“Don’t be sad about it. The captain is already a very happy man. He received the ring from Ananda as the pledge of their eternal friendship. The captain returned that thing to Ananda, which had an exceptional meaning for him. And besides, now the captain won’t be alone on his path anymore, because Ananda will always extend his hand of help to him.

I can give you exactly the same headscarf from sir Vomi, which he gave to Anna. You can give it to the captain if you want to. I will give you a little book, too, which you can wrap up into the headscarf. You can write him a letter and put everything on his table. He will come back and rejoice at such present more than the treasure that you could give to him.”

I thanked I. sincerely and added: “Everything is from you once again.” Shortly, they invited us to come to the desk, everything was put in order already, and we hurried to the confectioner’s by leaving the bank when it was closing already.

There wasn’t that dizzy heat in the street anymore, the cool was blowing softly from the sea – and I came to life.

“Lovushka, it will be difficult for you to get used to India’s climate. You’ll have to get in touch with Florentian and receive instructions from him on how to harden your organism,” I. told me lost in thought by taking my arm.

"Sir Vomi told me to ride on horseback, do gymnastics, box, but my second illness has ruined everything," I answered him.

Having come to the confectioner's shop, first of all we ordered the pie for tomorrow. I also asked the confectioner to make the same cake which he sent to the wise prince. Having fed us in the same secluded balcony, the owner told us about the latest news of Constantinople. The great events were taking part during this week. There were many people arrested. One of the richest persons of the city, one Bracano, and about ten of his fellows who were the same pillars of the stock exchange like himself, holding the whole commercial Constantinople in their hands, and who turned out to be only the band of villains in the end, became bankrupt. Hence, half of the city became bankrupt, too, including several of his friends. A part of the scoundrels succeeded to escape, a part of them were arrested, and nobody knew where their leader Bracano was up to now.

We heard out this story of his, felt for his unfortunate friends and came back home. My thoughts about Bracano and sir Vomi's words that my kiss had transferred the power of the universal law of compassion into his horrible world gave me no peace. I already was about to get irritated again inside of me because of the net of some secrets events, I already wanted to give a shout: "I hate secrets", but I heard I.'s voice.

"Lovushka, not everything is secret what you still don't understand, but if you want to make the captain glad with something and to write him the letter, then being so irritated like you are now, you will be able to write not only anything joyful, but even not anything reasonable for him.

Take my hand, feel my love to you and try to express all your pure and loyal friendship to the captain in words with this sir Vomi's headscarf. Try to prepare the working place in your soul as carefully as the captain did it on your table by putting the flowers which you haven't noticed up to now.

Don't try to reflect on the style and the words of your letter, but simply throw the little flower of your young soul to him – of your soul filled with such high flights of love that it made you kiss the fallen, defeated and humiliated living being.

Say good-bye to the captain exactly as Florentian and sir Vomi did to you. They were thinking only about you. You, too, think only about him. Try to enter his situation; think about his future life and imagine yourself being in his circumstances.

Love to man will be leading your pen with such a tact that the captain will see not a temporary friend within you, who is controlled by his circumstances, but the eternally loyal one who is ready to help him at once and to share all his misfortunes and joy."

I. was standing with me in his arms, his voice was exceptionally tender; as though I was melted in peace, joy and bliss, all trifles, everything what was unimportant and futile had stepped back somewhere. I saw the highest temple of man's heart, hidden from everybody, which no one was talking about, but which inspired life and moved everything what it met forward.

I was feeling well; I took the blue headscarf from I.'s hands, went with him for the book promised to the captain, came back to my room and sat down to write the letter. I didn't write many letters in my life with such joy and with so touched soul like this time to the captain. I was writing it to him easily and joyfully, as though my heart itself was leading the pen in my hand.

"My dear friend, my brave captain who hasn't yet loved till the end in his life, who hasn't been loyal and fearless till the end," I was writing to him. *"In this hour when I'm sad because of the*

separation with you – and who knows for how long it's going to last – my heart has opened for you till the end. And all thoughts of my head, which are catching the crows, as well as my entire heart, belong to you alone in this hour.

The suffering of separation doesn't exist for me, that suffering of the unknown which is tormenting people so much, which forces us to mourn over the beloved person who is leaving us, so that he could step into the new and unknown period of his life.

I know that it doesn't matter how life would separate us and wherever it would throw everyone of us – you aren't a page of life or an episode in it for me, but you are my eternal friend whose kindness and love – showed so undeservedly and so kind-heartedly to me – called out a return friendly love within myself, the loyalty of which is given to you forever and till the end.

I don't know how I could repay you at least a little for all your tenderness and for spoiling me, but I know for sure that it doesn't matter when or from where you would call me, I will be next to you if you needed my little help.

Your wish concerning Joan is already fulfilled, and she will possess her capital starting from tomorrow already; I have no doubt, the Gods will repay you for this properly and also "till the end".

Another portion of the money given at my disposal I allocated to support the poor musicians in your name, captain. In the name of Lisa and Anna (oh, how I wish to hear Lisa sometime) I will buy musical instruments for young talents and I will help them to learn.

Perhaps, I will cry when we say good-bye one to another, when I embrace you or squeeze your wonderful hands, but those will be only the tears of your spoilt child because of losing his indulgent and tender guardian, while that man who is writing to you now is kissing sir Vomi's headscarf with great respect and asks you to accept it as a keepsake together with I.'s book.

And that friend, that man is telling you: no separation exists for us. There's only one and the same path in which we will meet and separate again many times, but the loyalty in our hearts will be alive till the end.

Your Lovushka – the catcher of the crows"

I stuck down the envelope, wrapped up I.'s book into the headscarf and put everything into the beautiful, soft, goffered and glittering like a silk paper from Constantinople. I tied up everything from above with the ribbon, thrust the most wonderful white and red roses from the captain's bouquet behind it, went to his room and put everything on the night table.

I didn't want to sleep at all. I went to the balcony and started thinking about sir Vomi. How and where was he sailing now? How were the captain's freesias doing? Will sir Vomi plant them in his garden?

Soon I. visited me and offered me to take a walk with him. We went out to the settled down garden. The silent lightening was flashing round us, but the thunder was already rumbling in the distance. Anyway, we had time to take a breath of fresh air, we talked about tomorrow and agreed at what time we would visit the duchess and Joan. We came back home with the very first drops of the rain which was so rare at this season of the year in Constantinople.

The morning of the next day started unexpectedly late for me. I overslept for some reason. No one woke me up, and now it was silent in both adjacent rooms.

I didn't understand at once that today was the last captain's day in Constantinople, that tomorrow in the afternoon another one of my dear friends who had grown firmly into my heart and had taken his place there would disappear out of my sight.

"Not heart, but a rubber sack," I was thinking. "How strangely man is created! Only my brother was reigning in my heart still not so long ago. Then – as if not my brother's image shrank, but my heart widened – and Florentian settled next to him. Later sir Vomi settled there imperiously by taking a no less honourable place. Now I., both Ali, the captain, Ananda, Anna, Joan with her children, the duke and even the duchess were already there. And if I had a closer look there, I would find Stroganoffs, both Turks and... oh my God, that was the last straw – Bracano himself there..."

Being absorbed in thought, I didn't even notice when I. entered, I only heard how he laughed merrily. I came to myself and I already wanted to ask him why he was laughing, but I saw that I was sitting on the sofa with one shoe, holding the shirt in my hands and I was still muffled myself up in the frottier towel.

"Lovushka, we must be at Joan's in twenty minutes, as we agreed yesterday, but you are still not dressed after the shower, and it looks that it is hopeless to wait for you."

I became embarrassed terribly and I told him that we would be at Joan's in time. I dressed myself in a flash and met the clumsy sailor by the front door. He was bringing the captain's note to me.

The captain was writing to me that unexpectedly his business went very well for him and that he would be waiting for me in the steamer at seven o'clock. We will dine there and both of us will be at Anna's at nine o'clock.

I was very glad. I. praised the captain's offer, while the clumsy sailor added that he was told to visit me at half past six and to bring me to the steamer by boat.

I and I. hurried to Joan's. I was so hungry that I was running in the heat without any trouble, not muttering and not even looking for the shadows.

"I can see that hunger is the best way to inure you to heat," I. was jeering at me. He told me that Joan wouldn't feed me, because she wanted to idle and rest a little during holiday.

But Joan was lifegiving and charming, she seated us at the table instantly, and both of us appreciated her French breakfast properly.

When we went to her room where the corner of the bed was isolated with that new, unusual bed curtain, Joan showed us the note from the bank, received in the morning in Turkish and English languages which she didn't understand at all. I. translated the general meaning into French for her. Joan's eyes got stiff and she was staring at I., stunned. Having sat down for a long time in such stress depressively, finally she began to speak by rubbing her forehead with both hands.

"I don't want to and I cannot accept the money. Please find out who is sending it to me."

"There aren't any instructions here, it isn't even written which city it was sent from. It is only written that "the bank has the honour to inform Mrs. Joan Moranier of the deposit received in her name. She became the competent owner of the deposit from yesterday," I. re-read the excerpt from that note for her.

"That's the duke again. No, that's impossible. I didn't have the right to refuse the money given to my children, but I must work in order to provide for myself. Doctor I., you lent so much money to me that I didn't use all of it for establishing the shop. Besides, me and Anna are earning more than we expected already. I must give the money back to the duke."

"In order to give the money back to the duke, you have to be sure whether he really gave it to you. In what situation you are going to put both yourself and him if it didn't even occur to him to make this transfer."

Calm down. You are worrying too much lately, and that's the only reason why your health is so unstable. You looked like a refreshing flower, and now you are like a sickly old woman," I. was talking to her. I can only assure you that neither me nor the duke nor Lovushka – none of us have sent you this amount of money. Accept it obediently and calmly. If you can do it, keep it untouched for your children. Perhaps, someday you will meet some mother who's in the same trouble as you were in the steamer yourself and you will be happy that your hand can give the help of someone's kind heart to her, or maybe even save the unfortunate persons from hunger and poverty."

"Yes! Exactly so! That could really make me to accept the money sent by this strange benefactor if he doesn't want to do his kind work himself," Joan was speaking by rubbing her forehead again, as if wishing to erase some of her memories.

"What is wrong with you, Joan? Why are you nearly crying again? Why are you always rubbing your forehead?" I asked her, because I couldn't bear her suffering anymore by remembering the captain's description.

"Ah, Lovushka, I cannot recover from one horrible dream in any way. I'm afraid even of telling anybody about it, because one will laugh at me or take me for a madwoman, but inside of me I'm shivering of it so much that I'm really afraid of losing my mind."

"What have you dreamt about? Tell us everything – it will be easier for you, while we might be able to help you somehow," I. asked her gently.

"You see, doctor I., I was dreaming that the terrible eyes of Bracano were looking at me, while somebody, as though Leonid, but I'm not sure about it, gave the bracelet to me – exactly the same as the one of Anna – and the knife. And Bracano tells me to run to the duke's house, to find Lovushka there and to give the bracelet to him, and if somebody doesn't let me in, then I should even kill him, but to find Lovushka. And I'm running. I'm running along some streets, I find the house, I come running inside and I already know where to find Lovushka, but somebody barrs the way to me. I'm fighting, I'm begging him and finally, I hear Bracano's voice – message: "Stab him, or I will kill you", I pull the knife out... and everything disappears, only your face emerges before me, doctor I., it is so austere and menacing..."

And I wake up. I cannot understand where I am and what is going on with me... I fall asleep and I dream the same dream again. You know, this is so terrible that I'm weeping for long hours, not possessing any strength to overcome the horror and fear that after I fall asleep I will be dreaming the same dream again..."

"My poor Joan," I. was talking to her by taking her small hands. "Well, would these small hands be able to kill somebody? Calm down. Forget about this dream for ever. Especially because Bracano, an absolute patient, was taken out of Constantinople. He's living somewhere outside of the city. Your fear is absolutely without the slightest ground. Stop thinking about it. And remember and know my face to be kind and not austere. Why did you refuse to come to Anna to listen to the music today?" I. asked her, while still holding her hands.

"I told Anna that I would stay with my children, because I really was neglecting them a little lately. They would be completely unwell if not Anna's help. But to tell you frankly, I cannot look calmly neither at Stroganoffa nor at Leonid. I don't know myself why I started being afraid of them, but when I'm next to them I'm shaking all over, from my head to foot, as if I could sense something."

"Fear is a bad adviser, Joan. You are mother. You have a huge responsibility for your children. In order for you to be able to bring up those little ones of yours, first of all you have to educate yourself. You aren't just intemperate and impolite with your children, but lately you are provoking a constant fear to them, they are waiting for your scream or beating in every moment."

You need to be strong, Joan. You've experienced so many different feelings with respect to Anna, and only now when you saw that Anna was the second mother of your children and their real educator, you've reconciled yourself to that, and envy stirs only occasionally in your heart already. Your girl is clever not according to her age. She's very subtle and gifted. Think about that that she will have to live in much more complicated conditions than your youth. Try to avoid your constant irritability and a raised tone when you are associating with your children. An abyss may open between you and them insensibly. They will stop seeing the closest friend in you, and it doesn't matter how you would love them, they won't believe your love if you are always talking to them only in a raised tone."

"I understand everything, but I cannot do anything. Earlier I was thinking that it was easy to correct my character, and now I see that I cannot be calm even for an hour," Joan answered him.

"It doesn't matter how that is challenging the protest within yourself – first of all, think about your children and only then about yourself," I. told her, while standing up and squeezing Joan's hands.

I noticed that she brightened up again, her face stopped wrinkling and twitching, and the smile showed up in her lips.

When she was saying good-bye to us she asked us whether we would leave soon, whether we would be sailing in the captain's steamer again. I. answered her that we would leave soon, but that we hadn't yet decided how.

"How horrible it is! To stay here without you – I cannot even imagine it yet and I'm chasing those thoughts away. Doctor I., I've become so attached to you, and especially to Lovushka. You are my only benefactors, aren't you?"

"Joan, Joan," I reproached her. "Were only us who helped you in the steamer? And how about the captain? You've already forgotten about how he was taking care of you? And how about Anna who is living and working next to you? Anna who didn't allow you to sense her superiority over you for a single time? Unfortunately, your gratitude remembers only us, in the meanwhile, I'm absolutely out of the question here, and I was trying to explain this to you many times."

"Yes, Lovushka, I understand everything. I appreciate the duke, too, and everybody else, but I cannot do anything; doctor I. still is an unreachable deity for me; the captain is a noble sir who wouldn't allow me to enter his house further than its hall or cloak-room; while you are the closest to my heart. I'm very grateful to everybody, I know that I have to serve to them for their kindness, and I'm sure that I don't owe anything to you. And if you ever have your own home, then I will always find a shelter there, although I would be old and ugly. I cannot put it into words any better, I'm so stupid," Joan added silently.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks, while I couldn't bear to see her so crying.

"Joan," I was speaking to her by embracing her, "you feel such confidence in me, because I'm also such unexperienced and I don't know anything in life, just like you. I really opened my heart to you and

your children till the end, but the others – even more than I – they were treating you in the same way, but you can see and understand only my heart and you cannot see and understand the hearts of the people who are higher than you, that's why you are thinking like this only about me alone."

I kissed both of her hands. I told her that Chava would come back only in the evening after the music, and that she had not to worry about anything and go to sleep after taking his medicine.

We went home, but it was still difficult in my heart. I felt sorry for Joan. I understood that she would be able to create a peaceful and joyful life neither for herself nor for her children. I could imagine her future somehow especially clearly. I felt that she wouldn't be frank and friendly with the duke and Anna, although they would be attentive and careful to her, because her culture wouldn't allow her to perceive their inner strength which she could lean against, and she would accept their kindness only as their tolerance to her.

"Well, Lovushka, are the difficulties of life tormenting you?"

"Yes, they are, Lolion," I answered him, not even being amazed at his ability to penetrate into my thoughts. "And it is disappointing for me not because the people are wasting their strength only for their eternal thoughts about themselves, but because they simply become entangled in those constant thoughts about their private happiness and elementary closeness. Man confides his secrets and his most secret things to another one, which unfortunately, turn only upon his kitchen and bedroom, imagining that this is namely their friendship, and then there is no strength left for his thoughts to penetrate into the meaning of life intuitively. By spending his days in vain like this, man isn't searching for knowledge and he doesn't even seek for an ordinary development. Then there is no place left for the most sacred outbursts of love for his motherland, for another man, for the great idea of God or for creative joy in such life. Is man's family life the real life?"

"For many million people this is the only acceptable way of life, and it is an unavoidable stage for the whole mankind. In order for you to understand the whole charm and joy of liberation, first you have to understand the captivity and slavery of the things and passions surrounding you. In order for you to understand the power of the free spirit which is creating independently, you have to perceive that independence at least for a moment, to feel an absolute freedom within yourself, so that a wish would arise for you to keep growing further and higher. That person is shaking the yoke of his personal attachments off himself sincerer and easier, who understood his life as an eternity.

A narrow-minded person will call his life deplorable if flights don't rage in it, if he doesn't have an opportunity to shine with his external life. From here – from their desire for glory, riches and power – people come to that stage of fall on which you saw Bracano, but there are even worse cases. And only man who is distinguished for kindness of his heart, for its internal aspirations, and who doesn't distinguish himself in anything by appearance, can be interested in those ideas and thoughts which you were just talking about.

The great meetings of people, which turn the whole man's life upside-down are rare, Lovushka; but therefore, man who experiences such meeting once, suddenly returns to life, changes radically and he never comes back to his previous path of private life and his little, narrow-minded happiness. That man already knows what the light in his path is."

Having come to our home, we met Ananda and the duke who were returning with the carriage. Ananda greeted me pleasingly, looked at me attentively and asked me, smiling.

"Well, Lovushka, is your heart heavy? Why aren't you crying?"

"I leave it for the evening, otherwise I might not burst into tears from your human violoncello and your songs."

"Why is my violoncello human? What else could it be?" Ananda was laughing by filling up everything around him with the metal of his voice.

"Your violoncello is singing in a human voice, that's why I called it like this; I don't know what else they could be, but your laughter for me is like the clank of the swords, now I've really made sure of it," I shouted to him.

"Well, wait you, saucy chap! I will make you cry in the evening."

"No, no, don't even think about it! I need to save a little tear for saying good-bye to the captain tomorrow. And you are insatiable, aren't you? Everything has to be till the end for you. And the captain also needs my tears!"

Not only Ananda, but I. and the duke were laughing, too, while I ran to my room, dying with laughter.

Both of my friends visited me after some time.

"Well, you little coward who ran away from the battle-field because of the clank of the swords, confess what another trick are you going to play on me?" Ananda was joking.

"I couldn't even think of any tricks for you. Simply you will look me up and down with your stars and guess everything instantly."

"How?" Ananda interrupted me. "So I'm not only the clank of the swords, but also the stars?"

"Well, I'm not to blame here that mother-life has given the eyes-stars to you. Ask her about it, but what should I tell to the captain from you? I'm going to the steamer to dine with him. Should I bring something to him from you?" I asked him by imagining the captain's joy if I gave Ananda's kind regards to him.

"Very well that you are so loyal to your friend and that you are thinking about him. Let's go, maybe I will find something right for him."

We went down the winding stairs, straight into the beautiful Ananda's room. It was so well here! Some especially light atmosphere was in this room. I sat down on the armchair and forgot about everything in the world. I would have been sitting like this and enjoying the harmony surrounding me for a long time.

I don't know for how long I was sitting like this, for a minute or an hour, but I rested – as though I had been sleeping for a week.

"Give this to the captain. Let him give this thing to his wife when they come back home, married," Ananda was talking to me by extending the violet, leather case of a strange form to me.

"And I didn't know that the wedding was so soon," I told him by taking the case.

"Maybe the wedding won't be so soon yet, but in any case, he will be married when you meet him again."

“Ah, how I would like to hear Lisa’s play! Is she doing it better than Anna? Would her violin take my breath away? What a fool I am! When I kept darting glances at Lisa in the carriage, I was reflecting whether she loved me,” I was laughing boisterously by remembering my journey.

“When you are dining with the captain, don’t tell him anything about Lisa. Don’t even ask him whether he is going to Gurzuf, it doesn’t matter if he ever told you something about it or not.”

“That’s your order, Ananda, and I must remember it well, because I wanted to talk to him namely about Lisa. Now I will refrain from it, of course.”

“And doesn’t my prohibition excite neither protest nor indignation within yourself?”

“How could I protest against your prohibition if I believe and I know from my experience how you can guess people’s thoughts and how correctly you can describe every man. I’m only afraid that I could turn into the catcher of the crows and blurt out something because of my absent-mindedness,” I answered Ananda.

Chapter 25

Dinner in the steamer. Again Bracano and Ibrahim. The captain's departure. Thieves and Olga

Not risking to offend the sailor's discipline, the clumsy sailor was already knocking at the door and saying to me that it was time to go, because we could be late. Soon we were by the steamer.

The captain was waving his cap to me at a distance, and when I went up the gangway, he embraced me, sparkled his tiger eyes, and I saw him like for the first time in Sevastopol again. The sincere host was standing me a treat in his cabin of the captain. He thanked me for my presents and especially for the letter which, as he told me, had enriched him, because up to now no one was talking to him about such devotion and in such simple, but very meaningful words.

"For the first time I didn't consider or doubt anything, but I felt at once that your every word was the truth. And I cannot describe it how highly I appreciate the headscarf and the little book. The headscarf is in my pocket, while the book is at the head of the bed, and I won't part with them until I'm alive."

"Here's another regard for you from Ananda, which he has just given to me. It is dedicated to your wife, as soon as you come back home, married," I said to the captain by giving the case to him.

"What is here?" he asked me, surprised.

"I don't know, I didn't see it," I answered him briefly, being afraid of uttering any needless word.

The captain opened the case and gave a shout unwittingly.

He extended it to me, and I saw the same medallion which I told Stroganoffa to return, because it was stolen from Anna. Perhaps, it was a little smaller. It was also encrusted with the pansies from amethysts and brilliants, the small chain was also from the same jewels.

I was looking at this thing in silence and I was thinking about Lisa. Some anxiety arose within me, I didn't understand why each of my friends had some talisman, some flower of his own, some absolutely different nature of his behaviour.

"What are you so thoughtful about, Lovushka? Are you thinking about my wife?"

"No, captain, I don't know who will be your wife, do I? I don't know whose neck will be embellished by this medallion, but I think that if Ananda gave the ring with the amethyst to you and the same jewel to your wife, then it seems that he thinks that harmony would prevail between you and her in some fundamental questions of life. Consequently, my mind is quite at ease about you. I. says that Ananda isn't only the wise man, but that he's also the prince."

"I don't know if he's the prince by his descent and I doubt it," the captain said to me, lost in thought, "but his power of wisdom and the grandeur of his spirit exceeds the ordinary features so much that one could call them royal – I absolutely don't doubt it!"

"Yes, captain, of course; but for those who can see somebody else's perfection and who cannot attain it themselves, he's like unachievable riches, who only irritates them, while in order for them

to be infected with the want to step into the path of eternal development – here man needs not only the strength to understand, but also to refuse lots of things. In the meanwhile, I mentioned to me during these days that man cannot come up to any creative conclusions by the path of refusals and restrictions; that boredom of the virtuous path is one of the main superstitions. Well, how to understand that!”

“I understand it very well here, in Constantinople,” the captain told me. “If you really love somebody, you don’t even notice how you refuse something. And you don’t even refuse it, but simply give up yourself that what seemed to be valuable to you before. You have looked at it differently and noticed the nastiness of that what you could fight for before.”

The captain hid the case in the safe, darted a glance at the clock and offered me to go onto the deck.

I was surprised that it was dark already. The stars were shining in the sky, the water was also studded with the same stars, it was lit up around us like the forest of the fires of the looming ships. The captain’s steamer that was far away from the shore was already loaded, they only had to take the passengers tomorrow and maybe any casual cargo. The wonderful view of the city opening up from here, the boats and the cutters scurrying among the ships distracted my attention from the captain completely, but since I was standing next to him I noticed that he was leant over the side and he was observing the moving boats vigilantly. He looked at the dock again and told me.

“Chava is punctual. Sir Vomi has trained her well.”

“Chava? What does Chava have to do with it?”

“Wait here, Lovushka. Don’t go anywhere from here until I’m back. If you want to, you can observe that wide boat with the palanquin in the middle of it, because your friend, the clumsy sailor is steering it.”

Having told me this, the captain disappeared, and after a while I heard his voice far downstairs, next to the gangway.

How much I had to experience in this steamer before the storm, during it and after it was over! Where was that boy now, who came to rest to his only brother-father in one of the Asia’s cities? My thoughts flew me away from here in a whirlwind; I even forgot where I was and all of a sudden, I heard I.’s voice: “Don’t come up to Bracano in any way. Even if he begged you to under compassion of the entire heaven. The evil that has struck root in man doesn’t leave him so easily. Don’t take anything from him and don’t give anything to him.”

I was completely off the rails. I thought that this time it was really only a hallucination. I saw the clumsy sailor and three sailors at once. They were carrying the covered palanquin onto the deck with difficulty. Chava had muffled herself up in the raincoat, she was going in front of them, while Ibrahim with his father were following her.

When the palanquin came up to me, and the sailors stopped in order to wipe sweat from their wet faces, it seemed to me that my eyes met Bracano’s look from the drawn curtain of the palanquin.

The sailors took the palanquin again, brought it to the other end of the steamer and stopped at the luxurious cabin in which me and I. were sailing from Sevastopol.

A vague grievance that such a horrible being will be sailing in this wonderful cabin in which I. was travelling before, the piercing glance of Bracano with which he was just looking at me and which didn’t remind me of those eyes with the rolling down tear at the Stroganoffs’ table at all, I.’s words which as

though came flying through ether waves to me – everything was menacing me to become the catcher of the crows, but I heard the raised Chava's voice.

"No and once again no. I cannot allow you to do it."

"But I must give it to him if he's asking me to," I heard another voice and I recognized it immediately that it was Ibrahim.

"That is only the matter of your conscience, but in my opinion, your father acted wrong when he allowed you to talk to Bracano. Sir Vomi gave us precise instructions that all his contact with the outer world should be done only through me and your father until he's inhabited in the place assigned to him. Having accepted this task to fulfil, your father violated the instructions given to him from the very first steps."

"No, Chava, this absolutely isn't the truth. Bracano threw this little letter down to me from the palanquin and asked me to give it to Lovushka, and if Lovushka refused to read it, then I had to tell him to give the jewel back to him. Bracano's friends informed him that they could still restore his health if only he could get his jewel back. Bracano whispered all of it to me while they were preparing the stretcher to bring him to the cabin, and my father doesn't know anything about it," Ibrahim was speaking to her, while the wind was bringing each of his words to me.

"That is the last straw! Don't you even understand that you betray your father who has promised sir Vomi to fulfil his task precisely?"

"You exaggerate everything, Chava. Well, Lovushka isn't "the outer world", is he?"

"Well, of course! Lovushka is the inner Bracano's trouble. And how about you? You also aren't "the outer world"? You are that unreliable guard whom one cannot rely upon. And this mistake of yours now is already dragging the whole series of changes and confusion after it. Now others will be serving to sir Vomi instead of you, while you have to go away from this steamer."

"Not without reason they say that your accuracy doesn't go with the common sense. I gave the promise and I have to give the note to Lovushka."

"Regain consciousness, Ibrahim. You gave the promise? But you asked Ananda to believe in you. You swore to him and sir Vomi that you would be fulfilling all their demands precisely, although nobody was asking any vows from you. He was the first whom you gave the promise to. Your father told you that the journey would be difficult, he didn't want to take you with him, too. You were pressing him and you promised an absolute obedience to him, and now you already ignore the first two promises and you want to fulfil the third one instantly? The ill-fated torturer, the hard-hearted executioner Bracano is more important than sir Vomi and your father for you?"

"Chava, I don't want even to listen to you anymore. Everybody is responsible for himself. Lovushka isn't a baby, it'll be the way how he decides."

The conversation ended. I concentrated all my thoughts, I tried to feel I. next to me and I heard the steps coming nearer to me.

"Lovushka," Ibrahim went up to me and told me, "Bracano gave the note to you."

And he extended the folded leaf to me, which must have been torn from the notebook.

"I don't want to associate with that man in any form. I won't read his note and I think that you've accepted the role of his messenger to no purpose."

“Lovushka, I’m so sorry that your compassion lasted so shortly. Bracano is asking you to give the jewel back to him,” Ibrahim was telling all of it in a very irritable and derisive way to me. “All his future life, his health and his wellbeing depends on it,” Ibrahim added in high spirits after being silent for a while.

“I don’t know what his wellbeing depends on, but I think that it’s the other way round. I don’t have any Bracano’s jewel, I’m carrying sir Vomi’s jewel, purified by the feat of his love and compassion, the jewel that was suffocating that villain with its purity and from which he was asking me to liberate him himself. Only sir Vomi could order me to give it back to him. And if I get such order from him, I will give Bracano’s treasure back to him in an instant.”

Suddenly, in the fallen silence, some furious roar was heard from the luxurious cabin, as though a wounded beast had accumulated its strength for the last leap. The door of the cabin opened, and the stooped figure of Bracano appeared in the square of the bright light which was breaking through the door. His eyes were flinging lightning, he was trying to cross the threshold with all his might, the white froth was falling down from his mouth, and he reminded me of the flaming being from the hell.

He looked so horribly, his roared moaning was so disgusting that it made my entire flesh creep. I didn’t know what I had to decide if he came up to me, but all of a sudden, I heard somebody going upstairs hurriedly behind my back and I saw a tall man muffled himself up in the raincoat.

My heart told me that that was I., and I was right. Suddenly, I. shot up in front of Bracano who had already come out from the cabin.

“Go back,” I. commanded to the stooped Bracano clearly, relatively silently, but so masterfully that I had never heard him like this before. Bracano stooped from that voice even more, he yelped somehow, but kept standing.

“I command you, go back,” I. told him one more time, and such a metal was heard in his voice that I couldn’t even suspect it.

Not possessing any strength to keep on his feet, Bracano fell down on his four legs and crawled into the cabin in such a bestial way. I. came in after him, closed the door and stayed there for quite a long time.

“Lovushka, please take the note,” I heard the gasping Ibrahim’s voice. “It is burning me, I cannot stretch out my fingers, as though they were glued together. I don’t want I. to see this nasty shred of paper in my hands.”

“That is why you want Lovushka to take your mistake and the consequences of your disobedience upon himself,” suddenly I. uttered loudly, he appeared behind our backs very unexpectedly.

“Poor, poor Ananda. How you were swearing to him, Ibrahim! How you were begging him to vouch for you for sir Vomi! And here’s the result of your sincerity. And what is more, you also want to shift the consequences of your unfaithfulness upon another person. Great son and great friend! Put that nasty thing at my feet.”

Ibrahim put the scrap of paper at I.’s feet. It seemed to me that he did it absolutely easily and simply, although it seemed for him that he tore the paper off his fingers almost with the skin – so furiously he was rubbing his hand, although there was nothing in it anymore, while the note was already put on the deck for a long time.

I. poured some cologne over Ibrahim’s hands. He also poured it over the note and set fire to it. The paper flared up, and at the same time Bracano howled again by making my flesh creep again.

"Go home. Forget that you had to sail here. Tell your mother that you are ill, that she has to put you to bed and to call the doctor. Keep your bed for three days. When your father comes back – you will get up, remember everything and tell everything to him himself. Go," I. told him, and his voice was so menacing like the dreadful hum of the sea.

When Ibrahim's steps died away, I. turned to me, extended his hand to me and told me.

"Thank you, my loyal friend. If you were searching for an opportunity to express your gratitude to all of us during your entire life, starting from Florentian and ending with me – you wouldn't have done it better than your obedience to me now.

As soon as you had touched the note written by that villain who found the way to get in touch with his gang again – you would have lost your will. You would have given the jewel to him for the new, repeated desecration of it and then not only you would have died yourself, but you also would have done thousands of troubles for your brother and all of us.

And now, the ill-fated Ibrahim's disobedience has already caused lots of troubles for us. I will have to go instead of him, but you don't be sad, I will be back in one day, they will change me along the way. Now Ananda will come to take you and the captain, because they are chasing you again, this time because of the jewel already."

"Aren't you afraid?" all of a sudden I. asked me.

"No, I'm not afraid, but is one wrong man's action really so important in his life? Is the interaction of things really so strong?"

"It is even much stronger than this simple example which you have just seen. Communication of people, their relations one to another – those are the continuous threads which are invisible with one's bare eyes, but they tie people with steel ropes for the entire centuries."

The easy and quick captain's steps were heard, and he asked me, excited.

"What happened? Why did Ibrahim leave? He was gloomier than the cloud. Why didn't he want to explain anything to me? Who will be sailing with that degenerate?"

"I will be sailing, captain, don't worry," I. answered him, whom the captain didn't even notice because of the black raincoat in which he had muffled himself.

The captain was stunned and deprived of speech, because I. showed up so suddenly and he was able to utter this only after a while.

"But how I didn't notice you? Why wasn't I reported about you? But that's an intolerable negligence of my sailors on duty!"

The captain who always used to be so reserved and correct, now was so excited and irritated that I had never seen him like this before.

"I met your senior assistant on shore. He took me onto his boat, but I know that he went to search for you personally in order to report about me. Don't be angry, he knew that you were living with us in the same house in Constantinople, he didn't deny my request and took me to the steamer with him without your permission," I. was comforting the captain.

"Oh my God! Well, your presence in the steamer for at least another hour is more than happiness for me, but the violation of the discipline..."

Then the captain's senior assistant went up to him. He reported his coming back and the arrival of doctor I. The captain's anger settled down already, he only asked his assistant why he delayed the report about the arrival of the person without the permission for so long. The assistant raised his bandaged hand and told him that some gawk left the box with the saw and the nails on the path, so he injured his hand and was forced to be delayed until it was bandaged.

I. warned the captain that Ananda was also waiting on shore. He wanted to say good-bye to him personally and to stay in the steamer for a while. The captain became glad like a child and sent the boat for Ananda.

Me and I. were left alone in the darkness of the night and the sea, which was sparkling with the stars – and the stars were really great. I pressed myself to him and started complaining to him that I didn't have any strength to understand why here, next to this sparkling sky which was reflected in the mirror of the sea, next to the aroma of the flowers, next to the beauty of human bodies and spirit, so much evil, suffering, sacrilege and pain could exist.

"All this life doesn't fit in my soul," I kept complaining to my friend. "Well, now how can I go to listen to the music if I know and remember that the crowd of villains is harming poor persons, that a lonesome homeless man is sitting somewhere, abandoned by everybody, without any love and peace? And here is this villain, murderer and thief, while the orphans and the starving people are there. How will Ananda be able to play and sing after such a disappointment in Ibrahim? Ananda has received a blow from Anna and Henry. He was harmed two times already – now he has to bear the Ibrahim's blow for the third time. Will he be able to play and sing?"

"Lovushka, you have seen the crowds of people who were thinking only about themselves. You got used to perceive the music only as an entertainment and pleasure. You know only those talents who are playing and singing only for money. Sometimes, they also are able to reveal the beauty for a man in the upswing of their creation, but their playing, their songs, their music didn't become a need to pour their love with these sounds in order to brighten up people's lives. The music of Ananda, Anna and many others like them – that's their light, their prayer and joy, an invitation to kindness for all suffering people and the help for them. They don't need any glorification of the crowd. They are meeting the evil in that crowd; they calm and alleviate passions. And today when you are going to listen to the music – you will understand the grandeur of Ananda's spirit. You will hear not the moaning of his heart, reproaching those who have caused pain, - you will see an absolute forgiveness to them, a joy, because he can take their suffering upon himself."

The voices were heard, the light began to sparkle on the deck, and I saw Ananda who was coming arm-in-arm with the radiant captain.

Ananda looked at me tenderly, asked the captain whether he liked the present for his future wife and left us in the captain's cabin. He asked us not to leave the cabin until he's back and went to visit Bracano with I.

The captain changed into another suit, commanded something to his assistant who changed him, and when we were about to sit down for a game of chess, both of our friends were back.

I. stayed in the steamer, and this time I was especially sorry about our parting.

"Well, my friend, you don't want to part with I.?" Ananda asked me.

"I don't want to, but will I ever become so strong that a separation wouldn't break my heart like an irretrievable grief? My heart has turned into some kind of a sack during all this time, - so many

beloved people have settled there, but at the same time, this sack is full of holes – as though the separations had riddled it like bullets,” I answered him.

“Lovushka, it’s nothing! Tonight me and Anna will find such a musical putty for you that tomorrow you will wake up like an absolutely different person,” Ananda smiled to me.

At the captain’s instruction, the boat sailed up to an absolutely different place. We found the carriage there and we were at Stroganoffs’ and nine o’clock sharp.

They were waiting for us in the sitting-room with the tea. I saw the plate that I gave to Ananda on the table, among the wonderful vases with the flowers, while the same cake which the confectioner sent to the wise man-prince back then was placed on the plate.

While observing Yelena Dmitriyevna from my place, I noticed that she had become a little bit thinner; she kept darting glances at Stroganoff with anxiety, while he was cheerful and joyous, but he wasn’t paying any attention to his wife and his youngest son.

As usual, Anna was wearing a white dress and she looked very splendidly, but there was some kind of a change within her. I couldn’t describe it, but she seemed to be earthlier and more common to me. Now I already was able to imagine her as a mother or somebody’s wife, while those thoughts didn’t even come into my mind before. I was unable to perceive what had happened within her, because Ananda interrupted my reflections.

“Lovushka, I gave your plate to Anna, do you have any objections against it? That will supplement her dowry, because I don’t doubt that you have already given her in marriage to somebody.”

I became so embarrassed and dumbfounded that I wouldn’t have known how to get out of a scrape if the duke hadn’t come in at that moment and started apologizing for being late.

The duke explained to us that some thieves took advantage of the servants’ negligence and got into our rooms, but they were spotted in time and didn’t have time to steal anything, so he had to calm down his frightened wife and to set guards everywhere, that’s why he was delayed.

Ananda nodded his head, the captain became excited, because he couldn’t stay overnight at home, while the only word flashed through my mind: “already”.

“Yes, yes, already,” as though having looked through my skull, Ananda whispered to me.

The duke was showered with questions from all sides; the women seemed to be frightened. Only Anna looked at me and Ananda attentively and remained absolutely calm.

This room was also decorated with flowers, and I thought that although the captain was plunged in his business, he didn’t forget to decorate this sitting-room for the last time, because only he was able to choose the flowers with such a subtle taste of his.

I sat down next to him and whispered to him.

“Captain, I love you so much for your attention to people.”

“I love you so much for your desire to express more to people than they are worthy of it,” he answered me. “Lovushka, I’m worried. I would like so much for you to leave this place as soon as possible.”

“Although I’m not worried, but I would like to leave this place as soon as possible, too,” I confessed to him.

Anna sat down at the grand piano. Ananda tuned his violoncello.

All of a sudden, absolutely unexpectedly, I recognized the Russian song, but it was arranged so and played in such a human voice by the violoncello that I forgot everything in a flash.

A string of the days from my childhood ran past my eyes, then I grew a little, then I came back to my childhood – and it continued like this until the sounds of the music stopped.

“We’ll go from Russia to England,” Ananda told us.

A lullaby was flowing, and I was unable to single out anything – there was only happiness to live.

Ananda stood up, put the instrument by the wall and broke into a song. I don’t know what he was singing, I didn’t understand the words, but I was feeling with my every nerve that it was the hymn, it was the hymn of love, overcoming everything. The joy with which the heart of the singer was beating was flowing out of me as well, I was feeling it around me and inside of me almost physically. There were no boundaries between me and the people surrounding me anymore; I flew away and melted in the universe by perceiving myself as its living, little part.

I already was unable to distinguish how the sounds were changing, how the singers were changing, only when both voices merged into the duet like in the ecstasy of the prayer, I was thanking the world, because I was living in it. I gathered the entire evil and villainy, and I promised to somebody – to the one who’s the highest of all – to live in such a way that I could help all ignorant persons and villains to perceive the beauty; because once I have perceived it within myself, I was unable to live without it anymore.

The duet ended. Nearly everybody’s eyes were wet, while mine were dry and burning. Only my heart was beating like a hammer, and my thoughts were flying absolutely differently, as though the music today had helped me to find the new tracks to live by perceiving people unselfishly and impartially.

While saying good-bye to Anna and kissing her hand, I told her.

“They say in one fairy-tale that it is more important for the honest, sanctimonious man to show the path to heaven for another person, although he had to go wrong himself. Tonight you showed that path for two ignorant persons. The ignorant persons might not be able to reach the heaven, but they won’t forget you, as one cannot forget the bliss, once experienced in one’s dream.”

Her eyes flashed, she smiled to me and gave the flower from her chest to me.

The captain who was standing next to me added.

“I can tell you only this: the moments experienced tonight revealed to me in what kind of chains of superstitions I was living up to now. I didn’t understand that man’s life began where his division into castes, nations and conditionalities of one’s social state ended. Tonight I understood that the earth and heaven flowed together in man’s heart.”

And Anna gave him the flower which he kissed and put it into that pocket where – as I already knew – sir Vomi’s headscarf was placed.

We left with the duke for whom the carriage was still waiting and who noticed only now that I. wasn’t with us. Ananda explained to him that I. stayed in the steamer and that he would be sailing with the captain up to the first stop from where he would come back with the evening steamer.

The duke was very sad, because he didn’t say good-bye to I. and he was still worried about the thieves who had gotten into the house.

The captain got on the carriage with us and told us that he wanted to accompany us till home and to see the rooms himself.

When we came to the gates we saw that the guards were worried. They were running along the paths of the garden and insisting that they heard some noise.

Ananda calmed them down and asked them to stand in one place by the main door. He hurried to our rooms. We didn't see any mess here, everything seemed to be in place, but Ananda noticed somebody's the red shawl with black brims left on my bed. A strong and sickening odour of perfume was smelling bad from it from the distance. It was so intoxicating that it was even making us sick.

Having lifted this shawl with the small stick, Ananda threw it into the hearth. A rather thick letter was placed on the table in the captain's room. The address was written in the language which I didn't understand.

"What thieves! Duke, they are only fools! Calm down, they are charlatans," Ananda was talking to the grief-stricken duke.

"Maybe it is so, but since that time when Joan took leave of her senses here, I started worrying about all my guests. That is the last straw! Somebody was throwing all kinds of rubbish here. This perfume has more repulsive smell than any coquette," the duke answered him by looking round the corners.

"And after all, whom is this letter for? Do you understand this language?" he went up to the table and asked Ananda.

"I understand this language. It is not an address written here, but a sententious utterance from the Koran: "Let that one who wants to win take not the sword, but the power of Allah". Some of them left the shawl, while the others left the letter, but the tracks of both are leading to one knot, to one gang. There's nothing terrible here. Go to your wife and soothe her; go to sleep calmly, and we'll talk about it tomorrow."

The duke said good-bye to us, but he didn't seem to be settled down completely.

As soon as we were left alone, Ananda threw the letter over on the thick paper with his small stick and cast it in the hearth on the shawl. He didn't explain anything to us, poured some liquid over both things, and they turned into ashes even without any smell or sound.

The captain told us that he was leaving the clumsy sailor for us for the night. He was able to do without him until nine o'clock in the morning. Ananda agreed and told him that I would spend the night on the sofa in his room, because there was a nasty stink here; while the clumsy sailor would lie down in his hall.

No sooner said than done. We accompanied the captain to the gangway, while the clumsy sailor was already with us in less than half an hour. He was showing his teeth benevolently.

He brought us the letters from I. and the captain. I. was writing that he managed to get in touch with his friends and that he would accompany Bracano only up to the first stop, so he would be back home tomorrow in the evening. He was asking me not to step aside from Ananda for at least a moment. The captain was writing that in the steamer everything was in order, that Chava was a decent person and that now he also loved her; that his inner state was still unusual, that he was still carrying the heaven and the earth within himself by feeling their unity. He only was unable to express it in words and he didn't know for how long it would last.

The night at the duke's house passed successfully, but early in the morning, much earlier than usual, the duke was already knocking at our door, asking to examine his wife who had lost her speech again, and there was only horror in her eyes.

To my amazement, Ananda left his room fully dressed and he was already going to leave with the duke without me. Having remembered I.'s command, I started begging him to wait for me for five minutes.

"You don't want to break the command of your guarantor in this situation, too?" Ananda gave a laugh.

"Ananda, for God's sake, what kind of a guarantor have you invented here? Simply, I want that I. wouldn't have to worry about this, too, and I would like to fulfil at least this instruction of his accurately."

"Yes, Lovushka, I'm very happy that I. has found such loyal friend in you. I. is doing better than I do by giving you precise instructions where and how you should act, he's trying to develop in man his independent ability to walk his path from his very first steps.

I always want to prepare a man, to teach him to stand firmly on his own feet, and everything is great while he's next to me, he's strong and loyal. However, as soon as he is left alone, his decisions become doubtful and unstable, while his tempered loyalty seems to be the myth.

I have heard many times that I. is strict to those who are walking next to him, but I see that their path is shorter and easier, because they are obligated to strengthen their inner discipline within themselves from the beginning."

"Can anybody tell that I. is strict?" I shouted in indignation. "This is the same if somebody stated that living next to you didn't turn into happiness and celebration. Oh, Ananda, I don't know anything yet, but I really know that you and I. are creating the new perception of life values for people, and my entire being is full of gratitude and respect for you. I wake up happy in the morning, because I will spend my entire day next to you. I am so happy that I am with you. It is as easy to breathe for me when I'm next to you as when I. is next to me. And I'm not afraid of you at all."

"Can you ever forgive me for the dervish cap?" Ananda laughed, but he added very seriously in a moment. "Are you ready? Now think about Florentian. Let's drop in to take your first-aid kit and let's go straight to the duchess. I think that not an ordinary case is waiting for us there."

Ananda gave a strict order to the clumsy sailor not to open the door of his hall to anybody and not to allow anybody to come into his rooms, even if they tried to get in after waiting for a while or to hand a note – not to open the door to anybody for any reason and not to take anything from anybody.

"At your command, not to open, not to take anything," the sailor answered him. "If you are late until half past eight – the captain will punish me. I must be back before nine o'clock."

"At your command, you will be back before nine o'clock," Ananda answered him merrily. "If we are late, I am to blame and I will deliver you myself."

"At your command, you are to blame," and the clumsy sailor locked the door of the hall.

We dropped in at my room. Silence was reigning here. I compared this moment with the captain's laughter which was heard here not so long ago and with the creative life which was flowing to us from I. so intensively, and the silence seemed to me to be some evil-fated and lifeless.

I took the first-aid kit; at first, Ananda was taking something out from I.'s first-aid kit, but then he changed his mind and took it all. On our way to the duchess, I told him my impression about our rooms. He nodded his head and told me.

"When you are going to work, prepare a working state within yourself. Focus your thoughts on Florentian, concentrate your entire attention, all your feelings and thoughts only to what you are going to do now."

I remembered that not so long ago I. was telling me almost the same words, but we were by the threshold of the duchess room already and, having left all my not meditated thoughts for that "later", I stepped into the bedroom by carrying the image of my great friend within myself.

The duke was sitting next to his sick wife, as though he didn't see or notice neither her repulsive appearance nor her horror. He saw only her suffering, he was trying to alleviate it for her with all his might and he was suffering her pain and his helplessness to help her himself...

The duchess' eyes were flinging lightening. Only her eyes were alive in that face that had turned into the mask again, which looked the same when we visited her with I. for the first time.

Having seen Ananda, the duchess mooded bitterly, and the tears came pouring from her eyes.

Ananda went up to the bed, gave his first-aid kit to me, told me to stand absolutely close to him and whispered to me.

"Stand pressed to me in such a way that you would always touch me."

He took the duchess' hand and asked the duke.

"Who was keeping watch by the patient this night?"

"The trained nurse was keeping watch until midnight, then the housemaid of the duchess," the duke answered him.

"Call both of them to come here immediately."

The duke left to fulfil Ananda's order.

"Take my arm and be attentive," Ananda told me when the duke left.

Soon he was back with both women. The housemaid of the duchess entered the room, she looked like harmed and she started making excuses for something instantly. The second nurse seemed to be confused and even sad.

Ananda told them to stand on another side of the duchess' bed, while he was still holding both hands of the duchess.

Having seen her housemaid, the poor woman became very excited and she was trying to say something to Ananda.

"Duchess, calm yourself! Your suffering will end soon," Ananda was talking to her by stroking her hands. "Don't be afraid of anything. I am here, right? Be patient."

"Were you the first who was keeping watch?" he asked the nurse.

"Yes," she answered him silently and obediently by looking at his eyes gently.

"Why did you leave the bedroom when you had to keep watch during the whole night?"

"I don't want to lie to you and I cannot tell you the truth, because I promised to keep silent."

"All right. Well, why did you come here when nobody ordered you to keep watch?" he addressed the housemaid of the duchess.

"The trained nurse had a headache. She called me herself and asked me to change her, and now she's afraid of losing her place and she excuses herself," the housemaid started talking impudently, but not having held out the attentive look of Ananda, she cast down her eyes and fell silent.

"Nurse, did you put this hood on the duchess' head during your watch?"

"Hood?" she uttered amazed and looked at the duchess. "No, I combed and did up her hair in a plait and gave her the medicine with milk to drink, which you gave to me. When Olga called me, the duchess was already sleeping peacefully. What are you talking about, could I put this terrible turban on the duchess' head?"

"Do you want to shift everything on me?" the housemaid wanted to shout, but she stopped short from Ananda's look again.

"Hence, you left when the duchess was sleeping peacefully, and there wasn't this thing on her head?"

"The duchess was sleeping, she looked fine, it was almost midnight, I cannot remember exactly, and there really wasn't anything on her head," the nurse answered firmly. "I entered the room only now for the first time since that time and I'm stunned with the horrible change which has happened to the duchess."

"Great. Was the duchess sleeping when you entered the room?" he addressed the housemaid.

"Yes, she was sleeping. I sat down next to her bed and I must have taken a nap. His Highness entered the room, and I woke up from his steps."

"Why are you lying, Olga?" the duke asked her with indignation. "You weren't in the room, you were whispering to somebody at the door, while the patient was tossing in the bed by risking to fall out of it."

"It only seemed so for Your Highness..."

The duke simply became furious, and I didn't even expect it from him. He was about to attack the brazen-faced liar.

"Duke, come to me. If you want to save your wife, you need an absolute self-control," an imperious voice of Ananda was heard, which had a unique modulation, characteristic only to him.

The duke had turned pale, almost blue, his lips were trembling. He went up to Ananda and put his hand on him as Ananda had told him to do. Gradually, he became calm, he started breathing more evenly, and the blue colour disappeared from his face.

The housemaid turned towards the door, ready to leave the room, but Ananda's look as though fastened her to the floor.

"When, at which hour did you put that nasty thing on the duchess' head?"

"I didn't put anything on her head and I don't understand why you are carping at me. I'm not a serf, am I?"

"If you don't know who put this hood on, then you will take it off her now."

"I'm not going to take it off her head in any way. It might be even bewitched or poisoned."

"What?" the duke gave a frenzied shriek.

"I have already told you: now your self-control is equally required like my knowledge here. Observe the course of events and fulfil everything what I will tell you to do precisely. We cannot waste the time," Ananda stopped the duke once again.

"Take the hood off her immediately," he commanded to Olga, "otherwise, I will put it on your head myself."

Some loathing, a bestial fear, hatred and malice flashed through the face of the housemaid.

She would have scratched Ananda's eyes out, she kept turning to the door, her only wish was to escape, but an invincible power of Ananda was holding her fastened.

"Doctor, let me take the hood off," the nurse told him. "I'm the main culprit of the misfortune, I allowed her to deceive me."

"No. The time will strike for your selflessness, too. Olga, don't delay, because the hood will get on your head."

The unfortunate woman was coiling like a snake. As though against her own will, she turned towards the bed of the duchess by looking at the hood with horror. The hood with its wide, red ribbons and black, winding brim reminded me of the shawl that was by my bed.

It seemed that the woman would never get to the bed. Her bent fingers were more ready to strangle the duchess than to take the hood off her and to alleviate her suffering.

"Quickly, otherwise you won't have any choice," and as though the lightning flashed to Olga from Ananda's eyes.

I felt how the current of discharge ran through me from that side where I was touching Ananda – so strong was the strain of his will.

Olga's hands extended in a flash, and the nasty hood was hanging on her fingers.

A loud shriek of horror escaped our lips: the whole forehead, ears and the neck of the duchess were blood-stained.

"This isn't the blood, but the paint which the villains applied on the hood from inside," Ananda slowed down our excitement, "but this paint consists of the itching, poisonous substances which may bring the suffering person to madness and paralysis. Fortunately, we are here in time. Lovushka, quickly melt Ali's pill in that liquid which you will find in my pocket from your side."

I did it immediately, and Ananda gave the medicine to the duchess to drink himself.

"Now, don't let my hand go and take the third bottle from I.'s first-aid kit. Duke, you also don't step back from me and prepare the wad of cotton for me."

When the bottle and the wad were given to him, he wiped the patient's forehead, head, ears and threw the wad into the hood which Olga was holding with her extended hands like a sack.

He kept wiping the head of the patient until there wasn't any sign of the paint left. The face of the duchess became better and better after each wiping of Ananda. Finally, she settled down completely and fell asleep.

Then Ananda called the nurse, gave her some drops to drink, rubbed her hands with the same liquid which he was wiping the patient with and told her.

"Now you can show your selflessness to the patient. In spite of all these means of caution, you will still be feeling the itch of your entire body, because you will have to change the linen of the patient, and it is already imbued with that poisonous nastiness, although one cannot see it. When you take the linen off, melt that what is left in this bottle in the dish with the water, then wipe the whole body of the patient with the sponge.

Don't worry, she will be sleeping soundly, and your gentle movements won't wake her up, but you won't be able to do it alone. Duke, do you have any reliable person at home?"

"Well, this wonderful Olga seemed to be the most reliable one. Whom can I rely upon now?" the poor duke answered him.

"Excuse me," the nurse uttered, "my mother is here. Olga called me supposedly in her name, while my mother... Anyway, later about that. In short, my mother is experienced and great nurse. She will help me."

"Great, call her," Ananda told her.

During that time, he explained to the duke that the patient had to be moved to another bed and even to another room, so that nothing would remind her of this night.

As though he didn't see Olga who was still standing in the same pose, holding that nasty hood in her hands, although she was addressing him several times already by saying: "it is burning", "it is itching".

When the nurse came in with her mother, Ananda looked both of them up and down and told them to move the patient on the sofa that was standing in the corner until another bed was being brought in, in which the patient would be carried to another room.

Only then he paid attention to Olga and told her.

"Go first," all of us followed her from the bedroom, while she was still going with her hands extended with the hood up to my room.

"Throw it in the fireside," Ananda told her, and the hood flew on the same ashes which were still left after the night, while Olga herself was standing like crazy, with her hands still extended, as if she wanted to seize the hood again or to fight against the wish to scratch her itching hands.

Ananda went up to her, gave the moistened cotton wool to her, told her to clean her hands and asked her.

"Is the money promised to you really so pleasing that you could bring yourself to murder the duchess? In the meanwhile, yesterday the duchess asked the duke to provide for your future and to put the capital in the bank under your name for your loyal service."

"And I had to fulfil this want of her today," the duke confirmed it, "it is great that your loyalty was revealed in time."

Olga's lips were twitching for a long time already, the tears were rolling down her cheeks, but I understood that she was all of a sweat, that some kind of a fight was taking part within herself, that her thoughts weren't clear to the end for her herself.

Ananda ordered her to take the matches, to set the hood on fire and told her.

"It will burst into powerful flame. Olga, if you have forgotten how you behaved, what you were doing from yesterday's evening, then remember everything as soon as this poisonous material is burnt down with the hood."

Olga set the hood on fire, and as soon as the flame gave a lick to its inner side, such a sound was heard as though the gunpowder had exploded, while the frightened woman jumped back to the middle of the room with the shriek.

That jump of her was so funny that I was unable to suppress my loud laughter, while the duke was also rocking with laughter even louder than I was.

"It is great for you to laugh," Olga attacked me with indignation, "you are sound and unhurt, but in truth, everything has happened because of you, mister. All my and other people's troubles are because of you."

"Is it really so, Olga?" Ananda asked her. "Why did you meddle into the conversation of the trained nurse and the duchess yesterday? Why were you trying to persuade the patient that there was a doctor in Constantinople, who could cure such illness faster and better than me and I. could? What has Lev Nikolayevich to do with it?"

"That doctor promised some money for me and brought the hood. I didn't know that it was poisoned. He told me that the young mister needed to be evicted from this home, because he was troubling everybody here. He asked me to put the shawl and the letter on his bed, and when the young mister fell asleep, I had to let the doctor and his assistants into his room, so that they could take the young mister to the hospital.

When the duke entered the bedroom of Her Highness, I was just speaking to the doctor. I had to take those doctors to the room of Lev Nikolayevich long ago already, but the nurse wasn't sleeping yet, and I didn't have time to lead them through the bedroom earlier..."

"Where did those villain doctors of yours go?" the duke became excited. He was prepared to run to his wife again.

"Don't worry, duke. They are certainly talking to the clumsy sailor by expecting to bribe him. Let's get down the winding staircase to him. In the meanwhile, you Olga, sit down here and don't move until we are back."

Having said this to her, Ananda left, while we followed him.

While we were going downstairs, we already could hear the knock at the door and the sonorous voice of the clumsy sailor, demanding not to knock and not to break the door.

Having heard our steps, the clumsy sailor asked Ananda to allow him to bring those villains to their senses, who were abusing him impudently and demanding him to open the door.

Ananda gave a laugh and asked him whether he knew how to fire the new pistols which were left to him. Having heard the affirmative reply, Ananda told him merrily.

“They are charged with the special cartridges. If a man falls down or turns his back to you, don’t be afraid, shoot at him anyway until you have any cartridges left. When you use up that cartridge clip, take another one and aim at the second villain, while the third one will run away himself with fear.”

I went so mad that I looked like Olga with the hood. I was standing with my hands extended pleadingly and I was unable to grasp how Ananda could command to shoot at people.

A pistol appeared in the hands of the clumsy sailor in a flash, an intense blaze was heard, the bullets with the clouds of smoke and the roar of the shots were really flying towards one of the attacking Turkish bandits. He fell down, but it seemed to me that he wasn’t hurt. In the meanwhile, the bullets were already flying towards the second robber who also fell down and who was turning from side to side comically by trying to evade the bullets which were flying towards him; while the third one, having seen his fallen friends, surprised by so many shots and smoke, thought that they were dead and ran away.

We went to the hall, and when the smoke cleared away, we saw two frightened and motionless attackers who were still lying on the ground with their ears plugged.

“Mister great wizard, tell me, am I alive or in your kingdom already?” one of them mumbled in a perfect English language.

That was so unexpected that I snickered, jumped up and was unable to suppress the laughter that was suffocating me anymore. The clumsy sailor was neighing like a horse with his arms put to his sides. The duke kept up with us, and Ananda had to call us to order for a couple of times.

People on the ground were dressed in the Turkish clothes. Being stunned with lots of the shots and our loud laughter, they couldn’t understand what had happened to them. They were sooty, blackened with gunpowder and they look deplorably, but at the same time, they looked so funny that it was very difficult to keep from laughing.

“Who are you? Judging from your addressing the great wizard, I think that you are the lower wizards?” Ananda asked that bandit who began to speak in English with the smile.

Then another villain raised his head, looked at Ananda and started tattling in Greek by covering his eyes with his hand continuously.

The first one came to himself a little, he was looking at his accomplice with hatred and told in English again.

“Please don’t believe him. He’s the same doctor as I’m the cook, while Bracano gave all the material for the hood to us. That villain has made a half of the city to become bankrupt, including us. Only he himself has escaped somewhere; he must have taken lots of riches, too. His last deception was to tell us that the jewel – the priceless black brilliant – was hanging on your lad’s neck. He gave an amulet – a shawl to us, so that your lad would get to his forefathers faster. He gave a night-hood to us and told us that the whole fabulous wealth of the duchess – the jewels and the gold – were under the bed in her bedroom, and he lied about everything. Such life for me is not a life, I’m a beggar. Do whatever you want to do to me.”

“And aren’t you afraid of Bracano anymore?” Ananda gave a smile and asked him.

“I’m not only afraid of him, but I would like to strangle him with my own hands,” the unfortunate person answered him, while choking with anger.

“But you’ve made your terrible oaths and pledges not only for him, haven’t you?” Ananda asked him again.

“Of course, the whole ceremony was carried out with us,” the first one began to speak again, “but he considered himself to be the first assistant of that great wizard whom nobody had ever seen, but everybody was speaking about him that the devil himself couldn’t be more horrible than him.”

“Oh, I am a lost man! My children are lost,” the Greek began to squeal again.

“Shut up, you evil spirit, or I will teach you to keep silent,” the imaginary Turk cried out in fury.

“Well, here’s what we are going to do. Now we will call the police, and they will take both of you to the prison,” Ananda uttered. “I give you twenty minutes for your considerations. You can write a letter to your close friend or a relative, explain your situation and the bankruptcy to him and ask him for help in order to ransom you from the prison, but in this case, you must promise me to leave from here and to start working.”

“I am to blame for the bankruptcy of all my friends and relatives, so I can expect only curses and the same prison from them, and I don’t want to work. I was the rich and the master, so I don’t want another life. The goal of my life is to take vengeance on Bracano. They may take me wherever they want to. I will get out of a scrape,” the first one was talking.

“Oh, to work. But wasn’t I working during my entire life?” the second one was squealing. “I was always toiling by bringing the strangers’ money from one place to another one. I was only salivating over their money. Others were piling millions, and they would throw only thousands for me. I was working honestly. Am I to blame that one can get more from frauds than from an honest job? Fools are bending their backs from morning till evening, - and they can bring only a rouble back home. Am I to blame that my job is more cunning?”

I don’t have anybody whom I could write to. I was serving such ones like him,” he pointed his finger at his accomplice, “only now they don’t have any penny themselves, and here one can only buy everything. Listen, mister. You are a great doctor. Pay for me to the lousy cops, and I will serve you. It doesn’t matter whom to serve for me, pay me – and I will serve you faithfully.”

“Duke, well you don’t have another option. It is unpleasant that the thieves of Bracano’s gang were caught in your home, but what can we do? We have to call the representatives of the authority and give these persons to them... Get up,” he addressed these fascinating companions of Bracano, “sit down on the bench and don’t move until they come to take you away. If you try to escape, you will feel the taste of the pistols.”

While Ananda was talking to these thieves, the duke left to give orders to his servants.

The unfortunate transgressors got up from the ground, sat down on the bench and fell to thinking. Only how different their reflections were! The imaginary Turk was simply obsessed by the desire of evil. Obviously, he expected to bribe the police with something and to get an opportunity to take vengeance on Bracano. The only energy – persistence of his will – was feeding his consciousness which was dead for any light already. He wanted to see the enemy who has impoverished him humiliated or even dead with anger and insatiability. The envy and contempt experienced next to Bracano were playing the great part in his current hatred. He was all active, his eyes were flashing and he desired only one thing – to escape from here as soon as possible, but he didn’t have enough strength to overcome Ananda’s order.

It seemed to me that he also didn’t mind to start negotiations with Ananda, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it, because he didn’t know what he could offer to the man whose will had chained him.

The second one – a typical Greek smart dealer – had also lost any human appearance, but in an absolutely different way. Only money was his God, but if the first one wanted it as the symbol of glory, luxury and power, he wanted it only because of it itself. He was all chained with the chains of greediness as with the iron hoops. Money was his entire world, his entire universe, only because of it he was suffering slavery, jeer and contempt of those who were able to become rich.

Very soon – much faster than the usual pace of Constantinople – the duke was back with three policemen, besides two of them were of a rather high-ranking. It seemed to me that they would manage to arrange matters with at least one prisoner.

As soon as they disappeared, the harsh hooter raised a howl, and I recognized the voice of our captain's steamer instantly.

"Yes, I'm late – you are to blame," the excited clumsy sailor rattled off.

We locked the door, left it for two guards to protect and rushed to the steamer along with the clumsy sailor.

The captain who in the beginning met the clumsy sailor rather wrathfully not only accepted all Ananda's excuses and explanations indulgently and sincerely, but he even became distressed and was talking by throwing up his arms.

"Well, here's the task for you – the wolf, the goat and the cabbage. Wouldn't it be better for Lovushka to sail with us?"

Ananda was laughing and he asked him to entrust the baby to his care for one more day.

I was so glad, because I could see I. It seemed to me that I wasn't sad without him at home, but when I saw him in the steamer, for the first time I understood how close he was to me, how closely I was connected to him both with my actions and with my heart.

The hooter raised a howl for the second time, and while saying good-bye to us, I emphasized for me one more time.

"I repeat my request to you again: follow Ananda, not stepping aside from him until I'm back."

"Eucklid, don't worry," Ananda told him. "I won't leave him for at least a moment. And generally speaking, I noticed that your talent of education is irreproachable. And now I understand that freedom finally neither shortens nor makes the path easier for the man who isn't fully disciplined.

See you, my friend. We'll have to take care of the duchess persistently and for a long time again. That's how everything got complicated – and I got stuck here for a long time instead of leaving with you."

Ananda was speaking silently and calmly. A great wisdom was reflected on his face, and it seemed to me that when he was talking to I., as though he was turning the pages of many people's lives.

We came home, washed ourselves, changed our clothes and went to the duchess again. When we entered her room, she woke up, but she was indifferent to everything. Evidently, she didn't even perceive that here was another surrounding already, that she wasn't in her own bed and in her bedroom anymore.

"The duchess will be sleeping a lot again, and you will have to feed her with the spoon again," Ananda addressed the nurse. "Of course, you will exchange with your mother, but it won't be easy

for both of you. Perhaps, I will find some assistants for you, but only in the future. Today from five to eight me and Lovushka will sit by the duchess; while you can arrange that matter about which Olga was talking to you yesterday. Don't explain anything to me now," he interrupted the nurse who wanted to tell him something. "Now think not about your repentance, but about that that a moment of your dishonest behaviour may cost life for another person. We'll be here at five o'clock," he repeated to the perplexed nurse, "and you will be free until eight o'clock."

Having explained what precisely she had to do until five o'clock, Ananda took my arm, and we went to my room.

I admit that a thought about Olga who was left at the fireside was tormenting me all the time.

First of all, I saw her frightened look. She was still sitting by the fireside and rubbing her hands.

"Doctor, luckily you are back at last," she told him in the voice, trembling from fear, "they would have gored me to death without you."

"Who?" Ananda asked her. "You are absolutely alone here, aren't you?"

"How alone?" the irritated woman contradicted him. "They hid up as soon as they heard your steps, and when you entered, they made off through the door."

"I ask you one more time. Who are 'they'?" Ananda asked her again, smiling. He sat down on the sofa in front of Olga and showed me the place next to him.

"Oh Lord, oh my God! Doctor, why are you jeering at me? Didn't you see what they were? Goats! They are so ugly, stinking, with horns."

"She went crazy," I uttered in French in horror.

"Unlikely. Soon we'll try to find out what is wrong with her," he answered me in the same language and addressed Olga in Russian with the smile again.

"You are a grown-up woman, aren't you? Besides, you aren't only grown-up, you are also decisive if you decided to help the criminals. How could you allow such a childish delirium to yourself that goats could clamber up into this room, on the second floor of the house? I think that one would fail to find them in the entire Constantinople."

"Well, of course, one would fail to find them! Yesterday's men also had brought a he-goat with themselves. Such a stench was spreading from it, while they were ransacking under the duchess bed. They kept searching for something there, although I explained to them that they were washing the rooms of the duchess two times per day and that couldn't find a single dust there, not only suitcases or baskets.

Doctor, when you left, everything was calm. Only my hands were itching. I took some ashes from the fireside, rubbed my hands and thought that the itching would pass. Before I could say knife, a goat jumped out of the fireside, then they started crawling one after another from there! And all of them surrounded me! I started praying for Our saint Lady, so that you would come back as soon as possible, but I already didn't have any hope to stay alive," Olga was talking, while panting and crossing herself with her ashy hand.

She must have been experiencing the most genuine horror tragedy, but now, while she was imitating the goats which appeared to her, she was so funny and silly that I didn't have strength to refrain from laughter.

"Mister, you are always in jest! I would give a lot, so that sometime such a goat would frighten you, and you would grow out of the habit of laughing boisterously forever."

"Olga, it seems that your conscience is tormenting you," I answered her, "as well as the fear of responsibility before the duke and the fear before those deceivers in whose hands the goat seemed to you. They must have been threatening you with all kinds of punishments if you didn't listen to them, and now you fell into a doze, everything became confused, and you dreamt the goats. Olga, is it really possible that the whole herd of goats would crawl out from the fireside? They ran out through the door through which we came in, and we didn't notice them while we were entering in?" I kept laughing by imagining that view from the fairy-tales, read about the witches and sorcerers.

"Ah, mister, I don't know how I should answer your jeer. Yes, of course, if one thought a little, it is impossible for goats to jump out from the fireside... Oh Lord, doctor, help me! Oh, here it is again!" Olga gave a frenzied scream by pointing at the ashes in the fireside, which were left there from yesterday and from the hood, they made a move on the fireguard from the breathing of the wind.

"Stand up, take this cotton wool and wipe your face and your hands," Ananda told her by giving the moistened cotton wool to her.

When Olga started rubbing her face and her hands, a pleasant aroma spread across the room.

"One's soiled conscience is always giving rise to the thoughts about fears that don't exist in reality. We are sitting next to you and we see that there's really nobody around you, while you are moaning with horror, because already yesterday when you betrayed the duchess, you created the image of your act in the form of the he-goat for yourself," Ananda was talking to Olga who was frightened to death and who was looking round. "This always happens to the people when they behave meanly and badly. The goat seemed to be the most disgusting and the ugliest being for you already before. Well, now you saw it like the reflection of your deformed conscience.

You are asking for my help? Unfortunately, I cannot help you. Only you can help yourself. You've been living your entire life next to the duchess, it doesn't matter if it was better or worse for you. You often used to receive some valuable and sometimes even precious presents from her. While living next to her, you've managed to save an appreciable capital, the whole wealth for yourself, which will provide your life till its end. And your entire gratitude to her manifested itself in that that you let the murderers in her room."

"It didn't even occur to me that a murder was prepared here. No, no! Doctor, I thought that a soporific ointment was in the hood, that the duchess would fall asleep, and I could lead the people to the young mister's room through her room unnoticed. Well, and because you, young mister, are very arrogant and you don't pay attention to anything, I hated you."

I was stunned. How? How could I challenge the hatred of the person about whom I was thinking so little, and if I was thinking about her, then I was only taking compassion on that tyranny when I saw Olga in the steamer.

"Doctor, you say that I saved the capital during my entire life next to the duchess? I didn't receive it for nothing. I'm working for her during my entire life. There's nothing to hide here – what the

duke's life was! It was His Highness who turned everything differently, but it was only the racket and confusion during the entire days before. And the biggest part of my money isn't from the duchess..."

"Because it is from those villains whom you have helped to rob the honour of your mistress and to strive for her favour in every possible way?" Ananda interrupted Olga by flashing his eyes. "You were working? You were taking trouble? You call work to look over the toilets of your mistress again, from which you were always trying to steal or to sell something secretly? To lie on the couch of your mistress with the sugar-candy behind your cheek and to read her left novel if it's written in Russian; to yawn and to ransack in the sideboards by searching for something more delicious? What else were you doing during your entire life? You deserve only this that goats would seem to you."

"Doctor, save me from them. I will go crazy if I see them again. They are afraid of you – save me!" Olga was screaming by looking round frightened, as though the goats had seemed to her in every corner.

"I have already told you: there aren't any goats in reality. This is only the result of your imagination, of your conscience which you were selling during your entire life, and I cannot save you. Only a selfless and honest work can help you from now on."

"But I cannot become a laundress if you don't consider my entire life to be a work. I'm not going to engage as a cook in some family of poor persons, am I?" Olga was indignant. She must have imagined herself to be a maid of honour in comparison to other servants.

"Are you suited for such work? Your sister wrote to you that she has become a widow, she's very ill, she's afraid of dying and leaving her children as orphans. What did you answer to her?"

Olga cast down her eyes and she was silent with the angry, dull expression of her face. She reminded me of Lisa's aunt in the carriage when she kept shouting straight into I.'s face.

"I'm lady, lady, lady – I was, I am and I will be one!"

I thought to what deepest moral depravity the human soul found herself when she was ruined by idleness, greediness and apprehension of superiority over others, which existed only in her own imagination.

"I cannot become a peasant," finally Olga stammered out. "The people of the village are ignorant. I've got used to amusements. I'm also bored here because of the duchess' illness – I cannot see a single person! I like parties when a lot of guests arrive; when there's dinner, a merry noise, lots of men."

"You cannot live in the village, because people are ignorant there? I think that it is difficult to find a more ignorant person than you are among kind and intelligent people," Ananda answered Olga by burning her with his eyes. "The only path which you can still take and save yourself is to accept the orphans of your sister, to educate them and to find love within yourself. If you don't want this, then you can live with your goats."

Ananda rose by getting ready to leave the room.

"No, no, doctor, don't leave me – here they are again! I will do everything, just save me from them!" Olga was shouting.

"It becomes boring," Ananda told her austere. "It is meaningless to repeat the same over and over again. There's only one path for you – the path of love and compassion for the orphans of your sister. You were only ransacking, saving, lying and slandering. If you don't snatch at this only case when an opportunity is sent to you to overcome all your goats which you have called to your life with your bad

conscience – all those goats will tread you down,” he continued, while his voice was more gentle already. “You don’t have another choice. You’ve been playing with low people’s passions all the time, you were angry, irritated and you were pushing other people into shabby tricks. It is late for you to choose already. Either leave this place, take your sister’s children and create a pure – you’ve heard me – a pure life for them, or wait with this lunacy and horror of yours until your own born goats tread you down.”

Ananda’s eyes were flashing again. He was wonderful, divinely fascinating! I understood that now Ananda was setting those narrow frames, the frames of obedience and discipline, which he wasn’t applying for others up to now. As though I could see how he was taking I.’s hand and how he introduced this principle of people education into his arsenal of actions.

It was difficult even to describe what was going on with Olga, but perhaps, an astonishment was mostly reflected on her face.

“Well, that’s how you can trust anybody! I told about my sister’s death only to one contemptible doorkeeper, and I did it only because I knew his curiosity. It seems that he read the telegram before giving it to me. And the telegram was received at night. When did he have time to tell everything to you?”

“I’m asking you for the last time: will you take the path of love and compassion? Or... we don’t have anything to do here anymore?” Ananda asked her again.

“Even if I wanted to be engaged in charity for those children, I couldn’t do anything – those damn goats are still here. Do I agree to leave? But if they chase me?” Olga answered him by looking round in terror.

“If you take your stolen things from here with you – they will be chasing you and they will run until you return them. If you are angry and irritated, if you aren’t kind for the children – the goats will appear again. When your angry thoughts and your old habits will be dragging you to bad people and bad actions – you will be encircled by the goats again,” a silent and firm Ananda’s voice was heard. “Go, get ready and remember what I was telling you about other people’s things. The train leaves in the evening. My friend is going to Petersburg on the train. I will ask him to take you as his wife, so that we don’t have to loiter with your foreign passport, because it takes quite a long time to get it done here. Go downstairs when you are ready.”

Olga left. We took her downstairs ourselves, but she was still shaking with fear, she was looking round where, of course, there wasn’t anything except the usual things for her.

When Ananda came back to his room, he wrote a note to Stroganoff and sent one of our guards to bring it to him.

We weren’t left alone for a long time. The duke visited us. He apologized for all the trouble caused to us and told us that Olga announced him categorically that she was leaving immediately, while he was in big trouble because of that, because he didn’t have anybody to replace her with.

Ananda calmed him down by telling him that Stroganoff would come soon, in whose family there were lots of dependants who would help him to take care of his wife while she was ill, and then we would see what to do.

The duke calmed down. He didn’t know how to express his gratitude to Ananda, but suddenly, he got hold of his head.

“Oh Lord, both of you haven’t eaten anything yet! This is inexcusable for me.”

"Duke, don't worry, maybe I and Lovushka won't die if we starve for one or few more hours. We'll go to dine as soon as we talk to Stroganoff."

"I cannot permit that. The breakfast will be delivered for you here soon, and I hope that you will dine with me in the evening," and the duke almost ran out of the room, not waiting for any answer.

Ananda sat down at the table to read some letter, while I was so tired that I couldn't even sit, so I lay down on the sofa and I felt how my strength was abandoning me.

"My poor boy, drink this water," I heard the gentle voice. It was so soft, harmonious and loving that I could hardly feel the imperious and metal clank of Ananda's swords.

It became easier for me soon. The breakfast strengthened me – the duke himself was taking care of it by placing everything with his own hands. When Boris Fyodorovich came in after a while, I had already forgotten that only Ananda's care saved me from the fainting-fit.

Of course, Stroganoff could offer a new nurse for the duke. He also volunteered to take Olga to Ananda's friend who was leaving to Petersburg today. Ananda asked Stroganoff to tell the trader that Olga was the housemaid of the duchess who was forced to hurry to the children of her sister who died. He told about all events of today to Boris Fyodorovich himself. Stroganoff kept silent for a long time, then he uttered him.

"I think that Anna must visit the duchess as soon as her health improves a little."

"I cannot accept such a feat from her," Ananda answered him by reflecting on his words.

"No, Anna isn't the same already. What seemed to be behind an insurmountable wall before is easy for her now. I think that she will come herself as soon as she finds out about it," Stroganoff told him after being silent for a while.

Soon he left, and finally, we had several free minutes for the rest and peace. A hardly noticeable smile of happiness flew across the meditating face of Ananda, which now was gentle and peaceful, as though he had been speaking to somebody very dear, but distant. I had seen this fascinating face, these eyes-stars for so many times in the most different circumstances, and now I could see the new man again, from whom everything around was filled with peace and bliss. And I understood that I had seen only the scanty parts of the real and great Ananda up to now, also now I could see only the scanty part of Ananda-wise man, but I had never seen Ananda-prince. What kind of man was he when he was the prince? Soon I became Lovushka the catcher of the crows and I came to myself only from Ananda's laughter when he patted on my shoulder and told me.

"You will solve this important question in India. I will find you there and ask you which raja looked more fascinating to you than me, while now Boris Fyodorovich is coming back, and Olga is coming here. Give this letter to her in the hall and tell her to wait for Stroganoff, so that they could go to the trader. They will tell and show everything to her there. It doesn't matter what she would ask you – give only that what I have told you to her."

Stroganoff came back and told Ananda that the trader was very glad with the opportunity to express his gratitude to him. He also added that his senior son would bring the nurse to the duchess.

My last meeting with Olga was taking part in the presence of Boris Fyodorovich. She must have wanted to see Ananda and she was striving for it in every possible way. I didn't answer any of her questions. I stated that I gave only that what Ananda had entrusted me to give to her and that I didn't know anything else.

When Stroganoff and Olga left, during the remaining time until dinner, Ananda was dictating letters to me and some business-like answers to some banks. He also told me to enter heaps of addresses in a big book. Ananda's letters were travelling to all corners of the world.

"The whole address bureau," it slipped off me unwittingly.

"I will ask you to show your address book to me in about ten years, then we can compare one to another," Ananda answered me, laughing.

The duke himself came to invite us for dinner. I was glad that this chaotic day was soon over, and I was waiting for I.'s coming back impatiently.

"I don't know how I will be living without you, without I., without Lovushka," the duke was talking to us when we came to the balcony after dinner.

"Duke, instead of you, I would be thinking the other way round and I would say: "Prince and wise man Ananda, I'm so happy that you alone will stay with me"," I was joking.

"Wisecracker philosopher, I'm so happy that now your educator I. will shake you for such bad behaviour."

Ananda didn't finish his phrase yet, while I could already see I. who was coming along the avenue from the gates. I dashed to meet him at breakneck speed and I was already hanging on his neck after a while, having forgotten everything in the world, not only the rules of courtesy.

Chapter 26

The last days in Constantinople

My great and dear friend didn't give me a scolding for such intemperance, on the contrary, he pressed me tenderly to himself, stroked my head gently and asked me whether everything was all right with us.

Ananda and the duke hurried to meet him, and we went straight to Ananda's room. Already after the very first words of the duke about the swindlers and Olga, I. looked at Ananda attentively, then looked at me and, as though thinking about something else, he asked the duke.

"And how is the duchess doing now?"

Having received the precise answer about her health condition from the duke, I. told him as though with reluctance.

"I think that this might detain us here, while in the meanwhile we have to leave already."

The duke was asking I. pressingly to eat something, but he refused it. He stayed with us for a while, then he left to visit his wife after receiving our promise to call at her before bed time.

When the duke left, I. told us that the friends of Bracano were trying to get to the steamer one more time. They were bothering Chava and the older Turk with different pretexts, they were also trying to bribe and to frighten them, but every time they were driven away shamefully.

In the meanwhile, the psychology of the villain himself, which had changed so strongly at the presence of sir Vomi, now returned to the old pattern. This happened as soon as he was attacked by his accomplices who managed to get out from the government. They were demanding him to return the jewel which must have belonged not only to Bracano alone, but to the whole wicked gang.

Bracano was trying to attract the general attention of the passengers to himself by hoping to escape if he could challenge some compassion of the public. I. had to stay with him in his cabin during the entire way until the first step, because the villain was armed with some knowledge, he had gathered the whole collection of different, poisonous things and amulets, and since his accomplices were stimulating him, he seemed to be stronger than I. was thinking about him in the beginning. He was even trying to poison I., so he had to run rings around him and to take his voice from him again.

Only when they were quite far away from Constantinople and when he understood that there was no way back, he gave his entire collected rubbish to I., while he cast it overboard into the sea. When I. said good-bye to him, he gave a bitter smile and told him that he did quite a lot of trouble to the duchess and Lovushka anyway, who won't be saved by any medicine. He was persuading I. that he would still fight against sir Vomi and take his jewel back or acquire the new one, even more precious.

"That's why I was troubling you, Ananda, with my telegram, although I was certain of helplessness of the villain. Anyway, everything what I've heard from you now, makes me leave Constantinople earlier than we had planned. I must see Anna and Yelena Dmitriyevna with her son and Joan, because the new ball of interrelations is knotted here, which affects me strongly, too. It doesn't matter how sad it is, but I will have to leave the duke, the duchess and Ibrahim to you alone."

"I, don't worry, I had to stay here until Bracano would be taken to the destination anyway, and besides, my main task here was to help Anna to go to India with you. If I didn't manage to do it, - I must instil the energy for her for the new seven-year period of her life and activity. I won't have another possibility to spare more time for her again during those years; I need to help her now, so that her belief would become stronger and the joy to live would inspire her heart.

At the same time, I could do something good for Joan, too. Only I can do it. I need your help only regarding the duchess' health. I will get in touch with my uncle, while you do the same with sir Vomi, and most likely, we will have to use my uncle's method of treatment again. The duchess is always sleeping and she comprehends a little again lately. We can visit her now. Of course, there isn't any direct danger, but her entire nervous system is disturbed from the poison of that villain again."

We took the first-aid kits and some other additional medicine with us, and went to the duchess. As usual, the duke was keeping watch by his wife's bedside, and I was surprised by this loyalty and care of the youth for the one hundredth time – his entire life was concentrated on the fight against death, menacing to his wife, wasn't it?

Ananda helped the awakened duchess to take her medicine and asked her whether she recognized him. Although with difficulty, but the duchess managed to utter his name. She didn't recognize me at all, but having seen I., she brightened up, smiled and started complaining of an iron hoop placed on her head by asking him to take it down.

I. put his hand on her head, he was bringing her hair apart with his fingers carefully and he asked her who told her that something was placed on her head.

"Olga put it on," the duchess uttered absolutely clearly.

Soon the duchess was already sleeping peacefully. Ananda answered the duke who was worried.

"Let's sit down here. Today we aren't going anywhere anymore, we need to talk. The patient is recovering her memory, and this is a good sign, but all this matter is much more complicated and it affects you more than your wife. Why should you torment yourself over her recovery if she's unable to value her life differently? Of course, she has already changed a lot, but the main axis of her life – money – is still hiding within her; she's still estimating everything only as the row of deals – the actions of herself, of yours and of all people. Perhaps, some part of generosity is awakening within her now, but there's still no life in her heart, which could disconnect her thoughts from money.

Duke, you are an absolute opposite of your wife and you won't be able to be a strong spiritual prop for her if you are standing in one place and waiting for something. Is there something in your life, in which you would believe without any stipulations, what you could follow without any compromises? Do you see the goal of your life in any ideas and attitudes? Where do you see the meaning of existence?

Now you are already tormented by the habit of doing nothing, but everything what you are thinking about, all your dreams about the orphan's house, about shelters, about schools – that's only an external charity. And as everything what is external, it won't give you neither peace nor self-confidence. You must find independence and an absolute liberation within yourself. Only when you can grope the entire plentitude in you, within yourself – you will find the meaning in your external life, too. Then it will become the reflection of your spirit, and not an external place where you would like to squeeze your spirit.

You will be able to open a certain perception of the new life with your love for your wife, too. You will be able to explain to her that there's no death, that there's only life – the only and eternal; that

death comes to man only when he has already one everything on the earth and when he cannot do anything else anymore, so there's no need to be afraid of it. You will be able to explain it to her not earlier than you will understand all of it yourself, and therefore, you must become free of superstitions of grief and fear."

The duke's face was shining, he looked like a monk to me, who was waiting for a consecration.

"I understand everything. I don't know how, I don't know why, but I understood everything suddenly, while Anna was playing, and when you started playing and singing – as though I stepped into some never seen before temple. And I know that I won't leave it anymore. I won't leave it anymore not because I want or I don't want to do it, not because I choose or I don't choose to do it, but because after I stepped into the temple which you took me into with your music, I died there. That me who was living before was left there; while I returned from there as an absolutely different man already. I don't know how I should describe all of it to you and I don't find any words that could convey it to you. I saw a wonderful temple. I stepped into it, my heart was burning in an earthly love, and when I left the temple, as though everything was burnt down in my heart. It didn't become cold, no, but it became vacant and clear in it, like in a crystal dish, and now when I meet other people's suffering, it is so sounding there in that place where my heart was tormenting me so cruelly before as though I could hear the sound of your free and pure song. I know that I'm not talking clearly, but I don't have any other words that could express all of it."

Still not casting his eyes down from the duke, Ananda asked him silently.

"If your life changed again, and the fervent and passionate heart began to beat in your chest again, would you choose it?"

"Oh no, I don't have another choice, as I've already told you. I'm very happy now! I was speaking to sir Vomi, and he explained to me that the paths of people were different, and that my path was the one of joy. That what others achieve by suffering during the entire years or even centuries, I've passed in a single moment – sir Vomi was telling me so. Ananda, he told me to wait until you start talking about it with me yourself. He told me to keep silent and to carry my happiness to live every day by imagining that I was carrying the most precious cup made of the solid, shining amethyst, which was full of the most wonderful pearls of joy. I keep this image which he left to me, with which I wake up every day and go to sleep every evening, so sensitively in my memory, as though my hands were really carrying the wonderful cup. Ananda, thank you, thank you alone for this exceptional and unexpected happiness. When I saw Anna I understood that I was ruined. I fell in love with her instantly, without any questions, without any reflections, without any fight. I fell in love with her without any hope, with the most terrible passion of the earth... I knew whom Anna loved..., and your voice showed me the way to another world, to the world where one was living by loving everybody who was alive in such a way that one forgot about oneself. I experienced some kind of a change, but I don't know how and why it happened. I became free and happy. Ananda, you started the conversation, and I've been waiting for this hour. Now teach me to live and to work for the sake of other people, in a creative way by really helping them to live. And first of all – for the sake of her," he showed to his wife. "Once I thought that I would save her, and I nearly died myself."

"No, my friend, you've saved her. And if I, while seeing the change in you, was keeping silent, it was not because I wanted to test you, but because I didn't want to touch your new and wonderful sight until it became stronger within you, until it became the treasure of your love – the little part of eternity which awakens in man and makes him really alive, that is it opens all powers of his body and spirit like a harmonious totality, like his highest "Self" ...

I stay here, in your house, - and if you permit, - for several months more. I will see you every day and I will be taking you along that path of love with joy, along which my senior brothers were taking me and are still taking me.”

The duke bowed low to Ananda. He smiled and embraced him, then he took him to the patient’s bed and told him all necessary instructions by adding that there was no need to be afraid of the villains anymore. We said good-bye to the duke and came back to our rooms.

The unusual conversation to the duke, his radiating face that looked like the monk’s one made such an impression on me that as soon as I came back to my room I became Lovushka the catcher of the crows and I could see only the duke in front of me, who was holding the amethyst cup in his hands, while my imagination wrapped him up with the white chiton instantly, which was made from the same material that Ali gave to my brother on the feast day. This sight of the duke – the knight with the cup – cast a spell over me. I was already accommodating myself to such a life and I was already getting ready to choose the green cup in honour of my great friend Florentian when I heard the joyful laughter and tender I.’s voice.

“Lovushka, you will drop the first-aid kit, and all Florentian’s pills will spill out on the floor, and not into the cup.”

I came to myself, became angry and uttered almost with the grievance.

“What a pity! You dispersed such a wonderful sight which I could follow for so long. And it is especially unpleasant for me, and I don’t understand how this happens in any way. Does my miserable physiognomy really reveal everything what I’m thinking about? I., you know,” I continued sorrowfully, “that sometimes it seems to me that my skull simply opens up from your looks, and then one of you – Ananda, sir Vomi or you – is reading what you want to there, and then it closes.”

Both of my friends seated me tenderly between them, and I. started telling me how sad the captain was when he parted with me and everybody else. It seemed to him that he would never meet us again, and only the categorical I.’s promise that he would still see all of us many times and that my words about the loyal friendship would indeed become reality someday calmed him down a little.

I. asked Ananda.

“How are you going to lead Anna now? Are you going to accept the double blows to yourself again and allow her to wait until something matures within her by itself and until she, as she put it herself, feels that “something isn’t yet ready within her?” In truth, this is only her disguised laziness, negligence and carelessness which cover her faint-heartedness and instability, lack of the real faith and loyalty of the discipline. If she had been walking next to you hand in hand and heart to heart – she would have disentangled not only herself from the net of life’s conditionalities long time ago, but she would have led others from their troubles, too.”

“You are right. Judging by yourself and some others, I thought that the path of one’s free self-determination was better, easier and the shortest one. I didn’t pay attention to all individual Anna’s characteristics, and I’m myself to blame that I took her vow of unconditional obedience onto myself. Apparently, man’s culture doesn’t always carry his spirit into intuition. The net of the stubborn person’s mind and intellect fetters him, and he’s unable to jump over the conditionality of perception of the visible life of the earth and heaven as the only living life. Anna possesses so many evident, appreciable earthly talents, but she moves into the intangible wisdom with difficulty.”

“There’s still some stench here,” I uttered. “I feel giddy...”

I recovered only on the next day and first of all I saw I. who was talking to somebody – probably to a woman. Having taken a good look at her, I recognized Anna.

She always looked excellently, but now she surprised me with some sadness, some suffering of disappointment which had seeped through entire her, as though she had been oppressed by something.

“Could I really cause so much pain to Ananda, my father, sir Vomi if I had known everything? It seemed to me that Ananda simply didn’t like Leonid personally, so he ordered me to burn down the fez and the key pendant which Bracano gave to the boy. My little brother highly appreciated them, and I pitied him. What is so especial here? I was only pitiful to my relative. Why didn’t anybody explain everything to me in time?”

“Well, so you weren’t to blame for your own and everybody else’s misfortunes at all, but your friend Ananda was, who, as you say, opened the heaven on the earth for you? Tell me, woman, if you were standing with your beloved by the altar and swore your love till death to him, would you keep your vow at least here, on the earth? You aren’t the blind woman who is roaming about her life and who knows only that religion of the church that teaches to “pray for the dead”, are you? You got to know the real life that teaches you to live on the earth with light. You haven’t sworn to Ananda by the altar – you took the light from him in order to unite with him and to become the light for others on their paths. How did your loyalty to him manifest itself? You are demanding a clearing up, an explanation, a reasoning after your first not fulfilled instruction already. And how did your entire approach to joy of serving people which has opened the living heaven in everybody and in yourself manifest itself? It drew you into the activity of the eternal memory about light and love, while your entire behaviour, your stubbornness, jealousy, inconstancy – you weren’t different from any ordinary woman by anything, who imagined herself to be the miracle of the miracles of the world.”

“I understand that I have broken the very first rule of loyalty – the law of unconditional obedience. I understand that I was haughty, maybe even weak, vacant, but...”

“But you understand a little that also now you are walking gropingly, still wondering, because there isn’t the real obedience within you,” I. interrupted her. “Obedience is nothing else as the stable and unshakable peace of the heart, and it comes only to those who know their place in the universe. The greater is the peace with which man is walking on the earth, the further and higher he can see, the better he understands how small he is, how little he can do, how little he knows, how much he still needs to achieve. Ananda has never allowed you to understand through what suffering he had to go because of you. And you will never understand him. You are still rebelling and you are agitated, that’s why you cannot see that he was blessing you for every suffering, he was glad to take it upon himself, while expecting to help you to become free quicker. In the meanwhile, you, always seeing him joyful, as though not noticing your reproaching looks, began to envy and doubt him... You know yourself what this has brought you to.”

Anna covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

“Anna,” I gave a shout, “there’s no need to cry, I’m drowning in your tears! It cannot be true that such a soul as yours, giving the joy of music to people, would shed tears so often! You don’t know that Ananda is a prince and a wise man, and I know it, I. told me this. Once I saw how exceptionally wonderful and peaceful, divinely charming he was! Is it really possible to cry when you know and love Ananda?” but I began to pant with my lost words and I complained to I. of that nasty stench again.

I woke up in the morning again, this time I was absolutely healthy and strong, and I understood immediately that I was lying on the sofa in Ananda’s room, while he was sitting next to me.

“Well, at last you are healthy, joker-philosopher! Madcap, you’ve put us to trouble here! Anna was nursing you during the entire week, she didn’t give up her place to anybody. Get up, it is time for you to become stronger and to leave. Here’s the letter from Florentian for you.”

The letter affected me better than any pills. I dressed myself in a flash and sat down to read the letter.

“My dear friend, my dashing sword-bearer Lovushka,” – Florentian was writing to me. – “Your life which seems to be tangled for you is simple and clear like your young, pure and loyal heart. I’m always thinking about you, and no distance exists between us for me. In order for me to press you to my heart and to send all my help and support of love to you every day, I only need to know that your loyalty to my loyalty is steadfast firm.

Now it seems to you that you are torn off from somebody, that you have lost somebody, but soon, very soon you will understand what happiness you have met in your life and how rarely it happens to man.

It doesn’t matter how shallow and weak people would seem to you, how little and unimportant their troubles and difficulties would seem to you – never judge them and don’t feel to be big among small ones when they are complaining to you.

Remember how terrible and insuperable the differences of knowledge and spiritual culture between us and you seemed for you! In the meanwhile, you weren’t oppressed by my imaginary grandeur. You were glad that you were living with me, while I wasn’t feeling anything else except joy within you; I was also glad that there was still one place where my love could shine for a man.

When you meet people, don’t think that they are living wrongly or how they don’t suffocate in the atmosphere of suffocating passions. Think about me; think how you could bring in my living and restorative flow of my love and joy to them through yourself, which I’m sending to you incessantly. When you are thinking in this way, you will be working with me everywhere. You will be making the space around you bright with your pure thought. You will always find the strength within yourself to pass by many dramas and tragedies, caused by the human passions. Not only you avoid making yourself dirty from them, but you also will stop their development in others with the power of wisdom that you possess.

It might be so that you will have to live among people of low culture for some time, among people who are drowning in the darkness without any knowledge and who cannot even imagine that they could live without any hypocrisy. Don’t think that you are suffering innocently when you get into the slavery of such sad circumstances. Discover your own circumstances in them, which you need and which you must go past without fail in order to find the firm, stable honour and generous nobility within yourself.

Walk next to I. bravely, live hand in hand, heart to heart with him, just like you are doing it with me. I forward the letter from your brother to you, I embrace you, I bless you and I send the greeting of my loyalty to you.

Your eternal friend Florentian”

I don't know what excited me more: Florentian's letter or care of the friends surrounding me, but as soon as the Florentian's image with a fantastic lily emerged in my imagination, my life seemed to be so great, needful and valuable to me, and the grandeur of the earthly path rose as high as never before.

I took out my brother's letter, and the tears began to pour from my eyes only by seeing the handwriting of my dear brother-father whom I hadn't seen for so long.

"What happened, Lovushka?" I heard Ananda's voice and I felt his hand on my head.

"Don't worry," I told him by taking his hand and by pressing myself to it. "Simply I haven't seen my brother's handwriting for so long, so I was unable to control my excitement, but I'm absolutely healthy."

"Hold tight, my friend! Life has called you early. Try to respond to it not like a boy, but like a man."

He sat down to continue his interrupted work again, while I controlled myself instantly and started reading my brother's letter.

"We parted so long time ago, my little son Lovushka. And only now everyone of us can evaluate whom we were one to another and how we influenced one another."

Only now when you have parted with me and experienced so many tests because of me, you can tell whether you loved me and whether you still love me. Only now when you are alone you can decide whether those principles which I was trying to introduce to you were good or bad."

What can I tell you about myself? Having found myself in the world of unusual people and ideas, I felt how ill-mannered I was, how little I knew and what a great job I would have to start – self-education and discipline."

Having read the letter till this passage, I jumped up from my chair, I started running about the room with my hands on my head and I was shouting.

"But this is impossible! My brother Nikolay is ill-mannered person? This is a delirium!"

I entered the room, fixed his topaz gaze on me and told me.

"Lovushka, did you have a dream about goats?"

"I., it is worse! Read yourself, here. Well, do you have enough patience to withstand this?"

"I see that in your heart you got ready to read the letter of your brother in the same way as you did when you were writing the letter to the captain. Do you think you make Florentian glad now?"

I gave a sigh, came back to my place, took the letter again and I was amazed myself for how short period of time my self-control was, which seemed to be so firm and unshakable to me.

"If I had at least the slightest opportunity," – I kept reading my brother's letter, - "I would bring my dear Lovushka back, about whom I'm always thinking, without whom anxiety is sometimes penetrating into my heart. Sometimes it seems to me that it isn't easy for you. You think that I, your

brother-father, left my brother-son and that I'm living as I want to, as I've chosen to, that there isn't any place for you here.

In the entire universe, if I'm to blame for any personal attachment, for any personal friendship or a longing for a friend, it could be only for you, Lovushka.

Your achievements, your life is more precious to me than my own ones. I'm so grateful to Chava who has sent your short story to me. I concealed from you that I was writing, too. I concealed it from you, because I didn't want to obligate you in anything, because I wanted you to choose your world outlook yourself, independent of me, by searching freely not for harmony with me, but for harmony of your own actions with your life.

And you have made me happy. I was always waiting for a work of great talent from you, but already with your very first story you showed the features characteristic not to a boy, but to the great, strong heart and to wisdom which are characteristic to a genius.

My wife is sending the best wishes to you and a hope to see you soon. She also has to reorient herself into the new tracks, but because she's a woman, she's doing it easier and simpler, higher and happier than me, like some being that belongs to a higher race.

Laugh more, Lovushka. Don't grieve over our separation. I know what great love and loyalty is living in your heart, that's why I'm not talking to you about your gratitude to those people who have saved our lives. I only tell you this: look at their living example and search for all possibilities to grow within yourself, so that some time you could follow in their footsteps, you would dare to share the activities with them.

So long! I don't attach any great importance to letters, I know and I believe that I'm living in my brother's heart, but I will be glad when I see your half-childish handwriting that was able to write the work in which many hearts found consolation.

Your brother N."

I must have been catching the crows for a long time.

"Well, Lovushka, perhaps now you can tell me more clearly what have made you so enraged there?" I. asked me, while stroking my head.

I extended both letters to him, not possessing any strength to talk or to move anymore. As though, now I was with my brother Nikolay, I could see him and Nal, while both of them were nodding their heads to me by smiling joyfully.

I. sat down next to me, read both letters and told me.

"Soon, on one of these days, we'll leave this place. We won't be sailing across the sea, so that you could see the foreign countries and nations better. We still have to take a good care of one person here – that's Joan. Everybody else will reach their balance in one way or another and learn to stand on their own feet, while we still have to knock up temporary crutches for Joan, until Ananda and the duke help her to escape the traps of her own ill breeding and tactlessness."

"Ah, Lolion, I'm even ashamed when you say: "we still have". Every time I find myself in great difficulties myself – also in this moment; but I have to admit that regardless of the whole foolishness of my

behaviour, of my external ridiculousness, I can feel some kind of rejoicing inside of me always more and more often.

I'm so happy that I'm living next to you! And Florentian's words that as though I'm torn off from somebody or that I've lost somebody – this is my “yesterday” already, while my “today” is the bright adoration with which I accept my happiness to wake up next to you every day.

I understand well what the duke wanted to say. Only not an empty heart is sounding inside of me, as he put it, but on the contrary – it is so hot, simply it is my love which is breathing with heat! Sometimes it seems to me that the flows of my love are spreading even on the physical level.”

“Well, so we will visit Joan, and you should bring these flows of yours to her. Bring them to her not thinking about the words that you will tell her, but thinking only about Florentian's hand and his strength which you have to pass to her. Never mind that you are still unstable and weak, that your bond with him is still breaking, it is important that his image would be always shining in your heart. You can give his help to a person everywhere, only if your loyalty doesn't begin to stagger. Finally, nobody expects that namely today you must become an angel or a saint, but every wise man knows that he can rely upon the pure and fearless heart. A pure heart may be that path through which a wise man will be able to send his light to people.”

Ananda entered the room, and we told him that first of all, I would have something to eat at “Bagdad”, and then, during the lunch break, we would drop in at Joan's shop. Ananda thought for a while and answered us.

“Great. As usual, Anna will come here during the lunch break. I will talk to her and maybe I will drop in at the shop, too, but most likely, I will be waiting for you here, and we'll have to inject the medicine for the duchess again.”

We parted, and as soon as the lunch break began, we were already at Joan's.

“I'm so happy to see you,” she gave a shout when she saw us entering the shop. “Anna will feel so sorry. She and her father have just left to visit you.”

“Anna won't feel sorry, she has quite a lot of business to do without Lovushka, too,” I. answered her. “But you will really feel sorry and you will be weeping.”

“Doctor I., I won't be weeping at all. Now I've become so cruel that I wouldn't shed a single tear for anybody anymore. I've seen so much misery lately that my heart has gotten numb like that copper tea-pot,” Joan was explaining to him by pointing at the rather nasty and paunchy tea-pot which for some reason was standing on the elegant dinner table.

“Joan can you really call everything what you have experienced from people lately to be cruelty?” I asked her with horror.

Joan cast down her eyes, and such an expression of dull stubbornness was in her face, which only spoilt and bad children had. I was amazed how everything worst what was hiding in the depths of Joan's soul could come to the surface like this? And namely now, when people were pouring the very best from their hearts to her? I knew how many great qualities were in this soul and I didn't understand what could be the cause of her cruelty.

I. kept silent, and some unpleasant feeling for Joan covered me. “Doesn't Joan feel what happiness it is for her and everybody else to be sitting with I. in one room?” – I was thinking. I was unable

to imagine that one couldn't perceive that altitude of wisdom which was spreading from I. and not to experience it like happiness.

"Joan, are you thinking about going to the duchess and thanking her of her care for your children?" I. asked her silently, but clearly and in a masterful voice which – I knew already – was carrying the whole element within itself to that person to whom it was dedicated.

Her stubbornness didn't disappear from her face, and she answered him capriciously, with a grievance, as though we were bothering her with the most unavailing and boring matters.

"I didn't ask anybody to take care of my children; if they did it – they wanted to do it themselves; that's all."

I was deprived of speech from amazement, I lost my strength and I was unable to meddle in their conversation. I wasn't expecting such vulgarity from Joan in any way.

"And if tomorrow it seems for life that it is time to send the ungrateful people back to their previous position, and you will find yourself in the steamer with your children again, without a penny and without any protection of good people?" I. was talking to her, while looking at her attentively.

Joan raised her eyes lazily, as though with reluctance... and then she trembled and told him pleadingly.

"I'm not happy myself that I keep rebelling. It makes me indignant that everybody is teaching me, as though I didn't understand anything myself. I'm making such hats that I have already become famous in the whole Constantinople; and that's already something, isn't it? I cannot do both – educate my children and put my affairs in order, can I? And finally, life isn't only children. I want to live, I'm young. I'm a Frenchwoman, and we get used to an open life early. I want to see theatres, restaurants, parties, and not to sit at home like in a nunnery," Joan was talking to us, excited.

"Is it a long time since you've changed your views like this? While you were in the steamer, you were telling me that you were ready to dedicate your entire life to your children, to take care of them, to fight for their lives and their health, weren't you?" I. continued, while looking at her.

"Ah, doctor I., why do you always remind me of that steamer? It was so long ago, wasn't it? It was so long ago that I have even forgotten everything what happened there. Ladies are inviting me to visit them, they want to introduce me to some interesting cavaliers, while you are always telling me about my children. What will happen to them if I amuse myself a little?" Joan was protesting, while biting her lips in annoyance.

"Well, perhaps it will be even better for them if they are living not with you at all, but how about you? Does that dissolute life about which you are dreaming really seem to be more valuable to you? Are your children really only an obstacle for you?"

"I don't want to hide it at all that I would like to send my children to my relatives. I love them very much, of course, I will be sad without them, but I cannot become a great educator; I get irritated, because they disturb me."

"Now your children are already living at Anna's, and if you have to see them, it is not because you call up to them, but because they want to see you. They are running to their mother, and in the beginning she kisses them and gives them delicacies, and then she hits them with the same hand, while they go back to Anna by saying to their nurse: "let's go home". You don't pity them, Joan? Isn't it a pity for you that your children call the strange Anna's home their own home?"

"Doctor I., you will make anybody cry. Was I really waiting for you and Lovushka for so long today only because I had to cry now?"

"I, I, I – these are your only thoughts, Joan. Don't you really remember any wonderful, kind and clear face? Don't you have sir Vomi's image within yourself?" I was asking her silently.

"Well, sir Vomi! Sir Vomi – that was a fantastic meeting! He is a saint who came to the sinful world for a moment. He is so high and so distant – as the God – so we shouldn't be talking about him at all. He came, showed his hornlets like a snail and hid himself," Joan was chattering in the tone of a light-minded girl with her downcast eyes.

I thought that the wave of the storm that was rising from I. would hit Joan and break her into pieces. As though the lightning was flashing from his big, wide-opened eyes, he pressed his lips together, and as though a piercing power was already making its way through from him, but... he made some movement with his hand, kept silent for a while and – having controlled himself completely – he told her tenderly.

"Me and Lovushka are going to leave soon. Today you probably see us without any strangers for the last time when my talking which cause so much trouble to you might touch the people whom you love so much. Your children won't be able to live for a long time at Anna's. She's a perfect educator, but now she's solving some other tasks, other matters.

If life which Leonid promises to you allures you so much – go and enjoy all the passions of life, but I'm sure that some day you will be sobbing bitterly for this moment when you perceive who was standing in front of you, who was next to you and how you pushed everything away yourself...

Love – that isn't the sensitiveness which is nagging you now and in which you hope to find satisfaction; but everything whatever I would say to you makes no difference to you. You are a blind woman, a blind mother. That woman is blind who can see only one happiness in her life – "my children", and who spoils them with her brutal love, as well as that one who is unable to see the happiness to protect the souls given to her and to lead them to life. Both of them are equally blind and no words may persuade them otherwise, although they have given bodies to their children themselves. You cannot send your sickly children to your relatives where life is really cruel and where nobody will take care of them more than their dogs or hens. If they restrict you, I can send them to the perfect climate, to the cultured family where two educators will dedicate both their love and life for their job.

We must solve this question while I'm here and at my presence. Chava would take them. She will come back to you, and I ask some hospitality for her from you for several days. Tomorrow we will visit you, and you will tell us your decision. Well, here's Anna, and we must leave."

Evidently, Anna was in a hurry, she was gasping and she was pale from the heat.

"I'm glad to find you still here," she told us by greeting us, "but what happened to you, I.? You are like a God who has stepped down from Olympus – you are charming, but austere. I've never seen you like this before," she looked all of us up and down, darted a glance at I. once again and gave a sigh.

"I'm glad that you are healthy, Lovushka," she addressed me, "but are you really leaving sooner than Chava comes back?"

"Chava will be here tomorrow. She has carried out her task as the sir Vomi's student had to do it," I. answered Anna. "I asked Joan to shelter her for a short period of time. Anna, children cannot stay with you. If Joan doesn't change her mind, Chava will take them to the family of my friends."

"What?" Anna became excited and dashed to Joan, shouting. "Do you want to give up your children? But you aren't going to do it, are you, Joan? Now you are in the zone of your whims, aren't you? It will pass away, come to yourself!"

"Exactly, now I've come to myself. I don't want to go to the nunnery like you and I don't want to think about it. I give my children to you, doctor I. Chava may take them tomorrow if she wants to," Joan answered her coldly. She surprised me more and more, because I was unable to see that former kind and tender Joan within her anymore.

"Joan, you are slandering yourself, aren't you? This is your blind stubbornness, and you'll be crying tomorrow," Anna didn't yield to her.

"No, I won't be crying! Why are you all bothering me with those tears! Doctor I., do you think that I'm going to mourn over the separation with Lovushka, too? No, I've already grown wise!" Joan already changed to a challenging tone.

"When life seems to you unbearable anymore, when you are deceived, abandoned and humiliated, wipe your face with that curtain which I hung for you," I. was talking to her tenderly and sadly. "Then address the duke, the only friend in whose heart will be neither contempt nor indignation because of your behaviour. Don't forget these words of mine. This is the only promise of my love which I can leave for you. Don't forget it."

I.'s voice was ringing like the bell when he was uttering these last words. All of a sudden, I fancied I saw somebody stern and irrevocable that flew past me and put the wreath on Joan's head. It was made not of the roses about which she was dreaming, but of the thorns which she picked up, wove and asked for herself.

Once again I remembered how the captain had described Joan. My heart was breaking, my eyes were full of tears. I bowed low to Joan and I didn't touch those small hands for the first time when I was saying good-bye to her. I wanted to dash at her, to embrace her and to bring her to her senses, but I understood that I didn't possess enough strength even to hold her with my braveness. I was crying bitterly when I. was taking me out from the shop where the coach with smart ladies had already come rolling.

Only the power of I.'s peace and strength helped me to remember Florentian, to seize his hand in my thoughts and to stop the lament which was tearing me. It seemed to me that Joan simply got furious, that everything what was the best in her hid under the lees of her hurt heart, as if a distorting mirror had reflected the world and people in such vulgar form to her by hiding all the beauty behind banality and anger. When we entered Ananda's room, he didn't ask us anything, only he uttered me, as always as though he had looked at the inside of my skull.

"Distinguish that what is temporary and distorted from that what is eternal, immortal and bow to the man's suffering and that pain of his which will stay with him when his passions dry off, when they fall off him like shells and when he sees himself in the light of the truth. Then he will be terrified and he will start looking for the light which once was offered to him, but the path of the light – that's the man himself. Nobody can be taught anything here. You can show where the light is to him as much as you want, but only that one who possesses the light within himself is able to see it. There's no need to be sad. Not that one can help the suffering person who is crying by feeling for him, but that one who can give his smile of cheerfulness with joy to him, not by blaming him, but by understanding his situation."

Soon the duke came in. He told us that the duchess was already rested after the bath, she took her medicine, and that we could start the treatment.

Ananda and I. were concentrated, they were giving short instructions to me. All of us changed in white clothes, I was carrying the sterile packet with robes and caps, which we had to open at the duchess' and to put them on there.

I wasn't asking anything, but I was feeling that both of my friends considered this operation to be very serious and difficult.

The duchess was anxious, some blots were burning on her cheeks, obviously the bath had exhausted her.

Ananda told the nurse to prepare the dressings, he checked the medicine that was prepared beforehand and gave the drops to the patient to drink. When she fell asleep, he injected the medicine in three pricks of the needle to her, then he was injecting the dark serum with the very long needle to her hand for a very long time.

When he bandaged her hand, he told me to put everything back into the medicine chests and cases which we had brought with us, he sat down next to the bed and told the duke.

"Her temperature will rise in a couple of hours, ravings and a light trembling of her body will begin, but everything will calm down towards morning; the patient will often ask you to drink. Give a sip of this drink to take for her, but no more than once every twenty minutes. Can you do everything precisely yourself? If there's a nausea or pain – send somebody to call me, but don't step back from the patient yourself. Both you and the nurse sit down with her like this, not leaving her. I think that everything will be all right, and I will come to visit you myself."

We said good-bye to the duke and we were going to our rooms, but Ananda invited us to come to his rooms and offered us to settle here for a while.

I was still thinking about Joan. I read my brother's and Florentian's letters one more time, I was pressing myself to my great friend's hand by begging him for help and, for the first time during this entire time, I went to bed not being calm.

I don't remember how I fell into a doze this time, but I remember how I was surprised by calm and even solemn expression of I.'s face when he sat down at the table and when he was glancing through his notes.

In the morning, at about seven o'clock, Ananda came from his room and told us that he would visit the patient alone and if he needs us, then he would send somebody to call us. I would have taken a short sleep, but I. got up instantly. I became ashamed and I also went to take the shower by thinking that I had never seen I. or Ananda being ill. With what and how their organisms were tempered? I didn't know it and I felt very sorry because I hadn't fulfilled my friends' instruction to do gymnastics or to ride on horseback up to now.

Me and I. went to the garden and we wanted to go to the arbour, but the duke caught up with us and asked us to visit Ananda without any medicine chests.

"I invited you to admire the duchess," Ananda met us joyfully on the threshold of the room.

The duchess was lying down, to be precise, she was half seated. She was recovered, looked as though younger, and I had never seen her so brisk before. However, the duke was exhausted, and only his radiant eyes were telling us about his happiness.

I. congratulated the duchess on her recovery and told the duke to go to sleep immediately, because the nurse could stay with the patient already. He told him that we would meet him in the evening, at the dinner table, and we would have a favour to ask him and a rather long conversation with him.

The duke became glad and told us that he would have a double joy to be of service to I. We said good-bye one to another until the evening.

All three of us left the house, drank some coffee at our friend confectioner's, said good-bye to Ananda who had to do his own business which now had taken an absolutely different direction. Ananda hadn't uttered anything at least once about his disappointment of the failed journey to India. Not the slightest annoyance at least once – which is the most natural to the psychology of an ordinary person – had slipped in him by responding to those difficulties which Anna, Henry and Ibrahim had caused to him. If their names used to be heard in his speech, then one could hear only tender compassion to their destinies and respect to their misfortunes.

I was thinking many times how I would grieve, be vexed and blame everybody who would rise before me as an obstacle and destroy my intentions. And having remembered everything what I had experienced during this entire time, I confessed instantly how little I had learned, regardless of my all experienced shocks.

"What are you so thoughtful about, Lovushka? You probably don't even know where we are going now, do you?" I came to myself from I.'s voice. "And we are close to our goal already. Now we are going to visit Stroganoffs, and in all likelihood, we will find Yelena Dmitryevna and Leonid having their breakfast – and that will be our farewell call."

And indeed, we found mother and her son eating and talking, but it seemed to me that both of them were feeling like a fish out of water.

Having found out that we were leaving, Stroganoffa began to worry.

"Is it possible that Ananda leaves, too?"

"No, he will stay here for a while, but why are you so excited?" I. asked her. "And why does Leonid look like a stubborn and warlike dervish?"

"If we were talking only about this sect of monks, it would be much easier for us," his mother answered him. "Then there would be no woman involved here, while now – what one could hide from you here – the lad has rammed into his head that he has to marry that French doll!"

Only I.'s touch of my hand helped me to keep it to myself. Stroganoffa's words affected me so much – as if a hornet had stung my heart.

"Can you imagine? Mother with two children will be on our hands," Stroganoffa continued with indignation.

"She won't have her children with her at all," Leonid interfered. "She will send them to her relatives."

"Simply I cannot understand how she could charm you? When did it happen? This is some kind of hypnosis, isn't it?" his mother was bubbling like the boiling tea-pot.

"Well, mother, why should I explain myself what and when it happened? I want it – and that's all. I told you about it – and I will marry her, and the more you are going to resist me, the sooner I will marry her," the sissy was contradicting her.

"On what are you going to live? She's the beggar, isn't she? Hence, I will have to support you from my own capital again!" his mother was scolding her son, while the tears were already heard in her voice because of her irritation.

"My capital is still untouched," her son answered her. "This is one thing, and second – I have already reconsidered everything. I will be the owner of the shop. We will push Anna out of here, this isn't the place for that saint, she could teach music whomever and wherever she wanted to. She simply scares the clients away in the shop with her sacred physiognomy."

"The further the better!" Stroganoffa was shouting. She was absolutely irritated already. "You have to study. I was dreaming about your diplomatist career, and not about the trader's one."

"You will never know what you were dreaming about with Bracano! If you had fulfilled all your dreams, now you probably would be the princess, but you had to be the trader's wife," the sissy was stinging her.

Leonid was talking to her carelessly, from above, by straining his words like the experienced people are talking to those who know little about life. He stood up and continued by correcting his waistcoat and his tie in the mirror.

"Mother, I'm not consulting you about it, simply I inform you about my wedding. If you don't like the fact that my wife would be living in your home, although I must admit that it is joint due to my father's will, I will move to her place in the shop. I see here the only possibility to become rich and independent very quickly.

My father will give me the money that was spent on establishing of the shop, while I will make Joan work so much that soon we'll have not one, but ten shops. My little wife will be working a lot!" and Leonid burst out laughing maliciously.

I could hardly control myself and I was unable to imagine that Joan, my dear Joan had already fallen into the web of this spider.

"Yes! Great business! None of my sons married so that their wives would bring less than twenty thousand to our home! Besides they used to bring lots of rags, too. And what about you? You will bring the beggar to our home?" his mother was reproaching him.

"Joan's capital comes to thirty thousand," I. told her calmly, "and she's more wonderful daughter-in-law if we looked at her from that side. She's got talent and trade, providing for her living, while your ladies know only how to try their new dresses on and they don't know anything else to do. And let's look at this matter not whether Joan is worthy of coming to your home, but whether your son is worthy of honour to be the husband of this honest woman. And... are you talking about another woman in the proper way now, whom you've been pressing to yourself not so long ago, you bestrewed her with presents and called her your favourite? How did she change that you've changed your behaviour and views with respect to her so much, Yelena Dmitryevna?" I. finished by looking at Stroganoffa's eyes.

"Maybe she didn't change at all, but there is a difference whether she's simply a charming friend who can make a great hat and a night hood, or she's your son's wife."

"Mother, I have never asked you why you liked your cavaliers. We are all grown-ups here, aren't we? Let me decide myself why I like women. Wife – that's an especial matter. One needs to choose a slave for oneself," Leonid snapped it out impudently.

I wanted to jump up and to kill that impudent person, because I still could remember well in what terrible pose he was sitting in the shop, while now he was admiring himself, his curly and fashionable haircut, his dark moustache and his goggled, grey blue, glass, meaningless, impudent eyes in the mirror.

“Leonid, why did you decide that Joan was going to marry you?” I. asked him calmly.

And it was so strange! It seemed to me that Leonid as though faded from I.’s look. His vulgar physiognomy of self-confident cavalier-male who knew his value well somehow fell, he stooped a little and became worthy of mercy instantly, some cowardice was felt in him.

“Well, that’s the question! I thought that every woman wanted to marry somebody,” Leonid was still trying to encourage himself.

“Joan with her data can do it absolutely easily,” I. answered him. “And of course, she will find a man who is more cultured than you, who will be searching not a slave, but a friend for himself. Besides, forget not only your dreams about the marriage with Joan, but even the way to the shop if you don’t want to fall ill again and to lie down twisted. The same state will be waiting for you, in which you were sitting there for quite a long time and which you remember well. I repeat you one more time: I forbid you to come nearer to Joan not only in the shop, but everywhere else.

Yelena Dmitryevna, I have already told you, and Ananda was talking to you about it several times already: if you don’t give up your previous habits of living, if you keep feeling giddy from opium and molesting your spoilt son, then you won’t be living for a long time. Now we’ve seen the result of all of it already, as well as your sissy’s love and respect to you. You’ve tired out your organism so much that this is going to turn out badly for you.”

“Doctor I., stop frightening me. I’m not the most faint-hearted one,” Stroganoffa answered him with a spiteful smile. “Now I can see that my son is a coward. He shrank in horror, he is frightened with you and he’s already going to run away from Joan, although he was raging so much here not so long ago! I am even ashamed of him.”

“And what have you, his mother, done for him during your entire life in order to awaken some other powers in your unfortunate son’s mind and heart?” I. asked her calmly.

“It is so boring! I., you keep repeating only those moral ravings of yours! What can you understand about life, about people? You are seeking after some kind of ideals – which are ridiculous and impracticable – and you prevent people from living joyfully. I can still understand Ananda. He helped me a lot in my life, but you...” she made a wry face, but all of a sudden, she had a fit of coughing, she caught hold of her chest in horror, with her eyes fixed somewhere in the corner.

“Mother, what happened to you? You look like the witch from a fairy-tale. Well, tell me something! Why are you staring at the corner? I’m frightened!” Leonid was talking to her in a rude and irritated voice, all seized by fear, while turning his head to all directions.

“Your mother’s got a heart spasm. This is a very tormenting matter. Give some water to drink to her, while I will pour some drops,” I. told him.

“If she didn’t smoke so much, if she didn’t sit down with the cards during the whole nights, then she would be healthy,” the sissy grumbled and left to get the water lazily, as though it wasn’t easy for him to stand up.

Stroganoffa could hardly drink the drops. I. put some sniffing salt to her nose, he rubbed her temples with something and after some time it became easier for her, and soon it was completely over.

"It was so horrible," Stroganoffa told us after recollecting herself. "As though an arrow had pierced me through."

"I told you that if you don't change your mode of life, not an illness, but a catastrophe is waiting for you. Think about what you have done here," I. told her by pointing to her son for her. "Also remember those who have forgiven so much for you and what they have forgiven for you. You are pretending that you've forgotten about everything? There are no exceptions and there may not be any of them for anybody in life. The entire nature is living and moving forward according to the laws of cause and effect. And not a single person is able to avoid this law of the entire universe."

Stop playing with the evil. Luckily for you, you haven't yet understood or achieved anything in that game, but if you don't keep the word given to sir Vomi, then no one is able to save you anymore.

Goodbye! Don't forget what I have told you today. The arrow which pierced you now was the arrow of your own evil, you've challenged it yourself. Don't expect any mercy if you don't learn to pity others, and you, Leonid, - I repeat it one more time – never come nearer to Joan. Every time when you decide to violate this prohibition of mine – you will lose your speech and get stiff."

I. didn't add any single word anymore, he bowed to Stroganoffa, and we left. I felt as though I had fallen out of the bathhouse! The sweat was flowing down my face, while I was all trembling inside.

"Oh my God!" I gave a shout in horror. "Now I saw two mothers! I don't remember my own mother, but Lolion, can I expect to see the real mother some day?"

"You will see the real mother, and not only a single one of them, Lovushka. Now understand how deep the roots of people's misfortunes are, how you cannot judge them and how you cannot grieve because of their faults. You need to pour cheerfulness to them or to try to forestall the evil by putting them into the frame of strict behaviour where the people are weak in order to protect themselves first of all. Until you have matured yourself – don't try to help them. If you aren't prepared yet, if you cannot act with an absolute self-control, then you only will increase the evil and bring even greater irritation into the lives of those people whom you want to help."

We were sitting in the shadow of the public garden for a while and then we moved on.

"Concentrate your forces, my friend. Tomorrow we leave this place. Concentrate your thoughts on Florentian, put my hand to his hand, too. Stand firm, and let's go to Joan's."

The lunch break had just started, and we found not only Anna with Joan in the shop, but Chava, too.

Since I darted my first glance at Joan, I understood that she was suffering very much, but that her stubbornness was still holding her in its clutches as much as yesterday, or maybe even stronger.

As soon as Chava greeted us, she asked I. immediately.

"Why did sir Vomi tell me to come back here and to wait for your orders, I.? Are you going to detain here?"

"Probably no, Chava. I leave tomorrow in the evening myself."

"I., is this your final departure?" Anna asked him, and her voice was trembling, while the tears were shining in her eyes. "It will be very difficult for me to live after parting with you, besides there won't be even the children which could comfort me."

“Soon you’ll have two patients in your home, Anna,” I. answered her, “you will have one more grown-up child here, too; the duke will miss you very much, too. Besides, you’ll have to make a man from Leonid during those seven years when we don’t see each other. Parting with me – that’s only the distance which can be measured in kilometres. Ananda will teach you to be always together with those whom your heart will remember faithfully and with love.

While you are seeking for a higher life, you cannot live with only half harmonious feelings and thoughts, with doubts and compromises. When you feel that there isn’t any personalism left in your heart, only then you will unite with Ananda, sir Vomi, with me and others into one accord; until you are thinking what you need in order for your heart to sound with love – the song of your love will be only a moan, but not a triumph. One cannot live with mind. Creation – that’s the harmony of one’s heart and thought.”

Joan came up to I. and told him that she decided to send her children away. I received the blow into my very heart. I was still hoping, I was still waiting that she might decide differently.

“Poor children,” I whispered.

“They are absolutely not poor children. Lovushka, as soon as I set my life in order, I will take them back, and this will be soon,” Joan answered me, being inflamed with anger.

“Is your life really not set in order, Joan? You are working, you have everything what you need, you can learn yourself and you can teach your children. What else do you need?” I asked her with bitterness, not even looking at her.

“You won’t understand this. Lovushka, you are unfeeling, too, although it seemed to me that you were kind in the steamer,” Joan answered me capriciously, stubbornly, she was as though reproaching me.

“Joan, I have to warn you that you will see your children not earlier than in seven years,” I. went up to Joan and told her. “Make your choice now, determine your destiny. Perhaps, they won’t even recognize you in seven years. Make your choice not angrily and thinking about yourself stubbornly, but think about those little people whom you leave to their own devices without your motherly caress. Think about your husband. Once you were ready to live in his name and to protect his children, weren’t you? If you decide to send your little ones away, Chava will take them today to sir Vomi’s, right now in two hours.”

“Very well, doctor I. Children won’t even know that they are leaving for a long time. If they are prepared quickly, they will think that they are going only for a ride,” their mother answered him, who saw the whole goal of her life in her children not so long time ago.

Joan was talking impudently, as though somebody else was to blame that she was sending her children away. It seemed to me that she didn’t believe herself that her children might be sent away with Chava. As though she was waiting that something would happen in the last minute and that her children would stay with her, in spite of her wish to send them away.

I approached her one more time and I told her.

“Joan, have you thought about that moment when your children leave, and you would stay alone? What are you going to do without them? Now you know that at any moment you can run to them, embrace them, make certain that you are working for the sake of them. How are going to live alone, without any friends, without your children? How are you going to live surrounded by strangers?”

"It is so annoying, Lovushka! Your moustache will shoot up soon, you will take a wife and have children – then you will understand how one wants to be free," Joan answered me sharply. "My children will leave, then I will think how I am going to live now. I don't see them anyway; and when I see them – I only get irritated and I thrash them," she added by turning away from me.

Anna left to bring the children, while me and Chava started gathering their belongings and toys for the trip. Joan didn't help us, she only was answering to our questions.

When the children arrived, they rushed at their mother, at me, at I., they were snuggling up to us, playing pranks and laughing, not expecting such fast separation with all of us. Although they hadn't associated much with Chava before, they didn't feel shy of her, they weren't afraid of her blackness and for some reason they started calling her their "black mother", which made the black mother to cheer up very much.

I was trying to find out why they were calling her like this, and the girl answered me rather seriously.

"How can't you understand, uncle Leon, that for such number of children – one and two, one mother isn't enough?" she counted by poking her little finger into herself and her brother. "That's why we have: mother Joan, mother Anna and the black mother-nurse."

Her French was so charming, her great and serious manners were so comical that in spite of all tragic nature of the girl's speech, I was rocking with laughter and the tears in my eyes. Soon we became so enraged that I even forgot where I had come and why the children needed to go to the pier.

In order to cool off our heat at least a little, Chava told them that she would go for sailing in the steamer with them and sing the black songs for them if now they put the clean clothes on and sit calmly, while she is combing their hair.

The ceremony of changing the children's clothes and combing their hair would always end in tears and beating when everything was done by Joan, while now the children didn't even protest and they were admiring their new clothes. Ananda visited us and looked everybody up and down attentively. He as though pierced Joan through with his eyes-stars.

My heart began to beat with happiness. I began to believe again that since Ananda was here, Joan would come to her senses. It even seemed to me that her face became soft, a tenderness had penetrated onto it from her dull mask.

"Joan, you still have some time left," Ananda told her silently, "I can still meddle in, and the children will stay with you, but as soon as they get onto the steamer – they will leave the sphere of my influence, they will become surrounded with love and care of those who are higher than me. But now, at this moment, I can still shoulder the whole responsibility for you and your wonderful children."

An inexpressible kindness was heard in Ananda's voice. He was charming, and I was unable to take my eyes off him.

"Ananda, I have already told everything to the mother in order to help her to come to her senses," I. interrupted him. "Are you really going to shoulder the responsibility for the stubborn people who have to decide and choose their path themselves once again!"

"I'm not a little girl anymore and I take up the whole responsibility on myself!" Joan shouted hysterically and scared her children so much that their laughter stopped instantly, and the tears appeared in their eyes.

They fixed their gaze on their mother in fear, they snuggled up to Chava as though by searching for her protection, while the girl was asking her silently.

“Is our mother going to beat us? Are you going to prevent her from beating us? Are the uncles also going to protect us?”

Ananda’s eyes flashed, and his voice sounded masterfully – as though the swords had struck – when he told her.

“It is time. The duke is already here with the tickets. Let’s go.”

“Well, if I wish I won’t let the children go!” Joan gave a shout again, while standing up and turning towards her children.

Her children thought that she was dashing at them in order to beat them, so they caught hold of I. who took them in his arms where they put their arms round his neck and calmed down instantly.

Ananda shot up in front of their mother – and she sat down on the sofa again.

“Mother – that’s love, and not a storm. Mother – that’s comfort and help, and not a punishing hand. Mother – that’s joy, and not the tears. Mother – that’s the first and the last view which the baby is taking away with him. You will see your children when you perceive it with your heart. Now you’ve signed the judgement for yourself. If you had brought at least a drop of tenderness into your saying good-bye to your children a moment ago, I could still liberate you from great suffering of parting with them and living without them. Now – it’s too late. While you have such an attack of anger and revolt – I cannot even allow you to kiss them for the last time.”

The duke came in and he didn’t understand the meaning of that grave scene, but he was able to comprehend the children’s fear and Joan’s state perfectly. He gave a smile to the children and gave the documents of the children’s deposit in the bank to Ananda, which he still had. He added that the duchess was thankful for her new recovery and when she found out that the children were leaving she decided to double that deposit, so she has already given the instructions to the bank. The duke will give the new documents to Ananda, so that he could send them to the guardians of the children.

Ananda asked the duke and Anna to stay in the shop until we came back; Anna received it with a protest, while the duke did it with great joy.

Soon the children with Chava and Ananda left in the coach, while me and I. went to the pier on foot along the nearest way.

The children had already recovered from their fear completely, and when Ananda was carrying them in his arms to the steamer, they were attracting everybody’s attention to themselves. Even the liveliest imagination of the painter hadn’t succeeded to find a better model for the painting “The father with his children”.

It turned out that Chava received a separate cabin; unfortunately, the steamer was poor, although it was considered to be one of the best.

To my great amazement, as soon as we entered the cabin, the sir Vomi’s servant went up to us. He explained to us that he was sent to help Chava and that he was in time to change the steamer which had just arrived on the same itinerary.

Chava, Ananda and I. accepted everything absolutely normally, while I was catching the crows so much that even while we were coming back I was still surprised by it.

“Why does sir Vomi’s foresight surprise you so much? I think that while still staying here he could already draw the corresponding conclusions from Joan’s behaviour and foresee how and in what form he would be able to help her,” I. told me. “The longer you are living with us the clearer you can see that there are no miracles, but that there’s only knowledge. As long as you can see how immeasurable the knowledge of such people like sir Vomi, Florentian, Ali is, you have to understand how much you need to believe in each of their words, how much you need to be loyal to them, how unconditionally you need to obey to each of their instruction by evaluating and understanding the height of all their knowledge and our ignorance in comparison to them. Namely here the whole foundation of unconditional obedience is hidden, only here and nowhere else.”

“Oh Lord!,” I was thinking, “my brother Nikolay is writing to me that he understood how ill-mannered he still was! I. is talking to me about his ignorance! So what I should say and do then?”

“To learn and to rejoice at happiness to live when you understand what the light is in your path,” Ananda whispered and smiled to me, as though he had looked at my thinking mug again and read its entire contents.

We were walking very slowly. Apparently, my friends allowed me to recollect myself at least a little. Ananda led the way, I. was walking arm-in-arm with me, he was following him, but I doubted whether his thoughts were here. He was so absorbed in himself that I didn’t dare to disturb his concentration with anything.

The time has flashed like a moment for me, and actually, it was growing dark already. We entered the shop when it was already about to close.

Anna and Joan were putting the last hats into the boxes, the duke was helping them and he surprised me again. It seemed to me that this man was in his own place everywhere. He was putting the bands and the flowers in order so easily and simply, he was putting the plumes and the silks so carefully and skilfully as though he had done only this during his entire life.

I remembered how he was nursing the duchess – he knew how to do everything properly there, too, he would never get confused and he was as great as a trained nurse. He was a charming host at the table in his house; but still there was something within the duke that, according to Anna, made him “different than all the others”. My dear captain also used to tell me with humour: “The duke is a fool sometimes”.

The captain who was so clairvoyant with respect to Joan, - what could he see so especial within the duke and for what hadn’t I found the name myself? With what was the duke distinguished among us so much?

I remembered the duke in the steamer, next to his raging wife, his face back then, his hung head and the despair in his eyes; I remembered the suffering of his weakness and indetermination, his selflessness during the first days of his wife’s illness, our first visit to his house and the duke now. That man was gone, the new, another one showed up, but some common feature united both of them, only I didn’t know what it was.

The sudden Joan’s laughter interrupted my reflections. It sounded so artificially – as if somebody had cut through my ears with a razor.

“Doctor I., I have never seen you to be like this and I didn’t even know that you could be so solemn,” she told him, as though by challenging him for an argument.

"I don't know whether I seem to be solemn to you or something else, but I know that the whole power of my thoughts and the whole love of my heart is leading your children to their distant path, wishes them peace and happiness which they couldn't find here," I. answered her.

Joan fell silent instantly. Of course, the friendly, sad, so kind and tender I.'s voice penetrated through all obstacles straight into the very bottom of Joan's heart where – as I knew it – her kindness was hiding.

"Joan, I want to ask you a question," I. still continued in the same friendly way. "Tomorrow, me and Lovushka will leave. During this time which you have spent with us, you told both me and him several times that you owed us a lot. Doesn't it seem to you that I have the right to ask you a question if by asking you I'm observing only my thoughts about your happiness or at least my want to protect you from the most terrible disaster into which you may push yourself?"

"Ask me," Joan answered him very silently. "I don't know what your question will be, but in any case, I'm going to answer you rightly."

"Have you promised Leonid to marry him and to send your children before the wedding?"

As though a groan escaped Anna. She looked at Ananda in terror, but he didn't respond her with a look as he always used to do, but he was sitting and looking into the distance, as though by solving some very important task, as though by listening attentively to something.

Joan became completely confused, she flashed up, turned pale, she was rumpling her handkerchief with irritation, then she flashed up again, finally she squeezed out some nervous chuckling and told him.

"He was begging me to keep the secret so much, he was persuading me that we had to get married at his friends' according to some especial ritual so much, and now he blurted out everything to you himself, although he was afraid of you more than the devil himself. Well, believe him if you want to."

"Joan, you didn't answer my question."

"What should I answer you if you know everything yourself? He was carping at me with this from the very first days of our acquaintance. In the beginning he was only fondling, but when I drove him away, he started talking about our wedding and that Bracano, too, would support us regarding this question."

"And what exactly did you promise him?"

"I promised him to send my children away and to marry him. Our wedding had to take place during these days, but those who had to marry us according to the especial ritual didn't come yet, and Leonid was rioting."

"Joan, do you love him? You have sacrificed your children to him, hence you love him?" I. was asking her.

"No, simply I don't have any strength to live alone. I must have a husband next to me, I cannot be surrounded only by women anymore. I want to live merrily. I cannot live without men," Joan answered him sullenly.

"Can't you really see that this man is a coward, that he's wicked, that he wants to marry you only because Bracano has told him to do so, that he sees only the power of labour within you, that he wants to exploit your labour and to turn you into a slave?"

Joan rubbed her forehead, she began to mumble, she was trying to say something, to remember something and she kept rubbing her forehead, not answering him anything. Now I. turned to Anna.

“Here’s another work of your hands. You have an indignation for kind-hearted outbursts of love for others. Your love for another man is only a theory, it is only in your dreams, while in everyday life, in the simplest trifles of life you were unable to become the main link of spiritual unity with the people who were surrounding you. Ananda ordered you long time ago to gather and burn all the presents which Bracano has given to your mother and to your brother. You considered it to be a trifle and you didn’t fulfil it. Ananda told you sir Vomi’s order to stand between Joan and your brother from their very first meetings, while you discovered here a constraint with respect to two grown-ups and created a chance for Bracano to create the channel of evil for himself from the pure soul of this woman. You are responsible not only before Ananda, but – luckily for Ananda – also before sir Vomi for this sacrifice of evil which has fallen down only because of your disobedience, you are responsible for the changed paths of life of those children who are going to sir Vomi’s. Ananda would have shouldered your burden upon himself only because of his endless kindness, while you, unthankful and blind woman, would have slipped even more than before again. Not so long ago, you were sobbing here and telling yourself and others how great it was that your disobedience came to light here and not there where you had to go, but when the new possibility came to show the heroism of your obedience – once again Anna – the ordinary woman went to the stage of life and not Anna – loyalty. How many acts of the human drama – your lives on the earth – do you still think to live like this? Oh perhaps, you are waiting for the final act to come, in which the inscription “finita la commedia” will appear and the curtain will fall down?”

It was so silent in the room that I could hear the rustle of Joan’s hand rubbing. I. came up to the poor woman who was still rubbing her forehead unconsciously as before. Ananda also rose from his armchair and took both of her hands.

“Do you hear me, Joan?” I. asked her.

“Of course, I can hear you, doctor I., of course,” the previous ringing little voice of Joan was heard.

“You will never allow Leonid to approach you, whom you are so afraid of now. You don’t need to be afraid of him at all,” I. continued by putting both of his hands on her head.

“Do you love him?” I. asked Joan again.

“No, doctor I. He’s disgusting, but he is Anna’s brother, isn’t he? In the beginning I didn’t want to hurt her, and then – I didn’t understand myself how far everything had gone.”

“Don’t be afraid of anything now. Never come to Stroganoffs’ house and don’t meet Yelena Dmitryevna. Don’t accept any presents from her, even the material for your hats and don’t do anything for her. Let Anna do everything whatever she will need for her mother. Take this cross. Always wear it and don’t forget about the curtain. Clean your face with it, press it to your forehead in the moments of your greatest weakness and heartache. Tell one word: “Ali” with the full strength of belief in your thoughts. You will feel relieved and instantly find the strength to live honestly and purely. Good-bye, Joan. We won’t see each other soon, and unfortunately, everything what I can do for you is to give this cross to you. It will protect you from all kinds of Bracanos and Leonids forever. Don’t be afraid of them, don’t be afraid of anything while you are wearing this cross. I give it to you as the part of my power and protection.”

I. hung the cross on Joan’s neck. It was made of topazes with the same chain which sir Vomi gave to me. I. turned to Anna.

"Now you've seen how the chains of evil are forged from ignorance, pride and disobedience. Anna, if there wasn't enough kindness in the ordinary Joan's soul to forgive you, what a cruel enemy you would have now for centuries in her person! Bracano plunged her in this crazy hypnosis only because of the broken pledge of your independent obedience – which was so unexpected for all of us. You couldn't approach us during seven years, but now the call of life is given to you one more time. And this is done by the feat of Ananda's love and kindness again. Stop reasoning in the situations where the simplicity of wisdom is needed at last."

"Joan," he addressed the little hostess again, "here's the only loyal, unselfish and careful friend whom life is sending to you now for long years," I continued by bringing the duke for her. "Listen to him, consult him. Visit the duchess and try to make her boring life easier for her with your kind heart and your merry laughter. Don't go mad for your children. You are still an ill-bred child yourself. Chava will be writing to you about them. You understand yourself that they will feel well at sir Vomi's."

"Doctor I., how could I express my gratitude to you? I will do everything what you have told me to – everything, believe me. Suddenly, I am overcome by some cruelty and evil, and I'm surprised by that myself, but I'm unable to control myself. I will protect your cross as the most saint and I will be calling for the saint Ali about which you have told me, although I don't know such saint in the French church," Joan was talking, burst in tears.

The duke sat down next to her, and we left unnoticed. Anna wanted to go with us, but Ananda stopped her and told her that now her place was next to Joan where she should move temporarily or maybe even for a longer period of time.

He fixed an hour of meeting for Anna for tomorrow, and I understood that this would be when we were gone already and that now I saw both of the women for the last time.

Could I think during the first days in Constantinople in what a heartbreak we would leave Anna who seemed to be so divinely perfect to me back then?

Ananda told her to remind the duke that we would be waiting for him in his house at seven o'clock, because we wanted to dine with him.

We came back home in silence. Both of my friends were radiant with power, peace and fortitude which didn't seem to be even human to me.

I was not only helplessly distressed, but I was feeling as though I had been turned on the wrong side. I was unable to remain calm in the changing kaleidoscope of the day in any way. Each unexpectedness used to shake me.

When we reached our home, I lay down on the sofa. It seemed to me that I was unable even to move – I was so badly beaten because of a great deal of the flashing thoughts and feelings: now I was driving with Joan's children; now I was terrified by poor Anna who had become the cause of the mess of people's lives due to her carelessly woven evil; now I was unable to imagine the endless Joan's pain when she perceived her separation with the children; now I was trying to foresee the duke's behaviour...

"Drink it, my friend," Ananda told me affectionately. "Now you can see how passions are boiling within people. Later you will see how they are enslaved by those passions, and later you will understand the path of compassion, the path of help for people to become free of them. Lie down and try to finish your life in Constantinople cheerfully and without any fear. How you will finish your "today" – exactly in the same way you will start your "tomorrow"."

I drank some bitter drops, it seemed as though I took a nap and soon I felt flexibility and liveliness of my entire body, as if I had been sleeping during the whole night.

We had time to change our clothes for the dinner and we were absolutely ready when we were invited to the table. I didn't know when we were leaving, but from the evening clothes of the master and the table I understood that it was his farewell dinner for us.

There weren't any special conversations at the table and only in the last farewell toast of the duke a note was heard, which was full of such sadness because of parting with us, of such pain, that it took my breath away. He said that our meeting – the meeting of his shining happiness as he used to say many times – was partly ending tonight.

I. told him in his reciprocal toast.

"Meetings are not flowers. They don't fade, die, rot without any trace. Meetings teach us. Even when a meeting seems to be unbearable anymore when death takes away one's friend, son, father or daughter – even then one's heart is growing and its creation is expanding. If you know that your friend is walking somewhere next to you and you cannot feel him only because your spirit has become hard – you have to open your thought and your heart wider, and to perceive people not only as your personally close ones, but as your fellow-travellers to the truth. And then all your meetings will be blessed. The town dweller's spirit is always inclined to melancholy, although it seems to him that he is searching for the truth. It is like a dog's tail – it doesn't matter how hard you try to straighten it, it is looking for a chance to coil anyway. In the meanwhile, the spirit of the man who is really searching for heroic spirit of his thoughts and feelings is similar to the metal rails which cannot be bent by anybody. Duke, my meeting with you showed me how easily, simply, joyfully, not even looking where to put your feet, you have passed from weakness into fortitude which is now habitual to you, you are passing from fortitude into power and you will pass from power into beauty. The whole task of one's daily routine consists only of turning the difficult into habitual one, the habitual – into easy one, and the easy – into charming one in one's working day. I will always remember the meeting with you as the man's jump – in a flash – into another, heroic world outlook."

All of us drank to the duke's health and passed to I.'s room.

Here the duke told us that Joan was calm when we left the shop, but there weren't any limits for Anna's disappointment. Not the fight, but suffering arose within her when she clearly understood her wrong behaviour which she grasped completely for the first time.

The duke succeeded to help her to recover only when he reproached her for thinking only about herself alone and not thinking neither about Joan nor about her father who had to come soon and who would see such state of her. Anna tried to control herself, and when her father came, she met him with the smile already.

When Ann declared that she wouldn't come back to sleep at home, her father didn't protest at all, but he was even happy, because his wife and the youngest son spent the whole day arguing and poisoning lives both of themselves and the whole family.

Ananda heard the duke out and told him.

"We have a double favour to ask you, duke: cover not only Joan with your care, but help Anna, too. I will stay here for a long time and I will cure your wife, but Anna and Joan need the crutches like lame persons do, and they will stay like this still for a long time, although I will be curing them everyday. It is easier to awaken the entire loyalty in consciousness of the sleeping person, rather than to help the

loyalty of the man who has slipped once to become stronger. So I want to ask you to take this job, the job of kindness, the job of continual care and of healing the wounds upon yourself. If you can harness yourself into this joke easily – then I will be preparing you for this task personally and in a special way.”

“Easily?” the duke gave a shout. “You give me joy! You give happiness and the meaning of life into my hands, which I didn’t know up to now, and you are still asking me whether I could do it easily? Another question arises: I’m ready to die in order to carry out your proposal, but... will I be able to do it? I know absolutely nothing. My want alone isn’t enough.”

“I need only your want to do it. Everything else will come. Love-kindness, love-compassion and love-tolerance must meet in one heart in order for the opportunity to arise for man to begin his creative path in his life. Duke, do you want to walk the path of help and compassion with me? Can you take two pledges for me: to follow me with your entire, unshakable loyalty and to fulfil all my instructions precisely and by obeying unconditionally – it doesn’t matter whether you understand them completely or not?” Ananda asked him.

“And that is all what you ask from me for my happiness to follow you?” the duke uttered, surprised.

“Duke, you saw in the examples of Anna, Henry, Ibrahim, Stroganoff how difficult those two conditions were. Think about it until tomorrow,” Ananda answered him.

“Simply I cannot understand,” the duke nodded his head. “Why do I need to think until tomorrow? You can have doubts whether I am suited for wisdom at all, whether I – the man not distinguished by anything – am suited for the activity of love that requires so much tact, intelligence and attention, but with your ability to read people’s hearts I think that you cannot doubt my honour.”

Ananda extended his hand to the duke and told him.

“If tomorrow, at this hour you confirm your want to me, then I will begin to prepare you for your new life of knowledge and development of the powers which are somnolent within you.”

Here we parted with the duke.

And only now I found out that our train was leaving in two hours. It will take me and I. to unknown lands, to unknown people, to an absolutely new life, to the hope to meet Florentian and my brother Nikolay.

The end of part one