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Ukrainian Literature
A Journal of Translations

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Introduction

This issue of *Ukrainian Literature* has been a long time in the making. The delay is unfortunate but not entirely unexpected. A journal such as this is a labor of love and, like all non-commercial ventures, it is dependent on the available time of individuals who must complete the required tasks. In the case of this journal, those individuals are the journal's manuscript editor, Uliana Pasicznyk, and I. Our time is limited by our professional obligations which were too extensive to allow this issue to appear sooner.

This new volume of the journal appears three years after the first, just in time for the sixteenth anniversary of Ukraine's independence. Despite the delay in its appearance, I give my assurance that the journal is an ongoing publication that will exist for many years into the future. I sincerely hope that the publishers, the editorial board, our manuscript editor, and I will find the wisdom and the organizational skill not only to continue publishing the journal but to increase its frequency. Our plans for volume three call for it to appear no later than three years from now, perhaps sooner.

The first issue of the journal met with a mixed response. Some critics, misunderstanding biennial for semi-annual, complained that a second issue did not appear within six months. Oh dear! Other critics addressed our content. There were complaints that the selections in our journal did not reflect a particular taste or profile. This eclecticism is deliberate on our part, as I outlined in the introduction to the first issue. The editorial board and I do not dictate to translators: we encourage them to translate what they consider worthwhile. In our editorial decisions, we do not select a particular profile. We do not favor post-modernism, or short stories, or intellectual literature. Our aim is to reflect the wide array of Ukrainian literature—stretching across time, genres, themes, styles, and even quality. For a culture that is still seeking its rightful place, not only in the global community of readers but even within the borders of its own country, such an approach is the only one that can give an honest appreciation of the current state of affairs. The journal reflects Ukrainian literature not in its totality but in its particularities. It is my hope for this journal that readers who cannot read Ukrainian will find in it individual works that thrill them, move them, and speak to their feelings and desires, for that is the purpose of all literature, including the works that appear on these pages.

Many individuals have contributed in various ways to this journal and they all deserve credit. I thank the members of the editorial board for their

cooperation and shared expertise. I also thank the translators whose works appear in this issue for their extraordinary patience and commitment through the long process of preparing for publication. I especially thank Uliana Pasicznyk for her professionalism, patience, and personal support, which have played an enormous role in keeping me and this journal on track. Without her efforts, this issue of the journal could not have appeared.

Maxim Tarnawsky
Toronto, 2007

The UnSimple

Taras Prokhasko

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SIXTY-EIGHT ACCIDENTAL FIRST SENTENCES

1. In the autumn of 1951, it would not have seemed at all strange to head west. At that time even the east had begun slowly to move in that direction. Nevertheless, in November 1951, Sebastian and Anna left Mokra and went east. There was, after all, a lot more of it. To be more precise, they headed for the eastern south, or south-easterly.

2. It wasn't the war that delayed the journey for so many years. The war could do little to change anything in their lives. Sebastian had decided on the bold step of breaking with his family's tradition of showing the children important places from family history when they turned fifteen. That was because when Anna turned fifteen, Sebastian understood that everything was repeating itself and that Anna was the only possible woman in the whole world for him. And not just that he could be only with her but also that he couldn't be without her. Meanwhile, in Ialivets, that place in family history that he was meant to show her, the Unsimple were waiting for her. And Sebastian knew that they would easily persuade his daughter to stay with them.

After all, at the moment of her birth they had predicted that she would become one of them.

3. In April 1951, Anna began to sense that her father, Sebastian, was the only man she could be with, and they began to make love. That spring there was no lack of wanderers traveling by hitherto unheard-of roads and carrying fantastic rumors. This was how Sebastian found out that the Unsimple had vanished from Ialivets. After that nothing more was heard of them.

Sebastian and Anna spent the summer submerged in their love-making, oblivious to the various armies flowing back and forth around them. Nothing blocked them from going east, south, or southeast. When it got really cold and the roads contracted into tight, well-defined lines, they finally left Mokra and planned to be in Ialivets within a few days. The journey had been put off for three years. But Sebastian feared nothing—he had once again found a real woman. Of the same kind as always.

4. He had no idea how he would actually show his daughter all the places in the mountains between Mokra and Ialivets. Instead of four days the journey would need to have lasted four seasons. Only in this way and at all times of day—by day, by night, in the morning and in the evening—would Anna be able to see how different this road looked in its collective totality. He looked at the map, read the names aloud, and immediately began to feel better. Even the fact that the map meant nothing to Anna could not dampen his

mood.

He was, however, a little disturbed by the trees along the way, which he hadn't seen for so many years: the growth of trees is what most often makes a landscape unexpectedly unrecognizable. And that is proof beyond doubt that significant trees should never be abandoned to the whims of nature.

And as for the actual trip—no journey knows what might become of it, what its true reasons are, or what consequences it may have.

5. Franz once told Sebastian that there are things in the world much more important than what is called fate. He had in mind, first and foremost, place. Where there's a place, there's history (if history has been woven, there must be a place that corresponds to it). To find a place is to give history a start. To invent a place is to discover a plot. And plots, after all, are also more important than fate. There are places where there is nothing left to tell, and sometimes it's enough simply to speak the names of places in the correct sequence to take command of the most interesting history, one more captivating than any biography. Toponymy can lead one astray, but it is also perfectly possible to rely on nothing more.

6. And something of that sort happened to Sebastian. He found Ialivets, which Franz had invented. He became fascinated by linguistics. Toponymy captivated him, and not just because he became fascinated by its details. Pleska, Opresa, Tempa, Apeska, Pidpula, Sebastian. Shesa, Sheshul, Menchul, Bilyn, Dumen, Petros, Sebastian.

Before there were any mountains, their names were already prepared. It was the same with his women—they had not yet come into being when his blood had already begun to mix with the blood that would become theirs.

From then on he cared only about keeping to this limited toponymy and curtailed genetics.

7. Franzysk met Sebastian on the top of a cliff beyond Ialivets. Sebastian was on his way home from Africa, and he was shooting birds. His sniper rifle didn't let him feel the kill. Through the gun's sight he saw only a kind of movie. The shot didn't so much cut the film short as introduce a new scene into the script. He had already shot a fair number of small birds, which were flying over Ialivets on their way, as it happens, to Africa.

Winter was to arrive soon. Winter has to change something. Winter gives a purpose—this is its defining characteristic. It closes the openness of summer, and this has to find expression somehow.

Franzysk was looking for something to make a new animated film about. And suddenly here, just before winter, a cliff above the town, right in town, a flock of birds flying over a mountain to Africa, to Asia Minor, to the fields of saffron and aloe and hibiscus sown between enormous dog-roses, a short way from the long, slender Nile, a pile of many-colored birds, shot through

the eye, laid one on top of the other so that their colors contrasted even more sharply with one another, in each right eye a reflection of their epic journey, in each left one a red stain, not a feather damaged, and a light wind gently brushing and tangling the ghostly down of the weightless little bodies, and the eye of the marksman at the other end of the sight. And the marksman. A red white African.

8. Sebastian's hands were frozen. He'd gotten frostbite one Saharan night, and from that time on he couldn't wear gloves. Sebastian asked Franz what a pianist would do in such cold.

They looked around and saw that they were surrounded by beauty. Because it was autumn, and autumn was sliding into winter. Franz named various mountains, without even showing Sebastian which was which. Then he invited Sebastian home. It had been a long time since he'd had guests—it had been a long time since he'd met any strangers on the cliffs. That may have been the first time they drank coffee together with grapefruit juice. When Anna brought their coffee out onto the glazed veranda, where vine branches burned in the copper stove, Sebastian asked her to stay for a moment and describe the view from the window. Anna recited: Pleska, Opresa, Tempa, Pidpula, Shesa, Seshul, Menchul, Bilyn, Dumen, Petros.

It was late autumn 1913. Franz said that there are things far more important than what is called fate. He suggested that Sebastian try living in Ialivets for a while. It got dark, and before bringing them a second pot (almost pure juice, with only a drop of coffee) Anna went to make Sebastian's bed—she couldn't yet do this in the dark.

CHRONOLOGICALLY

1. In the autumn of 1913 Sebastian stayed in Ialivets. He was twenty years old. He had been born on the other side of the Carpathians, in Borzhava, in 1893. In 1909 he had spent a whole month in Trieste with his parents, and a year later he went to fight in Africa. He returned home via the Black Sea and Constanza, then the Rodian mountains, Hrynyiava, and Pip Ivan. He crossed Chornohora, passing by Hoverla and Petros. It was late autumn 1913.

2. Ialivets, named for the junipers that grew there, had appeared on the map twenty-five years earlier.

This place had been created by Franzysk, who was more often called Franz. For twenty years Franzysk had lived in cities—Lviv, Stanislav, Vyzhnytsia, Mukachevo. He'd been taught to draw by a single artist (who had once worked with Brehm and later made and forged prints), and had to, wanted to, and was able to travel with him from place to place. Then he was shown a camera, and he stopped drawing. Soon afterward, however, near Morshyn, an illustrator died who had been accompanying a professor of botany from Krakow—they'd been on their way to Chornohora to study the plants of the Hutsul country. In Stanislav the professor had come across Franz, who several days later would find a place where he felt at home—comfortable and happy. A year later he returned to that place, and began to build a town. After five more years Ialivets became the most magical resort in all of Central Europe, and quite fashionable.

3. Anna, on account of whom Sebastian remained in Ialivets, had originally been named Stefania. The real Anna was her mother, Franzysk's wife. She was trying to conquer her fear of heights because she was a mountaineer. She had come to the resort with a friend of hers, a speleologist. They were both masters in their chosen fields—the only difference being that she would only climb up, and he would only climb down. What they both lacked most of all, however, was space. When Anna became pregnant with Franzysk's child, she decided to give birth there, in Ialivets. And by the time Stefania was born, Anna had no desire to go back to where she'd come from.

She died in a duel to which she had been challenged by her husband. Franzysk immediately renamed Stefania Anna. He brought up his daughter alone, until the day he invited Sebastian, who was on his way home to Borzhava from Africa, into their home. Franz realized then that from now on, she would either submit to some other man or to no one at all.

LETTERS TO AND FROM BEDA

1. The only person who knew all of them over several decades was old Beda. It was said that he was one of the Unsimple. In any case, he was acquainted with them. When Franz taught Anna to read and write (for a long time he hadn't wanted her to know how, because he realized that Anna wouldn't write but would simply record, and that she wouldn't read but would only re-read, and Franz considered this useless), she began to show an interest in learning about the beginnings of Ialivets, and about her mother. Old Beda was the only one who knew such things, and Anna would write him letters with questions. The answers would arrive either very quickly or would take so long that she would begin to fear she'd written the address incorrectly, that the letter had ended up in the wrong place, in such a place where there wouldn't even be anyone to write back and say that Beda couldn't possibly be there, ever.

Around this time Beda began living in an armored car, traveling from place to place but always within a certain radius of Ialivets. Once Beda told a story.

2. After the first year of living in the armored car, he was sure that he would remember its interior down to the tiniest detail until the end of his life. Then the car ran over a mine that had been left behind by the Italians when they'd been building a tunnel in the Iablunysky valley. Beda nearly died. He was found by some Hutsuls. He was badly hurt, not in the way that one is hurt by a knife, a saber, or an axe, but as if the earth had split open. They stuffed him into a barrel of honey and fed him goat's milk curdled in hot wine. A couple of gypsy violinists undertook the job of repairing the car. Nine months later Beda climbed out of the honey. The armored car stood in the garden, and children climbed on it to shake the autumn apples off the high branches of the tree next to it. Apparently white calvins. Beda thought that he'd memorized the inside of his vehicle down to the last detail. He climbed up the ladder to the hatch, tiring quickly, and realized that he couldn't remember how he'd climbed that ladder nine months previously. He closed his eyes and could not picture where things were in there where everything had once been so familiar. He tried to calm down by telling himself that his skin had simply changed. Or that during the repairs the fiddlers had discarded some parts. But he couldn't quite put himself at ease. That's what old Beda wrote.

Anna sent him letters with questions about her family. He replied, answering the questions and always adding something about himself, and although she never requested this she read it with interest.

3. Some of Anna's letters went something like this.

... I'm not asking you to tell me everything...
... I also have so much to tell you about Ialivets, Franzysk, my mother, the Unsimple. You're the only one in the whole world who knew all of them...
... I don't even know why I want to know all this, but I feel them without voices. I feel my own body, I'm starting to think about how it is. I realize suddenly that I'm not an island. That who I am is connected with all of them, because my body thinks through them...
... it's not something that makes me feel bad, this dependence, but I want to know which parts of me belong to whom: which belong to Franz, which to my mother, which to the Unsimple, which to Ialivets, and which are mine...
... hesitation is more than a mistake...
... tell me something more...
... I want to hear more...
... how did Ialivets look long ago...
... I say this: I love you so much, it is and is...
... I know that my mother arrived when Ialivets was already fashionable. There wasn't a resort like it anywhere in the world...
... my dad always spoke about all our ancestors using the word "maybe"...

4. Old Beda would write in reply (If only I could remember everything they said, what we talked about. Even without the things I've told you. If only they had told me then everything they had said. But they too remembered little, only a few phrases. When you don't remember how you spoke, how you were spoken to, then there is no one. You won't hear the voices. You have to hear a voice. A voice is alive and a voice gives life. A voice is more powerful than an image. Franz told me that there are things more important than fate. Say, intonation, syntax. If you want to be yourself, never give up your own intonation. Through the whole war he spoke with the same voice. I can't speak with you a second time only about this. I can't tell you everything you want to hear. I can speak. And then you can hear what you want. But not vice versa. But you won't remember everything anyway. What has been said passes. It feels good now, because we're talking nicely. I like hearing myself talk to you. No one in your family ever recognized standard syntax. You know what your family phrases are—it is and is, should and should, irresponsible consistency is total, I love you so very much.... Hesitation is more than a mistake, or less. But for longer. They say that your grandfather—your mom's dad, who wasn't from round here but from somewhere near Sharish—had a little garden. He dreamed of living there in his old age: lying on his bed of snail shells, smoking opium, and rolling glass balls with his feet. He walled off a scrap of land and sowed it with a single variety of high-quality grass. In the middle he erected an enormously tall pole on which he trained ivy, beans, and wild grapes. Alongside he dug a pit and filled it with snail shells. They said he had seen something similar once behind a high wall in Hradchane, when he had been

lost and climbed up into a cherry tree to get his bearings. He would lie on that bed of shells when he smoked. He would lay his head on a great, flat rock, on which only lichen grew. He wandered in the White Tatras, collected spores and infected or fertilized the rock with them. He himself made the glass balls, in the centers of which were living cyclamens. He would set the balls in motion, they would roll and come to a stop; the cyclamens would be upside down but slowly they would begin to twist, turning their bottoms to the earth and tops to the sun. The garden was destroyed when your mother was still young and grandfather escaped with her and the other children to the mountains. Franz isn't a local either. Nobody can say where he came from, where he was born. He decided to settle in Ialivets because he thought that there wouldn't be any sensations there, that no stories would take place there. He wanted nothing to happen around him that he couldn't keep up with, that he would have to remember. He was still very young. He didn't know that things just don't work like that—that's first—that life will seethe around you no matter where you are, and that even in its triviality and monotony it is unrelenting and constantly changing. And second—you don't have to remember anything anyway, forcing yourself to keep up. What is to remain arrives and takes root by itself. A sort of botanical geography—the exhaustive joy of germination. I know that the first Anna didn't appear until Ialivets had already become fashionable. Patients came from all around to drink gin. The town already looked just as it does now, except without your inventions. Small hotels and pensions with bars were built. You could drink by yourself in your room, in pairs or in groups; three times a day, on an empty stomach and at night, or all night, or they could wake you at a certain time during the night and serve you a shot in bed. You could fall asleep wherever you were drinking, or drink with a doctor or psychotherapist. I liked to get drunk on a swing. Anna was an excellent rock climber. She felt the weight of every fragment of her own expanse and could spread it across the surface of a vertical wall. You don't have to see anything grand there. The most important thing is: you're always with a rope. She thought that she didn't care about anything—but actually she started to be afraid. She started to go to Ialivets after a serious injury. Although she could climb well again, now she was afraid. She couldn't explain it properly, because she hardly knew how to speak, although she thought with every millimeter of her body. Franz was then twice the size he is now—you can imagine how they must have felt. Franz never told anyone this, but I know things were the best for them when Anna became pregnant. And there's no maybe about it. For some reason people believe that stories end with death. Actually, stories end precisely when someone is born. Don't be offended, but when you were born the story of Franz and your mother ended...)

Anna liked the fact that Beda wrote on wrappers that still smelled of various fruit teas.

GENETICALLY

1. Franzysk considered himself a superficial person. He loved surfaces. He felt confident on them. He didn't know if there was any sense in digging any deeper than what is seen by the naked eye. Though he listened attentively to sounds coming from any sort of membranes. And he would sniff the streams that flowed out of pores. He observed every movement, but in looking at someone he did not try to imagine what they were thinking. He was unable to analyze essence, because the overflow of superficial details provided more than enough answers. Many times he noticed that he was completely satisfied with those explanations for various phenomena that can be seen without access to knowledge of the fundamental relations between things. Most often he used the simplest figure of thought—analogy. He generally thought about what was similar to what. More precisely, what is reminiscent of what. Here he mixed shapes with tastes, sounds with smells, features with feelings, the sensation of internal organs with heat and cold.

2. But there was one philosophical question that genuinely interested him. Franz contemplated reduction. He observed how the immensity of human life, that infinity of infinite seconds, could be reduced to a few words, the kind which, for example, can be found written about a person in an encyclopedia (of all books Franz recognized only the Larousse Encyclopedic Dictionary, and his library consisted of a dozen or so editions of it).

One of his favorite distractions was to invent entries of just a few words or sentences, in the style of Larousse, about everyone whom he knew or had met. The ones about himself he even wrote down. Over the years he had amassed several hundred. And although each one contained something that distinguished it from the others, the fact remained that his entire—though, granted, as yet unfinished—life could be set down in a few dozen well-ordered words. This excited and never failed to amaze Franz, and gave him hope that his way of living was a perfectly good one.

3. Further proof of Franzysk's superficiality was that he knew nothing about his family history. Even about his mother and father he knew only what he himself had seen as a child. For some reason they had never spoken with him about the past, and it had never crossed his mind to ask them about anything. He spent his whole childhood in solitude, painting everything he saw. His parents died without him, when he already had his own teacher in a different town. Eventually Franz somehow realized that not once, not even in the first years of his life, had he painted his mother or father. The reduction of them was practically absolute.

It was probably fear of continuing this emptiness that drove him to tell his

daughter as much as possible about himself. Even about the structure of the world he tried to speak in such a way that she would always remember that it had been her father who had first told her about this or that. Though about her mother, his Anna, he also knew only from the time they had spent together—a little more than two years. But that was enough for the girl to know everything she needed to know about her mother.

All her life, except for the last few months, she hadn't spent a single day apart from her father. Even after she became Sebastian's wife.

4. In September 1914 she volunteered for the army, and after a few weeks' training was sent to the front in eastern Galicia. Sebastian and Franzysk remained alone in a small building not far from the main street in Ialivets. There was no news from the front. Then, in the spring of 1915, a courier arrived in the town and handed Sebastian (Franz had been beheaded the day before, and his funeral was to take place the next day) an infant—the daughter of the heroic volunteer, Anna of Ialivets. Sebastian never found out exactly when the child had been born, or what pregnant Anna had done in the midst of the most terrible battles of the World War. But he knew for certain that this was his daughter. He called her Anna, or to be more exact, the second Anna (it wasn't until after her death that he often referred to her simply as “the second one”).

5. The second Anna grew more and more similar to the first. Or maybe they were both similar to the very first one—only old Beda could know. As for Sebastian, he grew accustomed to comparing himself daily to Franzysk. He brought up his Anna himself and would let no woman near her. In the end, eighteen-year-old Anna, of her own free will, chose a man for herself. The man was, of course, Sebastian.

6. This time there was nothing he didn't know about the pregnancy of his woman. Indeed, only he was present at the birth of their daughter, who was at the same time his granddaughter. And Sebastian saw how the birth became the end of the story. Because at the beginning of the next, his dear second Anna died a moment before the third came to rest in his arms. Somewhere in the bitter depths within him Sebastian felt the turbulence and calming of underground waters, he felt worlds being sketched out and erased, the transformation of the previous twenty years into a seedling. There was no need of any of the Unsimple to realize, he thought to himself, that something like this had already happened to him once, and that with his new-born wife he would live to a similar end. That this wasn't a question of the strange blood of the women of that family but rather of his own unstoppable desire to be poured into it. That it wasn't that they had to die young but rather that he had no right to see them more than one at a time.

7. Sebastian went out onto the veranda. The Unsimple had probably arrived earlier but sat quietly on the benches there, waiting until the birth was over. For supper Sebastian had shot almost a hundred thrushes that had just eaten all the berries from the young rowan tree. He baked them whole, after plucking them and brushing them with saffron.

Two women—a seeress and a snake-charmer—washed Anna and wrapped her in colorful blankets.

The men, meanwhile, managed to feed the child and declared that they needn't tell her anything—because she herself was Unsimple. And they also said what Franz had said, that there are things far more important than fate. Apparently he was thinking of heredity.

After supper Sebastian could not get to sleep. He was trying to remember whether Anna had ever said anything about where she would like to be buried, and how he was to feed the child tomorrow. Then he began to think about Pastor Mendel's experiments with peas, and decided that the child was going to be happy. He tried to imagine himself in fifteen years' time—in 1951—and immediately fell asleep.

THE FIRST OLD PHOTOGRAPH—THE ONLY UNDATED ONE

1. A low wall composed of flat stone slabs irregular in shape. Furthermore the slabs also differ greatly in size—there are small thin ones, like closed hands, and also larger ones, long enough to lie down on quite comfortably. These are the thickest, but not one of them retains the same breadth along its entire length. The majority are in fact of medium size. If you were to hold one of these in front of you, with one end tucked under your chin, it would barely reach down to your waist. The wall has a singularly strange quality: although it looks solid enough and gives the impression of having no end—just as all marked boundaries are supposed to—the presence of unfilled gaps between the horizontally laid slabs arouses a desire to rearrange them, or to remove each one and make something new of it.

2. It's important that all the stones are completely clean. On the whole wall there's not a single scrap of moss to be found—not a single stem or blade of grass. Even if the leaves of the beech trees happen to fall on it (the wall is wide enough for that, the leaves are yellowing already and occasionally fall off in the dry wind, as commonly happens at the end of August—all this is evident even from a black-and-white photograph), someone has carefully swept them up from the stone surface warmed in the afternoon sun.

Between the trees beyond the wall there is a cubic building, also made of stone. The stone is impeccably smooth and polished. The whole building seems to be a windowless, monolithic block. The relief on the façade is designed to look like four drawers, so that the cube also resembles an enormous chest of drawers, with the top drawer protruding slightly. Engraved on a relatively small enameled metal plaque, in simple, thick, and squat script, is the word JUNIPERUS.

3. In front of the wall there's a fragment of a road, already paved with river stones. The road begins at the bottom of the card, in the middle, and leads up toward the top left-hand corner, skirting round a tall, inclined cedar pine before disappearing once again near the center—at the top, naturally. In the distance the road curves at such an angle that it serves simultaneously as a sort of backdrop for the rest of the photo. The wall is always on the right, and on the left is a narrow canal with bare concrete embankments. Further to the left in the picture, beyond the canal, is a sliver of a high wooden platform, on which stand several deck-chairs and some planters with slender junipers.

4. Franzysk, in a white linen coat with large buttons, stands on the very edge of the canal, on the bank nearest the road. He holds a bundle of clothes slung across one arm. The clothes are the same color as his coat, but it's

possible to make out a shirt and a pair of pants. In his other hand is a pair of black shoes. From his posture it's clear that he has just turned away from the water. And in it is the head of a person, swimming with the current.

5. The face is impossible to make out, but Sebastian knows it's him. It had been a habit of theirs: they would go for strolls through the town, Sebastian slowly swimming the canals and Franz walking along the bank.

All the streets in Ialivets were lined with canals. That way water from the many streams that flowed down the cliffs above the town was collected in a swimming pool at its lower edge. Sebastian could swim for hours in the mountain water, and the whole time he and Franz would converse. From the looks of it, the photograph must have been taken near the end of the summer of 1914. Only once did someone come with them on one of their walks—a young instructor of the art of survival whom they had invited to one of the lodging houses to give private lessons. A teacher of Esperanto and the owner of a hectograph had also been staying then. But only the instructor was invited to take part in their stroll through the town.

6. Immediately after the swim and photograph the instructor suggested going somewhere to drink gin, but Sebastian and Franz had a fancy for some light, fresh gooseberry wine, and so took the instructor to see Beda, to the armored car, which stood between two island-patches of mountain pines. Beda had been collecting berries of all kinds all summer, and he now had in his car several ten-liter bottles in which the different colored berries were fermenting, heated by the metal walls of the vehicle.

First they tried a little of each wine, and then they drank all the gooseberry. The instructor became extremely talkative and began testing Sebastian, to see if he could solve some simple survival problems. It turned out that the latter had a serious lack of knowledge in this field and could perish quite easily in the most innocuous of situations. But Sebastian had a clear enough idea of what survival meant. Such a clear idea, in fact, that he had in the end stopped worrying about it. And had survived all the same.

7. In Africa he had had plenty of brushes with death but survival had been more important—because it was interesting, because this was Africa. Eventually he realized—by looking at the ground anywhere, even when urinating in the morning—that he was on a different continent, on unknown territory. Thus he became convinced that Africa existed. Because before then the long list of place-names, the numerous variations—in architecture, in the positions of the stars, in skull structure, and in customs—had been neutralized by the unfailing uniformity of squares of ground and the grass on them.

8. It was when this grass began to burn around him that he first discovered

survival. The wind, which normally brought only psychological disorder, drove the fire in all four directions from the place where it had landed on dry earth. But then, outsmarting the fire (he may have run to the precise place from which the wind was driving the fire in all four directions), Sebastian found himself caught in a rain that had been gathering all year and that now flowed over the hard red earth in a multitude of parallel streams, to which a human being is as insignificant as the tiniest sand turtle and as significant as those millions of myriads of thirsty seedlings cast off by dying stems over many months without a single drop of water.

The instructor was indignant at Sebastian's ignorance. He couldn't believe that someone could allow himself to live so calmly, without a clue about how to avoid everyday dangers. Sebastian decided not to say another word about survival.

9. So, the only undated photo was taken on the 28th of June 1914. That date should be written on the back of the photograph, at least with a hard pencil. Thus even if the inscription were rubbed off—and anything written in pencil is bound to be rubbed off eventually, usually when no one cares any more about what has been written—the hard pencil will have left an indentation of the inscription, pressed into the surface of the paper by the hard lead tip.

PHYSIOLOGICALLY

1. Every man needs a teacher.

In general, men must study.

Outstanding men distinguish themselves not only by their ability to study and learn, but also because they always know and always remember from whom they learned what, even if it was by accident. And while for women remembering their teachers is a sign of benevolence, for men it is the most crucial element of what is learned.

The most distinguished men not only study their whole lives (to study is to be aware of what happens around you), but also very quickly become someone else's teacher, insisting on this awareness of what is experienced. This accounts for the continuity of schooling, which, together with one's family tree, ensures the maximum likelihood that the world will not change during one's lifetime to such a degree as to make life totally undesirable for this reason alone.

(Later both Franzysk and Sebastian saw how much some women know without teachers at all; how wise women become the wisest when they learn how to study; and how when the wisest remember those from whom they inherited experience, voluntarily making it their own, then they turn into something no man can ever achieve. If for no other reason than that no man ever learns anything from such women, besides the fact that such a thing can exist.)

2. The illustrator who taught Franz had studied with Brehm. Brehm had studied among animals. Over the years the illustrator told Franz many stories about Brehm's teachers. For years Franz had observed animals and drew their habits. Later, this special zoological education would become the foundation for the upbringing of his daughter. And, of course, he also taught Sebastian all this, when the latter made the decision to stay in Ialivets permanently and began to live in Franz's home. For this reason Sebastian's children in turn knew these stories equally well.

3. The second Anna interested the Unsimple precisely because of her ability to understand animals, to become like them, and to live with this or that animal without arousing an uneasy sense of otherness in it. As for Sebastian, he found it delightful that Anna would turn into a cat or a lemur for a few moments every day as part of her morning exercises. Their nights together included ones when he would find himself sharing his bed with such delicate creatures as spiders and bark beetles.

4. Franzysk noticed fairly early on that he had a somewhat extended physiology. Obviously, the physiology of every creature depends on its

environment, but nevertheless in Franz's case this relationship was somewhat exaggerated. He clearly felt that some of what should be happening in his body was actually taking place far beyond its shell. And vice-versa: in order to occur, certain external things had to make use of his physiological mechanisms.

It struck Franz that he was in some ways similar to mushrooms, interwoven into the fabric of trees, or to spiders, whose digestion takes place in the body of their prey, or to a shell mollusk with its external skeleton, or to a fish, whose sperm, once released, swims freely through the water until it impregnates something.

He saw that there was not enough space in his head for certain thoughts, and they dispersed themselves across fragments of the landscape. For it was enough just to look at a plot of land to read the thought that had settled there. And in order to remember something, he had to take an imaginary walk through familiar places, looking around and picking out the required memories.

And making love to Anna, he knew exactly what she looked like inside, because he was convinced that he had walked along her internal road.

5. His own physiology stopped bothering him immediately after his teacher repeated to him what Brehm had said: that dogs have a sense of smell a million times better than humans. This was inconceivable; no imagination could even come close to grasping such an idea. But Franz, reducing the number to ten, was fascinated by the way everything that happens externally is exaggeratedly repeated inside a dog's head and by the drafts that rush through the corridors of their brains (This he related to Sebastian, who afterwards always tried to be careful with certain strong smells, so that dogs would not be irritated by what was impossible to escape. Sebastian almost cried whenever he walked to his sniper's position and had to rub his boots with tobacco solution, so that the dogs, having once breathed in that smell, would lose the desire and ability to follow him). (Franz developed such a respect for dogs that on settling down in Ialivets he acquired several very different ones. Out of respect, he never trained them. The dogs were born, lived, and died free. And it would seem, especially considering the lives of the other dogs around Ialivets, that they were grateful to Franz for this. Actually, it was they who were the real intelligentsia in Ialivets).

6. Saying that, one of them, probably the most intelligent—named Lukach in honor of the Serbian forester who had taught the Unsimple to grow trees a little more slowly, like wild vines, and who had planted thickets impassable for soldiers around Ialivets during the war—had to be killed by Franz himself.

7. Lukach had been bitten by a rabid ermine.

He was already in a bad way and his final death throes would soon begin. As always with rabies, the convulsions could intensify at the sight of water, a breath of air on the face, light, loud voices, or a touch to the skin or the nape of the neck.

Lukach lay in the orangery, in the shade of a young bergamot tree. The flowers of the passion fruit had just come into bloom, with all their little crosses, hammers, nails and spears, and Franz had to cover the whole bush with the dampened cloth cover they used for the piano, so that the pungent scent would not distress Lukach (once he had loved that scent so much that when the passion fruit was in flower he would sleep for days underneath the tree, not leaving the orangery at all).

The bergamot grew at the very end of a long alley. Franzysk walked towards it through the whole orangery, axe in hand, passing the exotic plants one by one. The dog's eyes looked up at the face, hand, and sword, and then he slightly raised his head, stretching out his throat. But Franz did it a different way—he put his arms around Lukach, pressing his head down, stretching out his vertebrae. The blow began at the spinal cord but did not stop there.

Despite the speed of the operation, Lukach would likely still have had time to smell his own blood. Franz distinctly felt the tissues rip as the blade tore through them. It was as though these sounds entered his inner ear from inside his own neck (the way sometimes you hear your own voice when shouting under a waterfall).

8. The killing of Lukach affected Franz so deeply that later he often imagined that Lukach was looking at him through the eyes of the puppies he had sired, that Lukach's movements, posture, and expressions were at times emerging from under the fur of his sons and grandsons—that Lukach was immortal.

Franz had simply not lived long enough to realize that it wasn't entirely so. Because now Sebastian had many opportunities to become convinced that it is possible to enter one and the same river, living with his wife, and daughter, and granddaughter.

Sebastian saw nothing strange in the fact that Franz himself died the same way as Lukach (only perhaps he didn't smell the blood—but he certainly heard the sounds of tissues tearing from the inside), although he was not killed so carefully.

9. Similarly, no allusions came to Sebastian when, twenty years after Franz's death, right in the middle of a bridge over the Tysa, a trained army dog attacked him. Sebastian just squatted down a little, so as to counter the dog's lunging weight, and stuck his fur-clad elbow into the dog's flying muzzle. The muzzle closed around his left arm tighter than a pair of pincers, but with his right Sebastian pulled out from his coat pocket a long razor and

in one swipe cut the dog's head off so that it stayed clamped to his elbow, while the body fell onto the planks of the bridge.

10. With his elongated physiology Franz couldn't feel comfortable just anywhere. He most preferred places where, just like an embryo in the placenta, his physiology was free to grow in the greatest comfort.

Beda had been right when he wrote to Anna—a sort of botanical geography. Franz found a place that made travel unnecessary.

Before the premiere of one of his films at the *Juniperus Cinema* he even told the audience, which had come from all over Europe: "I live like grass or juniper, so as not to be anywhere else after the seed has taken root; waiting for the world, which will traverse me; to see it not only from the bottom up but projected onto the heavens, that is, enlarged and distorted enough to be more interesting; after all, my place will always end up at the center of European history, for in these lands history in its various forms comes to our doorsteps of its own accord."

11. In Ialivets, or rather in the place where Ialivets was yet to be, Franz began to live most genuinely. He was even somewhat ashamed of his constant happiness.

12. The day that he and the professor rested between Petros and Sheshul, Franz felt that he was wandering across islands in the sky. Only a few of the highest peaks peeked out above the clouds. The setting sun shone only for them. The reddened tops of the clouds flowed about them, forming gulfs, lagoons, straits, river-basins, deltas, estuaries. What was in the depths was of no consequence.

On the gentle slope Franz found berries. Because of the brief summer in this mountain tundra they all ripened at the same time—woodland strawberries, black bilberries, raspberries, blackberries, and red bilberries. Franz fell into a trance, became absorbed in some kind of cosmic movement, and couldn't stop himself from eating so many berries that he was forced to lie down. Then he felt that he was being lowered to the bottom of an extraordinary bosom: he could not bear it and poured everything out.

A little higher it was still spring, and the fragrant first flowers were in bloom.

Higher still the snow was slowly melting.

Franz ran down the slope and darted into the beeches, among which it was still autumn. During his run he ejaculated again. The professor in the meantime set up their tent. They ate a few Hutsul cheese horses, and brewed a pot of tea from the leaves of all the berries. Then the night began. In the moonlight everything seemed to be covered in snow. The Romanian mountains were like a distant strip of shoreline, and the ground unceasingly gave off a heat that smelled of vermouth.

WALK, STAND, SIT, LIE

1. If places really are the truest of plots, then the culmination of Ialivets as a town was undoubtedly the time when the town architect was Anna, Franzysk's daughter.

For the children of animators who never leave their father's side, becoming an architect is not difficult. Especially in a town that daddy thought up. After her first sketch, drawn in 1900 (when Anna was seven), the new Juniperus Cinema was built, in the shape of a chest of drawers, especially for screenings of Franz's animated films.

When she was still a child Anna drew plans for a swimming pool in the shape of a grebe's nest floating on a lake; for underground tunnels with openings like those of moles on various streets in the town; for a bar in which the exit was designed in such a way that, on leaving, patrons found themselves not outside as expected but in an absolutely identical room; for a four-story pine cone building; and for an enormous two-story sunflower villa.

2. Because Anna thought with her body. She could feel every movement not only in its entirety but also as a series of contractions and relaxations of muscle fibers, the bending of joints, pauses and explosions of blood flow, intake and expulsion of streams of air. For this reason the sentences of her thoughts were spatial constructions. Thus she saw buildings as if they had no covering, as a space containing the transpositions of other mobile and semi-mobile structures—fingers, spines, skulls, knees, jaws.

3. Franzysk noticed, however, that at first Anna's imagination could not escape the bounds of symmetry. He realized that being enchanted by the wonder of natural symmetry is the child's first step towards consciously reproducing the beauty of the harmony of the world.

4. Anna had a fairly restricted upbringing.

When she was still called Stefania, and Anna was only her mother, Franz understood that the most important thing about bringing up children was to be with them as much as possible. He probably took this too literally: for almost twenty years after the death of his wife there was not a single moment when he and Anna were apart. Always together. Either in the same room, or out together, or doing something in the garden within sight of one another. Even when bathing Anna never closed the bathroom door. It was important for them always to be able to hear what the other was saying. This became the sole principle of Franzysk's pedagogy. Strange as it was, she was happy living like this. From the time she began actually working as an architect, she trembled with joy when they sat working at different tables in

their large study—she annotating her sketches and making drafts, and her father sketching his animations.

5. All their life together Franzysk spoke not so much to her as simply aloud. Everything Anna heard—their dogs heard too. Anna rarely asked questions; instead she learned to speak constantly of her every perception, endeavoring to find the most accurate combinations of words.

Often she would interrupt Franz—tell me the same thing again, only not so briefly.

Anna couldn't read or write but every day she browsed through the illustrations in Larousse. She heard only the music performed by the resort band and by Hutsuls playing shepherds' flutes, dulcimers, zithers, and trembitas. She herself played only the jew's harp. She could draw a circle impeccably, though she formed it from two symmetrical halves. She could draw any ellipse with the same accuracy and could continue a straight line indefinitely, resting from time to time for a few minutes or months. About her mother she knew everything that a young girl should. She played with dogs and thus had contact with others of her own age.

6. She lived twice as much, every day experiencing both her own and Franzysk's lives.

7. Unexpectedly even to herself, Anna began to draw beans. The movement involved in doing this gave her the greatest physical pleasure. Thousands of repetitions did not diminish the pleasure. Anna began to ponder this.

She saw beans everywhere: in river stones and in the moon, in curled-up dogs and in the position in which she most often fell asleep; in sheep's kidneys and lungs, hearts and halves of the brain; in lumps of budz cheese and mushroom caps; in the bodies of birds and in fetuses; in her breasts and the beloved two pelvic bones that stuck out beneath her stomach; in the banks of small lakes and in the concentric contour lines showing the increasing elevation of mountains on geographical maps. Finally she decided that the bean alone is the most perfect form for separating a small space from a larger one.

8. Anna told old Beda about this when she brought a whole sack of large blue beans to his armored car. They hauled the sack onto the roof of the car and poured the whole lot into the top hatch. Anna looked inside and gasped—the interior of the car was filled with beans of different sizes and colors, and the beans at the top of the heap were slowly slithering downwards, like lava flowing down a volcano. Beda gathered beans from all over Ialivets to take to the market in Kosiv.

He must have said something afterwards to the Unsimple, because they came and had the very young Anna appointed town architect.

9. When Franz chose a place he always took care that it be good in all four states—walking, standing, sitting and lying—that a human being can be in. With Anna things were different. She lived in such a place from the very beginning. After becoming an architect Anna began coming up with something different. She remembered very well what Franz had taught her, and even better what Franz himself had learned. But at first she did not think that he had told her everything.

10. One can fall—and large air cushions were placed under certain buildings so one could jump onto them right from the balconies.

One can hang—and cables were stretched between two mountains, along which, holding onto special handles (Anna found them among her mother’s climbing gear), one could slide down to a central platform and hang there for a few moments over the roofs and lower trees.

One can swing—and trapezes were installed on the buildings, so one could fly across to the opposite side of the street.

One can also roll, jump up, crawl, and burrow—and all this was also taken into account in reconstructed Ialivets. More and more patients began to come to the gin resort. Sebastian was already fighting in Africa then, and the terrorist Sichynsky escaped from Stanislav prison.

11. Franz clearly saw that Anna could not think up anything new, because even while falling (or, say, during flight—if she could manage even that) a person either stands, or lies, or sits in the air.

But the innovations pleased him and he proposed pouring water over the streets before winter arrived. For a few months Ialivets became one large ice-rink. Only by gripping the railings along the streets could one manage to scramble somehow to the upper part of the town. But Franz knew how to walk on a slippery surface.

12. Wandering with Franzysk in the nearby mountains, Anna saw many different Hutsul villages. Looking closer, she understood what it meant to have one’s own house. Maintaining a house lends sense to the daily search for food. Having a house is like putting aside leftovers, or sharing food with someone. Or, sometimes, being responsible for finding food.

If the body is the gate to the soul, then a house is the terrace onto which the soul is allowed to emerge.

She saw that for most people a house is the foundation for biography and an express consequence of existence. And this is also where memory rests, for it is with objects that memory functions best.

She was enchanted by the Hutsul habit of building one’s house far away from others. In an unspoiled place. When a house is built, it becomes wiser than all prophets and seers—it will always tell you what you should do next.

13. There's also this characteristic of beauty. To be accessible, beauty must be capable of being formulated in words. And therefore, to be reduced. A house gives that reduced space in which it is possible to create beauty through one's own efforts.

For Anna, the basic conditions for beauty in a home were space, light, drafts, passages between the divisions of space. For this reason she designed several buildings in the style of the Hutsul *grazhda*. Separate rooms and parts of the house led directly out into a square courtyard, which was enclosed on all sides by those same rooms.

14. The sources of all beauty that human beings can command, of all aesthetics, are, undoubtedly, plants (and, in the end, food as well: here the ideal and the material are a unity as nowhere else). On the other hand, few things are as perfect an embodiment of ethics as caring for plants. To say nothing of the fact that watching the seasons of the year change is the simplest way to a private philosophy. It was for this reason that the Serbian forester Lukach planted flowering bushes brought from Macedonia in the courtyards of the *grazhdas*: barberry, camellia, heather, cornel, spurge flax, forsythia, hydrangea, jasmine, magnolia, rhododendron, clematis.

15. Anna ordered that the town itself be encircled by transparent zigzag Hutsul fencing made from long spruce strips—*vorrynia*. Entry to the town was through real Hutsul gates—*rozlohy*— with gate panels—*zavorotnytsi* that needed to be pushed aside.

There was no particular need for this, but Anna wanted to revive as many as possible of the words needed to talk about such fences—*gary*, *zavorynie*, *huzhva*, *byltsia*, *kiechka*, *spyzh*.

THE SITUATION IN COLOR

1. The main inhabitant of Ialivets (Juniper) was, of course, the juniper (*ialivets*) itself. Franz planned the construction of the town so as to avoid harming a single bush on any of the three sides of the slope. Since there weren't many trees, most of the buildings were made of gray slabs of stone, which in some places are known as *gorgany*. The principle colors of the town, therefore, were green and gray—even fewer colors than in Hutsul ceramics. But if the gray was the same everywhere, the green had many shades. Actually, it's not altogether right to say green. Better to say greens. There were so many greens that everything seemed unbelievably colorful. Without even counting the thousands of radically varying dots of purple, red, pink, violet, blue, azure, yellow, orange, white, once again green, brown, and even almost black flowers. Little Anna learned her colors from these flowers (Franz often thought of that time as being a perfect time. Naming colors became for him a clear embodiment of the idea of the creation of the world and of harmony). If one lives attentively, floristry in such a town is unnecessary. And that's how it was.

One also has to imagine the combined shades of color of the near, far, and further mountains that were visible from every point in Ialivets. And then also the sky, clouds, winds, suns, moons, snows, and rains.

2. Around this stone settlement grew so many junipers that the smell of their warmed, soaked, cracked, and crushed berries, branches, and roots grew into a taste.

3. It's hard to understand how Sebastian managed to talk so much with Franz that he could remember so many of Franz's individual phrases. For they had only a year and nine months. Yet most of what Franz said survived thanks precisely to Sebastian. It was from him that the Unsimple noted down those best-known phrases that were later reproduced on the various parts of an enormous dinnerware set made at the porcelain factory in Patsykiv. The second Anna once even joked that that all these sayings were thought up by Sebastian himself, and the words "Franz said" were Sebastian's word-parasites. Just like: whore, maybe, really, and simple.

4. In any case, Sebastian himself said that Franz said that life depends on what you walk past. But what you walk past depends on where you're going. So changing it is quite simple. It's harder with other defining elements—what you drink and what you breathe.

In Ialivets everyone breathed the etheric resin of the juniper and drank juniper vodka, whose relation to juniper was threefold. The water in which the sweet berries fermented had itself for years, from the very beginning,

flowed between earth and sky, washing over the juniper, touching and remembering it, and then it was also heated on fires of juniper logs.

5. Juniper vodka was distilled in every yard. Fresh shoots were boiled in pots with spirits extracted from the juniper berries. Steam gathered on the hearth, cooled and dripped down as a thick gin. Sometimes thick gin clouds hung above the roofs. When frost was imminent, alcohol would drip from the sky. On the already cooled earth it would freeze, and the street would be covered in a thin layer of ice. If you licked the ice, you would quickly get drunk. On days like that you had to get around by sliding across the ice. Although your foot wouldn't actually have time to slip if you moved fast enough—so that the sole of your shoe touched the ice as briefly as possible.

6. Anna first appeared in Ialivets when the town was already becoming a fashionable resort. Not long before she had seriously injured herself by falling from a cliff, even though she had been attached to a line, and for a long time she ate nothing. The experience had given her a terrible fright. Nevertheless the next day she had gone into the mountains and tried to climb. But it was useless. For the first time her body refused to be a continuation of the rock. Something there proved stronger. She came to Ialivets and drank gin. She intended to train, but drank gin. She didn't dare to approach the cliffs. And not long afterwards she met Franzysk. He made animated films, for which no fewer tourists came to Ialivets than for the gin.

7. Anna felt like lichen scraped off the barren shore of a cold sea. She had to just hold on in order to hold out. There was no other way. She really didn't want to be angry. "God, don't let me harm anyone!" she prayed constantly. The first time they met, she and Franz spent the night in a bar, where, having come just by chance toward evening, they couldn't help but stay until morning. The barman was so unlike a barman that they waited a long time for someone to take their order. There they gave each other gin massages, had three gin inhalations, set fire to strong gin on their hands and stomachs, drank spilt gin from the table, and drank from mouth to mouth. Anna couldn't yet imagine Franz in any other place.

8. That night they lay next to each other on chairs pushed together and understood that through a confluence of bone and flesh they were brother and sister. Or husband and wife. Even if this never happens again, thought Franzysk, it still feels good to touch one another. And she thought about various trifles and curiosities that happen or might happen at any moment. As they slept, fitting bone to flesh, and bone to bone, and flesh to flesh, their skulls constantly touched at uneven places. They turned over, squeezed closer together, twisted around and moved away, but their skulls did not separate for even a second. Sometimes their skulls scraped against each

other, catching on especially pronounced protrusions or cavities, and they woke often, afraid of their incomparable closeness, which was secured by their heads alone. Never again would Franzysk and Anna experience such intense enlightenment and lucidity.

Outside, dawn was breaking. The main street of the town passed by the closed bars, the dark courtyards overgrown with vines that never ripened, the low stone walls, and the high gates and made its way to the foot of the one-thousand-six-hundred-and-ninety-five-meter-high mountain, gradually turning into a barely noticeable track, which at that time of day gleamed white.

9. Anna's pregnancy was a time of shared happiness. Something that can truly be called cohabitation, a family.

They began their evenings early. They walked in warm autumn coats along the remotest streets among the as-yet-uninhabited villas. They pretended that this was not their town. He held her hand in his pocket. They walked, simultaneously taking a step with the leg to which the leg of the other was pressed so tightly that at times their muscles would contract and their hip joints would rub together in a funny way. She liked it that things were so simple. That the one she loved loved her. For the first time she felt the joy of not having to clear out in the morning. She told him things from the time before he had appeared, and she loved to hear him speak about how he knew her. In the mornings they spent a long time on the balcony breakfasting on honey, sour milk, dried pears soaked in wine, fried biscuits dipped in milk, nuts of various kinds.

10. On the table next to the bath stood an old typewriter with an immovable cast-iron base, and whatever they didn't dare to say to each other they typed on a scroll of the finest paper fed into the Remington. "I feel bad with people you don't know about," wrote Anna. "Are they comfortable now, are they comfortable with me, is he comfortable here. It's awkward and difficult with those who don't say what they like and what they don't." Franzysk typed something completely different: "Without doing anything bad, bad people can do us harm—we have to be wary of their existence." "Good people stop being good when they start to begrudge what they are sorry to give away," wrote Anna for some reason. And Franz: "Sense and pleasure exist only in details: one has to know these details to be able to repeat them."

After Franz's death Sebastian found the typewriter. The paper was still in it. Later he often imagined real dialogues between living people made up of similar sentences.

11. Franz tried to cure Anna of her fear. He led her up to the top of the cliff, on the side where you could go up through a dense patch of mountain pine,

from the rear. Then he took her in his arms and held her above the drop. “Fate is not the most important thing,” Franz said. “The main thing is to fear nothing.” But something in his method wasn’t right.

He came to know her body better than she did. He could take Anna’s hand and lay it on her body in a way she had never done and would never have been able to do. He touched her in a way that made her blood vessels, arteries, and veins tingle. He spent hours making her aware of her own beauty. From all this Anna began to understand that she was beautiful. Beautiful not for somebody, but for herself. And she became even more afraid that all this could be shattered by falling against the rocks.

“I love my life,” she pleaded to Franz. “That’s good,” he insisted, “because besides that there is nothing. Not to love it means renouncing everything.”

12. She did try again after all. When Franz blocked her ears. Because he suddenly began to suspect that Anna was afraid not of heights but of the silence that accompanies heights.

Secured in every possible way, her ears plugged, pregnant Anna climbed up the stone wall, feeling awkward because she was not sure what to do with her belly.

Franzysk ventured to climb alongside. He painted onto the cliff all the contour where her belly had pressed against it. They rappelled down so fast that they singed their palms on the lines. For some reason such insignificant burns often make it impossible to get to sleep. The next morning moving daguerreotypes silhouetting the movements of the fetus across the cliff were already finished. The film turned out beautifully. It didn’t matter that it was short.

13. Franzysk paid no attention to time. All of his films lasted only a few minutes. He invented animation that was not yet possible. He got pleasure from the creation of satiated minutes that might never have been. If he hadn’t. If he hadn’t noticed something, if he hadn’t thought through the method, if he hadn’t matched things up, if he hadn’t distinguished things—if he hadn’t a whole lot of things.

“Life is so short,” thought Franz, “that time has no meaning. One way or another it happens as a whole.”

Franz dreamed of something radical. And he came to the conclusion that the most radical thing possible—was to wait.

14. After the birth of their daughter Anna decided to go into training again. She tried blocking her ears, but something bothered her again. Her inner ear was deprived of the vibrations without which it is hard to sense the limits of one’s own body.

She remembered her father’s garden and injected herself with morphine. The vibrations began immediately.

But sounds began to behave strangely. As though they had lost their dependence on distance. Sounds flew at great speed, tightly bundled together in clusters, not coming apart in the air. Sometimes one of these bullets would collide with another, changing the direction of flight in a completely unexpected way. In some collisions both clusters would give off aural splinters and dust. They flew independently. Mingling, separating, flying upwards, descending or driving down into the ground. When she reached a point some four times her own height, Anna found herself in the midst of a cacophony of opaque clouds. When she climbed higher still, the sound of tiny particles of rock falling from under her fingers and crashing to the bottom of the cliff became unbearable.

15. Anna stopped climbing. But she didn't stop using morphine. She would sit on the veranda for days at a time, listening in on the lives of the various insects that lived around the house. Not even hearing the cries of hungry Stefania.

Franz tried in vain to change things. The best he managed to do was to squeeze a little milk from Anna's breasts and feed it to his daughter. But the opium had developed a taste for the milk as well. It drank first, and Franz would squeeze the dried-out breasts pointlessly. Franzysk went to a witch who stole milk from cows, and asked her to take Anna's milk. The child began to eat properly. But together with the milk she consumed the opium. Franz thought the child slept for days at a time because she was so content at being well-fed. At last things were more peaceful. But when Anna's milk ran out and even the witch couldn't get a drop out of her, Stefania went through the symptoms of genuine morphine withdrawal. The Unsimple, boiling some poppy seeds in milk, barely managed to save her

Anna began to do the same thing. The child slept and had fantastic dreams (some of them—though she was barely six months old then—she would remember for the rest of her life. But maybe what she remembered was the feeling she'd had in those dreams, and the rest came later), and Anna listened to worms burrowing through the earth, to the cries of spiders making love in their tense webs, to the splitting of a beetle's thorax as it was crushed in the beak of a wagtail.

16. In mid-December Franz took Anna on his lap and told her to get out of lalivets. Anna got up, kissed Franz, and went to the bedroom to get the child ready. Then he proposed something different—he challenged his wife to a duel. For the little child's subsequent life required that one of her parents be dead.

Anna agreed and chose her weapon: they would go immediately to the snow-covered, windswept cliff and climb to the top by two different unmarked routes without taking any safety precautions. Whoever returned would be left with the little girl. Despite all her fears, Anna was sure that

this was the only way she could defeat Franzysk (it didn't enter their minds that they both might not return, and they said nothing to anyone, leaving the child in its cradle).

They barely made it through the snow to the cliffs. They took off their sheepskins, drank a bottle of gin between them, kissed, and set off.

17. For the first time Franzysk had to become a real mountain climber (“Is this my first first time?” he thought). Hence his descent from the top took several hours; it turned out that the hardened snow actually helped him—on bare rock he would never have made it. As much as it pained him, he could not bury Anna until June, when the snow in the ravine had melted.

THE SECOND OLD PHOTOGRAPH—ARDZHELIUDZHA, 1892

1. A naked female back ends in a wide leather belt. Below the belt there is only a strip of dark fabric. On the neck, sharply bent forward, is the fine line of a thick necklace. The head is not visible. The arms are lowered, though bent at the elbows. The torso is slightly twisted to the left, so only the four fingers of the right hand gripping the left forearm are visible. The back appears almost triangular—so broad are the shoulders and so narrow the waist. Between the upper edge of the belt and the white skin is a little empty space. Clearly visible are shoulder blades and the ends of the collar bone. Jutting out below the neck are the tips of four vertebrae. Where they end the lines of two tensed muscles running down the middle of the back begin. Nearer to the waist the distance between them is smallest, and the depth of the hollow is greatest. A keyboard of ribs shows through only on the left—and not on the back itself but on the side. But where the ribcage ends the concave of the waist begins, the line of which curves back out to its previous width at the top of the pelvis.

Observing the contrast of the white back and the black belt it's easy to believe that the light from the sun is at its most powerful. Though a barely visible shadow has appeared only between the muscles running along the spine.

2. The back is photographed from close up. To the right of it, in the background of the picture, stands a small horse, some distance away from the camera. The little Hutsul horse is quite old—the best horses had already all been taken away during the state requisition of horses to Bosnia—but all the same it is well looked after. In place of a saddle it has a long narrow covering.

3. During their first summer together Franz and Anna went to Kostrych to see the panorama of Chornohora. The day was sunny and they could see the entire ridge: Petros, Hoverla, Breskul, Pozhyzhevskya, Dantsysh, Homul, Turkul, Shpytsi, Rebra, Tomnatyk, Brebeneskul, Menchul, Smotrych, Staiky, and part of the Svydovets ridge—Blyznytsi and Tatulska, and further—Bratkivska, Dovbushanka, Iavirnyk. Behind them were Rotyla, Bila Kobyla, and Lysyna Kosmatska.

On the way back, just past Ardzheliudzha, Anna took off her shirt and bast shoes, which left her in nothing but a pair of men's trousers. They were walking along the Prut. From time to time they went down to the river to take a drink. The river was so shallow that Anna could put her hands squarely on the bottom, bend down to the water, and submerge her whole face. The tips of her breasts came close to the bubbling surface but stayed dry. Only her heavy brass crucifix, with its primitive depiction of the

crucifixion, rattled against the stones. At such moments Franz would place a ladybird on Anna's back, and the creature would run around between the drops of sweat, tickling her skin. Anna couldn't even move a hand to brush it off.

After bathing they kissed until their lips became completely dry. Because everything wet becomes dry. Their skin gave off the aroma of cold river plants in warm rivers between warm stones under warm winds blowing from beyond snow-covered Hoverla. If they'd been able to commit these physical sensations to memory, so as to be able to call them to mind at any moment, their feeling of happiness would have been constant.

Then they still talked a lot and with great enthusiasm. Franz thought about how everything that is worth looking at changes when you have someone to show it to.

The horse carried only a pear box containing a camera and a sycamore keg full of juniper vodka. Not once did it go into the water to take a drink.

4. When in December 1883 Franz returned from the cliff alone, the first thing he did, rather than feed the child, was to search for alcohol and in the process accidentally came across that very same keg. There was about half a liter of juniper vodka left in it, and he immediately finished off what they had not managed to drink together. Then he pulled out this photograph from the Larousse, slid it between two rectangles of glass, throwing out some old drawing, and placed the framed picture on his desk for good. He ground a handful of dried bilberries in a mortar, soaked them in warm water with honey, and began to feed Stefania. The next morning he went to the priest and told him to register his daughter in the church records under the name of Anna.

5. Sebastian decided it would be right to put the photograph in Franz's coffin (he could not know that there was already someone else in the world who would always regret its loss). For this reason, perhaps, the picture did not survive.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF SAINT ANTHONY

1. Little Anna was given a miniature figure of St Anthony by the Unsimple. Anthony, standing up straight in a monk's habit, in one hand holds lilies on long stems and in the other a child. Despite its size, when Anna laid her head on the floor and placed the figure a little ways away, or—still looking from the floor—when it stood on the very edge of a table, Anthony looked like a real statue. Especially striking was the expression of pure devotion conveyed by his facial features.

The Unsimple said Anthony had been cast from lead melted down from what had once been a bullet. The figure lived in a metal cylinder of the type soldiers use to store their nametags and the addresses of their families. Anna wore the shell around her neck on an overly long wire chain. The constant rubbing of the copper marked her skin with green stains permanently. Franzysk did not consider this harmful. When the weather was especially fine, Anna would take Anthony out for walks. She would take him out of his capsule and give him an airing somewhere in the grass. When she put him back in his cylinder she would also place inside a little flower—a violet or daisy, the blossom of a plum or linden tree—so Anthony would have something to breathe.

2. Anna herself had a lovely smell. What Franz liked most of all was when she fell asleep on his table. He would work on for a while, though his attention was drawn to his curled-up and sleeping daughter. Then he would crawl up onto the table, place a book under his head, put his arms around Anna, and lie for a long time breathing in the air she breathed out. He would stroke her head, and sometimes in the morning Anna would wake up with a net of fine, short scratches on her face—some hardened skin on Franzysk's fingers had scraped her body.

3. Franzysk was convinced that there could be no more worthwhile activity than watching his daughter. Every day he saw thousands of perfect shots but for some reason he never bothered to use his camera. As a consequence he dedicated so much energy to memorizing the images that he sometimes caught himself thinking that he couldn't possibly go on like this. Because very often by evening he could remember nothing of what had happened during the day other than those imaginary shots—although when Anna was a little older he could describe to her for hours on end how she had looked on any given day in her childhood.

4. Anna was six years old when she told her father that she could remember how she had once slept in a large box placed on a long wagon with eight wheels under a tree, from which hung a nest with an opening from below.

The little hatch was open, and from inside the nest the blue eye of a bird peered at her. And then flocks of little white owls from all around swooped down and landed in concentric circles on the ground around the tree on the haystacks, the dog-rose bushes, the well, and the hayrick. And also on the wires that were stretched from pole to pole.

5. Franzysk decided that a vision like this must be the result of morphine use and called on the Unsimple. They had a talk with Anna, and eventually the seeress said that the little girl had dreamed it all. She warned Franz that the little girl would begin to tell him all kinds of wonders more and more often, would begin to ask whether or not this or that had once happened to her. That she would be unsure about certain things until her death—what had happened and what was a dream—because for her things would not be real or unreal, there would merely be different types of reality. But dreams have nothing to do with foreseeing the future. They tell us how things could be.

6. Franz decided that his daughter should know at least one thing in the world perfectly and without any question. They started walking beyond Menchil hill near Kvasiv to Keveliv creek, which flowed into the Chorna Tysa, and Anna learned all the stones on its banks—how each of them looked and next to which stones it lay.

In the meantime all the Unsimple had crossed over the mountains and settled in Ialivets, and they stayed there, with some interruptions, right up until 1951. Then a special chekist unit disguised as UPA soldiers used flamethrowers to set fire to the mental asylum where the Unsimple, having been tracked down and caught, had been interned in 1947. They had to get closer to Anna.

7. A few weeks before the year 1900 Franz finished a very important animated film.

“To live is to untie and tie knots, with your hands and everything else,” he was once taught by an Unsimple snake-charmer, who gave him a whole bundle of snakeskins. Franz was to untangle the skins and weave his own pattern. Logic lives in the fingers, and its categories are defined purely by what the fingers are capable of doing. He turned the bundle over and over in his hands, like a rosary, for many days and nights. Eventually he untied all the knots, but when it came to making his own pattern his fingers found it terribly difficult not to follow the existing surface. But Anna tied such knots that the snake-charmer took Franz to the bridge where the Unsimple had made their home.

8. At one time they’d wanted to extend this viaduct from one side of the ridge to the other, across the place where Ialivets now lay. To build the

center first, and then extend it to the heights on either side. Franzysk imagined how eventually such a path would turn the whole way between Sheshul and Petros into an easy stroll. However, that project turned out to be the only impossible idea of Ialivets. Three arches, linked to one another but not to land—and much higher than the railway bridges at Vorokhta or Deliatyn—hung over the town along a diagonal, beginning and breaking off in mid-air. On top there was a fragment of wide road. This is where the Unsimple settled.

Franz climbed for a long, long time up a hanging ladder, which swung all the more violently because the snake-charmer climbed ahead of him. At the top it seemed that the bridge was too narrow, that if one so much as stumbled he would fall off, onto the small roofs, the short streets, the narrow canals, the froth of trees. But all around lay such beauty, as though in someone else's life. Everything was white, other colors didn't exist, not even in the distant sun.

The snow-covered Unsimple smoked pipes and looked out at Farkaul in the Maramureş Alps beyond the Bila Tysa valley. The conversation was simple—when Anna became a woman, let her be Unsimple. And for the time being they would always be close by.

9. And so the film that Franz finished resembled a necklace made of knots.

It looked like this. The whole screen seethed with a multitude of tiny, separate signs. These were all elementary symbols that Franz had managed to find on the patterns of pysanky from every corner of the Carpathians. Owing to variations in size, configuration, color, and speed, this mist of signs looked like an incredible mixture of different insects. One could make out ladders, wedges, half-wedges, triple wedges, forty wedges, yellow wedges, triangles, seams, pick-axes, meanders, semi-meanders, curls, spaces, crosses, scratches, curves, sparkles, stars, a warm sun, a half sun, the moon, half-moons, sparks, a shining moon, moon-lit streets, a rainbow, beans, roses, half-roses, acorns, marigolds, firs, pine trees, cucumbers, cloves, periwinkle, oat, orchid, barrel, plum, potato, branches, soapwort, horses, sheep, cows, dogs, goats, deer, cockerels, ducks, cuckoos, cranes, white-wings, trout, crow's feet, ram's horns, hare's ears, ox's eyes, butterflies, bees, snails, spiders, heads, spindles, rakes, brushes, combs, axes, shovels, boats, flasks, grates, chests, girths, straps, knapsacks, keys, beads, kegs, sheepskins, powder-horns, umbrellas, pictures, hankies, laces, bowls, a hut, small windows, pillars, trough, small churches, monasteries, bell towers, chapels, twisted sleeves, decorated sleeves, diagonal stripe, needles, beaked, crossed, toothed, braided, laced, princess, crooks, curves, dots, frayed, winged, eyed, spidery, flowery, flat, numbered, flask, secret, cherry, raspberry, flower-pot, sprout, damselflies, small windmill, sledges, hooks, honeycakes.

Slowly the movement of signs gained a certain order—like a powerful wind

gathering many light ones. The symbols whirled somewhat like a bath full of water draining out through a small opening whence there appeared a chain of signs, tied together here and there by knots. The chain curled itself into a spiral and spun like a centrifuge. From the chaos there flew toward it free symbols, arranging themselves in exactly the same order of signs and ever more closely following the turning movement of the first. Then both spirals flowed together into the vacuum, merging into each other more and more tightly and taking on the shape of the world tree. Calm descended. The tree produced flowers, the petals withered, the ovaries grew into fruit, which swelled and split, and thousands of the very same signs slowly and evenly descended onto the ground, piling up into a mound and losing form.

10. The premiere was delayed until Easter, 1900. It was the feature event in the opening of the Juniperus Cinema, built according to one of Anna's sketches, immediately after the reading of a pastoral message from the young bishop of Stanislav, Andrei Sheptytsky, to his beloved Hutsul brothers.

11. From that time on the Unsimple were in fact always nearby. It only seems that Chornohora is empty. In truth, there is actually too little space in the Carpathians. Thus people who live far away from each other are constantly meeting. To say nothing of the situation in a small town at the intersection of two ridges.

For a few Dovbush gold pieces the Unsimple bought a small plot on the Market Square and built a small building there. They covered the hut with weirdly painted tiles, so that it came to look just like a tiled stove. In each window they wrote one word—notary. But on the windowsills stood whole rows of bottles of different sizes and shapes, so it could be assumed that “NOTARY” was just the name of another bar. Lukach somehow saw to it that in just one week the whole roof became covered in moss and a green awning hung above the doors. Inside it was bare: opposite a small table (with one drawer) on high legs stood a comfortable armchair, upholstered in canvas.

In the armchair sat the notary himself, smoking one fat cigarette after another. The cigarettes were placed in a silver ring soldered onto a tin rod that hung down from the ceiling. Each cigarette was no longer than half the width of an average woman's palm. The notary kept busy by rolling the next cigarette while smoking the previous one.

While still young he had resolved somehow to control his own death rather than rely entirely on the unknown. Therefore he wanted to determine if not the date then at least the cause of his death. He had settled on cancer of the lungs and began to allow himself to smoke heavily in order to be destined for such a death.

12. But all it took was for someone to drop by and the notary would take a cigarette out of the ring, sit the visitor down in his armchair, open the drawer, and take out two red or yellow sweet peppers—always fresh and juicy. With one hand he would open a large folding knife that hung from a strap around his knee, clean out the peppers, and hold them in his palm, while asking what kind of liquor to pour—*palenka*, *rakia*, *slyvovytzia*, *bekherivka*, *tsuika*, *zubrivka*, *anisivka*, *ialivitsivka*, or *borovichka*. He would fill the two peppers, give one to the guest, stand by the table, take a sheet of paper and sharp pencil out of the drawer, raise his cup and, looking the visitor straight in the eye, say “God willing.” He would down the drink, take a bite of the pepper, immediately pour a second, relight the cigarette (he kept his matches in his trouser pocket right next to his belt, and the striking surface was glued to one of the table legs). Holding the cigarette in the same hand as his cup and in his left hand the pencil, he would take a deep draw of smoke and then be ready to listen.

13. The notary was called the French engineer.

The Unsimple found him in Rakhiv and offered him precisely this job because he looked modest and heroic simultaneously. He was the kind of man you want to surprise with some extraordinary tale from your own life. And the Unsimple needed as many such stories and tales as possible.

In Rakhiv the French engineer had been enlisting people to go to Brazil, writing out genuine tickets for a ship leaving from Genoa. Once he really had been a French engineer. For twenty years he had lived in Indochina, developing drainage systems and studying opium smoking, Thai boxing, butterflies and orchids, and Zen. At the same time he wrote articles on ethnology and geopolitics for big European newspapers. Several of his letters were translated by Osyp Shpytko. They were published in *Dilo*, where the author’s ancestral ties to the Orlyk family were emphasized.

The Unsimple visited Kryvorivna and advised Hrushevsky to bring the French engineer to Lviv. Having passed through Manchuria, Turkistan, Persia, Georgia, Odesa, Chernivtsi, Stanislav, Halych, Rohatyn, and Vynnyky, he finally arrived and got work in the ethnographic commission of the Shevchenko Scientific Society. He took a fee as high as that paid to Shukhevych and set off for Hutsul country. But the experience of having lived through several small wars in the course of his life would not allow him to betray himself as a folklorist. The French engineer made a detour to Budapest and managed to obtain all the necessary papers to exercise the right to enlist people for immigration to Austro-Hungary.

14. In Ialivets, the French engineer dressed in the same way every day from 1900 to 1921 (Even after 1914 the French engineer sat in his office listening and noting down everything that various people came to tell him. The storytellers received a decent fee, and the notes with stories, dreams,

insights, and insane ideas were analyzed by the Unsimple). A very wide white flannel suit made without a single button, striped white-and-green shirts unbuttoned at the chest, cork sandals. Only in winter did he wear a covering wrapped around his head like a hood.

It was the French engineer who taught Sebastian that self-awareness is found in the soles of the feet, and that one's self-perception can be altered by standing differently or on something different.

15. The idea for a whole new type of film came to Franzysk from the French engineer.

There was a small gallery in Ialivets. Its owner, Loci from Beregszász, was acquainted with talented artists—Munkácsy, Ustyianovych, Kopystynsky. He introduced Romanchuk to Fedkovych, and for Vodzytska—much later, when she returned from Paris and Zuloaga—he made a few photo-sketches for “Girl making pysanky.” He was close friends with Ivan Trush. Loci told him a lot about how plants can regain control of landscapes that people have ruined and abandoned. He even took him sketching near Pip Ivan, to an area that had been logged. Many years later Trush would return to this theme in his wonderful series called “The life of tree-stumps.” And it was Loci who first showed anyone Dzembronia, which later became a favorite haunt of many artists of the Lviv school. And he would regularly send the Didushynskys Hutsul rarities for their museum.

16. Loci himself painted the same thing his whole life: little wooden cowsheds—a separate one for each cow—on the Shesa plain, the wood walkways between them, and the giant overgrowth of sorrel that was gradually consuming its own environment.

Though he was a gallery owner by profession, he never displayed his own work. By contrast, he often fell in love with the work of others. He would take these lover-pictures home for a time and live in their presence, carrying them with him from the bedroom to the kitchen, from the kitchen to the study, from the study to the gallery, from the gallery to the bathroom.

And to a large extent Loci's life was defined by the picture that was living with him at any given moment.

17. In the gallery some unusual things were practiced. Every day Loci rehung the pictures, completely changing their dialogues. Often the buyers, having chosen a picture one day, could not recognize it the next morning. The roof of the gallery was a glass reservoir filled with rainwater. Loci changed the lighting of the room by covering different parts of the reservoir with spruce branches. But the most important thing was that the pictures could be borrowed, like books from a library. The orders from the most expensive hotels Loci put together himself, to suit each individual occasion.

18. Loci was the only one in Ialivets whose vines produced varietal grapes. His vineyard grew along a path between the house and the gallery. Each time he walked along the path, Loci would pick off at least one cluster of grapes. And that went on from when the grapes first appeared to their final ripening. By September there were only a few dozen clusters left, but they were as ripe as the grapes of Tokay, reaping the full benefit of the vine's strength no longer flowing to the bunches already picked. Although Franzysk was friends with the gallery owner, even he did not guess that Loci was working for the Unsimple.

19. The French engineer happened once to tell Franz what he had heard from Loci.

Loci had told him how a landowner from Teresva had come and asked him to paint a picture showing what was happening to the left—beyond the frame—of a scene depicting the battle of Khotyn that he had bought there a year earlier. The thought that a canon from there might be able to fire directly at the rearguard of the Ulans gave him no peace.

This is precisely where animation is better than painting, said the French engineer.

20. Franzysk came up with a more precise method. He shot an enlarged reproduction of some famous picture—this was the second part of the film. For the first and third parts he painted frames showing fifteen seconds before the scene in the picture and fifteen seconds after. As a test he used a recent landscape by Trush, “The Dnipro near Kyiv,” though Franz was thinking mainly of Rembrandt’s “The Night Watch.” Then he brought to life several still-lives of the old Dutch masters (although these he destroyed, all except a Jan van de Velde—the one with the deck of cards, a long-stem pipe, and hazelnuts) and the wonderful “A Fight” by Adrian van Ostade (an inn, drunk villagers, women are holding back two men who are waving knives and have a mad look in their eyes, everything is overturned, someone is running away, others are prone on the ground).

After this he started on Mamai images.

Animated painting was such a wild success that dozens of viewers from all over Central Europe would travel to Ialivets for every premiere. Newspapers in the capitals wrote about them, and Franz had no time to make more serious films.

21. Even before the Unsimple had discovered the unusual qualities of Anna’s dreams, one of Franzysk’s ambitions was to make a film set in a dream landscape.

He noticed that the mechanism of dreams is based on nothing more than unifying the familiar according to an unknown logic in a manner that could never occur in a single landscape. That meant that the key to this logic is the

unification of landscapes. In this, the consistency of the unification is decisive. If such a landscape is created, it will populate itself. And then all the characters will display incongruous traits. And—most importantly—the characters will occupy the space totally. Irresponsible consistency is total.

22. Then too, thought Franz, successful dreams are like good prose, with similes taken from different systems of coordinates, refined delineation of individual details in the flow of a panorama, transparent unlimited possibility, an unforgettable sensation of presence, simultaneity of all tropisms, the immutability of the unexpected and the thrifty rhetoric of restraint. And like good grass, which doesn't bring with it anything of its own but removes that which limits, and transforms the latticed proportions of time and distance from a crystalline state into a gas-like one.

23. However, daring to make such a film would be even more difficult than making "The Night Watch." So in time he even stopped saving dreams for later, instead enjoying them to the maximum at night.

24. In July 1904 Anna related one of her dreams.

"I'm standing on the level roof of a long two-storey building. The building stands in water. The water reaches right up to the top of the first floor. To the top of its high arches. In the water, three heads are floating, and a heron is standing. One head swims up under an arch. Another wants to swim out from there. Walking down the stairs from the window of the second storey is a naked, pudgy man. From around the corner a dry hand tries to stop him. I'm naked too. I'm standing on the very edge. My hands are raised up. They are joined together. I'm about to jump from a height into the water. Right behind me is a round table. And behind it, a barrel with a jug. Around the table sit a monk and a nun, drinking something. Stretched across a dry branch above the table, the barrel, and the monk and nun is a tent. On the side of the building there's a semi-spherical cupola built on, with a chapel at the top. Fire pours from the chimney of the chapel, and a woman looks out of the window. She is looking at me. Far beyond the cupola are a wide river, a green forest, and high blue mountains, like ours. On the other side of the building a round tower has been built. Little men have been painted on its walls. The little men dance, jump, and tumble. One is taking a book from the sky. On their shoulders two of them carry an enormous raspberry on a stick. The top of the tower is crumbling and full of holes. Among the ruins little trees grow and a goat grazes. The water in front of the building ends at a long island. The island is bare and made of red clay. At the end of the island stands a windmill. Beyond the island is more water. Beyond the water is a city. Two towers descend right down to the water. Between them is a stone bridge. On the bridge is a huge crowd of people with spears raised above their heads. Some of them stand along the railing and look across the

water in my direction. In one tower there are branches burning. Beneath the towers swim some kind of creatures. A man with a sword and shield is fighting with one of them. Farther on, beyond the towers, is an empty, sandy place. In the middle of it stands a two-wheeled cart. Farther still is the city itself. Buildings with steep roofs, the tall spires of a church, a wall. And in the distance, tall hills, or small, green, and bare mountains. On the horizon itself there is another large windmill. To my right on the shore, but beyond the water and the island, stand some figures. They have their backs to me. Some sit on horses or on strange creatures. One is in armor and a helmet, another has a hollow tree stump on his head. Between them grows a dried-up tree. Half the tree is covered with a red curtain. In a great crack in the trunk stands a naked woman. On the uppermost branch sits a woodpecker—an immensely big one. A man is leaning a ladder against the tree. Quite far beyond them, on a stone, sits a bearded man in a monk's cassock with a stick in his hand, looking at a book. He looks like my Saint Anthony.

“Through the window in the round tower, which I already mentioned, I see that behind the tower something important is happening. But I can't make anything out, which really frustrates me. But all the same it's really good to be in the midst of all this bustle. For a second I look over my shoulder and see a distant fire. It makes the skin on my back and on the back of my legs hot. Somehow it's clear that I have to escape from it into the water. I'm about to jump, but I look down and see a length of spiked chain stretched out below. I have no doubt that I can jump beyond it. But I still stand there. My hands are already a little numb, because they've been raised the whole time. Suddenly a shadow falls on my back and it gets colder. I look up. Directly above me a sailing ship covered in armor is floating past through the air. I see its underside. It's a flying ship. It flies past. The shadow disappears. It gets hot once again. Hotter and hotter. I want to step off. But I see a man with a camera.

“He's been hiding the whole time in a dark corner between my building and the tower with the paintings of the little men and the shutters. I don't want him to take my photograph, and I shout at him. The man waves his hands in denial and points at the flying ship. Everything in me agrees that this is all very interesting. The man hides the camera in the wall. He walks around the tower and disappears behind it. I stand up on my toes. I sway a little and then jump. I see the chain before me. I raise my whole body. I try to fly over it. But my body won't move. I am neither flying nor falling. I start to cough. I fly straight towards the chain at great speed. I hit it with the fingers of my outstretched hands. And at that point I woke up.”

25. Anna's dream seemed so picturesque to Franzysk that he immediately tried to draw it. Anna corrected the drawing as he drew. When they got to the people on the shore next to the tree and the man with the book behind them, Franz had the impression he'd already seen this painted somewhere.

Only the point of view was different. But it was enough for Anna to color in the drawing with coloring pencils, and Franz recognized Bosch. Without a doubt—it was “The Temptation of St Anthony.”

In Larousse Bosch was represented by “The Wayfarer” from the Madrid El Escorial collection. Anna could not have seen any other reproductions, Franz was sure, for he had always been by her side. No one had ever told her of “The Temptation” in her entire life, Franz had definitely heard neither mention nor allusion to it since the very beginning of her education. That meant the prediction of the seeress had come true—Anna’s dreams showed how things could be.

But Franz couldn’t let things lie. He ran off to Loci and asked him to order an album of Bosch’s paintings at his earliest convenience. Franz was prepared to wait a long time, so long as he was sure that eventually something would be done.

Loci promised to order the album the very next day. He also said that he had Bosch in his own library, but only one reproduction—“The Temptation of St. Anthony.”

Anna without hesitation pointed out her naked figure in the upper right-hand corner of the central part of the picture.

When they simultaneously recognized that two of the four main figures walking across the bridge in the left panel of the triptych were Unsimple, Franzysk promised himself he would make that film.

26. The work was harder than ever before. Franzysk was troubled by doubt. He constantly wondered whether he would be able to convey the mood, the color, the atmosphere; whether he would be able to decode all the secret meanings; whether it was right to show anyone something like this; whether Bosch wouldn’t look ridiculous and tasteless; whether it would be a sin to reproduce all this filth and sodomy, whether he would offend the Unsimple; whether he wouldn’t call down calamity on Anna; whether he hadn’t consciously or unconsciously done someone harm; whether art made any sense; whether he would live to the end of the work; whether something bad might not happen at the showing; whether he would die suffering; whether he would meet his parents after his death; whether his Anna was waiting for him there; whether his people would ever be happy; whether there was anything better in the world than our beloved Carpathian mountains; whether it was worth thinking so much; whether it was worth remembering so much; whether it was good to tell everybody all this; whether it was necessary to speak beautifully; whether plants think; whether tomorrow exists; whether the end of the world hadn’t already happened sometime before; whether he would hold out much longer without a woman; whether he wasn’t under the control of the devil.

27. A precise answer to the last question would have been the answer to

many of the others. Despite the fact that Franz was a devout Greek Catholic and in the frequent discussions in the gin resort he always attacked the Manicheans, the Cathars, and the Albigensians with unanswerable arguments, fearing nothing on earth, for he was convinced of the rectitude of God's plan—despite this, the devil appeared to him thrice during his work on this film.

28. The first time he did not show himself but only very laconically exhibited one of his traits. He was like a magnet.

Franz dreamed that he was lying on the floor. Suddenly, without making a single movement, not even tensing his muscles, he slid along the floor to the wall. Then—in the other direction. Then again and again, with intervals—now quicker, now slower. As though he were metal filings on a sheet of paper, and under the paper a magnet was being moved. Once he was even pulled up the wall—lying in the same position—and then delicately lowered to the floor.

After this the devil asked him to follow carefully what would happen. He dragged Franz into the corner. It turned out that his teacher was asleep there. Franz was shoved towards the teacher and then immediately pulled back. Without touching Franz's body or waking up, the teacher slid after him. "See," said the devil.

Franz didn't hear the voice, but somehow he knew what the devil had said.

29. In the second and third dreams the devil used different variations of one and the same method.

The second dream was the shortest one. Franz was standing in the street in Ialivets—the place was real, he knew it well. He was waiting for his Anna, who had already appeared at the end of the street. Suddenly Beda's armored car drove up to him. Beda looked out through the top hatch and said that he had brought someone with whom they would now go and drink gin. A fellow got out from the side doors and came up to Franz. Anna was getting closer. The fellow stood with his back to Anna and the car. He took a bottle from his inside pocket, pulled out the cork, and offered it to Franz. And then it all happened. In the few seconds it took Anna and Beda to reach them, Franz had time to see several thousand different faces pass over where the fellow's face should have been, several hundred waistcoats under his unbuttoned jacket, several dozen shapes of bottles, and more than a dozen varieties of drink. When the fellow and Franz were no longer alone, the kaleidoscope stopped. The fellow smiled; Anna and Beda smiled. Franz drank first. The taste reminded him of greengage plums. He passed the bottle to Beda, who returned it to the fellow (Beda hadn't actually introduced them to one another). When Anna's turn came, for some reason Franz blurted out that she didn't drink. Nobody, apart from Anna, was surprised, and no one insisted. Franz discreetly but tightly squeezed her

finger. He already knew who this was.

30. After the third dream Franz went to the high bridge and told the Unsimple about Bosch. “All the same, in the tower,” said the hill-wanderer. Franz asked whether he should show anyone the now completed film. “That depends purely on your own wishes,” answered the Unsimple. “Think about it, though. Maybe it’s not right to show our faces in those places where you imagined them. And for now, go home and look after Anna. We must wander some among the worlds, but soon she will be a woman and will know where to find us,” said the baimaker.

31. At home Franz burned the drawing that depicted Anna’s dream.

“In order to be happy,” he told Anna, “you have to live without secrets, and as for the secrets of others, you must know only those that you can reveal under torture.”

He was very afraid that sooner or later the Unsimple might come for the film, and so he told Anna never to mention its existence. But if someone wants to find out something through the use of torture, it’s better to reveal everything they want right away. Without any attempt to deceive, just tell the truth. “Therefore you must know that I’ve destroyed it all.”

Franz put the film into a pouch and went outside the town, to burn it, throw it into a ravine or into a torrent. On the way he thought: no matter how they torture her, Anna will tell the truth—there is no film. It’s paradoxical, but that will be the only truth the torturers won’t believe, and the torture won’t stop.

In that case it’s a shame to destroy the film. Maybe it will be of some use someday. Let someone find it who will watch it, analyze it, think hard about it, and comprehend what these Unsimple are about, how they spin the world. For it always gradually comes to light how everything and everyone in the world is connected with everything and everyone else—by transitions, of which there are no more than four.

32. Franzysk entered a beech forest in which every tree had a hollow amid its roots. He threw down the cuff of his long broadcloth mantle over his eyes so that he could see only the ground directly in front of him and began to run blindly around the forest. Several times he collided with a tree, but without harm, because his eyes were protected. He ran uphill and downhill until inside his hood all the sounds of the world were replaced by the sound of wheezing from the depths of his lungs. It was only then that he stopped. Without opening his eyes, he reached out till he felt a tree, found the hollow between the roots, and stuffed the pouch with the film into the hole, at a depth of one and a half forearms. Then he slowly made his way out of the forest. In those places this is easy to do without looking: you have to walk up, so you can follow the slope of the ground. At the top Franz threw off the

ice-covered cuff and looked at the forest. All the trees were identical and unfamiliar; between them curled endless intertwined lines of footprints; his eyes hurt from the shameless light of the moon.

33. Of course, it was winter. Of course—snow was falling. You could spin round and catch snowflakes in your dry mouth.

34. At home Franzysk couldn't smell his daughter and thought that he really was living after the end of the world, which had happened recently. In the house he could hear only the sound of water flowing deep in the drain pipes, the contractions of the metal in the doors of the chilled stove, the ultrasonic vibrations of the panes of glass in the windows. It smelled of sulfur and coal—the pressure was changing.

Franzysk ventured a glance through the open doors of the balcony. A quilt spread out in the garden looked like a painful stain. On the quilt slept a little girl lightly covered by snow who had never yet fallen asleep without her father. It takes a while for a draft to be created. So it was almost a minute before it began to smell of Anna. Franzysk sensed that he didn't want her to become a woman.

35. After that night the Unsimple really did leave Ialivets, somehow managing to throw their rope ladder back up onto the viaduct. The French engineer remained, not stopping his work for even a day. Franzysk stopped creating animations. Now he, together with Anna and the Serb Lukach, who planted forests wherever he moved, occupied themselves with improving the town. He drank a little—mostly he would bisect the circular table in the bar with an equator of full shot-glasses and go nowhere until he'd emptied the whole row—but declined to take part in any gin procedures.

He built himself an orangery, where he cultivated tropical plants. He observed the fluctuating similarities among the offspring of the dog Lukach, which he was obliged to kill in the orangery. Sometimes he would take an axe in each hand and run with it all the way to Menchil. From there he would bring back fresh *brynza*, slinging an axe across his shoulders like a yoke with the buckets of goat cheese tied on either end. He gave interviews reluctantly but dutifully. In general he insisted that he made different films in order to live in different ways.

36. In 1910 Mykola Lahodynsky and Vasyl Stefanyk, deputies of the Vienna parliament, made a special visit to Ialivets with the aim of persuading Franzysk to return to his work. Franzysk objected to nothing and promised nothing. He received the deputies not at home but in the hotel “Ch. P. T.,” which stood for Cheremosh, Prut, Tysa.

Lahodynsky later recalled how Franzysk Petrosky said that a Ukrainian state would be possible only when the Carpathian vector became the basis of its

geopolitics, the Carpathian cosmogony the model for its ideology, and the Carpathians themselves a nature reserve (Franz did not particularly believe what he said, since he hated the Hutsuls' desire to cut down as much forest as possible in the course of their life and their failure to understand that more and more rubbish was now being created that could not just be thrown away into water).

37. As for Stefanyk, he told his Vienna acquaintances even more “In their lifetime every human being,” said Franz, “can make a book. I say a book although we began talking about films. Every human being—but only one book. Those who think they have written many books are mistaken—that’s just an extended process of creating a single book. You cannot escape your own book, no matter what you change. You can imitate, but not create. Your single book is defined by your timber, intonation, articulation. Fate is a way of speaking. Although there is an infinite number of books in the world, the number of genuinely good ones is finite. It must be finite, and there must be an infinity of those others. This is what plants teach us. If the number of good books was not finite, the world would stop spinning or take to drink. I’ve written my book. I don’t know whether it’s good or not, but I’ve written it. And with that, it’s like this: it’s already meaningless whether I’ve finished it or not finished it, whether I copied it or merely intended to. Your book is just the same whether it’s one page long or its volumes fill a whole bookshelf. The voice exists—that’s enough. Plots are necessary for your own curiosity. Plots are not invented nor do they disappear. There are, and are. They can only be forgotten. All that I’ve learned and memorized in my life consists of a few landscapes that signified the joy of thinking, a few smells that were emotions, a few movements that adorned themselves in feelings, a few things or objects that were the embodiment of culture, history and sufferings, many plants that offer access to beauty, wisdom and to all that, in comparison to which we simply do not exist in the world. And many, many intonations. Unique similar intonations, the significance of which I do not know. Perhaps they will help us recognize one another in the place where nothing but the voice remains.”

38. Stefanyk was also pleased when, after Lahodynsky had gone to rest, they began to call each other all sorts of different names—blind bat, free-loader, four-eyes, brat, whimperer, mumbler, stutterer, cock-eyed one, bandit, ne’er-do-well, intriguer, layabout, rascal, glass-peddler, incomer, you playboy, you nouveau-riche, you lowlander, you highlander, you Bukovynian, you Boiko, you Lemko, you Hutsul—and then fell asleep.

39. Two years earlier Franzysk had first taken Anna to the place from which he had returned alone fifteen years earlier. Anna never managed to visit the place again, not even once. Nevertheless, this was the beginning of the only

tradition their family had.

In autumn 1913 Anna was still not yet a woman. And at around that time the birds flew over Ialivets on their way to Africa. Franzysk sensed it: a little longer and he would cry. The most important things don't happen of your own will, he thought, and asked Anna to make a large pot of coffee and squeeze the juice from four grapefruits the size of small pumpkins.

Franzysk realized that when he closed his eyes he couldn't precisely recall the features of all the surrounding mountains, just as he had earlier begun to forget all the unforgettable breasts of women he had known. That was why he had to climb up the cliff to see what he had loved so much. And before leaving on his walk he wanted to make sure that the coffee and grapefruit juice would be waiting for him when he returned.

40. Having re-familiarized himself with all the peaks, he returned home together with Sebastian. Franz proposed that he try living in Ialivets. Anna made up another bed in the spare room. For some reason she had had the second key to the room since morning.

Franzysk felt that Anna's scent had stopped being a child's, and that the Unsimple may come very soon, because the blood of the guest, like an airborne disease, had already begun to mix in the air with the blood of the women of his kind.

Sebastian wanted to sleep so much that he gratefully accepted Franz's invitation to live in Ialivets for a while.

And Anna thought that it would be hard for Sebastian simultaneously to be a friend to the father and a husband to the daughter.

Bare branches of the grapevine tapped on the window above the bed. Sebastian noticed that the rhythm of their taps could serve as an anemometer.

ABUNDANCE OF DAYS

1. In the morning Franzysk was awakened by a completely unknown smell. At first he thought that a miracle had happened, and that instead of the expected winter, which was to bring some meaning, a season of June rains and overabundant greenery had arrived. But when Anna entered their room in the early morning, Franz adopted a new calendar of smells, in which the seasons had a different order.

Reality exists for those who lack Anna.

2. For the first and last time in his life Sebastian made love to a woman he had known for only a few hours.

Even in Africa it wasn't like that. Although he identified the women who would become his at first glance, he was nevertheless always convinced that they would not have enough time to get to love-making. Even though they would care for each other for a long time, talk about their childhoods, and retell books in a way that doubled the number each had read, give one another food, wash and warm their bodies, point out things they'd seen from different sides of the road. Only later would it become clear that such coexistence was based on an unconquerable tendency. Inasmuch as it indicates love not for oneself but for another, it implies extending one's access to the territory of that other. And one can reach a point where extending any farther is possible only by going inwards, only under the skin. Thus it was with Sebastian.

As for the women, on seeing Sebastian for the first time, none had an irrepressible desire to make love to him. The inevitability of that became clear gradually—it was enough to live in direct contact with him for a while. This is precisely how it was in Africa. In the end, Sebastian knew such things only about Africa.

It was only after spending the night in Ialivets that Sebastian became convinced that Europe exists.

3. Overnight it snowed and winter began, a winter which that year would last until the middle of April. Because of winter's capacity to be more multifarious than all other seasons of the year, each of its days was completely different.

And it was never good in the same way twice.

4. Anna couldn't believe that such an unlikely similarity existed: curved lines repeated one another, curving inwards or outwards, following exactly the bumps and dips, coming together in such a way that the two surfaces felt not themselves, not the other, but the appearance of a third, perfectly fine line, which curved around, through, and back of its own accord.

And such unities do not happen by accident. A sort of perfect delicacy, delicate perfection, which passes so easily from one to the other and on to several generations to come.

Love doesn't imply mutuality, said Anna, and Sebastian kept silent, because he was aware that she too did not need an answer. It seemed to him that something in the world had moved, that he had caused some disturbance in it. And although love-making has no future and does not allow for the use of future tense, only with Anna could he imagine himself in old age.

Anna opened the window. Now the grapevines could not be heard, because the swaying branches simply flew into the room. But the wind died down not for the lack of an anemometer—such a heavy snow began to fall that it gradually squeezed the wind down to the ground and covered it with itself. And the snow, equally measured and unhurried, drifted into the room and settled on the bed. In this way the room was ruled by six fluids—saliva, blood, water from the snow, sweat, Anna's moistness, and Sebastian's semen.

5. In the morning the three of them had breakfast together. They had to sit in a row along the long, narrow table, one side of which was pushed up against the window. Sebastian almost didn't smell of Africa. The smell of Anna's mucous was still on his fingers so Franzysk considered how they should sit from now on: he-Anna-Sebastian, he-Sebastian-Anna, or Anna-he-Sebastian.

Anna was brought a letter from old Beda. This time the wrapper was from the same tea as she had just made the men for breakfast. She wondered what she would write back to Beda if she no longer had any questions.

6. That winter Franzysk suddenly realized that he didn't have a photograph of himself for the article in Larousse. He could have gone to the Chameleon Studio and had a photograph taken, but Franz correctly decided that, since the article had several hundred possible variants, even the best photograph would be purely serendipitous. He would have to have his photograph taken each time the article was written anew. (He had once even had such an idea for a film: he had photographed one person in the same pose and in the same place every day for two years then played back this series of evolutionary changes at various speeds. Against the background of evolution details become very distinct.)

Thus Franz turned to a strange way not only of regaining the past but also of discovering something completely unexpected.

7. After breakfast (eventually Franz decided that it would be most correct for Sebastian always to be in the middle, and he accepted that Anna would sit always by her man, and that he would have to be close to Sebastian, so that they could talk about everything easily) Franzysk took from Anna the

second key to Sebastian's room, for the room would no longer be locked and he would no longer go in there. He read the letter from Beda and said that he had told Anna this once, for he had told her everything he knew, and he knew what old Beda had written. Evidently she had been too small when this very memory had been related, and it had been forgotten. If she wished, she could hear it once again, when he told—as he definitely would—their entire story to Sebastian.

And then Franz pulled from under the bedding the winter sheepskin coat that had been stored there for the summer and went to the Union Hotel, where for several years now Ialivets's only contract killer lived in a room on the second floor.

8. Shtefan was very surprised when Franz entered his room—in Ialivets Franz could kill anyone without any need to hire an assassin: he was too well respected for that. Shtefan had just returned from a successful job in Kosmach and had to do a little work on his rifle.

Before Franz arrived he had already managed to attend a church service and even take communion afterwards. But he did not swallow the sacrament. He carried it in his mouth to the hotel and put it in a hole in the wall he had made earlier with a drill. He loaded a bullet into his rifle, walked to the opposite wall, and fired, aiming at the hole. It's a good thing he aimed well. Franz heard the shot between the first and second floors while riding in the lift that was being pulled upwards by two workers turning a winch up in the attic. Shtefan laid aside his gun and started to collect the blood from the wall. Franz opened the door. Shtefan should now have lubricated the rifle with the blood, but he didn't want to do this in front of Franzysk.

9. Franzysk quickly explained his request.

He wanted Shtefan to do something he did extremely well—to follow him unnoticed. Track him like an assassin. Find a good place for the shot and the right moment to shoot. But instead of a rifle Shtefan was to have a camera. Franz would give Shtefan three months' time. After this he would take a hundred of his photographs and pay the rest of the money. The main thing was that neither Franzysk nor anyone else should ever notice him. Once he was told the amount of the payment, Shtefan enthusiastically agreed, unperturbed in the slightest that he didn't even know what a camera looked like.

Among other things, because of this irresponsibility on Shtefan's part, a lot of people were alive. Shtefan—as is typical of Ukrainians—was constantly taking on more commitments than he was able to handle. And so some contracts took years to be realized, and some were simply forgotten. But now Shtefan understood that with Franz, delays were out of the question. He had been told that Franz knew those eighteen words that made the rifle tremble, and the target show up of its own accord, in tears, and stand where

you could aim at it directly from the window.

Franz showed him how a camera worked and left. Shtefan quickly rubbed the blood from the wall all down the barrel. He knew it was a terrible sin and that he would belong to Judas, but he always did this, so that the rifle would never miss. Especially after the blood began to boil.

10. Every day Franz took Sebastian for a walk around Ialivets. The frosts were severe and the ice-rinks didn't begin to melt even on sunny days. Finally Franz had someone to talk to—it turned out that Sebastian, as a real marksman, was able to see just as much. It seemed that they should be having endless, serious conversations, because the problem of Central Europe is stylistic: but no—just a few words, pointing out things they saw. When they went into bars, they drank gin diluted with boiling water, with chasers only of fresh juice from slightly frozen apples that had been left on the trees in the autumn and were only recently picked from under the snow. Sometimes they went to the place where the first Anna had died, and Franz drew in the snow sketches of ever changing versions of the family history. “There are things more important than fate,” he said. “Culture, maybe. And culture is family, and a deliberate adherence to it.” Franz asked that Sebastian and Anna's children be sure to visit this place. And also the place where Franz had met Sebastian (he almost added the beech forest with the undestroyed film but stopped himself in time, because, after all, he didn't know a great deal about the Unsimple), and other places that would appear with time. For time is the expansion of family into geography.

11. There were days when Sebastian would take his African rifle with him. On especially steep slopes it provided good support. On one such day they spoke of their dreams. It's no surprise that Franz's dream was the more complicated.

Sebastian dreamed of being old, living on a small cliff-island in a warm sea, and walking around in nothing but canvas trousers all year round; but also of walking little, mainly sitting on a stone bench beside an empty white hut, drinking red wine and eating dry goat's cheese all day, and looking at a few tomato plants and not at the sea, in which he would bathe every night until the carnations began to give off their scent.

Franzysk, on the other hand, dreamed of a woman with several pairs of breasts.

Suddenly Sebastian bent down and butted Franz in the stomach with his head. Franz tumbled from the snowdrift while Sebastian did a somersault on the ground and, lying on his back, fired from his snow-filled rifle. On a distant hilltop something rang out. After lying still for a moment they made their way to the place and found Shtefan, wounded by a bullet and holding the smashed camera.

Sebastian had taken the light flashing off the lens for the reflection of an

optic sight. Shtefan had overlooked the most important point: "No one should ever notice you," Franz had said. And one has to know how to take responsibility for an oversight.

On the other hand, Franzysk ended up without a photograph for the encyclopedia after all. Fortunately, reduction still interested him.

12. After this accident Anna decided she wanted to learn to be a sniper.

13. First of all you have to grow to love your own body, said Sebastian. And the location where everything will take place.

For the body is the gateway to the brain.

If you want to think well and quickly, the gate should always be open.

So that thoughts can come in and go out freely.

Thoughts are merely what passes through the filter from a location through the body and then flows out.

The freedom of donor-acceptor relationships.

To lie in the water and not to hear its smell.

To look closely at grass and not to feel its taste.

To experience with a glance the taste of what you sense by touch.

The gate opens only when you love it.

Open up, you always open up so beautifully.

Nails can scratch, but they can also clutch.

Prolong your gaze, maintain your gaze, hold your gaze.

Transfer to the rifle your body's desire to be in a place you cannot reach.

If you grow to love a location, it will become the creeping extension of your body.

It is not you who shoots, but the contour of the landscape.

It is not the head that thinks, but the body.

It is not the bullet that hits, but the thought.

Every thought is a desire that was able to enter and leave through the gate.

What you can do alone, do with no one.

Say what you have just thought, and think as you have just felt.

Cry from tenderness, for otherwise you will never be so strong.

Watch your breathing, for it alone can dictate rhythm.

Always remember about trees: they disappear and appear most reliably.

When you are very tired, stop being unbreakable and fall asleep.

Reach inside with your lips to your center.

Shooting into a window is like looking into a window.

Try to understand how Blacks make jazz.

Openness. Generosity. Gratitude.

14. To learn these and countless other subtleties of the art of sniping, it is necessary to maintain a strict, uncompromising regime: to make love constantly, and that only in the open air. Long, lightly, forcefully, rapidly,

gently, stubbornly, clumsily, beautifully, wisely, carefully, very carefully, wisely and beautifully. On the earth, in leaves, on moss, in trees, under trees, on hills, in hollows, in wind, in snow, on ice, along the road, across the bridge, above the bridge, in the dark and in the night, in the light and in the day, before, after and during eating, silently and noisily. Stand. Walk. Sit. Lie. As much as was possible during that longest winter of 1914.

That whole, long winter, which lasted until April 1914, Sebastian and Anna barely came into the house. Anna said what she thought, and thought as she felt. She cried from tenderness, for never in her life had she been so strong. Sometimes, when Sebastian was inside her, it seemed he wasn't close enough, and sometimes he was extremely close across a couple of shirts. When she bent, he was convinced that something was making him bend too. As though around his skin another layer of tight membrane had been created.

Excessive days.

Translated by Uilleam Blacker

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Look for the conclusion of this novel (pp. 69–138 of the original publication) in the next issue of *Ukrainian Literature*.

The Seasons

Volodymyr Drozd

Winter

He was an ordinary fiend of the domestic variety: a small and shaggy-haired goblin with wart-like horns and fiery eyes. He lived in the attic of an old five-story house, in a dark nook between the chimney of the boiler room and a rusty trough the janitor had lugged up here when the roof was leaking. He was as ancient as the world and knew that he would live as long as the world existed. This limitless life, in eternity, made the goblin taciturn and circumspect.

Nothing surprised him anymore, because in his lifetime everything had already happened and he had seen everything. He never hurried because he could foresee the future. The skein of the future weighed heavily upon his mind, as the threads of that skein were endlessly wound day after day by the rising and setting sun—the golden shuttle of the universal loom. Rolling himself into a small ball on the sawdust, he could think about nothing for days and nights on end. For him time had materialized to such an extent that he could touch it, like the water of a river in summer or a waft of warm air. He would submerge himself in this stream for a long time and feel happy.

In late afternoon, the goblin liked to sit on the roof near the steeple—the one topped by a weathercock that had rusted a long time ago and always showed only a southern wind—and gaze at the city enslaved by human bustling and restlessness. In that brick anthill there was a constant hubbub of people, cars, and even trees, feeble and stunted here among the stones. The people were always in a hurry, as if they were chasing one another, the cars obstructing their movement and pushing them onto the swarming sidewalks. Meantime, the sun would cool and turn purple, infusing the snow on the roofs with a deep red color reflected in a ruby-red blaze on the windowpanes, as if fires were roaring in stoves beyond the windows. Then the sun would disappear behind the high-rise buildings on the outskirts of town. The sky would turn greenish, the blue-gray mist of twilight, now noticeably shaggier and gloomier, would flood the brick canyons, and shortly afterwards an invisible hand would quickly lace the pale blue ribbons of streets with the thread of electric lights. And then, one after another, as if racing, the windows that had dimmed together with the sun would reappear, fiery eyes multiplying with every second, a fiery sea

spilling out beyond the horizon and spreading around as far as the eye could see, caressing the goblin in its scintillating glow.

Of course, at such times the goblin sensed her approach. He would shut his eyes and see her, a woman still young but weary—an islet of pensive composure and silence—in the rushing crowd on the sidewalk. Soon she was walking up the steps, catching her breath on every landing, and entering her apartment on the top floor.

Earlier Grandpa Iakym's son and his large and noisy family had lived in the apartment. When Iakym's wife died, the son brought his father, a hereditary buoy-keeper and fisherman, to the city from his lonely house on the Nevkla River. Grandpa Iakym had lured the goblin from the riverbank as well—they were fast friends. The goblin made his home in the spacious and warm attic of the brick building, while Grandpa Iakym made his bed in the kitchen. During the long autumn nights, when Iakym's grandchildren quieted down behind the wall, he and the goblin would converse softly about the old days. But Grandpa Iakym died unexpectedly. His body was placed in a dark coffin; a bus swallowed it and disappeared in the tangle of streets. Shortly thereafter Iakym's family moved to a new apartment, but the goblin did not join them. He could not forgive Iakym's son for having burned down his father's house by the river after drinking too much on a fishing trip there. The house had been standing boarded up for a long time—no one was eager to live in a place without any people around.

After the family left, the woman moved into the apartment on the top floor.

The goblin liked to while away his time in her company. Huddling quietly by the steeple with the weathercock, he watched as the air became lustrous, nipping, brittle and resonant with the advent of frosty nights; he watched as the ground turned to rock, as the walls and roof of the building grew cold and dead; as the trees in the streets shrank and people deserted the streets. Despite his wisdom, at times like these loneliness crept into his heart, gnawing and chilling his feelings. He slid down the ice-covered roof to the gutter and from the gutter he jumped onto the window ledge. Turning momentarily into a shaft of shadow or tuft of frosty mist, he stole into the room.

She would be dressed, as usual, in a dark-red satin robe embellished with black lace at the collar and sleeves, sitting in a deep armchair and covered with a checkered plaid throw. She'd be smoking a cigarette and listening to music. The goblin would sneak into a corner and climb onto an old mahogany sideboard with crystal panes in its doors, which somehow resembled the porch of the late Grandpa Iakym's house. He'd park himself there by a bronze candlestick that smelled pleasantly of wax. From this spot he had a good view of the room, illuminated by a candle flickering on an endtable by the armchair. The candle filled the room with wondrous, scintillating sparks that made the young woman's face look surprisingly

keen-featured and mysterious; it sprinkled goldish speckles on the bookshelves and the walls hung with framed pictures, drawings, ceramics and old icons. There was even a portrait of a distant relative, an infernal devil, in the dark corner of a icon painted on canvas. On a ceramic plaque a large-eyed and lithe water nymph squinted slyly at the candlelight, as if at the moon.

The music in the room had a life of its own. Originating from the red-eyed box of the record player, it gently yet insistently persuaded the walled-in world to yield to its rhythms, colors, and wisdoms. For a long time the music annoyed the goblin, because he did not want to bend to anyone's will. But gradually he got used to it and came to even like swaying to its teasingly playful and alternately peacefully pensive waves, their wise monotony reminding the goblin of the flow of time. Only the sharp painful chords of the grand piano were alien to him—they harbored an alarm that the goblin did not understand.

When the lady of the house fell asleep, the goblin would sneak up to the sofa as a gray dusky specter and place his soft hairy paw on her cool forehead. Then, looking at the frost-crisped windows, behind which the cold night was growing numb, he called up kindly colorful dreams for the woman.

In her dreams, too, she was quiet as winter.

Spring

The goblin fell into a fit, as if from some wicked sorcery or exorcism. It seized him as water babbled in the gutters, as partly melted icicles fell off from the roof with a lilting tinkle and shattered against the concrete of the yard, as pigeons enfeebled by winter cooed discordantly under the garret, as damp southern winds blew in with a roar, the weathercock now predicting them with ever-growing frequency. The fit had attacked, bound, and enslaved him. He seemed like someone demented: all night long he tore across the roofs, restlessly whooping and jeering, thumping the tin roofing, ripping apart clotheslines on balconies and throwing rustling bed sheets stiffened by the March frost into the courtyards. He moaned in chimneys and banged against water pipes with all his might, the pipes responding with a dull, alarming rumble.

Come morning, exhausted, he would at last return to his nook between the chimney and the trough, in the hope that at least now he might remain aloof from the world and from his own self and feel in his heart his former coolness and silent wisdom—those attributes of eternity. But no sooner would he roll himself into a little ball and shut his eyes, yearning for the delight of oblivion, than the faint, half-forgotten, and rancid smell of tillage grown languid under the sun would penetrate into the dry sawdust, clay, and rust, followed by the tantalizing smell of bursting buds, of moist leaves, of the deep red shoots of peonies, and of the tender green lovage that would sprout from the ground every spring around the *pryzba*¹ of Iakym's cozy house. Then images from mundane and ordinary bygone days would crowd into the goblin's mind: the old cat with cataracts snoozing on the sunlit porch, a hen cackling in the tiny shed after laying an egg, and a spotted calf scampering around Iakym (or Iakym's grandfather, or great-grandfather, or great-great-grandfather—people were dying and being born before the goblin's eyes, though the world wasn't changing), who was tarring the hull of his boat, lying overturned on the bright-green meadow. And all this was happening against the background of a brilliant blue surging flood that had long since consumed the Nevkla River, the low bank with the willows and stands of aspen, and even the horizon and was now coveting the sky itself.

Agitated by the insistent memories, the goblin would leave his nook and make his way up to the roof. A damp mist hovered over the city. Somewhere in the skies, beyond the mist, storks were returning from warmer climes—the goblin's sensitive ear made out their cawing and the rustle of their wings. Down below, car brakes screeched, annoying him. The contact shoes of the trolleybuses clanged against the overhead wires, and the

¹ Pryzba—a consolidated bank of earth raised against the walls of a village home and enclosing it on all sides (translator's note).

acid stench of gasoline, asphalt, and rubber, pressed into the human anthill by the fog, sickened him ever more. At such moments he felt like a catfish hauled onto shore, in a net woven of brick walls, sidewalks, asphalted streets, and urban squares, under a sky that wasn't even real but grimy and stinking of soot and smoke, like the ceiling above the place Iakym usually put the kerosene lamp. The cruel, choking net tightened around him remorselessly and he wanted to throw it off like an old faded skin, bunched up into a dim gray clump and chased by the wind, rolling down between the ribs of the tin roof.

Despite the goblin's disgust with the inanimate bricks and the subconscious yearning for another world, the days and nights crept on. Damp and warm, they devoured the edges of the dark ice-coated snow and breathed a sultry languor. Making himself comfortable on the roof, he listened as sprouts willfully swelled and curled outside the city, as they burst through the asphalt- and brick-covered crust, bending, breaking up and drilling through it, as sap surged in the dwarf birches that nestled in the garret after a heavy storm had deposited a handful of soil there, as buds unfolded on chestnut trees along the boulevards. And a forgotten lust trickled through the goblin's body, evoking ancient memories of a young and handsome witch with whom he had whirled over a river in the shrouds of an azure morning mist, over the same river into which superstitious peasants had later thrown her for a swim, having swaddled her hands and feet, and in which she had drowned, surrendering her body to the ravenous crayfish and her soul to the lascivious water sprite.

One night, having waited until the city settled down, the goblin slid down the gutter and went hobbling alongside the houses. He could not walk far, because his left foot, shorter than the right, let him down and his hooves, accustomed to the earth's soft elasticity, kept slipping on the asphalt in an echoing, goatlike clatter that attracted the policemen at the street corners, and compelled him to step into the shadows now and again. Yet he did manage to cross the city, and the city slid off him like an old skin. New smells and sounds were reaching the goblin's senses through the gray bars of the high-rise buildings. They were the smell of fresh-plowed earth and the rustle of winter wheat, which had been numbed by the snow and was now languidly stretching and pushing up its sprouts.

At last the goblin reached the last building, the only one with a lighted window somewhere on the eighth floor that looked out onto a field (a hare flitted past into the gray dry grass of a narrow gully, beyond which lay a shadowy glade, doomed to fall prey to the growing city). Without looking back at the human anthill, which was just now waking, its window-eyes blinking here and there, the goblin trudged right ahead toward the distant call of the river swollen with spring runoff, reveling as his little hooves sank into the moist earth. He could already imagine reaching the ash heap where Iakym's house had been a year before, kindling a flame in the soot-grimed

stove, clearing the earth of ash and dead firebrands, and planting beans so he could shell them at the end of summer—he loved to shell beans, squeezing them out of the dry husks. His face brightened into a child-like smile.

Summer

Every day, at dawn, the goblin lit the stove. The beet-red reflection of the fire darted around the black yard and the dew-covered meadow, inflamed the horizon, and lit up the sky in red. Day was breaking. The sun was rising out of the Nevkla, coloring pink the wisps of smoke swirling above the fireplace. Wagons rattled as they approached the river mooring. Chugging tugs strained against the current, pulling a rosary-string of long, glistening coal barges. Blaring their piercing horns, hydrofoils scudded around the bend in the river, churning the water, and the buoy-keeper, who traveled from the village in a clattering motorboat to switch off the buoy lights, had to hug the shore.

But people gave a wide berth to the ash heap where the goblin stubbornly kept the stove burning from sunrise to sunset.

The desire to act was overflowing in him. From the ashes around the stove rose charred oak posts marking the former corners of Iakym's house. One dark night the goblin lugged a gate from the village, raised it between the corner posts, plaited it with a weave of hazelnut switches, and covered it amply with dry reeds, cut down by a bog sprite for his relative from the silted pond by the edge of the forest. He held the reeds down to the switches with old wheels that had been lying in Iakym's shed, which had been spared in the fire but later rotted and collapsed. A pair of storks flew out from the village and settled on this roof of the goblin's shack. From the time of their forebears they had summered in the surrounding ranges, and now they built a nest among the spokes of one of the wheels. The mother chattered the whole day through on the pile of dry twigs, while the father stalked pensively around the meadows. A vast multitude of sparrows settled under the stork nest and in the reed thatch. Swallows molded a string of nests on the rain- and wind-battered oak posts. Swifts nested in every available nook and cranny around the stove, and linnets in the singed but growing thickets of lilac. There were orioles in the cherry trees, starlings summered in the hollow of an old pear tree, and the restless jays bustled in the glade behind the garden.

Sweeping away the ashes, the goblin stuck sunflower and bean seeds into the former *pryzba*. Soon afterwards, the sunflowers reached the thatch, and the beans wound around the oak posts and sunflowers, weaving green walls around the shack. He loosened the hard earth in the garden by dragging a rusty harrow across it at night, and then planted everything he could lay his hands on. Out of the mellowed and peaty black earth the bushy tops of potatoes shot up here and there. Spring wheat shone in green patches. Pumpkin vines with their long-stemmed broad leaves stretched toward the sun, and self-seeding poppies stood on tiptoe to rise above the pigweed, vervain, and sow-thistle, because the goblin liked everything living and did not weed out any plants. Radishes spread out their leaves,

spiky corn swayed above the garden, and near the edge of the field, where the earth was barren, the meadow insolently made its appearance in a foray of spear grass, broom grass, sweet-scented holy grass, spurge, and cow vetch.

It was dry that summer. Night after night the goblin brought handfuls of water from the river to sprinkle on his garden, while the water nymphs, the evil reed spirits, the fairies (who tickled their victims to death), the night ghosts, and even the busybody water sprite laughed at his useless efforts. But he paid them no mind and continued to scoop up handfuls of water and carry it to Iakym's yard.

Then came the warm summer rains. Nothing is more delightful than a summer rain for a place devastated by fire. The vegetation in the garden thrived, while the black sooty wasteland on either side of the *pryzba* suddenly became a riot of lovage, tansy, hellebore, mugwort, calendula, orach, wormwood, hemp, nettle, wheat grass, and silk grass. Iakym had planted them under the windows of his house, or they had propagated on their own and were now pushing upward toward the smiling summer sky. Soon a wall of green separated the surrounding world from the shack. Only the clattering of the storks, the smoke rising over the chimney in the early morning, and the track the goblin had beaten to the river identified its location.

It was the track that caught the fancy of a young couple. The sharp-sighted goblin, dozing on the roof near the stork nest, spied them in the distance as soon as they stepped out of the motorboat onto the planked dock. They were young, in the flush of life, and both were dressed in track suits—the girl also wore a wool jacket. Walking leisurely along the shore, they were happy, apprehensive, and bashful in anticipation of the wonder that was to happen that day. They turned onto the track and took a liking to the shack. Leaving their backpacks by the stove, they walked in the crimson sunset and splashed on the shore. At dusk they built a fire. Its flame flickered in red reflections on the waves and the bewildered water nymphs gathered in a small group and gazed enviously at the young couple from the water. The goblin brought some fresh balmy hay from the meadow and arranged it into a bed by the hearthstone. But when the boy and girl, silent and wary, returned to the shack, the goblin limped off to the glade by the pond, not wanting to be an invisible witness to their first love making.

He sat down by the riverbank on the decayed hull of the boat Grandpa Iakym had overturned long ago and listened for a long time to the alternating love calls of the frogs, crickets, and forest birds. A full and slightly ruddy moon sailed over the tree tops, as a human soul glided out of the sky like a star. Transparent and pure as a beam of moonlight, it fluttered its wings over the goblin's shack. The goblin closed his eyes and a minute later was lulled to sleep by the warm, soft night. He saw the witch in his dream once again, but this time it was a gentle and chaste vision.

When the goblin opened his eyes, crimson wisps of mist whirled above the mirror-like surface of the pond; the fluted goblets of water lilies broke through the surface and opened their snow-white flowers toward the sun; on the shack's roof the stork clattered its bill in alarm as her mate tested the inexperienced wings of their three fledglings so high up in the sky. Around the shack the swifts and their young offspring were chasing one another with piercing shrieks; young starlings fluttered over the garden; timid swallow chicks were rocking in the branches of the old apple tree; bumblebees buzzed around the shack; grains of wheat were tumbling off their stalks and sowing themselves on the ground; sparrows were alighting in droves on the heads of sunflowers, scattering the plump, fatty seeds on all sides; poppy pods were bursting, strewing their seeds around the garden. The goblin's eyebrows smoothed, his eyes became brighter, acquiring a more human appearance, and he began to look like Grandpa Iakym once did when he sat on the *pryzba* at rest after his labors.

Autumn

Perched comfortably on a tree stump or on some gnarled roots, the goblin watched the whole day as the cold yellow leaves fell from the oak trees. Picked up by a gusty wind that ruffled the tree tops, the leaves seemed to hang for a fleeting moment under the cold, bright blue sky, and then rocked back and forth, like weightless boats wobbling from wave to wave, drifting ever lower until they settled silently and submissively on the fluffy, faded gold of the forest floor after a long, such an interminably long, flight.

The goblin waited, resolutely and hungrily for the moment when a leaf would break free from a twig with a barely audible snap and begin its melancholy leisurely flight. The concentration tuned his mind, making it incredibly sensitive and capacious and absorbing it so completely that the outlines of the real world and real feelings blurred, leaving instead something formless, and yet all-embracing, sharply sad and joyous but at the same time also imperceptible and unaccountable, because in the end the leaf reached the ground and everything had to be repeated all over again.

"The speck of time during which a yellowed leaf falls from a tree—that's what eternity is, and up until now I didn't understand anything in this world." The goblin tried to mold his feelings into words, but what he had molded was so pathetic compared with his profound and real feelings that he ceased philosophizing and greedily just absorbed the moments of his awe at the world, moments of bitter unease in the realization of their transience.

The leaves soared and soared, as in a dream.

The night mist filled the meadows to the brim and hovered over the river, gathering into pink clouds in the morning and disappearing into the breeze, like a casual and fastidious guest from the heavens.

In the forest the mist clung to the branches of alder and hazelnut in heavy, pearly drops and sonorously landed on the leaf-covered forest floor, as if a thousand woodpeckers were hammering all around.

Clusters of cranberry suffused by the sun were ablaze with such a ruddy purple light that the goblin froze in awe and sat in the forest, enchanted, until dusk.

In the evening the goblin would slowly return to his shack, where everything was again deserted and dead. Wild boar had rooted through and trampled the garden. Around the *pryzba*, the flowers beaten down by early frosts and rains had blackened and now reeked of rot. The storks with their young and the starlings had long since departed to follow the sun. The tomtits and sparrows had left to find people, where there was more food. An autumn windstorm had torn the shack with the stork's nest off the oak posts, rolled it across the meadow, and flung it into the river, to the gloating howls of the water sprite.

The goblin would kindle the fire in the stove and recline on the slowly warming hearthstone under the open sky. Shutting his eyes, he'd go over in

his mind, as if fingering the beads of an amber necklace, the vivid moments of the day. Although he had existed since the beginning of the world and knew for sure that he would exist as long as the world, and although previously time had been for him like air, unnoticed and unmeasured, it now seemed to the goblin that he had really been alive only during those moments. At all other times, when he had fussed or dozed in the blithe shallowness of time, he had not lived but had been dead.

Having fingered the beads of the moments of excitement and having reveled in them to his heart's content, the goblin slowly, anticipating wonder, opened his eyes. And lo! Right before him were the wide-spread branches of an apple tree covered with sparkling flowers that had petals of flaming rays—that was how numerous, brilliant, and radiant were the stars in the low autumnal sky beyond the apple tree. The goblin's throbbing heart missed a beat from the inexplicable emotion he was feeling. On such nights he would recall that strange woman in the noisy city who sat out her lonely evenings in front of the flickering candlelight feeling happy. And again he understood her.

He recalled that strangely quiet woman more and more frequently, ever since the sky had hung down like a linen sheet pulled from a water pail, pouring, dripping, and trickling from morning till evening and from evening till morning, at first in torrential downpours and drizzles and soon afterwards as icy sleet. He recalled the serenely peaceful twilights in that room, permeated with the smell of wax, cigarette smoke, and paper. He recalled the woman's large expressive eyes, which seemed to have encompassed in one view this room, the city, and the entire world. He recalled the black lace around her thin neck, the long white fingers of her left hand resting on the armchair, and the long white fingers of her right hand speckled by the light of a cigarette as if by a ruby. He recalled the candle's reflection on the sofa and on the glass of the bookshelves, the shadows on the carpet, its colors dulled and obscured by the dusk, and the blue altar of a window over the silhouettes of odd-shaped cacti.

And as the wind was wailing in the chimney, scattering wet, cold leaves onto the hearthstone, and pressing down the gloomy leaden sky, the goblin suddenly longed for winter, when he could sit on the roof by the weathercock and listlessly gaze at the city—where people and cars habitually bustled in the valleys of the streets, where the windows of homes and stores shone brightly in the evening, where tin roofs turned rosy under crusts of ice, where even the sky was pleasantly warm, like a hearthstone; where attics had a cozy smell of human habitation, and over all this, night after night, the lights of TV towers glowed ruddy through the haze.

An oppressive solitude and loneliness were enveloping the goblin, like a damp mist over a bog. Seeking relief, he would leave the hearthstone and dash to the river, the one and only thing still alive in this desolate gloom. Filled amply by rains, the river was rushing headlong to meet the city,

whose glowing lights shone invitingly on the horizon.

But as the flood receded, so did time. The Nevkla subsided, the motor launches and ships sailed through the mist less frequently until finally the first ice shimmered along the shore. When the last motor launch of the season cast off from the dock, the goblin's shadow darted onto the stern of the boat from under the ice-covered boards of the dock and stiffened on the wet snaking coil of rope over the churning watery abyss where the first ice tinkled and rang as it struck against the propeller blades.

Winter was rolling in, and after winter spring would come, and after spring—summer, and autumn again, and then winter. And for the goblin with every season everything—even eternity—would begin all over again.

Translated by Anatole Bilenko

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Fame

Volodymyr Drozd

Just once, during my younger years, did fame brush me with its wings. And then it fluttered away to those more fortunate.

I had just published my first and, thus far, only collection of stories. It was on display in all the bookstores and newsstands, and every day I strolled down the city's central street and admired my creation. I picked up the book and leafed through it for the hundredth, thousandth time, my eyes caressing my own portrait etched in profile. The best part of the drawing was my glasses. Perhaps the lips in the portrait also resembled mine. Anyway, there was my name in large print under the portrait, and I recognized myself in every copy of the book. Unfortunately, nobody else recognized me. The salesgirls looked past me and took me for a crank who pawed and purchased one and the same book day in and day out—all the more so because nobody else was buying it. Occasionally a customer, seeing the book with its colorful cover in my hands, would ask trustingly, "Could you tell me what it's about?"

"About people!" I would answer with my nose in the air, convinced that I wrote like no one had ever written before.

The customer would take the book from my hands, finger it as if it were a length of cloth or chintz rather than spiritual food, gape at the humiliatingly low price, and then, distrustful of a cut-rate product, return it to the display stand.

Stealing hours from sleep for my writing, oh, how I dreamt of seeing the collection in bookstores. I thought everyone would stand up and notice. The world would change for the better! But nothing changed, and behind my back nobody whispered, "Look, there goes that writer...."

At the time I was working for a regional newspaper. I even had an office of my own, though, to tell the truth, it was a mere cubbyhole, a sidebar of an office with a column in the middle to support the dangerously sagging ceiling. In May, however, clusters of lilac peeped into my open windows, while in autumn flowers reached up to the sill and the heavy scent of marigold filled the room. On my desk, littered with manuscripts and copies of my book, there was a red telephone. I loved to hear it ring.

One day the telephone on my desk jangled. The pen I was using to busily scrawl out a story for the coming issue kept moving as I picked the receiver up with my left hand.

"Hello."

"Is this Volodia?"

"Yes, it is."

"This is Nina calling. So, you didn't phone me after all..."

I was frantically fumbling in my mind: now what Nina had I promised to call and didn't? I was free of matrimonial bonds at the time, and girls didn't shun me, or I them, but—Nina?

"You know, Nina, my copy editor's on holiday, so I'm the only one in the whole department right now, and a newspaper is like a child that has to be fed every day," I chattered away, playing for time as I tried to recall which Nina I was talking to, my right hand still dashing off line after line for the issue.

"I've got my pride, Volodia, and I wouldn't have called if ..."

"Of course."

I had to submit two hundred lines right away, and I didn't even have a hundred yet.

"... we weren't expecting a child, Volodia."

"Congratulations—children are always a cause for joy." I said, quoting from my own feature about a new maternity home. But suddenly the message registered in my mind. "Wait a minute. What do you mean, 'we'?"

"You and me. Have you forgotten, Volodia?"

My right hand froze over the sheet of paper.

The editor came into the room, glanced at my face, and asked in alarm, "Are you okay?"

"Now stop your silly jokes," I said into the phone. "I'm busy on copy for the next issue!"

I slammed down the receiver.

Instantly the phone rang again.

"What will I tell them in the village?" Nina wailed into the phone. "Mother will kill me! And I trusted you! I know the book you signed for me by heart and keep it by my pillow day and night. I thought writers were always truthful..."

I cupped the telephone with my hand and smiled sourly at the editor: "This is some kind of mystery."

After listening for a while, I said into the phone, "Are you calling from a phone booth? Where is it? Do you have the book with you? Catch a taxi right away and come here, to the editorial office. Agreed. I'm waiting."

I told the editor about the telephone conversation and asked him not to leave me alone with this unknown Nina.

Ten minutes later a girl of about eighteen crossed the threshold of my office. She was dressed in city clothes, but her constrained movements unmistakably betrayed her as a recent arrival from the countryside.

"May I see Volodia?"

I got up from the table with unbelievable relief in body and soul—I

was seeing this young woman for the first time in my life.

"I am Volodia."

Nina took a step back, shaking her curly, cold-permed head.

"Sit down, please, and let's see the book you were given as a present."

The book was mine all right, with a dedicatory inscription: *To my beloved Nina in remembrance of the enchanting days and nights at the resort on the banks of the quiet Desna, Ever yours ...* Below was my name, surname, date, month and year. Only the hand wasn't mine—it was too precise and clear.

"Who gave you this book?" Involuntarily, my voice took on the tone of an investigator. At that time I liked writing biting articles, and here was an interesting feuilleton in the offing.

"The writer, of course."

"I wrote that book!"

Nina dropped her head to her knees and burst into tears.

"He said it was his ... his ..."

"His pen name, you mean?"

"Yes."

Next morning I set off on an urgent assignment: the editor had asked for a feuilleton for the Sunday issue. The article had almost taken shape in my head: the only thing left was to uncover the real name of the protagonist. Through the window of the bus the autumn scenery flashed by as in a travel advertisement, while I sat gloomily thinking that fame resembled a capricious, skittish girl: now she scorns you and doesn't even look your way, and then suddenly, in a happy moment, she opens her loving arms and wraps you up in them. I had every reason to consider myself a popular and well-known writer, now that young men were borrowing my name to seduce young women. It was certainly pleasant to be famous amidst the general population—although, of course, there was my modesty to consider. In the article I'd probably leave out the name of the author of the book and put the matter this way: "The seducer used the good name of a famous author, etc., etc." I'd probably add "talented" as well. That famous and talented author was, of course, yours truly. In my bag I had several copies of my book, hot off the press: I'd give one to the director of the resort and donate one to the resort's library. Why not do something to benefit my readers?

But the library already had a copy of my book, prominently on display with an inscription on the title page: *To my dear readers, may the love of fiction never cool in their hearts. The author.* As it turned out, the director also had an autographed copy of my book.

"Didn't he like it here?" the director asked, obviously alarmed by my questions about this author. "Or did you come to get notes for a deeper insight into the man? He came to me the very first day and introduced himself. We tried to accommodate him and gave him a private room, so he'd have all the conditions necessary for creative work. We keep such a

room for VIPs, you know. The regional authorities occasionally pay us a visit, so we need it. I figured that the authorities were always coming here but this was the first time a writer had stopped at our resort."

"Did he register in his own name?"

"Oh no, they've all got pseudonyms." The director looked down at me as if to say: How little you journalists know about writing. "When an author publishes a book, he can sign it with another name—a pseudonym, it's called," he explained to me. "The author complained that he was tired of fame and asked me not to tell anyone that a writer was staying here. But can you really hide news like that: a living writer in our midst! As soon as he gave a copy of his book to the library, the vacationers recognized him from his portrait in the book."

I asked to see the guest registry, and suddenly, as they say in books, I felt a sharp pain in my chest (actually, I still had a good heart back then, which could withstand far greater stress without giving cause for alarm). Vitalii Piven—that's who my double was. Vitalii, the most garrulous member of the literary association I headed, who reeled off long-winded and meaningless speeches at every meeting. Vitalii, who brought me miles of paper with his unbearable poems almost daily! Vitalii, who really did look like me, and wore glasses, I suspected, to make the similarity all the more striking!

That instant, I lost interest in the lure of fame for many years to come.

Back at the editorial office, I rang up Piven. He was employed at a local designer's workshop, painting posters and slogans.

"Is that you, Vitalii? Could you please come over. I want to have a talk with you about your poetry."

"You'll publish them at long last?"

"That's what we need to discuss."

He showed up very soon, because he was simply mad to get his hackwork published. I sat behind my desk. After greeting me very casually (in his relations with me, he took great pains to underscore his independence), Vitalii Piven looked at the papers on my desk.

"What are you writing?"

"A feuilleton for the Sunday issue."

"Oh. What is it about?"

"About you."

"Wow, some joker you are!"

"I don't joke about my work."

Without saying a word, I brought my book with his autograph out of the drawer and gave it to him. Vitalii took it with two fingers.

"Are you trying to shove your deathless prose on me once more? Excuse me, but I'm already sick of it!"

"You better read what's written inside before you come to any snap conclusions!"

Vitalii opened the book. His face turned red like an overripe tomato, and he sank into the chair. Then his face grew yellow, after which it turned green and then, a moment later, brick-red. Just like the traffic lights at a street crossing. I dialed a number on the telephone.

"Hello. Is this the police station? I'm phoning from the editorial office of *The News* to ask a favor. We need to confirm the identity of the handwriting on two documents. Yes ... preferably with an official letter from your forensic laboratory. Thank you. I'll call back."

"You didn't have to do that," Piven said. "Yes, it was me." He started circling round the column. Lean, lanky, really looking like me, but with a smaller face, he seemed to be trying to catch up with himself going around the column. And it looked as if any moment he'd succeed.

"I wrote it! I signed it! I gave it away! I don't deny it. But did you ask yourself what my desperate act proves? It proves only one thing—inwardly I've matured for a book of my own. You have everything—fame, money, a book, but do you really believe that your prose is better than my poetry? You've gotten published because you work in an editorial office and have connections in the capital. As for me, you won't even give me a chance in the provincial press. For two years you've been promising to publish a large selection of my verse, but where is it? I'm an artist—I need contacts with my readers to thrive!"

"All right, you can have your contacts—as long as no children result from them!"

"What children?"

"Your Nina is expecting a child."

He stopped dead in his tracks, his face dissolving like the image on the movie screen when the film gets stuck in the projector and starts to melt. But that lasted only a brief moment. An invisible hand seemed to have switched the current on in him, and Piven again went running round the column.

"Children, you say—so what? Bearing children is probably nobler than writing books! Mind you, every child is an inimitable individual—as opposed to books like yours, which appear by the thousands every day with nothing but verbal froth and not much meat to them. Anything mankind really needs to know has been known for a long time. Do you really believe you'll say anything new in your books? In giving birth to children, we give birth to the future! Oh, my poor Nina! I would have phoned her long ago and told her everything, but I was afraid she wouldn't understand me properly. She instantly bloomed in my heart; she inspired me, and in one month of my holidays I wrote one hundred and seven poems! What could I tell her? That they won't even publish me in a regional rag? That I paint slogans day in and day out?"

Vitalii walked up to the phone. My best feuilleton was not destined to see print: the next day Nina and Vitalii were married. Truth is, Piven set one

condition—that the newlyweds would enjoy their honeymoon (only a week, since they had used up the rest of their holidays already) at a hotel, and in a deluxe suite, no less. I came to an understanding with the hotel director, and after a modest dinner at a restaurant (attended by members of our literary association and Nina's girlfriends from the dressmaker's shop) I showed the young couple to the deluxe suite. It was truly luxurious, with two big rooms and a vestibule. In the parlor there was a long table with flower vases and crystal ashtrays, the bedroom had an enormous bed, and in the corners of both rooms stood pompous-looking armchairs with soft, plush upholstery. Nina was so overwhelmed that she stopped on the parlor carpet with hands at her sides, her head bowed like a schoolgirl who had been asked a difficult question at an examination. Piven, on the other hand, behaved as if he had been living not in a workers' dormitory but in deluxe suites all along. Right away he moved the bed, carelessly flipped ash from his cigarette into a sparkling ashtray, and moved the table to the window facing the square: "Here's where I'll write my poetry," he said.

Later he bragged about writing sixty-nine poems during his honeymoon in the deluxe suite.

Nina and Vitalii have five children now; their eldest son is studying at the university. Vitalii still works as a designer at the plant. As for his poetry, none was ever published, and chances are he doesn't write any more. Once, when I dropped into a meeting of the university's literary workshop, I heard his son reading a poem, and a rather good one, at that.

Real fame has come to me only during the past few years, since I bought myself a miniature pinscher and trained him to run alongside me without a leash. Three times a day I walk him down our street. All the passersby smile at the pinscher mincing along gravely at my side, and they follow us with their eyes for a long time. My popularity is extending further and further beyond the confines of the street, spreading to the neighboring parks, public gardens, and markets. When I visit a store and stand in line to pay at the cash register, I frequently hear someone say, "The last person in line is the man walking the beautiful pinscher!"

"Oh—I know him."

When I carry my little dog across the street, pressing him gently to my chest, old women are moved to say admiringly, "It's a rare gift, to love animals—you're so kind and gifted."

At that, I become embarrassed and wordlessly agree.

Translated by Anatole Bilenko

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Everything All Over Again

Volodymyr Drozd

God was leaping about and laughing boisterously like a boy.

“My, my, they’re coming back! When I settled them in Eden, I told them: don’t eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, because you and all your kin will die. So now they’ve gotten what they deserved and have been taught a lesson to the end of time. They wanted to raise themselves above God—and everything went to rack and ruin. What a lesson for the disobedient!”

The angels stood in a motionless wall behind God, their faces frozen in fawning smiles. Adam and Eve, covered with ash as if dressed in unbleached cloth, were heavily walking up the slope toward Eden, stopping time and again, sadly glancing back at the Earth, which was burning on the horizon. Wading across a brook, Eve scooped up a handful of water and washed the ash off her face. But now her face was contorted with such a silent scream of despair and grief and her eyes had such a horrible expression that even God’s heart was stirred with compassion. In violation of the program the Chancellery had drawn up and He Himself had endorsed, God stepped forward toward the humans. But at that very same moment the Minister of Ceremonies waved his baton and the angels burst out in a joyously exhortative hosanna:

“Glory to the Almighty! Glory! Glory! Glory!”

The angels took God under the arms and sat Him on a throne garishly decorated with precious stones that seemed to be cut out of a rainbow. The throne was too tall for the lean old biblical God. His bare feet hung down without reaching the floor, and God tugged at His traditional robe lest the people see His bare calves. The choir kept on thundering, until waves rippled in the sky. God’s retinue lined up around the throne, each according to his status and rank, and began studying the mechanically duplicated scripts to see who was supposed to say what and when. From that point on, everything strictly followed the program: God’s face became dignified and He assumed the posture of a heavenly all-knowing judge with a bulging chest, much like the one in the images of earthly icon painters. Now only the black smoke blanketing the horizon and rising from the thermonuclear fire that was consuming the Earth alarmed God somewhat and hindered His concentration on the grand scheme of things.

In the meantime Adam and Eve had come closer. God recalled with

elegiac sadness the time when He was still a young God, just a beginner: when creating was as easy as breathing air, when in one week He separated the light from the darkness, created both the Earth and the sky and everything living on Earth—from bacteria to gigantic mammoths, even creating man, and then inventing for Himself a seventh day of rest. You never know in advance what will become of the things you create: the bacteria He had created so casually, as if He were shelling peanuts, had multiplied and were living everywhere—in the water, air, and even in the soil—while the mammoths had become extinct a long time ago, though He remembered to this day how He had personally chiseled tusks for the mammoths and had experimented with positioning them on either side of their heads, to achieve both beauty and convenience. He knew about the bacteria and mammoths because the angels had brought from Earth a secondary school textbook on natural history, which He had read through omnivorously in a single night.

It was true. He had been in a hurry when creating man—it was a Saturday and that meant an early closing. He got carried away with keeping to schedule, at the cost of maintaining quality. He should have considered everything more deliberately and foreseen all the details. Back then, He lacked experience. Now He had both experience and wisdom, but He no longer had the life-giving power He had had back then. He hadn't worked in clay for a long time and so He had lost the touch in molding it. Now He just listened to the hollow glorification of the angels and scratched about in His garden like a hen. At the painful thought that His happy days of Creation were probably over, God became crotchety and said to the humans with a malicious smile:

"Well, what good were your vaunted sciences? Wanted to get the better of God, did you? Planets, galaxies, the universe! 'We'll transform nature, fathom the mystery of matter!' Wanted to outdo the Creator of the world! And what's the outcome? You read in the Bible that I created the world in six days, on the seventh day I rested. But you have destroyed everything in just one day, and now you can rest on the ashes!"

"In the global context of the development of civilization a mistake is definitely possible. Perhaps we miscalculated somewhere," Adam rejoined gloomily. But in his voice there was no repentance, only a stubborn desire to find the mistake and understand it. "The phases in the development of matter..."

"You didn't take yourselves into account—your own selves!" God cut him off, because He did not like the scientific terminology of the humans. He was a self-taught hands-on practitioner, not a theoretician. "You managed to deduce that the Universe began as a vacuum, but you lacked the brains to take a closer look at the vacuum in your own souls."

Adam seemed undisturbed by God's ire. Instead, he kept looking around intently and tenaciously, as if mentally breaking down God and the

angels and everything that caught His eye into the simplest elements and delving into their nature. God found this quality in humans disagreeable, just as He did their scientific gibberish. He had disliked it from the start, ever since He created Adam and Eve and settled them in Eden, where they—what did they lack there?!—craved the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It seemed funny to Him how they went out of their way to analyze everything, to get at everything with their own reason, especially now, when they had such an opportunity to realize on their own the terrible consequences knowledge can lead to. Well, that's always been their habit—disobedience, independence, and an irresistible desire to know. Even before the Tree of Knowledge had grown and before Eden existed, when He had only just formed the first man out of the dust of the ground and breathed life into him, no sooner had Adam blinked his eyes than off he went—no humility or gratitude, but questions galore. Where was he? Who was he? And who was that One with clay on His hands? Later, when God was creating the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air and wanted to name them, Adam had not given Him a chance to shape a thought or speak a word but insisted: "I'll do it myself. Let me do it!" So now you've gone and done it yourself!

God gladly turned His gaze to Eve. Here was His best creation! Though crafted out of Adam's rib, she was nothing at all like that smart aleck. She was the embodiment of gentleness, kindness, and beauty. Even today, after all she had gone through, she was beautiful—and what finesse! Modern ladies' wear, all those tightly fitting jeans and tops, made the dazzling lines of the female body that He had designed all the more pleasing to the eye. The angels had lugged up a color TV set to Heaven and amused themselves by watching the images from Earth. Now and then God too glanced at the TV screen. He was knowledgeable about fashion and now realized the absurdity of the leather overalls He had made for the humans Himself when He chased them out of Eden. Eve was a good example of the importance of creative inspiration—today, try as He might, He would not be able to create such an Eve. He still tried molding once in a while. Angels brought Him the best clay from Earth and tried to create the perfect conditions for creativity. They even shut off the wind in Eden and stifled the disturbing cries of the birds. But the newly molded creatures that now jumped, fluttered, or crawled from His hands were all monstrosities. On Earth they would be attributed to the impact of radiation and recorded in lists of the anomalies of nature. Suddenly God realized that for creativity in the true sense of the word, He required the presence of humans. He needed the eyes of Eve, which would be enraptured by His creations, and the covert skepticism of Adam. Because everything He did during those unforgettable days of Creation had been done for them.

God looked into the eyes of Eve and again pain stabbed His heart, this time much deeper and sharper. For a fleeting moment He saw what she had

seen and experienced during the last days on Earth. Like winged sharks, rockets flew low over the Earth thundering and roaring. Forests flared up like matches, mountains crumbled to dust, people were set ablaze and died out like sparks, without leaving a trace, and children died, too. Rivers boiled and evaporated, leaving behind dry black channels, and the visible sky curled into a fiery scroll. Horror seized God at the sight. The burning Earth beyond the horizon now seemed much nearer and dearer, and unwittingly He was stirred from an age-old sheltered slumber.

Impulsively God slid from His throne and the angels burst out in an exhortative, "Glory to the Almighty! Glory! Glory! Glory!" but He gave them a squint-eyed look: "Hush!"

Offended, the choir fell silent as the Minister of Ceremonies demonstratively broke his baton. But God was no longer concerned with the finer points of courtly etiquette. Suddenly He was sick of all the comedy the angels had been staging around Him throughout the ages while He had played the part of the principal buffoon—even getting a big kick out of it, like a small child. He was ashamed to recall how every morning, as soon as the sun reached the earthly horizon, He would pull up the weight of the Universal Clock while the choir of angels chanted the acclamations, calling Him the All-Wise One and the Morning Star and the Supreme Being—even though He, the angels, and everyone else down to the pettiest clerks of the heavenly administration knew that the sun would roll over the firmament, the stars and planets would continue circling, and the galaxies would keep on pulsating regardless whether or not He pulled up the decorative weight of the decorative clock. By now God had already forgotten how this game of solemn morning appearances, hosannas, glorifications, courtly hierarchy, and the angels' courtly intrigues began, a game in which He performed the part of a gilded clown, idol, and puppet manipulated by covertly pulled strings. It seemed that the game had begun shortly after the days of Creation, when He chased the humans out of Eden and was left all alone, since the angels were essentially nothing more than a figment of fantasy.

What happiness it was to have had, through all this infinite time, a garden of His own, where He could escape when He desired silence and calm after the noisy ceremonies around the throne. It was as if He had known that sooner or later Adam and Eve would return to Heaven, and had preserved Eden for them here, notwithstanding the fact that the Chancellery had already begun to sell off items from this, His last refuge, to the omnipresent tourists for heavenly currency.

God waved His hand imperiously, and the curtain, garishly decorated with shiny angels, fell. He remained on this side, with the humans. He no longer needed to pretend to be holding the universe on His shoulders. Quite nimbly for His millions of years, God made for the Garden of Eden. The cherub He had ordered to stand guard at the Tree of Life when He chased the first humans from Eden gave a flap of his wings, raising a cloud of age-

old dust, and a flame leaped from the tip of his fiery sword.

"They're with me," God said, nodding toward Adam and Eve, who were following.

"They still need a pass from the Chancellery, like all tourists."

"They're not tourists. They've come to Eden for good."

"Even if they're eligible for settlement, I've got orders," the cherub declared, standing his ground.

God gave him an angry look—and the cherub's wings dropped, while the flame on the tip of the sword died away. God was regaining His former strength.

This was perhaps the first time that He was entering His garden as a full-fledged master since the Chancellery's decree permitting excursion groups to visit the garden. (The angels were bringing books from Earth ever more frequently—mostly historical novels—arousing an interest in history, specifically the days of Creation. The Chancellery took advantage of this interest to help underwrite the cost of maintaining such a huge retinue of supervisors, guards, singers, musicians, servants, wing-brushers, and all the other minions without whom heavenly life could no longer be imagined, let alone the Chancellery itself, which kept expanding and required ever greater funds.) Though permitted to move only in groups, with a guide in the lead, and only on the groomed and marked paths, the excursionists nevertheless overran the farthest nooks and crannies of the garden, trampled the grass, picked fruit—even of the Tree of Life, although they were guaranteed immortality anyway—and pruned their plumage, which was categorically forbidden. Feathers and down fluttered over the bushes of Eden like snowflakes in an earthly winter (God had seen winter on the color TV recently). God hid in the shrubs and raspberry bushes, or made Himself invisible, but that did not help because the noise in the garden was as loud as in a stadium (more and more angels were becoming soccer fans and God frequently heard the choristers exchange whispers of "What was the score today?" behind His back). God had dispatched an angry complaint to the Chancellery, from which came a reply that in its actions the Chancellery was guided by the regulations He Himself had approved, with reference to the appropriate paragraphs. God realized that rebelling against the Chancellery was tantamount to rebelling against His own self, and so He threw up His hands.

There were no tourists in the Garden of Eden that day: Heaven's idlers had flown off to see how the Earth was being turned into dust. At the risk of burning their feathers the aesthetes dived into the nuclear fire to save books and paintings from libraries, museums, and art galleries. Those who had no interest in earthly art or philosophy lugged gold, tableware, lace, and every other kind of junk up to Heaven. Along the horizon stretched a string of winged marauders with packages on their backs and bundles in their arms. Some angels had lovers on Earth and children by them, despite specific

prohibitions from the Chancellery. These libertines were now circling over the ashes like gulls over ruined nests, but for the humans—except the first, Adam and Eve—the way to Heaven was barred.

God turned His gaze away from the smoke-enveloped Earth and joyfully inhaled the fragrances of the orchard.

"What an aroma! Like nectar!" God said excitedly to the humans. "And just listen to the nightingales! And the orioles! Your orchestras are nothing compared to the concerts you'll hear in this place at sunrise! The acacias are blossoming on the hills, and toward evening their fragrance rises up the slopes into my garden. And this here, this is not an acacia but an oleaster exuding such a fragrance of honey. What I love most, though, is jasmine. Would you like to stroll down the jasmine lane? This willow over here is home to a flock of starlings. It's old and rotten; the holes woodpeckers bored in it are as smooth as if made by a drill, and the starlings have settled inside. I love chatting with the starlings. Oh, the magpies and jays are fighting again! That's enough, scram! And that tree over there is a Japanese cherry. The angels brought it from Earth as a present. When it comes into bloom the entire tree flowers, and later the cherries seem to hang on a string without any stalks. Under the birch trees I planted daisies. Aren't they beautiful against the green background? The walnut tree is growing slowly. There was an old one there that was withering, so I uprooted it. And here I have a grove of cranberry. I love the cranberry blooms for their remarkably pure color, the color of light, like the light I separated from the darkness at the very beginning. It'll be good for you here. I allow you to eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—but avoid the Tree of Knowledge, since you yourselves have learned where that leads. The less you know, the easier it is to live. Now here is the hut where you began your life. Don't think about anything at all. Sweeten your soul and your body and take delight in the Garden of Eden. Eventually I shall give you fruit from the Tree of Life, and you will become immortal like the gods, and everything that's been on Earth will seem like a bad dream."

God was so completely carried away that He saw only His garden and heard only Himself. Suddenly His consciousness was penetrated by a mournful, desperate cry. God was struck with fear—he had never heard anything like it in Heaven. He turned around. Eve was crying, her entire body convulsed with loud sobs. Her knees buckled and she dropped into the grass like a pruned twig. For the first time God felt the enormity of the pain of a mother whose billions of children—for all the people on Earth were Eve's children—had perished in a single earthly day, the pain of a flower burning in fire, the final horror of a fish at the bottom of a river suddenly gone dry, and the final flutter of birds' wings caught in the flames.

God, too, wanted to drop into the grass and weep like Eve. But He did not know how to weep. His eyes shifted to Adam. Adam's body seemed to have turned to stone, his muscles didn't move, not a single sound escaped

from his compressed pale lips, and only his eyes, under half-closed lids, reflected his torment and racking pain. Adam, too, did not know how to weep, which made his distress all the harder to bear. Only a single tear formed in the corner of Adam's eye rolled down his pale, seemingly lifeless marmoreal cheek, and fell onto the grass. On the spot where the tear landed the grass immediately yellowed, as if touched by fire. Adam bent down and raised Eve, who continued to weep bitterly. He embraced her and stroked her head as if she were a child.

That night it rained. Resting in His little cottage under the Tree of Life, God listened to the raindrops pattering against the windowpanes. He heard the rain whispering to the straw thatch and the murmur of the swollen stream in the willows. It wasn't the first time that it had rained in the Garden of Eden, nor was it the first time that sleep had evaded God. But never before had He felt so peaceful during a rainfall. At long last everyone He loved was back home, at His side. It was such an earthly feeling. It made Him angry at Himself for turning into a human. But then He fell to thinking and calmed down: that's how it should be, for the soul had returned to the body and resurrected it. Without humans the garden was dead. Was it for the sake of the angel-tourists that He had planted and nurtured the garden? For in the Bible it is written (he had looked through the Bible not long ago, and although the God there was a malicious sort, the first pages about the Creation of the world were good): "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden . . ."

He had planted it for humans. Let them live there for all time to come, in warmth and grace, under the trees of paradise, without any earthly worries.

God did not keep track of time and did not know how many days or years had passed since Adam and Eve were in Eden again. God knew but one measure of time—eternity. Only the Earth, like a marvelous colored clock, marked the passage of time. The conflagration died out at last, and the Earth turned from pink to dark blue. Soon the smoke dissolved, and the Earth hung like a black apparition on the horizon. The seas and rivers filled with shimmering azure water again, and the continents timidly began turning green. The angels that visited Earth spoke of sprouts of plants bursting through asphalt highways and concrete airport runways, of forests covering the ruins of cities under a green tent, and of lush grasses carpeting yesterday's battlefields. Almost every day Adam and Eve walked up the hill above the Garden of Eden, where God had once placed a bench, and stood gazing at their Earth for a long time.

But God had no time either for earthly or for heavenly matters. He was creating again. Creative plans and ideas were lighting up His imagination like stars at the juncture of day and night. On their own His hands reached

for the clay and molded a plant, or an animal, or a bird hitherto unknown either in the Garden of Eden or on Earth. Even Adam, who was always at God's side, encouraging Him to create—to compensate for the excessive radiation on Earth—did not interfere. On the contrary, Adam's silent enchantment with the power of the creative spirit of nature, as he put it—thereby emphasizing his atheistic convictions—delighted God and spurred Him to keep working. All three of them were working now: Adam kneaded the clay, God molded and breathed life into His creations, and Eve planted herbs and saplings and, on the meadow along the river, grazed all the sorts of cattle God had invented.

Never again did God feel so good. One day at dusk an angel from the guards at the Garden of Eden paid God a visit. With his slender stature, slow gait, and changeable face, the angel resembled a serpent. Adam had once made fun of this angel: with his bare rudiments of wings, he seemed better suited to creep than to fly. The angel-serpent whispered into God's ear that every day Adam and Eve were eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the overripe ones that had dropped to the ground and the green ones alike. Eve was also gathering the seeds of every plant in the garden, including the new ones God was creating, hiding the seeds in bundles, and hanging them on the joists and rafters in the hut. The humans were preparing to return to Earth.

God did not believe the angel-serpent, knowing that the latter nursed a grudge against Adam. The next day He looked into the home of the humans. Seeing bundles of seeds hanging around the entire hut, two shovels set aside in the corner, along with a hoe, rake, and even a fishing lure (the angels had once presented it to God as an earthly souvenir), God lost heart and lost his interest in creating. After all, for whom was He doing this?

God tried to talk them out of leaving:

"What do you lack here? You're living in warmth, in wealth, with food and lodging included. But on Earth you'll have to start from scratch. Hasn't your experience taught you anything at all?"

"This time we'll be more prudent and take into account the mistakes of developed civilization," Adam pledged without interrupting his work—he was crafting a fishing net just then. "And we won't be starting from nothing, not from the Stone Age, but from an advanced stage of development."

Eve did not want to listen to anything. She seemed moonstruck and only talked about what she would plant on Earth, what cattle she'd have. She would also have a hen and a dog to guard the livestock and she would bear children and bring them up carefully, lest they become indolent. Her eyes no longer betrayed the former pain and desire to die and forget everything—now hope shone like stars in her eyes.

And God backed down.

The humans departed from Eden at dawn. Eve walked in front, sacks of seeds over her shoulders. Adam led a cow by a rope tied to its horns. It

had caterpillar tracks powered by little electric motors built into its hooves to prevent them from sinking into the earthly mud, and antenna-horns to pick up natural sound waves. With God's help Adam had made some of the improvements himself. On its back the cow bore garden implements and a wooden plow with a copper blade. Behind the humans ran a hen-dog. It didn't have a name yet, since God had molded it on the last day, combining a hen and a dog into one animal that could both bark and lay eggs.

God's eyes followed the humans for a long time, until they disappeared beyond the horizon. Gradually, the humans became nothing but a memory. So, too, faded His second youth, His outburst of creativity, and His decisiveness to turn against the Chancellery. He didn't notice that He was now spending most of His time on the garish throne once again. Behind the tall back of the throne the choir of angels lined up hurriedly, and someone asked by habit: "What was the score yesterday?" He was answered with a whisper: "It's the Copper Age on Earth; they're not playing soccer yet." The Minister of Ceremony waved his new baton:

"Glory to the Almighty! Glory! Glory! Glory!"

Supported under the arms by angels, God slid from the throne, shuffled to the Universal Clock, and pulled up the cast-iron weight. As soon as the sun peeped out above the horizon, He pushed the pendulum.

And it was everything all over again.

Translated by Anatole Bilenko

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Eye of the Abyss¹

Valerii Shevchuk

CHAPTER FOURTEEN,

which describes the island on which Mykyta and his disciples lived

There were six disciples. Except for Teodoryt, who had brought us here, each disciple approached us in turn, bowing and introducing himself. The first identified himself as Antonii. It was he who had helped us clamber onto dry land out of the water. A lad taller than the rest came up to us next. He identified himself as Symeon; the fourth was Ievahrii, the fifth—Nykyfor, and the sixth—Heorhii. We, too, gave our names, while Teodoryt announced why we came. After the ceremony Antonii, who evidently served as elder here, informed us that we would now be left alone, as they each have their duties—we were thus free to do as we pleased, which is to say, we were to find a place to stay. If we had provisions, we could eat independently. If not, we were to partake of the communal meal, spare as it was: meatless, served once daily, at eventide.

“Wherefrom do you obtain food?” Sozont asked.

“The Lord provides,” Antonii replied. “That is to say, people who visit here bring alms. If that does not suffice, we buy it with the money left for us as charity by the visitors.”

“In that case,” Sozont stated solemnly, “we shall donate what we have brought. And we shall partake of the communal meal.”

“Your decision is noble,” said Antonii. “Brother Ievahrii will escort you to the kitchen. There, you can free yourselves of what you wish to be free.”

Bowing, he promptly departed. One by one the others followed. Ievahrii stayed with us. Stout, with stubby legs, he was the shortest of the lads; his bare arms were muscular, though, like a warrior’s. His head was round, like a kettle, and his eyes dark, with remarkably thick and black brows. One could not say his eyes were lifeless, like Teodoryt’s: quite the contrary, they were alert and animated. His dark, curly head of hair was lovingly groomed.

Asking permission first, Sozont at once besieged him with questions.

“Are we allowed to walk everywhere freely?”

“Everywhere, except past the fence. Climbing up to the saint is

¹ The first part of this novel appeared in Volume 1 (2004) of *Ukrainian Literature*.

forbidden,” Ievahrii answered in his bass voice.

“Is it possible to stay near the fence in order to view the saint’s platform?”

“That is allowed.”

“Where did the rooster come from? Do you, perchance, breed chickens?”

“The rooster’s crowing announces the time. At dawn, we rise with his crowing. Later, it bids us to the saint’s morning sermon and to the meal—the rest of his crowing is meaningless.”

We headed away from shore along a well-trodden path; I gathered that this was how others arrived here, as well. Sozont seemed to overhear my thoughts.

“Is this the only path by which people can reach you?” he inquired.

“The only one.”

“Will we be guided in our return?”

“If you do not wish to remain here, you will be guided, according to your wish.”

“Teodoryt made it known why I arrived here. To chronicle the saint’s life, to circulate it among Christian folk. Will I be able to commune with the blessed one himself?”

“If he so wills. Although he rarely descends from his pole, and he rarely participates in exchanges with strangers. We, his disciples, serve to facilitate communication with the righteous one.”

“So how does he heal the infirm?”

“He has refused to heal diseases of the flesh. Spiritual ones—through prayer. For that, the one ailing is led past the fence to the pole. The blessed one prays, without descending.”

“Is there potable water on the island? As far as I can surmise, the water in the swamp is not suitable for drinking.”

“Before, there was no potable water,” Ievahrii told us. “It was carried from afar, across the swamp, or those coming here were instructed to bring water with them. Since there was a constant need for it, the blessed one petitioned the Lord to provide water, as He once did for the thirsty Israelites in the desert. That is when the wellspring that you crossed in the middle of the Eye of the Abyss was formed. The water in it is pure and sweet. We draw from it, stocking the keg beside the refectory. This is what we, the disciples of the saint, do: standing one next to the other, we pass buckets. Visitors carry that water to the kitchen, until the kegs are filled.”

“May I record the stories you, his disciples, tell us?”

“Teodoryt remembers tales about the saint most credibly. Although, if Antonii agrees, we can tell quite a few stories as well. But Teodoryt must verify everything. That is why it is better for Teodoryt to tell the stories himself. Antonii can corroborate, as well.”

“Teodoryt has shared not a few along the way. Are there those among the disciples of the venerable one who can read and write?”

“Only Antonii.”

“So that whatever I record, Antonii must read?”

“He will read it to Teodoryt, who will verify.”

“How does Teodoryt know stories about the saint when he is blind? He did not see what transpired and he cannot read about it?”

“The blessed one himself has related the stories to him. And Teodoryt never forgets what he hears. He never alters a narrative. He repeats word for word, exactly what the saint has recounted.”

“If you do not possess a memory such as Teodoryt’s, how were you able to corroborate him?”

“The Venerable Father himself has verified, not we.”

“Do you have the Scriptures here? Do you read them?”

“The Venerable Father knows the Scriptures by heart. Antonii knows not as much. Teodoryt knows what he heard from them both. We know what we heard from the three—actually, from Antonii and Teodoryt.”

“Only these two are allowed to approach the saint?”

“Rarely it can be one of us, when the platform needs to be mended, or the walls of the saint’s place of standing. Or when he hails one of us himself.”

Meantime, we arrived at the kitchen. The island was overgrown with rather tall trees: alders, birches, a number of pines on slender, golden trunks. Bushes of alder grew below. The island had been built up well above the level of the swamp and thus it was quite dry.

Ievahrii took his leave and departed. He let us know that if any questions arose, we could approach him or the other disciples of the blessed one, and query without reservation. Overall he made a fair impression. There was not within him that darkness such as we perceived in Teodoryt. He answered questions directly, clearly, without being suggestively abstruse—this was a simpler soul. In my thoughts I was astonished at Sozont’s composure after the frightful tragedy that had befallen Kuzma in the Eye of the Abyss—he behaved as if Kuzma had never existed and as if there were no terrifying puzzle concerning his death. Moreover, he had at once proceeded with his habitual probing, and had already questioned one of Mykyta’s acolytes. Whereas I could not suppress the tremor in my being. My ears still reverberated with Kuzma’s screams. Thus I listened to the exchange between Sozont and Ievahrii with only half an ear, so that perhaps I am not delivering it accurately now. Although my memory, I believe, is no worse than Teodoryt’s.

The cook was a one-eyed fellow. He was clad in peasant garb. His face and hands were almost black—from the smoke or from the sun. The kitchen had no enclosure: the kettle was set directly into the masonry of a fireplace

with a tall chimney. He took the food from us without a word. Lifting a wooden lid, which we had not noticed in the ground at first, he carried the food into a small cellar. Two rather large barrels stood there. For drawing water, there were spigots near the bottom of the barrels: a larger one, for pouring water into a bucket that stood right there, and a smaller one, possibly for filling a smaller container. Pulling out a small cup, Sozont asked the cook's permission to drink. The man waved his hand without replying. We drank water from the bucket using Sozont's cup. The water was indeed sweet, with no hint of mud. Sozont tried chatting with the cook, posing innocent questions, but the cook affixed his one, suddenly enlivened eye upon the deacon and signaled for us to leave. Clearly, he was either mute or had taken a vow of silence.

Left to our own devices, we embarked on exploring the island. Until now, we had not met anyone, though we had heard rustling in the brush. We began checking behind every bush, and were astonished to discover that the island was populated with a most peculiar assortment of freaks and cripples: we saw the noseless, the armless, and the blind; we saw cretins with heavy, obtuse features; dwarfs; flat-faced beings with narrow, crack-like slits for eyes; men, youths, and boys with growths on their legs, backs, faces, some with red splotches on their faces, at times swollen and blackened—I believe this is known as wolf's meat. We saw a lad with six fingers and toes: noticing us, he stopped, his thick lower lip hanging open in wonder. These were all creatures of the male sex. Seeing us, some of them hid or ran off; others, stunned, stared in our direction without moving. They were dressed every which way, usually in dark rags. Most were barefoot. Only a few had unimaginably old shoes or bast sandals. Here and there we came across lairs fashioned of hay, tree branches—forming the frame—and pine needles. Our first excursion took us in a circle along the island's shore, where we found no buildings.

Ievahrii, of course, had told us the truth: swamps surrounded the island on all sides. An unenlightened traveler could neither get to this place nor leave it. At the same time, we felt—at least Sozont did, he was always sensitive to such things (so he whispered to us)—that someone was persistently tracking us. Later, Sozont quietly warned us not to talk about what we had seen or heard for the time being, as it could reach the ears of him who was sniffing us out. To make certain, we doubled back, reversing our steps several times, but we did not spy the tracker. We only heard a quickly receding rustling. It might have been one of the island's freaks, burning with curiosity about the new arrivals, after all. Pavlo and I longed to discuss all the strange, peculiar things we had witnessed here, but Sozont again forbade us, and here I understood that like every hunter or scout he was quite a vigilant and cautious man. Keeping in mind what had happened to Kuzma (how could one forget?) we had no other choice. What irked me

most, and what I wanted to consider first, was Ievahrii's statement that we would leave this place when we wished. What he had in mind, I could not fathom. I was surprised, too, that so far, aside from Mykyta's five disciples (the sixth was the blind one), we had met not a single normal person.

"We ought now to pay our respects to Mykyta!" Sozont said when we returned to the spot from which our walk around the island had begun, that is, to the kitchen. We set out along the well-trodden path. Soon we reached a fence, crudely assembled, like a wicker enclosure, out of branches, brush, and reeds. Beyond we saw creatures of the fair sex. They were sitting, standing, and lying on mats. Like those we had seen in the bushes, they, too, were maimed and freaky: crooked, blind, noseless, bow-legged, dwarfs, cretins with squinty, puss-filled eyes—clad in incredible rags, they were dirty, with uncombed hair, and frightened. Spotting us, some of them shrieked and sprang under the enclosure to hide, while others stood motionless, staring at us, awestruck. Like a blossom amid dung, an attractive, slender and graceful maiden stood out among them, with neatly combed hair, dressed exactly as were Mykyta's disciples—that is, in a linen habit.

"Come nigh, Sister," Sozont addressed her, stepping closer to the wicker enclosure. "I would like to ask you a few questions."

But, shaking her head sharply, the maiden turned away. Sozont shrugged, sighed, and returned to the path. We set out again. Presently, we saw Mykyta's place of standing: two pines growing from the same root. Solid, golden-barked, and massive, probably centurians, they were cut at a height of approximately thirty-and-then-some elbow lengths. A log platform was hammered thereon; a rail fashioned likewise of logs, though narrower, surrounded it. Upright corner logs supported a reed-covered roof. Openings between the walls and roof were veiled with blinds woven of cattails; the hut itself was small, as tall as the height of a man, and about five elbow lengths wide. A sturdy ladder led up to the hut. It was crafted of two sapling trunks, in which grooves were carved; steps were fastened in the grooves. The entry, as well, was screened with cattail blinds, except for a round opening, the width of a human face. A face, rugged and shaggy like Sozont's, was thrust into the opening. Only the eyes, a broad nose, and the narrow strip of a forehead were visible. Approaching closer, we saw a fence of posts, actually a palisade with gaps between the spiked poles, though even a child could not have squeezed through the gaps. A deer hide was nailed onto one of the posts. A few villagers hung around the gate. Folks milled around inside the enclosure, as well. I believe they were Mykyta's disciples.

"First, we will pray to the saint," Sozont advised.

We quickened our gait. Upon reaching the peasants we kneeled, praying. Beholding us reciting prayers, the peasants began crossing themselves. After praying, we arose. Only now were we able to see what

was occurring in the yard: all of Mykyta's disciples were there. A pauper was holding on to one of the cut-pine posts. He was sobbing.

"What is going on?" Sozont asked one of the peasants.

"This man, named Joseph, has slain a number of people in their homes, on the road, assailing folks in villages, along roadways," the peasant explained. "And so we resolved to root him out. As we hunted him, he came here, to this sacred place."

And we heard a rasping, high-pitched voice. A furry head, thrust into the opening of the blind in the door, spoke out: "Fresh arrivals are here! Evince who you are! Wherefrom, and why have you come to me?"

Joseph raised his tear-stained face. He declared in a nasal voice: "I am Joseph, a thief. I have effected only evil. I have come here to atone for my sins."

"And you, folks, what have you said to this? Repeat everything for those who have just arrived."

"We said that you, Reverend Father, should surrender this thief to us. We will try him in our people's court. He deserves to die a miserable death."

"I have not had a chance to have a word with you, my children. Now I shall speak," Mykyta exclaimed. "God brought him here, willing his penitence, not I. He was placed here by God. If you can, break into the yard and take him. I myself cannot surrender him to you or tell my disciples to—I fear that the Lord has sent him to me."

"We will not seize him without your will, Father, not to act against you," a peasant said. "But punish him with devout prayers—we have no other defense against him."

"God shall punish him, not I," Mykyta proclaimed. "And not from my prayers, but from yours!"

And the peasants fell to their knees, and lifting up their arms they prayed. We, too, kneeled, though we did not lift our arms. Nor did we pray. This did not concern us. Mykyta's furry head, eyes blazing, stuck out of the opening. Hearing something crashing behind me, I looked around and saw the cripples, the freaks, the infirm, and the downtrodden approaching from behind trees and bushes, entering the clearing where we all stood. They ran out and fell to their knees, raising quite a racket: ba-a-ahing, me-e-ehing, mooing, screeching, some whining hoarsely, some faintly—naturally, only creatures of the male sex appeared. Within the enclosure Mykyta's disciples kneeled at once, as if following a command, simultaneously lifting their arms.

And the thief stopped crying. He stood, staring with eyes wide open: genuine horror burned in those eyes. The crowd was already going mad: it wept, howled, yelped in screeching, whining voices, some beating their bodies to the ground, some tearing at their hair, others thumping fists into

their chests so violently that an echo resounded, some scratching their already dreadful faces with their nails. I glanced at our Pavlo. Frightened, I nudged Sozont: Pavlo's face had turned blue, the hue of a corpse. Foaming at the mouth, he hit the ground as he stood. His teeth chattered, his body writhed, his spine bent like a bow. Sozont grabbed a stick and inserted it between his teeth. He then pressed him to the ground.

Meantime, the gate creaked. A calm and collected Antonii passed through.

"Let him be," he told Sozont. "The blessed one has taken notice."

Abruptly, he yelled at the freaks and the cripples who were still going mad: "Enough! Enough, I said!"

And suddenly, from behind his belt, he pulled out a whip and cast lashes around him. Wailing, the freaks and cripples quickly scattered like mice, in a moment vacating the clearing. Only we and the peasants remained. Pavlo lay still, sleeping. This time, his attack was brief.

"Thank you for your prayers, children," the furry head in the opening said. "And now go ye with God. I have been summoned by Him to prayer. Pray to Him! Morning and noon and evening and night: according to your prayers, such shall be your reward. Amen!"

And the face disappeared. The peasants scratched their heads. An elder amongst them said uncertainly: "Shall we go, or not?"

Another replied: "Yea, we should prob'ly go."

A third ventured: "Let's wait a li'l beyond the swamp. We can catch the thief when he runs out."

They left, and Sozont whispered into my ear: "Stay with Pavlo. I will escort them out." And he shouted to the peasants: "Hold on! I will walk a bit with you!"

He left. Only now did I notice that the sun was getting hot. Pavlo lay unprotected, so I pulled him to the fence into the shade. Sitting next to him, I was able to look about the premises better through the openings between the poles of the palisade. Under one of the posts the thief stood, praying. From his shoulders hung the deer pelt. A grave, marked with a birch cross and covered with turf, rose under another pole. Evidently, Mykyta's mother was buried there. In the enclosure stood a small hovel, where Mykyta's disciples were probably now hiding—not one of them was in the yard. The yard itself was well-trampled. Grass grew only along the edges under the palisade. Unplastered, crudely fashioned of logs, the hovel stood under a roof thatched of reeds; the windows could be drawn shut. One of the window shutters was open and I saw the back of one of Mykyta's acolytes; actually, the linen of his habit. It wavered for a moment and disappeared from my field of vision. The door creaked open. Antonii appeared. He walked lamely across the yard, stepped through the gate, and stood next to me.

“He hasn’t awakened yet?” he asked calmly.

“I’ve just pulled him into the shade,” I said. I did not want Antonii to think that I was spying on them.

“Where is the third one?”

“He is escorting the villagers a bit,” I explained. For some reason, I felt a quiet sadness filling me.

“He wishes to leave the sacred place with them?” Antonii asked with feigned indifference.

I glanced at him briefly: why should that trouble him? “I do not believe so,” I replied. “He is obeying a duty to record the life of St. Mykyta. So he is questioning folks about him.”

Pavlo’s chest rose evenly. He was sound asleep. At moments his face twitched, even smiled—he must have been dreaming.

“Who willed him to do that?” Antonii asked with the same feigned indifference. He sat by the palisade, leaning against it with his back.

“Perchance, the holy fathers of Kyiv,” I said. “I do not know!”

“Is he not your friend?” asked Antonii, regarding me intently.

Sorrow bore into me more and more. It happens at times: though weaker, pervading only the senses, it is similar to Pavlo’s seizures. Everything appears fine, everything seems ordinary, and suddenly a stifling, dark tide rolls over, flooding me, oppressively wearying my spirit, rendering me idle and drained. I then sit, staring at one spot, seeing nothing as I attend my peculiar inner tumult. The heart feels calm, though apprehensive, as before a storm, and I feel serene, though ever more tense and lackluster.

“He is not a friend of mine,” I stated, “since I am traveling from Zhytomyr while he and Pavlo, from Kyiv—I did not know either of them before I joined them in Zhytomyr.”

“Is it true that you transcribed the Gospel? One book, or the entire New Testament?”

“A translation of the four gospels, arranged in chapters and headings, presented in compliance with the complete, twelve-month cycle of Orthodox sacred readings. I translated this book, copied it and designed many ornamental illustrations, headpieces, and illuminated initials. Next to these I lay miniatures set in adorned marginalia. And before that, back in 1554, I illuminated the Acts of the Apostles. Vasyl Zahorovsky, my patron, later acquired it from me. Oh, what a goodly piece of work that was! From morning ’til night, Monday to Saturday, month to month, year to year. Many years, Brother!”

“Why do you speak of it with such sadness?” Antonii asked warmly.

“The work has drained me, like water drained out of a cup—it has sucked the strength out of me like marrow from a bone. My bones and the vessel of my being have dried up, cracked, and hollowed. The vessel is there, but no water. I know not if this interests you, Brother, but I do know

that I shall never scribe nor illuminate anything like it again: I do not wish to execute anything worse, and I am unable to produce anything like it.”

“No need to,” Antonii replied brusquely. “It means that you have effected that which you were to effect in this world.”

“You see, the thing is, Brother,” I smiled confidently, not knowing myself why I suddenly took to being frank with him, “I am incapable of anything any more. Do you understand? No-thing-at-all!”

“Trust!” Antonii stated curtly, rising. “If you have faith, all your petitions and desires will be rewarded!”

And he walked toward the gate, calm and distant, while I regretted my words scattered in vain: was I not casting pearls before swine? Antonii opened the squeaky gate and entered the enclosure.

“Father Mykyta! Father Mykyta!” the thief was yelling from the pole.

The furry head appeared in the round opening. “Why are you disturbing me in my praying?” Mykyta asked.

“I wish to ask you: when do you will me to depart?” the robber shouted.

“Will you return to evil deeds?” the head asked.

“That is not the departure I speak of, Father! I sense my end is approaching!” he shouted.

“In that case, do as you see fit!” the face said, and disappeared.

And here something remarkably startling happened: I saw Antonii approach the thief with a measured gait. A knife appeared in his hand who knows from where; he plunged it into the thief’s back. The thief yelped and fell to the ground.

Antonii extracted the knife from his body, calmly wiped it clean with the evildoer’s clothes, shoved it behind his belt, and slowly, stepping somewhat shakily, walked to the hovel, in front of which stood the rest of Mykyta’s disciples.

“Bury him!” Antonii said calmly. “He has received that which he petitioned from the Lord.”

And he went into the hovel. Teodoryt hid in the doorway behind him. The rest of the disciples, chatting and joking as if about a nice plaything, walked together to the pole. Two of them grasped the thief by the legs, two others by the arms. They dragged him out of the yard.

“So full of human blood,” Symeon said. “Heavy as a rock.”

I sat under the palisade, as stiff as if smitten with tetanus.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN,

in which the wayfarer's communion is retold—their reflections about what had been revealed; Sozont's monologue about the game is presented; an evening repast at the island refectory is described

Pavlo awoke not long before Sozont's return. At once he inquired: "Where is the thief? I do not see him by the pole."

Not wishing to shock him after his seizure, I simply said: "The thief has died."

Pavlo's smiling face beamed. "I beheld his death in a dream."

And he retold the exchange between the thief and Mykyta, saying that the thief had simply died after the exchange. Also, he saw peasants returning to recover the corpse of the thief. They would show it to those who had sent them after him. The peasants had supposedly approached the gate, shouting: "Father, release our enemy's corpse. Because of him, none of the surrounding villages knew peace."

"He Who brought him to me shall with a multitude of heavenly warriors take him—pure through repentance—away! Do not sadden me!" replied Mykyta.

Afterwards, the peasants had departed. "Was it not so?" Pavlo asked.

"Exactly!" we heard a voice. Antonii stood nearby, smiling faintly. "Or did you see it differently?" he asked, his eyes meeting mine. I sensed blind darkness filling me.

And my tongue unwittingly pronounced: "It occurred as he described." And to justify my lie, I added: "With a few alterations."

"I expect both of you will receive deliverance from St. Mykyta. Recount the miracle to your friend, the hagiographer," said Antonii. In his voice I detected an undertone of mockery, or perhaps a challenge.

Meanwhile, Sozont approached. To Antonii's question as to where he had been, Sozont quietly replied that he had questioned the peasants whether they had heard any stories about miracles performed by St. Mykyta. They related that the blessed one possesses the gift of prophecy. A rumor had spread throughout the region once: famine and plague will strike in a year, and soon locusts without number will come—the saint had prophesied this.

And thus, the peasants claimed, it came to pass; there were locusts two years ago, and a famine and plague last year.

"That is true," Antonii said. "I can attest to it."

The sun slanted westward as all this was being told, and Sozont asked Antonii how they would be summoned to the refectory.

"By the rooster's crowing," Antonii replied. "At one crow—you go; two crows, the women go."

"Who was that maiden we saw in the women's camp?" Sozont asked.

“Our sister in spirit,” Antonii said. “And the spiritual betrothed of the saint, Marta.”

“Can one who does not allow woman to approach him be betrothed?” Sozont asked.

“He is not the betrothed of Sister Marta; rather, she is his betrothed,” Antonii explained calmly. “He knows no more about Sister Marta spiritually than he does about the other maimed, infirm souls. She serves in the women’s camp in his name. It is the same as virgins who seek betrothal to the Lord. They see themselves as such. But does the Lord honor betrothal to them all—there would be too many. At the same time, their desire is not denied.”

“Is Marta also sick?” Sozont inquired.

“All of us here are in our own way afflicted. The saint has imposed a penance upon her to provide succor to the lame. And so she is striving to effect what is willed.”

“Why have so many maimed and afflicted assembled here?” Sozont asked.

“They have been abandoned by relatives. They cannot live in peace, they are so grievously tormented. The Lord did say: ‘Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!’¹ Fulfilling this commandment, St. Mykyta does not banish them. For they know not worldly enticements and temptations. They are, therefore, closer to God than those who live in peace, enmeshed in the snares of worldly enticements.”

“Why are women kept fenced in, like cattle?” Sozont asked.

“For they are the Lord’s herd. Free, they would go astray, like those who are mentally lame. Sister Marta guards them against that.”

“And do not the men penetrate the camp secretly, at least at night?”

“At night, everybody here sleeps. And if someone attempts to penetrate it, the Eye of the Abyss swallows him.”

“You cast him into it?”

“No, he goes of his own will, led by the power of repentance.”

“Are not children born of this?”

“Oh, no! These people are not for propagation. The Lord has seen to that.”

“Forgive me my curiosity, Brother,” Sozont said.

“Uncertainty is better revealed than hidden,” Antonii responded. At that moment a rooster crowed.

At once we set out to the refectory, since after only a light breakfast and no midday meal we were quite hungry. All the crippled and maimed

¹ Note in the margin of the manuscript: “Matthew 11:28.”

had turned out from behind bushes and trees, walking, crawling, limping onto the path, in an instant crowding it by forming a long line. We ended up at the tail end, not pressing close but standing a bit apart. As no one stood behind us (I do not think anyone could have heard us), Deacon Sozont delivered a sermon-lecture about the game. I shall recount it from memory, in my own words:

“I know not if what we are witnessing and attending seems peculiar to you, but I believe that these people are playing an intricate game which I have not yet been able to comprehend sufficiently. I see nothing evil in the game, as a man’s life, according to the will of God, is composed of two parts: work and play. Working, man earns his daily bread for sustenance, and at play man entertains himself. No wonder the ancient Romans demanded two things: bread and spectacle, that is to say, work and play. Bread sustains man through life, while games provide a fascination with life; work exhausts man, and play lures and captivates. Play, my dear Brothers, is more primeval than work. God created Adam while playing, and Eve was created for Adam’s entertainment. Children were conceived for the amusement of each and both of them; and it was a game that led their children to the slaying. Before arriving on earth, Adam and Eve knew only play; cast out of paradise they learned to work. Work is self-enslavement, while play is entertainment one need not be enslaved to. To make the drudgery of work less unpleasant, man masks it in play: singing while toiling, inventing, altering something, thus lending novelty to enslavement, which means: he begins playing at work—turning it into pleasure, enjoyment. All learned men, all inventors, all lovers of books and writers, dancers, gamesmen, storytellers are like children at play. So that the more one lives, the more entangled one becomes in the game. Soldiers ply battles and competition, bidding Death along with the implements of killing into their games; priests have transformed temples into play places, for where there is ceremony there is a game. All holidays are play, all festivities, weddings, funerals, families, spring rites, harvest rites, etcetera. Toying with ideas, philosophers erect thought structures, song writers—songs and rhymes, musicians—delightful sounds, builders—buildings; play captivates man ever more. Play, my dear Brothers, gives one the will to live; kings wield games, politicians, judges and pages play games while investigating a crime; heretics and schismatics, the originators of agnosticism and sects sport games. One game is sacred with tradition, another breaks all tradition; one game, my dear Brothers, is considered benevolent, as it bears no evil, while another is wicked because it spreads evil. Competition on Mount Olympus was a game, all Parnassi are filled with amusement. Evildoers, deceivers, tricksters, knaves, defilers, adulators, connivers, glorifiers and censurers, heretics and saints, tyrants, thieves, warriors, detesters, prophets, merchants, usurers, misers, money collectors, land barons—all play games,

because without play man cannot survive. And because the greatest of all players is the Lord, God, Who while amusing Himself created the world; all creation involves play. It was He who wove an earthly web, interlacing the world with threads of life-giving waters, enabling life to begin. And so heaven, hell, and life on earth are a game. Grand, incomprehensible to the human mind, but a game nevertheless. Play ends only where man toils for profit. Even a cat plays with the mouse before eating it, though often the game of prey and consumer lasts all too briefly. And Death, after all, dallies with man, snatching and releasing him, or hatching disease, which is a kind of match with Death. Death is instrumental in the nourishment of all living things: a bird kills caterpillars, insects; birds of prey—predators; insects and caterpillars kill plants, growing plants absorb the sap of decaying, dead plants or live creatures for nutriment, or from manure, and manure is dead life. The wolf ravages sheep, sheep eat grass, grass consumes the dead wolf and sheep—without killing and destruction, that is, without Death, there can be no existence, and therefore no game. Work, after all, is also the servant of Death, as it provides nourishment for man, and nourishment involves killing. Work, therefore, is the science of annihilation in the name of consumption. And so the sole instruments in the hands of God for His eternal, inscrutable game with us is the game itself and Death. These are the two incontrovertible pillars of existence, whether we like it or not.”

“And the evil spirit?” Pavlo asked.

“Samuel had spoken of it,” replied Sozont. ““When the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that He shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.””

“So then the evil spirit is indeed from God?” I asked.

““Not a pace without His grace,’ that is to say, God is in everything, and everything is in Him. The evil spirit is one of God’s gaming dice.”

“You do not share Kuzma’s notion that God and the devil are mutually contradictory and independent of each other’s will?” I asked.

“I repeat: Satan is one of the dice in God’s great game.”

“But in a game everything is unreal, devised, relative,” Pavlo said.

“And I believe that reality is most real in a game. Reality itself is an outcome of a game.”

“You express peculiar thoughts,” Pavlo said. “Is it not irreverence labeling God a player?”

“I have already said: I see nothing evil in a game, and if so, I do not contradict nor judge God’s game, which is the world and reality. The game itself, as I have said, can be either good or evil. Reason was bestowed upon man to enable man to distinguish good from evil, and in the end to effect good or evil, which means playing a good game or an evil game.”

“Was Kuzma correct in saying that there is a contradiction in the love of God and love of one’s elders?” Pavlo asked, his kind, blue eyes widening.

“There is no contradiction,” Sozont replied quietly. “Jesus Christ said that the love of God supersedes the love of one’s elders, and this is the first commandment in the first line; love of one’s elders is the first commandment in the third line. That does not mean that there is a contradiction here. St. Symeon was able to love completely both God and his mother, not infringing on the status of either, as he had both the time and ability.”

“You mean St. Mykyta?” Pavlo said.

“The story of the mother and the saint is from a book,” Sozont stated calmly. “Taken from the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter. Almost all the stories about Mykyta duplicate the life of Symeon, with small variations.”

“But this might mean something other,” Pavlo said. “These folk are followers of Symeon. Thus Mykyta lives exactly as did he. Perchance, this is a symeonian sect?”

“I, too, believe that,” Sozont declared. “Although I have not yet come across any such sect.”

“You have not heard of one yet,” I entered the discourse, “because it is here, and has not yet spread. That is, the founder of the sect and his disciples are in one place, on this island.”

Sozont regarded me favorably. “You have a sound mind, Brother,” he said warmly. “And so I say that these people have devised an intricate and not completely comprehensible game. But I have learned one thing for certain: Mykyta has not performed a single miracle of his own.”

“What about the marvel with Kuzma or the one with the thief?”

“The miracle with Kuzma we need to reflect upon, while the marvel of the thief Brother Mykhailo can elucidate. I, likewise witnessed it all: I hid behind a tree.”

Briefly, I described how Antonii murdered the robber. Pavlo stared at us with surprised, wide eyes: they were filled with horror.

“And now let us remain silent, my Brothers,” said Sozont. “Mealtime is approaching.”

Scattered around the refectory the cripples and freaks, the dwarfs and mentally lame sat on the ground, each holding a wooden bowl in his lap, a wooden spoon dashing swiftly from mouth to bowl. We waited a bit for the cook to ladle broth to the last. They carried the bowls and spoons with them, leaving their sacks at the camp site. The cook measured our food with a metal cup.

“You did not have to wait for me to feed this brood,” he said in a hollow voice. “They are idlers. You brought provisions.”

“We are in no haste,” Sozont said. “Nor are we scornful towards these poor souls. As Jeremiah said: ‘And the most proud shall stumble and fall.’”

“Sacred words you are uttering, Father. But one’s patience can snap at times,” the cook declared.

“Are they baleful?” asked Sozont.

“No! But looking at them day after day one forgets what kind of people they are. It seems at times that there are no other people.”

“And the saint’s acolytes?” Sozont asked.

“Well, they do not come here. Unless they are bringing someone, like you. I have no time to go anywhere. I work continually.”

“What keeps you here?” Sozont asked while inspecting what was ladled into his bowl.

“Well, I have sinned. So the saint has imposed a penance. I will tow my line until the frost, and after, may it be done with.”

“And how do these hapless ones survive winters?”

“They scatter across the frozen swamps, trudging through villages seeking charity. They return with the warmth, while the ice is still solid.”

The cook regarded us seriously with his one eye. And suddenly that eye winked at us. “To tell you the truth,” he whispered, “I should not be chatting with you. Do not tell anyone.”

“Have faith!” Sozont responded connivingly.

The food we were served was peculiar: herbs boiled in water—wild sorrel, orach, or both together (both plants grew on the island), unseasoned but for a bit of salt. A few millet grains floated in the gruel—evidently the millet we had contributed. We even got a piece of stale, dry bread, so hard that even when soaked our teeth could barely mash it. But we were hungry, so we gulped it all with no less enthusiasm than the crippled and freakish did. Our bellies more or less filled. Feeling weary, we strove only to reach our camp site. We still needed to fashion sleeping mats of branches, weeds and grass, like the ones we saw used here by the settlers.

As we walked past the enclosure to the women’s camp, we saw that Sister Marta had lined everyone up in pairs. Holding a bowl and a spoon, they all waited in front of the gate. Apparently, they were waiting for us to pass. Seeing Marta among the crippled and freakish once again, I recognized the power of the cook’s words: communing with such, one soon forgets what normal people are like. Marta was no beauty, but in this setting her ordinariness glowed with loveliness, captivating my eye even though I am far from youth and, due to my celibate way of life, have not desired a woman’s charms in some time. Marta openly gazed in our direction with ardent, glittering eyes. Obediently, patiently, with eyes humbly lowered, stood her subjects.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN,

which recounts our meeting Musii, the dwarf, and our evening chats

We lay on the ground to rest a bit before starting to arrange our lairs. Burnished by the evening sun, the saffron bark of the pines glowed alluringly; the grass, weeds, the leaves on the bush nearby shone lustrously. Each stalk glistened, brimming with light.

“Have you noticed, my Brothers, that Mykyta’s disciples have chosen special names for themselves?” said Deacon Sozont. “Antonii was a disciple of Symeon the Pole-sitter, Teodoryt recorded his life story, Symeon Metafrast was the author of the notable ‘Lives of the Saints,’ Ievahrii the Scholastic likewise chronicled the life of Symeon the Pole-sitter, as did Nykyfor of Kalishten and Heorhii Kedry of Constantinople.”

“Your erudition is startling,” I remarked.

“No, it is not. It is unremarkable,” Deacon Sozont modestly contradicted. “Once I have taken upon myself to record the lives of saints, I must at least know those who have fulfilled similar duties before me. Just as a cobbler must know his hammer, rasp, and pliers, a tailor his scissors and needles, a blacksmith his hammers and forge.”

“Why did Mykyta not become Symeon?” I asked.

“If they really are symeonides, then a follower of Symeon should not bear his name, just as Christ’s apostles did not adopt the name of Jesus Christ,” Sozont stated. “Besides, every enlightened Christian is familiar with Symeon the Pole-sitter, yet only elected scribes know his chroniclers. This may, then, have been an act of hypocrisy. Though perhaps not.”

“But that means,” I responded, “that some among them are well acquainted with the writings of the holy priests of our church. That is, they are among the chosen scribes.”

“Either Teodoryt or Antonii,” Sozont reckoned.

“But Teodoryt is blind,” Pavlo countered.

“Perhaps he lost his sight due to excessive reading of sacred texts,” Sozont said. “One thing I know: we are faced more with obscurity than with revelation.”

This conversation was interrupted by a distinct rustling in the bush closest to us. Springing to his feet, Sozont darted into the bush like a bullet. In the next instant, he led out a dwarf, holding him by his ear. The dwarf was barefoot, dressed in sack-like rags, belted with a cord, the ends of which were tattered. His head was overgrown with thick curls.

“Let go my ear!” he wailed.

But Sozont held on to his ear until he brought him to us. Then he let go.

“Why were you hiding there?” he asked sternly. “Were you spying on us?”

Blinking, the dwarf scratched his ear. "I wanted to have a look at you," he said, his voice full of pain.

"What is your name?"

"Musii," said the dwarf. "I willed no-o-o evil onto you."

"Then we shall do no evil to you," Sozont said. "Come, sit with us."

Kneeling, the dwarf sat on his heels. He observed us with large, bulging eyes.

"Did you like today's meal?" asked Sozont.

"Oh-h! To-o-oday's supper was go-o-od," the dwarf said, his face beaming. "To-o-oday there was millet in the soup!"

"We brought the millet," Pavlo said.

"I kno-o-ow! We lo-o-ove visito-o-ors!" the dwarf said. "Supper is go-o-od then!"

"Have you lived here long?"

"Lo-o-ong! Chewing bread, here I am! Hee-hee!" We glimpsed his rotted teeth.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Oo-o-oh, I dunno-o-o! I'm o-o-old! As o-o-old as you are! Why should you, so-o-o o-o-old, come here?"

"Why did you come here?"

"Oo-o-h, I did!" the dwarf said. "It's go-od here! They feed us. No-o-o need to beg f'r bread! You, to-o-o, don't want to beg f'r bread?"

"We wish to be healed," Pavlo explained.

"Eh, that's useless! There are so-o many of us, yet no-ot one has been cured by St. Mykyta. He says, he'll cure us when we die, hee-hee!"

"Mykyta said so himself?" asked Sozont.

"Nah, Mykyta sits in his hut. Tho-o-ose around him said that."

"Do people come here often?"

"Nah, not o-often. It's hard to-o get here. Yup! But tho-ose who come do-on't always leave. Yup!"

"What becomes of them?"

"O-o-oh, St. Mykyta helps them..."

"How does he help?" Pavlo asked.

"Like this, by the tail into-o-o the sack, yup!" the dwarf grasped his throat. "Knock-knock—and gone, hee-hee! And into-o-o the Eye—whack, smack," and the dwarf gurgled as if rinsing his throat.

"He murders and drowns them?" Pavlo asked, surprised.

"Nah, no-ot murders...he helps them... yup!"

"But you yourself said." Sozont clasped his throat. "Knock-knock!"

"Aha! Hee-hee! But Mykyta kills no-o-one. Mykyta sits in his hut."

"So, those around him?"

But the dwarf had no chance to respond. His eyes suddenly widened: he lunged, fleeing headlong into the bushes. Looking toward the path, we

spied Mykyta's disciples heading in our direction, all six: Antonii, Teodoryt, Symeon, Ievahrii, Nykyfor, and Heorhii. They turned off the path toward us and made themselves comfortable on the ground.

"What did the dwarf tell you?" Antonii asked calmly.

"Nothing of note. That today's meal was good, thanks to our millet."

"We do not grow or harvest anything, except wild herbs," Teodoryt said, his lifeless eyes glowing. "So we serve and eat what is brought to us as alms. We have no gold, nor reserves of money. The donations we receive are spent on food, which sometimes needs to be purchased."

"Of course," Sozont said.

"We do not summon anyone here, nor do we force anyone to come here—or to stay. People come of their own will. They leave of their own will. We share as Christians. What else did the dwarf say?"

"He said," Sozont replied, "that St. Mykyta has not healed a single cripple or freak."

"He spoke the truth," Teodoryt said, his voice circumspect, easy. "St. Mykyta lives not for the corporeal. Why should he heal people for life in this world? He cures souls that are sorely vexed, flawed. He is a spiritual, not physical, healer. Things physical—crippling, freakishness, a feeble mind, as also health and strength—are endowed by the Lord and we ought not meddle in His will. Spiritually, one progresses on one's own, and here is where St. Mykyta can and does offer succor. But one must come to him in faith, as I have already said."

"The dwarf said that not all who arrive here depart from here," Sozont said. "There are those whom the Eye of the Abyss swallows. Do they die, or are they slain?"

"That, too, is true," Teodoryt stated thoughtfully. "Before your eyes the Eye of the Abyss swallowed Kuzma, who had dishonored God and was passionate in not displaying any faith in the saint. I did not slay him. Some do die here at times, as anywhere else in the world, not having overcome their physical troubles. We slay only those who appeal for that. That is, by the way, how the thief perished in front of Brother Mykhailo. Concur, Brother Mykhailo, that the thief begged the saint for death."

"Thus it was," I said.

"We always do this openly, to have indisputable witnesses. It's never hidden, nor caused by our wrath or insensibility. Besides which, we never slay of our own will; only when the saint sanctions through divination that the doomed one has arrived at his life's end. That is to say, we free that person of needless suffering. What would have happened had the peasants taken the thief, you know yourselves."

He was right: the thief would have been tortured mercilessly and then slain.

"How did the thief learn of the path through the swamp and the Eye of

the Abyss?" Sozont asked.

"Local folk know of the path. They serve as guides for pilgrims. You yourself, Brother Sozont, walked with the peasants to the Eye of the Abyss and saw that they departed with no help from us. This same thief had been here before. He wanted to seize our gold and money, which we never possessed—at least not gold and valuables. He dug up the whole island, even climbed up to the saint and fell off the ladder, breaking a leg. That is when he left with his compatriots."

"Why did the Eye of the Abyss not swallow him?" Pavlo asked.

"We do not venture to give commands to the Eye of the Abyss, but we warn people, just as we warned you and Kuzma. It is in its will to take one or not."

"Evidently, the Eye of the Abyss did not take him," said Symeon, a lad taller than the others, "so as to allow him to come here to do penance, for punishment to be meted out here. And thus it passed."

"We do not wish for misconceptions or distortion," Antonii said. "Therefore, be open with your doubts and thoughts before us. We are open before you."

"Has it ever happened that a visitor was held here against his will?" Sozont asked.

"That never has nor can happen," Teodoryt stated.

"What is the Eye of the Abyss?" I asked, as this interested me most.

"It is that which neither you nor we can fathom," said Teodoryt.

"According to me, it is God's prudent spirit. It restrains us, helpless, before the evil of the world," Heorhii said. He was completely white, with white hair, brows, lashes, white fuzz on his bare arms.

"Has it claimed many?"

"We do not keep track of the dishonorable ones," Teodoryt replied. "Let God keep track of them."

"Did you cast the thief in, also?" Pavlo asked.

"On the island we have only one grave—that of Mykyta's mother. Generally, relatives reclaim those they brought here who die. And when there are no kin, nor friends, we cast the deceased into the Eye of the Abyss."

"Do you throw them in with a weight, or just as they are?" Sozont asked.

"As they are," Teodoryt said.

"And the cadavers never resurface?"

"Not once has that happened," Antonii said. "I imagine a queer aquatic beast lives in the Eye of the Abyss. It was seen only once—Nykyfor saw it. Tell us, Nykyfor."

Nykyfor had a round face with slightly slanted eyes, a flattened nose, and full lips. He recounted how once he had ambled toward the Eye of the

Abyss while contemplating the ways of the Lord. He had stopped at the shore to reflect when suddenly the water churned and a round spine with angled fins surfaced. But this lasted only a moment—the spine disappeared with rings rippling the water. Then everything became still.

“And I believe that that boa constrictor, cured by St. Mykyta, lives in the Eye of the Abyss,” Teodoryt said.

“As you can see,” Antonii said, smiling, “we do not know that for certain ourselves.”

“Were you ever attacked by the beast while fetching water from the lake?” Sozont asked.

“Being aware of that creature or serpent, we fetch water ourselves. And we have never been attacked,” Antonii said. “Are these all your questions?”

“One more,” Sozont declared. “Will the dwarf not be punished for talking so much?”

Surprised, Mykyta’s acolytes exchanged glances.

“Why would we punish him?” Antonii said. “Brother Teodoryt has announced that everything he related is true.”

“But something else about this dwarf unsettles us,” Teodoryt said. “Sister Marta has informed us that he hangs around the women’s camp coaxing one of the dwarfs to come to him. Blunders are severely judged here—wantonness has no place in this hallowed spot.”

“And how shall you punish him if he sins?” Sozont asked.

“We will attempt to teach him discretion,” Antonii said. “You, too, as his acquaintances, can chide him.”

“During the courtship he will be left alone. Punishment will come when and if the blunder is consummated.”

“Who will punish him, and how?” Sozont asked.

“He will punish himself,” Teodoryt stated. “He must leave the island, that is, he will be free to cross the Eye of the Abyss. If he has luck, he will cross, and if not, he will accept his punishment. The Lord, not we, will punish.”

“Your words are clear. They explain everything,” Sozont said. “I have no reason not to believe you.”

“Then let us turn to that for the sake of which we came,” Antonii said. “We came, Brother Sozont, to recount what we know about St. Mykyta for your chronicle. Will you record it, or will you remember it?”

“I have recorded everything related to me until now,” Sozont said, retrieving a leather-bound folio. “Though I have not had time to record all I heard. Shall I read it to you?”

“No,” Antonii said. “Recount what you are familiar with.”

“Fine,” Sozont began to speak. “His childhood and youth in Cherniakhiv, his respite at Zhydachivsky Monastery, his stay in the well and

on the mountain top, his departure to this island and his pole-sitting—these are the themes of his life, and I have recorded them. Now the miracles: his trials, the devil's trick, the saint's mother, Kateryna, his drawing sweet water out of the swamp; the woman who swallowed the snake along with the water, the boa constrictor with the injured eye; the deer slain by the pilgrims—here I have not yet recorded everything. I myself have witnessed two miracles: the death of our fellow-traveler Kuzma, who had failed to demonstrate faith in St. Mykyta; the death, and prior to that, the repentance of the thief; the prophecies of the saint regarding famine, the plague and locusts. That is all.”

Mykyta's disciples listened to the list intently.

“You have presented the themes well, though inadequately,” Teodoryt said. “You do not know everything. So that if you agree, let us kindle a fire here and let each of the saint's acolytes, besides me—I have told mine—relate one of St. Mykyta's miracles. That way we will be able to ascertain if anything was left out of your notes, and you will have a chance to gain assurance that you have effected your duty. Who obliged you to this?”

“I have already told you: the holy fathers of Kyiv. I intend, having copied Kassian's transcript of the Kyiv Lavra Patericon, to add to it interpretations of celebrated miraculous phenomena in the Orthodox Church of our land. This is why I am journeying and troubling people with my inquiries.”

“An act worthy of God you are effecting,” Teodoryt said. “We are glad to be of service.”

All threw themselves into gathering kindling. Soon a fire blazed. We sat around it any which way. The tales began.

Antonii spoke about a soldier, one of Prince Konstantyn Ostrozky's armed attendants, who brought—actually carried on his shoulders, for he was of gigantic build and quite strong—his sick brother. The soldier's name was Spyrydon Chaika. He petitioned the saint for his brother to be cured. The righteous one declined, as he has no desire to cure physical ailments, only spiritual ones. Spyrydon Chaika then declared that his brother's ailment was indeed spiritual, not physical, as in their old age their parents had been tempted by a demon to adopt Arian heresy, and he surmises that his brother suffered due to the sins of his parents. Both progenitors abided in sin. The saint then willed the afflicted one to be brought to the pole. He asked: “Do you renounce the improbity of your elders?”

He did, and the blessed one proceeded: “Do you believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?”

The afflicted one confirmed that he did. Then the blessed one commanded: “Arise. Your brother carried you here, and now you shall have strength enough to carry your brother.”

Reflections of flames flickered across our faces. All listened with rapt

attention. Behind us, something snapped: out of the gloaming in the thicket the crippled, the freaky appeared, their forms like imitations of humans carved out of wood by a master with aberrant taste, stiffening mutely. While observing those still specters in the twilight, I suddenly realized what I had sensed before but was unable to express or voice, though perhaps the idea sounds strange: beauty dwells in orderly, harmonious arrangements, and the better and finer an image is arranged, the more beautiful it is. Embellishing the Peresopnytska Gospel with representations, say, of the Evangelists, I played with white, blue, yellow, red, and green, that is to say with pure pigments, twining ornaments, shapes, depictions of mountains or edifices into a knot of wondrously connected and interlaced lines, containing nothing superfluous or contradictory, attesting to the existence of an eternal truth, which is everlasting beauty. And now, watching these freakish figures—benumbed, nearly dissolved in the dusk while illuminated strikingly with flames, I thought that one can seek and find beauty not only in the youthful, pleasant, pure, perfect, harmoniously blended, but in the old, ruined, monstrous, broken, clashing—and this would not be a mutilated shadow or the converse of beauty; it would, instead, be its surprising variegation. Was this not, I mused, why the Lord sends not only the healthy, the pleasing, full of beauty and strength, the full-blooded and comely into the world, but also the freakish, the maimed, the sick, the clumsy, the feeble, the ugly, the crippled—all this is necessary for one to be able to grasp the multidimensionality of the world: in this way a uniquely profound understanding of it is imparted. This is what I was thinking as my ear harkened the conclusion of a parable recounted by Antonii: gigantic Spyrydon Chaika, a-straddle on his brother's shoulders, a stalwart fellow, was carried by the youth as if he were stuffed with straw instead of weighty flesh and bones. So that in his unfitness a strength was summoned, in some way reminding one of the beauty of the deformed: might is often borne of impotence, while strength is consumed like cloth by moths. Whether this was a miracle or not is not important to me. I was awed by the singularity of the parable itself, concealing a truth which could be interpreted two ways. Spyrydon himself, Antonii continued, crossed the entire swamp on his brother's shoulders, holding in his hand a missive to their parents from the saint. Their parents, upon reading the letter, were ashamed and repented, dispelling the Arians from their property and erecting a new church.

"The power of a spiritual utterance can be immeasurable," Antonii said.

"What town or village were those brothers from?" Sozont asked.

"From the village of Ryzhany," Antonii said. "They still live there. Their parents have met their righteous end."

"I will stop in that village on my return. As I recall, it is in the vicinity of Turchynka."

“So it is,” Antonii said. “Do stop in.”

“Your turn now, Symeon,” Teodoryt said.

Symeon, the tallest among Mykyta’s disciples, stood straight and tall. Looking up, he cleared his throat with a cough, and told a story about Olena Puliavska, a lady from the nearby town of Volodar. She petitioned the saint for prayers, as she was barren. And the venerable one inquired: can peas be found in the kitchen, and if so, to deliver an unshelled pea. Peas there were, and they were delivered with other offerings from that same lady. The saint placed a pea into a dipper filled with water—the water was from the Eye of the Abyss. When the pea puckered up, he prayed over it and sent it to the lady, willing her to swallow it whole. Soon the lady was with child. She bore a son the following year. She wanted to visit the righteous one, bringing her son with her, but upon hearing that women are not allowed to commune with the saint, and since she did not wish to sojourn in the camp nearby, she sent the child with her servants. They were to relay the following: “This, Father, is the fruit of your sacred prayers. Bless him! And if you can, please forward me another pea from my offering.”

This the blessed one effected. The year following, the lady bore another son.

A madness seized her then—she claimed the blessed one to be the father of her sons. She began relating that he had visited her in her dreams for this purpose. The righteous one understood: this was the power of the Devil, not of the Lord, at work here. He vowed to stand on one leg for an entire year, as he had after his first trial. The Lady of Volodar bore no more children. Those she had are alive and well to this day. Sozont can, if he wishes, call upon them.

Sozont was intrigued by the story. “How many years have passed since?” he asked.

“About five,” Symeon said.

“Has any of you seen the children?”

“Yes: Antonii, Ievahrii and I,” Symeon spoke.

“So that at that time there were three disciples with the saint?”

“We were all together already. But Teodoryt could not see, and Nykyfor and Heorhii were wandering from village to village for alms.”

“Do you still seek charity?” Sozont asked.

“We do,” Antonii stated. “We could not survive otherwise, with so many mouths to feed.”

“I shall visit Lady Olena Puliavska. Why did the blessed one believe that the power of the Devil was at work here?”

“Because woman is a vessel of the Devil. The blessed one ought to have remembered that when blessing the pea. That is why he vowed himself to penitence, suffering mightily, tormenting his body,” Antonii stated.

“Bearing children is man’s destiny from God,” Sozont said. “It is

stated in Psalms: ‘Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!’”

“And Hosea said: ‘They have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children...,’ and the blessed one could not nor did he desire to be an adulterer. That is why he accepted it as his transgression and as a warning not to interfere in matters where the Lord acts,” Teodoryt said. “Since then he has not settled issues of barrenness, so as not to have dealings with women.”

“You have convinced me,” Sozont said. “The blessed one acted honorably. Who then was the father of those children?”

“Her husband, with the aid of prayers from the Reverend Father.”

“Then wherein lies the sin of the blessed one?”

“In that a woman’s lips were emboldened to address him sinfully,” Antonii said. “Honor lies with the blessed one—he severed the sin before it became a sin...”

I looked around. The crippled and freakish had crowded around us. Surrounding us from all sides, like a dark wall, they were like night terrors or like devilry behind a circle sketched with inviolable chalk. Their silence added to the feeling of uncertainty and dread. To me it had even appeared that they were not breathing. Even as I was admiring their monstrousness, it seemed that it would suffice for Teodoryt or Antonii to wave a hand and that appalling herd would attack us, shrieking, tearing at our flesh to roast us over the fire for the evening meal. I glanced at my fellow travelers: Sozont was composed, as usual, even pleased about something. He lay by the fire on his side, his arms and legs spread comfortably. Pavlo sat, squatting, his blue eyes sparkling with ardor—the tales, obviously, had completely captivated him and he saw nothing around him. The flames rose high, evenly. Once in a while Mykyta’s disciples added brush to the fire. Only now did I notice that several dwarfs were supplying the brush, but he with whom we had communed—Musii—was not among them.

“Indeed, you are recounting truly instructive tales,” said Sozont.

“From those tales we learn to abide in piety,” Teodoryt said. Reddish flashes of flame reflected eerily in his blind eyes. “Your turn, Ievahrii, to tell a tale!”

“What can one say about the ineffable feats of the saint?” Ievahrii said. “They transcend human power, and it is impossible to describe them. Though perhaps I can share this...”

And he recounted how from his long standing an abscess developed on the righteous one’s other leg. It oozed blood, completely staining one of the pine trunks. The blood flowed and flowed as if the blessed one’s body were an inexhaustible source. Yet this did not divert him from his godly intentions: he suffered bravely. He was forced to show his abscess for the following reason: one day a priest from Zhytomyr arrived at the hallowed

place. He was a kind man, inspired by God. He said, “I seek the truth—that truth, to which mankind is drawn. And so, I ask, pray tell: are you a man or a fleshless being?”

And the venerable one inquired: “Why do you ask this of me?”

And the priest said: “I heard about you. I heard that you do not eat and did not drink for a long time. That only now do you drink a bit, but very little, and that you do not sleep. All of these are natural things for man. Man cannot exist without food, sufficient drink, and sleep.”

And something that had never happened before happened then: for the first time ever, the venerable one willed the priest, that is, one of the newcomers, to ascend the pole. He allowed his putrid abscess full of maggots on one leg as well as the bloody leg (the blood flowing unceasingly) to be viewed.

And the priest was astonished—how could this martyr stand on his own with such wounds?

“Why do you not heal your abscesses? You possess such power of prayer!” the priest asked.

“Let Him Who rendered them unto me heal them,” the blessed one replied.

“You are not afraid of dying of those wounds?” the priest asked.

“I live for that alone,” Mykyta replied. “I long for Death. It is a release for me. I expect to be accorded a place in divine chambers.”

“Are you certain,” the priest asked, “that this is what God wills of man? Rather than a peaceful, pure, decent, virtuous life of self-designated labor, bringing forth progeny in loving kindness?”

“In the midst of sin, strife, and mortality accursed by God, there is no place for a pure, decent, virtuous life in this world.”

“If man did not toil,” the priest said, “if man did not care about his descendants, life on earth would perish, as would humanity.”

And with great joy the saint proclaimed: “They would perish, therefore they would return to paradise, having atoned for original sin to once again inhabit it, replacing the rebellious, outcast cherubim. All that is mortal must be quelled.”

And those words uttered by the saint shocked the priest, and he descended, recounting all he had heard to the disciples. And he proclaimed that he would not return to the terrible world, the vale of misery, but would remain forever in that hallowed place.

“And he stayed?” Sozont asked calmly.

“And he stayed,” Ievahrii said proudly.

“Was it you?” Sozont asked.

Ievahrii looked down modestly.

“Describe the rules the venerable one lives by,” Sozont asked.

The fire blazed, bursts of flame reflecting in the faces of those

gathered. I noticed that the crippled and monstrous drew soundlessly closer, almost pressing in on us in a closed circle, walling us in. Now I heard their hushed breathing, as if the tales told here bewitched them. Mykyta's disciples, meanwhile, acted as if they did not notice that crowd, and were conducting a discourse only with us.

"Here is the order of the venerable one's life," Antonii said. "All night and morning he stands at prayer, until the rooster's first crowing. He then parts the reed curtains for all to see him at morning prayers. At the second crowing of the rooster, when the sun has risen a bit, he delivers a sermon to those present. For this, those willing, women excluded, assemble to listen. Then, if such present themselves, he heals the spirit of those possessed by demons, the spiritually infirm, grievously tormented, those smitten with grief, gripped with fear. Oft times peasants seek mediation in quarrels; he represses human discord and contention. Afterwards, he once again stands at open prayer—all can witness him praying and doing obeisance; folks can, if they wish, join him in prayer and obeisance. Drawing the curtains, he continues praying in solitude—this lasts until the next morning. He leads his entire life in this way. To folks in general the hardship of his life seems hardly bearable. At the same time, his incessant praying brings him closer to God."

"How many years has the righteous one lived and prayed this way?"

"He has been performing feats as a pole-sitter for twelve years," Antonii said.

"Have all of you, his disciples, besides Brother Ievahrii, spent that time here?"

"Disciples of the venerable one arrive, and they depart," Teodoryt said. "Those who have sated their hunger for knowledge depart. They embark to perform their own feats in deserts and monasteries. Those thirsty for knowledge arrive. Antonii and I have been here from the beginning, Symeon—seven years, Nykyfor—six, Ievahrii—three, and Heorhii has been here only a year."

"Has any disciple of the venerable one died here?" Sozont inquired.

"None of his disciples has died," Teodoryt said. "We abide under a certain protection from the venerable one's prayers.... Now you tell a tale, Nykyfor."

And Nykyfor narrated a story about a marsh wolf. This was a beast of extraordinary proportions and merciless ferocity. It lived in the marshes, so that it was impossible to cross the swamp summers or winters. It ravaged everyone. People stopped coming to the sacred place. It was said the Devil himself transfigured into the beast to besiege the sacred place, to root it out. Hunters hunted it, a few perishing, but the wolf could not be slain. It vexed not only those at the sacred place, but in surrounding settlements as well, ravaging cattle, at times people, especially children. They pursued him with

dogs, but even a herd of dogs, trained for hunting, was unable to weaken it—it savaged them while escaping unharmed. It could tread the swamp and hide in water. It would leap out at one while crossing the swamp, appearing like a pillar of water—one would die not from the wolf's teeth, but of fright. It was ubiquitous, as if flying from place to place. Though it eluded our island, it finally got the courage to attack even here, each night attacking and devouring some of the crippled and monstrous.

That is when they asked to be permitted to spend nights inside the enclosure, close to the pole.

After listening to them, the righteous one said: "Take some soil from the fenced-in plot and some water from the Eye of the Abyss. Scatter that soil where the wolf climbs out of the swamp, sprinkling a bit of water over it. And retire peacefully."

That is what they did. Each snatched a bit of soil from inside the fence and as there were not a few of them, and as they knew not wherefrom the wolf appears, they strew soil along the entire shoreline, sprinkling it with water. In their terror of the beast, however, they were unable to sleep. So that at midnight they heard an awful howling from the swamp—their hair stood on end. It was the wolf circling the island, unable to find a safe place to climb out. It howled louder and louder. The crippled and monstrous fell to the ground, plugging their ears with their fingers—they could not bear it. Abruptly, the howling broke off, a whining resounded; finally that, too, subsided. The entire night the crippled and monstrous shook with fear. Next morning, armed with sticks, the more courageous carefully set out to the place where the whining came from. Their dread, though, was senseless: the huge beast lay atop the heaped soil, its fur bristling like needles. Its mouth was clogged with soil, its dislodged eyeballs dangled around its jaws. Shouting joyously, the crippled and monstrous ran to us and we, barely able to move the beast, hauled it to the Eye of the Abyss, where we let it fall into the water. It sank like a rock. The water foamed in that place, as if boiling, for a long time after.

"Have I told the truth?" Nykyfor yelled to the crippled and the monstrous.

And filling their lungs with air, the crippled and monstrous whooped in one voice: "E-e-ah!"

Once again they grew silent, as if their mouths were full of water, drawing yet closer to us.

"Have local inhabitants seen similar swamp wolves before or since?" Sozont inquired.

"They have seen mud wolves, but never such a large or ferocious one," Nykyfor said. "At the time we had a few peasants on our island."

"What did you eat during the wolf's siege?" Sozont asked.

"Fish suddenly appeared in the swamp, though not in the Eye of the

Abyss. They had not appeared before. They do now, sometimes. They clung to the shore, so we fashioned a linen pouch into which we drove enough fish for chowder. To the chowder we added herbs native to the island. It is true that the fish stank with mud. But as we had no bread (those few villagers who came ashore were our only guests for quite a while then), the fish were tasty and nutritious enough for us,” Nykyfor said. “We consider the appearance of the fish a miracle, too.”

“Why do you, the disciples of the saint, not eat in the communal refectory?” Sozont asked.

“Two reasons,” Teodoryt said. “Firstly, to keep a spiritual distance between us, chosen by the saint, and them, the small-minded. And secondly, our abstinence is greater than is theirs—their food is too rich for us. We are striving to achieve the state the blessed one is in: to not consume food at all. Thus we eat very little, some of us not every day... Your turn, Heorhii!”

“As I am the youngest and most recent arrival, my tale will be short,” Heorhii said. “About how Lord Vasyl Puliavsky of Volodar, husband of Lady Olena, visited the sacred place to thank the blessed one for the birth of the children.”

And he described how having heard that the righteous one is angered with his wife for having called him the father of those children, Lord Vasyl, with the agreement of Lady Olena, embarked alone across the swamp, led by a guide. The righteous one agreed to commune with him. Lord Vasyl apologized in his wife’s name for her inapt utterance, assuring the saint that she had in mind not physical fatherhood, but spiritual. It is accepted to label a monk, a priest, father, and this is the fatherhood she ascribed to the blessed one not only in regard to her children, but for herself as well.

“And I, too,” Lord Vasyl said, “consider Your Reverence to be my spiritual father.”

During this exchange a maggot had fallen off the blessed one’s abscess, sliding down the pine trunk to the ground right at Lord Vasyl’s feet. He picked it up, put it into his hand and left. The righteous one dispatched Heorhii after him willing him to ask: “Why did you pick up that stinking worm that fell out of my putrid flesh?”

And Lord Vasyl opened his fist. Heorhii saw a sparkling diamond in his palm. It shone and glowed like embers.

“It is not a worm, it is a diamond,” Lord Vasyl said to Heorhii. “Report this to the righteous one.”

Heorhii rushed off and told the righteous one what had happened. The righteous one said: “Inform him that it is a gift from me for his faith. Let him keep it.”

Last summer, when this occurred, Heorhii was spending time in Volodar. While visiting the Puliavsky estate he inquired whether the diamond had been preserved. And Lord Vasyl showed it to Heorhii set in an

icon of the Mother of God. If one wishes, one can see it to this day at the estate in Volodar.

“By all means, we shall,” Sozont said. “Have there been similar incidents with others?”

“This happened only once with Lord Vasyl,” Heorhii said.

Silence hung over us. The fire faded; Mykyta’s disciples had obviously stopped adding brush. Only embers smoldered, glimmers of flame lapping them from time to time.

“Is there anything else you would like to ask us?” Antonii inquired.

“Just one thing,” Sozont said. “Has the saint remained on the pole all twelve years, or does he sometimes descend?”

“He descends occasionally,” Antonii said. “When he still ate, he descended to take care of natural urges, and after he stopped accepting food, three times a year: at Christmas—we have no outsiders at the sacred place then, unless one wanders here by chance—he celebrates this holiday with us singing psalms and songs pleasing to God; at Easter and Pentecost, at which time we usually have folks here so that he goes around blessing all. Pentecost is the day after the morrow, and you will be able to observe this. But he descends only at night, for a brief time, and after circling the island, after the Christmas singing, he returns. Have you asked everything?”

“Everything. I am quite satisfied with your stories and answers,” Sozont said.

Then Antonii raised his hands, clapped, and shouted at the crippled and monstrous: “Time to retire! Go to sleep! Enough ogling! And no wandering about at night!”

The crippled and monstrous shoved off into the darkness. Mykyta’s disciples waited for them to disappear. Bidding us a good night, they left: Antonii first, behind him Teodoryt, then Symeon, Ievahrii, Nykyfor and Heorhii.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN,

which describes a second meeting with the dwarf Musii and the nocturnal and morning events on the island

We were tired. We settled in gladly—at least I did. Sozont, however, said: “Everyone has related a miracle except you, Brother Mykhailo. Perchance, you do not know any?”

“I do know one. But I am sleepy,” I said.

Sozont himself was weary: he yawned loudly. “Let us pray before retiring, and let us sleep!” he said.

We kneeled, praying half-heartedly. But no sooner had we lain down, than we heard a rustling in the darkness. A large-headed form appeared, treading stealthily.

“Why are you not sleeping, Musii?” Sozont asked calmly.

“Shh-shh!” hissed the dwarf. “I want to tell you something.”

“Is it true that you frequent a dwarf in the women’s camp?” Sozont asked.

“They know abo-o-out it already?” the dwarf asked, whistling.

“If we know about it, of course they know,” I said.

The dwarf scratched his head. “That damned Marta to-o-old them! The bitch!”

“One ought not utter shameful words, Musii!”

“And if it’s true, o-oh? She go-o-es at night to-o-o tho-ose studs, and they umpf her!” The dwarf made an indecent gesture.

“All six?” Pavlo asked, horrified.

“I dunno-o-o,” the dwarf admitted honestly. “They shut themselves in. But they breathe heavily, and so-o-ometimes she screams. Wenches scream when their pudenda is being jammed, yup!”

“But she’s dumb!” I said.

“As dumb as I am a hunchback,” Musii said. “And that woman dwarf I visit, she’s my wife, yup!”

“Married?” Sozont asked, surprised.

“Nah, but we perfo-o-ormed a wedding, yup! And I’ve screwed her many a time.”

“Are you registered with the authorities?” Pavlo asked.

“We are,” Musii declared proudly. “And I screw her licitly. She’s my wife, yup!”

“Do they know that?”

“Indeed! But they say: unwedded therefo-o-ore unmarried, yup! And I can’t screw her, yup! And we’ve been to-o-ogether lo-o-ong, but here it’s no-o-ot allo-owed, yup!”

“Be careful with this, Musii,” Sozont said, concerned.

“Why do-on’t they let me screw my o-own wife?” Musii whimpered.

“Why?”

“Such is the custom here, Musii: no co-habitation here, you know that yourself.”

“I kno-o-ow. But I’m quiet abo-o-out it, and at night, yup!”

“They have their eye on you. They are sniffing you out, Musii! Be careful! You had something to tell us?”

“Indeed! Don’t sleep at night. Co-o-ome to the po-ole. You hee-hee will see so-o-omething, yup!”

“What will we see?”

“So-o-omething ’teresting, hee-hee! I’m running alo-o-ong! Yup!”

“Be careful, Musii,” Sozont cautioned once again.

But Musii was gone, dissolving in the darkness. We settled in.

“Is what Musii said true?” Pavlo asked. “They explain everything so finely and rationally. Is not Musii’s thinking unfounded?”

“Musii has a child’s mind,” Sozont said, slowly. “The lips of babes utter truth. In Psalms it is stated: ‘Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise.’ And Jesus said: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers...all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries ... but be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ.’¹ Did you, Brother Mykhailo, scribe these words in your Peresopnytska Gospel?”

“I did,” I replied, “and more than once I have meditated on their power.”

“The power of Christ’s words is indisputable,” Pavlo said. “But the acts of these people can be understood differently. They have forsaken the wicked world. They compose prayers to the Lord as do few others. They have vowed themselves to poverty and abstinence, through mortification leading themselves out of the temporal towards God. And they are not angels, but men. They are sinful, perhaps they transgress, but through their ascetic life of loving kindness they atone for it. Perchance they are in some things wicked, for Jeremiah said: ‘wicked is the heart of man,’ and ‘we are all one man’s sons.’”²

“The Eye of the Abyss has descried you, Pavlo,” Sozont said sadly. “Consider this, from Psalms: ‘Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man; preserve me from the violent man.’ ‘Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips.’ ‘Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked words.’ The

¹ Note in margin: “Matthew 23:1–10.”

² Note in margin: “Genesis 42:11.”

rest our evangelist Mykhailo can recite. Speak, Brother!”

And I said: “‘And lead us not into temptation.’ ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it.’ ‘When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that receiveth the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while.’”¹

“Two concepts, Brother Pavlo, are being confused: evil in a man, and an evil man.”

“So this, then, is the Eye of the Abyss according to you, Brother Sozont?” I asked.

“This is one of its peeks into the human soul,” Sozont said. “May the Lord protect us from that!”

“Amen!” Pavlo and I said.

Our minds were refreshed and enlightened by Sozont’s sermon, and we fell asleep for the night not having agreed about anything, as if we forgot what Musii the dwarf had said.

And I dreamt that I sat at a table. A sheet of parchment lay before me. Rulers, brushes of various thicknesses, and inkhorns with pigments were arranged along the table. And I rendered the Eye of the Abyss as a shiny, milky substance shaped like a clear ball with a pupil like a shaft. And in that ball I painted two pine trees, or rather trunks, and Mykyta the Pole-sitter atop them with bat wings instead of arms, impatient to take off, even as his legs are girded with cord to the trunks. And I painted Kuzma in that Eye—Kuzma being devoured by an invisible dragon-beast—and the mud-wolf, both eyes aflame, and the dwarf Musii stuck in its outstretched jaws, desperately grasping at the wolf’s teeth, wrenching himself out of its jaws. I painted tens of the crippled, the monstrous, dancing while embracing crippled, monstrous women, and amongst them a beauty holding a lash, with an exuberant twining of stalks arrayed in an image of a child sprouting from a pea in her womb. Around her I painted six youths, arms wreathed, and a worm with a diamond on its head, its luster scattering, and I painted yet another youth carrying a stout soldier on his shoulders. I painted Mykyta’s mother Kateryna frozen in a pietà, arms raised, tears of blood streaming down her cheeks, and a woman with a serpent in her belly. I painted Olena Puliavska as a modern Eve holding in her hand not an apple but a sprouted pea, Mykyta’s face gracing the surface of that pea. I encompassed all of them with the long form of a serpent, on whom instead

¹ Note in margin: “Matthew 6:13; 12:39; 13:19–20.”

of a serpent's head I devised a human skull. Everything stirred in that transparent form of the eye, everything shimmered and moved as if alive, not painted. Still, something was missing in it. So I painted Pavlo wracked with convulsions, and he really was convulsing. Then I painted Deacon Sozont glued to the round side of the Eye, a blade in his raised hand, and as I painted, Sozont began beating and stabbing the milky membrane of the Eye with his knife. Blood seeped out of the bruises and incisions, even flowing like a stream. And the blood collected at the bottom of the Eye into a round lake, and in that lake I painted a second pupil in which a splinter was stuck, like a Tartar saber. And finally I rendered the Eye as the head of a youth draped in a linen tunic, shod in bast shoes, wrapped in linen swatches, laced with linden fibers.

I studied this strange picture for a long time and suddenly realized that I had failed to render one of the participants in this vision. Of course the missing participant was I. But then, that worm, with the diamond on its head—was that not I?

Someone was shaking me. I opened my eyes, Deacon Sozont stood over me. "Wake up, Brother Mykhailo," he whispered. "It is time!"

"Time for what?" I asked.

"To see what dwarf Musii was talking about."

Half-awake, I sat. "Will we rouse Pavlo?" I asked.

"No, let him sleep. He's tired."

"Do we need to see it, Brother Sozont?"

"We do," Sozont declared firmly. "That is why we came here."

"Perhaps," I muttered, "it would be better to leave them in peace? '...verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth.'¹ And Ecclesiastes states: 'God shall judge the righteous and the wicked.' And in Matthew: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'"

"We did not come here to judge, brother Mykhailo," Sozont whispered, "but, as that same Matthew says—and these are Christ's words: 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.' And further: 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst for righteousness.' There is, Brother," he said, in a whistling whisper, "nothing accidental in the world. Once God brought us here, let us fulfill His will."

And I submitted. Cautiously attentive, we set out along the path, heading toward the fence near the pole. All was quiet. We detected an indistinct, light figure next to the fence. We hid behind tree trunks. We did not have long to wait: we heard nimble steps along the path. In an instant, a female shape sprang out—it was Marta. She headed directly toward the guard at the gate. In their linen raiments, flooded with moonlight, they were

¹ Note in margin: "Psalms 58:11."

both clearly discernible. They whispered something to each other, and Marta strode across the yard to the hovel. The hovel was illuminated. The shutters were shut.

The door opened; a shaft of light fell on the ground.

Marta entered. The door closed.

We intended to walk along the fence to get closer to the hovel when we noticed someone descending from the pole down the ladder. The man was clad in similar raiment. He approached the gatekeeper. His hairy face shone in the moonlight: it was indeed Mykyta. After exchanging a few words with the gatekeeper, Mykyta almost ran to the nearest trees, that is to say, close to the place where we were hiding. Bending over, we pressed closely to the trunks—I was afraid that Mykyta might uncover us. Instead, he stooped under a bush near us and we heard sounds one might emit while taking care of an important natural need. After, Mykyta rose and returned to the gate. “Bury it!” a hoarse voice said.

Taking a shovel from behind the gate, the gatekeeper went over to the bush. Mykyta, meantime, headed to the hovel. The door opened, and light vividly illuminated the linen garb, the shaggy head.

The gatekeeper put the shovel to use by the bush. Then he went to the gate, taking the shovel to the hut. Seizing the moment, we crept in the shadows along the fence up to the hovel. We fell to the ground as the gatekeeper exited the hut. From the fence, he again headed toward the yard. After he resumed his post we crawled further. Though the hut stood almost next to the fence, it was impossible to hear or see what transpired. We heard muffled voices. We lay for a while until the door opened again, Marta came out, marched toward the gate, exchanged a few words with the gatekeeper and then left along the path to the women’s camp. Mykyta came out after. He, too, visited with the gatekeeper and then climbed the ladder up the pole. Soon after, one of Mykyta’s disciples—I believe it was Ievahrii—appeared to relieve the guard. The light in the hut remained lit for a time until finally it went out. Nothing else could transpire here, so we crept back to the trees, and from there, we set off back to our place of repose.

“Were they eating supper?” I asked.

“Certainly,” Sozont said. “I wonder, Brother Mykhailo, if you noticed that all those stories we were entertained with are also bookish tales?”

“About the mud-wolf too?”

“In the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter it is not a wolf but a panther.”

“And Olena Puliavska and her husband?”

“That, too, is from the Life, though without the pea. The pea comes from the folk tale about Kotyhoroshok.”

“So they have adapted the bookish tales to their life here?”

“Exactly,” said Sozont, chuckling quietly. “And now let us sleep.”

But I could not fall asleep. To me it seemed for some reason that

Sozont's joy was not wholly good-natured; not only that, it seemed malicious. It crossed my mind that the deacon reminded me of a hunter: a hunter pursuing a wild animal not because hunger drives him, which is to say, not because of a man's vital physical need, and not because that animal means to devour the man or is causing harm and discomfort. The hunter is urged by a passion to lure and destroy the animal, which is, after all, less powerful. The hunter is driven by his fervor for the hunt—the fervor of a killer—and he has no interest in what the pursued beast is experiencing. At that moment, in my mind I repeated Pavlo's words that the acts of these men among whom we find ourselves can be interpreted not only critically but from a benevolent aspect as well. Yes, they are creating a life story; like any story, it is not wholly true. But the fact that the story itself begins to create them needs to be taken into account—that is to say, having devised a life story they begin to live not according to their will but according to what the story wills. They have elevated themselves to perform deeds loftier than human nature allows, and therefore contrived; for man cannot leap higher than himself. Hence they ended up in a snare they had themselves set up; in a ditch they had themselves dug. They were forced to transform themselves into scribes and pharisees who say one thing while effecting another. And so this became their curse. They are well aware that they are contradicting God's will as well as their human destiny, as designated by God, which means that God, to whose service they dedicated themselves, will have no mercy and will cast them into the Eye of the Abyss. They have embarked on creating their own hell. Fleeing the Eye of the Abyss—this world—they became the creators of a new Eye of the Abyss, and began to serve it like a pagan idol, zealously protecting that idol, standing by it like bound dogs. But to that end they have sworn themselves, knowing full well that the Eye of the Abyss, by them devised, will sooner or later swallow them. Deacon Sozont recognized and understood this well, though he did not wish to sympathize with them and therefore did not strive to save them. The hunt enraptured him. With flared nostrils, he raced after them, glad to have discerned their hypocrisy, unmasking it, ready at any minute to stab his prey with an imaginary blade or lance. Thence, while uncovering evil, he himself abided in evil, that is, in the Eye of the Abyss, which means that he himself was compromised while being convinced that his fable about his own veritable system of judgment was indeed true. He had led himself to heights greater than was designated for man. It was this that terrified me.

My spirit was alarmed and full of sorrow at such thoughts, for I already knew: this journey would not renew a right spirit within me nor fill my being with the fire I burned with while designing the Peresopnytska Gospel. The reason is simple: to burn with the lofty flame of spirituality, one must be spiritually whole—and my spirit is broken, like a vessel. My misfortune lies in that I began fearing the hypocrisy of creative inspiration,

so I became incapable of inspiration. Hence I thought: what would man be if he rejected the improvising of stories? Would he be capable of elevating himself above a brute? Would he know God, even though his God is often one of his tales? For the composing of tales is likewise creation. Everything born must live and requires nourishment. The essence lies, obviously, in how man lives; in breaking the boundaries of his destiny, does he remain beneficent? And if he is not beneficent, is he worthy of acclaim? If he is beneficent, is his benevolence genuine? And how can one recognize the true beneficence to avoid creating eyes of the abyss in this world? This, I thought, is where we need God. Not an imaginary, definitive God, but One who would lead us firmly along His narrow path. So that a pure, open soul must lead us to Him, not rational constructs. Then He will find in us a vessel in which to place a kernel of His mystery. But the vessel of our soul must be prepared for this. And I fancied: there is no genuine or disingenuous faith predicated upon ritual and service, in other words, upon games of faith, be they eastern or western, be they sects, such as these symeonides, or even Islam, or any other. Only faith or the lack of faith are important, since every faith is genuine, while faithlessness is disingenuous; only that mystery which exists or does not exist in a man's soul is significant. I knew that I would not have the courage to herald these thoughts any time soon, as those for whom faith is a game of rituals will condemn and revile me. But on that night they—those thoughts—sprouted within me and I was convinced that they bore no evil: they were founded on tolerance. And evil appears where intolerance reigns.

Glimmers of daylight were dawning when I heard cries and lamenting from the women's camp. I shook Deacon Sozont. He sat up immediately.

"I fear that our Musii the dwarf has been caught," I said.

"What happened?" Pavlo sprang up.

"Sleep, Brother, sleep," Sozont said. "We shall go see a bit of nocturnal diversion."

"What diversion? What is happening?" Pavlo could not shake off his drowsiness.

"One of this night's mysteries," Sozont said, rising.

We set out toward the path. Indeed, Pavlo, too, came with us. We heard an odd pounding from the camp, as if timpani were being struck, though the sound was hollower. The pounding drew nearer, so we stepped off the path and stood behind trees. And in the pale, diluted morning air we saw a crowd trudging slowly along the trail like a flock with Musii the dwarf leading the way. Bearing a torch, a strange person with an enormous head on a small torso and even shorter legs walked beside him; behind them streamed the crippled and monstrous women led by a female dwarf—evidently Musii's wife. Marta was not visible among them—the crippled and freakish walked without their sister-guardian. Except for Musii, the

woman dwarf, and the torch bearer, everyone held a wooden bowl in their hands (the one they ate out of) and beat it with a spoon—that was the source of the timpanic noise. We heard crashing sounds. The crippled and freakish men tore through the bushes toward the path. They stood and stared, as did we.

Stepping onto the path, we joined the procession. We let the women pass, and the crippled and freakish men clambered onto the path behind us. The procession arrived at the gate, where all six Mykyta's disciples stood. There was no sound from Mykyta's hut on posts, which stood as if melting in the mist. The round opening was covered.

"We have caught the debaucher and ripped a piece of cloth off him," a squeaky voice announced. We could not see who was speaking.

"I am no-o-o debaucher! I was visiting my wife," Musii screamed. "Everyone kno-ows she's my wife, yup!"

"May the saint pass judgment on him!" the squeaky voice continued.

"The saint passes no judgments," we heard Antonii's voice. "The saint prays for all and beseeches the Lord to have mercy on your sins and afflictions."

"Then you judge the debaucher!" the voice shrieked.

"I am no-o-ot a debaucher, yup!" cried the dwarf. "I was visiting my wife, yup!"

"Who can attest to the fact that she is your wife?" Antonii asked.

A gloomy silence descended.

"Everyone kno-ows!" the dwarf shouted. "I to-o-old everyone!"

"Everyone knows, because you told," Antonii said. "But no one was present at your wedding and no one witnessed your marriage ceremony. Is that not so, Musii?"

"My wife can attest to-o-o it, yup!" the dwarf cried. "Let her speak!"

In the ensuing perfect silence a feeble and somewhat musty, yet shrill though quite audible voice emerged. "Here we came to pray to Lordy, and he, this Musky, that shameful disgrace, wants my pudenda."

"Are you his wife?" Antonii asked.

"He wants me to be his wife, so I dunno. He wants my pudenda and I came to pray to Lordy."

"Are you no-o-ot my wife?" Musii the dwarf shrieked.

"Heh, so you said," the feeble voice continued, "as you crawled to my pudenda with your shameful disgrace. And I came here to pray to Lordy."

"You be your own judge, Musii. There is no place for you among us," Antonii said. "The saint does not pray for debauchers."

With the utterance of that word, the crippled and freaky beat their wooden bowls with spoons while suddenly stepping aside, clearing the path along which Musii tread, crying like a child. He was followed by the large-headed creature bearing the torch, and the woman dwarf, smiling, her tiny

eyes glowing.

“I warned you, Musii,” Deacon Sozont said as the dwarf passed us. “Why did you not heed me?”

“Because she is my wife,” the dwarf whimpered. “But she lo-o-oves me no-o-o mo-ore, yup! She has betrayed me, that damn bitch.”

“I am no damn bitch!” the woman dwarf squeaked indignantly. “I came here to pray to Lordy, not for you to shove your prick in. Debauching dog!”

Even larger tears rolled down the dwarf’s cheeks. Bowing his head, he continued walking. The last now became the first as they swept forward behind him. We followed. The crippled and freakish men wove after us; the women stayed back. The entire island was immersed in the dreadful, hollow knocking—everyone beat their wooden bowls with spoons. The procession headed toward the Eye of the Abyss. I looked around, but did not see Mykyta’s disciples. They remained beside the pole. Marta, too, was absent.

“And the governor said,” Sozont recited words from the Gospel according to Matthew, “‘Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude.’”¹

“Do not dishonor God, Brother Sozont,” Pavlo said. “Why are you comparing this dwarf with Jesus Christ?”

“Because, likening Himself to the wretched, the outcast, the unjustly executed, Christ accepted His destiny.”

“But Christ was King, and that Pilate acknowledged,” Pavlo said. “And He was not executed innocently—He suffered for preaching His sermons.”

“That is so yet not so, Brother Pavlo,” Sozont stated. “Christ said: ‘If you knew, what this signifies: Mercy I seek, not sacrifice—you should cease judging the innocent.’”

At last, the procession arrived at the Eye of the Abyss. Seeing this peculiar pool, or lake, I was shocked yet again: perfectly round, it was milky around the edges, with a shadow in its center, like a pupil: a small, dark, brown ring.

We all stood around the curving bank, which cut bluntly into the island. Musii the dwarf was untied. He began to rub his arms. A hush set in: the beating of bowls with spoons ceased. At that moment the sky split open in the east, a blaze of yellow splendor pouring out. The water fumed like smoke, a mist rising in delicate gray streaks. The sun had not yet risen, though the moment was near.

“Will you co-o-ome with me, wife?” the dwarf asked.

¹ Note in the margin: “Matthew 27:24.”

“Fie! As if I need you!” The woman dwarf raised her little nose haughtily.

“I will so-o-on pro-o-ove to-o you that she is my wife! I will!” Musii the dwarf wailed. “And I shall cro-oss the Eye of the Abyss, yup! And no-o-thing will happen to-o me!”

There was a deep silence. Observing the creatures standing around me, I was shocked—they were peculiarly freakish, perhaps the curiosity consuming them made them so. I wondered, painfully: what are we doing here, among these unfortunates, why did we have to end up here? What are we seeking, and what do we wish to find? Why did we come to this pool? Was it not malicious curiosity that brought us here, as it did the crippled and freakish? Then how do we differ from them? By being scribes and Pharisees?

Musii the dwarf found a staff and bravely stepped into the water. The moment he did so, tens of spoons struck wooden bowls; to this accompaniment the dwarf trudged slowly along the invisible underwater path. And I prayed raptly and sincerely to God for this little fellow to be saved, for I believed he was innocent. That treacherous woman dwarf really was his wife. All along she stood calm and indifferent, with head slightly turned to the side, her lips contorted in a capricious grimace. Who knows, perhaps, like every solitary mare she expected her stallion to be victorious and worthy of her? Meantime the dwarf plunged in chest-deep, groping for the path with his staff. I remembered then that in the deepest spot, exactly where our fellow-traveler Kuzma had disappeared, the water had reached our armpits. The dwarf will be unable to cross if he does not know how to swim—the water will be over his head. But then, even if he knew how to swim, breaking away from the path, would he be able to find it—that is, would he have strength enough to swim to the opposite bank?

Musii tread deeper and deeper, almost reaching the dark circle in the center of the pool. Only his head stuck out over the water. Suddenly, the head screamed wildly, and in an instant it vanished. The crowd, standing along the bank, filled its lungs with air and in a single voice yelled: “Oooooeah!”

Rings rippled across the surface and they rolled to the bank where we stood, slapping it with a splash.

Then the woman dwarf fell to her knees, grasped her hair in her hands, tearing at it and wailing, “Oh, Lord, why did You take him from me? I prayed for him! He was my husband! He was my husband!”

And her animal-like wailing trumpeted painfully.

The crippled and freakish stood, their hideous, grinning faces beaming. Inspired, they beat their bowls with their spoons.

At that moment the sun appeared: enormous, blood-red in an orange oreole, drowning in the blood of the newly-eradicated night.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN,

in which Mykyta's sermon is recounted, as well as his conversations with us

We returned to our place of repose. I was moved to the depths of my soul. Pavlo was saddened. Sozont was completely calm. We heard the rooster's first crowing.

"Where do they keep the rooster?" Pavlo asked.

"Either in the hut below or the one atop the pole," Sozont said. "We've measured the entire island and did not find a place for a rooster, nor the rooster. Perhaps Mykyta himself crows like a rooster?"

"Are you jesting, Brother?" Pavlo said. "The crowing sounds so authentic."

"No jests," Sozont replied seriously. "In fact, it is projected from the enclosure; it only seems to issue from on high. One can easily mimic a rooster's cry. If Mykyta truly kept a rooster, he would have trouble feeding and cleaning up after it; the rooster might flee. Though what I know not, I know not—I trust only sound and proven things."

Again, I thought: in everything, everywhere, Sozont remains a lawyer, a prober, an investigator. God bestowed this talent on him and it is an indispensable trait.

As it was early, we returned to our mats. Even though I was stunned by all that I had seen, having had an utterly sleepless night, I sank into deep, dreamless slumber, as if I had fallen into a bottomless hole. I was led out of this hole by Sozont, who shook me awake.

"Get up, Brother Mykhailo," he said. "The crippled and freakish are already heading for the sermon."

And the rooster crowed a second time. Though I felt dazed, I sprang to my feet. I sensed something indefinable, something gray stirring in my breast. Probably because of what we had experienced.

"Tell me, Brother Sozont," Pavlo said, still saddened. "Is the only way out of this island through the Eye of the Abyss?"

"Why are you worrying about it, Brother?" Sozont asked.

"I think we should leave here as soon as possible," Pavlo declared. "What do we expect to find here?"

Oft times we reasoned similarly, Pavlo and I: I had asked myself this same question earlier.

"The peasants crossed the Eye of the Abyss," Sozont said. "But they claimed that the thief had slipped onto the island some other way. After all, their guards stood along this path, which everyone uses. The peasants themselves know no other way, though they did say that their elders knew there had been some other path. But it has been abandoned long ago—it was even more dangerous than this familiar one."

"So that we are altogether under the will of Mykyta's disciples?"

Pavlo asked.

“Entirely,” Sozont said. “It is our hope that they do not detain travelers here.”

“Then we need to be prudent,” Pavlo said, sighing. “Because otherwise, we will share the fate of Kuzma and the dwarf.”

“I am glad that you have determined that, Brother,” Sozont said gently. “Today I shall record what was recounted to us about Mykyta and his marvels. I will then read to the disciples or let them read what I have recorded, and tomorrow we can set out on our return.”

“Fear has possessed me, Brother,” Pavlo sighed. “Just as in Jeremiah: ‘My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet...’”

“You are in shock from the dwarf’s death, Brother!” Sozont said. “My heart is calm.”

“And you, Brother Mykhailo?” Pavlo asked, concerned.

“The same as with you. Cats are clawing at my soul.”

“Then may St. Mykyta’s sermon provide you with succor,” Sozont said, the familiar half-smile appearing on his face. “Time to go!”

And with confidence he set off on the path.

Many of the crippled and freakish had gathered around the enclosure, although only men. Parting before us, they let us approach the gate; Heorhii stood there. The rest of the disciples huddled together near the fence, their heads raised up toward the hut on poles. The entry and side curtains were open. In the opening we saw Mykyta standing with his back to us, every so often lifting his arms—he was praying. “Glory to Jesus!” we greeted Heorhii. Responding politely, he swung the gate open, bidding us to enter.

“Stand behind the saint’s disciples,” he said quietly, and that is what we did.

Mykyta stood in the entry. For the first time, we saw him distinctly in the light. He wore a dirty, rent habit. His gaunt, almost black body was visible through the holes. His feet, unshod, were also nearly black; his face and head were overgrown with wild, abundant hair, more gray than black: disheveled, the locks mottled since they were never combed. His deep-set eyes, barely visible behind all the hair, glimmered; he had a wide, flat nose.

“I am aware of what happened today,” Mykyta said in a strong though hoarse voice. “Therefore, today I shall deliver a sermon about love.”

“Love is twofold: Divine and human. Love of God and love of mammon, or flesh. These two cannot unite, my children, for as the Lord said: ‘No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other’; or according to the Apostles; ‘Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.’ To love things is to be covetous; love of flesh is wantonness. Despise, therefore, the lust of the flesh, as

yourself, the world, and things in it, otherwise ye shall not hold, preserve, or find God. They that are after the flesh despise God with that love, and where there is hatred therein dwells enmity; lovers of the world, too, hate God, for the world is the incarnation of the Devil whom we must flee and despise. Lovers of beauty despise God, for beauty is decay's adornment, and where there is rot, there is abomination. The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God; one beloved by God must renounce the world, beauty, property, possessions, home, family, father and mother, his children, and firstly, his wife, the vessel of the Devil, for in begetting children man soils rather than draws closer to the Divine. It is not life God wills for the world, but death; therefore love death and nurture death, while learning a single lesson—the lesson of dying beautifully. There is death from God as punishment, as the beginning of our judgment—those of us who let our spiritual life shrivel—and there is death in God, bringing joy, freedom from mortality and putrid flesh, with an exit into joy and happiness everlasting, for the only soul that knows joy is the one that draws closer to God. So perish, my children, die with God, and may the damned, depraved world become forever extinct. Thence will man, cast out of paradise—that is, from the eternal into the temporal, mortal—return into that which he was cast out of, from a realm of rot into the kingdom of the immortal. So he who returns into the world like a dog into its vomit mocks the Lord, Who, through His crucifixion directed man onto the righteous path towards death, conferring the lesson of dying onto us to be crucified alongside with Him. For only those who suffer together with Him, who have adopted His lesson on dying, who have elected death, renouncing worldly enticements, only they shall inherit His kingdom. Our life is in Him, He is our praise, He is our crown; to die for Him is happiness and revelation. Therefore die to the world every hour, every day, every month, every year—this, then is the path to God; death is its guide. As one cannot cross the Eye of the Abyss without a guide, so without dying one cannot reach God Who awaits, expecting one thing from us: for us to step onto this path, to enter death with death, cursing the world and all that glimmers in it; thus escaping man's eternal original sin. Love death, my children, instead of life. Give no thought to what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, as flesh is your enemy. Death, when she is your guide along the narrow path across the Eye of the Abyss, is your benefactress, for he who loves the world instead of God is devoured by the Eye, never reaching the promised shore. He is devoured, my children, by a strange beast, unseen, horned, with big teeth and mouth; he devours mortal flesh along with the afflicted spirit. Beware of that death! Shun it! It leads into the Abyss, not to the Shores of Redemption, where our great Lord awaits you with His angels and archangels, with the saints and the righteous, Who loves only those who curse this mad, wicked world, this Abyss, wherein the sun is darkness, and moonlight perdition. If we find gladness in

privation here, know submission and obedience, suffering along with God; and if we renounce the world—in glory in His kingdom shall we be, for ye cannot serve God and mammon. Whatever one is taken with, to that will he devote himself. Should Divine love triumph over us, we shall be God's workers, and from Him shall we receive honey in life everlasting. Should we heed the voice of flesh and greed, passions shall rule, casting us to the enemy, the overseer of evil, and with him there shall be eternal recompense and eternal labor in Hell. Amen!"

Mykyta bowed deeply to all around and grandly fell silent, raising his beard haughtily.

Mykyta's disciples and all the crippled and freakish filled their lungs with air and shouted in unison: "E-e-e-ahh!"

"And now, my children," Mykyta said softly, "those of you who wish, go. Pray to God. I shall commune with the newly-arrived, whom the Lord has brought to me and who seek my succor for their ailments and sorely vexed spirits. Who wishes to listen may stay."

The disciples moved away. Teodoryt and Antonii stayed. Heorhii remained, watching the gate. The rest left for the hovel. The crippled and monstrous, meantime, still stood, inert, like a wall.

"Come first, Brother Pavlo," Antonii said. "You need the saint's aid most."

Pavlo approached, genuflecting. "Reverend Father," he said, "I am tormented with convulsions. The fathers at Maniava Hermitage in the Carpathians prayed over me, as did the holy fathers of the Lavra in Kyiv, but the ailment has not forsaken me. I was smitten along the way to you, and once here, near your sacred spot."

"Is your disease physical, or are you with demons?" Mykyta asked. "You must know, as you are the one tormented. If it is of the flesh, seek not healing from me, as I do not cure flesh, which is destined for demise. It is a sin to heal the body. I heal the spirit, so that it is not broken. So that it is restored to be worthy of joyous acceptance of the flesh's demise in the name of God."

"I do not know the nature of my ailment," Pavlo said. "When it smites, I lose consciousness and memory."

"The demon abides in you, then," proclaimed Mykyta.

"Why then were the holy fathers of the hermitage and Lavra unable to rebuke it?"

"Because you seek to cure the flesh, instead of the spirit. The spirit can be healed only one way: by accepting the death of flesh and, therefore, the demon. For the greatest demon in us is our flesh. Kill the demon, and I shall pray for you. And if you wish your spirit to remain joined to your body, wait patiently for the demon to drag you to Hell."

"So that you are advising me to die, Reverend Father?" Pavlo asked,

horrified.

“With the name of the Lord upon your lips, having prepared yourself to feel the joy of death—not with fear. Fear of death is a sword in the hands of the demon of flesh. Once you yearn for death you will be saved, and the Lord will cure you of seizures, receiving you in chambers of eternity. Step away from this sacred spot to reflect. You yourself must either heal yourself or destroy yourself.”

“You will for me to take my life, as did Musii the dwarf?”

“The dwarf Musii did not take his life. The Eye of the Abyss took him. From there he went to Hell. Taking one’s life is a sin for a Christian. He who gave life, that is, the Lord, is to take your life. Die without taking your life. Learn the sacred art of dying. Die with God, not without God.”

Pavlo was astounded and greatly disturbed—I saw that when I faced him. His eyes widened in a blue fervor, and his face became red as a beet.

“Now you go, Brother Mykhailo!” Antonii said.

I stepped forward and genuflected.

“My affliction is dissimilar,” I said. “I know not, Reverend Father, whether it is indeed an affliction. But perchance it is, as it churns within me.”

“If it churns, it is a demon. Speak!” Mykyta said.

“First in Dvirtsi and later in Peresopnytsia I copied the Gospel, embellishing each page generously with ornaments, rendering many an illustration. Toiling thus, I had no greater contentment, no greater joy. People who saw my work said there is none better or more accomplished, and indeed, it took me many years to accomplish. Each letter in the four books of the Gospel was scribed by me, every sentence reflected, meditated upon; I translated it into simple speech, to bring people closer to an understanding of the Scriptures. From morning until evening every day, except holy days and Sundays, I toiled in Divine inspiration, every day sensing that God is plenishing me with the power of creation. I invested all my abilities, all my skills in this craft, burning every day like a candle. And thus, my work was consummated, and I left for Zhytomyr, to begin copying another Gospel. Which is to say, I embarked on scribing one more book. And here I sensed something dreadful: my skill had vanished, the candle dimmed, and I became altogether unfit for work. Without my artistry, without my trade, what am I in the world?”

“Your sin,” Mykyta stated sharply, “lies in that you love the splendor of the world and serve that mammon. The beauty of the world is one of the Devil’s most favored demons. And, even though you were scribing Holy Scripture, it was not God lighting your candle: it was the Devil. Holy Scriptures do not need calligraphy, exquisite illustrations and ornaments—they are fine and grand in their content, and that suffices. God has made man’s beauty consume away like a moth, as ‘surely every man is vanity,’

according to David. ‘Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids,’ said Solomon. Beauty is flesh, not spirit, but ‘all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it,’ Isaiah said. ‘But thou didst trust in thine own beauty,’ Ezekiel stated, ‘and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by’; He who creates beauty builds unto himself an eminent place—so said Ezekiel—and like a whore has opened his feet to every one that passes by, multiplying his whoredoms. And the Lord said unto the prince of Tyrus: ‘I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.’¹ And again, Ezekiel: ‘Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty...I will cast thee to the ground.’ Rejoice! Be not saddened, Brother, that the Lord has caught sight of your delusion, numbing your hand and eye that served the Devil—He had mercy upon you! Rejoice! Without your craft, your artistry, you became a nonentity—you have thus drawn closer to God. Crafts, artistry are worldly inventions, and as the world is accursed, so are they accursed. Glory be to God that He freed you of it! Consider the incorruptible beauty of an obedient spirit instead of devised adornment. Embellishing Holy Scripture, you draped the timeless in temporality, flinging days and years of your life into the jaws of mammon. Have faith! Follow the narrow path through the Eye of the Abyss onto which the Lord has set you—with faith in Him, ye shall cross.”

And he pointed his finger toward the Eye of the Abyss.

His words fell on me like the blows of a hammer, completely demoralizing and stunning me. My physiognomy, evidently, looked like Pavlo’s, for I noticed the half-smile on Sozont’s face. I stood next to Pavlo, and saw that he was still red as a beet. My face, too, was flushed, all my thoughts and intentions had become muddled, and a peculiar tremor took hold of me. Mykyta’s words contained a mad, dazzling, pitiless, bruising power, and no wonder: he was slaying me not with his own words, but with words from Holy Scripture. I no longer saw myself as a worm with a diamond head, as I had rendered myself in the dream. I now knew for certain that a worm I am, with a worm’s head, and a worm on whom a metal-bound boot has stepped. And regardless of my will, I wept.

“Now you go, Brother Sozont,” Teodoryt chimed.

Sozont stepped forward, bowing to Mykyta. He did not genuflect, as had Pavlo and I. “I have not come to you for a spiritual cure,” he said evenly. “I have come as a duty. The holy fathers of Kyiv entrusted me with

¹ Note in margin: “Ezekiel 28:7.”

writing a new Cheti-Minei, as an addendum to the Patericon of the Caves, which I am to copy. And so, heeding the advice of the holy fathers, I wish to tell about you, to present your teaching.”

“I have no need for earthly glory, I do not seek it! Earthly glory is demonic, not Divine,” Mykyta droned gloomily.

“Not for earthly glory am I embarking on writing my Cheti-Minei,” Sozont said. “It is for the edification of the Christian faithful. Do you consider sacred preaching to be worldly, useless, as well?”

“If that were the case,” Mykyta said, “I would not be sermonizing to the faithful every morning. Though some do consider sermons to be superfluous addenda.”

“I am endeavoring to disseminate your sermons, your teachings, and your life story among Christians, so that your ideas resound not only among the few here on this island but among the many. However, if you do not give your blessing, I shall not write about you. I came here for that blessing.”

“Why should I believe you?” Mykyta asked.

“Why should you not?”

“It is stated in Psalms: ‘They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.’”

“Let me follow your example,” Sozont said. “‘The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?’”

“I said: ‘All men are liars.’ ‘The proud have forged a lie against me.’”

“‘I hate every false way.’ ‘I hate and abhor lying.’”

“‘He that speaketh lies shall perish,’” Mykyta said.

“We have amused ourselves with sketches from Holy Scriptures, and now let us get to the matter,” Sozont said calmly. “I have recorded stories about you from your followers, particularly from your disciples—this day I shall complete recording everything. If you will not bless my duty, I shall surrender what I have written into your hands, or into the hands of your disciples. If you bless me in my endeavor, I shall read it to your disciples, or they can read it themselves, and if you wish, you will read it too. Should you uncover any falsehood, we will blot it out of the draft; if you wish to add something, we will add it. Let me repeat: I am effecting all this not for your renown or earthly glory but as a duty to glorify the church. To the flock of the church I shall present your sermons. If such is your will, I shall effect it; if not, let me go in peace.”

For a time, Mykyta stood, gazing intently at Sozont. “The holy fathers of Kyiv have elected a wise man to effect their duty,” he said finally. “We can manage to check what you have written, but departing from here, will you not bear forth the misthinking that stems from your own particular views?”

“Do you doubt your own righteousness, Holy Father?” Sozont asked. “Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off?” Job said. Were I to deride you, I would be the one disgraced, judged before God, not you. So that if righteous you are, if you are certain of it, I should be the one afraid, not you.”

Again Mykyta reflected. “You are right,” he stated. “Effect your duty. My disciples, not I, shall listen to or read what you have recorded. That suffices. A judge cannot judge himself, lest he fall into the sin of arrogance. Now I am weary and would like to pray.”

“Amen!” Sozont said and retreated toward us.

Mykyta withdrew to the center of the hut and stood, motionless. We stayed in place, as did Antonii, Teodoryt, and Heorhii. Symeon, Ievahrii, and Nykyfor came out of the hovel and paused next to Antonii and Teodoryt; the crippled and monstrous, too, did not move. Mykyta stood, beard raised, even though there was no sky above him, only a ceiling.

Some time passed. Pavlo, at least, had managed to regain his senses, since he was no longer as red. The same was true of me, though I still lacked the strength to counter rationally the words of Mykyta—that would require quiet respite. We could have departed but, as it seemed everyone was awaiting something—Deacon Sozont, whom we silently acknowledged as our elder, did not budge—we continued to stand like posts in the yard.

And then we saw Mykyta shudder. He bowed once. Twice. Thrice. At first, he bowed slowly, but the more bows he bowed, the faster he bowed. Impulsively, who knows why, I counted: forty bows already, fifty, and he was still bowing and bowing, bending, unbending, as if he was doing this not of his will, as if a force similar to the one smiting Pavlo with seizures convulsed him. Producing a distinct, flat rhythm, like a clock pendulum, Mykyta bent and unbent; already I counted one hundred fifty-three. I felt stabs of pain in my neck from staring up the pole, while he bowed and bowed, seemingly not at all tired from bowing, bending and unbending, up and down; now I had counted two hundred bows to my amazement: how many more would he be able to endure? My eyes watered, my neck hurt—I counted to three hundred ten and had to stop. I lacked the strength to keep track. He bowed and bowed, bending and unbending, up and down. I glanced at Pavlo and Sozont. Pavlo appeared surprisingly sad, gazing at his feet rather than up. Sozont looked up, counting the bows, of course, as I had before. But finally he too, grew weary. Only Mykyta was unspent, bending and unbending, up and down. The sun overhead was scorching. Sozont’s eyes met mine and I noticed his half-smile. He winked at me, who knows why, perhaps cheering me up—probably, for soon after, he took Pavlo by the arm, pressing him lightly: he truly was cheering us up. Mykyta bowed and bowed, bending and unbending—there was no end to that continual bowing. I looked at the crippled and freakish: they were as if bewitched.

They stood beyond the fence, so watching the saint was easier for them—they did not have to crane their necks as we did. Standing erect, like soldiers, Mykyta's disciples were not watching: likely they had witnessed this more than once. And, wickedly perhaps, I thought to myself: while transcribing the Gospel first in Dvirtsi and later in Peresopnytsia, illuminating it, did I not resemble this hermit and pole-sitter, was I not prostrating myself in one-dimensional bows with my endless toil for long years. But there was a difference between us: my bows had yielded a result. I saw this result in the image of a wondrous book, the creation of which I do not consider my reward, but rather the Lord's, as He inspired me to it. God was in my thoughts while I toiled. With my artistry I glorified Him. What was the outcome, I wondered, of Mykyta's bowing, other than the astonishment that resounds briefly in the unthinking minds of the crippled, the freakish, or our own, the visitors'? For what and for whom is Mykyta effecting this? To impress the Lord? Does the Lord need such feats? More likely, he is demonstrating his dexterity, no less an artistry, though he himself condemned artistry, in front of those watching. And if so, then is he not bending and unbending himself for vain, fleeting glory? What does the Lord need more, I mused: our beneficent deeds, bringing forth fruit, with the help of which the Lord sustains life on earth: the fruit of grasses, herbs, trees, insects, fowl, animals and men, visible as well as invisible fruit, corporeal and spiritual, on the basis of which further beneficence is conceived, or, on the other hand, idle depletion, such as this buffoonery, these peculiar games, the effect of which is useless sweat that will evaporate like dewdrops? And, I thought, does the Lord wish man to disregard all the grand, wise, earthly inventions, including his own creations, desiring to devastate life in oneself, around oneself, striving to remake the world into a desolate desert? So to whom is Mykyta bowing endlessly: the Living God, the Creator of life, or the Angel of Death, ravenously devouring, obliterating everything?

And Mykyta bowed and bowed, bending and unbending, bend here and bend there, endlessly, unchangingly. Suddenly I was sorry for the enormous power and vigor he was tossing into the Eye of the Abyss, as if he wanted to dam it up with the stones of his feats, his visions—was he not doing it out of fear of that Abyss? This unfortunate man tore his feet away from mother earth and placed them atop a pole, supposing that in this way he would be closer to the firmament. His feet, though, remained bound to the floorboards of the poles and even if the pines were ten times taller, would his feet be anchored any less to the base? And the obeisance he continued to perform endlessly, was it not a hopeless effort to conquer gravity, to trample his nature, to soar into the heavens? But we all know that only what was designed for flight is capable of flying—for something designed to crawl, attempting flight is futile: it is not in its nature. He can

climb a pine tree, he can ascend a mountain to its highest peak, but earth will still pull him back. Even a bird cannot fly higher than its wings will permit.

And here Mykyta stopped. He stood, breathing heavily like a blacksmith's bellows, his mouth grasping for air, of which there was not enough; his eyes were bulging. At the same time, he was watching us, beard haughtily raised, as if he were proud and glad to be able to impress us. No other man was capable of such feats. But it seems he failed to realize one thing, the poor man: his feat of bowing flitted away like a bird into timelessness, wilted like a flower on the tree of time. Indeed, this is how it is when a bird sings. The bird lingers, though its singing has ceased and not a trace of its song remains. So had it been for the earthly and corporeal, which he had so reviled, that he had worked so hard? No. For he expected recognition for his feat. Not purposelessly, but for recompense had he strained. But who will recompense him?

CHAPTER NINETEEN,

in which another of Sozont's conversations with Mykyta's disciples is retold as is his attempt at understanding Mykyta's judgments

Mykyta was catching his breath. He then drew the curtains of the hut, disappearing from sight. The crippled and freakish started to disperse; some along the path, some straight into the trees and bushes. We alone remained with Mykyta's disciples.

"This day I must record the stories you recounted yesterday," Sozont said. "Perchance you would let me into your hovel, if there is a table? Writing on my knees, I am afraid my scribbles will be illegible."

"We have no need for a table," Teodoryt said. "Of what use is a table to those who serve no meals? We have only a bed with humble bedding and a stove for heat in winter."

"Fine. I shall write the way of the pilgrim," Sozont said.

"Is your memory that good that you can record word for word what was said yesterday?" Symeon asked.

"Not word for word, but I shall deliver the gist," Sozont said. "Since man is imperfect, as is his memory and mind, at eventide we shall read and verify."

"Do you harbor suspicions about any of what you have seen or heard?" Teodoryt asked.

"A few things unsettle me," Sozont admitted. "Does Sister Marta ever visit you in your hovel?"

"Musii the dwarf saw and told you?" Antonii asked.

"Yesterday we saw her walking along the path to the hallowed place. A few things we have learned from the dwarf."

"Your frankness delights us," Antonii stated.

"Sister Marta is the spiritual betrothed of St. Mykyta," Teodoryt said. "So that she is permitted to visit at night—never during the day—to pray to the blessed one, to feel his spirit upon her, to be cleansed."

"Does the saint descend to her?" Sozont asked.

"Only in exceptional cases," Teodoryt said. "When the demon begins to torment Sister Marta."

"She is tormented by a demon?"

"That is why she came to the sacred place. One does not come here for no purpose," Teodoryt said. "She wished to remain here. The demon in her is robust and tenacious, even though the saint expelled it once; it returns from time to time."

"The dwarf said she moans and squeals with desire."

"That is the demon in her moaning and squealing with desire," Teodoryt said.

"How does the saint expulse demons?"

“By praying. Employing a ritual,” Antonii answered.

“How is the ritual performed?”

“The same as priests in churches and monasteries perform,” Antonii answered.

“Does St. Mykyta not have the power to expulse the demon definitively?”

“He has,” Teodoryt said. “But he lets the demon return from time to time so that Sister Marta can test her spirit, so that she can perfect her contest with the demon. That is, to be able to wrestle with him alone, without the saint’s aid.”

“Is it not better to expulse him, to free her?” Sozont asked.

“The saint is tempering Marta’s spirit so that she will be able to wrestle not only one demon, but others when she departs the sacred place,” Antonii said.

“She wishes to leave?”

“Yes! She wishes to take vows, to become a nun. But first, she wants to prepare herself.”

“Is the demon in Sister Marta lasciviousness?” Sozont asked directly.

“Yes! That is why she strives for mortification of the flesh. Prior to this, it was whoredom.”

“Would I be able to observe St. Mykyta expulsing the demon from her?”

“Of course,” Teodoryt said. “If the demon should assail her during your stay at the sacred place, we shall summon you. In Deuteronomy it is said: ‘And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.’”

“I have no more doubts,” Sozont said.

“If any should arise, about anything, do not hide them, so that misthinking does not take hold,” Antonii said.

“Indeed,” stated Sozont, and asked: “So that on this night St. Mykyta is to descend, to walk around the island?”

“You are lucky to be able to see it,” Teodoryt said.

“If what I have recorded is accurate, will we be able to depart from the sacred place?”

“If any of you so wish,” Teodoryt said.

“And if you do not record what you witness tonight,” Antonii added.

“And if I do record it?”

“You will submit it for verification—and have a good journey!”

We bowed to Mykyta’s disciples and left. Along the path Pavlo started: “Brother Sozont, so it turns out that instead of healing my affliction, the saint proposes that I die.”

“That means, Brother, that he is incapable of healing your affliction.

After all, is he to be more powerful than the fathers of the hermitage or the holy fathers of the Lavra? Sadly though, he is right: the dead feel no pain.”

“No one can help me, then?” Pavlo sniveled. Sometimes he was childish.

“I am no doctor, Brother Pavlo. I am a lawyer. Writing prescriptions is not my province—investigating and inquiring is. Have you gone to doctors?”

“I have, before being tonsured into monkhood. All my fortune was spent on them, but they found no remedy, even though I was given all kinds of repugnant potions to drink, to swallow; even though they rubbed me with ointments.”

“Go to sorcerers, then.”

“I have done that. They massaged me, nearly breaking my bones, they cracked an egg over my head, they whispered, they sighed. But I derived no relief from them, either. Perchance what St. Mykyta said is true?”

“You have a mind to determine that for yourself,” Sozont said. “I cannot inject my mind into your head.”

“Do not pretend to be less than you are, Brother Sozont!” Pavlo cried. “Your mind is much greater than mine, which is unbalanced and confused! Did Mykyta state the truth?”

“Truth regarding what?” Sozont asked.

“Regarding Christian teachings.”

“Unfortunately, Pavlo, there is no single Christian teaching. Both the western church, and the eastern, especially the Greek, as well as ours, and the Muscovite, the Protestants, the sects and various orders of the western church—they all consider themselves to be true believers and the others falsifiers, heretics and blunderers, which is why they quarrel among themselves like dogs, afflicted, all of them, with the greatest of the great sins—the sin of intolerance. Hence, in their dogma they create differences that are often quite heathen and absurd, for example in teaching how to cross oneself.”

“The words ‘tolerance’ and ‘intolerance’ do not exist in the Gospels,” I said. “There is ‘patience,’ ‘suffering,’ and that is not always the same.”

“You are right, Brother Mykhailo. They are substituted with the words ‘love’ and ‘hate’ and sometimes ‘patience’ and ‘impatience.’ And some excessively fervid Christian minds—not without the help of the Devil, who muddles man’s thinking—interpreted patience as a need to perish, to suffering torture. That is why two schools of thought have emerged in Christianity; the misanthropic, and what is known today as the humanitarian. Mykyta avows the misanthropic point of view based not on love, as his love is likewise misanthropic, but on a hatred towards God’s great creation—mankind and his world. And it is between these two points of view that the great abyss lies, not between the incidental differences in

dogma between small-thinking men. As far as I am concerned, he who divides love into the carnal and the Divine sins mightily, for God is present in carnal love as well. Immortality relies on transience and mutability, as we see in a rotting seed. Decaying, the seed sprouts, yielding not only one new fruit, but tenfold, a hundredfold. To deny love for all things earthly, for beauty, loving only God, is, in my view, a weighty sin, for earth is God's creation in the name of man, placed on earth by God. As I have said, it was not out of vengeance or hate but out of love that God alienated man, casting him out of paradise into earthly life, to create perpetuity out of mortality. And when Christ said 'In your patience possess ye your souls,'¹ or when James said 'Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire wanting nothing,' patience ought be understood not as a challenge to breed maggots in one's sores, but as tolerance, or as love. For Christ said: 'As my Father loved me, so do I love man. Abide in my love.' Whom did He love? Men of the world, men who dwell in benevolence, and as such, create a beneficent world. Two worlds are being devised: a godly, beneficent world, and a demonic, evil world. This, too, is effected of God's will, to make benevolence evident in its opposition to evil and hatred. The abyss appears when man ceases to see white as white, naming hate—love, and love—hate, that is to say, dishonors the Lord's commandments, substituting them with his own contrived ones. That is when blasphemy, sacrilege take root, and, as Proverbs tell us: 'Proud and haughty—scorner is his name' and 'the scorner is an abomination to men,' and 'judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the backs of fools.'"

As we listened to Sozont's sermon we arrived at our place of repose. Pavlo and I lay down. Sozont continued standing until he finished. The power of his words was more congenial and desirable to me than was Mykyta's, but Pavlo, evidently, thought otherwise, for I saw distrust in his expression.

"What is the lesson of dying?" he asked after Sozont finished.

"Oh, that is a large subject!" Sozont stated. "I've told you already: either one of Mykyta's disciples or perhaps Mykyta himself obtained considerable learning in this world, which he has grown to hate so much. Most likely he studied not in our lands. Have you heard of *ars moriendi*?"

"The art of dying?" I asked.

"Exactly. Or *ars bene moriendi*—the art of dying well, about which Seneca, Epicurus, and Cicero spoke. Cicero used the term *mori discere*—the science of dying."

"So then this is not a Christian art or science?" Pavlo asked.

"Everything that exists is rooted in what was," Sozont stated.

¹ Note in margin: "Luke 21:19."

“Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who lived in the third century after the birth of Christ, in his treatise ‘De Moralitate’ taught that death is not to be feared if one wishes to become one with Christ. Only through death can one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. St. Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine wrote about the art of dying. Rupert of Deutz, too, wrote of it in the eleventh century; the thirteenth-century pseudo-Augustinian treatise ‘Speculum morsis’ also comments on this, and it is treated in an especially detailed manner in the form of questions and answers in Anselm of Canterbury’s tract ‘Admonitio morienti.’ Anselm advises the one who is dying to strive for repentance for his sins and to seek remission, attributing his salvation to Christ’s death. This tract can be considered the first in which the art of dying is presented. St. Joseph wrote of it, as did, later, the German Dominican Henrik Seuse in ‘Horologium sapientiae,’ and especially Joannis Gerson in the tract ‘Opusculum tripartitum.’ There is also a Polish treatise, ‘Ars Moriendi,’ penned by Matteus of Cracow. And if this does not suffice for you, I can also mention Domenic of Karpanika and his book *Speculum artis bene moriendi*—he lived closer to us, in the last century.”

“Your mind is remarkable, Brother Sozont,” Pavlo said quietly.

“Listening to you it is apparent that you have studied much, and not in our lands,” said I.

“It is impossible to pursue such learning in our insular land.”

“So where did you study?” I asked.

“First in Cracow, then in Heidelberg, where Matteus of Cracow was rector for a time. Later, in Bologna.”

“And why did you return to our, as you say, insular land?”

“For a man is born not only of his elders’ will, but of the will of God. And if God assigned man a place of birth—that means, his dwelling place is likewise designated. I dared not violate that law. A man torn from his roots is spiritually fractured.”

“Let us not deviate from our discourse,” Pavlo said. “I admit, the fear of death has gnawed at me for several days now. What do scholars say of this?”

“Both Jacob of Paradyzh and Erasmus of Rotterdam claim that fear of death is necessary; it is a constructive fear. It must move one towards a readiness to meet death. For that the school of dying well was established.”

“I wish to become a student of this school, Brother Sozont,” Pavlo stated quietly. “But I fear it may be too late.”

“Edification is never late, if one’s heart is open to it,” Sozont said. “If you have a need, Brother, apply spiritual remedies.”

“I am ready for that,” Pavlo said.

“Summon the doctor called Truth and Good Sense. Let him feel your pulse and ask what you understand.”

“What am I to understand?” Pavlo asked.

“Yourself, your own elapsed life, the good you have effected, the transgressions. And utilize the spiritual remedy.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“In recognizing your vices, take a very humble view. Add to that the idea of a true conversion to the Lord and three handfuls of the herbs of penance. To that apply a pound of genuine spiritual repentance. Mix well with tears generously shed while bewailing the sins you have committed. Thence, with heavy moaning and beating of the chest, awaken your conscience, filter it all through the sieve of justice, so that God may have mercy and your neighbors may ignore what was impure in you. With this clear potion of conscience, douse the spirit to absolve it of old sins.”

“A fine recipe you have, Brother Sozont,” Pavlo said.

“It is not my recipe, it is the recipe of learned men who meditated upon *ars moriendi*. If you want mine, I shall tell you.”

“That would be a favor to me, Brother,” Pavlo said.

“Expect Death, prepare yourself for it, but do not yearn for it nor summon it—Death itself knows when to come. When you are ailing, do not wish for all around you to ail, and be joyous not because you are dying, but for the health of those around you. Do not wish for the world with its beauty and creation to perish, as you are perishing, but pray for those who bear darkness and night within them to be able to cross over into daylight, that is, to grow into goodness and love. Do not hate the haters—but pity them because it is not you who have been despoiled by their hatred: it is they who are despoiled by it—they were incapable of seeing the light within you, seeing only darkness. Consider whether what they perceived in you was in fact just, and if you find yourself incapable of judging, repent for that which evoked their hatred and hostility towards you. Know that your kindness triumphed over evil, light over darkness, love over hatred and may intolerance grow into tolerance. Know that the loving kindness you effected in the world is that burgeoning shoot sprouting out of decaying matter into a future bud, and that your mortality is darkness, evil, and non-love. Know that mortality must be relinquished, although without it a germ cannot sprout. Your mortality is God’s creation, as is the world, humanity, and all life. Trust that the beauty of the world is God’s image in it, that monstrosity is the background against which it is made manifest, and that the fleetingness of beauty is the background against which eternity is perceived. Amen.”

“Your words are wholly opposite to what Mykyta had instructed, Brother Sozont,” Pavlo said. “Your words are powerful, but Mykyta’s were no less so. Where is verity? Somewhere in the middle?”

“In the middle lies the abyss, Brother Pavlo,” Sozont said, “out of which the eye gazes at us. That eye shall test us and judge us. ‘The truth shall set us free,’ Ivan Bohoslov says. May the Lord recompense us

according to our truth.”

“And what is truth, Brother Sozont?” Pavlo inquired.

“I shall respond citing the words of the eighty-fifth Psalm: truth is where ‘Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him: and shall set us in the way of his steps.’”

“You have presented too many things for me to ponder, Brother Sozont,” Pavlo said. “I fear I will have no time to crack this nut.”

“It is never late to reflect,” Sozont said. “And for that one does not need an appropriate moment. Only one thing is required: good will. Without good will, as without His grace—not a pace.”

CHAPTER TWENTY,

which recounts how we spent our second day on the island

Pavlo and I spent most of this day resting. Sozont was busy chronicling the life and feats of St. Mykyta; he wanted either to read it or submit it for reading to the pole-sitter's disciples at eventide. Pavlo withdrew from us, kneeling for a long prayer. Having spent a sleepless night and feeling quite weary from the two sermons, Mykyta's and Sozont's, I felt my head splitting: at this time I lacked the strength to digest the weighty wisdom of these two great men who, as it were, had come together here for this joust, though, as I have said, Sozont's wisdom seemed more convincing to me. So I delayed my own meditating about what had been said for a quieter time, after we would leave this island with its peculiar settlers. Thus, tired beyond measure, I fell asleep. I dreamed of a scaly beast with bony ridges along its spine, like the one supposedly living in the Eye of the Abyss—that odd pool that truly resembled an eye.

The beast had a long, sinuous body, like a gigantic lizard, with a lizard-like head, though with enormous eyes, like two encased mirrors reflecting everything it saw. Now the beast was looking at me, and I saw two refractions of myself. One eye cast me as I was while scribing the *Peresopnytska Gospel*: still young, full of verve, buoyant, burning with a great passion to design the book of books, the likes of which existed nowhere, with which I longed to glorify not so much myself as the Lord—He inspired me to this feat. The other eye mirrored me as I was now: older, lean, the right side of my head and beard gray, the left side still dark, though with gray hairs here and there appearing. In this second me the eyes were dimmed, emanating sadness and weariness, and where the lips in the first were smiling provocatively, in the other they were tightly pressed and a bit twisted. Thick wrinkles laced my forehead—in the first my high forehead was glowing. And these two images, reflected in the eyes of the beast from the Eye of the Abyss, began a conversation: “Do not languish in yourself,” the young I said. “Do not roam the world vainly, do not seek wind in the field, do not waste time, do not rack your brain with ideas your mind cannot fathom. Return to deeds you can and are able to perform, and the less free time you will have, the less confused and distraught you will be.”

“I will not effect anything better than what I have created,” the I of today said wearily, “and I cannot do something worse.”

“Something made better or worse—is, nevertheless, effected,” the young I said. “The unmade is forever unmade. Work begets strength, not idleness. Strength is lost and dies in idleness.”

“Strength requires vitality,” said today's I. “And that is what I lack. When one is drained, is it not honorable and sound to stop creating rather than effecting pretense?”

“Vitality comes from work, in daily achievement, attainment,” the young I contradicted.

“Vitality comes from Divine inclination and enlightenment,” said the I of today. “Without it, everything effected becomes feigned.”

And then the beast opened its jaws wide, and I saw blade-like teeth gleaming like polished steel, and I saw a long, red tunnel with a little flap protecting the gullet. That little flap opened and I felt tempted to go into it, as I had ventured on this journey in its time. It seemed to me that at the end of the tunnel I would find a windowless, doorless chamber where I would be able to commune with God, as had Jonah. And here is what I would say, in the belly of the beast: “I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.”¹

My spirit fainted. And even as I was unutterably tempted to enter the belly of the beast in the Eye of the Abyss, my legs lacked the strength to move. My tongue lacked the strength to speak. Smitten with an otherworldly terror, I screamed. That fear woke me.

Squatting, with head to the side, Sozont was writing on a small wooden board that he carried with him in his sack. “Why did you scream so in your dream, Brother Mykhailo?” he asked calmly.

I described my dream.

“This lake or pool is the only place my mind cannot fathom,” Sozont said as he stopped writing, rose, and straightened himself. “I can believe that an unknown beast lives there—we do not know everything about the world. It is more difficult to imagine in what way it effects Mykyta’s will—or rather, that of his disciples. As I walked along the path when Kuzma fell in, I felt heaving underfoot. Pavlo felt it, too.”

“I saved myself by lodging my staff into the track so that I would not fall in,” I said.

“That’s interesting,” Sozont remarked, “since you, Brother, were closest to Kuzma. So that he who was last had to perish.”

“Does that explain something to you?”

“No,” Sozont declared thoughtfully. “Somehow they are effecting it. The track could have shaken from Kuzma’s motions, or it could have moved of itself, throwing Kuzma off. A question: who moved the track? How? It is obviously suspended, artificially constructed.”

“I thought so too,” I said. “I drove my staff in and it stuck so tight that

¹ Note in margin: “Jonah 2:5–7.”

I was barely able to yank it out.”

“Let us recollect how Mykyta’s disciples stood,” Sozont said. “Scattered along the curving shore. One of them could have jerked a hidden cord fastened to the track. I can think of no other explanation.”

“And what about the dwarf?”

“In the dwarf’s case, the matter is simpler. For him it was too deep and he did not know how to swim. Mykyta’s disciples, by the way, were absent.”

“If Kuzma was felled by one of Mykyta’s disciples,” I asked, “and it was not Teodoryt, how could they know that it was Kuzma they were to topple?”

“I tell you, Brother: the pool is the only thing my mind cannot fathom, and I am expressing not what I know but what I surmise. In accusing someone, it is not fitting to surmise. Teodoryt, walking first, may have signaled his friends whom to drown.”

“Kuzma himself chose to be last,” I contradicted. “To drown someone in the manner you have described would be more difficult in the center.”

“I have thought about that as well,” Sozont said. “Two things are possible: either a section of the walkway is pulled out from under someone along the track, or circumstance played a role and was used to good advantage. I repeat: these are bare, bare, bare suppositions.”

“What have we, then?”

“The same again: there is among them a devilish mind, or, more exactly, a leviathan head under water, as the Psalms tell us, stuffed with knowledge, cunning, and artfulness.”

“Is it Mykyta’s, or his disciples’?”

“One of his disciples’, I believe,” Sozont answered.

“Teodoryt and Antonii are chief among them.”

“It would be unwise for that head to expose itself. And this is a wise head. Perchance, Symeon,” Sozont said.

“Why are you considering Symeon?”

“Every wise head is afflicted by vainglory,” Sozont said. “He has named himself Symeon as they are followers of Symeon the Pole-sitter.”

“Was Symeon Metafrast not among the hagiographers of Symeon the Pole-sitter?” I asked.

“That is why he might have been tempted to name himself Symeon. Though this, too, is mere conjecture.”

“Teodoryt and Antonii always answer your questions. And, admittedly, they break your hooks off very wisely, leaving not even a barb. Even in the matter of Sister Marta. So who was being truthful: the dwarf or Teodoryt?”

“The dwarf, of course,” Sozont stated. “Mykyta transgresses with Marta. Perhaps even the disciples, or just one of them, too.”

“Do you know this or are you surmising?”

“Surmising, though more firmly than about the Eye of the Abyss—we have a witness here who surely tracked them.”

Sozont began writing again.

“Are you writing what you wish, or what they wish?” I could not resist asking.

Sozont glanced at me in surprise. “I would be a fool to write as I think,” he said. “Otherwise, we would never leave this island, Brother. We would be fodder for their beast. Though I am chronicling not one life, but two: one on paper, and the other in my mind. On paper, the evident version, and in my mind, the real version.” All at once, Sozont chuckled quietly. “At any rate,” he said, “the manifest is wholly uninteresting. It is copied word for word from the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter, as I have said. Some things about that impress me here, as well.”

“What, exactly?”

“The story of the thief whom we saw and whose death we observed, likewise Mykyta’s bowing: that had not been recounted, we saw it with our eyes. Both instances are described in the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter. Mykyta’s bowing might be an imitation, for these people are symeonides, but what about the thief? The thief was genuine, the peasants were genuine, and he really was murdered. As they were dragging him off, I myself saw a trail of blood. This is the other thing my mind cannot fathom.”

“Could it be coincidental?” I asked.

“I do not believe in coincidence,” Sozont said. “Coincidence in the case of Kuzma, coincidence in the case of the thief—that is too much.”

“And if this was a staged show, similar to those performed by skomorokhy actors?” I asked.

“In that case, a truly diabolical mind is devising it all,” Sozont stated emphatically.

Pavlo, who had been praying, returned at that moment. He was pale and his eyes looked vacant. “I am following your lesson on the art of dying, Brother Sozont,” he said humbly.

“Why do you always speak of it, Brother Pavlo?” Sozont asked delicately. “No need to be overly concerned with things that are self evident or with the words of madmen.”

Pavlo stopped and stood straight, gazing somewhere into the distance. “I shall not leave this place,” he muttered. “Thus spoke my heart when I stepped onto this island and thus speaks my heart now: I shall not leave.”

“You wish to remain among Mykyta’s disciples?” I asked.

“No,” Pavlo replied quietly. “I shall not live to the morrow.” He looked around in fear, checking if anyone was eavesdropping. “And you, Brothers, steal away quickly, as soon as you can. Horror gripped me the moment I stepped onto this island. And that horror has not left me. I know

not its cause, but it is in me like a lump of soil. And all the while, a scent of soil lingers around me. Brother Sozont, you have a great mind, do not delay—think how to get out. Do not tarry!”

He regarded us with widened, azure eyes. His cheek began to twitch.

“Calm down, Brother,” Sozont said gently and quietly. “We shall live to the morrow and we will all leave together. And there, in the free world, we will pray for these hapless ones: may the Lord have mercy and may their prayers be answered. Lie down, Brother Pavlo, rest. Or go with Brother Mykhailo for a stroll. I must finish recording the life of the saint today. We have done them no evil, and they are aware of that. Why would they attack us?”

“Fine, Brother Sozont. May it be as you say,” Pavlo said agreeably. “But I do not wish to leave this spot. I will repose after prayer, only to begin again later, following your wisdom and that of the learned men.”

“May the Lord hear you,” Sozont said warmly.

Pavlo lay down. I decided to go for a walk about the island. I felt an urge, suddenly, to be close to the Eye of the Abyss, to scrutinize it. At least I wanted to investigate whether there was a rope tied to a tree or shore somewhere. I had no wish, I know not why, to make my intentions known. Silently I left for the depths of the island.

The sun stood high in the sky. In the heat herbs, grass, and leaves effused a particular pungency. Perhaps the earth too—as it seemed to Pavlo. I have always loved the sun. It made me eager to work, filling me with vigor. Back when I scribed the Peresopnytska Gospel, I would, when weary, stroll out into the sun, wallowing directionless in the flood of herbs, grass, flowers, and trees, wandering, nearly blinded by the dense shafts of sun, scented with rye, the suffocating fragrance of blossoms, the heady scent of weeds. That air, that aroma intoxicated me, oddly diffusing my spirit—I felt spilled around the air, I felt mellow and a bit unraveled in the sun, and my heart radiated a kind of sacred solemnity. My gaze soared into the deep yonder, alighting upon a faraway tree or upon a cloud; my feet barely touched the ground. I waded across the meadow, aglitter like emeralds; a delightful effervescence blinded me with its dazzle. Looking around to see if anyone was about (there are many among our folk who look askance at baring one’s body, or swimming), I undressed slowly, my body humming beneath the sky, a golden intensity filling me like spring water filling a vessel. Then I plunged off the bank into the water. I dove, not shutting my eyes, into green tallow—and all around me a strange world undulated, a world of algae and fish, the fish floating up to me, fearless, lips grazing me, as if kissing. Planting my feet in the sand and maneuvering my arms for support, I exploded through the surface, the sun once again blinding me, once more blessing me. Through a watery film I saw the world laughing—grand, miraculous, spacious, green, full of sap, of life; in the thick of grass

there was not a patch of soil on which something did not crawl, did not move; in the air above, agile birds hovered loosely—I, too, was a part of this life, this world. Floating easily, I felt my flesh shivering in the coolness of the sun-mingled water. After, I climbed out of the water sensing the last morsels of fatigue trickling out of my mind, evaporating into clouds on high. I dressed and lay facing the sky. My being flowed into the azure air, and the azure air poured into me. I became light, almost formless. All around me crickets sang in a maddening, rapturous chorus. Larks' windpipes burst with inspiration in the blue vastness. Tufts of grass surrounded my head, my arms, my torso, its pods, full of seeds, swaying. Picking a blade of grass, I tasted it, savoring its cool sweet juice, while searching for shapes among clouds. Closing my eyes, I felt the sun's rays kissing me all over my skin, like the intrepid little fish in the water. Peace fell upon me then: inviolable, cherished. My mind and heart full of tranquility, with peace on my lips, eyes shut, I envisioned a fresh page, still clean and light and glossy, on which I was to sprinkle seeds of letters, of words, embroidering it with lines and renderings of plant life. In my imagination, I sketched a frame with flora twining around it, for even though I was scribing a most woeful of woeful stories about Him Who in imparting to the world a lesson of love was to suffer an onerous, tyrannical death, that story was not in praise of death, but in praise of life. The Aggrieved One sowed seeds of love not as homage to non-existence, but as triumph over death. That is why across a field of white I sowed seeds of letters, each of which sheltered a germ for sprouting. It would, inevitably, burst forth, and nowhere but in this world, in these people, once sent here by God—in their minds and hearts. And I thought then as I think now that if the Lord willed death for the world, it, this world, would have ceased to exist long ago. Then it would be the shoots that would rot, not the germ, and the germ would harden like stone, no longer producing these endless profusions of shoots that the human mind is incapable of enumerating, or examining. Prescient possibility and Divine law would not be concealed in each seed with the sun warming it like a bird its egg, and that sun and seed—those birds' eggs and animal and human seeds would parch and wilt transforming the living world into a barren desert. Thus, I thought, I too am like a seed cultivator, a planter of spiritual fruit, of an egg and the warmth required for it to develop cannot come from death, but only a life-giving force. Thus the Peresopnytska Gospel, which I designed and copied, is also like one of these seeds amidst the stalks of the grass of life, like a seed in the apple of the world, while I myself am a simple tool creating it, not the creator—it is created by Him Who functions within the law of timelessness. No Mykyta can convince me that it was not the will of the Almighty that impelled me to produce the fruit of my life—that I was urged by the will of the evil spirit; for a pure intent, an act of Divine creation, cannot harbor the

evil spirit. So that it is not God, not the Creator that wills to level, to destroy this world, into which He invested so much of His love, but the impure one who has no need of the world, or of lofty ideas, of beauty, of the mystery of eternity.

With these thoughts I arrived at the lake. I stopped and stared at the pool. The immense eye lay with one half surrounded by the island's shore, the other half with sparse, arched saplings growing on hillocks, resembling eyelashes above the eye. It gaped dejectedly into the pale blue flood of the sky. The sun did not sparkle or frolic in it as it does in pure water. No ripples or bubbles formed in the lake or pool; there was no play of colors. It appeared congealed in a timeless, grim lifelessness, and a nauseating, fleshy odor, the feeble stench of carcasses emanated from it. Looking at that Eye I felt the joy and rapture that I had just experienced gradually fading within me, along with the warm memory of happy days—my vivid, hearty plenishment. I sensed myself becoming rigid, dark, out of focus, twisted, hollow. Denser and denser smoke filled my empty viscera. I glimpsed the grass under my feet: it was sparse, half-wilted, its ends shriveled, dry. Similarly the leaves on the trees were limp, they did not shine with polish—instead they hung mutely, not yet withered but not succulent either.

Head hanging low, I walked along the shore examining the strip of land between shore and water.

“Why are you so pensive, Brother Mykhailo?” an unexpected voice startled me.

Under a tree, leaning against its trunk, stood Symeon. His eyes glowed wisely in an elongated, lean, even emaciated face. I silently confirmed my own observation: Symeon's eyes reflect intelligence.

“I am pondering what St. Mykyta said to me,” I stated. “His sermon, too, was mighty powerful.”

“Indeed,” Symeon said. “Is that why you came to gaze upon the Eye of the Abyss?”

“Yes,” I admitted. “It emits an unfathomable force. What does it consist of?”

“I agree with you,” Symeon said. “Sometimes it seems to me that God has placed it here as a symbol of earthly life. I myself come here to meditate.”

“A symbol of earthly life,” I thought to myself. “An ignorant man would not speak thus! An ignorant man would not seclude himself to meditate.”

“What is it you encounter here?” I asked.

“Probably the same thing you feel,” Symeon said. “A revelation of the world of death.”

“Have you lived here long, Brother Symeon?” I inquired as nonchalantly as I could.

“Sozont had already asked me ... yes, a while,” Symeon replied.

“Who were you prior to this?” I asked.

“A sinful, dishonorable man, making a mess of his life and killing his own soul,” Symeon said sadly. “But God sent me to the venerable one, and he shed light on my ignorance. Thus I forsook my property, rich food, worldly enticements and seductions, my most lovely wife; I stopped worrying about the morrow, about material comforts, and followed Mykyta along the narrow path instead.”

“How did the saint and his disciples come across this place?”

“They became pilgrims without any goal or direction, trusting the Lord’s guidance instead. That is what brought them here. They tread simply: forward, forward, without digressing, not turning back, not looking around—they knew what had happened to Lot’s wife. You must know, Brother Mykhailo, Sodom and Gomorrah are, after all, a symbol of our time, and the Lord chose to lead only Lot and his family out of it. Lot’s wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. They walked for a long time, so they said, stopping only when darkness fell, never in towns or villages, but wherever else they happened to be.”

“And they stopped here,” I said, “because from here there was no place to go?”

“Yes. They were searching for exactly such a place. A place from which, without returning, there is no place to go.”

“How remarkable!” I exclaimed. “Can I recount this to Sozont, so that he records it as yet another of St. Mykyta’s marvels?”

“As you wish,” Symeon said. “We are spiritually open, we conceal nothing. Although, if you want to know the truth, I believe Brother Sozont is effecting a useless thing, wishing to tell the world about us. We seek no glory, we do not strive to disseminate information about ourselves, for we have vowed ourselves to the will of God. Our goal now: to continue onward without stopping, without looking back, so as not to become pillars of salt—continuing not along the path of the flesh but along a spiritual, empyreal path, elevating us higher and higher, until we attain the expected, mercilessly mortifying our flesh. May all that is mortal crumble into dust, become fodder for worms. Our path leads to the everlasting, the blessed.”

“Did the saint erect his pole as a reminder of the pillar of salt?” I asked.

“You reason well, Brother,” Symeon said. “Seeing the pole the saint lives on must always remind us of the salt pillar Lot’s wife turned into.”

“And if one of you wished to return to the world?” I asked.

“A few of Mykyta’s disciples did just that, though not returning to secular life, but into self-reliant hermitism. We do not keep anyone here forcibly. We do not compel anyone to assist us. One cannot follow our path without free will. And our will has a good watchman—there he is,” and

Symeon nodded at the Eye of the Abyss. “When one’s spirit is enfeebled, this is a good place to come for solitary reflection, as you did, and as did I.”

“A great and incomprehensible power flows out of this water,” I said.

“Two streams connect here: one living and one dead. The milky water is dead, and that dark water is living. That is the water the Lord has provided for our nourishment in answer to the saint’s entreaty. And we drink it.”

“How did you learn that the milky water is foul?”

“When we first arrived here, one of the saint’s disciples, thirsty, tried it. He drank it and died, suffering horribly.”

“How did you have the courage to try the dark water?”

“It appeared after the saint’s praying and under his protection. He willed us to drink it.”

“Great things you relate, Brother Symeon,” I said.

And Symeon smiled: it was a smile full of sorrow. For a moment it lit up and enlivened his lifeless features, but then it dimmed abruptly. “Do not stay near the Eye of the Abyss for long, Brother,” Symeon said warmly. “You are not accustomed to it. It can make you feel ill.”

“Thank you for cautioning me, Brother Symeon.” I bowed and withdrew, leaving Symeon standing under the tree.

I was oddly impressed with all I had heard and I hastened to relate it to Sozont. Patiently and attentively Sozont listened; Pavlo, meanwhile, once again kneeled in the bushes to pray.

“So that they have placed a guard at the Eye of the Abyss,” Sozont said. “We have confirmation of my conjecture: Symeon is no simpleton.”

“What about the fresh and foul water?” I asked.

“The story about the creation of a wellspring is described in the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter, though there the spring broke through a cliff. So, as with other so-called miracles, the fable has been dressed in today’s clothing.”

“Are you not simplifying, Brother Sozont?” I asked.

“Are you asking,” he said sharply, “is not Mykyta truly a saint and miracle worker?”

“The Christian church wills us to believe in saints and miracle workers. Christ was a miracle worker, as were His apostles.”

“One who performs miracles during one’s lifetime as well as after death, and whose relics become imperishable, is considered a saint by our church. So a person is not proclaimed a saint while still alive,” Sozont declared, reflecting for a moment. “Christ is the Lord, and about God’s miracles, there can be no doubt. His apostles, having entered into a direct relation with God, became His instruments. Whether other saints were similarly instruments of God or whether they were sorcerers, as was Simon from the Acts of the Apostles, I am not firmly convinced. There may have

been those among them chosen by God, or they may have been hypocrites. Hark back on the Acts of the Apostles: ‘But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.’ So, Brother, it is difficult to designate who among them was an instrument of God, and who a sorcerer. I have embarked on this journey to examine Mykyta. Only God can confirm the saints from the past, but among the living, today, even I, a sinful man can authenticate those who plot into sainthood.”

“But is it necessary to disclose them?” I asked.

“The Lord willed us to reveal the concealed, saying, ‘There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed and hid that shall not be known.’ The true God is the God of righteousness, not of falsity. With the lips of David God said: ‘O, ye sons of man, how long will ye turn My glory into shame? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?’; and ‘Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such that turn aside to lies.’ When I removed my lay clothing, Brother, and donned cloth of the church, I implored the Lord: ‘I despise all manner of lying, Lord, I hate lies and those for whom falsehood rules. Preserve me from a path of falsehood.’ In the world, falsehood reigns pompously and man finds refuge in lies. Our elders inherited lies, and we—from them, and our children from us. And thus, as St. Paul stated, ‘Who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator!’ This, Brother Mykhailo, is what guides me.”

“I believe and understand you. But something else torments me: what if your suspicion of these people is false; what if that which they profess is true, and what they profess—they profess verily; what if the dwarf, your only witness, driven by carnal lechery, spoke with lying lips, and not they; what if their denial of your suspicions about their replies to your questions, which you yourself admitted were true, are genuine? And if lies appear as truth, then cannot truth appear as lies, while not being lies? How can you prove, Brother Sozont, that your reasoning is faultless, that you are able to measure truth? Since you yourself said you were a billow of the sea, will your truth not be like the billows of the sea?”

“I am a man as small and sinful as are you, Mykhailo. I am not elevating myself or my mind,” Sozont said. “But there is human, variable truth, and Divine. Hark back on Psalms: ‘The Lord loveth righteousness,’ and ‘Grant us truth, oh Lord!’”

He broke off and thought. Then, abruptly, he raised his head and a half-smile appeared on his face. “The veracity of my suspicions will be proven tomorrow,” he said.

“You have resolved something?”

“I am not, Brother Mykhailo, such a foolish or careless man as to be self-confident. Not once have I said to you: an inference is not proof. I am afraid that for us to attain confirmation from an inference will not be easy. There must be a test. The concealed must be revealed. So that if they are what they purport to be, if they are not ruled by a satanic mind, on the morrow, Brother, we will depart from here calmly and freely. You yourself know: I am recording two chronicles: one on paper and the other in my mind. If we leave here undisturbed, I shall recognize the version recorded on paper as truth. If, on the morrow, I should die while crossing the Eye of the Abyss, as did Kuzma, the version recorded in my head shall be recognized as truth. Then you shall carry it out of here.”

“You speak of terrible things, Brother Sozont!” I shuddered. “They resemble fortune telling. Like the hag claiming that something might happen, or it might not.”

“This is not fortune telling. This is a test, Brother. If they are indeed genuine, not hypocrites, why should they fear me? Why kill me?”

“Why are you certain that it is you who will perish, not I, or not both of us, or Pavlo? Why are you depending on me, instead of Pavlo?”

“I fear for Pavlo,” Sozont declared, “that he will not live to the moment of departure. Look at him: he is crazed, full of the foreboding of death. You will tread along the path in front of me—I will, as Kuzma was before, be last.”

I regarded Sozont in disbelief, though he remained, as before, calm, a puzzling smile across his lips. Fear touched my heart with its bony paw.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE,

which recounts how Sozont saved me from the serpent and the reading of the Life of St. Mykyta

In the afternoon we started feeling hungry. We had no inclination for gluttony: I at least, practiced fasting and abstinence with regard to food and I believe my fellow travelers did likewise. But yesterday's gruel was hardly nourishing, and we had expended plenty of energy— especially mental energy—and it was a long time to wait until eventide. Even Pavlo ceased praying and complained of hunger. We could think of nothing better to do than to sleep especially since that night we were to gather for Mykyta's pentecostal procession around the island, and we did not want to miss that. It is easier to endure hunger asleep. So we lay down on our bedding. At once I was swept into chimerical mazes of phantasmal visions. Oddly, the dream was impious.

I was walking along a path in a thick forest. Suddenly, I saw Sister Marta peering at me from behind a tree, exhibiting her bare breasts. I threw myself at her. Laughing, and completely naked, she ran onto a path. She ran, and I chased her, but hard as I tried, I could not shorten the distance between us. Out of breath, I sat under a tree, wiping thick sweat off my brow. Marta, no longer running from me, entered a forest. In a moment I felt my arms being grasped from behind and stretched around a tree trunk, the flat of my hands bound tightly. An unknown force lifted me to my feet and stood me upright. Marta began circling the tree, winding a cord about me—in an instant, I was girded to the tree. When I looked at the cord binding me, I shuddered: it was a long serpent, its tail dragging along the ground, its head swaying right in front of my face, thrusting a little forked tongue at me. It was Marta's head.

“Are you pleased?” Marta the snake said, or hissed.

“But I am suffocating!” I jabbered.

“Such is carnal pleasure,” Marta's head laughed, “for those who chase whores.”

“But I have never chased whores, nor have I ever had anything to do with women,” I forced myself to say.

“Therein lies your sin,” Marta hissed. “Did not God provide this for you?” she shook my engorged rod. “Why is it withering uselessly? Why do you kill your semen with your evil will rather than coupling it, as intended, with the seed of a woman?”

“Because my destiny is to cultivate the fruit of the spirit,” said I.

“And I shall force you to grow earthly fruit,” Marta hissed. “Enter me!”

“Die! Vanish, you devil!” I shrieked. “I am old for earthly fruits! Benumbed!”

“If you were benumbed, you would not be chasing me, desiring me! You are not dead! And this in you is not dead!” She shook my rod again.

“I shall not go astray!” I declared valiantly.

“You already have! You have! Do you not feel it?”

And I felt the serpent’s sting. A torrid fire engulfed my body, consuming me along with the tree I was bound to. Tongues of flames enveloped me, ravaging me. I shrieked wildly and awoke.

And I saw Sozont beating his staff against the ground.

“What happened?” I shouted, frightened.

“Everything is fine,” Sozont said, lifting a dead serpent off the ground with his staff. “It’s a good thing that I was unable to sleep, that I sat down to write again. Another moment, and you would have been in trouble, Brother! It slithered on top of you!”

Pavlo, too, awoke and was looking on in horror. “It was coming for me,” he mouthed.

“Do not trouble yourself with nonsense,” Sozont said. “Were it after you, it would not have erred. And remember, Brother, superstition, too, is a sin.”

Sozont twirled his staff, winding the dead serpent onto it. But it fell off, dropping into the grass.

“Coincidences everywhere,” he grumbled. “The crippled and freakish sleep on the ground and they’re not afraid of serpents. Therefore there should not be any around here.”

“Serpents are a normal occurrence in mud,” I said, my teeth chattering from what I had experienced.

“Then I, too, am superstitious, may the Lord forgive me. ‘Every man is altogether vanity,’ I believe David sang.”

At that moment the rooster cried out, calling everyone to the refectory. The sound obviously came from the enclosure, from Mykyta’s hut on the pole.

“St. Mykyta bids us to fortify our flesh,” Sozont said, smiling. “My bowels are bursting.”

“I will not go,” said Pavlo, bleary-eyed. “I don’t want to eat.”

“You can pass your portion over to us,” Sozont said. “And what about you, Brother Mykhailo?”

My teeth stopped chattering, though I, too, did not want to eat. So I told Sozont.

“I will gladly eat your portion, as well,” Sozont said. “Let us go!”

We set out along the path, already crowded with the crippled and freakish. A small, crooked-nosed fellow with a solid staff was last.

“Are there serpents on this island?” Sozont asked him.

“Serpents?” the fellow asked. He was crippled, but not freakish. “I have not seen any. Have you?” he asked with interest.

“We are recent arrivals here. We are sleeping on the ground—that is why I asked,” Sozont said calmly.

“There are serpents in the mud,” the short fellow said gravely. “But St. Mykyta’s prayers prevent them from coming here. Unless one were to slither to the saint for healing.”

“The saint cures serpents?” Sozont asked.

“The saint is capable of everything,” the small fellow hooted, snorting air out of his nose.

“I’m telling you, Brother,” Pavlo whispered when the fellow turned away. “It was sent after me...”

“Sent by whom?”

“How do I know,” Pavlo murmured. “Here I know nothing, understand nothing. All my thoughts are fettered with fear, Brother!”

“Muster your strength,” Sozont said squeezing his arm by the elbow. “You are bound by a fear you have brought on yourself. Neither Mykhailo nor I are bound by it.”

“For you will leave this island but I will not.”

“Can one guess one’s fate, Brother Pavlo?” Sozont asked sadly. “Had I hesitated for a moment, Brother Mykhailo would have perished, not you. So that our lives are but a moment. And a moment brings death.”

Sozont showed himself to be wiser here, too; we declined food, agreeing, as it were, to give our portions to Sozont, as to the heartiest. When we received food in our cups, both Pavlo and I gulped it as greedily as did Sozont or the crippled and freakish who made themselves comfortable around us. Though the soup did not quell our hunger, at least it calmed us. When we returned to our lairs, another surprise awaited us: the dead serpent had disappeared.

“Probably you did not kill it,” Pavlo stated.

“Coincidences all around,” Sozont muttered. “When I beat something, I beat it well. What do you say, Brother Mykhailo?”

I remained silent. And here we spied Mykyta’s disciples treading slowly and solemnly along the path, accompanied this time by Marta, who had appeared in my dream so indecently. I sensed a rush of color to my cheeks. I had not, by the way, recounted my dream to my fellow travelers.

Mykyta’s disciples approached and sat down, scattering silently on the grass.

“This time we brought Marta with us,” Antonii said. “She is the spiritual betrothed of the saint and no less familiar with his life than are we. Have you completed your task, Brother?”

“I have,” Sozont said. “Though perhaps in haste. But all your observations will be corrected and copied flawlessly.”

“Read, then, and we will listen,” Antonii proposed.

Whereupon branches snapped and there was rustling in the bushes—

the crippled and freakish were peeking out at us. Just as yesterday, they stood, encircling us, watching silently.

“It would be better, if you would read, Brother Antonii,” Sozont said. “Have a look, is my writing legible?” Sozont held out his folio.

But Antonii did not budge. “We have no reason not to trust you,” he stated evenly. “You read! But read slowly, clearly, with pauses, so that all will hear you.”

The crippled and freakish stood around in a circle, craning their necks attentively. The deacon read as if in church: clearly, calmly, in sections. Everything was recorded exactly as it had been recounted, and once again I marveled at Sozont’s remarkable memory. My memory, too, was considerable, but he delivered the stories word for word, with not the slightest deviation, at least so it seemed to me. Engrossed, Mykyta’s disciples listened; Marta alone appeared wholly indifferent, not minding Sozont and instead glancing from time to time at Symeon. Absorbed in listening, he did not respond to her looks. To me it appeared that it was Symeon Marta was not indifferent to. I think she noticed that I was observing her, for I felt a scorching flash of her eyes as she glanced at me—just as she had eyed me in my dream, though she immediately turned away and directed her gaze at a tree nearby. I glanced in that direction and saw a squirrel leaping among its branches.

Dusk was setting in by the time Sozont finished reading.

He had paused after each story, waiting for comments, and continued his narration only after all had confirmed that there were no remarks.

“Everything is authentic,” Antonii stated. “Though, as far as I am concerned, you ought blot out the following: about Kuzma and about Musii the dwarf. They are not relevant to the Life of St. Mykyta.”

“Did not St. Mykyta’s will bear upon what happened to them?” Sozont asked. “And is that not a miracle?”

“St. Mykyta does not kill,” Antonii asserted. “Perchance this truly is a miracle, but they killed themselves at the Lord’s will. Unless the righteous one declined to protect them.”

“In my view, that is the miracle,” Teodoryt said. “When the saint deprives one of his protection, is that not his will?”

“Let the other Brothers speak,” Antonii said.

Ievahrii and Heorhii supported Antonii, while Symeon and Nykyfor—Teodoryt.

“It is in instances like this that we need Sister Marta,” said Antonii. “Your word, Sister!”

“It is a miracle,” she said, gazing lovingly at Symeon.

“Then let it remain as is,” Antonii said.

“Should we, perhaps, ask St. Mykyta himself?” Sozont asked carefully. “I would not wish to spread things uncertain.”

“The righteous one has declined to participate in this, as you heard,” Antonii declared emphatically, “He has placed the duty of confirmation on us, unworthy though we are. So that if we have determined that these stories can be considered a miracle, so be it. Amen.”

“Amen!” Mykyta’s disciples all said, rising.

“Will the saint be descending today?” Sozont asked.

“As was said,” Teodoryt replied. “He will descend.”

“Can he be approached for a talk?”

“Only if he starts it—that is, if he addresses you. Usually, though, he does not stop to talk,” Antonii said. “What would you like to discuss?”

“I would ask him about Kuzma and the dwarf Musii,” Sozont replied, “for I have doubts here.”

“What is it you doubt?” Antonii asked, his tone hostile.

“I consider, as do you, that they perished of their own will.”

“And I deem it was as we determined,” Antonii declared firmly.

“Then may Ievahrii and Heorhii confirm it.”

“I agree it was a miracle of St. Mykyta,” Ievahrii said.

“And I do too,” Heorhii said.

“In that case, I have no doubts,” Sozont said. “One more thing: am I to submit my folio to you for reexamination without me?”

“Does it contain other notes?” Antonii asked.

“It does,” Sozont said. “Those that I jotted down prior to arriving at this hallowed place.”

“Then submit the folio. It is too dark to read now,” Antonii said. “We will return it to you in the morning. What else interests you?”

“If everything goes well, will we be able to depart here in the morning?”

“We already told you: everything is in your will,” Teodoryt uttered.

“Will someone guide us across the Eye of the Abyss and across the mud?”

“Across the Eye of the Abyss we will lead you. Beyond that, the way is safe,” Teodoryt said.

“I fear we will get lost,” Sozont said.

“With your shrewdness, you will not get lost,” Antonii said.

And they set out onto the path, and dusk instantly swallowed them. The crippled and freakish, too, disbanded silently among the bushes and trees.

“And now, my Brothers,” Sozont said, “let us pray each for himself. Who knows what this night and the morrow shall bring us. May the Lord help us!”

And we too dispersed so that alone we could surrender ourselves to earnest prayer.

In my prayer I said: “Lord! Following Your will I found my way here.”

Be it Your will that I depart safely from here. Preserve, oh Lord, my fellow-travelers Pavlo and Sozont, so that together we can wrench ourselves out of this swamp. For all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, I repent. The voluntary I know and ask forgiveness for. Put the involuntary ones before my eyes, so that I can repent for them. Heed these folk among whom we find ourselves: if they tread along a righteous path, may righteousness be theirs, if they tread along an evil path, may they recognize it, turning onto Your path of righteousness, not theirs!”

As I prayed, I examined my own life, poring diligently over what was good, and what was evil. I prayed that upon returning to the world, my skill not languish within me, but that I should have the strength and the means to effect acts pleasing to God. That is, to be able once again to scribe and paint not for my glory, but for the glory of God.

The rooster’s crowing echoed from the enclosure. It reverberated loudly in the stillness of the night, and I rose off my benumbed knees. Lifting my face I beheld the star-strewn sky, grand and mysterious. The twinkling, iridescent stars seemed to be sprinkling us with their dust.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO,

relating Mykyta's descent from the pole, his promenade along the island, and other events of this night

Near the pole, a bonfire erupted and as if waiting for that, two more fires erupted: one in the women's camp, and the other where the crippled and freakish men had gathered.

"Well, my Brothers," Sozont said, "let us go view the spectacle."

"I will not go," Pavlo said. "I feel faint."

"Are you afraid your affliction will smite you?" Sozont asked sympathetically.

"That cannot be known," Pavlo said. "But right now, I am not afraid."

"Rest, Brother," Sozont said, almost soothingly. "Gain strength for the morrow. A difficult journey awaits us."

"Indeed!" Pavlo said. "I will lie a bit. Worldly spectacles do not attract me any more."

"You have said it well, Brother," Sozont said. "Perhaps, we should stay with you, so as not to abandon you alone?"

"No, you go," Pavlo sighed. "That is why we came. To see."

"This, too, is well said, Brother," Sozont said.

And we set out for the path. In a short while we arrived at the fence surrounding the pole. A fire blazed in the middle of the yard. Encircling the pyre, as if intentionally positioned there, stood all of Mykyta's disciples, holding thick sticks. Atop the pole, in the hut, the curtains were thrown open and we saw Mykyta bending and unbending, bowing innumerable times. This time it did not last long. As Mykyta came down the ladder, we noticed a radiance around his head, though perhaps it was the fire illuminating him. He descended, turning his face. No, I was not mistaken: his head as well as his face, indeed the hair that stuck out of his habit, truly shone. The moment he stepped onto the ground his disciples thrust their sticks into the flames, in an instant raising processional torches that burned brightly above their heads.

His gait serene and slow, St. Mykyta started toward the gate where we stood. His disciples followed. We bowed deeply before kneeling.

"Where is your third?" Mykyta asked.

"He has fallen ill, Reverend Father," Sozont said.

"In a while he shall be free," Mykyta declared, and blessed us as we bowed.

He strode along the path, his face glowing; behind him, two to a row, walked his disciples: first Antonii with Teodoryt, then Symeon and Ievahrii, and in the rear, Nykyfor and Heorhii. We followed.

The disciples sang:

Love us, oh, Lord,
Thou pure, Thou holy,
From a life of passion
Unto You us receive—
 Have mercy.
From all calamity deliver us,
The sacred hour approaches.
This world have we accursed
With our intent—
 Have mercy.
Fearsome wolves are poised
With jaws outstretched,
Claws toward us straining,
To devour us they crave—
 Have mercy.
Along a narrow path we tread,
Through mire sinking—
This accursed world—
We come to know you—
 Have mercy.

“There are songwriters among them,” Sozont whispered to me.

I pressed his arm above the elbow, cautioning him.

Mykyta shuffled along very slowly, his body barely swaying, as if keeping time with the melody, or devising in this way some kind of dance—his disciples did the same.

Thus we reached the women’s camp. A fire blazed in the center. The crippled and freakish women arranged themselves in rows of four, a guarded distance between each. The moment they spotted the procession, and following a signal from Marta, who stood at the front, they began beating their wooden bowls with their spoons. Stepping up onto a small mound, perhaps heaped there intentionally, Mykyta raised his hand. The beating ceased.

“Prepare yourselves for the way to Heaven,” Mykyta said loudly. “And may the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, may the Holy Trinity accept you!”

“O-o-e-e-ahhh!” the women’s voices groaned in unison.

“A bit longer, and you shall be vessels of the Devil no more!” Mykyta shouted hoarsely, loudly. “As a sign of this you can follow me.”

“O-o-e-e-ahhh!” groaned the crippled, freakish women.

They rushed toward the bonfire, pulling burning sticks out of it. And limping clumsily, staggering, teetering, waddling, dragging their feet, even hobbling they threw themselves at the gate that Marta had opened in the

meantime. She herself scurried to where Mykyta stood with his disciples.

“I am your betrothed, St. Mykyta!” she wailed wildly. “I am your betrothed!”

Trembling, she fell to her knees at the base of the mound.

Mykyta, meanwhile, moved forward. Symeon and Antonii lifted Marta by the arms, shoving her forward to walk directly behind Mykyta.

The procession blossomed with flames. Mykyta, his head glowing, led the way. Marta, upright, hair loosened, walked behind him. Mykyta’s disciples followed, bearing torches, then Sozont and I, and in the rear—the noisy throng of the crippled, freakish women, prancing a little as they walked, each shouting something of her own, some trumpeting, mimicking the horn of Jericho. They waved their flaming torches in accompaniment.

A woman yelled hoarsely in a strained voice: “We are coming to you, Holy Trinity! We are coming! Welcome us!”

Meantime, Mykyta headed to the other bonfire where the crippled and freakish men had collected. Here, too, stood a mound—we had either not noticed them before, or simply had paid them no heed—and Mykyta ascended it serenely.

“Prepare yourselves for the way into heaven!” he shouted. “May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, may the Holy Trinity accept you!”

“E-e-ahhh!” they all exhaled together.

Mykyta fell to his knees. His head now shone with a peculiar, dull phosphorescence, and lifting his hands heavenward, he droned a prayer. After a while he bowed, almost prostrating himself, stretching his arms along the ground in front of him. He lay for a time without moving, as if ossified, and came to life gradually: slowly he raised his torso, then paused, arms uplifted, beard thrust forward. What impressed me was that the prayer was recited in a precise rhythm: each bodily position was effected at a designated moment.

Meantime the crippled and freakish had gathered in a circle around the bonfire and started dancing and singing or chanting: “Eech-ooch! Bin-bin-bin! Let us run from sin! Eech-ooch! Bin-bin-bin! We shall run from sin!”

As they stood motionless, holding torches above their heads, for some reason Mykyta’s disciples seemed to me to resemble not men, but gigantic candles. I even saw tears of tallow trickling down their bodies, thickening at once. My vision was, after all, not far from the truth, for these men were truly self-immolating themselves spiritually. Their expressions were stern, stiff. Here, too, Marta lay prone near the mound with her face to the ground. I thought to myself: we have stepped back into the depths of the ages when paganism still clouded the minds of men. This is a merry festival taking place at the heathen temple. And there he is, Mykyta, the pagan high priest, praying for all. And here are the idols: the candle-men, with tongues of flames in place of heads. And the crowd: joyfully delirious, dancing,

leaping. And this maiden: the sacrificial offering that has been or will be stabbed as a gift to the gods.

“Have you noticed that Antonii had hinted at my peculiar acumen,” Sozont said to me, his voice subdued. “What can they know of it?”

“Perhaps he had in mind your countless inquiries?” I answered.

“That is natural, given the duty that I have,” Sozont said. “And in general, I try to behave in a way that accommodates their Divine Praise¹.”

“To me, too, Brother, this celebration looks very much like a pagan feast.”

“For these men have forsaken the Church Body, severing themselves from the church like a putrid finger,” Sozont said, his tone somehow morose. For the first time I noticed a strict devotion in him—not so long ago he had preached tolerance.

“‘Judge not, that ye shall not be judged,’ the Lord said. Consider, Brother, the wisdom of Isaiah. ‘And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor.’”²

Sozont seemed to awake. “Thank you, Brother, for helping me recover. Apparently, I had fallen into a stupor,” he murmured quietly. “It is not up to us to judge but merely to observe.”

The circle of dancers broke, each starting to sway independently in a peculiar way. They were vividly illuminated, and I was struck by their curiously puzzling, deformed features snatched out of darkness by the light of the bonfire: distorted, eyes bulging, mouths agape, drenched in sweat, madly inspired, stretched, flattened, full of self-abnegation, unbridled frenzy and excitement. They cried, shrieked, moaned, screamed, whined, trumpeted, yelped, whimpered. Several women fell to their knees wailing in a pietà, raking their fingers over their heads as if in a lament, as if they sensed the end of the world approaching and hoped for it. It was a shocking and confounding scene.

Mykyta finished praying. He rose and proclaimed loudly (though not shouting): “Weep, my children, for all of the earth is weeping! Weep, with fasting spirits! There is a time for weeping and a time for rejoicing. ‘The time is short ... it remaineth, they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. But I would have you without carefulness.’”³

Some wept and lamented at these words; others made merry, roaring with laughter. The laughter and weeping mixed so queerly and violently that

¹ Divine praise—paganism, worship of idols.

² Note in margin: “Isaiah 11: 3.”

³ Note in margin: “I Corinthians 7:29–32.”

shivers ran down my spine. Some tore at their hair, sprinkling dirt over their heads, while others pointed at them, tittering. Some convulsed in spasms of weeping or cackling; still others jumped around them, giggling.

Thereupon Marta sprang to her feet and squealed in a pitch so sharp, so shrill—like that of the Nightingale Thief in the fable—as if someone had pierced my ears with a nail. And at the top of her voice she shrieked: “Stop! Stop! I cannot bear any more of this!”

And abruptly, everyone stopped. Not moving, they stood for a time as though transformed into black pillars of salt. Only the fire burned, spurning huge, acrid, voracious tongues into the air; the firewood and brush popped, shooting sparks. And a vast silence fell upon the island. My body, too, felt numb. I was powerless to even wag a finger. Marta stiffened, as if carved out of wood. The crippled and freakish, too, stood as if carved out of wood; an odd-looking garden of idols. Dancing flames licked all those suddenly lifeless faces, faces with tiny blank eyes, with hollowed bodies and empty skulls—all dead, all. And Mykyta, fading, and his disciples—candles, dimming, and I, too, and Sozont—all dead, all. For a chill had swept above our heads and across our faces. Sowing its dreadful seeds, the spirit of mortality, that ghostly spirit, had penetrated every one of us.

Tottering, Mykyta stepped off the mound directly towards us. We were numb.

“Judge not these people, Fathers,” he said, surprisingly gently, “for they are wretched. Do not judge me, for I am no less wretched. Behold!”

And he lifted the hem of his habit, showing his feet. We were horrified: his feet were covered with dark abscesses. Maggots stirred in those abscesses. They glowed. I turned my eyes toward Mykyta’s face and only now understood why his head shone: his beard and hair were full of those same maggots. It was not Mykyta’s face or head that radiated light, it was those glowing maggots.

Mykyta dropped the hem, raised his head and proudly walked away. Swaying a bit, Marta set out after him. His disciples, aroused, followed; stirring like those maggots, the crippled and freakish bustled, slowly streaming away from the bonfire. Sozont and I remained, alone, as if rooted to the ground, like forsaken idols. Suddenly it became clear that it was not these people who were blockheads—we were. Solitary idols of the desert we were, whipped mercilessly by the wind flinging prickly sand in our faces.

Leaving the spectacle, Mykyta, his disciples, and Marta withdrew quite swiftly along the path—we watched the procession of torches disappear. Finally, in an instant the torches dimmed. The procession was out of our sight.

“Come, Brother Mykhailo, it is time for you to repose,” Sozont said. “Tomorrow will be a difficult day for us.”

“And will you repose?” I asked.

“I have no time for reposing,” said Sozont. “I will roam around here a bit longer. Stay with Pavlo. I have begun fearing for him, poor soul.”

“All right, Brother,” I said. “Do as you see fit.”

“Not what I see fit,” Sozont stated evenly. “My duty wills me to do this.”

“What duty?”

“The one I have spoken of many a time: to seek the truth. I fear I will not be able to seek it to the end. My thinking is becoming muddled.”

“Mine, too,” I admitted. “And the farther we go, the worse it gets.”

We walked silently for a time, and here Sozont delivered yet another sermon:

“I sometimes think, Brother Mykhailo, that the Latinists, having introduced the idea of purgatory—that is to say, atonement—into their dogma, were right to a degree. Our Eastern church contradicts that, though some of our holy fathers believe that purgatory exists, but not in the other world after death—rather, on earth—that the entire man-made world is a purgatory. For that is where man is challenged. And I sometimes think that at times man dies before his physical form perishes—he dies in spirit. This does not occur the same for everyone. Does an animal possess a soul? It does not, though it lives and moves in its body; therefore, a soulless existence of the body is possible. So why cannot the same be true with man? Man is a creature marked by God, and thus for man things are not as simple as they are with an animal. So it seems to me that there exist all kinds of men: there are those that are marked by God but are beast-like, that is to say, soulless. Though men possessing a soul differ, as well: in some, the soul abides until a natural death of the body occurs, in others the soul does not survive, but dies before its time. Darkness then pervades man, rendering him powerless in distinguishing good from evil, darkness from light, truth from falsehood. He exists soullessly—there is even an expression: ‘a soulless man!’—but he believes that he is leading a soulful life. He lives godlessly but considers himself to be godly. Wishing to fool both God and men he fools only himself. Such people are dead before the demise of their physical form. It is for them, I think, the Lord granted redemption as salvation—the possibility of atonement: this means that one who is spiritually dead can restore his soul in his body and begin once again to live in spirit. Thus a thief who stole and killed is soulless, but once repentant, can return his soul to his body; the same for the hypocrite, deceiver, conniver, thug, censurer, or any other kind of evildoer. So that in the purgatory of the world, this peculiar place, each man possesses a will for either soullessness or soulfulness, though often man’s will is blind. And this is that abyss, Brother Mykhailo. The abyss of relativity, of uncertainty, of experiencing the world in disgrace; in short, a failure to comprehend one’s

own soul and, consequently, the immutability of truth. Upon each man the Lord bestowed a lamp for his darkness, this lamp being man's reason. Thus Proverbs say: 'Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and that gotteth understanding.' Though Proverbs also say: 'Be not wise in thine own eyes.' And 'Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it.' And in Isaiah: 'The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.' St. Paul declared: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' That is why sometimes there is wisdom in folly, and folly in wisdom, so that the human mind, like billows of the sea, is unsettled and changeable. This, then, is one of the deepest abysses in the purgatory of the world. But in this abyss there is an eye—a sense that God knows you, hears you, sees you and steers you. And even here an abyss arises, no smaller than the former—the Lord, or the Devil draped in the image of the Lord, as trial. Because of this, Brother Mykhailo, we must constantly test ourselves, diligently and urgently. Not self-assured and cautious must we be—that is the other eye of this abyss. For this is where the Lord challenges us most."

Throughout the sermon, Sozont's tone was sad, slow, drawling, unsettled. And then he became still, as if he had draped himself in darkness.

We arrived, meantime, at our place of repose.

"I will go check on Pavlo," he said.

Pavlo was asleep. Bending over him, the deacon listened. "He is breathing," he said. "But with difficulty, fitfully. You, too, rest a bit, Brother. Lie down."

"Perhaps you, too, will repose," I suggested again.

"No! I have too little time," Sozont replied sternly.

I lay down and fell asleep, I think, and had no dreams. Screams suddenly woke me. It was completely light. I sprang to my feet. In horror, I saw a serpent writhing over the prone body of Pavlo, fiercely pecking at his face. I grabbed a staff, hurled the serpent off Pavlo, and, as Sozont had earlier, kept stabbing it until it became mush. Pavlo's throat rattled. Dropping the staff, I rushed over to him. His blue eyes were bulging, his face had turned blue, his mouth was foaming. He went into convulsions. I fell next to him, trying to grasp his arms and hold him down. He grunted and became limp. I let go. I stood next to him, kneeling. Pavlo's eyes cleared, as if he had regained his senses.

"She ca-ame for me-e!" he jabbered. "Rrr-un-n-n! Rrr..." And he died.

I felt tears streaming down my face. Everything around me appeared as if in a soft, murky haze; Pavlo's hand, which I still held, began to grow cold.

At that moment, something crashed in the brush—it was Sozont running towards us. "What happened?" he asked, out of breath.

Silently I nodded towards the mashed serpent.

“There are too many serpents on an island that does not harbor them,” Sozont said. He kneeled next to me and stroked Pavlo’s hair. “My poor, poor brother!” he said. “After all that, I could not save you!”

We sat on the ground, immersed in a profound, dark silence. The eastern sky was afire.

“Why did they kill him?” I asked.

“To execute Mykyta’s prophecy,” Sozont answered shortly.

“What will we do with the corpse?”

“We will try to take it with us. I do not want them to cast it into the Eye of the Abyss. I want blessed Mother Earth to receive him, as befits a human being.”

And here, next to Pavlo’s dead body, Sozont wearily described what he was able to observe and learn.

Upon approaching the fence and pole, he saw that the hovel was alit. He did not notice any guards anywhere. He was able to creep up to the hovel. Through a crack in the shutter he saw them all sitting around a long table. Marta was there, too, eating. Sozont saw bread and meat. They were drinking mead. Symeon sat at the head of the table, not Mykyta. Though they spoke quietly, Sozont was able to grasp that they were sharing observations about the spectacle that had just passed. They especially talked about the fact that during the spectacle several of the crippled and freakish men had copulated with the women. They spoke of it quite joyfully, laughing.

Then Symeon said: “And now let us serve a last supper! Come, Marta, let us be on guard, for I do not like that deacon. He is so nosy!”

Sozont was forced to recede from the hovel. Marta stepped out. Circling like a watch dog, she observed closely and listened carefully. Sozont lay quietly on the ground, having retreated past the fence. This lasted some time, until the door creaked and Mykyta came out. He walked up to Marta and pinched her skirt. Marta defended herself quite feistily.

“Leave me be!” she said. “You rotten foundling!”

Mykyta laughed and climbed up his pole.

Then Symeon came out of the hovel. Marta threw herself at his legs. Embracing him by the knees, she kissed his raiment. Symeon pushed her aside so forcefully that she rolled over completely. He approached the fence. Ignoring the maiden, he lifted his habit and urinated.

“Stepan!” Marta moaned. “Why don’t you want me?”

“I am dead to this world,” Symeon said, adjusting his raiment. “And I have not been Stepan for some time. Go to sleep!”

“Don’t drive me away, Stepan,” the maiden whimpered. “I will do anything you say—everything you desire, I will do for you. Only don’t cast me away! I will please you, caress you, pamper you—I will be your slave!”

“I have said this many times, and I will say it again: I am dead to this

life and this world. Go away!"

"But I came here on account of you!" Marta groaned.

"I am not driving you from the island," Symeon said coldly. "If you are willing to serve in my cause, that is, the Lord, then serve! Mortify your body, as I am mortifying mine. All of you gobbled meat here, while I ate only bread and water—you eat thus too. Become the betrothed of the Lord, not mine! Douse the devilish fire ravaging you, and you will find peace."

"I desire no one else, only you, Stepan!" Marta wailed. "My fire burns for you. Here! Look!"

And she tore off her tunic and lay naked in front of him. "Take me! Take me! I am on fire! I cannot bear it! I have been reduced to ashes!"

"It is the Devil burning in you!" Symeon said coldly. "You will not seduce me."

"The Devil consumes me!" the maiden yelled. "You are my Devil, Stepan, you!"

And Symeon became enraged. He attacked her and kicked her.

Writhing like a snake, she oohed and moaned longingly. "More, more, my love! Beat me, kill me!"

And again he struck her with his feet, saying in a hoarse voice: "You vessel of the Devil! Bitch! You will not seduce me—I would, indeed, sooner kill you! Die—perish!"

Again she moaned, enervated. "It's over! The Devil has left me, Stepan!" she said, her tone hollow.

"Get up then! Get dressed and get out of my sight!" Symeon said menacingly, breathing heavily.

Marta got up, dressing herself slowly, her motions languid. She threw herself around his neck, kissing him passionately. "I love you, Stepan!"

"Perish, Satan!" Symeon exclaimed.

A second time she threw herself at his feet, kissing his bast shoes. "You are my Satan, you! I am your slave!"

"If you are my slave, I command you to leave! Compose yourself! And do not call me Stepan any more. I am Symeon!"

Marta rose obediently and, head lowered, walked toward the gate. Symeon spat three times, crossed himself and entered the hovel.

"You did not beat her enough, the bitch," Mykyta remarked from the pole.

"You, too, perish!" Symeon said, glancing upward. Suddenly, he moaned. "Lord, how hard it is for me with all of you!"

"Take my place, then," Mykyta said. "Try how easy this is."

Symeon kneeled to pray in the middle of the yard. Drawing the curtains shut, Mykyta disappeared from sight. It began to grow light.

Sozont lay still, afraid of being uncovered, though it was time for him to slither out, for Mykyta could notice him from above—with nothing else

to do on the pole, he could occupy himself watching. At last Symeon sighed affectedly and withdrew to the hovel. As carefully as he could, Sozont crept away from the fence and then nearly ran for the lake, to check what I had been unable to ascertain, that is, whether there was a cord connecting the plank to the shore. But a surprise awaited him here: amid the drifts of fog rising from the Eye of the Abyss, he saw one of Mykyta's disciples. So they continued to guard the shore! It was Nykyfor. Only it was not clear how he had arrived here. Sozont thought that he had not let a single disciple out of his sight, except for the moment when they were leaving the spectacle and Sozont was delivering his sermon to me. It even seemed that Nykyfor had been sitting at the table when Sozont peered into the hovel, though he could not be certain of that.

"This same Nykyfor could have set the serpent on you, though this time it chose kind-hearted Pavlo," Sozont said plaintively. "Most likely, Nykyfor broke away from the others at the spectacle."

"You have witnessed and described peculiar things, Brother Sozont," I said, thoughtfully.

"This proves," Sozont said, "that the truth truly does lie in the middle. Musii the dwarf did not lie about Marta that the demon of wantonness smote her, though he lied about her fornicating with Mykyta: when he pinched her, she repulsed him quite vehemently and rudely. She does not mate with Symeon, nor with any of the other disciples, and she is passionate only towards Symeon, whom she loves madly. Moreover, she knew Symeon in the other world. That is why she called him by his secular name, and why she came here. So these people are not debauchers. Symeon treats Marta like an indifferent man to whom the overly clinging female is repugnant, while Marta, owing to her self-degradation, seeks satisfaction through lasciviousness, which one could call debauchery. But she is devoted only to one man. She is willing to suffer everything from him alone. The other conclusion," Sozont whispered feverishly, "is that their chief really is Symeon, as I had surmised."

"Perchance he acts thus to avoid human glory?"

"More likely, responsibility," said Sozont, "for their sermons are in the name of the Lord while their deeds are dark. Actually, it all stems from their preaching about death and the desire for death as judgment. When Death is so elevated, it becomes desirable and serving it is no sin. Thus, they circumvent the Lord's commandment 'Thou shalt not kill!' by generally not killing with their own hands, although they assist death. Kuzma was swallowed by the Eye of the Abyss. Pavlo was poisoned by a serpent—not by them."

"And the thief?"

"The thief himself sought death. It was as if they only aided him. So that they are holding fast to their strict rules or commandments, which are

similar to the Lord's. But they have gone too far by elevating their own truth or its interpretation over the Lord's. That is evil. Having done it once, they began to weave a specious web of arguments in which they have been caught and whose slaves they have become, like fish in a net. This is the most likely explication of this puzzling Abyss with its Eye."

"Before he died, Pavlo advised us to flee this place as quickly as possible," I said. "Did he know?"

"He not so much knew as sensed it. He was a warm soul," Sozont whispered, his breath whistling. "But we are wholly in their hands. Without them we cannot cross the Eye of the Abyss. Fearing that, they have placed a guard on duty."

"I fear, Brother, that your musings are too full of conjecture," I said, "although we also have more evidence."

"You speak the truth, Brother Mykhailo. I myself am tormented by this. But we will not learn anything more definite. What I saw tonight wholly confirms their hypocrisy but not their villainy. Pretense and villainy are not the same. Even Pavlo's death can be attributed to chance, for serpents live in or near mud—and we did not catch anyone in the act of setting the serpent. So that one thing remains to expose the truth—my death in the Eye of the Abyss." And he grew silent, dark. "Should I die there, it will undoubtedly mean that they grew afraid of my discoveries. They want to protect themselves. Then they are guilty of Kuzma's death as well. I believe they are steered by a mind not seeking blood for blood's sake, but acting out of necessity: Kuzma was killed as a lesson, the thief was killed to confirm the miraculousness of Mykyta's words. I've presented myself as the author of their glory, and they would kill me only from fear that I may have learned something untoward and that I will record it or carry it out of here with me. They are aware of their own villainy, and fear being exposed. It is not a Divine mind directing them, but a Satanic one."

"But then they ought to kill me, as well," I asserted.

"I know not, Brother, I do not wish to lie," Sozont declared. "But I hope they will underestimate you. You do not meddle in their affairs, and Mykyta has treated you most kindly."

"And you agree so easily to die?" I asked, horrified.

"What is there left for me? Were I to repent before them they will not release me from here all the more, though they have mere suppositions regarding me—no proof."

"A frightful, fatal game is being played," I murmured.

"Indeed, Brother Mykhailo! And it will be won not by the one who perishes, for it is the Lord who shall judge, not men. The truth He prophesied shall prevail. I was and I am its high priest. But for victory, one condition must be met: you too must become such a high priest and carry out of here not the chronicle that is recorded on paper—it is worthless and

may it perish along with me, but the one recorded in my mind. That I entrust to you.”

“And if they destroy me?”

“This is precisely that extreme case when God’s help must be sought. I have faith that He has heard my prayer.”

“So that you have prayed for me, not for yourself?”

“Indeed. I feel I am destined to be sacrificed. I expect, too, that they have not completely lost their sense of balance in keeping the Lord’s commandments. To them, you appear as one who has died for the world.”

“That is a thin thread!”

“Thin, but it exists. I have faith in it. And even more in God.”

“And if you successfully cross the Eye of the Abyss?”

“That question has been posed,” said Sozont. “Then I will accept my defeat, and understand that my conjecture was the fruit of an afflicted mind, and I shall call them devout actors. And I shall disseminate the written Life of Mykyta as genuine.”

“Though you yourself said: they copied it from the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter.”

“They follow that chronicle in their own lives, and the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter has been recognized by the church as genuine. I will not raise a hand against its dictates. After all, all chronicles are copied from older chronicles, only dressed in local garb and adapted to contemporary mores. I know this from experience. Thus, they are, to a degree, credible. And as I have said before: following the dictates of Christ, we do not become Christ, but Christians, and as they follow the dictates of St. Symeon, they are not Symeon, but Symeonides.”

Immersed in reflection, I felt my head splitting from it all. “And what if the mind of Symeon, Mykyta’s disciple, is so profound that he understands this and will release us freely?”

“In that case, he hopes for atonement,” Sozont said. “But the nature of an evildoer is such, that having begun, he cannot stop.”

Then we heard steps. Approaching along the path were all six of Mykyta’s disciples: Nykyfor, supposedly standing guard at the Eye of the Abyss, among them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE,
in which our crossing the Eye of the Abyss is recounted

When they caught sight of us next to Pavlo's supine corpse lying on the ground, the disciples halted in shock.

"What happened to Brother Pavlo?" Antonii asked.

"He died of a serpent's bite," Sozont replied calmly.

"Serpent?" Teodoryt asked, in wonder. "But there are no serpents here, in view of the power of the saint's words. Not even snakes."

And here Sozont uttered something I believe he should not have: "If his words can repel serpents, why can he not summon them?"

Mykyta's disciples frowned.

"Why did you say that?" Antonii asked.

"It was the saint who vowed death for Pavlo," Sozont said.

"The saint does not summon death," Antonii said coldly. "He can merely foretell it, so that the doomed one has time to repent."

"Cannot a foretelling be a summons?" Sozont inquired.

"Not at all! The saint cannot violate one of the greatest commandments," Antonii said. "Where is this serpent?"

"Over there, by the bush," Sozont said. "This is the second one, by the way. I took the first off the chest of Brother Mykhailo as he slept."

"Strange," Antonii said, turning the dead serpent over with a staff. "Did you kill the first one, too?"

"We thought we had killed it, but it vanished. It probably slid away," I said. "Perhaps this was the same one."

"We will have to ask the saint," Antonii said anxiously to his fellow disciples, "to repel this filth from the sacred island." Then abruptly he asked: "Perchance, you harbor secret evil thoughts, and that is what brought the snakes on?"

"If we had brought on the snakes, they would not be killing us," Sozont said.

"Well, that is in the will of God!" said Teodoryt.

"Snakes are the devil's kin, and were we malefactors, we would abide in the Devil, so that we would be at one with snakes," Sozont declared, and I thought he should not have said that either.

"Perhaps it slithered here by chance," Symeon said indifferently. "That has happened here before. What will you do with the body?"

"We will try to take it with us, since you have no cemetery here."

"That is true. We have only one grave, that of the saint's mother, as you know," Teodoryt said.

"How will you carry it?" Antonii asked.

"Across dry land in a stretcher, and on water we'll pull it in tow."

"Fine," Antonii said. "That is how others who claimed their departed

have done it. We do not object.”

Sozont raised his face toward me. In the morning light, it appeared gray. He hadn't slept for two nights, after all. “Cut down two small trees, Brother Mykhailo.”

I set out for the thicket in search of poles suitable for a stretcher; the others continued talking around Pavlo's corpse. I prepared the poles, then cut smaller ones for crossbars and brought everything to the camp. Sozont tied the shorter sticks to the poles and we lay Pavlo's body on this stretcher. As his face had become bloated and blue, almost black, we covered it with a large bur leaf. Then we set out in the lead, with Mykyta's disciples, wall-like, behind us.

“You weary yourselves needlessly,” said Sozont, walking behind the stretcher. “We are not such important personages that all of you need to accompany us. A guide would suffice.”

I understood why Sozont said what he said: he was being careful.

“You are not insignificant guests to us,” Antonii said. “We wish to honor you accordingly. Everyone came to escort you of his own will.”

“Fine,” stated Sozont. “We thank you for the honor.”

Neither we nor Mykyta's disciples made any further attempts at conversation. Several times, while resting briefly, I glanced at Symeon—he seemed indifferent, and as if aloof. For some reason I thought: how could this balanced, rational, taciturn man with pleasant features have beaten so savagely a woman who loved him so madly? Evidently, a beast did lurk within him.

I walked ahead of everyone and so had to keep my eye on the path. Furthermore, the stretcher with Pavlo was heavy, and I could not look around especially well, nor could I focus on any complex thoughts.

Oddly, along the way to the Eye of the Abyss we met not a single crippled or freak, though before, while rambling about the island, we had always stumbled across them either wandering, or sitting, or reposing. As if following some signal, they had withdrawn and cleared the path for us.

High above, the sun, swathed in clouds, spurted sheaves of sunbeams; the sky, too, was covered in thin clouds. From early morning it had been steamy, but there was no dew—the grass rustled dryly underfoot. Sweat rolled down my face, streaming down my forehead into my eyes and down my cheeks. We paused from time to time to wipe off the sweat and to catch our breath. Silently Mykyta's disciples paused too, not offering any help; their faces were as gray as Sozont's, evidently from a sleepless night. A transparent barrier seemingly arose between us and them: we on one side of it, they—on the other. An invisible tension grew, as if both we and they wished to free ourselves from the other as quickly as possible. Symeon remained calm and reserved throughout, though his eyes expressed sadness. And I sensed that they were all in their own way doleful, as were we, and in

their own way resigned, weary, and dissatisfied with something. Maybe, the presence of a corpse among us, its face covered with a bur leaf contributed to this feeling?

Finally, we arrived at the Eye of the Abyss. The water emitted a mist, though only the milky part, the part Symeon had called dead. The dark circle in the center of the pool appeared to be covered by a clear, icy glaze—it did not fume. Again we smelled a peculiar odor, which existed only here. This time it contained not only the stench of cadavers but a blended odor of rot and an aroma akin to that of swamp flowers, though we saw no flowers nearby.

“Brother Symeon will guide you,” Antonii said as we laid the stretcher down by the water. “Go with God! If something here has made you unhappy, forgive us! You have been dear guests.”

He approached Sozont, embraced him and kissed him thrice. He did the same with me. I smelled something acidic on his breath—probably from the mead he had drunk. The other disciples simply bowed to us, except Symeon, who was to continue accompanying us along the way. They retreated as if on some signal, positioning themselves along the curved shore of the Eye of the Abyss at set intervals from one another, exactly as they had when welcoming us: two at the left and two at the right. Antonii remained in the middle, which is to say, at the foot of the path. Three sticks lay there, evidently prepared in advance. Suddenly, a thought pierced me like an arrow: if these sticks were prepared in advance, let us say, by Nykyfor, whom Sozont had found here at dawn, then there should have been four of them. How did Nykyfor know that Pavlo would be bitten by a serpent, that it would kill him? Hence, he must have known that three of us, not four, would be crossing the Eye of the Abyss—so was it not Nykyfor who set the serpent onto us? Sozont, too, noticed that there were three staffs, not four, for he looked at me meaningfully. And a second thought pierced me: if what Sozont had foreseen was to occur here, at the Eye of the Abyss, and if the one to die was to be the last one, that is, if that conjecture was correct, then should not I go last? Sozont believed, after all, that they do not kill for no reason. Hence they would not touch me, and they would be unable to cut Sozont off along the path. That is why I said:

“I prefer to be last. I will hold on to the stretcher and feel more confident.”

“What will you say to that, Brother Symeon?” Sozont asked, understanding in an instant what I had in mind.

“Do as you see fit,” Symeon said indifferently. “My duty is to guide you.”

At the same time I noticed that he and Antonii exchanged glances.

“You decide,” Antonii said to Sozont. “I think the one lacking confidence should be placed in the middle.”

“I think so too,” Sozont said, utterly calm. “That is why I shall be last.”

My heart grew heavy. I had given Sozont a chance to save himself. After considering his options, if our suppositions were right, he had openly chosen death.

Symeon got down into the water, walked along the track a bit then stopped. I climbed down the bank and faced Sozont to pick up the stretcher. In the meantime, I had a chance to feel around with my foot at the start of the path. This time our assumption was correct: the track was suspended. I felt two wooden pegs driven into the bank one next to the other.

Sozont pushed the stretcher toward me while I stepped backwards, pulling it along. The bur leaf slipped from Pavlo’s face. It was dreadful: bloated and black, no one would ever again be able to recognize his features. I fished the leaf out of the water, and covered him again. Sozont slid into the water right off shore and obviously felt the pegs too, for again he glanced at me meaningfully.

“Take the staff,” said Sozont, giving it to me. “Now turn around.”

I was forced to turn around holding the staff in one hand and the stretcher pole in the other—the stretcher floated on the water.

“We’re off!” Sozont’s voice sounded behind me.

I could not see how he was holding the stretcher and what use he could make of his staff. The stench of decay increased in the muddled water masking the aroma which we discerned previously. Symeon tread confidently, though slowly, ahead of me, feeling for the path with his staff. Apparently he had crossed the Eye of the Abyss many a time.

“We forgot to bring water,” Sozont’s voice was suddenly heard behind us. “Could we stop by the fresh water, Symeon?”

“Observe what I do,” Symeon turned his head. “I’ll signal!”

Once more he moved on confidently. Our feet stirred the milky water. The smoky haze enveloped us. I felt a bit dizzy from the fumes; breaking off from the broad surface, the haze rose in swirling tufts. We plunged deeper and deeper into the water. The haze reached our faces.

“Do not breathe deeply!” Symeon yelled to us. “The fumes can make you dizzy!”

I was already feeling dizzy. After all, I was short, especially in comparison to Sozont and Symeon. Colorful, twirling rings appeared in my mind’s eye, I felt faintly nauseous and my eyes seemed veiled in a mist. I kept my breaths shallow, but nevertheless I felt sick, though not enough to lose consciousness. And, as always happened with me in times of danger, I lit a watchfire in my mind, that is to say, I concentrated all my attention on this tiny candle in my mind. The candle burned, its flame flickering, but it did not go out. Then the nausea began receding, though the vivid rings still spun and shimmered. My mind was hazy, as was this pool.

Slowly we approached the dark circle, where there truly was no haze and where we would be able to catch our breath. No vapors swirled at the edge between the milky and dark water. It seemed a transparent shaft, like a well, had formed. An invisible force held the haze beyond that circle. I felt an unbearable urge to run along the track, to reach the spring water sooner, but Symeon's tall, slender and impenetrable figure towered in front of me, and he walked slowly. I was dizzy, and my grip on the stretcher pole weakened. Suddenly I felt it slip away. At that moment a horrible shriek echoed behind my back. Yes, it was an inhuman shriek, full of dread and despair. The plank beneath me shook and in that instant something splashed. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the pole, which I had been holding, shoot steeply backward.

"Do not stop!" Symeon yelled. "Hurry!"

Underfoot, the track swayed. Symeon was practically running. Unconsciously, as if fettered to him, I followed, my feet barely touching the swaying plank, balancing and counterbalancing with the staff I grasped in both my hands. We leaped into the stretch of dark water, and I inhaled deeply. The air was pure, brisk, and fragrant; it dispelled my dizziness. I wanted to stop and look around.

"Do not stop!" Symeon yelled once again, not slowing his gait. I did not stop and I did not look around. Once more I inhaled deeply, and again I dove into the suffocating billows of gray vapor. Now the track stopped swaying. The water's depth decreased. Vivid streaks again floated through my head, bending and whirling, and with a concentrated force of will I once again ignited my candle of caution. Symeon, too, did not once look around, though he did slow his gait, and that was fortunate because I felt faint and sensed not malodorous vapors filling me, but fear — horror, actually—and that horror drove me on like a whip jabbing my head. Nearly blind, I saw nothing around me but the bright spot of Symeon's back bounding ahead in front of me. The water was no longer merely chest-deep—it reached my armpits. The nausea increased and I retched the remains of the scant food still in my stomach—it was a yellow, acid liquid. That brought a bit of relief, and I was able to withstand the rest of the course, which brought us to a hillock emerging out of the water. Several feeble birch trees with small, pale leaves grew here. Evidently this was where the two pegs holding the track on this side of the Eye of the Abyss were driven in.

Symeon leaped onto dry land and handed me his staff. I grabbed it with one hand. With the other, I leaned against my own staff, though it had no firm support, climbed onto dry land and fell to the ground. But I did not let myself rest: I sat up and turned toward the pool. It was calm and still. The milky water steamed quietly and the dark water was motionless as ever. The stretcher floated in the milky water near the dark circle but Pavlo's body was not on it. There was no sign of Sozont, either. Spasms rolled

through my body and I wailed like a child, tears large as peas spilling from my eyes.

“Did you so love those men that you cry, Brother Mykhailo?” Symeon asked with a chill in his tone. “Perhaps you knew them earlier, before you set out on this journey?”

“I did not know them before,” I said, “and I am crying because they were human beings: Pavlo, a blessed soul, and Sozont who had a great mind and great knowledge.”

“A great mind and knowledge cause harm,” Symeon stated sadly. “They lead one into misthinking.”

“What do you know of these men?” I asked plaintively.

“Less than you do. Do not grieve over death, for though it is full of sorrow, it is not to be feared,” Symeon answered. “What is life in this world, Brother Mykhailo? Merely a step between birth and death. Yesterday you arrived, today you depart. It is not the demise of the flesh that is horrible, but of the soul. Our lives are a passage into the domain of death, the fleeting mercurial breath of those who seek it. Death peers into our windows every minute, and what are we before Death? Like grass before the scythe.”

“Did these men deserve death for what they did?” I asked through tears.

“Perhaps they did, and perhaps not—I am not familiar enough with them,” Symeon continued in the same tone. “Death arrives when it wills and takes whomever it wills. We are miserable creatures! For who shall save us from the flesh’s demise? Fear of death keeps us in bondage. Earthly life is that bondage.”

He became quiet, and we surveyed the broad surface of the Eye of the Abyss. On the other side along the shore stood Mykyta’s disciples, like fixed props. They appeared phantasmal through the haze suspended above the water. And again I was gripped with fear. I was flooded with it, it seized me, swallowed me—I wanted to leave this accursed place as quickly as possible. I had no strength left for suffering. I wanted to hole up in a hole of some kind, in a niche, to shut my eyes and once again to reflect on all that had occurred. To ponder, to tie up the loose ends of those threads that remained untied. Will I comprehend anything? What Sozont feared had happened, and so through his death he confirmed his own surmising. But at the moment I was incapable of reflecting upon this. I was too exhausted, too weary, too tormented. I longed for only one thing: solitude and peace.

I had not looked at Symeon during our exchange, but I did now. He stood speechless, motionless, like a pole-sitter’s pole, as if imitating those stupefied followers of his, or standing as an example to them. More likely the latter. His expression bespoke grand inspiration, as if he were shameless; or he felt like a chief or military leader victorious in a great bloody battle, knowing no sorrow, only gladness at all the enemy corpses.

At that moment this poor fellow did not know, did not gather, that his victory was a sign of his defeat, that one taken by death often triumphs over death, that Jesus was not vanquished by His crucifiers, rather, He vanquished them—that in weakness there dwells a power greater than is evident, and that humility is more honorable than arrogance. This poor fellow did not know that in stepping over that line, his mind had become lame, had become crippled and freakish. It was dreadful for me to hear him say; “A great mind and knowledge harm man, leading him into misthinking,” for he was speaking of himself, not Sozont. That is, he recognized this truth, judging not himself with it but the one by him defeated, not realizing that damaged truth holds no truth, that damaged good is no longer good, and damaged reason is no longer reason. This is what horrified me: seeing that self-inspired victor. In my mind’s eye my guardian flame ignited again, like a candle.

“Thank you, Brother Symeon, for having led me across the Eye of the Abyss,” I said. “Go back. After resting a bit, I shall go on.”

“Can you cross the swamp on your own?” Symeon asked.

“You volunteered to guide us only across the Eye of the Abyss,” I answered.

“I said that thinking that you would be on your way with quick-eyed Sozont,” Symeon said. “I fear for you. And you are dear to my heart.”

I wanted to ask: “Did you not know that Sozont would perish?” but the guardian flame in my mind burned brighter and I said something else: “Why am I to your liking?”

“Because you are almost dead to this world—St. Mykyta spoke of this to you as well. Because your great skill is lost and you will not reclaim it. Though, Brother, you have not yet attained higher perfection and this wicked world still has a hold on you. Return to it once again to become convinced: it is foreign to you, hostile. There is no place in it for you, nor will there ever be.”

“What then, Brother Symeon?”

“Then you shall finally die to the world. And once you recognize this, you can think of us, dead to the world, and you will want to return here. I say onto you: we will gladly accept you. But we force no one, we bid no one—it is all in your will.”

“Is this why you want to lead me across the swamp?”

“Exactly, Brother Mykhailo. It would be a shame if you did not traverse the path of the salvation of the soul—and you have stepped onto it.”

And I became completely sorrowful—this man was so convinced of his truth and superiority that he believed he would triumph over me as well, the only living survivor of those who had come to visit. I sensed and recognized that I was the weakest of all, the one with the most broken spirit—there was no need to break it in me, I could do that myself. And here

he was wholly right. But he failed to reckon one thing, that is, that with me I bore the modern Gospel, written without paper or parchment, recorded and deposited in my mind as if into a treasure chest by Sozont and thus I was his adversary, even as he was wholly convinced that he had not only triumphed over his enemy Sozont but had swallowed him, like a shark swallowing a small fish.

“I will consider your words, Brother Symeon,” said I. “But why agonize over my destiny? Neither birth nor death is in our will, therefore why fear danger? Let us leave it to the will of the Lord—not ours, worms of earth as we are. Were it the Lord’s will to take me, not wholly dead to this world, who can stop Him in that? Were it His will to place me onto the path of which you speak, I shall walk that path, for I am accustomed to submitting to His will.”

“So you are not afraid to die?” Symeon asked with interest.

“I am not afraid,” I answered. “Ought one fear the inevitable?”

“You have spoken well, Brother Mykhailo,” Symeon smiled amicably. “St. Mykyta and all of us pray for you. Surely, you will safely cross the swamp. Let it be as St. Peter said: ‘Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.’ I expect that we will see you among us soon.”

“And when I return, how will I cross the Eye of the Abyss, alone?” I asked.

“You will find a way. If you have the desire, you will cross.”

I rose. We embraced. We kissed three times. And I sensed something strange: it seemed that I was actually embracing and kissing a corpse. His flesh was as cold and lifeless as Pavlo’s had been earlier, after he died. I shivered.

“The water has chilled you, Brother Mykhailo,” Symeon stated warmly, turning away. “Warm yourself in the sun. It is out already. Regain your senses. A fine day is predicted for today.”

Indeed, the sun shone above us. Not bright, not hot, but wrapped in gray clouds, as if in a woolen scarf. I thought it was unlikely to be a fine day since there was no dew on the morning grass—earth’s greenery had not been rinsed with its usual sacred drops.

Symeon plunged into the water and set off across the Eye of the Abyss without looking back. He tread lightly, swiftly, unguardedly. Deeper and deeper into the water he plunged, which, by the way, had abruptly stopped fuming—the high sun had swallowed the vapors. The inert forms of Mykyta’s disciples (actually Symeon’s) became clearer, no longer appearing dissolved in the haze.

I sat down again on the grass and trailed my palm across it: no dew here, either. Nor did the shriveled birch leaves shine.

“A fine day is not predicted, Symeon,” I said sadly. “It is not predicted!”

But Symeon was already far away. I sat and watched. There he was, approaching the spot where Pavlo's stretcher was floating. He caught it with his staff and dragged it off behind him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR,
which describes how I crossed the swamp

I sat atop the hillock until Symeon crossed the Eye of the Abyss. Antonii helped him pull Pavlo's stretcher out of the water. Mykyta's disciples huddled together and chatted about something. Then they set out into the thicket and disappeared a moment later. Only then was I able to pray for the repose of the souls of my fellow-travelers, Kuzma, Pavlo and Sozont, whom the Eye of the Abyss had swallowed. As I prayed, I felt immeasurable sorrow and nearly wept. These men, Sozont most of all, clung to my soul.

The sun got hot, warming me. It emerged from behind the clouds into an opening and this opening was round, as was the Eye of the Abyss. I turned my back on the pool and prayed a second time, this time for God's aid in my uncertain way. A boundless space, awash in water with outcroppings of cattails, brambles and sparse saplings, lay in front of me. I had to cross it on my own. The sun showed where east was. Mykyta's island lay to the north. I had to head south.

I began considering what I knew about the course across the swamp. It would take half a day or possibly a bit longer to reach the small island where we had slept and cooked our last kulish, and a whole day to get from that island to dry land. Symeon had said that the inquisitive Sozont would have found the way without his help; if that was a derisive remark, then it was meaningless, but if he had spoken the truth, the course should be marked somehow.

Just then, a magpie screeched overhead. I remembered how Teodoryt had related that this magpie guided him. That had to be verified.

Feeling for the path with my staff, I stepped onto it and moved slowly ahead. The magpie, did indeed, fly ahead, and it alighted on a small birch that grew on the hillock. In my mind I sketched a straight line between myself and the outcropping and then set out: the path did not disappear from under my feet. Mosquitoes swarmed overhead. I have no food, I thought, or potable water; but I did have a small kettle and some salt in a tightly bound leather pouch, which might nevertheless have gotten wet—I had not opened it in a long while. I also had a piece of steel and a flint stone—all in the pouch. So my goal was to reach the small island, where I would be able to light a fire and gather greens—sorrel, for instance, or orach—and cook them for myself, even if in muddy water. I would spend the night there and consider the next step.

I was so immersed in thought that I stepped off course, falling headlong into a hole. My feet touched a slimy bottom. But I knew how to swim and, beating with my arms, I surfaced. The magpie flew up from the birch, screeching madly above me. I swam up to the staff I had let go,

thinking that was where the path should be, but I was unable to feel it with my foot. Swimming in clothes was awkward, so I decided to find the line between the small birch on which the magpie had alighted again and the outcropping that I had left. God favored me. I fumbled onto the path. I pushed ahead slowly and did not get lost in thought again.

The magpie took off from the small tree and, chattering, headed farther out. I noticed that one of the branches on the birch sapling was broken and hung down—was this not a sign? My pouch, which was fastened to my shoulders, also helped me this time. Tightly bound and waterproof, it was like a bubble pushing me to the surface.

I clambered onto the outcropping and fell heavily to the ground, my heart pounding loudly in my chest—I was tired. I caught my breath. I considered how and where the next portion of the path lay. I noticed no more broken branches on nearby trees, but my eye caught a rod, stuck into the ground by a small outcropping—I detected no other markings.

The magpie circled over me, chattering. This time it did not show me the way. I decided to tread very slowly. We had taken a little more than a half day to walk from the spot where we had spent the night to Mykyta's island. I could spend a whole day on it. Of course, it would have been much better if Symeon had guided me at least as far as the place where we had spent the night, but I was glad that I had gotten rid of him: for one thing, it would have been difficult to endure him next to me, and secondly—I was afraid of him. Who knows what could have stirred in that mad mind? This fear was not well-reasoned, for in truth Symeon did not wish my demise: if he had, the Eye of the Abyss could well have swallowed me, too. The terror that springs within us is not always commensurate with common sense.

I peeled off my mantle and wrung out the water from it. I did the same with my habit. Then I put them on again. All the while, mosquitoes were stinging me profusely. I began probing for the track with my staff. I finally found it, and descended into the water. I walked directly toward the rod—the direction was correct. This time I was not mistaken.

The magpie left me, flying far ahead and landing on a small tree. I paid it no heed, though I made note of the tree. It stood in the center of an outcropping, larger than the others, overgrown with grass. This time I walked very cautiously, one foot after the other and reached the rod successfully. Here I saw a dark linen ribbon tied to it—our raiments were of this same cloth. I understood that only Sozont could have tied the ribbon, so that along the way he was thinking about our return—that is why Symeon had hinted about his keenness. I sighed with relief: if the course was marked, I should not come across any great misfortune. I had only to watch for the markings carefully.

I glanced at the small tree on which the magpie had perched earlier, but now it seemed to me that a similar tree stood to the left of it. It was

impossible to tell them apart. I continued along the track, splashing chest-deep in water, staring at those trees so intently that my eyes hurt. There was a ribbon on the tree to the left of the one on which the magpie had sat—tied low, nearly at water level, it was not easy to spot.

I steered myself in that direction. And here a frantic thought entered my mind: if Symeon was aware of Sozont's markings, could they not have jumbled them deliberately? But I smothered that thought with another: to accomplish that, they would have had to step off the firm path themselves.

"But how did it happen," I thought, "that heading here I did not notice the tying of ribbons, and I was walking behind Sozont? Though it's true, I was not behind him, but Pavlo."

I had no answer. It also occurred to me that Teodoryt was blind. He, too, could not have seen any markings.

While passing the small tree with the mark I swerved off the path and felt my foot caving into thick, sticky mud. Leaning so heavily on my staff that I heard it cracking, I pulled my foot out of the mud with great effort; I was glad that my sandals were tightly fastened. Had I been in boots, I would certainly have lost one. Stars floated before my eyes from the exertion. I had to stop.

Meantime, the magpie flew ahead again: it circled the outcropping on which only grass grew and flew off into the depths of the swamp. The water emitted a dense fetidness, and I became dizzy again. Large bubbles rose from the bottom, popping with a dry cracking sound. I could not find any markings in this spot, so I had to tread as if I were blind, fumbling for the path. A cold sweat dripped down into my eyes. Mosquitoes in increasing numbers were darting at my face.

I rinsed my face with the foul water and moved on, heading toward the outcropping on which the magpie had alighted. This time the magpie deceived me! I barely kept myself from falling off the path and sinking into the mud. My staff went completely under water and got stuck somewhere. I found it with my foot, inclined it towards myself and could barely pluck it out. In the brief time I was searching it seemed to have set roots in the bottom.

I moved on and finally saw a small birch tree with a broken branch—this was a credible sign. Overhead, the magpie cackled loudly at me, satisfied with her game. I headed in the direction of the birch; here the outcropping was such that I could rest. I sat down and a cloud of mosquitoes surrounded me, their tiny moth-like wings shimmering madly before my eyes but with these it was easier: they did not sting. They did not need my blood.

Abruptly I wondered: where am I going? I had no parents in this world: they died of an epidemic while I was still young. I had no brothers, nor sisters. I was their only child. While I had skill, I was needed. What was

I now? Alone, abandoned by all, I had only this left: to hark back on the times of inspired impulse, when I had designed the Peresopnytska Gospel. My soul ached to see it again, that massive volume bound in ocher leather, with eight coils along the spine, where it was sewn together. I myself had been the bookbinder. I had stitched it, I had selected the leather, I had prepared the wood panels, I had shaved them, I had glued on the leather, and I had been the first to lovingly unfold the book. I had poured all my strength into it, so that the book had drunk me, like a cup of spring water or milk—only the potsherd remained.

And before me I saw Sozont's pale, washed-out face. It appeared as if in a fog.

"You must cross this swamp," it said. I heard his voice quite clearly in the stillness. "For only you will be able to preserve me and Pavlo and Kuzma, innocently slain, from oblivion. May this be your new Gospel. You must find the strength! Rouse your spirit!"

And I sensed something stirring within me, as if in the depths of my viscera a fresh sprig was sprouting, slowly budding, and ever so slowly developing. A blossom began growing within me, a blossom known as kryn or white lily, and it sprouted amid the dark, half-dead brambles (Symeon had described it thus) of my being. And I recalled the words of Matthew, words I once scribed with such love: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin," so that even Christ had looked upon that lily of the field as necessary in life, for He had used it as an example. My soul was overgrown with these same lilies of the field when I scribed and painted. That grand, magnificent book became such a lily of the field—my child, into whom the Lord had breathed life, and now it lives independently of me, its manure, out of which that white flower had blossomed. May the Lord receive praise for it, not I: it was He Who bestowed growth upon this lily. And I sensed in me an unfamiliar flux of energy: when such a force appears I cannot and must not perish in this not wholly endless swamp.

I think I fell asleep. I thought that it had all been a dream; but regaining my senses, I felt truly stronger. I glanced back to where I had come from, and everything I had experienced seemed like a distressing, phantasmal dream, a dream I ought not forget once awake. I shall carry that dream within me, its unexplained mysteries, all the spoken words, all the transpired events—I shall forget none of it. This is now my duty.

And I moved on more boldly and briskly, penetrating this muddy flood further and further amid dwarf trees that reminded me of the dwarfs on Mykyta's island, amid monstrously withered vegetation, which reminded me of the crippled and the freakish, past the alders and birches that were like Mykyta's disciples. Surrounded thus on all sides, it was as if I were leading them out of the abyss, though they themselves were the abyss. And I

was leading my brethren out of the abyss also, though they remain forever in it. Here I was, carrying their words, their thoughts like a sack, or like a cross, on my back: I myself was full of them. Slogging through the putrid, watery wastes of our lives, I could always pause to behold pure, celestial springs amid white clouds—lilies of the sky, for the creation of which I had set out onto the journey of life. O, I was not dead, I was not hollow: for one who senses the presence of divine lilies in one's soul is never hollow. It was not a foul fluid flowing through my veins, but a spring. I was spilling my old blood, as had naïve Kuzma, letting leeches suck his living flesh. Crossing the swamp, I was effecting something similar. My pain was like the leeches: my grief, my sorrow for those who had perished, my uncertainty, my numbness, my despair, my aloneness, my disillusionment, my doubts, my accursedness—there were so many of these leeches craving my blood. And I surrendered my body to them, but not to be ravaged. I let them suck only my dead blood—I still needed my living blood.

I waded through the swamp nearly the whole day, from marker to marker, seeking them, examining them. The search was not without incident: I fell into the water several more times. Once I sank in a quagmire that began to absorb me, but I was able to pull a floating log to me, and used it to wrench myself out of the all-consuming mud; once I lost the track and swam about at least an hour searching for signs, until weakened, almost exhausted, I finally found it again. But during this entire trek my flaming passion did not dim, the guardian candle in my head did not fade, and the lily blossoming in my soul did not wither. I was wet, caked with mud, covered with mosquito bites, filthy and famished, but I continued to hold on firmly to a thread—that thread was the lily blossom, bestowed on me for renewed strength. It even rained on me along the way, and I was splashing in water below and from above; the rain whipped my head and shoulders mercilessly. There was not a dry thread left on me. Then, when the sun reappeared I steamed as if on fire. But, teeth clenched, I walked, walked, and walked: for I had to arrive, I had to prove to myself that I am still fit for something in this life. So that when I finally spied the small island on which we had spent the night, I was not glad, for I had no energy to be glad. With parched lips I merely thanked the heavens. Half-conscious, half-dazed, half-extinguished, dragging my benumbed legs, collecting myself into a hard fist, painfully compressed, I did not clamber—I crawled onto shore. I pulled my body a short way into the grass and lost consciousness, falling into a cold, dark pit, all the while steadfastly aware that this pit was no abyss but a dark cave one could enter as a temporary refuge.

I came to toward evening. Looking around in surprise, only now did I allow myself to be glad: I had weathered half of my trek. Rolling over onto my back, I lay staring wide-eyed at the sky. It rained again and I rinsed my face. Opening my parched mouth I drank, licking the drops off my lips. The

rain, brief but generous, unexpectedly poured new energy into me.

Sitting up, I saw a family of dense, shiny mushrooms growing by a tree. The Lord had sent them to me. I prepared kindling. Scooping together some old, dry leaves and yellowed grass with its roots, I set about striking a flame. The brushwood was damp and it was hard to ignite. It took me a good while to start a fire. From the swamp I drew some water, cooked the mushrooms in it, then strained the water, boiling it once more. Again I strained it—it smelled too strongly of mud—and then got the salt from my sack. Though it was damp the salt in the pouch had not dissolved. I was able to salt my meal. The food fortified me. I was almost without strength. My eyelids drooped with fatigue, which increased after my meal. My body wilted—it was hard even to wag a finger.

But this did not trouble me. I lay on firm ground, and even though I was surrounded on all sides by swamps, they no longer scared me. I gave my last bit of strength to praying, for I had to thank the One who had saved me.

“I was excessively distrustful, Brother Sozont,” I whispered, lying supine, gazing at the rapidly darkening sky where stars as large as apples were alit. “Miracles do occur in the world with God’s will. Not all of them are recorded, not all of them are noted by men. But without the Lord’s miracles, what are we in the world? Today, Brother Sozont, another has occurred, and they will continue to occur. In my life, this is the second,” I whispered, drifting off into sleep, “the first was the Peresopnytska Gospel. I am saddened that you are unable to record this in your Cheti-Minei. But I have learned one thing: they are performed not by mortal, corruptible men, even if they lead a pious life, but by the Lord. Beyond God, Brother, there are no miracles—there never were and never will be. But then you, too, had expressed this in your own way.”

“Amen,” said the voice of Sozont, invisible in the darkness and in the world. “Now you have recounted your miracle to me...”

I awoke in the morning wholly refreshed. I foraged some more mushrooms on the islet. I cooked them and ate them. Then I stood on shore and gazed out.

Before me stretched a limitless morass of mud and water. But now I gazed upon it fearlessly: I was certain that I could cross it. Though I would be dishonest if I did not admit that the worm of fear was, indeed, nibbling at me. The beginning of the path was marked: here the grass was trimmed and a small stick stuck out. Overnight my raiment had not so much dried as stiffened—I was covered in muddy slime. Before setting out I prayed: “I praise You, Benevolent One, I glorify You, Almighty, that You did not disgrace me above others, undeserving sinful servant though I am. Heeding my prayers, You plenish my spirit with Your presence. Bless my further journey, which I chose but onto which You directed me, for You dwell in

life, not in death. Grant me strength to overcome this morass of life that has sullied me, and out of which I want to emerge with a cleansed spirit. Lay a firm path beneath my feet, so that I, a small worm of this earth, will not doubt and will not waste the strength You gave me. I have faith in it, as I do in You, and in Your Guiding Light!”

And again I stepped into the mud, but with greater confidence and persistence. And though the route was longer than yesterday’s, it was easier. And though I lost my way more than once, fell, got stuck, swam, searched for support, even so, the farther I got the greater the joy that embraced me. And only now did I understand: being close to the Eye of the Abyss, I felt its gravity, its proximity; it was behind my back, breathing at me, stretching its gauzy tentacles towards me. I felt some of them, like leeches, sucking at me and not releasing me—in pain I detached them, they were like clinging leeches. Blood flowed out of me, as did my strength. But the farther I retreated from it, the less I felt the Eye of the Abyss behind me, especially that which had breathed poisonous vapors into me, stupefying me, captivating me, stripping me of my faculties, luring me into its endlessness, pulling me therein forcibly, so reluctant was it to lose yet another sacrifice. But I did not wish to become its victim. I scrambled out of it, like out of a quagmire. The farther I retreated, the more I tore myself from its feelers and my feet from its countless mouths hidden in the mud. Puking its essence out of me, I walked, walked, and walked stubbornly, drearily, with a flame burning in my head and a sprouting lily in my soul. I could not and did not want to stop, or look around, for were I to look around, I know not if I would have turned into a pillar of salt. That is to say, I might not have been able to overcome the force that I did not understand, whose attraction is incomprehensible. I walked because I had to walk, and I had faith in my “had to.” I walked because I did not believe in the endlessness and bottomlessness of the abyss, believing, instead, that the Eye has a bottom. It is not omnipresent. It is limited. Its power is not limitless and therefore it can be vanquished.

So that I looked around only after I had completely succeeded in crossing the swamp and when my feet had stepped not onto an island in the midst of the swamp, but onto ground that was firm and larger than the swamp. Nevertheless, when I looked back, I could not suppress a scream that horror wrenched out of me.

In the middle of the swamp stood an enormous sphere: milky, half-limpid, a black, obscure pupil in its center. It appeared to me that the lake called the Eye of the Abyss, which usually lay flat on top of the earth had rolled over and stood upright. And that Eye with its endless darkness was staring at me, smoky tufts rising from its milky surface as if it were on fire. Perhaps it was on fire, for I believe I saw flashes of flames in it. My hair stood on end, and I screamed. Only it was not a scream of horror but a

scream of damnation. And my shriek became a sharp lance cast by a warrior. And that lance flew through the space which divided us, striking the transparent black pupil and becoming stuck in it. And blood trickled out of that Eye—lifeless blood, of which I wished to be free.

EPILOGUE

I was able to muster enough strength to reach the village of Turchynka, the same Turchynka that had been ravaged by Tartars. Here I was laid up with swamp fever, as the illness was known among the peasants. I shivered. I hallucinated. Each succeeding morning washed most of the phantoms away, and I welcomed three such mornings in Turchynka. Slowly I regained my senses. The peasant who took me in out of Christian compassion was very surprised to hear that I had crossed the swamp alone, with no guide, and said simply that God had preserved me.

Barely recovered, I set out for Zhytomyr. I walked the route not in three days, as we had before, but in a full five—I had little strength. When I counted all the days that had passed, I was surprised to note that an astonishingly small number of days had passed since we undertook our journey: three days of travel to Turchynka, two days crossing the swamp, and two days on the island. So with my fellow travelers Sozont and Pavlo we had spent only a week journeying together. It had seemed to me that long years had passed. My return journey was longer: it took me two days to cross the swamp, I was laid up in Turchynka for four days, I took five days to reach Zhytomyr—four I walked and a fifth was spent at Father Ivan's in Cherniakhiv, at whose place we had also stopped earlier. There I was talked into resting a bit. All together I had spent eighteen days on my journey. In Cherniakhiv I briefly recounted to Father Ivan what had transpired and he was horrified. I asked to confess my sins to him, and he granted absolution, saying that I had not sinned. I believe that was not so: at the time Sozont and I embarked upon our return across the Eye of the Abyss, it behooved me to insist that I walk behind the stretcher. Perhaps in that way, I would have been able to save Sozont. Recounting to Father Ivan what had happened to us, I laid out only credible facts, not touching upon Sozont's conjectures or undertaking a more detailed description, or expressing my own surmises, or blaming anyone. So I said that the Eye of the Abyss had swallowed Kuzma and Sozont and Pavlo had been bitten by a viper. But Father Ivan, in all his simplicity, after lending an attentive ear, asked me anyway: "Was there no ill will by anyone in all of this?"

"I fear to judge, Father," I said, "lest I fall into greater sin. Besides, I must still studiously reflect upon it all."

Both Father Ivan and his plump wife were determined to capture and butcher a goose for me, but I dissuaded them, explaining that I was quite exhausted and that lately I had been eating only small morsels of food: rich food might harm me. On reflection, Father Ivan agreed, though his lads were ready for the chase. Thus, on that day I was given milk to drink, honey, bread, and light foods to eat. I was sufficiently fortified and the road from Cherniakhiv to Zhytomyr was easier to endure. Father Ivan was so

amiable that along with his lads he accompanied me to the edge of town. Parting, he embraced me and said: “May the Lord protect you! I always thought Mykyta was a frivolous man!”

I related what had happened face to face for a second time to Father Hryhorii in Zhytomyr, this time copiously, not concealing Sozont’s suspicions and conjectures. That is to say, I recounted what the deacon had willed me to remember—Sozont’s mental manuscript, which I had carried in my mind, but not offering any of my own suppositions this time either.

Father Hryhorii said that he needed to reflect thoroughly about what he had heard and dismissed me to regain my strength. It turned out that the abbot, not waiting for my return (“Why?” I wondered in my thoughts), had summoned his pupil Petro to Zhytomyr, either for a trial or to assist me in scribing the Zhytomyr Gospel. Petro had already begun working (“Did Father Hryhorii expect that I might not return,” I asked myself, “or had he lost all faith in my skill?”). The abbot seemed to have overheard my thoughts, for he said that if I wish, I could design the Zhytomyr Gospel, but to give thought also to my successors. My considerable training and artistry were not to remain only mine, but must be handed down to apprentices, to live on through time.

I wanted to look at the pupil Petro’s work right away, but a fainting spell suddenly overtook me—I had still not rested from the road. The abbot sent me away to sleep soundly, to regain my strength, that is to say, I was entirely free until my senses were restored. Meantime, he would carefully reflect on what I had recounted—there was abundant time and now I did not have to hurry anywhere. He helped me get to my cell, summoning a novice to assist as well, for it became apparent that I could not walk unaided. They led me, holding me under my arms and put me to bed. At once I sank into the dark abyss of sleep. I slept so soundly that I dreamed no dreams, as if I had vanished off this earth. I slept thus two nights and two days. I awoke toward evening. Golden evening light filled my lodging.

The abbot was sitting next to my bed. He smiled joyfully when I opened my eyes.

“You are finally awake,” he said. “I had begun to worry about you.”

And he gave me a refreshing herb to drink. It helped. It cleared the stupor after my long repose. I was able to sit up on my cot.

“Is everything all right?” the abbot inquired.

“Yes, Father,” I replied. “But it seems as though that journey was a difficult, freakish dream.”

“I’ve had time to reflect upon all you related, and here is what I believe: you must execute Deacon Sozont’s testament.”

“In what way?” I asked.

“By recording all that you have seen and experienced to the last detail, concealing nothing. I shall convey that document to the metropolitan, to

confer with him.”

“It would take a long while,” said I. “What about scribing the Gospel?”

“Are you prepared, have you the strength for scribing and painting the Gospel?” Father Hryhorii asked.

“I know not,” I said. “I am wasted and spent. How is the apprentice Petro?”

“I am astonished at Petro’s ability and artistry,” the abbot said. “You could assist him with your advice.”

So it appeared I was being deterred from scribing and painting the Zhytomyr Gospel. I felt no bitterness, however.

“I would like to have a look at Petro’s work,” I said.

“Tomorrow you shall,” the abbot said. “But today, don’t get out of bed. You will be brought food directly.”

Food was brought, and after eating, I sank immediately into slumber again, and when I surfaced from it in the morning, I felt wholly refreshed and rested, though I did feel a mild tremor in my hands and body.

The first thing I did was to go and see Petro’s work. And here again I was stunned: Petro sat in a spacious, brightly lit cell, completely immersed in his work. When he raised his head at the sound of the creaking door, it seemed I was looking at myself in a strange looking glass. For that was me, exactly, but not the I of today, rather the I of the day when I had embarked upon scribing the Peresopnytska Gospel. I had seen this pupil once in Peresopnytsia. He had eagerly observed me at work and assisted me a bit, so he also knew me. Springing to his feet, he rushed out from behind the table and bowed to me, pressing my hand.

“I am so fortunate, Master,” he said, “that you have dropped in on me, unworthy though I am!”

I then looked through his illustrations and proof sheets for the prospective book. They were designed in my style, though his hand was evident, as was his sensibility and way of seeing.

“Do you remember the Peresopnytska Gospel?” I asked.

“How is it possible to forget?” the apprentice said enthusiastically, and his enthusiasm was genuine. “For me, it is the heaven of art!”

“Do not blaspheme!” I cut him off. “Things devised by man are imperfect and insignificant.”

“Forgive me, Master!” Pavlo bowed meekly. “I wanted to say that for me your work is an example of perfection and I do not say this as flattery. I wish to achieve your mastery at least in small measure.”

“That is what is wrong!” I said. “By imitation you will not attain a high standard, but will reach only a low one. The pupil who does not aspire to surpass his master is a poor pupil.”

“Is it possible to surpass the Peresopnytska Gospel in artistry?” the

pupil asked, moving only his lips.

“Everything can be surpassed,” I said, “for man, as I have said, does not know perfection. But to reach heights, be yourself, and not somebody’s copy.”

“I have thought about this,” Petro said. “But without superior exemplars, one cannot form oneself.”

“You speak well,” I said. “But do not extol those models as heaven. Models are not to be exalted—God is. Follow Him, heed Him, and from models learn not to imitate anything or anyone.”

“About this, too, I have thought,” the pupil said. “But my hand and senses are still fragile. Models are like a supporting staff for me.”

“The sooner you get rid of the supporting staff, the sooner you will stand on your own feet, and the firmer you will stand.”

“I shall do as you say, Master,” he bowed lightly. “At least I have a great desire to do so.”

I gave him a few more recommendations, pointed out defects in his illustrations, in the way he scribed letters, and then I departed from him, satisfied. And not because he had flattered me, but because he had reminded me of my youth so acutely. My conversation with him in fact reminded me of a conversation I had had with my instructor, the great master of calligraphy and drawing Ihnatii, with whom I had studied. And also, because I sensed in this lad power and perseverance, not yet sufficiently evident, but palpable. I knew from Abbot Hryhorii that Petro toiled all day, forgetting to eat and even forgetting his duty at divine office, for which the abbot had reprimanded him more than once, though he did not punish him. Father Hryhorii was a wise and benevolent spiritual father. He knew how to value and support talent, as he had done at one time with me. That is why I believed that under the abbot’s guidance, this youth could develop into an adept artist, and may the Lord aid him in his indefatigable labor. I had always considered myself an unworthy instrument in the hands of God: He sees my sins, and may He forgive them; though one sin, spread widely among men, possessed especially among artisans, I did not possess—envy towards others. I had always considered envy to be a mark of spiritual paltriness. Zoil envied Homer because he was incapable and did not expect to reach his heights; Homer had no basis to envy Zoil.

At once I went to Abbot Hryhorii and shared my thoughts about Petro. I said that I was resigning from scribing the Zhytomyr Gospel, for I was not ready to work, and the matter cannot wait. So I agreed to execute another duty—to record everything I had experienced along the journey and what Deacon Sozont had deposited in my mind. But I had two requests of the abbot: before embarking upon this not insignificant piece of work, to allow me, after adequate rest and after my strength was restored, to go to Peresopnytsia. Ten years had passed since I completed the Gospel, and my

soul ached to see it once more. The reason was quite simple, I told Abbot Hryhorii: every artist is afflicted with exaggerated estimations of his creations and often is unable to evaluate himself accordingly and dispassionately; thus he falls into the sin of arrogance, having no basis for that. Hence, an artist needs to examine himself from time to time in all modesty, for if something dishonorable has been created and the deficient is elevated to eminence, he deserves pity; when he becomes persuaded that his work is imperfect, his spirit will be fortified. Before embarking on my own work, my spirit needs to be fortified. If I feel that the labor into which I had invested all of myself and into which I had expended all my energy and strength is undeserving, I should be excused from my duty: I shall embark on sacred indolence, repent my arrogance before the Lord and end my dishonorable life in prayer.

“Go, my son,” Father Hryhorii said, “and may the Lord bless you. I expect you will return with your spirit restored. But do not fall into useless self-degradation, which can be worse than arrogance.”

“May the Lord’s will and not yours prevail,” I stated.

And I went to Peresopnytsia. I cannot say this journey was easy for me. I was still weak and so I did not hasten. Fortunately, I came across a caravan driving steers to Poland, and I joined them—I continued on in a carriage.

Princess Kateryna Chartoryska greeted me graciously, saying that my Gospel’s fame had spread throughout the land. Distinguished nobility came to see it, and that is why she had taken the book out of the monastery to hold it temporarily. Besides, a trained calligrapher and illustrator was working for her, copying it for one of her kin.

I met the copyist—he was Father Dymytrii, a serious and able man. I was, incidentally, briefly acquainted with him earlier. His particular skill was his great ability to accurately imitate what had been scribed and painted by others, but he was entirely incapable of creating anything of his own.

And so, the moment had come to stand face to face with my offspring. Slowly, attentively, I leafed through the book page by page, examining and evaluating myself; attempting to view my work through the eyes of a stranger, and a disinterested spirit. What I saw astonished me. What is more, it gladdened me, saddening me just a bit. There were insignificant faults that I could observe, though in general, the work was worthy. This was what gladdened me. Something other saddened me: I saw and sensed, in fact, that I would never effect anything better, finer, more perfect. I would, that is, be unable to muster enough energy for it to burst in such a flood of colors, lines, and ornaments. I would never again scribe such letters, each possessing inconceivable beauty and refinement. There were moments when I could not believe that this marvel in front of me was an achievement of my hands; indeed, it was not I who had created it—I was an instrument in the

Lord's hands. Thus, sitting by a window flooded generously with sunlight, I suddenly heard the voice of Mykyta, hoarse but powerful, full of inner conviction and acrimony: "Your sin lies in that you love the beauty of the world, serving that mammon; the beauty of the world is one of the Devil's most favored demons: and though you scribed Scriptures, it was the Devil lighting your candle, not God. Holy Scriptures do not need calligraphy, splendid illustrations, and ornaments. It is grand and fine in its content, and that suffices!"

Listening to that voice, I gazed at this remarkable achievement of my hands. And the voice faded and faded and without completing the accusation, it failed in mid-word and then vanished.

And then I heard Sozont's voice saying: "The abyss forms when man stops seeing white as white and black as black, and instead names white black, and black white; love is labeled hate, and hate love: that is, when man dishonors the Lord's commandments, substituting them with this own. That is when blasphemy and profanity set in. As you die, do not wish for the world, with its beauty and its creatures, to perish—pray for the blind, those bearing night within them, to cross over into day, that is, to mature into loving kindness. Believe that earth's beauty is God's image in it, and freakishness is the background against which God is perceived, and that the fleetingness of beauty is the background against which eternity is discovered."

I sat, rigid. Those words echoed clearly, distinctly and wholly opposite to each other, Mykyta's words and Sozont's words, and I could not place my pebble's weight on either one or the other plate of the scale. But again my eyes fell upon the Peresopnytska Gospel, and I whispered: "Whoever is darkness, may he be darkness, whoever is light, may he be light. Nocturnal birds have no desire to fly in daylight, the fowl of light sleep when darkness falls. For the nocturnal bird, the moon is its sun, and for the bird of day, it is the sun, not the moon. Day would be indistinguishable without night, and the other way around. All is strangely interconnected in an odd dependency, each illuminating and overshadowing the other. In this lies not the abyss but the truth, though man's reason cannot reach the bottom of that truth. At the bottom lies the mystery of God, and it is unknowable."

I felt stronger in spirit. It was not a useless thing I had created—it was indispensable for goodness. That is why Father Dymytrii was copying it, and apprentice Petro was inspired by it, and refreshed by it, and was producing the feat of his life. Which meant that the remains of my achievement were nourishing a newly-roused bud.

Here is how Sozont had expressed it: "Know that the loving kindness you effected in the world is that burgeoning shoot sprouting out of decaying matter into a future bud and that your mortality is darkness, evil, and non-love. Know that mortality must be relinquished, although without it a germ

cannot sprout. Your mortality is God's creation, as is the world."

The power of those words was confirmed for me as I reviewed the Peresopnytska Gospel.

I had nothing more to do in Peresopnytsia and so I returned to Zhytomyr. Afterwards I secluded myself from the world for many months, writing this book. But before that, I asked Father Hryhorii's permission to write it not in simple entries, but artistically, with illustrations and ornaments. So that I wrote each section of it as a draft copy, and later copied it calligraphically, coloring it. And the flame of creation rekindled in me: I not only wrote this Gospel of the new day but painted it with inspiration. In it I depicted the Eye of the Abyss that I had seen on Mykyta's island. I included my fellow travelers, Mykyta with his disciples, Marta, Musii the dwarf, the crippled and freakish. Here too was the imaginary beast that had supposedly lived in the lake, devouring the sacrifices cast to it; there were birch trees, aspens in the mud, snakes, outcroppings, clumps of cattails, the hut atop the pole—everything, everything that my eye had seen and that had solidified into an image. I burned with ardor exactly as I had while designing the Peresopnytska Gospel, even though the likenesses, paintings, lines, and ornaments were as dissimilar as if another man had created them.

Apprentice Petro burned with similar ardor as he created the Zhytomyr Gospel.

I visited him at times, and we had long discourses about creativity. Petro showed intelligence and he absorbed my instruction as if imbibing it. In the end, I could no longer label him a pupil—in front of my eyes a genuine master was developing. This was truly a fresh sprout. It really did grow out of my dust. This not only gladdened me, it inspired me in my own work. Not only did he quench his thirst through me but I did likewise through him since he had the advantage of youth over me.

And so I finally wrote my book. And at this time, one clear morning, not yet having awoken completely, I beheld a dream—or a vision. Sozont would have said it was a dream.

And I fancied that I had resolved to heed Symeon, Mykyta's disciple, and returned to the Eye of the Abyss to spend my last days on the island. I had already crossed the swamp and was again glimpsing the peculiar, puzzling broad surface of the lake, or pool, or eye, immersed in a flood of mud. But when I groped for the suspended track that crosses it, I could not find the pegs that held it. So I decided to swim across the lake, and since I was afraid that it would swallow me as it had my fellow travelers, I cut a bunch of dry cattails, tying two bundles to my body, as the Tartars did when traversing rivers: and thus I swam, the bundles keeping me afloat. I was approaching the dark circle in the center of the Eye of the Abyss when blind Teodoryt stepped out onto the curving shore. He wore the same habit, though it was torn and worn out, through which his body shone. It was

much like the one Kuzma had worn. He turned his blind eyes towards me and seemed to sniff. He was tense and nettled.

“Who is swimming there?” he shouted in trepidation.

“Brother Teodoryt, it is I,” I responded. “Mykhailo Vasylevych, who visited you last summer.”

I noticed, for I was close now, that Teodoryt’s tenseness and anticipation had vanished—as if he had expected something else.

“It is not me whom you awaited, Brother?” I asked, approaching shore.

“Not you,” Teodoryt said. “Though I am glad for any visitor.”

“Why did you say: ‘I am glad, not we are glad?’”

“For I am the only one here,” said Teodoryt dejectedly.

“And St. Mykyta?” I asked, clambering out of the water and untying the bundles of cattails.

“St. Mykyta has died,” answered Teodoryt. “If you wish, I will describe how it happened.”

“I am glad to listen,” I said, catching my breath. For that, I stooped in the grass.

“He died when Symeon and Marta left the island. Actually, Symeon abandoned it and Marta set off after him. For some reason, he had feared you, Brother Mykhailo.”

“Was he afraid that I had not perished in the swamp and would reach land?”

“You know of it?” Teodoryt asked, smiling sadly. “He did not expect you to return. He feared his tricks would become known. Several days later Heorhii and Nykyfor set off after him, for they were not Mykyta’s disciples but Symeon’s. Ievahrii, Antonii, and I were Mykyta’s. But Ievahrii did not stay long with us and left as well.”

“Is that when Mykyta died?” I asked.

“Has someone told you the story already?” Teodoryt asked.

“No, Brother,” I said. “But I knew that Mykyta was already very ill last summer.”

“But no one knew of that!” Teodoryt exclaimed.

“He showed us his body covered with abscesses,” I said, “the night of Pentecost, when he came down.”

“One day, on Friday, the rooster crowed in the morning to rouse us but it did not crow for the sermon.”

“Because Mykyta was the rooster,” I said.

“You know that, too?” Teodoryt shuddered.

“Sozont had deduced it and had told me.”

“Symeon greatly feared your Sozont. He thought he was sent here to spy.”

“I know,” I sighed. “That is why the Eye of the Abyss swallowed him. Continue.”

“The crippled and freakish assembled,” Teodoryt recounted, “as did Antonii and I, but Mykyta’s voice did not sound and the curtains were not opened. Then I climbed up the pole. But it was quiet there. ‘Father, bless us,’ I said, ‘people are waiting below.’ He did not answer. And again I said: ‘Why, Father, do you not answer your child?’ He was silent. A wild thought flashed through my mind. Being sinful, I thought the righteous one had fled the island as his spineless disciples had. I groped around and came across the blessed one. He stood, as if in prayer, his arms folded across his chest. I was glad he was standing, for I thought if he is standing he must be alive. And I said: ‘Have I offended you, Father?’ He was silent. Then I said: ‘At least extend your hand—let me kiss it.’ But there was no answer. And I thought: could it be that he has departed to the Lord? I inclined an ear: there was no breath and a dense odor of decay emanated from him, though that should not have been, for at morningtide he was still crowing like a rooster. Then I realized that he had reposed in the Lord. So I laid down his body, which had been propped up against the pole, and wept bitterly. This, Brother Mykhailo, is how he departed.”

“Was he buried or cast into the Eye of the Abyss?” I inquired.

“You see! That you do not know yet. We buried him next to his mother.”

“Sozont doubted that there had been a mother.”

“Why did he doubt?”

“For the story about the mother, like all the other stories about his life, were taken from the Life of Symeon the Pole-sitter of yore.”

“I do not know,” Teodoryt stated. “Being blind, I did not see his mother, but everyone said she existed, died, and is buried here.”

“What happened next?” I asked.

“Afterwards, the crippled and freakish left the island. Antonii guided them across the Eye of the Abyss and across the swamp. He told me to go, too, but I decided to stay.”

“Why did you decide to stay?” I asked, feeling sadness, too.

“I expect Marta to return here.”

“Why do you expect that?”

“Symeon was brutal and merciless towards her. I told her: when you recover your senses, come back. I shall wait for you.”

“What would happen then?”

“Then I would build a home here, and we would live in love and harmony.”

“Do you love her?”

“Yes!” Teodoryt replied succinctly.

“Being blind, how would you be able to build a home?” I asked sorrowfully.

“I would do the building, while she, as the one who could see, would

direct me.”

“Do you know that the track across the Eye of the Abyss is broken off?”

“Yes. Antonii told me he would disconnect it.”

“What would you eat here?”

“Oh, I would think of something. I own fishing tackle, which I have set up on the other side of the island. I have dug a well, and though the water stinks of mud, it is potable. We had grain—I planted it in spring. Orach and mushrooms grow here.”

“And in winter what would you eat?”

“Winters I would trek to the villages for alms, bringing them for her, the children. We have lived here for a number of years—we have learned what to do.”

“And how would Marta be able to cross to you without the path, Teodoryt?”

“This, too, I have considered,” he said cheerfully, “I am building a boat—do you want to see?”

And he escorted me into the thicket. There stood a bulky object, a trough or barrel gouged out of the trunk of an old pine tree.

“It’ll roll over,” I said.

“I will tie sheaves of cattails to the side, and it won’t roll over,” Teodoryt stated proudly. And then abruptly he asked, “Does it look like Noah’s ark?”

“Who knows what Noah’s ark was like,” I answered evasively.

“I care only that the vessel be able to carry the two of us, her and me,” Teodoryt said.

“And if she does not wish to come here? How long will you wait?”

“As long as I have hope,” said Teodoryt evenly. “I believe she will come. Where can she go in that accursed world?”

“Why are you cursing the world, without having learned enough about it?” I asked. “Perhaps it is better to return to it?”

“No,” Teodoryt declared calmly. “I know the world, and have found nothing good in it. That is why I shall not return to it. And if I did, I would never be able to find Marta in it, and she would not know where I am. This way, I have hope.”

“You could wait for her here and return to the world together. You could build a house among people—it is easier to live collectively.”

“To the world of encitements and blunders? No! I wish to be a *new Adam*, to settle on uninhabited land, to bring forth *new men*. Not Abel and Cain, who introduced discord, but beneficent semen.”

“Fine,” I said. “Your intent to build a home and to establish a benevolent family is charming to me. You will at the same time bring life into this dead place. And if you stop hoping?”

“For that, too, I have an answer,” Teodoryt smiled. “Then I will ascend Mykyta’s pole and await disciples, praying to God and mortifying my loathsome body. And once disciples arrive, people will visit here with their offerings. But I will not do as Symeon did—the Lord would punish me.”

And he straightened out proudly in front of me, handsome as an angel, though with dead eyes and an inert face. He stood, glowing in the sun, as if hewn out of a golden-barked pine tree, self-assured and therefore lifeless.

“If you wish,” his lips moved grandly, “and since you are already here, let us leave Marta be. You can become my first disciple.”

And he stretched his hand out towards me, pointing pompously...

I awoke. Actually, I emerged from the vision. I do not know whether it was real or if on that island near the Eye of the Abyss everything had transpired as I fancied. Nor do I know whether this was a voice or summons for me, but I had no desire to embark for that island. Then I thought, perhaps I should take advantage of the vision’s suggestion and become Teodoryt’s disciple, but in something other: to find somewhere in the world a suitable location and build a home for myself, awaiting the moment when a creature dear to me would cross the threshold. She must be wandering somewhere, like me, for every person, they say, has a pair. And though I firmly did not wish it, this idea captivated me in its own way.

I shut my eyes, hoping to envision my own home. Instead, I beheld the Peresopnytska Gospel. Once again, slowly, admiring each page, I leafed through it, page after page, in my mind. And my soul was at peace. The kind of peace that comes when you awaken in a room awash in sunlight and you suddenly realize that each newborn day is a gift from God.

I opened my eyes. My cell was completely flooded with brilliant morning sunlight.

Translated by Olha Rudakevych

Original publication: Valerii Shevchuk, *Oko pryvny*, Kyiv: Ukrains'kyi pysmennyk, 1996, pp. 82–196. The first half of this novel appeared in the previous issue of *Ukrainian Literature*.

Ivan Franko

Strewing, strewing falls the snow
From the heaven's graying chasm,
Fluttering down in myriads
These cold butterflies, unpleasant.

As concerted as old troubles,
Colder than ill-tempered fate,
They bespatter all that's living,
All the fields' and meadows' beauty.

The white carpet of oblivion,
Stiffness, stupefaction, stupor
Covers everything and deadens
All down to the deepest roots.

Strewing, strewing falls the snow,
Ever heavier lies this carpet.
Youthful fire in the soul
Flickers, wanes, and then expires.

Translated by Ivan Tephyy

Original publication: Ivan Franko, untitled poem from the collection *Ziv'iale lystia* [Withered leaves], cycle 2 number 20, in his *Zibrannia tvoriv u 50 tomakh* [Collected Works in Fifty Volumes], Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1976–1986, Volume 2, pp. 152–53.

Khmelnysky and the Soothsayer

Ivan Franko

When Khmelnysky, who had been sentenced to death by Hetman Potocki, escaped from jail and was heading for the Sich, he happened one evening to be riding past a large forest. Afraid of falling into the hands of the hetman's posse in the darkness, he turned his horse into the forest, intending to spend the night beneath an oak tree.

As long as the path was good, he rode his horse. When he entered a thicket and the twilight obscured his vision, the lord captain of Chyhyryn had to get off his horse, take him by the reins, and lead him on, feeling about for the path with his feet.

When he thought he had gone quite far from the forest's edge, he gazed around amid the impenetrable thicket, searching for a suitable spot to spend the night. Looking around cautiously, he saw a light flashing nearby.

What is this, thought Khmelnysky. A posse? But no—why would a posse penetrate such an impassable thicket? Forest wardens? But there is nothing here for them to guard. A lord's hunt? But there's no sound of hunting horns or barking dogs. Maybe those are fugitives running away to the Sich, like me? In that case, I'll have some company!

Inspecting the powder in his pistols and testing the blade of the Tatar yataghan tucked into his belt, he made the sign of the cross and together with his horse slowly advanced through the thicket in the direction of the light.

When he had approached to within fifty paces, he found himself in a small clearing. In the middle, beneath an ancient oak, stood a tiny hut covered with green sod instead of straw thatch and almost completely grown into the earth. A light flickered through the lone small window. The clearing was deserted and quiet.

After ascertaining that there was no ambush, Khmelnysky tethered his horse without removing his saddle and let him graze in the small clearing. With his hand clasping the haft of the yataghan, he approached the hut and knocked on the door.

"Enter," a deep voice sounded inside, as though coming from beneath the earth.

With his foot Khmelnysky nudged open the small oak door and bending low, entered the tiny dwelling. Inside, a very old man with a long, waist-length beard white as milk was sitting next to the fireplace, drying some skewered fish.

"Good day, granddad!" said Bohdan, barely able to stand in the low earthen hut.

"Good day, Hetman!" said the old man without looking at him.

"Hetman? What kind of hetman am I?" Khmelnysky said in astonishment. "I am a poor fugitive heading for the Sich, and I request lodgings for the night."

"Sit down, Hetman. You will be my guest!" said the old man, still staring calmly into the red flames of the fire.

Khmelnysky sat down on the long oak bench near the window, making sure that his broad shoulders covered the window so that no light would flicker outside.

"Don't worry, Hetman," said the old man, as though guessing his thoughts. "Here you are safe. Still, you cannot avoid what is predestined for you."

"Ah, so you're one of those!" said Bohdan, smiling. "You know how to read that mysterious book where our fate is recorded? And is my Hetmanate recorded there?"

"It is."

"Thank you for that news, granddad! Now I am safe. And I don't need to know more. Will you perhaps give me a bite to eat, or am I to lie down on an empty stomach?"

"Have a bite to eat, and then you'll lie down on an empty stomach," said the old man, and offered him a freshly dried fish from his skewer. Stepping up to the fireplace, Khmelnysky ripped off the head of the fish and threw it into the fire. Then he bit into it like a starving man, without splitting or gutting it.

At that very moment he felt something cold and slippery in his hand and his mouth. He looked down and saw a huge, headless serpent writhing in his hand. He spat out what he had bitten off and that, too, was a morsel of the snake. With horror and disgust he cast the revolting food away from him. The old man continued to stare into the flames of the fire.

"What is this?" asked Khmelnysky, who had recovered from his momentary fright.

"Go to sleep, Hetman," said the old man. "I have no other food for you, and now is not the time to talk about the meaning of what you saw. You will find out tomorrow."

Khmelnysky left the house, spread his felt cloak beneath the oak tree, and lay down. Although tired from his full day's journey, he could not sleep. His body still trembled from fright, and his eyes gazed immovably into the darkness. Stars shone in the heavens, and from this spot their light seemed odd and unusual. A kind of mournful sighing stirred through the leaves and branches of the old oak, touching some deep, dark strings in Bohdan's heart. Strange thoughts flashed in his head, like quiet distant bolts

of lightning heralding an approaching storm.

It was late before he fell asleep, but in the morning his faithful horse awakened him early, tugging at his sleeve with his teeth. Bohdan sprang up and washed himself at the nearby well. After saying his morning prayer, he approached the old man's house. The old man was already awake and came out to meet him.

"Did you sleep well, Hetman? Come, now, let's have breakfast."

They entered the house. The small bench was covered with a luxurious Turkish kilim. A small round table, carved from the stump of an oak and covered with brocade, stood in the middle of the earthen hut.

"No, granddad—I don't want your fish!" said Bohdan with disgust, remembering yesterday's incident.

"Have no fear, Hetman! Yesterday was a prophetic hour, but not today. Just sit down and fortify yourself. See, I will eat too."

Bohdan sat down. Hunger overcame his squeamishness, and the old man's fish turned out to be tasty. They ate in silence. Then the old man, frowning his thick eyebrows, looked at Bohdan. As though continuing a string of mysterious thoughts, he said:

"You did well, Hetman, to tear off its head yesterday."

At these words Bohdan raised his eyes and gazed at the old man.

"If you had bitten into it without tearing off its head, it would have killed you."

"Does that mean that I will tear off the head of the hostile force pressing hard on Ukraine and it will not kill me?"

The old man nodded. For a long moment he remained silent. Then he spoke again as though from the depths of his thoughts.

"But it is not a good sign that you threw it down but not into the fire. I saw where it fell. But when I looked for it later, I could no longer find it."

"That means it came back to life! Does that mean it will live without its head? Does that mean I will not vanquish it completely?" Bohdan cried.

The old man hung his head gloomily. Both of them were silent for a long time.

"But tell me one thing, old man," Bohdan finally spoke. "Yesterday, you gave me a fish?"

"Yes."

"Then why did it turn into a serpent in my hands?"

"I tell you: it was a prophetic hour."

"But what does it foretell that it turned specifically into a serpent, into such filth?"

The old man considered for a moment.

"No doubt, you have heard, Hetman, or perhaps you have read the tale of St. Peter. They say that St. Peter, in wandering through the world, once entered a desert. For three days he could not find a single soul. He became

very hungry and began praying to God to give him something to eat. All of a sudden, a serpent crawled out from beneath the rock on which he was kneeling. And from the heavens he heard a voice: 'Peter, take it and eat!' But Peter drew back in horror and said: 'Lord, this is filth!' And the voice replies: 'Fear not, everything is clean to one who is pure!' And St. Peter stretched out his hand, took the snake, and lo and behold, it had turned into a dried fish."

"Well, old man, that's the exact opposite of what happened to me," Bohdan cried.

"Yes, Hetman, but you are not St. Peter. And the deed that you are to carry out in Ukraine...."

"Enough, old man, enough!" said Bohdan, standing up. Bidding goodbye to the old man, he left the earthen hut and set out on his journey.

Translated by Marta D. Olynyk

Original publication: Ivan Franko, "Khmelnysky i vorozhbyt," in his *Zibrannia tvoriv u 50 tomakh* [Collected Works in Fifty Volumes], Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1976–1986, Volume 21, pp. 142–45.

The Return

Iurii Ianovskyi

He returned to his native village toward evening. He placed his rifle in the chimney of the burnt-out house. The whole time his hands could not rid themselves of the feel of the rifle's usual weight. The sun, the familiar sun of childhood, set behind the familiar hillock. Overhead, amid the melancholy silence, the stars began to shine. A wind blew in from the field, as it had earlier. The peasant, who had been a soldier and was now a peasant again, let out a sigh. The spring evening of his return had come, just as he had dreamed of it in the trenches.

The village lay in chaos. During the winter the front had passed through it. In its center a military road had eaten into the earth. The village was destroyed by shells and burned by fire. The destroyed homes looked like candle-butts in a sand bowl. In them human life had begun, cooled, and come to an end. Human feet had trampled the earth in the yards. Generations had trampled it, beating out a ring around the candle-homes. The spring emitted a heavy fragrance. The convex horizon was turning pink from the sun. In the sky geese sailed by in a vee, like a boat. Little clouds crowded above them, nudging one another like young calves. Skeins of clouds passed by. A raven, so black it was dark blue, flew, as though breaking off its wings. "And so what!" said the peasant loudly.

With his hands he was catching the night that encircled him; he shot at the silent moon and seemed to see gleaming slivers falling from it. Suddenly the moon hid and the peasant fell asleep. It seemed to him that the trench was shooting all around him. A shell shrieked through the air, exploding somewhere behind him. The peasant awoke briefly, surprised that there were shells in the village. Then a real dream came. He settled more comfortably, sensing that this dream would bring something pleasant. Indeed it did. In the middle of the homestead sprawled a new green plow. The plowshare and coulter shone brightly. The plow beam was sticking upward, and the little plow cart stood comically on two crooked wheels. Grasping the plow handles brought a feeling of languor. The blinding sun beat against the wall of the house. A little sunbeam darted over the door. Through the windowpane, a fire was blooming on the oven's hearthstone. He looked at the blossoming sun singeing the sky and tearing itself from the azure background. The sun exploded into an infinity of fragments. The sky above the horizon darkened from the earth—it flew upward.

"This is a dream," he thought. He felt the struggle between the two

dreams: the house illuminated by the sun, through which the gloomy trench appeared to him. He knew for certain that he was sleeping in the ashes of the village. His brain, like an exhausted, tormented, and fragmented being, struggled with all its might, restoring the vision of his house. The trench thundered and obstructed his vision, but his brain in its dream exhaled this noise as if it were a narcotic poison in his lungs. Finally, his brain fused the two dreams together. A cloud appeared over the house. It was still far off, but its fingers were already appearing in the sky, and from below reflections of lightning bolts were streaming toward them. The open fingers of the clouds tightened into a fist, which took aim at the low-hanging sun.

It began to rain. The sun disappeared, having illuminated the brain with the warmth of its last rays. Once again he dreamed of the trench. The peasant knew that it was only a dream. Inhuman exhaustion bound and tangled his muscles. In this dream, this "trench" dream, he wanted to see another dream again. He wanted to fall asleep in his dream. His brain definitely knew that the ruined yard was reality. Everything else was a dream. Everything else was a dream.

A struggle was taking place. His brain was protecting the peace with a dream. It was raining. Streams of rain were reaching his body; raindrops were running down his face. The human being began to dream that he was wounded, that he was crying. The wound did not hurt at all: the tears were in gratitude for the wound. In the dream the person was utterly pleased that he has only been injured. Even the rain—it was completely real—could not awaken the person. It seemed to him that cold blood was flowing and running from the wound on his back. Somewhere in the depths of his brain there glimmered the realization that this was just a dream, that reality was the burnt-out village. But this dream was more pleasant than the dream about shells exploding. The thought flickered that reality is the return home from the war, to his native fire-ravaged village.

In his dream his wife appears. "My husband," she says. Near the well she stops to draw water. Her shadow breaks over the white house. He sees himself putting away the new plow. Together he and his wife carry the plow into the cellar. The cellar smells of frogs and damp earth. He dreams that he is explaining to his wife why he is storing the plow. He embraces his wife, breathing in her scent. Subconsciously an idea forms about this dream. How can he tell his wife that reality is the fire-devastated village, that the plow must be put into the underground cellar in the dream (the dream takes place earlier!), that after he wakes up it will be possible to find the plow? His wife clings trustingly to him with her whole body. The joy of return. A wave of desire stirs from the very depths of his mind. The peasant awoke on a spring morning on the ash-heaps of the village. He woke up and sighed deeply.

The orchards were destroyed. They had barely begun to turn green. Broken branches, like twisted arms and legs, lay scattered in the yards. Houses stood roofless. Burned walls and piles of clay stank of great, alien

misery and ashes. The sun rose from the chaos of the horizon. Army wagons, bogged down, were scattered along the road. The peasant walked through the village. He was alone among the streets and houses. Beyond the village, fog suddenly caught up to him. It enveloped him, as though transporting him to a foreign land. The peasant halted. In front of him was the precipice of the trench and a never-ending wetness. He jumped inside and clung to the breastwork. Instantly he felt like sleeping. Fighting off somnolence, he continuously observed the familiar picture: barren and deserted. Willfully, he tore himself out of the earth and went off to roam the field searching for field markers. The war had destroyed everything that was reminiscent of land divisions.

He found his field. On the slope of a hollow he recognized a corner of it. The zigzags of the trench ran along the hollow. How much work it will take to level it! The stench of corpses rose from the earth. The soil would be fertile. He took a shovel that protruded nearby. It fit his hands like a rifle. He began leveling his field. He hacked off the hands of corpses so that they would not stick out of the earth. He dragged away those that were lying on the surface. He found weapons and ammunition and gathered them in a pile. The sun set and rose several times, but he continued to dig. He ate tins of food instead of bread. They popped out of the earth like mushrooms—meaty, vegetal, and milky.

The village stood empty. Winds blew over it endlessly. One wet it, another dried it, and yet another chilled it. Storms came, one after another, and destroyed the remnants of the dwellings. He learned to think in general sentences. He thought "we" and imagined myriad ruins and a human wilderness. At times it seemed that people were walking around him; that the houses were standing, cheerful and attractive. He could not see that, although he wanted to say a word to someone. Inhuman torment filled his brain. Consciousness and eyesight told him that there were only ruins here, but somewhere deep in his subconscious he did not believe his eyes. Or his mind.

The field was now level amid the madness of the twisted trenches. He plowed it and sowed it with seeds. He was afraid to look at what was pulling the plow and walked on, pushing down on the handles. He walked along the furrow, looking at the ground. The plow and the seeds were found by those who had stored them away in the dream. The seeds scattered like small shot. Like heavy drops, they flew out of his hands. And practically before his eyes, they began to sprout and grow.

All around the peasant the field throbbed. His mind told him it was machines hurtling past, plowing and sowing. Common sense assured him that machines were conquering the earth. His consciousness said that the earth was reviving everywhere. Life experience told him to wait and see. But his eyes were blind, his ears were deaf, and his heart was implacable. Surely, the insanity of the trenches was all around. And the peasant saw it,

feeling his solitude amid the gigantic circle of the horizon.

The ears of grain were remorseful in the wind. In the stench of the half-rotten remnants of war, the field rustled, covered with level ears of grain. From underneath the earth victims of the war stuck out the remains of their bones. The peasant chopped the bones with his shovel—they were threatening to overtake his land. Something higher than reason, more powerful than consciousness, governed him, a feeling of solitude and despair.

He entered the yellow field with a sickle. Each swing of the sickle was brutal. Each severed stalk echoed like a shot. He mowed for a long time, an entire lifetime. Yet he could not cut down the entire field. It seemed to rise up ahead; it was turning green and yellow in front of his eyes. It rose up behind, like something living, and anchored its little stalks into the earth. The peasant felt old. Having begun to mow as a child, he seemed to have continued through his entire life. He could not finish mowing and fell asleep, falling onto a hot sheaf. The sun burned mercilessly.

He dreamed about the trench and the war. At the foot of the mountain a section of yellow field burned beneath the sun. The sun was covered by a veil of clouds that opened only over the sown field. The peasant saw the field. From beyond the horizon machines rattled. Like rain on the steppe, they lumbered forward, raising dust in front of them. People with rifles rose up beside the sown field. The peasant ran to help and instantly felt how difficult it was to run in his dream. The machines crossed a strip of the sown field. Their breath felt hot on the peasant's face. He awoke on the scorching earth of his field.

Inhuman despair and solitude. Fatefulness and weariness. He took the sickle and wanted to cut his throat. The sickle bent and tickled him. His throat ached, but life did not escape through it. Then he tried to pierce his heart with the sickle. He cut through his clothing easily. But he did not manage to find his heart. It was rummaging about in his chest and hiding in all the corners. The peasant stood up on his two legs on the hot yellow field. He threw the sickle far away. His throat and heart hurt. He looked all around himself and choked on his solitude.

He seemed to be under water. The water muffled all sounds. With a dignified stride he crossed the sown field. His whole life shrank to this one moment. To him death seemed the highest stage of life. He went off the field into the trench. He tied a rope, made a noose, placed his head in it, and began to sink along the wall, pulling the noose tighter around his neck. Life slowly left his entire body. His arms and legs grew cold. His chest ripped away and his heart contracted for the last time. The head lost the nose, eyes, ears, tongue. Slowly, his entire large brain transformed into a dot.

Consciousness—everything that was secret and most important—was concentrated in this dot. The dot had to break apart. Then everything would be over. The dot was overwhelmed by madness.

It could acquiesce to the destruction of everything but itself. It destroyed the body, destroyed feelings. But now, in madness, it set fire to the whole brain, and the person woke up, half-smothered.

All of this was a dream. The war was not over. The person was still in the war. Having fallen asleep in the trench, he had nearly hanged himself when his army coat caught on a knot of wood on the trench shoring.

He stared, his eyes wide open, gazing at everything around him as though for the first time. Joy enveloped him: he was still in the war. On the other side of the hollow trembled the bedraggled forest, smashed by shells. In the trenches the mud splashed drearily. His neighbors were dozing, rifles at the ready.

A look of mute enchantment froze on his face. At that moment, a bullet flew right into his forehead—it seemed to have been boring into his brain for countless years. Finally his mind's eye stopped seeing. There was neither dream nor life. Slowly he fell like a crumpled sack of earth into the thin mud of the trench.

Translated by Marta D. Olynyk

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Tale about the Vampireling Who Fed on Human Will

Emma Andijewska

There once appeared among the vampires a fledgling so puny, tiny, and feeble that its parents worried greatly whether their long-awaited offspring would ever succeed them in carrying on the fame and honor of the vampire race. For when it came time for the vampireling to try its wings, it became apparent that the young thing was not only too weak to attack humans but was scarcely able to maintain its balance. Its spine, arms, and legs were so soft and light that the slightest wind or even a draft through a house was enough for the vampireling to fall to the ground like an old rag doll, unable even to lift its head on its own. But what caused its parents the most travail was the terrible, inexplicable fact that even after their child lost its baby teeth and the permanent ones grew in, these were more like gelatinous scales filled with grayish fluid than teeth. Such teeth could not scratch, let alone pierce the skin of a human.

The claws on the vampireling's front legs were no better. Instead of being able to help the jaws do vampire's work, they grew as tender cartilage, resembling rose petals. Looking at them caused the parents to suffer as though an ashen stake were being driven through their hearts.

But even this did not cause the hapless parents the most anguish. Their deepest grief and disappointment sprang from the fact that from birth the vampireling could not bear the sight of, let alone drink, the human blood that its soft-hearted parents initially brought the sickly child in a pouch made from a pig's bladder. At the very sight of even the freshest human blood, the vampireling immediately suffered terrible cramps that threatened to bring its life to a close. Lest they lose their only offspring the tearful parents, gritting their teeth, were forced to feed their child not healthful and nourishing human blood but porridge cooked from dandelions and juice squeezed from daisy petals.

Finally the vampireling's parents, who, like all loving parents, had tried every means to remedy the great affliction, lost hope that their child would ever find its way to being a true vampire. With grieving and breaking hearts, they began to consider whether to abandon their degenerate offspring to humans, so as not to bring ultimate disgrace to the vampire race and clan.

But one very old, toothless vampire, living out his days in the chimney of a stable that had burned to the ground, to whom the despairing parents

had turned for some word of wisdom as a last resort, persuaded them to wait a little longer, and meanwhile to find some decisive and fearless man to serve as nanny to their child.

The parents decided that his was wise advice. Barely able to wait until the break of dawn, they immediately set out among humans. But no matter whom the vampires approached, no matter how respectfully they asked, everyone they turned to, resolutely refused to undertake any such task, crossing themselves as they spoke.

Then, in a wood, the vampires chanced across a man whom misfortune had dogged so long that he had lost any fear of them. Shunning needless hesitation, the vampires talked the man into taking care of their only child for a small remuneration, having also vowed that he would be inviolable to any other vampire. The requirements were that the man carry the vampireling out on walks—in several years it had not grown even an inch, so even now its legs folded together under it like string—and that he cook porridge of dandelions and squeeze daisy petal juice for his charge—the only food that did not bring on its cramps.

They came to terms, and the man began to care for the vampireling. Fate had not been kind to the man, and he rejoiced that things had at least taken a somewhat better turn. Now, at last, after long toil and much disappointment, the man had a roof over his head, even if it was among vampires, and he was even eating normal human food, which the vampires brought him, instead of the roots and moldy husks he had serendipitously found.

At first, truth to say, the man was wary of the vampireling, for he remembered that the acorn does not roll far from the oak. But once he became convinced that the child did not crave human blood, and that it was indeed puny and feeble, the man let down his guard. And because nothing much needed to be done for the child—after eating it usually sat quietly in a corner, rather than go to play—the man relaxed completely. And having relaxed, he grew lazy and careless.

So whereas earlier the man had fed the vampireling three times a day, now he decided that twice a day would suffice, all the more because the child never mentioned being hungry. Then, noting that it did not cry, the man began to prepare its food just once a day, a meal that seemed of no great interest to the child. And then somehow it happened that one fine day, the man just forgot to feed the vampireling altogether. Earlier that day the man had lunched especially well, for the vampireling's parents, believing that the man was caring for their child conscientiously, had brought a basket loaded with foods and wine filched from their victims. And since he who is sated never thinks of one who is hungry, the man, having eaten and drunk

well, forgot about the vampireling, and soon he was overtaken by the urge to sleep.

Until then the man had taken care not to sleep in the presence of his charge. But now, deciding there was no danger—as things always seem to the satiated—and feeling his eyelids grow heavy, he made himself more comfortable, and he fell asleep.

That is when the vampireling first saw a human asleep.

If the man had fed it, perhaps the vampireling would have paid no attention. As things were, it felt hunger and began to look around to see if a daisy petal might be lying about somewhere. Laboriously it made its way out from the corner and closer to the table, where there still lay remnants of the food the vampireling could not eat. Then it was struck by the discovery that a human sleeps totally differently from the way vampires do.

For when vampires slept, there arose from them a heavy stench of blood, which made the vampireling's extremities grow numb and took his breath away, making it feel ill. During the day, when the man was active, he smelled like an old goat. But now, as he slept, there wafted from him a pleasant aroma that tickled the nostrils.

The vampireling, intrigued, came up close. It did not yet realize, of course, that what smelled so sweet was human will, which during sleep rises up from man's flesh and floats above him in a soft, round, and aromatic biscuit.

And because the vampireling was hungry and had found nothing it could eat, it nipped at this aroma. Slowly consuming a bit of human will, it was astonished to find that nothing in the world tastes as sweet as this nourishment.

The more the vampireling ate of this new food, the more it gained strength from it and the tastier it became. The vampireling was so taken by this new food that it ceased to eat only when the man stirred heavily and began to regain consciousness. Grasping his chest with his hands, the man felt a strange languor and lethargy throughout his body, unlike anything he had known before.

The man peered about on all sides but he did not realize what had happened. And how could he have realized anything, when, even before he sat up and rubbed his eyes, the vampireling, to whom the new nourishment had brought previously unknown strength and agility, had quickly scurried back to a corner and in no way betrayed that it had just been feasting on human will.

For the very moment that the vampireling tasted human will, not only strength but intellect awakened in it, as well as cunning and caution. The vampireling now resolved resolutely that from then on, human will would

be its only food. When the man occasionally remembered the vampireling's existence, it still pretended to consume the dandelion porridge and daisy petal juice, but when the man slept it was sure to feast on its incomparable new nourishment.

Thus, before long, the vampire child consumed all of the man's will, for a person lacking will never notices that he is a living corpse. And when it had satisfied itself that all this precious food had been eaten, the vampireling asked its parents to give the man a reward and let him go, and then host a lavish banquet before it set out to go among humankind. The time had come for the vampireling to make its parents rejoice at the realization of their dreams.

At that banquet, when the vampireling proclaimed not only to its parents but to all vampire kind that from that day forward they would feed on human will exclusively, the vampires, wonderstruck, unanimously agreed: the small, puny vampireling was the mightiest and most fearsome vampire of them all.

Translated by Uliana Pasicznyk

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Tale about the Man Who Knew Doubt

Emma Andijewska

There once lived a man who from birth was defeated by doubt. No matter how he began any activity, whether indifferently or conscientiously, whether work or recreation, he would be seized by doubt. At that instant the work would become loathsome to him, or the pastime would slump into boredom and despair. Nothing brought him any pleasure, and existence itself seemed such a heavy burden that the poor fellow would gladly have rid himself of it, had not the resolve entailed effort beyond any that he could muster. For doubt did not allow him to make a final decision about anything.

When they realized something was amiss, the man's parents tried every way they knew to alleviate his distress, but all their attempts proved futile. The older their son became, the stronger his doubt grew, and all his worried parents' urgings and counsel served only to increase his despair and hopelessness, making their son weary of life.

Finally the parents became convinced that in his condition neither threats nor pleas were of any use. So they began to equip their only child with the things he would need to travel far and wide, in the hope that by being out among people he would gain the wisdom and experience needed to cure him of his excessive doubt. At last, having given him directions and bestowed their blessing, they let their feckless child go off on his long journey.

But even in far-off lands doubt continued to torment the man, and sooner or later everything he undertook ended in failure and vexation. From time to time the man came across kind-hearted people who took pity on him and gave him shelter and work. But as soon as the man took a good look at whatever he was doing, doubt would seize him again: he would abandon everything and find himself once again in the same situation as before. Yet now he was no longer an impetuous youth but a man full grown, for whom it was time to have a roof over his head and a family of his own.

And then, in his wanderings from place to place, because Providence, if not always immediately then at least occasionally, tends to even the most forsaken of men, the man somehow found a corner to call home and acquired a wife and children. Now he felt pleased that at last he was making something of his life. But as soon as his children began growing out of

diapers, doubt once again seized the man, doubt stronger than he had ever known before. He left his wife and children and set off aimlessly into the world, as before.

And then one day, as he was fording a stream along his way, the man turned around and chanced to see that his doubts were seven chargers forged together as one black steed, bearing him into an abyss of no return. The terrified man, feigning calm, tried to vanquish the doubts now taking on such increasingly physical form. But his powers proved too weak to scatter them. Calling on God to bear witness that he could carry on no more, exhausted in body and soul, he dropped down at a crossroads, under a tree, and fell asleep.

As soon as his eyelids closed, he beheld a little old man standing before him, tugging at his sleeve. Pointing to a small yard made of packed clay, smooth as a finished floor, the old man asked, "Will you agree to sweep my yard? For this job I need a man defeated by too much doubt. Here are the sun and the moon—they will serve as your two brooms—and as for your pay, what I have to give you is one small seed."

"All right," said the man, and as he began to sweep the old man's yard, he immediately felt his doubts vanish somewhere. After a time the old man made him stop, saying that his job was done, and in remuneration he gave him the one small seed.

The man thanked him, and then awoke. To his amazement, in his palm there indeed lay a small, luminous seed. As the man took another look at the seed, doubt again reared up within him, with such angry force that the man understood: his end was at hand, for the chargers were racing at a gallop under him. They were galloping so fiercely that, to stop himself from falling and cracking his skull as doubt was about to plunge him into the abyss, the man grabbed the horse's mane with one hand while pressing the other, the hand holding the little old man's payment to his breast. At that instant he felt the seed fall tremulously to the bottom of his heart and immediately send forth a slender shoot. And from the way the shoot trembled, the man understood that the seedling sprouting in him was hope.

"You have become a bad horseman," the man's reason immediately admonished him.

"You will never make any headway in life if you don't pull that log out from your heart," the doubts added angrily, slackening their galloping pace.

"It's not a log but a new doubt stirring in my heart," lied the man, all the while feeling the sapling of hope within him sprouting forth new branches.

"A person is a person only when he is overwhelmed by doubt," declared the doubts, appeased. And that was the last that they said. For hope, which from a tiny seed had flourished in the man's heart into a blossoming tree, silenced the voices of doubt. For only the tree of hope, growing in the human heart, helps man vanquish the doubts that are his horsemen to the abyss.

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India

Yuri Andrukhovych

1.

India begins with dreams of departing eastward,
and these dreams are narrative dreams,
like a film where you wander, a tin god.
You simply hear a trumpet, or a gong, or the ring
of water, or perhaps a voice that whispers, Arise and go!
But whether you heard it with your ears or heart, you don't know.

India is not quite a peninsula. It is a continent
that borders Nothing. Neither atlases nor glossaries
take into account the fact that the world is wrapped up by the Nile,
that the stars in the sky are, in essence, a drama
in God's theater. The time, it seems, hasn't come—
we prefer to imagine the plane as an orb. A body.

We perceive as a sphere what lies flat like a pie.
But you, having heard the sudden, sharp "March!"
procure a sword and depart for the east to perish.
You gather a troop of merry and rabid bandits
who sing, when they march, much like
heavenly angels, in a concert of cherubs in the nocturnal skies.

A plane is deserts and kingdoms, ridges, towns,
and above them, only the atmosphere's thickening height,
seven heavens deep, and no consolation or manna!
Only after you lose your horses and friends, the whole train,
with the grape-like resolve of beaten and twisted vines,
will you fight your way to the place you can utter—and mean it—
rahmanna.

2.

Marco Polo lied when he claimed
that his donkeys, oxen, and mules
took him farther East, all the way to China
over abysses of gloom and the Tibet of fog.
His path, without doubt, was a circular straying.
Marco Polo must've slept in his saddle,
for there is no land farther east, no tracks,
because India is the limit, the land on the boundary.

What east can you speak of, if there is only a wall
and behind it: the great and mute Void
and It doesn't like us, for no reason at all,
or so we think, for in truth It has no opinion.
Here is the end of your pilgrimage and wilderness,
the final rock, and rain, and bush,
so you'd better have your vanity crushed –
this wall is not one your cutthroats can climb.

This wall is a *fata morgana* against
which Asia spills her ridges of sand,
harrows and plows break against her—grand—
and above is a different dimension: God and the bodies of heaven.
But you are a stray and such is your fate:
To travel down as far as the river will take you,
as long as you trust that you can climb out to light
as if out of a sack. At your dumb body's price.

3

When you enter jungles full of parrots,
imagine: nature is God's workshop
where your impotence roams.
All you can do is throw yourself prostrate.

Implacable greenery sprouts like a plague,
like a flood, like foam, slippery to touch.
These plants have pride. They are a drug.
These plants resemble a choir of hellcats.

"But this greenery is nothing! It is a backdrop
for reptiles, fiends. I absorb
this rotting, this lechery, prototype of Eden
where not all has yet happened and evil breeds."

You who have a sword and a spirit to match
in your glorified body—hack away, like St. George,
slit salamanders, fiends, harpies, and furies,
slice pythons open like frogs!

If here, already, God has gone berserk
and this bestiary stands for the crown of creation
vibrating with mockery of devilish songs—
it's your duty to tramp this slime into moss!

You must emerge from this jungle
while Our Lady stands watch above you.
You, with the foundling's light in your eyes,
you must reach the silver—the river's run.

4.

Of course, this river is pulled only downward,
slow and viscous like the slime of vegetation
while the spear in your hand becomes a boat-hook.

And you look into the river and do not see fish,
nor shells on the sand glowing in the depths,
nor lilies heavy and luminous, like a jasmine bush;

But you see, as in a dream, your face in the river—
your loneliness, the lance with which you steer,
your face on the bottom and a wound on your cheek.

On these waters' shores live exotic folk:
the twisted people seeded on this flat terrain.
You wished for it—now look at these brutes!

They have a thousand charms: little goat hooves,
love through the arse and food through the nose,
they have no "above," only ever-darkening woods;

With maws like underground vaults and blood like rotten fruit,
their spirit shriveled like their tongue and speech of Tartar root;
they have a many-handed god and a far-reaching czar.

Who was it that untied a sack and let loose,
as if for laughs, these irksome bums with hooves?
Who gave them the yearning to be prone for their beastly loves?

Protected by your cloak, holding to your pole,
you sail through the trumpets' blaring from under hearts and ribs
to Eden's entrance. And hell's a gaping hole.

5.

The ubiquitous presence in the thickets of tritons, dragons,
griffons, pythons, and the way cats go rabid
when turned into genies, the coming of comets and cyclones—
all are signs that the inferno sighs closer. And you
find this opening, step into its stench and gloom
and walk above the fire. Ramshackle bridges sway
and ahead, who knows what else—imps, terriers, tails.
Keep making the sign of the cross, one hundred and forty times forty.
You soldier on through this trial like a set of maneuvers;
Hell catches you by the hem of your cloak, by your shoulders,
By the sheath of your sword, by your elbows, and you hear, "Pay!"
Hey, up there, in heaven, have you gone deaf?

The saints

intrude in the course of events rarely but on time.
Angels swoop like resurrected aces—in threes,
even in fives and sevens, their swords and wings
bloom fiery, unfading; they rescue you from the pit,
and unroll a garden for you along the vertical axis:
the trees ever taller, the fowl closer, and fruits
ever sweeter, heavier. These are the citrus,
cymbals, streamers etcetera, books in percale,
oxygen, honey, etcetera. And you, raised above
the earth's surface, after all, above its plane, finally,
will never come back, even if you bleed or burn!
All you have left is a steady, heavenly glow.

Translated by Nina Shevchuk-Murray

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Hunting in Lost Space

Vasyl Gabor

Despite my dire premonitions, I still set off on that damn hunting expedition that caused me such anxiety and turned me, the hunter, into the prey.

When I was still in the Deep Forest, though I was carrying a gun and had a plentiful supply of ammunition with me, I suddenly felt that I was not the hunter but the game—at that very moment being stalked by someone who seemed not only more powerful than I was, but more dexterous and more cunning. I tried to flee the Deep Forest quickly, but some unknown force kept turning me back to its depths. Leaning against a hundred-year-old oak tree, I reloaded my gun. And then the sound of a beating drum reached my ears and for some reason I thought it was the beating of an African—yes, definitely an African—drum, and only afterwards did I ask myself whether it wasn't my heart, pounding from fear.

No, my heart was functioning normally and rhythmically, and the sound of the tom-tom continued to reverberate from the Deep Forest, evidently giving someone instructions on how to prevent my escape from the forest. My mind told me that the unknown hunter had set out to track me down and was systematically stalking me far and wide, determined to drive me, his victim, into a well-prepared trap. Well, there was nothing for it but to accept the challenge. For I, the hunter, did not intend to run away from the Deep Forest, even if I was cast in the role of quarry. I understood that in this case, fleeing was not the better part of valor and having resolved to stay, I thought first about this: if someone had indeed chosen me as a victim, they would find me a persistent thorn in their flesh. Anyhow, I would gain nothing by running away, because I had nothing to prove to anybody except myself.

“All this is just a hallucination, that's all it is,” I tried to comfort myself. “Or else an evil force has taken hold of me and is leading me astray in the forest. I'll rest a bit and then set off for home.”

I lit a cigarette and observed as though from the bottom of a well a small speck of sky showing between the majestic crowns of trees. Languidly, I blew out long puffs of smoke. But in my soul I still felt uneasy. Nonsense of all kinds ran through my mind. Suddenly, it seemed someone had seized me with bony hands and was pressing me to the tree I leaned against, smoking the cigarette. I tried to free myself but could not. Then the giant tree started laughing at me, its whole trunk shaking. Its bark split open and

white feelers, like worms with suckers on the end, came out and began to penetrate my body. I actually leapt away from the tree and aimed my gun at it, but a moment later I gave my head a good shake, driving away the evil thoughts, and burst out laughing at my own faintheartedness. All I needed now was to start imagining that every twig was a snake and that every bush or tree-stump was a wild animal.

After all, nothing like this had ever happened to me before. I had never known the meaning of fear, but now it seemed that fear was overpowering me.

I set off along a familiar path, and to my surprise I saw that instead of leading out, as I expected, it was bringing me back to the center of the forest again, as the sound of the tom-tom doggedly kept following me.

So I was right—I *was* in the grip of the evil force. From my belt I took the flask I still had from my army service days and swallowed a little cold and unsweetened tea.

It grew dark in the forest, though the sky in the wells between the crowns of the trees was still bright blue. The sun must have been about to set and so its rays no longer penetrated between the trees but glided along their tops. I decided that this was my cue to set off for home too.

Just then, the thought that I had not come across a single living soul or heard a bird sing or screech during a whole day of wandering about in the Deep Forest caused me to give a loud whistle. I hadn't even heard a breath of wind—only the rustling of fallen leaves beneath my feet, which had deceived my ears. No, of course I should not have gone off on the hunt, after those dire premonitions. I remembered one of them.

I vividly recalled waking up from a terrible dream. It was in Africa. Black African warriors with bands tied around their thighs were carrying long spears and bows, alarmed about something. Probably they were about to come under attack and their chief was preparing a determined resistance against the enemy. And I was that chief! I could see the great fear in the eyes of the warriors, and I knew I could not banish that fear from their hearts. I also knew the cause of that fear. One of the warlike tribes of the desert had bred a great black bird. It was as tall as four elephants standing one atop the other and as wide as four elephants side by side. Its sharp beak had easily dispatched the elephants of the defending armies of other tribes. With a flap of its enormous wings it had scattered the opposing warriors like specks of dust. With the black bird's help, the aggressors of the desert had subjugated one tribe after another. Ours was the only tribe still free. And now it was our turn to suffer defeat. I realized this but did not want to give in, though I didn't know how to fight the black bird. There was one thing that puzzled me—why did the bird carry out the orders of the aggressors so obediently? Why did it not desert them? Why did it not harm its masters, though trained to attack others?

A thought suddenly struck me. "Suppose we introduced it to the taste

of human flesh and the smell of human blood. Perhaps, intoxicated by the smell of blood and human flesh, it would then attack the aggressors instead of submitting to them."

I already knew how the bird could be made to acquire a taste for human flesh. We would appear to prepare for battle, and when the warriors sent the bird after us, we would quickly hide in the mountains and give it someone from our tribe to devour. But who? Deserters? They would not be able to provoke the black bird sufficiently for it to devour them before its masters arrived to drive it away. Then I felt a gentle touch on my arm. It was my son, the one who most takes after me. I saw that he was pale-skinned and I noticed that my own skin was white and not actually black—just heavily tanned. I looked at my wife. She was black, like all the other women. All our other children, standing beside her, were also black. I recalled that I had joined this tribe a long time ago and was not actually born here. I had been made chief because of my white skin. Now here was my son, my favorite and most beloved son, touching my arm and saying:

"Father, order me to go first. Then the others will submit to your will and sacrifice their own children."

"No," I replied firmly, wondering how he was able to read my thoughts.

"Otherwise they will not submit to your will. And if you go first, the tribe will not be able to defeat the black bird, because it will be left leaderless."

"But perhaps the bird can be destroyed by some other means—not at such cost!"

"Father, you have no time to choose. The enemy is close; they are already preparing for battle." My favorite and most beloved son warmly kissed my hand.

In a loud voice, drowning out the pain in my heart with a sharp cry, I declared my intention to send my favorite and most beloved son to be the first to die.

"And each of you will sacrifice your most beloved child, and when the bird acquires a taste for young human flesh, it will attack the children of the aggressors, and then our enemies will kill it themselves. That is the only way we can defeat the black bird."

But as I spoke, the thought tormented me ceaselessly—was I doing the right thing? What if our sacrifices were in vain?

But there was little time to think: it was vital to act decisively. I ordered some of the warriors to take the women and children to safety in the hills and the remainder to prepare for battle on a hill above the field. I knew that my son was standing in silence nearby, but it was torture for me to look at him. When we were ready for battle the gigantic black bird appeared on the field. Suddenly, I changed my mind.

"I don't know how long our struggle with the black bird will last," I

told the warriors. If it devours all our children, who will continue our tribe and who will combat the bird? So I declare my last will: my son will now be your leader, and I will go first to confront the bird. That is my final word!"

With these words I ran down the slope to the field and our warriors began to beat loudly on tom-toms. I saw the gigantic black bird coming languidly towards us from the other end of the field. I was as small in relation to it as a worm is to a hen, but for some reason I was cheered by that thought. I began shouting loudly and brandishing my spear.

The aggressors from the desert also shouted something to the bird, and I was surprised at the rapid change that came over it. Its clumsiness vanished and it became viciously agile. The next instant it flew at me like a hurricane, aiming its beak at my chest. I leapt aside in time and with all my might thrust my spear into its eye. Although it would seem that the spear could not have done more harm than a thorn, to my astonishment the black bird shrieked furiously with pain. I realized that I had hit the target and at that same instant understood that this was the last moment of my life. I just had enough time to glimpse the bird's bloody eye before it swallowed me.

I vividly recall waking up in a cold sweat, with the sensation that I was inside not a room, but the entrails of a black bird the size of our three-storey building. For a long time afterwards I could not rid myself of this sensation.

But, it seems, things did not happen that way but differently. One morning I woke up suddenly with a strange sensation. Lying in bed and looking about the empty room, I felt as though I was inside some great black bird. I could not fall back asleep, unable to shake off this thought: "Who could have bred such a great bird?" The thought went round and round in my head. I began to think that it could only have been an African tribe. And I began to fantasize about why they had bred it. Then I drifted off into half-sleep and clearly saw our tribe beginning to fight this bird. And everything that had happened was real, for nothing is without cause.

And I remembered the first time I had seen the black bird and calculated that it was exactly a week before the hunting expedition. In setting off for the Deep Forest, I had attempted to dispel my dire premonitions and what seemed to me to have been a bad dream. Only now, in the Deep Forest at dusk, did I fully understand. This Deep Forest and this world are in reality a black bird, and although we think of ourselves as hunters with guns and plenty of ammunition, we are in reality victims who are being stalked. For we have gone hunting in a lost space. Or, perhaps, we cannot escape from the one we are locked into.

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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Night Obscures the Way

Vasyl Gabor

She stood in the doorway, blowing into her frozen hands. She had come such a long way, but nobody here recognized her and nobody, it seemed, expected her. The parents of her friend Marika were downcast and responded to her greeting with indifference. They were sitting by the stove, swaying drunkenly, gazing with unseeing eyes at the frost-covered window.

The cottage air was heavy with the bitter odor of old food, stale tobacco smoke, and alcohol. Guests had been there recently and the odors had not yet had time to dissipate.

“Perhaps Marika invited me to that meal too, but I didn’t make it in time,” Khrystia thought, still standing in the doorway.

Her hands were so painfully frostbitten that tears came to her eyes. She rubbed her frozen fingers clumsily. Marika’s parents acted as though she were not in the room. She remembered seeing a bucket of water in the corridor and dipped her hands in it, but the pain did not subside. Then Khrystia went out into the snow. She left the door open and white clouds of steam billowed out, like smoke, but it didn’t occur to anybody to close it.

Opposite the house of Marika’s parents, two children, a boy and a girl, stood behind a fence, watching her in silence and tightly holding hands. Their eyes showed no interest in her, no hint of sympathy, just a blank expression that Khrystia found most surprising. The snow was frozen hard and crunched underfoot. The crust was so hard that she couldn’t punch through it with her fist. She broke through with her heel. Scooping up handfuls of snow from the hole as though from a well, she rubbed her hands with it.

The door of the neighboring cottage creaked. With a great cloud of steam a rosy-cheeked young woman came out, wearing a padded jacket, felt boots, a gray head-scarf, and a man’s mittens.

“You’re keeping a sharp lookout, aren’t you?” thought Khrystia.

The rosy-cheeked woman frowned at the children and motioned toward the door with her head. Frightened, the boy and the girl ran indoors, still firmly holding hands. Khrystia thought they were tied together. She thought with bitterness of her own two children.

Meanwhile the rosy-cheeked woman came right up to the fence and gave Khrystia an apprehensive look. Then, mumbling to herself, she set off for the squat pig-sty. It was covered in snow almost a meter deep. It was a

wonder that the roof hadn't caved in, but apparently the owners did not intend to clear off the snow.

Khrystia, frozen through and through, scooped up more snow with both hands, and went indoors. Marika's parents were still sitting motionless in the room, but now they were looking at the stove rather than the window. Something was bubbling away in a large iron pot blackened by dirt and smoke. The water occasionally boiled over, hissing loudly like a snake. The smell of burnt food and smoke filled the cottage, but the old couple remained quite indifferent.

"I've come to see your Marika," said Khrystia yet again, but the old couple seemed not to hear her. Thinking that they were somewhat deaf, she repeated the phrase even louder. At this the old couple looked up in surprise, as if noticing her for the first time.

Khrystia began to regret that she had undertaken the long journey. It had been so hard on her. She had traveled to the nearest market town in an overcrowded bus. Then, there were no buses running from there to the village, because of the fuel shortage, so she had hitch-hiked part of the way and walked the rest. But what if it wasn't actually Marika who had called?

Khrystia had dashed off without really thinking. And it was all the fault of her damned drunken husband. He had been on a three-day binge with his buddies so she had gone off to her mother's with the children to avoid his ugly drunken face. On the fourth day her husband rang. He said that someone had phoned from the village, and asked her to come. Who it was and where the call was from, he couldn't remember. Khrystia had cursed him and slammed down the receiver. "Who could be looking for me?" she wondered. She had only one friend who lived in a village—Marika, a former classmate at the Institute.

Khrystia now remembered that in wondering who had phoned her, she had imagined straightaway that it was Marika. Yes, without hesitation she had decided that it was Marika who was looking for her. Since she had telephoned, something must have happened—otherwise she would have written. After all, Marika lived a long way off, in a God-forsaken village in the mountains. Khrystia decided to go right away. She thought this would also be one in the eye for her rotten husband. Her mother agreed to look after the children, so why should she stay at home? In the village, in the fresh air, she would finally get a break from her husband and from the dirty, noisy town, its expensive bazaars, and her boring job, which didn't even pay enough to live on. So she had set off. But here, it seemed, she was not welcome. Her friend was absent and her parents were pretending not to notice her presence.

She thought of asking someone on the street if they knew where Marika had gone, but she didn't fancy going out in the cold. Anyway, it wasn't likely there would be anybody out in such bitter weather. It would be pointless to wait for a chance passer-by. What about going to ask the

neighbors about Marika? But when Khrystia recalled the unwelcoming rosy-cheeked woman, her desire to call on the neighbors evaporated.

"But suppose I've come to the wrong cottage, and not to Marika's?" she thought suddenly, and began to look around the room. The walls were covered with icons and numerous framed photographs. Looking at Khrystia out of these frames were happy newlyweds, serious men, stiffly posing soldiers, pretty girls, cheerful children, and melancholy old women. Amongst all of these, Marika's face was the only one missing.

In the over-heated cottage Khrystia began to feel warm and even found it difficult to breathe. But nobody invited her to take off her coat and sit down. If only Marika would come soon! Who knows how long she might have to wait! So Khrystia took off her coat anyway and sat down on a bench by the window. Only once she sat down did she become aware of the exhaustion that had overcome her. Her shoulders hurt and her legs shook slightly. And she realized how hungry she was after a whole day without food.

Leaning against the wall and stretching out her legs, Khrystia half-closed her eyes and relaxed. She recalled how she had made her way to the village. As she approached, the first person she had met was an old woman carrying a bundle of twigs as wide as the road itself. She wore no gloves, yet her rough hands showed no sign of redness from the frost. Khrystia had stepped off the road to let her pass. The old woman was so bent over under the bundle of twigs that Khrystia could not see her face—she could only hear her heavy breathing. The old woman breathed in and out with a groan, as though there were a blockage in her chest through which the air had to force its way. Khrystia found it surprising that the old woman was carrying her bundle away from the village. She herself had walked a good hour along that road without spotting a single dwelling. She stood watching the bent woman and thought how sad it was to be old.

Some five minutes later a horse-drawn sleigh flew at full tilt around a corner towards Khrystia. A short, small-faced man stood on the sleigh, holding the reins and waving a whip over the horses' hind quarters. If his face had not been covered in wrinkles and his right eye had not been bloodshot—"perhaps it's a wall-eye," thought Khrystia—he could easily have been taken for a youth. Khrystia leapt out of the way of the horses and fell over into the deep snow. By the time she got up again, the sleigh and horses and the fellow driving it had disappeared behind the snowdrifts. She had not gone much further when she heard horses' hooves behind her. Quickly turning off onto one of the paths leading to the first cottages, she let the now familiar sleigh driver with the red right eye pass by her.

On the sleigh, behind the driver, sat the old woman on the bundle of twigs. When Khrystia caught sight of the woman's yellow face her entire body stiffened. Immediately she remembered the hospital where her elder daughter had been taken several years earlier. It was two o'clock in the

morning when they took her in to operate and the doctors came out of surgery at five. Those three hours of waiting had been the most dreadful of Khrystia's life. She walked up and down the long corridor hardly able to breathe. She opened a window and gulped air through her mouth. The sound of the clock ticking away loudly in the corridor reverberated in her head. She prayed for her dear daughter. Sometime around four o'clock drowsiness beset her mercilessly. She splashed warm water from the tap onto her face and kept walking and walking. She thought that if she dozed off for a second or stopped praying it would be disastrous for her daughter. But intermittently, as she leaned against a wall, Khrystia fell into a kind of sleep. And it was then, when she was in a half-waking, half-sleeping state, that death had shown its face. It was an old woman wearing a black head-scarf, her face yellow, like wax, and covered in eczema-like freckles. Her nose was very slightly hooked and she had black holes where her eyes should have been. Her deathly smile seemed to be molded in alabaster. Khrystia had been seized by such terror that she instantly awoke and, falling to her knees she had prayed to God and all the heavenly hosts to rescue her dear daughter from disaster. The operation was a success but for a month afterwards Khrystia kept having that nightmare about the yellow face with black holes instead of eyes. And now she thought she had seen that nightmare in reality.

She had been frightened merely to walk along the road. Reaching the cottage nearest to the street she tapped lightly on the frost-covered window. Inside, someone began to wipe the window-pane, breathing on the silvery patterns made by the frost. When a clear patch had thawed, an eye looked out intently at Khrystia. After a while it disappeared and Khrystia heard someone shuffling to the door, jangling the keys. The dry hinges creaked as the door opened, and a tall, gray-haired man came out onto the doorstep. Khrystia found it surprising that the cottage was locked in the daytime, when people were home. She expected the man to address her, but he remained silent, so she asked him how she could find Marika's cottage. The gray-haired man's bushy eyebrows had twitched comically and without uttering a word he had indicated the cottage she was now sitting in.

Recalling all this, she felt uneasy. It seemed she had been sitting here like this, propped up against the wall, for a few minutes, but when she opened her eyes the cottage was already dark. Dusk had fallen outside.

Khrystia looked around as though she had just entered the room for the first time. To the right of the window there was a sturdy bed covered with a thick woolly blanket. In the middle of the room there was a steamer trunk with cast iron bands, and opposite the bed stood a stove, with several small chairs beside it. There was no table and nothing more in the house.

A door by the stove led into the adjoining room. But it was locked with a large key, like the trunk. Khrystia got up and went over to the door. Standing on tiptoe, she glanced through the lace curtain into the next room.

In the middle were two tables pushed together and covered with white material. There were benches along the walls. On them sat women with their heads lowered, holding lighted candles, which burned slowly and quietly sputtered. All the women were dressed in black and wore black head-scarves, and the horrifying thought occurred to Khrystia that if they raised their heads they would all have yellow faces, like wax, and black holes instead of eyes. This thought sent shivers down her spine. She recoiled and rushed to the door that led into the yard. But it would not open—it was frozen shut and a snowstorm was howling outside.

A long dark night awaited Khrystia.

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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Finding the Way to the Garden

Vasyl Gabor

(For Natalia)

The garden has been there for a long time, but it's impossible to reach, and that is what makes people so unhappy.

These words seemed to flash into my memory suddenly, but I knew very well why and that made them all the more painful. The pain was even more intense because of the place and time when these words seemed to take me by surprise. This old garden was on the outskirts of town (it was an unusual garden that had come to mind). It was late autumn, warm as could be, and I was gathering ripe apples in a faded army rucksack. The ground was white under the trees—all covered with apples. As the sun shone on them, their skin looked ever so thin and transparent. I recall that I couldn't resist the temptation to pick the fruit from the branches, even though I had promised the old woman who owned the garden that I wouldn't. I plucked them gently but still my fingers left impressions that quickly became discolored blotches. As I ate the apples, their frothy white juice squirted all over my hands which made them sticky, so I wiped them on the grass where it was moist, close to the ground. They must have been summer apples, apparently a cultivated variety, though I had never seen summer apples still on the trees so late in autumn, when brown snow-clouds darken the evening sky and the cold penetrates your bones as if snow were about to start at any moment and cover the fruit on the trees and the ground.

The old woman who owned the garden had no one to gather the apples. She was in poor health, hardly able to walk, so she let people have the apples cheaply. Yet she stubbornly refused to allow them to pick the fruit off the branches, despite offers of additional pay.

That old garden on the outskirts of town where I picked apples was a painful reminder of my sister and the tales about her garden.

As a small boy I was alarmed by my sister's stories. Frequently I found them implausible but was afraid to say so, for fear of angering her. You see, she was the only friend I had. Besides, to be honest, I really enjoyed listening to her.

My sister's garden was on the shore of a small lake. The apple trees there weren't very tall but they had wide-spreading branches which always bore abundant fruit—though not all at once but by turns. As some of the apples ripened, others were still green, and some trees were only just

beginning to blossom. When I protested that all trees blossom simultaneously, my sister interrupted me: would I kindly refrain from making stupid remarks, she said. After all, this was no ordinary garden. So I kept quiet. But what surprised me most was that every apple tree in my sister's garden bore fruit of many colors. White, red, yellow, and green apples all grew on a single branch. At this point I usually told my sister that she was lying: I couldn't believe that different sorts of apples could grow on the same tree, let alone on the same branch. No, that was just too much! When my sister, in turn, would take offense and leave my room, I would begin to regret what I had said. I would run after her, pestering her to forgive me. She would always be magnanimous, forgive me, and continue the tale about her garden.

There was a tiny cottage in the middle of her garden, which was difficult to pick out among the spreading branches of so many trees. (The old woman in my garden had a cottage by the gate—it was tiny, too, and a branch of an apple tree nearly as big as a church hung directly above it. But why do I bother to compare these cottages?)

I remember sitting in the old woman's cottage. She kept a mangy dog on a chain, and it always trembled from the cold, even in the corridor. When it whined the woman let it off the chain and allowed it into the kitchen. (Oh dear, what's this mangy dog doing in my story? I don't want to write about a dog! I want to recount the story of my sister, her garden, and her love).

There were no mangy dogs in my sister's garden. Only flowers grew there, and the sun always shone. I often feel that what my sister described was the Garden of Eden. Though the Garden of Eden is a probably just an invention. Nobody can return there any more.

My sister also told me that only two people could live there. No matter how insistently I asked, she would not tell me who they were.

I finally came to believe in her garden when she started seeing Todos, a boy who lived in our neighborhood. That is when it occurred to me that there were two of them now and they could enter the garden but I would never see it. My sadness soon vanished, though, when my sister started to talk about it.

The path to the garden began in an old cave on the mountain.

Of course, I always swore to my sister that I would not reveal her secret to a living soul. Since she could trust me to keep my mouth shut—mother questioned me about her secret persistently, but I remained silent even more persistently—she confided her innermost thoughts and dreams in me with even deeper trust.

I knew why mother was so interested in my sister's secret. She had seen her with Todos once and for some reason had taken an instant dislike to him. She called him the fish, saying that his face, eyes, nose—absolutely everything about him—reminded her of a fish. I never saw anything like that in Todos. He reminded me, instead, of a kindly crab. When he walked

quickly, he swung his right arm forward and drew it in like a claw, and that made me laugh.

At first, my mother told my sister not to see him—she never actually referred to Todos by name. When my sister disobeyed, Mother had words with Todos and made unpleasant threats, telling him to keep well away from our house. But he was never far off—my sister would sense his presence and dash out into the street. Then mother started locking her in the house. My sister was beside herself with anger, and at night she had terrible dreams. They frightened her and she told me about them. Perhaps they weren't dreams at all but things she actually experienced? It's difficult for me to say, because in my child's imagination, reality and dreams have been confused.

One day, she was wandering with Todos in Kyiv at night. It started to rain and the rain became a downpour. Todos asked whether they should take shelter somewhere and wait for the rain to stop. She merely laughed. They so rarely had the opportunity to get out into the city, so surely they wouldn't let the rain deprive them of the pleasure of a walk down the Andriivskiy Uzviz and along the Podil. Todos agreed.

They walked on, but the rain kept getting heavier and heavier. Their coats were soaked, and water sloshed in their shoes. They laughed as they walked along in the pouring rain.

A bubbling stream flowed down the street. It was enthralling—my sister had never seen anything like it before. "If we had a boat, we could sail down the Uzviz in it," said Todos, and suddenly he turned into a big fish, lifted my sister, and carried her off on his back. Taken by surprise, she gave a shriek, and woke up. It had been a dream.

But they really did walk down the Uzviz in a downpour. And then, when Todos mentioned a boat, he lifted my sister up and said he would gladly carry her to the end of the world. Far away from all people, so there would be just the two of them. My sister embraced him tightly. As she did so, she sensed that somebody was creeping up behind them, and that this unknown person wanted to cause Todos's death. In the pouring rain it was hard to make anybody out clearly, but my sister distinctly saw a human figure. It was a man, dressed all in black and barefoot. And a mouse was running after him. My sister thought: "Good heavens, there's enough water to wash a person away, yet a mouse is freely running about, with no fear of the water." She told Todos somebody was following them, but he laughed: "Surely only crazy people go out walking in such foul weather."

"He *is* crazy," replied my sister as a cold shiver went down her spine. "Don't worry, my love. Nothing can harm you while I'm with you," Todos replied. She saw the stranger give a rapacious smile, and then turn away unhurriedly and depart. The mouse ran after him. My sister understood everything. She realized that he was not leaving for good and that he might re-appear. For the moment, however, she was grateful to him for leaving them alone together, at least for a while.

One day Todos and my sister decided to make their way to the garden. I clearly remember that day, because that morning my mother had been angry with my sister and ordered her not to set foot outside the house. But my sister replied:

"You can't stop me going anywhere I want."

At that my mother lost her temper and struck my sister in the face. Her nose started to bleed. Mother burst into tears and said in a subdued voice:

"I don't want you to see him."

"Why not? Please explain," my sister asked calmly—I was surprised how subdued and determined she was. Blood ran down her face, but she did not wipe it away. I could hardly believe what my mother said then:

"Because his mother's heart is on the right side¹ and all the members of her family are unhappy."

My sister laughed at this, then she asked: "How do you know?"

"I've been to their home."

My sister blanched at these words and rushed out of the house.

On that day Todos and my sister first attempted to reach the garden. They took nothing with them, apart from a small flashlight. They walked for ages and ages, but felt no fatigue, because ahead of them was the garden, pulling them and renewing their strength. They lost track of time and discovered that the walls of the cave were beginning to close in—the further my sister and Todos went, the narrower the path became and the lower they had to stoop to avoid hitting their heads against the sharp rocks. They proceeded in complete silence, but without any fear.

In some places the path was of stone, and their footsteps rang out, but mostly it was covered by soft earth. Here and there they came across small, boggy patches, into which water dripped from above in loud splashes. They cupped their hands below where the water dripped the most, collected it, and drank. After quenching their thirst, they moved on.

It seemed that they had been walking more than a day. They were exhausted, but did not want to stop. Then the way became so narrow and low that they had to crawl.

My sister injured her knee on a sharp rock, drawing blood. She was on the brink of tears. Todos tore a strip off his shirt and bandaged the wound.

"Perhaps we should turn back?" he asked my sister. Without waiting for her reply, he continued: "Tomorrow we'll dress warmly, take some food with us, and try again."

Mother prohibited my sister from seeing Todos, but my sister kept disobeying and mother often beat her. After one of these punishments, my sister ran away from home. I saw her with Todos in town. They were walking along the pavement, holding hands, and everyone was looking at

¹ Indicating a superstition that someone might be a servant of the devil (translators' note).

them in astonishment because my sister and Todos had both shaved their heads. I was truly alarmed by what my sister had done, thinking that she would never dare return home. But she did, and without anger. Mother, however, became hysterical. She locked my sister in her room and it was painful to hear the loud slaps of the belt as she beat her mercilessly. But I heard no crying.

After that, everything happened as though in a dream. My sister disappeared from the house, and Todos disappeared, too. My mother searched a long time, but in vain. I kept quiet—I was certain my sister had reached her garden.

Some time later, fishermen pulled the bodies of two young people from the lake. Both had been so gnawed by fish that it was difficult to recognize the bodies of my sister and Todos—but it was them. It wasn't appropriate to bury them in such condition, so they were covered with masks and wigs.

I remember that both masks were sorrowful, with eyes closed. The bodies were covered by a thick white shroud right up to their chins.

The same day that the fishermen discovered the lovers, my mother turned gray. At the funeral she was taciturn, and afterwards she kept wandering through our rooms looking for somebody. One day she went to the same lake where the lovers were found. Next day mother was discovered wandering on the shore. She had lost her memory—she didn't know her own name. Fortunately, some kind people brought her home.

Many years have passed since then. Much rain has washed down the Andriivskyi Uzviz. I am an adult now. Yet even today, it still seems to me that none of this happened, that it was all just a bad dream. And every time I find myself in a garden, I intuitively look for a tiny cottage beneath a white flower or under branches laden with fruit—and I imagine my sister, full of laughter, running out with Todos.

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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The Curse of ... Love

Oleh Hovda

The road to the village ran downhill. The figure of a traveler appeared on it just at the moment when the sun's bright red orb began to fall below the horizon. It seemed that the man had emerged from the sun's rays, taken a step forward, and now stood on the hillside above the village. All kinds of things seem possible.

The man slowly approached the first dwelling and paused, leaning in exhaustion on the gate-post. He wore a light, rather threadbare coat, which had once been pale beige in color. The coat was of a somewhat unusual style: it reached down almost to his ankles and had a hood instead of a collar.

The traveler's intelligent features radiated calm, and his gray eyes observed the surroundings with serene pensiveness. Only one thing spoiled the overall impression. Despite the late hour, the man wore indoor slippers on his otherwise bare feet.

Spotting the stranger, the dog in the yard took a step forward and gave a brief bark of warning. He was a large, powerful dog, and his general appearance gave the distinct impression that he was not given to joking.

On hearing him bark, few people would venture into the yard, especially as the guard dog was not on a leash. But the man merely smiled and said in a friendly voice:

“Why are you angry? I'm not a robber.”

Having uttered these words, he calmly opened the gate and entered the yard.

“Be so good as to summon your master, Rover. I'm tired, and I don't want to have to sit on these rough steps.”

On hearing his name from the lips of the stranger, the dog raised his head and barked loudly several times to summon his masters from the house, as if to say “See for yourselves who has come to your house.”

The barking summoned a slight young woman from the house. She was immediately struck by the stranger's curious attire but did not show her surprise.

“Good day, madam,” said the visitor, slightly bowing his head.

“Good day to you, sir,” replied the woman. “I suppose you have business with my husband?”

“Actually, I wanted to ask permission to spend the night here. I still have far to go, and I am exhausted.”

The young woman raised her eyebrows in surprise. These days people undertake a long journey on foot for one of only two reasons: either they are destitute or they are not entirely in possession of their senses. The intelligent look in his gray eyes eloquently refuted the latter suggestion. So he was penniless. Immediately she felt sorry for the poor man. Perhaps he had been robbed or suffered some other misfortune. The unexpected guest gave no impression of being a drunkard or tramp.

"You can stay the night, but I'm alone in the house with my children. I'm afraid I can't let you inside the house until my husband returns from work. You know yourself the things that go on in the world today." Then, realizing she had been indiscreet, she corrected herself.

"Don't think I am afraid of you, but God protects the prudent," she said. "Look," she went on, pointing with her finger. "The barn is open, and there's fresh hay there. Lie down and rest. When my husband returns, you can talk with him. It's up to him to decide, anyway," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Thank you," replied the traveler courteously. "For me, that is quite adequate. I have experienced worse."

The aroma of straw soon numbed his exhausted brain. The soft bedding soothed the man's body, and before he knew it he had fallen asleep.

He was awakened by the sound of heavy footsteps over on the porch of the house.

"We have a visitor," the master of the house was informed by his wife as soon as he opened the door.

"Who is it?" he asked in a deep and powerful but tired-sounding voice.

"I really don't know. Some traveler. Seems to be a decent man. He's quite exhausted. Perhaps there's been some tragic event or an illness. He's asking to stay the night. I sent him to the barn. Is that all right?"

"Let him be. He isn't in our way. And I don't suppose he'll set the barn afire."

The master was silent for some time—evidently he was changing his clothes. Then his deep voice was heard again.

"Go and see what he needs. Give him something to eat. But don't invite him into the house. I'm dog-tired and can't face visitors. And tell him to go outside into the yard if he wants to smoke."

"I'll tell him," said his wife. "His breath doesn't exactly smell of alcohol. He probably isn't very well. There's really no point in inviting him into the house—he might bring in fleas or some other bug. There's plenty of hay, the nights are still warm—he'll manage. Shall I ask why he's traveling on foot?"

"No need. We haven't any money lying around anyway, and if he ... er ... hm," mumbled the husband irritably, "we'd never get rid of him afterwards. They're all like that. As soon as they start talking about themselves...."

Lying on the hay in the barn, the traveler smiled gently, shaking his head. This was the kind of reception he got in so many households. Often, they did not even let him into the yard.

"Here you are—I've brought you some refreshment."

The young woman was standing in the doorway, holding a mug of hot milk and a large slice of bread. There was also a cup full of gleaming white sugar.

"Here's your supper. In the morning we'll find you something more nourishing. For now this is all we have—we were not expecting visitors. You can sleep here." She gave a friendly smile. "My husband wasn't in a very good mood when he came home. I'll bring you a blanket a bit later."

"Please don't trouble yourself. I'll just settle deeper in the hay and I'll be fine. I can't cover myself with a blanket wearing these clothes, and it's too inconvenient to get undressed." With these words, he reached for the food.

"Oh!," cried the housewife, "What's the matter with your hands?"

The man looked at the palms of his hands. The wounds were bleeding again and the blood was dripping onto the floor in large drops.

"Oh, it's nothing, really," he replied, smiling pleasantly to reassure the young woman, who was quite alarmed. "Some old wounds have opened up. I expect the weather's about to change. Don't concern yourself about it."

"No, no!" The woman put the food down on the chaff-cutter. "We must do something. I'll bring something to soothe your wounds and bandage them. You could get blood poisoning."

After a while his hands were freshly bandaged, and soon the traveler, with a full stomach, lay on the sweet-smelling dry hay, listening to the silence of the night.

"That bitch has let me down again—she's just deserted me," dreamt Rover, snoring away. "She says only a silly chump like me would live in an old kennel breeding fleas. Normal dogs go out at night, looking for what's not tied down, but I'm stuck here, guarding someone else's property." When he felt the touch of human consciousness reading his thoughts, the dog roused himself and gave a growl of dissatisfaction.

That first time he saw the land it was gray and seemingly lifeless. It stretched out before him as far as the eye could see, waiting for his hands to rouse it from its winter hibernation. And he began to walk across it, leaving in his wake darkening traces of vapor—the coming to life. Then, after what was for his hands an eternity, it all turned darker and asked to be fed. Once again he was traversing the field from end to end, nourishing it with the sweat of his brow.

When it turned green, his life was full of joy. He stroked and caressed the silky ears of wheat, and he was happy. He shared in its happiness ... until the greenery also asked for nourishment.

The master of the house was so exhausted after his work that he did

not realize someone was eavesdropping on his dreams. And even if he had, he wouldn't have been annoyed. His dreams held no secrets. In spring they were about sowing, in summer about harvesting, and in autumn about preparing winter fodder. Only in winter did he dream about everything at once: sowing, harvesting, and preparing the fodder.

When the visitor saw the children's dreams, he squinted involuntarily—he was so dazzled by all that light and by those brilliant colors. It had been a long, long time since he had seen such a firework's display of happiness and joy, even in the dreams of children.

Only the woman of the house slept a dreamless sleep.

Her dreams, her pleasures, and her worries accompanied her all day long. So when everyone else finally fell asleep and dreamt, she would simply rest, gathering her strength for the next day's round of the joys and tribulations that are the lot of any ordinary woman.

The traveler quietly rose and went out through the gate.

He loved them all, the good and the bad. They had forgotten about Him and they no longer recognized Him. So He had no choice but to wander about in this world from dwelling to dwelling, awaiting that final day when He would be able to protect them better than any lawyer in the world, as they came face to face with His father. Those victims of self-love, that most dreadful of all curses.

Translated by Oksana Bunio and Patrick Corness

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Going My Own Way

Oleh Hovda

Today is the seventh or eighth day of my suffering since they bricked me in. But perhaps less time has passed, since my mind is still quite clear. My feet burn unbearably from standing continuously. I am strong and I will live for a long time yet. Much longer than I would wish. But I do not regret what I have done.

My desire to see the world gave my feet no rest. In the last ten years I have visited seven distant lands. I had never been in this country before, and as soon as I arrived, I immediately suspected something was amiss. My soul protested and urged me to turn back immediately, but my mind, seeking adventure, could not turn back without uncovering the truth.

I passed through settlements, noting the picturesque houses with cultivated orchards and carefully tended vegetable gardens without a trace of weeds. From the very beginning I was struck by the beauty and the wealth of these settlements. And by the indifference, too. Not one of the residents stepped onto a porch or came through a gate to have a look at the stranger, or ask what news I brought, or simply enquire what my business was. There were no children running about in the streets. Even the dogs, dozing idly, remained indifferent to my appearance.

Meanwhile, behind each fence orchards and gardens were buzzing with work. Sweat poured from adults and children alike, leaving dark stains on their white linen shirts.

On the square in front of the church sat a young woman, begging. Her three little children played in the sandy dust. All four of them were clad in tattered rags. At the beggar's feet lay a shard of broken pottery that resembled a pair of cupped hands, but it contained not a single coin or crust of bread. My hand involuntarily reached behind my belt for a few silver coins and I gave them to the woman.

She leapt to her feet, calling her children to thank me, but I hastened on my way.

I spent my first night in this unknown country at the edge of a forest. Firewood was plentiful and there was water nearby. I still had sufficient rations in my knapsack to last me several days.

I was underway before the sun rose. Traversing a hill, I descended a gentle slope into a valley, where I saw a small town, surrounded by a wall and encircled by a wide moat connected to a river. Small farmsteads and attractive villages surrounded the town. The road led me through one of

them. It was apparent that everything here was just as in the first settlement I had encountered, except that the dwellings were even more opulent, evidently because the town stimulated a livelier trade in meat and vegetables. I passed the farmstead and did not stop anywhere nor venture to enter anyone's yard to ask for water. As the heat became more oppressive, I made for the river, where I might drink and bathe. There I heard a cry. A young woman was pleading for help.

I quickened my pace and quickly reached the river bank. First I saw two horses in military trappings, then two burly fellows armed with swords. They were restraining the girl, twisting her arms, and snatching at her blouse.

"Stop that, you swine!" I shouted at the youths.

What business of mine was the honor of an innocent girl? Why not allow two young men a little amusement? Because I can't stand villains!

The one unlacing the girl's blouse turned in my direction, and, seeing a slightly-built man brandishing a stick instead of a weapon, he gave a wry smile and spat into the water. He drew his sword from its scabbard and rushed at me.

"Tired of living, swineherd?" enquired the man who was holding the girl in an almost friendly tone.

"Ha!" cried his companion, baring his teeth and brandishing his sword. The weapon glinted and whistled in a circle above my head and came down by my right foot. "Hobble away, before I cut off your miserable head."

I did not move an inch. In one bound he was next to me and made a gentle, half-hearted jab at my side with his sword. I struck the flat of the blade with the edge of my hand. The kick to his temple was the last thing my attacker felt in this world. He fell backwards into the river and remained prone under the water.

"Aha," cried the other man, "I see you have serious intentions towards her!" Pushing the girl in my direction, he dashed to the river bank, leapt into the saddle, and rode off on his horse as fast as he could towards the town. As for the girl, she ran off to the farmstead.

The sight of the dead man quenched my desire to drink the water. It was another five or six minutes' walk to the town gates. Atop a tower of the defensive wall I saw a decrepit old man with a stone tied around his neck.

"Wait, sir!" I cried, breaking into a run. But the suicide took a step forward and plunged into the water.

In an instant I reached the moat and dived in after him. A few minutes later the man was on the bank. I squeezed the water out of his lungs and forced air into his lungs. At that moment someone bent my arms behind my back and tied them firmly with a length of rope. I turned around. Before me stood armed town guards.

"What's going on?" I asked in surprise.

"You have broken the law and must appear before our Ruler's court

for judgment," replied one of them, observing me with indifference.

"I am a foreigner and do not know your laws."

"You can explain that to our Ruler."

The Ruler was a short, broad-shouldered man with sinewy arms and an alert appearance. He wore a gold crown on his head and a magnificent suit of armor.

"Your Majesty," I said with a deep bow. "At last I can learn what your servants accuse me of."

"I do not think my words will be of comfort to you, foreigner," said the Ruler in a soft voice. "You have committed a serious crime and your punishment will be death."

"But I have been in your country for only a single day!" I cried, desperately trying to release the bonds.

"In the course of this day you have thrice broken our laws."

Realizing what he was referring to, I said to him:

"What you are calling a crime is known in the world as Goodness."

"We live by our own laws, handed down to us by our fathers and grandfathers."

"But what I did was good!"

"Good?" The Ruler raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I see you truly do not realize the harm caused by your actions. You gave alms to a beggar and in an instant she made more money than an honest worker can earn in a month's hard labor. Will she ever seek work now? She will starve rather than work, for she will expect some benefactor to turn up again. You rescued a girl from those rapists, and in doing one 'good' deed you simultaneously committed three bad ones. First, from now on the girl will always be afraid of men, for imaginary horrors are always more terrifying than experienced ones. Second, you made a coward of a soldier and I was obliged to execute him, since he could no longer be trusted. Third, you killed the other soldier. And if a hostile army appears outside the walls of our town tomorrow, it may happen that for the lack of two swordsmen the balance will be tipped in favor of the enemy. Then our whole nation will be violated, not just one village girl. And, finally, you prevented a suicide, saving the life of a person who had already taken leave of this world because he saw nothing good in it. He will not have the strength to jump into the water a second time. To the end of his days he will drown his misery in hard liquor or some other stupefier and be a burden to all who come into contact with him. So where is the 'goodness' of your actions, foreigner? Good deeds are like weapons, they need to be used properly."

"You speak wisely, Your Majesty, but have you not considered that a country whose people are indifferent to one another is easier to conquer?"

"I am sorry for you, foreigner. If you had shown remorse for your imprudence, I would have ordered your release. But as you have not done so, I have no right to grant you freedom, for you might continue to cause people

harm. You will die in a manner that will cause you to understand your error.”

The Ruler made a sign to the guards, who seized me under the arms and led me away.

I lay awake all night, imagining the various tortures the cruel Ruler might subject me to.

I made my Last Confession and was then led me out to the wall of the castle courtyard. There the sentence was read out. The Ruler had ordered me to be bricked up in the wall. After all the horrible tortures I had imagined all night long, I felt a sense of relief.

They took me to a niche, secured a hook in the wall, and tied my arms to it. Then they began to brick me in. I felt no fear, since I knew what awaited me: a few minutes in total darkness, then suffocation. A few gasps and that would be it—eternal silence and peace.

The bricklayers did their work swiftly. Only ten bricks remained, eight, six, four, two...

“Stop!” I heard the Ruler’s voice in the courtyard. “I want to do a good deed for you after all, foreigner. You will not suffocate. The bricklayers will leave a gap so you can breathe. Farewell!”

Translated by Oksana Bunio and Patrick Corness

Original publication: Oleh Hovda. “Ity svoieiu dorohoiu,” in *Pryvatna kolektsiia* [Private Collection], ed. Vasyl' Gabor, Lviv: Piramida, 2002, pp. 82–84.

Three Miniatures

Iryna Vilde

A Legend About A Dream

“If you only knew what a wonderful dream I had last night,” said the older woman to her friend.

“So tell me.”

“Just think, I dreamed that I had regained power over a man.”

“Is that all?” The younger woman was clearly disappointed. “Don’t you have any power over your husband or your sons?”

“You’re not listening carefully.” The older woman said, growing impatient. “I’m talking about power over a man’s heart and you’re asking about my husband and kids.”

“I see! So, it’s our fate to regret that pleasant dreams come to us so seldom. And then, what’s a dream, anyway? A web of illusions, that’s all.”

“Stop grumbling,” snapped the older woman. “Or that web, too, will fly away from me.” Then she added with melancholy: “Oh you young people! Give them a candy and they want the whole box.”

And That’s the Problem

“Mom, isn’t it true that when a couple breaks up, they return the gifts they gave each other?”

“Yes, more or less.”

“And, what about feelings? Do people give them back too? Or do they burn them with old papers in the fireplace? Or maybe they give them to the janitor as a keepsake? Or listen, maybe they leave them in the old apartment, somewhere in the corner with the chipped bottles? Honestly, Mom, what do people do with their feelings when they separate? They can’t just throw them in the trash with the jars and tins, can they?”

“No. Feelings are not thrown out with the trash. People dig a grave for them in their hearts and bury them there. Some do it ceremoniously, others do it any old way, just to hide them.

“And then they walk around with a grave in their hearts?”

“Yes, and usually with more than one.”

“Will there be a grave in my heart too?”

“Very likely, my dear.”

“Mom, that’s scary. How can I avoid having a grave in my heart?”

“If I only knew! Except if you never fall in love with anyone.”

“What do you mean, Mom? Never?! Nobody?! Never love anybody?
That’s impossible!”

“And that’s the problem, my child!”

You

You said to me: “When spring arrives, I will take you in my arms and I’ll tell you something that I’ve never told any other woman before.”

And I believed you—I believed that your vocabulary of love could still contain some words that you have never yet uttered to any woman.

(You who laugh at my naïveté—show me a single woman who would not believe that her chosen one has reserved in his vocabulary at least a couple of words intended for her alone. If you do, I’ll stop believing in love, just as I have stopped believing in fidelity.)

You’re thirty and have a profile like those carved in marble, so the thought of several words that you’ve never yet spoken to any woman yet....

And so, since that day in December, I’ve been dreaming of the spring.... But how will I recognize it here in the city?

Maybe in the village, swallows are already weaving their nests and children are running barefoot on sunny hills. Here the only sign of spring is the first appearance of ladies’ spring hats in the store windows.

Tell me—what is supposed to happen when the display is full of ladies’ spring hats?

The sidewalks are already as dry as the sunny village hills in the spring. The dry streets make footsteps echo.

In the evening I lie in bed, curtains purposely left wide open, and listen to the sounds of footsteps on the sidewalk. I think to myself that I would recognize your footsteps even if you were marching with a whole company of soldiers.

I hear footsteps of various kinds from my window: tired and light, careless and cautious, long and playfully short. But your footsteps are nowhere to be heard.

I know very well that wherever you are, the distance from you to me will always be the same as from me to you. And I would have found you a long time ago, were it not for the fear that a woman’s heart knows from birth.

I fear that one day I’ll meet you on that sidewalk, one as dry and warm as the earthen mound around a village home in spring, and you’ll be in the

company of a woman who will look like spring itself, wearing the first spring bonnet of the season.

That is my fear.

You're thirty and have a profile like those carved in marble. That's why I'm afraid of that unknown woman in the spring hat. That inevitable one. That one in the future.

Who will she be and what will she look like, the one that will make you forget me? Will she be smart? Pretty? Young? With a heart or without? And how will you renounce our love for the sake of her heart's peace? How will you kill the jealousy her heart holds for the days we spent together?

Will you tell her that our lips have never kissed? Will you convince her that you have never loved anyone as you love her? Or, perhaps, you will promise, come spring, to tell her something you've never said to "any other" woman?

Translated by Khrystyna Bednarchyk

Original publication: Iryna Vilde, "Legenda pro son," "V tomu vsia bida," and "Ty" in her *Tvory v piaty tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes], Vol. 5, *Opovidannia i povisti. Zustrichi i lysty. Miniatiury*, Kyiv: Dnipro, 1968, pp. 332, 333, 12–13.

The Lame Mermaid (A purely private episode)

Oleksandr Zhovna

When of an evening old Kornii plodded across his garden to the river bank, his back bent under the weight of a long, crooked oar, someone would be bound to call after him over the fence, “Mind the mermaids don’t tickle you to death!” and then roar with laughter.

Perhaps that’s why Kornii was setting off after dark, as always, to clear his nets—so nobody would bother him.

The old man’s cottage looked like an old mushroom that had sat and sat in the middle of a meadow and then just collapsed from exhaustion. It was also the cottage nearest to the river. At the end of the old man’s garden glistened a small fish pond where he had constructed a wooden dock with a ladder to help him get down to the water. Ever since the pond has been known as Kornii’s bathing pool. This was where he moored his boat. A narrow channel through the rushes led from the bathing pool to a calm part of the lake where the old man set his nets.

With his bushy gray beard, and white linen shirt, old Kornii was as bright in the darkness as if he were covered with luminous phosphorus. Seen from afar, few would have doubted that a jasmine bush might be blossoming in the boat. Above the surface of the water mist gathered in large white balls of cotton and the old man’s big hands, which occasionally disappeared into them, looked as though they had been clumsily fashioned out of red clay by an inept potter who had dozed off (no doubt after strong drink) and left them in the sun too long, so that deep cracks had formed on them as on parched earth in the desert. Unsuspecting mosquitoes alighting on these hands would wander futilely over their tough surface and eventually give up and fly off with nothing. When the old man leaned overboard to draw up a net his gray beard would inevitably get soaked in the dark water, prompting the thought: what if some river sprite were to grab the old man by the beard and drag him out of the boat? Since Kornii was rather old now, he went about his work unhurriedly, as though relishing it. As the mist thickened, in looking at the old man it was impossible to tell for certain whether it was he sitting there or whether the sight was just a cloud of mist in the shape of a hunchback.

That evening the bottom of Kornii’s boat was covered with large roundish carp glittering like huge gypsy earrings. The old man examined

them and muttered in satisfaction. It was a beautiful July night. Kornii had cleared all the nets but he wasn't eager to row back to shore. The old man looked up and stared intently at some distant star, twinkling goodness knows where in the pitch-black sky, and he fell to dreaming.

Some time passed before Kornii took his mind off that star and gradually came down to earth. He pricked up his ears—he sensed, or perhaps actually heard, something splashing beyond the rushes where his bathing pool was. Surprised by the sound, he seized his oar and rowed toward it. At the end of the channel, where the water of his bathing pool glistened, he pulled his oar from the water and froze. The boat ran into some young reeds and came to a stop.

"Well, I'll be!" the old man's lips moved so feebly that the words got tangled up in his beard and couldn't get out. By his dock, just a few oar strokes away, was a mermaid. She was on the ladder, her legs in the water just below the knee. She looked like a young girl with long blonde hair that fell below her waist. Except for those tresses, nothing covered her body. Indeed, she was naked. The mermaid had her back to Kornii and she seemed to be coming down the ladder into the water. She descended one rung more, and the dark surface of the water now covered the mermaid's knees and reached her thighs. At that moment the water rippled and seemed to retreat in embarrassment. The mermaid turned toward the water, and what the old man saw in the dark might just as well have been a real young girl. Her pale body, not exposed to the sun, was quite unlike what Kornii would have expected. "A river sprite ought to be green and have a tail. But she has legs! Though they're nothing much to speak of, those legs!"

Who knows, perhaps it's natural for a man to remain a man, at least in spirit, even at his age: caught between the conflicting emotions of fear and temptation, the latter overcomes the former.

The mermaid leaned forward, submerged her arms, and splashed water over her body. She repeated this several times; then she drew herself up to her full height and, staring up at the sky, let out a prolonged, trembling sigh. Her wet body glowed in the night, shimmering in the moonlight. Droplets of water rolled down her firm white breasts, upturned like the snub noses of little girls, and fell into the watery deep. Kornii's moustache bristled and he muttered something. It was impossible to tell exactly what, but at that moment the old man thought: "What if I just went ahead and took them in my hands and felt them? Just held them in my palms?" Had this been half a lifetime ago, he probably would have. But now he held back. "What if she really is a water sprite who will tickle you and drag you down into the murky deep? Just try shouting for help then—who'll hear you?" And so, quite casually, gesturing in the air, as it were, Kornii made the sign of the cross.

Meanwhile, the river sprite—scarcely less alluring, as you already know, than a real woman—continued to exist. The mermaid leaned forward

again and splashed water over her body. This action was apparently part of a ritual, and the mermaid seemed to be whispering something as she performed it. All the old man could make out was two names, Peter and Paul, which were repeated frequently.

"Why does she keep saying Peter and Paul?" Kornii wondered. "Just a minute, though. Tomorrow is ... what's it called? Yes, yes—the feast of Saints Peter and Paul." Kornii scratched behind his ear, "Hmm!... So that's it!... Yes.... Still, she's a pretty demon, can't deny it. Fair-haired, quite fetching. It's no sin to pilfer crumbs. She's nice and shapely. A mermaid, you know!"

These were old Kornii's thoughts in his advanced years. Although this was the first time in his life that he had seen a mermaid, Kornii didn't doubt for an instant that such she was. If Kornii had borne in mind that the night shows its own peculiar reality, different from what daylight reveals, who knows how certain he would have been about what his eyes saw. And if this mermaid had appeared in the daytime, and if her white body had been dressed in the clothes she usually wore, if her hair had been gathered up and her face were visible, covered with freckles as it was year round, Kornii would have recognized her as redheaded Leska, a neighbor's daughter, or lame Leska, as she was often called—the girl had been born with a deformed leg. In that case, Kornii would have been unlikely to take such an interest. Leska was dreadfully disturbed by her disability and by her freckles, numerous enough for a whole class full of kids but all unhappily spread on her skin. So the girl always shunned company, and when anyone might see her she was always wrapped up, swaddled and concealed in her very ordinary clothes. The only friend Leska had was the old dog Dasher. Even her mother sometimes felt ashamed of her daughter, especially in company: she virtually disowned her when Leska's little sister was born with her pure white face and nice straight little legs. When Leska glanced into the cot and saw that pure little face, apprehension tempered her feelings towards her little sister and inhibited her love for her. Leska could not bring herself to stretch out her freckled hand and touch that little white face in case it might catch her freckles and be contaminated by them. Who could tell, or even imagine, what was going on beneath Leska's simple attire? Beneath those reddish upturned breasts beat Leska's solitary heart, concealed from everyone, but longing for motherly warmth, friends, emotions, love, and passion. It also held her most heartfelt desire, the dream that comforted Leska in her nocturnal thoughts and dreams and yet also saddened her, causing her to regret that it was so unattainable during the daytime, when people drove her away with their despising, doleful, alarmed, indifferent, transient, evil, and haughty glances. Oh, how frightened she was by all those looks. Only old Yivha, the hundred-year-old woman known in the village as the Witch, was kindly disposed towards Leska, as though she were oblivious to her misfortune.

It was Yivha who suggested Leska take advantage of that special night. She had taught her what to do, and how. The chance came only once a year, on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. If a girl were to bathe in the river that night without any clothes and utter certain prayers, mysterious forces would work a miracle. Many girls who longed to be beautiful or wanted some handsome young man to fall in love with them embraced this ritual. Who can tell what good it did them, whether it worked? But it was said that those who firmly believed in the uniqueness of this night succeeded in fulfilling their wishes. Normally Leska was afraid to go to the river at midnight, let alone undress and enter the dark water. Nevertheless, that night Leska set off to the old man's bathing pool, bearing in mind old Yivha's advice to ignore everything else and resolutely pursue her goal. This was her last hope of winning back her mother's affection, her little sister, and regaining love and happiness.

Leska contemplated the deep, clear, dark water in which the stars twinkled and the moon rippled across the waves. She scooped up the cool water in the palms of her hands and poured it over her freckled body, whispering old Yivha's sacred prayers over and over again till she became entranced. Suddenly the miracle happened. Leska saw the water running off her body and taking her red freckles with it into the darkness. It was washing them away as though they had been dirt. Leska's body was becoming clean and white, like her little sister's face. Leska couldn't believe her eyes. She turned towards the moonlight and marveled at all the parts of her body that now seemed someone else's, as she had seen it only in those exciting dreams of hers that she had wanted never to end. The miracle had happened. Now it wasn't only old Kornii who wouldn't recognize lame Leska. Her body was pure, young, and attractive. Her face seemed changed, too. Happy, smiling, she relaxed in the light blue aura. Like a child Leska played with the water in the river, splashed it over her body and face, as though thirsting after it and unable to resist slaking that thirst. She had no care in the world—she was happy. Suddenly, she cried out. Mesmerized, Kornii had accidentally dropped the oar. It struck the side of the boat and fell with a splash into the water. At that moment Leska caught sight of a big gray beard in the darkness. Old Kornii stared at the river creature, wondering what would happen next.

"Why is she going on shore?" is all the old man could think of before the mermaid's shining form dissolved into the night mist.

The dock was dripping wet.

"Well, I never!" sighed Kornii finally. "Like a mirage, as if she'd never been ... just like that. That's how it was! But who'd believe it now? Nice girl, but she limps. Why would a mermaid limp?" The old man sighed again, "No, it's unbelievable. Nobody will believe it!" And he wistfully picked up his oar again.

No one saw Leska running across the fields to her back yard. Out of

breath, wet, and clutching her clothes against her chest, she rushed into the hallway and locked the door behind her. All was quiet in the cottage—everyone had gone to sleep long since. She glanced out of the window—all was quiet there too. Nobody was chasing her. Dasher sat on the doorstep sniffing himself all over, rooting out those hateful fleas. When she had calmed down a little, Leska recalled the miracle. Then she looked at her body and collapsed on the bench. By the bench was a bucket of water, and in it swam a handful of stars. Warm tears fell from Leska's eyes into the bucket among the stars. They fell on her red knees and arms, covered with so many, many freckles. It was not a dream. Afraid of waking up her mother and her white-faced little sister, Leska didn't cry or yell out loud. She just whimpered softly like a puppy hiding under the bench, now and then whispering to an unknown hearer:

"If only you knew! If only you knew!"

Translated by Patrick Corness and Natalia Pomirko

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Ukrainian Literature in English
A Selected Bibliography of Translations
2000 –

Marta Tarnawsky

- ¶ 10. Andrukhovych, Yuri. *Perverzion*. Tr. from the Ukrainian and with an introduction by Michael M. Naydan. Evanston, IL : Northwestern University Press [©2005]. xiv, 326 p. (Writings from an unbound Europe).

Translation of the novel *Perverziia*.

- ¶ 11. Dimarov, Anatoliy. *Broken Wings*. Selected prose fiction. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Saskatoon, SK]: Language Lanterns, 2001. 316 p. (Ukrainian short fiction in English).

Contents: “Bananas”. • Not for children sixteen and under. • Only you, beloved. • Wings. • The new girl. • The noose. • Gods for sale. • Anatoliy Dimarov: Biographical note.

- ¶ 12. Franko, Ivan. *Fox Mykyta*. Verses in free translation from Ivan Franko’s Ukrainian classic *Lys Mykyta* by Roman Bohdan Karpishka. Illus. by Edward Kozak. [Lviv; Montreal: Papuga Publishers, 2002]. 156, xii p. col. illus.

A free verse translation of all twelve songs of Ivan Franko’s poem *Lys Mykyta*, with additional material added. A compact disk with narration by Roman B. Karpishka accompanies the printed book.

- ¶ 13. A Hunger Most Cruel: Selected prose fiction by Anatoliy Dimarov, Yevhen Hutsalo, Olena Zvychnayna. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Saskatoon, SK]: Language Lanterns, 2002. 284 p.

Contents: **Anatoliy Dimarov:** Biographical note. • The thirties (A parable about bread). • **Yevhen Hutsalo:** Biographical note. • Holodomor: murder by starvation. • **Olena Zvychnayna:** Biographical note. • The market at Myrhorod. • Socialist potatoes. • “Lucky” Hanna. • Without doctors and priests, without graves and crosses. • Glossary.

- ¶ 14. Kostenko, Lina. *Landscapes of Memory: The Selected Later Poetry of Lina Kostenko = Peizazhi pamiati (Vybrani poezii, 1977–1989)*. Tr. from Ukrainian by Michael M. Naydan. Translations edited by Olha Luchuk. Lviv: Litopys, 2002. 127 p. illus.

A parallel text edition, Ukrainian and English. Text layout and design: Kostiantyn Kukushkin.

Contents of the English language material: Translator’s introduction (p.8-10). ● Acknowledgments. ● Poetry and destiny / Mykola Ilnytsky. Tr. by Olha Luchuk (p.21-27). ● **From the collection “At the Shores of the Eternal River” (1977):** *** (The immortal diorama of memory). ● *** (The rain began to fall, and the day’s so shiny). ● *** (An emerald forest after the rain). ● A deadly pas de grace (The earth circles in a cosmic waltz). ● *** (The pine forest strums its strings). ● *** (At times I feel a strange sensation). ● *** (A thunderstorm. Fanciful ghosts of antennae). ● *** (Yesterday Blok came to visit me in the rain). ● *** (Ravens have bewitched the dawn). ● The summit of sorrow (At the foot of Sorrow is a grip of fear). ● *** (What did we have? Love and summer). ● A prologue again (I have today, I have a moment, I have eternity for me). ● **From the collection “Uniqueness” (1980):** *** (All that will be, already is or has happened on earth). ● Landscape from my memory (Just barely I touch a word with watercolor). ● *** (Behind the oven a gnome is champing). ● *** (How cold it is! The acacia is blooming). ● *** (Somewhere tenderness passed between us). ● *** (And the uniqueness of every moment). ● *** (The autumn day began with birches). ● *** (With great difficulty I suffered myself out with you). ● **From the collection “Garden of Unmelting Sculptures”:** *** (A shady spot, twilight, a golden day). ● *** (The storm was passing somewhere side-by-side). ● *** (With your eyes you told me: I love you). ● *** (I step out into the orchard, it’s black and meager). ● Watercolors of childhood (The River Dnipro, an old landing-stage, yellow shores). ● The monument to I. M. Soshenko (He died in passage. Korsun slept, indifferent). ● A terrifying kaleidoscope: at this moment someone somewhere has died). ● *** (I will listen to this rain. It steals up and clamors). ● *** (This isn’t a miracle, but a burning scent, this kind of love terrifies me). ● *** (Near the white tower there is a black tree. Sleep). ● **From the collection “Selected Works” (1989):** *** (I open the dawn with a treble clef). ● *** (In a wicked and cold world). ● *** (I step out into the night. To meet my fate). ● *** (Somewhere, they say, there is a mountain where birds do not sing). ● *** (And how can I forget you now?) ● *** (Nothing special has happened). ● **From “Incrustations”:** *** (It’s not quite democracy). ● *** (A terrifying violinist raised his bow). ● *** (It seems to me that music is cosmic). ● *** (I am surprised that in childhood nothing surprised me). ● *** (I dreamt of my grandmother. That she’s still alive). ● *** (Lakes stand in the cupped hands of valleys). ● *** (Dahlias on the Chernobyl road). ● *** (In my childhood I floated above dahlias). ● Translator’s notes.

- ¶ 15. Neborak, Viktor. *The Flying Head and Other Poems = Litaiucha holova ta inshi virshi*. Tr. with an introd. and notes by Michael M. Naydan, with additional translations by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps, Jars Balan, Mark Andryczyk and Yaryna Yakubyak. A guest introd. by Yuri Andrukhovych. Translations edited by Olha Luchuk. Cover design and illus. by Yurko Kokh. Lviv: Sribne Slovo, 2005. 303 p. illus., ports.

A bilingual Ukrainian-English illustrated edition. **Contents of the English language material:** Yuri Andrukhovych: The head that used to fly. Tr. by Roman Ivashkiv. Ed. by Olha Luchuk and Michael M. Naydan. ● Michael M. Naydan: The poetry of Viktor Neborak: A conventional introduction. An unconventional introduction to a skyrocker poet or Lecture notes on Viktor Neborak and *The Flying Head*. ● Viktor Neborak: A few words from the author. Tr. by Olha Luchuk. ● ***The Flying Head:*** Genesis of the flying head (a show in verse): I. Metro fantasy (Color is still not space you try anyway to hew through). II. UFO (We called the landing boat “C-ATAS-TROPHE”). III. Metro fantasy (This is a body a murder a specter a hook). IV. Fantasy about a morning bus (Your time and space is bus number 20). V. Metro fantasy reflections (He sees himself before himself). VI. Metro. Versions (...Finally you get into the rhythm, vagrant...) VII. (The vertical glass is heavy and sharp). VIII. The flying head. A production self-portrait (... They assemble the flying head in my likeness in a mine). IX. The vertical (O Holy Virgin). X. (It rises up like a head). ● Stunning reincarnations (A lantern castle is raised above the earth at night). ● Nocturnes with mysterious herbs (an herbarium of melodies): I. The plot (To the touch the night is a treasure chest of mysteries). II. The gaze (I stepped out from the night. My eyes are thirsty). III. The castle (Come and meander in my garden). IV. (My farewell is like a black stone). V. The tapestry (Once again above me a dream grows). VI. A kiss (... And the aftertaste of death on lips). VII. Invited to the funeral of April is (everyone who wants to drink the last sky-blue). VIII. Viy. A variation (I speak above you (above the coffin) and to myself). ● *** (My lyric hero is a white-winged fellow). ● The Yaniv cemetery (We’re characters from *The Odyssey* who found themselves in imperfect circles). ● The case of the “Fall of Atlantis” (May recreations dissolved in the wind. They’re not there). ● Question and answer (What was real in winter?) ● Catching crabs (a speech) (—The water’s tailor—a damned nightingale). ● Monologue from a canine pretext (Fido’s hung himself—suicide-dog!). ● A drug-tympanum (a sonnet uttered by the Flying head) (- Paint a BABE naked BLUE). ● The urban god Eros (a variation on the theme of “Stunning Reincarnations”) (We’ll begin from the street. Eyes gleam cerulean blue). ● Headshaved (“Place your heads beneath the blade’s edge!) ● Hair (It is wind in the captivity of). ● Waiting for Orysia (Not beings, not mechanisms). ● *** (Sixteen candles. She has a premonition). ● A cage with a lion (The lion is one who releases flowers of blood). ● A cage with a panther (You love to ogle skin). ● She (rap performance by Kids of the Queenie): 1. (I looked at her like at a thing). 2. (on the balcony you stand). 3. crazy lady (alone in the lilies you’re walkin’, walkin’). ● 4. (you got spensive eyes). ● 5. (she be one of a lot). ● The appearance of Pantagruel

the lesser (his substance—a rabelaisian body). ● The fool (a card game) (a country of thirty six). ● An itty bitty ditty 'bout Mr. Bazio (sung by Viktor Morozov) (He's the holy spirit of philistine walls). ● The spiritist seance (a ballad sung by Kost Moskalets') (The table—a square abyss). ● The performance of the rock band Lucifer (from the rock opera “What's hiding in the darkness?”) (Dread-dread-yellow sorrow torment). ● The thriller (a video clip) (I was invited to the Dnister Hotel). ● *** (O roses-girls from music). ● Rock and roll Olesia (performed by the “Neborak-rock-band”) (I'm a learned crow). ● Eyewitness evidence (... The city celebration ignited and swallowed passions...) ● *** (“Gentlemen guitarists! A few drops of the golden libation are left”). ● *** (A bus is riding through soft wind). ● *** (A drawing of years, of trees and wrinkles). ● The eating of an apple (Five tentacles of my feelings). ● A sonnet with a reddish cat (Along the fallen rustle, in a ray). ● The death of the hero (a mosquito) (The soprano rubbed the rust-colored space). ● Lament (from the performance of a post-decadent poet) (—in september forests). ● The god Bacchus's drinks: I. Beer (From the bottomless nomadic German stomachs). II. Wine (The peak—the marble maw of a lion). III. Liquor (All around the table are eyes, a motionless axis passes). IV. Cognac (An impetuous Latrec watercolor). ● Coffee (Inspiration—is a bartender—at your service). ● Three elegies (found in an empty bottle that contained an unknown beverage) I. (Winter has iced me in). II. (An orchestra of invisible men drags). III. (Movie theaters and train stations). ● Water (ice) (Salt has surfaced on the blades of ice). ● A pendulum (In Lviv—I'm the dreamwalker Odysseus). ● Metro fantasy (The reflection disappears again you). ● *** (The magical wave of dreams dissolved like morning fog). ● **From the collection Alter Ego:** *** (there are mirrors and doors) / Tr. Jars Balan. ● Genesis (Clothing evolves from a display-window to) / Tr. Jars Balan. ● Fish (cold-blooded beings) / Tr. Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps. ● Subjective point of view (Someday) / Tr. Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps. ● *** (what kind of a beast) / Tr. Jars Balan. ● What he does (what he does) / Tr. Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps. ● *** (This is just silence) / Tr. Michael M. Naydan. ● Supper (There were seven of us) / Tr. Jars Balan. ● Novel (There will be a happy ending) / Tr. Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps. ● The land of lotus-eaters (He opens the door of oblivion) / Tr. Michael M. Naydan. ● *** (I'll be cheerful this evening) / Tr. Michael M. Naydan. ● *** (Green sounds echo) / Tr. Mark Andryczyk with Yaryna Yakubyak. ● Biographical notes. ● Acknowledgements. ● Contents.

¶ 16. Palij, Lydia. *Woman in the Window: A Collection of Poetic Images*. Toronto: Libra Publishing, 2002. 47 p.

Contents: Contents. ● **A white bird:** Raspberries (1. Blissful repose (In the raspberry time). 2. White silence (Beyond the hospital window). 3. End of the day (The maples darken). ● **Love letters:** Junction without signposts (By the Dnipro river). ● Autumn letters (Under the geranium scented sun). ● Dark window (We met briefly). ● Hospital (A black crow follows me). ● Cold sun (While your eyes radiate sunniness). ● Sadness (We walked the night streets). ● **Short summers:** On the shore (On the shore). ● In my garden (White sails soared above the lake). ● Evening (Evening birds). ● **Grieving for leaves:** Lake and sky (On yellow autumn

days). ● Empty days (Like an Egyptian woman). ● Crows (On neighbouring trees). ● The wind (The wind). ● Lost autumn (Autumn radiates). ● Sunflower (A haggard old sunflower). ● Last dance (With the candelabras snuffed). ● The wake (Don't grieve for autumn leaves). ● November (November rains leaves). ● **Cold nights:** Bare branches (At night). ● Sleepless (Bare branches). ● **Celebrating spring:** Impressions (A green wind rushes). ● April (Children's tricycles). ● **Solitude:** Sleep (I can't sleep). ● The wall (Loneliness has no scent). ● Woman in the window (When late at night).

The author's own translations of her poems, with the assistance of Patricia Harvie.

¶ 17. *Passion's Bitter Cup*. Selected prose fiction by Mykola Chernyavsky, Ivan Franko, Hnat Khotkevych, Yevhen Mandychevsky, Mykhaylo Mohylyansky, Stepan Vasylichenko, Volodymyr Vynnychenko, Sylvester Yarychevsky, Mykhaylo Zhuk. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Saskatoon, SK]: Language Lanterns, 2004. 349 p. (Ukrainian short fiction in English). On cover: Ukrainian male authors, 1880–1920.

Contents: Introduction / Sonia Morris. ● **Mykola Chernyavsky:** The Barbarians. Snow. ● **Ivan Franko:** From the notes of a patient. The high life. The postal clerk. ● **Hnat Khotkevych:** Bella Donna. ● **Yevhen Mandychevsky:** The storm. ● **Mykhaylo Mohylyansky:** Perdition. The saviour. The shot. ● **Stepan Vasylichenko:** Behind stone walls. ● **Volodymyr Vynnychenko:** The chain. Derision. ● **Sylvester Yarychevsky:** The cooper's wife. That foolish girl... The illicit daughter-in-law. The judge. ● **Mykhaylo Zhuk:** Dora. She. ● Glossary. ● Biographical notes.

¶ 18. *Riddles of the Heart*. Selected prose fiction by Mykola Chernyavsky, Ivan Franko, Hnat Khotkevych, Mykhaylo Kotsyubynsky, Osyp Makovey, Mykhaylo Mohylyansky, Panas Myrny, Leonyd Pakharevsky [sic], Valeriy Pidmohylny, Stepan Vasylichenko, Volodymyr Vynnychenko. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Saskatoon, SK]: Language Lanterns, 2004. 349 p. (Ukrainian short fiction in English). On cover: Ukrainian male authors, 1880–1920.

Contents: Introduction / Sonia Morris. ● **Mykola Chernyavsky:** The end of the game. ● **Ivan Franko:** Amidst the just. Fatherland. The jay's wing. William Tell. ● **Hnat Khotkevych:** The prodigal son. The she-devil. ● **Mykhaylo Kotsyubynsky:** The debut. ● **Osyp Makovey:** The emancipation of men. Loneliness. ● **Mykhaylo Mohylyansky:** From the dark wellsprings of life. The fiancée. **Panas Myrny:** The hunt. ● **Leonyd Pakharevsky:** A sentimental story. ● **Valeriy Pidmohylny:** God is good. ● **Stepan Vasylichenko:** The princess. The sin. ● **Volodymyr Vynnychenko:** The clandestine affair. ● Glossary. ● Biographical notes.

- ¶ 19. Stelmakh, Yaroslav. *Once in a Strange, Faraway Forest*. Illus. by Anatoliy Vasylenko. Tr. by Roma Franko. Ed. by Sonia Morris. [Saskatoon, SK]: Language Lanterns, 2001. 95 p. col. illus. (Ukrainian children's literature).

Translation of the children's story "Iakos' u chuzhomu lisi".

- ¶ 20. Zabuzhko, Oksana. *Girls*; a story by Oksana Zabuzhko translated from Ukrainian by Askold Melnyczuk. [Boston: Arrowsmith, ©2005]. 36 p. port.

Translation of the short story "Divchatka".

About the Authors

Emma Andijewska (Emma Andiiivs'ka) was born in Donetsk in 1931. She lives in Munich, Germany. She is well-known as a writer and as a painter.

Yuri Andrukhovych is one of Ukraine's best-known authors. He was born in 1976. His most recent work is entitled *Taiemnytsia* (The Secret, 2007). The poem "India" dates to 1994.

Volodymyr Drozd was born in 1939 near Chernihiv and died in 2003 in Kyiv. The stories translated in this issue date from the 1970s.

Ivan Franko is one of the most significant and prolific figures in the history of Ukrainian literature. He wrote poetry, prose, drama, and literary scholarship. He was born in Western Ukraine, then part of the Ausro-Hungarian Empire, in 1866. He died in 1916.

Vasyl Gabor was born in 1959 and lives in Lviv. He is the editor of a significant anthology of contemporary short prose entitled *Pryvatna kolektsiia* (Private Collection).

Oleh Hovda was born in 1964. He lives and writes in Lviv.

Iurii Ianovs'kyi (1902–1954) rose to prominence as a writer in the 1920s in Soviet Ukraine. "The Return" was written in the 1920s but was not published until long after the author's death.

Taras Prokhas'ko was born in 1968. Before turning to writing he studied biology at Lviv University.

Valerii Shevchuk was born in 1939 in Zhytomyr. He now lives in Kyiv. Many of his works exemplify his interest in history.

Iryna Vilde was the literary pseudonym of the Western Ukrainian writer, Daria Polotniuk, nee Makohon (1907–1982).

Oleksandr Zhovna was born in 1960 in the Kirovohrad area, where he lives and writes today.



The Shevchenko Scientific Society is an organization of scholars dedicated to the advancement of Ukrainian studies. It is the oldest Ukrainian academy of arts and sciences, and its activities have formed a mainstay of Ukrainian scholarly and cultural life for over a century. Founded in 1873 in the city of Lviv, Ukraine, it was liquidated by the Soviet regime in 1939. The Society was reestablished in Western Europe and the United States in 1947, in Canada in 1949, and in Australia in 1950. In 1989 it resumed its activity in Ukraine.

The Society's headquarters in the United States, located at 63 Fourth Avenue in New York City, include offices, lecture halls, and a specialized library and archives pertaining to Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora. Its membership of four hundred fellows and associate members is organized in six scholarly sections: Mathematics & Sciences, Medicine & Biology, Philology, History & Philosophy, Social Sciences, and the Arts. The Society's publications in these fields comprise over 160 volumes. The Shevchenko Scientific Society in the U.S.A. is proud to add *Ukrainian Literature: A Journal of Translations* to its list of publications.