

SAMSON GELKHVIDZE

**RETURN
(Storybook)**



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DEDICATED TO:
In loving memory of my mother
ETERI ALEXANDROVNA KURDADZE

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(Storybook)

“STORIES OF YOUTH”
(From the author)

The collection of stories "The Return", like the previously published "Dealers in Pain", is an integral part of one large collection of stories called "Stories of Youth", which were written by the author mainly in 1984-1998 and which were his attempt to delay, at least for one moment, for one moment, like an arrow flying time.

In the stories, an attempt is made to convey to the reader through their characters those moods and feelings that each of us could experience if they had not already experienced the same. After all, each person carries the universe in himself and, at the same time, he himself is the smallest particle of this universe.

And every person sits in every person.

It is known that in order to know humanity, it is enough to know one person, and vice versa, in order to know one person, it is necessary to know humanity.

Often there is a favorite genre - "plotless" stories, or, as I call them, stories of moods, as an attempt to bring the reader to get acquainted with those subtleties and nuances of human feelings and experiences that often border on his deeply intimate, esoteric experiences.

The plots and stories described in the stories, as well as their heroes, often represent a mixture of events and characters that we meet in the real, virtual, a priori, possible, imaginary ... and other worlds.

Some readers consider the stories autobiographical. No, this is an incorrect vision of the attempt and desire to experience all the feelings experienced by the characters as closely and clearly as possible.

But, perhaps, if we talk about the most important purpose and purpose of the author's work, this is the red thread that stretches and permeates everything - this is the attitude of people towards each other and towards God.

“Life without God is hell!”, the author believes, and tries to show in his stories what difficult and far from ordinary situations the heroes get into, who have strayed from the only true path in life - the path leading to God, which runs through the Church.

Throughout our “conscious” life, we, people, walk in painful and exhausting circles, invent a certain world for ourselves, subject ourselves to all sorts of trials and torments, invent a different “new bicycle”, then, as everything has been invented and said a long time ago. “I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12), says the Lord God.

We, people, often do not follow Him, but follow each other or even follow ourselves, on the lead of our earthly desires, feelings and passions. And, as a rule, as a result, we often go to the wrong place where our soul needs and needs for its salvation and resurrection. And when we find ourselves in a hopeless situation, then we begin to call for help from people who are often unable to help us, and sometimes do not respond to our call at all.

In many of the author's stories, there is, at least for a moment, the ringing of bells, calling, calling heroes to oneself, to the Church, to the only saving ship of the laity, which is able to lead them out of the most difficult, confusing and dangerous situations for life and health.

In our today's complex world, it is not difficult for a person to get lost and lose himself and the good beginning that was originally invested in him by God. And in such cases it is very important to return to oneself, to one's beginning, to one's origins, and this return is possible only with the help of God and the Church.

In conclusion, I note that a more experienced writer, perhaps, would have been better able to say and express what I was trying to convey.

Therefore, I hope for the indulgence of readers, who may have a lot of questions for me, of which the most important seems to be: “Why, then, in this case, I write?” “After all, it is better for a baker to bake bread.” To which I can simply answer: “I write, perhaps not so much because I know how to write, but because it makes me better!”

12. 12. 2003

BEST DIVER

Connecting body
Separates them again
But my life will be bright
As long as love lives.

N.S. Gumilyov

Nugzar slowly walked up the stairs and examined the traces of his childhood on the walls. No, he was not one of those who dirty the walls as a kid. He didn't like it then, but now he looked at things a little differently.

From the friends of his childhood in the city in which they all grew up, almost no one remained. Friends were in good health, but moved to live in other cities.

- Throughout life, a person reaches a certain mark, after which he takes a sharp turn and starts all over again, - with such thoughts, he approached the mailbox with number twenty-six. Deftly he put his fingers in the top slot, took out a poor mail, bent down and peered into the holes at the bottom of the box.

Reluctantly, he pulled out a bunch of keys from his pocket, pulled out two more envelopes from the drawer. I thought: "Isn't it too rich?" and, without reading the addresses of the senders, continued his way upstairs. "What drives these restless, restless people?" - thought on the go.

In the room I threw all the mail on the table and moved to the bathroom - to take a shower.

shower came

I like him.

In a half-open dressing gown, with a large linen towel, disheveled, he appeared before him in a tall mirror.

Having drunk from a glass of yogurt, he brought his face closer to the mirror - his cheeks and nose were covered with wrinkles. For the first time I noticed gray hair on my half-bald head and felt a pang in my heart.

Dejected, he sighed and stepped away from the mirror.

He settled himself comfortably in the rocking chair, began to parse the mail.

- "Dynamo" started to lose already on their field and not so famous teams, - I thought not without sadness, remembering the last time I was at the stadium.

Previously, he usually had a subscription for every season, at home the walls were full of tables fixing the course of the championship. In a word, football lived in it. And is it just football?

Quickly running through the headlines of the newspapers, Nugzar got to the correspondence.

He already forgot when he received so many letters.

I immediately recognized the first letter, it was sent by him to the grandmother of a friend. He himself was surprised that he was more attentive to her than to the most familiar. I could not remember the reasons, I forgot how it started, but I corresponded with her for exactly twelve years, and regularly. And a friend caught a trace.

- Life has swallowed, - suggested Nugzar.

The address on the envelope was crossed out with a cross, and on the back of the envelope was written: "The addressee died last year."

My heart sank a second time, and much stronger.

- Well, now, Nugzar, you lost another friend, - flashed through my head.

Grandmother was already aged, but Nugzar did not separate his friends by age categories.

The second letter was from the Union of Hunters.

- Finally remembered - he thought - casually tearing off the edge of the envelope. It contained a reminder of the payment of membership dues.

- What a disgrace not to pay for four years! - Nugzar was annoyed with himself. - It will be necessary to hand over a gun to Soyuzokhot and generally close the whole shop, - the whims of youth have come to an end.

Nugzar became a hunter because of a puppy that was given to him in the village, a brown Scottish setter named Lady. The dog was his good friend. They had experienced a lot in the short life of the Lady. Nugzar had never seen a smarter and more sensitive dog in his life.

He was offered several times other puppies, but he completely refused. I could not forget the dying look, the look with a plea for help.

- Powerful poison! The fact that she is still alive is due to a partial burp. This is the end, Nugzar, I can't do anything, she has only half an hour left, - were the words of the veterinarian.

Nugzar looked at the Lady for the last time.

A lump rose in my throat.

A tear rolled down her cheek.

The dog trembled with a chill and occasionally wagged its tail weakly. Nugzar did not take her back, he said goodbye to her alive and did not want to see her again...

Through the open, uncurtained windows, giant poplars swaying in the wind were visible. The rustle of leaves whispered to Nugzar, who came up to the window, about what had and had not happened during his absence.

“I am very tired and unable to do anything,” he silently complained to his friends, looking at their still very tender, green leaves.

He took a deep breath.

- Oh spring, you are charmingly beautiful, your aroma excites the soul, I feel good with you. But soon you will leave me too. Only I alone do not leave anyone, - thought Nugzar, and then a slight fright crept into his soul.

He returned to the room at the ringing of the phone. He heard the familiar and pleasant voice of a friend.

- Hello, old man, how are you?

- Thank you, Temo, little by little.

- I felt like you were coming today, how did you do it?

- Yes, he escaped, missed his wife and son.

- Such, brother, is family life - it shakes you, regardless of time or kilometers.

- I remember, like I did not complain to you about her.

- What are you, I'm just joking, myself - like a top ... Are you for a long time? I'm flying back tomorrow morning.

- Yes, not enough, but this time is enough for me.

- What's happened?

“Your help is desperately needed,” Temo changed his tone. - Understand, I'm very embarrassed in front of you, but without you, things are rubbish ...

- Explain plainly what happened to you.

- Well, OK! Could you come to our base?

- Right now?

- Yes, I'll explain everything there, now there's no time!

- But, - Nugzar hesitated, thinking for a few seconds. - Well, well, - he agreed, knowing that Temo would not bother a person without extremes.

He once again walked around all the rooms in the house. A certain feeling from any meeting with them did not leave him in childhood and became more and more aggravated with age.

- Thank God, at least there is someone to clean the house, - he thought, and a warm wave swept through his heart.

What to do with a tile that has flown off almost everywhere? The kitchen, my God, what it looks like! Wallpaper, yellowed and half-torn in places, hung from the walls.

- When and to whom to repair all this ?!

- Oh, parents! We, children, cannot even imagine what kind of burden you carry on you all your life.

In the bedroom, his wife and son looked at him from a photograph. He himself took them off last summer at sea, when they came to visit him, to find out how he works and lives without them.

Although Nugzar considered himself a strong man, he was familiar with feelings that were not easy to resist, and some of sometimes they even managed to draw more than one pair of tears from the depths of his stern eyes.

Standing in front of the closet with the doors open, he thought for a moment, looking over his clothes.

There was a loud, impatient bell in the hallway.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," a woman's voice answered.

"Here, take it, please," the woman who came in asked, releasing part of the nets with food from her hands.

- Fu-u, - she drawled, - I thought they would fall off.

- Hello, granny, - the little one, about five or six years old, happily greeted her, the grandson, naturally, who considered himself already big.

- And my mother bought me a machine gun, tr-tr-tr, - he crackled with a toy weapon.

- Wow, you, what a fine fellow, come to me, grandmother will kiss you.

The grandson did not disdain the caress of his grandmother and always responded to her with joy.

- Where have you been for so long, Rusudan, I have already begun to worry.

- It's a day off, mom, the market is so full of people that you can't get through, Kahi almost lost on the way.

- Why so strain when you can ask your father and he will give you a lift in a car.

- Oh, you know him, - he always has no time!

He won't refuse you this. Well, okay, now quickly wash your hands and eat.

- What's your wanderer, didn't come and didn't call? - Mother asked Rusudan at the table.

- I don't know, mom, I don't know anything.

- What do you know? When it was still not too late, I warned you about everything.

- My Nugzar - he is so sensitive, attentive ...

- Now what? Whom she began to resemble, she lost weight all over.

- Mom, I'll go to the yard, can I? - asked Kahi.

Rusudan smiled back at him:

- Yes, but only for a short time!

“As long as he listens,” she thought.

- Do you even love him, Rusudan, now?

- I do not know. Though yes, probably.

- And he you?

- He says yes.

- This is not love, on the road.

- We will never lose each other's love, - Rusudan smiled.

- He will not have time to settle in with Kakha, as he is again on a business trip. Sometimes it seems to me that it is better this way, a person always strives for what he does not have. And he doesn't have us. God, what nonsense I'm talking!

- And what does this job give him ?!

- Everyone except us. Although, maybe, us too... Scuba diving and the sea are his selfless love since childhood, and he never parted with his beloved for a long time.

- It seems to me that he taught you to his absences too?

- What are you, mom, you can't accustom yourself to this. I get very tired from work, but I often remember him. When I get tired, a new business appears from this. This is how Kahi and I live in anticipation of him.

- Previously, I remember, he traveled very rarely, but now he frequented.

- There is a great demand for good specialists everywhere. Now he is collecting materials for environmentalists. Underwater life is interesting, of course. You know, one day he took me with him.

- What are you saying?! This was not enough for him to drown you there!

- Hmm, - laughed Rusudan. - Move there and live, at least for a while, as an amphibious man. It would be great!

- It's time for a thirty-year-old woman to say goodbye to her sentimentality. Live where your mother gave birth to you.

- Mom, don't remind me of my age, please.

- Does not matter! It can't go on like this anymore.

- What do you suggest?

- Get divorced. What is he like to you. I lost all my youth for him. A young wife needs a husband, let him decide what is more important to him. It can't be like that! The last time he showed up for a few hours, only upset us and went back. Wow numbers?! In the end, he can find some work for himself here. How many fans did you have

one is better than the other. And what did you find in it? He's so many years older than you!

Rusudan listened in silence and remembered her husband's eyes when he proposed to her. She then felt herself standing over a certain abyss. I caught such a prayer in them ...

"If I hadn't married him, he would definitely have died," she said in a low voice.

- Wow, I would have died, - muttered my mother sarcastically. - This is the crown number of men, I already know them.

Previously, Rusudan would have thrown a tantrum after such words, but now she just smiled.

- What are you, mom! Okay, let's leave this conversation, please...

- You know better, but keep in mind that we live in this world once. Both I and your father don't want to see you unhappy.

- I know!

Rusudan was silent for a minute. Mom continued to finish her dessert, an apple, while sighing as if someone was forcibly stuffing her with it.

- I'll go and look at Kahi! - Rusudan went through the room to the loggia.

In the room, she locked herself with a key and gave vent to her feelings. Hardly restrained tears gushed forth.

"Lord, why am I in such pain, because I love him, I love him," she pleaded, falling face down on the bed. She buried her face in the pillow and sobbed for a long time until she completely burst into tears.

From the parking lot next to the cafe, there was a view of the sea surface. There were more cars than usual.

Going down the paved road to the rescue station where Temo worked, Nugzar glanced at the shed nearby, it was crowded under it.

Nugzar paused. I noticed a car on a ferry, not far from the coast, and people scurrying around near it. My heart skipped a beat for the third time that day. You have to be a novice at sea not to guess what's going on. He was incomprehensible only to his own important role in this matter. He suddenly became agitated and quickly walked towards the station.

He noticed Temo, who had already come out to meet him.

They greeted the hand.

- Who? - Nugzar asked, barely catching his breath.

- Guy, twenty-four years.

Like a stone fell on the heart of Nugzar.

He took a deep breath and wiped the cold sweat off his forehead.

- Well, you arranged the number for me, my friend!

Forgive me, I couldn't help it. Look, these are the relatives and friends of the deceased.

They walked slowly towards the station.

Temo was still apologizing to his friend.

Passing by the audience, Nugzar heard behind him:

- This is the best diver, Nugzar Chedia, I recognized him!

- Brought, finally!

What have you been waiting for so far?

Nugzar already knew what Temo had to ask him.

- How did it happen? asked Nugzar.

- Looks like a heart. We don't know yet! He was with a girl, he probably wanted to show himself. She claims that he could swim. They were going to play a wedding the other day, - Temo added.

Nugzar asked the following questions already from the observation post.

- How many days already?

"Three," Temo replied, hesitating.

- What did they do?

- All that was in my power: divers, cords, now here he is, - Temo pointed towards the sea.

"Why the hell don't your people keep an eye on the boats before the tragedy happens!?"

- You can't keep track of everything and everyone, you know, - Temo drooped.

The living are always sinful and guilty before the dead.

Nugzar noticed in the corner of the room a sign brought from the beach with the inscription "No sacrifice to the sea". Temo noticed his friend's gaze. He became even more embarrassed. Both were silent.

- The place that the girl pointed to, we surrounded with buoys. They combed the whole area, even more, as if through the ground, - Temo continued to explain.

- Parents cry, do not let up, at least they want to get a corpse, some strange ones. They promise to stand up for nothing.

- A person is more loved and respected when he dies. But don't die for this, damn it! However, they do not interest me, I am interested in you.

- We need to finish this business! - There was not a blood in Temo's face.

- Do you know the weather report of that day?

- Yes.

- What are you thinking of doing?

- I no longer hope for these, I want to try it myself. Nugzar, you know me well, I'm not a coward, but now the conversation is not about me. No one here knows these places better than you - help me out!

Nugzar sighed heavily.

- I'll take you past the funnels, but where the undercurrent is, - Temo thought, peering at his comrade.

Nugzar remembered his childhood, when he and Temo were diving in simple masks with a snorkel and fins, armed first with spear guns, and later with underwater cameras.

But since then, much has changed both in their lives and in the life of the sea. The sea became different, and Nugzar knew about it. He also knew that the new sea of Temo was more familiar than he was, but he could not refuse a friend.

- Well, you got into history, buddy! - muttered Nugzar, not interrupting his thoughts about the matter.

Soon the boat, loaded with the necessary supplies for the work, set sail from the shore ...

There was a particularly sharp phone call. The woman's heart seemed to fall from a height.

"He's the one," she thought in her head. She jumped out of her chair in front of the switched on TV and rushed to the bell. On the way, she slipped on the carefully varnished floor and fell face-first onto her knees.

Luckily, I managed to put my hands up.

- Mom, phone, long-distance! - I managed to say.

The mother picked up the phone, heard a male voice and immediately saw her daughter rising from the floor.

She wanted to put down the phone and rush to help, but her daughter shook her head to the side, as a sign of refusing help. A few seconds later, she picked up the phone.

The conversation didn't last long. Rusudan answered only occasionally, dryly, in separate words: okay, I understand...

A pretty young telephone operator smiled sweetly at the customers as she sent them to their respective booths.

- What's wrong with you, Nino? the woman asked her employee.

- No, nothing, - the young telephone operator answered with amazement, - it's just that the man who has just left behaved very strangely. I called the city on long-distance, and then left the cab and stared at me like a ram at a new gate.

- Ha-ha, - the employee laughed, - it is clear that he really liked you.

- No, I think there was a more serious matter here.

Nugzar almost did not feel the pitching, only a heavy head and a dull hum of engines chained him to the chair.

- And what? What happened? he asked puzzled.

- You are already better, - was heard in response, while he could hardly distinguish the silhouette of a stewardess, - here, drink this, - a hand with a cup stretched out to him.

- What is it?

- Mineral.

- Thank you, - thanked Nugzar.

The stewardess put her hand to Nugzar's forehead and, smiling, retired deep into the cabin.

- What did she need? - Nugzar asked a neighbor.

- You were delirious, in my opinion, young man, and demanded to stop the flight. What was left for me to do, - the old woman sitting next to him justified herself indignantly and excitedly.

- Ah, - said Nugzar, apparently starting to come to his senses. - Well, of course, of course, you did the right thing, thank you!

The old woman is nearby, not hiding obvious indignation deniya, still shaking her head and staring at the porthole. Nugzar drank from a cup of mineral water and sank into thought.

The flight of the air liner was coming to an end.

- Should I even come this time? thought Nugzar. - For what purpose did you come and why am I going back? Hmm, how does this folk proverb say: a fool went to the city, what did he carry there, and what - back?

He had several hours to see his family, but he did not use them. He flattered himself with hope: he would finish the remaining couple of months, and then he would quit his "long-distance" work and return home forever. I couldn't imagine my life without her though. Or family, or favorite work - today life offered him such a choice. But today he could not give up either one or the other.

He tried to delay the solution of the issue in time, hoping that problems that a person cannot solve can sometimes be solved by time.

- And poor Temo did not help anything. And why am I so unlucky! - Nugzar was annoyed. - All your life you are spinning, spinning, but you really don't have time to do anything.

Where Nugzar was heading now, good news awaited him. For painstaking work and interesting finds, he was presented with an award. But will he now be pleased with what he used to live and what once pleased him? He felt his sadness

and his joy grow old with him. But to start life anew, at the age of forty, it also did not seem possible and prudent to him.

“Hmm,” he thought, “how does that proverb say: you chase two hares, you don’t catch ... either one or both?” What the hell, I forgot again!

The liner hovered freely over the luxurious motley glades. On one of them, Nugzar noticed horses running in different directions, which, apparently, were running away from the roar of aircraft engines overtaking them.

Blood flowed from the bruised knee of a young girl, a tear rolled from the eye of one of the passengers, and dewdrops streamed down the window of the plane. The girl's parents were indignant, the pilots operating the liner were worried about the flight, the air liner carried passengers with their problems and sins.

Which one was the hardest now?

The liner unexpectedly dived sharply down, so much so that the passengers took their breath away, and immediately corrected the roll of the flight.

- Who is the best diver! - decided one of the passengers, who was already thinking about taking this maneuver into service at his work, which began already from the very early morning.

In general, Nugzar considered the best divers to be the dives that they, together with Temo, hunted on boats in their youth. For all the time of the hunt, they did not manage to shoot a single one. Hunting rifles did not reach them, and diving did not let them within range of a shot.

Convinced of the futility of their undertaking, they decided to learn from them the highest degree of professionalism - diving.

When the dives disappeared under water, one of them remained on the boat, and the other dived after them in a mask with a snorkel and fins, and there, under water, watched their swimming.

Having dived, the birds descended like a stone vertically deep down, then slightly surfaced and, straightening the list of swimming with the help of their beak, freely soared in the water space, conquering kilometers of the underwater kingdom for a long period of time.

Then they surfaced for a short time on the surface of the water far, far from the place where they dived, and again repeated everything several times a day.

Nugzar now had to do the same. He dived into his work and only occasionally surfaced to see his family and then dived again.

The best divers are the best because they can stay underwater for a long time, which gives them enough food, joys and pleasure in life.

People often dive into life, like diving into water, remaining for a long time under its deep layers and at the same time rarely emerge to see the Sun - the Source of Light and Heat - and take a breath of life-giving fresh air.

And to emerge to the surface, although not for long, it is salutary necessary for both of them, because they are alive not only by food alone.

9.09.1984

RETURN

What we have lost
what a harmful oversight we commit, so
that Christian power is moving away from us,
all living creatures leave us, and we, as
coffins painted like an empty shell,
worm-eaten from the inside?

/Archimandrite Lazarus (Abashidze)/

Hoping to quell his spiritual crisis, Otar decided to visit a former classmate. Much to my surprise, I found him at home.

- This can happen only once a year! - he frankly remarked, in response to which it was heard:

- When you come in once a year, of course, yes, Otar!

- Don't tell me! You completely forgot my address!

Although it was very pleasant for Otaru to talk with a friend, to turn over the pages of the past that had connected them so closely, four hours of conversation still did not bring him the desired relief.

He had not experienced such a state for a long time. I could not but notice with alarm that over time it loses its taste for the surroundings, that all colors mix into one, unloved color, which seemed to have froze for a long time, hiding and looking at the surroundings in anticipation of something unusual, as if anticipating that life is preparing some - some changes.

"When you lose one, you find another," he thought with the hope to which he now owed his life.

- But Adam did not feel completely satisfied even when he was full, and then he met Eve, because of whom he subsequently lost paradise - thoughts relentlessly climbed and caused irritation.

After what he had suffered from his "beauty", he was wary of women. He considered them as abysses that should be bypassed in order to reach some mysterious and still unknown to him lofty goal.

- A meeting that does not fully satisfy the thirst for spiritual communication does not justify itself. It even prevents people similar in character from maintaining contacts, Otar believed, summing up the conversation with a friend.

Even on the escalator running down, Otar noticed an elderly man, about seventy years old, who later asked to show him the way to the desired station. The old man remained Otar's companion for only two stations.

Otar did not remember how he talked to him, but he remembered his words.

- I went to the doctor, they pumped out three liters of fluid, but they still insist on an operation.

- Since they insist, maybe - it is necessary? - Otar asked with pity.

- What is there, they did it to two of our yard, and not one of them could stand it.

- What if it gets worse?

- How much worse! The wife also warned, said, do not agree. And now she's dead.

- Well, do you even have children? - asked Otar.

- There are children, God bless them. Only they are not up to us - there is no time, because they have their own families, their own worries. I don't really tell them anything.

The old man was talking to Otar reluctantly. It was immediately obvious that he was ill. I trembled slightly.

- Can I take you out?

- Don't, son, I'm on my own!

Otar had seen the sick before, but the old man puzzled him.

Where and how is he now?

His eyes - large and tormented - were remembered and haunted.

It was time to return home, in the morning a new working day was waiting for him, but he was in no hurry. I knew that habitual insomnia and a bunch of medicines for it awaited at home.

- Better to admire the moon - he thought, walking along the main avenue. But the moon was not visible that evening.

He phlegmatically walked past posters, shop windows, occasionally peered into brightly blinking colored advertising inscriptions from fluorescent lamps. I dreamed that the day would never end. But traffic along the avenue subsided.

Passing by telephone booths, Otar could not resist. He found coins, dialed a familiar number.

The first coin went to the machine for free, and the second connected it with a rough male voice.

- Who do you want?

- I'll give Irina, if possible, - Otar hesitated.

- And who asks her?

- And who are you, in fact, forgive? - Otar added after a pause.

“Listen, no gentleman would dare call a lady at this hour.

- Give the phone, - Irina's cheerful voice was heard in the receiver.

Hello, who is asking?

Otar stepped back a little, hearing a familiar voice.

Hello, Ira...

- Hello! - not long in coming surprised female voice.

- How are you doing?

- Good. And who asks? - still surprised asked Ira.

- You will not know?

- Sergey - no. Nico, hello! Where are you from?

- No, it's not Niko, I'm Shaliko, - Otar answered with annoyance.

- Shaliko? - Ira was amazed. - I don't know this.

Ira hung up. Otar did the same, but a little later, while smiling ironically.

He was not offended, although he was annoyed that the conversation did not work out.

- When you do not appear on the stage for a long time, they begin to forget you, - thought Otar.

All life you need to play something and something. Otherwise, you are nobody. For others, of course. So the actors lose their roles.

Even old friends forget you.

I wonder who this man was? Has she got married? If yes, then today I probably made her porridge.

To marry or get married is to get lost, then why is divorce not to appear? It seems that here is an irreversible process. If A is equal to B, then this does not mean that B will always be equal to A. Maybe everything also depends on C?

As a child, Otar was most afraid of the dark, but now he realized that in There are worse things in life. He murmured to himself a somehow folded quatrain:

Don't live without hope

And don't lie to yourself

Loneliness is ours

Worse than death and darkness.

And he immediately consoled himself with the words of Omar Khayyam.

- Hmm ... better alone than with just anyone. It's not like you sometimes look at a person, it seems that outwardly it leaves a normal impression, but you open your mouth, even if you run for three to nine lands. No, perhaps Omar Khayyam is right about this.

- Yes, breaking away from people, it's not so easy to get used to them again
... It's hard both with them and without them.

“The golden mean,” an inner voice answered him.

“I know,” he agreed, and immediately added another quatrain:

Golden mean,

Who can tell where she is

If here this very second,

And in another - somewhere there.

- But if people, even the closest and dearest, sooner or later leave each other, then a person cannot remain completely alone, without some kind of higher supervision?

Thinking as he walked, he silently continued on his way.

- In such a big city and - no one! Was it harder for Robinson? One thing is clear - it's not easier, - concluded Otar with a smile.

Who starts early, ends early, and there's nothing to be done about it. It seemed to him now that he was living as if he had never lived before.

Where did all the old go, all the past, where?

Before time, nothing can resist - not even time itself, especially neither strength nor love. Perhaps this is the cause of all misfortunes and hardships? The point is that this concept helps people to live, and not vice versa, as is often the case. I would put them before the abyss, with the condition of obligatory advancement, even when the wings of a person turn out to be clipped long ago.

In this case, any other road but forward is doom.

As in that fairy tale: you go to the left - you will pierce your heart through, to the right - you will lay down your head, straight ahead - there is no road at all, behind - death flies like an arrow, and heaven does not allow you to fall through the earth.

Stand and wait? Funny: why? Or maybe just evaporate? But how?!

Okay, just in case, let's say goodbye to someone and something, so that the fruits of ignobleness do not hang over us later in a heavy cloud.

Thoughts prevented Otar from noticing the young couple walking towards them.

- Hello, Otar! Thank God, at least we met on the street.

- Tengiz? Otar was surprised.

- Well, of course! Where did you disappear to? How did you fall through the ground? You don't visit anyone, as if no one works except you.

- What about yourself? thought Otar, but said nothing.

- Meet my wife. Were with her in the theater.

- Vika, - the companion nodded her head.
- Very nice! Otar! - He delicately responded and inquired:
- What theater did you go to?
- In "Contemporary".
- Where is it?
- And here, not far, below the main square, remember, the church was there.

They repaired it, arranged an excellent hall, in general, it turned out great!

- And he didn't come to my wedding! - Tengiz suddenly changed the topic of conversation. - True, it was not, as such, but the guys still came. Otar, what's wrong with you?

- Oh, nothing special.

- Listen, brother, live simpler, here's my advice to you. Take an example from others. Learn to live, because once it falls to us, in the end. Everyone works, as they say, they don't get killed for their salary, they drink, go for walks, have fun with their girlfriends, with friends. Well, what are you, "unfortunate"? Did something go wrong?

- No, nothing, - Otar changed his tone, - just a temporary eclipse. I am looking for a way out of life's problems and answers to them.

- So, it means that you solve the next questions posed by life? Tengiz smiled.

- May be.

- Well, okay, God is with you! Resolve quickly and come back to us. We miss you very much. Promise?

- Will try.

- Well, happy to you, sorry, we are in a hurry. Yes, do you remember Andrei Ebralidze?

- Of course, - remembering, answered Otar with fear.

- The boyfriend is gone, - Tengiz added sadly.

- Why? ^ - Otar asked almost indifferently.

- Peritonitis. Well, okay, everything!

- Total ... - muttered Otar, seeing off the departing couple with a look.

- Andrey, Andrey, forgive the friend who left you!

Otar muttered these words almost without pain, almost indifferently, and from the realization of this he became even more gloomy.

Truly: all the blessings of this world are only the consolation of mortals.

- There was a time, we were friends, - Otar recalled. But then the paths diverged, as often happens in life. Nothing can be done, each person has his own way in life.

Among his negative qualities, Otar attributed, along with others, the fact that he never returned to where he was happy. Sometimes he was afraid of himself - when earthly happiness seemed not enough ...

Those were already meaningless for him spiritual boundaries, which he was most afraid of, even though from the point of view of life strategy they seemed very convenient. For this he often scolded himself, but he could not help himself.

He could not, without any regret, not notice in himself the fact that lately he had lost interest in anything. So many things around, but still - emptiness.

The oppressive emptiness ruthlessly drove him to clarify himself, to determine his place in life. And frightened him, and filled with hope. Like the wind, it blew in his back, as if about into the sails and whispered: go, go ahead, boldly, until you find your way! Of course, I had to do something, but there was neither enthusiasm nor interest in what was being done. Rather, the feeling of dissatisfaction intensified, and he reproached himself for trying to violate his old principle: "Do not look for a way out of a hopeless situation."

Only now did he remember the once-familiar feeling that he experienced as a teenager, when his parents left him alone - in a rest home, outside the city, in a pioneer camp. It was fun and good there, but the enigmatic, mysterious sadness, the name of which he had searched in vain all his life, still cruelly oppressed him. He could not stand such a "severe" test, and begged his relatives to take him back.

And now all the people around him are like people, and among them he is like a white crow. It seems like it's not of this world. The search for secrets that had not yet been revealed to him, which were to be comprehended, tormented and tormented him. He felt like he was about to be reborn.

- The fruits of a bad upbringing?! If there is one, then only the fault of the educator himself. The child must learn to think for himself, he himself must distinguish the bad from the good, he thought, recalling the past.

Why is there so much melancholy in a person? It accumulates in him a destructive bile, without which he cannot live and which at the same time oppresses him so unceremoniously and ruthlessly.

How many secrets hide in themselves the depths of the human personality, not visible from the outside!

It turns out that in order to destroy a person, it is not at all necessary to cut off his wings, cut off his limbs, tongue, plug his ears, mouth, gouge out his eyes ... It is enough to tear him away from his roots, sources.

"If we are aliens from heaven, then perhaps separation from our true homeland is the reason for our worries," he suddenly thought.

Simple as that!

But what if the reason for all this is time?! It is ruthless to all life on earth. Recently, it seems to him that the speed of its flow has almost doubled in him.

“Twice, if not more,” repeated Otar.

It was like sunset during sunrise.

Otar looked at the cloudy night sky:

- So, you gave me life on loan, took pity on me, as once on Lilian Remarque? Well, I'll just say thank you out of tact. You endowed me with reason, not only so that I could think, but also, probably, so that my thoughts would lead me to the discovery of something most important and important in my life?

You don't have to answer, any answer of yours will not alleviate my fate.

Life, shortened by half ... Is it doubly beautiful? Would life on earth, shortened by half, three times, make people nobler and more beautiful? Or would it ruin them doubly, triply? Would this make a person think faster, move faster and reach his goal earlier? What is the point in the consciousness and in the mental gift of a person, if they do not lead him to the goal - to the truth. The truth... I feel it, but I don't see it.

I'm only twenty-six. God, how do people live to seventy, eighty, and still manage not to go crazy? Although they partially succeed.

He no longer wanted to think, but thoughts stubbornly overcame him. I did not want to look, but stubborn eyes saw almost everything around and remembered. He did not want to go home, but something pushed him forward. Finally, resisting himself, he tried to brush it off, but his hands would not obey him... In the early morning, with the first chirping of birds and the rattle of trams leaving the park, Otar was returning home.

A sprinkler and a garbage truck drove past him.

The long-forgotten breath of fresh dew from the lawns and the first rays of the coming morning instilled in him cheerfulness and a tiny hope for the day ahead. Even the sun managed, overcoming the thickness of thick heavy clouds, to look out of prison for a few minutes in order to warm the awakened faith of a person.

All in time, but where is it?

“Maybe, to rely on time and attribute all the troubles to it is as reckless and absurd as to completely forget about it?” Otar flashed. - So, the whole point is in a person and in how he relates to everything that happens?

So there is hope, at least some, for the future, even though it is invisible and hidden?

He passed by the bathhouse, the doors of which welcomed and escorted visitors. Flocks of pigeons crowded on its roof, flocking for long respite between long-distance flights.

- Hmm, they say that there used to be a beautiful church here, and now - on you ...

Two fishermen overtook and easily overtook Otar, talking impatiently and cheerfully about something among themselves.

Otar has never seen happier faces.

“Naive,” he thought, “crazy, in this weather, but happy,” he added with good envy.

Now he really wanted to sleep.

As he approached his house, he noticed a light in his window.

- What is it, left it on or do I have guests?

Inserting the key into the keyhole, before opening the door, he thought for a minute:

- I already ran away from self-deception once, and I will never return to it.

14.09. 1988

SPA CASES

People are like rivers...
Everything in the human soul
It flows, everything changes.

old wisdom

The big hand of the clock jumped past twelve.

- It's time, - was heard in the hall.

The double doors swung open, and people, almost in an organized manner, headed into the hall. They passed through the rows of tables, like mushrooms, scattered across the "clearing" with a roof held up by massive columns, like centuries-old oak trunks.

Everyone went to their table.

Young girls-waitresses had been scurrying about in the kitchen for a long time, laying dishes and decorating, like a Christmas tree with toys, their two-story mobile carriages.

This is how they started every day. Their everyday enthusiasm could only be envied, and, perhaps, the only reward for them was a "thank you" from the table. But sometimes it happened in a different way: the duty officer had to sort out the statements of the vacationers. These girls in white aprons also came across comments.

They handled the kitchen utensils like jugglers in a circus, going from "please serve this" on one table to "please bring it to me" on the other.

But, alas, no one saw or noticed this on this ordinary working day as clearly as Maria Mikhailovna, the attendant in the hall. And who cares before that, everyone had their own plans for the day and their worries.

- Well done, my girls! - Maria Mikhailovna thought with joy, looking at how they managed.

Some leave, they are replaced by others, and so every day, and the work of the girls is more fun.

Whatever you say, the accordion still inspires. We work in anticipation of the end of the shift, when the harmonist and singing teacher arrive, and then we pour out our souls, - Maria Mikhailovna looked through the visitor's log.

- Table six - two, seven - three... eleven - four. Many have left, but others will soon arrive. Nothing can be done, everyone celebrates the New Year according to their abilities, and not everyone is equally happy about its approach.

Before New Year's Eve, the tables really thinned out, but this made it no less work.

Everyone was seated and settled down. Maria Mikhailovna walked around the vacationers, asked about their health, about how they live with them.

- How are my girls? - smiling, she asked, pausing briefly near the sixth table.
- How do you relax? Any comments about the menu?

"Everything is wonderful with you, Maria Mikhailovna, thank you very much for your attention," Nadezhda Nikolaevna and Klavdia Petrovna answered with courtesy in return.

Well, besides the exchange of pleasantries, they had something to share with each other. And advice, and practical suggestions, and even secrets. Women, even strangers, always find something to talk about, and sometimes they do it with such zeal that it is difficult to determine the statute of limitations for their acquaintance.

Beauty and a craving for communication, even if it is banal, is something that the whole history of human existence on earth could not take away from them.

- Klava, who are these delicate people? - Nadezhda turned to her friend sitting next to her, pointing to her neighbors at table seven.

- Husband and wife, - answered Claudia, - the husband is an artist, and she, it seems, works in the press.

- Do you know them?

- In principle, no, so, I heard about them in the lobby.

- Hmm, about whom they just don't talk about. Probably about you and me, Klava?

- Maybe. Oh, yes, let them chat, whatever, I'm neither cold nor hot from this. Nadezhda reached for a bottle of sunflower oil.

- Sunflower is the best choleric agent, Klava. Do you know this?

Claudia was silent. Biting off pieces of bread, she looked around the hall.

- Do you really think to meet him here? - inquired Nadezhda, pouring oil into a salad of beets, carrots and cabbage with potatoes.

- Not excluded.

- In my opinion, he should still be in the hall nearby.

"Maybe," Claudia sighed.

- Eat, Klava, eat, why do you eat only bread? Your figure is not bad, but so much bread ...

- I don't want something porridge, I'll wait for the second one. In vain we ate too much fat yesterday, Nadezhda.

- Nothing, at the dance with him you will settle everything.

- No, the liver is whining.

- Well, drink while at least warm tea. Maybe bring a rosehip?

^- No, don't, it will pass!

A rhythmic and quiet noise could be heard in the hall: the tapping of chairs on the floor, the sounds of falling knives and forks, and some incomprehensible words from neighboring tables.

- Actually, they look like very intelligent and interesting people ...

"Who are you talking about?" Claudia asked.

"About the neighbors," Nadezhda once again pointed to table number seven.

"Ah," Claudia drawled.

- How old will they be, I wonder?

- They are probably ten years older than us, it is possible that they are a little more - that way, over sixty ...

- You know, they always come very early and solve more and more crossword puzzles almost every time. Moreover, it is clear that the husband does this reluctantly, and the wife continually pesters him with her questions, to which she does not always receive satisfactory answers. On his face there is always an amazing calmness and mysterious phlegmatism.

- He lives only thanks to her. It is evident that he has already given up on his life for a long time. People said that she snatched him from the clutches of death. Here and now she persuaded him to come to Minvody. This is love, right, Hope?

"Love is devoted, which is adjacent to beautiful and businesslike love," Nadezhda sighed.

- And what kind of love did you have, Claudia?

- Oh, yes, what kind of love is there when a husband gets drunk and swings his fists. No wonder I divorced him. Better a terrible end than horror without end.

- Well, at least she was at the beginning?

- It was, since we have Alena. Poor thing, and she and her husband were not lucky, - added Claudia after a short pause.

- Do not be upset, Klava, men are all the same, except perhaps some ... But can you understand right away ?.

- And how did your life turn out in this regard?

Claudia managed to notice how a tear from her friend's cheek landed right into a glass of tea.

She put her hand on Hope's sleeve.

- Hope, what are you? I'm sorry if I offended you, I didn't mean to.

"Nothing," Nadezhda said in a barely audible voice, looking for a handkerchief in her purse.

People came out of the dining room through a narrow door in a long stream, dispersed in different directions.

Two men in blue tracksuits, with opaque cellophane bags in their hands, stood to the side of the exit, looking at the exiting crowd with curiosity.

- Good morning, Klava, - a tall, thin man in a tracksuit called.

- Oh, Gena, hello! - Claudia happily responded, quickly approaching those waiting.

- This is my friend, Slava, meet me!

- Very nice, - Claudia greeted the stranger by the hand.

“Me too,” Vyacheslav replied with a restrained smile.

- Hope will not come to us? - asked Gennady.

- How, - called Claudia to her friend.

- Well, everything is fine, now we are all familiar, - Gena remarked not without joy.

“Where did you disappear to yesterday?” Klava asked importunately.

- Klavochka, please don't judge me, PE. Tell me what are you doing today?

- What, again something sensible? - asked Klava.

- Yeah, cultural and entertainment program. Today at seven in the House of Culture dancing. We would be very happy to see you there.

Claudia looked at her friend. Hope shook her head slightly.

- Yes, nothing will work out today, unfortunately, - Claudia explained.

- Well, why, Klavochka?

- PE.

- And tomorrow? - Gena asked after the departing interlocutors.

"We'll wait and see," Klava promised.

- Well, wait, let's talk a little.

- Once, we are late for the procedures.

- These are wonderful, they will not forgive a single mistake, they will certainly answer the same, - Gena was upset.

- All right, Slava, let's go.

- Wow, cavaliers, - Claudia complained to Nadezhda, - they would be glad to see. Why can't they invite a couple of rubles as a human being?

Nadezhda was silent all the way until they parted, only listening to her friend's stories about her new acquaintances.

In the evening, the foyer of the health resort was relatively quiet, but crowded.

Some watched TV, others played dominoes, chess, and some rested at home, although there were very few of the latter.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna was sitting on her made bed and, under the light of the table-topper, from time to time leafed through the pages of a tattered book wrapped in newspaper.

Suddenly she heard a familiar voice, then laughter. The laughter went on for a long time, several minutes with short breaks.

- Hmm, wow sick, - Nadezhda continued to read the book.

There was a knock, then the creak of the door opening, and the same familiar cheerful voice.

“Come in, guys, let’s sit for a while,” Claudia invited the guests.

Nadezhda managed to put down her book and get up from the bed.

- Good evening, Nadezhda Nikolaevna, we were bored without you, - said Gena.

- What are you talking about? Sorry, but I could not foresee this, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna sneered.

There was a pause for a moment.

- Yes! - Gena said. - Well, okay, we'll go, Klavushka, we're really at the wrong time, goodbye.

- Goodbye, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna was not stingy to answer.

Klavdia Petrovna gazed at the slamming door for a long time.

- Sorry, Klava, if I ruined your evening.

Klavdia Petrovna put the small cups back into the cupboard.

- The guys wanted to drink a bottle of champagne with us ... just simply And you drove them away.

Hope silently sighed, burying herself in the book.

- Nadia, what does it look like, tell me, please. How are you behaving? Surely I have not read all my life that every evening you do not part with this damned book for a minute. Stand up and see how you've driven yourself.

Nadezhda tore her head from the book and looked at Claudia.

- What do you care about me? I live as I want, and it is not for you to teach me how to live.

- Ah! .. - Klava drawled. - I didn't like it. How much longer do you think you will live? Or do you hope with your sores to reach a ripe old age?

The argument gradually turned into shouting.

- Klava, stop it now.

- No, since I started, I'll finish it. Do you want to know what they say about you?

- It doesn't interest me at all.

- You still listen. They say about you that you are no longer a woman, that men, therefore, do not interest you at all.

- Shut up, bitch! cried Nadezhda and gave her friend a slap in the face.

- You're a jerk! Klava slapped her friend on the head with a pillow so that she flew almost to the opposite wall.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna turned away and began to cry. For a while there was silence.

- Oh, Nadya, - Claudia relaxed, - forgive me, please, forgive me.

Klavdia Petrovna ran up to her friend, sank to the floor, and helped her up.

Sitting on the bed, they looked into each other's tear-stained eyes, and then, embracing, sobbed together.

After weeping, they continued to sob and apologize to each other, wiping their reddened eyes.

“Where did you go alone today, fool?” Claudia finally asked.

- I called home, I talked with my son, - Nadezhda, still not calmed down, answered.

“Nadya, what do you have there, confess,” Klava advised.

There is no point in being silent now. Last year, for the umpteenth time in recent years, I put my husband in the hospital. Asthma tormented the poor fellow, and it was evident that he gradually began to fail. You know, it was not his strength that was running out, but the desire to help himself let down.

On the day I saw him for the last time in the ward, he was so cheerful, he looked relatively fresh, he was joking.

The doctors wanted to arrange a pension for him, but he refused, saying that they would not have time. He turned out to be right. On that day, it turns out, I saw him for the last time, - Nadezhda sighed, - who could have known! He escaped from the hospital and disappeared.

It's been over a year since we can't find him.

Wherever they searched, what they did not undertake, all to no avail. So much money, nerves and time squandered.

He determined his fate, but at least he thought of me and my son, - Nadezhda began to cry again. - Who am I now, a widow, not a widow? To live, not to live, and how?!

For a long time, almost all night, the friends spent together in tears and lengthy conversations. In the morning, their strength began to dry up, they were inclined to sleep.

- Enough, Nadezhda, to torment yourself and torment yourself. You loved him and did everything you could. Well, what will you change with tears? -

Nothing! Live a little for yourself. He won't be alone, don't worry. Secondly, you look, and someday it will appear.

- You think?

- Of course, anything is possible!

- No, - Nadezhda shook her head, - so much time has passed!

“Life itself will tell you what to do next,” Klava reassured her.

Days passed, and the friends gradually got used to life in the sanatorium. Although the frost in the mornings did not please, the warmth of the people warmed the souls.

- Good morning, my dears, - greeted Maria Mikhailovna, - how are you resting? So, today one of our ovens has gone bad, and we are changing the menu for you. Here you are, - she held out a double printed sheet.

“Is this the menu for the whole day?” Claudia asked.

- No, I think the masters will fix the stove by noon.

- Well, what will you order, Klava?

- What did you choose?

- Pancakes with curd.

- Then I, too, pancakes with cottage cheese.

- That's good, the order has been accepted, - Maria Mikhailovna moved away from their table. Yes, girls, I've got two more hooked on you here - a son and a mother, I think, get along.

Hope nodded her head.

- Klava, do you like pancakes with cottage cheese?

- So-so, - answered Klava.

- I'm not particularly.

- Hmm, why did you order?

- My husband loved them. I remember even at the wedding stuffed me with them. It was kind of weird at the time. He was sure that what he liked, his young wife should have liked. Although during our life together, he still managed to persuade me to pancakes. And my Vovka does not eat them.

- What is it like for you, Vovochka?

- Big already, married, but also with oddities. For some reason, he does not like everything that I buy for him. Have I become so old-fashioned, Klava?

Claudia smiled back.

- He asks: Mommy, do you like it? If I answer yes, he offers me to wear it myself.

Hope shook her head slightly, smiling.

“Looks like our new table-mates are coming,” Claudia remarked.

Hope instantly turned her gaze to them.

A young man of about thirty, of medium height, with straight hair and an elongated face, in denim trousers and a jacket, accompanied an elderly mother of about sixty.

“And he’s not at all bad-looking,” Claudia burst out in an undertone.

- Hello, - the first lady greeted, coming up to the table and pushing back her chair, - allow me?

“Hello,” the son said dryly.

The first day of dating was gloomy. Each pair was limited to talking among themselves.

But little by little, Alexei, as the young man introduced himself, and his mother, Pelageya Andreevna, found a common language with their new acquaintances, and at the table a mutually interesting and cheerful conversation sometimes began.

Pelagia set the tone, turning over the cheerful pages of her past. The admiration of the listeners was not always held equally firmly.

- Well, you give, Pelageya Andreevna? - Nadezhda rolled every now and then.

“Do you remember, Klava, we were worried, we thought it was bad luck,” Nadezhda turned to her friend.

Perhaps, of all four, Alexei experienced the greatest inconvenience, whose understanding was inaccessible to many details in the conversation of women. In addition, he had heard the stories of his mother more than once. But he could not fail to notice that in the new arrangement their originality doubled. Perhaps she overdid something.

Grateful listeners did not remain gu. Officially declaring Alexei their man, they shared with Pelageya the secrets of life at the resort. They learned from Pelageya to regulate their failures and ups in the emerging resort, as they called, novels.

There were many more meetings and interesting conversations for women up to the minutes of parting with each other, which, of course, did not go without kisses.

Klavdia Petrovna kissed Alyosha good-naturedly and friendly, like a son.

- Farewell, Alyosha, happy to you! Listen to your mother, you have a nice one. In short, all the best, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna lavished wishes, - well, I don’t kiss men at all, don’t be offended.

It so happened that Pelageya Andreevna and Alexei left earlier, although they arrived later than Nadezhda Nikolaevna and Klavdia Petrovna.

In life, the laws of information stacks often operate, when the last one to leave is the first to leave. Well, if it happens only in good aspects.

Now Klavdia Petrovna had to cut short her vacation and return home earlier than Nadezhda Nikolaevna, despite the fact that she arrived later. This decision forced her to accept a recent telephone conversation with her daughter, and she was convinced that her mother's heart would not make a mistake.

"You need to look after Alenka," Klavdia Petrovna explained, "there is one guy driving up to her, but I don't like him so much.

"The young people will sort it out themselves, Klava, don't interfere," Nadezhda Nikolaevna tried to restrain her.

- Yes, how! We all think in our youth that we are well versed in all life issues and do not need help, even parental help, at least advice, however ...

"Yes," Nadezhda Nikolaevna confirmed, "if youth only knew, if old age could..."

"All the peasants are bastards, they must be crushed like bedbugs," Klavdia Petrovna cried out with tears coming to her eyes, twisted her thumb and ran her fingernail along the table as if she had already had a chance to fulfill the promise.

- Klava, what are you? - Nadezhda Nikolaevna, stunned, barely articulated.

- They have only one thing on their minds! - Claudia Petrovna burst into tears to her friend "in a shirt".

- Well, well, well, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna patted her comfortingly on the shoulder. - Don't worry, Alena will be fine!

"I'm not talking about that now," muttered Klavdia Petrovna.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna hesitated, looked inquiringly at her friend.

- I'm sorry, Nadia, you were right, but I'm a fool for not listening to you.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna's surprise grew with every word her friend said.

- It's just that the whole life has passed without great love. And she wants it so much! It is so painful and scary that you will die and not have time to experience it, at least for a short time, at least a little. You dangle tirelessly through life, you dangle, and all you think about is to meet her, even if you burn in her. And for this, Lord, forgive me, it is not a pity to give up anything - neither honor, nor well-being, nor even life.

Claudia Petrovna burst into tears already to the fullest.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna could hardly restrain her impulse. She felt the force of her heart beating, and she was afraid that it was about to jump out of her chest.

- To hell with honor, life, health and everything in the world, - Klavdia Petrovna sobbed, - love, real great love, where are you, where, respond! Lord, help me find her and don't kill her before that.

- All right, Klava, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna consoled her, - you are looking for something that does not exist in the world.

Klavdia Petrovna was suddenly silent.

“Are you serious?” she asked through her tears.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna nodded her head in the affirmative.

- Yes, but how can you live without it, Nadyusha?

- How we live, - explained Nadezhda Nikolaevna.

Passions slowly subsided.

- Well, okay, what else happened to you there? - asked Nadezhda Nikolaevna.

Klavdia Petrovna drooped silently.

- It's your handsome offended you?

There was a slight nod of approval.

- Don't tell me! .. Did you have something? - Nadezhda Nikolaevna threw up her hands.

The movement of the head was repeated after a pause.

- What? - Nadezhda Nikolaevna was indignant. - Are you crazy? When? We were together most of the time, weren't we?

How much time does it take...

- Wait for it! I'll arrange for him, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna threw in anger, trying to fly to the offender.

“Wait, Nadia, it's not about him,” now I had to calm her down.

- That is, how is it?

- I myself, the first ... and do not regret it. Even now.

"Then what the hell...

- That is, it was not drawn to him, but to that love, which, it seemed, I finally met.

- Where is he now, I wonder?

- Gone!

- So how did you leave?

- That's it, took it and left! Unexpectedly, secretly, without saying goodbye.

- Yes, but he arrived much later than us. Like so?

Klavdia Petrovna bowed her head in agreement.

“Meanwhile, he promised that he would spend it, that we would exchange addresses, that we would correspond, that he would invite me to his place and that he was even thinking about how to connect his life with me. He also pretended to be divorced.

“Bastard!” concluded Nadezhda Nikolaevna.

Friends for a long time discussed the tricks of a familiar handsome man.

A few days later, Klavdia Petrovna was given a luxurious farewell. Only they did not come from the one from whom she dreamed. A farewell feast was arranged by Nadezhda Nikolaevna and Maria Mikhailovna with her maiden retinue.

- All the same

I managed to snatch from life moments of happiness that may not be repeated, - Claudia Petrovna consoled herself in her soul, and an hour later she was waving goodbye to her friends from behind the large window of a departing comfortable bus.

And a few days later, Maria Mikhailovna promised to arrange the same for Nadezhda Nikolaevna, but she completely refused immodest wires, confining herself to warm words of gratitude to the hostess of the dining room.

- Hello, Vovochka, how are you, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna asked loudly on the phone.

The conversation was arranged by custom communication from the administrator's office.

- Nothing, ma, how are you?

- All right, I'm leaving in a few hours, I'll be there by noon. Do you hear?

- I hear, mom, I hear, we will meet you.

At the airport, check-in took place for the flight on the announced flight.

- Citizen, are you Nadezhda Nikolaevna? - a young man in the form of an airport employee scattered.

"Yes, yes," Nadezhda Nikolaevna drawled in surprise.

- Please come with us for inspection.

Two employees escorted her to a separate room. They seated me in a comfortable chair, in front of a wide table with a polished surface, left me alone, asking me to wait a minute.

"Hello, Nadezhda Nikolaevna," she suddenly heard a familiar voice from behind her.

"Hello," she replied, got up and turned around. "Vyacheslav?" she dropped in surprise. - What are you doing here?

- The same as you.

- What does all of this mean?

- Nothing, please, sit down and listen to me.

- No, listen to me! Either you let me out of here at once, or I'll call the police.

"You don't have to call her, because I am the police," Vyacheslav laughed and presented his certificate.

- Well, okay, what do you want?

- Nadezhda Nikolaevna, can I see you? It will be easier!

“The power is in your hands,” the woman humbly looked down.

- Nadia, believe me, I did not think to detain you. It's just that I work here, I happened to see you and...

Vyacheslav hesitated.

- Well, bolder, bolder, why are you embarrassed? Don't forget where you work!

- Okay, I'll be direct and frank.

- Excuse me.

I'm so embarrassed to talk about this, but...

- Come on, otherwise my plane will fly away.

- He won't fly away without you, I took care of that.

- What? This is getting interesting. Lord, what an adventure this is.

- All right, so be it. I think you know about the affair of your friend Claudia Petrovna and...

- Your Genka, - Nadezhda Nikolaevna did not let him finish.

- Gennady Alekseevich, - Vyacheslav specified.

- Well...

- You know, at first everything turned out so great for them! I even envied them in a good way.

- What are you talking about? - Nadezhda Nikolaevna threw ironically.

- Yes, imagine!

- Well, what happened next? - Nadezhda Nikolaevna took on the role of interrogator.

- You may not believe it, but at first Gennady Alekseevich lost his gold watch, then little by little money began to disappear. Who could do this but me and your friend? Only we were next to him.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna looked perplexedly at her interlocutor.

- You think?

- Yes.

- You better know about it!

- Well, so, when the money was almost out of him - naturally, he had some expenses - he opened up to me. And although he believed me, I still felt some suspicion in him. It, I think, passed when I gave him money for the journey home, and even more than was required. Although he promised to send them to me immediately upon arrival home, the conversation is not about that now. This amount for me, a person working here in this position, means nothing. I think you understand me.

- Yes, of course. I'm willing to pay twice as much to get you out as soon as possible.

There was a pause between the speakers.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna caught the great insult inflicted on her interlocutor.

Vyacheslav pressed the button and called the duty officer.

- I'm listening to you, Vyacheslav Grigorievich, - a young man in civilian clothes rapped out.

- Escort the lady to the boarding gate along the platform at number one.

- I obey, - the young man responded to the command.

“Wait, Vyacheslav,” Nadezhda Nikolaevna threw in embarrassment, “forgive me, I offended you undeservedly. I confess you puzzled me.

- I wanted to ask you: Klavdia Petrovna did not tell you anything about this? Or maybe you yourself noticed or felt something?

- Well no! True, she said that she needed to help her daughter, but she did not have the opportunity. That's all!

- Yes, you do not think that I am investigating this case on duty. Gennady Alekseevich categorically asked me not to do this. But just, you know, purely sporting interest, as they say. Maybe a cup of coffee? - Vyacheslav Grigoryevich unexpectedly suggested.

- Perhaps, if you are responsible for the flight.

Vyacheslav Grigorievich smiled.

The conversation between the interlocutors lasted another twenty minutes. The interlocutors seemed to compete with each other in who would shock and surprise whom more.

- If you want, here's my business card! Maybe it will come in handy for something else, - Vyacheslav Grigoryevich, smiling, handed out a beautifully designed cardboard business card.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna took it with a smile and headed for the exit to the platform, where a specially fitted foreign car was waiting to deliver her to the gangway of the airliner, which was delayed, according to the announcement, for technical reasons.

She opened the door of the foreign car and turned around. The eyes met.

She suddenly closed the car door and went back, as if she forgot to say something.

He walked towards her.

“Did you forget something?” he asked, approaching.

- Yes. She stood up on her tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek.

He hugged her cordially and looked intently into her eyes.

"Please don't think so badly of us," he pleaded.

- Who is it about you? About the policemen?

- No, about men! Women have a very wrong opinion of us, but we are essentially the same as you.

- Lord, Vyacheslav, what are you talking about? - Nadezhda Nikolaevna muttered, barely holding back her laughter.

Vyacheslav Grigorievich clutched his head and tried to justify himself.

- You know, Nadia, I just wanted to say that we, people, have no right to think badly about each other, no matter what kind of people we had to meet. They should not even look at them through the prism of their views and their worldview. You just need to remember that man is God's creation and God treats everyone with the same love with which we treat our creator.

"That's how we met," she whispered in his ear, dropping her business card into his outer pocket. She once again rewarded him with a kiss, on the other cheek, and turning around every now and then, she rushed to the car at a run, saying goodbye:

- And I thought that only policemen work in the police!

The airliner drove onto the runway for a long time, then stopped, then suddenly ran up, faster, faster, until it soared like a big steel bird, gradually gaining both speed and altitude.

The white passenger car deftly circled overtaking cars, friendly winking at them with its left "eye".

- Vova, can you slow down? Well, how are you, tell me, - a female voice asked the driver.

Vova joined the conversation, not taking his gaze off the motorway growing in front of him.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna plunged into memories of the recent past, without missing anything important from her son's messages.

She opened her purse, took out a small mirror and looked into it for a long time.

- Mom, are you listening to me? - asked Vova.

"Yes, of course, go on," Nadezhda Nikolaevna replied.

She smeared her lips lightly with lipstick and spread it evenly with her lips, but did not take her eyes off the mirror.

- Hmm, how interesting, - memories came flooding in, - what he did not succeed at will and out of friendship, he succeeded in the service. And what if it was just an occasion to get to know each other better, - suddenly flashed through her mind. Pretty original, in that case.

- Mom, who are you talking about? - As if overhearing, her son asked, directing the cabin mirror so that he could see his mother in the back seat.

- Yes, just like that, about no one.

- So... - Vova continued his story.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna diligently dug in her purse, as if trying to find something she really needed.

A piece of paper suddenly fell under her arm, on which she easily made out Klavdia Petrovna's address. I also found Vyacheslav Grigorievich's business card.

- I wonder which of them can and should be trusted - Klava, Genk, Slavka or yourself? Who among us is lying and who is telling the truth?

"You have to believe God, mom," Vova answered, as if reading her thoughts and joining in her reflections, "for every person is deceitful and vain.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna slowly folded the sheet of paper in half, tore it into separate pieces and threw them through the lowered car window.

Vova carefully watched her in the mirror. On reflection, she did the same with the business card of Vyacheslav Grigorievich.

- What are you tearing up and throwing out the window, mom? - asked Vova, smiling.

- Yes, nothing, - answered Nadezhda Nikolaevna, - resort affairs.

- Ah... - drawled Vova, - resort? Well, how are you there, did not meet anyone? Didn't get an interesting person on your hook?

- What kind of nonsense are you talking, Vova! Better watch the road, and your father...

- Father, father! He is probably gone, mom, you have to face the truth, no matter how hard it may be.

Nadezhda Nikolaevna regretted that she had brought sadness to her son, and, wanting to change the subject of the conversation, she made a second mistake:

- In vain did you marry Marinka, your son, she is a sick girl, you will have a lot of fuss because of her.

- Mom, - Vova said warningly, - I love her, firstly, and secondly, what time is it to talk about it!

Already in the city, Nadezhda Nikolaevna cast a glance and could not tear it away from the Church on the main square.

- The service has been restored! - she exclaimed, noticing the incoming and outgoing parishioners.

And she didn't stop. Repair is repair, and service is service.

- How good, - thought Nadezhda Nikolaevna, - I will have to put myself in order, and in the evening I will confess and at the same time take communion after the resort affairs.

- In our life, mother, good and evil are so mixed up that only the church can now separate them. In pursuit and in search of the truth, people so often forget about the Truth.

“Maybe I was in a hurry to throw out the addresses?” Nadezhda Nikolaevna thought with annoyance.

- No, mom, n no, - as if guessing her thoughts and in continuation of his story, - Vova replied, - there is no turning back, there is only a way forward, to church and home. Where do we go now?" He stopped the car at the fork.

- Directly! - confidently commanded Nadezhda Nikolaevna.

After a modest New Year and Christmas celebration, Nadezhda Nikolaevna received two greeting cards. She expected them from Klava and Vyacheslav, but received them from Maria Mikhailovna and Pelageya Andreevna.

- No need to torture yourself with unnecessary thoughts about your future plans in life, - thought Nadezhda Nikolaevna, - life itself tells a person in which direction to move.

Marina and Vovochka were already expecting a baby and captured the thoughts of Nadezhda Nikolaevna.

“A holy place is never empty for a long time,” she thought. As soon as they see a man who has been liberated, they will immediately come running and devour him. Who? Yes everyone! There are more than enough hunters for this joy. Only a person gets - a victim, and only one who is stronger and faster. Who will reach you first.

10. 1990

LEISURE “SIMULYANTA”

Seagulls circled high above the river, soared under the gloomy winter sky. They moved in circles towards each other.

“I wonder if they know that nothing lasts forever on Earth?” thought a stooping young man in an old tweed jacket, watching the flight of white birds in the air by the window.

Only the lucky ones will be able to keep their wings until next summer.

The end of autumn did not promise a warm winter, as often happened in this city.

- Survive until next summer! Do they really understand this, or do they live without knowing themselves, constantly plowing the expanses of the sky?

“Is their concern only food and family?” Tamaz kept standing at the window and looked at the helpless birds with a feeling of compassion.

- Well, why do they soar without flapping their wings, only in a small, as if enchanted, circle, - he wondered. As if they are not real ... Or, maybe, they don't know how to fly in another way? Or are they really dumb? Why not, if this is typical even for people ...

Now Tamaz was experiencing just such a state. And the reason for this was not the upcoming vacation, but the delivery of equipment that has dragged on until today.

There was a lot of work in management, he, of course, also, but he obviously pulled, did not sit up at work, as if there was absolutely nothing to do.

- The devil knows what, - he was angry with himself, - he ruined his vacation, rushed here, and here is what is happening, just a disgrace. And no one cares. Everyone does only his own, protects only his own prestige and his own interests, and as for the general: oh, come on!

Press down with a plan, and then they will fuss. After all, I am a small person, just some kind of lousy engineer, I just recently graduated from the institute, Tamaz reasoned with himself. But my conscience is clear. God knows, I did and do everything that was and is in my power.

The bastards themselves are messing around and they won't let us stick our nose into anything, as if we'll confuse something or we won't figure it out. You get dumber, of course, when you do nothing, but also when you do something that is not to your liking, not completely in truth, and not completely according to your capabilities. Is it really that incomprehensible?

Why destroy specialists and slow down progress, kill me, I don't understand!

He was indignant, despaired, and every time the matter ended with the fact that he only hastily carried out the urgent, and even then, by the way, not always in full and with high quality.

The latter happened through no fault of his own, only he himself and only a few who worked and communicated directly with him knew this.

Nevertheless, he considered himself partly guilty, and gradually the status of an inferior worker, who did not fully understand and did not catch something, was gradually established in his mind, however, not only in the professional field.

All this suppressed his optimism and high spiritual mood of the first years.

And so constantly, almost all my life: the desire to at least something and somehow change for the better at work or at home either flared up into a violent flame, then faded into a light, fragile dream.

Each time, the matter ended with the fact that he remained in his former positions as an ordinary engineer, who was destined to pull the strap, as if paying for his torment, patience and false joys, dotting the entire path he had traveled to the point reached today.

The only consolation was the trust and moral support of the chief engineer, who, although he noticed mistakes and omissions in the work of a young specialist, looked at him with hope, no, no, and entrusting the most “hot spots” of the case.

But now the chief engineer was away, and few people were interested in Tamaz's opinion.

From the very first days, Tamaz felt himself in bondage and gradually wilted. Contributed to this and intensified disciplinary measures, the requirement to immaculately paint the minute-by-minute location.

Excessive formalities had a detrimental effect on him. He did not dare to object, could not but notice in himself growing indignation, constant irritation, a feeling of some kind of unpleasantness, turning into exhausting and prolonged boredom, into a feeling of a heavy, engulfing marsh layer under him.

The forces were melting, he felt it like no one else. And not only the expectation, but even the appearance of the end of his moral and spiritual life crushed him, released hitherto unknown defensive reserves.

He rushed about like a caged animal from one side to the other, becoming more and more convinced that there was nowhere to wait for help and that the only right choice was waiting and resignation to fate. But to add to the misfortune was the fact that this statement was not firmly established in his mind for a long time. Forgetting the conclusion made the other day, he started all over again. The

only difference was that the intervals between each "first" were getting longer, and he was aware of it.

Deep deprivation and a stunning emptiness more and more shackled him with chains, increasingly dictated their conditions of life.

The pain, not so much for his helplessness, but for the reality of what was happening, seized him for a long time, tormenting his exhausted soul.

He remembered how, after graduation, he kept imagining that he was walking along an insurmountable high and long wall, looking with hope in it for a saving door or at least a tiny loophole so that, having penetrated through this thickness of stone slabs, he would forever throw back and free himself from his vices, proma hov and defeats, get out of dullness and darkness into a clear Light.

Each time he moved slower and slower, fell, rose again, walked again and fell again. He stroked the semi-smooth surface of the wall with both hands, as if hoping to find the least solid place in order to break through it. But everything was unsuccessful.

It seemed to him that it lasted a long time, all his life, an eternity, and he was morally exhausted so much that he was sure that he would never even pass through the golden gate in the wall, no matter who asked him, no matter who begged him. He used to fall, and then get up and go, and then fall again. He did not know another life and did not want to know any more.

And only now he guessed that the same thing was happening to many around him, and he had never understood the reason for their negligence and licentiousness as clearly as now. But that didn't make him any better.

In the evening, after supper, Tamaz felt even more tired.

"More than two weeks have passed since I returned from vacation, but Givi has never looked in," he thought sadly. - Offended, probably. But for what? Passes every day, on the way to work and back, past my house, and I have to make special time to visit him. Just think how proud, or maybe I have more pride ...

He drank the last sip of hot tea, thanked his mother for dinner.

- No, you can't think like that, damn it, maybe something happened to the guy. Will have to come in!

Overcoming fatigue and lethargy, he got into his raincoat, tousled his hair with his hand, and looked at himself in the mirror.

- Mom, I went for a walk. Maybe not soon...

- Good luck. Of course, walk yourself while you are young! What about sitting at home with an old mother.

He often had to report to his mother.

He waved his hand in helpless despair and went out, slamming the door loudly.

We had to go to Givi along a steep, narrow ascent.

Tamaz never remembered such darkness here.

- Of course, Givi had to endure a lot. I always did everything I could for him, and there was no hint of reproach, everything from the bottom of my heart.

Now, when Givi was renovating his new home, he needed the support of a friend more than ever. It looked like Tamaz had turned his back on him.

- Damn him! God forbid to see him now in good health, but sometimes he tends to see no one and nothing but himself, As if there is only one Givi beaten by life in the world.

The rise of Tamaz passed relatively easily, without shortness of breath.

- Wow! - he thought. The vacation, though partly shakes the nerves, but it does its job, he concluded.

Turning to the right of the rise, Tamaz noticed here and there dim lights.

On one of these streets, he remembered, he had once been robbed. He, then a schoolboy, was two hooligans armed with a pistol and a knife, who got only an earflap and a shabby paper ruble. But in moral terms, Tamaz suffered much more significant losses. This “defeat” in childhood, albeit from unequal forces, left its mark on him: a constant consciousness of helplessness, a generalized view of people, the confession of the principle “An armed villain is a doubly villain” ...

Carefully opening the narrow doors, Tamaz, not without embarrassment, entered the courtyard of a high two-story house, the right side of which had not yet come to life after the fire that had occurred in it four years ago.

The family in which Givi lived owned this particular part of the building. All this time they huddled on the first floor, in the kitchen, which served them both as a reception room and a front door. True, Givi has recently moved upstairs, where the “exotic” of half-scorched logs and planks overhead would pinch the heart of any sincere person who accidentally got here.

Tamaz went into the world and was not mistaken. I saw my friend through the glass door. He was sitting on the couch in a blue sports uniform, pulling his right knee under his shoulder. His gaze was fixed on the unfolded newspaper. He was at home alone.

Tamaz felt a soothing warmth pass through his body.

“Alive and well, brat,” he thought affectionately and lightly tapped on the glass. - Givi, - he glanced at the door in surprise and half opened it.

- Ah, - he drawled, - the simulator has come! But I still don't go, I think, maybe you'll decide for yourself.

Friends hugged.

It's been more than two months since they haven't seen each other. This happened for the first time in their lives, starting from the school bench. Both felt how people's feelings cooled when they were not fed by at least rare meetings.

From the very first words, all insults were forgotten, the conversation improved. Givi talked more, talked about the most difficult moments in those two months that they were out of sight of each other, as if once again reproaching Tamaz for indifference.

Tamaz listened in silence, feeling some regret about the fate of his friend.

- Well, now tell me how you're doing, - finally asked Givi.

Tamaz felt that his friend poured himself out completely, hiding nothing in his soul, and for this he was grateful to him.

- How did you rest, how did you go?

- As usual, a little exhausted, of course.

- I hope you're healthy?

- Of course, quite! How are you?" he asked further questions.

- It's okay...

Soon Givi's mother came and greeted Mr. ostyay:

- Why haven't you been here for so long?

Tamaz noticed that she had no idea about the subtle transformations in his relationship with his friend.

We talked in the tiny, stuffy kitchenette for more than two hours.

Finally, Tamaz apologized and got up from his seat.

Escorting a friend across the yard, Givi, when asked by Tamaz whether the TV was working, answered somewhat strangely.

- Yes, what is there to see, everything is so boring!

Sometimes Tamaz also experienced boredom, but he had not yet imagined television as a source of boredom.

And then the suspicion crept into him that Givi had told far from everything that had befallen him.

He could not resist and laid out to his friend what he decided "hard" not to tell anyone:

- Givi, I had to experience a lot!

- What exactly?

- Upon arriving, I found my cousin in a serious condition. Fell off the second floor at work.

- Wow!

- And before leaving, my sister was the same as, remember, with yours. Exhausted and pretty scared you.

- Operation?

- Yes ... That's it, brother! - Tamaz said, dissatisfied with the fact that he had split. - Okay, come on! Check it out sometimes.

- No, now you have to go to me for a whole year until I forgive you. Now here, and then to a new house.

Tamaz recalled how "close" his friend got a new apartment, almost on the very outskirts of the city, and, sighing, threw out consolingly:

- Okay, I agree.

Walking down the slope to my place, I crossed a wide street, dived into the archway of a long eight-story building.

Looked at the clock. It was half past ten.

"It's too late, damn it!" he thought.

But then he decided to get up.

"Nodar never comes home before," he remembered.

He found a door with a familiar plaque, put his finger on the bell.

The door was opened by Nodara's sister and invited into the house.

"Hello, Aunt Nadya," Tamaz said in a barely audible voice to the woman lying in the corner of the room.

The TV turned on and the glasses resting peacefully on her forehead were not yet signs that the woman was awake.

Aunt Nadya glanced at the guest, happily recognized him as her son's classmate.

- Hello, Tamazik, come in, dear!

Nodar was indeed not at home. He was expected later.

Tamaz knew that he visited his mother more after the operation than Nodar himself.

Especially since she had another one coming up this week.

The woman's self-confidence and the good complexion of her face were reassuring.

But the hour of conversation with her turned into torment and torment for him. It hurt to hear about the heavy burden of a friend. To work during the day, to feed his young family, to study at the university in the evening, to heal the daytime wounds caused by the life that pursued him. The mother herself was now more worried about the fate of her son than for her own.

The last time Tamaz saw Nodar was thinner and tired. His elderly father also worked day and night, drank after work, though in moderation, but when he came home, he collapsed exhausted.

It was inconvenient to stay longer, and Tamaz said goodbye.

- So, my golden one, - Aunt Nadya addressed, - on Monday I go to the operation. You'll get there, right?

"Yes," Tamaz agreed curtly, and went through the corridor to the light steel front door. But suddenly he stopped and turned back.

Aunt Nadya had already seen rising from the bed.

- Aunt Nadia, when Nodar comes, greet him from me.

He felt that he had done it only to touch his mother's heart.

- Oh, my gold!

Already at the entrance, Tamaz glanced at his watch. It was exactly eleven.

- It's too late, - he thought, - will they let me into the hostel?

I also wanted to see a relative, my peer Vano.

Vano worked at a car repair plant and, like Givi, on duty, at least twice a day passed by Tamaz's house.

Tamaz had good feelings for Vano, whom he had known, by the way, only for the last few years, and these feelings were dictated not only by family ties.

Tamaz knew from his father that on the day of his arrival, Vano went to the airport twice. True, the meeting that day did not take place, the flight was postponed two more times, and the plane arrived only at one in the morning.

Since then, Tamaz kept thinking about going to find out how Vano knew that his excessive modesty could not allow him to see him at home for a long time.

Tamaz found Vano without difficulty.

The guys sat in a smoky room and watched "Dead Souls" on TV.

Vano went with the guest to "his" room with four beds in the corners and two high cabinets between them. One dim light was on. But overall it was enough.

In the middle stood a square table covered with a soiled tablecloth.

On a table with a stained tablecloth were two large pieces of bread, several half-peeled onions, a sausage on a piece of yellow-gray paper, a half-empty bottle of red wine.

The room was quite clean, but the chaotically scattered things gave it a far from decorous look.

Vano took out a cigarette.

- Don't smoke, Vano, you'll sleep here later, - asked Tamaz.

- Ah, - Vano waved his hand phlegmatically, - anyway, air it before going to bed.

Little by little, a conversation began.

Vano talked about frictions and disagreements at work and naively, as it seemed to Tamaz, talked about the negative properties of people living in the city.

Tamaz guessed that a person who had lived all his life in the village, let even in an urban-type settlement, and one who is accustomed to the sincere frankness and kindness of people, it is difficult to understand how people in the city, even if at least some, even by half a little finger, can differ from the village ones for the worse. Tamaz smiled in his heart at Vano's naivety. He calmed the disappointed guy, consoled him with reminders of a good future.

Tamaz returned home at one o'clock. He thought about how sometimes friends have to help in life more than relatives.

Father at the unturned TV, hanging his head, slept a tired sleep. Tamaz woke him up.

- What is it, son? - his father muttered with displeasure, - is it possible to linger like that! And we're worried, and you're not sleeping. Recklessness, and only ...

Grabbing a high-necked bottle of water, he trudged slowly to the loggia, where a half-open sofa was waiting for him, with a clean, but rather crumpled bed.

"Turn off the light and go to bed soon," the father ended the conversation with his son in the same displeased tone.

"Come in, Tamazik," the mother's voice was heard from the room where she usually slept with her daughter, who was about to be married off in the near future.

- What do you want, mother? - Tamaz asked in an offended quiet voice.

- Congratulate me, I took a bath.

- Oh, really a great joy - thought Tamaz.

- Today there was hot water, and we all washed ourselves. It seems that it is going on now, maybe you will have time.

- Really? - Tamaz was surprised.

"Indeed," the mother answered jokingly and in rhyme.

By two o'clock in the morning, Tamaz was lying in a clean bed and listening to a program for night owls on his radio.

He did not feel tired at all, the water refreshed him, gave him new strength. He set the alarm, watching the vigorous movements of the second hand. Under the clock, he noticed a note with an instruction left to him by his older sister, who lived with her husband in another apartment.

The task was postponed until tomorrow.

- And how many more things to do tomorrow, - Tamaz thought with horror. He no longer looked at the list of cases written out on a separate sheet. Some of the recordings were so old that they were already stuck in his memory. He performed them "in the course of life" when the slightest opportunity arose.

Having swallowed a gray pill that had already fallen in love with him and washed it down with water, Tamaz disconnected from the outside world, slowly plunging into this blissful world of sleep that was captivating for him.

"Still, I had a good time tonight," he thought in a half-asleep state, "such a happy opportunity to see so many familiar people in one evening ...

Today, that is, already yesterday, Tamaz had an evening free from work.

23.11.1984

LIZA

Don't listen to the birds, people and stars
And even your mind and heart,
But only the Creator of everything!

The twilight that descended on the city lit the night lamps, towering on white-painted steel tubular poles.

A river of passenger cars slowly flowed along the wide avenue, in places interspersed with trolleybuses and buses packed to capacity. Pedestrians on the sidewalks hurried in different directions.

The time has come for the awakening of advertising lighting lamps and posters on the facade walls of houses. On the main city square, a fountain spurted high with its beauty to the accompaniment of colored light music.

Perhaps the only thing that overshadowed the evening was a lot of small puddles frozen on the pavement after the recent long rains, which, however, brought the much-desired coolness to the city and its inhabitants.

In place of the old electric clock, at the entrance to the subway, there was a newsstand, and behind it a long row of payphone booths.

A chubby, blond-haired young man was nervously sipping a cigarette at the machine booth, not taking his eyes off the subway exit... He was already smoking his second cigarette, shifting from foot to foot, but... He suddenly froze, threw away his cigarette butt and moved towards the exiting crowd.

- Dima! - exclaimed a girl who emerged from the crowd.

- Lisa! .. - Dima answered after a short pause.

They took hands. Liza reached out into Dima's arms, which did not meet her, even wanted to kiss him, but she felt restraint and drooped. She gazed long and hard into his eyes.

- Hello, - she said with joy, and received a dull answer with the same word.

They headed towards the fountain. Dima tried to speak, but did not know what he was talking about, and kept getting lost.

- I know you're angry with me. Forgive me, please, I was wrong, - asked Lisa.

Dima's face good-naturedly and accurately reflected the behavior of his shrinking heart, but he did not utter a word.

They silently walked in the direction of the ice cream parlor, each analyzing and remembering the time lived without each other, and both regretted their love, which had taken the first lesson of the ordeal - a long separation and cold correspondence.

“Does the one who does not miss his loved ones love?” thought Dima.

Lisa did not consider some acquaintance that took place after Dima's departure to discredit their love, especially since it helped her to more clearly understand and better understand the world of people and the value of her today's meeting with Dima.

“I did something stupid just because I let Dima know about it. But in any case, he should have known this, am I not acting honestly, although, perhaps, cruelly, Lisa thought. “Everyone, after all, has their own truth.”

An elegant man, standing next to the vast showcases of a souvenir shop, was seriously and busily winding a motley and long snake around his neck, performing all sorts of tricks with his ward to the surprise of others.

Passers-by, slowing down, but not stopping, slightly bypassed the strange illusionist, and, moving away, looked around.

After the ice cream in a bowl on a stand, offered by him in a cafe, there was a river embankment, seagulls, a cedar alley, squares, and, finally, a quiet garden. Then there was the first deep kiss on the bench, the first hugs after a long separation, a long night with a walk through the sleeping city.

In Dima's jacket and next to him, she felt warm and gratifying.

They guessed the constellations, passed the places of childhood, rode on a creaky swing, went down the hill, met the dawn and the rising of the hot, gentle sun.

So light, in the semi-darkness, their first meeting after parting took place.

The time of separation every day less and less embarrassed their hearts, and the wounds gradually healed.

A small steel ball fell with a crack on the bed of a game roulette rotating around the axis and, having run with a roar of several revolutions along the dial, stopped at nine.

“I lost again,” Leva said displeasedly.

- And I lost! Eh, this fraer is lucky! - Nick suddenly exclaimed and, rising, gave Sergey a sonorous, playful cuff on the back of the head, meeting his victory with a smile.

- The winnings went to the red token, - announced the "banker" Valera and raked the losing tokens into the bank with a rolled broom.

- Valya, and you lost, - Nick turned around with a joke to his friend, - but they usually say that fools are lucky.

“You're a fool yourself,” Valentine objected touchily, “a swamp schmuck,” he also added as a joke.

- Without insults, friends, - Valera warned, - make your next bets, gentlemen. He tried to imitate the voice of real croupiers working in the casinos of foreign countries, and often he succeeded.

Each of the friends made regular bets.

They didn't meet very often.

After leaving school, their paths diverged in different directions, like the paths of many other classmates. Everyone pulled the strap of life, as best he could, in his place.

But the desire to meet, to communicate could not be denied to anyone. The occasion was not long in coming. Now in a larger, sometimes in a smaller composition, but nevertheless, gathering, they enjoyed each other and never allowed themselves anything superfluous and unworthy.

The money earned from invented competitions went to a revelry - the purchase of chebureks, khinkali, or even to various cultural and sports events.

The roulette wheel was spinning noisier.

“Why didn't Dima show up today?” Sergei asked.

- He resumed his affair with Lisa, - announced Nick. -Last week they spent the whole night together, and in the morning their parents were looking for them like crazy.

- Yes, - Levan drawled, - they often went on dates, no matter how something happened.

- God bless! - said Valentine. - To your health! Maybe we'll take a walk at their wedding soon...

- Eh, Dima, Dima, does not obey me, - Nick was upset. - She is not a couple for him. The fact that before their romance, in front of the army, she walked with others is okay, but after all, while he served, she also got someone. And we served together, and I know how she tormented him with her letters. I found a good girl for him there, and he, it seems, forgot about Lisa over time, although he was so worried that he even turned gray. With great difficulty, his longing for her faded away. But in the end, what happened: he arrived, she apologized, and everything went on again! - Nick was annoyed.

- And what if they really love, - said Sergei.

- You know what, Sergey, and no offense to you guys either: Dima is my closest friend, and I don't want him to hang out with some kind of crook, - Nick got excited.

- Come to your senses, Nick! - Sergei interrupted him.

- You know this better than me: everyone was at my school party then and you know what I did with her! But you don't dare to tell him about it, because you are cowards, you don't want to spoil your relationship with him.

- Well, you know, this is too much! they murmured in response.

- Remember: it will cost you dearly! - Nick shouted nervously.

- Understand you, damn it, it's too late to do anything! To interfere with love means to destroy it, and this is a sin, - Sergei explained no less nervously.

- Okay, Nick, it really will work out! We all sin somehow, - Levan tried to reassure the guys.

- Dima is a great guy, he does not deserve this, and I, even at the cost of our long-standing friendship, will be against their marriage, - Nick did not let up.

"No one asks us about this, and it's none of our business," Leva said.

- How much he has already suffered because of her, - Nick insisted, as if not hearing Leva's words, - they seemed to be studying together, preparing for the entrance exams. In fact, she interfered with him. And imagine, even after that, he passed all the exams perfectly and well and did not get in just because he did not get a point. Two whole years wasted. I drove a good girl away from him, tortured the guy in the service with my stupid letters, you bastard! - Nick fumed.

- Okay, Nick, calm down, better go to the bet, otherwise the croupier will exclude you from the game, - Leva reminded.

- Yes, I will exclude myself. Sorry guys, I have to go home, mom still has to go on business.

The door slammed coldly.

"Yes, damn it," Valentine was annoyed, "would go with her, walk, love, love yourself to your health, but marry?"

- Full of rushing things, guys! After all, this has not yet been decided, Levan suggested.

- No, Lyova, everything is going to this, believe me, - Valera confirmed.

- Yes, there, at the university, at the preparatory courses, he was much more intelligent than many. It's a pity if his head disappears, - Sergey lamented.

- But what's the matter? Can he still try his hand next year? - Valentine consoled everyone.

- After five years of separation from the book? - Sergei doubted and shook his head.

- No, of course not, - confirmed Valera.

- No, guys, Nika is obviously overdoing it! Maybe he's right about something, but that's also impossible, "Valentin was indignant.

- Nika is generally a fan of showing himself, however ... - said Valera.

- Damn, how many cretins in different ways not only enter, but then study at universities, and how many worthy guys get lost due to their stupidity! After all, this is damage to the country! - Sergey was indignant.

- The irony of fate, - Valera grinned.

- It's just life! - Sergei suggested.

Colored tokens were slovenly scattered across the green cloth field, an overturned roll broom froze in anticipation of a human hand. Heavy chairs not moved, a table moved from its place, the living room door ajar, silence and rare pieces of furniture emphasized a certain emptiness. The silence in the room was broken only by the voice of a cricket coming from under the window.

First one, then the other leg alternately threw themselves at each other. They were decorated with long white laces threaded through special holes in elastic rubber sneakers.

The first drops of sweat were already beginning to appear on his face, and it was felt how the red T-shirt was trying to stick more tightly to the thin body.

For almost the entire length of the distance circle, cheering exclamations and cries of "Faster! Hurry!"

At first, his gaze rested on the legs of the one running ahead. But the distance of the outstretched hand, which had been held for a long time, was suddenly broken. The breath of the chase was now experienced by the "red jersey".

The "chase" obviously could not keep up with the pace of the leader and the distance between them grew more and more every second.

- Wait, where are you going? No one has been able to escape me yet.

Barely taking a breath, the "voice" continued its explanations:

"Sooner or later I catch up with everyone, because life is a distance much longer than the one you boldly dared to challenge me to. But when I catch up, don't expect mercy, I'll twist it in an instant. What can you do, so fate dressed up - life gave you legs to run away from me, and to me, Death, patience and will to wait for the hour. And although my visits are sometimes premature, I make them unexpectedly in the intervals between my usual business. Or when there's nothing to do. Or just the desire to have fun takes precedence over patience. The more lives I disturb in a day, the more tenacious, terrible and insidious I become. And no one is able to interfere with my work, not even temporary successes of vitality, accidents and diligence of doctors. Today - yes, I agree - yours took, you ran away from me! But tomorrow? Day after tomorrow?"

The "Red T-shirt" was barely visible.

"Do you think I should come to you and surrender?" Dudki, - the "red shirt" objected, - I will not refuse the only opportunity to tease you - the opportunity to live out my own.

- Well as you know! Just do not put off your visit to me, - advised Death, - remember that it is good to die young. By the way, you should know that these words do not belong to me, but to you people, just like those who are loved by Heaven die young.

There was no answer, or it was no longer heard.

From the bathroom came the sound of water spurting from the shower. He suddenly broke off, and a few minutes later Yevgeny Pavlovich appeared in front of the light-filled window, in a long colored dressing gown, diligently rubbing his wet hair with a terry towel.

"Ah, son, are you already awake?" Get up, get up, it's time!

- What time is it? asked a voice that had not yet fully awakened.

"Dima, did you buy tea yesterday?" came instead of an answer.

- Yes! The pack is on the table.

The radio was broadcasting an overview of the press in an undertone. Tea and sandwiches for breakfast were ready.

- Nu, you soon, Dima?

- I'm coming, I'm coming, Uncle Zhenya.

- What is it - washed up, but still half asleep ?!

- I didn't sleep well yesterday, I've been having some nightmares lately. They read some poems, unknown poems, constant chases, they want to kill me, I run away, they shoot at me, I feel pain in my sleep. I myself shoot at them from their own weapons and hit, for some reason I don't kill them, but there are an uncountable number of them. You wake up and your head hurts...

- Communion, or what, you, son ?! Will you be cleansed?!

- Yes, we'll come home from work in the evening, I'll swim, - Dima agreed.

- Hmm, - Yevgeny Pavlovich smiled, - I'm talking about spiritual purification.

- What is it?

"Oh-oh-oh," drawled Yevgeny Pavlovich, "I see you, son, except for your beauty, you don't think about anything.

I prefer feelings to thoughts.

What if they are deceitful?

- All the same, it is better to go in life, according to the voice and call of your mind and heart.

- A limited, blind mind and a fallen heart? - Uncle Zhenya explained.

- Painfully you are smart, Uncle Zhenya, but something is lost in this dusty and hard work, in the cemetery, and even in such a distance from your hometown. With your diplomas with honors, you could get a clean job.

- Hmm, I, son, - Yevgeny Pavloich smiled, - all my life I was an excellent student on Earth and, it turns out, a loser in heaven, and now, at the end of my life, I wanted something on the contrary.

- You are some kind of strange, uncle, it seems that you were in office at one time in the past, but now? - Dima was perplexed, - do you know what some of your colleagues are talking about here?

- We, people, in the hustle and bustle of earthly life strive in every possible way and make our way forward to wealth, to power, position in society, to a career, and to many other peaks of this world, and sometimes we even succeed in many ways, some through honest, sometimes hard labor, and some in other ways, and we fall into the number of the first, if we do not become the first, often forgetting the words of the Savior that "many of the first will be the last, and the last - the first."

- Yes, but still I want to learn from my mistakes, - Dima objected. - Each person has his own life, and you can't impose it on others, even if this other is close. You are too strict with me, - Dima complained.

"Perhaps," Yevgeny Pavlovich sighed, adding in his thoughts, "probably because I wish you well.

- When did they promise a new batch of stone? - Dima hastened to change the topic of conversation.

- From next Monday!

We won't be able to finish the job on time.

- Wait and see! Well, did you drink your tea? Ida. Let's have a rest in the evening!

Tea did indeed quench one's thirst, but even he could not overcome the summer dampness and heat. Is it just to sit all day in the water.

The sun generously scattered its rays, as if trying to drink all the water from the nearby sea. But the more it quenched his thirst, the stronger his appetite played out. In greed, only mosquitoes could compete with the latter. Having drunk their fill of human blood, they stuck to the corners of the rooms, clumsily rushing about in further searches for easy money...

Almost everything was ready for the arrival of guests and the New Year. But Liza and Marie Lvovna kept spinning in the kitchen. Andrei Ilyich was pouring wine into bottles.

- Mom, I can't find salt.

- There, Liza, in the sideboard, on the top shelf, - explained Marie Lvovna.

"Dima, what kind of beer did you bring today?" Andrei Ilyich asked.

- Zhigulevskoe, pa, a little old, but nothing, I already tried it, - Dima explained.

"That's good," Andrei Ilyich rejoiced. - One of these days there will be fish.

- Dim, under and in the hall, the guys have already come up there, "Liza suggested.

- Well, here, newlyweds, get a gift, - the guys merrily handed over to Dima and Lisa a beautiful giant cloth bear.

- Oh, Valera, full of you! Well, what kind of newlyweds are we, for more than three years, how we tolerate each other.

They looked at each other and smiled. Liza affectionately ran her little fist over Dima's face.

- Well, here, Dima, and so that replenishment as soon as possible! - Valera wished.

These last words of a friend made Dima sad.

- I congratulate you, such a redneck, - Valentine rumbled happily, waiting for his turn to insert a word.

- With the upcoming, or what? Dima asked.

- And not only! And not only! By the way, lately you have become, brother, quiet. A nephew was born - he was silent. He gave his sister in marriage - he was silent!

- Strange, I've never heard of the latter! - quietly responded Dima.

- As same, all say! After all, they already signed?!

"Maybe," Dima interrupted sternly.

- So, brother, as you can see, there is more than one Mogarych behind you.

"Valya, don't be offended, but I'm more interested in my own affairs, and I'm not always aware of what's going on with my relatives," Dima explained. - You better come in, come in!

- Hi, Gosha, where did you go, haven't seen you for a long time, - Dima greeted his friend-classmate with a smile.

- Here you are, keep your bag and eyes wide open!

- Not that... what?

- Scratch out how to give a drink.

Pulling back the zipper of the bag, Dima saw a black Siamese kitten.

- Mind you, he's aggressive and nervous.

- In general, with character, right?

- That's it!

- Okay, come in, Gosha, and I'll take him to the balcony.

- Wait, Dima, - who else is there?

- Yes, all my guys, do not be embarrassed.

- Levan and Nick came?

- Levan will not come because Nick will not come, and Nick will not come because he ... - followed by a long pause, - a bastard.

This word had an effect on Gosha, like a sudden cold shower, and stunned him.

Dima felt this and decided to explain what was said:

- Don't be surprised, Gosha, you still don't know what language he has and what he just didn't say about Lisa. Come on, you better go!

Light music and noisy conversations were already coming from the room.

There were a lot of healthy toasts, wishes, and especially to the young hosts.

“You gave us a lot of trouble in the past, Liza,” admitted Marie Lvovna.

- What, isn't it? - she answered the embarrassed look of her daughter.

Andrei Ilyich, who had just joined the table, carefully and searchingly listened to the words of his wife, whose power in the house was indisputable.

- Let Sergey say, is he the most direct and honest with you ?!

- Oh, no! - Sergey disowned. - We are all smeared with the same world. One God is good and infinitely kind.

“Not the head, but the government house,” Valentine concluded.

“Get up, Sergey, and tell the truth, hand on heart, because Liza did stupid things at school,” asked Marie Lvovna.

- Here is a woman, - Sergei was silently surprised. - Another mother is called ... Yes, even under Dimka.

“Which of us didn't do stupid things at school, Marie Lvovna?” All this is nonsense compared to the world revolution.

Sergei looked at his friend. Dima, already haggard from the wine, smiled slyly and sadly.

Everything around froze, silence reigned.

Sergei hesitantly got up. Cold sweat covered him. He once again exchanged glances with Dima.

- Serge, Serge, what and how it is, do not worry, - Dima allowed, - the bitter truth is better than ... - then he thought rather than said. “Although I know

something even without you, and I knew it even before the wedding, but what's the matter," ran through his head, "understand, stupid people: I love her, I love her, and that's all! So much so that nothing and no one can oppose this!

- Well, wait a minute, - Sergey decided and, putting his hand to his heart, holding the glass with difficulty, he started talking about the fact that he had not seen anything bad for Lisa, had not heard and did not know. True, it was clear that he was not entirely sure of his words ...

Lisa listened outwardly calmly, only smoking cigarette after cigarette.

"Valentin, open the shushkhun," Andrey Ilyich pointed with a glance.

This word stung Lisa.

Valentine unsuccessfully uncorked the bottle, filling those sitting nearby.

Tobacco smoke enveloped a young beautiful girl who seemed to disappear with him.

One of the city's main railway station squares has long been involved in New Year's Eve preparations. A large Christmas tree was brought in and installed in the middle of a spacious elliptical lawn in front of the main railway station.

In the townspeople, scurrying in different directions, high spirits were felt.

Not far from the square, looking around every now and then, nimble smart gypsies were briskly hunting for all sorts of small New Year's trifles, intercepting buyers from the state trading network and shops on the go.

Three high school girls, hand in hand and barely holding back their laughter, quickly rushed along the wide sidewalk. On the run, like a fan, they opened up around two modest young boys, who looked at each other in bewilderment.

- Girls, let us go, please! - plaintively groaned one - if you want, we'll even pay.

Girlish laughter splashed, hesitating frequency, tone and timbre.

"But we don't take money, we take little things," one of the girlish voices rang out.

One of the guys tore off his hat, another scarf and handed it to the girls.

The girls parted.

"Shushkhuna, shushkhuna, shushkhunebi!" a young gypsy shouted, spreading her arms and showering passers-by and occasionally suitable buyers with sparkles.

"Borya is guessing, Borya is guessing," another one called out, with a box stuffed with paper prediction tubes and a motley parrot perched on them.

The parrot suddenly, apparently bored with idleness, pulled out one of the tubes with its beak, turned it around and threw it to the ground.

Immediately followed by admonition from the hostess, who rewarded the pet with a light slap:

- Fool! Why are you throwing away our work?

- The fool itself, - the parrot snapped and flew up into the air, forgetting that it was tied with a short rope to the hand of the hostess.

- All right, all right, I'm sorry, sit still! - the hostess picked up the bird hanging on the rope, picked up a piece of paper from the ground and pushed it into place.

“Sorry, sorry!” the parrot repeated distressedly.

One of the girls immediately ran into a gypsy and embarrassedly asked for an apology.

“My smoke for a long memory to you,” the gypsy shouted piercingly and exhaled smoke from a cigarette into the girl's face.

- What beautiful eyes you have!

The girl smiled back.

- Give me your hand! - with a sharp movement, the gypsy jerked her hand towards her.

“Femme fatale,” she concluded after a short pause, “you will break the hearts of many men. They will love and hate you, respect and neglect, appreciate and put no value on you, you will give them love and hate, good and evil, life and ...

“Let me go,” the girl murmured in fright, trying to free her hand.

- To each his own, everyone will get from you what he deserves. And your life will be short for it.

- Lisa, Lisa! - the girls called a friend.

Lisa almost escaped from captivity and rushed to them.

- Try to give birth early, girl, so as not to be left completely without a child later!

Liza ran up to her friends in tears, and they took her away from the scene.

- Don't listen to them, they're crazy! - consoled one of the girls.

- Yes, - the other agreed, - what they won't say in order to squeeze out money.

“She didn't ask me for money,” Lisa explained.

“Yes, because I didn't have time,” her friends reassured her.

Liza could not calm down for a long time, and even after many years she often heard a sharp voice from behind her, she fancied a piercing look and a cloud of smoke.

Lisa took one last deep breath of her finished cigarette and exhaled at the ceiling in one gulp. She stubbed out her cigarette on a small ornate glass ashtray. She shook her head and rejoined the conversation.

Sergei was still eloquently talking about something.

- And what's more, - Sergei continued, - whoever tramples on their love will deal with me. He caught Dima's smile, and a hot shiver ran through his body.

It was as if a huge stone fell from the shoulders of Andrei Ilyich, who confirmed that Sergei had said everything correctly, that he had not made a mistake in anything.

- Appreciate your friendship guys as you have done so far. You keep it for a short time, how long is there, Dima?

- Seven years have already passed.

- Well, there are at least seven dozen more to come!

Good parting words and wishes to Dima and Lisa followed.

- Thank you guys, all of you for the wishes! Before the toastmaster announces a musical break, let me wish you all the same!

Already rather stunned, unlike the guests, with wine, Dima began to lavish toasts and wishes to each individually.

- I wish you, Valera and Tanya, that everything is fine and, most importantly, that there are children. So you asked me, Valery, why we don't have them, but, unlike you, I will never ask about this.

Finally getting nervous, Dima could hardly restrain himself.

Soon, long before dawn, the guests gradually began to disperse.

- Yes, even though Dima is my friend, but when he drinks, he becomes unbearable, - Valera argued, parting with Sergey at the bus stop.

Gosha, putting Valentin in a taxi, went home on foot. He was indignant at human stubbornness and disobedience to fate.

"After all, no matter how much you talk, swear and kick, in the end everything turns out the way it should turn out and should be," he thought. - And a person only wastes energy and strength when he opposes the life processes that go on their own stubborn course. Why are people so willing to shorten their lives? - he wondered.

Gaucher liked the life of the stars much more than the life of people. She was distinguished, in his opinion, by harmony, discipline and obedience to established interstellar relations. Gosha looked over the brightly burning luminaries scattered across the cold clear winter sky.

- It would be a good idea to close this session! - he thought.

That night, Gosha's eyes, with this wish, recorded the fall of two stars with an interval of no more than ten minutes.

"Everything will be fine, just don't resist life, man," he thought, adding speed.

Unfortunately or fortunately, he did not know the language of the stars. The fall of two of them was, it seemed to him, a prediction to someone of something in the future.

- No, - he thought, - with such knowledge about the star you won't reach them. It will be necessary to return to the basics of astronomy, through them to astrology, and there the stars themselves will show the way for the star man. Maybe the kids will be able to help.

The next morning, Gosha bought everything that seemed necessary to him now, textbooks, books, a map of the starry sky, a globe, a telescope, etc.

He plunged into a new hobby more and more every day, looked out for stars and constellations at night, made some calculations, predicted the appearance of new and the fall of old stars, learned to build natal charts based on people's biographies.

The stars, their birth, life and death occupied him more and more. He has already received the nickname of the star boy. His astrological predictions appeared here and there in the press, some predictions came true, which inspired and inspired him even more.

- Gosha, when will you finally give up this childishness, - his older sister complained, - there is no more urine to look at your telescopes. Soon you will turn the whole house into an observatory!

- To the observatory? - asked Gosha. - And you gave me a good idea. Will have to go there!

- That's good, go and work there!

- Lena, where did you get such a dislike for the stars? - Gosha was amazed.

- I have no animosity towards them. It's just that each person has his own lighthouse, his own luminary!

- And what kind of light do you have? - asked Gosha.

- You know very well.

- And still?

The sister defiantly slammed the door in his face.

- And yet? - inquired Gosha, catching up with his sister in her room.

- Get off! Tired of talking about the same thing all the time. You still don't understand!

- Well, okay, I promise to figure it out, - asked Gosha.

She became thoughtful, hesitated for a long time, but nevertheless made up her mind and carefully took out a small icon of the Most Holy Theotokos with a baby from the drawer. The sun's rays played on her face.

Gosha froze for a moment, he seemed to be chained by a magical radiance!
A warm shiver ran through my body.

- Okay, that's enough, otherwise I'll go blind, - Gosha asked for mercy.

The sister took pity and put the icon in its place.

Gosha left his sister's room in deep thought.

- She's right, - he agreed, - everyone has their own way in life. But how could she know who and where this road would lead if the stars did not tell?

Time and life pretty much confused the plans and forecasts of Gosha's classmates, made their tough adjustments to them.

Service in the army, in missile units, left its mark, and Dima died three years later. He died of acute leukemia.

Lisa got married shortly after Dima's death, divorced three years later, and pinned all her remaining hopes on her daughter from her second marriage.

Ten years later, the events unfolding in the country forced Valera, Levka, Nick and Valentin to move to live in Russia, and Sergei and Gosha went abroad in search of a better life.

05.1985/2001

TOPS

I left my grandfather
I left my grandmother
Gone from the beloved
I left life
And from you, death,
I also...?
Kolobok

Mercury thermometer every day more and more vigorously approached the mark of plus thirty. The “real” heat was slowly creeping up to the city. But it has not yet been felt, the inhabitants have not felt its approach, after several rainy and cool days, the warm sun is always pleasant. And contrary to the words from the famous song that nature does not have bad weather, the debate again entered into combat over whether the chicken was born earlier or the egg?

One way or another, while the disputes led the interlocutors into the dense jungle, life continued to flow according to its unwritten law: one event was replaced by another.

And in our case, it did not matter who and how the events were created - by life or by a person, consciously or subconsciously.

The merry-go-round of life revolved according to the principle of a close successive dependence of events, that is, the events of the present were predetermined by the previous ones, those that happened in the past, and so on.

And it was difficult and even fearful to break this ill-fated chain, at least by some separate link in human society.

Things were moving towards summer, despite the fact that spring could not be properly understood or felt, and the time for holidays was approaching. Although not everywhere. Each institution, plant, enterprise has its own specifics, periods of its "fever", "tension" and its "departure". As if traces of the “ill-fated” chain are visible here too. As if indeed everything that is monotonous is unstable.

Like all institutions, the research institute had main entrance doors and, for fire safety purposes, spare doors.

In a building with several floors, anyone could be reached by stairs or an elevator.

Doors were already opening in some rooms along the long deserted corridor on the second floor. And the daylight coming in from the doorways on either side of the corridor negated the need for artificial illumination.

From behind one of the doors in the middle of the corridor, strange sounds were barely perceptible - human barking like a dog, couplets from Yezidi songs and the dull clinking of coins.

- Wow, wow, wow, wow.

- On you still, get it! Well done! Come on, a song.

- Ay lala la, ah lala la lelo...

- Good girl, here's another one for you, get it! Come on...

- Guys, what are you, really? It can be heard throughout the first floor, - half in jest, half seriously, the voice of the newcomer was indignant.

- Oh, Gocha, hello! Where the hell are you? Look at what a circus act I have arranged, - boasted Dmitry, a man of about thirty-five, of a dense build, tall, with short curly hair already beginning to turn gray.

- Come on, let's show Gocha, - Dima suggested with a barely restrained laugh.

Makwala, with a smile literally from ear to ear, with brightly luminous and shooting brown eyes, turned her gaze to two of her listeners and willingly repeated the number, with the only difference being that this time she did it behind closed doors.

Makwala was a little younger than Gocha, but older than Dmitry, thinner than the latter, but slightly shorter in stature. She was not one of the beauties, but, with the advent of Dima at the institute, she changed and changed in many ways, obviously for the better.

The young friend of Makwala and Dima, Gocha, did not stand aside, no, no, and he received compliments, either from one or the other. To Gocha's credit, he rarely had to reach into his pocket for an answer. In general, it was one of the rare and unprecedented cases in life when the third is clearly not superfluous. Feeling this, Gocha was grateful to his colleagues. Their close relationship was envied by other employees. And in general, he also considered it unacceptable that seniority was not in fashion and not held in high esteem.

- Well, okay, you go on, and I'm gone! - said Gocha.

- Wait. Come here! Look how cool it is with us, - Dima asked.

Makwala's eyes sparkled with fire. She seemed to unconsciously smile. A short youth haircut, dyed light gray hair and a minimum of cosmetics were removed from her for almost ten years.

- No time, I want to start the task by car, - Gocha explained seriously.

- And in vain you try, today they consider the salary. From tomorrow, the adjusters are coming to them. When they start working, they don't know themselves, - Dima explained with slight annoyance.

- Damn them with their salary! How many times a month can you count your salary? During the time they take from us, you can count all their salaries and funds manually three times,” Gocha was offended. “Where are Arkash and Vakho?” he suddenly asked.

- Let's go to the center for yesterday's listings, - Dima suggested.

- That's how it always is. You will tune in to work with all your heart, so be sure ... ugh, - Gocha got angry.

- Is our boss here?

- No, at the academic council.

- Nobody asked me?

- Who needs you! It was written down in a magazine, that's all.

- And here are our listings, Gocha, - Vakho boasted when he saw Gocha entering the next room.

- Don't tell me, all without a single one?

- No, as always, some lost! This time you and Arkash were not lucky, - Vakho explained.

- And where Arkash?

Arkash burst in with a crash of the door, with a mug of cold water from the tap of the toilet, the door of which also slammed shut with a deafening thud.

Arkash is a thin guy of about thirty, with an emaciated face and an awkwardly protruding thin aquiline nose, with which only the massive nose of Gochi could argue in the whole institute. By the way, this "competition" lasted from the time of their acquaintance.

A distinctive feature of Arkash was that he liked to wear a white shirt, and not so much to wear it as to quickly get it dirty. After getting dirty, he proudly turned up his nose and showed his interlocutor a profile. Here, they say, what am I!

“Gocha, you understand what they did,” Arkash explained in deliberately broken Georgian, “because I work as a “slander of the institute” (in a scientific institute). Amas hamoakles (they subtracted from this one) - he pointed with his finger to the place where Dima was sitting, - shen gamoakles (they subtracted from you), yes metz hamomakles (and they subtracted from me). “Hoda hamodis, rum gamoklevebulebi vart chven sukvelani” (it turns out that we were all robbed).

Homeric laughter rang out. For a long time they could not calm down. Arkash, as if nothing had happened, defiantly fixed his profile.

The guys started processing the data received on the listings, and the day came to an end unnoticed.

Domestic and personal duties have been replaced by official duties and cares. Carelessness, if it exists, is only in the minds of some in relation to the activities of others. "I would have his worries!" - this hackneyed phrase has more than once intrigued and distracted not the worst minds. The path to the stop ran past a number of buildings and structures and a small descent.

- There is no greater joy and wealth than when you know what to do and how to do it, and when the process of work pleases you, so much so that goosebumps run through your body from this joy. Do you know this feeling?

- No, Gocha, my dissertation hangs around my neck, like a re-examination. I want to get rid of her as soon as possible.

- That's why you sit up with me at the Center until midnight. Are you spinning options for your task?

"Yes!" Makwala interrupted heavily.

- HM! His moralizing was just not enough, she thought.

- This deuce will suit us, I think.

- Perhaps.

The trolleybus, gently tinkling and tinkling, pulled away.

Arkash worked in another department and hung around among people of his generation who had endured many difficulties, trials, sometimes injustices and even grief in their lives. He never lost heart, moreover, sometimes he outdid himself in jokes. Perhaps that is why he went to everyone's favorites.

- Arkash, of course, is an excellent guy, - said Guram, - but he also has a negative trait.

Guram worked as an engineer in a neighboring department and succeeded in many ways in a short time at the institute. He always and everywhere was in a hurry, but he often managed to realize his life plans without detriment to public affairs.

- Ha, ha! - as if Dima objected to him. - Each of us has this drawback. Listen, how are you with the invention?!

- Not yet, I'm waiting.

- Are you going to the conference?

- I want to, but I also need to get to the alpiniada. As time goes by, I don't know.

The corridor is a place of minute meetings, desired, unwanted, unexpected, and sometimes planned, as, for example, during a break in table tennis, where optimists converged to play.

- Gotcha, can I have you for a minute? - Wakho called. - Look what the program is doing! It seems that everything has been calculated, but the conclusion is not the same. The picture is true, but the numbers!..

Gocha ran through the program with an air of importance. He glanced up and down and up and down. I tried to delve into it, but after going through several operators, I stopped:

- Whose system of operators?

- Arkashina, right, work!

- You can see it right away. Sorry, Vakho, but I am not competent in the work of aces!

- Here's a crook, - Wakho exclaimed affectionately, but not without annoyance, - the program worked fine, asked him to improve it, and here you are, he served you!

By the way, where is he?

- Haven't come yet!

- It's good to be listed on half the staff! Maybe we'll move on too, Vaho?

`- What, you can!

They agreed with each other, but in fact they clearly understood that no one had ever had anything like this on their minds and never would.

- He is strange, this Arkash. He helps everyone in everything, but for himself, at least move a finger. Waho, can you persuade him to take up his mind?

- What to do, Gocha? Already said twice...

Dima burst into the room.

- Guys, have you heard about Arkashka?

- And what? - asked Gocha.

- He again arranged a bacteriophage in his stomach! Just like an eternal call!

- What a hell of a kind, - Vakho was indignant, not without a smile, - how many times have I told him not to drink a whole liter of unboiled milk, and moreover, after eating, but he, as if out of spite, continues to make himself "eternal urges".

- Yes, now it's not less than a week, - said Gocha in the affirmative.

Makwala entered the room:

- Waho, give me one cigarette, please! - plaintively held out her hand. She coughed.

- This stupid girl will die, - thought Gocha, and watching with pity how strangely she sucks in the white smoke of a luminous cigarette with her thin lips and lets it out in one gulp. - How she still loves to grind with her tongue, and what a gentle voice she has, despite that she is ruining him with cigarette smog.

Others have Makwala for sure would have disgusted her, but Gocha was pleased to listen to her. Not her chatter, not proceedings, not naive speeches about what is happening around and in the world as a whole, but her gentle voice, in which he caught that defenselessness and weakness that every person on earth is secretly endowed with!

“In our evil and ugly world, it is not easy for a person to preserve the good and noble qualities that God so generously rewards everyone at birth,” the elderly climber, who has seen a lot in his lifetime, succumbed to incoming thoughts.

- Joni, what are you doing there? - asked a female voice from the next room. - Probably, you are talking to yourself again or thinking about something!

- Thinking and talking with yourself is almost the same as with God - he thought and added aloud: - What do you need?

- Please take care of Andreika while I manage my business.

- Let him go to me, let him go, - agreed Joni and returned to his thoughts.

- What is the age - such is the poet! - This famous statement is easily paraphrased by the common people: what is the time - such are the people, and what are the people - such is the man!

- But with such principles and formulations, humanity is easily rolling towards its inevitable death. And he is not saved by natural internal laws, which eventually wear out and fade away. It is very important in such cases to find the only true path that will return a person to his origins.

“It is rightly said,” the old climber agreed, “that only the truth of God saves a person.

And he was looking for this truth there, in nature, high in the mountains. On the heights, it seemed to him easier to confess to God, to talk with him about everything that was happening below, on the earth where people live. And he perceived each return home safe and sound as the forgiveness of his sins. And he felt himself cleaner and nobler after that.

“He who moves away from God also moves away from the truth,” he thought.

- The strength of man is in unity with God. Only in this way can the truth be known. Departing from the truth, a person leaves both life and many other blessings.

“Hmm, grandfather, but does the one who leaves life also leave death?” His grandson suddenly interrupted his thoughts, imperceptibly approaching him.

- Look at you, how do you know this?

The grandson made an offended grimace.

- All right, don't frown! It's too early for you to think about such things. But since I asked, so be it, I will answer. In life, you need to be able to get along with people, and this business, Andreika, is not easy, remember.

- I understand, grandfather, here Gogi and I are friends in kindergarten, and I also love Aunt Tamara and when I grow up, I will definitely marry her.

The hoarse laughter of a sixty-year-old grandfather could be heard in the room.

- Joni, what's wrong with you? - I heard from the kitchen.

- Wait a minute, grandma, - Johnny answered, barely taking a breath, - Andrey makes me laugh here. Okay, listen on. Once upon a time there was a fool. All the women passed by him. The fool was happy, but he did not know it. Happy, as well as the one who, by chance, miracle, fate or for other reasons, was protected from them, remained outside the field of their interest.

- Why are you happy?

- You see, Andreika, women are such a people who, with their earthly bustle, lead us, peasants, away from the knowledge of high spiritual principles. After we become their property, the peasant no longer has to think about anyone or anything, except for them. And their problems, needs and wishes sometimes know no boundaries. What then remains for the man? Going from one woman to another is the same as going from one problem to another and getting drawn into the swamp of life even more. Therefore, the peasants sometimes flee from them and move in all directions. Who is in science, who is in sports, who is in art, and who is completely drunk.

- Did you go to the mountains? - asked the grandson.

- Look how smart you are, - grandfather was delighted, - he talks, just like an adult.

- Joni, well, you really, like a little one, are talking nonsense to a child, is it possible? Better go have some tea.

“You see, they are confusing again,” complained the grandfather.

- Not nonsense, first of all, grandma! And secondly, the person asked to explain, so I explain to him, and at the same time to myself. You go and we will soon!

- Is it bad to be an adult?

- Why do you need to be an adult, Andreika? What, do you feel bad about babies? - Embracing her grandson, sitting on her lap, the grandmother kissed the six-year-old creation of nature.

- I want to. I'll go to school, become an adult and then marry Aunt Tamara. Another wave of laughter rippled through the room.

- Okay, fiancé, let's go drink tea. Aunt Tamara will have to see, do you know her?

"Uuh... shameless old man, aren't you ashamed?"

- Here you are, - Johnny remarked with a smile, - you need to know the tastes of your grandson. Really, Andrew?

- Grandfather, I will definitely introduce you to her, you'll see, you will like her very much. Truth!

The ringing of the bell plunged the kitchen into a moment of silence.

"I'll go and open it," Johnny said. - Geno, what happened?

"Hello, Johnny," a man in his forties, tall and heavily built, said sternly.

Geno, although he was as tall as Joni, was twice as massive as his thin friend.

"Come in," Johnny invited.

- Once, Joni, everyone has already gathered there in the tourist club.

At old John and his heart ached, he felt something was wrong. The old wolf had many years of experience in mountain rescue teams. He saved many human lives in the harsh and cold high mountains and rarely made mistakes in forebodings. He saw the dead, he himself miraculously escaped more than once. He got used to many things, but every life lost in the mountains excited his soul.

"Any of ours?" Johnny asked cautiously and with pain.

In response, Geno closed and opened his eyes.

Joni knew the composition of his Mountain Rescue Service (GSS) group perfectly, as well as all those who went as part of the group almost a month ago. I myself did not get into this group by pure chance and now regretted it.

- Who is it? Don't stomp! -Joni asked, although he knew that any given name would upset him equally.

- Malkhaz, - Geno said sadly.

For a moment, Joni lost his strength, and he felt his knees buckle.

- Damn it! This is Kazbek, you can't joke with him! How many times have I told the guys about this!

No jokes this time, Joni.

- It can be seen ... - Johnny paused. - Collapse?

- Crack! Come on, Joni, if you can. I'll tell you everything on the way, Geno suggested.

- What is it, Joni? - I heard a female voice from the kitchen. - Invite a man to the house!

- No, ba, no time, better look after Andreika, I'll be soon, - the old man said sadly.

Joni and Geno were walking down the nearest city avenue with quick, long steps. Geno was also part of this rescue group, and what happened was doubly tormenting him.

- Joni, we literally saw how he slowly rolled down the slope, and it seemed that before him - a stone's throw, just jump off, and he can be held. After all, he managed to hold out for a few seconds over the crack on the ice ax, slowly continued to crawl down. Realizing that he could not resist, he looked in our direction for the last time. It seemed that he did not try to stay on the slope, as if he himself wished death at that moment ... He let go, as if he had thrown the ice ax away from himself, and flew down like a stone. He rolled as silently as he fell, only at the end he uttered a low, short cry. As I remember ... - Geno barely took a breath. A violent spasm seized his throat. - Nika rushed to save, wanted to jump on the slope, I kept him by force. John, there was such an icy slope, they would both die.

- What the hell happened to him?

- I don't know, he, apparently, disconnected himself somehow from life. We went to save a group of young guys: three guys and a girl, we managed to find them half-dead, three escaped, and the fourth died. Also a young guy, only twenty years old, he got married a week ago.

- And with his wife climbed into the mountains?

No, it wasn't his wife.

- Did they go through the checkpoint?

- They went through me, but I did not allow them to climb to the top and wrote down the same thing in the escort, and they, you see, secretly slipped away. The body of the fourth was lifted by Malkhaz, for reliability he tied it with his own rope. When the corpse was pulled out, Nick was anxious to notice the rope of Malkhaz, both of them were tied to each other. Nick only managed to shout, look they say, no jokes and tricks. And Malkhaz reassured. Having freed the rope, Nick immediately threw it back, but Malkhaz disappeared somewhere and did not appear for five to seven minutes. We decided not to irritate him with an extra call, and when we saw him again, it was too late.

- Did you find a body?

- Yes, apparently, he died immediately, poor fellow! Strongly crashed, - Geno sighed. Three idiots were also dragged here, to the city, to the first hospital.

What, did they have a leader?

Geno nodded.

- Show me the idiots later, I want to talk to them.

- Joni, believe me, they also regret what happened, and they lost a man, and it's not worth talking about this topic with them now.

- The devil knows what, no order, no discipline, no seniority, no advice, no instructions - these young people do not want to accept anything. Well, in the city, at home, on the plain, on level ground, the Lord is with them, let them live with their own mind, but in the mountains, fir-trees-sticks! . Hey, why am I telling you about this! It's a pity, damn it, our guys are dying because of such fools by their own stupidity.

- In the mountains, to foresee everything, Joni, rescuers do not always succeed, you know, - Geno explained.

Johnny recognized his words. He said nothing.

"He who goes to the mountains knows why he goes, as well as what he goes for," thought Joni, and he remembered the cases when he himself miraculously got out alive. They helped him gain a sense of caution in extreme conditions, overcome his fear of the powerful vertical and sheer cliffs of monsters-beauties, called the word "mountains and glacial peaks."

What can I say: Joni, Geno, Nick and other guys themselves helped each other more than once.

Perhaps this explains their so unbreakable long-term friendship, despite the big difference in age. If there were any quarrels or misunderstandings between them, they did not last long.

- Yes, the mountains teach a lot, - thought Joni, - and after each trip you usually bring something new, unusual, which helps in life, and hinders, and burdens at the same time. Why is real life where a person does not live? Is human life itself a hindrance to life on Earth? Is it really a man idealize your life? He underestimates her, just as poor Malkhaz underestimated the situation. Even the small victories won by a person in life, and the low peaks conquered by him, make him too self-confident. Confidence gradually turns into excessive self-confidence, and if a person does not stop in time, into a feeling of invincibility, into permissiveness, and here it is, at this turn, that lies in wait for him at every step - danger or even death. Underestimation of their capabilities, in the end, is fraught with disastrous consequences.

The swallows had long ago chirped theirs and, leaving the sparrows to dominate the sky, waved away to distant lands.

The leaves changed color, and the first yellowed leaves that fell from the trees gave signs of their existence with a timid rustling when they were walked on with undisguised pleasure.

- What a delight, Gocha, right? - exclaimed the enchanted Makvala, turning to Gocha.

"True," Gocha replied sadly.

- What are you doing? - Makvala was surprised, gently slapping her companion's hand.

- Veal tenderness. I love her, - thought Gocha to himself and added aloud: - Nothing.

A group of tourists, consisting of about ten people, led by Joni, "stormed" a hill up to 1500 m above sea level from a mark of 450 m. not to charm anyone, even an indifferent person. That is why Joni, slowly, step by step, led the young nature lovers up the steep slope to the top. In order not to tire the guys too much, he led them to straight sections, thereby lengthening the path.

It was here, on the flat sections of the slope, that there was a huge accumulation of foliage of past years and fresh in the upper layer.

In some places the leaf cover reached the waist.

- Try, catch up, - Makvala shouted and grabbed Gocha in the back so that he could hardly stay on his feet.

"Ah, I'll tell you now," Gocha got furious and set off in pursuit.

He ran, quickly caught up, brought down, lifted, he ran away. They pushed each other into the fallen leaves. Laughter and loud talk unceremoniously intruded? into the mysterious and blissful silence of the forest...

Gocha felt the tenderness and warmth of her body, her heart, and she complemented his already overflowing soul. The whole soul was poured out, and he felt how painlessly and without hindrance he was immersed in it. He sank and dissolved gradually. I felt that the process that was happening to him was irreversible, but the more I got involved in it, the more discoveries I made for myself. Behind the outward rudeness, clumsiness and many, at first glance, its inherent negative features, he discovered the opposite - tenderness, purity, decency ...

The more aggressive the feelings became, the more he resisted them. And not from the fact that he did not trust his feelings - he did not trust the words.

- Feelings are changeable, - he thought with annoyance, taking into account and taking into account both his own life experience and the experience of people who had already lived life on Earth before him, - but words - they remain in memory. Yes, and love, if it is real, should not need words, - Gocha believed and tested his assumption in practice ...

- Well, what's stopping me from loving someone else besides Dima, - Makvala thought in her turn, - after all, there is something attractive in him. - A happy triangle, this is such a rarity in life!

Both of them, like everyone in the group, went to their only, desired peak, where a flash of charm, passions, and burning awaited them. And then the descent, the spread, everyday life, only because of the monotony, lost its charm and attractiveness. Conquest of the peak, pleasure at the peak, descent is almost the same as the conquest by a person of the peak of the feelings of a loved one, enjoying them and their inevitable decline.

And here, as in nature, a person falls to go through the same stages. Gocha felt it very clearly now. It seemed to him that now he was standing on two peaks at the same time: at the top of a real mountain and at the top of a feeling of love. This could happen, with luck, only once in several lives...

At the top there was a halt, a fire, tea, sandwiches, people communicating with each other and with nature. This is something good that, due to the balance of processes in life, compensates for disappointments, pain and resentment. Not immediately, but over time, at least that's what the man drinking tea thought.

- You know, Guram, how Makvala sometimes has to earn extra money at work, - Gocha intrigued his partner, smiling.

Makwala with sparkling eyes nodded her head first in one direction, then in the other.

- How? - asked Guram with greedy curiosity.

- We bark like a dog. Mac, show me, please, - asked Gocha.

Mzia and Tiniko immediately pricked up their ears, trying not to miss an interesting moment.

- Av, av, woof, woof, - Makvala sang.

- Not so! - Gocha objected. - It should be different.

- How? Makvala asked with her eyes.

- Wow wow! Aw-wow! - prompted Gocha.

- Wow wow! Ava-vav! - Makvala joyfully picked up. She clearly liked the new arrangement of her repertoire.

“Who is it that torments you so much?” Johnny asked.

- This is our Dima, Joni, - Gocha explained.

- Oh, this is the one who Oh, we won't tempt you to go to the mountains, just like Wakho, however, - remembered Joni.

- Temptations are useless. He's probably in great company right now. Surrounded by very interesting guys and girls, - Gocha explained, - spending time at the table.

- A-ah-ah, - drawled Johnny, - even so! You look - well done! But, after a pause, he added. - Mountains are better!

- To each his own, Joni, - said Gocha, - but some brains work in one direction: where to drink and where and with whom to walk.

Gocha exchanged glances with Makvala.

“By the way, your brains work in the same direction, too,” whispered Makvala mysteriously.

- Ah well? Good! - as if with resentment, Gocha said and decided to play offended with her.

- No, you didn't understand me, Gocha, - Makvala objected in fear, - I...

“Nothing, nothing, everything is clear,” he snapped.

“Aleko, Guram, Tina, come here, look what I found,” Mziya's voice came from behind the wall of the monastery complex.

Joni, slowly smoking a cigarette, finished his tea, peered into the sky, which did not portend changes in the weather, into the clouds, determined the exact direction of the wind, admired the enthusiasm of the young. Every time, in similar situations, he was seized by a welcome sense of care and responsibility for each member of the group, who should have been brought back to the city not only safe and sound, but also as satisfied as possible. And it must be said that the feelings he experienced were fully combined with his role as a leader, for the young, in turn, understood him, believed and treated him with gratitude and reverence.

- Well, now - hang up the halt, get ready to go! - Joni's call was heard, and from different sides the group began to converge towards the fire.

“There are two ways,” he declared, “through the falls and down the path past them.

The majority of votes accepted Joni's proposal - to the waterfalls!

Canyons of numerous small spurs blocked the path to the descent, and it took a lot of effort to find the path.

- Yes, damn it, there's nothing to be done, we'll have to move on, - Johnny announced with excitement, standing on the cliff of the canyon.

The height of the rocky cliff reached fifteen meters, with a wide shelf in the lower reaches, followed by another - up to eight meters high.

This news was greeted by many members of the group with shouts and howls. Everyone's faces were cheerful, but there was anxiety in their souls. Fear tried to hide, who how and with what they could.

The descent took over three hours. It took Joni's rope and training in some elements of climbing technique.

Perhaps the freest and most elegant of all, after Joni, looked nimble, tenacious and strong Guram, who helped Joni to insure and safely lower the rest of the group.

- Here they were, - Johnny was perplexed, - for almost four hours they slammed onto some lousy cliff! Not a tour group, but real tour makers!..

- Never mind, Joni, they are still green, - Guram explained with a smile.

The group never went out to the falls that day.

Examining the ruined buildings of individual basilicas on the outskirts of the settlement, the group dispersed again, but not far from each other.

Enjoying the architecture of the building with rectilinear masonry lured Gocha into the arched entrance, where the light penetrating through the breach of the collapsed vault of the church illuminated part of its interior. In the corner of the church, under the old paintings on the wall, Gocha saw a familiar figure.

“What did you find there, Makvala?” he asked.

Makwala didn't answer.

Otar came closer, looked at the paintings, then at Makvala.

What are you doing, Mac? - Gocha was taken aback when he saw her shedding tears.

- Gotcha, are you really offended by me? Makwala said plaintively.

- The Lord is with you, Mac, what are you talking about, I'm all in jest!

Makwala covered her face with the palms of both hands and lowered her head.

Gocha gently grabbed her head and slowly shook it like a piggy bank, as if checking for coins. He tried to calm her down somehow. He saw Makvala like this for the second time. The first time she had a serious quarrel with Dmitry.

But then the feelings poured out due to the loss of the previous relationship with Dima. And although with great difficulty and perseverance Gocha Dima and Makval managed to reconcile, but at times a chill still broke through.

Gocha tried in every possible way to restore and bring back the past, but to no avail.

- Yes, - he was convinced once again with chagrin, - nothing can be returned and restored one hundred percent: neither shaken health, nor shaken relations.

Fearing to break what was real in their still good relationship, he did not take any further measures.

- Dip the red-hot iron in cold water and get it out - this is how Gocha saw their relationship.

- Gocha, dear, - Makvala explained then with annoyance, - with many I had to find myself in different places, under different circumstances, but no one had

ever allowed himself anything like that. Even in words. Sometimes it takes him so far to the wrong place that he does not even realize. You can't be so careless and abuse good relations. I can no longer be with him in the previous relationship!

“Oh, I also found a proud one,” Gocha was angry, wishing Dmitry well and at the same time believing in him.

yogurt.

But all this has already happened and gone. And now?

And now, like a fox waiting for a crow to drop a piece of cheese, Gocha grabbed Makvala, which Dmitry had dropped.

With all his being, he resisted these thoughts and convinced himself that this was by no means so, nevertheless, such thoughts, no, no, but tormented him.

- You remember, fool, no matter what happens, we will always be together and nothing will ever separate us, - he promised her.

- Why torture each other, Gocha, if ... I love you.

“Me too,” Gocha confessed after a pause, “but I can't. Forgive me, Mac, forgive me if I was careless with this feeling, but understand... I was hoping that I had a reliable shield - your relationship with Dima, which I thought would not allow you to drive close to me But now I see that I was wrong, I'm sorry. Well look at me, look! Why the hell are you such a fool as me, you are a world girl, and you will still be lucky in life! You'll see, I promise you this...

They stood for a while, gazing intently into each other's teary eyes, and embraced.

Gocha longed for her lips, her tenderness, her body, her caresses, but with considerable effort he restrained himself, burned his feelings, sadly blamed fate for not meeting him earlier.

- I don't understand, - Makwala said with amazement, - why do you refuse your love?

“I can't marry you, not because I don't love you, but because I can't,” he repeated, without opening his arms, “I have no right to be guilty of anything before you.

- But why, if...?

“Love alone is never enough. Love is necessary for human life, but it is not enough.

- What else?

- It is also necessary to observe and fulfill the rules and wishes that the surrounding society imposes on a person.

- Yes, but does a person become happy for the sake of society?

- Without society, a person cannot be happy, and besides, I cannot give you everything that you deserve.

“You men, like blind kittens, do not see your happiness and almost always pass it by,” Makvala exclaimed with annoyance.

Gocha looked at her in amazement.

- All the same, you and I have one fate, one life, one love and one ..., she did not finish.

- How do you know?

- A woman does not know, she feels.

- It must have told you some fortune-teller?

- Yes, if life and the future are called by that name.

- Mac, please, I'm having a hard time too.

He seemed to subconsciously renounce her, wanting to save her from the fate that fate had prepared for him.

Some strange, misunderstood feelings to the end besieged him. Sometimes it seemed to him that some other voice spoke to Makvala for him.

Joni called to the group and suggested that they hurry to the city before dusk.

- All right, - Makwala whispered doomedly, as if her heart had been taken away, - let everything be as you want and as it was before.

- Why are you late, Gotcha? - Joni shouted.

- Let's go, let's go! - Two voices were heard simultaneously.

The group was already waiting for the pasik, stopped by Guram on the track. The bus was heading into town.

Saying goodbye to the guys and Johnny, Gocha set off from the nearest metro station to the house on foot, shrouded in evening twilight, street smog and thoughts.

“Why is my love for you so unrestrained and passionate, Kva,” he thought of the girl whom he liked to call abbreviated that way, “is it not because our love is hopeless and impossible?”

Gotcha didn't want to believe that.

“Because it's impossible!” a hidden mysterious voice answered him. “Neither her life nor mine belong to her or to me. She knows this better than me. In addition to us, there are also our relatives, close and distant, the team at work, people from the environment. Even if we publicize and legitimize our love with a union, it will be pecked, stoned, defiled, trampled. Even if we unite, we won't be able to live happily together, - Gochi's heart ached from these thoughts, - and if we can't live together, then why the hell do we need all this? Behind her desire

to be mine, she sees no one and nothing. So you're going to lose her? he asked himself.

“No, no,” he answered himself in horror, “only not this! What then? Doesn't it seem to you, my friend, that you contradict yourself: you don't want to give it up, you don't accept it!

- Yes, you go, - Gocha snapped at himself, but immediately softened, - have pity on me, I beg you. Well, why, why can't you leave everything as it was before, love her as before, have the same feelings for her, be with her more often, go hiking with her, admire her, talk about nonsense, live by her and in her. Well, isn't it possible?

- Ha, ha, well, you give, my friend, but where, then, is the movement of life and matter forward and the transformation of one form into another? It was as if you really wished to stop life, to freeze and mortify everything.

- Well, at least for a moment!

- This blissful moment of yours lasted a long time! It's time to pay, and if you can't afford it, get out of the way.

“Well, really, nothing lasts forever under the moon!” Gocha said mournfully.

- Nothing, my friend! And there is no need to be offended either at yourself or at life. In the end, we are all under the rule of certain rules and laws, - Gocha chiseled over a deep inner voice.

- But do not be angry, I will try to go against life and fate and leave everything as it was before.

- Well, it's up to you, try it! Just remember and keep in mind that nothing will work out for you, and if you survive this mess, then consider yourself lucky, and you only lost time, not life. So goodbye! From the bottom of my heart I wish you good luck! - declared and suddenly the voice speaking from within fell silent.

- All this is some kind of obsession and nonsense! We love each other, and nothing is incommensurable with our love, even if it is impossible. The more impossible it is, the more blessed it is, thought Gocha, neither distance nor time will be able to block our path.

And the time on the clock struck eleven forty-six, and Gocha tried not to think about anything else. He quickened his pace and pushed his thoughts away, surrendering to the melodies of the musical group PINK FLOYD.

Dawn took up her post, and the strict snow-white peaks of a whole range of hills began to be clearly visible. Although yesterday's blizzard had calmed down, the wind was reluctant to give up its positions.

The sun only occasionally peeped out of the clouds, or rather, it was hidden by snow-white islands floating across the sky, called by someone once clouds.

“Obviously, the weather will finally clear up today,” the bearded climber said gloomily.

There, far below, the alpine camp tents were visible. The fog gradually dissipated.

“Check boots and crampons for everyone, change woolen socks,” the instructor sounded strict instructions. “We won’t take oxygen cylinders, one is enough. All basic things remain here in the tent. Let’s go light, you’re already out of breath. Let’s go to the top and back. And for me to go somewhere else with you - no way, that’s enough for me.

- Johnny, is that enough?

- Calm down, Guram!

- Wow, if not for the top, Gotcha. I’ll probably never get to it. I’d rather wait for you in the tent.

- Then I’ll stay! - A woman’s voice followed.

- Well, stay, very good! Get ready, Gotcha, we’ll touch it.

- Joni, I beg you, because there is not much left, we will jump to the top, and it will all be over.

- Why, then, does she agree with him in everything? Also for me, an artist, he rises without equipment and special equipment, as if he was going for a walk along the avenue. I do not allow him to go any further, and let both remain here. We don’t even have a normal rope with us, because he left everything in the camp.

- No, and the conversation is over!

The sun had long since risen high above the horizon. The clouds have almost completely dissipated. The going got harder and harder. The feeling of lack of oxygen was added to by the heat. Sweat poured down. I had to take off my woolen hat under my helmet. The unbuttoned windbreaker allowed portions of cold mountain air to pass under the warm sweater.

Guram took her duffel bag from Makvala and handed over some of his belongings to Gocha. He handed his ice ax to her, and Makvala, as if on crutches, with the help of two ice axes, hobbled the second in the group of old Joni, which delayed the movement of the entire group. After her came Gocha and, last, Guram, who could not unlearn the habit of rushing and pushing Gocha in the back with the word “Forward!”

- Keep up with Johnny! - his parting words rushed.

All the precipitates and troubles of previous campaigns and relationships suddenly surfaced in the minds of everyone, and a chill of mutual misunderstanding again pulled in their souls.

Hatred, resentment, evil, love, a feeling of friendship - everything was mixed up in the snow-white cover of snow crisp under the boots.

The four went to the top, went slowly, but strictly and evenly.

People went forward, rising higher and higher, to where it was cleaner, more beautiful, blissful...

Each of the four now harbored not the best of his feelings towards the other, but it was necessary to go together.

Yes, not the best feelings ruled over everyone. All four strove for one common goal, all four had only one innermost dream, to which they, with such difficulties, walked and approached step by step. One cherished common dream is the pinnacle of snow-white purity. And if something united them now, it was the realization of a dream. There was a peak that had to be conquered. And yet everyone was alone in front of this common dream, unique, individual. Everyone perceived the environment in their own way, seeing it through the prism of their passions and worldview.

But the mountains do not like discord, ambiguity, do not like quarrels and do not tolerate cold in human relationships. They carefully guard the innermost purity of their heights.

What was allowed down there, among people and another living world, was not allowed here, thousands of meters above that life. Lowland life was intertwined in numerous cohesion and cohabitation of millions of human hearts. The instructor knew about this, but it was difficult for him to overcome these negative feelings in himself.

As if sensing this, the mountains suddenly burst out with a powerful roar, everything around trembled, froze from fright.

- Here you are, get trouble, because it is she who unites you, people! roared.

Thunder from a clear sky, thunder and roar as a warning to all mankind. Thunder and roar from pain, from anger, from misunderstanding and indignation, from the fact that everything in people is exactly the way it is. And not a little different.

The old climber Joni knew the language of the mountains well, and through the roar he heard the words of the summit: "To conquer the peak, you must first conquer yourself, and if a person cannot conquer and conquer himself, then he will not be able to conquer anyone and nothing in the world. Before climbing to us, understand yourself and among yourselves. You need to go to the same with similar feelings and guts. You can not ascend to the top, beauty, freedom, purity, the sublime ... with earthly and base standards. You need to go to the mountains not in order to cleanse yourself there, but in order to check your purity there. And

you need to purify yourself down there, on the earth where people live. Purify yourself and purify others by your example.

Your behavior here is totally unacceptable. Wrong, unjustified, insulting! - these mighty and majestic rulers of the planet shook with increasing force.

Here you go, sycophants, back also your winged sayings that only mountains can be more beautiful than mountains. For there can be nothing more beautiful than love and human relationships built on this feeling ... Human love, which is also a likeness and prototype of that great absolute love that God Himself has for man.

If you are not able to love and tolerate each other, how can you fully love the mountains and comprehend the depth of their charms and beauty.

“Without this feeling, everything in the world loses its meaning and everything will be lost,” the giant mountains thundered, “if there is no meaning either in your life or in our life!”

It looked like the mountains were committing suicide. Shaking, with a nervous trembling, they threw huge arrays of snow-white avalanches from their sleeves, rolling down with a roar into the abyss of snow-white plummets ...

“Hello, hello, Velvet, tell me how you are doing there,” an alarming voice was heard in the radio control room of the camp.

- What's there?

"Velvet is silent, Gennady Ilyich," the radio operator declared anxiously.

- Gene, what is it?

- They are silent, Nick, call an urgent car and contact the helicopters, and I will go to the camp. Oh, and one more thing: perhaps only the transmitting link failed. Radio them about what happened, and not to panic, understand?

- I see, - said the radio operator and bent down to the receiver. - Hello, hello, Velvet, answer me. - There was no answer. - Velvet, I'm passing on information about what happened. All GSS members are requested to remain calm and not to panic. You found yourself in the epicentral zone of a powerful earthquake that occurred a few minutes ago, which caused avalanche collapses. The magnitude of the earthquake is still unknown to us. Subsequent shocks are also possible. It was ordered not to undertake any exits for rescue operations before the approach of rescue vehicles. Hello, hello, Velvet, can you hear me, Velvet...

On the pass, the UAZ was firmly stuck.

- Gennady Ilyich, let's wait for the tractors, it's safer to drive with them, they are about to drive up, - the driver asked plaintively.

- Come on, give me your binoculars!

Geno got out of the car.

The panorama of the summit opened before him as calmly as he felt nervous and tense now. It left the impression that nothing had happened. Through binoculars, he barely made out the highest point of the peak and saw a flag flying on it.

- Yes, there is a flag, the peak is conquered! - Geno uttered with tears in his eyes, - you hear, - he turned to the driver, unable to restrain himself, - you understand: they took the peak!

Tears rolled from the eyes of a huge and strong man.

- Joni, you are so tenacious, you wouldn't have lost your head, you would have done something anyway, you wouldn't have let yourself die, you wouldn't have ruined the guys. Remember, didn't we get out of such messes with you! Oh, you old bastard, you couldn't leave me in any way!

- Wait, Gennady Ilyich, where are you going? After all, the tractors will drive up soon, - the driver shouted after him.

But Geno went on foot to the camp without looking back...

There, even lower, shots from a hunting rifle were heard: A boy was born somewhere in a remote village, in the mountains.

So, for no reason, for no reason - was born and that's it! He came into this world and did not ask anyone about it. What he would be called, what he would become when he grew up - was still unknown. Or maybe another climber was born?

The sun was already sinking below the horizon, arrogantly declaring: like this! So it was and so it will be, as long as I exist, warmth, love and understanding will be established. And after me - let it be what will be.

The mountains still stood - majestically and sternly, as if hiding, as if they were waiting for someone to demand for the horror they had committed. It seemed that they were trying to hide the secret of the fate of the conquerors of one of their peaks, four daredevils who were in distress for the sake of one great feeling - a feeling of love for the purity of the snow-white peaks.

08.1986

BATH PHILOSOPHY

It is unsafe to stop in one place for a long time, as well as to get lost, to panic. This consciousness, like many others - obvious, hidden, comes with every step of the path, becoming a friend of those who continue to go ...

However, the word “go”, although it was identified with the word “live”, did not quite clearly express and reveal the whole complexity of what was perceived and experienced, which had to be fought even with momentary relaxation, when “life” provided small respite even with deceptive pleasures that seemed or those who wished to seem far from momentary.

The notes of the experienced seeped deep into the essence of the individual, prompting him to explain himself in a language that was complicated and devoid of willpower, intertwining hierarchical lines of words with rude and not always easily perceived relapses.

Such was the consequence of the extraordinary destinies of individuals. Not everyone fell when they matured: some fell earlier, some later, and only one thing did everyone agree on - everyone died alone. The latter, in turn, helped to realize and understand the inevitability of losses and to reconcile. Others were overtaken by the realization of inevitability and knocked down stronger and more painfully than the turns of a difficult path and the bizarre oddities of fate. The fall of a satellite sometimes seemed more terrible than its own, not yet experienced.

The arrogant senselessness of life is added to what is happening, the meaning of which was determined by a few ...

The black mustachioed “alpinist” crawled slowly and diligently, clinging to the snow-white and slippery enameled wall, clumsily tossing his head around and looking around, moving his mustache. Almost on a par with him, the redhead rose with extraordinary ease. But the freckled man did not dare to take the lead.

The “alpinist” named Squealer, moving his hind legs, tried to keep up with the elders, every now and then tapped the musician, who was singing a familiar melody, urging him to be more serious. Two more crawled below. The rest were nowhere to be seen above or below. Either time or space separated them from the rest, depriving the latter of the opportunity to be together with everyone.

Yes, yes, not desire and possibilities, but space and time were the cause of separation!

One could judge those crawling in front by the way they flew head first and flew past the main group.

During one of the falls, Squealer was caught, and with parting words: “Happy to you, guys,” he took off and rushed down into the abyss of being.

Here, by and large, no one was able to help anyone. They could sympathize with the maximum, comfort the pain, save from illnesses, ailments, cheer up ... but no more.

The informer was given a minute of silence.

His paws slid, unable to stay motionless on a smooth surface. Although he did not yet feel tired, he knew well the possibilities of the others and could not disregard them.

- Everyone go, - he commanded, and the group moved on, on the way ...

We walked without extra cargo, even the essentials were left below, at the place where the ascent began. The day was retreating, and it was necessary to hurry to the “ventilation station”.

Not far away, a transition appeared through a smooth white zone, into a rough gray zone, the walking along which was noticeably simplified. It was only necessary to overcome a small hillock on their border.

The barbel kept the newcomers who had fallen on the hillock for a long time, but his powerful front paws, clinging to the ledge, felt more and more tired. Everyone just watched what was happening around. Even the black barbel, doomed on its hind legs, also phlegmatically awaited its further fate...

“We all, in the end, turn out to be worthy of our fate,” the barbel thought with annoyance and, waving his hand, rolled down along with the losers. It fell much faster than its two companions.

No one is able to help anyone - this thought ruined the mustache, - the freckled redhead thought in turn, - even though he was not subject to it.

Only the musician got to the station, who was met by other “lucky ones” - a powerful stream of hot “lava” forced the freckled man to part with him.

The “lucky ones” no longer had the desire or strength to go somewhere from the station, they would not agree to go on a trip even to paradise, but everyone understood the naivety of their desires and knew that, after waiting for a day, they would set off again, because to stay in place, they had to walk.

The dazzling light of a glass mini-sun disrupted the course of what was happening.

- Mom, come here, look what's going on. The cockroaches will soon eat us! She promised to sprinkle with a remedy and did not sprinkle ...

Hot water, picking up the corpses of cockroaches, rushed to the drain, spinning like a funnel around a wide opening.

Hot water was given with great interruptions, and we had to hurry.

Plunging into a warm bath with shampoos diluted in water and lying in it on his back to his full height, Zhenya, closing his eyelids, was immersed in his thoughts.

- How often between a person and evil, which appears to us, in most cases, in the form of all kinds of masks, a sprout of love breaks through, - Zhenya reasoned to himself. - It prevents the use of all means and opportunities to fall on this evil.

- Excessive confidence of a person in his abilities has always been an erroneous step of his logical conclusion, because at certain moments of life she herself caught a dirty trick and inconsistency in herself.

- The unrealized power of internal possibilities sometimes destroys in a person his social and biological credo. A social creed is a crystal castle of morality, without which a person turns into a predatory animal. For example, is it reasonable to save when for this you have to kill?

It happened once, twice, ..., the clock beats the count, and you are going down faster and faster, where you will find an insidious and harsh, but, alas, a fair trial below - you look, and you will find yourself in front of a torn off mask of evil. All this is so similar to the principle of dominoes! Try to put the bones one by one, using thousands and millions of boxes, and then push just one of the "initial" bones and the whole charitable chain will go and twist with a colorful ribbon.

- There is only one answer and the only way out. He can protect a person from this humiliating fall - he is clear even to a fool! - No need to line up!

- Hooray! The reason is clear, the disease is curable! - Zhenya exclaimed naively.

- But alas, between "not necessary" and objective necessity is the whole historical abyss of past and present events. Life forces you to get in line. Or, if it's simpler, she puts you in line herself, without asking anything from you. The revolution is objective and natural, as the result of the struggle of the pure and the just. But is one enough?

To satisfy the whim of a few and alleviate the fate of even many thousands, sometimes millions die.

Everything has been discussed more than once, said, written, most of these questions have already been answered by philosophy, but each time you die in a new way and you perceive the scum that has gone wild more and more sharply and more painfully. Nobody wanted to die! However, they died and are dying to this day.

"Life flows along its own course, and it has its own laws, it is cruel and insidious!" Evgenia climbed into his head. "And especially when it appears to us

in a mask, a mask of the beautiful and majestic. Is it possible to not see the forest for the trees?

- And if we say that everything in life is interconnected and interdependent, that a person is a biosocial being, then social death is a potential biological death.

- How not to recall here the statement of the great Plato, Zhenya cleared up: "Life is a slow death, and whoever does not want to die should not be born." We've come! Yes, but where then is the historical quality of this category? Life for a brighter future! Is it possible that here, too, is the deceit of objectivity - to make light into darkness?

- Zhenya, why are you still there, failed or something? Like no one but you wants to swim?

- Now, Mom, I'm leaving soon, - Zhenya replied, opening his eyes and getting up - that's where the end of any philosophy!

Getting out of Zhenya's bath, he picked up a long clean terry towel from the hanger, sniffed it a couple of times, began to wipe himself, enjoying the cleanliness of his body. He dipped his hand into the water, removed the stopper from the drain hole of the bathtub, put it on the edge of the sink and turned his attention to the polluted water with surprise.

- Weird! It seems to have swum quite recently, and here you are! It's good to swim, wash the body from the outside. And if you cleanse the body from the inside, at least according to the fasting method, according to Bragg1 - then you will generally sway with pleasure .. And also rinse and cleanse the heart and brains, that would be great, all sorts of bad thoughts and philosophical theories would be less overcome, as they are not overcome the unfortunate creatures that climbed the walls of the bath and had to be washed off with water. Maybe you really need to live easier? But how? Life to pass and indeed not a field to pass.

"Zhenya, well, you're soon, finally, or not," her mother called in a nervous loud voice, asking her to quickly empty the bathroom, "it's been more than an hour since you've been busy. I wonder what are you doing there?"

- How quickly everything changes, and how quickly time flies, - Zhenya thought, standing at the window and watching the twilight slowly descending on the city, - which failed to change only the essence of man.

From a distance, almost from the other end of the city, the sound of bells was barely audible. - Hm? - he was surprised. - I wonder who they call at such a time? Strange, they usually called in the morning. A lot has changed in this city too.

He wiped his damp head and hair with a towel for the last time and, turning around, glanced back at his desk. Stacks of paper folders, all kinds of books and a bunch of different papers were waiting for him. He was proud of his education

and his work, which brought him much joy. But he did not yet know if he could work today or not. After a hot bath and a light wash in the shower, he felt a salutary relief of the body and an influx of new forces, but his head was still occupied with tiresome philosophical reflections.

A few minutes later he made his way to the kitchen. To complete the set of biological needs and achieve the highest point of physical bliss, he lacked a couple of cups of strong hot tea.

But even after that, he did not feel completely happy and satisfied.

The soul of his hot he ate something else, yet unknown to him, some sublime feeling, which he needed like wings for flight.

03.12.1988

THIRTY-SEVENTH PATIENT

There are problems that cannot be reached,
but you must at least reach, limping, and in these cases
it's not a sin to limp.

Z. Freud

What is the phenomenon of knowledge?

The fact that when they are not needed and they are not used, they gradually disappear, go away, but not without a trace. They leave their traces in the soul, in the form of scratches, like on a gramophone record. Traces appear and are played out in the end in those methods and techniques of world perception that are not amenable to verbal formulations and explanations...

The hot scorching sun raised steam from the ground. Through a metal mesh stretched on a high iron grate, dust was golden from a sandy road a hundred meters away, when a passenger car or dump trucks occasionally ran along it, dragging sand from quarries.

A clean white "Volga" of a new brand raced along the road, raising regular clouds of dust behind it.

- Caught, caught! - there was a joyful voice.

- Whom, who caught? - asked the second.

- Who, whom? - mimicked the third. - It's clear who, the cat by the tail!

- Oh, how good - supported the fourth - let me hold. Oh please!

- Sadists, do not torture the beast, let go, let go, start, have a bite, - the fifth wound up.

- In a quiet forest, only the beaver does not sleep ... - the song came, - ... because of that, the beaver does not sleep. - Consider, the more, the less, but not always, - shouted the sixth.

"Look, look," the next voice suddenly yelled, "the captain still has the genitals of the beast in his hands.

There was a joyful roar and roar.

The little lizard, having lost its tail, did not feel the loss at all, on the contrary, the joy of liberation carried it with stunning speed to the nearest shelter.

"Anzor Mikhailovich, visitors have come to you!" a young paramedic declared, turning to an elderly tall man in a white coat standing with his back, who was observing something curious that was happening outside the window, in the yard.

"Who are they?" asked the doctor, not without surprise.

“I don’t know, I see it for the first time,” a gentle female voice answered behind him.

In the office of Anzor Mikhailovich, a man and a woman of forty or forty-five years old, of pleasant appearance, were waiting. The woman, however, looked much younger. They were both well dressed.

- Anzor Mikhailovich, - a man in a white coat introduced himself.

- Kaha! And this is Nana, my wife, - the visitor introduced himself, rising from the luxurious sofa in the waiting room.

- What do you owe?

- You see, I am the elder brother of Zakharia Bendukidze. We are concerned about his fate. I can't believe how serious this is.

- Tiniko, please find me the folders and magazines that I asked you about, they should be down there in the closet.

The paramedic silently nodded her head and proceeded to fulfill the request.

- Anzor Mikhailovich, we very much hope that the answer will be encouraging. Is there anything serious with him?

The head doctor sighed, unhurriedly took out a cigarette from a pack lying on the table, crushed it, moved the ashtray closer and lit it. He was silent, considering the answer.

- I know there are people who strictly and punctually do what they say. There are those who talk about themselves better and more than they are, these are all kinds of braggarts. It is quite rare to find those who slander themselves, - Kakha tried to somehow start a conversation. - Zakhariy never belonged to any of the listed types and was usually laconic, he liked to have his deeds and deeds speak for him. True, I was infuriated in him by the fact that he always urged me to hone my feelings, while he himself ran away from this, strove more towards the peaks of the rational that he had not conquered.

Kakha peered with curiosity at Anzor Mikhailovich, who did not try to interrupt his story, but on the contrary, by his puffs and the position taken in the chair, one could judge his interest in additional information about his patient. Therefore, after a short pause, Kakha continued his story.

- School - for a medal, university - with honors, a large department at the institute under his leadership, and then, I'm sure, wide horizons awaited him, and here's the ending for you, besides, such an unexpected one! Has it burned out? Doctor, tell me straight, is he sick?” Kakha asked bluntly.

- Yes ... that is, no ... - the doctor hesitated.

- Like this?

“His trouble is that he knows too much and too little.

- About myself?

- About everything, including myself.

- Well, what's the matter?

- Exactly in this!

- Doctor, your calmness is starting to cost me nerves!

- They are unlikely to help your brother now.

"Listen, you..." Kakha said almost sternly, getting up from the couch.

- Kakha, I beg you, don't! - the companion threw him.

Tiniko stopped her search and glanced at the doctor.

"Can I see him?" continued Kakha.

- I am afraid it is not!

- Here, what, a prison, or what? Well, you are in order! If a person is not sick, why do you keep him, and even do not allow you to see him? My father wrote to me about it, and now I see it myself.

The head physician patiently listened to the reproaches, and then suddenly asked:

- I'm asking you both to get out of here.

- That is, how is it? - Kakha exploded.

- If you really think about him and want him well, then leave. Your arrival will not give him anything, but on the contrary, it will upset him once again.

"No," Kakha resolutely objected, "we're not going anywhere from here until we see him, or at least find out from someone that with him and how he is here!

Anzor Mikhailovich thought for a minute. It seemed to him that Kakha was even more seriously ill than his brother.

There was no point in resisting.

- Tiniko! - He turned to the nurse.

"Yes, Anzor Mikhailovich," she answered readily.

"When do we have a hypnopedia session with him?" the doctor asked.

- I'll see now! Tiniko took out one of the stationery books with the inscription "Patient Diary" from the closet and began to flip through the pages.

"At fourteen-thirty today," she told the doctor.

"Damn it!" thought Anzor Mikhailovich. - If I let them in an hour before the session, they will disrupt my entire course, and then everything is gone! Well, why a person in life never manages to hide from his world. They find you, even if you run away many kilometers from him, and interfere, interfere, constantly and from everywhere! We need to try to discourage them from this, - he tried to calm down and gather his thoughts.

“Well,” he said aloud, “I’ll try to explain what I can do,” he began calmly and slowly. “You see, the fact is that Zakhar always yielded to everyone in everything and sacrificed himself - his happiness, well-being, health .. yielded to you - relatives and friends, yielded to friends, acquaintances, yielded to society. Yielded, conceded, and conceded again! And now you suddenly realized. But right now, when, in your opinion, his time has come, his turn, it’s already too late, - Anzor Mikhailovich took a deep breath, held his breath for a second and exhaled with relief. - Zakhar fell for too long, - he thought, - and without a great idea, this occupation is far from safe for a person. He fell even when he got up, climbed out of spite and contrary to fate. But he couldn’t run away from her.

- A well-known Russian film director I recently reminded us that there are things in life more important than our own happiness... - continued Anzor Mikhailovich, smoking another cigarette with deep puffs. He stood at the window and looked into it more than he looked at his subdued interlocutors, and was surprised at the great and rapid changes in nature. When they hurried here, everything around was incinerated by the sun, and now the wind rose and overtook the clouds, drizzling rain, foreshadowing a thunderstorm. It seemed to him that nature itself was angry for him.

- These are things connected with the thoughts, worries, deeds and experiences of other people, especially those close to them, - continued Anzor Mikhailovich. - Replacing one’s own for the sake of the environment was the principle of Zakhar’s life. This boundless self-sacrifice was the postulate of his inner state.

“How do you know all this?” Nana asked in amazement.

Anzor Mikhailovich continued without answering:

You never could and never will understand this. He wanted, passionately desired not what he sometimes told you about, but for you to understand: every person, especially the closer one, has the right to be understood and desire, not all, well, at least a little of what you have and have had for a long time you. He waited on you, but did not demand, he waited, held on as best he could, to the last strength. I expected from you such elementary - not material assistance and nothing else, except for one thing: ordinary human understanding. What did he get instead? Advice, reproaches, even attempts to help - everything except what is desired. The desired understanding on your part, despite all his “creative successes”. So why do you need it now? He was with you and lived with you all the life from which he came to me!

“How do you know all this?” Kakhaber objected nervously, with some astonishment, and added: “All this is nonsense, nonsense, the fruits of your

imagination in order to keep the patient and conduct your vile experiments and observations. But this number will not work with us, I warn you!

- He has new manifestations of a well-known disease and they require new, non-traditional methods of treatment, - Anzor Mikhailovich convinced.

- Can you guarantee success with your method of treatment? - Kakhaber's companion was interested, calming her angry husband.

“Unfortunately, I cannot give you any guarantees.

“We saw a smart guy, he can't give guarantees,” Kakha was indignant.

“But I will do everything in my power, and I can assure you that my hopes are not unfounded,” continued the doctor. - And the rest ... The rest will be yours, when he returns to you, you will have to take into account and implement everything that I talked to you about.

- And yet we want to see him! - Kakha was implacable.

A loud male voice came from Anzor Mikhailovich's room, and lively arguments were heard for a long time.

Then everything calmed down for a while. Suddenly, the door opened and a married couple came out, accompanied by Tiniko. She headed towards the long corridor leading to the chambers.

Zakhary lay alone in a spacious ward, under the supervision of a constantly present nurse, who was sitting at the table, sorting through some papers, and now and then glanced at the instrument control panel, the intercom.

Three visitors stood over the sleeping patient.

“Hello, Zakhar,” Kakhaber yelled joyfully and lightly shook his hand.

But Tiniko immediately stopped him with a gesture, and he obediently recoiled.

- You see, Nana, he has not changed at all!

Nana affirmatively nod ula head.

Zakhary opened his eyes and looked at the visitors with curiosity.

- Ah, - he drawled, - Ka...Ka...Kaha.

Tiniko stepped aside in anger - she violated the doctor's order.

Kakha and Nana chattered happily and impatiently, interrupting each other. Zakhar was awakening little by little. The nurse, who was sitting in the room, began to argue with Tiniko, who persuaded and asked her for something.

After some negotiations, Tiniko approached the visitors.

“That's enough,” she pleaded and tried to push Kakha towards the exit.

“How are you here?” he asked.

Zachary smiled and nodded his head.

“Do you want to stay here?” Kakha solicited.

` Zakhar in response smiled again and nodded his head.

Do you want me to take you away from here?

Zakhar answered the same way as he did to all questions - with a smile and a nod of his head.

After some negotiations and parting, Kakha and Nana promised to come again and then take him home.

- What happened, Tina? Doubt me?

Tina, exhausted, not convinced that she was right, nodded her head negatively. Anzor Mikhailovich approached her with a leisurely step and stopped in front of her:

- Tina, remember how for many years we have been jointly discussing the causes of our patients' diseases and the prospects for their treatment. There are ordinary, extraordinary and, so to speak, the most interesting cases. You cannot but agree with this, as well as with how many adversaries and enemies we have, eager for us to stumble and fall. I need you, girl, understand, - Anzor Mikhailovich gently passed his hand over her arm.

Tina pulled away from him in disgust.

- I am not your girl, Anzor Mikhailovich, but a woman who has many friends, acquaintances - people I love, and it pains me to watch your problematic experiments based on the trial and error method on people. They come to you for help, and you finish them off in your clinic.

- Tiniko, you know that often they come to me too late.

- Then what is your contribution to all this? After all, they are not experimental animals. Why do we need all these empty tricks?

- Tiniko, I do not recognize you, all the last years you have been my right hand and even more. I thought you were my soul mate, but it turned out I was wrong.

- No, they weren't wrong! I believed you, I waited, I hoped. You need to muster up the courage and bluntly say, at least to yourself, that all this ...

- Tiniko, it hurts me very much to hear such words from you.

- Anzor Mikhailovich, our deeds are much more painful.

- Excuse me, in that case - it's not for you to judge!

- Yes, but this is judged by practice, life, the results of our work.

The female voice was gaining more and more determination, and now it became clear that this opinion was unshakable.

- None of your patients have returned to normal life.

“Without us, they would have died much earlier,” Anzor Mikhailovich objected peacefully.

- It is known that there are normal clinics, proven methods of treatment. And your experimental clinic is just a den for prostitution and corruption.

- Well, you're going too far, - Anzor Mikhailovich was almost indignant, quickly walked towards his opponent and stopped in front of her, looked intently into her eyes. - Where did you bring this from ?!

- Yes, the whole clinic is already talking about this: you recruit patients for money, you pay for their money with the medical staff, who, according to your careful selection, are recruited from women with unsuccessful destinies. And much scarier than what you do to your patients is what you do to your colleagues. You are doing double experiments, while remaining in profit, with a name and the prospect of a brilliant career.

- Girl, you're crazy! - Anzor Mikhailovich furiously shook Tina by the shoulders. - How dare you?!

- And so, - Tina answered already in hysterics, freeing herself from the hands of the interlocutor by force. - And besides, they also say that you are an insolvent man.

- Rubbish! Whore! - at these words, the tender female cheek felt a slap in the face.

- And now this next victim, Zakhary Bendukidze, and folders with his supposedly sophisticated sessions and interrogations, from which you are trying to extract the reason for the formation and development of his illness. It is tempting, of course: Lominadze's patients, once in his clinic, begin to think differently! Yes, you will finally ruin this unfortunate mute ...

- This is not your concern! - Anzor Mikhailovich raised his voice in anger.

- Farewell! Tina stormed out of the room, slamming the door hard.

Anzor Mikhailovich stood at the window in complete exhaustion and objected to himself: "This is unheard of!". In the depths of his soul he caught himself on the fact that he was trampling at the beginning of one of the paths of a new scientific work.

"Sorry!" Tina shouted, returning to the office and heading for the couch next to the closet. On her white bedspread rested a folder with which Tina threatened the head doctor of the clinic a few minutes ago. "I forgot your credo," her voice sounded caustically, "now it will fall into the right hands.

Tina walked towards the door.

The possibility of losing and ruining all the results obtained in recent years blew up Anzor Mikhailovich.

“No, excuse me,” he shouted back to her and rushed after her, “you won’t take this folder anywhere, this Oh - the fruit of science, born within the walls of our clinic, and he will certainly remain here!

Anzor Mikhailovich ran into the paramedic and with all his strength pushed her away, pushing her away from the door.

“Give me this folder right now!” he insistently demanded.

“Let me go now, you vile type!” the paramedic shouted in response, continuing her stubborn resistance. Otherwise I’ll scream!

Anzor Mikhailovich reached for the key in the door of his office and, having managed to turn it twice, pulled it out of the keyhole and put it in his pocket. Tina reached for the door handle and pulled it a few times. Anzor Mikhailovich took advantage of this and managed to grab a folder from her. Tina pulled away from the door and tried to make her way to the long office table. But she was stopped by a strong man’s hand, grabbing the left side of the dressing gown. First, the top two buttons flew, and then the sound of tearing fabric was heard.

- Well, thank God, - Tina answered with a cry, - this will be taken care of not by such victims as I, but by people higher up - in the ministry. And they have plenty of materials to take on you. This folder will be added to them! - Tina ran to the closet and took out a thick blue folder with contents unknown to Anzor Mikhailovich.

- Rubbish, you behind my back collected a dossier on me! - yelled the doctor.

- And not only followed, watched you! Conducted the same experiment as you on us, comrade psychoanalyst!

Anzor Mikhailovich froze at the window for a minute in complete shock. What happened was beyond all the experiments he was familiar with, conducted by him personally after graduating from medical school, during the entire time of thirty-seven years of medical activity. And now this slender, pretty thirty-seven-year-old lady, standing in front of him in a white coat, overthrows him with a loud cry. The number thirty-seven seemed fatal to him at that moment.

The warnings of a gypsy in childhood about the ill-fated number thirty-seven in his fate surfaced in her mind. At thirty-seven, he left the department, was expelled for his “non-standard” views and work in a completely different direction from what was required of him.

At thirty-seven, his wife left him.

In the thirty-seventh, cursed year, he lost his father due to circumstances known at that time.

- God! he exclaimed, remembering that Zachary, his last patient, was also the thirty-seventh.

- You only get by by catching even the slightest sublimatic manifestations between your patients and colleagues. And when the results of your “most brilliant” experiments reach the peak of insanity even in the clinic itself, you feel unheard of physical and spiritual satisfaction. That's all you can do. You no longer have any interests in life!

Tina turned around. Her body was visible from under a torn piece of cloth hanging down.

“Ah!” she cried out in surprise, and cast her gaze over Anzor Mikhailovich. Crimson color flooded her face. She suddenly collapsed from fear and embarrassment. For a minute they stood in confusion. Then Tina came to her senses.

- Scoundrel! - she tried in vain to cool the ardor of Anzor Mikhailovich, treating him with a slap in the face, - anyway you will not receive this folder! she rushed and, overcoming resistance, reached the table.

Several papers, seized with paper clips, fell out of the folder and ended up on the floor. Trying to save what was left in the folder from the same fate, she stretched and fell face and hands on the tabletop, dropping both the remaining papers and the folder on it, and froze in exhaustion.

Anzor Mikhailovich ran into her from behind and in anger continued the struggle to win back his “folder of life”, but the struggle turned into other feelings.

He resisted the urge for a long time. Tina felt pain from hitting the edge of the table, she could not straighten up, even when she was freed from the load of the male body for a while. She seemed to have fainted.

- No, it's impossible, - Anzor Mikhailovich resisted himself, but he was already stroking her with his hands.

Then he suddenly stopped and froze...

He was still waiting for Tina to rise, straighten up, turn around, resist, and he would leave her alone. But Tina didn't get up. He didn't hold back. Unwittingly, he crossed the line that ruined not only himself, but also the cause to which he devoted his whole life.

What was to be done if it was not yet time for his new scientific view to appear.

He perfectly understood that Tina was set on him by his enemies, who tried in every possible way to destroy him and his business.

But the most terrible was the suspicion that crept into his mind and soul. In Tina, he always saw and felt his faithful assistant and perceived her as his right hand. There were one, two, and counted such people loyal to him, to whom he

trusted a lot, and could even trust his life. And now he suspected that she had been assigned to him from the very beginning, in order to undermine and drown his cause and himself at one fine moment. And this suspicion hit the "very bull's-eye, in the top ten." This, as he himself believed, was a defeat, the end of everything. He sadly remembered the proverb: "The biggest friends are the biggest traitors." It seemed to him now that he would not trust anyone else in his life.

He wondered how she could be so cruel to betray him? Both he and she knew perfectly well that nothing of what she tried to incriminate him happened in his clinic.

"Well, then," he thought with chagrin, "I will get what I deserve. But what about the work, with the results of analyses, observations and research that I have been doing all the best years of my life? I dedicated my work and gave it everything - even my personal happiness."

God, what a fool I am, - indignation rose in him, - and he was also going, if suddenly something happened to me, to hand over to her all the results, this very "folder of life".

Groups of paranoid and self-satisfied fools swarm around in packs, and no one needs anything - no progress, no progress, no science ... just like a community of madmen and idiots. It is better for them to cash in on these unfortunate patients than to try to help them at least with something seriously and radically change their situation. Lord, if it were impossible to help them, I would not have been engaged in this business all my life. Maybe in another country or at another time they at least listened to me, but here at least shout at the top of your lungs, no one wants to listen to you.

Yes, go to hell, nothing can be changed for the better here, and no one simply needs it. Life proceeds according to a very simple principle: "Don't change anything, and there will be fewer problems." Nothing was able to "break through" before, and now even more so. The only thing I can still do is to help my patient Zakhar a little."

Anzor Mikhailovich left the clinic completely crushed. He knew that it was all over for him, and now he was worried not so much about this, but the question: "Why did she lie at the interview?" - followed by a number of others: "Why did she fill out the form incorrectly when applying for a job? What was it on her part? With what thoughts did she hire me to work: sacrifice for the sake of science, curiosity, the machinations of my enemies? After all, she had nothing in her life! Then why?"

Anzor Mikhailovich felt an urgent need to talk to Zakhary and immediately felt the fear that the thought of a possible farewell and separation from Zakhary forever overtook him.

He was already sitting on a chair in front of the sleeping Zakhar, his head bowed, clasping it with both hands, resting his elbows on his knees. He was silent for a long time and was grinding something in his head. He mentally addressed the sleeping man:

“That's it, my Zakhar. What has the old, life-torn outrageous done! Oh my God, why are all my good intentions and undertakings always turned inside out and presented as evil and unworthy, and then they pursued me all my life, harassing and finishing me in every possible way?”

He remembered the words of one patient who was brought to him too late, and he could not help her in any way.

“I have gone too far, from where there is no turning back,” the unfortunate woman repeated before her death.

He sat for a long time, tormented, moaning. Finally, he remembered that today was the day of the session, and regretted that he had come here with such thoughts and moods. I also caught myself on the assumption that now I was more likely to receive a session with Zakhar, whose calm face radiated a smile of appeasement. And the whole set of his triads (along with the main triad of Z. Freud1 "GAT" - hypnopedia, association, transfer), with other fundamental moments of the psychological concept of the unconscious, seemed to be rolling somewhere to hell.

“It turns out that nothing in life needs to be simplified or complicated, and not everyone can climb beyond the bounds of the insoluble, but you just need to live peacefully, and what is not desirable for you, you cannot do yourself, so as not to tempt fate. Hmm, he remembered, just like with the phenomenon of the forbidden fruit.

- And remember, Zakhar, no one and nothing in life will help you as much as you yourself, because even if someone wholeheartedly wants to help you, everything will oppose this act - nature, people, society, finally the case. So, Zakhar, from now on, only you are your own support and help, and I set you up for this. You will remember my image in a dream and repeat these words aloud. Do you understand me son?

The doctor paused, as if waiting for an answer.

There was no answer. Then he continued himself: “Another thing: to live, you need to be thirsty. To help yourself, you need to at least want it for yourself. In this, and in nothing else, I saw my function and purpose in relation to you. For

the death drive has been known for a long time, the “philosophy of death” is also present in Dr. Z. Freud, and it is possible to kill this drive, at least for a while, only by interrupting it with another drive, suitable for a specific individual and special for each patient. I was close to the goal, but now I'm afraid that I won't be able to do it to the end, so relax and listen to me carefully. Then follow my precepts, and everything will pass for you, even barriers in speech will be removed.

Anzor Mikhailovich instilled something in the patient for a long time, sometimes resorting to the help of his hands and facial expressions.

Finished the session and continued.

- Yes, that's what I wanted to tell you, Zakhar. I had a friend, a type with no small quirks. What were they? You see, he acted in a way that no sane person in the world would have done. He watered for a withered bush, looked after an unfruitful tree, loved and became attached to girls from whom he would never have received reciprocity, spent where it was possible to get. Why did he do it? You see, it turned out that he was not earthly! Understanding, feeling, suffering and experiencing what he succeeded is sometimes much more important than what we encounter in our gray everyday life, even with its most beautiful manifestations. Zachary, you are the only one who will hear, recognize, even subconsciously, the essence and core of my method of treatment, which brought me so many joys and so many troubles. I will put my healing program into your unconscious, and your conscious will draw from the unconscious. The meaning of life is in its necessity, and therefore the salvation of man is in man himself. Yes, I confess that my fault and serious mistake is that I was aware of this and, saving all of you, my patients, I saved and prolonged the life of myself too. But I think I won't be able to do it now, and it doesn't depend on me. Do you understand me son? Never talk about it to anyone or mention it either in speeches or even on a subconscious level. Otherwise, the same, and maybe worse, can overtake you. Let these freaks think they cured you. It doesn't matter, as long as you feel good. You can't blow it out loud, but you need to try to do it. Forgive me for being frank, and please don't think that I'm telling you about this knowing that you have lost the gift of normal speech. It's just that now I need someone to listen to me, hear me and keep silent. Sleep, son, sleep. I could cure you, but who is to blame for the fact that a person believes, but life and fate have? I leave you to these lunatics, with their traditional, formulaic and completely brainless therapies. May God forgive me for this, for leaving and abandoning your beloved work is the greatest sin on earth. But now it doesn't depend on me.

He buried his face in his hands and fell into deep thought. After a pause, he got up from his chair, straightened the bed and, nodding goodbye to Zakhar, went to the door. He was well aware that he had much in common with Zakhar, as he also understood that if it were not for hard work in his time, he would have shared his fate. But was his current fate the best?

“Rita,” he turned to the nurse, who was enthusiastically immersed in reading the patient’s journal, “please take care of him,” he looked towards the patient with whom he had just parted, “replace his dialogues with me with self-determination procedures with other patients. And then, I think, he will fall into good hands. The Almighty will not sacrifice a person if the person himself does not do this - he remembered with joy, but said nothing.

- Well, - Rita agreed not without amazement, she wanted to ask something, but did not dare.

- Yes, and one more request, please transfer Zakhar from this ward number thirty-seven to some other one.

Rita nodded in the affirmative.

“A person only reaches the beginning of his foreseeable perfection when his soul begins to think, and his mind begins to feel,” thought Anzor Mikhailovich.

He believed that this thought, not without intent, came to him with some delay, like many other things expressed in the tragedy of the mismatch and incompatibility of desires.

A charming statue of the Muse with outstretched arms and soul invited to itself - in the building of the State Philharmonic Society - the participants of the next international symposium - the school-seminar of psychiatrists. The last days of its work were going on, the participants had already listened to many reports, exchanged opinions, arguments, shared the results of their achievements and observations. In the main, the paths for further work and the program for the global and local development of science, with all its characteristic and specific ramifications, have already been formulated.

A draft resolution had already been handed out to the participants, but the symposium was still in progress, and the report of the next speaker was in progress.

Exclamations of amazement, and even objections, followed by sighs, then exclamations and greetings, gradually awakened and enlivened the hall.

“So, comrades,” the orator proclaimed, “throughout the history of mankind, greatness was revered not so much as that which discovered the great, as that which came into contact with it. Of the scientists-discoverers, one can name physicians, and biologists, and physicists, and philosophers, politicians, and

many others, you can't list them all. It's all about how, with what and when you come into contact.

In this report, I would like to dwell on some of the conceptual principles of the "contact theory" of the doctor known to all of you, our compatriot and major psychoanalyst Lominadze, and I propose to call the phenomena associated with this doctrine the Lominadze effect.

A noise went through the hall, a revival was felt, even a few cries were heard: "We don't know this!" "Unheard of!"

Many were talking.

- And who is he?

- I don't know, I called myself his student.

- Did you know him?

- Who, Anzor Mikhailovich, or what?

- Well, yes, this very Lominadze!

- Yes, there was one rogue charlotte. They say that in the era of the emergence of cooperation, he left the department at the institute, allegedly opened a wedge for himself and switched to practical activities.

- And why supposedly?

- Yes, because, as they say, this clinic of his was in fact an institution and served him as a means of making money. Rumor has it that he himself seduced one minor. Anyway sewn in court, among many other things. True, he was later rehabilitated, but his heart, as they say, could not stand it. Seems to have recently passed away. It is also said that he was very confident in himself and in his methods of treatment and did not recognize anyone or anything else. My God, how mean, how could you drag his name here!

- A speaker from the podium! - a cry was heard from the audience and a whistle.

- As you know, what is rejected attracts, and I ask some of those present, if they do not respect me and the name of my teacher and healer, let them at least reckon with our guests and participants in the symposium who do not know and have not heard what I want to tell.

The chairman rang.

- In fact, let the speaker finish. I have a request to him: in short - your regulations have already been exhausted.

- I'm finishing, - the speaker agreed. - So, what is the greatness and strength of the theory of contact. Firstly, in that it closely echoes the philosophy of the presence of M. Heidegger¹, the essence of which is that: "Man is a being whose essence is in his presence and environment." The greatness of personalities has

always been determined by the greatness of the pain that they experienced in relation to the people they loved immensely and all of humanity. This is a pain that mercilessly treated and claimed thousands, millions and sometimes billions of human lives. Their contact with the great subconsciously made them such. "For a small ship, a great voyage." - In a great voyage, a small boat becomes a big ship. In such cases, it becomes unimportant if something does not work out. My report has been presented to the organizing committee, and those who wish can familiarize themselves with it. I also inform you that I can share some materials of Professor Lominadze's works. He even succeeded in revealing the contradiction in the great Freud. He proves that the energy, desire and passion with which Dr. Freud came to his conclusions are greater than those physiological and energy concentrations that, in his opinion, constitute one of the main sources of energy in human life and, of course, in himself. But the great scientist could not see this in himself, but Lominadze saw it thanks to the fact that Freud came into contact with it.

There was noise again in the hall.

- And one more thing: he had an amazing premonition of lack of time. He understood that if something that could happen did not happen once, then it might never happen again.

The results to which he came through overwork, sometimes even through "I can't", led him to the following: "No luxury (even the luxury of human communication according to Saint-Exupery, the joy of Freud's physical, biological or physiological attraction and its satisfaction, like much more) cannot be compared with the joy of knowledge and discovery, which can also be called the process of doctor Lominadze. And then, in a fit of joy, he declares that truly there is only that which does not exist in concepts, sensations, etc., which exists as if it does not exist. Truly, the most material thing in the world is the non-material. The material is temporary, and the intangible is eternal, though if the latter is Good!

He was one of the few stalkers in the realm of the unconscious.

- God, what is he wearing? heard in the hall. The cheers grew louder.

- Lominadze had neither students nor followers, because no one will follow a madman. I wonder who is this?

- Oh, yes, leave, for God's sake, the same crazy person as his teacher, don't you see?

- What if he's his patient? Probably! But then what is he doing at the symposium, who let him in here? And who allowed him to continue his work? No, it's impossible, it's nonsense!

- He had some famous sins in his life!

“All this is no reason not to take his works seriously,” objected the orator. - I insist that some of the above effects, open to them, be given his name. This is necessary, he assured. As for his oddities and quirks, they are often characteristic of large personalities, and this is no reason to tear us away from considering his concepts. He not only supplemented Freud's teaching, but also developed it, introduced new fundamental and fundamental provisions into science.

Applause, exclamations: “Bravo, excellent”, “Bravo, Dr. Lominadze”, and whistling, laughter, cries, exclamations accompanied the speaker from the podium.

According to the participants of the symposium, at the last meeting on this issue, the debate flared up no less than on the previous day.

Only the speaker could provide a complete and exhaustive answer to very important and fundamental questions. But at the last meeting he was not in the hall. It was also not possible to establish his identity, because he registered under an assumed name.

It turned out that the participant he pretended to be was unable to fly to the symposium due to illness.

There were rumors that the speaker had escaped from psychiatric hospital and on the very day when he spoke, he was caught again.

In any case, the participants and even the public of the city, excited by this news, were promised that everything would be cleared up in the near future.

The promise was nevertheless fulfilled - the troublemaker was discovered, but the issues raised by him at the symposium have not yet been returned ...

On that day, the moon resisted the sun for an amazingly long time, even managing to challenge it to a competition and challenge the beauty and power of its impact on the earth.

“... It is impossible to joke not only with life in general, but also with any business, remembering where it should be directed. And not a single minute should be wasted. In a plant, for example, and in an animal body, not a single moment passes so that there is ???-?? what is required for life has not happened, but it is happening there unconsciously and involuntarily, and a rational creature must do the same in a moral-religious order independently, consciously and self-significantly.

St. Theophan the Recluse

The white, latest-issue Volga, turning off the intercity highway outside the city to the left, gradually headed up the serpentine mountainous terrain, raising clouds of earth dust behind it.

Half an hour later, the territory of the beginning city cemetery was already visible, growing every year at an incredible speed, turning into an alternative to the lower city.

“Stop here, please,” the woman said in a soft voice.

“Maybe we should wait for you?” the driver suggested.

- Don't, I want to be here alone.

Would you like us to pick you up on your way back?

- Don't, I beg you, don't, leave, don't linger.

Not far from the road, a five to seven minute walk, the woman stopped at the grave.

“How I miss you, mother, how I miss you,” she shed tears and lit a candle at the head of the bed.

After sitting for half an hour, the woman moved back home, hovered for a long time among the graves tightly pressed against each other, running down the slope of the hillock.

“I think it's around here somewhere,” she whispered audibly.

The sun was rising to its zenith and it was getting hot. She shielded her eyes from the rays with her hand and looked up.

- Go a little further, don't worry, I'll help you find it, - as if she heard the whisper of a fiery luminary in response.

Not far from the narrow path, she noticed what she was looking for. Came in at a brisk pace. Eyes filled with tears.

A narrow grave, trimmed with basalt, overgrown with densely tall weeds, stood out sharply from the rest of the well-groomed ones.

The woman leaned against the marble slab with the initials and ran her hand over it several times. Tears escaped from under the eyelids.

- All my life I was alone, unattended, and remained so after her, - she barely kept the growing waves of emotions.

Forgive me, forgive me for betraying you and your cause so cruelly. But what was left for me when you left that day and left the office door ajar. The duty officer came in and saw ... She stared at me for a long time, and then ran out of the office. The next day everyone was talking. And then my pride, desecrated honor and those fighting against you forced me to make a second big mistake. Sorry if you can. I, too, paid dearly for what happened. I didn't have anyone

before or after you, you know that. I tried to atone for all the guilt before you by raising your son.

You know what it means to give birth without a father. I could have gotten rid of it in my time, but I didn't do it for you. The numerous persuasions of my parents did not persuade me to such a decision. I was able to hide from everyone only that this child is yours.

The father could not bear what happened. He lamented, was ashamed of what they would say at work, friends, neighbors. After that, the mother was sick for a long time.

Of course, I left the clinic, it became impossible to stay there.

Recently she buried her mother, and now Mishutka and I are left alone. Don't worry about him, I'll do anything for him. If only you would forgive me, Anzor. When I caught myself and came to my senses, it was too late and nothing could be changed.

She cleared the grave of weeds and put it in order.

Half an hour later, a woman was descending along a winding road from the cemetery to the main highway, crushed by life and grief, with a broken fate and heart.

At home, she was tired, met by quiet modern pop music. She kicked off her shoes with difficulty and eased her tired feet into her slippers.

In her hand was a very wet handkerchief.

She almost stealthily walked towards the bedroom. The sounds of music and the fragrant smell of tobacco smoke wafted from it.

Through the open door of the room, she saw a slow dance couple.

Her girlfriend was the first to notice her, young, thin, with chestnut hair cut "under the boy", almost a head shorter than the guy with whom she walked in a slow dance.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, catching a look at herself. "Hello, Aunt Tina," she lowered her thin little hands.

- Hello, Olechka, hello! - How are you?

"Thank you," the girl murmured, embarrassed.

- Ah, mother, hello! Olga was passing by and decided to visit me. At the same time worked out together.

Tina noticed a drink on the edge of the desk.

a bottle of liquor, a couple of glasses, a chocolate bar broken into pieces and slices of an apple on a saucer.

- Yes, I see!

- I'll go, - Olya picked up her handbag from the table.

- Oh, wait, well, what are you really! Well, why are you like this, mom?
- What why?
- She is a very good girl!
- Certainly! At her age, she smokes, walks, drinks.
- Mom, stop it, she smokes light ladies' cigarettes, now it's fashionable, and we drank light liquor.
- As you young people, everything is fine and easy!
- Not at all! You see, there are books on the table, we were studying, then we relaxed a little and decided to rest.

Tina looked through the books out of curiosity. Psychology, sociology, philosophy.

For a long time she turned over the works of Z. Freud on the psychology of the unconscious, leafed through the program of entrance examinations to universities, and notebooks scattered on the table. She gazed at her son, who replied with an irritated question:

- What? What do not you like?

She suddenly grabbed him by the arm and dragged him to the corner with the icons.

“Here,” she said sternly, “look, look at the icon of the Lord God. What is he holding in his hands? Which book? Z. Freud or the Bible? What does he advise us to read, which way to go? What are you doing?”

- Yes, but he does not forbid us to read other books.
- Not! But everything else is a waste of time, a hobby, a hobby! We are commanded to live in the world not like the world.
- You know, mother, that I want to continue and complete the work of my father, at least on paper, theoretically.

- Your father was ruined by this way!
- No, not true, you yourself said that he was ruined by an absurd accident.

“But you are already a big boy, quite well-read in theology, and you should understand which path leads to what.

- I use my knowledge in theology and psychology.
- First, in the psychology of the unconscious, study the conscious and all that is necessary for a person to save the soul. The main theological literature, writings and works of the holy fathers. And then, if there is time, please take up other literature. But, I assure you, you will not only have no time for other literature, but you will also have no desire.

- But, mom, I can't live the way you want it.
- Not me, but the savior of each of us.

- Yes, but he does not forbid us to live, love, enjoy life if we do not violate his commandments.

- Whoever is fond of what, in the end, he is defeated. Understand, finally, whoever loves God does not have worldly love, with its lust and pride.

- I still want to continue the work of my father. Who will do it if not me. Don't you understand this? Forgot how much you told me about him and his case?

- I didn't forget, but all my life I believed in him, in his work. But now, better than ever, I understand that we were both wrong.

- Yes, but someone has to deal with this matter. Damn it, you gotta help people in trouble.

- Isn't it easier not to bring it to this, son, think about it? To everything, absolutely to all questions, the Church and our Christian Orthodox faith gives completely exhaustive and the only true answers. Following them, you can avoid the dangers, traps and abysses that lie in wait on the path of life of every person.

"Then why do you keep folders with your father's work?" The bales you use to litter the apartment?

- It's just a memory of him.

Mom, maybe you're right. But I don't agree with you on everything. According to your philosophy, there is no need for a person in science, art, sports, health care ... but all this exists. Well, all right, but you yourself said that your father managed to cure the thirty-seventh patient using the new method developed, and many more before him.

- Yes, but many remained uncured, and all of them could not be brought to this state. Oh, God, - she put her hand to her forehead. - Perhaps you're right, you need to get rid of your father's works, - she said, agreeing with her son and went to a pile of folders and rolls of papers located in the corner of the loggia.

"Don't you dare!" the voice of her son, who followed her, retorted sharply.

In the loggia, she seized on the ill-fated eighteen-year-old manuscripts that had played such a fatal role in her fate and life.

- Do not you dare! - the son tried to snatch them from his mother.

A light confrontation and struggle ensued.

- Misha, stop it, how dare you? - objected Tina.

"Give it to me, give it back," insisted the son.

He managed to get hold of the materials.

Tina ran after him, hit his back with acceleration, grabbed his shoulder.

Misha automatically, from a half turn, grabbed her by the sleeve and, not calculating his strength, pushed her aside.

She flew off and found herself in a half-sitting position on the table. In amazement, she remembered what had happened to her eighteen years ago.

“He is the spitting image of a father,” flashed through her mind, “just as strong, handsome, stubborn, purposeful ...”

- You raised your hand on your mother, - as if coming to her senses, Tina stated in an almost calm tone.

- You take away my beloved girl, my favorite pastime and the purpose of life.

"Wrong target," Tina corrected.

“Better put yourself in order,” Misha suggested.

- If you die, like your father, I will not mourn you!

There was a knock at the front door.

She threw herself in her room on a stake not in front of the icon of the Mother of God and burst into tears.

- He is as stubborn, tough, intractable as his father! Please help me change him for his own good. Don't let him die, because I have no one left but him, and the path he is going to take will not lead to you.

That evening, Tina prayed longer and more fervently than usual.

A few months later, in the published lists of students enrolled in the theological seminary at number thirty-seven, Tina found the surname, name and patronymic of her son. Her joy knew no bounds. she stood in front of the lists, sobbed with happiness and thought: everything that she had endured in her life was worth this one day and these minutes.

It seemed that the number thirty-seven turned out to be a happy side for her and her family. The same number of days after that, Olya and her family moved to another city. Tina lived another thirty-seven years, of which she devoted most of her time to raising her grandchildren and granddaughters.

04.1990/2001

DIFFICULT WORDS

Carry each other's burdens
and thus fulfill
the law of Christ.
(Gal. 6:2)

The rain poured down like a bucket. The wipers of the front, windshield of the Zhiguli, which had lost their normal rhythm, could hardly cope with the flow of rainwater. Visibility has deteriorated to a disgrace. The splashes from the puddles were scattered with pressure under the wheels spinning furiously along the road.

“You relax, surrender to the flow of life, you find yourself almost ready to renounce earthly life, but no!” the driver thought, peering into the barely visible road, “merciless fate gives neither life nor death. Throws from one wall to another, like a billiard ball. What carried me at night, in such weather the devil knows where?! For two days he repeated: “Damn it all!”, and suddenly: here you are! Idiot!

A strong blow to the parpriz of the machine made him cry out loudly. The steering wheel turned involuntarily. An instinctive braking reaction followed. The car skidded slightly. The door slammed noisily. There was a kick on the front wheel, then a loud exclamation: - "Damn this sympathy!"

It looks like the loud statement struck down the lightning, which was apparently taken by surprise.

The sky heeded the wrath of the driver, the rain suddenly stopped abruptly.

- Okay, calm down and go in peace! - that was the answer of the sky.

Quickly replacing the tire with a spare, the soaked driver continued on his way.

The wipers continued to move.

- The devil knows what! Still winter is called! - the driver was annoyed.

The rain turned into light snow. Suddenly, the driver was powerfully blinded by the headlight of an oncoming car.

- Oh, yours! .. - scolded her driver.

- What if we call on Misha? - he thought, calming down a little. - All the same, on the way, maybe he can help with something? And this is an idea! A relative, in the end, let him help out! But what will he think? On such a night! The clock is nearly twelve. How many years have I been passing by him every

day, on my way to work and back, and then things, sometimes at the wrong time, sometimes something else ...

- Who's there? - I heard from behind the gate, after his several drawn-out intermittent calls.

The dog barked.

And now the night guest sits at the table and explains with the owner.

- Listen, Mish, help me out: it is necessary to exchange money, at first somehow I didn't think about them, well, and now ...

- Yes ... - the owner, far from being a young man, stretched out. - Nick, the fact is that we have already taken ours and handed them over.

- Is it clear! Of course, the second time they will not accept from you.

- Wait, we'll think of something, leave a little.

- You know how it happens, it seems that no one had anything, but such a thing happened - everyone got everything ...

- Well!

- God, - continued Nick, - how many good and dirty deeds are sometimes done on them! Well, here, I leave, just in case, a little.

- Okay, I'll try to think of something.

The conversation did not last long. In a hurry, they forgot to really talk about who is doing, and Nick only apologized:

- For God's sake, apologize to your people for waking you up!

- Nothing, they are so asleep that they probably did not hear anything.

The wipers are back to work.

The tape recorder emitted Madonna from the speakers.

- So, not bad! - Nick thought. - Already less, and that's good.

“Who else can you go to, damn it?” Nick strained. “Neither friends nor acquaintances seem to be left. Everyone moved, got drunk, killed by life. Eh, Ivan, Ivan, how I have always missed you, all the last years. I'm sorry to remember you now, but you know that I always do this. Worst of all, life treated you, knocked you down when you were very young. Your Natalie has been married to someone else for a long time, she has a daughter. Your relatives have long moved somewhere far away. In the house where you lived, now strangers. I'm sorry, but nothing could be done. The doctor then killed us with his cold ruthlessness, declaring the inevitability of what was to come. My eyes would not have seen how you suffered, how every minute you took our life with you, leaving us, friends, the hell of a new life. Sorry if that's not right.

And here is the former window of Svetlana. My first love! Patience left you then, and today you are no longer mine, you already have your own family.

Are you satisfied with life? How are you in another city? Although who is now happy with life! Yesterday, they broadcast on the radio about the most terrible curse that the Chinese have - to wish a person to live in troubled times.

The janitors, having entered the musical rhythm, built their breath and coped with the work already without much difficulty. Madonna was replaced on the speakers by Stevie Wonder.

- What's the damn detour here? We'll have to get out and stomp on foot.

The door slammed again.

Nick marveled at what human hands had done. The old two-story houses that lined the street that Nick was now walking along were almost completely dismantled and pulled apart. On the stretched railroad track stood a low, but ready to shoot up crane. Nick remembered how he and Givi came here to Alina - to drink coffee, guess, chat, finally, just kill time.

- Yes, plenty of time was killed! Why the hell did they fool the girl's head, because they didn't think about anything?! - Nick was upset and immediately calmed down. - True, they didn't think about the bad, but still ...

Nick remembered how in an old meeting, Alina mentioned that they were moving for a while, while a new one was built on the site of their old house.

- To whom to build something? - thought Nick.

I had to slam the car door hard three times to close it.

- As luck would have it, Givi is not here! Always wandering around on business trips, where it is necessary and not necessary.

- Let's go to Seryozhka! - it dawned on Nick.

Surely this is a chance.

The poor thing lives with his mother, he said goodbye to his old job, there seems to be no special income, he will have the opportunity to claim a small amount. All in all, well done man! He suffered, poor fellow, in life, a lot of pain accumulated in his soul. But he got out, he found a way out. He began to write and spill everything onto paper, so touchingly and expressively that it was just right to howl. I wonder how he is now?

Luckily for Nick, even though it was after midnight, the light in Sergei's kitchen, located at the back of his own courtyard, was still on. Nick saw in her the silhouette of a working woman.

- You seem to be Nick, son? - the woman asked, hardly recognizing the guest.

- Really forgot, aunt Xenia! Nick! And who else?

- Oh, son, we haven't had you for a long time.

- For an eternity, Aunt Xenia, - Nick admitted embarrassedly. - You know, work, home, third, fourth ... - he began to make excuses. - Well, how are you, Aunt Xenia?

- How is it, son? So, as you can see, we are suffering, the Almighty does not take to himself yet ...

- Oh, the Lord is with you, what kind of talk, what time, aunt Xenia!

- Come in! You, probably, to Seryozhka?!

- I hope at home? And how is he?

- Yes, a little cold.

- Not sleeping, by any chance?

- Nothing, come in.

- Hello, old man!

- Oh, Nick?! Hey! What fates? What kind of wind? Wait, I'll get up, it won't take long to get dressed. You see, I'm dressed. Here we have such a cold dog! As always, do not drown. Well, tell me, how are you, what's new with you?

- There is nothing special to tell, Sergey. Everything seems to be old. But you, damn striped, are completely lost.

- Yes, Nick, what to do, you need to live somehow. We bought a dacha now, there is a small plot, so we go, we work there.

- Are you driving? On what?!

- Don't you know? We bought a car. True, used, but nothing, you can ride.

- Congratulations.

- Thanks.

- Listen, Sergey, I don't have much time. Let's get down to business. What are those envelopes in your pocket?

- Ah... these are wooden ones, they need to be exchanged.

- Lucky, - thought Nick.

- And what?

- Yes, I wanted to throw you myself.

- I'm sorry, Nick, I'm deaf at my place. You know, I left my old job, but I haven't landed on a new one yet, I'll look for it myself tomorrow, ask.

- And how is your mother doing?

- She has the same. What to do?

- Nothing, I'll think of something, don't despair!

The parting was short-lived.

The marching group, wriggling like a snake, slowly and heavily overcame the last meters of the steep ascent of the highest hill in the district. Having risen, they arranged a small halt.

“We won’t linger for a long time,” the leader’s statement was heard. “The more we sit, the harder it is to get up later.” It’s better to get to that hillock over there, a very beautiful panorama opens up from there, you can even see the city, it’s very close. There we will arrange a big halt, make a fire and all that.

- And how far is it to that skate?

- Well, how much? See for yourself! A couple of kilometers, maybe a little more. And don't wear t-shirts. Although the sun is shining, it blows quite a bit here too, after getting up, you must have sweated, and you could be shot.

A close-knit, friendly group of seven people walked along the ridge, leaving behind them caves in the rock, built in a row, like train cars. It was a wonderful, clear, sunny morning. There was still morning dew on the grass and flowers.

The view was amazing indeed. No description can even come close to the sensations experienced by the lucky ones who conquer peaks, from small to great. Only the remnants of the smog that had not dispelled during the night, poisoning the air and people, hanging over the city, darkened the panorama.

A small halt was arranged already in the evening, in a lowland, at the very approaches to the city.

- Oleg, be a man, after all! Let's step aside and talk like a man.

- To speak to you like a man, you must at least be a man.

“Boys, finally stop quarreling over trifles,” Sasha pleaded.

- Well, come here! - Nick threatened, grabbing Oleg by the collar of his shirt, and dragged him away from the fire. - What are you talking to me in front of her?

- Nick, what's wrong with you? I've never noticed anything like this with you before! - Sasha said anxiously. - You can't prove the truth by force, let him go!

- And you go away! - Nick rude to Sasha and pushed her away from him with a strong hand.

- How dare you, you're ... - Sasha ran away with tears in her eyes.

The members of the group who found themselves right there with difficulty separated the quarreled.

- I will be the last person if I forgive you this! - Nick threatened Oleg.

- We'll see who will teach a lesson to whom, Oleg snapped, pulling up his shirt.

- What's the matter with you? - the leader of the group asked Nick.

- Look, don't take this fool on campaigns anymore, or then - without me, - Nick couldn't calm down, - he doesn't listen to you, the leader, doesn't take into account the opinion of the group, and generally behaves like a cynic.

- So I'm patient, but what about you?

Sasha all the way The rest of the road ran next to Oleg.

For the first time in his life, Nick admitted to himself that this way down to the city was a hundred times harder and more painful for him than the morning rise. He barely trailed behind, thinking only of one thing: to fall behind the group, to get lost, not to return home, to realize with bitterness that Sasha's crystal vase had cracked in his soul.

In fact, this was the end of his relationship with her, even though the fear of losing Sasha prompted him to restore and forge a peaceful relationship with Oleg. Sasha in relations with Nick was no longer the same as before. She was on the half that did not belong to Nick.

- Having, you always lose. You gain only by not having, - Nick realized bitterly.

But, perhaps, the most painful thing for Nick was the feeling that, after what had happened, he was closer to Oleg than to Sasha.

- How stupid these women are! - Nick was surprised, accusing them of not understanding the difference between black and white.

The irreversibility of the inevitable predetermined his life, and he felt it even now.

The coldness of a man who once confessed his love made the movement of his thoughts back happier than forward ... He was amazed at such rapid changes in life.

Since then, a lot of water has flowed. Everything, almost everything, remained unchanged.

- Formalities have one interesting property - they change little. Appearance ... That's why it can be majestic, to hide under itself the deepest and darkest abysses of a person's soul, thought Nick.

- No, I will not call on Oleg, - thought Nick, and immediately confirmed to himself, - in no case, even tomorrow! - Oh yes! Datoška still remains! - he remembered. - Well, yes, that's enough, I'll somehow attach the rest at work.

Leaving some more money with David, Nick, tired and somewhat calmed down, returned home late at night. On the way, he went through a couple more options and addresses.

Parking the car, he thought with horror what would happen if he did not manage to return all the other people's funds distributed to him.

“Then she won’t be able to pay part of the contribution for the cooperative apartment, and that’s all, she’s dead,” he thought with alarm. In addition, in case of failure, he himself got into her debts, not even imagining how he could get rid of them.

At home, Nick was waiting for a peacefully sleeping society of households who did not know about his night journey.

The dream was interspersed with heavy thoughts, the result of nightly tossing and talking. I thought about how everything changes and turns upside down. With apprehension, he also remembered that all his best undertakings turned around and ended in strange deviations.

- And ... what will be, will be, - he waved him off.

This thought prompted him to take a glass of alcohol for internal heating ...

He was starting to get pissed off.

The next day, it was broadcast on the radio that the campaign for the exchange of old banknotes for new ones was extended by two days.

A “duck” was started up and about the amount of the preliminary amount, according to which applications and declarations were supposedly accepted by the commission formed in each district of the city.

He really hoped that the risky undertaking he had undertaken would end without excesses.

- People should help each other, if they can do it, - he had no doubts.

The phone rang. Nick walked over to him with a weary gait.

- Hello, Nick, is that you? - a woman's voice was heard in the receiver.

- Yes it's me.

- Well how are you?

- I think everything will be fine.

- Seriously? Well, thank you very much, otherwise I had a very bad dream.

It felt like she was barely holding herself back from crying.

“I dreamed that the boots that you gave me, which I loved and wore with great pleasure, were stolen from me,” she continued.

“Yes, but I never gave them to you,” Nick answered.

“That's the point,” she explained.

Nick didn't get it right away.

- Maybe this is a hint? - he thought to himself. - Although no, she does not like to walk in them, she says that her feet sweat.

- Does your ex-husband know about your problems? - Nick asked, just in case, a divorced woman abandoned to the mercy of fate.

- Where? He doesn't even want to think about us, I don't even remember when I saw him for the last time.

The telephone conversation took a long time. Finally, a long beep sounded on Nick's phone.

A strange feeling took over and haunted him. He seemed to resist the feeling and the echoes that reverberated through his mind. He felt, but did not want to admit to himself, that he was completely permeated and occupied by him.

- Agree, Nick, it's true, - tormented his inner voice.

- No! - Nick denied. - It's impossible.

He was afraid of losing what he could not experience with anyone else. He had never experienced anything like this with any woman in his life, and his heart skipped a beat again, as if flying in an airplane, when it abruptly descends. His soul and mind seemed to leave his body, diverging in different directions.

It was necessary to pronounce only one, the right word, which he knew, which he trusted, but did not pronounce. He also knew the word for people who torture themselves like that, but he didn't say that word either.

Nick found a Validol tablet in the drawer of the nightstand and put it under his tongue. He put out the table lamp, got into bed, covered himself with a blanket, and began to slowly die.

fall asleep.

- Impossible - for that and the impossible, which is impossible, - he philosophized, avoiding the search for a reasonable way out.

- Desired impossible? Or is the impossible desirable? - the inner voice asked him again.

Now for Nick there was only one refuge from himself and his thoughts - sleep, and therefore he hurried to meet him with all his might.

- We'll get through, if we're lucky, - was his last thought before diving ...

16/17.02.1991

PALERMO

Impossible to be on earth
continuous well-being, because
it is the lot of the future eternal life.
Rev. Nicodemus the Holy Mountaineer

In two large plastic bags, it was quite possible to fit a one-time purchase for several days of food.

- So! Let's put these two pamphlets in one, and the other, unused bag, also here, - thought a young man of forty, of medium height, in a blue checkered T-shirt with short sleeves and gray checkered trousers.

"Ha, David, hello," another young man of about forty-five, tall and thin, turned to him, "what were you staring at?"

- Oh, Zhenya, hello, - David answered, - yes, I'm looking at fruits, it seems like there, at the beginning of this street, it's better and cheaper.

"Yes, it's better to go and have a look," Zhenya agreed.

- How are you, Zhenechka?

- Nothing, little by little! And you?

"Yes, too, we tolerate this crimson life for the time being," David admitted.

- Geno is also here, over there, - Zhenya pointed to a man at the age of sixty, in a light brown shirt and jeans, who, ten or twelve meters away, was absorbed in buying vegetables. - Now he will come to us too.

On both sides of the street adjacent to the central city market, there was a brisk trade in seasonal fruits and vegetables. But the same continuous row of vendors of various household items, including washing and detergents, perfumes, underwear and all sorts of knick-knacks, stretched in the middle of the street, thus forming two walkways for buyers.

This street itself stretched for commercial purposes from the central city market through the first and second newly formed trade fairs with numerous indoor and outdoor kiosks, shops, counters, open, semi-closed and closed canopies on top.

The abundance of sellers and buyers gave the impression that a large part of the city's population was included in this trading life, which was arranged not only in this area of the city, but also in many others.

"We buy everything and sell everything, come on, everything is to your taste," one cheerful buyer beckoned, not far from two old acquaintances standing in the middle of the street, chatting smartly with each other.

This trading part of the city seemed to live its own separate, specific and characteristic only life, with its own rules and laws.

“Zhenya, why are you suffering with these tiny bags, here’s one big one for you, and put everything in it, it will fit,” David suggested, taking another one out of his one big white bag and handing it to his interlocutor.

“Don’t, David, don’t worry, I’ll carry it to the car somehow,” Zhenya waved it off, but he obeyed his interlocutor and put several of his purchases in one large cellophane bag.

- Wa...David, hello, - Geno drawled, approaching the two interlocutors, - how many years, how many winters, where are you lost at all, not to see you, do not come to us.

- Yes, my mother is sick, Geno, you know. For the sixth year now, she has gone as bedridden, cannot walk, three strokes in a row.

- Yes, these strokes have become more frequent, and many people have high blood pressure, - Zhenya confirmed plaintively.

- Just as this great country was destroyed, so our prosperous life was destroyed en masse, - Geno complained.

- It’s a terrible thing to live with such changes, but it’s worse to get sick, not to doctors, not to medicines, you can’t reach finances.

- Yes, what is it, - Geno waved his hand, - listen, I’ll tell you a story about my friend.

Geno reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a long, thin, white filter cigarette.

David noticed that he had no front teeth, his eyes were reddened, there were obvious bags under them, his cheeks were lowered down ...

Ten years ago, when he last saw Geno, he looked completely different.

- How much and how little for a man ten years - flashed through his head.

Geno rummaged through his pockets in search of something to light up, glanced at the interlocutors, but, remembering that they were non-smokers, looked around. A little ahead, about five meters, I caught a look in the middle of the street, on a wooden box, a vendor of various trifles and household utensils, on a mini-counter made of cardboard paper boxes, with several boxes of matches crowded around.

Geno leaned forward, towards those matchboxes. The interlocutors automatically followed him.

David stood with his back to the merchant, Zhenya sideways, Geno’s face.

Geno reached for the matches. He picked up the box, took out one match, lit a cigarette with a deep puff, and put the box back in its place.

- So, - he continued, - what I wanted to tell you about ...

- Wow, - the merchant started up, - do you think I'm sitting here so that people like you stand over your head and light cigarettes from me? What do you think I am, your lighter, or something ...

It was evident that she was wound up for a long time, and was not going to stop waiting for a response from those talking.

David looked around and for the first time saw a plump woman in her fifties in a red robe, not letting up, like a rattler.

Geno and Zhenya exchanged inquiring glances with surprise and surprise.

"Listen, woman," David objected, "do you know who you are talking to?"

- What does it matter to me, - the saleswoman raised her tone, - who is he?

- Yes, he is a professor of the institute, doctor of science, said David.

- Yes, even an academician, what's the difference! Especially! Culture! Couldn't you have asked permission?

Geno reached into his pocket for change, but David beat him to it.

The merchant, grumbling a little more, calmed down and the conversation took their former positions to continue the conversation.

"So that's what I was talking about," Geno began, taking a deep puff.

The tradeswoman povarichivala by inertia.

David heard her voice behind him, but his gaze was fixed on Geno's face. He suddenly writhed in pain, like a man trying to hold back his vomit. He was clearly sick.

- Look what she's doing, - Geno turned to his interlocutors. Yes, if you allow this in Palermo, they will cut off your legs there!

- And you do not look, - objected the merchant, - none of your business! The same to me Palermo! We're not in Palermo, and you better watch yourselves.

Mutual accusations between Geno and the merchant ended with the fact that the interlocutors managed to drag Geno aside for a considerable distance.

- Okay, Geno, calm down, - Zhenya consoled him, - that you are messing with this bazaar woman.

Geno could not calm down for a long time.

- I'll go away for a while, - Zhenya said businesslike, - I'll buy some greenery and come up.

"Look, Dato," Geno explained, placing a large black bag with purchases on the paved road, "if you leave such a bag in the middle of the main street for a year in Palermo, then, regardless of what is in it, you will find it in a year." in the same position. Do you understand?

David shook his head affirmatively.

- That's if you're even local. Well, if they notice that you are a foreigner, then even more so. People and orders are respected there, and even more so tourists. We can say that Italy in general largely lives off tourism. Imagine, they have up to 50 million tourists a year. In Palermo, for example, if you didn't pay something somewhere or didn't pay extra, then when you're alone in the room, an envelope with a letter will be thrown under your door, in which they kindly offer to pay the debt due to you according to the law.

You know, I was there a few years ago. The name "volcanoes" comes from these places. In general, if you, for example, are an unworthy person, then they won't let you go below Naples, and don't dream about it.

Zhenya returned.

- Well, Geno, let's go? - He suggested.

- Yes, let's go, - Geno agreed, picking up a bag of purchases from the road.

- Dato, come to our work, I have a big map of Italy on the wall, I'll tell you everything about it in detail.

- Even where what kind of mafia is operating? - Zhenya joked smiling.

On the way to the metro station, David, having bought something else, went to a small area arranged for pedestrians.

There, having gathered in a circle, they had fun to the accompaniment of unfortunate musicians from the crowd with simple folk instruments.

In the middle of the circle, to the sound of claps and cheerful exclamations, a crazy girl danced vulgar dances.

Passers-by stopped and stared for a while at the merry performance.

Curiosity also stopped David, who was despondent at the sight of the spectacle.

The girl suddenly broke out of the circle, grabbed the hand of another girl passing by, tried to forcefully draw her into her dance.

- For such things you need to beat! - Flashed through David's head - but who will raise his hand to the sick?

Fortunately, thanks to her dexterity and resourcefulness, the captive quickly managed to free herself from her rapist.

Already in the taxi, David looked at his watch.

"Perhaps I'm late," he thought, "they must have been waiting at home."

- Buy ice cream, different, tasty, cheap, - suggested a young guy in a white soiled bathrobe who came up to the open door of the minibus.

He was replaced by pedlars with small household goods and food products.

A tall, thin old man in a cap appeared, muttered some verses and walked with outstretched hand through the rows of sellers. It ran in a whisper that he was a professor of philosophy in the past.

Having stuffed the minibus with passengers from the market square, the driver slowly moved through the dense rows of many other standing minibuses operating in different directions of the city.

Movement not only within the market square, but also at a considerable distance from it was extremely difficult. Scolding was often heard, to which people's ears obediently and indifferently became accustomed to.

- Zhenya, please stop the car over there on the edge, I want to buy more ripe peaches for my grandson, - Geno asked, - he loves them so much.

On the way to the products he liked, Geno was almost deliberately knocked down by two young passers-by passing by at a quick pace, one of whom was quite drunk.

Noticing that, at the cost of great effort, Geno held on, they rushed down the street between the two fairs with merry laughter.

Geno was taken aback by surprise and looked around in amazement at Zhenya, who shook his head indignantly.

The cheered couple of young people had already moved several tens of meters down. Geno looked after them and saw that the tipsy fellow was walking forward without looking back, and his sober partner was looking back.

Geno put the index finger of his right hand to his temple, twisted it, indicating with a gesture that the guys of that ... Tr

The guide clearly caught this gesture and said something to his drunken friend.

Geno lost sight of the "good fellows" in the pushing crowd.

The purchase took Geno several minutes.

- Phew, it seems that's it! - He said with relief, returning, opening the car door and putting the purchase at the seat next to the driver, - Let's go, Zhenya, and quickly, out of this madhouse.

Suddenly Zhenya saw Geno leaning back sharply and heard an unfamiliar assertive voice.

- Father, what are you doing, huh?

Geno was oscillating back and forth.

Zhenya hurried out of the car.

- You just look at them, huh? What do they allow themselves, - Geno was indignant.

“Father, we accidentally touched you and apologized, and what did you start to show with your hand!” The tipsy fellow threatened.

- Wow by chance! - objected Geno.

- Yes, by accident!

And I don't remember any apologies either.

- Yes, I'll smear you now, godfather, - the drunk was angry, but, fortunately, his sober friend took his hand away and dragged the fighter aside.

- What do you allow yourself? - Zhenya, who arrived in time to help, loudly threatened.

“Let me go, I'll smear them both now, I'm so...” the drunk fellow tried to free himself from the embrace of a sober friend.

Zhenya quickly put Geno into the car, drove away from the scene and for a long time watched in the mirror of the cabin the “good fellows” chasing them from behind with threats.

Zhenya's white passenger car no longer stopped all the way to Geno's house.

- Zhenya, maybe you will come up to us, - suggested Geno, - you know how happy you will be at home!

- No, Ivanovich, excuse me, another time, - Zhenya hesitated, - something very tired.

- Well, look, - Geno sighed, - thank you for everything.

- Come on, don't worry about these boors, Ivanych.

- What are you, - Geno sighed again, - simply, if this happened in Palermo, their heads would be cut off. Zhenya, have you been to Palermo?

- No, Ivanovich, how could I be there.

- It's a pity if you knew what a beautiful and glorious city it is, respecting the old customs and traditions.

Zhenya noticed how Geno's eyes moistened.

- All right, Ivanovich, we'll go together somehow, - Zhenya reassured.

- Yes?

“Well, of course,” Zhenya said affirmatively, “after all, it's up to small things, so we'll put together our way, and let's go.”

- Eh, how can we knock together for our forty rubles a month?

- Well, why, after all, you can get yourself some kind of grant, or something else. Remember how Charlie Chaplin in one of his films found a million in a garbage dump?

- Yes, where is it, - Geno said doomedly in an undertone, - and my Monica, too, must have already settled down with someone.

- Wah, - Zhenya was surprised, - what else is Monica, for the first time I hear about her from you.

It was felt that Geno let it slip and very much regretted it, but it was too late, what was said could not be returned.

- So be it, - thought Geno, - there is nowhere to retreat.

He put the index finger of his right hand to his lips and spoke in a low voice.

- Just don't say a word to anyone. Promise?

- I promise, - Zhenya agreed smiling.

Standing at the open door, Geno returned to the seat of the car and slammed the door.

She was then only forty, but she looked twenty.

- Well? - Zhenya was amazed.

- Yes, - Geno shook his head, - and was light as a feather.

- You were holding her in your arms?

- Yes, I held it, and carried it in my arms, but don't think anything bad, you hear, we had great love with her, but there was nothing else.

- How was there nothing, Ivanovich, when was it?

- It was... but it wasn't, I'm telling you.

- And how?

- She was drowning in the sea, and I saved her.

- Ah! - Zhenya drawled. - Then it's clear. And what about your wife?

- What a wife, my wife is here, in the house, on the third floor, and she is there - in Palermo.

Geno was daydreaming, immersed in memories.

- What is she on?

- What on what? - Geno asked without looking up from his thoughts.

- And she lived on what floor? - Zhenya asked again.

Geno looked at Zhenya for some time in astonishment. With no less surprise, Zhenya was surprised at his surprise.

- Are you really stupid? Or are you pretending?

- Why are you suddenly, Ivanovich? - Zhenya was offended.

- What does it matter what floor a woman lives on if you love her, huh?

- Well, anyway, just in case.

- On the sixteenth, - Geno said offendedly, opening the door.

- Did they have an elevator?

“Pah, you,” Geno completely lost his balance, “you don't understand anything, Eugene, either in life or in love. Go, please, in a kind, healthy way, until we really quarreled at the end.

- Okay, Ivanovich, don't be angry, I'm so simple.

Zhenya understood everything perfectly, but now he was glad that he managed to transfer his boss's thoughts from an undesirable plane to a desired one.

- Why do men often have to live with unloved women and endure them all their lives, and only meet and know their loved ones for a moment? Why, why do we love those whom it is impossible or impossible to love, - Geno lamented, - and get along with those whom fate has so mercilessly thrown at us, as if playing a cruel joke with us? And why is it necessary to live with dislike, and not with love, even when it is possible in principle? - Geno, who was returning home, importunately climbed into the head.

- So what if she was divorced? Divorced and congenial better than the established ones. And what kind of stupid and vulgar question did Eugene ask me? And by the way, on what floor did she live? - Geno thought.

- Buy black bread, - the voice of a young, pretty girl was heard from the last floor of a modern eight-story building, we ran out of bread!

"Good, good," said Zhenya.

Putting the car in the garage, Zhenya went to the other side of the street, to the store.

- Oh, Lenochka, hi, how are you? - he was delighted to meet his classmate's wife.

- Yes, how will you be now? - Elena complained.

- How is Levan, is he not going to come?

- No, I got a job there, at a private mini-factory and lives happily ever after, according to the factory-bed formula, and in the evenings, on occasion, drinks with friends.

- Not going back?

- Not! He says that I won't go back to any, they say, there won't be, they say, no work, no salary, but he doesn't want to sit idle and spit at the ceiling.

"Couldn't you move there and settle down there?"

"No, I don't want to live in this hole," Elena suddenly attacked him, sharply raising the tone of the conversation. It's enough for me to go back and forth, back and forth, like...

- Forgive, forgive me, sister, for God's sake! Just don't beat me and I promise, I won't ask you anything more in life.

- Well, it is not necessary.

"What a boorish woman," Zhenya was surprised, rising home with bread and with market purchases, "I have known her for twenty years, it's true, I have

noticed rudeness in her before, but never like this! What does our life do to people? Who told me at work, - he tried to remember, - that the aggressiveness in our city has increased several times, soon, probably, we will overeat each other. I wonder if there is any power in the world that can save us from this?

But what about the wives of the Decembrists, who went to their husbands in Siberia, and she has it “under her nose”, one might say ...

The elevator car slowly rose up, swaying and making suspicious creaking sounds.

- And yet, I, too, would not have exchanged life in my city for anything else, - Zhenya thought, and added, - even to Palermo.

It seemed that only the massive white-stone walls of the building of the city's main library patiently, with dignity and silence, withstood the changes.

- Well, father, that you should let me go to the second floor for a while, look at something in the catalog, - the man on duty begged the portly duty officer.

“I can't, it's said clearly, and that's all,” the duty officer sternly threw in high tones.

- But after all, we donated a lot of works to this library, and now we don't even have the right to see if they got into the catalog or not? - the man was indignant.

“Listen, you know what,” the duty officer objected in anger, rolling his eyes, “my grandfather gave the Soviet authorities sixty-three villages, and now, as you can see, I am sitting here. Moreover, half an hour ago, our young director walked by here and threatened me with his finger, warning me - look, let someone through without a pass, fire you from work and lose your salary. And my salary here is only thirty-five rubles. Not thick, right?”

- Now everywhere and everyone has such salaries.

- Not everywhere, firstly, and secondly, why should I lose her because of you? I am a disabled person of the second group, I receive a pension of fourteen rubles, and that's it.

The reader who has come has calmed down a little.

- Yes ... father, I understand you well.

- You do not understand anything. My ancestors went to the princes. Do you even know what the gradation was at that time?

The visitor remained silent.

“So, listen, son,” the voice of the duty officer softened a little, “before, nobles and princes stood out in the upper class, to which our family belonged.

The duty officer began a story about a long but interesting history of his family.

- But how is it, father, why don't they respect you up there, in the government?
- Who needs us? You see what is going on in Parliament, what battles are going on for chairs! Well, they, I have already given up on them for a long time, as the French say - everyone is his own best servant, no one will help you except you. Well, okay about them. So, what did I tell you about? In those early pre-revolutionary years, my grandfather and his family...

Half an hour later, a friend of the listener entered the front door.

"Hi David, how are you?" she asked.

The acquaintances exchanged a friendly kiss.

Hi Nana, how are you?

- Yes, little by little, but what, do you have any difficulties?

- Yes, nothing special, I just wanted to rummage through the catalog a little, but they don't let me in. A pass is needed, it is nearby, at the registration desk, they issue it, you need three rubles, the subscription is valid for a year. But I won't need it anymore.

- I see, then tell me what you need, and I'll look.

"Thank you," said David.

An hour later, David was standing at a common stop for fixed-route taxis, buses and trolleybuses, waiting for the right transport.

Behind him, a cute young couple of students in love chirped. The conversation gradually turned from a calm tone into a nervous one. The aggressive guy, in the midst of anger, spat, scolded his own mother with the most terrible abuse, and the girl frightened and meekly answered in an undertone.

- Wow declaration of love - thought David - just like in our youth.

- Who are they themselves, and imagined wonder who their children will be?

- a man standing next to David was indignant in an undertone.

Let's go by trolleybus. At the next stop, the doors of the car, decorated on the outside with all sorts of advertising inscriptions, opened right in front of the church on the main avenue of the city.

David crossed himself according to the Orthodox custom.

- Here you are, the gates of paradise, what else do you need, - he said to himself, - get out of this door and enter that door, the main one for your life, otherwise I forgot when I was in church for the last time.

He hesitated for a while, and then decided:

- No, perhaps not now, later, someday, when I am freer and when my mother recovers at least a little. Oh, this life is all there is no time, all is vanity of vanities!

The doors closed, and the trolleybus slowly drove away from the open doors of the church.

David peered at the panorama of the main thoroughfare of the city.

Researcher Avenue, he thought, they can be found where they sell ice cream, soft drinks, hot dogs, and "miscellaneous." Yes, for this it was really worth studying and pushing science forward all your life, - he added. - What did you fight for?

Rows of cars flowed along the avenue, the number of foreign cars clearly prevailed over the old domestic cars. The trolleybus seemed to change its mode of movement, meaningfully sailing next to the most modern building of a four-star hotel under construction by the Americans.

"You can't forbid living beautifully," one of the passengers turned to the other.

"Yes, indeed," he agreed.

- And life is good, and to live well, - added the third.

- Don't forget who gets off, go to the front door! And pay the fare, the rear doors will not open at the next stop, - the voice of the trolleybus driver sounded.

- So, clearly, the entrance is free, the exit is three rubles, - concluded the fourth.

"This day of victory smelled like gunpowder," the old front-line soldier murmured a song, barely audibly, to himself.

- Do not be sad, father, and do not despair, our time will also come, - his neighbor encouraged him, - you'll see.

- Or will he come, or not so much? - the second neighbor doubted, behind the front-line soldier.

- Do you know, at the top of this trolleybus, on the roof, some two suspicious turntables are spinning, - an elderly woman, silent until now, suddenly said, - I wonder if this is dangerous?

- When stopping, starting to move and along the way, the trolleybus made some kind of almost musical sounds and for some reason oscillated in a vertical plane.

"Bayram kach-kach," a man standing on the back platform winked at David.

- It's good that the trolleybus has shock-absorbing springs, - thought David.

A few minutes later there was a sharp braking, throwing the passengers forward.

Both slingshots flew off the phase line and twitched asynchronously.

- Eh, roads ... - the old front-line soldier began another song in an undertone.

Attempts to fix the malfunction took the driver a lot of time, during which he lost many passengers who did not pay for the half-way.

Finally, the trolleybus with the passengers remaining in it continued its journey along the luxurious city avenue.

The chairman of the session of the thematic section of the international conference organized under the auspices of UNESCO announced a break until noon.

The participants of the section slowly, in small groups, left the assembly hall of the State University.

- Zhenya, get acquainted, this is Professor Sergio Gandoli from Italy, - Geno said with a self-satisfied smile.

“Yeah, Geno managed to dig up and make contact with the Italian,” Zhenya thought, holding out his hand to an elderly thin man over sixty years old, who could hardly speak Russian.

- Do you also work in this area, young man? - asked the professor from Italy.

- I'm trying, professor, - Zhenya answered, nodding his head.

- Zhenya is modest, professor, - Geno explained and listed his main achievements.

- Oh, - the professor drawled, - this is very good, young man!

Talking on the subject of the conference, the trio left the university building at a leisurely pace.

- Well, Professor, where shall we go for a break? - asked Geno, approaching Zhenya's car.

- Geno, to be honest, in the week that I've been with you, I've been so stuffed with your national cuisine! - Professor Gandoli opened up. you to leave, and my wife will scold me for it, - the professor lightly tapped himself on his belly, which had already managed to get a convex shape. in extreme cases, let it be kharcho soup.

"As you say, professor," Geno agreed.

Soon the car was in front of a new fashionable restaurant building, recently built and finished with colored decorative stone facing.

The two professors, while Zhenya was locking the car doors, admired the luxury of the new restaurant on the waterfront.

Geno seemed to be dumbfounded, tears came to his eyes, bliss spilled over his entire body. On the roof of the building shone the name of the restaurant - "Palermo".

- Geno, why did you bring me here, I asked ... - with difficulty you olvil Italian.

“He arranged everything,” Geno answered, pointing at Zhenya with a glance.

The professor, who was about to dash back into the car, pulled Geno back with difficulty, promising him not to break his promise.

Sitting down at the table offered to the guests, Zhenya managed to warn the pretty waitress about his guest.

The restaurant hall was almost empty, a couple more tables were occupied.

- Geno, here you are complaining that your life has become difficult compared to what it was under the old regime. But how many luxurious new buildings do you have in your city? - Gandoli was surprised.

"Ah, professor," Geno tried to explain, "only those who have money build. There are only five percent of them, and the remaining ninety-five are almost beggars.

- Wow poverty - flashed at Professor Gandoli.

- Well, all right, - he was perplexed, - why do so many restaurants need to be built along the entire embankment in the city, because they are empty.

It was evident that Geno was confused.

- During the day, yes, professor, - Zhenya came to the rescue, - but when you drive in the evening, everything is crowded everywhere, and even if you don't book seats in advance, you won't get to a decent restaurant.

"Oh, Mamma Mia," muttered the Italian, looking up at the ceiling.

Soon the table was served with borscht for three persons, cutlets with Italian spaghetti garnish, a bottle of fanta and Coca-Cola and some fruit.

The tender melody of an Italian song performed by local restaurant singers poured into the hall.

Zhenya refused borscht. He surreptitiously observed the pleasure that two elderly professors had in sweet conversation with each other, and he was pleased.

Zhenya's daydreaming was broken by a phone call on his mobile phone, after which he, as if bewitched, stared into nowhere.

- What's the matter with you, Eugene, - asked Geno.

Professor Gandoli also interrupted the meal.

Zhenya was silent.

- Eugene, did something happen? - Geno asked, lightly patting him on the shoulder. - Who called?

"Daughter," Zhenya answered cautiously.

- Well...?

- At home, in the entrance, the elevator car was stolen.

- What? - Geno said in bewilderment. - Is this also possible?

"Oh, Mamma Mia," Gandoli pleaded.

- They usually steal the motor, cable, etc. But for the elevator cabin, I hear it for the first time, - Geno continued to be surprised, - but how did they get it out of there?

- I don't know, Geno, - replied Zhenya, still not completely out of shock.

- But when did they have time, if you didn't know it today, up to this minute? - asked Geno.

- I don't know, Geno, apparently last night, - Zhenya explained, - this morning, when the elevator was not working, I thought it was another temporary problem, and went downstairs on foot.

- Wow! - stretched out Geno.

Zhenya regretted divulging the telephone conversation with his daughter, as he felt that this had affected the appetite of the professors.

- Well, nothing, nothing, - he muttered distressedly, - we'll think of something. - It's just a pity that they were going to repair the roof, and now they have to carry all the building materials up on their hump.

Grieved no less, Geno winked at Zhenya as a sign that he pulled himself together and did not prevent the guest from finishing the meal.

Zhenya caught the leader's thought and, as a sign of agreement, nodded his head approvingly in response.

- Do you know, Professor, what good daughters Zhenya has? - Geno tried to change the subject of the conversation.

- Yes? I don't know, Professor Galdoni asked.

- Yes... one is a mathematician, she graduated from the university with honors and is now completing her master's degree, and the other also graduated with honors from school and wants to continue her studies at the university, on the physical.

- Well done, Zhenya, - Gandoli praised, - and where will they continue to work in their specialty?

Zhenya did not understand the piquancy of the Italian's question.

"Either he doesn't know and asks naively, out of curiosity," Zhenya thought, "or he guesses that even after such a successful and highly rated study, a person turns out to be flying down from the sky, to the earth - into the dough," and added, - it's good if it's in the dough!

"Professor, to be honest," Geno hurried to the rescue, "in our time, both science and higher education have dived down a lot, and they are losing their relevance today.

- But why, Geno? - objected Gandoli. - Knowledge never dies and it is always valuable, at any time and in any country. Not useful here, maybe the girls will go abroad and get a job there.

- Yes, - Zhenya objected in his mind, - just for you, foreigners, I educate and train my daughters. Dudki, do not wait!

The break at the restaurant lasted another half an hour.

- Can you imagine what a mistake you and I made, - Geno addressed Zhenya in an undertone, entering the hall, in which the section meeting resumed its work after a break.

- What? - Zhenya asked with a look.

- What a shame if they learn from our guest that we took him to a restaurant and fed him borscht there.

Zhenya unexpectedly wrinkled his lips, he wanted to please both professors at once, he chased, as they say, two hares, now he felt like he sat down in a puddle.

- I wanted the best, but it turned out, as always, - he remembered in his mind the words of the famous prime minister.

- Well, now there's nothing to be done, - waving rokoj, Geno explained, - can you imagine what will happen? What will be, will be!

- I can imagine what's going on in our... - Zhenya thought, as if remembering the words of the most famous domestic football commentator and hastened to add - in the entrance.

- Geno, and the borscht was indeed excellent, - Professor Gandoli whispered in Geno's ear during the speech of one of the speakers, from Papua New Guinea.

- And to be honest, Professor, I liked spaghetti with cutlets more, - Geno answered in an undertone, trying to please and deliver a pleasant guest.

“Oh, yes, of course, spaghetti is spaghetti, wherever they are,” agreed Professor Gandoli.

In the evening, after the end of the session of the section, having escorted the guest from Italy to a five-star hotel where foreigners who came to the city lived, Geno, refusing the services of Zhenya, who offered to take him home, set off on foot to the city center.

“I want peace, silence and loneliness,” he admitted to Zhenya.

Walking around the evening city for more than an hour, Geno stirred in his mind many fragments of his past, from which his head, instead of rest and relief, even more tense.

He peered into the structure of the church.

- What a beauty, - he stopped and made the sign of the cross, - what greatness, what calmness and wisdom of spirit. How many years have I been away from church, thought Geno suddenly and immediately confessed, many, many, I even forgot when it was the last time.

- We must go in, by all means go in, - he decided firmly and went to the underground passage. - And I will buy candles, and bow to the holy icons, - he continued his reflections.

In the underground passage, stuffed with many stalls with all kinds of goods, it was no longer light and not very crowded.

Suddenly Geno stopped. At the opposite end of the underpass, he noticed a young woman of average height in a fashionable white T-shirt with foreign inscriptions and black, neatly pressed trousers.

Geno was not very interested in women, especially at his age, but this one immediately fascinated him. She must have been over forty, and, as if catching his gaze, she quickened her pace and, with a smile on her face, walked towards him.

Geno was dumbfounded. He remembered and experienced that unique, blissful feeling that was associated with only one woman in the world.

Here, walking towards him, she caught up with him, looked and, as it seemed to him, shot him in the eye and passed by.

Geno, as if struck by lightning, slowly reached the middle of the underground passage, could not stand it, and looked around, subtracted the inscription "Follow me" on the back of his T-shirt.

- What vulgarity! - he cooled down a little, disappointed. Reassured, he walked up the steps.

- What a familiar face, what a familiar gait, - flashed through his mind, - I wonder where I could see her? Ah, but you never know where, you go everywhere and go everywhere, - he answered himself, - well, her, - and continued on his way.

Rising, he could not restrain himself and looked around the opposite side of the street, with difficulty found the stranger with his eyes.

- Monica! - the awakened thought struck him with lightning. - Monica, well, of course, Monica! But it can't be, how can she get here? Or maybe she came with a delegation from Italy, he convinced himself. - Yes, but in that case, why didn't she contact me by phone?

- Dubina, after that you changed both phone numbers and residential address several times, - he answered himself.

- Yes, but still, she could contact me through work.

- Monica, wait, where are you!

He followed her for a long time, in the direction of her movement, although he lost sight of her as soon as he crossed to the other side of the street.

A very large area was allotted for a market-fair selling all kinds of household utensils and various building materials.

It was a city of goods within a city, a city where you could get and buy almost everything and absolutely everything except money. However, money too, but through labor. The access roads to it were strewn with many home-made billboards, behind which stood ordinary ordinary people, the townspeople - the labor force, ranging from a simple worker to top-class craftsmen, for any type of construction work and apartment renovation.

A few weeks after the end of the scientific conference, and without waiting for the elevator to resume operation, Zhenya, having received a small proceeds, ventured and decided to repair his roof and ceiling.

Having loaded the trunk and top of the car with all the necessary building materials, he slowly drove away from the fair, which stretched for a couple of kilometers, and slowly moved past the rows of workers standing on the edge of the road.

Finally, having looked at a seemingly suitable candidate, he slowed down. Instantly the car was surrounded by people who wanted to get at least some work.

“What is your name?” Zhenya asked.

- Shalva, - the reddish dense man of about fifty answered.

Zhenya described to him the work that needed to be done and inquired:

- How much will it cost?

- Twenty rubles, - clearly minted Shalva.

- Yes, brother, are you out of your mind?

- I know what I'm saying, you'll see, I'll do it, you'll be satisfied and still say that I take a little.

Short disputes soon ended in a draw.

- Look, how many of them, who want to find a job, and you break such a price.

- Please, take any other, they will even go for ten, but keep in mind that after their work you will come to me again.

- Okay, sit down, if you want, for fifteen. I, too, will not sit idly by.

On the way home, the car got stuck in a traffic jam.

- You look what is being done, huh? - Shalva was indignant.

- There is no order in the country, where does he come from here! - Zhenya supported him.

- These assholes completely ruined the country, so much so that you can't bring it back.

- Yes perishing! - Zhenya agreed.

- Now we have the same situation as it was at the beginning of the birth of America - every man for himself and only God for all.

Shalva joined in a long and tedious conversation about politics. Zhenya listened to him distractedly and completely immersed himself in the light music of the modern stage.

- Keep in mind, if we drive like this all day, then you won't get any money from me, - the driver turned to the passenger jokingly.

- Offended, chief! What, little kids? I have to take it for work, not for driving a car.

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding," Zhenya smiled.

Shalva again launched into his reasoning.

The car drove unnoticed past a small church and stopped in front of it. Zhenya looked around and looked at the incoming and outgoing parishioners. He suddenly wanted to enter.

Turn the car around the first lane and stop there to go into the church, even if only for a short time, he thought, it's still such a traffic jam that you waste a lot of nerves, time and fuel. But what about the passenger? In addition, these building materials. Oh, come on, some other time!

Zhenya managed to escape from the captivity of a traffic jam only an hour later. The agreed work had to be completed the next day.

- Shalva, everything, coven, finish work, wash your hands and go to the table, - commanded Zhenya.

"Now, boss, I'll finish something else and I'm going," the worker replied.

At the table with a light dinner, consisting of a salad with tomatoes and cucumbers and fried eggplant, a sincere male conversation ensued.

- Oh, how great it is to sit well after a good job, - Shalva admitted.

- Shalva, you, for God's sake, excuse us for such a simple table, without meat, but as they say, the richer we are, the more we are happy.

- Come on, what are you talking about, - the worker objected, there would always be such food. And where to eat meat in the summer.

- Yes, I myself am not particularly drawn to him, - Zhenya explained, - they say, you get mad from him.

- In the summer you don't need more, and how many people don't even have this.

- Well, Shalva, it's a shame for a healthy person not to be able to support himself. The main thing is to love work.

- That's right, boss! It is not for nothing that they say that without difficulty you cannot even pull a fish out of a pond. And in general, a person was created for work, the body and all his organs are also given to him for active work, for the benefit of people and society, and not for pleasure.

- Look what's going on around! They go out, drink, smoke, inject, walk, have fun, get carried away ... and what little by little they reach? Either they go crazy, or they lay hands on themselves.

- Yes, Shalva, perhaps you are right, - Zhenya agreed, - a person's desires gradually and imperceptibly turn into passions, from which sins, and therefore, illness and death. Little by little we plunge into the viscous swamp mud of pleasures, and the farther, the more difficult it is to stop. That is why, as far as possible, it is necessary to avoid satisfying one's desires in every possible way, to refuse and abstain from many things in life. Clever men compare the passions of a person with a zealous, indomitable horse that rushes forward without looking back, and if it is not tamed by force, it will throw a person into the abyss and die with him.

- What could be better than when you work hard, then, like we are now, you sit quietly, refresh yourself, drink a couple of glasses for health and comfort your soul.

Previously, we would never sit down at the table if the meal was not deserved by due work, but now they drink on every occasion and not on occasion.

- Yes, that's for sure, not only food, but your entire existence must be earned, earned, - Zhenya agreed.

- Surely! Yes, and food after work passes through the throat freely. Well, okay, boss, let's drink from these glasses for honest work and for all honest people!

They clinked glasses and slowly drank the fragrant red wine.

- The wine is excellent, what can I say, - said Shalva, eating.

- Sofa, make us some more scrambled eggs your way, - Zhenya asked his eldest daughter.

- Now, pa! - Daughter responded.

The meal went on for half an hour.

- Let's skip one more, Shalva, - Zhenya suggested.

"No, boss, that's enough, that's enough!" the worker snapped firmly, rising from the table. - Good things come in small packages.

The farewell was also short-lived.

- In general, if you need me, then you know where to look for me, - the master clarified, saying goodbye.

- All right, Shalva, all right! Thank you very much.

- Well, all the best.

Moving away from the door, Zhenya felt himself shaken to the side.

- Wow, - he said to himself, - I think I overdid it a little!

That's it, in words one thing, but in reality - another. Who and where will draw the line between the few and the many, and in general, where does it go, does anyone know about it? This is the line between good and evil, which sometimes so imperceptibly eludes a person.

- Hmm, dad, what Uncle Shalva is funny and interesting after all, right? - Asked Sofa.

“Remember,” Zhenya warned his daughter, putting his finger to his lips, “never laugh at a person and don't judge him, and not only so as not to be judged yourself, but also so that his sins do not pass onto you. Understandably? And learn to see the main thing in a person - his soul. And everything else doesn't matter.

“Zhenya, go to bed,” the wife suggested, “and don't start philosophizing!”

- You what, mother?! Can't you talk to your daughter?

- Sofa, daughter, put him down, please!

- It's great when a person has children, - Zhenya thought, - they will take a nap, look after! For the sake of such happiness, it is worth living in this world.

He philosophized for a while longer, until sleep took over completely.

Gone were the long, hectic years. Days followed days, months followed months. Nothing significant has changed in the life of the townspeople. All life activity was reduced to two main global sources - good or evil. Admixture and mixture of these two principles could be found only in the lower reaches, and in the sources a clear distinction was preserved in absolute sterility.

Good allowed the existence of evil, but only in order to remember it, to show free will in their choice and not to forget the skills and art of dealing with it and its principles.

But the negligence of people, their carelessness, fatigue from everyday problems and many other factors sharply reduced the combat capability of people who gradually get used to their abnormal lifestyle, leading to unawareness of the sinfulness of their existence.

And to the heavy load of sins of the past life, they added a new load of miscalculations, erroneous actions and thoughts.

A snowball that has fallen from the top rushes down and not only increases in weight, but also increases the speed of its fall.

And far from many managed to escape from such a development and flow of circumstances of life, in the whirlpool of which many human destinies were involved.

All this was like a nightmare, and in order to get rid of it, one desire was not enough, one also needed a great effort on oneself, some kind of big push from the outside, or from the inside.

So in the sky, for several days in a row, black clouds were gathering more and more. The clouds, not finding a way further, rubbed against each other. And then, finally, everything was resolved in an instant. There was a violent thunder, with blinding lightning, followed, at short intervals, by new discharges of slightly less force.

A stream of unprecedented strength and power gushed from heaven, washing the city and the townspeople with pure heavenly water and illuminating them with heavenly fire.

“So, when you don’t cleanse yourself of your own free will, you are cleansed from above,” thought David, who was running away from heavenly retribution, soaking wet, hiding in God’s temple. penetrate into the fabric drops of rainwater.

Little by little, the church was filled with forced newcomers, trying to hide under its cover from the “retribution” that had overtaken them.

- Hi David! Are you here too?” Zhenya joyfully exclaimed, out of breath from running and pretty wet.

“As you can see,” David smiled.

- And Geno is about to run.

- What an inseparable couple you and him are, huh?

- What can you do, fate! - Zhenya smiled.

- Fate is fate, but trouble is trouble? As trouble, so let's go ahead, save your own skin, right? Leave the old leader to the mercy of fate? - David jokingly threatened.

- What can you do, your shirt is closer to the body, - Zhenya joked.

Geno, soaked to the skin, nevertheless walked at a leisurely pace. Many pedestrians ran past, fleeing the rain, but he, paying no attention to anyone, stubbornly walked to the wide doors that were wide open for everyone.

- Ivanovich, why are you so slow? - David greeted.

- Ah, - Geno drawled, - you are here too, soon we will all gather here! And where to hurry, anyway, already wet, it will not get worse.

- How, still catch a cold, God forbid, catch pneumonia!

Zhenya wrung out his shirt and T-shirt and put it on again.

- And where is your vaunted car? - David asked Zhenya's car.

- Ah, - Zhenya smiled, - she ordered us all to live long.

- What happened to her?

- Old age, decrepitude, wreck, what else? - Zhenya explained. - Time has power over everyone and over everything!

- Yeah, - David agreed, peering at the aged Geno. - Ha, Ivanych, well, what's new heard from Palermo?

- And ... what about Palermo, don't you see what's going on here? Professor Gandoli passed away.

"I didn't know him," David shrugged.

- What are you talking about, Ivanovich, - Zhenya said sadly, - when?

- Last year.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Zhenya reproached him.

- I thought you knew.

- No, from where. From what?

- A heart, dear, a heart capable of containing the universe, but very fragile, vulnerable and responsive to human pain.

- What a pity, - Zhenya was upset, he was a good person.

- Yes, we corresponded for a long time, and then this happened.

- What about Monica?

- What about Monica? Monica has long had her I am life, she got married, - Geno said sadly.

The next discharges of thunder and lightning hit the ground, the rain intensified.

- Well, what do you hear about the parliamentary elections, David? - asked Geno.

- The struggle for mandates will be uncompromising.

"Shh," a man standing next door called for silence, "it's impossible to talk about politics and earthly vanity here.

- But now the service is not going on? - David was surprised.

- All the same, this is a heavenly temple, not an earthly one, although it is built on the ground, - the stranger did not give up.

- Well, well, well, - David agreed, - we will speak more quietly.

A chant was heard that warmed the souls of people who were wet and chilled by earthly life. Candles lit up in candlesticks and in people's hands. The conversations subsided.

After the end of the service, the weather moderated its passions, calmed down, although a little rain still drizzled and streams of water rolled over.

“There are rains like this, but there are no such services as here even in Palermo,” Geno admitted under a deep impression. “Well, shall we go here more often?” he suggested. “Every Sunday?”

- We will, Geno, we will, - Zhenya agreed.

- Of course, we will, - David confidently supported him, - God will unite us together again.

12. 1998

NIECE

Bare feet hurriedly led the man along the golden warm sand, which was gradually cooling down after a hot summer day.

From the sea to the shore, predicting a change in the weather, a light, transparent wind ran up.

- That's why in the morning the bite is unimportant, - the man thought, looking up at the grayish clouds driven by the wind, - the fish senses ahead of time when it comes to rain.

He increased his pace, and his steps lost their harmony, expressiveness and rhythm. The run became more and more chaotic.

- Rufovich, probably, is also already worried ...

Shouted, at a low altitude struggling with gusts of wind, lone seagulls. It seemed that they were not only talking to each other, but also trying to communicate something important to people. They flew up to the shore, sat down, deftly and quickly sorted out with graceful legs, pecked out something from under the ever-increasing waves running on the sand. They behaved almost like people who entered the sea for a swim and gradually got used to the temperature of the water.

The man's legs rushed forward, and his gaze lingered on the sides. A smile flickered across his face.

- How strange and interesting they are, these seagulls...

Bare knee-deep, tanned legs were already carrying a person away from a sign flashing nearby, on a highway, either a sign, or a sign with the word "Solprom" crossed out.

- And curious, where and what kind of salt? After all, there are no signs of mining nearby?

It remained a stone's throw to the so-called "snake", protruding from the shore almost to deep water.

Fishermen crowded along it in a dense row and from time to time waved their long rods.

The pier was a powerful iron frame with a boardwalk.

The boards held on somehow, and when they were passed over, they banged loudly, and it seemed that, if desired, having studied their strict arrangement well, one could walk along them in such a way as to beat out the rhythm of ditties or tap dance.

- Olezhek, you, by God! Waiting for you, waiting! Did you go for girls or something? - an elderly fisherman, almost seventy years old, attacked the approaching boy.

- Nu, that you, Rufovich! Oleg blushed.

And the guys have been waiting for you. You are strange! You know that I can't live without it for a long time.

Rufovich, with slightly trembling fingers, secured the end of the rod under his foot and hurriedly fumbled in the shopping bag brought by Oleg. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes, took out one, lit it.

- Yes, not a damn thing will come of it today! - exclaimed, satisfied with the puff, but dissatisfied with the bite.

- Take it, guys, and you! Help yourself, - he suggested to random neighbors, whom he had just met today.

- Naum, what is this, your grandson? - one of them was curious.

- Not! A nephew from the city has arrived. I want to instill in him a love for fishing, while I haven't started to walk around the girls yet. I think the first is better than the second.

- Where did you get it? - the neighbor doubted.

- From the fact that today we are here, not there, - Rufovich burst out laughing.

- So because the strengths are not the same, - another neighbor threw from afar.

- And how do you know, maybe a guy in the city has a girlfriend? - He winked at Oleg.

Oleg blushed and was embarrassed.

- Rufovich, here's a string bag for you, and I went aft, left the fishing rod there. There must be some kind of fish on it.

- Well, go ahead, don't miss it! Fish and girls must be hooked in time. Do you hear? - Rufovich taught Oleg the tricks of hunting.

- Rufovich, as always, in his role. One and the same program, - Oleg thought, heading towards the stern of the pier, - swearing, smirks, vulgarities ...

- Good boy, Naum! - In the meantime, a neighbor on the pier turned to Rufovich. - How old is he?

- Sixteen. So modest, quiet, - the fisherman replied with satisfaction. - At his age I was already a good hunter for all living creatures, and this one is still green.

- Nothing, time will teach everything! - with calm confidence, the second neighbor brought clarity to the matter.

- What else, I wonder, did he bring us? - Naum Rufovich reached for the string bag, pulled out buns, mineral water, kefir in half-liter bottles. - Here's an eccentric, - he smiled broadly and began to treat the neighbors and eat himself.

Oleg ran up with a floundering horse mackerel in his hand.

- You look how quick! - Rufovich encouraged him. - Well, come on, come on, continue!

Biting, like, as the fishermen say, died, and Oleg now and then dragged to Naum either a horse mackerel or a goby, which professional fishermen, out of principle, usually scornfully refused.

Rufovich pulled his net cage out of the water on a long rope and threw fish caught by Oleg into it.

“You drive slower, you’ll get further,” he muttered with satisfaction, “we’ll also please grandma at home, we won’t come empty-handed.

The neighbor suddenly pecked sharply, pulled the rod down. The fishing line, like a guitar string, emitted a melodic ringing.

Everyone sitting nearby began to fuss, bent over the water. The owner of the rod picked up the thick end, lifted the thin one, strictly held it at forty-five degrees. The fishing line rang, and the prey wriggled on the hook, rushing from side to side.

- Look what the reptile is doing, huh? - the fisherman was perplexed, unable to hide his fear and fear of losing his prey.

- Don't be so hasty! You're not in a hurry to see the girl! - Naum was indignant. - Yes, what are you doing? Not so, not so, lead her, you will confuse our tackles for all of us, so yours ... so, - he scolded in a terrible way.

After a long climb and managed to extract a well-fed eel from the water, albeit at too high a price. The gear of all the nearby fishermen was thoroughly mixed up.

- The main thing is not prey, but gear, - argued, swearing, annoyed Naum.

The victims began to restore their gear, while Naum, out of frustration, finally cut off the end of the tangled fishing line and let it fly into the wind. There was no strength and desire to restore it, even though all the necessary supplies were at hand.

He shouted a couple of times, called Oleg, and he came running already with a small red mullet.

- You look! - Naum was still raging in his soul. - And he will become a fisherman, that's for sure! He just needs to learn something from me, of course.

- Okay, Olezhek, you see, it's rubbish, there's no bite, then these blockheads ruined the whole structure. Went! And the weather is something else. It will probably rain. Aida tick?

- Yeah, - Oleg agreed.

They returned, distressed, by the shore to the nearest pier, the terminal for the steamboat, which was cruising along the route Solprom - the city seaport.

Rufovich now and then slowed down his steps, peered into a wide field, spread out on the opposite side along the highway.

- There, Olezhek, - he caught Oleg's questioning look, - firth mud, and excellent red worms are found in it. You'll have to come here for them somehow.

Oleg perked up with curiosity.

- Just do not think that they are so easy to get! - as if persuading him, explained Naum.

- And I don't think so, - Oleg thought, but did not answer.

- It is necessary to dig up a lot of land in order to collect at least one box. And then they can be kept in the refrigerator, in a wet rag, for at least two or three weeks.

Oleg looked back at Naum with a feeling of not fully satisfied curiosity.

- Hmm, what's next? - Nahum truncated his thought. - And then, it can be very good fishing in one place.

He thought a little, as if he was thinking about something.

- Nothing, nothing, don't worry! There is still a little time before your departure... let's figure it out! I will not send you without taking my soul away properly.

In the meantime, he had something to think about. "Who knows when he will arrive. For next year? Hardly! University entrance exams, a joke, or what? It will be prepared but in two or three years it is not known whether I will be alive at all?"

- Oleg! You see, the ship is already sailing, - he woke up, - in such weather, it is possible that this is his last voyage for today. So let's get moving. Reluctance to vote something today on the track.

The pace was increased to the point that it seemed as if they were running away from their own footprints on the coastal sand. But in general, there was no need to flee, the traces were immediately washed away by the sea waves after the appearance.

And it became impossible to determine whether people passed through these places at all. And were they born and lived in this world? Traces of human feet,

left on the golden sandy shore, left those fleeing from him after a futile call and a call not to be separated from them.

Lonely gulls accompanied them at separate distances. Already almost raging waves rolled on each other and hissed at the meeting of the tides, as if dictating the pace of the run to the people running past them.

Exhausted from exertion and fatigue, they entered the house, shedding excess weight as they went.

- Ah ... Rufovich, welcome back, - exclaimed a plump young woman in her forties.

- You were just missing, - thought Naum, - but where is Aurora?

- I went to the zoo nearby, carried the heads from the horse mackerel to the chanterelles. It will probably come soon. Olezhek, come in, dear, what are you ashamed of?! Let's wash and change clothes, and I'll feed you with hot soup, I suppose, hungry. And I'll warm the second.

- Who cooked the soup? - asked Naum, taking a sip.

- Aunt Aurora. Well, how delicious?

- Delicious, tasty, - agreed Naum, taking into account in his mind that the taste is determined not so much by the taste of the dish, but by the one from whose hands you take it.

Over the years, the feeling of gratitude to women's hands and souls did not dull in him, reminding him that if it were not for them, he would not have been alive for a long time.

- A woman's heart and women's hands are what still keeps life on Earth...

Soon the mistress of the house, seventy-year-old Aurora, returned, soft and friendly, with a smile that radiated warmth and affection.

“Ah,” she drawled, “are you back yet?” Clara, did you manage to feed them?

“Yes, yes, auntie, we had dinner,” said Clara, some relative of hers, who also came to visit for a short time.

- Where does he wear you in the evenings? - Naum asked Aurora from the balcony, on which he went out to smoke.

Didn't Clara tell you?

- She said, she said, but you knew that we were about to return.

- Oh, Naum, stop it, for God's sake!

- It's boring here, Rufovich, in the town. Have fun somewhere! Clara tried to soften the argument.

- How nowhere? - Naum was indignant. - So many dance floors, restaurants, cafes ...

- Yes, but not with anyone, - Clara immediately found herself and complained.

The hostess caught that her husband cursed silently.

- Oleg, do you want to go with you to the sea, to the evening beach? - Clara suggested. - It's so romantic.

“Right now?” he asked. Oleg.

- Well, yes, of course, now, if you're not too tired.

- Yes, we just came from there, - Oleg explained.

- So what! Do you want to walk along the embankment?

- Oh, not today, - Oleg hesitated.

Naum Rufovich was still standing on the balcony on the second floor, laying out and rearranging his things, and became more and more furious. And it was already difficult to guess what was the reason, the accident on the pier or the importunate invitations of Clara.

Oleg lay down and fell asleep “without hind legs”. Clara busied herself in the communal kitchen at the end of the corridor, which was used by several families.

Aurora was sorting through the linen in the big roomy drawers of the chest of drawers.

Naum Rufovich was sitting on the bed, in front of the TV, and was already beginning to peck. He was drawn to sleep, but a cheerful transmission held his attention and did not let him fall asleep.

It was about the dangers of smoking and alcoholism with the involvement of specialist doctors, narcologists, and along the way, scientists, philologists, sociologists and people of various other professions. Suddenly, the conversation turned to something that could not but hurt the pride of the fisherman.

- There is no sex in our country, - one of the experts expressed his opinion and gave his arguments and explanations.

The last phrase heard by Naum Rufovich turned out to be a drop that overturned the whole bowl of his patience.

- What? - he snapped in an almost inhuman voice. - Damn you! Come and look at her, she's over there now... in the kitchen.

- Naum, stop what you allow yourself! - the hostess was indignant. - Aren't you ashamed?! Firstly, she is our guest, and secondly, my relative.

- This is what helps, not that ...

- Oh, stop it, for God's sake, where is the horse with a hoof ...

- Don't you see how she wants it, she's already cracking?

- None of your business!

“Then there's no point in coming here with this...”

- And she did not come to you, but to me. This is firstly, and secondly, it all seems to you.

Clara came in at the noise with the washed dishes.

- What happened? - she asked. - What are we arguing about?

- Yes, he doesn't like the program, and it arises, - the hostess complained. - I say, I don't like it, don't look, yes ...

"Okay, okay!" Clara threw conciliatorily.

"Here you are, but you didn't believe," Naum Rufovich triumphed after Clara left.

- Oh, come on, be quiet, or you'll wake up the child! Better go to bed and you, tomorrow morning to the market. Forgot, right?

- I didn't forget, I didn't forget! - Naum Rufovich mumbled and slowly began to fulfill the orders of his wife.

The phone rang.

- Go better, pick up the phone, - Aurora ordered, - it seems, a long-distance call ...

- Hello, I'm listening, - Naum Rufovich muttered tiredly, but solemnly important.

- Hello, brother, hello! Do you recognize?

- Oh, yes, Tamila, hello, sister!

- How are you doing? How is my Aurora?

- Yes, little by little, everything shoots, already from the seventeenth year. It will never go away!

- Stop it, Naum, - Aurora Davydovna got excited, - let me better ...

Naum protested.

- How is my son? Doesn't bother you much?

- Nah, everything's fine! Only now, except for fishing, he is not interested in anything.

"Stop it," Aurora demanded again, lightly slapped her husband on the shoulder and snatched the receiver from him.

- Hello, Tamiločka! Hello dear, how are you?

- Thank you, Aurora, okay. How are you there? I'm so worried about you. We are very busy with you.

- What are you! It's all right, don't worry. That's what we live for, to disturb each other and worry about each other.

- When will you return my son to me?

- By the end of the month takes off. The ticket has already been taken.

- Thank you, Avrorochka, but did you have enough money?

Enough is enough, don't worry.

- I sent you a parcel yesterday, if you need some more money I can ...

- Yes, no, Tamilochka, it's better to come to us next summer all together ...

- Well, Avrorochka, I kiss you, my dear! And thanks for everything. I'll call again, but later.

- All right, all right, Tamilochka! Well be there...

- Tu, tu, tu...

- Worried. A mother is still a mother.

- Yeah! And where are our Gavrik sons now. how are they, who knows?

- Who knows? They call and tell...

- Yes, after all ... you can't tell everything on the phone.

- So after all, they already have families - wives, children ...

- That's it! For them, we raised them, suffered.

- Well, what to do? That's how life works.

- We have it. For others, it is set up differently.

- Oh, okay, Naum, I beg you, lie down and fall asleep.

Naum muttered something to himself for a long time, grumbling and grunting.

People scattered around the greyish viscous field. Who, having walked a little, lingered for a long time on the spot, who, carefully stepping barefoot on the odorous firmament, visually looked at the future parking lot.

Having taken a fancy to what must have been a suitable site, two pairs of bare feet froze and lingered. Shoes and all other necessary camping equipment rested in backpacks, behind the backs of the aliens. Standing half-tilted on firm legs, poking their heads into the ground like herons, they swarmed about in it, raked it, scattered it.

Here the fingers carefully penetrated the gray odorous soil and began to slowly sink deeper and deeper.

At the required depth, they froze, trembled and removed a viscous lump, which later easily broke into pieces, from the deep crevices of which x retrieved red, long, writhing creatures.

Red firth worms were considered an excellent bait for any fish that lived nearby - in the sea or in artificial freshwater lakes.

The exoticism of worm hunting was enhanced by the specific, tart, in a sense even pleasant smell of firth mud. Such healing places could hardly be found in the whole great country.

In principle, for the sake of this gray gold, vacationers and treated patients from all over the country flocked to this point. And in the summer, the small

resort towns of this coastal zone could hardly contain the huge, multimillion-dollar visiting flow.

Here, the hard-working fingers carefully, classically removed the red fat and wet worm from a lump of gray clay.

“Save yourself, who can,” the victim uttered panicked cries, cries, inaudible to the human ear, warning relatives about the danger.

“Look, Olezhek, what a charm,” the elderly admired, bringing close to the face of the young sagging red-brown tenderness.

- Slyai, slyai, - he walked a couple of times with the tip of his tongue along his upper lip, - he himself would not refuse such a delicacy.

A shiver of disgust ran through Oleg's gut, and he immediately looked away.

Naum took out a small plank box from his backpack, lined with a damp cloth, filled it with selective gray mud, and let the captured “pets” fall on it.

- So, Olezhek, - the old fisherman taught, - take them and carefully put them in a box, and then, inside, into the clay, they will climb themselves. Heard a joke about how Vasily Ivanovich and Petka went fishing?

- No, - confessed Oleg.

- Petka looks at how great Vasily Ivanych bites and how he drags fish after fish from the pond, but he himself does not bite and does not bite. Same thing on the second day. Petka could not stand it and asked: Vasily Ivanovich, I also catch red worms here, why is it that you bite, but I don't? Vasily Ivanych explained that on even days he catches girl worms, and on odd days he catches boy worms.

- How can you tell?

- Very simple! You take a worm, you pass it between your teeth. If something remains on them, it means - it's a boy, if it doesn't remain - it means a girl.

- Fu-u, - Oleg shuddered, - what a disgusting thing!

Naum Rufovich burst into laughter.

The hands of man created on earth. Everywhere felt the result of their deeds. God created this world and man, and everything else was created by man, for it is known that man can do that God will not do.

The fingers of both hands of the young man carefully penetrated the golden sandy soil, saturated with the waters of the sea, and slowly began to sink deeper and deeper. They removed a lump of wet sandy mass and descended over a sand structure near the shore. A fortress was built with a wall surrounding it and watchtowers.

“Now, perhaps, that's all,” exclaimed the young man, crowning the tower with a spire.

“Yes, you won’t say anything,” a voice answered him from afar, “no one has ever seen such beauty here.

- Take a picture with a camera!

- Now it will be done.

The builders rounded off and lay down on wooden trestle beds under the gentle rays of the rising sun.

“It’s a miracle to sunbathe in the morning on the sea,” thought the young man.

His body gradually warmed up. Feeling the heat, he sat down on the trestle bed, clasping his fingers on his bent knee, and peered into his surroundings:

- It’s time to chill!

He stared at the back of a slightly plump woman approaching the edge of the shore and appreciated her gait.

- It’s like walking on broken glass!

A woman in a colorful bathing suit lowered her into the water and immediately pulled her leg back. She went into the sea, then she ran out of it.

- And I want, and it pricks!

His face suddenly showed a question and surprise.

- Can not be?!

A moment later, strong male hands gently but urgently pushed the woman towards the water splashing at her feet.

“What are you doing?” she shouted. - Shame on you?

- It is necessary to enter the water more boldly, citizen! - A male voice encouraged her.

Finally, under the pressure of strong hands, leaning forward, she plopped down into the oncoming wave.

- Poor fool, idiot!

- Vadim?!

- Hello, Clara!

She rose to her knees in the water. Overcoming light waves, not hiding her joy, she pulled herself up to the tall handsome man, grabbed her elbows, catching the momentary tilt of her head, and kissed him on the cheek:

- What fates? - gladly felt the reciprocal touch.

- Yes, that’s passing, with his wife and child. We decided to stay here for a while.

- That’s it!

- I already sent them, but I myself stayed with the guys for a couple of days,

- Vadim showed with a glance towards the two men on the shore who were looking at them.

“Look!” exclaimed one.

- Wow, quickie, - the second agreed in surprise.

- Oh, - Clara, embarrassed, recoiled behind the crest of the wave.

- What are you talking about! - Vadim was amazed. - You see, here they don't know the measure at all!

- Yes, but they are not classmates! Well, did you swim?

- What?! Need to hear how you got here?

The conversation afloat continued on the trestle beds.

“It's boring after all to rest here,” Clara complained.

- How, - Vadim was surprised, - such and such a woman?

- Yes! Like this color, such a cluster of people and events, but still emptiness. Want something special. Lack of something very important in life. Don't you have that feeling?

You need to get married, Clara.

- For whom? There is only small fry around, - Clara waved angrily.

- Well, if you wish ... for a good person.

- There was one good one, but he swam away.

- Mm...

- We did not agree on the characters ... Lord, how difficult it is to find the person you need.

- Sisyphian labor!

- You don't know how to live! There is a lot - work, friends, a loved one ... enough for living and rags, but ...

But the person you love...

- That's not what I need.

- And what do you want?

Clara drooped, Vadim noticed tears glistening in her eyes.

- Well, well ... here's another, - gently slapped her on the shoulder.

“Take a risk, or what?!” - rummaged in his bag, took out a book wrapped in paper.

"What is it?" Clara asked surprised.

“Perhaps what you are missing. I feel at ease with her, and I'm not alone.

- Yes, but I've already read it, - Clara looked at the cover. - Holy Scripture ...

- Well?

- It's far from our real life.

- What you?! You know what is the reason for our alienation from everyone and everything.

Clara listened. Vadim's speeches seemed strange to her.

- Our life is a building of sand, which eventually shares the fate of that golden sandy town over there. The guys and I built it this morning.

The billowing waves had already reached the borders of the town, part of it already almost washed away.

- Soon the water will rise even higher and the waves will lick the whole town. But this building of the sanatorium resting against the bottom of the sea with a colonnade will stand. You wonder at me, Clara, don't you?

Clara nodded her head cautiously.

- Well, well, but I'm not surprised at people's surprise at my reasoning. I was kicked out for this, first from the party, and then from work. And now I'm kind of a dissident.

- Well, how are you?

- Ah ... not a problem, a friend temporarily attached himself to work, while there is enough, and then we'll see. You understand, Clara, what it is like to borrow from Him all universal good principles and values, and at the same time not only not to mention, but to deny His existence altogether. The same as building from sand, even golden. Artel "Vain Labor".

Clara tossed her head around.

- Do you want us to change the subject?

- No, keep going...

The sun rose to its zenith. Vacationers fled "flight" into the shade, under the canopies with trestle beds.

The fingers of women's hands carefully and gently plunged into the snow-white viscous mass and began to squeeze and mix it. The hands moved rhythmically and peacefully, leading away from reality and plunging into memories.

- Come on, dear, a little more! Stronger... Stronger!

I can't, I can't anymore! Oh mommy! For me to ever...

Prolonged, complicated childbirth took away all the forces. The feeling of pain was replaced by joy. The walls of some mysterious corridor loomed more and more distinctly before my eyes. From all sides voices were heard:

- Doctor, the pressure drops sharply, just about ... - a gentle young whisper of the nurse was heard.

- What are you doing to us, girl? - He was blocked by the bass of an experienced doctor. - Quick injections and a dropper, donated blood!

- Leave them - melodiously flowed from the outside. - Do not return to them, come to us, you will be fine with us. Come on, well, be bolder ... quietly ... but don't turn around ...

She mentally nodded, agreed, walked towards the mysterious voices.

How long it went on, she does not remember. But she remembers a thin scream and cry, to which she turned around after all. I felt the sun imperceptibly rolled into my heart and instantly lit up inside. From an excess of energy, light and warmth, she was thrown into a kind of mysterious blissful trembling that had never been experienced before. For a while, her body trembled non-stop. With a trembling, the weight of the body seemed to be removed as if by hand. What happened next was not remembered.

She woke up under the nurse's gently stroking her fingers. Slowly came to my senses:

- Where I am?

- Here, here, everything is fine ...

-And the child?

Alive, don't worry! And demands from you, you know what..

“Who?” she asked with her eyes, barely holding back tears.

- A boy, of course, a boy.

She buried her face into the pillow and sobbed.

- Well, well, what are you, silly!

Thus was born the first son of Aurora - Yura. At the birth of the second - Igor, she had to have a caesarean section. But she believed that the real cutting off of her sons was made by her daughters-in-law. I had to go through considerable torment until they grew up, stood on their feet. And bam, they were taken away! She did not allow her husband to discuss this issue, so as not to get upset, but she herself did not let it out of her head.

- Aurora, what are you kneading for so long? Enough, probably, - the neighbor was curious.

Yes, the longer the better.

Yes, but not so much...

Why doesn't your relative help you?

- What are you, let him rest. And in general, there is enough work for her.

- Nothing, you can do both.

A middle-aged woman walked through the kitchen and disappeared into her room.

- I also have more, gossip ... - the neighbor grimaced. - Don't be too frank with her, she spreads everything to the neighbors.

- What, for example?

“Here, she claims that our sewers clogged up last week because of Clara.

Aurora Davydovna had had enough of the current.

- Not maybe this is it, - flashed through her head, - today I will clarify ...
- This is it, so as not to pay for repairs.

The conversation didn't last long. But Avrora Davydovna could not come to her senses for a long time.

“Ask her about it or not?” thought Aurora Davydovna, seeing that very neighbor who appeared at the door, but restrained herself, deciding first to clarify everything with Clara.

- This Sofa is a bad woman, - Luda complained, - she is so curious, she sticks her nose everywhere. She didn't tell you anything about me, did she?

- No, - after a short pause, Aurora Davydovna answered.

- He says to everyone that I drive to myself. And I have lessons, English... Do you have to live somehow?! Imagine, she also claims that your Oleg is the grandson of Naum Rufovich from his second, illegal wife.

- What? .. - Aurora drawled, finally finished off with new information. - You will get into other people's affairs, - she warned sternly.

- Come on, what are you, Avrora Davydovna, I'm just trying to warn you ...
Aurora left the kitchen.

The sun was sinking over the sea.

Two anglers with backpacks thrown behind their backs walked in time along a narrow paved path, intended mainly for pedestrians. Vacationers liked to walk along it, especially in the evenings. The street turned at the end and flowed into the embankment.

Not far from the rectangular arch leading to the common courtyard, the fishermen slowed down and carefully peered at the talking couple.

- You see, Olezhek, what a bull she grabbed for herself, and you look and flap your ears. He'll handle it like this...

- Well, let it be, Rufovich, but what about you, - Oleg did not slow down.

Naum Rufovich was somewhat delayed, but, feeling the eyes on him, he became embarrassed and more energetically followed Oleg, who had already managed to hide behind the archway.

- There Naum Rufovich and Olezhek, - the woman said, pointing in the direction of the fishermen, - do you want, let's go and introduce you?

- No, - the man hesitated, - some other time.

- All right, Vadim! Thank you for everything. So, see you, see you in the evening?

- Yeah, I'll follow you.

Clara slowly walked towards the archway.

“I wish I had a man like Vadim. Everything would be fine and alright right away.”

- So! Have you settled down? Have you washed your hands? - Aurora Davydovna commanded the parade. - Well, now help yourself to hot pies and fried fish, and tea will be a little later!

The delicious meal lasted quite a long time, but finally ended with fragrant hot tea.

When Oleg left, and Naum Rufovich went to the balcony to smoke his next cigarette, Aurora cautiously asked Clara if she had accidentally clogged the sewer in the bathroom.

- What-about? .. - they stretched out in surprise almost simultaneously, Naum Rufovich was silent, and Clara aloud.

- You, Naum, smoke on your balcony there, - Aurora Davydovna ordered sternly, - well, what do you need to poke your head in, here's another!

Between Avrorra Davydovna and Clara a long, very intriguing conversation-clarification ensued.

Naum Rufovich lamented on the balcony. His patience was coming to an end, and anger towards Clara was growing.

- It's necessary ... here's a bitch, here's rubbish ... Well, wait, I'll give them both a thrashing.

After long mutual clarifications, the landlady came to a definite decision.

- All right, Clara, calm down. Today it's too late, well, tomorrow we'll figure it out. The morning is wiser than the evening.

Clara was nervous, barely restrained, and even canceled the evening with Vadim, so as not to burden him with her problems. Vadim left in the evening of the next day. She didn't know when life would give her the opportunity to be alone with him...

- I heard, Oleg, the main events will unfold tomorrow, - Naum Rufovich said instructively.

Oleg looked at him in surprise.

- This is going to be...

- Oh, Naum, come on, don't exaggerate, nothing will happen! Let's just figure it out, that's all.

- No, it will be ... - Naum Rufovich stubbornly insisted on his point, - but we won't be here anymore! he concluded emphatically.

"That's good," Aurora Davydovna agreed, not without satisfaction.

“I would look at him if I told him what I was gossiped about him.”

Both hands of the clock have already gone beyond the number twelve, reminding of the onset of night.

Clear, starry sky illuminated the road. The travelers walked with an even, energetic gait. They were met and escorted by steel lampions frozen in silence at an equal distance from each other.

Awakened grasshoppers chirped here and there, adding to the symphony of a summer starry night with restless cricket soloists.

One of the travelers suddenly recoiled away from the middle of the alley along which they were now passing, and, bending down, picked up something.

“What is it?” asked the second.

- Yes, nothing special, just a beautiful stone.

All the way to the outskirts of the town with a small suburban bus station, where it was necessary to be in time before dawn, the young traveler looked around the sides of the road, noticed something, picked it up and put it in a small plastic bag.

- Oleg, well, what are you, by God, how small! Do not mess around and walk quietly next to me!

- Rufovich, I collect beautiful stones for my girlfriend.

- Where is she?

- There, at home.

- Ah ... well, collect! But only beautiful pebbles should be looked for during the day in the sea or in the sand on the shore, and not at night on the road.

Until the bus station the old fisherman mumbled something under his breath, got annoyed, indignant.

- Son, on! Two tickets to Zarechye, - he turned to a half-asleep guy who was crouching on a wooden bench in a small building of the bus station.

- Give it directly to the driver, father, - he turned over to the other side.

- Is the bus coming soon?

- In half an hour, probably, sit down, wait ...

Naum Rufovich smoked another cigarette "Shipka", Bulgarian production, and looked at the night starry sky.

“The weather doesn’t seem to let us down,” he thought, “I wonder what the situation is now there?” I haven't been for a long time and I haven't talked to the guys on the phone, but I should have, at least before leaving. Oh, these women, all the plans of men are mixed up.

They have a new boss there now. I've heard of him and know him a little, but I've never been close, I've never been in business with him. And ... what will happen, it will happen, in extreme cases we'll go and come back, that's all, we'll

take a walk," he concluded. "But what to do with him, he actually didn't see normal, beautiful fishing," he recalled Oleg.

Long reflections were interrupted by a small bus "pazik" that drove up to the bus station.

- Oleg, come on, quickly! Get it all over here! Can you handle it? - Naum Rufovich threw Oleg, and he spoke to the driver.

After waiting for a few more passengers, residents of the outskirts, the bus drove off.

Oleg glanced at the weighty knapsacks parked near the front seat. "Why so much cargo," he thought, "just like for all occasions."

"If I were traveling alone, I wouldn't take so much with me," Rufovich thought, as if reading Oleg's thoughts, "I'm an old man, how much do I need?"

- Rufovich, why didn't we take fishing rods and spinning with us? - Oleg asked.

- Well well well! Look what you wanted, but you don't need folding beds? - Rufovich warned. We can't take them where we're going, so as not to loom there with them, not to arouse anyone's suspicion of what we came there for, okay?

- Clearly, - Oleg nodded his head.

Climbing up another small rise, the bus ended up a few hundred meters from the dam, through which the further paved road passed.

A most charming morning panorama opened up before the eyes of the passengers. Oleg, who, as it seemed to him, had never seen anything more beautiful, took this unsurpassed beauty especially sharply and enthusiastically.

He took a breath, he even gasped.

Naum Rufovich smiled contentedly.

"Well, well," he thought, "it was worth coming here just for the sake of it.

To the left of the dam there is a lake, overgrown with reeds, and to the right there are three more, though a little smaller.

"Wow, wow," thought Oleg, "well, there really will be a lot of fish here."

Employees of the fish farm met their old friend Naum Rufovich warmly and cordially.

- Where have you disappeared, Rufovich? - they exclaimed to his surprise. - How many years, how many winters! We didn't know, so guess what?

Rufovich justified himself by being busy and busy.

- Well, well, well! How are you now, how is Davydovna?

- Nothing, little by little, thank you! Yes, my nephew came to visit, he will soon be leaving, but I want to show him normal fishing at least once.

“What are we talking about, Rufovich, no problem,” the young men reassured him, “when our new boss Viktor Alekseevich arrives, talk to him.

- How is he, nothing?

- Well, ordinary, like all bosses. Only now he reduced us a lot, there were four of us, besides, Anatoly went to the village with his family to rest. Do you know him?” asked one of the fishermen.

- Which the?

- Boogey!

- Ah... well, yes, of course, I remember. Well, how do you manage? Networks are still ... heavy.

- We invite guys temporarily ...

- Well, how about it?

- But how? In the morning and in the evening we go around the reservoir on the “Rafik”. Once a day, we feed fish from boats, and that's it.

While there was a conversation between old acquaintances, Oleg admired the surroundings from the reservoir.

Not far from the warehouse building, he noticed a small beautiful long-legged crane pecking from a bowl set for him by people.

- Zhora, Zhora, Zhorushka, - one of the fishermen called him.

The crane fearlessly approached, responded with its gentle trills.

- They found him on the shore, with a damaged wing, - one of the fishermen explained, - they picked him up, treated him. He was gone, but soon returned. Doesn't want to leave us. See how faithful the birds are. Fly away, fly back! Get used to us! Yes, and we do not offend him, we feed him little by little.

A man in his fifties drove up in a car, and Viktor Alekseevich himself greeted them solemnly and met Naum Rufovich and Oleg.

- Our old sidekick, Alekseevich, I think it will come in handy, - one of the fishermen introduced Rufovich, - at least with advice. Such an experience in the economy, God forbid us!

“Very well,” the director said contentedly, “we will use his experience as well,” and he went off to give the guys business assignments.

After some time, catching a suitable situation and moment, Naum Rufovich approached the director.

- Viktor Alekseevich, what's the matter: my nephew came to me, he will leave soon. So I promised him to go fishing. If it is possible for you, I would be grateful to you all my life.

Oleg watched b the speakers are still from the shore of the reservoir.

“You see, Rufovich,” Viktor Alekseevich answered after a pause, “the old master was removed here. I am also responsible for the economy, I have a demand for it. But if that's the case, here's what we'll do. Work with us for one day, help us with some things, and tomorrow we will let you go fishing on the third pond, okay?!”

Naum Rufovich almost lost his tongue.

- And-and ... children! - He barely murmured with joy.

- Well, that's good!

- Do you know how to fix the network?

- What are we talking about?

Naum Rufovich and Oleg spent the whole day at work.

Late in the evening they were told that guests were expected and asked to help in the kitchen.

Oleg was sitting on a low stool, peeling boiled potatoes and onions. Naum Rufovich was frying a duck shot by fishermen in a frying pan.

From the courtyard came the rumble of an approaching car and women's voices.

- Kralechek brought himself up, they saw it! - Rufovich noticed.

Oleg went to the window to watch the ceremony of welcoming and receiving guests.

Two pretty ladies, about thirty-five, dressed in modern fashion, talking cheerfully about something with each other, went up the stairs.

They played until late at night. Naum Rufovich and Oleg watched the table, treated the guests. Oleg fed the remnants of the runaway stray dogs, which earned him great recognition from them.

The yard was lit by a powerful lantern on top of a wooden post in the middle of the yard.

When more laughter than speeches began to be heard from the banquet room, Naum Rufovich kept Oleg in the kitchen and only himself entered the guests. However, soon they were allowed to go to bed with Oleg.

- Oleg, let's go to the warehouse, to that neighboring hut, - Rufovich pointed out, - we will sleep there.

Soon the driver of the farm joined them.

- What are you, Ivan? - Rufovich asked in surprise.

- Yes, well, well, I'll stay here with you, at least I'll sleep a little.

Early in the morning, just as it was beginning to get light, Naum Rufovich cautiously opened the doors of the house that had received guests just now, and found the person he needed.

Viktor Alekseevich was lying on the bed by the window, embracing one of the ladies. The couple slept peacefully.

Coming closer, Naum Rufovich looked closely at the couple.

- Wow, - the lady drawled, and, as if trying to please the observer, she involuntarily woke up the one lying next to her.

- What do you want, Rufovich? - a male voice asked half asleep.

- Viktor Alekseevich, - Rufovich drawled, - well, can I go fishing with my nephew in the pond?

- Ah...ah, come on, go, go, only to the third body of water.

- Yeah, okay, okay! Thank you! - Rufovich hurried out of the house, barely restraining his joy.

"He got a beautiful bitch," he thought, quickly heading towards the house where Oleg and Ivan were still sleeping. "Well, well, to each his own."

We reached the third pond at a slow pace in about forty-five minutes.

- Well, come on, Olezhek, turn around slowly. Get everything and let's get started.

The fishing tackle, called "donka" or "zakidushka", moved and quietly went - the main fishing line with a leash and a swivel at the end, a lead sinker and several leashes with hooks tied to the main line. The other end of the main line was tied to a winding plank with a "bow-shaped" cutout in the middle, firmly fixed to the shore.

- Look, Olezhek, - the old fisherman taught, - do not spare the worms, plant several on one hook. That's it, see?

"Yeah," Oleg replied.

- Well, go ahead, put the worms on the rest of the hooks and tick to the side.

An old, emaciated fisherman, who had lost even in stature, stood barefoot on the bank of the pond and waved a shack that made circular movements in the air. Then he made a sharp throw forward, the sinker rushed to a length of up to seventy meters into the depths of the reservoir, dragging along the main fishing line with leashes and hooks tied to them with voluptuous bait.

"That's it... well," the old fisherman said with satisfaction as he saw the sinker sink gently into the water. He drove a small stick into the ground and stood upright on the shore and, having made a small cut at its upper end with a knife, strengthened the main fishing line on it with a stretch. Further, not far from the

stick, he installed a small lump of clay taken from the shore on a fishing line. - This is as a beacon, - Oleg explained, - to notify us about the bite.

On the remaining three snacks, set close to each other instead of a clay beacon, signal bells were suspended, mounted in plastic corks from champagne bottles. These corks were attached to the main stretched fishing line by means of a slot, which was made with a knife in the lower long part of the cork. Corks hung on tight lines, bell down.

Naum Rufovich on the shore, not far from the snacks, nervously smoked one cigarette after another, waiting for the first bite.

Time dragged on for a long time, slowly, the bite did not start. A couple of hours later, two small rudd and one crucian splashed in the cage.

Naum Rufovich's indignation grew. fuel was added to the fire by the annoying sounds of three fishermen fishing in the neighboring, second, reservoir.

“It means that they can do it in the second one, but we can’t, right?” he was indignant, but immediately remembered it. “Well, of course, they seem to be relatives of the director, but who are we?”

?

- There is no horseradish fish in this pond, - he turned to Oleg, - otherwise the wagon should have been caught during this time. The guys didn’t say in vain that it’s not worth fishing in the third one, they passed through it several times with nets.

Naum Rufovich had enough patience and cigarettes for another hour.

- Everyone, let’s go, - he said firmly, - what will be, will be. Gather gear, go to the second body of water.

- Don’t, Rufovich, - Oleg tried to resist.

“Let’s go, I said,” Rufovich insisted, “only from that opposite side, so as to be away from the road and from his relatives.

The stretched fishing line gradually gave slack. The clay ball sank lower and lower and finally lay on the shore.

“What the hell?” Naum Rufovich wondered. “We need to tighten the line from the end and put the clay beacon in a new way.”

He took hold of the line, and then suddenly a heavy moving mass on the other end of the line, thrown into the pond, hit him with force on the arm.

The old fisherman felt his heart sink into his heels.

“Hefty, you see, the filly was caught,” he flashed with joy and fear at the same time, “as if the tackle had not broken!”

He pulled the line tighter, she howled. The end in the reservoir slowly led to the side. My heart pounded even harder.

He pulled the line carefully, trying to avoid any slack.

Having dragged the victim almost half the length of the abandoned hook, he felt some weakness, after which the line abruptly, without resistance, succumbed to him.

- Gone! he exclaimed in annoyance.

At the next pulling of the fishing line, the end of it caught on something.

- And the hook turned out, well, what are you going to do, huh?

Several times, with varying speed, he tried to pick him up to him, but to no avail. The end led again, but in the opposite direction.

- Oh, no, you bastard, he's still sitting still, sitting, Olezhek! You hear, he is sitting, - triumphant Rufovich.

In the immediate vicinity of the shore, the fish dragged along the bottom, cutting through the water column with its dorsal fins and demonstrating all the beauty and charm of fishing.

- Get out of here, Olezhek! Listen, tick!

Oleg, not responding to the grumbling, stubbornly stood nearby and did not leave.

But then, in fear of the fish leaving, he nevertheless obeyed, although the thirst for a thrill took him no more than two steps.

He fell prone to the ground, got up, silently cheered: "Come on, Rufovich, come on, don't let it go!"

The fish began to be attributed to the right, to the reeds.

- If he gets to them, khana! Then I will definitely lose! He will go behind the reeds, tie himself up, bury his nose, and that's it! Either her lip will be torn off, or the tackle will burst!

Everything took the fish.

- Lord, what to do! At least one of her to catch, and no more! And then quite a shame in front of the boy from this worthless fishing.

Fear of missing the caught fish in the reeds forced him to slightly break the classic rules of fishing.

He added a little bit in speed and fishing power, and the fish broke away, leaving him with an empty fishing line in his hands.

- Ugh you, your mother, an infection of sorts, - he swore once again.

The fish, which had descended from the main line near the shore, with a hook in its lip and a leash, as if listening to abuse, stared and, opening its huge mouth with movements of strong lips, seemed perplexed, asking him:

- What do you want, old man?

It seemed that for some time both sides continued to remain in some confusion, looked at each other, anticipating further actions.

Oleg crashed once again to the ground, and the sound of the fall served as an appeal to the old man: - Well, what are you staring at, Rufovich, come on, go ahead!

Rufovich only now realized that since the capture of the Reichstag he had not experienced such a feeling today.

Rybina, meanwhile, sensing liberation, slowly turned around to face the pond and gently waving her tail fin, set sail from the shore.

Naum Rufovich ran after her with all his strength, ran like no one, for no one, never. And the confidence that he would overtake prey, even if he had to dive into a pond and swim after it, increased the strength and speed of the chase.

Finally, like a true diver, he jumped into the water and flopped on the shallow bottom of the reservoir.

Oleg leaned over the water, closed his eyes, clasped his head with both hands. The events that unfolded in the last few seconds seemed to come to a logical conclusion.

- Yes, but to what? - flashed through Oleg's mind.

It seemed to him that enough time had passed after the splash and it was time to clear up the finale.

Silent seconds dragged on for an annoyingly long time.

And suddenly a joyful, cheerful, long-lasting cry came to Oleg's ears, followed by a song: "This day of victory smelled like gunpowder. This is a holiday..."

- Lord, really? - Oleg thought with relief.

He looked at Rufovich. He stood, stretched out, to his full height, holding the caught fish by the gills, and the bright summer sun rose and shone over his head. He had never seen a grander sight in his life.

- Look, Oleg, how handsome we are, all three, - he suddenly heard, - a fish, the sun and me.

Rufovich hurriedly got out of the water, holding with his hands ... a kilogram mirror handsome carp with a long mustache on thick and dense lips, eagerly capturing the air.

"Wow, you, my tsatsulechka," he said affectionately and kissed the fish right on the lips, "I never chased my Aurora in my life like I did after you," he explained to her, "well, you scared me!"

Having attached the handsome man in the water near the shore, Rufovich calmed down a little.

- So! After such a shock, it would be nice to smoke. But the cigarettes ran out, - he stated with regret and looked pitifully at Oleg, phlegmatically spreading his arms.

The fish in the pond, frightened by the loud noise and floundering of their catcher, began to creep heavily to the rest of the catch. Moreover, Naum Rufovich from time to time tossed her a specially prepared homemade appetizing bait.

Soon the bells jingled, and the fishing declared itself in full swing. In principle, it had only just begun, although this time the specimens were of medium size, freely fitting in the cage.

- That's it, I can't take it anymore, let's go home, - Rufovich said firmly, folding one of the buns.

- What are you, Rufovich? The fishing is about to begin! When else will we get here? - Oleg was indignant.

- I know, but I can't live without cigarettes anymore, I want to smoke!

- Wait, I seem to have a good bull lying around somewhere

A spark of hope flashed in the fisherman's eyes.

- Well, let's see, - Oleg said reassuringly and with a leisurely movement took out a small fresh cigarette butt.

"Ah... here he is, handsome, I told you," and handed it to the old man, who greedily picked it up and smoked it very quickly.

But the cigarette butt did not last long. After a while the complaint was repeated.

For four hours, Oleg dragged Rufovich with his cigarette butts, giving them to him, as if on a coupon, after tedious and long requests.

In the meantime, the cage was filled to the "neck".

It passed after noon, and there was no point in staying here, especially since the fish took a breather before the evening bite and decided to wait out the hot day in the reeds and away from the shore, at the deepest depth of the reservoir.

Leaving the conquered pond, fishermen with heavy backpacks walked along the coast, when on the opposite side they noticed a dark green Rybkhoz "rafik" driving along a dirt road parallel to their course.

- Rufovich, let's go up a little bit and hide behind a hillock, - suggested Odeg, - let's say that they caught in the third reservoir, and they won't be able to prove otherwise.

- No, - Rufovich objected, - I won't go anywhere. We plowed on them all day? Yes, even with their girls.

- Rufovich, let's hide, please. Let's go out on the track, and then look for the wind in the field. For the sake of such a catch, we will make an extra ten kilometers. Do you think?

- No, - the old man was stubborn, - I am responsible for the consequences. They may think that I am afraid of them, but let them know that I am not afraid of anyone.

They went out to the highway and began to "vote" hitchhikers. They waited for twenty minutes to no avail, no one stopped.

And then a dark green "rafik" slowly rolled up to them.

- How are you, Rufovich? - Viktor Alekseevich asked, getting out of the car.
- Did you catch a lot?

- Yes, they scored a little, - the old man was modest. - He pleased the little boy and pampered his wife at home.

- So ... and me, then, decided to upset? Guys, look what they have there.

- The guys from the fish farm reluctantly approached the backpacks.

- Don't, Alekseevich, can't I open it myself? - Rufovich unfastened his backpacks, one of which was completely filled with caught fish.

- So ... - the director drawled. - So, they decided to take me, right? What did I say, in which reservoir did I allow you to go fishing?

- In the third, - Rufovich answered frightened.

- And what did you fish in, eh?

It made no sense to evade, and Rufovich decided to turn around in a different plane.

- Viktor Alekseevich, well, you understand, the nephew came, he could not refuse him, I ask you, understand me ...

Brief requests and explanations were followed by decisive action by the director:

- Well, get in the car, and let's go, show the place where you fished.

Soon the guys from the fish farm were shaking carp, crucian carp, and rudd out of the cage into the pond.

The fish could not understand the essence of what was happening, but when they came to their senses, they quickly swam into the depths.

The last to be released was a handsome mirror carp. Taking out a strong rope put through the mouth and gill, they left it near the shore. Having swallowed water and regained consciousness, the fish blinked goodbye and threw an arrogant glance at the old man.

- That's it! - Rufovich heard something like from a carp. - Laughs the one who laughs last!

These words nailed him to the shore for a long time. He fished all his life and for the first time he heard the fish speak to him like a human being.

- Never come here again, - the director demanded and ordered his driver. -
Let's go!

The second time to get to the highway was much more difficult.

"Don't you have one more beautiful stone left for your girlfriend?" Rufovich asked timidly.

-What other pebble? - Oleg was amazed, but immediately remembered: -Ah ... now I'll look. Here's another pebble, Rufovich, but just keep in mind, this is really the last one. Smoke enough to get home, okay?

"All right, all right," the fisherman agreed ruefully.

Getting off at the nearest tram stop, Naum Rufovich asked Odeg to wait a bit until he had a rest.

"Another Reichstag awaits us at home. Already it is impossible to take it without fire and smoke. We need to buy matches and cigarettes."

A tall, elderly man approached those sitting on the bench.

- Rufovich, hello! How are you, old man?

- And ... - Rufovich drawled after a short pause, - Genka, hello, how are you?

- Yes, a little.

- How is your wife? Did you hear that you got sick?

- Yes, she scared us, so many examinations, tests, medicines. Thank God, everything worked out.

- How are you?

- Yes, too, we puff like an old man. What brings you to our area?

- Yes, I was passing by, I see that they are selling live fish from the car, I took a little. Tomorrow we are celebrating my son-in-law's birthday, I decided to decorate the table.

- So it's very good. How long are they with you?

No, they're leaving in a week.

The conversation went on for some more time.

- Okay, Genka, where are you now?

- Yes, I'll wait for my tram ^ and go home!

- Well, okay, I'll go to the store, take cigarettes, otherwise I was completely without a smoke.

- Oh, it's your smoke! You cough like you should have said goodbye to him a long time ago!

Yes, I want to, but I can't! Okay, as long as they don't close. And you are here with Oleg, my nephew, think. Just in case, if the tram comes, goodbye, and say hello to your big ones.

- But you really puzzled me with Viktor Alekseevich. It must be what it turned out to be?!

- Nevermind. And it wasn't something that had to be experienced.

- Bye!

Rising to the second floor along the high wooden stairs of his house, Naum Rufovich tuned in to the fact that he would have to endure many surprises.

But what awaited him, perhaps, exceeded all expectations.

In the apartment, he saw a set table, at which, in addition to his family, several people from the neighbors were sitting, including Sofa and Lyuda.

Not even having time to enter properly, he froze in surprise on the spot.

- And ... - Aurora Davydovna held out, - our fishermen have come. Where is the fish?

- There is no fish, it swims along the bottom, - Rufovich answered in a tired and sad voice.

- Well, no, so no, no, and there is no trial. Nothing, change your clothes and join.

Amazed, Naum Rufovich proceeded to his balcony to take his soul off by smoking.

- Well, let's see what we have here, - he suddenly heard the voice of his wife.

- Yes, you look, oh! What a wonderful fish! Yes, they are still alive! Look, look how they flounder. A deceiver, and he also said that there were no fish.

- What the hell is that? - thought Naum Rufovich, heading from the balcony into the room.

In the middle of the table stood a large enamel bowl with live fish floundering in it.

Naum Rufovich looked in bewilderment at the broadly smiling Oleg. And he did not tear it off until he broke into a smile himself:

- Well, hare... ugh, well, Genka, wait a minute!

And the fishermen joined the already merry company. Even the fish arrived, which Clara managed and fried.

Avrora Davydovna was haunted by the questioning eyes of her husband, who was trying to understand what, how and in honor of what this cheerful party was taking place in his house. And he compelled her to give him explanations even in front of the guests.

- We sorted things out for two days. Well, guess what, there was some misunderstanding. Who hasn't happened. So what if someone said something, someone conveyed something. We agreed that it was better to walk together than gossip in pairs. Is not it?

"True, true," they all said cheerfully in one voice.

- All that was behind and forgotten forever. Yes?

- Yes, yes! - unanimously responded chorus.

"Geese, geese ... Ha-ha-ha!" Naum Rufovich grinned in his soul.

Then he peered for a long time into the cheerful, kind face of his wife under the mixed rumble of tape music and lively voices.

I just watched and marveled at her wisdom and art at building relationships between people, restoring them and getting them out of the most impossible situations.

Aurora caught the understanding look of her husband and answered him the same.

- Yes, yes, Naum, just like that, - she mentally answered, - how do you not strive to accept the gift sent down to us from Him. It is necessary to look for in each other what unites, not what separates.

The plane taxied to the runway. Having rolled up to its very beginning, he stopped at once, as if frozen. And, after a moment's hesitation, like a lion in pursuit, the roar of the engines intensified all the time, it ran, faster and faster, until it shot up from the edge of the runway at high speed into the blue heights.

"Why stagnate for so long, pull the rubber, and not immediately shoot up?" Oleg thought, watching through the porthole, how with every second the material, earthly, remaining below, decreases under his gaze.

From a bird's eye view, everything seemed negligible, and not only in size, but also in meaning and content, in comparison with the sky and the process of flight.

"In order to take off into the air one day, you need to scatter along the ground all your life," a thought flashed through his head, "otherwise you won't take off.

The plane suddenly landed on the right wing, sharply to the side, taking passengers away from their thoughts, worries and flight path.

02.1995

- That's it, it's over.
- And it's all?

L.N. Tolstoy
Last, dying
writer's words

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სამსონ გელხვიძე

დაბრუნება

(მოთხრობები)

თბილისი, 2022

Самсон Гелхвидзе

ВОЗВРАЩЕНИЕ

(Рассказы)

Тбилиси – 2022

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In 1975 he graduated from the 9th secondary school in Tbilisi and in that the same year he entered the Georgian Polytechnic Institute Faculty of Civil Engineering, graduated with honors in 1980 year in the specialty "Industrial and civil construction".

In 1989 he defended his PhD thesis.

In 2006 awarded the degree of Doctor of Technical Sciences.

From 1980 to the present day, he has been working in various educational institutions and research institutes of the Academy of Sciences of Georgia. He is the author of many scientific papers and inventions.

He began to take his first steps in poetry and prose in 1984.

In 2002, the first collections of short stories and poems were published. S. Gelkhvidze "Dealers in Pain" and "The Sacrament of Confessions, or confession in verse.

In 2004, a collection of short stories "Return" was published, and in 2005 year a collection of poems and poems "Pain and Faith" and the first author's novel: Nightingales of the Monastery Garden.

In 2014, the author's second novel, Moonlight Sonata Budapest".

In 2015, a collection of poems and poems by the author "The soul strives for the word" and a collection of short stories "Wind of Change".

The author's third novel is offered to the readers' judgment "PARADISE LOST". 2021 year.

Nominated for the Literary Prize "Writer of the Year" - 2021, and "Poet of the Year" - 2022. Awarded the Medal of F.M. 200th birthday of Dostoevsky