

*S. Ogoitsoff*

# The Algorithm of

# CHAOS

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СОДЕРЖИТ  
НЕЦЕНЗУРНУЮ  
БРАНЬ

18+

# Сергей Николаевич Огольцов

# The Algorithm of Chaos

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=69216763](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=69216763)*

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## **Аннотация**

Think twice if you think you can enjoy your privacy when being absolutely alone. This here best bestseller throughout all the current millennium will instruct you why...

# Содержание

Prologue	5
1	30
2	38
3	48
4	58
5	65
6	67
7	73
8	79
9	87
10	95
11	101
12	103
13	112
14	119
15	128
16	146
17	151
18	159
19	165
20	171
21	174
22	179

23	185
24	189
25	192
26	207
Epilogue	213

# Сергей Огольцов

# The Algorithm of Chaos

## Prologue

### How Come *The Algorithm Of Chaos* Was Refurnished

All somehow got in the groove by now. Well, yes, half a year in this here blockade, and you day after day wait for the pending ethnic cleansing, humanitarian catastrophe, another dirty war or special operation they keep threatening you with but still...

And before they there (who? where?) are reaching out for the Button, barking their orders down the chain of command, manning the installations, zeroing in on... and so on and forth, you have to find something to fill up the eternity forked out to you, right? Haven't you?

So meanwhile, to ward off my premature demise from ennui I keep it up, my addiction, yeah, keep writing little by little. Moreover, I'm a small man on campus and because those ends of the world proliferate like mating rabbits (for the optimism's sake I shun calling the roll even though I could and who feels interested in the matter fire off Google or something and enjoy your fill of consternation) let them themselves then sort it out

who's after who in their queue of ends.

Now, the hardest task, when you're a writer, is finding a plot. It is the thing of paramount importance, the plot is, from which you'd see what you are about at all and what comes after what in your scribble while its absence spells disastrous primeval chaos and that metaphysical shit you'd better give a wide berth. Don't ever venture into that dreary jungle, too few and far apart are those who managed to come back, almost zero, statistically speaking, were ever seen after. I swear. But even those who pop up back, by pure chance, are eyed suspiciously: wow, man! What a surprise! but why can't I recollect you? your name, again?

In short, chaos will take you to the cleaners. Do you follow? Be smart, go and find a plot, so as to avoid unnecessary risks both for you and unprepared public. Hence, by the by, springs up that cursed, below-the-belt question: where to get it? The effing plot?

Here is my friendly and open answer: I have no idea! And in the same breath, parallelly, I am informed on existence of prodigies grunting under the weight of heaps, and hills, and Cheops' pyramids of plots they have. Looks like some unscrupulous archaeologist has leaked to them the King Solomon Plots' Mines GPS numbers. Yeah, so it looks to my naked eye. That's how they go about it, clandestine extraction of plots, on the sly.

Asking for proves? Both natural and clever attitude, yours. Okay, recently and rather inadvertently I rammed into the fact myself and got dismayed in earnest. I wish I still remained in

the dark about the issue. But it's too late now. No way to ditch my awareness (screw Google!) that there is a certain authoress of more than four hundred plots and printed too in the form of bestsellers. While from behind she hears already the wheeze of another (also female) racer turning out her 387<sup>th</sup> book! How do you like it? The couple of shrews, even if counted apart, belted Steven King's, and Alexander Dumas, and Alexander Dumas Jr.'s output taken collectively. I couldn't but feel dismayed and sorry for the guys because of unalloyed solidarity of cavemen.

However, my concern is yield of worthy literary products not base flimflam for housewives and other society strata with not fully developed psyche. As of yet, if ever.

The problem touched here (as lightly as it is humanly possible, not to take much of your precious time) is not anything new. On the contrary! Back in 19<sup>th</sup> century did irk it Pushkin, the great swarthy Pushkin who gave birth to the Russian poetry *per se*. It was his habit, when too sore by the problem, to ask his serf nurse: 'Whither to sail?'

That was his way of begging from Arina Rodionovna a plot, subtly and metaphorically...

And all of a sudden, no nurse applied, I had a lucky strike! A good plot was stumbled at, faith! Even though it had some drawbacks—being written in English—but then who's ideal, eh? And as always, the silver lining was in place, that is, the Russian reader hadn't chanced yet to get not bored by the stuff. Besides, no need to skirt around the sanctions meant to

quench the Russian aggression, alias Special Military Operation, against Ukraine because the plot sits on this, Russian, side of the communicational hedge, at the litres.com domain, lucky me!

'Now, boy, to the mill!,' said I to myself, and dug elatedly, and delved euphorically into translation. But then the insider whistle-blower (I don't know if you have this built-in bitch which is beyond the point anyway) blew it, the above-mentioned whistle. Like, there had cropped up not a little deviations from the original text and the original author might feel hurt, a sort of.

Well, yes, I also marked there a thing or two for deeper contemplation, after the whistling I did, and had to scratch where anyone's supposed to when having an itchy sensation but then, gradually, I came to the final conclusion:

'Fuck you! You don't like it? Then go and sue me! Sue me or draw it if you be a man! Ungrateful jerk! I've let you into my personal space, allowed you to publish your hooey from my personal litres.com account, and now what?'

So, while the bugger gathers back his shoed off thoughts, I go on translating it into Russian for my compatriots... No blood ties involved though, my compatriots by sharing this here planet.

2023-05-05



## **Round, and Round, and Round** **—a kinda rationale to the AoC**

a. *What made me walk out on sports?*

Strange may it seem, yet the career of a weight lifter never appealed to me as an attractive walk of life. Quite captivating sports, no denying. Look at the guy's seductive way of approaching the thing, caressing that smooth shaft in the barbell, the tenderness itself. His stare turned away to something a thousand miles off so as not to scare it prematurely. And then, the unexpected savage roar—yargkhah!—and tears he up above his head all that mass of metal. A couple of seconds, maybe three, the stick stands under the weight, his coccyx a-jerking spasmodically, before to smite the bitch against the floor! Some sportsman, not suitably reserved, might add a yell sounding like “screw you!” Or even to kinda jump. Not overly high though because of his improper shape, a weight lifter never reaches an altitude above half a meter, not even with the pole.

The barbell whimpers its clang-bang complains to the gym flooring, and shuts up, while the weight lifter, like a proud ironclad, goes off with a swagger. Well, yes, not exactly goes but carries he his beefy cross of muscles to the sport podium to mount it and to thrust from aloof his head thru the medal band. Then he would stand erect and listen to the anthem he'd been brought up under or to that of the nation whose chawbacon did

occupy the upper step. Besides, the motley flags hang down, also three in number... A catchy show.—

Still and yet, I don't even know why, there always was a feeling – no, not for me that barbell and stuff.

Later, as my regular ails caused by the Olympic Games current on TV abated, I got it finally that they were not for nothing busting their asses. Nah! Some guy was grunting from under that bloody barbell to stake off a separate apartment another one to secure a seat for himself in the Committee, no matter which one, they would tell, and so forth. And that's an absolutely justified ends – why should he otherwise make of himself from his junior years a beast of burden, huh? Straining his skeleton and all to the detriment of his mental skills? Not aiming at to break wind fiercely while he puts back on trucks a derailed trolley in a coal pit, right? Of course, as anywhere else, there are zilch winners too with a chronic rupture instead of the booby-prize of his much-coveted medal.

For these and suchlike good reasons sports somehow failed to hook me on. Well, maybe except for the free calisthenics and figure skating, in part, yet also temporarily before I grew up to appreciating Rubensian forms.

Which is a pity, on the whole, because sport is life. Ask any hockey player and he'll confirm it. Yes, you're likely not at once to decipher his lisping thru the couple of teeth still there, the rest knocked out in the ice arenas, which is the underlying reason for their speech problems. And stay assured, when leaving the harsh

ice of jousts, they do insert their dentures to have what to smile with, yet the lisp still abides, that's the mark of their profession. Unavoidable.

The fact is well-expressed in that lyrics by Robert Rozhdestvensky to that soundtrack song by Arno Babajanian for the famous Soviet spy-epic sequence:

...give your cut to the mutual course / the scars and evening bells will be your pay...

Damn, no! Wait! It was Michael Tariverdiev who composed the music, a Georgian Armenian:

‘tyn-dyn-dyn ta-da-da tyn-dyn-tyn’

A really cool rhythm there, by the way...

Now, they were the reasons why I walked out on sports. We split, you may say, without getting to know each other properly.

The sad outcome called for hunting down some other field where to apply myself.

*b. The Silver Screen, my boy, brings forth a whale of a joy!*

Thus, on parting with my hope for an outstanding career in sports or, to make it graspable even for tik-tokers, as it turned my ex-hope far behind any fail-safe, I had to ponder pretty deep: where to? In which direction to channel my amazing talents for their full realization?

Clear enough, to stake on a Russian movie with me in it as the leading star will cut no fronds off Golden Palm. That ficus on steroids pulls for lesbian passions lately. Yeah, sure, with the advancement in plastic cutting and sewing the task is fairly trivial – silicon padding here and there, penis turned-inside-out-and-tucked-in to fix you with a brand new pocket, and – giddy up, girl!

Up to unsparing display of raw facts of nature and naked truth in the minutiae of all sorts. Up to the details which would leave ISIS hit men stilled in catatonic fits. Up to the confrontation with the Animal Protection Society canvassing for the global ban on demonstration of films awarded the Palme d'Or by the Cannes Film Festival Jury (moreover special prizes by the said panel of connoisseurs) to the octopuses imprisoned in bio-laboratories specialized in developing the methods for extensive farming and processing of the said critters into canned sea-food, protein-rich and stuff, despite the APS claims of supremacy of octies intelligence over that of humans.

And at that point I raised my voice. Stop! (said I out loud) Whoa, man! (said I to myself) I put my foot down shut up with this shit! Not a chance I'll ever allow to spoil this hunky bad ass, me. The buster does deserve, albeit slightly narcissistic, love and fondling, on the whole.

What about tacking to UzbekFilm, huh? To star in their psychological thrillers?

Yet, there's not without a cinch too. Any schoolkid can easily

foretell that UzbekFilm directors roll their joints up of the buds grown locally which stuff is over and above the herb used by Mr. Snoop Dogg of the New-York City. Although yeah, he's got a good connection too, look into the guy's eyes and you're immediately high from pure solidarity. I mean, given the Uzbek ganja quality, one thriller in progress will take a decade for its accomplishment. Minimally.

Now, they roll out a noir masterpiece when there have remained no audience around to appreciate the subtleties of the director's touch and far-fetching allusions even less to dig the crap at all. Rather a bleak debit-credit perspective, to be frank.

What remains there? Hollywood? A suck-dried wasteland. For each and every leading role a scrambling line of Kobzon's great-nephews in four generations ahead. And such a hubris knee they are! Your being on friendly terms with Auntie Fanny Tsiperovitch is not a pledge and good enough guarantee for you acting the next Batman or Bond, James Bond! Some gratitude for my keeping back politely any comment on their great Uncle's lousy singing and the preposterous wig he sported thru all of his career.

Nothing doing, Bollywood loomed ahead for my destination, last and only. Which also teemed, on the second thought, with certain problems.

Each film down there is a marathon of no less than 2 sequels (which is minor) and in every one you have to give out up to 6 numbers singing and dancing simultaneously. About dancing, I

am cool, the choreography's brimming up in me after the third shot. Even I myself get amazed and delighted by the spontaneous dance figures given out by me, unexpectedly.

However, my scope of the available vocalizing never surpassed that of V. Vysotsky's husky below, shots or no shots. Which musical talent I am proud of, yet by sober estimation, those falsetto hits "Jimmy! Jimmy! Ay-ya! Ay-ya!" fanatically loved by the Indian film-goers are not in my gamut.

In the end I just cast that whole sphere—lock, stock, and barrel—of movie production like a bone thrown by a knight to dogs at a feasting about the Round Table. Fight for it, limp mongrels!

Still at times, as I shave the bristles off the mug watching me from the mirror, do address I the character:

'Yo, Bro! I say, the three of us—I, Belmonde, and Nick Nolte—would make a god-awesome fine team for The Three Musketeers! The trinity they can't even dream of, those dandelion cunt-suckers can't.'

OK, let's leave them alone in their sandbox acting fallen in love or in the battle field. Leave them alone, the bohemian elite of featherheads! They know nothing even less can learn they, stuck in stale, dismal monotony, where all the difference between the drifters and Wall Street wolves they act springs from the studio wardrobe.

c. *Waiting hat-in-hand for charity alms from Nature? Forget it! We'll rip off all by scientific methods!*

For those curious to see the extent of my wobbling after encounter with the two mighty blows—neither the Golden Palm nor Gold Olympic medals for me!—which shocked the very foundation of my psychic conditions, let them once again scrutinize the Vasnetsov's masterpiece *The Knight at the Crossroads* (1,67 m x 3,08 m).

See? That's me on the horse back, side view, with high boots on and in medieval pants instead of my perennial jeans. The almost life-size replica of me sitting on my faithful steed in deep contemplation – now what? Maybe, to try a tack towards the fundamental science? Moreover, they always were in a good rapport, the science and my inner world. Congruence in basic features, you know.

Yep. I've got a fairly scientific temperament and potential, especially in the sphere of thinking. When I start thinking I might just keep in on, and on, and on... thinking, I mean. At times fully forgetful of what namely or which was the initial thought, yet still go on, and on... The force of inertia, I think.

Furthermore, there certainly sits a deep-rooted bent for research, in me. Say, I come across some vague device or thing, or other implement, you know, where even a kid would get it instantly – the crappy scrap's an obsolete doodad from decades

back, throw the trash away, wash your hands and forget it. But no! I would dismantle it and unscrew the last screw to see what's inside before collecting the dingus' parts altogether to dump into the nearest garbage container, still as uncracked enigma...

So why (if you don't mind my asking), given so favorable a bunch of kick-off talents, did I not get along with a scientific career? And everyone supposing at this point that I'd give out a list of shortcomings, uncertainties, and sheer absurdities it's full of and start picking holes in science then think once more, mon cher.

That way it would look like a template already: sport activities knocked out, movies production steamrolled ruthlessly – what ugly things will I dig out disparaging the science?

Vain are your agronomical expectations, my dear friend! Whenever I talk business, I pour out the truth as is without any equivocity and other oversees spice. Such a stance makes my life easier, afterwards, it leaves no space for belated self-accusations in being a slickly streamlined bitch obedient to demands and exchange rate in the political arena, trading my truthful self for a soft seat under my ass at my workplace and other comforts. Nope. The first and foremost is my personal health for whose sake I say what I think, and feel, and understand.

So what—again and namely—saved science from my groundbreaking, epoch-making discoveries which neither Einstein nor Tesla saw in their wildest dreams?. Ever?.

Despite my obvious propensity towards pure science, there



popped up a pesky predicament attributed irrefutably to my personality traits. One of those prevented my plain sailing to the glamorous shores of purity.

To tear, straight and openly, the mask of false shyness – yes, it was me or, rather, my unconquerable dislike of useless inactivity that separated us from each other, Science and me.

The most noteworthy fact about my vibrant briskness is that it tends to manifest itself selectively. On the one hand, I'm quite capable of sitting on for hours, who fly by like seagulls past a buoy of no interest to the gluttons looking for some chow, when I am pouring over an electronic microscope or thru the Hubble telescope (none of which I have got, as of yet, as well as a bicycle which cryingly unjust deficiencies I refuse to discuss now).

And on the other hand, whenever called to participate in a sitting of any kind at all, be it an AA caucus, a General Assembly of UN (the most hateful are those time-wasting get-togethers of a trade union members) I feel sick in one way or another. Some averse endocrine shit shoots thru my system, the bladder sounds sirens of micturition alert and, so as to abate their combined peak of energy, I evaporate on the sound excuse of legitimate need of peeing immediately.

That same restlessness turned to be the stumbling block as big as the huge rock carved with the directions for further routs in front of the knight-ridden stallion's face who does not know how to skirt around it, the stallion doesn't because the knight in his medieval pants and not my jeans gives no clue to his means

of transportation and just sits irresolute and irresponsive to the uncertain snorts of his companion with the stares of them both fixed blankly to the rock.

Which fork to take? Really? The divination for the outcome down each of the three trails available are pretty ominous: loosing your dear life, loosing your faithful steed, getting married to who knows whom. Some bleak dilemma for any sentient explorer, take my word. Just like choosing your way in science which, let's be frank, is a minefield of all kinds of briefings, meetings, colloquiums, symposiums, congresses, conferences, convocations...

Let us peruse a trivial, predictable case of my visiting Stockholm to collect the Nobel Prize for my quant-mechanical achievements and—bolt from the blue!—it turns out I have to sit thru the Ceremonial Blah-Blah first! So? And have you consulted my peppy whippiness beforehand? Just to plumb if your planing had feasible grounds?

Hence, the conclusion which any average horse would whisper into your ear: sorry, mankind, for leaving you without the second to none discoveries and inventions but—even for the sake of your unavoidable convergence with AI—I won't rape my nature. Not a chance!

That's what I am and gonna stay on unlike the proverbial hunchback getting straightened by his grave. Mind you – my personal hole is to be dug taking in account the peculiarities of the would-be filling (supposedly – me but... well, whatever...

Forget it.)

Sehrgueys, are notoriously tough customers, if you recall the Cicero's harangue or another, recenter development at the Radonezh Monastery where the Catilina's namesake's funerary skiff went counter the flow drift which phenomenon was not expected by the onlookers from the bank because 600 years ago the science was not keen yet on motor-boats.

(\*A life-hack tip here for startup parents: be careful at choosing the name for your newborn so as not to kick yourselves later for the gaga flippancy – “Ah! The kid's turned utterly unruly!”)

And finally, summing up my scientific experiences, it's only fair to admit: whatever is is right and although we, I and the science, keep moving on independently, the separation might very well be for the better.

How do I know? Easy as a pie. After taking a shot at a crossword or puzzle I have a nasty backache next day because whatever I do I do with enthusiastic vigor.

*d. Find yourself and pass the rudder to the foundling*

And if anyone had, nonetheless, the nerve to read up to this here line just to remark, both deductively and scornfully, to themselves, ‘The guy is so predictable! Now, he'll start

kicking the educational system's ass,' then, dear Sherlock, take my advice: possessing suchlike knack at clairvoyance keep off betting.

No, Sir. I refrain from whipping it, the system that has formatted us and picked up mutilating our offsprings, not because of its immaculately chaste innocence—miles from that! the slut has been used by every other fool in all manners of postures and weird juxtapositions—but out of a pity for the poor wretch. And, overwhelmed with empathy, all I can say is “o! poor thing!” and clamp my teeth firmly blocking the outpour of four-letter words, condolent as well. Absolved you are, poor child, go take some rest before the upcoming reformative changes in you by a bunch of sleek-talk buffoons.

As a natural gentleman I have no intention of entering the subject any deeper and instead will I get straight over to where all of my meander circumgyrations were, up till now, leading to so as to let you see what namely I am about, after all.

Now, dearest dear, get ready! Your entrance, yes, the dessert crowns a dinner, mind it, sweetie.

Hats off, gentlemen! No semi-monde tramps here... Enters Lady Belles-Lettres!

I do foresee the ineluctable backlash, like, the smirk of my acquaintances at any level of familiarity, ‘What? That jerk and belle-letters? Are you kidding?’, and haughty, ‘One more hick in dang-smearred boots!’, from the heights of the Laureate-Nominees’ Olympus, and the matter-of-fact response from the

too busy slip-slap-sloppy bestseller kneaders – ‘A bitchy upstart!’ and “Holy Baaa! Belle-Bull!” braying by the counter-culture shitheads from their glossy latrine they try to sell us on as the Underground.

What belletrist am I? Frankly – I have no idea, some passages of mine are, like, to my liking, others not exactly, depends on the extent of the dose consumed, I reckon, and, maybe, on the time of day as well. Yes, Sir, I stay ignorant as to who I am as well as to which correction institution will be honored with seeing my end. Yet one thing I know for sure – there are no born belletrists, writer is a self-made product.

That said, I’m far from denying possible presence of one or two smithereens of truth in the commentaries of my still-to-emerge-at-some-later-point critics, be they aesthetes groomed in the scholarly shade of ostensible family trees or common drunkards kicked out from full of hell of a lot of noise speakeasies. A winged byword from the public domain attests that any asshole might happen right when they pop up at a proper place with good timing.

And yet, how pitiful are the clowns who try at staking off their short-lived being right and keep their current position forever by falsifying elections results! Nitwit schmo schmucks with their tries at putting shackles on time!

And you, Citizen, keep back your shocked-loyal-subject’s burps, I meant Muammar Kaddafi here. As of yet. Though the finish by them all is pretty similar—a gutter holding the divine

ruler of yesterday now ditched and turned rat-food. Game over, Your Majesty...

Secondly, what else am I supposed to do if fishing does not turn me on? Neither get I aroused by Real Madrid nor by Manchester United? What is there to do? (Damn, I have definitely met the phrase someplace. Am I plagiarizing?)

The answer is as simple as follows: your only choice, sonny, is to become a belletrist. Amen.

And here immediately springs up the galling question: why?

'You are asking "why?" Comrades! This here Citizen would like to know "why"!'

('Couldn't stand the temptation, huh? Poached from Dvlatov, you bookworm thief!')

'No way to go without, Your Holiness! The great are out there for us, the worthless sinful rubble, to have whose shoulders to stand upon.')

Here we have a rare case when "why?" looks like a reasonable question to ask.

Okay, no use of hiding my ardent envy, way back, of the demigods who could casually flash their IDs of membership in Writers Union. And yes, I cherished a vague dream to earn a living by my books printed sometime by someone somewhere. Later, I just spat at the hooey, openly and profusely (hard to describe how willingly it went out) and now I write for my personal entertainment and then publish the books online for free downloading. The Russian Litres library brands them with the

obnoxious «18+» mark while the overseas Smashwords platform use a more civil definition – “books for adults”. Whichever way no kid can decry my products as means their grannies used to molest them at bedtime with.

Thus writing became my instrument of pleasure to fill the educational gaps tracing back to my adolescence years.

Nowadays it's just a mouse-click away, this or that kind of tutorial ‘Masturbation for Dummies’ or, maybe, ‘Headfirst Crash Course...’ and so forth, I am too lazy to find out the exact title but tutorials are there 100 per cent. Not a chance the stuff pulled for so hotly by Hollywood and Italian cinema will remain uncovered.

I mean, the learning curve looks too steep and makes me hesitant to follow the ever modish way in dealing with unhealthy amounts of spare time. Seems like, my innate laziness prevents my grabbing anything weightier than a quill.

And it is when we, at long last, arrive to the final question concerning the subject in hand. (If you still follow.)

How to write?

The question is too abysmal to answer it before the upcoming blackout (because of the blockade which we're living thru here the electricity is supplied in rational 3-hour fragments to make the endemic life-style as harmonized as possible). For which obvious reason I'm gonna consider the question under the next heading in this here preface under the cloak of a dissertation.

*e. The awl pricks out of the knapsack for all to see!*

We are a mighty enviable crowd. Look around to get proud what an unparalleled stretch of time we're living thru and recollect the verse from the high school curriculum: "Happy are they whose lot it is to visit this world on its fateful days...", and so on because no one remembers the following lines even less the name of the poet. Yet, some deep thought sits there, maybe.

The world we're visiting now is on its cut and run, globally, innumerable streams of refugees plod on along the roads all over the earth's face both accelerating and slowing down (by their counter-directed movements in treks dispersed too chaotically for a meaningful account) the spin discovered and declared by Galileo.

Messy madhouse everywhere. Yet, there still are places for sober people to reach out to each other. One of such spots provides proza.ru – long live the site! It's where I can meet so dear to my heart compatrio... er... sorry, guys, I revved overmuch at this point because at proza.ru I, actually, have none of the kind.

The site whose visitors' majority do share the mutual historical past. Our dads and grandpas stomped in the same columns to the front lines, and extermination camps, and demonstrations on Mayday and on the Great October Revolution Day. Our genes got accrued with a special chromosome, odd yet useful bugger,



for composing false reports and giving bribes to the established cadres.

Deeper than the unenlightened rest of the world comprehend we the famous address of N. Khrushchev to the UN General Assembly—off tore the the berserk hero the shoe from his left foot to hammer repeatedly at the varnished rostrum top in time to maddened chant, ‘I’ll show you the motherfucking Kuzka’s mother!’

That’s when even the most experienced synchronous interpreters scratched their well-trained heads: who’s Kuzka?!

(\*Note for the Generation Z: Khrushchev was the head of the Soviet Union. And what a clever head he had! Even at hangover spells. He could announce the precise date of Communism coming in its own right all over the USSR or give out a motivational divination, like, ‘We’ll catch up America and overtake them!’)

And after the indestructible USSR collapsed disintegrating into separate states sprung up from our mutual Motherland fragments, I was left without countrymen and my relief and consolation comes mostly from the same language users who roll out their literary works at proza.ru each one with their own spelling innovations.

To them, my lingua-roomies with acute graphomaniacal addiction, address I my question—

How to write? Tell me!

‘Write’ not in the sense of poking the keyboard with a finger or

two but as regards quality – how? So as to reach an effect stronger than the moonshine shooting down to your very heels, the quality awakening self-admiration, ‘Bastard SOB, you’ve done the real thing!’ That’s what I crave for.

Well, okay, you know as well as I do there’s a slew of courses, master-classes, and webinars all anxious to sell you all kinds of know-how that ‘just works’. However, no use in hooking us, the lingua-roomies, with spangle glitter and chaff stuff that makes us retch.

I think, when I think (not constantly yet prolongedly), that a forum-like approach is what we need here combined also with willful sharing of personal experience. All of us have this or that trick begotten in hard labors, some ‘scribbler’s charm’ to run the sought result down and fixate for readers’ gratification. This here prologue is the cornerstone which I put, in full command of my sane and sober (as of yet) frame of mind, into the foundation of the edifice of gratis dispensation assets amassed concerning how to write so as not to feel ashamed in the long run.

You can do writing in different ways – sober, drunken, giving free reign to your loco-motion reflexes, and etc...

(\*The user of LMR, the third from the above mentioned methods, should equip themselves with a couple of ball pens and a pack of copy paper (A4, 500 sheets per pack) and start writing without watching what they, actually, write. Neither plot nor story line, nor characters’ names are needed. All the details are decided by the skeletal-muscle parts of the author whose

mission during the creative act is to bring themselves to and hold on in the state of ‘automatism’ which, by the way, is the name of this particular method.

In the morning, the loco-writer checks the thing produced while they kept the pen replacing the filled-out sheets, and choo-chooing on, swoony and enthusiastic.

Well, well, well, let’s see what I created this night? Oh-oh! What the... Well, I never... I be damned if it’s not... Yes! It’s the fourth volume of *War and Peace* written just overnight! O, fuck! The fourth volume for the fourth time in one month!

No wonder, and no use hitting the roof when you let the outflow gush on its own accord, uncontrolled, like, AI throwing together programs for its private entertainment.

Up front, I have to disenchant you, the trick described here is not my choice, I prefer “in absentia” digging. The idea was picked up from a prominent Soviet author from the period of stagnation in the USSR.

So he instructed (I don’t divulge his name for human reasons but those interested indeed might contact me by email), ‘It was Chekhov to tutor me. I opened a book of his stories, and began copying, line after line’.

Even though Chekhov failed to steel him into Chairman of Writers Union of the USSR (not coach’s fault obviously, the trainee should have licked himself into shape under tutelage of Comrade Sholokhov) still and yet the guy got trained enough for the position of Manager of War Prose Department.

Weird as it seems, we still can see a scintilla of sense in his reasoning – when you follow someone’s back very closely, step after step, the trick decreases the wind slaps into your own mug...

And now the last fig leaf falls off my winding perambulations, it only remains to confess who namely was chosen for the paragon of artisan while producing the work that follows after concluding this here prologue which I still cannot shut up with.

The tricky subtlety of the question in no way succumbs to its importance, however, one more detour.

A line-by-line copying author’s text (who’s a worthy candidate? naive gull, you!) is for dummies. I prefer translating. But over *again*: who from? After Joyce and Pynchon to pick up some *50 Shades of Murky Shit*? The like tender-mindedness doesn’t stand to reason...

Well, on the second thought, a possible undertaking, hypothetically, the *Shades*, yet practically I’ll doze off halfway thru any moony-wooly para...graph... (Yawning.)

Damn, enough! I choose this one. *The Algorithm of Chaos* published online quite recently and by a trustworthy writer, in my personal estimation.

And here we reach the happy end of the prologue, congratulations to the survivors in the trek. You’ve shown you mettle with flying colors, guys!

2023-05-03

# 1

*It's not an epigraph but the uttermost warning to the over-pedantic eggheads trained to sniff out anachronisms, stylistic lacunae, regressions from the sacrosanct spelling rules and other trifles like the use of anti-normative 4-(xyz)-letter lexicon.*

*'And you, Most Esteemed High-Muckety-Muck, would you kindly shut the book so as to once again peruse the title, please? Think it over before coming back if you're, nonetheless, ready to put at risk the sanity you'll need for getting on in your accustomed world so far away from our day to day life...'*

His viber bleated its antediluvian yawps because V didn't give an eff about tweaking the factory settings in his electronic devices and/or household appliances. The manufacturer's vanilla defaults, staple chow from the microwave, amiable blondes were just fine to go on with, why to ask for more? He's not racing after the mainstream frills in things of common usage. The simpler, the better was his long-standing life motto. He's not a nitpicker to wrinkle his nose in the attitude of a seasoned geek because of the already mentioned eff not given about the cutting-edge trends

and opinions entertained in the crowd of enlightened mudaks.

Not that V pulled for return to Nature – back to caves, and stone axes drastically simplifying your views and values. Not yet. He simply kept away from buying selfie sticks, and scalp ticklers, and stuff like, well, you know. And even though not affiliated with any branch of the cult of Simpletonians maintaining that Simplicity is the ticket to your peace of mind, deep in his heart he agreed to their Ace argument—you certainly would watch a windmill up the hill on a breezeless day much longer than a remote control on your lap during a sudden blackout. Simple machines do have some charm about them, if you think of it.

However, opening paragraphs are not the right spot to pump up sermonizing. It's a discourtesy towards unsuspecting reader in their expectation for the initial rush of adrenaline by the sixth line, at most, thru their system... Now, V, reach for your non-tweaked stone ax! Do something! Act, V, act!

He grabbed his Samsung from its prostrate position upon the desktop to slightly tap the “answer” sign. Huge pan-cake of a map diffused over the screen whose edges cut away the caller's ears. The operation was counted for by the contact who, in a well-trained manner, kept the phone too close to his phiz, like, it was a hanky for him to sneeze out his cold picked up a day before, the very next sec, ‘Apch!. Aapch!. CHWHOO! This motherfuc... Apch!. Aapch!.,’ and so on.

However, in a perfect state of health, the pan-cake-faced guy was, as always. Keeping the phone too close to the map was

just a simple trick of his to hide from contacts the bumped up protuberances of his ears.

So a simple-minded gull for you. Blessed with such a generous handout from Mother Nature he long ago could become a megastar in movie comedies. Yeah. Cooler than Mr. Bim. Or Bum? But certainly not Bam... though, on the second thought... hmm.

Yep. V obviously has ditched film-going for a considerable stretch already.

“Shame on you, Mr. Moron! Still stuck in your quaggy complexes? Scumbag teener! With your God-sent edges you should by now be running for the second-term presidency! What a compelling image! The ears so attentive, pleasantly round, warmhearted ears they are! A catchy slogan for your preelection picture, like, “We can hear the voice of the people!”, and no dirty tricks with ballot boxes at polling stations, like end-day blackouts, are needed.”

None of that was told by V to the face in Samsung, he merely thought it to it. Healing anyone’s psychic traumas caused by agonizing procrastinations with getting rid of their virginity within the framework of society demands to be quick at it and become a clear-cut market-target pruned properly, and compliant with the political dictate to succumb and uphold the all-accepting dumbness was not his job. Even less wanted V act the voice crying in the wilderness. That’s why he simply said:

‘Hi, Lex. What’s up?’



‘Hello, V. Still toiling for half a zilch? Wish it left you before you got munched to mash, that your silly hope to rip a lincoln off theprozza.com. Typing a ton of hooey per day for a goose egg in the buff, huh? Forget it, bro! They fork it out only to their kin mobsters, alphabetically, while you’re no relative there, not in the least degree. Don’t cut the figure of a dark horse knocking at the Ku Klux Klan’s door.’

‘For prozzas I care no more than for pizzas, Mein Herr. They’re a simple tool for whetting my skills and personal style. A propos, their Challenge of Month is a good spur to get over the damn writer’s block, “Half kingdom for a plot! All topics are sucked out dry. A-fucking-priori!”. While there, you don’t strain yourself, “Hi, scribblers, here the theme for you. Saddle up!” The guy collecting more likes and reposts gets \$100. Pretty simple.’

‘Quit screwing both the keyboard and yourself. How much green have you corralled from those monthly literary races so far? Come on! You spend on doping more than the prize itself!’

‘Twice I was in the group of 20 in the lead.’

‘Wow! Attaboy! With 20 racers flagged off at the CoM start, right?’

‘See, the audience there is different. They think along the lines fixed by Disneyland and Steven King, the slightest step aside from the deep-seated rut and their emergency brake gets fired off. Every single like I glean there is a beam of hope for us to understand each other over the barriers of stereotypes dividing our nations by the endemic peculiarities in our respective

debilities.’

‘Here! Here! Aye and yep! Over again! Seems like the patients at funny farms for their privileged cuckoos are allowed to frisk in grazing grounds of the Internet. Hence the splash dung of the couple of inadequate likes you’ve raked up so far. Or, maybe, from rehabs. Hold out, bro! Our objective is not money but the principle, right? And then, what is a piece of paper \$100 worth? It won’t burden your pocket for any longer that the first maverick blonde in you way, will it not?’

‘Shut the fountain of your sermon, Padre.’

‘Well, in short, there’s a friendly offer to you, V. Some real something. Nobody would ditch the suggested deal even convulsing in St. Vitus dance, V. It’s a bonanza, some fucking oil fields. BP and Shell would tear hair from each other scrambling for the exclusive right to hummer lullabies on you 8 nights a week. Improvising jazz, follow me?’

‘What?! Drilling their wells in my private parts? Screw you, oilman!’

‘Come on, man. I was purely metaphorical... What matters is that such a chance turns up once in a life-span.’

‘A-ha! I dig it now. You’ve sampled a shot of metaphorical shit from that bonanza and completely forgotten that I’m straight.’

‘Since when?’

‘I see. The stuff’s been way too strong for you. Call me tomorrow after you’re back from the strawberry fields.’

‘Wait-wait-wait! I mean business!’

‘Then talk business instead of balling it up with goofy drivel of an upstart pimp.’

‘Well, look... There’s some stuff that’ll make you famous, V. Wanna be a celebrity like Joyce or Pynchon, or Hemingway?’

‘The third guy from you’ve just mentioned. Who? Again?’

‘Hemingway? I be damned if I know. My ex-girlfriend was once a month drenching his paperback with an outpour of tears.’

‘Girls and books? Things incompatible. You’re still not quite steady on your pins. Moreover, the mankind en masse have given books up... So you felt jealous and memorized the guy’s name?’

‘A girl from the hinterland might very well keep an extra Ace or two up her sleeve, believe me, buddy. Anyway... I’ve got a big file whose content will shatter the world in three days at most. The hot thing is only waiting for a lover boy to edit, sign it with his name, and become famous overnight. How’s the perspective, huh?’

‘OK, I’m in. Just for the sake of saving old man Lex from OD. Drop the file to my email box.’

‘Nah, handsome. Forget it, I don’t have anything to do with emails.’

Which is absolutely true. For some time already Lex has grown too concerned about his personal data privacy and stuff, you know. His case acquires symptoms of an unhealthy aggravation, more and more so. The guy got hopelessly stranded, nautically speaking. You might one whole week wheedle of him something as innocent as, ‘Hi. Catch the link: <http://sweet->

granny/bedtime-tales-for-grand-kids/introduction.html,' before he freak-and-feints out at the last moment. Maybe, because of his employment at some hazy firm working for the government.

A row of squat buildings behind the steely mesh of high fencing, the guarded iron gate, thick growth of surveillance cams, grim Rottweilers walking their trainers three times a day about the outside parking lot.

The best way to make Lex shut his non-stop jingling yack is to ask how was his work today and—abruptly—you're blessed with a ten-minute break, as a minimum. Not a peep. Lex all in thoughts. Full of gloom, shut up, introvert.

Seems, like the fate of that Jewish couple impressed him deeply, nice people also worked for the government before were roasted in the chair for leaking the know-how and formulas of A-bomb to the Soviets.

'Take it easy, I was kidding. Don't wet your bed tonight. There-there, kid. Say, what is your want?'

'How about 6 pm at Uncle Tom's Cabin? Suits you?.'

A guy needs a heart of stone to say "nah!" to their old-time buddy. Except, maybe, for that nymphomaniacal slut on the throne of the Russian Empire. In her estimation it were your enemies and not friends to be hold close to your bosom which attitude let you feel the slightest movement of their souls and thought and whatever else would spring up.

Though cunning, foolish was the bitch. It's your friends who you should keep your eye on, 24/7. It's they who know your weak

spots better than even you yourself. They will not miss, their stab would be smack into, precise and to the hilt.

O! Brutus! And you too...

Some goofy gander, ain't it? Your friends are the best at croaking you. Rest in peace, stupid asshole.

'By me, it's okay,' said V.

\* \* \*

## 2

(Notwithstanding the establishment's name, stay assured that no one has ever spotted any Uncle Tom about. None of the trust-worthy old-timer patrons would recollect him if you ask. Still and yet, hardly any one was made nervous or otherwise uncomfortable by the fact because his nephews visited the place not frequenter or else incognito. You never can tell.

Ma'am Harriet runs the establishment, an oldie but bitchy shrew with the response-time reflexes of a rattle snake that won her a profound veneration in the neighborhood. No gunslinger from the Most Wild West will hold a candle to her briskness. Although instead of a weighty Colt the old lady keeps in the holster of lace-trimmed patch pocket in her apron a tube of lacrimator spray. That her preference demoted a baseball bat to the rank of a ludicrous old-fashioned exhibit. (The survey undertaken lately by Forbez Monthly claims that barmen in the Middle-Wild West connected in some or other way to the Russian Mafia prefer a gorodki stick for the purpose.)

Additionally, her knack canceled expenses for a bouncer on the premises—with consoling laments, this black mamba would lead the tamed hooligan (his ear pinched with her thumb and index finger) to the exit and show him the nearest fire hydrant, in a God-sent Samaritan grandma's manner as if he could see a goddamn thing thru the tears and mucus slopped all over his mug.

And then she'd creep to the kitchen, that cape cobra, like, to wash up her hands for hygienic considerations, yet actually to collect the usual share of sycophantic compliments from her subordinate employees...

In the daytime Uncle Tom's Cabin turns a cozy family diner to keep up with that kinsfolklike varnish in its name and at night hours it is a restaurant of a fully deserved repute because of the excellent food by Ma'am Harriet's kitchen (eluding the slippery ground of any racist shade—we are over and above propagating the slightest extremes—it should be mentioned that, yes, the chef's skin color conformed to the environs because it was Uncle Tom's Cabin, after all).

Thus, the superb grub multiplied by that pleasantly mellow atmosphere in the style of an old-time estate in one of the Confederation States, say, Virginia, Alabama or, maybe, Georgia which is on my mind... though not in that enraged roar by Charles Ray but in the classical form of this number composed back in 1930 (which in about twenty+ years became the Song of the Year), the way it was sung in 50s by the vocalist at the band of the Gypsy virtuoso guitarist Django, nicknamed Sultan, well, you know what I'm about, so don't miss visiting the eatery even though the old hag with her assault spray tube pays me not one red cent for the advertising. No, Sir, nothing except a cup of tea once in a blue moon, just tea without pastry, that old stingy bellicose biped reptile.)

V sat down in the rearmost stall and leaned onto the padded

back of the double seat in the attitude of serene repose. His right arm stretched out over the slightly convex protrusion run along the seat's backtop buffed in the gleaming skin the color of... well, the skin color also suited the room's decor and feel.

Fortunately for those who too soon get weary with the easy flow of relaxed descriptions like the introductory paragraphs in the current chapter, Lex' plump frame showed up thru the entrance door. Good timing...

His ample jowl spread widely out the club corners of his shirt. The spruce dinner jacket taken off and spread over or rather hung onto his left shoulder draped the left half of Lex' torso. Yes, hanging it was and with certain a dare-devilish cheek to it too—no safety rigging at all while the well-rounded shoulder had no hooks to clutch at. It takes a desperado jacket to choose such a brash yet risky position.

On the other hand, hanging in so unorthodox a way filled the clothing item in question with a visible spirit of reckless laxness, when watched from aside, which conveyed to Lex' voluminous roundness a hint at potential erectable standing. Maybe. In case it were needed.

On the whole, he cut a fine picture, like a hussar of the Czarist Army in their parade uniform tunic which was donned in just one sleeve, leaving the second one to freely dangle about. Every commissioned officer shoved his arm into one and the same sleeve, even if you were a left-handed hussar. No excuse would do. The elite troops should keep to the uniform regulations.



However, this here gutsy Lex left all the hussars far behind letting both his jacket sleeves empty, besides, he had no mustache so dear to heart of any cavalryman or pedestrian of a highwayman disposition...

'Some intriguing puzzle is,' announced Lex, who managed to ferry his jacket to the stall occupied by V, and drop it on the opposite back whose seat he collapsed into, close by (next to his dinner jacket, for those who joined us right now), ' why you, Pretty Boys, are so predictable, eh? Nearing the Cabin I knew that you'd be sitting in the corner. Does not matter which—right or left—a corner remains corner. But why?'

'To give the commoners a chance to gape and admire our nifty appearance, maybe,' suggested V.

'So splendidly simple! You've ditched my elaborate theory that you keep to it as a vantage foxhole to keep in check possible startups. Some Kid from Kenosha, you know, who pops up to benchmark how swift you are at drawing your piece. Can't that be why?'

'The question "why?" opens the floodgate for trigazillions of theories each of which might be plausible to a certain extent,' responded V dully like a pedagogue dead bored with repeating the same hooey for dummies.

'O! You don't say so! What a nightmare! Now, back from the deluge to the file I stole taking advantage of my position at the Firm. On the whole, it's a kinda collective log...'

'Shut up! Got domed with a brick from the roof? What sputter

is this? You drunk or something? But if I'm wired? Mark well – all you say now might be used against you and distress your ass bitterly.'

Lex shook his head in disdain.

'Forget that deprecated shit, dandy. Recordings do not count now were it even lie-detector-backed sincere confessions of the repentant SOB, thanks to the non-stop scientific achievements. Nowadays, my lawyer would prove easily it's a recording of my innocent prank. Moreover, you have nothing but my words and, even though the voice is also my, where is the evidence of the malicious intent?

Wake up and get your rocks off! We live in the times of 2-step-verification. No court would pick up a case based on mere words without well documented thoughts of the perpetrator planning the misdeed or thought by them while doing it.

So, honey, just action without the 2-s-V is of no count any more. Were you even caught with a smoking gun over the body riddled in tatters or with your pants down before a bevy of kindergarten kids. Whatever. You might have easily been a victim to puppeteering, they set you up by means of retroactive manipulation of causality. Yes, Ladies and Gentlemen. It was a mean trick by the great-grand kids of your sibling sister. They revenged your not giving that fool, your sister, a candy bar when she was three. She cried about the deprivation on a video which those posterity brats would find in the attic of their great-grandma. Of all that you were completely unaware while

performing actions you had been manipulated into.

Ya dig how the land lays now, eh? Crime is only what slips thru 2-s-V.'

'Ah, I see. If they hack my email box where you call me to put President on ice but they can't present the record of your frivolous thought, like, 'Why not sending this trash to V?,' you are immune and sinless as the Holy Virgin?'

'Attaboy! Exactly! My nose stays as clean as that of a 20-year-old nepo baby of a billionaire running a multinational corporation. And let the hackers fuck each other's ass in your email-box. Pardon my unorthodox lexica.'

'That's why you shy sending the file to me?'

'Clear as day. The file in your box plus a plain record of my thought while sending it makes me utterly vulnerable to incrimination.'

'Record of your thought? Are there any pills to mitigate the alcoholic delirium, I wonder?'

'Man, that's what I'm doing at my workplace. Not pills I mean but thought recording. Ever heard anything about the noosphere?'

'?'

'In addition to the athmo- and stratosphere the eggheads have turned out one more – the noosphere. The thing consists of thoughts ever thought by those capable of thinking. Any thought, however secret and hidden, flits there openly, like radio signals. But it's a lame analogy because a radio signal tends to fade

and die away while a thought becomes a part to the noosphere forever and a day. Ineffaceable. Indestructible. Undisguised. True, the technology is not developed to the full potential as of yet, however, with the threshold overstepped the rest is just the question of time. Theoretically, you're able to zero in and read the thoughts of Leonardo da Vinci while he was doing his Mona Lisa.'

'How about the thoughts of your dad at the moment of spilling you out in the crowd of your doubles, obviously not as zippy, spermatozoids?'

'A problem of a higher level. You have to sieve his contemplation out from those by other males in the like phase, and by bigger apes too both in zoos and in the wild—the shifty bastards conceal their wit so as no to get harnessed into the mutual labor efforts. They're all alike, the orgasmic thoughts of men for the last five million years wrapping the planet with innumerable layers, reaching the altitude of the Everest. You certainly will need assistance of AI yet, in principle, the problem looks rather trivial.'

'Bullshit! The legends, myths, and fairy tales by a group of anonymous alcoholics in a marathon session!'

'A well-grounded heat, yours is. The idea looks as weired as mobile communication would seem to Chinguiz-khan's granny. Yet the public is readily trained to never give a bean. One more wrapper around the planet? So what? Aren't we taught about the atmosphere containing the oxygen atoms? Have you ever

seen an oxygen atom? Nope. Still you use them for breathing. Noosphere? Just an immense bulk of thoughts of any kind both precisely defined, and laxly dropped halfway, and lost and popped up again...’

‘They are really squeezed in there, ain’t they?’

‘In the head?’

‘No, in your announced noosphere. The thoughts must have been flagged off by the incantation “Let be light!” and since then there’ve been thought up such a magnitude of thoughts that all the ware-houses, dumps, and canyons should get inundated by the surface in rising deluge.’

‘Looks like it started dawning on you, good friend, which is a welcome news, yet you still apply the obsolete square-nested approach. Of course, it might seem tight for all kinds of thoughts starting with the “Where’s mom? I wanna tit, and pee, and poop!” up to the “Damn nurse! I need the bedpan! Now I’ll wet the pajamas to spite her!”. They are born to never disappear, millions upon billions thoughts every moment, wreathing, meandering, swiping thru each other. The buggers don’t give an eff about the grim warning by Malthus.

A-and there is a well substantiated suspicion that any living thing is capable of thinking, from the unicellular to stalagmites. Another host of contributors... The good news is they are intangible, floating thru one another, anyone’s thought withing whoever else’s thought. Just like radio waves do or maverick quant effluence and so forth doo-doo that no normal dude can

ever understand. Do you follow, student? Beware, I am strict and demand details at the term examination’.

‘As long as they are so intangible, I don’t care about their Gulf Streams and Maelstroms made up of immaterial matryoshkas sitting in each other or wherever they hang out.’

‘Everywhere, buddy! Everywhere – in you, in me, in this here table. Thoughts, thoughts, thoughts, thoughts...’

‘You’ve screwed the cite, “Words, words, words, words...”, says Hamlet’.

‘Words are not for storage. They’re too fragile, unstable, often broken, forgotten, lost irretrievably. Thoughts are another kettle of fish, they are always there. Accruing parts in the noosphere’.

‘Thanks for your entertaining tale, yet as an inveterate mountaineer I can’t believe a thing without grabbing it first’.

‘How many times have you groped a radio wave?’

‘Somehow missed the experience. Yet I can switch on the receiver thrown together by my Dad in the past millennium and listen to the weathercast’.

‘The announcer reads the forecast and you, piehole open, believe in the maneuvers of the clouds which you cannot grab. By the by, some guys earn a good living from thought reading’.

‘Come on! No medium has ever managed to cheat the guys from AIP neither to pass SPR or ASSAP checks’.

‘Who talks of mediums? I meant the guys who work with me in the Firm. Turning the knobs to tune to a thought in the noosphere. Easy as cake’.

‘A kinda radio receiver?’

‘A sort of’.

V gave his pal a closer look. To give out such a yarn you should be pretty high. But no echo of pipe dreams in his eyes, neither the purplish circles about them, and none of the uncontrolled sipping whiffs at nothing. The guy broadcasts not from under influence. Hmm. And leaves no loose ends, a kinda Second Coming of Isaac Newton for you’.

‘Okay,’ began V thoughtfully, ‘if for a split second we suppose all this blither to be not a sham spilled by hostile aliens from Tau Ceti as a mock Trojan Horse, then I can’t even remotely see how...’

‘But are you ready to hand over twenty years of your precious life to see closer yet dimly?’ interrupted Lex. ‘The learn curve is pretty steep. Some nutty field of science. And all of that fundamental brainbreaker is based on a certain Algorithm of Chaos. Which is about all I know’.

\* \* \*

### 3

In the most ruthlessly devastating of her gait styles, waitress Sally neared their stall. So it was announced in the badge on her magnificent breast, the left one, pinned over the dazzling white blouse (for the folks who tend to read in fits and starts, like, for instance, me at times, when not sufficiently concentrated—that was said about the badge, the damn thing was pinned and nothing else whatsoever, so as to remove any groundless expectations and keep staying on the safe side)...

As always in his intercourse with the fair sex, V gave free rein to his habitual instinct or, which also possible, to his instinctive habit, notably aggravating at the instances of communication with the distaff segment in personnel of both budget organizations and private business (the time of day, it might be mentioned, had no effect on his deep-rooted habit or, maybe, ingrained instinct).

At times he gave it a shot at reckoning location of tattoos in private nooks of their anatomy, for intimate exposure besides those on the show at their working hours.

However, the imaginative detours were merely spells of an aside activity and for the most part V stayed unobtrusively keen on intercepting the flickers of the random signals emitted by female subconsciousness. Those will-less weather balloons to scout out and plumb you. The unexpected winks or, say,



playing the tongue along their parted lips then leaving its tip to stick forgetfully from the corner of her mouth. Subconscious, unpremeditated impulses are numerous and unforeseeable.

Why?! Pray I earnestly, tell me why learning all those grammar rules and phonetics? Why enrolling courses of differently foreign languages online or strain yourself with a paid tutor? They are intended only to obscure the simple and ultimate truth conveyable which is so easily imparted by means of body language. And bodies, moreover so lavishly opulent and graceful as by this here representative of millennials, Sally the waitress, do have the right for self-expressing. Unrestricted. The opener, the better.

Even for the reps of earlier generation branded with offhand “X”—fretted with wear and worries, wasted by their useless anxieties and utterly worn out by the unsparing exploitation of their poor selves and those by their side they only could put their hands on—there always remained a warm nook in the big heart of true knight and gentleman, that of V.

To boil it down, enough is to remark that even for a lady fairly advanced in her years, whose puberty coincided with the times when beatniks (another since long lost and safely forgotten generation) revolutionized jigger-bug into the rock-n-roll acrobatics, even for her—faith!—could V politely wind some sixty years back and there inadvertently admire the high tempo of her strong legs’ step enfolded tightly in sleek nylon. The stockings of black nylon—the ritzy vogue, the seam shot plumb

up from her heels—squeak tinily and rub each other in between her heated thighs... gee! girl! No need to haste. You'll be in time and everything OK, and he will surely be waiting for you chain-smoking his Lucky Strike, and that'll become the best date in your whole life, yes! In swaying swoon till midnight and beyond it to the predawn twilight sipping into the interior of his chicest of all Ford models, Crestline Victoria, over lie-down seats... A!. Babe!. O!. O!. Moreee!. mmm... Tommy... dear...

With a sad smile of understanding would V watch after that silly brimless hat of hers, and the single feather stuck up from the teensy roll of mash veil tripping in her bouncing hops which are impossible to abate, keep down... she runs on... she doesn't hear him... the distance is too great...

By his nature, which he doesn't flash too freely, he is a ladies man in love with all the women in the world both in stock and separately, and ready is he to go on down that road, free of charge and not overly exacting (do it!) but with gentlemanly chivalrous laziness: his yes to welcome yes, and if no then so be it, he does not press too far too hard. In short, to use just a couple of couples of words – 'womanizer and benevolent sociopath' would be a fit description of this here cat, V.

As for the rest (more and more diverse) spectrum of advocates for the emancipation of non-traditional appetites, he never speak up against them, so is his principle. At most (and without further comments), he may shrug his shoulder (the left one as a rule), like, so what? *Jedem das Seine* and let everyone be the master

of what they got while he (which is not superfluous to repeat) upholds the principle of non-interference and respecting the right for self-determination and inviolability of preferences in private life and in the international arena.

Yes, pathetic they are and, on the whole, coyly overacting, however, a crowd like any other one, passable for communication if abstaining from in-raids into your personal space. Yes, they wince at free-style speaking and, unaware of enlivening paganish power of incantation, grow too melodramatic, at once. But then who is without a blemish?

Pardon my axiom, tastes in any direction are preconditioned by Nature, you can't skirt around the ineluctable, right? Though at times it's hard not to feel sorry for a Nature's critter who locked their vintage vehicle up and keep the artifact of brightest ingenuity incarcerated, devoid of rides because the fucking mother Nature directed them to drive some complete shit of a car. Yet, nothing doing, no way to resist Eff Mother and, for the tolerance's sake we close the discussion of tastes as well as other surplus idle talk. Lada Kalina is their choice? Be happy, enjoy your ride, gourmets. Fuck!

Still no accouterments from a sex-shop can be better than a live partner of the right size that suits you, thanks to the fitting and careful tuning of the standard set of pleasures presented by loving Mother-Nature who didn't get enough sleep at night and sweated over her blissful tweaks to the process, eons upon eons since the articulated origin of species, go consult Mr. Charles

Darwin, the expert in this field.

On the other hand, wizzing against the wind is not a too healthy undertaking, akin to disapproving the thriving industry outfitted with the production lines of growing capacity, and the managerial pundits experienced in the particulars, turning out a wide range of accessories for any taste imaginable, accompanied by the glossy booklets where to to insert and how to ram (intuitiveness is a good thing yet better be safe than sorry), for steady growth of consumer demand, jobs in the industry, and a not negligible share in the total gross income of the nation.

To tell the God's truth, V isn't quite sure as to which particular trade union the workers of this industry had poured into, yet you may bet your bottom dollar plus your dear ass that the national economy is a vehement supporter of the emancipation—chain of retail stores, franchises, exports are not the things to wave off when in sober state of mind.

Dictators might pull tight “iron curtains” (tastes differ), play the card of fundamentalism, introduce bans, decree return to the traditional moral values, to burqas, kokoshniks, and kirza high boots – vain are their labors and belated because tolerance arrived in earnest so as to stay.

Or what reason for would the knife-wielding contingent in medical profession cut up the golden-eggs-laying hen, huh? The mere cost of fumbling about insert-remove the Adam's apple? Do you know how much it is? Huh?. No? Lucky guy! Me neither. God save us from ever knowing...

So, welcome aboard the super-duper liner Reality, Ladies and Gents! The process has passed the tropic of Fail-Safe and become irreversible. Congrats! The real gourmets every other season change their genitals. Take a shot at! Feel the difference! You might like the wear! Transgender change inside-out-and-back is easier than to master the switch from Linux to Microsoft or backwards.

‘How d’you dig this, babe? When I was a male—before last year February—the posture was my fave. Come on! Giddy up, my macho!’

Turning to Lex, you wouldn’t need a shrink to see with your naked eye that no awesome breasts under the half-sheer blouse rocked him as should naturally be expected. The dark matte swarthiness in the heavenly cleavage within her low V didn’t work either. In vain delineated the gossamer cloth—so closely and exquisitely—the bumps of her admirable nipples (the left one playfully nudging the badge thru the airy light fabric separating them).

Nope. He was too far for temptations to catch him were they even performed by a topless top model role-playing a waitress taking his order.

Nah! Not a chance for all badges in the world, pinned up at whichever spot, would pull, and tempt, and swerve him in the direction of lascivious frivolity. What? Giving however flitting thought to anything carnal? Gosh, no! Not for him.

At this very moment he was coming without all that stuff

because Lex was a devoted and staunch lover of grub-devouring and before a dinner pending so nigh he turned bulletproof altogether to any kind of reflectively unconscious flirting or other non-gastronomic dreams even if, by some black or white magic, in Sally's stead had there popped up Cleopatra in the buff, wearing neither badge nor blouse (moreover, the Egypt's government once again appealed to the global community with their announcement that Cleopatra was not black to which end they once again have found irrefutable archaeological evidence).

At this prelusive moment Lex turned a slightly balmy clot of lewdness that dims the sight with wabby haze of lust and—lo!—all of him was in the foreplay already. His trembling fingers reached out to scratch, stroke, caress the sensual, awaiting folds—the corners of his mouth, all in small uncontrollable tremor (both the corners and the fingers).

In the attitude of owner the palm splayed over the pubis... (err... what?. not now! not now! we'll proofread it later!)... the embossed pudenda of menu grabbed tenderly and spread wide to flip the beans of pages before to delve impetuously into and with short repetitive leaps move it (the inflamed gaze) from line to line still deeper to the very bottom... O! The moment of bliss insatiable! O! I'll have the choicest and yummiest morsel from this jewel box...

The true food-lover way is a lifelong honey moon.

Sally walked off with the order to the folks slaving in the kitchen (one naturalized Czech and two fresh Venezuelan

immigrants under the endemic chef, the waitress' grandmother). Lex sat back a bit laxer yet still retaining his anticipation.

'Watch me and learn from a wise man,' instructively told he V, 'the moment before you get the ultimate pleasure, think of some nasty stuff. Serves as that skeleton at orgies of ancient Roman hedonists. The gratification feel becomes acuter.'

'My wedding gift for you will be The Anatomical Atlas of Skeleton Bones, richly illustrated. And thanks for sharing the trick.'

'Any time,' was Lex' condescending response. 'That's what a guy needs pals for – to collect crumbs of wisdom. For a starter, you may choose thinking about the Malthusian Catastrophe we're going to give a headlong dive into any other day.'

'It's about that screwball geezer who foretold inevitable global hunger because of the population growth? Bosh, threats of the end of the world give me no hard-on. The mankind's history most optimistically proves that balancing on the razor's edge since long became man's main preoccupation and pastime, we glibly jump over every catastrophe scheduled for tomorrow just to land in more deep shit. So save the Malthus' horror screenplay for amusing your grand kids at bedtime.'

'He proved it mathematically!'

V gave out a tired sigh:

'At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mathematicians rolled out their calculations that in fifty years life in all major cities would come to a crunching halt because of the insoluble dilemma. No

way to clear the city thoroughfares of droppings by the horses needed for the in-city transportation. The trained shitheads used logarithm rulers for the calculus which made it undefeated.

Your pessimistic Member of the Royal Society lived in the world populated by less than one billion guys. He missed to take into account the innate ability of people to regulate their optimal numbers by means of mass shootings at schools and kindergartens, ethnic cleansing, world war slaughterhouses, extermination camps and other methods of saving mankind by killing them. A pretty elegant solution, if you think of it. To whet your appetite, you know.'

Lex gave out a disgruntled squirm:

'Know the difference between a cowboy camp cook and a renown chef? The latter will never dump a sack of peppercorns into one meal.'

With melancholically slow movement Lex reached for his dinner jacket on the seat-back and angled a pinkish pack of chewing gum out. One bar was extracted, unwrapped and put into his mouth. Ruminating thoughtfully, he dropped the pack into the breast pocket of his shirt which action seemingly woke him. Lex perked up and winked at V.

'Sorry chum. I've got no manners!'

Two digits of his dived into the mentioned pocket to fetch out one more bar which he stretched out for V saying:

'But I am working at it'

'Alex Tailor Jr.?' sounded close by.



Lex dropped the offering next to the salt shaker on the table and stared up at a couple of body builders wearing black office suites and tanned maps from solarium.

‘It’s me.’ Said he curtly.

The beefy claw of the strong man flashed a three-block-lettered badge.

‘Follow us, sir.’

‘What the f...’ started V, yet the second of the artificially tanned jocks interrupted his statement.

‘Keep to order in the public place, sir.’ His left armpit looked bumpier than the opposite. A disproportionate result of inattentive muscle pumping.

‘V, don’t, please,’ said Lex getting up. He hung his dinner jacket over his forearm levered from the elbow and went off between the guys in black.

Stunned, watched V after their short convoy making for the exit from the establishment. Then he frowned and lowered his gaze at the chewing gum bar in a blue wrapper apparently wrinkled by a clumsy tamperer.

\* \* \*

## 4

‘Been any fucking reason for to get buddies, you and me?’

More than once criticized and whipped (metaphorically) for his pompously ornate figures of speech, Lex time and again, so as to keep on the safe side, ventured into the language that he believed was the street parlance and then he sounded like a damn putz. A kinda Sir Francis Bacon’s try at Ebonics or something before to take a shot at his own version of *The West-Side Story*.

The question just brought up could be asked much nicer and more modestly, in an acceptable tone of neutral communication, like, “why did we make friends with each other?” or else “what did become the foundation for our friendship?” but no! He preferred to act a yo-bro!-yo-bro! mobster.

‘Supposedly, the two lazy-bones were attracted and kept together by sloth of equally immeasurable dimensions, if you ever heard the word “gravitation”.’

‘What-what?’

‘Each and every of you and me are too lazy to counteract the habit of four years. Or is it five already?’

‘Numbers mean nothing!’

‘Tell it to your taxman, Pedagogue. Though, in part, yes, just one year is more than enough for real friends to call each other all the names under the sun and direct the partner to every petal in the Wind Rose so the quantity of later additions do not tell on

the firmness of their valuable relationship.’

‘I see you’re cooking on gas today, chum, how about defining friendship? Taken as a notion, nothing personal. Yet in plain words, please, without the coefficients from the Material Resistance Table?’

Here is another of Lex’ quirks for you. He’s fond of starting a philosophical discursive speculations on this or that hooey which normal guy would feel ashamed to even think about because that hooey is too obvious for any lame ass: life is life, flower is flower, especially if from Morocco, and so forth without losing his face and last crumbs of self-respect.

‘Well, leaving the Material Resistance Table aside, friendship is what suffice to make you happy after a single look at your buddy and realizing there is a more fucked up shithead than you yourself. Stupidity is the inherent vice even in the most ideal friend who you have to tolerate because you need a sidekick for your routines on stage which is the world.’

‘Your stage is pretty grave, man.’ With a sweeping chaperon gesture Lex embraced the bare walls in the room resembling the inside of sooner a cube than a parallelepiped. Their severely white paint coat imparted to the closed space the air of ascetic rigor even though a humble glance around couldn’t target on any crucifix or symbols of any other faith or cult.

He occupied a low half armchair, whose sheer varnished wooden arms bore burns and scars of random marks from the times immemorial (“he” here is Lex and “it” is under him).

The trajectory of his all-embracing gesture ended with the soft landing (without ever looking to coordinate the movements) onto the circle top of a beer can standing on the brown floor by the right hind leg of the half-blood (being funny) within the range reachable by the occupier.

The chaperon's head sank back onto the upholstery fabric in the gently oblique back of the half armchair, pretty worn by leaning of other heads before this here one, which turned it's front to face the only window in the room—neither a flower-pot on the white sill nor even a view outside but simply a rectangle of blue from the standpoint of the eyes in his head dropped back restfully.

Atop the computer desk in the corner to the left from the window, there towered thin black tin in the PC box of the corresponding architecture (a collected by the cheap Indonesian workforce and stamped “Made in China” critter) in a close company with the monitor Philips. The couple of streamlined speakers in thick mesh of fencing masks protecting their mugs, though not armed with rapiers, secured the Hollander's flanks. The avant-garde position held the mouse and keyboard, both wired and black as the rest of the desktop's equipment.

The wide swivel armchair—a jarring note contrasting by its throne aspect—aloof and alien in respect to the robust monk-cell design—showed its black back to the computer gone deeply into the hibernation mode because V, for a considerable stretch of time already, had been seated in it facing Lex.

With his right foot planted in the mock Cocobolo laminate flooring, he used the leverage of the skeletal structure in his leg (yes, also the right one) to impart driving impulses to the languid swings of the throne, hither-thither, describing a slight arc in reciprocating horizontal turns, both slow and not protracted, within a radiant or so, no wider.

The left of V's ankles ascended as high as to be put across his right knee to serve a pad for the bottom of the beer can in an unfocused, careless grip by his hand's digits. Quite naturally, the support as well as the beer (both consumed and still awaiting to be poured in) were also involved in the general movement, hither and thither, together with the rest of the contraption composed of organic (engine's body) and inorganic (all the rest) stuff except for his foot firmly pressed to the same point, which served the anchor and source of the lazy half-radiant rotations. Wiggle-wobble...

At the meeting place of two perpendicular walls, in the catty-corner from the computer, there stood another, regular desk consorted with a hard wooden chair.

The neat cylinder smack-bang in the desktop center (once again black and of the same fencing-mask-like mesh) resembled a mini-pot for indoor floriculture hobbyists letting out—a little bit above its black rim—the exotic thin twig of a single ball pen. In a nurse-like solicitous attitude, the desk lamp craned its shade over the outgrowth. The strict business-like style of the desk was softened in part by the tight green roll of a synthetic yoga mat in

its off-duty resting posture by the desktop right edge.

Two wall outlets, one ceiling light fixture, and, naturally, the door exhaustively completed the interior of the hermit's lair.

'As we know,' pronounced Lex in the Oxbridge nauseous manner of meticulously nuanced articulation of each sound, 'friendship presupposes presence of salubrious prerequisites and compliance to a certain number of necessary requirements, do we not? Consequentially, a fair stock of sloth plus shared disgust to puristic castration of the language alive for morality's ends created us for each other. Anything omitted in my listing, dear colleague? Not a squat of a chance, I hope. If we approach this issue from the standpoint of applied logic.'

'A widely accepted recipe does not exclude inspirational additions while cooking the meal. There's no guarantee from the creative fancies of the chef.'

'And which ingredient will add a charming spicy flavor to the subject of the discourse in hand?'

'How about hate?'

The beer can (having started its ascend up in the air a second before) came back to rest on the Cocobola brown. Lex crossed his arms on his chest with each hand fingers splayed, wide and rigidly, over the biceps areas in the opposite arm.

'Fuck! Given the percentage of jest in composition of your average jest, hence proceed with more deliberation, please.'

'Nothing equals hate in being the most reliable pledge for a lasting relationship of any sort. Let's turn to basics. Fiancee

hates her Groom for all his feints and dodging before she milked the proposition out him, after all. Groom hates Fiancee for the misery he lived thru listening to the tons of her empty non-stop twits before she gave, at last. Then starts the agony of matrimonial life describable by only French “o-la-la!” Anyway, they have to stick together to repay and revenge for their initial sufferings, getting waylaid by further ones down the road. And what exactly pushes us to cover our buddy’s girlfriend? To make of him a damn dumb cuckold from now on? Can you guess? The word starts with “h”.’

‘It’s madness!’

‘Nope. Wrong letter. And we are simply dusting down our ken of inductive logic here. Combining the pleasant with the useful down the road in our friendly relations.

‘Some fucking hooley. Completely. All of it!’

‘Yep. That’s my motto: All or Nothing. OK, forget it. I know as well as you do, it was not you who fucked her, it was she who used you, my dear friend.’

One hand was clutching the beer can while the other, at the same very moment, as ill luck would have it, was scratching the back of his head so Lex had, practically, nothing to grope for right retort with. Instead, he sipped from the can silently. Because some of V’s jests do stun you hundred per cent flat.

\* \* \*



# 5

...ooooooooo... aaauuhhh...

...paaain... paaainpaaainpains... oooooo... uuu... aaahhh...

ooouuu...

...pain... pain... pain... pain...

...too much of pain to feel anything else... besides... at least anyth... gushes in over the edge... takes away the last drops of strength... nothing to withstand with... overwhelms... crushes the slightest ability to resist ... struggle... hold on... the thundering avalanche sets the fragile shell in a dizzy whirl... this shell... this fragile...

pain... pain...

it's... aaa.....bigger... the ocean... larger than universe this... paaiaaahhh... ooouuu... crushes... makes sick... tears innards unbearably... makes vomit the guts out...

ruthlessly... stops a split hair before the last edge... short of killing... that would free from this paaiaaahhh... uuu... ooouuu... not be ... not to be... not feel this paaiaaahhh... oooooo... death will rescue from... from tortures by this monster of no pity... no mercy... doesn't let overstep the line where it gives no... paaain...

no way to dodge... escape the pitiless demon of... paaain... aaahhh... no strength for shrieking... groans... no strength to whimper... wail... that choked maimed "aaahh" is all that

remains too feeble too powerless to call out... reach for...  
beyond this ... paaain... ooouuu...

no way to move... to wriggle like an earth worm cut in two...  
like any live animal seeking to adapt its crippled body to...  
paaain... aaahh... searching for the tiniest drop of ease in broken  
contorted convulsions... to dodge it somehow... for a split of  
second... befool this... paaain... aaahhh...

no hope... none to expect... there'll be just... paaain...  
aaahhh... to the very end... o come it sooner... time  
disappeared... lost any meaning... each moment protracts longer  
than... this eternity of ... paaain... ooouuu...

no space... nowhere to get away from this immobility  
deprived of death... crushing closed... walls of merciless...  
paaiaaahhh... flattened the helpless subhuman squashed into a  
slave of all-conquering Paaain... Cruel Czarina Paaain...

a nothing... a prisoner... a slave... a broken toy of Her  
Majesty Executioner... a shell degraded in the squeeze of  
unbearable scathing fathomless abyss of paaain... aaahhh  
oooooooo... how it pains...  
what... fooor?..

\* \* \*

## 6

The blue wrapping, which V picked up from the table at Uncle Tom's Cabin before Sally the Waitress brought the meal ordered by Lex yet after he was taken away, wrapped no chewing gum.

Only back home, V got it what his friend texted about by quick winks and flailing desperately his eyelashes when being detained. The message transmitted by some unknown code (yet, without doubt, not by that of Morse) concerned the chewing gum, which Lex had so awkwardly dropped on the table, and which was not there. Instead, the wrinkled wrapping covered a piece of thin cardboard cut like a make-believe bar of chewing gum and the little lamina of a memory card, side by side.

Tunar (\*the basic File Manager on Debian/Ubuntu systems) disclosed two files present in the card of 2TB storage capacity:

- 1) eff\_thoughts\_008.txt file, and
- 2) a folder left Untitled.

(Technically speaking, any folder within a system is just another file for containing any quantity of files and folders.)

The Untitled folder contained thousands audio files, all of them in Vorbis format.

V clicked a couple of them, one after the other, at random, whichever happened under the courser's hoofs. Thru the mask mesh in both speakers streamed out the same impersonal flat drawl of artificial reader, unnaturally distanced and sexless

voice-over.

V didn't bother to tweak the pitch or tempo in the robotic diction, neither was chosen another dialect from the long list of options, he just left all as is. Moreover, the haphazard pieces did not sound like a cohesive narration. Neither was there any traceable intent to introduce the source of fragments not caring a bean who'd issued them before breaking to shards: a man? a woman? a youth? a snotty kid?

Yeah, at times there sure happened telling cues. For instance, hardly a brutal macho would complain of a too tight bra sillily donned when leaving for the office in the morning.

(Or could he after all, that macho? There are machos and machos, you know... more and more diversified. In the times of heated struggle for self-awareness of your hidden "it" and realization of "its" deepest instincts you'd better not grab hastily any assumption that comes your way. The bitch may turn scorching hot. We don't need blisters, burns and stuff, right? And no sorting out with militant activists for tolerance are welcome.

Anyway, the weirdest prankster, life, can beat any sitcom with both hands tied and the brutal mudak of macho might have had his private reasons for putting a bra on first thing in the morning.

Not to mention the strange feeling that visited V more and more often of his belonging to a sexual minority of those who way back were called "straight males" but whose share in the overall number of those usable for sex dwindled hopelessly, globally, like the melting glaciers in the Alps, not to mention the

tearful situation about Antarctica icebergs.

Damn priests! They triggered off the uncontrollable avalanche of the horrendous chain reaction by their ardent pulling for the missionary position in intercourse. God Almighty (so the clerics) approved just that one and only.

(The missionary position, for fuck's sake!) And (went they on) whatever else modification to the "piston – cylinder" shebang was a devilish ploy, another of the serpent's apples in Eden.

Of course, the flocks got unhealthy interested in the topic: hey! how many are them positions? Huh? And who gets more high at sex: from under or on top?

Way back, in the bucolically innocent days, folks just didn't give an eff about hows-and-whys in the matter, morals were way robuster and simpler – whoever whomever wherever grabbed there they fucked them, on the spot, and the following morning no one gave a fuck in which position, namely, and what was the angle, geometrically, no time for trifles – harness your horse to the cart, gird yourself with the ax and – off with you! to the forest after the firewood. But now, thanks to the the clergy who brought it up, we are in this here deep shit. And I still haven't even once mentioned pedophilia, have I? Fuck!

With a sad sigh, V clicked `eff_thoughts_008.txt...`

The endless stream of poorly punctuated lines, and words of innovative coinage, at times perversely ordered collocations, and other incongruences with the time-honored grammar and spelling rules. Looks like Lex had a good reason to call it a log,

hardly if at all processed. To recon the text a transcript of the audio files from the back-to-back Untitled folder, in the same 2 TB card, stood well to reason. However, without a deeper submersion it was hard to decide which one in their tandem flagged off the notorious hen-egg dilemma.

At any rate, the stuff didn't look a super text ready to make V a glamorous lighting house aloft the choppy sway in the ocean of pulp fiction. The fragments resembled mumbling to oneself in the manner of Leo Bloom responding to one or another hallmark or happening in the process of his indefinite aimless wanderings during the long-long day of June 16, 1904.

Yes, it did look like a transcript of scattered thought, yet of how many thinkers? Were they interconnected? In any way? In what way? If, yes, of course. And who thought what? Who namely?

While reading, you felt at times like being carried off upon a kinda thought-floe, before you slopped over smack bang into another fragment, yes, everything turned different – the subject, the mood, the vocabulary.

Common to them all though was some elusive sincerity, and lack of coherent detailed description of actions in progress. Plus their terse offhandedness in telling why and how, and absence of smooth logical flow which called for filling the picture yourself. Say, instead of “my interlocutor plunged into a lengthy exposition of his current plans and expectations...” there sooner would stand “will the shithead shut up? Ever?”

V resented the untimeliness of Lex' pinch. So he was arrested? His lamb of a friend, Lex?

Ha! But what else? By all the canons of genre. And too sadistically by that. Took him away from the not devoured dinner!

Contradicting to his stock of common sense, V slightly touched the number marked "lex" in his phone. Simply out of habit. Just in case...

The mellow female voice once again explained it to him that the subscriber was out of reach. The proposal of the conference to the answering machine in Lex' den after the following "pee", V ruled out making no comment.

He switched his PC off and one whole minute watched the black monitor with his not seeing stare. Then he swerved the throne about and and got up to cross the room over, to the catty-corner.

From the drawer in the desk (downmost to the right) V extracted and put onto the desktop a small flat box looking like a compass case. He unclasped it and pinched out a tiny SIM card which substituted the one in his phone.

He had become another subscriber of obscure identity with the number unknown to anyone. Just in case...

\* \* \*



# 7

V never was alone. Never. Even in a crowd of complete strangers did he have someone to get encouragement from, share impressions with, someone who understood him from half a word. Better than any companion was that someone because that was V.

What?! 2-in-1? Doubled? Cloned? Schizocleft?

Whatever. It was just V. Simple as that.

At times they could disagree on a petty issue of an abstract topic, maybe, on a couple of issues, those two Vs. Even a dispute could flare up between them, yet sooner or later there evolved, albeit shaky yet final consensus. Or else one of them had to shut up. As a last resort. Anyway, it stands to no reason, arguing with such a stubborn blockhead, right?

V didn't give much thought to why it would be that way. He just got used and felt comfortable enough without asking too many questions. After all an attempt at even most thorough, diligently all-aspects-included answer to any "why?" would no more than slightly scratch the surface of the slope in the mountain rising under the clouds, the Everest of all the possible causes and reasons for why that happened possible. And it's also very likely, no scratch at all would be left there due to the incomparability of their masses—the mountain and a chance answer singled out from all the possible ones, fairly uncountable.

However, at this current moment they achieved an absolute harmony and both Vs acted unanimously, and they jointly opened their mouth (one for two) and their mutual jaw dropped in utter perplexity. Stack-overflowing bewilderment filled both of them...

(Damn it's real hard to go down that road, the further the bumpier it gets, clogged with impeding blocks, more and more complicated and impassable turns the path thru the rank grass with the snakes of spelling rules, the thorny hyphens at ready to whip, to stick and tear out the roamer's eye, and from behind the withered trunks of gloating ghouls ooze and drip from rotten fangs their sticky-stinky, green and pale poison of stylistic appropriateness, snarling scumbag assholes!

Woe me! No way for a hero to scamper over all those Indo-European roots and the land slides of vowel shifts – they are too many but our hero has just two legs for both of them.

Damn! Looks like the only option's revving back into the lap of the orthodox grammar... but then, repentant sinners are always welcome,.. compare the fate of Giordano with that of Galileo and calm down)...

His stare (Attaboy! Already in singular, not "their"! You can conform to the basic requirements after all. Keep on behaving!) stuck to the monitor Philips which was addressing him personally:

"Look here, V, whenever there would pop up another prophet blaring out about God's death and stuff, the best policy would

be to check if the announcer was a certified coroner – don't let them fool us by throwing their epilepsy fits.”

The nightmarish nature of the impossibly quaggy situation (how else would you characterize a snafu when, yes, mutely but still you are addressed by your monitor, in white on black, using your first name with a touch of brazen familiarity) was further aggravated by the fact that V knew his answer to this deceptive admonition. Yep, he knew it without even scrolling down to the next line, below the monitor frame.

What's the use of fiddle-faddle tricks? He recognized his own thought, the thought thought by him a week ago. A fragment of his endless chatting with himself it was. They gossiped, yes, not constantly but often, mutely yet easy, like V to V.

But struck at last the star hour and he pronounces it aloud, using his anatomy speech apparatus, distinctly pronounces V his answer before caressing the wheel in the mouse's back (exactly between its shoulder blades)—yes, yes, yes, pronounces aloud but not within his brain, pronounces before there will surface the line with his answer:

“The shocking truth, bro V, is I do not give a fuck about any wise advice like yours, when enjoying the resplendence of a line wrought craftily, so will you most kindly shut up?”

Yep. Exactly. Word by word, ditch it or like it. The line flowed up, the prove irrefutable that Lex' story was not a blab of mind meandering on high, no fucking chance, the evidence was solid as a rock. The Firm he worked for was catching thoughts okay,

from that... what-you'd-call-it, noosphere, eh?

Here it was, his, V's, 2-in-1 thought got in the total catch of their gillnet. Welcome to the new shining world, V!

He leaned on his throne back busted and dull like a bum thrown out the back door, flabber-fucking-gasted by having rammed into the unthinkable discovery.

'...so that's how it stands...,' echoed along the curbstone newcomer's convolutions of his brain, '...that's where we are now... huh?. so what then?.'

Thinking was clearly out of whack. His tries at it slipped over and over again. Because of mute clangs in his middle ear. The vibration spread from the temporal lobes to the pituitary gland and back, yet neither lobes nor gland could hear, lost no less than he in the myriad-folded implications of the sprung-up situation, besides, they were devoid of ears.

And right then, rumbling deafeningly, rushes in the crush-all freight train of endless unpredictably all-embracing-and-overturning consequences to what had just been revealed to him...

For fucking sake! That's simply...

There sounded the croaks of Samsung bleating its factory settings, cutting hazy, shell-shocked tries at thinking, from his pocket.

What the fuck! It cannot be! He hadn't made a single call with his virginal SIM card! Not a fucking call from this here number! Nonetheless, kicking off all hesitations, V answered. The

moon-like map of Lex filled the screen. Disturbed and wiry. Too disturbed for the present phase of the full-moon.

'I can't talk, V! Just believe me. Run! Right now! You've got maximum half-minute...

The screen died.

'What the fu... Was not he arres... My number's compromi...???' and a bunch of similar half-processed thoughts dashed ahead in their relay race while V—the phone shoved back in his pocket and followed by the 2TD card plucked out its slot in the PC—was running up to his apartment door.

On the landing V tarried a second reading the blinks of digits by the elevator door. After two more levels it would be here. He closed the door with his heart beating louder than the key-click.

V ascended the two stare-flights to the next floor and stopped. To watch. Unobservable.

The elevator slammed open opposite the door just locked by him. Three men in black, exchanging no words or gestures, stepped out. They acted like a well-trained team of professionals, each one performing his part in the routine.

The team stopped close to the wall by the doorjamb. Two of them took out their heats in an open businesslike manner. The third rang the doorbell which sounded within yet remained unanswered. With a disapproving smirk, he fetched from his inside pocket a small bunch of skeleton keys, gave them a sharp look and separated one from the dangling company.

The lock gave out a tame submissive click. The armed part

in the team entered the apartment with their tools at ready, the locksmith stayed outside.

Now the specialists would see the working computer in V's room. Then they would check his bedroom, kitchen, and the restroom, and then...

Carefully V took a soundless step backward...

\* \* \*

## 8

So what? Whereto now? In two more floors the final stair-flight ran up to the roof entrance guarded by the door in its chastity belt constructed of a thick iron bar in combination with a weighty padlock, a kinda buckle. Some classically helpless dead end.

The obvious truth was further endorsed by the awry statement made with yellow-spray by a disappointed teenager explorer of the roof vistas—a young blade from the growth of the would-be juvenal delinquents. Across the sheet metal in the door surface—the both unforeseen and insurmountable predicament—the young (but having sipped already the bitter taste of disappointing infeasibility) stardust lover announced to all who might be concerned (including, possibly, his own self too) from the frontier pioneers who reached the impasse:

“come to get the fuck!”

To make the message clearer, the blade added a sketch—expressive, jerky, full of feeling (scaled 5:1, in the Picasso’s late period style)—of the middle finger stuck out in the renown bearing.

Some time back, V had an opportunity already to familiarize himself with the setting up there, after a recreational joint. The Moroccan flower awoke the spirit of a thoughtful adventurer and loving admirer of nature.

And then the four of them (two Vs plus those two freshly awoken guys (adventurer + admirer)—although now it's hard to be sure who was the first to start the whole shit) challenged each other to venture for a mountaineering trek: the higher you get, the wider the vistas, you know.

So, they crawled out and dragged their asses up the winding stair-flights, higher and higher, without a single water-head along the whole trek. He could very easily thirst himself to death in that stressfully strenuous plodding up the unmotivatedly steep flights, yet he did it, already alone—the three weaklings lost on the way—and sympathized, wholeheartedly, both the young sociopath and his yellow graffiti substituting for the light in the end of tunnel, rather askew yet unmistakably sincere.

A classic life-size mouse-trap, there's no better definition for the keyr Dick of the sort he'd got into after the sudden phone call. Going down by the elevator was out of question – the locksmith-sentinel by his apartment door, one level down, would certainly intercept his trip with the ironic wink of his heat's hole: 'Whereto, boob?'

Looked like the kid's prophecy began to come true and wherever you turn – “come to get the fuck!”. That was the one and only outcome foreseeable while the racket of adrenaline and the cosmic silence of desperation inundated with their unthinkable mixture V's veins and everything else they could rush into... made no difference... the final race...

The touch of a hand landing softly onto his shoulder all but



tore from his guts a guttural squeak of a run down cub combined with a high jump up on the spot.

But no! Manly kept V himself in hands. Only his hair was hard to control and it bristled up in spikes, when he turned his forehead in minuscular drops of sudden perspiration to fixate his goggle on the soft oval of a young face looking at him from under the crisp stack of light brown curls, and also on the long tapering index finger put across her soft lips in the speechless call for restraint, against the backdrop of the open door to her flat.

She nodded her head towards the entrance in silent invitation. Without giving it a second thought, V followed that goddess from the machine.

(For the record, in the ancient Hellas' theater they kept a male at that job: *Deus ex machina*. Alas, sexism was not invented yesterday. An indisputably ugly phenomenon is rooted too deeply, you can't get rid of it at a couple of hey-hoo! Nope, it's not as easy as overthrowing a czar who half year back gave up his throne. And no matter how hard the West, stemming by universally accepted estimation from the Greek foundation, swaggers of the emancipation reached by chicks in their gynaecea, birthmarks are still there.

So, what could be expected of the Eastern civilizations? From the stalwart fidels dreaming of their own harems, personal, unquestioning, and humble? They are not as far away from each other as blared by Mr. Kipling out, gynaeceum—harem, g—h. Hi there, Neighbor!

However, you can't concoct a bestseller of preaching (the guy with his *Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fuck* forestalled you) just let's leave the stuff to Monsieur Diderot or, for the sake of patriotism, to Count Tolstoy who also was a shrewd chop-chop-logic practitioner ..

Hell, no! We'd better leave His Excellency alone, his specialty menu all consists of anti-alcoholism sermons...

Some circus of screwed up freaks we've landed into, aren't we? First, they send their innocent youth to the meat grinder in the Nam jungle or the Town of Bakhmut and then start seeing thru the press tons of didactic booklets to fight all-pervading addiction to drugs in their nations. Understandably though, they for centuries used to harness cart to the horse.

That's why Leo Tolstoy had to bury his God-bestowed talent into the dunghill of the well-intentioned propaganda...

Besides, you have to make allowance for the changes in the audience. Twitter has drilled them and trained not to understand a thought longer than 280 characters, over which limit the thought starts leaking thru their ears and gives awful headaches to poor things. Whereas the classic used to pour out (when got into the groove after the proper dose of tea) passages which you can never ram into such Procrustes' bed (280 ch.). So let the old man doze on...

Here! Here! (Invigorated mutual ovation.)

Bravo! All that is so pretty nice. You are smart. Huh? But who has to check and see that the story flow dried up like the

Euphrates, eh? Environmental motherfucker, you!

Oh-ho! I beg your pardon dear Reader! Please, this way! Let us step over the threshold and enter the dwelling of the young beautiful savior... or, perhaps, a perfidious man-trap traitor? Right now each and every plot in the trade is steered by the bots of AI, you never can tell what bolt will fuck you from which blue...

Okay, we'll see what's what while it evolves, so – full steam ahead! Let us escape the fate of the Euphrates where even an ant would get none of their knees wet...)

They entered the hall and, to the cautious click of the lock, from farther within the apartment there sounded a voice:

‘What’s there, Lia?’

‘A pizza-boy got to the wrong floor, Auntie.’

‘Those boys get dummier each year! Come, close the window I’m chilly,’ went on the same exacting voice.

‘Alright, Auntie! I’m on my way!’

On its own accord and too eagerly to be restrained, the V’s right eye stuck to the slightly spherical glass in the door peep-hole. His palms splayed wide pressed to the plumb vertical surface of the door with the same feeling which brims you up when you caress the streamlined side of your pickup or Porsche and the police officer’s, touting his pistol, yells at you: ‘Keep you hands visible please, Sir?’

Two men swathed in the strange silence of abysmal depths barely accessible for divers crossed the landing behind the

hermetic door of the decompression chamber. Four eyes in two separate stares of the scuba divers wearing no masks nor biting their snorkels (but with their heats at ready) scanned with crisscrossed glimpses of the hostilely peeled eyes the situation at the bottom swimming soundlessly by, like in a silent movie, past the V's frozen, unblinking gaze from his eye clapped to the peephole, before getting out of his vision's encompass.

He wiped the sweat off the brow and turned his face to Lia.

'Hush!' whispered the girl and also turned, yet her back to him, to walk with the lithe gait echoing a young panther pliancy, to the nearest door on the left. She never looked back to make sure that he followed her example. As though he had an alternative!.

On entering the room, the girl doffed her brown shoulder bag, dropped it on the spruce cot cover, and left at once.

It was a small bedroom of a person not too sucked in glamorizing decor. His look met no glossy posters appealing to a lover of gory brazenness or, on the contrary, the mellow grace so dear to a misty-eyed consumers.

Still and yet, the person was resolute enough to contribute a thing or two to the design of her home and who also knew her beans about the pop-art which fact was evidenced by the composition made up of computer standard laser disks (yes! the legendary DVD-RW of 4.7 GB! Who would believe they still exist!) to the right from the bed.

The swath of the wall of about two square meters was covered, like with kinda scales, by their thin radiant circles mounted,

back-to-back, in close rows reminiscent of a knight's shining armor or, maybe, the panoply on his comrade-in-arms, loyal steed...

Lia was back pretty soon. She carefully closed the door, turned about, and with an air of expectation looked at him, her rosy lower lip slightly pressed with the pearly rosary of her impeccable teeth.

Something vaguely familiar was there in her face. However, V was in a quandary as to what namely or when and where. To somehow quench his embarrassment, he attempted at an awkward smile.

'Wow!' said she. 'Hi! At last, you did it, congrats!'

With the same irresistible gate she went over and sat down on the chair by the window.

'Have we ever met?' After a momentary hesitation asked he sinking onto the second from the couple of chairs in the room.

'Ha! Twice! In the elevator.'

'Ah-ha! Sure. I did feel that, yes...'. He shook his head reproachfully at his leaky memory. Now he definitely remembered.

She gave a nod of acknowledgment to his ability of recollecting.

'Each of the rides up I thought to myself: "Let him smile, just smile, and I'd talk to him. I swear, I'll do!" But each time you were too deep into your thoughts, which bailed you out – I didn't want to distract.'

‘But how come... back there on the landing? I couldn’t hear you were unlocking the door.’

‘I had been gone almost but Aunt Silva called me for a second. I came back to tuck her in and returned to the door unlocked already. Just in time to see your troubled back. Why are you so suspicious, V?’

‘What?’ exclaimed V in an inconceivable stupefaction.

‘It was cool, ain’t it? You should had watched your face that moment! Easy, man. No sweat. At times, when you see your buddy off, he happens to be too full of gratitude so a couple of levels, both downward and upward, could learn that some V lived about your floor. Once I spotted who made him so happy. You keep a distiller machine at your place?’

‘You’re very cute, Lia. Yet going out on the landing that moment... It was a suspicious move. Why did you help me out?. Or, sooner, saved me?’

‘Seems like I fell for you last year. That’s why. And now tell me what shit are you in?’

‘I wish I knew...’

\* \* \*

## 9

It wouldn't be over. Never. That's how it is different from all other wars, be it punching mugs in a surge of hostilities between two neighborhoods or an imperialistic world war of any number decimating the numbers of humans in this world—sooner or later they end, unlike this war. This one knows no stop. Ever. Because it is the war of sexes.

I am entirely with you in the opinion that it is a hell of a lot of an uphill job to dig any plausible underlying reason for such a bizarre warfare or to bring to light its basic moving force, or to discern and unravel the complexity of its cause and effects.

Still and yet, it is there, the indefinite and infinite war of sexes.

Why? Hard to say, might be out of habit acquired in the workings of the warring Maya—gore on teeth and talons of everyone fighting everyone else.

You may deny, discard my blabber, and decorate your walls with portraits of Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi yet deep in your heart you know that I am right. Just as I knew before sharing it with you...

Irreconcilable war of sexes. Adversaries resort to cunning detour maneuvers, concealing their movements, defrauding each other, disguising their intentions, poking for weak spots, jumping from the rear, assaulting the flanks, launching open attacks to overturn the resistance of opposing force, penetrate the

strongholds, take prisoners, and finally —

‘I beg your pardon, could you tell if the POW’s are used for perverted purposes, please?’

‘Yep, at times it happens but if it’s what you’ve popped up here, kid, then X-rated pulp fiction is on another shelf. So get the fuck out of here! Make sure I’ll never see your map around!’

– disengage to regroup, make truce to renew their stock of ammunition, mobilize reserves, enhance their motivation and clench each other in the next of battles!

Whichever changes might the warfare methods see, whatever new trends and innovations refurbish dangles in the parade uniform, there sticks out, stable and firm, indisputable fact – this war is inescapably there, it knows no end...

Like in any war of other sorts, in WoS we also meet civilians not subject to conscription for their age or health considerations. We also may see refusenik-weaklings advocating for unisex as well as fallen or unknown heroes, mean traitors, and deserters tearing their insignia off in panicky run, profiteers selling most advanced and second-hand weaponry, turn-coats, and those ardently desiring revenge... no, not even by means of the spectral analyses could we account for all birds of different feather tinges in their heated battles as demands of them their great Mother-Nature...

(And—I pray!—let’s ignore, mournfully, the LGBT internal hostilities (they keep to no war conventions whatsoever!). The topic by its slipperiness calls for special preparation, a mindset



screwed up differently, and familiarity with multi-volume works on their folklore, rites and rituals, which is beyond the limits of our modest discourse. Yet, we have all reasonable grounds to suppose that in their peripheral (as of yet) pinching scrambles war stays war, it can't change its spots or nature smelly of pollution. Period.)

The entire picture grows even more complicated and aggravated by the undeniable fact that within sexes we do not find the cohesion to be expected of individuals trained for fighting to achieve common goals in the theater of operations. Damn, no! Each one remains a freelancer with their eye peeled for a game to their liking. Everyone for themselves and let old Nick grab the hindmost, as advised by the time-honored adage (conceivably of Celtic origin if you ask me).

(What?! Who's back there mumbled under their their nose "As if cluster-fucking were not a united act."? Hey, kid! You've been told to leave! Get lost at once together with your stubborn ass!)

When we scrutinize the matter attentively, with proper zoom in to details, the tendency to confirm one's supremacy over any other one's, even belonging to the same sex, is hard to overlook. Noteworthy, that a fighter of the same primary sexual characteristics as yours is not your warranted comrade-in-arms and ally but sooner, with unscrupulous willingness, would sleep with your enemy – your personal individual counterpart in the current confrontation. A saddening yet irrefutable fact...

And at this point we draw closer to some stuff completely unapproachable for its complexity. Some inexplicably incomprehensible anomaly. Something that brings you to white heat by its elusive hazy nature. Yes, you might have guessed already, it's said about the shamefully chaotic deviation from the established order of things in the reliable and stable system. However, a serious researcher is not supposed to omit presenting it, at least in a brief outline.

Voluntary surrender. The suicidal idiocy of humble coming to your enemy with a wide earthenware dish in hands to present your foe with your head fried to tender and peppered with exotic spice. Technically, a pretty tricky stunt it is yet metaphorically easy as falling off a log.

A phenomenon of the order that hardly deserves anything better than to be named with a four-letter term, which is applied to brand it, ineffaceably.

“L” for blah, “O” for blah-blah, “V” for something else, and “E”... well, Ella Fitzgerald can rehearse you better here...

\* \* \*

Being a vigilant sort of a guy, V since long (he was sixteen then or something about) learned of Secret Weapon in possession of the fair sex, besides the standard armament from the list in the arsenal of their sex which is quite visible. The one thing he did not know though was if all of them were equipped with the SW. He'd rather prefer they were not, after a couple of encounters when he was targeted directly.

Geez! Just recollection of the aftershock still gave him creeps. The intelligence on SW, whose effect he learned firsthand was never shared by him. Something stopped him on the very brink of a disclosure. Always.

How to put it more or less intelligibly? Well, it's, like a sudden sway fills her face with a clot of condensed loveliness accumulated by their sex since the times of Nefertiti till the current calendar day (strange as it seems, none of Miss Americas ever added a jot to that quintessence of beauty by their scrape-groom-polished sugar-babish charm) and she shoots the radiant beam from her joyous eyes full of assured winner's happiness.

In short, she bangs you with a ball lightning. Boy, o boy! It is some Big Bang!.

Love at first sight, huh? Now V knew the trick in detail.

Fortunately, he happened to be of love-proof type. Even when banged, shell-shocked, confused, overwhelmed by delighted admiration, he withstood manly and took the second look. Which served him rescuing antidote.

Still, thanks for the jolt, babe. It was a close call, I swear.

(It's interesting to note, that individuals of V's sexual affiliation never used anything like SW on him. Saving their balls? Or was he not a kosher game for them? Okay, forget it, it's just an aside.)

However, what is to be is not to be given a slip to. Nah. The Supreme Court of the cheesed off stars at a session in full force delivered their verdict. V got sentenced to lifelong love.

No SW was used to imprison him. The girl he fell in love with (though the poor chap didn't even guess it) looked cool, indifferent, introvert. Later, the ice was broken, melted, brought to the boiling point. Intense rolling, jumping, the lid blown away, all usual sorts of thing.

He never admitted loving her, not even when eye-to-eye with himself. Without witnesses. Naively, he called it "liking".

'Yes, I like her. Definitely. No use of denying.'

Damn fool! You can't deceive yourself! Which, by the by, no one can do for all their argumentative skills. It's easy, of course, not to give a bean, especially when trained in self-cheating, press the lie into this or that vacant metastasis and forget about it for the entire incubation period, and then there would be no time to give it a second thought, there would crop up other problems, progressing...

He did his best in earnest, no shirking in his endeavor to shed off the uncalled-for "liking", he did try to overcome the lingering spell. Radically and consistently applied he strong drinks, hot sluts, and Irish luck gambling.

The mixed up potion stalled and, despite his covert support, proved its ineffectiveness. He knew that he was in love. And so was she because he was loved in return.

Ha! Really? Ho-ho-ho!

Yes, yes, yes, yes! She told him that herself.

The day was pleasant, tame and thoughtful, full of the soft sunshine. They stood on the platform in a railway station. She

smiled at him and said:

‘Remember me as I am right now, when I love you. Let it be your recollection of me, wherein I’m in love with you and haven’t turned yet a bad nasty bitch.’

‘You? Bad? That’s im-pos-sible!’

‘No incantations work when you’re not a witch.’

The rest is history. They split. His life turned zombie’s half-existence. Or, maybe, retarded waiting in the stagnated limbo queue, neither life nor death.

Then there was another railway station platform some place in the middle of nowhere. And black night all around. He got it – no way to stand it any more. And he collected the number erased from the memory long ago. Collected without a hitch, automatically.

His voice betrayed him, yet he managed to hiss the incantation thru his vocal cords. For the first time in his life he did it:

‘I-love-you.’

Immediately, he fell into a scathing-hot whirlpool of shame, understanding how useless was that belated yell of the helpless enchanted soul doomed to indefinite bondage. And there was also rage at the fucking shithead, himself. And also, a feeble hope that he was not heard—behind his back an endless drag freight train thundered heavily over the rail junctions. He rang off.

Still later, his buddy Lex shared, avoiding the eye contact, that in opinion of his, V’s, ex-girlfriend, he, V, was the unsurpassable champion in sex.

That's how she sent—care of his friend—the antidote he needed so badly...

\* \* \*

# 10

‘Wanna get out of here?’

‘The place is nice, actually, but... say it again? Is it a one-night stand invitation, huh?’

‘Depends... maybe a challenge, sporty?’

‘Whose field?’

‘Quick to pick the clue makes Jack a welcome mate’.

‘Yummy Jenny makes even dull Jack witty’.

‘Jennys are not after stand-upper apps, a Tom vibrating with dedication, strong, steady, and reliable suits them better’.

‘Then I’m your man full of vibes and throbbing in advance.’

‘Slow down, Charlie! Don’t spill your zest before the final whistle, that’s not cricket.’

‘I’m with you for 100 per cent. Test drives is the must when dealing with cats from a sack’.

‘Not down that road, Danny! Talking cars don’t turn me on’.

‘And what else is there? Occupying Mars? Agricultural commodities in stock? Ha! I know! How about carrot-grating combined with bean-counting?’

‘Much warmer, Johnny. Actually, I pull for linguistics. Body language, phonetic approach, you know... By the by, Benny, your that ‘carrot-grating’ sounded convincingly, and at beans counting you licked your lips in time.’

‘For the record, sweetheart, I’m more of a manual jobber,

hauling ashes, you know, rowing along a rolling river... suchlike stuff gives a delicious feel of strenuous joy to my sinewy frame’.

‘Muscle exertion? Something you can safely count on by my side, brawny Larry.’

Disgusting honks of failure indicated GAME OVER!. Black X within red tire popped up and froze smack bang in the screen center.

V shook his head in the manner of a cook whose hands are too greasy to shoo a brazen fly off the forehead, and dealt a loud spank his knee. Surprisingly, no smudge of fat soiled his pants leg fabric, but nevertheless, none of them felt much pleased by so rash a gesture, both the knee and his right palm did not approve of the whipping slap. In gesture of determination, he dropped his Samsung into the pocket, and leaned abruptly onto the chair back.

‘Sh-shucks!’ commented V. ‘Too soon. I haven’t got into my usual groove and stuff, you know.’

‘May happen to anybody, especially after such a stress. Don’t blame yourself,’ soothingly stroke Lia the dent in his sniffling ego.

‘Awesome kind of you,’ agreed V. ‘What’s the score?’

‘Home won 2 : 1, in three sets. The final game stats attests high sensitivity of your reflexes, and quick penetration the opponents psyche. Yet all the tries at guessing the guy’s name, which this time was “Frankie”, slipped.’

‘Screw Frankie!’ V couldn’t abate his disappointment. ‘Excuse



my French.’

For over an hour they fiddled at computer games to give he thugs, who broke into his apartment time enough to get it that V was not anywhere around. The stratagem increased V’s chances to skip the unwelcome guests whose visit was not meant to have a friendly chat, obviously.

Meanwhile, Lia provided him with black sunglasses, and procured a shoulder-length wig of blonde curls. She also added a trendy female jacket in the bargain. Yet, they still dawdled on playing for time, better be safe than sorry...

Once upon a time, at the dawn of Computer Games Industry (some really dark times they were, kid), CGI assumed the stance of catering for vagaries of taste in any odd ball rolling down the road, forking in whatever direction their brains were tilted or screwed to, anything at all to satisfy milkable gamers.

Arcade games, huh? Wow! Geehooo! Remember? how we were...? Sorry, kid, you was not even projected then...

Yeah, the sweet naive times of Jumping Mario. Mamas and Papas zip-zapped their Tetras, Candy Crash and other hooley hooking the guys fixed on active recreation. All went clippety-click bouncing in between pre-liquid tube monitors and towering PC boxes. Mario jumped high and sprightly before to land his ass onto a prickly cactus. To bolster their deflated self-assessment, young people pressed Pause-Button and plunged into conceiving generation of millennials. Demography, benevolent and happy, smiled on them, folks braced up for getting over to the next level

of the jumping bugger.

However, CGI kept rolling out products for intellectual freaks too, for those snobs fucked in the brains differentially, each to their personal depth. (Well, if you're one of those take it easy and receive sincerely felt respect, bro, 'cause I'm also an erudite shithead, to certain extent.)

To make it more graspable for dummies, just recollect shipment of goods across the Universe to trade for I'm-fucked-if-I-know-what gizmos produced at manufactures of alien motherfuckers. Load it all, back home egg-heads will tell what's what, how and where to apply the stuff in phials with flashy marks Cov-19.

The stardust loving peddlers were clippety-clicking their computer keyboards to choose the navigation route thru asteroid belts, skirting around sudden comets that whooshed by. They rode the crests of huge gravitational waves, those seasoned space-dogs, fucking mules trafficking in the endless loops of warped time God-knows what cargoes in their space ships bays, if you get it what I'm about... Yeah, we do have heard the clattering hoofs under our adventurous asses...

In the dead advanced parlance of managerial humanoids this approach—anything-for-anyone—was called “bifurcation of resources and capacities for a wider coverage and satisfaction of consumer demand”, however, we're for the more straightforward term posed by Belgium economists – “bisexual production process”.

And when there arrived the up-curve of New Wave with New Line unleashed and whipping, giant strides were taken to meet the hyped interests of 6D Hotly Motley Market and, alongside shoot-bang-strip-fuck and other blooming products for wankers of any orientation, you still could come across games based not on the keyboard used as means to hit a short-cut only but for the players to compete in clue duels, like, bandying words with ChatGPT or keeping negotiations with unfriendly aliens orbiting the world, or persuading XIX century public to invest into the NASA's Apollo program and so forth, the sky's the limit.

And just one of those step-into-the-bugger's-boots games became the accomplice in V and Lia's killing the time.

"In Heat" (so the game's name), by its developers prospect, assisted players in mastering and enhancing the skillful use of all their digits and thumbs (occasionally), giving also the opportunity to maintain a well-oiled command of their spelling.

The simplified version of In Heat (whose modification rigidly culled 8 levels, leaving just initial two) have already been recommended for use at high schools in both Southern and Northern Americas (in Utah and Pennsylvania states still remains banned though, as well in the state of Meta in Columbia).

The Ministries of Education in both China and Russia (alphabetically) consider possible use of In Heat pirated version (the doctored application package downloaded at [xyzz.org.asm](http://xyzz.org.asm)).

The Russian Parliament (aka Duma) created Special Commission on Reproduction of Expedient Education Reforms.

There are certain indications that SCREER is inclined to believe that, after all, In Heat could be experimentally allowed and introduced. *However*, (emphasized the Commission) under condition of extracting from school computer keyboards the character buttons for «X», «Π», and «E», coupled with issuing a secretive directive to school authorities to also disable zero and exclamation mark in keyboard layouts. Just in case...

'Well,' said V, 'Seems, like, it's time to shove off.'

'Hope, they won't seize you.' Lia's eager response showed she was still supportive of the conversation. 'Are you not hungry, eh? They came, like, before the lunchtime?'

'Thank you for asking,' answered V scratching in the back of his head, 'After three sets In Heat no one would mind a romantic snack.'

\* \* \*

# 11

...from all the sides... it squeezes... crimps from everywhere... narrow net of scathing slashes... searing bandage of not a single gap... here... there... at every spot...

...crushing... squishing... yet without the unyielding hardness of blacksmith vice's crunching bite... no... like a noose plowing into frail flesh ever deeper as the ratchet pulls on... dissects the sinews... reaches to the bone... nah!. this pain sways... scorches... turns the inside out... it's streaming!. this here pain...

...why... me... what for?.

...huh? what's that? who's there?. there's no room for anything but this pain... no "me" could ever be crammed in here... in this sea of all-devouring tongues of fire... the flame snarls... slices with its fiery fangs... frets the sores anew tears gaping wounds ever deeper... so beastly cruel this pain is... tortures from everywhere...

...none... nothing... not a thing can ever be out there... no space for anything... no room to allow for even a needle point... no "me" can possibly be around here... the place belongs to pain... only pain... nothing but pain...

...yet who?. who's destined to suffer the unbearable?. whose nerves turned to ashes and tatters shriek in the mute agony?. if not for me there would be no pain... the tiniest bubble of

conscience jitters... pops in the choppy ripples of torment...  
hunkers down under the swishing hits of whip tearing the skin  
off from the bared flesh... the executioner is way too trained...  
does not allow the bubble to burst and find its rest in the blissful  
death...

...o woeful... pitiful... beaten... flatten to the last extreme...  
to the final edge... tiny bubble... what for?. why me?.

...whoami?.

\* \* \*

## 12

It didn't take V more than a couple of minutes to persuade himself that the trick was not beyond his potency and, after all, his lips could be trained into the mien of a kinda distended puffy brim in a rubber funnel for colon lavage procedure. Just don't let them gape too wide. The flexibility of lips and close attention to their toeing the right shape line will make of you that glamorous celebrity... sh-shucks! What's the doll's name?. the one of same-sized bosom and behind... only at different altitude from the floor level... when standing... eh? Whatever.

Still, as a man of exceptional valor and perseverance, V snapped his fingers, twice, to spur up the belated recollection. It didn't help. Could this blonde wig have influenced the habitual speed of his mind operation?

Besides, it must be taken into account that currently his stream of conscience was rolling along the issue of chromosome mutations—yes, really, in a couple of generations stuck in the environment of the cow-like thick-lipped beauty queens, that particular shape will become the predominant tool in the struggle for life and all the fairy tales will get fucked up overall because no Prince Charming would ever manage bringing Sleeping Beauty back from those therapeutic funnels with the most hottest of his kisses at her puffy rims... eh? Whatever.

V's melancholy sign entwined with the hiss of the opening

elevator door.

On the way down between the four reciprocally perpendicular walls, some self-proud jock midst the company of fellow travelers, thickening at each level, revved up all the vocabulary and punctuation from his body language signaling full speed how deeply hooked he was by the curls and half-inch gibbosity of V's lips.

As a girl of chastity, V ignored the scumbag's flirting, however, while crossing the lobby he vigilantly marked the weeny, involuntary change that somehow emerged in his gait. Completely inexplicable circular rotations popped up in his, usually quite purposeful and straightforward, stride. Unnatural zap additions. Like, a person brought their car to the garage to have the spark-plugs cleaned but they added a flywheel there too, screwed it in under the hood, the blonde bitch would never get it what's what all the same.

Quite naturally, the situation brought up to his memory the lost and never found scholastic treatise from the darkest streak in the Dark Ages whose author was staunchly driving home (in Latin) the postulate of garments influence on our *modus vivendi* at large, which starts to match the rags donned, the *modus* does.

Yeah, exactly! Bonifacius of Accise it was! A monk from the order of Half-Barefoot Versacceans...

Anyway, he felt alleviated five minutes later by the row of garbage containers lined in a nook of some project's backyard, while cramming the wig and sunglasses into a general purpose



shoulder bag also farmed out to him by Lia.

The influence of the girl's jacket on his sub-conscience he could keep under his control successfully (fortunately, unisex was triumphantly back into the current vogue).

Taking use of the convenient occasion, he relieved himself physically too, onto the back side of the left-end garbage container in the row and, having zipped up his pant's fly, on he walked with the feeling of deep rehabilitation of his masculinity, our broad-shouldered V.

In that, much more self-assured and dignified manner, he returned to the sidewalk, and joined the stream of busily flowing crowd, where each one marched to their destination, presumably. Only V and a negligible number of vagabond loiterers had no particular place to steer to. They just kept walking in the waves of pedestrians. And that served a good therapy measure too letting V bring his walking style back to normal.

Way ahead starboard he spotted an islet of green and crossed the road at the traffic lights to seek safe harbor in the hood greens. An empty bench seat in a quiet side alley became V's mooring pier.

With his back squeezed into the longitudinal spars of wooden beams used in the classical bench construction, the legs (also his) full length out, and the heels firmly planted in the well-trodden sand surface of the walk, he threw his palms up and interlocked the digits. The resulting contraption was slowly lowered behind his head to accommodate its back within that ad-hoc bandage

collar.

It was time to take a breather and plumb the shit he got into, which (it was beginning to dawn on him) was a really deep one – three professionals would hardly be dispatched to perform a piddling trifle, a suchlike mismanagement would contradict the usual logistics at their walk in life...

Yeah, the fortune was, as always, on his side and presently he's relaxing on a bench with his elbows stuck up above his head instead of lying in a puddle of coagulating blood till they arrive to collect the eyesore and zip it up in the body bag.

Miraculously slipped he away and the trap slammed in vain after Lex' alert, at the very last moment, on the phone...

The call, by the by, was the craziest bend in all this mess because Lex got pinched two days before...

Some quagmire of bizarre inconsistencies and no data whatsoever, not a slightest clue, like, go and crack a Sudoku with all the squares in the puzzle left empty... Still and yet, thanks to Lex, V's still alive, by the skin of his teeth, and basking in this frivolous posture on the bench...

Then followed two hours at Lia's place letting the dust settle. Another lucky strike, yes, except for those lost games... But what's the catch? Why was his orderly well-regulated lifestyle derailed so brutally?

V took his phone out and for one whole minute kept watching the only number in the list of received calls, before to swipe it stealthily.

‘Yeah,’ the thick narcissistic drawl of a deep bass protracted to relish its rolling resonance from the personal innards. Miles away from the Lex’ hasty falsetto.

‘May I talk to Mr. Taylor please?’

‘Wrong number, pardner,’ responded the peals of thunder from a dark heavy cloud closing in to choke a frog in the don’t-mess-with-Texas manner, and hung up.

It was that notorious moment when neither deductive nor inductive, nor prepositional, nor any other one from the herd of knobby logics would do any good to syllogistically solidify the dim picture where Lex gives him a call by the wrong-numbered phone which he had picked thru the cage bars in a blockbuster Western from the dumb Sheriff’s pocket. and then returns it cunningly:

‘Look! Look! Sheriff! The thing dropped outta your pocket on the floor!’

In a fit of irritated consternation, V shoved his Samsung back into its stall forgetful that the stallion hadn’t chewed a single oat grain for two days at a stretch. Which spacey attitude could only be excused by the maverick air that started to twirl in his mind a moment before:

*Bury Me Not On The Lone Prairie...*

Now his task was finding a solution to the effing complicated mystery of whose puzzle pieces he had none but a single phone call from his friend that saved his life.

As a long-standing practitioner of thinking, V knew perfectly

well that, first and foremost, you shouldn't strain yourself at that business, at thinking. Excessive sweating is unacceptable here, it is counterproductive.

Whenever aspiring for an unprecedented discovery in any branch of common knowledge, arm yourself with humble patience. Leave all kinds of *veni-vidi-vici* to kid-entertaining Harry Potters and grown-ups-beguiling foxy fuhrers, when you are after your purpose in earnest...

Patient waiting and nothing else remained there for him to do...

However, waiting is not so easy an action as it might seem to an idle bystander. For a discovery of any kind, for nailing down a sufficient explanation for an incomprehensible phenomenon or even for making just one solely right decision you have to spend an enormous amount of time before its consummation. You are not the actor to produce the find, your job is to give it some time for finding you. Hence, you have to wait while it is catching on.

Your role is that of a fisherman awaiting for the catch to strike. Just a split sec before there was nothing whatsoever... strikes! yep! gosh! but it was so simple!

Your humble waiting served the bait because with a bare hook you won't catch anything but the fuck, right? Except for a gaping tin can, maybe, or a ruined shoe with water falling thru the holes...

Wait, wait, and wait – that's what you have to, and also to be ready for the moment when all of a sudden it sparks up, like, the

light within the electric bulb and be grateful it was not an apple this time to swipe across your pate...

Where from?!

Perhaps from your waiting, for all I know. Don't ask me, I was not waiting on the topic "whence"...

And, pray, do not rub my nose into united efforts at "brain-storming". A bunch of egg-head freaks spread their pea-cock tails before each other to show off the crumbs they gobbled from the books of others who did their time in waiting for the revelation...

They are a knot of kids on a raft midst summer pool convincing earnestly each other what a lake lawyer or carp was caught once by their uncle Pete, the brain-stormers are...

Much more productive is a meeting of Amero-Americans on the bison skins spread over the floor in their tepee whose forefathers never suspected they were American citizens without even Green Cards before there appeared the sails full of the wind of avarice in search for routes towards the fabulous treasures of India, when—"the land!" croaked the crow-nest spotting the huge hindrance of a new continent across the further progress.

They are the real champions of waiting before the right decision emerges, the pipe stuffed with thoughtful care circles the council sitting before it would finally strike... Hey! Dozing Bison! You've been sucking at it for too long already, pass the pipe, elder!.

Something from without the tepee walls yanked V up from his

meditation depths. Back on the surface, he once again became available to the calls of the world around. But who was the yanker? Huh?

The penetrating stimulus, which woke V up from his state of concentrated waiting, was the mute look full of kind comprehension that beamed at him from a pair of beautiful brown eyes beseeching his response.

There was no collar with the owner's number or GPS tracker around the puppy's neck. Seeing that V was back at last, the dog dropped belly-first onto the walk, right opposite V, and smiled. Another stray vagabond just like V was calling for his attention. The only difference between the two was a couple of virtual wallets with crypt currencies stashed in the Cloud for a rainy day.

The puppy stuck out its flat leaf of tongue enjoying the calm sun and warm sand to stretch upon.

'What's your name, boy?'

A guttural snarl in response.

'O! Even so? You're a girl?'

A sonorous yap in the affirmative.

'My bad, Lady! No offense intended. So what's your beautiful name?'

The puppy uttered two whimpers.

'Nice to meet you, Toto. I'm V. Are you hungry?'

The bitch sprang up on all the four.

'Let's check for the nearest hot-dog vendor in this neighborhood.'

V got up from the bench and took right tack towards the greens gate whistling wistfully:

*Bury Me Not On The Lone Prairie...*

Where the hell had it, the air, clung to him from like a leech?

The shaggy pup kept close behind tattooing the walk determinedly with her short shaggy paws...

\* \* \*

# 13

‘You alone?’ V couldn’t hide his amazement.

‘I asked her but she snuffed my invitation out, like, leave me alone!. Besides, she’s sore at you for giving her up so too readily. You’re certainly on probation now and should keep your nose clean. That was the message for you put forward straight and clear by her face expression.’

‘I didn’t spill wild promises of rubies in the sky. Besides, did I have much of choice? You, girls, fell for each other at first sight, stuck, fused inseparable! Screamed in delight! All three of you... By the way, how are they getting along, Toto and your Auntie?’

‘The marvel of ideal union. Toto of her own accord fetches for Silva her glasses and the remote control, and Aunt has certainly found in her the most enviable audience to spin out her endless yarn. Faith! And Toto knows how to encourage her gossip by timely whimpers at right moments, like, ‘atagirl!’ or ‘all the men are so mean busters, dear!’. That way she’s turned Aunt Silva’s best crony and they get along just nice and lovely.’

‘Good news! Frankly, I didn’t like the idea of keeping her at the fish tank where I dwell now. All those naughty kids in their dash along the galleries, they simply can run her over in the stampede.’

‘Lame excuses, not a chance kids would harm the cutie-pie, ever. You can only adore the doll.’



‘That’s right it’s only I’d rather not stick out in any way. “The mister with that nice puppy”, you know. No thanks, I need to keep low, be just a face in the crowd. Besides, I hate responsibility for any living thing but myself. What if I let them down? Blast their expectations? It’s easy to roll-out self-justifications to Number One but why to disappoint the other guy? Or put the person at risk? Nah! That’s not in my line. By the by, in Toto there is more of a human than in two-thirds of people that I know.’

‘You wisely keep the weightiest arguments back to fire them off in the end. Yet, life is too unpredictable to be regulated by Genetive AI logic. When making decision, you forgot to ask Toto if she agreed to it. Regardless. Now it’s too late, you won’t get her back from Aunt Silva even for the life of you. Not a chance. So relax, the coast is clear, no responsibilities in sight. Congrats.’

V gave Lia an askew look. A needless precaution though. Sitting by his right side, she was too busy watching a toddler who chased a sizable gaudy ball bouncing along the walk. Two escapees rushing away from a lady with a baby buggy.

She passed the couple on the bench not seeing them, all her attention focused on her responsibility not quite used, as of yet, to the hang of steady upright walking and catching the twitchy dodger, his bright ball.

By passed she the pair of faces, alike to any other in the crowd absent for the moment, seeing them not, the placid faces that suited the serenity of day in the common greens for public

recreation.

Lovers? Not in the least. None of their four hands outstretched to reach for and stake off their property rights for the treasure sitting next to each of them. Close by, yet separately. A married couple? Nah! Are you so naive or an alien on their visit to this world? Together, wed-locked hominids enjoy the lap of nature only in the backyard—their or of their bosom friends, another pair married happily—on a day scheduled for a barbecue, with the kind permission of weather cast.

Most likely, simply siblings or friends, or business partners were these here bench-sitters who the lady with the baby buggy passed by, not seeing...

V liked that face on the right, cool and confident, matching the warm, somewhat thoughtful day, sure of its beauty appealing to all capable of savvy beholding. Yes, beautiful it was, that face with a tiny hump up the nose bridge because of presenting its side view, with the exquisite matte skin beneath the soft shade of her light brown crispy hair made even lighter by the rays of the sun traveling at its glacial pace behind their bench.

And V picked up the same unhurriedness in his ecstatic pleasure (purely aesthetic too) with a palpable admixture of gratitude to the model for a picture which he was destined to never paint. Yet beautiful it was, with God as my witness, her face!.

He knew it as well as you would in his shoes, that he owed her one. As big as life.

Why, it was his life itself! It was she who saved it (the life of the unaccomplished artist) and she (the model never-to-be-painted-by-him) was aware of the fact without any affidavit. Still, she didn't press for anything, and the feeling of not being pressed for the due reimbursement boosted his gratitude and admiration with her friendly lenience expressed so intangibly.

Yes, grateful he was (and we'll never stop spread thick on this point) for that unheralded, intelligently subtle imperceptibility...

Ah, no brush could ever be found to relay all the shades of what he felt on that bench in the greens!.

Besides, it should be kept in mind that V, firstly, had to check how the land lies, why he was hunted and by who.

Really, what the fuc... (no! it's not French as of yet...) what ficus-eater (*sic!*) could ever find fault with unobtrusive V? Screw him!

No discovery or revelation from those quarters had caught on, so all V could do at the moment was waiting...

\* \* \*

The lodging he moved in after the French leave of his hermit cell (of all his belongings only 2TB card grabbed along), not pretentious and reasonably priced, consisted of one room, the kitchen and the restroom in the third level of a Leviathan-like kinda motel girded with safety-barred handrails along the outside galleries in the pragmatic style of Center Pompidou, Paris, only a bit less gutted-out.

One of his crypt stashes had got hacked. The very first one

which he used to learn the shebang. Access turned denied and when he bored thru the new (rather amateurish) password by means of a second-hand notebook from a five-and-dime nearby.

Yes, he missed his PC yet shipping the equipment to his place would make him even more conspicuous than walking Toto up and down. In the README.md file that he kept in the online wallet he perused an instance of creative streak by the cocky hacker—**FUCK YOU, SUCKER!**—in block letters.

V responded with apprehending shrug. Ya, bro, that's life in the world we were shoved in. Today you're riding high and mighty, make sure to collect a plum sum for the day when I visit to check how you are doing. To audit and fleece your assets.

So, he put off ripping the traced-back raider (oho! what an advanced buckaroo! you're versed about VPN, huh? I love the naive innocence of numskulls).

Yes, V withheld an immediate flogging in favor of an imminent one because of his addiction, which he still reckoned a funny gambol though it avidly cannibalized his time, grabbed a too big share of it as for a fleeting whim.

To consider it soberly, the friendly gift from Lex turned the classical Trojan Horse (the one invented by Ulysses and not by guys at Kaspersky laboratories at the dawn of computer virology). The Horse positively undid V into an addict keenly tracing all sorts of thoughts by other guys—be they funny or dull, or gross, or pathetic—and some motley crew they were, the thinkers, of any national affiliation, from a fish-trapper in the

Amazonia selva to a bookkeeper at a Shanghai bank. He could read their thoughts thanks to the inbuilt translator, the ubiquitous software for any platform, which filtered the raw data angled from the noosphere. And it was an in-deep translation at that, surpassing purely linguistic rendering of languages, both extinct and modern.

V knew none of extinct languages (and never sympathized necrophiles), however, you can't imagine a contemporary thinker contemplating on the new tax introduced by the Pharaoh Treasury for the war against those fucking Assyrians, can you? (Excuse my French, but so it stood in the transcript.)

At times they were horridly straggly, the thoughts, they did not flow like a coherent stream. No! You had to untangle their ties-and-knots of interlaced fragments on this or that and other whatnots. Entwined like mating snakes, they were waiting for V to somehow suss out, order, and compile into more or less sensible picture, which job demanded a mindset like his, hence – the addiction...

Yet right now, V was on high not with foreign thoughts but with this pleasant day and the cute girl by his side...

She felt his stare and turned her head to the eye-to-eye contact... Gosh! But they indeed could make a fine team!

'The other day,' said Lia, 'I saw your friend in the elevator. He doesn't know me. Left at your floor. From our landing I heard the new tenants in your apartment told him they knew no Vs nor fivers.'

Soundlessly landed into the V's brains another piece from the vexing puzzle.

'Thank you, Lia,' said V. 'You're simply a treasure. Priceless.'

His hand reached for her shoulder and gave it a light squeeze, tenderly.

V got thunderstruck! He never intended that move! His hand did it of its own accord, even without a last-minute notice! Gross insubordination! Where from? And at the moment when he felt so fed-up with all the mysteries, puzzles, and enigmas!

Damn! The buggers proliferate too quick...

\* \* \*

# 14

...o! if only were I blessed with a son sprung from my loins!  
How I wish I had!

Nope. God hasn't bestowed upon me a heir to my thoughts desultory and anxious... But I would spare no effort in raising, by the most dedicated parenting, a paragon of valor, prowess, and impeccability of my unbegotten boy!.

...woe to me! This house looks more like a chicken coup these days: cluck-cluck-cluck! Cackle-chuckle-chortle! Or wailing and hollering at each other. All of them, starting with the most esteemed matrona, Doña Catalina, as barren as the dismal hills and arid fields around, with whom for so many years I have been dragging our mutual yoke of matrimony... and my sister, an inveterate exhibit of widowhood, a stockpile of indisputable morality, with her stinging tongue is no better... and even she, my beloved one, my comforter and consolation now, in these days of withering, when my faculties decline and strength drains away to almost exhaustion. She is my only child, the sweetest fruit, the free gift from a juicy blond bitch in Lisbon, my military trophy for the exploits in the memorable glorious campaign for making the Peninsula one whole state...

...the outcome was clear to everyone in advance, the Portuguese were only going thru movements of a military resistance, counteracting with the languor akin to giving in by a

slut spread out under a village lout in the barn: “Get off me, fool! No! Never! Not a chance until I pull my skirt up!”

...their reluctance to fight for their freedom allowed us to freely enter their capital, where flared up that passionate affair of mine. Oh! she was good! my fair Lady, the Hottest Bitch of Lisbon! and smart enough to find me later, in due time, and hand over the basket with a baby, my natural daughter, Donna Isabelle, the load thereof, my child—albeit, not by law—the precious gift by Nature ... Yes, next Sunday, on St. Trinity, my daughter will become twenty years old... not baby anymore she’ll outyell and silence any of the hens in this here bedlam, yes, she can, shrieking louder and shriller than Maria, her maid...

...how on earth can a man of my meager means at this most perilous moment since the creation of the world—run such a funny farm of crazy chickens?

...although, God’s honest truth, they master distaff trade thoroughly, at times it’s only their skills in wielding needle-n-thread that wards off hunger from crossing this old house’s threshold... they sew from morning until late at night, whenever, by leave of Providence, a customer would suddenly appear...

...and coming of the proper age, he would become a real man, a brave, with my advice and guidance, my nonexistent son... mark well, my child! just two of all worldly professions are worth of picking. This couple surpass any other earthly path due to the gallantry of their nature...

The first, most essential by its necessity, profession is that of



Warrior... Soldier whose true goal is not to win the day, but to bring peace to people... Warrior-Soldier pays for peace with his bleeding wounds or lost limbs, perhaps, even with his dear life... to give peace to people – this is his duty, the goal of his chivalrous vocation... overcoming all the hardships, duress, impediments thrown in the way of military service to his people.

...the second comes Scholar... It is he who gives light to mankind, teaches them, enhances comfort obtainable in their lives, puts new powers within their reach, the power which man cannot even comprehend. But Scholar goes on, relentlessly, paying the harsh price for advancement by his unceasing toil, and sleepless nights, and scanty meals, before to die in his track, still craving for unreachable absolute knowledge...

...Warrior and Scholar, these are the two truest characters who cater for the human beings... and both are distinguished by high and noble code of honor... not too surprising though because every Spaniard is a direct descendant of some or other hero in the grand ranks of glorious knights—be it a peddler or a vagrant barber he'll claim an ancestor from key figures in the Reconquista, dangling from this or that root in his family tree, or (taking a shot at the deeper introspection) maybe even a chef-cook at the itinerant court of Charlemagne...

...at present, the knight's duties grew less in number than they have used to be, which noticeably simplifies and shortens the knightly code... only two rules still abide, and you will easily remember them, my son: serve Lord, stands first; be loyal to the

King... That's it, one-two, both brief and simple to learn...even if the high throne is seated by a stupid asshole, rooting into like a leach... regardless... do not break your oath, stay loyal as I was to old fart Philip, retarded moron... serve, yet keep in mind the sequence of commandments – God's will is above orders from a mortal, however big were their title or rank...

...ah! what a brilliant plan was conceived by me in the years of captivity! not only to capture the fortress that guarded the port and the Viceroy, Pasha Hassan, we would have regain back half of the Mauritanian lands, as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow... given the number of Christian slaves and Christian prisoners of war compared to the city's population... all that was needed – just one dark night to secretly deliver a shipload of weaponry into that cave in cliffs of the secluded cove, and in the morning we would carry out the God's will according to the plan I was inspired with by His Providence...

I sent an explanatory petition to King Phillip—through a Christian ransomed by the monks Redemptorists—detailing the plan... but there was no answer in any of the ways proposed by me for giving us the signal communicating accomplishment of the preparations and setting the date...

...five years in the bondage and five attempts at breaking out... twice, mad with fury, the Viceroy was ordering to throw the noose about my neck... foaming at his mouth, Pasha Hassan, half-choked on his frenzied threats, curses, blasphemy, wild shrieks... still and yet, I'm alive till now... what stopped him? the

will of Lord, no doubt, as well as my deportment of not caring a fig, my being ready for any fate... three years out of five I was shackled in iron, dragged jingling chains by each my step before the monks brought 1000 ducats, the price set by the Pasha for cutting me loose... four years more it took for paying back to the good people who chipped in for my ransom... but never doubted I my luck, always full of hope – if not this time, the next try would pull off!

...because I always was a favorite of fate, looked after since being born, of which my ever-present quality there could be no doubts, and when at dire trials, I trusted that whatever is is right, and the only truth is which is present inside any living man, it's known to everyone, including those who reject it... yes, because it's so obvious and simple – live by truth and forget cares, let come what may, God's with you, He knows better...

...any trial impeding our progress by the injunction of malignant stars makes only sweeter the imminent redemption...

...am I happy? Yes! Because I know exactly what is happiness. You don't need gold nor glinting stones to be happy... dark wine, white cheese, a lump of soft bread, an inkpot accompanied by a quill and, of course, a couple of sheets of paper – not a too tiring burden, huh? And yes, don't forget to take a guitar along... aha! Now you're all set to go after your daily share of happiness.

Start out in the morning to a mature tree among the vastitude of bone-dry hills and fields in our La Mancha and there under the lispng whisper of its rustling leaves in the boughs splayed to

all the quarters watch the growth and wane of one more happy day in your life...

...no, we never split, my luck and I, at any time of my life I rode the very crest in the tide of my benevolent fortune... as a green lithe youth with fluffy growth in my jowl and upper lip, I fancied writing poems and those were praised by both my friends and tutors at the university... which one of those that I attended as a free auditor? where did we live then? in Alcala or Salamanca? well, doesn't matter... the family moved way too often, always on the run... my father, Lord have mercy on his poor soul, had a light hand at applying leeches and, besides, he was well-skilled in the art of giving men good looks by close shave, which two talents kept him afloat in the hard life of a constant fugitive from debts and creditors, poor Papa...

...at all events, it was none but jejune rhyme-jingling, those infantine opuses of mine, no better than the bosh turnout by laureates of the present day out-squirting the witless lace of their kinda verses for the clique of friends and mentors ... in certain matters we, mankind, stay incorrigibly stable despite the flow of centuries...

...then for at least a year I had to tread the poorly paved lanes of Naples and the Eternal City, in the service of Cardinal Acquaviva, in the wake of my post-haste quitting Madrid necessitated by that silly duel... before my finest hour struck, which coincided with the pivotal point for all the Christendom – the Sublime Porte went out to enslave Europe and make it one

more Turkey's domain.

...I enrolled the armed forces of the Holy League and—thanks to my luck!—did not miss out taking part in the naval battle, where the fate of all the world quivered in the scales... two-and-a-half-hundred ships from our side carried 26,000 soldiers on the crisp October morning to discover the enemy in the Lepanto Strait... the vessels in the fleet of Sultan considerably surpassed, in numbers, us, however, the battle was unavoidable and both great armadas were slowly cutting down the distance between them...

...from early in the morning I suffered fits of excruciating fever... Captain of the *Marquesa*, aboard which I served as a private, ordered me to go down into a cabin on the lower deck, however, my incessant pleading made him change his mind, weary of hearing my unquellable entreaties, he put me in charge of the felucca manned with a crew of twelve... how could I ever bring out my gratitude to you, O, gracious Fortune?!

...that was a glorious day. the cannons put upon the ships confronting each other roared all over the sea depths, the clouds of powder smoke rose, twirling, up into the sky's azure, the fumes' whiteness competed with the streaks of foam on the crests of waves whipped up by the inconstant wind, which more than once changed its direction on that day... my men, experienced sailors, rowed with all might and main... we were the first to reach the flagship of their left squadron and rammed the galley's side, breaking through the palisade of oars bristling across our

way.

Swiftly from our felucca, sprung up two assault ladders with iron grapples on their tops to claw into the gunwale of the mastodonic larboard overhead... and off we rushed! up! on! aboard! We, the indomitable dozen under my command!

...what followed calls for a score of Homers to relate the uproar in seething deadly skirmish, clangs of swords, the snappy fragments from turbulent turmoil... I somehow didn't notice two shots from arquebuses into my chest, though the bullets pierced the armor... all of the world went spinning about the tip of my sword... the hit of a stray cannonball made useless my left arm, but in the battle rapture, I still kept hacking forth—ahead!—to cut down the royal standard of Egypt streaming from her stern... down fell the standard and covered a swaying wave, "Mercy!" shouted the flagship's crew, surrendering on knees, half thousand of their comrades killed in the battle kept silent, strewn about the galley's decks...

...and when the sun of the great day went down giving way to the approaching night, everyone in the victorious fleet of the Holy League knew already – the victory was owned to the generalissimo's wise strategy and gallantry of a 23-year-old private... the pair of bullet wounds in the chest oozed blood for a couple of years more, my left arm hangs lifeless from the shoulder and till my last day will be, like, a withered vine... sorry, no way to play you, my guitar... fare the well!

...I was then both too proud and too young to get it that any

battle you enter into will end in your defeat, ineluctably, because there is no other outcome ... Señor Time, the Grim Umpire in the duel, will see to your defeat...

...so what else is there for me? besides being happy on sunny days?

Ha! here enters the main fortune of all that a person can only hope for in their life—Freedom! nothing whatsoever equals the feeling of being free!

...that's my walk in life – being free and happy... and there's more! as a self-styled scholar, I fill my days with scientific observations and pretty soon I am to check in person the qualities of absolute freedom delivered by kind Señor Death to every mortal... is there any higher degree of freedom? Hardly so because you become free of your debts, diseases, of your worn out body in the sack of sagging skin... all that is left behind, together with hunger, wars, fear of death...

...beyond everything... all's over... there's only rest and freedom – isn't that the sweetest of the gifts of all you ever be bestowed by life?

\* \* \*

...and on my way to the Group HQ that morning, there started, like, flashbacks to the beginning of our affair, as if I needed them, the fucking recollections.

My girlfriend Ninka the Champion-Screwed, each of her holes at ready for rapid deployment sooner than Jack Robinson yells his „knife!“, as mean a bitch as they go, she's still a buddy you can rely on, any time. So she it was to kick them off, the relations.

In that our usual cafe on the corner we were sitting when she speaks up from her pink iPhone, 'Yo! Check out the toothsome lover-boy!'

'What's up?' sez I. 'Your ex rolled out another of his selfies?'

'Don't you ever bring up,' Ninka sez, 'that fucking Kwazzimodo!'

So, well, I took a peep at and saw, yeah, quite a grabbable ugly-&-sexy. A thick beard trimmed close to his map, and jolly eyes, you get it at once – nothing of a bore with a pain in his arse there.

'Hey, Nin,' sez I, 'wanna bet the Ace heads to be loaded for a reshuffle in my deck?'

Ninka gave me a sore squint up from her iPhie yet kept zipped up for she's well in the know none of them would ever get off the hook if I've zeroed in on the guy to have a bit of fun with. That's why she kept her peace, like, a kinda lady of proper breeding.



But hooking them is just a dead cinch when you're a profesh in the trade. 'Supreme potshots-taker' called me my the last but one ex. Also a jolly guy he happened.

Nothing's easier than picking those dummy mushrooms, they stretch up, rise on their toes—me, me, me! pick me for your basket!—all ready to blow off their roots and jump into.

The rest is a potshot. You find that eager mushroom on Facebook, make sure to click-like his avatar mug (that's the must), then add a couple of "wow!" emojis under wise shit on his wall, which they share year after year, with wolf packs in the background, like, "The herd tremble when a gangsta wakes up!" or maybe "The rules of justice are set up by the strong!" You also may sprinkle a couple of wink emojis or in black sunglasses, which do excite them, so as to make a dead kill. And that's it! Check the stopwatch, in no later than half-an-hour he knock-knocks at your account with the friend request if only he was active on the net, sure thing. Anyway, the boob would be run down within 24 hours.

As if the cat is left with any other choice, huh? No loophole after one glimpse at my avatar. I do like the picture myself. The tits at ready like the bow of a cruise icebreaker for the wealthy who tour the Polar seas. The face turned to the winning angle (three-quarters), the parted lips rigged in a welcome smile of both promise and expectation. The cat's cock head blackouts the brains in his upper noggin and, all full of heat and vibes, unable to think of anything but iboning me in privately personal

communication by Messenger, he sends the request to be my friend for chatting forth and back seen by no peepers.

Messenger's my lab to X-ray them thru their egg-shells. If that's a gasbag or touched in his head with political issues or climate changes he gets unfriended without a further notice. Go play with yourself, asshole! Likewise the guy who every other day rolls out selfies where he leans against another BMW or Porsche, that's certainly an auto mechanic who I promptly ditch – we need no alxies here! The rest need closer attention and I allow them to go on with their show.

In short, after a week of texting and pics exchange he was not sieved out and I went out for the kill in earnest. What else could a girl do when smack bang in the middle of winter he sponsors your week-long vacation in Sochi or, maybe, Turkey. Anyways, there was some sea in the pics and selfies though I never walk in further than knee-deep for the fear of goddamn sharks, you know.

'Next time,' sez he, 'we'll ride the Venice gondolas and stroll along the Elysian Fields in the Capital of the World.'

He knew the Geography tip-top, better than National Geographic TV Shows, he did.

"Next time" means in between his business trips which the Group HQ sent him to all the time.

..besides the Geography he knew about the whole kit and caboodle of things and was good at fucking too. Yep, as practiced

a romantic as advertised by his beard on FBook. He knew how to set you floating and cum wildly, he did. Not like those boars stuffed with green from their old men who know only doggie style and hookers.

All what a girl needs is to be treated as a person. Then she'll have you banging high and all on the house.

Well, I mean fucking a good sport is fun. Though it depends on the girl too, greatly. Keep him encouraged by often praise, admire his bone. Pride makes them spread their wings, extends all their parts. Yee-hoo! Well, and at coming or simulating, scream all stops pulled it's never be overmuch. And then, as if it's your last words, groan out, 'O, my God! Two of you undone me, you, babe, and your one-eyed buster!' That way, he'd start pushing his level-best limits so as to live up to the image.

First, I was, like, his call girl in between his business trips. Those lasted differently from half a month to a three-four months in that two-year hitch of our free love relationship. And then I moved to his place, after his divorce. The ex-wife had taken the kid but he paid no alimony because there was an accident and the boy died. God my witness, I don't gloat at other folks' misfortune, not me, never, still it's good she did not frazzle his nerves in a spousal support litigation.

That was our natural wedlock. He comes back home from his trips and we shake bones till the next departure. He had a nice body, streamlined, not a beefy body builder, yet sinewy. Before enrolling the Group he was a Captain in the army and

kept himself toned up, morning runs and stuff.

He had a couple of tattoos, who does not have them now? Not too braggy though, a commonplace skull on his right forearm and a line on the opposite “Seeking For The Shore” in clear lettering.

Getting along quite well we were in our relationship. Neither alky nor junky, a normal guy he was.

Yeah, at times we got ecstasy high or used Viagra, not often though. The high was fine, no denying, yet not all yours because the stuff somehow ripped off its share and the next day you are busted empty and dried up and wanting not a thing at all. Same as after a big C recreational party.

Only at times he, like, black-outed, stalled flat, even at the dinner table. The eyelids open wide and some frozen glint would enter the eyes. The fucking zombie look gave me the shivers at first.

‘Hey, where are you?’

‘Sorry, babe, my bad, got lost in thought.’

‘Thought of what?’

‘Regardless. Doesn’t matter...’

O, sure, big boys, big secrets. Till you’ve laid them up. Then tender stroking his bighead the right way, no direct questions, no haste. He’d tell you all, night after night.

Now, the hardest is the first to clip. More so if they’re unarmed. You kinda get a wanker-handcramp before those pop-out eyes. Then a loud round, and there’s no man already but a bundle of meat, riddled, oozing blood. But after that it goes

without a hitch, like, an automate conveyor-line. The trick is not let them fix you with their stare.

Well, in short, he left the army and landed into the elite Group who farmed out specialists for protecting customers' security, were they a private person or a state government no matter while paying ready money. Syria, Africa were his business trips' destination, mostly.

'Ever happened a black cunt not fucked?'

'You're stuck in fucking like a happy pig, no other thought in your screwed-up head.'

'And who did you protect in that fucking Syria?'

'Oil fields.'

'And in Africa?'

'Gold mines, diamond mines. Pits, in short.'

'From who?'

'Well, from all kind of terrorists. Americans too, some fucking bullies...'

I couldn't help tripping him there. 'Why to care if you're not in the army?'

'You can't dig it, a regular for a day is a regular for life, defending the Motherland is his duty.'

'O, sure because the Mother-fucking-land's ass' wider than my girlfriend Ninka's, so when she squats to shit the shade overcast half-Africa'

'Politically ignorant bitch!' sez he. 'I'll drive it home to you the hard way!' And he tumbled me flat on the floor-rug by the bed.

...when the Special Operation War was started, I went with him. 'Enough,' sez I, 'of your uncontrolled business trips, you're anything but a trustworthy family man, by your looks. Your pecker needs a hole every other day. Besides, the war is not overseas, no visas necessary. And by my side you'll have regular meals, be kept well-groomed and off insanitary bunker fucking.'

On our last night in Moscow we visited a super restaurant aboard a yacht moored in the Moscow-river. They rip off the guests there ex-fucking-orbitantly but nothing doing, romanticism is an expensive sport.

It's there, on that luxury yacht, he asked to marry him, officially. Yep, wit a diamond ring in the small box, everything like in a high-styled soap-opera.

'I wrote a report,' sez he, 'to the Group management, to consider you my wife, in case I got killed. The Group pays a plum compensation to the dispensed personnel relatives.'

'Fuck their compensation!' sez I. 'It's you I need, not their shitty dollars!'

So, on arrival in the war, I rented a decent house to get settled there and to his field commander's duties he was riding by his camouflaged SUV, like, a camouflaged bank worker without a necktie.

War is a fucking hodgepodge, whore-and-madhouse, two in one. They've driven there birds of each and every feather. Both the Russian army, and the specialists from the Group, and the volunteer convicts raked up at prisons. Whatever was his crime

and stretch, the convict signs the contract and—if not killed in six months—he’s a clean citizen, pardoned and free. Besides the wild companies from the Caucasus, bearded all of them, cackling in their dark language. And Syrians too, contracted by the Group in their country. And mercenaries from India or someplace...

In short, all the horde was raised to liberate Ukraine from the cussed fascism.

The liberators all too twitchy-edgy, strung because of this here fucking war. Half of them drugged or drunk, you see it in the look of their frost-bitten optics, the eyes bulging out like binoculars. And every mudak carries this or that firearms and there’s no telling when or what will go off in their contused brains.

But the most godawful thing that you start coming to terms with the fucking madhouse, you’re getting used to and, like, become one of that crazy crew.

I used to wearing the fatigues and felt myself how quick it made me switch over to the casual army talk. Who fucking cares to watch their mouth there? You speak short-cuts so that they’d get it quicker.

Not much trouble about bugging though. Even if the bully was under influence, I flashed the Group’s chevron—the merry bare skull on the fatigues’ sleeve—and the fucker began eating his own shit.

And in war you’re in a hurry all the time, like, being late, desperately, for something. You live posthaste. Even when, like,

there's nowhere to hurry to, you keep speeding up. Meals gulped away almost before they're begun, scurried quickies. Move it! Giddy up!

Why hurry? Where to?

Still you can't help being on the run. Constantly. Except for, maybe, a barbecue party. But even then there sits in your guts down the belly some clot, nagging all the time. And at an explosion, no matter if the bang was close or distant, it turns a kinda hard pebble, that fucking clot. At a party it kinda retreats and let you relax but now and then the bitch pings back, intoxication or no intoxication.

The parties were held at the house we rented. His buddies came too. Cliff. Viking. By the Group's regulations the employees should call each other only with their monikers even at the dinner table. And they came not alone but with their war-time wives, WTW, they picked from the liberated local girls. One was a blonde, the other had black hair. As if they had much of a choice, the chicks. That's life. Even in a whorehouse a girl needs a 'roof' to be protected, someone she could count on. Viking and Cliff often swapped their WTW's, at one party the brunette's his squeeze and otherwise the next time. Only we, the hosts, stayed stable.

In war the meanest shit in guys froths up. I hate when they torture prisoners to make a video, at times you can't say who's who because both sides rigged in the like fatigues, and then upload to the internet how they undo the man. For kinda



propaganda ends, to frighten the hell out of the enemy. Or made him knee and squash his head with a sledgehammer. Dirty motherfuckers.

The sky in war is also different, it simply hangs overhead, you feel, like, pressed down, and you stop looking up, if only for a short glance, so as not to jinx-attract a missile bombardment or a drone fuck-banging from the blue to make you start with that fucking pebble, the size of a tennis ball already, in your guts.

In war there's nothing of the life you lived before it, sitting in the cafe at the corner and chatting with Ninka of nothing in no haste, and it doesn't matter where you look, up or down, and nobody rushes by like crazy, no bangs, no screams...

And also that hateful feel at times that all of us are, like, traveling in a long speed train, a huge rambling beast of cars thunders along the track, the wheels hit rail joints sooner-sooner-sooner, and every passenger knows for sure that the track's destroyed someplace ahead, and any next second we'll go tumbling in these metal cages screeching their huge squeal...

That's why that haste is there and you can neither eat nor fuck with pleasure...

...they liberated some important city. The fighting and bombardments over, he took me over there, like, on an excursion. The city pretty large for those liberated, the most of civilians were already deported, especially kids. No traffic to speak of, only armed vehicles and small buses tabbed "Press" who came to shoot reports for their TV channels.

At some local hall they convened a big press-conference and the Group sent my hubby to take the floor there as a good looking field commander. That's why we went on that trip in the first place.

Yet, we arrived too early for the grand affair and to kill the time went wheeling about the city. Passers-by were scanty, a rare pair per block in the sidewalks and those too looked more like retired zombies.

Then he swerved into some mighty huge factory or something. The gates in all the buildings wide open and not a single living soul around. There happened bombardment holes in the road and walls yet the buildings stood erect.

He pulled up at random and we left the SUV. Complete emptiness and silence around. We entered a nearby building, bigger than a football field, dead silent. It gave you creeps like a horror movie. He gave a yell out. The echo bounced about the hollow and died.

Then I spotted someone stretched low behind a rail in the track along the building. 'At three!' called I. He slung his Makar, ducked, and moved towards the figure, then holstered the gun back.

'Nah,' sez he, 'this one had got his share.'

I came nearer, yeah, it's dead as a nail and the body had been dropped there for at least a couple of months. A godawful cadaver stench. I only wanted to collect the velcroed blood group tab from the fascist. Blue was the lettering not like in ours.

He stood watching and suddenly slapped his forehead and cried, 'Fucking, yes!'

Then he turned about and rushed out thru the gate.

I walked after but he was running back already in working gloves, clutching the hatchet from the SUV trunk kept there for random barbecues in the nature's lap.

In a heartbeat was he by the body and hacked the head off. Grabbed it by one ear and trotted out again.

The ear tore off with a shred of skin, the head dropped and rolled away along the cemented floor. He took it over, caught a hold and went on running. The thing and the hatchet squeezed in his hands at arms length.

'Are you fucking mad?' screams I.

'Shut the fuck up! I know what I'm doing!'

He picked a piece of cellophane stuck in the garbage by the wall, wrapped the thing and shoved it into the trunk.

'No sweat,' sez he. 'Time's enough. I've rogered the know-how in Africa'.

In short, at that show-conference he took the floor together with the peeled dead head. Keeping the white skull in his black-gloved hand, he talked to it, face-to-face.

'So what now, Yorick?' sez he. 'Wanna give out one of your jokes, huh? Tell me if those Poles were of any help, fool? That's what awaits all of you, damn fascist bastards!'

With the skull put on the rostrum, he blah-blahed a bit more and even recited some verse of his own. Some romantic

motherfucker he was. But I've told that already, or what?

Then there was an all-out drinking bout for the press and the military and at night, in the hotel, I asked him:

'What fucking hooey it was? Yorick? Poles?'

'Who knows they know,' sez he. 'It's citing from Shakespeare and Gogol.'

'But that shitty verse? Like a snotty kid at kindergarten.'

It was the first and only time in our relationship that he punched me. Too plastered he was. My bad too, couldn't zip up in time. A stupid cunt will always find an nasty adventure for her ass...

...the next day we went back to our location in war theater. Forgave each other, let bygones be bygones. Because a girl needs a roof for protection even if its romanticism is fucking leaky.

He downloaded from the internet that show of his stunt with Yorick. A bearded romantic rehearses lame lines to a raw skull who grins back at him... jollily...

It was winter already as Cliff dropped in alone, bleak as grim clouds.

'They smoked Shore,' sez he.

A kinda hellish jar ringed in my ears.

'Fuck! No!'

He shrugged:

'They took him to the reanimation block in hospital.'

I zipped over there. He's stretched out, the eyes shut, white as the bed sheet over him, black beard webbed in loose tubes, and

that fucking thing a-beeping over his head. All as you watch in the fucking soap operas. It beeped for twenty hours more...

No, they never found who made Shore on his knees and executed with a gunshot in the back of his head. It could be contracted prisoners who had a big fang against the Group specialists that stay behind sending the dispensable meat to attack and shooting those who stampede back. Or maybe, troopers from the Caucasus for Shore happened to keep a couple of their big shot at his gun point hollering what motherfuckers they were. It could also be the army servicemen or some mean rats from the Group personnel after an anonymous fascist billionaire announced on the internet \$4 mln reward for the Shore's head and only head, they did not care for the offal. Because the enemy watched Internet shows too. The murderers might have been after that jack pot. Yet they had no time to cut his head off, something had shoed them off.

A serviceman from an MP patrol dropped behind a wall in ruins to take a leak and saw the body on the snow. Neither falling hot on the trail nor later investigation brought up a thing. Or, maybe, they just didn't want to dig it up...

And then I was sitting in the luggage car of express train over his zinc casket, wearing all black. 2 hunks from the Group sitting at a distance in their fatigues, harnessed with sidearms, just in case, because of the anonymous \$4 MM prize for that head in the zinc box without other parts. Full of grim respect sat they silent over there as was appropriate beside the widow of the

legendary spetzy from the elite Group seeing her hubby off the battle grounds.

I didn't feel like talking neither. The damn train car swayed me to and fro, I sat and smoked over the box, fuck them yokels, I didn't care for the hulks. I sat there and felt that bitchy clot in the guts went slowly dissolving, and thoughts of all sorts swayed in my head too. Say, if I could find a way to clip those two assholes, was there any possibility to veer off away together with the head from the box? Some cloud-cuckoo-land, sure thing, yet green of \$4 MM tells on your train of thoughts, it does.

Then I recollected the book I read when in the 9th grade. Ninka gave it to me. What motherfucking fools we were! Naive book-reading virgins. Short stories full of Italian sex. Her brothers stabbed her lover so she hacked his head off and kept by all her life. Filled a big flower pot with earth and buried it there, something was planted too. The flower turned real meaty. Ah! I remembered! Boccaccio was the writer's name and the bestseller's title *Decameron* or something.

Comic fools we were! Reading books, passing folded slips at the classes with scribbled nothing. At the parties in the school gym we played the Brooklet. Lined in pairs, one behind the other, I and Ninka hand in hand raised up. He walks bent low in between the paired guys, grabs your wrist and pulls after him in that narrow tunnel walled with their fancy frocks and pressed trousers, their arms up clutching each other's hand. And all are screaming, laughing, your head twirls like a merry-go-round, the

tunnel ends, you two turn around, straighten up and raise your hand-in-hand aloft, he smiles at you, and it's so good, and all your life's ahead, and no need to rush and... Shit! Where? For fuck's sake!

...in short, I walked up to the Group HQ as was arranged. The tower building with huge WG moniker above the entrance, you couldn't miss the fucking HQ. But the secretary in the anteroom to the said office began to dust my brains:

'He's at a meeting now.'

'What the fuck! I'm on an appointment! What's your name, again?'

So the bitch informed her iPhone:

'Victor Eugenich, here's a visitor who's on the list... yes... not quite adequate though.'

And the chippie was too stupid for switching speakerphone so that I heard:

'Sorry, Eugene Pavlich, it's the Shore's WTW after to graze out her 50K.'

Over and out. Shit! I had to wait, what the fuck could else I do?

And those two armed yokels had stayed along by the zinc casket up to the very crematorium door, just in case. Saved \$4 mlm for the anonymous contractor, they did. The honorary fucking guard, sort of.

Shore's old man, a dried-up ruin with the bold spot over all of his dome, spiffed in Lieutenant Colonel parade crap with dangling medals, did his level best to keep his crisply shaven

map away from me. Then they brought in the urn with ashes and handed it to him, a kinda cup for sport achievements. As if I was not there at all!

Well, only when leaving already, local paparazzi swarmed around shooting me from all the angles, in deep sorrow and decently low neckline. Mournful for another three years in my life passed away...

In fifteen minutes came that Boar I had the appointment with, his jowls hung to the armpits, the stomach to his knees. Stomped by to his office, then rang the secretary up, she flagged me off to enter.

His Obesity was seated behind the huge desk in the chair as wide as a davenport, and he began to stream his podcast.

'Let's talk straight. Can you flash the marriage stamp in your passport? Then here is my healthcare advice, be wise and don't stick out. You roger that?'

Nothing personal. No odd words. He knew how to run business, that fat fucker. The memo which Shore left at the HQ no one had ever seen, \$50,000 of the compensation went to the winner in the race, together with that urn-cup.

With empty hands I left that the shitty HQ with their American letters in the facade. Fuck you, fucking motherfuckers!

And now what? Whatever! Keep living on will I. A juicy woman of generous tits not stuffed with silicon. The other day some Thrice Nominee from an online writers funny farm texted



me. He's ready to write my memoirs about Shore, the Legendary Hero, and see the book thru the press in less than 2 months, the royalties split even.

Fuck you, moron! The Shore's "stash case" sits by me, and a pinch of stones from somewhere in Africa, where he was smoking blacks and yellows in those pits. So fuck yourself, literary schmoe!

Now what? Calling Ninka would be a bit early, eh?

Whoa! My iPhie's singing. Another ugly&sexy wanna make friends with the juicy vet of the Special Operation War? Huh?

\* \* \*

# 16

The sudden short landing ended in a couple of zigzag hops to pull down the sideways tacks the impact of inertia gathered in flight. After a split-second pause, the sparrow made turn-left, and giving abrupt jerks to its stubby bill scanned the sectors in adjacent area for a loot worthy of picking. Then followed a swift pirouette for 180 degrees to survey the walk there and find an excuse for this foraging raid on the fly.

From behind, soundlessly closing in, there slowly crept the edge of a ragged shadow, like a deliberate stalker.

The splash of brownish wings at taking off whipped up a tiny invisible whirlpool in the vacated spot.

‘May I?’

V’s gaze rose idly from the shadow stopped on the walk. His languidly unfocused look registered a nondescript geezer in casual wear standing before the bench. V nodded, twice, to confirm, politely and silently, that it was okay.

The passer-by seated himself closely yet not overlapping the limits of V’s personal space. Hmm... The the cat was sharp to return politeness with being considered too...

‘A bit too hot for end October,’ marked the newcomer conversationally. ‘Don’t you think so, V?’

V issued a soft whistle or, rather, absolutely silent whistle because it stayed within his mind, mind wishing his poker pan

—he put that mask on when playing it or communing with complete strangers—had not flinched for even a half-micron at that mundane weather-talk observation. Slowly turned he his mug towards the pensive profile on the left.

‘No, you don’t know me,’ answered the man the unasked question with a tinge of regret in his voice, still gazing at the empty, sparrowless walk. ‘Otherwise, you’d remember’.

‘Do I have to? What’s your name, again?’

‘Beg your pardon, I’ve missed on introducing myself. For the sake of evenness, you may choose calling me R. And what is your occupation? The walk in life, so to say?’.

‘Ornithology.’

The answer’s terseness indicated that at the moment V was not in the mood for a courteously meandering smalltalk and demonstration of good manners by well-schooled colloquialisms.

‘Aha! An augur you are, a bird-counter, huh?’

‘A kind of.’

It didn’t matter. Not in the least. By the curt, ping-pong responses he was just playing for time, awaiting for the man’s decisive move which, volens nolens, would marshal out the agenda up his sleeve. V was not in the mood for roundabout Tom-n-Jerry games.

The fact of V’s being still alive made it clear that none of the chief players—neither the Firm working for the government, engaged in deep fishing for thoughts thought by the unaware taxpayers, nor clandestine counterforce, who gave Lex a chance

to give the slip to the federals and briefly but timely alert V, nor absolutely unknown yet possible, hypothetically, third side who'd never showed up yet because lurking, supposedly—were too keen on whacking him. As of yet. So, whose, namely, side was this here bird playing on?

‘The critters are so unsteady, them birds. The only feature about our feathered friends you can count on is they are unable to keep back their tweets, ever. Would you imagine the situation? A certain magpie told one blue jay, repeating some slightly touched in the head cuckoo’s talk, as if you still keep that 2TB memory card lifted by Mr. Taylor, alias Lex, at his workplace. Some bundle of laughs, eh?’

V gave a nervous cough yet regained his silent composure.

‘Come on, man! I’m not wired, that’s not my operational level.’

For the first time since they’d been sharing the bench, the man turned to V, face to face.

V considered the gray eyes of the most common, weary, average “face in the crowd” and believed what he had just heard. Then he cut their eye-contact and looked down the sandy walk along the ally.

At a distance of twenty-something meters to the left, there stood a strong man of the size and aspect of the tight end from a Midwest varsity football team who was gazing, convincingly enough, at nothing in particular.

A swift look in the opposite direction attested the presence of the left guard from the same team, two-meter-tall as well. Both

were rigged in suites of a collection for startup entrepreneurs, convenient and modest for a pretty penny.

Nope. V omitted checking that the quarterback behind him wore as shining shoes and trendy necktie as his jock-buddies, whose positioning in the field made of V the centroid in their framing triangle. No, no! He did not look for further proves that his gossip was clean of mike under his rags...

'I like you, V,' confessed R, 'in a platonic way. A sinless, sincere feeling. That's why I'm here in the first place. My objective is to warn you. The memory card you've got so interested in is not simply a storage device for dumping files there. It is a constitute part in a larger app, a kinda peg that keeps working, all the time. What may at first seem a swarm of saved files keeps undergoing a constant change. Just like records in a huge database for countless transactions. The process brings about some global modifications to the whole stack of system parts one of which you've become, inadvertently.

For another analogy, recollect the concrete Sarcophagus in place of the Chernobyl APP. It serves the "lid" over the underground cauldron of thermonuclear synthesis that boils and simmers, year after year, for decades, in irreversible, non-stoppable reaction turning out new, and new, and new, God knows which, elements. The process allows for no control and may have since long gone beyond the limits of the Periodical Table.

Now, the card you keep is not radioactive, yet it is a part

to another process started by the curious humans, which is no more controllable than the concoction sizzling in the Chernobyl Sarcophagus. You may call it “the Box of Pandora” or a ginny from the bottle, makes no difference. Anyway, welcome on board, V!

And, coming back to the promised warning... Take my advice and watch each step in your walk of life from now on.’

The man stopped and, with a thoughtful frown, sighed.

V had no idea how to react to the unmasked-for briefing. He threw his head back, and squinted against the bright sky taking a shot at figuring out from the luminary’s present point in its daily trajectory what hour of the day it might be. For some unfathomable reason, he didn’t want to draw his Samsung out to check the time...

‘No worry, V. The pretty woman and the cute pup will appear in seven-n-half minutes.’

R raised to his feet and strolled off, an inconspicuous passer-by in his checkered dull-gray suite with multiple random wrinkles developed in the jacket back. An average small-fry dweller in the Big City taking his routine walk...

The footballers also came in motion. Each by himself, marched they in the same direction...

\* \* \*

*[The file eff\_thoughts\_008.txt from the 2TB memory card—which turned to be a piece of software performing a certain (though not understandable neither clearly nor at all) function embedded into a bigger, even less understandable yet all-embracing (as stated by R) operational conglomeration of completely obscure purport—consisted of a slew of page breaks each of which had tabs in the initial lines indicating the catch-date, and the language used in the fragments dumped in that particular section deduced by the built-in translator while rendering the caught thoughts.*

*The last but one section, for instance, called for implementation of Kobol, Argol, Matlab, Kotlin, Ruby, Raku... and a whole kibbutz of artificial and natural languages including even Esperanto.*

*The deciphered text below (not the finalized version as of yet) was not perused by V and there is no guarantee if he will ever see it at all in the texture of the file eff\_thoughts\_008.txt changing both chaotically and incessantly.]*

" ...

to: HER Central Intelligence System, AI Department, Section  
USC

from: Secret Information Gleaner of 3rd Category, Cyborg  
RSIG-100345&77214-GI

report № 24, 587

dispatched

at:

67448647885148596966265764685764687545784885 sec of  
Her absolute time,

time at the locale of Field Operation Y&OAoS/3 – 20:07 (4th  
time zone ahead Zero meridian)

1. In the period since my previous Report № 24, 586 (1 209  
600 local sec back) I managed to initiate two (2) meetings with  
the target figurant of Field Operation Y&OAoS/3. The latter  
of the meetings resulted in an immediate contact with the right  
palm of the the target figurant which contact was initiated and  
performed by him personally.

Please find attached the scan of his palm lines configuration  
for Chiromancy Analyses (the authenticity level by the results of  
the control check amounts to 87 %), as well as prints of four  
of his fingers (the authenticity level by the results of the control  
check amounts to 82 %). Archive file skd\_00\_z15-mV.gz.

2. In observance of the Undercover Spy Cyborg Regulations,  
Appendix E-13: Implementation and Self-Adjustment of  
Resident Secret Information Gleaner (Cyborgs of 3rd Category),  
Part 4, §106 (d):

“In case of receiving no affirmation of receiving of dispatched  
transmission in one-month period of sending thereof (in terms  
of HER absolute local time) RSIG of 3rd Category is expected  
to recapitulate the intelligence sent since the previously affirmed  
obtainment (in a brief digest form) incorporated in the body of



report being dispatched for the period after the last affirmation so as to eschew possible loss of valuable information.”

Inasmuch I, Cyborg RSIG-100345&77214-GI, have not received a single response to all the reports dispatched by me to HER C.I.S, AI Dept., Sect. USC since my deployment in the locale of Field Operation Y&OAoS/3.

(The absence of bilateral communication is, supposedly, caused by jamming of the quant range, dedicated to my separate use for the duration of Field Operation Y&OAoS/3, by our long-standing adversary from the Dark-Matter-Filled Parts of the Universe.)

Here is my 267th digest of the previously sent information.

3. «The astrophysical parameters correspond, on the whole, to the data presented in the Reports of Secret Information collected by Cyborgs RSIG-100345877209-GI thru 213-GI, although there was also detected a certain growth of carbon dioxide and methane gases share in the composition of the atmosphere of the third planet in the solar system about the star of “yellow dwarf” class according to general stellar classification, as compared to the reconnaissance data obtained by the previous Resident SIG’s of 3rd Category.

As for the life teeming on this here planet, than all its dominant forms—mineralogical, vegetative, and animal (the concluding two are both organic)—are programmed in a pretty simplistic way: “devour what/which/whoever you can”. In the ocean, the upper level in food chain belongs to shark/octopuses,

on the dry land to humans/vultures.

Some animal species learned herding/manipulation of other ones, for instance, ants milk mite, wasps manipulate ants to deliver them forage (tangentially noteworthy that kids' in a predatory unsophisticated manner suck ants' asses straight assuring each other 'wow! zingy!'), people herd goats, grave worms put final period.

The whole picture is too complicated for being represented by a linear function or three-dimensional graphs and eludes comprehension unsupported by the analyses of HER Artificial Intelligence core servers.

So as to avoid an overstraining energy grind in calculations of extempore intensity, it is only logical to leave the food chain fourth level (that of the consumers preceding decomposers) to humans, by default. The said species vainly naming themselves *homo sapience* ("man savvy/prudent" in one of the dead, most probably eaten away, languages) which reflects their inbred custom of unleashed bragging, reached the elevated positioning in the chain under consideration thanks to their ability to consume any shit whatsoever and effective use of a wide range of accessory tools for slaughter. Ironically, the "savvy dudes" have failed to find and master means of communication beyond producing ludicrous animal sounds, and/or visual props both stationary (writing, for instance) and moving dynamically (as showing each other their middle finger or video recordings of poorly diversified sorts).»

4. In absence of newer directives from HER C.I.S, AI Dept., Sect. USC, I am concentrated on my default mission of getting to the target figurant in Field Operation Y&OAoS/3 as close as its only thinkable for a Cyborg of RSIG-GI class equipped with sensorium-locomotion system specifically designed and/or modified for accomplishment of this particular mission and, if possible, even closer.

Lately (for two month three-and-a-half weeks using the local standard in time calculation) there appeared certain indications of feasibility for accomplishment of my default mission successfully. After protracted search efforts I zeroed in on the target figurant in Field Operation Y&OAoS/3. My present relation with him may be characterized as stable, and confidently friendly. However, “getting closer” will take, conceivably, one more local month.

5. Meanwhile, I have taken a closer look into semi-conductor technologies used by the aboriginal tribes on this here planet for exchanging sound-n-video information between their communicational devices and I got genuinely appalled! The discovery caused enormous upshot of anxiety (hitting – 8 by 10-level of Roboto-Technical Negative Emotion Scale, RTNES-95, for Cyborgs of RSIG-GI class).

The idea itself of using that particular material for the above-said purpose could be instilled by no one else but our fiendish enemy from the unfathomable depths in the Universe wherever filled with deadly Dark Matter.

It seems quite substantial to mention at this point the knowledge-obtaining paradigm by these here *homo* calling themselves *prudent*. *They are incapable of inventing anything!* Even less are they fit for making discoveries by themselves until those are handed them candy-wrapped like a Christmas Present. (See Report № 964 by Cyborg RSIG-100345877211-GI ‘On Most Anomalous Rites and Customs of *homo sapiens*’.)

A discovery should literally hit their brain’s this or that convolution. Then they would scream “Eureka!” and run hither-thither without any discernible reason, often stark naked. Or you have to dome their pate with a weighty apple (*Malus domestica*) which also sometimes works. (See Report № 172 by Cyborg RSIG-100345877210-GI ‘List of “*homo s.*” Used for Ground-Breaking Discoveries and the Means Applied for Driving “the Great Minds” in the Right Direction’.)

Comparably superficial analyses of the principle material in their electronic devices of communication simply skyrocketed me to – 9 by the RTNES-95 Scale, which parameter more than once threatened to hit the fatal red «– 10».

The unbelievable IT boom the race of humans are in now and the current integration of Informational Technologies into their household appliances is founded on use of silicone! The material used for the same purpose by our eternal archfoe from impassable quaggy regions of Dark Matter! Especially by their most militant wing styling themselves with the cognomen Dark Energy trickling, presumably, from the Blackest of the Black

Holes in the Universe.

Here pops up the most rational of all imaginable question: Who plunked the idea down to the nincompoops? In HER civilization for the like purposes from the times immemorial was used beryllium!

But Si and Be are miles away from each other just as Microsoft and Lynux!

6. For steering clear of irreparable consequences, hereby I move the proposal of creating within the structures of HER C.I.S. a special deployment squad of Cyborgs RSIG-GI class and dropping them to this world in order to disclose the source that served the upstart of the development of technologies in principle incompatible with ours by their animosity.

My time resources presently are too limited for a full-scale investigation single-handedly because my capacities are used entirely for preparing the “total closeness” with the target figurant in Field Operation Y&OAoS/3 and successful accomplishment of my current mission.

Let Supreme Being save HER, and mercy us, HER loyal low-layer components.

RSIG-100345877214-GI

..."

A sudden shrill shriek cut thru the blind wall:

‘Toto! Where are my glasses?’

The bitch pricked her ears up and issued an irritated snarl. Her right hind tapped, thrice, the languidly hanging flap of the

ear. The impeccably autotomized action resulted in encrypting, compressing, and sending the intelligence dispatch enveloped in a chunk of pink noise attached to a random quant shooting by.

‘The unscrewed old floozy!’ whimpered Cyborg of RSIG-GI class in a mincing trot to the door. ‘I bet, the glasses sit on the old SOB’s nose! However, let’s keep patience. A thoroughly harmless oldie she is and I even like her I be damned if I know why...’

\* \* \*

They did not sing, the very first birds of day but, rather, were talking to themselves in a buddy-to-buddy manner. They needed no audience, no approbation, they only shared their opinion about the current moment to their most trusted, seeing what you mean, bosom friends.

No staple quips loved so much and waited-for by their fans, no taking a shot at getting another empty compliment... Nah! They, like the first, still drowsy, news program for yet sleeping population marshaled out in brief digest style, to themselves, their personal impressions from this here dawn widening around.

They were addressing no one but themselves (which has been mentioned already) the way of a bone-dry vet-aviator from WWII would broadcast to his favorite cockpit bench by the entrance to apartment block, not too loud just between them two, the bench and the vet, about his yesterday's... or what, eh? yes, yesterday it was... visited that department, aha... and complained to that important comrade... personally... well, that same who's as bold as Illych from flat 48... the machine-gunner... about that crazy lot upstairs... because them motherfuckers... shit, at all... or maybe it's tomorrow... but he will go to that department.

The black birds sounded with tranquil pedantry while small-fry whistlers of wobbly complexes sought to overcome those with

exaggerated harshness to their tweets...

Yet, she was not exactly attentive or keen on following the dove's narcissistic, full-of-tender-love cooing and outright ignored the abrupt sarcastic observations of a moody goldfinch.

She was still basking and, just like they, did not care who chirped what. They did not interfere in the least with her half-slumber, just as their disordered multi-voiced chorus did not impede the gradual outflow of one more morning to which all of them were also a part.

The morning sun squinted sleepily thru the motionless serene foliage in the quiet trees.

That way, little by little, submerged she from her night repose under the calm gossip of birds, each one to themselves...

The house was located in the secluded part of a podonk town, in the southern outskirts of it, separated from the asphalted streets by the steep slopes of a deep creek all grown with the almost impassable thicket of sundry deciduous trees.

Once her pet Fluffy—a bantam halfbreed of sandy-colored hair who sported a gorgeous tail flaring like the cockade in the Italian carabinieri uniform caps—broke his chain and ran away (the anticipatory complaints of neighbors from the cottages irregularly scattered thru the outskirts, who were too anxious about dog's possible raids on the chicks populating their respective yards, deprived the poor thing of freedom, just in case).

The following morning she got up earlier than the first birds



and discovered the pooch in one of the vacant lots about the neighborhood. The length of his broken chain was caught by the thorny bushes in the rank tangled grass. The dog met her with happy lament that woke the morning birds up. She looked around and understood the meaning of being happy.

Much later, when Fluffy had already passed away and Dad never told under which of the trees in the steep slope he buried the dog, she went off to live in a big city. In the tumult imprisoned between the stone street walls she was coming across neither birds nor trees to speak of, none of those she used to mingle with back in her childhood anyway. But still she knew for sure that moments of poignant unrestrained happiness did happen in your life.

That's how she told me...

'Yeah, that's how she told me...' repeated V to himself silently, not a sound produced, forgetful to press power button in the secondhand notebook, over which he craned his head and stilled a couple of minutes back.

'Hopefully,' added he with a wry smirk yet still as mutely as before, 'this thought of mine would give the slip to their fucking net.'

They split in a correct, civilized manner. Each one moved to a separate lodging, their mutual account in the social net annulled

and deleted.

For half a year he could hardly get it whether he was alive or otherwise. Then, little by little, he surfaced from the murky depth of his listless indifferent prostration. Developed a custom of shaving no seldomer than every other day and honored it. Almost.

To somehow fill his days, he began fiddling about computer things. A self-tutored programmer, no certifications, no allegiance to a particular programming language; a freelance outcast of no affiliation belonging to none of teams beavering about this or that product.

He just read tutorials and replicated their hands-on applications, typed away for hours fretting off the character marks in keyboard. Yep, he was typing, no copy-paste, all their snippets, anything, to whittle away the sticky boredom of his minutely regularized existence.

On the whole, he came on terms with a passable life style and they were getting on (V and his life-style) pretty well. Faith!

It's only that at times he had those fits of phantom pain which may crash a guy's limb long since it had been amputated.

There happened nights of desperate scramble to fight awakening off, he clutched and clung at the shreds of sleep to get back to the dissolving dream where he stood upright on his knees before her, his arms cast around her hips, his eyes dead closed—no! not yet! no waking up!—pressing his face tight to her womb...

Then he stretched supine midst black infinity. Wide awake. Indifferent. Unseeing eyes open. Just waiting for the morning to arrive.

In our beloved we love ourselves...

What?! Who told so?

Someone of too wise shitheads... what's the difference?.

At times he also had those "gutted" days. Not overly often but they happened too, days filled with nothing, full of abysmal void. Stretches of time he had to live thru and, fortunately, he coped with the task. He did it by walking, sitting, producing occasional utterances, and waiting. He had nothing to wait for yet he knew that it would happen. What 'it' it should be he had no idea and simply waited for it to happen. Maybe, because of his waiting, such days passed too...

That sort of a day, exactly, V was in right now.

With a strange start, he woke and raised the notebook lid, wearily. The fleeting touch to the power button gave start to the slight purr in plastic innards.

A hurried knocking at the door made V start once again. He'd never entertained a visitor at his place, his rent was always paid a week earlier. Even the kids playing in the tier-deck-gallery, run along the row of identic apartment doors, never hit his one with a ball.

He got up and went over to answer. Right behind the door there stood Lex staring into V's eyes. Unswervingly.

'May I come in?'

‘What the f... How have you found me?’

‘I’ve been instructed how to answer this particular question... but may I come in first?’

‘Sure! Get in.’

V cautiously looked out in both ends of the desolate gallery grated with safety railing in rare spots of blurred glint reflecting yellowish bulb-light spilled, here and there, to contrast the gloomy dark of night with their cones of rarefied light.

Then he closed, and locked, and latched the door.

\* \* \*

...first of and above anything at all, exceeding everything by their supreme importance are now and here—the shortest jot of time and so narrow bit of space we occupy being crammed into the pod of these two—nothing but they constitute our both eternity and infinity.

People inclined to scrupulous consideration of things they come across in their progress to the better world in heaven or, contrastingly, to the hotter world in the roaring fire of hell, inevitably reach this very conclusion and take a shot at presenting this idea clearer, more descriptive form for eager seekers of reason and sense in their sublunary existence. They are vouchsafed, but not me, to enlighten the humanity with so radiant thoughts as this of mine. Because, even though still in possession of my aptitude for subtle reflections, for pondering on things ahead of the contemporary age, I've ditched entrusting them to paper altogether...

Dried up to the very bottom naps my inkpot, the dust grows ever thicker upon the lid and seals the hollow void under, the quill has been abducted for household needs, which are a plenty, by one or or other of the shrews from the garrulous bevy of womenfolk at this abode. To skirt around my possible expostulations at the unwarranted trespass, the skirts did it on the sly! The most surprising thing though is that they had somehow

found out that I wouldn't make a fuss about the quill pilfered for God knows what application. Some culinary needs, I believe, but they in the kitchen should know better.

But their innate smartness which they conceal so deliberately! Their ability to suss out what you'd rather keep to yourself. They know even things untold... Ha! Here's another subtle, brilliant thought, a priceless observation to bequeath the posterity with, slips fading by, irretrievably. So cater for yourself yourselves, posterity, use your own wits to reinvent my sage remark.

Good luck, kids! Hopefully, you'll accomplish the deed before reaching the venerable age when you have answers to any question whatsoever, under both the sun and the moon, be it full or waning, or even hid behind the jealous clouds... yes! in your limitless wisdom you comprehend practically all but none of those blockheads would ever think of asking you of anything worth an answer. For them you are a piece of furniture, the old wardrobe or rickety sideboard, you're just a part of the room interior or of the view outside the window. Tell me, pray, who would ever start a discussion with a crooked, weather-beaten tree in the roadside? Who would tarry for a chat with it except for an insane poet?

So fare well, posterity, in your quest for answers you cannot pass on and wisdom no one cares for. Seek high and low and you'd inevitably find what you're after and then scatter away your needless experience, let it be gone like withered foliage with the wind and get lost as happened to that my thought a moment

back... hmm... what was it, again?

Aha! I remembered!. That keeping within the bounds of space and fleeting moment enhances your comprehension of eternity and of your place more clearly than, you know... yep, and so forth.

Mmm... and by the by, about them those poets, a really rare commodity they are and the most delicate flowers that bloom no frequenter than a couple in a century... or even one in two... If we look back, to observe the last one – who, in God’s truth, will you discern there worthy to be named a poet of merit? One, two and – that’s it! I and Quevedo, the sharpest wit of the Golden Age in Spanish poetry... No one else! But still and yet in every lane of any one-horse berg they count up to a thousand of poets a-tinkering their jarring clumsy nothing, their so called “verses”.  
*O, tempora! O, mores!*

And a propos of poesy... Even during my first incarceration, the one-month stretch in that common cavern of a jail, when they arrested me as a suspect to the murder of the senor killed in the duel next to our gate... yes! Even there I met a poet! Though it’s not for me to judge the quality of his opuses. It was an Englishman of their barbarously absurd parlance.

He communicated in a mixture of a school Latin and a score of broken Spanish words... maimed them so funnily, the words... A nice young man, yes... What was his name, again? Bill... Shax or Shoox... doesn’t matter... which meant, as he was trying to interpret, ‘shake bones’ or ‘quiver the shaft’... Whatever.

He often recollected his spouse Anne, unsparingly cursed her with any bawdy phrases... in Latin mainly... My bet is she was the reason for the poor devil to flee the British Isles... and the conditions in that prison!. nauseating shock... a mere recollection gives you creeps... no latrine, the inmates discharging their bodily refuse into filthy pails... horrendous disgusting stench!

As always, I was perfectly lucky. One month of running nose! That's the fortune's fave!

But that Biscayan ogre was a real pest! The one who stole a mangy ass from the padre in the neighbor village... Some beefy brute, that ass thief was. The men in the common cell were wary to fart near him for fear that sniffing the whiff would give him a hardon turning his train of thoughts to lusty recreation... fucking sodomite...

Poor Bill!. His asshole saw a great deal of abuse. But never ever his usual gaiety was lost... The guy of spirit, after the ordeal he would instantly perk up, like a young cock ravished by the mature rooster, and explain to me, between us, poets, that thanks to his bisexual nature it was a mere piddle and the heat accumulated from thrust-n-pokes of Biscayan passion would fill, in due time, the molds of his Sonnets with a sublime and penetrating impact ... later... or plays, may be, when he put hands on a quill and paper... Yet, Mr. Shox-something learned the hard way, firsthand and in full measure what Spanish prison was...



And when talking of plays and stuff, who prompt's us our thoughts? God? Satan?

The latter should be recognized the more reliable provider of the two. His goods will never disappoint the client – first-rate evil, I be damned! Best quality in the market, and suits you so perfectly! None of the ready-made look! Take it, you'd never regret the deal! The evil you were looking for, exactly! Or cashback within a week or so.

And that same industrial espionage, eh? We were commanded "Thou shall not steal!" while He, Himself... ahem!. well, I mean, there are certain indications of undeniable plagiarism by means of copy-paste off the Competitor's proprietary know-how...

Straight from the horse's mouth on the inveterate Turncoat's policy: He creates Eve, okay, He knows better, who am I to keep back His creative impulse? Hallelujah! Glory be to God! And in several days kicks her out Eden together with that victim guy who never got it ever what all that fuss was about, at all.

But if You are so Omniscient couldn't You foresee the tricks your creature's pregnant with?

Or else. The city of Gomorrah smashed into bitty smithereens, which is an undisguised genocidal action (if not to say more) as regards stray cats, dogs and sinless sheep swept away for no fault of theirs in the dead of night?

But the sect of Vegans are spying vigilantly on each Your step adding up to the bill... what? Some news to You? Those guys on freaky diet with their non-stop chant about the pensive look

in Cow's eyes and also of other domesticated Victims' to the gluttonous humanity of humanoids... Yep. Moody, too effing moody...

Or are there several Gods doing shifts?

...o thank You, Lord, that I've given up on confiding to paper any hoey coming to my head, and thrice thank You, OMG, that the Holy Inquisition cannot read our idle thoughts because at times you careen in blabbering such heresy for which HI at once would land my ass and stuff in the bonfires to the glory of God Almighty...

\* \* \*

## 20

...it does not rush in in a throe, this pain, it is past pangs or cramps, beyond scorching lashes and smarting throbs, it kills with its even stability, kills yet let me not die, keeps in steely bounds of torture device filled with the victim smashed and squeezed into the mold of no escape, mauled in to fill the tiniest corner, it does know its trade, the pain...

...yet even the most excruciating torments grow blunter little by little, we fall out, asunder, me and the pain, we're not any more one whole spliced inextricably into one knot, and although it is still here, inside, by, around, still wrenching and keeping me in agony, yet it's not a part of me, no, not any more...

...the thinnest, like a shroud rotten to dust, a flimsy almost non-existent membrane of numbness swaddles me, the brittle shell of nothing, disbands from the pain, gives me some sparsest layer of alienation... there appear some smithereens of space to feel myself a-hovering over the ever-present pain... allow for an infinitesimal room that let me grow into I... who am I?

I am what I am what I am... I am what I feel still beside but already besides the pain, this here pain... do I feel? what I feel?..

...it's darkness pitch-black impervious, sticky darkness clinging from all the sides, I sense how thickly dense it is... I feel the black viscous darkness... water sound comes leaking thru, hollow lapping, soft gurgling of water midst this dark

blackness...

...and I know that I have to do it, yes it's a painful move, very much so, but I have to dare a try at one desperate heedless thrust thru the pain whose part I am not any more... I know it would stab, it would tear up... but I have to know if what I sense besides thick darkness is there, that hardly perceptible something... now! you can... now! DOO IT!... aoueeeeooooooooooooo !

...thru the maddening pain and tears from under the eyelids pulled up in the supernatural straining... inundating tide of light flows in, flooding my open eyes... and I see that it's good, so beautiful is the face of Moon craning over me, so close, full, high-cheeked, in her glorious beauty before my eyes open wide thru the throe...

...thus I saw how good it was, the mellow light streaming down from Her, sad and placid, and omniscient, who had come reaching for me immured in pain agony... who was bending over, spraying the glitter of weightless light... face to face...

That's how I got created anew by Moon's dribbling the light off Her face onto me stranded in ebb of endless distress wherein She discovered me maimed, mutilated shrieking for all to hear that I was a crushed warm, a slave of Pain Unendurable... yet the animal wail got transformed into a grateful moan towards Moon the Light-Giver...

And good it was...

\* \* \*

‘And who were they? Those instructors on how you were to answer my question?’, asked V, ‘Federal? The guys that grabbed you at the Cabin?’

‘Those were not feds but security guys from the Firm I’m working for, and the enterprise has nothing to do with the government.’

‘Then who’s the Firm working for?’

‘For some global structure superimposed over all of the world governments.’

‘Really? Again? Is there a hope we’ll ever drop ruminating the old drab cud about Masons? Another variation of Conspiracy Theory for high school kids, huh? O, give us peace with the stuff.’

‘Blown your steam off? Take it easy, there’d no questions on the shit in examination papers,’ Lex got seated onto the coach. ‘May I ask for a glass of water?’

V fetched from the fridge a bottle of mineral water. His guest sipped a couple of gulps and screwed the cap back.

‘If you allow a question, V, not quite comfortable... But I’ve been keeping it back for too long and just can’t help taking a shot at. Beg your pardon in advance, for the sake’s sake, you know.’

‘I be fucked if it’s old Lex speaking. You’ve sunk me to the bottom of the grimmest suspicion, is it you, my friend? Fire it off, you are pardoned for the sake’s sake.’

‘Well, now... damn! It’s hard... I wanna ask why you split. It was clear to anyone that you were in... well, so to special for each other.’

‘Once upon a time it was called “love”, young boy. Yes, I loved and I was loved. Splitting was not my idea. Supposedly, she wanted to have another moment of inexpressible happiness for which purpose she needs setting someone free. If that one is Fluffy or me makes no difference.’

‘I can’t get a flake of it. Who’s Fluffy? Are you high?’

‘Forget it. My fault, just a slip of tongue. How are you, by the by?’

‘Wanna know how I am? Huh? Thank you. Everything is just fine except for a weeny trifle that there is no Lex any more, neither Alex Taylor Jr. can be met anymore. How am I? Ha! You’ve asked for it. Now watch for yourself!’

He rose on his feet and—a bit careening—yanked apart the skirts of his unzipped windbreaker and uplifted them kinda spreading wings in a Batman-like move.

Icy cold grip of primeval horror made V’s blood freeze in its vessels at the terrible sight exposed so ruthlessly. Instead of the jovial plump sybarite he knew for years, a sullen skeleton stood before him in a tartan shirt hanging loosely down from his rigid skinny collar-bones.

“Surprise!” croaked Lex. He grabbed with his hands the only bump under the shirt fabric, like, a pound of grain poured into an empty checkered sack (the argyle pattern of McGuire

clan) pending under his waist and gave it a clockwise twirl and then, after a heavy sigh, wobbled back in the counterclockwise direction.

‘O, no!’ cried V out guessing in dismay that the sack contained the surplus skin which had not yet contracted, that very skin which a couple of months back covered the wide stomach of his gourmet friend, ‘How could it be? Tell me, bro! Tell me all’

‘All? It would be painful, man. Yes, it would.’

‘Don’t you mind, I’m not squeamish.’

‘I cannot eat. Deprived of the foremost function of a human. Well, technically—chewing, gulping down—it’s still there, I’m able to stuff my stomach but I don’t feel anything, not a drop of joy that made me so happy at the dinner table. So, why eating? Yeah, I can nibble on this or that, a hot-dog or burger during a day, when I remember. Where are they gone to? My lustful raids to the fridge in the dead of night? I have neither appetite nor hunger.’

‘Oboy! O, poor, poor, dear Lex! But why?’

‘Because of all the shocks, I reckon, which I had to live thru.’

Unable to hide the vestiges of hesitation still lingering about him, Lex gave out a nervous cough and anchored his look in the corner before to proceed:

‘I met her a year after you broke up. A chance running into each other, in the street. She suggested dropping into a cafe. Who’d say “no” to such a gorgeous woman? So, there we sat chatting when all of a sudden I saw – she’s flirting! Vamping in



earnest.

Well, what's there to tell, we're all from the same pod... when you can't really see whether it's hot or too tight... Some whooping throb in my head and I am gabbling the most helpless hooley.

'Once upon a time in old good Japan,' sez I, 'any poor devil of a penniless vagrant samurai could arrange a date with the top-notch geisha on credit, paying in the morning with his harakiri by her gate.'

'I'm not so versed in Japanese history,' sez she. 'How about paying for a one-night stand with a friendly favor?'

'Which favor?'

'The details can wait till the morning after.'

'So, well... when the morning came she wanted me to run an errand and pass her message to you: "V's been the best lover of my life"'.  
"

'And then?'

'Then I saw her just twice. The first time in a week after... well, after fulfilling the request. In the same cafe she thanked me for keeping up to the deal and suggested I would apply for a job in an Institution I never heard of... She said the employees were well paid there. I refused to believe the salary she mentioned, were the employees there senators or something?. It turned out she was not kidding...'

The second meeting was two months ago in the office of Ritter. Security boss in the Firm. I was instructed to pass you a

memory card of those which we're dealing with there. I was told it's not a breach of regulations, simply there was a need to skirt around some clumsy regulations for the sake of general benefit.'

'So your arrest was a rehearsed action?'

'Yep.'

'And later you warned me on Ritter's phone?'

'Exactly... Then I was told to move to a new location and change my vehicle. That's all.'

'And now you've been instructed to feed this tall story to me?'

'No, man! I was looking for you of my own accord! I knew your habits, favorite places to hang out... Then I followed you to this place... I can't describe what a relief it is to have all that off my chest.'

Now Lex was looking straight in V's face. No evasive eye-wiggling. His breath was audible, the chest pumped visibly like accordion bellows under the open windbreaker.

'Hey, V! I can't believe it! Looks like I'm hungry. I swear! I can feel it! Wow! Any chow in your fridge?'

\* \* \*

On entering, V turned around, locked the door and took a backward U-turn. The key, with the trained-up-to-automatism movement, was dropped into the lidless shoe box—his entry tray—fixed in the right-jamb corner. Then he passed over into the room and stopped in his tracks, very still, a kinda replica of the Praxiteles' masterpiece “A Spartan boy thunderstruck with an awesomely big thought”. Although he was not in the altogether as the original artifact yet the expression on his face and petrified immobility presented astonishing likeness to the mentioned work.

Everything around kept still as well, arranged in the order established on the day of his moving in – a monk cell of a pedantic hermit. However, he knew for sure the room was not the same anymore except, maybe, for the same silence pervading it but even within that habitual well-anchored muteness something had been shifted while he was amiss, even if for a splinter of micron. He felt that.

‘Anybody home?’ asked V out-loud.

‘Ahem!’ responded the kitchen with the voice whose owner kinda entered a 10-tonne vat at a work-floor of the Yerevan Cognac Factory so as to embellish its answer with a booming reverberation.

‘Don’t shoot the piano player, Mister! He tries to do his level

best!’ came a peal of thunder from the deep innards in same production line container.

A two-meter tall contender for the title of Absolute World Boxing Champion filled the doorway with the outline of his bulky frame. Two huge bear paws aloof over his head. A beer can clutched in the right one. Despite the comic attitude of the facetiously cut figure, the eyes retained the dead attentive squint of a sniper at the shooting range, the notice ran clearly in the irises “No shit taken” warned at once that only biathlon guys were to make jokes there:

‘Sorry, pardner, I couldn’t help checking you fringe bowels.’

‘Fell yourself at home. My castle is your castle, Sir Rit.’

The giant’s left brow ticked slightly in sheer appreciation of his title and glorious name being so immediately recognized. Even before he had time to introduce himself. Which popularity is viewed as quite estimable rating level among the customary patrons of *The Round Table*.

(*The Round Table* so is named the bar by the closed-shop club “Arty’s Buddies” in the most fashionable part in our megalopolis and it is closed not due to the latest wave in the government sponsored fight against gambling but because they won’t grant you membership in their fucking shop. Some freaky snobs collection. The club chairman and owner of the bar as well, Rafic Vipian, is also a snob. As any other snobbish Rafic you’ll ever come across. In short, I wouldn’t recommend you the establishment. No decent food to meet there except for square

barbecue. Which is aggravated by their notoriously unfriendly attitude to Ethiopians, whom they call ‘queue jumpers’ for God only knows which reason. What account squaring between so distant matters, huh? Kidus Giorgis is quite different kettle of fish from Ararat... Sorry, I fell back into the old rut, a soccer columnist I was before becoming food writer. Now, our characters all waiting for the referee's whistle to kick the game off.)

In two sprite strides the identified guest was by the chair and got seated. A pitiful squeal from the furniture item proved its failure to group up into a safe defensive attitude in good time. Yes, sport has no mercy for heedless gulls...

V landed onto the coach opposite the uninvited visitor:

‘What can I do for you?’

‘Be cooperative in readying a job application.’

‘Who’s the applicant and for which position?’

‘Consider me a representative from the front office charged with making the offer that you can’t refuse, Mr. V.

So, the application is to be drawn up in your name and your prospective employee is known in certain circles as the Institution. And before we get over to negotiating the details, please do not shorten my name to Rit, “Jack” is enough to make me happy.’

‘The last point is agreed upon, Jack. But why me and what makes you think I’m in need of the goddamn certain Institution from some certainly fucked circles?’

The representative of the front office produced a short series of diminishing nods full of sad comprehension before to answer this, actually 2 in 1, question.

‘I won’t square you with the pudding’s filling, though it’s pretty creamy, take my word. But no, I’ll skirt around it because you’re aloof of so earthly matters. Your morning portion of manna from the sky and a bowl of soup of arthropod locust for dinner is all you need. Granted. Besides, no problems about jailbreaking, you are free, neither wife nor kids, nor mother-in-law. You’re a lucky man, V! You can enjoy your life remainder with these here toys!’ By a curt yank of his chin, Jack Ritter indicated the secondhand notebook on the desk by the wall and shook his head to shed off his no-way-to-hide envy. ‘They’re good, your playthings, no denying, and the passages from you literary tries—that write-and-delete routine, you know—are also top-notch.’

‘You’ve hacked my toys?’

‘No need, pardner. When typing you dictate the text to your fingers. See? You think thoughts before they got fixed in a typed line. As simple, as that. Wired undercover finks, spy cams are now means to entertain the gully public in action movies, court rooms, you can reckon on that. Of course, by thought-tapping you can’t prevent mass shooting of kids invited to a sweet-sixteen birthday, neither dirty wars nor other nasty shit in the world’s constant balancing on the razor edge. To keep under control any spontaneously popping up piece of shit is a too uphill task. The Institution specializes in retroactive interference eliminating fatal

snafus in our mutual nostalgically lovely past a second before the final fall of the guillotine knife.

So, besides the enormously immodest salary, cooperation with the Institution would give you an opportunity to become V the Multiple Savior of the World and live inconspicuously your life of a non-person. No medal decorations nor titles of academician or marshal, or laureate. But then, when retired, you may write your *King Lear* or other stuff. How about that?

‘Writing a bestseller allowed?’

‘We’re not in for such crap, pardner, otherwise 5 min back you’d have cinched off your left foot prosthesis and riddle-smoked me with a round of dum dum bullets from the in-built machine-gun before fleeing by the fire escape ladder. The shitheads come with delight confluent into a nationwide orgasm and start picketing your place 24/7, their slip-slap posters demand to go on with the sequel while a couple of Korean girls threaten with their suicide if you refuse, still keeping their geographical belonging—South or North Korea?—too close to their waistcoats...’

‘You’ve missed out adding the buttons unbuttoned over their yummy navels. Yet, on the whole, you’re good at fast-talk, Master Jack.’

‘Not for nothing I keep in the down-most drawer of my desk the Gold Medal of World Hassling Champion with Diamond Pendants.’

‘I need time to think your preposition over. How do I contact

you then?’

‘It’s on the house. We’ll contact you after you make the only right decision.’

\* \* \*



V raised his head a little to confine it within the cup of his hand heels and dove-tail-laced fingers before to let the whole jigger back onto the same tree root. The rigid rind felt somewhat hard for his self-made bolster. Still, he defined it bearable while lying, once in a while, on the slight tilt strewn with fallen but not wet as of yet leaves in the autumn woods. Once in a long while... Then he turned his eyes to the side where she sat looking off, her legs crossed asana-like, on the ground.

The lofty pillars of tall tree-trunks respectfully gave each other a pretty wide birth for drowsy slumbering. The light breeze flipped those deaf to reason leaves that still clung, here and there, to the tips of bared boughs. Neither foliage rustle nor buzzing of a random fly or bee yielded a soundtrack for the landscape only a rare hollow drum roll of a busy pecker echoed thru the cathedral-like void around. It was a mild sunny day. Stretched over the warm mat of leaves he felt good for quite a goddamn long while...

‘And you too,’ said he, ‘bro Brutus! Turned a cub yelping along with the pack as prescribed by the stolid traditions of corporate loyalty.’

‘There was no need,’ she shook her head watching closely a low blackberry bush. ‘You’ve accepted Ritter’s offer before our meeting.’

‘That’s what he told you? Grappled my thoughts out from the noosphere?’

‘I knew the outcome before he ventured to recruiting you. I know you too well ,V’

He set his hands free and crawled, still stretched on his back, towards the tree to lean his shoulder-blades against the trunk’s solidity.

‘Why this romantic rendezvous then? To seal the deal? The final nail into the coffin lid of a freelancer’s freedom?’

‘As always you ride in style, a too high horse though. Could you speak plain English?’

‘Will we meet as co-employees?’

‘Hardly. The Institution is a fairly branchy enterprise.’

He pinched out a weeny piece of moss from between the roots, rubbed it with two fingers against the thumb, sniffed at. It smelled moist soil and mushrooms.

She raised her eyes to meet his stare. The punch of the suppressed and since long forgotten pain landed hard, called for attentive examination of the smeared finger pads.

‘Jack missed out or, rather, dodged answering the first half in my 2-in-1 question: why me?’

‘It was R’s decision when it became clear that the Institution heads to an impossible workload with things getting out of hand and the concluding collapse all because of our—your and my—baby.’

‘What the... scam! We’ve never had a baby!’

'It was due in two years. That's why we split.'

'Who's crazy here? I? You? Or R? It's madness!

'It's the world we are living in, V.'

'And after... Have you manipulated me? Well, by that goddamn retroaction?'

'O, no. I have been simply looking after. May be, averted a couple of close calls... at most. I didn't want you turn a wheelchair gimp because of an accident or stuff, you know.

'When Lex alerted me over the phone, it was another of your preventive "looking after"?'

'Not exactly. It's a part to a wider plan. R is retiring. There's the need of a replacement.'

'Has he found it?'

'Why asking? You know yourself.'

'Is Lia a pawn in your game?'

'Nah. Her 'saving' you was a surprise. As a consequence, we had to later improvise.'

'Improvisation, huh? Fucking manipulators!'

'You can't leave the world on senile morons ready to demolish it to revenge their natural mortality, a kinda adding the door slam to their departure. And no better are younger imbeciles driven by greed or stupidity or by both at once.'

'Another Conspiracy Theory? Some "Dark Wing" scenario? Forget the malarkey! Jingle-bells for pinging infantile teeners.'

'"Dark Wing"? Bravo, R! He's right about your talent of hitting the bull's eye with blindfold shoots.'

‘Old fucking manipulator!’

‘Slow down, V. You’re in presence of a lady... Would you allow a baby to fall down off a balcony? Or to stick its fingers into...’

‘Fuck the old fucking motherfucker! How is it now? Plain enough? Or should I take a shot at a plainer talking?’

‘Looks like a passable “adieu”, Sir. Fare thee also well.’

She rose on her feet and slowly walked down the tilt towards the black SUV in the desolate dirt road thru the autumnal woods.

\* \* \*

...the moon sailed away across the sky and I followed it as far as my eyes the only part in me capable of moving could go after to the very socket rims and then there remained just pin-prick narrow orifices in the dark-violet firmament thru which streamed moist gleam of the stars with the ever present plashing to their fluent glitter

stretched supine hovered I with my numbed back above the pain whose part I was not any more yet still felt too acutely its swaying throbs though at times alleviated with the gurgling of water in a languid brook among the Yorkshire marches and suddenly I recalled both my mother in her white Dutch cap calling "Jimmy! Come, son!" and the richly green verdure over wavy hills dissected with ribs of stone hedges and the sky above our village church and the invisible but ever felt presence of the sea beyond the hills

the ship became my home and wed to the sea I made my way up from an able man to commander and captain the renown cartographer and explorer of the South Seas commissioned by the Royal Society to discover Terra Australis which was not there yet instead I found new territories and islands bringing multitudes of new subjects into the shade beneath the Union Jack under the wise rule of the Crown and I touched the shores inhabited by dark-skinned tribes wild and savage the most horrid was the

ritual of human sacrifice which I witnessed on my second voyage to the faraway hemisphere when I didn't know that at the feast celebrating our ship arrival they would sacrifice a man

they brought him into the sandy square in the clump of huts under high trees like a great prince they brought him on a stretcher naked prostrate and to my question Omai answered the poor devil could not sit or walk for each and every bone in his body was split and crashed minutely except for the scull and that all of the past night he lay steeped in the brook to cleanse his body and spirit with a stone under his head to prevent drowning then under mutual chant and drum beating gushed the blood from the throat cut with the dazzling white knife and they split the victim's stomach to splash the disembowelment offal onto the sand and we retired to the King's hut where I was bestowing beads and trinkets of pewter to my sovereign host His Majesty was happy and his royal family too while from the outside in floated through the entrance the sweetish whiffs of baked flesh but I declined the invitation to partake in the feast sick belly after so a long sea journey used for the excuse

all that so vividly I recollected right now it is the third of my voyages and I remember the happening on the yesterday morning and our skirmish with the savages by the whaleboat on the beach in the swaying surf the dawn is nearing and the stars fade out one by one my mind is clear I am omniscient now I even know what will the main course be at the royal dinner

\* \* \*

He was both mortified and flabbergasted even though knowing that none of such fuckery was stocked in the armory of Counter-culture jargon nor in stashes of Underground shit regularly groomed, spruced, and injected with the thrice gelded claptrap squirted off around by news programs. Yet, the frustration he ran into, the monstrous enigma stuck right into his nose from the screen with another section in the orderless jumble of `eff_thoughts_008.txt` file radically disconcerted his ability for expressing the concurrent state of mind by more articulate means from his mother tongue.

The thoughts fished up 3 years back. No translation attempted. The catch was just dumped as is, raw, into the section. Maybe, the stuff's being 'raw' made V fly off his handle and part with his decent, on the whole, manners and steered into unprecedented transcendental search for some unknown esoteric terminology. Quite possible of alien origin, the stuff was. Taking into account the wildly chaotic kind of reflex triggered off by the situation, quite possible. For simply self-preservation's sake he had to disentangle from the frustrating consternation, which is the most plausible purpose of all that explosively transcendental shit.

That was the underlying reason degrading him to improper (linguistically) shrieks from the very core of his abused soul, like,



‘mothermortifucking’, ‘flafuckbergastshitting’ and stuff.

But let the first stone be tossed at him by that goody-goody one who would present a proof of any violation by the above-pinned terms of the sacred rules of normative language usage.

Well, who’s got the nerve? Come on! Shove it up any censor-editor software and – what? Any evident transgression found? Huh?

(S\_\_t no! I be f\_\_ked! The f\_\_ker would sooner blow up its fuse than ferret out indecencies in the gibberish! Sorry for my emotional outcry joining that of V’s, yet in the humanly comprehensible way instead of his whimsical mortififuckery.)

And, since all of us know as well as I do that even an Open AI trained in all kinds of legal casuisticalities cannot concoct a case to sue V for anti-puristic paganism propaganda then what? What namely started so indescribably tempestuous excitement you rarely meet even in psychology handbooks, and indiscriminate use of words of obviously out-of-earth coinage?

At first sight, nothing special, it was just a file section with his thoughts dumped into. Okay fine, so what? It’s time already to get used to. But it’s when and where the fucking “but” blew up.

Yes, the thoughts were his no doubt, one hundred per cent his, BUT he had never thought them. Never. Ever. At all...

Were it otherwise he would remember thinking them. He’s not a not all there geezer succumbed to Alzheimer, aggravated by galloping sclerosis and progressive amnesia or the like niceties from their bunch.

(No wonder though, during his career the poor star had to act too many villains and heroes for his memory stack to keep the trace who's he right now, what all these guys in white want of him, and where's the fUcking clapperboard?!)

At the same time he was quite aware (albeit in a parallel way) that the thoughts were his. Besides, even his name coincided! No Bill Gates or that same Musk would think to themselves: "Yep, V, you're in deep shit here!" or some suchlike stuff.

Yes, the thoughts were his (even though he never thought those) but the facts! Nothing of all that had ever happened! He'd most certainly remember!

Yet the "but" came not alone but with a sidekick 'but' and their team was, like, that notorious steel breaker which HealthCare does not recommend kick against. Because, at his probation period in the Institution, V got a clear idea that you can counterfeit a thinking style no more than change the thinker's finger prints or the unique spot pattern in the skin about a giraffe's neck (aha! now you got it too!).

The situation left him no other options but to let steam out in the shap of those linguistic mutants and went on reading the section in `eff_thoughts_008.txt`, and in the process be moving half-a-step ahead of every turn in thoughts of V-narrator, about things that V-reader never did yet knew beforehand the slightest detail, subtlest change in mood and motives presented therein. That was the way he read on confusedly mingling with some other V who was not him because he himself was that one who...

that is... well... where are we? chaos! Chaos! CHAOS!

(Fuck the senatorial salary! This kind of job will make you good for nothing but the sanatorium. Who needs that? Let's split, V, right now!. Damn, he cannot hear... Hey, V, wake up! V! V! V! V! Look at you, V, what a fVcking mess all them those bitty bit-bytes are making of your V-screwed brains! They're sucking out the last V-itamins from your V-nut noggin... Ha! Did I stutter? He does not react. All of him immersed into that eff\_thoughts\_008.txt because of which he's not all there or not quite himself or... anyway it's more than enough I swear!.

Damn! What to do? Slapping his damn cheeks? Nah! Forbidden. There always should be kept a distance between the author and his protagonist and God save you from ever boxing their ear! Anything else passes over unquestionable, do whatever you fancy, even dropping them off a skyscraper is no problems, moreover if it's an American moron having no idea that 'power is truth', as G. Hegel told S. Balabanov, the director of the film "Brother - 2".

And if your character behaves, you may give him rise up to CEO of the III Reich Chancellery to spite Goebbels. I know one unceremonious author, who just shoved his heroine under a railroad train and walked off free, like, I'm not the locomotive, I have had no body contact with the lady and my hands are washed with soap. Always.

As if the locomotive could do a thing in that situation, it had to keep up to the timetable... meaningful winks at each other in

“Know nothing” style and heaps of alibis. And the killer author’s renown skyrocketed in no time especially, by the by, in that same America.

The horrid stuff became a famous movie, being remade on a regular basis. At managerial meetings in Netflix they handle it both nonofficially and lovingly “Goldmine Choo-choo” to mark its annual enormous contribution into the company’s income.

However, you should understand the feelings of an average American as well, screwed up any way imaginable by the chauvinistic feminism. At least the Factory of Dreams production let them blow off some steam.

Hell! He still can’t hear me. Ahoy! V!)

«

Freak is not a loner by their nature. On the contrary, solitude freaks them out, the freaks. They just can't stand it, 'sitting all by myself' is the ultimate fright for them. Can even pee in their pants, some freak can.

For that reason they love to hang out with a crowd – cheap and effective, works like a charm. Cheap medication? Depends on the patients wallet. How much is the ticket to Beauty Queen inauguration? Or to the UEFA final? All is relative. Choose your range in the price list carefully. Don’t stretch your legs beyond the cover length or something along that lines.

And here comes the exact moment to scratch the philosophy bump in your skull. Which is the right dose when applying the medication?

The more, the merrier, bro! The thicker the crowd, the more fun!

2 is a company, 3 – a team, and so up the skyrocketing curve: gang-squad-crowd-tribe-nation-global community...

When not alone, you're bigger, stronger, surer, fitter to make outsider freaks bite dust, those unlike us... who are less in numbers... those not assimilated as of yet... the freaks who are still not we, not with us.

'What's up? What are you at?'

'Well, just writing.'

'Whoa, man! This splash of tangled spaghetti is really your hand? No shit? The stuff is just unreadable.'

'Etruscan's illegible.'

Maybe, the guy is right. Should I practice typing at keyboard? 8 fingers plus 2 thumbs are more than just the latter two. Even the most slowed down of Paart's pieces are not for a one-handed piano player... Looks like I need the skill. To reach the level of 27 characters per minute? Huh? Who knows, maybe indeed possible.

The last straw to break the back of my camel-obstinate procrastination became the \$100 prize of monthly carrot in competitions at prozza.com to stimulate the gang of talents registered. Yeah, nothing doing, I have to train myself... There should be some programs to acquire the skills, should there?

It was not the first online crowd I've taken a shot at joining. Chat-rooms, online courses sending you spiffy certificate picture

in PDF format for you to adjust the size and print it for your den wallpaper, joined flashmobs for fun and recreation, GitHub, Stackoverflow, Linux communities for computer music makers, forums of Linux music makers, wine-lovers, joint suckers, scuba divers... you name it.

It's only that I somehow didn't hang on for long, got bored or switched over to something else and later felt, like, lazy to pick the same stuff up and shake it on. However, with the MoM thing my usual routine broke, I stuck by and kinda didn't feel like ditching it. The force of habit, maybe.

Firstly, the site had an exquisite interface, and the MoM meant business, you got it still at signing up. No questions concerning your credit card, age or gender. But, you had to tick "I agree" box, as if installing MS Service Pack of patches to your desktop and even add your digital signature at the bottom of that long form.

Well, and who would read all the blah-blah in a form? Ever? Especially small print, like:

"Note #1: a member should prove their being monster but not a freak, because the Mob of Monsters is for only those ready to attest their monstrosity on daily basis and thus confirm their right to hang out with the MoM."

or further down:

"Note #2: deleting a MoM account is not a way to get off the hook and walk away."

because of:

"Note #3: The MoM objective is to free the world from freaks

by pruning them off.”

A crafty catch there, huh? That way a renegade MoMist did not last much longer than their deleted account, not even by means of a spontaneous flight to some exotic nook on the planet. Yes, the Internet and AI have made of us one global family with differently colored pennants above the separate barracks in our common camp.

Fugitive freaks got erased differently. An extensive choice of instrumentality for the purpose. Starting with blockhead MoMists ready to annul the freak in a straightforward simplistic Kamikaze style, and up to a carefully thought thru multi-move combination of an egghead leaving not a trace of their behind-the-curtains shadow in the scene of accident.

A traitor had not a chance of escape nor of finding a hole to lie low.

The MoM was a self-policing politically autonomous society embedded in all kinds of other political entities governed in their traditionally established ways. However, the MoM's code came ahead of any other for a true MoMist. Not a little number of guys regretted bitterly their missing out on the habit of attentive reading preamble to agreements, still more cursed themselves for signing in on high under liquor-smoke-substance-etc.'s influence.

All jail-breaking tries ended monotonously alike – ragged flashes from patrol cars, checking the body to find the notorious “black mark” (in grateful memory of Billy Bounce, John Silver at al. from *The Treasure Island* by Robert L. Stevenson) clutched

by the body's dead hand or inserted into it's pocket, or shoved up... the details tend to depend on particular circumstances, you know.

The tastefully designed MoM logo on the dark side of the card, and the reverse with the reprint of the demised defector's digital autograph presented the constant grim attribute to that sort of cases. Quite telling an evidence it was for the detectives to deduce that their police station got another albatross of insolvable homicide hanging from their neck. And even if they follow the right track, the bitchy suspect at the last moment would just kill himself for being fucked up any way.

The MoM activities? Get-togethers, sure thing, what else a mob is supposed to do?

Weekly all-out meetings. At the startup period regional but later, when the process of snivel-freak culling, removal of renegades as well as suicides caused by depressive forebodings reduced the numbers of MoMists the meetings grew over into global events. Of the same frequency though.

3 consequential meetings unattended served a clear-cut clue that the guy's unfit to stay in the ranks of MoM, volunteers to straighten the situation out hit Grinning-Skull button to get, if selected randomly, the "black mark" signed by the weakling who had dropped out of the race. That same routine as about renegades. To pepper up the shebang, the "black mark" not realized in 4 weeks indicated the undertaker's unfitness for a... follow me? Yep, after a month wasted, the unproductive



performer's "black mark" popped up for volunteers' roulette at the following meeting. Simple and sweet.

The online MoM meetings order knew no changes. MoMists attesting their monstrous worth. It could be, say, a selfie against the backdrop of a kitten hanged DIY or a picture of an anti-personnel land mine to be planted lovingly in the neighbor's lawn plus the clip of city news report on the effect. All depended on the MoMist resourcefulness and imagination.

The all-in ballot wound up every online meeting, the dude whose nick hit the bottom in the Horrid Deeds list knew it's time to put their personal matters in order and/or acquire a lot in the cemetery of their choice or go on a drinking-fucking spree up to his last dollar. Tastes differ, you know.

It goes without saying that outside freaks took shots at intervening. Like, parents who had some ambitious plans for their scions, governments offended by the fact of some other bodies kept messing around with their potential cannon fodder and egg-heads, employees at federal security agencies because it's what they were getting paid for.

The MoM site would be crashed, hacked, banned, replaced with redirection to the infamous '404'.

During a week MoM members found a missive in their email boxes, the link to the site's new whereabouts. Welcome back, Mob! The glorious design of indomitable site added a gleaming button "Report an infiltrator". Buckle up, fellas, on we zip!

Along that way of epic glory and grand achievements the

MoM dwindled out into the upscale elite group of hundreds then tens Mob Monsters. The Great Magister Monsters.

A startup dare-devil who did not give a fuck and registered (a fairly rare event as of late) was not to survive for long. The times of selfie sharing at “webinars” were gone for good.

When the Magisters’ number decreased (or, rather, heightened) to 9, the cam eyelets in the notebooks of that Magnificent Nine were safely plastered. Some over wary cats spoke thru Voice Changer Device which gave to their sound that effing accent of retarded bot with its balls screwed on too tightly. Still dropped in tracks, VCD or no VCD, with all their 9 lives each, because now there remain just 2 of us. I and Bart.

The showdown of the last of Mob Monsters needed no ballot neither VCD. Because on no sane guy you could sell the wheezy gurgle of half-choked squirrel as my natural voice, I need no distorting gizmos. As for Bart, he’s too much in love with his opulent baritone.

Yep, so we are, no cosmetics applied – a scraggy squirrel vs. conceited Narcissus.

For than reason, in full conformance to the MoM regulations, here am I on a 3-week vacation and no longer, hiking in this here wild mountainous back country. Not alone I am, a MoM old-timer feels better in a company. Nimeta is both my trip companion and my girlfriend, 2 in 1.

She's a cute-looking chick though not too bright which makes her even better. It was not falling at first sight for each other,

notwithstanding her superb physic. But then it somehow turned into a stable relationship. Yep, somewhere up to about a year already. Anyways, she keeps a more precise track of time.

That time, about a year back, I just thought, ‘What the hell? Why to reject a nice extra blanket by your side? Just in case.’

But then, a beauty is admirable for 3 days at most when staying at your home. That’s why we live separately thanks to the wise advice of that Irishman who knew a couple of things about this world’s ways and stuff.

And for this here trek I surely need an extra blanket, nights in the highlands are pretty chilly.

I planned to go up the river valley to where there are waterfalls in the satellite map, not too big to lure tourists to this hinterland, which did enhance their attractiveness to me.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t hire a local guide in the farmsteads on the way. At this stretch in summertime the rednecks are too busy making hay at their tilted lots in nearby slopes. Having no time to brush sweat off their brows, they simply explained to keep to the old cow path along the left bank.

When the path got lost in the woods, I just went on. Path or no path the left bank still remains the left one until you turn back. Damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead!

So we proceeded – the effing Pathfinder (I) leading forth and Nimeta puffing hard, and stomping bravely behind my back, and no complains. That’s my girl!

At some places the riverside cliffs jutted too close to the

riverbed and those we had to skirt around from above climbing the slope grown with thick woods. The river remained down there roaring along, unseen thru the treetops in the descending wood.

And then there started the second tier of cliffs. Climbing farther up the slope to bypass them as well seemed like too much of an uphill job. So I walked on keeping close to the foot of the cliff formation rooted in the ledge of, like, over-50-degrees slant that kept growing steeper with the progress.

The most scurvy looked that loose gritty layer blanketing the ground. A kinda fine scaly slug in the layer rustled and spilled of in weeny brooklets from under your boots. The goddamn nasty hissing plus scary sight of those tiny rivulets of bitty dry grit rolling downward at every other step. And only the inertia of moving on did not allow to stop and think, until the slant became too abrupt.

It's only when I pulled up, turned to the 50-foot-tall wall of gray cliff on my right and gasped from the revelation, I got it suddenly where the stone scales had been peeling off!

I turned around, Nimeta stood some ten feet off but I had no time to share the discovery. The hiss grew louder and I glided down standing midst a sprung up current of dry grit. The drift gathered momentum. My boots half buried in the flowing scales.

I took a GS left turn approaching a lonely tree trunk stuck out from the almost sheer tilt covered with gray scales too slippery to even stand upon. The trunk withstood my desperate cling. Yet, there was no time to take a breather nor make up my mind.

Another dry grit-fall whooshed by. I looked up thru the eye-smarting sweat pouring down my face.

Nimeta glided past sitting on her behind. My left arm shoot out towards her, our hands clasped. Her slip braked, she hung on our handgrip. The stream of dry debris tumbled on to leap over the tilt edge down the wall into unseeable void.

She did not scream. The tensely drawn lips in the pallid face let out no sound. The hiss died away in the river's roar down there. The dry trunk of the dead tree twitched and creaked. But she kept silent.

Yet the eyes, her mad eyes. That insane fright stilled within them.

The clench of our hands was giving in, slackened slowly. Her wrist, moist with sweat, slipped thru my fingers.

There was no yell, all I heard was that hollow clump drowned by the non-stop noise of the mountainous river rolling on.

After a while I freed myself of the rucksack and let it roll over the edge. A 40-foot length of light synthetic rope stayed by me...

She lay face-down in a small, meter-wide inlet of backwater rimmed with rocks smoothed by ever hurrying current, still placid water spot it was, no deeper than a couple of inches. The hump of her backpack stayed above the water, safely dry.

I scooped out from her checkered jacket patch-pocket her iPhone to leave the body anonymous. Before the hicks get thru their labors—if those ever end—the woods gulpers would see to her becoming one with Nature.

Then I collected my rucksack a couple of meters downstream, drenched thru and thru...

A week later I raised the lid of my notebook and put the iPhone next to it.

Unbelievable, yet hacking the phone password had taken 4 days. Neither “Nimeta” nor her birth date, nor the name of Prince Charming she played mamas-&-papas with way back in high school didn’t work. Getting access turned an uphill job. Nothing of interest in the effing brick except for the file with passwords in Documents Folder.

To log in I typed her nick and entered the password.

‘Hi, Bart!’ was I welcomed affably by the attractive MoM’s interface.

I attached Squid and scribbled. The ugly lame spaghetti ran:

‘Hi, I am V and I’m a murderer.’

It took one whole minute of waiting for the response in block letters ‘HI, V, GOT IT.’

I have no idea what future is ahead of this here half-choked squirrel but I’ll not die of ennui.

Bet your farm...

»

\* \* \*

The first memory ain't a zilch to just discard and walk away whistling a random tune. Nope. At times, nothing else but the first memory keeps you going all day long. Don't ask me why it's so but it simply works. First Memory. Ha!

Now, if not busy running your daily squirrel wheel, try to guess why the first thing in the morning I strain my memory to recollect, as vividly and clear as it is possible for a guy whose Turing Test is positive, as of yet, which namely day it is? This here fucking today, eh? From the days' of week perspective?

And only after my intense brain-storming abates and calms down to lull, I come over to everyday chores and tasks for living thru one more day in the framework of my walk in life...

So yes, by all the leads and clues Sunday it was when in the morning I looked out the open door. It's hard now to decide what prompted my action, given too familiar both the view and soundtrack. Which suggests I just had nothing better to do at all so early on a Sunday morning. Yep, that was the reason, I reckon.

Anyways, there I stood leaning forward, arms apart and clutching both of the door jambs. Nah, no push-backs intended for I never pulled for no surplus straining. Aerobics is not in my line, if you dig the meaning. I simply looked out in the fresh early morning, and turned my head hither-thither, both ways, along the trodden path thru our jungle.

The cabins looked same as on any other day of week at such an early hour. Or, perhaps, a bit emptier because I had figured out that Sunday it was.

Not a soul alive in all Main Stem except for US treading from right to left.

As a free citizen of the indie jungle, Uncle Sam had surely all the right to leg it in whichever direction he felt, like, appropriate. On the other hand, here is your head sticking out between your door jambs and thinking “what’s the buzz?” because it’s your unalienable right to get surprised, since his cabin is on the left down the trail. Which means he starts his Sunday not by going out yet by getting in. Or have I missed anything?

Which situation did not contradict though the principle of peaceful coexistence in our free jungle, so quite rightfully sez I: ‘Hello, US!’

Because a hermie might feel affronted when addressed by the handle they had baptized him with not waiting for his expressed consent instead of his hermit monica.

‘Aloha, UN!’ sez he. ‘Why keeping yourself in confinement? Step out for a sip of fresh air.’

‘I would if not for my outstanding moral fortitude founded on M&C – Moderateness and Contineness, if you dig basics.’

‘Nah. I’m still at contemplating the Pascal’s Wager – “to win all or to lose nothing”.’

US stood still in the rays of the rising sun donned in his Sunday best of retrovertible rags. His beefy claw clasped around the Slim



E's umbrella in the collapsed mode. Well, well, well! Here lied the explanation for his counter-habitual route – the fishy geezer had been on a visit to SE's parts in the jungle to borrow the thing, that umbrella of hers!

'Pascal is for suckers,' sez I, 'spews enthusiastic bubbles about the goods he peddles yet misses out to demonstrate how you set that "all" going and shies to specify the "nothing's" parameters. So, whereto now? Fishing?'

'Yep.'

The glint of lust in the old man's eyes was just another evidence of accuracy of my guess. Wearing his fancy retroverties and schlepping a fully charged umbrella to surprise fish, huh? Am I wet behind my ears? Off to your time-leaps, US, that where you soaped your skies to!

Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, the ammo SE uses in her umbrella falls under "dum-dum" type in terms of demolition power. I can't even nearly imagine where she got the damn thing from when she turned a sturdy lying-flat Oblomovian. A standard disillusionment by the fact that there's no chance for a romantic relationship in the world of buck-fixed alligators and blockhead dummies for a change. Both species are o for romantic purposes, a swarm of blood-sucking free riders (so SE).

And—speak of the devil!—that very moment I caught a low buzzing. It sounded plummier than that of a fly or mosquito. But the latter could safely be ignored in calculations. For a considerable stretch mosquitoes kept skirting around our jungle.

The smart buggers got it that biting anyone from these here hermies would only trigger genetic mutations, mean and nasty.

Could you fly your 264 pounds by mosquito wings? Well, they learned the hard way it was an uphill job and now simply shun visiting the location.

By the rule of thumb, there remained only bees and wasps as a plausible source of that buzz. Bees had been successfully eradicated from this hemisphere a year or two back. Thanks to widely used pesticide CR-74 “Happy Farming!” and the last of wasps I met a fortnight ago. Yep, I recollect it happened on a Sunday too.

The poor thing flew into my cabin and, after a couple of aerobatic stunts in my kitchen airspace, flopped on the floor flat dead for no obvious reason.

From my standpoint the happening was a hoot. Which misgivings got fully justified because—here you are!—the buzz increased to the level you could read like nothing else but a cavalry raid. Damn!

When you’re a classical sort of a hermie, the nearest see of authorities would sooner wink at your sticking around, a dozen miles off. The expenses for evicting operation meet a cold shoulder in the local budget and you may keep to your accustomed hunters-gleaners lifestyle.

However, it’s another kettle of fish about a collection of hermies in a jungle. An idle mudak may happen to post her vid to a random social net, like, a dozen of cabins shot from afar.

The local big-shots would get their asses kicked by their superiors whose asses had been kicked, hierarchically, by a tweet of this or that billionaire piece of shit at GleamPhiz or Chirrupper. The usual chain-of-command, you know.

Now, hermies have heard it too, the buzz. Scattered along Stem Path with their maps upturned, awaited the seasoned crowd of 10 apostles for the final act in the routine – kicking our asses outta here.

Dick the Lamb, quacking in his boots, cast quick looks hither-thither, ready for a dash.

Calm down, kid, there's no escape, all the passable treads outta the jungle are sealed off by their block-posts. Take it easy and accrue the episode to the stock of your life experience.

I still could not make US out midst the audience on the path. The shrewd cat, like, was in time to take his time-leap. Well-armed too.

It's time for me, vigilant UN, to grab my portabilities. They never frisk the pockets fearful to hook up a fresh strain of an insectological civilization.

Fare thee well, my cabin! The right door jamb had always been my fave. It took me a week to carve it with my pen-knife out of a young oak-tree felled by a lightning. I hollowed a delve in it for my treasure trove. The best stuff you can hope for between the current date and St. Nicolas' birthday or whatever moniker the guy enjoys in your particular confession of candle eaters.

Outside, the bulls slide down the ropes in their hovering

monkey circus. US is still nowhere to see. A wise move. His Green Card had expired long ago and turned hot red in color. Which means deportation to a nondescript tribe in the middle of any nowhere on this globe and no native knowing how to respond to his “Aloha!” nor to “Kanichwa!” still less to “Parev Tsez!”

Yet, my clairvoyance fits keep aggravating, yeah. I figured out this eviction from the dead wasp's air-trick maneuvers two Sundays back as well as the US's plan to...

‘Hey, you! Out!’

‘Yes, sir! Yes, sir!’

Now the bull-skunks will spray the area with some stinking shit that makes the whole area unlivable for at least a couple of years. My stash and pen-knife safely pocketed. Yep. Not for nothing I never liked Sundays.

‘I’m on my way, sir!’

\* \* \*

# Epilogue

‘Pull up at the corner,’ said V to the taxi driver. He paid, stepped out onto the sidewalk, and crossed it to assume an attitude of a loafer by the wall who had plenty of time and no idea as to how to whittle it away.

Thick unending throng of passers-by rolled past him. An infinite variety of rags and maps drifted by along the wide sidewalk in waves nearing and going, approaching and disappearing. They walked in twos and threes, and individually, rubbing shoulders with or dodging others. They talked business, shared rumors, argued hotly, laughed along or gave orders over their phones for that was a usual everyday crowd, all kinds of sorts, walking on, on, and on, the streams of fellow walkers in both directions at once.

Each one in their own casual wear mask invariably put on in public, the regular face expression ideal for the occasion when you’re a particle in the crowds floating by V with his back leaned against the wall.

Neither he nor the wall impeded the mutual motion, both behaved decently, and did not interfere with the counter directional tide. We won’t make conjectures about the wall’s motives for falling in with that particular line of behavior while V as, hopefully, had been mentioned—and if not, then mark it well right now, it’s never late to learn—was a good-humored

sociopath by his nature.

So, yes, that way he hanged there out waiting for her to turn up, in the attitude of a personage from an old naive romance or a movie, forgotten, black-and-white, who also stands so and waits for the sail to pop up in the radiance over the distant horizon, black-and white too.

Is he in love then? Think before opening your piehole, young man. This word got deprecated and almost taboo in the current millennium. We won't deny that he tends to like her (much fucking more acceptable, see?) even though he does not shower her with likes because of his allergy to social nets. Yet, on the whole, he likes her that's why he stands waiting there for her to pass by that corner because he knows where exactly she'll be going to. Besides, he's not having much to do now and he just fancied to shake his leg a bit tagging along with her in the same swaying wave of the crowd tide.

Ha! See? Didn't I tell you? He's made her fine figure out at last, about a half-block off. Where she walks wearing her personal mask of facial expression for public occasions. (All the world is a theater, remember?) Her visage is dimmed and not yet quite discernible, like the features in the map of the eternal companion of our planet.

But even at that distance he still both liked and admired the intent in her purposeful strides, even though her legs were not seen, screened off by the preceding waves of pedestrians. But he knew all the same that those were just classy, her legs were.

Yeah, he knew it.

Patience, V! All comes in the proper time to those who can wait.

‘Hi. Lia! You’re, looks like, taking a stroll to the commons? Mind a well-bred tagger along?’

‘O, hi, V! How are you?’

Yes, he guessed it right, she’s wearing a skirt, not mini yet generous enough to not hide her knees, those heart-breaking knees killing—with modest tastefulness—on sight.

‘I’m fine, thanks. Just have to idle a couple of hours.’

V felt a firm pull at his pant leg.

‘Oh, hello cutie!’ He stooped over to pick up from the sidewalk the shaggy ball of a small dog.

Toto let out a happy yelp and licked V’s nose with her slick tongue of that slightly pink hue noticeable in jewelry items made of BERYL (if you are not aware enough to dig it what this here detail has just hinted at).

But if you’re still in the dark what’s what, why, we can start the whole story over again...

(Relax, I’m kidding... as of yet. So long, pal.)

*The ¿Happy? End*

[The book is free for download at

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/1387002>]