

Svetlana de Rohan-Levashov

Revelation

Part. 1 Childhood Vol. 1 Awakening

Svetlana means "Bearing Light". It very rarely happens that the destiny of a person, their deeds and name, fully coincide, as happened in Svetlana de Rohan-Levashov's case. All her life, from earliest childhood, was permeated with an aspiration to Light, Knowledge and spiritual development. That her fate is unusual is the very least one can say. From the very beginning of her life she had to adapt to the fact that she differed greatly from people around her, that she could do a lot of things which were inaccessible and incomprehensible for others. Being yet very little, Svetlana had to study and master her abilities, to learn how to control and use them correctly. She experienced the bitter taste of misunderstanding and mistrust, envy and cruelty, loneliness and hatred very early on. Her miraculous innate abilities were misunderstood and unclaimed; she had to survive and live in this world, a very dangerous and insidious world, especially, for a lonely little girl...

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Preface

Why did I decide to write this book? Of course, I did not do that because I consider myself someone special or extraordinary. I just happened to live a bright and quite unusual life, and if this book helps someone not to feel lonely in our beautiful, but very cruel world, then I have not written it in vain.

We got used to make our life easier by saying: "it cannot be, because it never can be" readily casting aside everything that cannot be squeezed into our "universally recognized" frameworks. We got used to believing that all people are kind, that TV sets broadcast "only truth and nothing but truth" which is so comfortable to live with and anything that brings (or just could bring) us any inconvenience, or we cannot find room for in our "well-organized", but at the same time too problematic world, is banished from it without the least regret.

This book is exactly about this kind of "incorrect" life. It is a history of a "little hermit" lost in the incomprehensible and sometimes very spiky world of people. One who has walked a long and very "thorny" way and finally found her real essence, the understanding of life and those wonders which accompanied her throughout her life.

I am grateful to my grand-dad for bright and unforgettable recollections with which he filled my child's world and also unusual wonders which, regrettably, very soon became the "scourge" of my childhood existence.

I am grateful to my father. I could not have lived my life with my chin up, never surrendering or losing my faith in myself without his support. My life would never be the way it is now without his love and faith in me.

I am grateful to my mother for her wonderful kindness and faith in me, for her help and resolute guarding of my "eccentric" abilities.

I am grateful to my wonderful son Robert who gave me a chance to be a proud mother, for his open heart and his talent, and also because he just exists on this Earth.

And, with the whole of my heart, I am grateful to my amazing husband, Nicolai Levashov, who helped me to find myself in my "lost" world, gave me the understanding of that to which I tantalizingly tried to find answers for many long years and opened a door into the fabulously beautiful world of Big Space.

To him, my best friend without whom I could not imagine my present existence, I dedicate this book.

Addendum to Preface

As we grow, mature and get older, our life is filled with plenty of recollections, which are dear to our heart, but sometimes absolutely unnecessary. They overload our memory, which already is so tired, leaving in it only fragments of the events which happened a long time ago and vague faces of people who you met also a long time ago.

Present ousts the past bit by bit, encumbering our brain, which has been already strongly over-loaded with today's important events, and our lovely childhood and youth, so dear to our hearts, gradually recede into the background, being blurred by the stream of the important today...

No matter how bright a life we have lived and how brilliant our memory, nobody is able to reconstruct events which happened forty (or more) years ago with total exactness.

For reasons of which we are unaware, sometimes a person or a fact leaves an indelible impression and is literally "imprinted" in our memory forever, and sometimes something very important disappears in the ever-flowing stream of time and only an accidental conversation with an old acquaintance unexpectedly snatches out some exceptionally important event from the nooks of our memory and the thought that we could have forgotten such a thing amazes us to the bottom of our heart!

Before I started writing this book, I tried to refresh some events in my memory which I considered important for me and interesting enough for telling to others, but to my huge disappointment I understood that even my excellent memory would be unable to restore many details, and especially dialogues, which happened such a long time ago, with appropriate accuracy.

Therefore I decided to use the most reliable and well proven method – time travel – in order to rebuild any event and any detail of the past with absolute exactness, re-living exactly that day (or days) when the event I choose to tell about took place. It was the only way to get the result I aimed for, because the usual "normal" method cannot, with exactitude, reproduce past events.

Perfectly understanding that such detailed precision, down to the minutest details of the dialogues, mine and other protagonists, and the very events, may leave my readers perplexed and even in doubt (and give the opportunity to my "ill-wishers", if any, to call all of it a "fantasy"), I therefore wrote this addendum, considering my moral imperative to try to explain somehow what will be going on here.

In case of my being unsuccessful in that, I just would like to invite all those interested to slightly lift the veil of time with me for a short while and to live together my strange and sometimes even slightly mad, but very unusual and colourful, life...

1. The beginning

From a bird's-eye view of the past years of our life, our dear childhood looks more like some kind of very beautiful fairy-tale which we heard a very long time ago. Warm mother's hands carefully covering you with a blanket before sleep, long and sunny summer days, not yet blurred with sorrows and many other things, light and cloudless like our far away childhood itself, are summoned to mind.

I was born in Lithuania, in a small and strikingly green town called Alitus, far from the stormy life of famous people and "great powers". It had then only about 35 000 inhabitants who mostly lived in their own private houses surrounded by orchards and flower-gardens. An ancient forest which stretched for kilometres embraced our princely small town giving the impression of an enormous green bowl in which it placidly and peacefully snuggled, living its tranquil life.

It was built in 1400 by a Lithuanian prince, Alitis, on the bank of the wide beautiful river Nemunas. More precisely, a castle was built first, and the tiny town around it appeared later. The river looped around the town, as if creating some kind of natural protection, in the middle of which the blue mirrors of three small forest lakes glittered.

Regrettably, today nothing is left of the ancient castle; only its ruins survived to see the present day as it gradually turned into an enormous hill the top of which grants an amazing view of the river. The ruins were the most favourite and enigmatic place of our childhood games. It was a place of spirits and ghosts which, for us, still seemed to live in these old tumbledown underground tunnels and looked for "victims" to drag into their mysterious underground world. Only the bravest boys dared to go into them deep and far enough to return afterwards and scare their less bold mates with frightful stories.

2. A Friend

For as long as I can remember the greater part of my earliest recollections as a child was always associated with the forest, dearly loved by all members of my family. We lived in a couple of houses very close to it and went there almost every day. My grandpa who I adored with my whole little heart was like a forest spirit to me. It seemed that he knew every tree, flower, bird or path and he could tell about that absolutely awesome and unknown to me world for hours, never repeating himself or getting too tired to answer my foolish child's questions.

I would never miss these morning walks with him for anything in the world. They were my favourite fairy-tale world which I shared with nobody. To my huge regret, I understood who my

grandfather really was only many years later, but then he was just the nearest, warmest and most fragile human being with bright lively eyes who taught me to listen to nature, talk to the trees and even to understand the voices of birds. Then I was just a little girl and sincerely thought that such things were quite normal; or maybe I did not think about it at all. I remember my first acquaintance with a "talking" tree. It was an old and enormous oak, too huge for the little hands of a child.

— Do you see how big and kind it is? Listen to it. Listen... – the gentle and enveloping voice of my grandfather whispered. And I heard...

Until now, as if it happened yesterday, I vividly remember that feeling, incomparable with anything else, of a confluence with something incredibly enormous and deep. It was a feeling of strange visions of strange far away lives which began to drift suddenly before my eyes and deep feelings of joy and sadness, too deep and complicated for a little child. My familiar and usual world disappeared and instead of it everything shone around and spun in the incomprehensible and amazing whirlpool of sounds and feelings. I felt no fear, only huge surprise and desire that it would never end...

A child is not an adult. He does not think of anything as wrong or that it should not be (according to our "accepted" concepts). Therefore it did not seem strange to me that it was another, absolutely different world, which was very exciting and beautiful. And this world was shown to me by the man my little child's heart trusted with all its natural, pure and open simplicity.

I always adored nature. I was tightly connected with any of its manifestations, independent of place, time or somebody's wish. From the earliest days of my conscious existence our enormous old garden became the favourite place of my everyday games. Until now I remember, in the minutest detail, the feeling of that unique child's delight which I always experienced running out there on a sunny summer morning! I submerged into that extremely familiar and at the same time so mysterious and ever-changing world of smells, sounds and absolutely inimitable senses; the world which regrettably grows and changes as we grow and change, and later we have neither time nor strength to stop and listen to our soul.

We constantly speed along in a wild whirlpool of days and events, pursuing our dream and trying to "achieve *something* in this life" at all cost. And gradually we begin to forget (if we remembered it at all) how strikingly beautiful a blossoming flower can be, how marvelous the forest smells after the rain or how sometimes incredibly deep the silence can be and how our soul exhausted by the everyday race needs just a simple **rest**.

Usually I woke up very early. Morning was my favourite part of the day (which, regrettably, totally changed when I grew up). I adored hearing the way the still sleepy earth woke up from the morning coolness; seeing how the first drops of dew sparkled still hanging on tender floral petals and then fell down like little diamond stars at the lightest puff of the breeze. I relished watching LIFE waking up to meet the new day. This was truly **MY world**. I loved it and was absolutely sure that it would be with me forever.

At that time we lived in the old two-story house surrounded by an enormous old garden. Every day my mother went to work and my father mainly stayed at home or was out for trips because he worked as a journalist in a local newspaper the name of which I regrettably do not remember. Therefore almost all day I spent with my grandpa and grandma, my father's parents (as I knew later, his foster parents).

3. The first "swallows"

My second favourite passion was reading, which forever remained my greatest love. I learned to read when I was three which, as it appeared later, was a very early age for that. When I was four, I already could fluently and incessantly read my favourite fairy-tales (for which I have now paid with my eyes).

I adored living with my heroes: I sympathized with them, cried when something went wrong and was indignant and offended when the evil won. And when fairy-tales had a happy ending,

everything sparkled in pink and the festive mood accompanied me throughout the whole day. It is funny and sad to remember these astonishingly pure childhood days, when everything seemed possible and absolutely real. Well, sometimes it was indeed so real that I could not even imagine how this was so. It happened when I read one of my favourite fairy-tales, being in pure rapture. The feeling was so bright that I remember everything as if it happened yesterday: the ordinary world around me suddenly disappeared and I found myself in my favourite fairy-tale. I mean I **truly** appeared there. Everything there was **really alive** – moving, changing and absolutely astonishing. I did not know exactly how much time I spent in that amazing world, but when it suddenly disappeared, I felt a painfully-deep clanking emptiness inside me...

It seemed that our "normal" world had suddenly lost all its colours, so bright and colourful was my strange vision. I did not want to part with it. I did not want it to end and suddenly I felt so "deprived" that I started crying and rushed to complain to anybody I could find at that moment about my "irreplaceable loss". Fortunately my mother was at home and on patiently hearing out my confusing babble, made me promise not to share this "extraordinary" news with my friends.

When, surprised, I asked: – Why?

My mother confusingly said that it would be our secret for a while. Of course I agreed, but it seemed to me a little strange because I was used to sharing all my news openly with my friends, and now it was suddenly forbidden for some reason. My strange "adventure" was gradually forgotten, because every day of one's childhood usually brings something new and unusual. But one day it repeated again and then happened almost every time when I began to read something.

I fully submerged in my amazing fairy-tale world, which seemed to me far more **real** than all other usual "realities". And in no way could I understand, having the mind of a child, why my mother became less and less delighted every time I told her my inspired stories. My poor kind mother! Now, on living my life, I can only imagine what she must have gone through then! I was her third and only child (my brother and sister died at birth), which had suddenly submerged into who knows what and was not going to come out of it!

I am very grateful to her for her boundless patience and her efforts to understand everything which happened to me then and during all the following "crazy" years of my life. I think that my grandpa greatly helped her to do that, the same way he helped me. He was always with me and probably that was why his death became the most bitter and irreparable loss of my childhood years.

4. The loss

A burning and unknown pain flung me into a strange and cold world of adults, giving no possibility of ever coming back. My fragile, light and fairy-tale world of a child was broken into thousands of tiny pieces which, somehow I knew, I could never bring together. Certainly, I still was a little six-year-old child with my dreams and fantasies, but at the same time I firmly knew that **our amazing world could not be always so fairyland beautiful and, so it appears, was not always safe to exist in.**

I remember that just a few weeks before that frightful day, my grandpa and I sat in our garden and "listened" to the sunset. Grandpa was quiet and sad for some reason, but this sadness was very warm and light and even had a kind of deep kindness. Now I understand that he **knew** then that he would leave very soon, but regrettably *I* did not know that.

— Some day, in many, many years, when I am not with you, you will watch the sunset and listen to the trees and maybe sometimes you will remember your old grandpa, – his voice purred like a quiet brook. – Life is very precious and beautiful, child, even if sometimes it will seem to you cruel and unfair. No matter what happen to you, remember: you have the most important things in the world – **your honour and your human dignity** – which **nobody can discredit or take away from you, only you can do that.** Preserve them, little one, allow nobody to break you, and the rest in life can be remedial.

He rocked me like a baby in his dry and always warm hands. I felt so incredibly peaceful that

I held my breath in order not to scare off this wonderful moment, when the soul was warmed and rested, when the whole world seemed to be so enormous and extraordinarily kind... suddenly the essence of his words reached my mind!!!

I jumped up like a disheveled chicken, gasping in indignation and, as ill luck would have it, unable to find in my "rebellious" head the words so needed for this moment. It was so vexing and absolutely unfair! Why must he speak about the sadly-**inevitable** event which (I even understood it already) sooner or later must happen, on such a wonderful evening?! My heart did not want to hear that and accept such a "horror", which was quite natural: all of us, even children, refuse to acknowledge this sad fact so much that we pretend that it will **never happen**. Maybe **one day** it can happen to **someone somewhere**, but **not to us... never**.

Of course, all the charm of our wonderful evening disappeared and I did not wish to dream anymore about anything. Life again gave me to understand that no matter how hard we try, **there are not so many things in this world which we, actually, can control**. My grandpa's death indeed turned my life whole upside-down. He died in my hands when I was just six years old. It happened in an early sunny morning when everything around seemed to be so happy, tender and kind. The first morning birds joyfully called to one another in the garden, merrily passing the latest news to each other. A pink-cheeked dawn, still soft after the last morning sleep, was about to open its eyes, washed by the morning dew. The air exhaled an amazingly delicious fragrance from the multitude of summer flowers.

Life was so pure and beautiful! There was no way one could imagine that a misfortune could suddenly and pitilessly burst into such a fairy-tale-wonderful world. It just **did not have any right** to do so!!! But it is not in vain that they say misfortune always comes uninvited, never asking permission to enter. This morning it entered our home, without knocking, and effortlessly destroyed my so well protected, carefree and sunny child's world, leaving unbearable pain and the terrible and cold emptiness of the first loss in my life.

That morning my grandpa and I were going to go for a walk in our forest to pick the wild strawberries which I liked very much. As I calmly waited for him outside, it suddenly seemed to me that a piercing icy wind blew from somewhere and an enormous black shadow came down to earth. I felt scared and lonely. There was nobody in the house in that moment except for my grandpa and I decided to go to check whether he was all right. He lay on his bed very pale and somehow I understood at once that he was dying. I rushed to him, hugged and began to shake, trying by all means to return him back. Then I began to yell and call for help. It was very strange: nobody heard me and came to help for some reason, although I knew that everybody was somewhere close by and must hear me. I did not understand then that it was my soul that cried...

I had a terrible feeling that time had stopped and we were both out of it, as if someone had placed us in a glass sphere where there was neither life nor time. And then I felt as if my hair stood on end. I will never forget that feeling, even if I live for a hundred years!

I saw a transparent luminous spirit that came out of my grandpa's body and, on floating to me, it began to softly flow into me. I was terribly scared at first, but then I felt soothing warmth and for some reason understood that nothing bad could happen to me. The spirit like a luminous stream, easily and softly flowed into me, and became smaller and smaller, as if gradually "melting", and I felt as if my body became enormous, vibrating and extraordinarily light, almost "soaring".

It was a moment of confluence with something uncommonly substantial, all-embracing and incredibly important to me. And then there was a terrible and engrossing pain from the loss which swept over me like a black wave, crushing any attempt of mine to resist it. I cried so much at the funeral that my parents were afraid that I would fall sick.

The pain took total hold of my child's heart and refused to let it go. The world seemed intimidating, cold and empty. I could not accept the fact that my grandpa would be buried and I would never see him again! I was angry with him that he had left me and I was angry with myself that I failed to save him. Life was cruel and unfair... and I hated it because I had to bury him. Probably, this is why it was the first and last funeral which I ever attended in my life.

5. Reality

After the funeral I could not become myself. I became withdrawn and spent a lot of time alone, which distressed all my family to the innermost of their hearts. But little by little life took its normal course and I gradually began to come out of that deeply isolated state in which I submerged myself, but this coming out did not appear to be a simple thing... My patient and loving parents tried to help me, as best as they could. But with all their efforts, they did not know that I was not alone anymore, that after everything I had experienced, a much more unusual and fantastic world – than that in which I had already lived for some time – suddenly opened before me. This world, which excelled any imaginary fantasy with its beauty, was presented to me by my grandpa's extraordinary spirit. It was much more striking than everything that had happened to me before. Only this time I did not want to share it with anybody for some reason.

Day passed after day. In my everyday life I was an absolutely **normal** six-year-old child, who had joys and sorrows, wishes and grief and such unrealizable cheerful child's dreams. I chased after pigeons, adored going to the river with my parents, played badminton with my friends, helped my mother and grandmother in the garden, read my favourite books and studied playing the pianoforte. In other words, I lived the most normal and ordinary life of a little child. The only trouble was that by that time I already had **two** Lives. I lived as if being in two quite different worlds: the first one was our ordinary world in which we all live every day; and the second one was my own "hidden" world where only my soul lived. With every day it became more and more difficult for me to understand **why did everything that happened to me not happen to any of my friends?**

I began to notice more often that the more I shared my "unbelievable" stories with some of my friends, the more often I felt a strange estrangement and non-child watchfulness from them. It hurt and made me very sad. Children are curious, but they do not like incomprehensible things. They always try to get to the essence of what is going with their child's mind as quickly as possible and if they are unable to understand it, it becomes "alien" to their everyday reality and they try to forget about it as quickly as possible. Gradually I became such an "alien" thing.

I also began to understand that my mother was right when she advised me not to tell my friends about everything. But I just could not understand **why** they did not want to know about these things, they were so interesting! So, step by step, I came to the sad understanding that I probably was not like any other children, that I was different. When one day I asked my mother about it directly, she said that I must not be sad, but on the contrary, I should be proud of it, because it was a special talent. Honestly speaking, in no way could I understand what kind of a talent it was from which all my friends tried to keep as far away as possible! But this was a reality and I had to live with it. Therefore I tried to adapt to it somehow and share my strange "abilities and talents" with my friends and acquaintances as little as possible.

Although sometimes it slipped out unwillingly, like, for example, I often **knew** what would happen in that or any other day or hour to one or another of my friends and wanted to help them, warning them about it. But to my great surprise they **preferred to know nothing** and were angry with me, when I tried to explain something to them. Then, for the first time, I understood that **not all people were eager to hear the truth, even if it could help them somehow**. And this discovery made me even sadder.

6. The first contact

Six months after my grandpa's death an event happened, which I think is worth a special mention. It was a winter night (then, the winters in Lithuania were very cold!). I had just gone to bed when suddenly I felt a strange and very soft "call", as if someone called me from very far away. I got up and came to the window. The night was very quiet, bright and serene. A thick snow-cover shimmered with cold sparks all over our dormant garden, as if the reflection of countless stars gently spun a sparkling silver spider web on it. It was so quiet, as if the world stiffened in a strange

lethargic sleep.

Suddenly right in front of my window I saw the luminous figure of a woman. It was very tall, higher than three meters, absolutely transparent and sparkled, as if being woven from billions of stars. I felt a strange warmth coming from her and embracing me as if she called me somewhere. The stranger waved her hand, inviting me to follow her, and I did. The windows in my room were very large and long. They almost reached the earth, so I could easily get outside at any time. I followed my unusual guest without feeling the least fear. There was another very strange thing – I absolutely did not feel cold, although the outside temperature then was not, probably, less than 20 C below zero and I wore only my night gown.

The woman (if I may call her so) waved again with her hand, as if inviting me to follow her. I was very surprised that a **normal** moonlight path suddenly changed its direction and "followed" the stranger, creating a luminous path. I understood that I must go exactly there. Thus I followed my guest right to the forest. There was still a piercing and stark silence. Everything around sparkled and shimmered in the silent light of the moon. Everything was so still, as if the whole world froze in expectation of what was about to happen. The transparent figure moved farther and, as if being charmed, I followed her. I still did not feel cold, although, as I understood later, I was barefoot. There was another oddity. My feet did not break the thin crust of ice over snow, but floated over the surface without leaving any footsteps on it.

At last we reached a small round glade and there, in the moonlight, were several very tall and incredibly sparkling figures. They looked very like us, people, only they were absolutely transparent and weightless, like my exceptionally uncommon guest. They all wore long streaming clothes which looked like white shimmering cloaks. Four figures were male with absolutely white (probably grey) very long hair with shining hoops on their heads. And two figures were female which looked very like my guest, long hair and an enormous sparkling crystal in the middle of the forehead. They all emitted soothing warmth and somehow I understood that nothing bad could happen to me.

I do not remember how I found myself in the centre of the circle. I only remember that suddenly all these figures began to produce bright luminous green rays which were directed right to me, into the area of my heart. All my body began to "sound" quietly (I do not know how to define my state more precisely, because this was exactly the feeling of a **sound inside of me**). The sound became stronger and stronger, my body became weightless, and I hung over the surface like these six figures. The green light became unendurably bright, completely filling all my body. I felt unbelievably light, as if I was about to fly up. Suddenly a dazzling rainbow flared in my head, like a door opened and I saw an unknown world. I had a very peculiar feeling, as if **I knew** this world a very long time ago and at the same time **I never knew it**.

My husband later explained to me that I saw then was **Sacred DaArya**, the far away and fascinating ancient Motherland of our ancestors. But then I was just a little girl and only saw a crystal city of striking beauty which looked like one of the grand cities of my fairy-tales. Then these visions suddenly disappeared and another appeared, already quite incomprehensible to me. A powerful sparkling stream of unknown signs which looked like strange and very beautiful letters floated before my eyes (I knew what they were much later, on reading the ancient Slavonic Veda). I saw an enormous crystal staircase, so high, that it gave the impression of going nowhere. One of the six figures indicated to me that I must go upstairs.

It was absolutely fabulous! I almost did not feel my body, it was totally weightless! At the top of the stairs there was another six tall luminous figures; on the head of one of them was a crown of amazing beauty. It shone and sparkled with millions of colours which I never saw on Earth! It changed its form all the time. Much later I knew that these were the energy structures which very highly evolved spirits possess (which in most cases are reminiscent of a crown), but then it was truly and absolutely unusual and painfully beautiful.

I again somehow found myself in the circle, only now there were twelve luminous figures around me. I again heard a beautiful sound. And I saw myself in a strange crystal egg which was as

if being assembled of countless number of small diamonds. The figures disappeared, I remained alone. Suddenly each of these crystals began to shine very brightly and I felt myself full of "holes", as if millions of holes opened in my body through which strange and warm music was poured into me from every small crystal. I felt so amazingly well that I wanted to cry... Afterwards I remembered nothing.

I woke up in the morning in my room, perfectly remembering every detail of what had happened last night, being absolutely sure that it was **not a dream or my imagination**, that it was all **true** and **real**, like it always was with me. But even if I wished to doubt it very much, the following events would have wiped clean my most sceptical thoughts, if such had ever flashed through my mind.

7. A test

My strange "walks" repeated every night now. I stayed awake, waiting for everybody in the house finally to fall asleep and everything around to sink into deep night silence, so that, without being caught, I could again submerge in that unusual and mysterious "other" world which I had so got used to visiting. I waited impatiently for my new "friends" to appear and the dazzling miracle with which they presented me every time. Although I never knew which of them would come this time, I was always sure that somebody would **certainly** come and that whoever did, he or she would grant me the next fairy instant which I would carefully keep in my memory for a long time, like in a closed magic trunk the keys of which only I had.

But one night nobody came. It was a pitch-dark and moonless night. I stood at the window pressing my forehead against the cold window-glass, keeping my eyes glued on the garden covered in a shimmering snow shroud, trying to discern something moving and familiar till my eyes began to ache, feeling deeply lonely and even a bit "treacherously" abandoned. I was very sad and bitter and felt like crying. I knew that I was losing something incredibly important and precious to me. No matter how hard I tried to prove to myself that everything was all right and they just were late, at the bottom of my heart I dreaded that they could never come. I felt offended and hurt and in no way wanted to believe it. My little child's heart refused to accept such a "terrible" loss and acknowledge the fact that some day that **should** happen; only I did not know yet – when and I wildly wanted to postpone this ill-fated moment as far as possible.

Suddenly something began to change behind my window and shimmer in a familiar way! My first thought that some of my "friends" appeared at last, but instead of familiar luminous spirits I saw a strange "crystal" tunnel which began right near my window and went somewhere far away. My first impulse was to rush there without thinking twice, but then it suddenly seemed a little strange for me that I did not feel that usual warmth and calmness that accompanied each appearance of my "star" friends.

As soon as I thought about it, the "crystal" tunnel began to change and get dark turning into a strange pitch-dark "pipe" with long moving tentacles inside. A sickly and unpleasant pressure squeezed my head, very quickly turning into a raging and bursting pain which threatened to crush my brain. Then for the first time I truly felt how cruel and strong a headache can be (which in the future, only for completely different reasons, would poison my life for nineteen long years). I was scared indeed. There was nobody who could help me... The house deeply slept, but even if it did not, I would not be able to explain to anybody what had happened...

Then, being on the verge of the most real panic, I remembered the creature with the crown of amazing beauty and mentally called to him for help. Foolish, it would seem, but my headache immediately disappeared, giving place to blustering delight, because I suddenly saw again the already familiar shining city and my wonderful and unusual friends. They all for some reason smiled at me very warmly, as if approving, emitting incredibly bright green light around their sparkling bodies. As it appeared later, without knowing it, I had passed **the first test in my life**, of which later on there will be so many indeed, but this was the first time and only the beginning...

I was just a child and could not even suspect then that bad or, as we call them, "black" spirits can perfectly exist in those "other", incredibly beautiful and "pure" worlds and snatch the "greenhorns", like I was then, which had just "hatched out" to another level of reality, like a fish on the hook and gladly devour their raging life-force or connect them to a "black" system for good. Regrettably, there were not many "nestlings" that could free themselves from it without knowing how or having the necessary potential for that.

Therefore I could not even imagine how lucky I was then that I somehow **managed to see** quite another thing instead of that which someone very persistently tried to suggest to me. (I think that even then I somehow managed to **scan** the situation without realizing that). And if it were not for my amazing "crowned" friend who I called just in time, being wildly frightened, nobody knew in what far away "black" worlds my spirit would dwell now, if it was still alive at all. That is why there was so much joyful warmth and light in my "star" friends' hearts. I think that this event, regrettably, became one of the main reasons for our farewell. They considered that I was now ready to **think independently**, but I personally did not consider it so at all...

8. The farewell

Two female spirits came to me, as if hugging me on either side, although I absolutely did not feel it physically. We appeared in an unusual structure which looked like an enormous pyramid all walls of which were completely covered with strange and unknown writings, but on looking at them closely I understood that I had already seen the same letters when we first met. We stood in the centre of the pyramid and I suddenly felt a strange "electric current" coming from both female spirits straight into me. The feeling was so strong, that I rocked from side to side and it seemed that something began to grow inside of me.

Then the male spirit with a shining crown stretched his hands toward me and the world changed. A dazzlingly bright crystal tornado began to whirl around me and fully "insulated" me from my friends. When it disintegrated, a strange, black and naked Earth was around me. I was in the middle of nowhere and absolutely alone, but for some reason I was not afraid. I felt that they were trying to show me something and I had to try to do my best to see it. Suddenly a terrible feeling of **absolute emptiness** crept into my heart: there was nothing there – no light, sounds or any foothold under my feet. I hung in the "nowhere"...

The only thing I saw before me was a shining ball (as I understand now, it was Earth) and there was a bright "egg" inside it flaming with green fire. Then it began to grow and change, becoming brighter and more transparent. Hundreds of green "bridges" stretched out on all sides from it and there was "another" Earth at the end of each of them. I do not know how to explain it otherwise, but those were our Earth indeed, only each of them looked quite different, as if being in another time or dimension.

I did not understand what it was, but I knew that I must remember it and did my best to do so. Everything suddenly disappeared and I again found myself inside the same enormous pyramid and saw all my shining "friends". There were twelve of them again and they again, like at the very first time made a circle, and I was inside it. Only this time, in addition to the warmth which they emitted I felt a strange deep sadness, and I understood that they came to say goodbye.

To my great surprise, I perceived it very calmly, as if I **knew** that it would not last forever. Each of them came to me and laid their right arm on my chest, which made me feel astonishing warmth and calmness. The touch of each spirit left a different shining colour on me, and in the end my body shone with twelve amazingly bright changing colours. I again heard strange music within myself and everything disappeared, and I remembered nothing more.

9. The awakening

I slowly came back home, feeling loss and happiness at one and the same time. When I got

there, I bumped into a huge surprise: my mother was waiting for me in my room almost about to faint. The world turned upside down and I fell from my "shining dreams" right down into pitiless reality. I could not lie, but I absolutely did not know what to say; also I felt that my mother perfectly **knew** that it somehow related to my "strange talents", the conversation about which neither she nor I would, regrettably, be able to avoid.

To my enormous relief, she said nothing that night. Maybe, she did not know what to say. But the next morning the windows in my room were thoroughly nailed up. My mother did not mention the incident for a couple of weeks, as if giving me time to realize what I had "done", which did not make me feel the least bit better. My dad was on a trip on his reporter's business then, and I hoped with all my heart that somehow everything would settle down and be forgotten before his arrival, but that did not happen. One morning, before going to work, my mother said that she wanted to talk to me. Of course, it was not a big secret for me, what she wanted to talk about...

As usual my mother was tender and warm, but I felt with my whole being that this story oppressed her and she truly did not know how to begin our conversation. We were talking for a very long time. I did my very best to explain to her how much all that meant to me and how terrible I would feel if I lost it. But it seemed that this time I had indeed scared her and she said that, if I did not want her to tell my father everything, when he came back home, I must promise that that kind of thing would never be repeated again.

She did not understand that these bizarre "surprises" of mine **did not happen at my will** and I almost never knew, when one or another "surprise" would happen. But because my father's opinion mattered to me more than anything else, I promised my mother that I would not do anything of the kind, as far as it depended solely on me.

10. Everyday life

Like all other children I went to school, did my homework, played with my "ordinary" friends and infinitely missed my other, unusual and shining "star friends". Regrettably, complications sprang up on every side at school too. I began to attend it when I was six (normally, children began school in the former USSR at the age of seven), because the testing showed that I could go right into grade 3 or 4, which, certainly, pleased nobody. My school friends considered that everything came too easily to me, and their mothers quite disliked me for that for some reason. So, it turned out that I was alone almost all the time at school too.

I had only one real school friend, the girl with whom I shared a desk. We sat together for the whole twelve school years, but the relationships with other children did not turn out right for some reason. And not because I did not want that, or because I did not try, on the contrary, I did. But I always had a very strange feeling, as if we lived at different poles. I never did my homework, or better to say I did it, but it took just several minutes. My parents, certainly, always checked it, and because usually there were no errors, I had plenty of free time. I attended a musical school (studied playing the piano and also singing), painted, embroidered and read a lot. But all the same, I had a lot of free time left...

It was winter. All the neighbourhood boys skied because they were all older than me (and they were precisely my best friends then) and I had to content myself with sleighing, which to my mind was good enough only for kids. And, certainly, I desperately wanted to ski!

Finally I somehow managed to entreat my softhearted mother and she bought me the smallest skis she could ever get. I was in seventh heaven!!! I immediately rushed to share the news with my friends and was absolutely ready to try my new acquisitions on the same day. Usually they went to a large mountain to ski, near the river, where the princely castle once was. The ice-hills were very high there and in order to ski one had to have at least some initial skills, which, unfortunately, I did not.

But of course, I was not going to yield to anybody in this respect. When at last, puffing and sweating (despite the temperature of 25 C below zero!), I clambered behind the others to the top, I,

frankly speaking, was terrified. Romas, one of the boys, asked me whether I wanted to watch them ski down first, but of course I said no and chose the highest ice-hill. Well, the "punishment" did not keep me waiting...

I hardly remember where I got the boldness to push off and go down. What I do remember perfectly was the real horror of the wildly whistling wind in my ears and the picture of very quickly approaching trees on the border of the forest. I was lucky; I did not run into a tree, but slap-bang bumped into an enormous stump. My poor new skis were smashed into pieces and I had a lucky escape with a little injury which I, burning with indignation, did not even feel; so much for my short, but very bright ski "career". Much later I came to like skiing very much and could ski for hours with my dad in the winter forest, but I never liked ice-hills.

After such a vexing fiasco with my "sport adventures", I had no wish whatsoever to do any winter sports. Therefore, in order to fill the rest of my free time, I tried to read as much as possible. And here something new and completely unexpected happened again.

I was reading a lesson which I did not like and I was eager to finish it as soon as possible. Suddenly I noticed that I read too quickly. It appeared that I did not read like we all do it usually – horizontally, but **vertically** – from top to bottom. I was very surprised at first. It was unusual and a little strange, but because I was already used to my different oddities, I tried it again. It was true; the reading went much quicker. From that day I almost always read "from top to bottom", however, for some reason my eyes got tired much sooner doing this. But it was quicker and this method of "rapid reading", as I called it, saved me a lot of time in future.

Other "wonders" constantly happened too, but I already became more careful and did not hurry to share them even with my nearest people. At first I was a little sad and bitter because of it, but then I got used to it and it seemed to me that life **should be exactly like this**, at least mine. Loneliness is not created for a child, just as a child is not created for it. Unfortunately, life sometimes can be quite a pitiless thing and pays no attention whatsoever to whether we like something or not; or it may also happen for reasons which will be hidden from us for the time being, and when their sense becomes clear later, it may strongly surprise someone, or leave somebody sadly guessing "what would have happened to us, if..."

11. The neighbours

My "sixth" winter reluctantly retreated, leaving behind lacerated furrows on the once virgin and pure face of earth. Snow-drifts pitilessly "sank", losing their proud whiteness and growing into dirty lumps of ice, and bashfully melting, giving life to numerous merry brooks, which playfully whispering to one another, joyfully ran on slopes and paths which already began to turn green here and there. The days were clear, transparent and windless. The spring confidently exhaled its "green" scents in the air, and almost genuine warmth spread all over, waking up the earth, still sleepy from hibernation. The new life was born once again...

Like all children I adored spring. It seemed that we too, like sleepy little bears, got out from our "lairs" after a long hibernation and gladly exposed our smiling faces for a kiss from the first tender sunrays. The good sun, brightened with pleasure, "painted" our cheeks and noses with freckles, making our mothers warmly smile. The days gradually became longer, and on our street more old women came out of their houses with small benches to sit at the porch and enjoy warm sunrays.

I loved our good and quiet street. It was neither very wide nor long; it was, as I always called it, homely. Its one end set against the forest and the other – against an enormous daisy field. Much later, to my huge regret, a railway station would be built there. There were only twenty houses on our buried in verdure street. This was a "blessed" time when there were no TV sets yet (we had the first one when I was nine) and people simply **socialized** with each other.

We all knew each other very well and lived like one big and united family. Somebody was loved very much and somebody less, but everybody knew that if there was trouble, they would be

helped anyway. It never happened that somebody remained aloof, even the most "disagreeable" neighbours offered their help, although later they, certainly, one way or another did not miss the slightest opportunity to mention it now and then. By no means do I try to picture a romantic idyll of the place and time in which I lived, or decrease the meaningfulness of any "progress". But I will never forget how much warmer and purer people were when their souls and minds were not burdened by the **alien** "fog of prosperity" and "mental dirt" of "progress".

There were twelve boys and four girls in my street then; we all were of different age and had different interests. However, there was a time of day which we all loved – the evening, when we gathered together and did something that allowed us all, both teenagers and little children, to take part. Our poor parents found it quite difficult to "drag" us home, tearing us away from some (always exciting, of course!) unfinished story or game.

Even here, in a seemingly inoffensive corner of my life, I got the next bitter lesson that it would be better, if I kept my strange "abilities" to myself. It turned out that whatever game we played, I always **knew** its result beforehand, be that hide-and-seek, riddles or just storytelling. And at first I was sincerely sure that it really should be like this. I was glad, when I won (which happened almost always) and did not quite understand why it caused my friends' "deaf fury", although usually they treated me very well. And one evening one of them finally "burst" and after my next success he darkly said:

— We won't want to play with you anymore until you stop showing your nasty "tricks".

It was quite a shock for me, because I showed no "tricks" at all, never mind nasty ones, and could not understand what he was talking about. I never thought about why I could foreknow one or another answer; it was an absolutely normal thing for me and, as it appeared, not quite normal for others. I came home grossly offended and closed myself in my room to feel it keenly all by myself, but my grandmother had a sharp flair for all my unsuccessful "adventures". She always **knew**, when something went wrong, and it was absolutely useless to deny it.

She came to my room in just a minute and found me in tears. I never was a weeper, but it was always hard for me to endure the bitter taste of unfair accusations, especially when they came from the closest friends. In fact, **only the closest friends can indeed wound you**, because their words get straight to your heart.

— There, there. You'll see, the time will pass and everything will be forgotten – my grandmother assuaged my grief – **the offense is not like smoke, it will not eat away your eyes.**

Well, yes it probably will not eat away my eyes, but it certainly ate my heart with each new drop of injustice, to be sure! I was just a child, but I already knew much of "**it is better not to show**" or "**it is better not to talk about**"... and I learned not to show. After that little incident I really tried not to show that I knew more than others and everything was all right. But was it really all right?

12. Cookies

The summer came quite unnoticed. And, as my mother promised, exactly this summer I was going to see the sea for the first time. I had waited for this moment since winter, because the sea was my long awaited "great" dream, but a quite foolish event almost reduced my dream to ashes. Only a couple of weeks remained to the journey and in my mind I already was on the shore, but, as it turned out, it was still a long way off.

It was a pleasant warm summer day. Nothing unusual happened. I lay in the garden under my favourite old apple-tree, read a book and dreamed about my favourite cookies. Yes, yes, exactly about cookies from a little shop near by.

I don't remember eating anything more delicious than those home-made cookies. Even now, after so many years, I perfectly remember the marvelous taste and smell of this dainty morsel melting in my mouth! They always were fresh and incredibly soft with a dense sweet crust of icing

which burst at the least touch, with a divine scent of honey and cinnamon and something else which was almost impossible to catch... These were the cookies which I was going to get without thinking twice. The weather was warm and I had only my short shorts on. The shop was nearby, right in a couple of houses and (there were three shops like this in our street!)

Then in Lithuania this kind of small shop in private homes were very popular and usually occupied only one room. They grew like mushrooms after rain and usually belonged to the citizens of Jewish origin, like the shop where I went which belonged to our neighbour called Schreiber. He always was a very pleasant and polite person and had very good food, especially sweets.

To my great surprise, when I came there, I could not enter inside – the shop was crammed full of people. Obviously there was a new delivery and nobody wanted to miss freshly brought products. So I stood in a very long line and was not going to leave, patiently waiting for my favourite cookies. The line moved very slowly, because the room of 5 x 5 metres was absolutely crammed with grown-ups and I could not see anything because of them. Quite suddenly, on making the next step, I began to fall head over heels down a wooden, crudely knocked up staircase and plopped down on the wooden boxes which were made in the same rough fashion.

It turned out later that the owner left the door of his basement (seven metres deep!) open, probably hurrying to sell new goods or simply forgetting to do that, and I managed to fall into it. It is highly likely that the impact was very serious, because I did not remember how and who dragged me out of there. I only remember many frightened faces around and the owner, endlessly asking whether everything was all right with me. Of course I was not all right, but I was not going to confess it and declared that I would go home. A whole crowd accompanied me. My poor grandmother almost fainted, when she suddenly saw that impressive "procession" which chaperoned me home.

I stayed in bed for ten days. As it turned out later, the fact that I managed to get off with just a scratch after such a stunning seven meter deep "flight" with my head downward was considered something **unbelievable**. The owner, Schreiber, came to us every day for some reason, every time bringing a kilogram of candies and asked whether I truly felt all right. To tell the truth, he looked very scared.

Be that as it may, I am sure that someone **had put a "pillow"** under me; someone, who considered it too soon for me to break my head. By that time my very short life had contained quite lot of "strange" cases of this kind. Some happened and very quickly were forgotten, others were remembered, although they were not necessarily interesting. Thus for an unknown reason, I well remember the case with making a fire.

13. The fire that did not warm up

All neighbour's kids (including me) were very keen on making campfires, especially, when we were allowed to bake potatoes there, which was one of our favourite delicacies, and making such a campfire was a real festivity for us! Indeed, could something else ever be compared with scalding potato, which we just fished out from the fire with our sticks, smelling fabulous and powdered with ash?! One would really have to try hard to stay serious, on seeing our awaiting and thoroughly concentrated faces: we sat around a campfire, as if not having eaten for a whole month, like hungry Robinson Crusoes. And at that very instant nothing in the world was more delicious for us than that little, smoking ball of potato slowly baking in our campfire.

Exactly in one of such cheery "potato" evenings the next "unbelievable" adventure happened to me. It was a quiet and warm summer evening and it already started getting dark. We gathered at somebody's "potato" field, found a suitable place, brought a sufficient amount of firewood and were ready to make a campfire when somebody noticed that we had forgotten the most important thing – matches. Our disappointment had no limit. Nobody wanted to go back home and get them, because we had come quite far away. We tried to make fire in the ancient way – rubbing a piece of wood against another piece of wood, but very soon patience ran out even in the most persistent of us.

Suddenly one boy said:

— Oh! We completely forgot that our "little witch" is here with us! Well, c'mon! Do it! Set fire!

They often called me a "little witch" and it was more a rather tender nickname, than offensive. Therefore, I was not offended, but, honestly speaking, was taken aback. To my huge regret, I had never set a fire in my life; it somehow never occurred to me to do this kind of thing. But this was the first time they had **asked me to do something** and I, certainly, was not going to let such a chance slip away and moreover, "lose face".

I had no idea whatsoever what had to be done to "light it up". I just concentrated on the fire and wished very much for it to happen. A minute passed, but nothing changed... Boys (and they are always and everywhere a bit wicked) began to laugh at me, saying that the only thing I could do was "guess" when I needed to. It was very offensive for me – I honestly tried to do my best, but that, certainly, interested nobody. They needed a **result** which I failed to produce.

To tell the truth, even I do not know what happened then. Maybe I felt very strong indignation that they laughed at me, which I did not deserve at all, or the bitter offense of a child was roused too mightily? One way or another, I suddenly felt as if my whole body froze (it would seem that it should be to the contrary); the real "fire" pulsed with explosive impulses only in my hands. I got up, turned and sharply threw my left arm forward. Terrible roaring flame flashed out of my hand right into the place with the firewood. Everybody began to yell... and I recovered consciousness already at home, feeling a cutting pain in my hands, back and head. My whole body burned, as if I lay on a burning hot pan. I did not feel like moving or even opening my eyes.

My mother was in shock about my "trick" and accused me of "all possible sins", and the main reproach was that I did not hold to my word that I had given her, which for me was worse than any all-devouring physical pain. I was so sad that this time she did not want to understand me, and at the same time I felt an unprecedented pride, that I, nevertheless, did not "lose face" and somehow I could do what I was expected to do.

Certainly, today all this looks a bit funny and childishly naive, but then it was very important for me to prove, that I could be useful to someone for something with all, as they called it, my "tricks", and that they were not mad fables, but the most real reality which now they should take into account, even a little bit. If only everything could be so simple, as in a child's thoughts...

14. Loneliness

As it appeared later, not only my mother was horrified by what I had done. When the neighbouring mothers heard their children's stories about what had happened, they immediately required their children to keep away from me. This time I indeed remained all alone, and because I was a very proud little human being, I was not going to ask anybody to be my friend, not for the world. But it is one thing to show one's attitude, and quite another – to live with it....

I loved my friends, the street and all who lived there very much and I always tried to bring some joy and good to anybody. And now I was all alone and the only person to blame for it was me, because I was unable to withstand the simplest and inoffensive child's **provocation**. But what could I do, when I was a child myself then? But the child, who gradually began to understand that not everybody in this world deserved proof of something, and even if you prove something to somebody, it did not absolutely mean that the person, to whom you do that, would necessarily understand you correctly.

In a few days I physically came back to normal and felt fairly well enough, but since then I have never desired to set a fire. Regrettably, I had to pay for my "experiment" for quite a long time. I was in complete isolation from all my favourite games and friends for some time. It vexed me a lot and seemed very unfair. When I told that to my poor kind mother, she did not know what to say. She loved me very much and wanted to protect me from any troubles and offenses. But on the other hand, little by little, she started being scared of what almost constantly happened to me.

Regrettably, that was a "dark" time, when it was not "accepted" to speak openly about this kind of "strange" and unusual thing. Everything was preserved in very strict frames of how it "**must**" or "**must not**" be and everything "inexplicable" or "eccentric" was flatly hushed or considered **abnormal**. To tell the truth, I slightly envy those gifted children who were born at least twenty years later than me, when all these "eccentric" abilities were not considered a **curse**, but, on the contrary, they started to be called a **GIFT**. And now nobody badgers or sends these poor "unusual" children to madhouses, but on the contrary, they are valued and respected, as unique children endowed with a special gift and talent.

Regrettably, nobody was delighted with my "talents" at all then, quite the contrary. Several days later after my "scandalous" adventure with fire, a neighbour "confidentially" said to my mother that she knew a "very good doctor" which treats exactly "**problems of the kind I had**" and if my mother wanted she would be delighted to introduce her to him. It was the first time, when my mother was directly "advised" to send me off to a madhouse.

Later there was a lot of similar "advice", but I remember that exactly then my mother was extremely distressed and cried for a long time, shut in her room. She never told me about this offer, but a neighbouring boy betrayed a "secret". It was his mother who gave such "precious" advice to mine. Certainly, thank goodness, nobody took me to any doctor, but I felt that I had crossed some "line" with my last "acts", behind which even my mother was unable to understand me. And there was nobody who would help me, explain or simply calm me as a friend, let alone, teach...

So, I "floundered" in guesses and errors in stiff solitude, without anybody's support or understanding. There were some things which I tried and some which I did not dare to try. Some of them turned out to be successful, some did not. And how often I was simply terrified, like any other human being! Honestly speaking, I continued to "flounder" till I was 33, because until then I had not found anybody, who would somehow explain at least something intelligible to me. Although, there always were more than enough people who wished to do so, having no idea whatsoever what they were talking about...

Time was passing by. Sometimes it seemed to me that everything that was happening did not happen to me or that it was just a strange fairy-tale which I invented. Regrettably, the fairy-tale was too **real** a reality. So, I had to abide by the circumstances and, which is more important, live with it. Everything went smoothly at school, just like before. I got "excellent" in all subjects, and my parents had no problems at least with that. Rather, on the contrary – being still in the fourth grade, I could solve very complicated algebra and geometry tasks and did that, as if it were child's play, enjoying it enormously.

Also I loved my music and drawing lessons. I drew almost all the time and everywhere: at other lessons, during breaks, at home and outside. I drew on sand, paper and window-glass, in short – anywhere possible. I drew **only human eyes** for some reason. It seemed to me then that it would help me to find a very important answer. I was always fond of observing human faces, eyes in particular, because very often people dislike saying what they truly think, but their eyes tell everything. It is obvious that not in vain they say that eyes are the mirror of our soul. And I drew hundreds and hundreds of these eyes – sad and happy, grieving and satisfied, kind and wicked. For me it was again a time of **cognition of something**, the next attempt to dig down to some **truth**, although I had no idea of what truth. It was just the next time of "search", which, with different "digressions", lasted almost my whole conscious life.

15. Giving up eating

Day flew after day, months passed, and I continued to surprise (and sometimes terrify!) my family and very often myself with my numerous new "unbelievable" and sometimes unsafe adventures. When I was nine I suddenly, for some unknown to me reason, stopped eating, which terribly frightened my mother and upset my grandmother.

My grandmother was a genuine first-class cook! All the members of our family gathered at

the table to enjoy her famous cabbage *pirozhki*, including my mother's brother, who lived then 150 kilometres away. Nevertheless, he came to visit us every time when my grandma baked her *pirozhki*. Even now I remember very well and with enormous warmth those "great and mysterious" preparations: the smell of the fresh yeast pastry, which had been rising for the whole night in a clay pot near the stove and turned in the morning into dozens of white circles spread all over the kitchen table, waiting for their magic time to turn into fluffy *pirozhki*... and my grandma, concentrating, her hands covered with white flour, busy, like a bee buzzing around the stove. I also remember how impatiently we waited for the moment when our "craving" nostrils could finally snatch the first amazing, deliciously delicate, savour of freshly baked pastry...

It always was a very special occasion, a true feast, because everybody adored her *pirozhki*. And whoever came to our house, there always was a place for him at my grandma's large and hospitable table. We always stayed late at night, trying to prolong the delight of being together. But even when our tea-drinking was over, nobody wanted to leave; it was as if my grandma "baked" part of her kind soul into her *pirozhki* and everybody wanted to sit a little bit longer and warm themselves near her cosy hearth and big heart.

My grandma truly **loved** to cook; whatever she made was always incredibly delicious. It could be Siberian meat dumplings, smelling so good that all our neighbours mouths watered "hungrily", or my favourite cherry-and-cottage cheese *vatrushkas* which literally melted in my mouth, leaving the amazing taste of warm and fresh cherries and milk for a long time. And even her most plain pickled mushrooms, which she made every year in the oak tub adding currant leaves, dill and garlic, were the most delicious food I ever ate in my life, despite the fact that by now I have travelled more than half the world and tested every delicacy one could possibly dream of. But no foreign dish, even the most exquisite one, could ever outshine the unforgettable taste of grandma's incredibly delicious works of "cooking art".

So, even having such a cooking "magician" right at home, one fine day I suddenly stopped eating to the overall horror of my family. I do not remember whether there was an occasion for this or it simply happened for some unknown reason as, with me, things always did. I simply lost any desire whatsoever to touch food, although I felt no weakness or dizziness, on the contrary, I felt extraordinarily at ease and was in splendid shape. I tried to explain all that to my mum, but she was seriously frightened by my next new "trick", did not want to hear and only tried to make me "swallow" something.

It felt bad then and every new portion of food made me throw up. My tormented stomach could accept only pure water. My mother was almost on the verge of panic, when our family doctor, my cousin Diana, paid us an unexpected visit. Being extremely happy about her visit, my mother hurried to tell Diana our "terrible" story about my starving myself. My joy was limitless when I heard that "there is nothing terrible in that" and that I could be perfectly left alone for some time without food being forcibly crammed into me! I saw that my loving mother disbelieved that, but she had no grounds for objection and decided to leave me alone for some time.

At once life became easy and pleasant, because I felt absolutely perfectly myself and got rid of the permanent agony of suspense waiting for stomach spasms which usually accompanied every single attempt at taking food. It lasted about two weeks. All my senses intensified and perception became keener and stronger. I felt like only the most important things were brought to the forefront and the rest receded into the background.

My dreams changed or rather, I began to have the same repetitive dream: as if I suddenly rose above the ground and could easily walk without touching the floor with my heels. It was so real and such an incredibly wonderful feeling that every time I woke up, I wanted immediately to get back to it. This dream repeated every night. I still do not know what it was and why. But I began to see it again after many years, and even now, before I wake up, very often I have the same dream.

One day my dad's brother came to visit us from the city where he lived at that time and during the conversation he mentioned that recently he had seen a very good film and began to recount it. I was very surprised when I suddenly understood that I knew what he was going to tell us! Although

I was completely sure that I **had never seen** the film, I could retell it from beginning to end with all the details... I told nobody about it but decided to wait and see whether something like that would show up again and of course, as usual, a new "trick" did not keep me waiting.

At that time we were studying ancient legends at school. During a lesson on literature the teacher said that today we would examine "The Song of Roland". Suddenly and unexpectedly for me, I raised my hand and said that I could recite the Song. The teacher was very surprised and asked whether I often read old legends. I said, not very often, but I know that one. Although frankly speaking, I had no idea how.

From that day I began to notice that unknown events and facts which I could not possibly know came to light in my memory more often, and their number increased with every day. I got a little tired of the "influx" of unknown information which, highly likely, was too much for my child's psyche, but since it came from **somewhere**, then probably it was **necessary for something**, and I calmly accepted it, just as I always accepted everything unknown which my strange and unpredictable fate brought me.

Although sometimes this information manifested in a very amusing form – I suddenly began to see very bright images of unknown places and people, as if being among them. "Normal" reality disappeared and I found myself in a world, "closed" to others, which only I alone could see. I could remain there for a long time, standing "rooted to the ground" somewhere in the middle of a street, seeing nothing and reacting to anything, until some frightened and sympathetic passer-by began to shake me, trying to "bring me to my senses" and find out whether everything was all right with me.

Despite being so young, I had already perfectly understood then (from my own bitter experience), that everything that constantly happened to me seemed absolutely **abnormal** to the rest of the "normal" people according to their usual norms (although I was already prepared to argue about "normality" with anyone then). Therefore, as soon as somebody tried to help me in these "unusual" situations, I usually began to convince the kind helper that I was absolutely all right and there was no reason whatsoever to worry about me. Well, I did not always succeed in that and often it ended in calling my poor, ever-patient, mother who came to fetch me after the call...

So, this was my difficult and sometimes funny **childhood reality** in which I lived then. Since I had no choice, I had to find something "light and wonderful" even in that where others, I think, would never find it. I remember that I sadly asked my grandma after my next unusual "incident":

– Why does my life differ so much from the life of others?

Grandma shook her head, hugged me and quietly answered:

– Life, my dear, is **one tenth** what **happens to us** and **nine tenths** how we **react to it**. React joyfully, my little one! Otherwise sometimes it will be very difficult to exist. As for your difference, **in the beginning we all are different** one way or another. It's just, you will be growing up and life will gradually "trim" you down to general requirements, and whether you want to be like others will depend entirely on you.

I did not. I loved my unusual colourful world and would not change it for all the tea in China. Regrettably, any **wonderful** thing in our life has a very high price, and one truly has to love it **very much** not to be hurt when paying for it. And as we all know very well, we have to pay always and for everything... But doing it consciously, you feel **the satisfaction of free choice**, when your choice and free will depend **only on you**. And to my mind, this is truly **worth** paying any price, even if sometimes it costs you too much. But let me come back to my fast.

Two weeks had already passed and I still wanted to eat nothing, to my mother's huge distress, and oddly enough, physically I felt strong and perfectly well. Since I looked very well, I gradually succeeded in convincing my mother that nothing bad was happening to me right then and nothing frightful would happen in the immediate future. It was a plain truth: I truly felt splendid, except for that "ultrasensitive" mental condition which made all my senses a little too "exposed" – colours, sounds and feelings were so keen and bright that sometimes it was hard for me to breathe. I think that this "supersensitisation" was the reason for my following and next "unbelievable" adventure.

16. The second contact

It was a late autumn afternoon and some of our neighbourhood guys were going to go the forest after school to pick the last autumn mushrooms. Of course, I went with them too. The weather was extremely soft and pleasant. The still warm sunrays jumped like bright young hares among the golden leaves, sometimes leaking down to earth and warming it with the last parting glow. The forest met us wearing its elegant festively-bright autumn attire, ready to hug us in its tender arms like an old friend.

My cherished slender birchs, gilded by autumn, generously dropped their "gold-leaf-coins" at the faintest breeze and seemingly did not notice that very soon they would be left face to face with their nakedness and would bashfully wait until spring again dressed them in their tender smart new clothes. And only majestic evergreen fir-trees proudly shook off the old pine-needles, preparing to become the forest's only decoration during the long and colourless winter. Yellow leaves quietly rustled under my feet, hiding the last russules and milk mushrooms. The grass under the leaves was warm, soft and moist, inviting me to walk on it.

As usual, I took off my boots and went barefoot. I adored walking barefoot always and everywhere when the slightest opportunity arose! Although, very often I had to pay for these walks with tonsillitis which sometimes lasted a very long time, but, as they say, "the game was worth the candle". It seemed that my feet acquired "sight" without shoes, and a special keen sense of freedom from something unnecessary, which seemingly impeded breathing, appeared... It was a genuine little pleasure, not comparable to anything else, and it was worth paying for it sometimes.

As usual we divided into pairs and went in various directions. Very soon I felt that I had been alone for some time. I cannot say that it frightened me (I was never afraid of the forest), but I became ill at ease because of a strange feeling that someone was observing me. I decided not to pay attention to it and continued to pick mushrooms. But the sense of supervision gradually increased and had already become unpleasant.

I stopped, closed my eyes and tried to concentrate on seeing who did it, when suddenly I clearly heard somebody's voice:

– That's correct...

For some reason it seemed to me that it did not sound outside but only in my head. I stood in the middle of a little glade and felt the air around me begin to vibrate very strongly. A silvery-blue transparent glimmering column appeared right before me and a human figure gradually materialised in it. It was a very tall (according to our concepts) and mighty man with silver hair. For some reason I thought he looked very like the statue of our God Percunas (Perun) for which every year we made campfires on the Saint Mountain on the night of the 24th of June.

By the way, it was a very beautiful ancient holiday (I do not know whether it still exists) which usually lasted till dawn and was very much loved by all, independent of age or taste. Almost the whole town gathered to celebrate it and, which is quite surprising, no negative incidents were ever noticed during the holiday despite the fact that everything took place in the forest. Apparently the beauty of the customs opened even the most hard-hearted human souls to good, thus shutting the door to any forthcoming aggressive thoughts or deeds.

Usually the campfires were burning on the Saint Mountain for the whole night, ancient songs sounded in round dances and all that looked very like an extraordinarily beautiful fairy-tale. Hundreds of loving couples began to search for the fern flower, wishing to secure its magic promise to be the happiest couple and of course, that would be forever. Single young girls, making a wish, put flower garlands with an ardent candle in the middle into the river Nemunas. There were a lot of such garlands that night and the river turned into an amazingly beautiful celestial road, softly glimmering with reflections of hundreds of candles, along which rows of kind gold ghosts floated, creating trembling golden shadows and carefully carrying human wishes to the God of Love on their transparent wings. And there, on the Saint Mountain, the statue of the God Percunas, which my unexpected visitor resembled very much, can be still found.

The shining figure "floated" to me without touching the earth with his feet and I felt a very soft and warm touch.

- I came to open the Door for you; – I again heard the voice in my head.
- The Door? Where to? – I asked.
- To the Big World, – came the reply.

He stretched his luminous hand to my forehead and I had the strange feeling of a light "explosion" after which I indeed had the feeling of a door opening right in my forehead. I saw fabulously beautiful bodies which looked very like enormous multicoloured butterflies coming out of the center of my head. They lined up around and, being tied to me with the thinnest silvery thread, made up an amazingly colourful unusual flower. A quiet and "unearthly" melody was flowing into me, vibrating, through this "thread" and a feeling of peace and plenitude filled my heart.

In the shortest instant I could see numerous transparent human figures standing around, but for some reason they all disappeared very quickly. Only my first guest remained. He still touched my forehead with his hand thus making some very pleasant "sounding" warmth flow into my body.

- Who are they? – I asked pointing at the "butterflies".
- They are you, – the answer sounded again. – It is all **you**.

I could not understand what he was talking about, but I **knew** somehow that genuine, pure and light Goodness came from him. Suddenly but very slowly all these unusual "butterflies" began to "melt" and turn into an amazing star fog, shining with all the colours of the rainbow, which gradually began to flow back into me. A deep sense of completeness and of something which I could not understand yet, but only felt very much, with my whole being, appeared.

- Be careful, – my guest said.
- Careful? Why? – I asked.
- You have been born... – came the reply.

His tall figure began to vibrate. The glade began to whirl. When I opened my eyes, my extraordinary stranger had already disappeared, to my utmost regret. One of the boys, Romas, stood in front of me and observed my "awakening". He asked me what I did there and whether I was going to pick mushrooms. When I asked what time it was, he looked at me with surprise and told me. I understood then that everything that happened to me had lasted just a few minutes!

I got up (it appeared that I had sat down on the earth), dusted myself down and was already going to go, when I suddenly noticed a very strange detail – the whole glade around us was green!!! It had the same amazing emerald colour, as in the early spring! Our mutual surprise became even bigger when we saw beautiful spring flowers in it! It was absolutely fabulous and regrettably, completely inexplicable. Probably it was a side-effect of my strange guest's visit. But I could neither explain nor even understand it then.

- What have you done? – Romas asked.
- It was not me, – I guiltily mumbled.
- Well then, let's go, – he agreed.

Romas was one of those rare friends of that time, who was not afraid of my "tricks", and nothing that constantly happened to me could surprise him. He simply trusted me, and therefore I did not have to explain anything to him, which I considered a very rare and valuable exception. When we came back from the forest, I was shivering, but I thought that I had simply caught a light chill and decided not to disturb my mother unless something serious appeared. Everything was over by the next morning, and I was so pleased that it fully confirmed my notion that it was indeed just a chill. However, it was too early to celebrate the happy ending of my adventure.

17. The result

In the morning when I went to breakfast as usual, I had only to stretch out my hand to get the heavy glass cup and it moved sharply toward me, spilling some milk on the table. I felt a bit ill at ease. I tried again, the cup moved again. Then I thought about the bread. Two slices next to me jumped and fell down on the floor. Frankly speaking, my hair began to stand on end. Not because I was frightened. I was not afraid of almost anything then, but because it was something so very "earthly" and precise; it was right here and I had absolutely no idea how to control it.

I tried to calm down, took a deep breath and tried again. This time I did not try to touch anything, but decided only to think of what I wanted – for example, I wanted a cup in my hand. Certainly, it did not happen; it just sharply moved. But I rejoiced!!! My whole being squealed with delight, because I understood that, moving sharply or not, it happened just **at my mental wish!** It was awesome! Certainly, at once I wanted to try the "novelty" on all the living and lifeless "objects" I could find.

My grandma was within easy reach, placidly preparing her next culinary "masterpiece" in the kitchen. It was very quiet; my grandma murmured a song to herself, as suddenly a heavy cast-iron frying pan jumped like a bird from the stove and fell on the floor with a terribly loud sound. Grandma jumped up in surprise almost like the pan, but to give her due, she settled down at once and said:

– Stop it!

I felt slightly offended, because it had already become a family habit that I was always found guilty of whatever happened in the house (although this time, it certainly was, absolutely true).

– Why do you think it was me? – I asked, pouting.

– Well, as far as I know we don't have ghosts here, – she said calmly.

I loved her very much for her imperturbability and steadfast calmness. It seemed that nothing in this world could truly get her out of the groove. Although, of course, there were things which distressed, surprised, or made her sad, but she accepted everything with surprising calmness, and therefore I always felt very comfortable and protected with her. Somehow I suddenly felt that my grandma showed some interest in my last "trick". My gut feeling was that she observed me and waited for something more. Well, I certainly did not keep her waiting long. In a few seconds all the utensils which hung over the stove flew down with a terrible noisy crash right after the frying pan.

– Well, well. It is much easier to break than to build; you'd better do something useful, – my grandma said calmly.

I almost suffocated with indignation! Just imagine! How could she treat this "unbelievable event" so calmly?! Doesn't she see that this is such... **SUCH** an event!!! I could not explain how much this "**SUCH**" was, but I was absolutely sure that one should not treat what had just happened so calmly. My indignation made not the slightest impression on my grandma, and she said, again in her calm voice:

– It's pretty useless to spend that much force on what can be easily done with your hands. You'd better go and read something.

My indignation had no limits! I could not understand **why** she was not totally delighted with that which seemed to me such an awesome thing? Unfortunately, I still was too small then to understand that all these impressive "outer effects" in reality **gave nothing but the "outer effects" themselves**. And the essence of producing them is just to "befog" trustful and impressionable people's minds with "the mysticism of the inexplicable", and my grandma, naturally, was not this kind of person. But because I had not yet grown to such understanding, I was only eager to find out what else I could move. Therefore, feeling no regret whatsoever, I left my gran who did not "understand" me to search for a new object of my "experiments".

A beautiful grey cat, Grishka, dad's favourite pet, lived with us then. I found him sweetly sleeping on the warm stove and decided that it was a very good opportunity to try my new "skill". I thought that it would be better, if he sat on the window-sill. Nothing happened. I concentrated and added more strength to my thought... Poor Grishka flew from the stove with a wild howl and struck

his head on the window-sill. I felt such pity for him and was so ashamed, that I rushed to pick him up with an enormous sense of guilt. But for some reason the cat's hair bristled up and he ran away from me full pelt meowing loudly, as if scalded with boiling water.

It was quite a shock for me. I did not understand what had happened and why Grishka suddenly disliked me so violently, we had been such very good friends before. I chased after him almost all day long, but, regrettably, I failed to get his forgiveness. Grishka's strange behaviour lasted four days, and then our adventure was forgotten, and all was well again, but nevertheless it made me reflect upon it and I now understood that sometimes I could do harm with my unusual "abilities" even without wishing it.

After this event I began treat everything that unexpectedly manifested in me with more seriousness and "experimented" much more carefully. Of course, in the following days I became obsessed with the idea of moving things. I tried to move mentally everything that caught my eye and sometimes got deplorable results.

For example, I watched in horror how the shelves, neatly set with dad's very expensive books, fell down on the floor and I tried to put everything back with my shaky hands as quickly as possible because books were "sacred" objects in our house and before I could take them, I must deserve them. Fortunately, my dad was not at home then and "the storm passed" this time.

Another very funny and at the same time sad event happened with dad's aquarium. As far back as I can remember, my father was always keen on fish and dreamed that one fine day he would construct a large aquarium (which later he did); but then we had only a goldfish bowl with a few multicoloured fish in it. But even such small "piece of nature" gave joy to my dad's heart and everybody, including me, looked after it with great pleasure.

One "ill-fated" day, when I passed by my dad's aquarium, being extremely busy with my "moving" thoughts, I accidentally looked at the fish and felt sorry that the poor things had such a little place to live in. The bowl suddenly began to vibrate and burst to my great horror, pouring water all over the room. Before the poor fish had time to be scared, our cat, being extremely happy about such a sudden stroke of luck right out of the blue, ate them. I felt truly sad, because I did not want to distress my dad, even less to take somebody's tiny life.

That evening I waited for my dad in a very poor state – I was ashamed of my foolish blunder and although I knew that nobody would punish me for it, I was sick at heart. I gradually came to understand that some of my "talents" could be very unsafe in certain circumstances, but unfortunately, I did not know how to control them and was anxious more and more because some of my actions could be quite unforeseeable and possibly have unintended and undesirable consequences.

But I was only a curious nine-year old girl then and could not be upset for long because of lost fishes, even though it had been my fault. I zealously continued to move all objects I saw and was unspeakably glad of any unusual manifestation in my "research" practice.

Thus, one wonderful morning during breakfast my cup unexpectedly hung in the air right in front of me and continued to do so, and I had no idea how to let it down. My grandma was in the kitchen at that moment, and I feverishly tried to find something to fix the thing in order not to blush again and explain myself, expecting to hear her words of complete disapproval. But the stubborn cup did not want to come back to the table. On the contrary, it suddenly glided and, as if teasing me, began to make wide circles over it, and I was unable to catch it.

My grandma came back into the room and froze on the threshold with her cup in her hand. Of course I rushed to explain that "it just flies, for no particular reason" and "isn't it really beautiful"? In short, I tried to find a way out of this situation, in order not to appear helpless. And suddenly I was very ashamed of myself. I saw that my grandma **knew** that I simply could not find the solution to the problem and was trying to "mask" my ignorance with unnecessary and pretty words. Then, being indignant with myself, I gathered all my "wounded" pride and quickly blurted:

– Well, I **don't know** why it flies! And I **don't know** how to let it down!

Granny looked at me, her face serious and suddenly very joyfully said:

– Try then! This is what your mind is given to you for.

A load off my mind! I hated to seem clumsy, especially, when it came to my "strange" abilities. And I tried... from morning till evening, until I flopped out being absolutely exhausted.

A sage once said that there are three ways conducive to higher reason: the way of reflection is the noblest, imitation is the easiest and one's own experience is the heaviest. For some reason I always chose the third way and my poor "neck" truly suffered because of my endless experiments.

But sometimes the game truly was "worth the candle" and my unremitting toil was crowned with success and at last it happened with moving things. Soon I could move any object; they flew, dropped and rose when I wished, and it already did not seem difficult to control that, except in one case, a huge omission of mine, which to my regret happened at school – the thing I always honestly tried to avoid. I did not need additional rumours about my "oddities", especially among my schoolmates!

My being far too relaxed was the reason for the vexatious event, which was absolutely **inexcusable** in this situation, taking account of my "moving" abilities. But we all make big or small mistakes once and, as they say, learn by them. Although, frankly speaking, I would prefer to learn some other way...

The teacher Gibiene was my form-mistress then. She was a gentle and kind woman and all the schoolchildren sincerely adored her. Her son Remi was in our class. Unfortunately, he was a very spoiled and unpleasant boy. He always despised everybody and mocked the girls and was constantly tittle-tattling about his classmates to his mother. I was always surprised at the fact that, being such an open, clever and pleasant person, his mother could not or did not want to see the real face of her darling offspring. Maybe, it is true that love can sometimes be blind, and in this case it was truly blind.

That ill-starred day Remi came to school already being "wound up" and at once began to search for a scapegoat to vent all his accumulated malice on. Of course, I was "lucky" enough to appear exactly within striking distance at that moment, and because we did not like each other very much from the very beginning, I became the ideal object for the wreaking of his discontent with God knows what.

I don't want to seem biased, but not a single class-mate, even the most fearful one, blamed me for what happened a few minutes later. And even those who did not like me much were very pleased to the bottom of their hearts that there was someone at last who braved the "thunderstorm" of an indignant mother and taught an arrogant bully a good lesson. Frankly speaking, the lesson turned out to be cruel enough, and if I had had the choice to repeat it, I probably would not have done such a thing again to him. But no matter how much I felt shame and pity, I have to admit that the lesson was very well learnt and the hapless "usurper" never again showed any inclination to terrorize the class.

On choosing his "victim", as he thought, Remi headed straight toward me and I understood that conflict, regrettably, could not be avoided. He began to bug me, as he always did and suddenly something in me broke out. Maybe it happened because I had been subconsciously waiting for it a long time? Or maybe I was sick and tired of bearing his insolent behaviour all the time, without any comeback? One way or another, the next second he got a strong blow in his chest, which threw him from his desk to the blackboard and, on flying in the air about three meters, plopped down on the floor like a squealing sack.

I never knew how I could perform this blow. The point is that I **did not touch** Remi at all – it was a pure **energy blow**, but I can not explain even now how I managed to do it. An indescribable havoc spread among the class – somebody squeaked in fright, somebody yelled that it was necessary to call the ambulance and somebody rushed to bring the teacher, because whatever he was, he was *her* now "disabled" son. I stood in a frozen stupor, wondering what I had done and not understanding how it had happened.

Remi moaned on the floor, making himself out to be the almost dying victim, which really horrified me. I had no idea how strong the blow was and therefore could not know even approximately whether he was playing to take revenge on me or he truly felt that bad. Somebody called the ambulance, the teacher-mother came, and I still stood stiff as a poker, unable to talk, so strong was the emotional shock.

– Why have you done that? – The teacher asked.

I looked into her eyes and could not pronounce a word. Not because I was unaware of what to say, but because I still could not come back to myself from the terrible shock of what I had done.

I can not say **what** the teacher saw in my eyes, but the violent indignation which everyone so expected did not follow, more precisely, **nothing** happened at all. Somehow she managed to control her indignation and calmly told us to sit down and began the lesson. Just like that! As if nothing happened, although it was her son who was a victim!

I could not understand it (nobody could), and I could not calm down because I felt very guilty. It would have been far easier for me, if she had shouted at me or expelled me from the class. I perfectly understood that she must be very offended over what had happened and it was very unpleasant for her that it was exactly me who did that, because before the incident she always treated me very well, and now she had to make a quick (and preferably "faultless"!) decision regarding me. I also knew that she was worried about her son, because we still had no news about his state.

I did not remember how the lesson passed. Time hung heavy and it seemed that there would be no end to it. Finally the bell rang and I came to the teacher at once and said that I was so sorry about the incident, but that I honestly did not understand how it could happen. I do not know whether she knew something about my strange abilities or she just saw something in my eyes, but she somehow understood that **nobody would be able to punish me more than I had already punished myself**.

– Go and prepare for the next lesson, everything will be all right, – she said nothing more.

I shall never forget that terribly painful hour of expectation, while we waited for news from the hospital. I felt very frightened and alone, and this awful recollection was forever printed on my memory. I was guilty of an **"attempt" on somebody's life!!!** It did not matter whether it happened by chance or unintentionally. It was a Human Life, and it could have abruptly come to an end through my action, albeit inadvertent. Certainly, I had no right whatsoever to do that.

As it turned out to my enormous relief, nothing terrible happened to our "terrorist-class-mate" except for getting a good fright. He got off with just a small bump and already the next day sat at his desk; only this time he was quiet as a mouse and, to everybody's satisfaction, undertook no "vindictive" action toward me. The world was wonderful again!!! I could breathe freely, without feeling that terrible guilt, which recently hung so heavily on me and which would have poisoned my whole existence for many long years, if a different reply had come from the hospital.

Certainly, the bitter sense of reproach and deep regret for what I had done still shattered my peace and quiet, but that terrible genuine sense of fear, which held my whole being in its cold grip until we got positive news, left my perturbed soul. It seemed that everything was all right again. However, this ill-starred incident left such a deep print in my heart that I could not even hear about anything "unusual". I pushed aside the least manifestation of any "oddity" in me, and as soon as I felt that something "strange" began to show up, I tried to suppress it, preventing myself from being involved in a whirlpool of any sudden dangerous activity.

I honestly tried to be the most ordinary "normal" child: I went to school (and studied even more than usual!), read a lot, more often went to the cinema with friends, diligently attended my favourite musical school... and continuously felt a deep aching emptiness in my soul which any of those studies and pastimes were unable to fill, even if I honestly tried to do my best.

But days raced past one another and everything "bad and frightful" gradually began to be forgotten. Time healed big and small scars in my child's heart and, like they say, absolutely

correctly, truly appeared to be the best and most reliable healer. I began to come back to life and little by little returned to my usual "abnormal" state which I had terribly missed all this time.

Not without reason do they say that even the heaviest burden is not so heavy for us only because it ours. It appeared that I longed for my "abnormalities" which became usual and normal for me and, unfortunately, made me suffer quite often...

18. Anaesthesia

That winter I acquired the next new "abnormality" which, probably, can be called **self-anaesthesia**. Regrettably, it disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Just as very many of my "strange" manifestations which suddenly and very brightly opened in me did and then disappeared, leaving only good or bad recollections in my enormous personal "brain archive". But even that short time, when this "novelty" was "active", was enough for two quite interesting events to happen.

The winter had already come and my class-mates began more often to go to a skating rink. I was not a big fan of figure-skating (more precisely, I preferred to watch it), but our skating rink was so beautiful that I simply liked to be there. It was arranged every winter on the town's stadium which was built right in the forest (as was a greater part of our town) and was surrounded by a high brick wall which made it look like a diminutive city.

An enormous beautifully decorated new-year tree was there already from October and the wall around the stadium was decorated with hundreds of multicoloured bulbs the reflections of which interlaced on the ice like a very beautiful shining carpet. Pleasant music sounded there every evening. All that created an agreeable festive atmosphere which nobody would wish to leave. All the children from our street went there and of course, I went with them. So, the accident about which I would like to tell you happened precisely on one of those pleasant quiet evenings.

Usually we skated making a chain of three or four children, because it was not quite safe to skate alone. The reason for that was a number of boys who came every evening to play a nasty "catching" game. They spoiled everybody's enjoyment and were disliked by all. Several of them would join together and, skating very quickly, try to catch the girls and knock them off their feet. The girls were usually unable to withstand the blow and fell onto the ice. It was all accompanied by laughter and whooping, which many found foolish, but, for some reason, nobody made any attempt to stop.

It always surprised me, that among so many almost adult guys nobody was angered enough or at least touched by this situation to feel forced into producing some kind of counteraction. Maybe they were, but fear was stronger. There is a foolish saying: "Being cheeky is fun". So, these "catchers" took others prisoner by their frankly not funny insolent behaviour. It happened every night and nobody even tried to stop these obnoxious fellows.

One evening I was caught in exactly the same foolish "trap". I did not skate well and therefore tried to stay as far away as possible from the mad "catchers", but it did not help much, because they rushed about all over the rink like beings possessed, sparing nobody. Therefore, no matter whether I wanted it or not, our collision was inevitable.

The push was very strong and the whole moving pile of our bodies fell on the ice. I was not hurt, but I suddenly felt something hot flow down my ankle and my leg became numb. Somehow I crawled out of the ball of bodies floundering on the ice and saw that my leg was terribly cut. Probably, a falling guy's skates seriously wounded me when he bumped into me with all his might.

It looked, I must say, very unpleasant... My boots were low, like the ones for speed skating (we could not get figure skating skates then) and I saw that my leg near the ankle was cut almost to the bone. Others saw it too and the panic began. Nervous girls almost fainted, because, honestly speaking, the sight was quite sinister. To my surprise, I was not scared nor did I feel like crying, although I had been almost in a state of shock for several seconds. I clutched the cut with my hands with all my might and I tried to concentrate and think of something pleasant, which did not appear to be a simple task because of the cutting pain in my leg. Blood leaked through my fingers and fell

onto the ice; large red drops were gradually gathering into a small pool.

Naturally this did not calm down the already highly-strung guys. Somebody rushed to call the paramedics and somebody else clumsily tried to help me somehow, only worsening the already unpleasant situation. Then I again tried to concentrate and thought that the blood **must stop**, and patiently began to wait. To everybody's utter surprise, in barely a minute nothing leaked through my fingers anymore! I asked our boys to help me to get up. Fortunately, there was my neighbour Romas who usually never contradicted me. I asked him to help me to get up. He said that if I got up, then blood certainly would "flow like water". I removed my hands from the cut... and to our huge surprise we saw that there was no bleeding whatsoever! It looked very unusual – the wound was large and open, but almost completely dry.

When the ambulance arrived at last, the doctor could not understand what had happened and why I was not bleeding having such a deep wound. He also did not know that I **felt no pain at all!** I looked at my wound with my own eyes and, according to all natural laws, should have felt extreme pain... but I did not. I was taken to the hospital for the wound to be stitched.

When I said that I did not want anaesthesia, the doctor looked at me as if I were completely insane and prepared to give me an anaesthetic injection. Then I said that I would yell... This time he looked at me very attentively, nodded and began to sew it up. It was very strange to observe my flesh being pricked with a long needle and myself, feeling a light "mosquito" bite instead of something very painful and unpleasant. The doctor watched me all the time and several times asked whether everything was all right with me. I answered in the affirmative. Then he inquired whether things like that always happened to me? I said no, only now.

I do not know whether he was a very "advanced" doctor for that time or I succeeded in convincing him somehow, but in any case, he believed me and asked no more questions. In approximately an hour I was at home and devoured with enormous pleasure grandmother's warm *pirozhki* at the kitchen table and could hardly get enough to eat; I was truly surprised at such wild hunger, as if I had not eaten for several days. Now I understand that it was the enormous loss of energy after my "self-treatment" which needed to be quickly recovered, but I certainly could not know that then.

The second case of the same strange self-anaesthesia happened during an operation which our family doctor Dana persuaded us to undergo. As far as I could remember, my mother and I very often had quinsy. It did not happen only in winter because of cold, but also in summer when it was very dry and warm outside. Should we overheat a little, our quinsy was right there and forced us to spend a week or two in bed, which neither my mother nor I were fond of. So, on consulting Dana, we at last decided to listen to the voice of "professional medicine" and ablate that, which too often impeded our normal life (although, it appeared later that there was no need to ablate it and that was the next mistake of our "omniscient" doctors).

The operation was scheduled for a week-day, when my mother, as all others, was at work. We agreed that I would be the first to go for the operation in the morning and she would have hers after work. My mum promised that she would try to come at least half an hour before the doctor started to "attack" me. Strangely enough I did not feel any fear; however there was an aching feeling of uncertainty. It was the first operation of my life and I had no idea whatsoever how it would be.

From the early morning I walked along the hospital corridor hither and thither like a lion cub in a cage, expecting it all to begin at last! I hated waiting for something or somebody then, as I do now, and I always preferred the most unpleasant reality to any "downy" uncertainty. When I knew what was happening and how, I was ready to solve it or, if necessary, fight it. According to my understanding, there was no unsettled situation, but only indecisive or indifferent people. Therefore in the hospital I longed to get rid of the "nuisance", which was hanging over my head, as quickly as possible, and know that everything was left behind.

I never liked hospitals. The sight of so many suffering people in one place terrified me. I wanted to help them very much, but could not, at the same time feeling their pain as strongly as if it was mine (probably, being totally "plugged in" to the situation). I tried to somehow protect myself

from it, but it fell heavily on me like an avalanche, leaving no chance to get away. I wanted to close my eyes, withdraw into myself and run from all that pain as far and fast as possible without turning round.

My mother still failed to appear and I began to worry that something had detained her and most likely she could not come. By that time I was tired of walking and sat at the duty doctor's door, pouting and hoping that somebody would eventually come out and I would not have to wait anymore. A very nice duty doctor appeared in a few minutes and said that my operation could start in half an hour, if, of course, I were ready. I had been ready a long time ago, but could not do it until my mother came, because she promised to be there in time, and we were accustomed to always keeping our promises.

But to my huge regret, time went on and nobody appeared. I found it harder to wait with every minute. Finally, I decided that probably it would be better, if I went now and then that nightmare would finally end. I brought all my will together and said that I was ready to go now, if, certainly, he could receive me.

– But what about your mother? – The good doctor asked, astonished.

– It will be my surprise, – I answered.

– Well then, let's go, my brave little hero! – The doctor smiled.

He led me into a small, very white room, sat me in an enormous (for my size) arm-chair and began to prepare the instruments. There was certainly nothing pleasant in all that, but I persistently continued to watch everything he did and mentally repeated to myself that everything would be all right and I would not surrender, not for the world.

– Don't be afraid, now I'll give you an injection and you will see and feel nothing, – the doctor said.

– I don't want the injection, – I objected, – I want to see how it looks.

– Do you want to see your tonsils?! – He was surprised.

I proudly nodded.

– Believe me, there is nothing pleasant in them to look at, – the doctor said, – and it will be painful for you. I cannot let you do that.

– You will not anaesthetize me, or I shall not do it at all, – I insisted. – Why don't you give me the right of choice? Just because I am small, it does not mean that I have no right to choose how I should accept my pain!

The doctor looked at me with his eyes widely open and it seemed that he could not believe what he had just heard. For some reason it suddenly became very important for me that he believed me. My poor nerves were already at breaking point and I felt that only a bit more and treacherous tears would pour down my tense face, which I could not allow to happen under any circumstances.

– Please, please, I swear that I shall never tell this to anybody, – I still entreated him.

He gave me a long look, then sighed and said:

– I shall let you, if you tell me why you need it.

I became confused. I think I didn't understand then very well what had made me to reject the ordinary "saving" anaesthesia so persistently, but I forbade myself to relax, understanding that I needed to find an answer very quickly if I did not want this wonderful doctor to change his mind so everything would go the ordinary way.

– I am afraid of pain so much and have now decided to overcome it. If you help me, I will be very grateful to you, – I said, blushing.

My problem was that I could not lie at all. And I saw that the doctor understood that at once. Therefore without giving him a chance to say anything, I fired:

– Several days ago I stopped feeling pain and I want to check it!

The doctor gave me a long and inquisitive look.

– Have you told anybody about it? – He asked.

– No. Nobody knows yet; – I answered and told him what had happened at the skating rink.

– Well, all right then. Let's try, – the doctor said. – But if you feel pain, you already will not be able to tell me about it, understood? Therefore at once you should lift your hand, agreed? – I nodded.

To tell the truth I was not sure at all why I started all that, and also I was not totally sure whether I would be able to manage that and not have to feel bitterly sorry about this crazy story. I saw the doctor preparing the anaesthetic injection and putting it on the auxilliary table next to him.

– In case of an unforeseen failure, – he warmly smiled, – Well, shall we?

For a second all this seemed to me a wild endeavour, and I suddenly wanted very much to be like everybody else – a normal, obedient nine-year old girl, who closed her eyes, just because she was terribly afraid. And I truly was afraid, but to retreat was not my habit and therefore I proudly nodded and prepared to observe. Only after many years did I understand what this nice doctor risked in reality. I never knew **why** he did it. It forever remained a secret "sealed with seven seals". But then everything seemed quite normal and, honestly speaking, I did not have time to be surprised.

The operation began, and I somehow calmed down at once, as if the knowledge that everything will be all right came on me out of somewhere. Now I don't remember all the minor details, but I remember very well how shocked I was on seeing "that" which had mercilessly tormented me and my mother for so many years when we caught the slightest cold or got overheated. It was two grey, terribly puckery lumps of matter which did not even look like normal human flesh! Probably, on seeing such "ugly things" my eyes became like saucers, because the doctor broke into laughter and merrily said:

– As you see, things extracted from us cannot always be beautiful!

The operation was done in a few minutes and I could not believe that everything was over. My brave doctor nicely smiled, wiping his sweaty face. He looked for some reason like a "squeezed lemon". Apparently, my strange experiment was at a price for him.

– Well, little hero, still don't feel pain? – He asked, attentively looking into my eyes.

– I just have a tickle in my throat, – I answered, and that was the sincere and absolute truth.

My mum was very upset and waiting for me in the corridor. It appeared that there were unforeseen problems at work, and no matter how hard she tried to get permission to be absent, the head would not give it. I tried to calm her, but it was the doctor who had to tell her about everything, because I still found it difficult to speak. After these two cases the "self-anaesthetic effect" disappeared and never returned.

19. The neighbour

As far as I can remember, human attributes like the thirst for life and ability to find joy even in the most hopeless or sad situation always attracted me. In short, I always loved the "strong in spirit" people. Our young neighbour, Leocadia, became the real example of "survival" for me then. My impressionable child's soul was staggered by her courage and truly **ineradicable desire to live**. Leocadia was my light idol and the greatest example of **how high a human being could rise over any physical ailment** preventing it from destroying either their personality or life.

Some illnesses are **curable**, and only patience is needed whilst waiting for that to eventually happen. The effect of Leocadia's accident was doomed to be with her **for the rest of her life** and, regrettably, there was not the slightest hope for this brave young woman to become a normal person again one day.

Fate had treated her very cruelly. While still a small, but absolutely **normal** girl, she had the bad luck to fall off the stone steps and strongly harm her spine and breast bone. At first the doctors were not even sure whether she would be able to walk. But time went by and due to her

determination and persistence this strong cheerful girl succeeded in rising from her bed and slowly but confidently began to take her "first steps" again.

It seemed that all ended well, but over time, to everybody's shock, an enormous and absolutely ugly hump began to grow both in front and at her back and later completely disfigured her body. The most terrible thing was that nature, as if mocking, endowed this blue-eyed girl with an amazingly beautiful, light and refined face, probably wishing to show what a marvellously beautiful woman she would have been, if it had not been for such a cruel fate.

I don't even try to imagine through what heartache and loneliness this amazing woman had to go, trying to find ways **to get used** to the frightful misfortune whilst being a little girl; and how she could survive and not break, when many years after, being a young lady, she should look in the mirror and understand that she could never experience a simple woman's happiness, no matter how good and kind she was. She accepted her misfortune with pure and open heart and probably exactly that helped her to preserve a very strong faith in herself, without getting angry at the surrounding world and crying over her wicked and distorted fate.

Even now I remember her permanent warm smile and joyful luminous eyes which met me every time independent of her mood or bodily condition (but very often I felt how truly hard it all was for her). I loved and respected this strong light woman very much for her inexhaustible optimism and cordial goodness. It seemed that it was precisely she, who did not have the least reason to believe in good, simply did, even though in almost every way she was deprived of the chance to feel what it was to **live** a full life. Or, maybe, she felt it much deeper than we?

I was then too little to understand the abyss of difference between such a crippled life and the lives of normal healthy people, but I remember perfectly that even after many years my recollections of my wonderful neighbour very often helped me to bear offense and loneliness, when it was truly hard not to break.

I never understood people who always were displeased with something and constantly grumbled about their permanently "rough and unfair" fate... I never understood the reason why they thought they **had a right** to consider that they were **destined** to be happy right from their birth, and had the "**legal right**" to happiness, disturbed by nothing (and absolutely undeserved!).

As for me, I never believed in my "obligatory" happiness and probably therefore did not consider my fate "bitter or unfair". On the contrary, I was a happy child and that helped me to overcome many obstacles which my fate very generously and constantly presented to me. It's just sometimes there were short-term frustrations when I felt sad and lonely, and it seemed to me that I just needed to surrender in my heart, stop searching for reasons for my "uncommonness" and fighting for my "unproved" truth, as everything would fall into place; and there would be no offensive bitter taste of undeserved reproaches or loneliness which had already become almost permanent.

But the next morning I met my darling neighbour Leocadia, luminous like a bright sun, who joyfully asked:

– It's a wonderful day, isn't it?

And I, healthy and strong, became very ashamed of my inexcusable weakness and, turning red like a ripe tomato, I clenched my little, but "resolute" fists, and again was ready to throw myself into the fight with the whole world to defend more furiously all my "abnormalities" and the whole of myself.

I remember that one day after the next "emotional confusion" I sat alone in the garden under my favourite old apple-tree, trying to make head or tail of my doubts and errors and was very displeased with the result. Leocadia was planting flowers under her window (her ailment made it extremely difficult for her to do that) and could perfectly see me. Probably, she did not like my state of spirits (which, good or bad, was always clearly visible on my face), because she walked up to the fence and asked me whether I would like to keep her company for breakfast and taste her *pirozki*.

I agreed with pleasure. Her presence was always very pleasant and calming, and her *pirozki*

were always delicious. And also I longed to talk to someone about the things which had oppressed me for several days. For some reason I did not want to share them with anybody at home, probably, because sometimes the opinion of an outsider could give more "food for thought" than the care and untiring attention of the always worried about me grandmother or mother. Therefore I accepted the neighbour's invitation with pleasure, detecting from afar the wonderful scent of my favourite *pirozki* with cherries.

I was not too "open" when it concerned my "unusual" abilities, but from time to time I shared with Leocadia some of my failures or distressing incidents, because she was a truly excellent listener and never tried simply to "protect" me from troubles, unlike my mother who, unfortunately, did it very often and sometimes it made me shut more away from her than I would like to. That day I told Leocadia about a little "failure" which happened during my next "experiment" and strongly vexed me.

– Don't be upset, my dear – she said. – **One should not fear falling down; the most important thing is always to be able to get up.**

Many years have passed from that wonderful warm breakfast, but her words were imprinted in my memory forever and became one of the unwritten laws of my life where I had to "fall" very often, but until now always **succeeded in getting up**...

Days passed and I gradually got used to my surprising and so different world and felt truly happy in it, despite occasional failures. By that time I had clearly understood that I would not be able to find anybody with whom I could openly share what constantly happened to me. I calmly took it as a matter of course. I was not distressed anymore on this occasion and quit any intentions to prove anything to anyone. This was **my world** and if somebody did not like it, I was not going to invite them there.

I remember when later reading one of my dad's books, I came across an old philosopher's lines which were written many centuries ago and which made me very happy and surprised me unspeakably:

"Be like everybody else, otherwise life will become unbearable. If you will break away in your knowledge or ability from normal people too far, they will stop understanding you and consider you a madman. Stones will be thrown at you; your friend will turn away from you..."

It means that already then (!) there were "unusual" people who **knew** from their bitter experience how hard it all was and considered it necessary to warn and, if they could, to protect other "unusual" people!

These simple words of a person who once lived a very long time ago warmed my soul and settled a tiny hope in it that **some day I maybe would meet someone** who would be "unusual" for others the same way I was and with whom I would be able to talk freely about any "oddities" and "abnormalities", without being afraid of being given a hostile reception or, at the very best, being pitilessly laughed at. But this hope was still so fragile and unbelievable, that I decided not to get carried away thinking of it too much, so that in case of failure I would not be too hurt to "land" from my beautiful dream in rough reality.

Even from my short experience I had already understood that there was nothing bad or negative in all my "oddities". And if sometimes the result of some of my "experiments" was not perfect, only I suffered the negative effect, not the surrounding people. And if my friends dreaded being involved in my "abnormality" and turned away from me, I did not need such friends.

I also knew that someone needed my life for something, because no matter what dangerous situation I got into, I always succeeded in getting out without any negative consequences for me, as if someone unknown always helped me; as for example, it happened that summer when I almost drowned in our beloved river Nemunas...

20. Unusual rescue

It was a very hot July day. Beyond a shadow of doubt, the temperature was not below +40 C. The white-hot air was desert dry and literally "crackled" in our lungs with every breath. We sat on the riverbank, shamelessly sweating and catching the air with our mouths like overheating carps thrown out onto dry land. Being already almost fully "roasted", we wistfully looked at the water. The usual moisture from river could not be felt at all and we all longed to jump into the water as quickly as possible, but were a bit wary of doing so, because this was a different bank to our usual one, and as was generally known, the Nemunas has always been a deep and unforeseeable river which was not one to be trifled with.

Our old favourite beach was closed for cleaning, therefore we all gathered in a place more or less familiar to some of the children and "got dried out" ashore, without daring to bathe. An enormous old tree grew at the very edge of the river and long silky branches touched the water at the slightest puff of wind, quietly caressing it with their tender leaves. Its robust old roots, abutting against the river stones, interlaced under the tree, creating a continuous "warty" carpet and forming a peculiar lumpy roof overhanging the water.

Oddly enough it was exactly this old wise tree that represented a real danger for bathers. For some reason there were a lot of eddies around it which "sucked" a person in, and one had to be a very good swimmer to manage holding out at the surface, taking into account that the place under the tree was very deep.

But to tell children about danger is almost always useless. The more caring adults convince them that an irremediable misfortune can happen, the more they are sure that "it can happen to someone else but surely not to them, not here, not now". On the contrary, the feeling of danger attracts them even more, provoking them to sometimes doing stupid things.

So, we – four "dashing" neighbourhood guys and I – thought the same way and on being unable to endure the heat any longer, decided to bathe. The river looked still and seemingly represented no danger whatsoever. We agreed to watch each other and started to swim. In the beginning everything was quite familiar – the flow was no stronger than near our old beach and the depth was the same as we had been used to. I plucked up courage and started to swim more confidently. The requital for such confidence did not wait too long. I had not swum far from the bank, but suddenly I felt that I was being sharply pulled down. It happened so swiftly that I did not have time to react and hold out to stay at the surface. I was twirled around and very quickly went down. It seemed that time had stopped and I desperately felt the lack of air.

Back then I knew nothing either about clinical death or luminous tunnels which appeared during the process of dying. But what happened next looked very like all those stories about clinical death that I found in different books, when living in far away America...

I felt that if I failed to breathe any air right now, my lungs would explode and I would certainly die. I got terribly scared and everything went dark before my eyes. Suddenly a bright flash blazed in my head and all feelings disappeared... A blindingly bright transparent blue tunnel, as if woven from moving tiny silvery stars, appeared. I placidly soared inside it, feeling neither suffocation nor pain; I was just surprised in my mind by an unusual sense of absolute happiness, as if at last I had found the place of my long-awaited dream. I felt the incredible peace and quiet. All sounds disappeared. I did not feel like moving. The body became very light, almost weightless. Most likely I was simply dying in that moment...

I saw very beautiful, luminous and transparent human figures slowly and smoothly coming to me along the tunnel. They all warmly smiled, as if inviting me to join them. I had already begun to reach out for them, as suddenly an enormous luminous palm appeared from somewhere, caught me from below and began to lift me to the surface rapidly and effortlessly, like a grain of sand. My brain exploded with the sharp sounds which gushed into me, as if a protective partition suddenly broke in my head... I was thrown to the surface like a ball and stunned by the waterfall of colours, sounds and feelings which for some reason I perceived deeper than before...

Everybody on the shore was in a frenzy of panic. The neighbourhood guys were yelling and vigorously gesticulating, pointing in my direction. Someone tried to drag me out onto dry land and

then everything started to drift and spin in a crazy whirlpool, and my poor overstrained consciousness glided into complete silence... When I came to myself a bit, the children stood around me with their eyes wide with horror. They all looked like frightened owlets. It was clear that all this time they were terror-stricken and probably had already "buried" me. I tried to smile and still gulping warm river water, managed to squeeze out that I was absolutely all right, although it was very far from being the truth.

As I was told later, the whole havoc had lasted only five minutes, although I felt that time stopped during that frightful interval when I was under water... I was sincerely glad that my mum was not there that day. Later I succeeded in persuading a "neighbouring mother" who volunteered to supervise us to keep secret everything that had happened at the river, because I did not want my granny or my mum to have a "heart attack", all the more so now that everything was over and there was no sense in frightening anybody. The neighbour agreed at once. It was obvious that she was more than eager to do so, unwilling for anyone to know that, regrettably, she had failed to justify the trust placed in her.

This time all ended well. Everybody was alive and happy, and there was no reason to talk about it anymore. However, very often, after my unlucky "bathing", I came back to the same blazing blue tunnel in my dreams, which for some unknown reason attracted me like a magnet. I again felt the unusual sense of rest and happiness, not knowing that, as appeared later, it was very dangerous...

21. Unexpected guests

Evening casts a smouldering gloom upon us.

It seems a harbinger of a bitter loss.

Another day is leaving, leaving and...has left into yesterday,

Like a raft down the river. **And there will be no return.**

Maria Semionova.

A couple of weeks after the ill-starred day on the river, the souls (more precisely, the spirits) of the dead, unknown to me, people began to visit me. It is highly likely that my frequent returns to the blue channel "disturbed" the rest of the souls which had calmly existed in peaceful silence... Well, as it appeared later, not all of them were calm and peaceful. When a lot of extremely different spirits had visited me, from very sad to deeply unhappy and turbulent, I understood how important **the way** we live our life was and what a pity that we began to think about it when it was already too late to change anything and we remain absolutely helpless facing the cruel and inexorable fact that we will **never be able to put anything right anymore...**

I wanted to run out into the street, grasp people's hands and cry to everybody how it was terrible, when it became too late for everything! And painfully, I wanted everybody to know that nobody ever would help them "**afterwards**"! Regrettably, even then I perfectly understood that all I could get for this kind of "sincere warning" would be a direct route to an asylum or, at the very best, laughter. Besides, what could I, a nine-year old girl, who nobody wanted to understand, and found the easiest way of accepting was to consider her a "bit strange", prove to anybody?

I did not know what I must do to help all the unhappy people, suffering from their errors or cruel fate. I was ready to listen to their requests for hours, forgetting about myself and wishing to be open as much as possible in order that all who needed could "knock" on my door. So, the "avalanches" of my new guests began, which, honestly speaking, at first frightened me a little.

The first was a young woman who for some reason I liked at once. She was very sad, and I felt that an unhealed wound, which prevented her from going away, "bled" deeply in her soul. A stranger appeared for the first time, when I sat, comfortably curled up in dad's arm-chair, and "devoured" a book which it was prohibited to take out of the house. Enjoying my reading very much, like always, I submerged into an unknown and such exciting world so deeply that I did not

immediately notice an unusual guest.

First a disturbing sense of a strange presence appeared. The feeling was quite peculiar, as if a light cool breeze suddenly blew in the room and the air filled with a transparent vibrating fog. I lifted my head and saw a very beautiful, young and fair-haired woman right in front of me. Her body slightly shone with bluish light, but apart from that she looked quite normal. The stranger intently looked at me as if begging for something. Suddenly I heard:

– Please, help me.

Although she did not open her mouth, I heard the words very clearly; although they sounded slightly different; the sound was soft and rustling. And here I understood that she spoke to me the way I had heard it before – the voice sounded only in my head (which, as I knew later, was **telepathy**).

– Help me... – the voice quietly rustled again.

– How can I help you? – I asked.

– You can hear me; you can talk to her... – The stranger answered.

– Who must I talk to?

– To my little girl, – the answer followed.

Her name was Veronica. As it appeared, this sad and very attractive woman died of cancer almost a year ago, when she was just thirty and her little six-year-old daughter thought that her mother had left her and, therefore, refused to forgive her and still deeply suffered because of it. Veronica's son was too little when she died and did not understand that his mother would never return, and now stranger's hands would take him to bed and a stranger's voice would sing his sweet lullaby to him. He was still too little and could not realize how much pain such a cruel loss could bring. The matter with his six-year-old sister was different... That is why this nice woman could not calm down and go away, while her little daughter suffered so deeply, in such a grown-up way.

– How shall I find her? – I asked.

– I shall take you, – the answer rustled.

Only now I suddenly noticed that, when she moved, her body easily passed through furniture and other solid objects, as if being woven from dense fog... I asked whether it was difficult for her being here. She said – yes, because it was high time for her to leave. I also asked whether she had been afraid to die. She said – no. **Dying is not a scary thing. The most frightful is to watch those who you leave, because there are still so many things you wish to say to them, but, regrettably, you cannot change anything...** I felt so sorry for this nice, but helpless and very unhappy woman. I wanted to help her, but did not know how.

The next day I returned home from my friend's where we learned to play the pianoforte (because I did not have one then). Suddenly I felt a strange internal push, turned and went in the opposite direction along a street, absolutely unfamiliar to me. I went for a short while until I stopped near a very pleasant looking house buried in flowers. A sad tiny girl sat in a small play area. She looked more like a miniature doll than a child. Only this "doll" was incredibly sad for some reason... She sat absolutely motionless and looked indifferent to everything, as if the surrounding world did not exist for her.

– Her name is Alina, – the familiar voice rustled inside me, – please, talk to her...

I came to the gate and tried to open it. The feeling was far from pleasant – as if I intruded on somebody's life. But I thought what an unhappy mother poor Veronica had to be and decided to take a chance. The girl turned her enormous sky-blue eyes to me and I saw that they were filled with such deep grief, which a tiny child simply could not possibly feel. I approached her very carefully, being afraid of frightening her, but the girl was not going to be scared, only looked at me in surprise, as if asking what I wanted from her.

I sat on the edge of a wooden partition and asked why she was so sad. She did not answer for a long time and then, finally, whispered through tears:

– My mother left me, but I love her so much... Maybe, I was very bad girl, and now she will never come back.

I became confused. What could I say to her? How to explain? I felt that Veronica was with me. Her pain literally twisted me up into a hard smarting lump of pain and began to burn me so strongly that I could not breathe. I wanted to help them both so much that I decided – whatever will be will be but I would not go away without trying. I put my arms round the girl's fragile shoulders and said as soft as possible:

– Your mother loves you more than anything, Alina, and she asked me you to tell you that she never abandoned you.

– It means, now she lives with you? – The girl bristled.

– No. She lives where neither I nor you can go. Her earthly life here with us ended, and now she lives in another, very beautiful world from which she can watch you. But she sees how you suffer and cannot live in our world, but she should not be here any longer. Therefore she needs your help. Would you like to help her?

– How do you know all that? Why does she speak to you?

I felt that she still disbelieved me and did not want to accept me as a friend. I could not think of how to explain to this little and unhappy girl that there was "another" distant world from which, unfortunately, nobody could return and that her beloved mother spoke to me not because she had a choice, but because I simply was "lucky" enough to be a bit "different" to everybody else.

– People are different, Alinushka, – I began. – Some have a talent for drawing, others for singing, and I have a special talent for conversation with those who have left our world forever. Your mum speaks to me not because she likes me, but because I heard her when nobody else could hear her anymore. And I am very glad that I can help her. She loves you very much and suffers because she had to go. It hurts her to abandon you, but it was not her choice. Do you remember how long and seriously she was ill? – The girl nodded. – It was the illness that forced her to leave you. But now she must go to the new world where she will live. And to do so, she wants to be sure that you know how much she loves you.

The girl sadly looked at me and quietly asked:

– Does she live with angels now? My dad said that she lives in the place where everything is like on the postcards which I received at Christmas, where there were such beautiful winged angels... Why did not she take me with her?

– Because you must live your life here, dear, and then you will go to the same world where your mum now is.

The girl began to shine.

– So, I shall see her there? – She joyfully prattled.

– Of course, Alinushka. Therefore you only have to be a patient girl and help your mother now, if you love her so much.

– What must I do? – The little child asked very seriously.

– Just think of her and remember her, because she sees you. And if you stop being sad, your mother will finally find rest.

– Does she now see me? – The girl asked and her lips treacherously began to twitch.

– Yes, dear.

She became silent for some instants, as if gathering her inward strength, and then firmly squeezed her fists and whispered:

– I will be a very good girl, mummy ... you go... go, please. I love you so much!

Tears rolled down her pale cheeks like big peas, but her face was very serious and concentrated. Life had inflicted the first cruel blow upon her and it seemed that this little, so deeply hurt, girl suddenly realized some very grown-up thing, and now tried in earnest and openly to accept it. My heart was torn apart with pity for these two unhappy and so nice creatures, but

unfortunately, I could not help them in anything more. The surrounding world was incredibly light and beautiful, but it already could not be their common world anymore.

Sometimes life can be very cruel, and we never know what the lesson of pain or loss prepared for us really means. Probably there is some truth in that: without losses, it is impossible to comprehend what fate gives us, no matter whether it comes by right or lucky chance. But what could this unhappy girl, shriveling like a small injured animal, comprehend when the world suddenly threw at her all the cruelty and pain of the most frightful loss?

I sat with them for a long time and tried to do my best to help them both to find some peace of mind. I remembered my grandpa and the terrible pain which his death brought me. How hard it would be for this fragile, vulnerable girl to lose the dearest creature in the world – her mother?

We never reflect on the fact that those who fate takes from us for one or another reason suffer the consequences of their death much deeper than we. We feel pain from loss, suffer and sometimes even get angry, because they abandoned us so pitilessly. But what do **they** feel when their suffering increases by thousands of times, **on seeing how we suffer from not having them with us anymore?** And how helpless a person must feel not having the slightest opportunity to say and change anything?

I would have given a lot then to find a possibility to warn people about that. Regrettably, I did not have such. Therefore, after Veronica's sad visit I started waiting impatiently for when I could help somebody else. As usual, life did not keep me waiting long.

The spirits came to me day and night. They were young and old, male and female. All asked me to help them to talk to their daughter, son, husband, wife, father, mother or sister. It was an endless stream until in the end I felt that I had no energy left. I did not know that on contacting them I had to put on my protection (which, besides, should be the strongest one I was able to create!), restraining myself from being open emotionally and pouring out my life-force, which then I did not know how to fill up, on them like a waterfall.

Very soon I literally had no strength to move and fell ill. When my mother called our doctor Dana to check what again befell me, the latter said that it was a "temporary loss of strength because of physical overstrain". I said nothing to anybody, although I perfectly knew the real reason for this "overstrain" and as I had done for a very long time, honestly swallowed any medicine that my cousin prescribed me and after spending almost a week in bed was ready for my next "feats".

I had understood a long time ago that my sincere attempts to explain what really happened to me gave nothing but headaches and increased my grandmother and mother's permanent watching me; honestly speaking, I found no pleasure whatsoever in that...

My long "communication" with spirits of the dead once again turned upside down my already unusual world. I could not forget the endless stream of deep human despair and bitterness and tried to find another way to help them all. But days passed and I was unable to invent anything but doing what I did; only now I spent my life-force more carefully. But I still could not treat what happened with cold calmness and continued to contact the desperate souls and tried to help them, as much as I could.

Truth to tell, sometimes there were amusing, almost funny, cases and I'll tell you about one of them.

22. The poltergeist

It was a grey gloomy day. Low leaden clouds slowly trailed across the sky, threatening to break into a heavy shower at any moment. It was stuffy in the room; I did not feel like doing anything – my only wish was to lie down, staring at "nowhere" and think of anything. But the point is that I never was able to think of anything, even when I honestly tried to relax or have a rest. Therefore I sat in my dad's favourite arm-chair and tried to drive away my sombre mood reading one of my favourite "positive" books.

In a while I felt a stranger's presence and mentally prepared to meet a new "guest". But

instead of feeling a usual soft breeze I was almost glued to the back of the arm-chair and my book was tossed on the floor. I was very surprised at such an unexpected stormy manifestation, but decided to wait and see what would happen next.

A "dishevelled" man appeared in the room. He did not greet me and give his name (which usually all others did), but demanded at once that I "immediately come with him", because he "needed me urgently". He was so highly strung and "boiling" that I almost laughed. Unlike others, there was no sadness or pain in him. I made an effort to look as serious as possible and calmly asked:

– Why do you think I will go with you anywhere?

– Don't you understand anything? I am dead!!! – His voice shouted in my head.

– Well, why? I know perfectly, **where are you from**, but it does not mean that you have the right to be rude to me. – I answered calmly. – As I understand it, it's **you** that needs help, not I; therefore it would be better, if you tried to be a bit polite.

My words had the effect of an exploded grenade upon the man... It seemed that he would explode himself. I thought that he certainly was a very spoiled child of fortune or simply had a terribly bad temper when he was alive.

– You have no right to refuse to help me! There is nobody else who hears me!!! – He bawled again.

The books began to whirl in the room and then flopped on the floor. It seemed that a typhoon raged inside this strange person. But then it was me who became indignant and I slowly pronounced:

– If you do not calm down at once, I shall stop the contact, and you can rebel alone, if you find so much pleasure in it.

The man was obviously surprised, but slightly cooled down. I had the impression that he was not used to anybody refusing to submit to him at once as soon as he expressed his wish. I never liked this type of person – neither then nor now. Boorishness always revolted me, even if, as in this case, it came from the dead...

It seemed that my violent guest calmed down and asked in quite normal voice whether I wished to help to him. I said yes, if he promised to behave in a civilized manner. Then he said that he must talk to his wife and that he would not go away (from earth) until he could talk to her. I naively thought that it was one of those cases when a husband loved his wife very much (despite that seeming quite unnatural regarding his way of behaving) and decided to help, even if I disliked him. We agreed that he would come back tomorrow when I was not indoors, then I would try to do what I could.

The next day I felt his mad (I can not call it otherwise) presence from the early morning. I mentally sent a signal to him several times that I could not hurry the course of events and I would go out when I could in order to prevent additional questions from my family, but my new acquaintance was again quite unbearable. Apparently the possibility of talking to his wife made him absolutely beside himself. Then I decided to change my schedule and get rid of him as quickly as possible. Usually I tried not to refuse help to anybody, therefore I said yes to this strange and capricious spirit. I told my grandma that I wanted to go for walk and went out to the street.

– Well, lead me, – mentally I said to my companion.

We walked for about ten minutes. His house appeared to be not far from us, on a street running parallel to ours, but for some reason I did not remember this man, although I knew all our neighbours. I asked when he died. He said: ten years ago (!!!). It was absolutely impossible, and to my mind too long ago!

– But how can you still be here? – Dumbfounded, I asked.

– I told you. I will not go away until I talk to her! – He answered crossly.

There was something wrong in it, but I could not understand what. Nobody of all my dead

"guests" stayed on earth for so long. Maybe, I was not right, and this strange person loved his wife so much that he did not dare to leave her? But to tell the truth, I could hardly believe it. Well, he did not look like a "knight, in-love-forever", even at a huge stretch. We came to the house and here I suddenly felt that my stranger had become shy.

– Well, shall we? – I asked.

– You do not know my name. – He mumbled.

– You should have thought about that at the beginning, – I answered.

Suddenly some kind of a door opened in my memory and I remembered **what** I had known about these neighbours.

It was a house "known" for its oddities in which only I, in our whole neighbourhood, believed. The neighbours rumored that apparently the hostess was a bit off her head, because she constantly told "bizarre" stories about flying objects, self-writing pens, ghosts, etc. (*things like this are shown very well in the film "Ghost" which I saw many years later*).

The neighbour was a very pleasant woman in her forties. Her husband indeed died about ten years ago, since when these "wonders" began to happen. I visited her several times, being eager to know what really happened in her house, but regrettably could not get my reserved neighbour talking. Therefore now I fully shared her husband's impatience and was eager to enter, anticipating that which, in my opinion, should happen there.

– My name is Vlad, – my former neighbour croaked.

I looked at him in surprise and understood that he was very afraid, but I decided not to pay attention to it and entered the house. She sat by the fireplace and was embroidering a pillow. I greeted her and was going to explain why I was here, when she unexpectedly quickly said:

– Please, dear, leave as quickly as possible! It can be dangerous here.

Poor woman was frightened to death and I suddenly understood of **what** she was so much afraid. Obviously she always felt the presence of her husband when he came in! And all the poltergeist manifestations, which had happened before in her house, were his fault. Therefore, when she felt his presence again, she wanted to "protect" me from possible shock. I took her hands and said as gently as possible:

– I know what you are afraid of. Please, listen to what I want to say to you and all of it will be over forever.

I tried to do my best to explain about the spirits which came to me and how I tried to help them. I saw that she believed me, but for some reason was afraid to show it.

– Milia, your husband is with me. If you want, you can talk to him, – I said carefully.

To my surprise, she was quiet for quite a long time, and then gently pronounced:

– Leave me alone, Vlad. You have tormented me for long enough. Leave.

I was shocked at how much pain was in the woman's voice! As it turned out, her answer dumbfounded not only me, but her strange husband. His reaction was immediate. I felt a wild whirlwind of stranger energy next to me, which began to smash everything around. Books, flowers, teacups – everything which was on the table fell on the floor with a terrible crash. The neighbour turned white like linen and hastily began to push me outside. But it was already too late to frighten me by such "effects" like tossing cups. Therefore, I softly moved the poor shaky woman and firmly said:

– If you do not stop frightening your wife, I will go away and then you can look for somebody else for as long as you did before!

But the man did not pay any attention to me. Apparently he had been waiting for somebody who would help him to "get" his poor wife and his ten years of "sacrifice" would not be spent in vain. And now, when it happened at last, he totally lost control...

– Milia, darling, I wanted to tell you this for so long... come with me, dear...come. I cannot

be alone... I cannot do without you for so many years... come with me.

He disjointedly mumbled something, repeating the same words all the time. Only then did I understand **what** this man truly wanted!!! He was asking his living, beautiful wife to come with him, which simply meant – to die.

I could not bear it all anymore.

– Listen, you! You are absolutely mad! – I mentally cried. – I am not going to say these mean words to her! Be off where you should have been for a long time! Your place is there.

I was simply turned inside out through sheer indignation! Can this really happen? I did not know what I would do, but I knew one thing for sure – **I was not going to give this woman to him, not for the world.**

He fell into a furious rage because I did not repeat his words to her. He yelled at me. He yelled at her. He cursed with words I never heard. He wept, if it can be called weeping... I understood that he could be truly dangerous now, only I did not understand yet how. Everything moved frantically in the house, the panes were smashed. Milia stood motionless, unable to say a single word. She was terribly frightened, because, unlike me, she saw nothing of what was happening in "another" reality, closed to her and saw only objects "dancing" in front of her in a mad fantasia, and slowly went crazy...

It is very amusing to read about poltergeists and another reality in books, being entranced with heroes who always "defeat dragons". In reality there is nothing "amusing" in it; when you, being horror-stricken, do not know what to do with it and a good person can die right now because of your helplessness.

I saw Milia slipping down the wall and become pale as death. I was terribly frightened and suddenly felt who I really was then – just a little girl who, due to her foolishness, got into something terrible and did not know now how to get out of it.

– Well, no way! – I thought. – You will not get her!

And I delivered an energy blow to this insignificant spirit, putting all my indignation into it. I heard a wild howl and everything disappeared. The crazy motion of objects over the room stopped; there was no fear... and there was no strange crazy man who almost sent his innocent wife to the next world. Dead silence hung in the house. Only broken bits still tinkled. Milia sat on the floor with her eyes closed and showed no sparks of life. But for some reason I was sure that everything would be well with her. I came to her and stroked her cheek.

– Aunt Milia, everything is over, – I whispered softly, trying not to frighten her. – He will never come again.

She opened her eyes and observed the devastated room, looking tired and dubious.

– What was it, dear? – She whispered.

– It was your husband Vlad, but he will never come again.

And here she broke into tears. I have never heard before such a heart-rending weeping! It seemed that the poor woman wanted to cry out everything that had been happened in her life for these long (as I knew later, terrible) years. But, as they say, no matter how deep the despair or offense, one cannot cry endlessly. The tears wash away the bitterness and pain and the soul gradually comes back to life, like a bud turns into a beautiful flower in spring after a long cruel winter. The same way Milia began to come to her senses. Her eyes were filled with surprise which was later replaced by shy gladness.

– How do you know that he will not come, baby? – She asked, as if wishing to get additional confirmation.

Nobody has called me baby for a long time and in that moment it sounded especially strange, because I was exactly that "baby" which right now accidentally saved her life. But, naturally, I was not going to be offended. Besides, I simply had no strength for that, being unable even to move to the sofa from the floor. It is highly likely that I had "spent" all my force in delivering the only blow

which nothing could make me repeat now.

I stayed with my neighbour for quite a long time and she at last told me how her husband tormented her all this time (the whole ten years!!!). She was not quite sure then that it was exactly he, but now her doubts disappeared and now she knew that she was right. When Vlad was dying, he said that he would not know rest until he took her with him and he did his best to achieve it for so many years...

In no way could I understand how a person can be so cruel and dare to call that love. But I was, like my neighbour said, just a little girl, who was still incapable of believing that sometimes man can be really cruel even in such a high and noble feeling as love.

23. A car accident

It was the most shocking case in the endless train of my contacts with the spirits of the dead. It happened one warm autumn evening when I was slowly making my way home from school. Usually I would have been much later because I attended the evening lessons which finished at about seven o'clock, but on that day the two last lessons were cancelled and we were allowed to go home earlier than usual.

The weather was uncommonly pleasant. I was in no hurry and decided on a gentle stroll. The air was filled with the bitter-sweet scent of the last autumn flowers. The playful breeze rustled among fallen leaves whispering tender words to the now bare trees which bashfully blushed in the last rays of the sunset. The soft twilight calmly breathed quiet peace and rest...

I loved this time of day. It attracted me with its fragile inscrutable air of something undone which at the same time has not even started: when the day has not yet dissolved into the past and the night still refrains from claiming its rights. It feels like a fairy-tale "no man's land," elusive, suspended in time. I adored this short period of time and was always myself then, in a very special way. That day something "special" did indeed happen, but not the kind of special which I would gladly see or experience again.

I was calmly approaching a crossing, being deep in thought, when the wild squeal of a car's brakes and the screams of shocked people suddenly and sharply pulled me out of my reverie. Right in front of me, a small white car slammed into a cement post and met an enormous car coming from the opposite direction head-on.

In a few moments the spirits of a small girl and boy "jumped out" of the smashed white car. Confused, they began to look around until they saw their disfigured physical bodies and dazedly stared at them.

– What's happened? – The girl asked in a thin frightened voice. – Is that us out there? She whispered in a very hushed voice, pointing at her bloodstained little physical face. "But... how can it be?... we're here, as well".

It was perfectly clear that she was shocked by the event and her greatest desire was to hide somewhere from all that.

– Mummy, where are you?! – The little girl suddenly cried. – Mummy!

Judging from her appearance, she was four, no more. Two thin blonde pigtails with enormous pink bows bristled like odd pretzels on either side making her look like a little, funny kind of faun. Her wide open large grey eyes looked with enormous confusion at her familiar and well-known world, which for some reason had suddenly become incomprehensible, strange and cold. She was terribly frightened and did not hide it.

The boy was eight or nine. He was thin and fragile, but his round "professorial" glasses made him look a little older, very business-like and serious. But all his seriousness suddenly evaporated somewhere giving way to absolute confusion.

A lamenting and bewailing crowd began to gather around the cars. Within several minutes the police came accompanied by an ambulance. Our town was quite small then, therefore the city

services could react to any incident quite quickly and efficiently. After some swift words the paramedics carefully began to take out the maimed bodies, one by one. The first was the boy's body whose spirit stood in shocked silence next to me, unable to say or think anything.

The poor little fellow was shivering wildly. Obviously, it was too much for his child's overtaxed mind to comprehend. He just looked goggle-eyed at that which had been "him" some moments ago and had no strength to come out of his prolonged "numbness".

– Mummy, Mummy!!! – The girl began to cry again. – Vidas, Vidas, why does she not hear me?!

Or rather, she cried mentally because, unfortunately, she was already dead physically, as was her brother.

And her poor mother, whose physical body still clutched tenaciously at its fragile, hardly glimmering life, could not hear her because they already belonged to different, inaccessible to each other, worlds....

The children became more confused and I felt that give it another minute or two and the girl would have a real nervous breakdown (if that can be said about an incorporeal spirit).

– Why are we lying there, why does Mummy not answer us?! – The girl still cried tugging at her brother's sleeve.

– Maybe because we are dead. – The boy answered with his teeth chattering.

– What about Mummy? – The girl whispered in horror.

– Mum is alive. – Her brother answered somewhat doubtfully.

– But what about us? Why don't you tell them that we are here, that they cannot go away without us! Tell them!!! – The girl still could not calm down.

– I cannot, they do not hear us. Don't you see? They truly don't hear us. – The boy tried somehow to explain it to his little sister; but she was too young to understand that her mother could neither hear her, nor talk to her, anymore. She could not understand and refused to accept this horrid situation. Spreading the tears that streamed down her pale cheeks with her little fists, she saw only her mother who for some reason did not want to answer her and did not want to rise.

– Mummy, please, get up! – She began to cry again. – Please, get up, Mummy!!!

The paramedics began to carry the bodies into the ambulance and the girl lost her head...

– Vidas, Vidas, they are taking all of us away!!! What about us, why we are here? – She was unable to calm down.

The boy was paralyzed with fright. He stood silent, even forgetting about his little sister.

– What shall we do now? – The girl became panic-stricken. – Go now, please, let's go!!!

– Where to? – The boy asked quietly. – We have nowhere to go.

I could not stand it any longer and decided to talk to the poor frightened, clinging to each other, children who were suddenly thrown into a strange and incomprehensible world. I really felt for them and could only try to imagine the horror of a little girl who did not have a clue as to what death was.

I came near and, fearing to frighten them, softly said:

– Let's talk, I can hear you.

– Vidas! She can hear us!!! – The girl chirped. – And who are you? Are you a good person? Can you tell my Mummy that we're scared?

The words streamed from her lips nonstop. Obviously, she was terribly afraid that I would suddenly disappear and she would lose the chance to say everything she wanted. She looked at the ambulance and saw that the paramedics had redoubled their activity.

– Look, look, they will take us away now, but what about us?! – The frightened child babbled in horror, unable to understand what was going on.

I felt caught in a blind alley because this was the first time I had come across children who had just died and had no idea how to explain all that to them. The boy seemed to understand something but his sister was so terribly frightened by what was going on, that her little heart refused to understand anything at all. I was confused for some moments and wanted very much to calm her down, but I could not find the right words and, being afraid of doing more harm, kept silent.

Suddenly the figure of a man emerged from the ambulance and I heard the paramedics' voices crying: "We are losing him!" Then I understood that the next to say farewell to life was the father...

– Daddy!!! – The girl exclaimed with joy. – I thought that you had left us and here you are! Oh goody. That's better!

The father, understanding nothing, looked around. On seeing his body covered with wounds and the paramedics bustling around it, he grabbed his head with both hands and howled faintly. It was very strange to watch a big strong man contemplating his death in such wild horror. Or maybe, it always happens **exactly this way**? Because **he**, unlike children, **perfectly understood** that his earthly life was over and nobody could do anything about that despite wishing with all one's heart that it was not so...

– Daddy, daddy, aren't you glad? Can you really see us? – His daughter chattered happily, oblivious of his despair. The father looked at them with such confusion and pain that my heart was slowly torn to pieces...

– Good Lord, you, too?!.. And you?!.. But why – you?! – These were the only words he could find to say.

The three bodies in the ambulance were already covered fully; there was no doubt that all three were dead. The mother was the one who remained alive and, to tell the truth, I did not envy her "awakening" at all. In fact, on seeing that she had lost her whole family, the woman could well renounce her life too.

– Daddy, will Mummy wake up soon? – The girl asked merrily.

The father was totally confused but I saw that he did his best to gather his strength to calm his little daughter.

– Katienka darling, mummy will not wake up. She will not be with us anymore. – He said that as calmly as possible.

– What do you mean she won't be with us?! But, aren't we together? We **must** be together!!! Right?.. – little Kate didn't want to give up.

I understood that the father would find it difficult to explain to his daughter – such a little human being – that their life had changed dramatically and they could not return to the old world, no matter how much she wanted that. The father was in shock himself and, to my mind, needed consolation no less than his daughter. The boy bore up best of all, although I could see perfectly well that he also was terribly frightened. Everything happened so unexpectedly and neither of them was ready for that. Obviously, the boy had an "instant of courageousness" triggered when he saw his "big, strong" dad so taken aback, and he, poor thing, had to be the man and take the "reins of government" from his confused father's hands into his child's shaky little ones...

I have never seen people (except for my grand-dad) at the very moment of their death. It was then, on this ill-fated evening, that I understood how **terribly helpless and unprepared people were in the moment of their transition to another world!** Probably the fear of something unknown and the view of their physical body from the outside (but already **without** them in it!) shocked people who suspected nothing of the kind.

– Daddy, look! They are taking us away and Mummy too! How will we find her again?

The girl tugged at her father's sleeve, trying to catch his attention but he still was somewhere "between worlds" and paid no attention to her. I was very surprised and even disappointed at this behaviour, unworthy of him, for no matter how scared this big human being was, a little human being – his tiny daughter – standing at his feet, needed his consolation and support. For her he was

"the best and strongest" dad in the world, therefore, in my opinion he simply had no right to be so apathetic in her presence.

I saw that the poor children had no idea whatsoever what to do and where to go; neither had I, frankly speaking. But someone had to do something and I again decided to interfere in that which, probably, was not my business but I simply could not look at all that calmly and not act.

– I beg your pardon, what is your name? – I gently asked the father.

This simple question led him out of the "thick fog" in which he had been submerged, unable to find his way. Astonished, he confusedly pronounced:

– My name is Valery. Where did you come from?!... Did you die too? Why do you hear us?

I was very glad that he had somehow regained his senses and answered:

– No, I did not die. I was just passing by when all this happened; but I can hear you and talk to you, if you wish.

They all stared at me with surprise.

– And why are you **alive**, if you can hear us? – The girl inquired.

I was just going to answer when suddenly a young dark-haired woman unexpectedly appeared and swiftly disappeared, without saying a word.

– Mummy, here you are!!! – Kate cried happily. – I told you she would come, didn't I?

I understood that the woman's life "hung by a thread" now and her spirit was knocked out of her physical body for a few moments.

– Well, where is she?! – Kate looked disappointed. – She was just here!

The storm of strong emotions exhausted the girl and her face became very pale, helpless and sorrowful. She grabbed her brother's hand very tightly as though seeking support and whispered:

– Nobody around sees us. What does it all mean, daddy?

Suddenly she looked like a little, sad and confused old lady, who looked at the so familiar world with her pure eyes and could not understand – where she was to go now, where was her mother and her home?.. She turned both to her sad brother and to her father, who stood apart, lonely and seemingly indifferent to everything; but neither of them could answer her simple child's question and suddenly the poor girl became really terrified.

– Will you stay with us for a little while? – She asked plaintively looking at me with her large pleading eyes.

– Of course, I will, if that is what you want. – I assured her immediately.

I wanted so much to hug her firmly in order to warm her scared little heart.

– Who are you, girl? – The father unexpectedly asked.

– I am just a person, only slightly "different" – I answered being a bit embarrassed. – I can hear and see those who "have gone" ... like you now.

– We have died, have we? – He asked more calmly.

– Yes, you have. – I answered honestly.

– So, what will happen to us now?

– You will live, only in another world. And it is not so bad, believe me! You just need to get accustomed to it and accept the idea that you will like it.

– Do people really **live** after death? – The father asked, still unbelieving.

– They do, but not here. – I answered. – You will feel everything the same way as before, but in another world, **not your** usual one. Your wife is still there, as am I, but you have already crossed the "border" and now you are on the other side. – I said trying to find the proper words so he could understand what had happened to them.

– So, will she come to us some day too? – The girl suddenly asked.

– Yes, she will, one day. – I answered.

– Well, I will wait for her then. – The girl declared confidently with satisfaction in her voice.
– And we'll be all together again, right daddy? You want Mummy to be with us again, don't you?

Her enormous grey eyes shone like little stars with the hope that one fine day her dear mum would be there too, in her new world. But she did not and could not understand that being in **her** new world would mean death for her mother, no more and no less...

It so happened that the girl did not have to wait too long. Her beloved mother reappeared. She was very sorrowful and slightly confused but behaved much better than the wildly frightened father who, to my sincere joy, slowly became himself again.

*I made a very interesting observation covering the whole period of my contact with an enormous number of dead people's spirits. I can say with almost one hundred percent confidence that women accept the "shock of death" much more calmly and positively than men. I could not understand the reason for that then but I was firmly convinced of it. Probably they felt the pain of guilt for leaving their children in the world of the "living", or the pain which their death brought to their nearest and dearest more heavily and deeply: but the overwhelming majority of them did not experience the **fear of death**, unlike men. Could the fact that it was they that gave the most valuable gift on our earth – that of human life – explain that? Regrettably, then, I did not yet have the answer to this question...*

– Mummy, Mummy! They said that you wouldn't come for a long time! And you are already here!!! I knew that you would not leave us! – Little Kate twittered, choking with delight. – Now we are all together again and everything will be all right!

I felt deep sadness observing this lovely united family trying to protect the little daughter and sister from realizing the fact that their being together now was **not all right** and that none of them now had any chance to live the rest of their un-lived life; and that they would sincerely have preferred any member of their family to survive: but little Kate chattered on innocently and happily, extremely glad that the family was all together again and everything was all right...

The mother smiled sorrowfully trying to show that she was glad and happy too... but her heart screamed in pain like an injured bird mourning for her poor children who had lived so little. Suddenly she created a transparent "wall" as though "separating" her husband and herself from the children and looked at him gently touching his cheek.

– Valery, please, look at me. – The woman spoke in low voice. – What shall we do? This is death, is this not?

He fixed his large grey eyes on her. An unbearable mortal melancholy reigned in them so that now **I** wanted to howl like a wolf because my heart and soul could not take it anymore...

– How could it happen? And why them too? – The wife asked Valery again. – What are we going to do now? Tell me.

But he could not either answer or suggest anything to her. He was dead and, unfortunately, knew nothing of what happened "**after that**", just like all other people who lived in that "dark" time when the greatest lie of all was hammered into everyone's head; that being the idea that **there was nothing "after that"** and that human life **was over** at the mournful and frightful moment of physical death...

– Daddy, Mummy, where shall we go now? – The girl asked cheerfully. It seemed that now, when they all were together, she was completely happy again and ready to lead her life here, in an unknown, for her, level of existence.

– Oh, Mummy, look. My hand went through the bench!!! How can I sit down then? – The girl exclaimed with surprise.

Before the mother had time to answer, the air right above them sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow and began to thicken, transforming into a blue channel of amazing beauty which looked very like the one I had seen during my unfortunate "bathing" in the river. The channel

sparkled and shimmered with thousands of stars and wrapped the dumbfounded family within the thickening cloud.

– I don't know who you are, girl, but you know something about that. – The mother unexpectedly asked me. – Please, tell me. Should we go there?

– Yes, you should. I am afraid so. – I answered as calmly as possible. – This is your new world where you will live. It is very beautiful. You will like it there.

I was a trifle sad that they had to leave so soon, but I understood that it was for the better: they should avoid regrets about the world they just lost, because they would quickly accept their new world and new life...

– Look, Mummy, it is beautiful!!! Almost like Christmas! Vidas, Vidas. Isn't it so lovely?! The little thing was absolutely delighted. – What are you waiting for? Let's go!

The mother sadly smiled at me and tenderly said:

– Farewell girl, whoever you are, I wish you happiness in this world.

Embracing her little children, she turned to the sparkling channel. They all, except for little Kate, were very sad and looked extremely worried. They had to leave everything they were accustomed to and knew so well and "go" who knows where. Unfortunately, they had no choice. Suddenly a luminous female figure condensed itself in the middle of the sparkling channel and slowly began to approach the dumbfounded bunched up family.

– Alice? – The mother said, squinting at the new guest.

The spirit smiled and stretched her hands toward the woman as if inviting her embraces.

– Alice, is it really you?!

– Well, we finally meet again, my dear. – The shining creature pronounced. – Are you all here? Oh, what a pity! It's too early for them... What a pity...

– Mummy, who is she? – The little child whispered in astonishment. – How beautiful she is! Who is she, Mummy?

– She is your aunt, dear. – The mother answered affectionately.

– That beautiful lady is my aunt? This is great – a new aunt!!! And who is she? – The curious girl could not quiet down.

– She is my sister, Alice. You have never seen her. She went away to "another" world before you were born.

– Well, it was long ago then. – Little Kate confidently established an "undeniable fact."

The luminous "aunt" sadly smiled watching her cheerful little niece who saw nothing bad in this new situation. The girl merrily hopped on one leg, testing her unusual "new body" and feeling absolutely satisfied with the latter stared inquiringly at the grown-ups, full of expectation, that at last they are going to go into the unusual luminous "new world." She seemed to be quite happy again, because the whole family was there which meant that everything was perfect and all right and there was no need to worry about anything anymore. Her tiny child's world was again protected by the people she loved and she did not have to think about what had happened to them anymore and she just waited for what would happen next.

Alice looked at me very attentively and softly said:

– It is too early for you, girl. A very long road awaits you.

The luminous blue channel still sparkled and shone, but it seemed to me that the luminescence was becoming weaker. As if confirming my thought, the "aunt" said:

– It is time, my dearest. You do not need this world any more.

She embraced them all (which surprised me a little, because she suddenly became bigger) and the luminous channel disappeared together with the sweet girl Kate and her wonderful family... I felt empty and sad as if I again had lost someone dear, as happened almost always after a new meeting with a person who was "leaving".

– Are you all right, girl? – I heard an alarmed voice. Somebody was shaking me, trying to "return" me to the "normal" state, because it seemed that I had again "entered" into another world, distant for others, too deeply and scared a good man with my "abnormally-frozen" calmness.

The evening was still wonderful and warm and everything around was the same as it was an hour ago... but I did not want to stroll anymore.

Some fragile, good lives had just been torn off so easily and flown away to another world like white clouds. I was sad, as if they had taken a little piece of my lonely heart with them. I wanted to believe that the lovely girl Kate would be happy while expecting to return "home." I was sincerely sorry for those who did not have such "aunts" to calm their fear, and who rushed about in horror departing for another, unknown and frightening world, having no idea what waited for them and not believing that their own real **LIFE was still going on...**

24. An angel

Days glided by unnoticed. Weeks passed. Gradually I began to get used to my unusual everyday visitors. In fact all events, even the oddest ones, which at the very beginning we consider almost a miracle, become ordinary, if they recur regularly. Just as happened with my wonderful "guests" who greatly amazed me in the beginning and then became almost an ordinary phenomenon to which I honestly gave part of my heart and was ready to give much more to help anybody, but it is impossible to absorb endless human pain without it asphyxiating and destroying you. Therefore I became more careful and tried to help without opening all the "sluices" of my boiling emotions and tried to remain as calm as possible; and to my greatest surprise, I noticed very soon that I could help more efficiently without getting tired and spent noticeably less life-force.

It would seem that my heart should have been "locked" very quickly, being submerged in a "waterfall" of human sadness and grief, but apparently, the joy for those who had found the so long needed peace, when I succeeded in helping them, greatly exceeded any sadness, and I wanted to do it endlessly, as much as my forces, unfortunately still those of a child, allowed. So, I continued to talk **to each one**, to search for somebody somewhere, to prove something to somebody, to convince somebody of something and, when I could, even to console somebody...

All "cases" were very alike; all of them had one and the same aim – the wish to "**correct**" that which one did not have time to live through or to do right in the "passed" life. But sometimes there were really outstanding cases which were fast imprinted in my memory, making me come back to them over and over...

When they appeared I was sitting quietly at the window and drawing roses for my school homework. Suddenly I heard very clearly a thin but very persistent child's voice which for some reason spoke in a whisper:

– Mummy, please! We're only going to try... I promise you... Let's try?

The air in the middle of the room became thick and **two** spirits, which looked very like each other, appeared. As it turned out later, it was a mother and her little daughter. I was silently waiting, watching them in surprise, because previously spirits had come to me **exclusively one at a time**. Therefore, in the beginning I thought that one of them probably had to be like me, that being, alive; but I could not define which one, because according to my perception neither of these two was living...

The woman was still silent, and the girl obviously unable to wait any longer, lightly touched her and quietly whispered:

– Mummy!

There was no reaction whatsoever. The mother seemed absolutely indifferent to anything, and only the child's thin voice was able to sometimes snatch her out of this terrible numbness for a short while and lit a little spark in her green eyes which had seemed to be extinguished forever...

The girl, on the contrary, was merry and very lively. It seemed that she was quite happy in the

world where she dwelt presently.

I could not understand what was wrong here and tried to be as calm as possible in order not to frighten off my strange guests.

– Mummy! Come on! Talk!!! – Obviously the girl lost patience again.

She was five or six by appearance, but it was she who was in the lead in this strange company. The woman kept silence all the time.

I decided to try to "melt the ice" and asked as softly as possible:

– Tell me, may I help you in something?

The woman sadly looked at me and at last said:

– Can somebody really help me? I killed my daughter!

On hearing such a confession, I felt chills run up and down my spine, but it did not perplex the girl at all and she calmly pronounced:

– It's not true, Mummy.

– So, what happened in reality? – I carefully asked.

– A terribly huge truck ran over us; my mum was driving. She thinks it was her fault that she could not save me. – The girl explained patiently with the tone of a little professor. – And now my mum does not want to live even here and I cannot convince her how much I need her.

– Tell me, what do you want me to do? – I asked her.

– Would you, please, ask my dad to stop blaming mum for all that? – All of a sudden the girl asked very sadly. – I am very happy here with her, but after each time we go to see dad, she becomes the way she is now for a long time.

I understood that the father had probably loved this child very much and, on having nowhere he could unburden himself of his pain, he accused her mother of everything that had happened.

– Do you also want it? – I gently asked the woman.

The only thing she did was a sad nod and then she again firmly locked herself in her mournful world, letting nobody in there, including her little daughter, so anxious for her mum.

– Dad is good. He just does not know that we still **live**. – The girl said faintly. – Please, tell him...

Probably, there is nothing more awful in the world than to feel such guilt as the mother did... Her name was Christina. When she was alive, she was a cheerful and very happy woman who was just twenty six at the moment of her death. Her husband adored her...

Her little daughter's name was Vesta, and she was the first-born in a happy family adored by all, and the father simply worshipped her. His name was Arthur, and he also was merry and cheerful just like his wife, before her death. And now nobody and nothing could help him to find any peace in his soul tormented by ruthless pain. And he gradually **allowed hatred toward his most beloved human being, his wife, to grow within him, thus trying to protect his heart from total destruction.**

– If you go to visit my dad, please, don't be frightened... He sometimes can be strange, but it happens only when he is not "real". – The girl whispered. I felt how very unpleasant it was for her to talk about it.

I did not want to ask and thus distress her even more and decided that I would find out for myself. I asked Vesta who of them would wish to show me where they had lived before their death, and whether her father still lived there. The place which they indicated disappointed me a little, because it was quite far from my house and time was needed to get there. Therefore I could not think up anything right now and asked my new acquaintances whether they would be able to appear again in a few days? On getting the affirmative reply, I firmly promised them that I would meet their husband and father.

Vesta glanced at me with a slightly mischievous look and said:

– If my dad refuses to hear you out at once, say that his "fox-cub" misses him very much. He called me this only when we were alone and nobody else knows it...

Suddenly her playful face became very sad. Obviously she remembered something very dear to her and she indeed began to look like a small fox-cub.

– All right, if he refuses to believe me, I shall tell him this. – I promised.

The figures disappeared, softly twinkling. I continued to sit on my chair, trying to think something up to get at least two or three free hours to have the opportunity to keep my word and visit a disillusioned with life father...

At that time "two or three hours" outside home was quite a long period of time of which I undoubtedly would have to give an account to my grandmother or mother. As I never could lie convincingly, I had to think of a **real** reason for my absence for such a long time.

By no means could I let my new guests down...

The next day was Friday and my grandmother was going to go to the city market which she did almost every week, although, honestly speaking, there was no huge necessity in that, because the majority of fruits and vegetables grew in our garden, and other food could be bought in the nearest grocery stores. Therefore a weekly "tour" to the market obviously had another reason and mostly was symbolical – Gran simply wanted to "get some fresh air", meet with her friends and acquaintances, and also to bring us some delicious things from the market for the week end.

I hung around her for quite some time and could not invent anything, and then she suddenly asked:

– Why can't you keep still? What's the urge?

– I have to go out! – I fired, happy to have unexpected help. – For a long time.

– For others' sake or for your own? – My gran asked, squinting.

– For others', and I really need it. I gave my word!

As usual, she scrutinized me (few liked this gaze of hers – it seemed that she peeped straight into your soul) and finally said:

– You should be home by dinner, not later. Is it enough?

I nodded, restraining myself from jumping for joy. I could not imagine that everything would turn out as I wanted so easily. Grandmother often truly surprised me – it seemed that she always knew when the matter was truly serious and when just a whim, and usually helped me, within the limits of the possible. I was grateful to her very much for her faith in me and my odd acts. Sometimes I was almost sure that she **knew exactly** what I did and where I went. Probably, she did know, only I never asked her about it.

We went out from the house together, as if both going to the market, but after the first turn we separated and each went our own way...

The house where Vesta's father still lived was in the first "new district" (thus we called the first districts with many-storeyed buildings, which recently began to be built in the town) and was approximately a forty minute rapid walk from us. I always liked to walk very much, and it never caused any inconvenience to me, but I did not like this new district, because all the houses were like match boxes – identical and faceless. Besides, because the place had only just begun to be built on, there was not a single tree or any other "greenery", and it looked very much like a stone and asphalt model of an ugly and unreal town. Everything was cold and soulless, and I always felt very uncomfortable – it seemed to me that I lacked air there...

Besides, it was almost impossible to find the number of a house, even if one wished to very much. For example, I was between houses № 2 and № 26 and did not understand how that could be, guessing where my "disappeared" house № 12 was? There was no logic in it whatsoever, and I could not understand how somebody can live in such chaos. But I was helped and at last succeeded in finding the house I needed. So, I finally stood in front of the closed door, wondering how an absolutely unknown man would meet me.

I met many people I never knew this way, which always required huge nervous tension on my part. I never felt comfortable, breaking into somebody's private life, therefore each "excursion" like this always seemed to me a little mad. Also I perfectly understood how bizzare it must sound to those who had just lost a dear person and a little girl suddenly intruded in their life and declared that she could help them to talk to a dead wife, sister, son, mother or father. Admit it; they should have considered it absolutely and totally abnormal! To tell the truth, I cannot understand even now, why did all these people listen to me at all?

So, now I stood in front of a stranger's door, hesitating to call and having absolutely no idea what awaited me behind it. But I thought about Christina and Vesta and mentally scolded myself for cowardice. I forced myself to raise my trembling hand and push the button...

Nobody answered for very long time. I already was going to leave as the door suddenly swung open with a jerk and a young man appeared on the threshold. He was undoubtedly very handsome in the past, but now he, regrettably, produced a rather unpleasant impression, because he was absolutely drunk.

I became scared and my first thought was to go away as quickly as possible. But next to me I felt the raging emotions of two very disturbed spirits which were ready to sacrifice heaven knows what in order that this drunk and unhappy, but so dear and beloved man, could at last hear them, if only for a minute...

– What do you want? – He began aggressively enough.

He was truly drunk as a skunk and all the time swayed from side to side, obviously having difficulty being steady on his legs. Here I understood what Vesta's words about her daddy being "not real" meant! Apparently, when the girl saw him in this state, which did not remind her of **her daddy** who she had known and loved for all her short life, she called him "not real".

– Please, don't be afraid of him. – Her voice sounded in my head, as if she felt what I was thinking about at that moment. It forced me to brace up and speak.

– I would like to talk to you. – I said soothingly. – May I come in?

– What for? – Almost maliciously, the man asked.

– Please, I beg you, don't worry... I have a message for you... from your daughter. She is here with me, if you want to talk to her...

I was afraid to imagine what reaction my words could cause in the blind drunk man. As it appeared, I truly was right to be fearful.

He roared like an injured beast, and I was afraid that all the neighbours would come running and I would have to go away, achieving nothing.

– Don't you dare!!!! – The father, infuriated by my words, raged. – Where did such a thing like you come from? Get out!!!

I did not know what to say to him, how to explain and whether it was really worth doing? He understood almost nothing at that moment. But the thin voice again whispered:

– Don't be afraid, please. Tell him that I am here. I often saw him in this state.

– I beg your pardon, Arthur. This is your name, isn't it? No matter whether you want to believe it or not, your daughter **is** here with me. It is true! And now she sees everything that you do and hears what you say.

For a fraction of a second he stared at me with almost intelligent gaze and I already rejoiced that everything would be all right, as suddenly strong hands raised me from earth and put me on the other side of the threshold, quickly slamming the ill-fated door right in front of my very nose.

To my shame, I was absolutely taken aback. Certainly, many different things had happened over the time that I communicated with the dead. Some people were angry only because an unknown girl suddenly dared to shatter their peace. Some did not want to believe in the reality of what I tried to tell them. Some did not want to talk at all, because I was a stranger to them. Yes, a lot of things happened... But nobody ever chucked me out of the house. Again, like it sometimes

happened to me, I felt myself to be a little and helpless girl who wanted very much that a **clever grown up** would give me some good advice which would solve all the problems at once and everything would fall into place.

Unfortunately, there was no "grown up" next to me and I had to get out of this scrape by myself. So, taking a deep breath and closing my eyes tight, I pulled my "trembling" emotions together and pushed the doorbell again ...

Danger is not frightful when you know how it looks. Therefore I said to myself that I just had to deal with a drunk, embittered with pain, person who I would not be afraid of anymore.

This time the door opened much quicker. Arthur's drunken face expressed utter surprise.

– You? Again! – He could not believe it.

I was very afraid that he would slam the door again and then I would have no chance to do anything...

– Daddy, daddy, please! Don't offend her! She will go away and then nobody will help us!!! – The girl whispered, on the verge of weeping. – It's me, your fox-cub! Do you remember how you promised me to take me to the magic mountain? Do you? – She "glued" her round pleading eyes on me, desperately asking me to repeat her words. I looked at her mother. Christina nodded.

It didn't seem a good idea to me, but I had no right to make any decision instead of them, because this was **their life** and, most likely, it was their last conversation.

I repeated the little girl's words and was terrified of the miserable father's expression. It seemed that he had been stabbed right in the heart. I tried to talk to him or calm him down somehow, but he was beside himself and refused to hear anything.

– Please, enter. – The girl whispered.

I managed to squeeze by him through the doorway and entered the flat. There was a stifling smell of alcohol and of something that I could not define.

Once, a long time ago, it had been a very pleasant and comfortable flat, one of those which we call **happy**. But now it was a real "nightmare", which its owner was unable to get out of on his own...

Pieces of broken porcelain were scattered all over the floor, mixing with torn photos, clothes, and heaven knows what else. The windows were tightly curtained and the room was submerged in semi-darkness. Certainly, this kind of "decor" could only cast a mortal gloom followed by suicide...

Probably, Christina had similar thoughts, because she suddenly asked me:

– Please, do something.

I answered: "Of course!", but thought to myself: "If I only knew what!!!" Nevertheless, something had to be done and I decided that I would try until I got whatever result – either he would hear me at last or (at worst) he again would chuck me out of the flat.

– So, are you going to talk to them or not? – I asked him with deliberate anger in my voice. – I don't have spare time for you and I am here only because this wonderful person – your daughter – is here with me!

The man suddenly flopped into an arm-chair, embraced his head with his hands and began to sob bitterly. It lasted long enough, and it was obvious that, like most men, he absolutely did not know how to cry. His tears were scanty and came to him very hard. For the first time I understood what the expression "man-tears" truly meant.

I sat down on the edge of a beside-table and confusedly watched the stream of another person's tears, having absolutely no idea what to do next.

– Mummy, what are all those monsters doing here? – The scared thin voice faintly asked.

Only now did I notice some very strange creatures a multitude of which "spun" around the drunken Arthur...

My hair stood on end. They appeared to be mostly "monsters" from fairy-tales, only here they

seemed **very real**. They looked like evil spirits released from an oil lamp which managed to "fasten" right to the poor man's chest and, hang on him like a bunch of grapes, gladly "devouring" his life-force, which was almost exhausted already...

I felt that Vesta was absolutely horrified but tried not to show it as best she could. The poor thing watched in horror at how the terrible "monsters" pitilessly "ate" her beloved father right before her eyes. I had no idea what to do but something must be done immediately. I quickly looked around and found nothing better to grasp than the pile of dirty plates and toss them on the floor with all my might. Arthur jumped up in the arm-chair and stared at me with his half-mad eyes.

– Stop moping! – I cried. – Look, what "friends" you have invited to your house!

I was not sure whether he could see what we saw, but this was my only hope to bring him round somehow and thus make him sober up a bit.

The way his eyes suddenly became like saucers I understood – he **saw** it. Totally horrified, he dashed aside into a corner, being unable to take his eyes off his "cute" guests and say a word; he only pointed at them with his trembling hand. He was trembling with shock and I understood that if I did nothing, the poor man would have a nervous attack.

I mentally tried to address the strange monster-like creatures, but nothing good came of it; they ominously "growled", waving me away with their paws with sharp claws and without turning around, sent a very painful power blow straight into my chest. One of them "unglued" from Arthur and thinking that Vesta would be easy prey, jumped on her. The girl began to squeal wildly from surprise, but – one has to give her due for bravery – she began to fight it off with all her might. They were incorporeal spirits, therefore perfectly "understood" each other and could freely inflict and exchange energy shots. You should have seen the fervour with which the fearless little girl threw herself into battle.

Surely her vigorous blows made the shrivelling "monster" see stars, but to our shame we, the three observers, froze so that we did not react immediately to give her any help. Right then Vesta began to look like a totally squeezed golden lump and, on turning transparent, disappeared somewhere. I understood that she had given all her forces, trying to defend herself, and now she had nothing left to maintain the contact with us. Christina perplexedly looked around – probably her daughter was not in the habit of disappearing all of a sudden, leaving her absolutely alone. I began to look around then and I saw the most punch-drunk face I ever saw in my life, both before and after... Arthur was in real shock and looked right at his wife!

Most likely the overdose of alcohol, huge stress and all subsequent emotions opened a "door" between our different worlds for a short while and he **saw** his dead Christina, being beautiful and "real" the same as he always knew her. No words could describe the expression in their eyes! They did not talk, although, as I understood, Arthur could hear her. I think, he just **could not talk** at that moment, but his eyes contained everything – the wild pain which had tormented him for so long, boundless happiness which stunned him with its suddenness and supplication, and a lot more things which no words would be able to express!

He stretched out his hands to her, not understanding that he would never be able to hug her anymore in this world. I think he hardly understood anything at all then... He simply **saw** her again, which was quite incredible in itself! All the rest did not matter to him at all... And here Vesta appeared again. She stared at her dad in surprise and suddenly, understanding everything, cried heart-rendingly:

– Da-a-d! Daddy!!! – She threw her arms around his neck, or rather tried to, because she, like her mother, could never physically touch him in this world anymore.

– My fox-cub, my dear, dear, child, my joy. – The father repeated, grasping emptiness. – Don't go. Don't leave me, please!

He literally "choked" with emotions too strong for his tormented heart. And here I became worried that this unexpected, almost superhuman, happiness could kill him... But the hissing and frenzied "monsters", about which we had totally forgotten, took the strain off (just in time!), but

they obviously were not going to forget anybody. To my shame, I absolutely forgot about them, being "hypnotized" by the beauty of the family reunion! Now, they changed "tactics" and did not attack the father. They considered it more comfortable to appease their eternal "hunger" and sate themselves with the life-force of a child – little Vesta. Arthur frantically brandished his arms, trying to protect his daughter, but of course he was unable to harm anybody. The situation got totally out of hand and began to acquire a very unpleasant turn too quickly. I had to get rid of this dog-tooth-claws-hissing horror as quickly as possible and do that so that it could never come back and hurt the poor man...

– Think, think, think! – I yelled to myself, almost aloud.

Suddenly, in a bright flash, I saw a "picture" of my body shining with blinding green and my old "star friends" who smiled on me and pointed at that green light... Most likely my "panicking" brain somehow succeeded in calling them from somewhere, and now they tried in their own way to "prompt" me as to what I must do. Without thinking twice, I closed my eyes and tried to concentrate and mentally call the feeling forgotten a long time ago. In a fraction of a second the whole of me "blazed" with the same amazingly bright green light which I had just seen in the "picture" that my friends showed me. My body shone so brightly that it lit up almost the whole room together with the swarming loathsome creatures. I was not sure what to do further, but I felt that I must direct this "light" (or more precisely, energy) at the wriggling "monsters" to force them to disappear from our sight as quickly as possible and from Arthur's life, which was complicated enough without them.

The room blazed with green and I felt that a very "thick" green ray broke from my hands and hit the mark. A wild squeal turning into an "other-worldly" howl was heard. I thought that everything was over at last and they would disappear for good, but it appeared that the "happy ending" had not come yet. The creatures convulsively clutched with their claws and paws at the father swinging with his hands and the daughter bravely fighting with them and obviously were not going to surrender. I understood that Vesta would not survive the second "attack" and thus lose her only chance to talk to her father for the last time. I could not allow that. I pulled my strength together once again and with all my force "flung" the green rays at all "monsters" simultaneously. Something loudly flapped and..... Complete silence.

At last all monster-like creatures disappeared and we could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

This was my first, still a "child's", war with real creatures from the low-astral level of our planet. I cannot say that it was pleasant or I was not scared. Today we live in the twenty-first century with a glut of computer games and have got used to everything, so that no scary thing can surprise us anymore. Even little children feel totally at home in the world of computer vampires, werewolves, killers and rapists and are absolutely delighted to kill, cut, devour and shoot just to "go to the next level" of their favourite game. Most likely, if a real monster were to appear at that moment in a room, they would not even think about being frightened, but surely lump the blame onto special effects, holography, shifting in time, etc, despite the fact that none of them could experience in **reality** either "time travel" or the other "effects" they adore so much.

But they proudly feel themselves the "fearless heroes" of their favourite cruel games, although **it is highly unlikely that these heroes would behave in the same "heroic" way, if they saw any LIVING low-astral monster in reality.**

But let us come back into our room, now "purified" from the claw-and-fang dirt.

Gardually I calmed down and was able to talk to my new acquaintances. Arthur sitting in the arm-chair, stone-still and dumbfounded, looked now **at me**. The alcohol had totally evaporated from him and now I saw a very pleasant but recklessly unhappy young man.

– Who are you? Are you an angel **too**? – He asked faintly.

I was asked this question very often (only without "too") when I met the spirits and I already got used to not reacting to it, although to tell the truth, in the beginning it perplexed me for a long time.

I pricked up my ears.

– Why "**too**"? – Puzzled, I asked.

– Somebody came to me who called himself an "angel", but I know that it was not you. – Arthur answered sadly.

A very unpleasant conjecture dawned upon me...

– Did you feel bad after the "angel" left? – I asked, having already understood what was the matter.

– How do you know? – He was very surprised.

– It was not an angel, rather on the contrary. You were simply used, but I cannot explain it correctly for you, because I still know little about it. I simply feel when it happens. You have to be very careful. – The only thing I could tell him then.

– Is this something like what I saw today? – Arthur asked thoughtfully.

– In a way, yes.

It was clear that he did his best to understand all that. Unfortunately, I was unable to explain everything to him, because I was just a little girl which tried to "dig" down to truth on her own, being guided in her "search" just by her "special talent", still unclear even to herself...

Obviously Arthur was a strong person who, being unable to understand what was going on, simply **accepted** it. However, no matter how strong this exhausted by pain man was, it was obvious that his beloved daughter and wife's images which now he could not see brought unendurable and deep suffering to him... One had to have a stone heart to calmly observe how he looked around with the eyes of a confused child, trying to "return" his beloved wife Christina and his brave dear "fox-cub" – Vesta, if only for a fraction of a second. Regrettably, his brain could not endure such a huge load and became firmly "shut down" isolating him from his wife and daughter's world, thus preventing their communication.

Arthur neither begged for help nor was indignant... To my enormous relief, he accepted those crumbs which life could give to him today with surprising calmness and gratitude. Obviously, the "squall" of both positive and negative emotions totally emptied his poor, exhausted heart, and now he could only patiently wait, hoping that I would have something to offer him.

They talked for a long time, even making me cry, despite the fact that I thought I had got used to something like that, if, certainly, one can get used to this at all...

In approximately an hour I felt like a squeezed lemon and began to worry a little, thinking about returning home, but did not dare to stop this meeting, which had already become much happier, but regrettably doomed to be the **last** one. Very many who I tried to help this way pleaded with me to come again, but I refused. Not because I did not pity them, but because there were so many of them and I was one, unfortunately. Besides I had to live **my own life** which I adored and always dreamed of living as fully and interestingly as possible.

Therefore, no matter how I pitied them, I always gave myself to a person for only **one meeting** in order that he had the opportunity to change (or at least to try) that which he or she would like very much to change but **usually had not the slightest hope of doing so**. I considered it to be fair enough, both for me and for them. Only for one did I break my "iron" rule and met my guest several times, because I just could not say no to her.

25. Stella

How can one understand or explain that which he never heard or knew? But people do it constantly, without thinking that maybe they are wrong or others quite simply do not need their opinion or explanation... I still remember my only intent to tell a "clever man" about a charming girl with a lucid name Stella. From his "bird's eye view", he very indulgently began to explain to me **what** I had "**truly**" felt and **what** had "**really**" happened....

It was an amazing story and I was eager to share it with somebody for the first time, but after

this unprecedented in its foolishness case, I never repeated a similar error and shared my thoughts or adventures with anybody, except my father, which happened a bit later. Then I firmly decided that I would never again allow someone to wound my soul, which I usually held "unbuttoned" for all who might need it, so badly and which now got a deep crack in it, because a quite dull-witted person senselessly wanted to make a brilliant display of his "knowledge" in front of a naive nine-year-old child.

The most shocking detail here was that this person was a "well-educated" university professor who was invited to our school to carry out a meeting and I thought that he would be the one who **understood everything correctly, like it should be**. But as it appeared, a graduate degree could not always give a real level of understanding, not to mention his stale and indifferent soul. Like one magnificent writer said: "even a small mind can shine, if it is properly rubbed against books". So, obviously, this professor had rubbed his mind...

But this story is not about him, but about someone truly pure and lucid and therefore absolutely worthwhile telling about.

One early autumn morning I walked in the nearby forest. On gathering a bouquet of the last autumn flowers, I, as usual, came to the cemetery to lay them on my grandad's grave.

Our cemetery was very beautiful (if, certainly, one may use this word to describe this sad place). It was (and still is) right in the forest in a surprisingly light glade surrounded by mighty old trees and looked like a quiet green harbour where everybody could find rest and peace, if fate for one or another reason suddenly broke his fragile thread of life. We called this cemetery "new", because it had just been opened and my grand-dad was only the third person to be buried there. Therefore it did not look like a real cemetery...

I entered the gate and greeted a shortish, thin, old lady who sat there alone and was submerged in the train of her thoughts.

The day was pleasant, sunny and warm, although autumn had acceded to the throne and ruled very confidently. The light breeze rustled in the remaining leaves, spreading around the sweet smell of honey, mushrooms and earth warmed by the last sun rays... Kind, deep and "golden" silence reigned in this peaceful place of Eternal Rest, just like it should.

As usual, I sat down on a small bench near grandad's tomb and began to tell him the latest news. I knew that it was foolish and that he could not hear me, even if I wished it very much (because his spirit lived in me from the day of his death), but I lacked his presence so strongly and constantly, that I had allowed myself this tiny, inoffensive illusion in order to return that wonderful connection which I had only with him alone, if only for a short moment.

So, I quietly and peacefully "spoke" to my grandad and did not notice when the miniature old lady came and sat down next to me on a small stump. I do not know how long she sat with me like this, but when I came back into "normal reality", I saw blue radiant eyes, not at all senile, which tenderly looked at me, as if asking whether I needed any help.

– Oh, I am sorry. I did not notice when you came! – I said being strongly embarrassed.

Usually it was difficult to approach me unnoticed. An internal sense of self-defence always snapped into action, but this nice old lady emitted such warm and boundless good which most likely inhibited all my "protective reflexes".

– Well, here I am, speaking with my grandad. – I said abashedly.

– Don't be ashamed, dear, – the old lady shook her head, – you have a soul-grantor. It is a rare and enormous happiness. Don't be ashamed.

I looked at the frail and very unusual old lady with total attention having absolutely no idea what she was talking about, but for some reason feeling absolute and complete trust toward her. She sat closer, tenderly hugged me with her aged, dry, but very warm hand and unexpectedly smiled very brightly:

– Don't worry, dear, everything will be all right. Just don't be in a hurry to know all the

answers. It is too early for you, because, **in order to get answers, first of all you must know the correct questions**, which have not matured in you yet...

Many years had to pass before I succeeded in understanding what this strange wise old lady truly wanted to say. But then I just listened to her very attentively, trying to memorize every word in order to "scroll" later in my memory everything I did not understand (but which was, as I felt, very important for me) and try to catch at least grains of what would help me in my ever-lasting search.

– You have undertaken too heavy a weight. Be careful, you may overstrain yourself. – The old lady calmly continued and I understood that she meant my contacts with the dead. – Not all people are worth it, dear. **Some must pay for their acts**, otherwise they will begin to consider that they deserve forgiveness for no reason whatsoever, and then the only thing **your goodness will bring to them is harm...** Remember, my little one, **good always must be WISE**. Otherwise **it is not good, but just an echo of your heart or desire which may not necessarily coincide with the real essence of the person to whom you have given such a precious gift.**

I suddenly became ill at ease. It seemed that those words were not said by a nice old lady but a very wise and kind sorceress who's every word was literally imprinted in my brain. It looked like she carefully conducted me along the "**correct**" path in order that I, still little and foolish, would not have to "stumble" too often, undertaking my "soft-hearted feats", sometimes quite incorrect ones.

A panic thought suddenly flashed through my mind: what if she disappears right now?! But I wanted so much that she shared with me as many things as possible!

But I understood that this would be exactly the "**receiving something for free**" against which she had just warned me. Therefore I tried to take hold of myself, extinguish my raging emotions as much as I could and rushed to "defend" my rightness.

– What if those people just made errors? – I did not give up. – Everybody makes a mistake sooner or later and has the right to repent.

The old lady sadly looked at me and calmly said, shaking her grey head:

– There are mistakes, and then there are mistakes, my dear. Not just any mistake can be atoned by anguish or pain, let alone words; as well as **not everybody who wishes to repent should get the chance to**, because, due to Man's greatest foolishness, he **values nothing that comes to him gratis** or when a gift **requires no effort** from him. Therefore, there is nothing easier for one who has made a mistake, than to repent, but **to change himself** is indeed incredibly hard. You would not give a chance to a criminal just because you suddenly felt pity for him, would you? But anybody who offends, hurts or betrays his nearest and dearest becomes a criminal in his heart, if only for a tiny, insignificant fraction of a second. Therefore, "give" carefully, girl...

I sat very quietly, deeply in thought about the words which this amazing old lady had just shared with me. Only I still could not agree with her wisdom. An unshakable faith in good was very strong in me, like in every innocent child, and back then her words seemed to me too hard and not quite just. But that was **then**...

As if catching the train of my "indignant" thoughts, she tenderly stroked my hair and quietly said:

– This is exactly what I meant, when I said that you have not yet matured enough for the **correct questions**. Don't worry, dear. It will come very soon, maybe sooner than you think now...

I accidentally glanced into her eyes and I felt a chill down my spine... They were the most amazing, truly bottomless, omniscient eyes of a person who had lived on Earth for at least a thousand years! I never saw such eyes!

She probably noticed my confusion and reassuringly whispered:

– Life is not like you think, little one. But you will understand it later, when you begin to accept it correctly. Your fate is strange... hard and very light, woven of stars. Many fates are in your hands. Take care of yourself, girl.

I did not understand what all that meant, but I had no time to ask because to my huge regret the old lady suddenly disappeared and a, shocking in its beauty, picture appeared instead – a strange transparent door opened and a sunlit marvellous city appeared as if being made of a solid piece of crystal... It sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow. The shining edges of its incredible palaces or amazing buildings and structures, which one never could see on Earth, twinkled. It was a breathtaking embodiment of somebody's crazy and beautiful dream. And there, a little human being sat on the transparent step of the fretted porch, a very fragile and serious redheaded girl who amiably waved her hand to me. Suddenly I had an urge to get closer to her. I thought that it again was "another" reality and most likely nobody would explain anything to me, as it had often happened before, but the girl smiled and shook her head as if saying "No".

At a short distance she appeared quite a "tiddler" who did not look more than five years old, at the very best.

– Hello! – She said merrily smiling. – I am Stella. How do you like my world?

– Hello, Stella! – I answered carefully. – It is very beautiful here, indeed. And why do you call it **yours**?

– Because I created it! – The girl twittered, even merrier.

Dumbfounded I stood with my mouth wide open. Words escaped me... I felt that she told the truth, but could not imagine how one **can create** such a thing and tell about it so matter of factly.

– My Gran likes it too. – The girl said with contented air.

I understood that "Gran" was the unusual old lady who had just talked to me so amiably and who hugely impressed me, just like her no less unusual granddaughter.

– Are you absolutely alone here? – I asked.

– It depends. – The girl grew sad.

– Why don't you call your friends?

– I don't have any. – The little one whispered cheerlessly.

I did not know what to say, being afraid to distress such a strange, lonely and charming creature even more.

– Would you like to see something else? – She asked, as if awoken from sad thoughts.

I only nodded in reply, deciding to leave the thread of conversation to her, because I did not know what else would distress her and had no wish whatsoever to try to find out.

– Look, this was yesterday – Stella said, becoming a bit cheerful.

The world turned upside down. The crystal city disappeared and a "southern" landscape blazing with bright colours materialized. I was so impressed and surprised that I had a lump in my throat.

– Have you done this too? – I asked carefully.

She proudly nodded her curly red head. It was very amusing to watch her, because the girl was earnestly proud of what she succeeded in creating. Who would not be? She was a tiny being which created new unbelievable worlds in between times with no effort whatsoever and changed those of which she had tired, just like that... To tell the truth, it was something that may truly shock you. I tried to understand what was really happening here. Stella was obviously dead, and it was her spirit that communicated with me all this time. But **where** we were and **how** she created those "worlds" was still a real riddle for me.

– Is there something that you don't understand? – The girl was surprised.

– And how, to tell the truth! – I exclaimed.

– But you can do **much more**! – The girl grew surprised even more.

– More? – I asked struck dumb.

She nodded, funnily bowing her red head.

– Who showed all that to you? – I carefully asked, being afraid of accidentally hurting her feelings.

– My Gran, of course. – She said, as if it went without saying. – I was very sad and lonely in the beginning, and my grandmother was very sorry for me. So, she showed how to do it.

Here I finally understood that it was really **her world** which she created by **the force of her thought**. The girl did not even understand what a treasure she was! Unlike her grandmother, who, I think, understood it very well.

As it appeared, several months before Stella died in a car accident together with all her family. Only the grandmother survived because it happened there was no place for her in the car that day. She almost went mad when she knew about the frightful, irreparable tragedy. Oddly enough, Stella did not go to the same level where all her family went, as usually happens. Her body possessed a highly developed spirit which went to the highest levels of Earth after death. Thus the girl found herself quite lonely, because her mother, father and elder brother apparently were the most ordinary people who had no special talents.

– Why haven't you found someone here, where you live now? – Again I asked warily.

– I have. But they all are sort of old and serious, not like you and me. – The girl whispered thoughtfully.

Suddenly she merrily smiled and her charming little face began to shine like a bright petite sun.

– Do you want me to show you how to do it?

I only nodded in consent, fearing that she could change her mind. But the girlie obviously was not going to "change" anything, on the contrary – she was extremely glad to find someone nearer her age, and now was not going to let me go so easily. This "outlook" suited me just perfectly and I was prepared to listen attentively about her unbelievable wonders.

– Everything here is much easier than on Earth, – Stella twittered, being enormously pleased with the attention provided, – You must just forget about the "level" where you still live (!) and concentrate on what you want to see. Try to imagine it very exactly and it will come.

I tried to disconnect myself from outside thoughts and failed. I never could do that easily for some reason.

Finally everything disappeared somewhere and I found myself hanging in complete emptiness. A feeling of Total Peace appeared. Its plenitude was amazing, impossible to experience on Earth... Then the emptiness began to be filled with a fog which sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow and gradually became thick looking like a shining and very dense ball of stars. Fluently and slowly the "ball" began to untwist and grow until it looked like a shockingly beautiful, giant sparkling spiral the end of which was "nebulized" with thousands of stars and disappeared in the endless expanse. Dumbfounded I looked at this fairy-tale unearthly magnificent beauty, trying to understand **how** and **where** it came from. It did not occur to me that it was truly me who created it in my imagination. Also I could not get rid of a very strange feeling that exactly **THIS** was my **real home**.

– Wha-a-at is it? – The thin voice asked in a wonder-struck whisper.

Stella was in shock, "frozen", unable to move a single muscle. Her eyes wide like saucers observed the unbelievable beauty which came like a bolt from the blue who knows where from.

Suddenly the air around us strongly swayed and a luminous creature appeared right in front of us. He looked very like my old "crowned" star friend, but obviously it was somebody different. On recovering from shock and examining him more attentively, I understood that he did not look like my old friends at all. It's just that the first impression "fixed" the same hoop on the forehead and the same might, but apart from that they had nothing in common. All my "guests" were tall, but this creature was **very** tall; his height was, probably, almost five meters. His strange shining clothes (if they can be called so) were streaming like a banner in the wind all the time, scattering sparkling

crystal tails behind, although we felt no wind or even breeze around. His long, silver hair shone with strange lunar halo, giving the impression of "eternal cold" around his head. And his eyes! What eyes he had! I wish you'd never have to look into them! Before I saw them, I could not imagine such a thing even in my boldest fantasy. They were incredibly pink and shimmered with thousands of brilliant stars which lit every time he looked at you. It was absolutely unusual and terribly beautiful.

He emanated a feeling of enigmatic distant Space and something else which my brain of a little child was unable to grasp then...

The creature lifted his hand with the palm turned toward us and mentally said:

– I am Ales [elei]. You are not ready to come, go back.

Naturally, at once I was eager to know who he was and wanted to retain him somehow, if only for a little while.

– Not ready for what? – I asked as calmly as I could.

– To come **home**. – He answered.

The unbelievable might (as it seemed to me then), and at the same time a strange deep warmth of loneliness came from him. I wished him never to go away and suddenly I became so sad that I was on the verge of bursting into tears.

– You will come back, – he pronounced in response to my sad thoughts. – It will be much later, however. And now – go.

His halo became brighter and to my huge regret he disappeared.

The sparkling enormous "spiral" shone for some time and then began to scatter and fully thawed, leaving the deep night behind it.

Stella at last "came to" from the shock and everything around began to shine with merry light, hugging us with fairy-tale flowers and multicoloured birds which her incredible imagination hurried to create, most likely, wishing to be rid, as quickly as possible, of the oppressive impression of eternity which leaned heavily on us.

– Do you think it was me? – I whispered, still unable to believe in what just happened.

– Of course! – The girl twittered in a merry voice. – It was what you wanted, was not it? It was so huge and frightful, though very beautiful. I would not want to live there, not for the world! – She confidently declared.

But I could not forget that incredibly-enormous and attractively-majestic beauty which, I knew for certain, would become my dream forever, and the desire to return there some day will pursue me for long, long years, until one fine day I shall find my real and lost HOME at last.

– Why are you sad? You've done it just splendidly! – Stella exclaimed in surprise. – Do want me to show you something else?

She wrinkled her nose in a conspiratorial way, after which she looked like a funny little monkey.

Again everything turned upside down, "landing" us in a madly-bright "parrot-like" world where thousands of birds chirped loudly and incessantly. My head began to spin because of this terrible cacophony.

– Ooops! – Stella laughed, tinkling like a bell, – not like that!

Pleasant silence came at once. We "misbehaved" together for a long time, creating funny, merry and fairy-tale worlds by turns, which in reality did not appear so difficult. I could not tear myself away from this unearthly beauty and the crystal-clean amazing girl Stella who carried warm and merry light within herself and with whom I sincerely wanted to stay forever.

Regrettably, real life called me to "come down to Earth" and I had to say goodbye, without knowing whether I would succeed in seeing her again, if only for an instant.

Stella looked at me with her large, round eyes, as if wishing and at the same time not daring

to ask me something. I decided to help her.

– Do you want me to come again? – I asked, cherishing hopes for "yes".

Her funny face again shone with all shades of joy:

– Will you really, really come?! – She squeaked happily.

– I will, really, really. – I promised firmly.

26. Stella-2. Harold

My days, busily "up to my neck" in everyday bustle, turned out to be weeks, and I still could not find free time to visit my darling little friend. I thought about her almost every day and swore to myself that tomorrow I would find time to "unburden my heart" with this wonderful light creature, if only for a couple of hours... There was also another, very strange, idea which gave me no rest – I wanted very much to introduce Stella's grandmother to mine, no less interesting and unusual... For some inexplicable reason I was sure that these extraordinary women would certainly find something to talk about.

So, one fine day I suddenly decided that "That's enough!" and it was high time to stop putting aside everything "for tomorrow". Although I was not sure that Stella's grandmother would be there that day, I thought that it would be wonderful if I finally visited my new friend at least and if I were lucky, introduce our dear grandmothers to each other.

Some strange force literally pushed me out of home, as if someone very softly and at the same time very insistently called me, mentally, from far away.

I quietly came to my grandmother and, as usual, began to hang around her, trying to think up the best way of telling her about all this.

– Well, shall we go or what? – Gran asked calmly.

I stared at her in disbelief, trying to understand how she could know that I was going to go somewhere at all.

But she gave me a sly smile and asked, as if nothing happened:

– What? Don't you want to walk with me?

From the bottom of my heart I was indignant at such unceremonious intruding in my "private mental world" and I decided to "test" her.

– Of course, I want! – I exclaimed joyfully, and without telling where we would go, headed for the door.

– Take a pullover, when we're coming back, it'll be chilly! – My grandmother called after me.

That's it! I could not stand it anymore! I ruffled up like a frozen sparrow and mumbled, being offended:

– How do you know where we are going?

– It's written all over your face. – Gran was smiling.

Of course, nothing was written on my face, but I would give anything to know how she always knew everything so confidently when the matter concerned me.

In a couple of minutes we were strolling toward the forest, enthusiastically chatting about different and unbelievable stories, of which she, naturally, knew much more than me and this was one of the reasons why I liked to go for a walk with her so much.

There were only two of us and therefore, there was no need to fear that someone would be eavesdropping on us and not like what we were talking about.

My grandmother easily accepted all my oddities and was never afraid of anything; and sometimes, if she saw that I totally "got lost" in something, she gave me advice, helping me to get out of that or another unpleasant situation; but most of all she simply observed how I would react to complications, which had become permanent on my "thorny" life-path. Lately it seemed to me that

my grandmother waited impatiently for something new to happen in order to see whether I had grown up even a little bit, or still "stewed" in my "happy childhood", unwilling to get out of my child's short shirt. But I loved her very much even for such "cruel" behaviour and tried to use every single opportunity to spend time with her as often as possible.

The forest met us with friendly rustle of gold autumn foliage. The weather was absolutely gorgeous, and I hoped that I would find my new friends there too.

I picked a small bouquet of still remaining modest autumn flowers, several minutes more and we came to the cemetery and I saw the same fragile sweet old lady sitting at the same place, the cemetery gates...

– Oh, I thought I could not wait until you came! – She joyfully greeted us.

Extremely surprised, I looked at her with my mouth wide open and most likely I looked foolish enough, because the old lady broke into merry laughter, came to us and tenderly patted my cheek.

– Go dear, Stella is probably getting tired of waiting for you. And we'll be sitting here for a while...

I did not have time to ask how I would get to Stella, as everything disappeared and I found myself in the already familiar, shining with all colours of the rainbow, world of Stella's luxuriant fantasy and before I had time to see how the land lies I heard the enthusiastic voice:

– Ah, how swell that you came! I waited and waited for you!

The girl flew up to me like a whirlwind and dumped a... little red "dragon" right in my hands. I jumped back in surprise, but then broke into laughter, because it was the most charming and funny creature in the world.

The "dragon", if I may call it that, puffed up his tender pink belly and threateningly began to hiss at me, obviously hoping to frighten me. But when he saw that nobody was going to be frightened here, calmly settled down on my knees and began to snuffle peacefully, showing what a "good boy" he was and how strongly he should be loved.

I asked Stella what his name was and how long ago she had created him.

– Dear me! I have not thought of what to call him yet! He appeared right now! You like him, don't you? – The girl twittered merrily and I felt that she was glad to see me again.

– He is yours! – She suddenly said. – He will live with you.

The dragon funnily pushed out his thorny little mug, hoping to find out whether I had something interesting for him... And unexpectedly licked my nose! Stella squealed in delight and was obviously extremely pleased with her work.

– All right, – I agreed, – he can be with me while I am here.

– Don't you want to take him with you? – Stella was surprised.

And I understood here that probably she did not know that we are "different", and live in different worlds. Most likely, the grandmother did not tell the whole truth to the little girl, feeling sorry for her, and she sincerely thought that it was exactly the same world where she had lived before with only one difference – she could create her world.

I was absolutely sure that I **did not want to be the person** who would tell this small trustful girl what her today's life truly was. She was happy in **her** imaginary reality and I swore in my heart that I would never be the one to destroy her fairy-tale world. I could not understand one thing – the way the grandmother explained the sudden disappearance of her family and the whole world where she had lived to her.

– You see, – I began with a small hitch, smiling, – dragons are not very popular where I live....

– But nobody will see him! – The girl twittered merrily.

A load off my mind! I hated lying or slipping out of direct answers, especially before such a

pure little human being like Stella. It appeared that she perfectly understood everything and succeeded somehow in combining the joy of creation and the sadness of her loss.

– I have found a friend here at last! – The little one declared victoriously.

– Really? – I was surprised. – Will you introduce me to him some day?

She amusingly nodded with her fluffy red head and squinted slyly.

– Do you want to do it right now? – I felt that she was "fidgety" and unable to restrain her impatience.

– Are you sure that he would want to come? – I asked cautiously.

Not because I was afraid of somebody or felt shy, simply I was not in the habit of disturbing people having no special or important cause. I was not sure that right now this was really such a cause, but Stella was obviously absolutely sure, because in a fraction of a second a man appeared next to us.

It was a very sad knight. Oh, yes, it was exactly a knight! The fact that, even in this "other" world where he could "put on" **any energy "clothes"** he still did not give up his severe knight's look, in which he probably remembered himself very well, surprised me very much... I thought that he must have very serious reasons for being unwilling to change his look after so many years.

*Usually, when people die, for some time their spirits always look just **like they looked in the moment of their physical death**. Most likely, the shock and wild fear before the unknown is great enough to add additional stress to it. When the time comes (usually in a year), the spirits of old people gradually begin to look younger till they look as they did in the best years of their youth. Prematurely dead children sharply "mature", as if "catching up" with their un-lived life and come to look like the spirits they were before they entered the bodies of the poor children; the only difference is though, some of them "added" a bit in their development, if they were lucky enough during the short years they spent in their physical bodies. Much later, every spirit changes, depending on **how** it lives in the "new" world.*

*Unlike others, **highly developed spirits** that live at **the mental level** of Earth, can create their "look" and "clothes", because, on living for a very long time (**the higher the development of the spirit, the more rarely it incarnates into a physical body**) and getting accustomed enough in "another" world, unknown for them in the beginning, they can already create a lot of things.*

I am still at a loss, why a little girl, Stella, chose exactly this grown up and deeply hurt man as her friend. But because she looked absolutely happy with such an "acquisition", I had no choice but to trust fully in the little and playful enchantress's faultless intuition.

As it appeared, his name was Harold. Last time he lived in a physical body was more than a thousand years ago and he obviously possessed a very highly developed spirit, but I felt with my heart that the recollections about his life in the last embodiment were very painful, because exactly **from there** Harold brought this deep and mournful sorrow, which had accompanied him for so many years.

– There! He is very good, and you will be his friend too! – Stella pronounced happily, paying no attention to the fact that her new friend was here too and could perfectly hear us.

It obviously does not occur to her that to talk about him in his presence cannot be quite proper. She simply was very happy that at last she had a friend and shared this happiness with me openly and with great pleasure.

She was an **unbelievably happy child!** We call it "happy in nature". Neither before nor after did I meet anybody who would look like, even a little, this "sunny" and charming girl. It seemed that no trouble or misfortune could knock her out of her extraordinary "happy track". Not because she was unable to understand or feel human pain or misery; on the contrary, I was sure that she felt it much deeper than others. She produced the impression of being created from cells of **joy and light** and protected by a strange and very "positive" protection which allowed neither grief nor distress to get to the depth of her little and very kind heart in order to destroy it by the everyday

avalanche of negative emotions and feelings injured by pain, so usual for all of us. Stella **WAS HAPPINESS** herself and generously, like the sun, gave it to all around.

– When I found him, he was so sad! Now he is much better. Right, Harold? – Addressing both of us simultaneously, Stella happily continued.

– I am very pleased to meet you, – I said, still feeling a little constrained. – It probably is very difficult to be between worlds for so long?

– This world differs little from others, – Shrugging, the knight answered calmly. – Only it is almost empty...

– What do you mean empty? – I was surprised.

Stella interfered immediately. It was obvious that she wanted to tell me everything as quickly as possible and jumped with burning impatience.

– He could not find his family here, but I helped him! – She gladly fired.

Harold affectionately smiled at this marvellous, "sparkling" with happiness, little human being and nodded in confirmation of her words:

– It is true. I have been looking for them for an eternity, but what I really had to do was to open the **right** "door". She helped me to do that.

I stared at Stella, expecting explanation. This girl continued to surprise me more and more.

– Well, yes, – Stella pronounced, being a bit abashed. – He told me his story and I **saw** that they are not here. So, I looked for them and found...

Naturally, I understood very little from such explanation, but I was ashamed to ask for more and decided to wait what she would say further. But unfortunately or fortunately, nothing could be easily concealed from the clever girl... Cunningly glancing at me with her enormous eyes, she offered immediately:

– Do you want me to show you?

I only nodded affirmatively, being afraid of frightening her off and expecting something "shockingly-unbelievable".

Her "variegated" reality vanished and the unusual landscape appeared...

It appeared to be a very hot, maybe eastern, country, because everything around dazzled with bright and white-orange light which usually can be found in an area with burning hot, dry air. The earth was scorched and colourless to the very horizon and nothing diversified this stingily-monotonous, flat and "naked" landscape except for distant mountains far away in the blue haze. Far off I saw a small, ancient white-rock city which was walled in by a tumbledown stone wall. It was obvious that nobody had attacked the city for a very long time, and the locals did not care about defence or at least renovation of the municipal wall.

Narrow ophidian streets hurried inside the city and then united in one, a bit wider with unusual little "castles" on it which rather looked like miniature white fortresses surrounded by miniature gardens which bashfully hid from stranger's eyes behind their high stone walls. There was almost no greenery in the city; therefore the incinerating heat mercilessly "melted" the white stones lit by the wicked midday sun which furiously brought down all the power of its scalding rays on unprotected, dusty streets which, choking lamentably waited for the slightest puff of fresh breeze which never came. The burning hot air "swayed" with hot waves, converting this unusual town into a real stuffy oven. It seemed this was the hottest day of the hottest summer on earth.

The picture was very real, just like my favourite fairy-tales into which I "fell", hearing and seeing nothing around...

Suddenly a small but very "domestic" fortress came forward from the "general picture", which would have looked more like a large and comfortable house, if it had not been for two funny square turrets.

A little blond boy of four or five years old played on the steps under a big olive tree. Behind

him a plump pleasant looking woman, who looked like a nice good-natured nanny, picked apples under an old apple-tree.

A very beautiful fair young lady appeared in the courtyard and behind her I saw ... my new acquaintance – the knight Harold.

The woman was dressed in an unusual but, obviously, very expensive, long silk dress the folds of which softly swayed, repeating every motion of her light, elegant body. A funny little beaded blue silk cap peacefully reposed on beautiful lady's fair hair, splendidly emphasizing the colour of her large blue eyes.

Despite the incinerating infernal heat, Harold "honestly suffered" in his red-hot knight's panoply, almost suffocating and damning the heat in his thoughts (after which he immediately begged pardon of the "gracious" Lord which he had sincerely and devotedly served for so many years). Hot sweat was pouring off him, strongly irritating his skin and blurring his eyes, heartlessly spoiling the quickly escaping minutes of their next "last" farewell. Probably the knight was going to go very far away, because his fair lady's face was very sad, despite the fact that she honestly tried to conceal it as much as she could.

– This is the last time, my angel... I promise you, it's **true** – the last time. – The knight hardly articulated, tenderly touching her soft cheek.

I heard the conversation mentally; nevertheless, there was a strange feeling of **foreign speech**. I perfectly understood the words, but knew that they spoke another language.

– I shall never see you again... – the woman whispered through tears. – Never again...

The boy, for some reason, showed no reaction either to his father's forthcoming departure or his mother's farewell. He calmly continued to play, paying no attention to grown-ups, as if it had nothing to do with him. It surprised me a little, but I decided to ask nothing and continue to watch to see what would happen next.

– Don't you want to say "good-bye" to me? – The knight addressed his son.

The boy shook his head, without even lifting it.

– Leave him. He is just angry at you. – The woman said sadly. – He too believed that you would not leave him alone anymore.

The knight nodded, mounted his enormous horse, galloped along the narrow street, without turning around and very soon disappeared from sight behind the first turn. The beautiful lady sadly followed him with her eyes, and her soul was ready to creep ... to run... to fly after him, no matter where, if only she could see or hear him once again, even for a moment! But she knew that it would not happen and she would remain where she was, and due the capricious whim of fate she would never again see and hug her Harold... never... Large, heavy tears rolled down her pale cheeks, which became haggard in a flash; the dusty soil swallowed crystal bitter drops.

– My God, save him... – The lady whispered bitterly. – I shall never see him again... never... help him, My God...

She stood motionless, like a mournful Madonna, seeing and hearing nothing around. The blond boy nestled up to her, now revealing his sorrow and sadly looking at the empty street, where instead of his beloved father, only white dust swirled...

– How could I not to say goodbye to you, my angel? – Suddenly the quiet and bitter voice sounded nearby.

Harold looked at his charming and so sad wife, without taking his eyes off her, and mortal sorrow, which could not be washed off even by the waterfall of tears, hid in his blue eyes... But he looked a very strong and brave man who would not and could not shed tears easily.

– Please, don't! Don't be sad! – Stella's fragile fingers stroked his enormous hand. – Don't you see how much they loved you? Let's not look at it anymore; you've seen it already so many times!

The picture disappeared... I looked at Stella with surprise, but did not have time to say

anything, as found myself in another "episode" of the strange life which so deeply affected my soul.

An unusually bright, merry and pink dawn, spangled with diamond drops of dew, was gradually waking up. The sky blazed up for an instant, painting the edges of lacy, tow-haired clouds with a scarlet glow, and at once it became very light. An early, extraordinarily fresh morning came into its own. The knight Harold and his united little family sat on the terrace of the house, which we've seen before, in the cool shade of a big tree. The woman looked amazingly beautiful and very happy, like the newly-born dawn... Affectionately smiling, she talked to her husband, sometimes gently touching his hand. And he, being absolutely relaxed, gently rocked his sleepy, dishevelled little son, sipped a pink cooling drink and from time to time idly answered his wife's questions which he had probably heard many times.

The morning air was charmingly "tinkling" and strikingly pure. A small tidy garden breathed freshness, moisture and lemon fragrance; the plenitude of the stunningly pure air, which streamed right into the lungs, took one's breath away. Harold wanted to "fly" because of the quiet happiness which filled his tired, worn out suffering heart! He listened to the thin voices of just waking birdsong, saw his smiling wife's beautiful face and it seemed that nothing in the world could break or take away this wonderful moment of light, joy and peace with his little happy family from him...

To my surprise, the idyllic picture was suddenly separated from us by a luminous blue "wall", leaving the knight Harold alone to enjoy his happiness. Indeed, he did – forgetting about everything in the world, he "absorbed" these wonderful and so dear to him, moments with all his soul, not even noticing that he was left alone.

– There. Let him watch it, – Stella whispered. – And I will show you what happened next...

The wonderful picture of quiet happiness disappeared... and another one – cruel and frightening, which promised nothing good, let alone a happy end, appeared instead...

It was still the same white-rock city and the same house we had seen before. Only this time everything was seized by fire. The fire was everywhere. Roaring, all-devouring flame broke forth from broken windows and doors and attacked people who rushed about in horror, converting them into screaming human torches, this turned them into easy living targets for the pursuers. Screaming women grabbed their children and tried to hide in the basements, but their salvation did not last long – the monsters, laughing loudly, pulled them, half-naked and desperately yelling, outside to rape them right in the street, next to still warm dead bodies of their children. One could not see anything because of the soot which spread everywhere. The air was stuffily filled with the smell of blood and ash; there was nothing to breathe with. The old people, crazy with fear and heat, ran out of basements and fell dead under the swords of the beast-like wild people, which rushed about the city on their horses with terrible whooping. I heard the loud cacophony of rattling hoofs, clanking iron and wild cries which made my blood freeze.

Terrifying scenes of violence and atrocious murders flashed before my eyes, like in the cinema... I could not calmly look at all that; my heart literally "jumped" out of my chest, my forehead was covered with cold sweat (as if I was in my physical body!) and the irresistible wish to escape from this horrific and monstrously-pitiless world haunted me. But when I looked at the serious and concentrated Stella's face, I became ashamed of my weakness and forced myself to look further.

We found ourselves in Harold's house. Now everything was broken; nanny's dead body lay in the middle of a room, right on the floor. We clearly heard heart-breaking female screaming in the street through the broken windows; everything mixed into a terrible nightmare of despair and fear. It seemed that the whole world had suddenly gone mad for some reason. Then we saw another room where three men were trying to tie Knight Harold's tow-headed wife to the back of the bed, bringing their whole weight to bear on the woman who tried to break loose from their grip with her last bit of strength. And his little son sat right **under the bed**, squeezing his dad's dagger in his tiny hands, too huge for him, and whispered something with his eyes closed. Nobody paid any attention to him in the middle of this mad bustle. He was so strangely and "motionlessly" quiet, that I thought in the beginning that the boy just got an emotional shock witnessing all that horror, but soon

understood that I was mistaken. As it appeared, the child simply was gathering all his strength and preparing himself to make an important and decisive step.

He could easily reach any of the rapists, and at first I thought that the poor thing, still thinking like a child, wanted to try to protect somehow his unfortunate mother. But, as appeared, this tiny boy, frightened to death, was the real son of a knight in his still child's soul, and managed to find **the most correct and the only possible** way out of the terrible situation. He decided **to take the heaviest step in his short life**. He finally managed to pull himself together and, quietly whispering "mummy!", jumped out to the side and with all his child's might... slashed his poor mother's tender neck with the heavy dagger... he loved her tenderly and selflessly and could not find another way to save her...

At first nobody noticed anything in the "rapist" ardour... The boy quietly crawled away to the corner and, having no strength for anything else, sat there motionless, indifferent to anything, observing with his eyes, wide with horror, how, right in front of him, his kind and tender mother, the best in the whole world, departed this world **by his hand**.

Suddenly the frightful scene disappeared and everything around shone again with all colours of the rainbow; we found ourselves in Stella's world, light and merry. I was unable to come to my senses from the nightmare I had just seen. I tried to keep the pure image of this wonderful and brave little boy in my memory and did not even notice that I was crying. I felt the tears rolling down my cheeks, but for some reason I was not ashamed about it at all...

– I won't show you what happened next, because it is even sadder... – Stella said cheerlessly.
– But we found them. Everything is all right with them! Oh, don't be so sad! – She twittered, shaking off the sorrow.

And poor Harold sat on the sparkling stone which she had created for him, stroked the purring red dragon with one finger and was very far from us, in his cherished world, where they were still together and where his might-have-been dream lived very really...

I was so sorry for him! Regrettably, I could not help him in anything and, honestly, I was eager to know how this unusual little girl could.

– We found them! – Stella repeated again. – I did not know how to do it but Gran helped me!

It appeared that Harold did not even get to know in his life time what a terrible fate befell his family. He was a knight-warrior and had died before his city appeared in the hands of the "butchers", just as his wife had predicted.

But, as soon as he got into this unknown, marvellous world of the "gone" people, he at once could **see how pitilessly and cruelly wicked fate had treated his nearest and dearest**. After that he had been obsessed with trying to find them for the whole of eternity. He looked for them for a very long time, more than a thousand years, until one day an unknown charming girl Stella offered him **"to make him happy"** and opened another, the **"right"** door to finally find them for him...

– Do you want me to show it to you? – The girl offered again.

But I already was not so sure whether I wanted to see something more. Because the pictures she had just showed wounded my heart and I was unable to get rid of them so quickly to wish to see a continuation.

– But you do **want** to see what happened to them! – Little Stella confidently established the "fact".

I looked at Harold and saw in his eyes the complete understanding of what I unexpectedly went through right now.

– I know what you've seen. I watched it so many times. But they are happy now, we come to look at them very often... And at them **"former"** ones, too... – The "sad knight" pronounced in hushed voice.

And only here I understood that Stella simply **transferred him into his past**, when he wanted, like she did right now!!! And she did it, as if it were child's play! I did not even notice how

this marvellous light girl began to "attach" me to her stronger and stronger, becoming a real miracle for me which I endlessly wanted to observe and never leave. Back then I knew or could do almost nothing, except for what I could understand and learn by myself, and I wanted so much to learn from her, while I still had a chance.

– Please, come back to me! –Stella whispered, suddenly getting joyless. – You know that you cannot remain here for a long time. Gran said that you would not be here for very long... that you must not die yet. But you come...

Suddenly all around became dark and cold, as if black clouds covered Stella's colourful and bright world.

– Hey! Don't think about such frightful things! – The girl became a bit indignant and quickly "painted" out everything again in light and merry colours like a painter would paint on a canvas with his brush.

– There. That's much better. Right? – She asked contentedly.

– Was it really my thoughts? – I did not believe it again.

– Well, of course! – Stella laughed. – You are strong, and therefore create everything in your own way

– How am I to think then? – I still could not understand.

– You simply **"close" yourself and show only what you want to show.** – My unusual friend said, as if it was the most matter-of-fact thing in the world. – My Gran taught me.

I thought that, obviously, the time came for me too to slightly "shake" my "classified" grandmother who certainly knew something (I was almost sure about it!), but for some reason did not wish to teach me anything yet.

– So, do you want to see what happened to Harold's family next? – Stella asked impatiently.

To tell the truth I did not feel a burning desire, because I was not sure what I would see during this "show". But I did not want to offend the generous Stella and agreed.

– I won't show you long. I promise! But you must know about them, right? – The girl declared in a happy voice. – Here, look... the first will be the son...

27. Stella-3. Axel

To my greatest surprise, we got into a completely different epoch and country which looked like France and, judging by the clothes, showed every sign of being the 18th century. A very elegant covered carriage drove along a wide paved street. A young man and woman in very expensive clothes and apparently, a very bad mood, were inside it. The young man persistently proved something to his female companion who absolutely did not listen to him and had her absent-minded head up in the clouds, which extremely irritated the young man...

– See! It's him! It's the same "little boy"... only many, many years later. – Stella whispered.

– How do you know that it is **precisely** him? – I asked, still showing little understanding.

– Why? It's very simple! – The girl stared at me in surprise. – We all have a spirit which has a "key" and everybody can be found by means of it. One just has to know how to do it. Here, look...

She again showed Harold's son.

– Think of his spirit and you will see...

At once I saw a transparent, brightly shining and surprisingly powerful spirit. An unusual "diamond" energy star sparkled on its chest, flashing with all colours of the rainbow. It slowly pulsated – shrinking and then enlarging – and sparkled so brightly, as if it were indeed made of the finest diamonds that ever existed on Earth.

– Do you see that strange inverted star on his chest? It's **his "key"**. And if you try to follow it, like following a thread, it will bring you straight to Axel who has the same star and it will be the

same spirit, only in its next embodiment.

I could not restrain my utter surprise so that Stella laughed and merrily confessed:

– Hey, don't think that I knew it all by myself. It was my Gran who taught me!

I was very ashamed to feel absolutely incompetent and clumsy, but the desire to know more was hundred times stronger than any shame; therefore I swallowed my pride carefully and asked:

– What about those amazing "realities" we observe here? Is that in fact somebody else's life and you do not create it like you create all **your worlds**?

– Of course, not! – The girl was happy about the opportunity to explain something to me. – It's just a past where all these people once lived and I simply transport us there.

– And what about Harold? How does he see all this?

– Oh, it's easy for him! He is like me, dead, so he can move wherever he wants. He does not have a physical body, therefore there are no obstacles for his spirit here and it can travel anywhere he chooses... like me... – The girl finished on a cheerless note.

I sadly thought that what was a "simple transfer into the past" for her would certainly be a "secret sealed with seven seals" for me for a long time... But Stella hurried to calm me, as if she heard my thoughts:

– You'll see. It's very simple! You just have to try.

– And these "keys" – don't they ever repeat in others? – I decided to continue asking.

– No, but sometimes another thing may happen... – The little one answered, oddly smiling for some reason. – In the beginning that was how I fell into a trap and was battered quite seriously... It was so foolish!

– What happened? – I became very interested.

Stella merrily answered: – Oh, it was very funny! – And on thinking a little, added, – but dangerous too... I was looking for Gran's past embodiment all over the "floors", and another spirit came along her "thread" instead of her. It had managed to "copy" grandmother's "flower" (*probably the "key"!*) and before I knew where I was, so happy I had found her at last, the unknown spirit pitilessly struck me right in my chest. The blow was so strong that I almost saw stars!

– But how did you get rid of it? – I was surprised.

– To tell the truth, I did not... – The girl was slightly embarrassed. I called Gran...

– And what is it that you call "floors"? – I was impatient to know more.

– Well, they are different "worlds", where the spirits of the dead dwell... Those who were good, and probably the strongest ones too, live on the most beautiful and highest floor....

– Like you? – I asked smiling.

– Of course not! I think I got here by mistake. – The girl was absolutely sincere. – Do you know what the most interesting thing here is? **Belonging to this "floor" we can walk everywhere, but the dwellers on other floors cannot get here...** It's interesting, isn't it?

Yes, it was very strange and grippingly interesting for my "belly-punched" brain which gasped for information, and I wanted to know more so eagerly! Probably because nobody ever clearly explained anything to me until this day, only sometimes someone gave me something (like, for example, my "star friends"). Therefore even such a simple child's explanation made me extremely happy and forced me to rummage more passionately in my experiments, conclusions and errors to find there even more incomprehensible things. My problem was that I could do or **create** "unusual" things quite easily, but the matter was that I also wanted **understanding** of how I did it. Regrettably, I did not achieve much of that.

– What about other "floors"? Do you know how many of them there are? Do they differ a lot from this one? – I was unable to stop and flooded Stella with questions.

– I promise you we'll go there for a walk! You will see how interesting it is, dangerous too, especially at one "floor" in particular. There are such scary monsters! The people are very far from

being pleasant too.

– I think I've already seen similar monsters. – I said, though not very confidently. – Here, look...

And I tried to show her the first astral creatures I had met in my life which attacked the little Vesta's drunken dad.

– Oh, they are quite the same! Where did you see them, on Earth?

– Well, yes, they came when I helped a good little girl to say goodbye to her dad...

– So, they come to the living too? – My little friend was very surprised.

– I don't know, Stella. I still know almost nothing... I wish I did not have to walk in darkness and learn everything "by touch"... or from my experiences which constantly "hit me on the head"... What do you think; would your grandmother agree to teach me something too?

– I do not know... Probably *you* should ask her about it.

The girl was suddenly deeply engrossed in her thoughts, then broke into laughter and merrily said:

– It was so funny when I started to "create"!!! You should see how funny and amusing it was! In the beginning when everybody "left" me, I was very sad and cried a lot... Then I did not know where they were, both my mother and brother... I did not know anything then. Maybe therefore my Gran felt very sorry for me and began to teach me little by little and... Oh dear, it was quite something! In the beginning I constantly fell into some unknown places, created everything "upside down" and Gran had to watch me almost all the time, but then I learned... I almost feel sorry for that, because now she comes rarely... and I am afraid that one day she will never come.

For the first time I saw how sad this little lonely girl could feel sometimes, despite all these awesome worlds which she created! No matter how happy and kind her nature was, she still was a very little child who was unexpectedly abandoned by all her nearest and dearest and was awfully afraid of the only relative she had now – her grandmother – leaving her one day too...

– Oh, please, don't think that! – I exclaimed. – She loves you so! And she will never leave you.

– I don't think so... she said that we all had our **own life** and we must live it as destined... Isn't it sad?

But, apparently, Stella could not be sad for long, because her face was again lit with joy and she merrily asked:

– Well then, are we going to look or you have already forgotten everything?

– Of course, we will! – I answered with greater readiness, as if being awakened from sleep.

I could not say that I truly understood everything, but everything was incredibly interesting and some of Stella's actions became clearer to me than they had been in the beginning. The girl concentrated for a second and we again appeared in France, exactly at the same moment we left... We again saw the same chic carriage and the same beautiful couple which could not agree about something... In the end the young man reclined against the back of the rhythmically rocking seat and sadly pronounced, desperate of proving anything to his young and capricious companion:

– **Well, let be as you wish, Marguerite. I shall not ask for your help anymore... Although only God knows who else could help me to meet *Her*. There's only one thing I don't understand – when could you have changed so much and does it mean that we are not friends anymore?**

The young lady produced a stinging smile and again turned her head to the window... She was very beautiful, but it was a cruel and cold beauty. The impatient and at the same time bored expression frozen in her shining blue eyes showed very clearly her eagerness to finish this prolonged conversation as quickly as possible.

The carriage stopped near a beautiful large house, and she finally breathed a sigh of relief.

– Farewell, Axel! – On descending from the carriage, she coldly pronounced, like a true woman of the world. – And let me give you some good advice – stop being romantic, you are not a child anymore!

The carriage was off. The young man called Axel continuously looked at the road and sadly whispered:

– Oh my merry Daisy, what happened to you? Is this really all that is left of us since we grew up?

The picture disappeared and then another one came... It was the same young man called Axel, but a completely different and shockingly beautiful "reality", looking more like an unreal dream, surrounded him...

Enormous mirrors reflected thousands of candles which dizzily sparkled in a splendid fairy-tale hall. Probably it was somebody's very rich palace, maybe even a royal one... An unbelievably great number of guests in their finest dresses stood, sat and walked in this wonderful hall, radiantly smiling at each other and, almost as one, from time to time looking toward the heavy gilt door, expecting something. Music quietly played somewhere; charming ladies, each one more beautiful than the last, flittered like multicoloured butterflies catching delighted glances from the likewise stunningly dressed gentlemen. The multitude of different jewels sparkled, shone and glittered all over the place; silks softly rustled and the enormous elaborate wigs besprinkled with fairy flowers coquettishly rocked on lady's elegant heads.

Axel stood, leaning against the marble column, and looked absently at the lustrous crowd, being absolutely indifferent to its charm, and I felt that he too waited for something, just as did the rest of the people.

At last everything around began to move and, as if with the wave of a magic wand, the splendidly dressed crowd divided into two parts, forming a very wide, "ball" aisle exactly in the middle of the hall. A dazzlingly beautiful woman walked regally along this passage-way, or rather it was a couple, but the man next to her was so artless and plain, that despite his sumptuous attire, he hopelessly faded into insignificance next to his magnificent companion.

The beautiful lady looked very spring-like – varicoloured paradisiacal birds and amazing silvery-pink flowers were embroidered all over her blue dress, and garlands of fresh flowers reposed on her silk ash-grey hair, set in a highly elaborate *coiffure*, like a fragile pink cloud. Numerous strings of tender pearls coiled around her long neck and it seemed that the extraordinary whiteness of her amazing skin made them shine. Enormous sparkling blue eyes amiably looked at the surrounding people. She happily smiled and was exquisitely beautiful...

Axel, who had apathetically kept aloof from all that, transformed as if by magic! The bored young man vanished somewhere in the wink of an eye and instead a living embodiment of the loftiest feelings appeared, which "devoured" the beautiful woman who slowly approached him with a blazing look...

– Oh! What a beautiful lady she is! – Stella rapturously breathed out. – She always is so beautiful!

– Why? Do you see her often? – I asked with an eager interest.

– Oh, yes! I look at her very often. She is like spring! Don't you think so?

– Do you know her? Do you know who she is?

– Of course I do! She is a very unhappy queen. – The little girl grew slightly sad.

– Why unhappy? To me, she looks very happy. – I was surprised.

– It's now... Later she will die... She will die a terrible death. They will cut off her head... But I don't like to look at that. – Stella whispered sadly.

Meantime the beautiful lady came up to young Axel and, on seeing him, stiffened unexpectedly for a fraction of an instant and then smiled a very pretty smile, charmingly turning red. I had the weird impression that the world around these two people stood still for an instant, as if

everything and everybody ceased to exist for a split second, except for them... But then the lady continued to move and the magic moment disintegrated into thousands of brief instants that interlaced into a strong shining thread and connected these people never to release them...

Axel stood absolutely stunned. He continued to notice nobody but followed his fair lady with his eyes and his heart, which she had conquered so effortlessly... He was absolutely oblivious to the admiring glances which young beautiful ladies constantly cast at him and did not return their shining and beckoning smiles.

Axel was truly a handsome man, "both inside and out" as they say. He was tall and elegant and had enormous serious grey eyes, always polite, restrained and modest, which attracted both women and men. A smile rarely lit his regular serious features, but when it happened, Axel's charm was absolutely irresistible... Therefore the ladies' increased attention toward him was natural, but, to their regret, Axel was interested in only one creature in the whole world – his fascinating and magnificent Queen...

– Will they be together? – I could not wait to know. – They both are so handsome!

Stella just gave a sad smile and "submerged" us in the next "episode" of this unusual and very touching story.

We found ourselves in a very comfortable, fragrant little summer garden. A luxurious park, splendidly well-groomed and decorated with numerous statues, surrounded us with green for as far as we could see and in the distance there was a stunningly enormous stone palace which looked like a small city. Only this cosy garden, totally protected from indelicate strangers' glances gave a feeling of real comfort and some warm, "homely" beauty in the middle of all this slightly oppressing grandiosity...

A dizzyingly-sweet fragrance of blooming acacias, roses and something which I could not define soared in the air, being intensified by the heat of the summer evening. Enormous cups of gently-pink water-lilies and the snow-white "coats" of lazy, ready to fall asleep, majestic swans were reflected in the pure surface of a little pond, as in a mirror. A beautiful young couple promenaded along a narrow path around the pond. Music, a merry female laugh which sounded like little bells and the happy voices of many people were heard somewhere far off, but the whole world stopped here, in this little corner of the earth, for these two people, where birds sang their tender songs **only for them**; a playful breeze rustled in the petals of roses **only for them**; and time obligingly stopped **only for them**, giving an opportunity to be together – just as man and woman who came here to say goodbye, without knowing whether they would ever see each other again some day...

The lady was charming and seemed "flimsy" in her modest, white summer dress embroidered with tiny green flowerets. Her beautiful ash-grey hair was tied with a green ribbon which made her look like a charming forest fairy. She looked so young, pure and modest that I did not immediately recognize the majestic and dazzling Queen in her magnificent "parade" beauty that I saw just several minutes ago.

"Our acquaintance" Axel walked next to her without taking his eyes off her and catching her every motion. He seemed very happy and at the same time deeply sad for some reason... The Queen linked her arm through his with elegant motion and gently asked:

– But what about me? I shall miss you so much, my dear friend. Time flows too slowly when you are so far away...

– Your Majesty, please, don't torment me... You know what all this is for... And you know how hard for me is to leave you! I have already managed to avoid unwanted marriages twice, but, nevertheless, my father still cherishes hopes to get me married... He dislikes rumours about my love for you. I too don't like them. I cannot... I have no right to do you harm. Oh, I wish I could be somewhere near you; to see you, to touch you! ... It is so hard for me to leave! And I am so worried about you...

– Go to Italy, my friend, you will be awaited there. Only don't stay long! Know, I shall be

waiting for you too... – The Queen said, affectionately smiling.

Axel kissed her elegant hand with a long kiss and when he lifted his eyes, there was so much love and anxiety in them that the poor Queen exclaimed:

– Oh, don't worry, my friend! I am so well protected here that even if I wanted, nothing could happen to me! Go and may God be with you; and come back as soon as possible...

Axel looked at her wonderful face, so dear to him, for a very long time, absorbing every detail and trying to remember this instant in his heart forever, and then he gave a low bow and quickly went along the path toward the exit without turning around or stopping, as if being afraid of not having the strength to leave her, if he did...

She followed him with her enormous blue eyes which suddenly became damp and deeply sorrowful... She was a queen and had no right to love him, but she was also a woman, whose heart belonged to this purest and bravest man forever, without asking anyone's permission...

– Oh! How sad is all this? – Stella whispered. – I wish I could help them!

– Do they need anybody's help? – I was surprised.

Stella nodded with her curly head without saying a word and showed a new episode... I was very surprised at her deep concern about this charming story which still seemed to me just a sweet history of somebody's love. However, I already knew pretty well about the sympathy and kindness of Stella's big heart and therefore I was almost sure that everything would not be as simple as it seemed in the beginning, and I only had to wait...

We saw the same park, but I had no idea how much time had passed since we had seen them in the last episode.

This evening the park sparkled with thousands of coloured lights which, on merging with the glimmering night sky, created a magnificent continuous firework "blaze". Judging by the splendour of the preparations, it certainly was a grandiose evening party where all the guests were dressed exclusively in white, fulfilling the Queen's whimsical desire. They looked like ancient priests and moved in an "organized" manner through the blazing park ingeniously lit up with thousands of lights, heading for the beautiful stone gazebo which all called the Temple of Love. Suddenly, a fire flared behind it... Blinding sparks soared up to the tops of the trees, staining the dark night clouds with blood-red light. The guests exclaimed in delight, approving the beauty of the happening, but nobody knew that according to the Queen's plan the raging fire expressed **the force of her love**, and only **one person** understood the real meaning of this symbol...

Axel was thrilled. He leaned against the tree and closed his eyes. He could not believe that this spectacular beauty was meant exclusively for him.

– Are you pleased, my friend? – A quiet tender voice whispered behind his back.

– I am delighted... – Axel answered and turned around. Of course it was **she**.

For only an instant they looked at each other with rapture, then the Queen gently squeezed Axel's hand and disappeared into the night...

– Why was he always so unhappy in all his "lives"? – Stella was still sad about our "poor boy".

To tell the truth I still saw no "unhappiness" whatsoever and looked at her sad face with surprise, but for some reason the little girl persistently refused to explain anything...

The picture sharply changed.

A luxurious and very large green carriage rushed at full speed along the dark night road with Axel as a coachman. He managed this enormous vehicle with admirable mastership and from time to time looked around with obvious anxiety. There was an impression that he was in a mad hurry to get to some place or was escaping from somebody...

We recognized the King and Queen inside the carriage and a pretty girl of probably eight years old and two ladies who we did not know. Everybody looked sullen and disturbed, and even

the little girl was very quiet, as if she felt the general mood of the adults. To my surprise, the King wore very modest clothes – a simple grey frock-coat and a round hat of the same colour; the Queen hid her face behind a veil and it was obvious that she was afraid of something. It all looked very like an escape.

I glanced at Stella, hoping for explanations, but no explanation followed – the girl watched what was happening with utter concentration and a deep sorrow, inappropriate for a child, was hidden in her enormous doll's eyes.

– Why? Why did not they listen to him, for heaven's sake?! It was so simple! – Unexpectedly she exclaimed in indignant despair.

The carriage rushed at a mad speed. The passengers looked tired and somewhat lost... Finally they drove to a large yard obscured by black shade from the stone building in the middle and the carriage sharply stopped. The place looked like an inn or a large farm.

Axel jumped down to the ground, approached the window and was going to say something, as suddenly an authoritative masculine voice was heard from the carriage:

– It is time to say goodbye, Count. It is unworthy of me to expose you to danger further on.

Certainly, Axel did not dare to object to the King and could only briefly touch the Queen's hand at parting... The carriage darted away into the night... and quickly disappeared in the darkness. He stood alone in the middle of the dark road, wishing with all his heart to throw himself after them... Axel felt with his whole being that **he had no right** to leave everything to the mercy of fate! He simply **knew** that something would certainly go wrong without him and everything that he had been carefully preparing and organizing for such a long time would fail because of a ridiculous contingency...

It had been quite a long time since the carriage disappeared from his sight but poor Axel still stood motionless, peering into the darkness which swallowed them; his fists squeezed in despair. Scanty angry tears rolled down his deathly pale face...

– It's all over... I know, this is the end... – He whispered.

– What happened to them? Why do they escape? – I asked, understanding nothing of what was going on.

– Oh! Very bad people now will catch them and put them into a prison... even the boy.

– Where do you see a boy here? – I was surprised.

– Haven't you got it? He is dressed up as a girl!

I shook my head. I still did not understand almost anything about what the matter was – neither the royal escape, nor the "bad people". So, I decided to watch what would be next, without asking about anything any longer.

– These people treated the King and Queen really badly and wanted to capture them. Therefore they tried to escape. Axel arranged everything... But when he was ordered to leave them, the carriage went slower, because the King got tired. He even got out for "some fresh air"... and he was recognized right there and caught, of course.

Stella sighed... and threw us into the next "episode" of this not so happy, but still beautiful story...

This time everything looked ominous and intimidating.

We found ourselves in dark and repulsive quarters which looked to me like the most truly wicked prison. In a tiny, dirty, damp and stinking room a thin grey-headed woman, exhausted by sufferings and dressed in black, in which it was quite impossible to recognize the fairy-tale beautiful and ever smiling miracle-queen who the young Axel loved more than anything, sat on the wooden stove-bench with a straw mattress... He was in the room too, punch-drunk by what he saw, noticing nothing, bending his knees, pressing his lips to her still beautiful white hand, unable to utter a word... He came in absolute despair, having tried everything possible and impossible in the world to save her and having lost the last hope of doing so... Nevertheless, he again was ready to offer his

last, already almost impossible, help... He was obsessed with only one aspiration: to save her, despite everything... He just **could not allow her to die**, because his life, which he did not need without her, would be over...

They looked silently at each other, trying to hide disobedient tears which rolled down their faces leaving narrow paths on the cheeks... They could hardly take their eyes off each other, because they knew that if he failed to help her, it would be the last time they looked at each other...

The bald jailer stared at the visitor broken with grief and looked at the sad scene of other's sorrow, having no intention whatsoever of turning away his impertinent gaze...

The picture disappeared and we saw another, worse than the previous one – a yelling crowd, terrifying in its brutality, armed with lances, knives and guns, was pitilessly crushing a magnificent palace...

Then Axel appeared again. This time he stood near the window in a very elegantly decorated and exquisitely furnished room. The "friend from childhood" Marguerite, who we saw with him in the beginning, stood next to him. But now her arrogant coldness had vanished somewhere and her beautiful face expressed concern and pain. Axel was mortally pale and, pressing his forehead to the window-pane, watched with horror at what was happening outside... He heard the noisy crowd and repeated one and the same words, being in a horrific trance:

– My Soul, I could not save you... Please, forgive me, my dearest... Lord, help her; give her strength to bear it!

– Axel, please! You must pull yourself together for her sake. Please, I beg you, be prudent! – His old friend tried compassionately to persuade him.

– Prudent? What *prudence* are you talking about, Marguerite, when the whole world has gone mad?! – Axel exclaimed. – Why her? For what; what has *she* done to them?!

Margaret unfolded a little sheet of paper and pronounced, obviously not knowing how to ease his pain:

– Calm down, dear Axel. You'd better listen to this: "I love you, my friend... Don't worry about me. The only thing I miss now is your letters. Probably we are not fated to meet again... Farewell, my most beloved and most loving of all..."

It was the Queen's last letter which Axel had read thousands of times, but for some reason it sounded even more painful when a stranger pronounced the bitter lines.

– What is it? What happens there? – I asked impatiently, unable to restrain my inquiring mind.

– The beautiful Queen dies... They are going to execute her now. – Stella sadly answered.

– Why don't we see anything? – I asked again.

– Oh, believe me. You don't want to look at it. – The girl shook her head. – What a pity! She is so unhappy... How unfair is all that.

– Nevertheless, I would like to see... – I asked.

– All right, watch... – Stella sadly nodded.

A scaffold ominously towered in the middle of an enormous square crammed full of highly excitable people... A mortally pale, very thin and exhausted woman in white proudly stepped up its small crooked steps. A plain white nightcap almost fully covered her short cut fair hair; deep gloomy sorrow was reflected in her tired eyes, reddened by tears or insomnia...

Slightly rocking – she found it difficult to maintain equilibrium because her hands were tightly tied behind her back – the woman somehow managed to climb the dais, still trying to remain straight and proud with all her might. She stood and looked at the crowd, without lowering her gaze or showing how truly scared she was... There was nobody around whose friendly look would warm the last minutes of her life... There was nobody, who would help her, with the warmth of their heart, withstand this horrific moment, when her life had to leave her in such a cruel way ...

The raging, excited crowd suddenly fell silent, as if it had bumped into an insuperable obstacle... The women in the front rows began to cry silently. The thin figure on the scaffold came to the block, stumbled and very painfully fell down on her knees. For a few short seconds she lifted her exhausted face, pacified by the closeness of death... deeply breathed... and, on proudly looking at the executioner, laid her tired head on the block. The crying became audible, women closed children's eyes. The executioner came to the guillotine....

– My God! No!!! – Axel uttered a bloodcurdling cry.

At the same moment, suddenly the grey sky was split by a sunray which peeked from the clouds, illuminating the last path of the ill-fated victim... It gently touched her pale, terribly emaciated cheek, as if tenderly saying the last earthly "Good bye". Something flashed brightly on the scaffold – the heavy knife fell down and splashed scarlet drops... The crowd gasped. The blond head fell into the basket and everything was over... The beautiful Queen went where there was no more pain or mockery... only peace...

Mortal silence reined in the square. There was nothing to look at any longer...

This was how a tender and kind Queen died. To the last minute of her life she managed to stand, head proudly raised, which was then so pitilessly cut by the heavy knife of the bloody guillotine.

Pale Axel, stockstill, like a dead corpse, looked at the window with blind eyes and it seemed that life left him drop by drop, painfully slowly, carrying his soul very far away in order to merge forever in the light and silence with the one who he loved so strongly and selflessly...

– My dearest... My soul... How could it happen that I did not die with you? Everything is over now for me... – Axel whispered with stiff lips, still standing near the window.

But everything will be really "over" for him much later, in twenty long years, and his end will be no less terrible than that of his unforgettable Queen...

– Do you want to look further? – Stella asked gently.

I nodded, unable to say a word.

We saw another crowd, raging in a wild frenzy, and Axel in front of it. It happened many years later. He still was a very handsome man, only his hair was almost completely grey. He wore a magnificent, military uniform of a very high-rank and looked the same as before, elegant and slender. So, the same brilliant and cleverest of men stood before a crowd of half drunk, brutal people and in vain tried to outvoice and explain something to them... Regrettably, nobody wanted to listen to him... Stones started to fly toward poor Axel; the crowd, kindling its malice with swearing, began to push. He tried to defend himself, but he was knocked off his feet. They began to trample him brutally and strip off his clothes... A tall fat person suddenly jumped on his chest, breaking his ribs, and easily killed him striking Axel's temple with his knee-boot. Axel's naked, disfigured body was thrown on the side of the road, and there was nobody who would pity him, dead already. There was only a drunken and agitated mob, roaring with laughter, which had just needed to unleash its beastly malice on somebody...

At last Axel's pure, worn out with suffering, soul was free and flew away to join his light and only love, who had been waiting for him for so many long years...

Here was how very cruelly (again) the life of a man called Axel, who Stella and I had not known before but who became so dear to us, was over. He was the same little boy which, on living for just five short years, could perform the only and most shocking feat in his life, of which any adult could be proud...

– It's terrible! – I whispered in shock. – Why did they do such things?

– I don't know... – Stella whispered too. – For some reason people back then were very wicked; worse even than beasts... I looked at it so many times to understand why, but I could not... – the girl shook her head. – They did not listen to their mind, simply killed and for some reason crushed every beautiful thing too ...

– What about Axel's children or wife? – I asked, recuperating from shock.

– He never married. He always loved only his Queen. – Stella answered with tears in her eyes.

Suddenly a thought flashed through my mind. I understood **who** we had just seen and so worried about! It was the French queen Marie Antoinette. Recently (and very briefly!) we studied her tragic life in a history lesson and our teacher strongly approved of her execution, considering such a frightful end very "correct and instructive"... apparently, because of all history subjects, he mostly specialized in teaching "Communism"...

Despite the sadness I felt after what I had seen, my soul rejoiced! I could not believe the unexpected happiness that came like a bolt from the blue! **I had waited for this for such a long time!** It was the **first time** that I, at last, **saw something that could be easily checked** and I almost squeaked with the puppyish delight which seized me! Certainly, I was not so glad because I disbelieved what constantly happened to me. On the contrary, I always **knew that everything I went through was real**. Probably, like any ordinary human being and child, in particular, I, nevertheless needed sometimes even the simplest confirmation that I was still in my senses, had not gone mad, and could prove to myself that everything that was happening to me **was not a figment of my imagination or fiction, but purely real fact described or seen by other people**. Therefore such a discovery was a real gift for me!

I already knew beforehand that, as soon as I came home, I would at once rush to the municipal library to gather everything I could find about poor Marie Antoinette and I would have no rest until I found any fact **consilient with our visions**... Regrettably, I found just two thin books which did not describe many facts, but it was absolutely enough, because they fully confirmed that what Stella and I saw was the truth.

Here is what I succeeded in finding then:

– The Queen loved the Swedish Count called **Axel Fersen** who selflessly loved her throughout his life and **never married after her death**;

– Their farewell before the Count's departure to Italy **took place in the garden of Little Trianon** – Marie-Antoinette's favourite place, the description of which totally coincided with what we had seen.

– The ball in honour of King Gustav of Sweden happened on June 21, where all guests **were dressed in white** for some reason;

– The attempted **escape in the green carriage organized by Axel** (*he also organized another six escape attempts, but none of them, for one or another reason, were successful. Two of them failed at Marie-Antoinette's will, because the Queen did not want to escape alone and leave her children*);

– The Queen's decapitation proceeded in **complete silence** instead of the expected "happy rage" of the crowd;

– **Unexpectedly the sun peeked out of the clouds** a few seconds before the executioner released the blade...

– The Queen's last letter to Count Fersen is reproduced in *Count Fersen's Memoirs* (Probably, the full name of the book in English is *Diary and Correspondence of Count Axel Fersen, Grand-Marshal of Sweden Relating to the Court of France – E.L.*) and almost the same text that we had heard, except for just a few words, was cited.

These little details were enough for me to continue my odd experiments with much greater enthusiasm, but that happened later... right then, in order not to seem strange or heartless, I tried to conceal my delight about my exciting "enlightening" with all my might and asked, in order to dispel Stella's sad mood:

– Do you like the Queen very much?

– Oh, yes! She is kind and so beautiful... And look at our poor "boy", he suffered so much here too...

I felt pity for this sensitive and nice girl who even in her death worried so much for the people she hardly knew unlike many others who do not care even for their nearest ...

– Probably, there is a share of wisdom in suffering without which we would never understand what a precious gift our life is? – I said with a great deal of uncertainty.

– There! Gran says that too! – The girl cheered up. – But if people only aspire to good, then why should they suffer?

– Maybe because even the best people would not truly understand what good is without pain and ordeal? – I joked.

But for some reason Stella did not take it as a joke and said very earnestly:

– Yes, I think, you're right... Do you want to look at what happened to Harold's son next? – She asked even merrier.

– Oh, no! Please, I've had enough! – I begged.

Stella chuckled joyfully.

– Don't worry. There will be no trouble this time, because he still lives!

– How is that, he lives? – I was surprised.

A new vision appeared again and to my utter surprise we were in our century (!) and even our time... A grey-haired, very good-looking man sat at a writing desk and was deeply engrossed in thoughts. The room was crammed with books; they were everywhere – on the table, floor, shelves and even on the window-sill. An enormous fluffy cat sat on a small sofa, paying no attention whatsoever to his owner, washing itself with a large and very soft paw. The "scenery" created an atmosphere of "erudition" and coziness.

– What does it mean? He lives again? – I did not understand.

Stella nodded.

– And it happens right now? – I went on.

The girl again nodded with her lovely red head.

– It is, probably, very strange for Harold to see his son being another person? How did you find him again?

– Oh, the same way! I simply "felt" his "key" like Gran had taught me. – Stella pronounced thoughtfully. – When Axel died, I was searching for his spirit on all "floors" and could not find it. Then I looked among the living – and he was there.

– Do you know who is he now in this life?

– Not yet... But I shall. Many times I tried to reach him, but for some reason he does not hear me... He is always alone and spends most of the time with books. Only an old woman – his maid – and this cat are with him.

– But what about Harold's wife? Did you find her too? – I asked.

– Of course, I did! You know his wife. It's my Gran! – Stella smiled slyly.

I was really shocked. For some reason this unbelievable fact was absolutely beyond my comprehension...

– Your grandmother? – That was the only thing I could squeeze out of me.

Stella nodded, being extremely pleased with the produced effect.

– Wow! How is that? Is that why she helped you to find them? Did she know? – Thousands of questions simultaneously spun in my agitated brain. I feared that I would not have time to ask about everything I wanted to know so eagerly. I wanted to know EVERYTHING! And at the same time I perfectly understood that nobody was going to tell me "everything"...

– Probably I felt something and that is why I chose him. – Stella said thoughtfully. – But maybe it was Gran who "put me on the trail"? Well, she will never confess. – The girl waved with her hand.

– And HE? Does he know too?

– Of course, he does! – Stella broke into laughter. – Why are you so surprised?

– Well, it's just, you know, she is already old... It must be hard for him... – I faltered without knowing how to express my feelings and thoughts more exactly.

– Oh, no! – Stella laughed again. – He was glad! He was very, very glad. Gran gave him a chance! Nobody could help him, but she could! And he saw her again... Oh, it was great!

Only now at last I understood what she was talking about... Apparently Stella's grandmother gave her former "knight" the long-awaited chance about which he had desperately been dreaming for his whole long life after physical death. After all, he had been looking for them for so long and so persistently, he wanted to find them so desperately just to tell them one thing: how awfully sorry he was that once he went away... that he was unable to protect them... to show how strongly and devotedly he loved them... **He needed them so badly to understand and forgive him somehow, otherwise there would be no sense for him in living in any of the worlds...**

So, she, his sweet and only wife came to him, appearing as he always remembered her, and gave him a wonderful chance – she **gave forgiveness** and therefore, life...

It was only then that I truly understood what Stella's grandmother meant when she told me how important the chance that I gave to the "gone" people was... Because, probably, there is nothing more frightful in the world than to live with the unpardoned guilt of any offence and pain you once inflicted on those, without whom, the life you lived would not make any sense...

I suddenly felt very tired, as if this very interesting time I spent with Stella took the last drops of my forces... I absolutely forgot that this "interesting" thing, as well as all interesting things before, had their "price". Therefore now, as well as before, I had to pay for today's "adventures"... It happened that the "viewings" of other's lives produced enormous loads for my poor physical body which had not got used to them yet, and to my huge regret, I could only hang on for quite a short time...

– Don't you worry; I'll teach you how do it! – Stella said merrily, as if reading my sad thoughts.

– Do what? – I did not understand.

– Well, how to last out so that you could be with me longer. – The girl answered, surprised at my question. – You are **alive**, therefore you find it difficult. But I'll show you. Do you want to go where "others" live? Harold will wait for us here. – Slyly wrinkling her little nose, the girl asked.

– Right now? – I asked with a great deal of uncertainty.

She nodded... and suddenly we "fell through" somewhere, "leaking" through "star dust" which sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow and appeared in another "transparent" world which looked quite different from the previous one...

28. Stella-4. The astral world

– Look, angels!!! Mummy, look! Angels! – Unexpectedly somebody's thin voice squealed nearby.

I had not come to myself after the unusual "flight" yet, as Stella already twittered something to a little chubby girl.

– If you are not angels, then why do you sparkle so much? – The little one asked, being sincerely surprised and then cheeped in exhilaration: – Wow! What a beautiful little thing you have!

Only then did we notice that Stella's last "creation" – her amusing red "dragon" – had "fallen through" too...

– It... What is it? – The girl asked, gasping with excitement. – May I play with him? He won't resent it, will he?

Apparently, the mother mentally pulled her up sharply, because the girl suddenly got very

upset. Tears began to glitter in her warm brown eyes and it was obvious that a bit more and they would be rolling down her pretty cheeks.

– Please, don't cry! – Stella quickly asked. – Do you want me to do a dragon like this for you?

The little girl's face instantly lit up. She grasped mother's hand and happily twittered:

– See, mum, I did nothing bad, and they are not angry with me at all! May I have him too? I promise I will be a very good girl!

The mother looked at her with sad eyes, choosing the correct answer, as the girl unexpectedly asked:

– Have you seen my dad by any chance, kind shining girls? He and my brother disappeared somewhere.

Stella looked at me inquiringly and I already knew what she would offer...

– Do you want us to look for them? – She asked what I thought she would.

– We've already searched here. We've been here for quite a long time, but they are not here. – The woman answered very calmly.

– We shall look for them in a different way. – Stella smiled. – Just think about them in order for us to see them and we will find them.

The girl funnily blinked, trying very hard to create a mental picture of her dad. Several seconds passed...

– Mummy, how could it be that I don't remember him? – The little child was surprised.

It was the first time I heard something like that and, judging by the surprise in Stella's large eyes, it was also something new for her too...

– What do you mean you don't remember? – The mother did not understand.

– Well, I try and try and don't remember... How can that be? I love him very much, you know. Maybe it's true that he does not exist anymore?

– I am sorry, can you see him? – I carefully asked the mother.

The woman confidently nodded, but suddenly something changed in her countenance and it became very confused.

– No... I cannot remember him... Is this kind of thing really possible? – She said, being almost scared.

– Can you remember your son? Can you remember your brother? – Stella asked, addressing both.

Mother and daughter shook their heads negatively.

Stella's face, usually so cheerful, looked very concerned, probably, she could not understand what was happening here. I almost felt the intense working of her vivid and very unusual brain.

– I've got it! I really got it! – Suddenly Stella happily chirped. – We will "dress" in your images and go for a "walk". If they are somewhere, they will see us; Right?

I liked the idea and we had only to "change" our clothes mentally and set off for a search.

– Please, may I have him until you come back? – The girl persistently did not wish to forget her desire. – What is his name?

– He still doesn't have one. – Stella smiled at her. – What's yours?

– Lia. – The girl answered. – Why do you shine, anyway? We saw several creatures like you, but everybody told us that they were angels... Who are you then?

– We are girls like you, only we live "upstairs".

– Where is it, this "upstairs"? – Little Lia continued to heap us with questions.

– Regrettably, you cannot go there. – Stella tried to explain it somehow, finding it quite difficult. – Do you want me to show it to you?

The child began to jump with joy. Stella took her hand and opened her amazing fantastic world, where everything was so bright and happy that it was truly hard to believe that this kind of thing could really exist.

Lia's eyes became like two enormous round saucers:

– Wow! How beautiful! What is it? Is it paradise? Oh, my! – The girl was absolutely delighted, but expressed it in a very low voice, as if being afraid of frightening off this unbelievable vision. – Who lives there? Wow, look, what a cloud! And the rain is golden! Can it really be like this?

– Have you ever seen a red dragon? – Lia shook her head. – See, but I do have one, because it's my world.

– Then what? You are God!!! – But God cannot be a girl, right? Then who are you?

Questions poured from her like an avalanche and Stella burst out laughing, unable to answer all them at once.

Being free from the question and answer session, I slowly began to look around and was astonished at the unusual world which spread around us... It was a genuinely "**transparent**" world. Everything sparkled and shimmered with a blue, ghostly light which did not make us feel cold (as it seemingly should), but on the contrary – it warmed us with an unusual deep warmth which penetrated to the bottom of our hearts. Transparent human figures floated by me from time to time. They constantly changed – First becoming more compact and then transparent like luminous fog... This world was very beautiful, but somewhat unsteady. It seemed to change all the time, as if having difficulty deciding how it would prefer to be forever.

– Well, are you ready to "take a walk"? – Stella's cheerful voice pulled me out of my thoughts.

– Where shall we go?

– We are going to search for the disappeared! – The girl smiled merrily.

– Dear girls, would you let me guard your dragon, while you go away? – Little Lia asked, reluctant to forget him, casting down her round eyes.

– All right, here you are. Guard him. – Stella indulgently granted her permission. – Just don't give him to anybody. He is still a baby and can be easily frightened.

– Oh, no! How could I! I shall love him very much while you are away.

The girl was willing to bend over backwards to get this fascinating "dragon", which bellied out and puffed up, trying to please us with all his might, as if knowing that we were talking precisely about him...

– When will you come back? Will you come very soon, dear girls? – The little one asked, hoping very much that we would **not** come the **very soon**.

The glimmering transparent wall separated us from them...

– Well, what shall we begin with? – Stella asked, being downright concerned. – I've never seen such a thing, but, certainly, I have not been here long... Now we **must** do something, right? We promised!

– Well, let's try to "put" on their images, as you said? – I offered without thinking twice.

Stella performed her next "hocus-pocus" and looked exactly like little Lia and that meant that the "mother" was left for me, which made me laugh... As I understood it we simply put on energy images which we hoped would help us to find the people we aimed to find.

– This is a **positive** way of using other people's images, but there is a **negative** one – when someone uses it for bad ends, like the spirit which put on my Gran's "key" to beat me. Later she explained it to me...

It was very amusing to hear the tiny girl's professorial voice with which she expounded such serious subjects... But she really treated everything very earnestly, despite her sunny, happy nature.

– Well, shall we go, "girl Lia"? – I asked, with a feeling of burning impatience.

I was eager to see these other "floors" while I still had some forces left. I did notice the huge difference between the "floor" where we were now and the "upper", Stella's "floor". Therefore I wanted very much to "dive" as quickly as possible into the next unknown world and know about it as much as possible, because I was not sure whether I could ever return there.

– Why is this "floor" much denser than the previous one and has more spirits? – I asked.

– I don't know... – Stella shrugged her shoulders. – Maybe because good people who did not do any harm to anybody in their last life live here, therefore there are many of them here. And "special" and very strong spirits live in the upper "floor"... – she began to laugh. – But I am not talking about me, if you think that! Although Gran says that my spirit is very old, more than a million years... It's a terribly long time, don't you think? How can one know what happened on Earth over a million years ago? – The girl contemplated.

– Maybe then you were not on Earth?

– Where do you think I've been?! – Stella asked in great perplexity.

– Well, I don't know. Can't you really look through? – I was surprised.

It seemed to me then that her abilities allowed her to do ANYTHING! But to my huge surprise, Stella shook her head.

– I still can do very little, only what my Gran taught me. – She sighed with regret.

– Do you want me to show my friends to you? – I suddenly asked.

Before she knew where she was, I unfolded those meetings in my memory, when my wonderful "star friends" came to me so often and when it seemed to me that nothing interesting could ever happen in my life...

– Wow! What beauty! – Stella exhaled in delight. Suddenly she saw the strange signs which they had shown me many times and exclaimed: – Look, it means they **taught** you! How interesting!

I became frozen, unable to pronounce a word... They taught me!!! Could it be that during all those years I had some important information in my brain and instead of trying to understand it somehow, I, like a blind kitten, floundered in my shallow attempts and guess-work, trying to find some **truth** in them?! And I've had it already for such a long, long time?

Even without knowing what I was taught, I "boiled" with indignation at myself for such a vexing negligence. Can you believe it! I was given some "secrets" from the very beginning and I did not understand that! Well, they surely gave them to the **wrong person!!!**

– Please, don't be so upset! – Stella smiled. – You'll show it to Gran and she'll explain it to you.

– May I ask you? Who is your grandmother anyway? – I asked feeling embarrassed at trespassing on "private territory".

Stella was engrossed in her thoughts, wrinkling her little nose in a funny way (she had this amusing habit, when she thought of something in earnest) and pronounced wavering a little:

– I don't know... Sometimes it seems to me that she knows everything, and that she is very, very old... We had many photos at home and she was the same on them – old, like now. I have never seen her young. Isn't it strange?

– Did you ever ask her about it?

– No, I didn't. I think she would tell me, if she thought I needed it... Wow! Look at that! How beautiful! – Suddenly the girl exclaimed in delight pointing at the strange golden sea waves with her finger. It, certainly, was **not a sea**, but they really looked very like sea waves – they heavily rolled on the shore, playfully outstripping each other, with one difference though – instead of snow-white sea foam and blue water we saw shining pure gold which nebulized into thousands of transparent goldish sparks... It was very beautiful and, naturally, we wanted to see it closer.

When we came close enough, I heard thousands of voices which sounded simultaneously. The

sound resembled a strange magic melody. It was a not song or even music in the sense we understand it... It was something barely thinkable and definitely indescribable... but it sounded awesome.

– Come on! It's a thinking sea! You'll love it! – Stella chirped merrily.

– I like it already. It's not dangerous, is it?

– No, not at all. Don't worry. It exists for calming the "lost" souls which are still sad after they came here... I have listened to it for hours... It's alive and "sings" different things to different souls. Do you want to hear it?

Only now I noticed that there were a lot of spirits splashing in the golden sparkling waves... Some simply lay on the surface, fluidly rocking on waves; others dived into the "gold" and remained there for hours, fully submerged in the mental "concert" and were absolutely reluctant to return to the surface...

– Well, shall we listen? – The girl impatiently pushed me slightly.

We came closer... and I felt the miraculously-soft touch of the sparkling wave... It was something incredibly soft, surprisingly affectionate and sedative, and at the same time getting to the "depth" of my surprised and slightly watchful soul... Quiet "music" ran through my foot, vibrating with millions of different tones. It went up, shrouding me in something fairyland beautiful, which cannot be described with words... I felt I was flying although I did not in reality. It was sensational! Every new surging wave dissolved and melted my every cell; the sparkling gold washed me through, carrying away everything bad and sad, leaving only pure primordial light in my soul...

I did not feel the moment when I entered and submerged in this shining miracle. I felt so unbelievably well and never wanted to come out...

– All right, that's enough! The mission is waiting for us! – Stella's pushing voice burst into the shining beauty. – Did you like it?

– I'll say! – I breathed out. – I wish I did not have to leave it!

– Indeed! Some "bathe" there to the next embodiment... and then never return here...

– Where do they go? – I was surprised.

– Below... Gran says that one **should deserve one's place** here too... And the one who just waits and has a rest "works" it off in the next embodiment. I think it's true...

– What is there, below? – I was interested.

– It's not a pleasant place, believe me. – Stella smiled slyly.

– And this sea, is it the only one or there are many of them here?

– You'll see... It's always different – it is like a sea in one place, "scenery" in another and in the third place it's a power field full of different flowers, brooks and plants, and all that "treats" the soul and calms too... only one should not simply use it, one has to deserve it first.

– What about those who have not deserved? Don't they live here? – I did not understand.

– Yes, they do, but not so comfortably... – The girl shook her head. – Here is like on Earth – nothing is given for free, only values here are quite different. Those who do not want to exert themselves, get very simple things. **This beauty cannot be bought; it can only be deserved...**

– You speak now exactly like your grandmother, as if you learned her words... – I smiled.

– It's true! – Stella returned a smile to me. – I try to memorize a lot of what she says, even that which I don't quite understand yet... But I shall understand it some time, right? Probably then there will be nobody who would teach me... So, it'll help.

Then we suddenly saw an incomprehensible, but very attractive picture – a host of spirits stood on shining and fluffy-transparent blue earth, like on a cloud. They constantly changed with each other, took someone somewhere and then returned.

– What is it? What do they do there? – Puzzled, I asked.

– They come to help the "newcomers" not to feel afraid. This is where new spirits come. – Stella said calmly.

– Have you seen see all that? Can we come closer to look?

– Of, course! – And we approached the "cloud"...

I saw something absolutely thrilling in its beauty... A transparent luminous ball suddenly appeared in complete emptiness, as if from nowhere and opened up like a flower, letting out a new spirit which looked around in confusion, understanding nothing... The spirits who waited for it hugged the "newcomer" in a mass of warm sparkling energy, as if calming it, and led it away somewhere.

– They are those who come after death? – For some reason I spoke in a very low voice.

Stella nodded and sadly said:

– When I came, we went to different "floors" – my family and I. I was very lonely and sad... But now everything is all right. I came to visit them here many times. They are happy now.

– Are they right here, on this "floor"? – I could not believe it.

Stella sadly nodded again and I decided to stop asking, in order not to worry her lucid and kind heart.

We walked along an unusual road which appeared and disappeared as we set foot on it. The road softly twinkled and it seemed that it conducted us, pointing a way, as if knowing where we had to go... There was a pleasant feeling of freedom and lightness, as if the whole world around suddenly became imponderable.

– Why does this road point us where to go? – I asked again.

– It does not point, it helps. – The girl answered. – Everything here consists of thoughts. Have you forgotten? Even trees, the sea, roads and flowers – they all hear what we are thinking about. It is a truly **pure world**... probably, the one that people call Paradise... It is impossible to lie here.

– Where is Hell then? Does it exist too?

– Oh, of course, I'll show it to you! It's on the ground "floor" and there are **SUCH** things!!! – Stella's shoulders flinched, obviously remembering something extremely unpleasant.

We continued to walk and I noticed that the surroundings began to change gradually. The transparency disappeared little by little, yielding to the "denser" scenery which more looked like the earthly one.

– What's happening? Where are we? – I pricked up my ears.

– We're still in the same place. – Stella calmly answered. – Only in its "simpler" part. Remember, we've just discussed it? Mostly those who just came are here. When they see the scenery which looks like the one they got accustomed to, it's easier for them to assimilate the "transition" into a new world... Also those who do not want to be better than they are and make the least effort to achieve something greater, live here.

– So, it means that this "floor" consist of two parts? – I specified.

– Yes, you can say that. – Stella answered thoughtfully and unexpectedly changed the subject. – It's strange – nobody pays any attention to us. Do you think they are not here?

We looked around and stopped, having no idea what to do.

– Shall we venture "downstairs"? – Stella asked.

I felt that the little girl had become tired. To tell the truth I too was very far from being on my best form, but I was almost sure that she was not going to surrender and therefore I nodded in reply.

– Well, then we have to prepare ourselves a bit... – Stella declared, "war-like", and concentrated, biting her lip. – Do you know how to create your powerful protective shield?

– I think I do, but I am not sure whether it will be sufficiently strong. – I answered confusedly. I did not want to let her down exactly now.

– Show me. – The girl asked.

I understood that it was not a whim and she simply wanted to help me. I concentrated and made my green "cocoon" which I always created when I needed to be seriously protected.

– Wow! – Stella's eyes widely opened with surprise. – Well, let's go then.

This time our flight downward was not so pleasant unlike the previous one... For some reason I felt that something strongly squeezed my chest and I could not breathe freely. But gradually everything returned to normal and I could observe the surroundings. The sinister scenery unpleasantly surprised me.

A heavy, blood-red sun stingily lit up the dim, violet-brown silhouettes of distant mountains... Deep cracks crept along the surface like giant snakes; a dense, dark-orange fog came out of them and, on merging with the surface, came to look like a bloody shroud. Strange human spirits, which were very dense, almost physically dense, wondered aimlessly everywhere... They appeared and then disappeared, paying no attention to each other, noticing nobody except for themselves, as if they lived exclusively in their private world, tightly closed to anybody else. In the distance we saw the dark silhouettes of monstrous beasts which fleetingly appeared but did not dare to approach us yet. The danger was strongly felt; everything smelled of horror. I felt an urgent desire to run from there at breakneck speed...

– Are we in Hell, or something? – I asked, being horrified by what I'd seen.

– Well, you wanted to see how it looks, so, you did it. – Tensely smiling, Stella replied.

I felt that she expected trouble. No wonder. What else could it be in a place like that?

– You know, you can sometimes find kind spirits here. They simply made huge mistakes. To tell the truth, I pity them very much... Can you imagine – waiting for your next embodiment here?! Terrible!

No, I could not imagine that and honestly – did not want to, and besides there was not a tiny snippet of **good** in the air.

– You are not right, you know. – The little one eavesdropped on my thoughts again. – Sometimes truly very good people get here, and they pay for their errors very dearly... I do indeed feel so sorry for them...

– Do you think that the boy we're looking for got here too?! I am sure that he had no time to do anything bad. Do you hope to find him **here**?. Do you think such thing is possible?

– Watch out!!! – Stella suddenly shrieked out.

Before I knew where I was I was flattened like a big frog and felt an enormous, terribly stinking mountain on me... something puffed, champed and snorted, spreading the disgusting smell of rot and tainted meat. I felt like vomiting. I was very fortunate that it was just our spirits that "went for a walk" here, without physical bodies, otherwise I would have huge problems.

– Get out of here! Come on, get out!!! – The frightened girlie squeaked.

Regrettably, it was easier to say than to do... A stinking hulk leaned the whole of its enormous weight on me and apparently, prepared to regale itself with my fresh life-force... As ill luck would have it, I could not get free from it and the panic which began treacherously to squeak within my heart squeezed me with fear.

– Come on! – Stella cried again. Then she suddenly struck the monster with a bright ray and again cried: – Run!!!

I felt that it became a bit easier and delivered an energy blow with all my might, pushing the stinking hulk off me. Stella ran around and fearlessly struck the weakening monster from all sides. I managed to get out, heavily breathing and was in horror at what I saw! An enormous thorny hulk lay right in front of me, covered with the sharply stinking mucus. There was an enormous, bent horn on the wide, warty head.

– Run! – Stella cried again. – It's still alive.

I tore along... I absolutely do not remember where to... But I can say I ran like hell.

– Well, you *can* run, I dare say... – Stella squeezed out breathlessly, hardly articulating words.

– Oh, I am sorry. Please, forgive me! – I exclaimed, being ashamed. – The way you screamed, I just ran in fright wherever my feet would carry me...

– Well, it's nothing. Next time we'll be more cautious. – Stella tried to calm me.

This statement made my eyes open wide! ...

– You mean there can be a "next" time!? – I asked carefully, hoping to hear "no".

– Of course! After all, they **live** here! –The brave little girl "calmed" me.

– What are we doing here then?

– We came to rescue somebody. Have you forgotten? – Stella was sincerely surprised.

Obviously our "rescue expedition" went right out of my mind because of the awful occurrence, but I tried to pull myself together as quickly as possible in order not to show Stella how terribly scared I was.

– Hey, don't worry. The first time it happened to me my hair stood on end for the whole day!

– The girl said, much merrier.

I wanted to give her a huge kiss! She somehow saw that I was ashamed of my weakness and managed to make me feel good.

– Do you really think that little Lia's father and brother can be here? – I asked surprised from the bottom of my heart.

– Of course! They could be simply kidnapped. – The calm reply followed.

– What do you mean – kidnapped, who by?

But the girl did not have time to answer... Something scarier than our first "acquaintance" jumped out from thick trees. It was something incredibly nimble and strong, with a little but very powerful body. Its hairy belly expelled a strange sticky "net" which caught us before we knew where we were... Stella looked like a little disheveled owlet. Her large blue eyes looked like two enormous saucers with splashes of horror in the middle.

I had to think of something very quickly, but my head was absolutely empty, no matter how hard I tried to find anything clever there... Meanwhile the "spider" (having nothing better to call this creature) dragged us, apparently, to its nest, anticipating a feast.

– Where are all the people? – Being almost strangled, I asked.

– Oh, there are a lot them here. You saw for yourself. More than anywhere... But the majority of them are worse than these beasts... They won't help us.

– What shall we do now? – In my mind my teeth began to chatter.

– Remember, when you showed your first monsters to me, you struck them with a green ray?

– Stella asked with a sprightly and mischievous sparkle in her eyes (she came to her senses again, quicker than me!). – Let's try the same thing together.

I understood that, fortunately, she was not going to surrender yet and decided to try, because we had nothing to lose anyway.

But we had no time to strike, because the spider sharply stopped and we plopped down on earth... It had dragged us to its home much quicker than we thought...

We found ourselves in a very strange room (if it can be called so). It was dark and completely silent... It strongly smelled of mould, smoke and the bark of some strange tree. From time to time weak sounds like moans were heard. It seemed that "suffering" souls produced them with what was left of their strength.

– Can you light it up somehow? – I asked Stella beneath my breath.

– I've tried already, but I failed for some reason... – She replied also whispering.

At once a tiny light shone right in front of us.

– That is all that I can do here. – Vexed Stella sighed.

This dim, scanty illumination made her look very tired and much older. I always forgot that this amazing child was only five years old! Probably it was her often, so serious, unchildlike conversation or her adult attitude toward life, or everything put together that made me forget that she is still a tiny girl who must be terribly scared now, but she bravely endured everything and even was going to fight...

– Look, who is here? – Stella whispered.

On peering into the darkness, I saw strange "shelves" on which people lay.

– Mother? Is it you, mother??? – A surprised thin voice whispered. – How did you find us?

At first I did not understand that a child addressed me. I clean forgot why we came here. I understood only when Stella shoved her fist in my side.

– We don't know their names! – I whispered.

– Lia, what are **you** doing here? – A masculine voice sounded.

– I was looking for you, daddy. – Stella answered mentally in Lia's voice.

– But how did you get here? – I asked.

– Probably, the same way you did... – there was a hushed answer. – We went for a walk on a lakeshore and did not see that there was a "hole"... and we fell in there... and below waited this beast... What shall we do?

– Leave. – I tried to answer as calmly as possible.

– What about others? Do you want to leave them?! – Stella whispered.

– Certainly not! But how are you going to take them out of here?

A strange round manhole opened and viscid, red light blinded our eyes. I felt as if my head was squeezed with nippers and I felt an irresistible wish to sleep...

– Hold on! Don't sleep! – Stella cried.

I understood that the spider exerted a strong influence upon us. Probably this terrible creature needed us weak-willed to easily accomplish its "spidery" ritual.

– We cannot do anything... – Stella muttered to herself. – Why doesn't anything work?

I thought she was absolutely right. We both were just children, which set off on a life-threatening trip without thinking it out well and now were unaware of how to get out of it.

Suddenly Stella took off our imposed "images" and we again became ourselves.

– Oh, where is my mother? Who are you? What did you do with my mother?! – The boy hissed indignantly. – Bring her back immediately!

I liked his fighting spirit, considering the hopelessness of our situation.

– The point is that your mother has not been here. – Stella whispered. – We met your mother at the "floor" from which you "fell" here. They were very worried about you, because they could not find you and we offered to help. But, as you see, we did not take enough care and got into the same terrible mess...

– How long have you been here? Do you know what he will do with us? – I tried to speak confidently.

– We are quite new here... He brings new people all the time, sometimes little animals, then they disappear and he brings new ones.

I looked at Stella with horror:

– It is a **real** world and absolutely **real** danger! It is not that **innocent** beauty which we created earlier! What shall we do?

– Leave. – The little girl persistently repeated.

– We can try, can't we? Gran will not leave us too, if things get really dangerous. Probably,

we can get out by ourselves, if she has not come yet. Don't you worry, she will not leave us.

I wish I had her confidence! Although I never was too fearful, this situation made me very nervous, because the matter was not only about us, but also about those who we came to rescue from this horrific situation. However, I had no idea **how** to scramble out of this nightmare.

– There is no time here, but he usually comes in at one and the same interval, approximately, twenty-four earthly hours. – Suddenly the boy answered my thoughts.

– Was it today? – Stella asked with obvious relief.

The boy nodded.

– Then, shall we go? – She gave me a significant look and I understood that she asked me to "put" my "protection" on them.

Stella was the first who put out her red head outside...

– Nobody! – She rejoiced. – Gosh, what a nightmare!

Immediately I started climbing after her. Here was a real nightmare indeed! Human spirits hung in "bunches" near our strange "place of incarceration"... They hung head downward, suspended by their feet, forming something like inverted bouquets.

We came closer – nobody showed any signs of life...

– They are totally "pumped out"! – Stella was terrified. – There is not even a drop of life-force in them! All right, let's run away!!!

We were off like a shot, absolutely not knowing where we running, simply wishing to be as far as possible from the blood-freezing horror... We did not even imagine that we could bump into the same or even worse thing.

Suddenly it grew very dark. Dark blue clouds rushed across the sky, as if a strong wind pushed them, although there was no wind whatsoever. Blinding lightning flashed in the bowels of black clouds; the tops of mountains blazed with a red glow... Sometimes the wicked tops ripped swollen clouds which released dark brown waterfalls. This frightful picture was reminiscent of the most terrible of terrible nightmares....

– Daddy, I am so scared! – The boy squealed in a thin voice, forgetting about his former "bellicosity".

Suddenly one cloud was "torn" and blazed with blindingly bright light. The figure of a very thin young man with a face, sharp like a knife-blade, being wrapped in this light as in a sparkling cocoon, approached us. The sparkling light "melted" black clouds which turned into dirty, black shreds.

– Blimey! – Stella cried with joy. – How does he do that?!

– Do you know him? – I was unspeakably surprised, but Stella shook her head negatively.

The young fellow landed next to us and asked, affectionately smiling:

– Why are you here? This is not your place.

– We know. We just tried to get upstairs! – The happy Stella began to twitter at full speed. – Will you help us to come back up? We have to come home real quick! Our grandmothers are waiting for us there, and these two have others waiting for them too.

Meantime the fellow very attentively and in earnest examined me for some reason. He had a strange and piercing gaze which made me feel uncomfortable.

– What are you doing here, girl? – He asked softly. – How did you manage to get here?

– We simply went for a walk. – I answered honestly. – And then looked for them. – I smiled at our "lost and found" and pointed at them with my hand.

– But you are **alive**? – The rescuer continued to inquire.

– Yes, but I've already been here several times. – I calmly answered.

– Only not here, "upstairs"! – Laughing, my little friend corrected me. – We would not come

back here for all the tea in China, right?

– Oh, yes. I think that will be enough for a long time... at least – for me... – I flinched, recalling recent events.

– You must leave. – The fellow repeated softly, but more insistently. – Now.

A sparkling "path" stretched out from the place where he stood and ran straight into a luminous tunnel. We were literally pulled in there, without having the chance to take even one step, and in an instant we found ourselves in the same transparent world where we found our nicely rounded Lia and her mother.

– Mummy, dad's back! And Velik too! – Little Lia ran out to meet us, firmly clasping the red dragon to her bosom. Her round little face shone like the sun. She could not contain her stormy happiness and threw herself on her dad's neck, squeaking with delight.

I watched the reunion of this family with enormous joy and was a little sad about all my "guests" who had come to me on earth for help – they could not hug each other anymore, because they had already belonged to different worlds...

– Daddy, you are here at last! I thought you'd got lost for good! And you've been found! How wonderful! – The little one shone with happiness.

Suddenly her happy face was clouded with gloom and grew notably sad... She addressed Stella with a quite different tone of voice:

– Dear girls, thank you for my dad! And for my brother, of course! Are you going to leave now? Will you ever come back? Here is your dragon! He was very good and he liked me very much...

It seemed that poor Lia would start to howl right now – she was so eager to keep this miracle of a dragon for a tiny bit more! And he was about to be taken away and she would never see him again...

– Do you want him to stay with you for a little while longer? And when we come back next time, you'll give him back to us? – Stella had pity on the little child.

At first Lia could not believe her luck which suddenly came like a bolt from the blue, and then, unable to say anything, began to nod her head so vigorously that we were afraid it would fall off!

On saying goodbye to the happy family, we moved further.

I was unspeakably glad to feel myself safe again, to see the joyful light which filled everything around and not to be afraid of being unexpectedly grasped by some terrible monster...

– Do you want to go for another walk? – Stella asked me in absolutely fresh voice.

The temptation, certainly, was huge, but I was so tired that even if I saw the greatest miracle on earth, I probably would be unable to enjoy it in full measure...

– All right, another time! – Stella giggled. – I am tired too.

Our cemetery appeared again where our grandmothers sat next to each other on the same small bench where we had left them...

– I would like to show you something. – Stella said under her breath.

And then two incredibly beautiful and brightly shining spirits appeared instead of our grandmothers... They both had marvelous sparkling stars on their chests, and Stella's grandmother had an amazing crown on her head which shone and shimmered with all the colours of the rainbow...

– It's them... You wanted to see them, right? – I nodded, being absolutely stunned. – Only don't tell them that I showed you that; let them do it.

– Well, it's time for me to go... – The little one sadly whispered. – I cannot go with you there....

– I shall visit you! Absolutely! Many, many times! – I promised with all my heart.

The red-headed girl looked at me with her warm sad eyes, and it seemed she understood everything... All that I could not express with our ordinary words...

29. Stella-5. Svetilo. Hell. Isolda

All the way home from the cemetery I was sulky with my grandmother for no reason whatsoever, at the same time being angry with myself for that. I looked like a ruffled sparrow and my grandmother perfectly saw it, which, of course, irritated me even more and forced a retreat into my "safe shell". It is highly likely that it was childish offence that raged inside me because she actually, so I thought, hid a lot from me and taught me nothing, apparently considering me unworthy or incapable of doing something greater. Although my inner voice was telling me that I was awfully wrong, I was unable to calm down and look at the situation from the outside, which I always did when I thought that I could be wrong.

Finally my impatient heart was unable to bear the silence any longer.

– Well, what were you talking about for so long? If certainly, I am allowed to know... – I mumbled, not even trying to hide how offended I was.

– We did not talk, we **thought**. – My grandmother answered, calmly smiling.

It seemed that she simply teased me to provoke me to some action which only she knew...

– Well then, what did you "**think**" about? – Then I finally fired, unable to contain my feelings: – Why does Stella's grandmother teach her, and you don't teach me?! Do you think that I am incapable of anything more?

– First of all, stop boiling or you'll steam away. – Grandmother said calmly again. – And secondly, Stella has a long way to go to match you. Besides, what do you want me to teach you, if you have not yet understood even that which you have now? So, when you have, we'll talk about the rest.

I stared at my grandmother, as if I saw her for the first time in my life. What does she mean "Stella has a long way to go to match me"?! She does such things and knows so much! And of what am I capable? The only thing I did was just help somebody; and apart from that I knew nothing.

My grandmother perfectly saw my utter confusion, but did not help a bit, probably considering that I must get through it on my own, but I could not. The unexpected "positive" shock made my thoughts somersault. I was absolutely unable to think soberly and only looked at her with eyes wide open, failing to digest the "devastating" news...

– But what about "floors"? I could not get there. It was Stella's grandmother who showed them to me! – I persistently did not wish to give up.

– Well, she did that precisely so you could try it on your own. – My grandmother established an "undeniable" fact.

– Can I really go there **on my own**? – I was dumbfounded.

– Of course you can! **It's the simplest of things that you can do**. You don't believe in yourself and therefore don't try...

– I don't try? – I nearly suffocated at such terrible injustice. – The only thing I constantly do is keep trying! Well, probably not the things I should try...

Suddenly I remembered that Stella very often repeated that I could do much more... But *what* precisely could I do? I had no idea what they all talked about, but now I felt that I gradually began to calm down and **think** which always helped me in any difficult situation. Suddenly life did not seem so unfair to me and I began to revive.

Being inspired by such good news I, certainly, "tried" during the following days. Not sparing myself and pitilessly martyring my emaciated physical body, I daily visited the "floors" dozens of times without showing myself to Stella. I wished to give her a pleasant surprise but wanted to do it properly without disgracing myself by making a foolish mistake.

At last I decided that it was time to stop hiding and to visit my dear little friend.

– Wow! Is it you? – At once the familiar voice sounded like happy bells. – I cannot believe it's truly you! But how did you come here? Did you really come on your own?

As usual her questions rained down on me; her merry little face shone and I was sincerely pleased to see the joyous light that gushed out of her.

– Well, shall we go for a walk? – I asked smiling.

Stella was in raptures about my **independently coming** and that now we could meet when we felt like it, needing nobody's assistance!

– See! I told you that you can do much more! – Stella twittered happily. – And now everything will be all right and we need nobody! It's so great that you came! I wanted to show you something and have been waiting and waiting for you to be here. But we'll have to go to that unpleasant place.

– Do you mean the "ground floor"?

Stella nodded.

– Why? – I asked. – Have you lost something?

– I have not lost anything; on the contrary I found something! – The girl exclaimed victoriously. – Remember, I told you that there are good spirits in that world and you did not want to believe me?

Frankly speaking I still held that opinion, but I nodded, unwilling to offend my happy friend.

– And now you'll believe me! – Stella said contentedly. – Shall we?

This time we easily "slipped" down the "floors", probably because we had already gained some experience in that, and I again saw an oppressive picture, very like one that I had seen before.

Our feet squelched through the black stinking slush, out of which the brooks of turbid reddish water streamed. The scarlet sky was dark. It blazed with blood-red flashes and loomed very low, pushing the purple mass of heavy and cumbersome clouds, which resisted and hung – heavy, swollen and pregnant, threatening to be delivered of a terrible waterfall, wiping everything off the face of the earth. From time to time a wall of brown-red opaque waters broke through out of them with a resounding roar, striking the earth so strongly that it seemed that the sky fell to the ground...

The trees were naked and faceless and idly moved their flabby and thorny branches. Further on there was a joyless withered steppe which faded in the distance behind the wall of dirty grey fog. Numerous sullen and wilting human spirits aimlessly rambled here and there, senselessly looking for something, paying no attention to the surrounding world, which, to tell the truth, was so unpleasant that it evoked no desire whatsoever to look at it. The scenery spread horror and depression seasoned with despair all around.

– O, dear! How scary it is here. – Stella whispered shivering. – I could not get used to it and probably never will, no matter how many times I come here. How can the poor fellows live here?!

– Well, probably, these "poor fellows" did something really wrong, if they got here. In fact nobody sent them here – they got what they deserved, right? – I still did not give up.

– Just wait and you'll see. – Stella whispered enigmatically.

Suddenly we saw a cave covered with greyish greenery. A tall stately man who was absolutely out of place in this wretched soul-freezing landscape came out of it, squinting...

– Hello, Sad One! – Stella affectionately welcomed the stranger. – Here, I brought my friend. She does not believe that it is possible find good people here and I wanted to show **you** to her... I hope you don't mind, do you?

– Hello, dear. – The man answered sadly. – I don't think I am good enough to show to anyone. You should not do that, really.

Strangely enough, I liked this sad man. He emanated strength and warmth and it was very pleasant to be next to him. Anyway, he was not like the overwhelming majority of people who

dwelt on this "floor" – weak-willed and broken-hearted, surrendered at the discretion of fate.

– Tell us your story, Sad Man... – Stella asked, lightly smiling.

– Well, there is nothing to tell, actually, and there is nothing to be proud of. – The stranger shook his head. – What do you need this for?

For some reason I felt deep pity for him. I knew absolutely nothing about him, and still I was almost sure that this man **could not** do anything truly bad. Well, he just could not! Stella, smiling, observed my thoughts which she obviously liked very much.

– All right! I agree. You're right! – At last I honestly confessed, on seeing her satisfied little face.

– But you know nothing about him and the matter is not so simple with him. – Stella complacently pronounced, slyly smiling. – Please, tell her, Sad One...

The man cheerlessly smiled at us and quietly pronounced:

– I am here, because I killed... I killed many people – not for pleasure, but of necessity.

I was terribly disappointed – he killed! How could I be so foolish as to believe in him! But for some reason the slightest sense of rejection or hostility persistently failed to appear in me. I obviously liked the man and I could not do anything with it, no matter how hard I tried.

– Is it an identical guilt – to kill for *pleasure* or from necessity? – I asked. – Sometimes people don't have a choice, do they? For example: when they have to defend themselves or others. I always admired heroes – warriors and knights. The latter I always adored... How is it possible to compare them to ordinary killers?

He gave me a long and sad look and then quietly answered:

– I don't know, dear. The fact that I am here means that the guilt is identical. But judging on how I feel this guilt in my heart, it's not. I never wished to kill, I simply protected my land; ***I was a hero there***. And here it appeared that I just killed... Can it be fair, really? I think – not.

– So, you were a warrior? – I asked with hope. – But then, the difference should be huge – you protected your home, family and children! And you don't look like a killer.

– Well, dear. **None of us are truly as others see us**; because **they see only what they want to see** or only **what we want to show them**. And as to the war, at first I thought the same way as you and even was proud of my deeds. And here it appears that there was nothing to be proud of. Murder is murder, and it's not important the way it was accomplished.

– But this is **wrong!** – I was indignant. – How can a maniac-killer turn out to be the same as a hero?! It **can not** be; it **must not** be!

My whole self raged in indignation! But the man dolefully looked at me with his sad grey eyes in which I read understanding...

– Both a hero and killer **take life**. Probably, there are "extenuating circumstances", because a person who protects somebody else takes life being guided by a **noble and just reason**. But one way or another, they both have to pay for it... very bitterly, believe me.

– May I ask you, when did you live? – I asked, being slightly confused.

– Oh, it was quite long time ago. I am here **for the second time** already. For some reason my two lives were alike – I militated for somebody in both... and then paid... always bitterly... – The stranger fell silent for a long time, as if not wishing to talk about it anymore, but then continued quietly. – There are people who *like* to militate. I always hated it. But for some reason life returned me to the same circle for the second time, as if I was deliberately put into this *exclusive circle* without any possibility of being freed from it. When I lived, all people fought inter se. One occupied others' lands, the latter protected their possessions. Sons overturned fathers, brothers killed brothers... Many terrible things happened. Some people performed unthinkable exploits; some betrayed others and some were simply cowards. But nobody even suspected what a bitter price they would have to pay for everything they did.

– Did you have family there? – I asked to change the subject. – Were there children?

– Certainly! But it was so long ago! They once became great-grandfathers, died then... And some live again. It was a long time ago...

– And you are still here?! – I whispered looking around in horror.

I could not even imagine that he'd been living there for many, many years, suffering and "paying" for his guilt, without the slightest hope of leaving this horrific "floor" before the time comes to return to the physical Earth! And once there he will have to start everything again from the very beginning, in order that when his next "physical" life is over to return (maybe here!) with a whole new set of "luggage", bad or good, depending on how he lives his "next" earthly life... And there is not the slightest hope for him to be freed from this exclusive circle (be it good or bad), because if one **begins** the earthly life, he "dooms" himself to this eternal circular "journey". And depending on his actions, the return to the "floors" can be very pleasant or very scary.

– What if you don't you kill anybody in the new life, you will not return to this "floor" anymore, right? – I asked with hope.

– But I **remember nothing**, my dear, **when I return there...** It's after *death* that we remember our lives and errors. And when we **begin to live there again, our memory is closed at once**. Probably, that is why our old "acts" recur – because we don't remember our old errors... But frankly speaking, even if I knew that I would be "punished" again, I would never stand aside, if my family or my country was in danger. It's all strange, if we come to think it over. It would seem that the one who "*distributes*" our **guilt** and **payment** wishes that only cowards and betrayers live on Earth. Otherwise, he would not punish scoundrels and heroes the same way. Or is there, nevertheless, a difference in the punishment? It must be, in all fairness. In fact there are heroes who performed superhuman exploits. They had songs and legends dedicated to them which lived for centuries. They should not be placed amongst ordinary murderers, for sure! I wish I could ask somebody about that...

– I also think that such thing cannot be! In fact there are people that performed such wonders of human courage that even after death they, like the sun, lit up the earthly path for all the living for centuries. I like to read about them very much and I try to find as many books as possible which tell about human exploits. They help me to live and cope with my loneliness, when life becomes too hard. The only thing that I cannot understand is: why heroes always **must die** on Earth in order that people can **see** their rightness? Why does everybody become indignant only when a hero cannot be revived? Why is it only then that the long sleeping **human pride** arises and the crowd, ardent with just anger, take down the "enemies" like specks of dust on their "faithful" way? – Sincere indignation raged in me. Probably I spoke too quickly and too much, but I rarely had the possibility of expressing what really "hurts" me... and I continued.

– In fact people **killed first** even their poor God, and only afterwards began to worship him. Is it really impossible to see **the real truth before** it's already too late? Is not it really better **to keep safe the heroes, follow** their example and **learn** from them? Do people really always need **the shocking example of others' courage** to believe in theirs? Why is it necessary to first kill somebody so that they could set a monument to glorify him after? Honestly I would prefer to **erect monuments to the living**, if they are worthy of it...

And what do you mean that somebody "distributes guilt"? You mean God or something? But it's **not God that punishes. We punish ourselves**. We are responsible for everything.

– Don't you believe in God, dear? – The sad man, who attentively listened to my "emotionally-indignant" speech, was surprised.

– I **have not found him yet...** But if he really exists, then he must be **kind**. But for some reason many people are afraid of him or threaten others in his name. They say in our school: "Man – stands proud"! How can a person be *proud*, if fear hangs over him all the time?! Besides, there are **too many different Gods**. Every country has its own. And everybody tries to prove that their God is the best... No, I don't understand a lot of things yet... But how can one **believe** in something

without understanding? We are taught at our school that **there is nothing after death**. But how **can I believe it, if I see quite another thing?** I think that blind faith simply kills hope in people and increases fear. If they knew what happens **in reality**, they would behave a lot more cautiously. **It would not be all the same** to them what happens after their death. They would **know** that they will live again, and they will have to pay for **how** they lived their life. The only thing is that they will not answer to a "threatening God", of course, but **to themselves**. And nobody will come to redeem their sins, but they **have to do that on their own**. I wanted to tell about that, but nobody wanted to listen to me, probably, because life is much more comfortable and simpler without this knowledge. – At last I finished my "terribly long" speech.

Suddenly I became very sad. This man somehow made me talk about things that never left me in peace since the day I first "touched" the world of the dead, and naively I thought that I just needed to tell to people what I know and "*they would believe at once and even rejoice! And of course, would want to do only good.*" What a **naive** child one has to be to engender such a foolish and unrealizable dream in one's heart?! People **hate to know** that there is something else "**there**", after their death. Because if they admit it, it will mean that they will have to **answer for everything they have done**, and this is exactly what nobody wants to do. People are like children. They are sure for some reason that if they **close their eyes and see nothing**, then **nothing bad will happen to them...** or if they shift everything onto their God's strong shoulders, which "redeemed" all their sins, everything will be all right... But is it true and **right?** I was just a ten-year-old girl, but a lot of things **already** could not find their place within my simple "child's" logical scope **then**. For example, the book about God (the Bible) told that **pride** is a **tremendous sin**, but the Christ (son of man!!!) said that he would redeem "**all human sins**" **with his death...** What **Pride** one must have to put oneself on the same footing as **the whole** of humanity?! And what kind of man would be so bold as to think of himself in this way: God's Son or man's son? Let's take churches: each one is more beautiful than the last, as if ancient architects tried to do their best to outdo each other in building their God's house. Yes, it's true – the churches are incredibly beautiful. They look like museums. Each is a real work of art. But, if I got it right, man goes to church to speak to God, doesn't he?

In that case, **how can he possibly find Him in the shocking luxury that strikes the eye with its abundance of gold**, which, let's take me for example, did not dispose me to open my heart at all, on the contrary – I shut it as quickly as possible in order not to see the brutally tortured bleeding God, almost nude, **crucified in the middle of the glittering and oppressing gold**, as if people **celebrated His death**, but did not believe or rejoice in His **life...** We plant **fresh flowers** even on our cemeteries in order that they remind us of the **life** of the dead. So why I did not see a statue of a **living Christ** in any church, to whom one can pray, or talk or open one's heart? And is that really so that the **House of God** only means **His death?** One day I asked a priest why we did not pray to a **living** God. He looked at me as if at an importunate fly and said that "*it was done to prevent us from forgetting that he (God) had given His life for us, redeeming our sins, and now we always must remember that we are unworthy of Him (!) And repent of our sins, as much as possible*"... However if he **has already redeemed** all our sins then for what we should repent? And if we must repent, then His atonement is a lie? The priest got very angry and said that I had **heretical thoughts** and I must atone for them, reading "Our Father" (!) twenty times in the evening. I think, comments are unnecessary here...

I could go on at great length, because all of that strongly irritated me then. I had thousands of questions to which nobody gave any answers, but only advised me to "believe", which I could never do, because **before I come to believe**, I need to understand **why**, and if there was no logic in "faith", then I considered it to be a "search for a black cat in a black room", and neither my heart nor my soul needed such faith. Not because I had a "dark" soul (like some told me) which did not need God, on the contrary, I think that **my soul was light enough to understand and accept**, but the matter was that there was nothing to accept... Besides, what can be explained here, if **people killed their God** and then **decided that it would more "correct" to worship Him?** In my opinion, it would be better if they had not killed Him but **tried to learn from Him as many things as**

possible, if He indeed was a real God... For some reason I felt much closer to our "old Gods", the carved statues of which were in abundance both in our city and the whole of Lithuania. They were amusing and warm, merry and angry, sad and severe. These gods were not so incomprehensibly "tragic" like, for example, Christ to whom shockingly expensive churches were dedicated, as if somebody really tried to atone for sins.

To me these Gods were kind protagonists of fairy-tales and looked like our parents – they could be kind and affectionate, but if necessary, they could to punish us severely when we misbehaved too much. They were a lot nearer to our heart than that incomprehensible and distant God which had His terrible death at men's hands.

I would like to ask the faithful to try not to be indignant, on reading the lines which contain my thoughts of that time. It was then and I looked for my child's truth in Faith too, as well as in any other things. Therefore I can argue only about my views and concepts which I have now, and which will be expounded in this book later. And then it was a time of "persistent search", which did not come to me easily.

– You're a strange girl... – The Sad one whispered thoughtfully.

– I am not strange, I am simply **alive**. But I live in two worlds – that of the living and the dead. And I can see things which many people, unfortunately, do not see. Probably, that is why nobody believes me. But everything would be much simpler, if people **listened** and **reflected** on it a little, even not believing. Well, I think that if it could happen one day, it would not be *today*. But I have to live with it **exactly today**...

– I am very sorry, dear... – The man whispered. – You know, there are a lot of people like me here. Thousands... Probably, you will find it interesting to talk to them. There are real **heroes**, not like me. There are many of them...

Suddenly I felt a burning desire to help to this sad and lonely man. However, I had no idea what I could do for him.

– Do you want us to create another world for you while you are here? – Stella asked unexpectedly.

It was a magnificent idea, and I became a little ashamed that it did not occur to me first. Stella was a wonderful little human being and somehow always found something pleasant that could bring joy to others.

– What do you mean "another world"? – The man was surprised.

– Here, look... – and suddenly bright and joyful light began to shine in his dark and sullen cave! – How would you like *this kind* of a home?

The eyes of our "sad" acquaintance lit with happiness. Perplexedly he looked around, understanding nothing of what had just happened here. Meanwhile his terrible and dark cave changed: now the sun shone brightly, luxuriant greenery exhaled pleasant aromas, the birds joyfully sang songs, and blossoming flowers smelled divine; the brook murmured, lively in its farthest corner, spilling drops of the purest and freshest crystal water...

– There! Do you like it? – Stella asked merrily.

The man was absolutely stunned by what he saw and could not say a word. He only looked at this beauty with his eyes wide open in which trembling drops of "happy" tears glittered like pure diamonds.

– My God, I have not seen the sun for so long! – He whispered. – Who are you, girl?

– I am just a human being, like you – dead. And she is, you know it already, alive. Sometimes we go for a walk here together and we help, if we can, of course.

It was obvious that the little girl was extremely satisfied with the produced effect and literally fidgeted to make it last longer...

– Do you truly like it? Do you want it to be always like this?

The man nodded, unable to pronounce a word.

I did not even try to imagine the happiness he was now experiencing considering the black horror in which he lived every day for so long!

– Thank you, dear... – The man whispered. – Tell me one thing – how can this **last**?

– Oh, it's simple! Your world will be only here, in this cave, and nobody will see it except for you. And if you don't leave, it will remain with you forever. Well, I will come to you to check it... My name is Stella.

– I don't know what to say for such a gift... I don't deserve it. It's probably wrong... My name is Svetilo. Well, I have not brought much "light" yet. (Svetilo means "Luminary" – *E.L.*)

– Don't worry; you will bring it some day! – It was clear that the little girl was very proud of what she'd done and almost burst with pleasure.

– Thank you, dear girls... – Svetilo sat, hanging his proud head, and suddenly began to cry like a child.

– What about others **like him**? – I whispered into Stella's ear. – There are probably very many of them? What we shall do for them? It is not fair to help only one. Besides, who gave us the right to judge who deserves such help?

Stella's face frowned at once...

– I don't know... But I **know** that it is **correct**. If it was wrong, we could not do it. Different rules work here.

Suddenly it dawned upon me:

– Wait a moment. What about our Harold?! In fact he was a knight, so he killed too. How did he manage to stay "upstairs"?

– He paid for everything he had done. I asked him about it. He paid very dearly. – Stella answered in earnest, funnily wrinkling her little forehead.

– How did he pay? – I did not understand.

– With his spirit... – The little girl sadly whispered. – He gave part of his spirit for what he had done during his life-time. But he had a very highly-developed spirit; therefore, even on giving a part of it, he still was able to stay on the "highest floor". But very few can do it, only truly very highly developed spirits. Ordinary people lose too much and go much lower than they were at the beginning. Like Svetilo.

It was staggering. It means that on having done something bad on Earth, people lose a part of themselves (more correctly, part of their evolutionary potential), and even then still must be in that terrible horrific place called "the low" astral world. Indeed, each has to pay for his errors too dearly.

– Well, we can go now, – Stella waved with her little hand and merrily twittered. – Good-bye, Svetilo! I shall visit you!

We set out and our new friend sat still, frozen from unexpected happiness, voraciously absorbing the warmth and beauty of the world which Stella created for him, like a dying man would absorb the life which suddenly came back to him...

– Yes, it's **correct**, you were absolutely right! – I said thoughtfully.

Stella shone.

Being in the most "iridescent" mood we made our way toward the mountains, when suddenly an enormous, thorny-sharp-clawed creature came up from the clouds and threw itself straight on us...

– Watch out! – Stella squealed, and I just had time to see two rows of razor sharp teeth, felt a strong blow in my back and fell head over heels onto the ground...

The creature flew right toward us, loudly clicking with its widely open sharp-toothed beak, and we sped along at top speed, splashing through loathsome mucous and mentally begging that this terrible "miracle of a bird" would be interested in something else. We felt that it moved much

quicker than we did and we had no chance to break away from it. As ill luck would have it, there was not a single tree nearby or bushes or even stones to hide behind. There was only an ominous black rock in the distance.

– There! – Shouted Stella, pointing at it with her finger.

Suddenly another creature appeared right in front of us. It looked so scary that our blood ran cold. It appeared as if "straight out of air" and was truly horrific. Long wiry hair completely covered the enormous black hulk, making it look like a pot-bellied bear; only this "bear" had the height of a three-storey building. Two enormous bent horns "crowned" its rugged monstrous head and a terrible mouth was decorated with a couple of incredibly long tusks, sharp like knives; one would become weak at the knees just looking at them. Unexpectedly for us, the monster easily jumped and hooked the flying "ugly thing" on one of its enormous tusks... We froze, dumbfounded.

– Run!!! – Stella squealed. – Run while it's "busy"!

We were ready to be off like a shot, as suddenly a thin voice sounded behind us:

– Girls, stop!!! Don't run! Dean saved you. He is not an enemy!

We turned around and saw a tiny, very beautiful dark-eyed girl who... calmly stroked the monster! To say that we were surprised is to say almost nothing. It was unbelievable! Indeed, it was a day of surprises! The girl smiled in a friendly way, being absolutely not afraid of the hairy monster standing near her.

– Please, don't be afraid of him. He is very kind. We saw that beastly Ovara was after you and decided to help. Dean was in time. Good boy!

The "good boy" began to purr which sounded like a light earthquake and, bending his head, licked the girl's face.

– And what is an Ovara and why did it attack us? – I asked.

– It attacks everybody. It's a predator, a very dangerous one. – The girl answered calmly. – May I ask you what you're doing here, girls? You are not from here in fact?

– No, we are not. We simply went for a walk. But we have the same question for you – what do you do here?

– I visit my mother. – The child grew sad. – We died together, but for some reason she got **here**. And now I live here, but I don't say it to her, because she would never agree to it. She thinks I just come to visit her...

– But would not it indeed be better if you just visit? It's so awful here! – Stella flinched.

– I cannot leave her alone here. I look after her in order that nothing happens to her. And Dean is with me. He helps me.

I just could not believe it. This tiny brave little girl **voluntarily** left her beautiful and kind "floor" to live in this cold, terrible and alien world, protecting her mother, who obviously did something very wrong! I think that there wouldn't be very many such brave and selfless people (even adults!) who would make up their mind to do anything similar... And then I thought – maybe she simply did not understand to what she was going to doom herself?!

– How long have you been here, girl, if it's not a secret?

– I got here quite recently... – The dark-eyed child sadly answered, fingering a curl of her lovely black hair. – When I died I got into such a beautiful world! It was so kind and light! And then I saw that my mother was not with me and rushed to look for her. At first it was so terrible! I could not find her anywhere... And then I fell into this terrible world... And found her. I was so scared here... and so lonely... My mother ordered me to leave and even scolded. But I cannot leave her... And now I have a friend, my kind Dean, and I can live here somehow...

Her "kind friend" roared again, which gave us enormous "low astral" shivers. On pulling myself together, I tried to calm down a little and began to observe the hairy wonder. He felt at once that I paid attention to him and showed his terrible teeth. I jumped back.

– Don't be afraid, please! It's the way he *smiles* at you. – The girl "calmed" me down.

Well, one would learn how to run very quickly on seeing such a smile. – I thought.

– How did it happen that you became friends? – Stella asked.

– When I just came here, I was very scared, especially when the monsters, like the one that came for you, attacked. One day, when I almost died, Dean saved me from heaps of the terrible flying "birds". I was frightened of him too in the beginning, but then I understood what a golden heart he has. He is my best friend! I never had such friends, even when I lived on Earth.

– How could you get used to him so quickly? His appearance is not quite, let's say, ordinary?

– I understood one very simple truth here, which I did not notice on Earth for some reason – **appearance does not matter, if a person or creature has a kind heart...** My mother was very handsome, but sometimes very wicked too, and then all her beauty disappeared somewhere. Although Dean looks frightful, he is always very kind and always protects me. I feel his goodness and am not afraid of anything. Besides one can easily get used to any appearance...

– Do you know that you will be here for a very long time, longer than people live on Earth? Do you really want to stay here?

– My mother is here. So, I must help her. And when she "goes" to live on Earth again, I will go too... to the place where there is much more good. The people are very strange in this frightful world – as if they don't live at all. Why is it so? Do you know something about it?

– Who told you that your mother would go to live again? – Stella became interested.

– Dean, of course. He knows a lot. He has lived here for a very long time. Also he said that when we (my mother and I) **live** again, we will have different families and then I would not have **this** mother... That is why I want to be with her now.

– How do you talk to your Dean? – Stella asked. – And why you don't wish to tell us your name?

It was true. We did not know her name yet and where she was from.

– My name was Maria. But does it really matter here?

– Of course! – Stella broke into laughter. – How do you think we shall socialise with you? When you go away, you will have a new name, but while you are here, you'll have to live with the old one. Have you talked to someone here, girl Maria? – Stella asked, as usual jumping from subject to subject.

– Yes, I have. – The child pronounced uncertainly. – But they are so strange here and so unhappy. Why are they so unhappy?

– Do you think that this reality can make somebody happy? – I was surprised at her question. – It kills any hopes beforehand! How is it possible to be happy here?

– I don't know. When I am with my mother, it seems to me that I could be happy here too. It's true that it's very scary here and she does not like it. When I said that I could stay with her, she shouted at me and said that I am her "brainless disaster". But I am not offended. I know that she is simply scared, as well as I am...

– Maybe, she just wanted to protect you from your "extreme" decision and make you come back to your "floor"? – Stella asked carefully trying not to offend the girl.

– No, of course not. But thank you for your kind words. Mother often called me quite unpleasant names even on Earth. But I know that it was not from malice. She was unhappy because I was born and often said that I ruined her life. But it was not my fault, right? I always tried to make her happy, but for some reason I failed. And I never knew my father. – Maria was very sad and her voice trembled as if she was on the verge of tears.

Stella and I exchanged glances and I was almost sure that the thoughts similar to mine visited her head. I already disliked the spoilt and selfish "mother" which instead of worrying about her daughter did not understand her heroic sacrifice and in addition very painfully offended her.

– But Dean says that I am good and make him very happy! – The girl chirped much merrier. – He wants to be my friend. Others who I met here are very cold and indifferent, and sometimes even wicked, especially those with monsters hooked on.

– Monsters – what? – We did not understand.

– Well, some spirits have terribly ugly monsters sitting on their backs which tell them what they must do. If they disobey, the monsters taunt them terribly. I tried to talk to these spirits, but the monsters did not allow me.

We understood absolutely nothing from this "explanation", but the fact that some astral creatures torture people could not remain "uninvestigated" by us, therefore we asked her at once, where we could see the surprising phenomenon.

– Everywhere! Especially near the "black mountain". There, behind the trees. Do you want us to go with you too?

– Of course, we'll be very glad if you do! – Stella replied immediately, being terribly happy.

To tell the truth I did not relish the prospect of meeting again somebody "terrible and incomprehensible", especially being alone. But interest won over fear, and certainly, we would go there, even being a little bit afraid. But now, having such a protector as Dean with us, we went with greater enthusiasm.

In a very short while our eyes wide open in amazement saw the real Hell... The picture was reminiscent of Bosch's paintings, a "mad" painter which once shocked the whole world with his art. Certainly, he was not mad, but simply a **visionary**, which for some reason could see only the low astral world. But one should give him his due – he depicted it excellently... I saw his painting in a book which I found in my dad's library and still remember the terrible feeling which most of his paintings transmitted...

– It's terrible! – The dumbfounded Stella whispered.

I could probably say that we saw a lot of things on the "floors", but even we were unable to imagine **this** in our most terrible nightmare! We found something absolutely unthinkable behind the "black rock". It looked like an enormous flat "caldron", gouged in the rock, at the bottom of which purple "lava" bubbled. The burning hot air "burst out" every now and then with strange flashing reddish bubbles from which scalding steam broke forth and its large drops fell on the soil or people. The heart-breaking screams were heard, but they grew silent at once, because the most revolting creatures I have ever seen in my life sat on the people's backs and controlled the victims, with an air of satisfaction, paying no attention whatsoever to their sufferings.

Burning hot stones reddened under people's bare feet; purple soil bubbled and "melted". The hot steam broke through enormous cracks and burned the feet of the human spirits, which, crying from pain went upwards, evaporating in a light puff of smoke. The wide and fiery red river ran through the middle of the "caldron". From time to time the disgusting monsters threw an exhausted spirit there, which caused a short splash of orange sparks, at once turned into a fluffy white cloud and disappeared... this time **forever**... It was a genuine Hell and both Stella and I were eager to leave this terrible place as quickly as possible.

– What shall we do? – Stella whispered, horrified. – Do you want to go down there? Can we really help them? Look, how many of them are!

We stood on the brink of the dark-brown precipice dried up with heat, observing the "medley" of pain, despair and violence at the bottom, inundated with horror, and felt so childlike and powerless that this time even my bellicose Stella totally agreed to loosen her ever enthusiastic "get-up-and-go" and was ready to dash away to her homely and safe upper "floor"...

I suddenly remembered that Maria had *spoken* to these cruelly punished people (whether it was fate or themselves).

– Tell us, please, how did you get down there? – Puzzled, I asked.

– Dean took me there. – Maria answered calmly, as if it went without saying.

– What have the poor people done to deserve this kind of place? – I asked.

– I think the matter is not in what they've done but in the fact that they were *very strong and had a lot of life-force*, which the monsters need because they "feed" on these poor people. – The child explained in a very adult way.

– What?! – We almost jumped. – It means that they simply "eat" them?

– Lamentably – yes... When we went there, I saw a pure silvery stream that comes out of these poor people and fills the monsters on their backs. And the latter at once revived and became extremely satisfied. Some human spirits found it very difficult to walk after that. It's so terrible. And there is nothing we can do to help them. Dean says that there are too many of them even for him.

– Indeed. And we can hardly do anything too. – Stella whispered sadly.

It was very hard to simply turn and go away, but we perfectly understood that it was not in our power to help and could not just stand and calmly observe the terrible "spectacle". Therefore, on giving one last glance at this terrible Hell, we decided to go to another place. To say that my human pride was not hurt would be untrue, because I always disliked losing. But I also learned a long time ago to accept **reality** the way it is and not to complain about my helplessness, if to help somebody was beyond my strength.

– May I ask you, girls, where are you going? – Maria grew sad.

– I would like to go upstairs. Honestly speaking, I've had enough of the "ground floor" for today. I would like to see something more cheerful. – I replied and thought about Maria – poor girl – she has to stay here! And regrettably, we could not offer her any help, because it was **her** choice and **her** decision which only she could change...

Well-known whirlwinds of silver energies began to shimmer and "wrapped" us in the dense and fluffy "cocoon", and we easily and gracefully slipped "upstairs"...

– Gosh, how good is to be here! – Stella happily breathed out, coming "home" at last. – And how terrible it is "down" there! Poor people, how is it possible to **become better**, living in such a nightmare everyday?! Something is wrong here, don't you think?

I laughed:

– Well, what would you offer to "correct"?

– Don't laugh! We must think out something. I do not know yet – what. But I shall. – The girl declared, being absolutely serious.

I loved very much her adult serious attitude toward life and "iron" desire to find a **positive** way out of any situation. Having a shining sunny character, Stella, nevertheless, could be an incredibly strong and brave little human being who would never surrender and always defend justice or friends, dear to her heart, with might and main.

– Well, let's go for a walk and get some fresh air, because I have still not recovered from the horror which we've just seen. I cannot even breathe easily, not to mention those awful visions. – I suggested to my wonderful friend.

We again "slid" gently within the silver-"dense" silence, being totally relaxed, enjoying the peace and tenderness of this wonderful "floor", and I still thought of brave little Maria who we willy-nilly left in that terribly joyless and dangerous world and who had only her frightful hairy friend and hope that her "blind" but dearly beloved mother could at last **see** how strongly she loved her and wanted to make her happy for the period of time that they had before their new embodiment on Earth...

– Wow! You just look at that. How beautiful! – Stella's merry voice pulled me out of my sad thoughts.

I saw an enormous merry golden ball which glimmered inside and a beautiful young lady dressed in a very bright multicoloured dress in it. She was sitting in the brightly blooming glade and was hardly distinguishable from the background of unbelievable bells of some fantastic flowers

which vigorously blazed with all colours of the rainbow. She had very long fair hair the colour of ripe wheat which fell downward in heavy waves, shrouding her from head to toe like a golden cloak. Deep blue friendly eyes looked straight at us, as if inviting us to start the conversation.

– Hello! I hope we won't bother you. – I welcomed the stranger, not knowing what to begin with and, as usual, slightly feeling shy.

– And hello to you, Light One. – The young lady smiled.

– Why do you call me that? – I was very surprised.

– I don't know. – The stranger answered affectionately. – It simply suits you! I am Isolda. But tell me, what is your name?

– It's Svetlana. – I answered, being slightly confused.

– See! I've guessed! What do you do here, Svetlana? And who is your pretty friend? (Svetlana means Bearing Light – *E.L.*)

– We just went for a walk. This is Stella; she is my friend. Are you the Isolda who had her Tristan? – I took heart to ask.

The lady's eyes widened in surprise as she obviously did not expect that somebody would know her in this world...

– How do you know it, girl? – She whispered.

– I've read a book about you. I liked it so much! – I exclaimed enthusiastically. – You loved each other so much, and then you died. I was so sorry about it! And where is Tristan? Is he really no longer with you?

– No, dear, he is so far away. I have been looking for him for so long a time! And when I finally found him, it appeared that we cannot be together here too. I cannot go where he is. – Isolda answered sadly.

And suddenly a simple vision came to me – he was in the low astral world, apparently for some "sins" he had committed. And certainly she **could** go there; simply she did not know how to do it or doubted that she could.

– I can show you how you can go there, if you want, of course. You may see him whenever you want, with the only condition – you should be very careful.

– You can you go there! – She was very surprised.

I nodded.

– And you too.

– I am sorry, Isolda. Tell me, please, why is your world so bright? – Stella was unable to retain her curiosity.

– It always was cold and misty where I **lived**, and it was quite different where I **was born**: the sun always shone brightly, the flowers smelled sweet and the snow was only in winter and even then it was sunny. I missed my country so much that I still fail to take delight in it to my heart's content. Indeed, my name sounds quite cold, but it's because when I was a child, I got lost and was found on ice. That is why they called Isolda. ("Iso" can be translated from Russian as "from or of", "lda" – accusative case for "liod" – "ice" – *E.L.*)

– Wow! That's true – "of ice"! I would never guess! – I stared at her, dumbfounded.

– It's nothing. Take Tristan, for example. He never had a name and lived all his life *nameless*. – Isolda smiled.

– But what about "Tristan"?

– Oh, come on, dear! It just means "one who owns three camps", – Isolda laughed. – His family died when he was little and that is why he was not given a proper name when the time came – there was nobody to do it.

– But why do you explain all of it **in my language**? In fact it's in Russian!

– But we are Russians, more precisely – were then. – She corrected herself. – Now who knows who we will be...

– How is that – Russians? – I was completely confused.

– Well, not quite, but in your terms we were Russians. There were many more of us then, and everything was much more diverse – our land, language and life... It was a long time ago...

– But the book says that you were Irish and Scottish?! Or is it a lie again?

– Why a lie? No not at all. It's just that my father arrived from the "warm" Rus to become the ruler of the "*island*" camp, because it was seized with long and bloody wars and nobody could put an end to them, and he was a skilful warrior, and therefore they asked him to come. But I always missed "**my**" Rus... It was always too cold for me on those islands.

– May I ask you, how did you truly die? Of course, only if it does not hurt you to tell me. Different books describe it differently, and I would like to know very much how it really happened...

– I gave his body to the sea – it was their custom then... and went home... Only I never got there... I did not have enough forces. I wanted so much to see the sun, but could not... or may be Tristan did not "let me go"...

– But what about those books which say that you died together or that you killed yourself?

– I don't know, Light One. It was not me who wrote them... And people always like to tell tales, especially beautiful ones, and they embellish them in order that they touch hearts more deeply... I died a natural death after many years. It was forbidden to commit suicide.

– Probably, it was very sad for you to be so far away from home.

– Well, what can I say? At first it was even interesting while my mother was alive. And when she died, the whole world grew dark for me. I was too small then. I never loved my father. War was the only thing that made sense of his life. He appreciated me only because he could barter something on marrying me off. He was a warrior to the very marrow of his bones and died as such. I always longed for coming back home, even in my dreams, but... it never happened.

– Do you want us to take you to Tristan? We'll show you how to do it at first, and then you can do it on your own. It's easy. – I offered, hoping with all my heart that she would agree.

I wanted very much to see this legend "fully", if the occasion arose anyway, and although I felt a little ashamed, I decided not to listen to my strongly indignant "inner voice" this time and to try to convince Isolda somehow to go for a "walk" on the ground "floor" and find her Tristan.

I truly loved this "cold" northern legend. It conquered my heart from the very minute I began to read it. The happiness in it was so fleeting and the sadness so infinite! In fact, as Isolda said, they did add a lot of things there, because it really touched one's heart, but maybe everything happened exactly this way? Who could know it? In fact those who saw all of it died a long time ago. That is why I wanted to take advantage of this, certainly, the only opportunity to know what happened in reality...

Isolda sat quietly, thinking about something, as if not daring to take advantage of the only chance, which occurred so unexpectedly, and meet the one from whom fate had separated her for so long...

– I do not know... Maybe it's all unnecessary... Maybe it's better to leave the things as they are? – Isolda whispered confusedly. – It hurts too much... I fear to make a mistake...

I was incredibly surprised at her fear! It was the first time since the day I began to speak to the dead that someone refused to talk or meet those who once loved so strongly and tragically...

– Please, let's go! I know that later you will regret not going! We'll simply show you how to do it, and if you decide not to do it again, you will not go there anymore. But you **must have a choice**. A person **must** have the right to choose. Do you agree?

At last she nodded:

– Well, let's go, Light One. You are right. I must not hide behind the "back of the impossible". It's cowardice. And nobody likes cowards. And I never was one of them...

I showed my protective shield to her and to my greatest surprise, she made hers very easily. I was very happy, because it greatly facilitated our "journey".

– Well, are you ready? – Stella smiled merrily to cheer her up.

We dived into the shining haze and in a few short seconds "swam" along the silver path of the astral world...

– It's so beautiful here. – Isolda whispered. – But I saw him in another place which was not so light.

– It's here too, only a little bit lower. – I calmed her down. – You'll see, we'll find him very soon.

We "slipped" slightly deeper and I was ready to see the usual "terribly-oppressive" reality of the low astral plane, when, to my surprise, we saw nothing of the kind. We found ourselves in a place, pleasant enough, but with very sullen and sad scenery. Heavy and muddy waves washed the stony shore of the navy blue sea. Idly "pursuing" one another, they "bumped" against the shore and unwillingly and slowly returned, pulling the grey sand and shallow, black and brilliant pebbles with them. A majestic, enormous and dark-green mountain the top of which bashfully hid behind the grey swollen clouds was seen far off. The sky was heavy, but not intimidating, totally covered with grey clouds. Small bushes of some unknown plants grew scraggly on the shore. The landscape was sullen, but **"normal" enough**. In any case, it was reminiscent of those which one can see on Earth on a rainy, very gloomy day. It did not produce the "blatant horror" which we had seen in other places on this "floor".

A lonely man sat ashore of this "heavy" dark sea, deeply in thought. He seemed to be quite young and handsome enough, but was very sad and paid no attention to us.

– My Brave Falcon! *Tristanushka!* – Isolda whispered with a catch in her voice.

She had stiffened and was pale as death. Stella began to worry about her and touched her hand, but the young lady saw and heard nothing around her and only looked at her beloved Tristan without taking her eyes off him. It seemed that she wanted to absorb every detail of his face... every hair... the curve of his lips... the heat of his brown eyes... to save all this in her heart, worn out with suffering, forever and maybe even to carry it into her next "earthly" life.

– My light *Ldinushka*... My sun... Please, leave, don't torment me... – Tristan looked at her fearfully, unwilling to believe that it was a reality, and covered his face with his hands, thus shutting himself off from the painful "apparition", and repeated: – Leave me, my joy... Please, leave now...

Unable to look at this heart-breaking scene anymore, Stella and I decided to interfere.

– I beg your pardon, Tristan, but it's not a ghost, it's your Isolda! She is real. – Stella pronounced affectionately. – You'd better accept her, don't hurt her anymore...

– *Ldinushka*, is it really you? How many times I saw you here like this and how many times I lost you! You always disappeared, as soon as I tried to speak to you. – He cautiously stretched his hands toward her, as if being afraid to frighten her off, and she, forgetting everything in the world, threw herself at him and froze, as if she wanted to stay like this, merging with him into one, never to part.

I watched this meeting with increasing anxiety and thought of how we could help these two people who had suffered a lot and now were infinitely happy to be together the remaining time before their next embodiment...

– Oh, don't think about it now! They've just met! – Stella read my thoughts. – And then we'll work something out...

They stood, snuggling up to each other, being afraid that something could suddenly separate them or that this wonderful vision would disappear in a flash and everything would be the same as it had been before...

– The world is so empty without you, my Ldinushka, so dark!

Only now I noticed that Isolda looked different! Probably that bright "sunny" dress was intended **only for her** alone, just as the blooming field... And now she had met her Tristan... I must say that wearing her white dress embroidered with a red pattern, she looked absolutely stunning! She looked like a young bride.

– They neither danced in a wedding circle for us, my brave falcon, nor did they offer their felicitations with a nuptial toast. They gave me to a stranger, but I always was **your** wife. I was destined to be yours... even when I lost you. Now we'll be together forever, my joy, we'll never part from this day... – Isolda gently whispered.

Something treacherously pinched my eyes and I began to pick pebbles on the shore in order not to show that I was crying. But Stella was not the kind of person to be fooled that easily, and besides she also was on the verge of tears.

– How sad is all this, right? She does not live here... Doesn't she understand? Do you think she will stay with him? – The girl fidgeted. She wanted so much to know everything.

Dozens of questions for these two recklessly happy people, who saw nothing around, swarmed in my head. But I knew with absolute certainty that I could not ask anything, being unable to disturb their unexpected and so fragile happiness...

– What shall we do? – Anxious Stella asked. – Shall we leave her here?

– I think it's not we who should decide. This is **her** decision and **her** life. – Then I addressed Isolda. – I am awfully sorry, Isolda, but we would like to go. Can we help you in anything else?

– Oh, my dear girls! I totally forgot! Please, forgive me! – She clapped her hands, blushing. – Tristanushka it's they who we should thank! They brought me to you. I came before, as soon as I found you, but you could not hear me... That was so hard, now they have brought so much happiness!

Tristan suddenly bowed very low:

– I thank you, good maidens... for returning my happiness, my Ldinushka. I wish you joy and good, *celestial* ones... I am in your debt forever... You only have to say.

His eyes began to glitter suspiciously and I understood that a little bit more and he would cry. Therefore, in order for him keep his masculine pride (once hurt so severely!), I turned to Isolda and said as tenderly as possible:

– I understand that you want to stay?

She sadly nodded.

– Then, look attentively at this. I hope it'll help you to be here and make life a bit easier. – I showed her my "special" green protection, hoping that they would be more or less safe here with it. – And one more thing. You've, probably, understood that here you could create your "sunny world". I think he (I pointed at Tristan) would like it very much.

It was absolutely clear that Isolda did not even think about it and now she began to shine with happiness, obviously anticipating what a "staggering" surprise she would give to Tristan...

Everything around them began to sparkle with merry colours; the sea began to shine with rainbows, and we understood that everything would be all right with them and "slid" back into our beloved mental world to discuss our possible future trips...

30. Stella-6. Mental world

As well as other "interesting" things in my life, my fascinating walks to different levels of Earth gradually became almost constant and quickly occupied the shelf of "ordinary phenomena" in my mental "archive". Sometimes I went there alone which disappointed my little friend, but Stella never showed it, and if she felt that I preferred to be alone, she would never thrust her presence on me. Certainly, it made me feel even more guilty toward her and I went for a walk with her after my

little "personal" adventures, which doubled the loads on my physical body which was not quite accustomed to them yet, and I came back home exhausted, like a ripe lemon, squeezed out to the last drop... But as our "walks" became longer, my exhausted physical body gradually got used to them; I got tired less and the time I needed to renew my physical forces became notably shorter. These awesome walks quickly outshone everything else and my everyday life began to seem surprisingly dull and boring...

Of course I continued to live the **normal** life of a **normal** child: I went to school, participated in all the events which were organized there, went to the cinema with local fellows and tried to look as **normal** as possible in order to attract as little unnecessary attention to my "unusual" abilities as possible.

I genuinely liked some of my school subjects and there were some which I did not, but for the moment they all came easy to me and my homework did not require serious effort.

I adored astronomy which, unfortunately, we were not taught yet. But there were a lot of amazingly illustrated books on astronomy at home which my dad adored too, and I could read about distant stars, enigmatic fogs and unknown planets for hours, dreaming of seeing all these captivating wonders **with my own eyes** some time, even for an instant... Probably it was already then that I felt in my "gut" that this world was much closer for me than any other, even the most beautiful, country on our Earth... But my "star" adventures were still in the very distant future (I did not even think about them being possible!) and for the time being I was fully satisfied with my "promenading" on different "floors" of our planet, being with my friend Stella or alone.

To my huge satisfaction I got total and unconditional support in that from my grandmother. So, on going for a "walk", I did not need to hide which made my trips much pleasanter. The point is that in order to "walk" on the "floors", my spirit had to go out of my body, and if somebody had come to my room in this moment, he would have found a quite peculiar picture there: I would sit with my eyes open, as if being in a totally normal state, but showed no reaction if somebody addressed me, answered no questions and looked totally "frozen". Therefore my grandmother's help was simply indispensable then. I remember that one day my neighbour and friend Romas found me in this state... When I awakened, I saw his face seized with fear and two round blue eyes, enormous like saucers... Romas vigorously shook my shoulders and called me by my name, until I opened my eyes.

– Are you dead or something?! Or is it your next "experiment"? – My friend hissed in a low voice; his teeth chattering in fear.

Although it was difficult to surprise him with anything after years of our friendship, it was quite obvious that the picture he saw then "outdid" the majority of my most impressive "experiments" he had witnessed earlier. It was precisely Romas who told me how intimidating this particular "presence" looked from the outside.

I tried to calm him down and explain somehow what was that "frightful" thing that had just happened to me, but no matter how strongly I tried to calm him, I was almost one hundred-per-cent sure that the poor thing would have the impression of what he had seen imprinted in his brain for years.

After this funny (for me) "incident", I always tried to carry out my explorations so that nobody would take me by surprise and be so shamelessly punch-drunk or frightened... Therefore I very much needed my grandmother's help. She always knew when I went for a "walk" and watched that nobody disturbed me. There was another reason why I did not like being "dragged" out of my "journeys" by force. When I had to come back into my physical world briskly, I always felt a very strong internal strike in the whole of my body at the moment of "rapid return" and it was very painful. Therefore the **sharp return of the spirit back into the physical body** was a very unpleasant experience for me and absolutely undesirable.

So, one day Stella and I went for a walk through the "floors", and on finding nothing to do without "exposing us to a greater danger", we decided to investigate "deeper" and more "seriously"

the Mental "floor" which had already become almost home for her...

Stella's *own* colourful world disappeared and we "hung" in the shining air powdered with star flashes. Unlike the ordinary "earthly" one, it was saturated and "dense" and constantly changed, as if it was filled with millions of tiny snowflakes which sparkled just like on a frosty sunny day on Earth... We readily stepped into the silver-blue glimmering "emptiness" and a bright and merry "path" appeared under our feet, which was made of glimmering, fluffy silver clouds, and it changed all the time.

It appeared and disappeared of its own volition, as if offering a friendly invitation to walk on it. I stepped onto the shining "cloud" and took several careful steps... I felt neither motion, nor the least effort to do it. There was only a feeling of a very easy skidding in a quiet, enveloping and blazing silver emptiness... My footsteps immediately melted, scattering into thousands of multicoloured shining specks of dust... and new ones appeared, as I stepped on the captivating "local land" which totally charmed me....

Suddenly a strange transparent Varingian-like boat emerged from this deep silence. It shimmered with silvery sparks, and a very beautiful young lady was in it. Her long golden hair now softly blew back, as if touched by the waft of a breeze, now was still again, enigmatically sparkling with heavy golden speckles. It was clear that the lady headed straight toward us; her fairy-tale boat effortlessly drifted on "waves" which we did not see, leaving very long streaming tails which flashed with silver sparks... Her white light dress looked like a glimmering tunic and like her hair it was first blown about, then fluidly fell into soft folds making her look like an admirable Greek goddess.

– She sails here all the time and looks for someone. – Stella whispered.

– Do you know her? Who does she look for? – I did not understand.

– I don't know, but I saw her often.

– Well, let's ask her – I bravely offered, having come to feel at home on the "floors".

The lady sailed closer. She emitted sadness, grandeur and warmth.

– I am Atenais. – She pronounced mentally and very softly. – Who are you, divine creatures?

The "divine creatures" became slightly confused, not knowing how they should respond to such a greeting...

– We simply went for a walk. – Smiling, Stella said. – We won't bother you.

– Who do you look for? – Atenais asked.

– Nobody. – Stella was surprised. – Why do you think we must look for somebody?

– It should not be otherwise. You are now where **everybody looks for themselves**. I did too...

– She smiled sadly. – But it was such a long time ago!

– How long? – I could not restrain myself.

– Oh, very long! In fact there is no time here, how can I know then? All I remember is it was a long time ago.

Atenais was very beautiful and somewhat extraordinarily sad. She looked like a proud white swan, when he sings his last song falling from the sky and giving his soul – she was the same way majestic and tragic...

When she looked at us with her sparkling green eyes, she seemed older than eternity. There was so much wisdom and unspoken sorrow in them that I felt tingles down my spine...

– Can we help you in something? – I asked, feeling a bit shy to ask her such a question.

– No, dear child, it's my work... My quest... But I believe it'll be over some day... and I could go away. Now, tell me, joyful ones, where would you like to go?

I shrugged my shoulders:

– We did not choose. We simply went for a walk. But we'll be happy, if you could offer us something.

Atenais nodded:

– I guard this Mid-world and can allow you there. – And added, affectionately looking at Stella. – And you, child, I shall help to **find yourself**...

The lady softly smiled and waved with her hand. Her unusual dress swayed and her hand looked like a white-silver, soft and fluffy wing... then another, blindingly gold and almost dense road stretched out, scattering golden specks of light. It was light and sunny and ran straight to an open golden door which "blazed" in the distance...

– Well, shall we go? – I asked Stella, knowing her answer beforehand.

– Wow, look, somebody is there... – The girl pointed to the door with her finger.

We easily slipped inside and... saw a second Stella, like in a mirror! Yes, yes, it was exactly Stella! Exactly like the one which stood next to me, being quite confused...

– But, that's me?! – The slightly punch-drunk girl whispered, staring hard at her "other self". – It's me, really... How can that be?

I could not answer her seemingly simple question, because I was taken aback too, finding no explanation for this "absurd" phenomenon...

Stella cautiously stretched her hand to her twin and touched her "other" little fingers extended to her. I wanted to shout that it could be dangerous, but, on seeing her satisfied smile, said nothing, deciding to wait and see what would happen further, however, at the same time was on my guard in case something suddenly went wrong.

– It's **me** too... – The girl whispered in delight. – Wow, this is marvellous! It's truly me...

Her thin fingers began to shine brightly and the "second" Stella began to melt slowly and fluidly flow into the "real" Stella, who stood near me, through her fingers. Her body began to be denser, but not the way a physical body would become denser. It rather acquired a denser shine, being filled with some unearthly light.

Suddenly I felt somebody's presence behind my back. It was our acquaintance Atenais.

– Forgive me, lucid child, but you won't come to fetch your "imprint" soon... You'll have to wait a long, long time. – She looked into my eyes very attentively. – And probably, won't come for it at all...

– How is that, "I won't come"?! – I was frightened. – If everybody comes, I will come too!

– I don't know. For some reason your fate is closed to me. I cannot tell you anything, sorry...

I was very disappointed, but trying with all my might and main not to show that to Atenais, I asked as calmly as I could:

– And what is an "imprint"?

– Oh, everybody comes back to it when they die. When your soul ends its "suffering" in the next earthly body, in the moment it says goodbye to it, the soul flies to its real Home and it is as if it "heralds" its return... It is then it leaves this "imprint". But afterwards, it must come back again to the "dense" earth in order to say goodbye to **who it once has been**... and in a year, on saying the "last farewell", leave it for good... And then, this free soul comes here to meet the part it has left earlier and find rest, expecting a new trip to the "old world".

*I did not understand then what Atenais was talking about, it simply sounded very beautiful... And only today, after so many, many years, (when my "hungry" soul has absorbed the knowledge of my amazing husband Nicolai a long time ago) "looking" through my amusing past for this book, I remembered Atenais with a smile and certainly, understood that what she called an "imprint" was just a **power splash** which happens to everybody in the moment of our death and reaches exactly **that level** which corresponds to the **evolutional development of a dead person**. That which Atenais called the "**farewell**" with "**who it once has been**" was nothing else but the **final separation of all "bodies" of the spirit from the dead physical body**, so that it can **go away once and for all** and meet its failing particle, the **level of development** which it could not "reach" for one or another*

reason, when living on Earth. All this happens **exactly in a year** after death. All this I understand now, but then I had to be content with **my own child's understanding of what happened to me** and my own guesses, which sometimes were erroneous and sometimes correct...

– Do the spirits which live on other "floors" have "imprints"? – The curious Stella inquired.

– Yes, they certainly have, but the imprints are different. – Atenais answered calmly. – Besides, not on all "floors" are they pleasant like here... especially on one...

– I know! I know! It's probably the "lower" one! We should go there to look! It must be so interesting! – Stella contentedly twittered again.

The swiftness and easiness with which she forgot everything that a minute ago scared or surprised her and the readiness to get to the new and unknown was awesome.

– Forgive me, young maidens. It's time for me to leave. May your happiness be eternal. – Atenais pronounced in solemn voice.

With a flowing wave of her "winged" hand, again, as if pointing the way, the familiar shining gold path ran under our feet and the marvelous woman-bird placidly floated in the air in her fairy-tale boat, ready to meet and direct new travelers which "looked for themselves", patiently fulfilling her quest, the essence of which we did not understand...

– Well, where shall we go, "young maiden"? – I asked my little friend, smiling.

– Why did she call us that? – Stella asked thoughtfully. – Do you think they spoke like that where she once lived?

– I don't know. Probably it was very long time ago, but she bears it in mind for some reason.

– Well, that's all! Let's go on! – Suddenly exclaimed the little one, as if getting back to reality.

This time we did not go along the path so obligingly offered to us and decided to choose "our way", exploring the world using just our forces which, as it appeared, were not so insufficient. We moved toward the numerous transparent and horizontal "tunnels" which emitted the golden shine, along which spirits constantly glided here and there.

– Is it something like an earthly train? – I asked, laughing at the amusing comparison.

– No, it's not that simple. – Stella answered. – I was once in it. It's something like a "train of time", if you could call it that.

– But there is no time here. – I was surprised.

– Correct, but they are different habitats of the spirits: those which died thousands of years ago, and those that just got here. Gran showed them to me. It was there where I found Harold... Do you want to see it?

Of course, I wanted to see it! It seemed that nothing in the world could stop me! These fascinating "steps into the unknown" agitated my imagination, which had already been too vivid, and prevented me from living a tranquil life, until I, being on my last legs but absolutely happy about what I had seen, went back into my "forgotten" physical body and fell asleep, trying to rest for at least an hour to charge my seriously flat vital "batteries"...

So, we continued our little trip and now "swam" in the soft "tunnel", which got to our every cell and lulled our hearts; with enormous pleasure we observed blindingly colourful (like Stella's one) and very different "worlds" – the results of somebody's creation – which marvellously flew through each other, now becoming dense and then disappearing, leaving the tails of the rainbows shining with astonishing colours.

Unexpectedly this tenderest beauty was scattered into shining pieces and we saw a world fulgent in its splendour, washed by star dew and grandiose in its beauty. The astonishing sight took our breath away...

– Wow! Just look at this beauty! Goodness gracious! – The girl breathed out.

The view was so delightful that I had a lump in my throat and instead of saying something, I

suddenly wanted to cry...

– Who lives here, I wonder? – Stella tugged at my hand. – What do you think, who lives here?

I had no idea who the happy dwellers in this kind of world might be, but I suddenly wanted to know it very much.

– Let's go! – I said resolutely and dragged Stella along behind me.

Awesome scenery opened before our eyes. It was very much like the earthly one and at the same time it sharply differed. It seemed that we saw a real emerald-green "**earthly**" field covered by succulent, very high and silky grass, but at the same time I understood that it was **not Earth** but something very much like it, yet too ideal and unreal. Extraordinary "poppies" reddened this too beautiful field, untouched by human feet, like red drops of blood scattered all over the valley as far as the eye can see. Their enormous bright cups heavily swayed unable to sustain the weight of the gigantic diamond butterflies which shimmered in a chaos of unusual colours... The strange violet sky blazed with a haze of golden clouds, illuminated from time to time by the bright rays of the **blue** sun.

It was a sensationally beautiful world created by somebody's impetuous fantasy. It dazzled us with millions of unknown colours... A human being walked in the middle of this world... It was a tiny fragile girl, who looked like Stella from afar. We were literally frozen, being afraid to accidentally frighten her off, but the girl paid no attention to us and calmly walked in the green field, being almost fully submerged in the dense grass. The transparent violet fog curled over her fluffy hair, glimmering with stars and creating a beautiful halo. Her long, brilliant and violet hair "flashed" with gold while the light breeze affectionately played with it and from time to time kissed her tender pale cheeks. The little one seemed very unusual and absolutely calm...

– Shall we talk to her? – Stella asked in a whisper.

At that moment the girl almost came alongside and, as if awakening from some distant dream, lifted her strange, very large and slanting... violet eyes at us with surprise. She was exquisitely beautiful. Her beauty was strange, wild and unearthly and she looked very lonely...

– Hello, girl! Why are you so sad? Do you need any help? – Stella asked carefully.

The little one shook her head:

– No, it's you who need help. – And she continued to examine us attentively with her strange slanting eyes.

– We? – Stella was surprised. – What kind of help do we need?

The girl opened her diminutive palms and two amazingly bright violet crystals sparkled on them.

– Here! – She unexpectedly touched our foreheads with her finger-tips, laughed and the crystals disappeared.

It looked very like the "green crystal" which my "star" friends once gave me, but then it was **them**. And this was just a tiny girl who did not look very like us, people...

– There, now everything is all right! – She said with satisfaction and went ahead, no longer paying attention to us...

We followed her with our eyes, stunned and unable to understand anything, and continued to stand rooted to the ground, digesting what had just happened. As usual Stella came to herself first and shouted:

– Girl, please, stop! What is it? What shall we do with it?! Wait, please!!!

But the little human being only waved with her fragile palm without turning around and calmly continued on her way, very soon fully disappearing in the sea of dense green and unearthly grass... and only the light cloud of transparent violet fog flew over it...

– What was that? – Stella murmured to herself.

I did not feel anything bad yet and, on calming down after receiving the unexpected "gift",

said:

– Let's not think about it for a while, and later we'll see...

No sooner said than done. The merry green field disappeared somewhere, and a quite uninhabited, coldly-icy desert appeared instead, where a man sat on the only stone... He was obviously upset about something, but at the same time looked very warm and friendly. Long grey wavy hair fell on his shoulders, framing his face, emaciated by the years, with its silvery halo. It seemed that he did not see where he was or feel on what he sat, and paid no attention whatsoever to the surrounding reality...

– Hello, sad man! – Stella greeted him quietly, approaching near enough to start the conversation.

The man lifted his eyes. They were blue and pure like the earthly sky.

– What do you want, little ones? What have you lost here? – The "hermit" asked emotionlessly.

– You are alone and why is nobody with you? – Stella asked sympathetically. – And this place is so terrible...

It was clear that the man did not want to talk, but Stella's warm voice left him no choice – he had to answer...

– I have needed nobody for many, many years. There is no sense in that. – His sad voice affectionately purred.

– Then what do you do here alone? – The girl continued asking and I began to be afraid that we would seem too obtrusive and he would simply ask us to leave him alone.

But Stella had a real talent for getting anybody to talk, even the most taciturn man... Therefore, she was not going to surrender and, on funnily tilting her red head to one side, she continued:

– Why don't you need anybody? Can that really be?

– I'll say, little one... – The man heavily sighed. – I'll say... I lived the whole of my life in vain. Who do you think I need now?

I gradually began to understand something and, gathering up my courage, carefully asked:

– Had you got the whole picture of everything when you came here?

The man jerked up his head in surprise and, on fixing his gaze, which suddenly became piercing, upon me, sharply asked:

– What do you know about it, little one? What **can** you know about it? – He stooped even more, as if the weight that rested on his shoulders became impossibly heavy. – All my life I bumped against the incomprehensible, looked for an answer... and did not find it. And when I came here, everything appeared to be so simple! I lived my whole live in vain...

– But this is great, if you already know everything now you can look for something new! This place is full of incomprehensible things! – The happy Stella "calmed down" the stranger. – What is your name, sad man?

– It's Fabius, dear. Do you know the girl who gave you this crystal?

Stella and I jumped from surprise and seized poor Fabius in a "death grip"...

– Please, please, tell us, who she is!!! – Stella squeaked pleadingly. – We have to know it! Absolutely! Such a thing happened to us!!! Such an unusual thing! And now we absolutely don't know what to do with it... – The words flew from her mouth with machine-gun speed and it was impossible to stop her even for a minute until she stopped herself, being out of breath.

– She is not from here. – The man said quietly. – She is from far away...

It absolutely and fully confirmed my crazy guess which appeared very swiftly in my mind and then disappeared at once, as if afraid to exist...

– What do you mean – from far away? – The girl did not understand. – It’s impossible to go further, isn’t it? We don’t go further, right?

Stella’s eyes opened widely and a spark of understanding gradually began to kindle in them...

– Oh, boy! Has she flown here or something?! How did she do that?! And how is it possible that she is absolutely alone? Oh, my! She *is* alone! But how can we find her now?!

The thoughts in Stella’s confused brain mixed up and boiled, quickly changing each other. And I stood, being absolutely astounded, and could not believe it – **that, which I had hoped in my heart to happen for so long a time, finally happened!** And when at last I found this marvellous wonder, I was unable to hold it...

– Don’t be so upset. – Fabius calmly said. – They have always been here... and always are. One just has to be able to see them...

– How is that?! – We gasped and goggled at him like two stunned eagle-owls. – What do you mean – they are always here?!

– Well, yes. – The hermit answered calmly. – Her name is Vaya. It’s a pity but she will not come for a second time. She never appears twice... What a shame! It was a real delight to talk to her.

– Ah! So, you talked then! – I asked feeling absolutely crushed.

– If you are lucky enough to see her again, little one, please, ask her to come back to me...

I nodded, being unable to pronounce a word. I wanted to sob violently! I was given such an unbelievable and unique chance and lost it! And now I could do nothing to get it back. Suddenly a thought flashed through my mind!

– Wait a moment! What about the crystal? She gave us her crystal! Will not she really come back for it?

– I don’t know, dear... I cannot tell.

– See! – Stella joyfully exclaimed. – And you said that you knew everything! Why be sad then? I told you – there are a lot of incomprehensible things here! So, now you have something to think about!

She jumped with joy and I felt she had the same thought spinning busily in her head as I had in mine...

– So, you really don’t know how we can find her? Do you know **somebody** who does know?

Fabius shook his head negatively. Stella wilted.

– Well, shall we go? – I slightly pushed her, trying to show that it was time.

I was glad and at the same time very sad. For a short instant I saw a real **star creature** and was unable to retain it... I could not even talk to her. Her surprising violet crystal tenderly fluttered and pricked in my chest and I had no idea what to do with it or how to open it. The tiny wonderful girl with strange violet eyes gave us a wonderful dream and went away with a smile, leaving part of her world and the faith that **there was life** very far away, over millions of light years, and **maybe one day I would see it too...**

– Where do you think she is? – Stella asked in a whisper.

Apparently, the amazing "star" girl greatly impressed her and was engraved upon her heart, as well as on mine, forever. I was almost sure that Stella cherished some hope of finding her some time.

– Do you want me to show you something? – My faithful friend changed the subject on seeing my unhappy face.

And she "took" us outside the last "floor"! It very strongly reminded me of the night, when my star friends came for the last time – they came to say goodbye and took me outside Earth, showing me something that I carefully kept in my memory but could not understand yet.

And now we soared in the nowhere – in the strange, real and terrifying emptiness which

differed so much from the warm and protected emptiness of the "floors". The enormous and boundless, breathing with eternity and a little bit intimidating Space met us with open arms, inviting us to submerge in the still unknown star world which had attracted me for my whole life. Stella shivered and went pale. It was obvious that the load was too huge for her.

– How did it occur to you? – I was absolutely delighted with what I saw around.

– Oh, it happened accidentally. – The girl gave a forced smile. – One day I was very excited and probably it was my too strongly raging emotions that took me straight there. But Gran said that I must not do that, it was still too early for me. But I think that *you* can do that. Will you tell me what you find there? Promise?

I wanted to give a huge kiss to this kind girl for her open little heart who was ready to share everything, holding nothing back, to make people feel good.

We felt very tired and, one way or another, I had to go back home, because I did not know the limit of my abilities yet and preferred to return until the urge to travel in space got truly bad.

That evening I had a very high temperature. My grandmother went about in circles, obviously feeling something, and I decided that it was time to tell her everything.

My chest pulsed strangely and I felt as if someone was trying to "explain" something to me from far away, but I understood almost nothing because of the high temperature; my mother was in a panic and decided to call an ambulance to "protect" me from this incomprehensible rise. Soon I began to rave and, on frightening everybody to death... I suddenly stopped "burning". My temperature dropped the same incomprehensible way as it rose. Watchful expectation hung in the house; because nobody understood what had, again, happened to me. My upset mother accused my grandmother of not looking after me well, and as usual my grandmother was quiet, taking all the blame upon herself.

The next morning I was completely all right and my relatives calmed down for the moment. Only my grandmother continued to watch me attentively, as if she expected something, which, certainly, did not keep her waiting long...

31. Vaya – other worlds

Nothing special happened for several days after my visiting the higher "floors", except for a very unusual and brief rise in my temperature. I felt perfectly well, but thoughts about the girl with violet eyes persistently agitated my wound-up brain which clutched at any, even the most absurd idea, as to *where* and *how* I could find her again. Scores of times I returned to the mental world of Earth trying to find Vaya's world, but it seemed we had lost it forever. My efforts were in vain. The girl had disappeared and I had absolutely no idea where to find her...

A week passed. The first heavy frost came. I was still unaccustomed to it and the cold air took my breath away every time I went out for a walk and the bright dazzling winter sun made my eyes water. The first snow gently covered the naked branches of the trees with white fluffy flakes. Every morning Father Frost merrily painted fabulous patterns on the windows, while walking playfully on the gleaming hard blue puddles. Slowly winter took possession of the World...

I was at home leaning against the warm stove (our house was still heated by stoves then) and enjoying reading the next new book, when I suddenly felt a pricking in my chest, which had already become an habitual thing, in the place where the violet crystal was. I lifted my head. Enormous, slanting, violet eyes looked straight at me. She calmly stood in the middle of the room, the same as before, surprisingly fragile and rare, and stretched out her tiny palm in which was a wonderful red flower. In a panic my first thought was to close the door as quickly as possible so that nobody could enter!

– Don't do that. All the same, nobody sees me but you. – The girl said gently.

Her thoughts were verbalised in my brain in a very odd way, as though someone translated a *stranger's* speech quite incorrectly. Nevertheless, I understood her perfectly.

– You looked for me. Why? – Vaya looked intently into my eyes.

Her look was also very unusual, as if, simultaneously with her gaze, she passed me images which I never saw and the meaning of which I regrettably still did not understand.

– And now? – The "star" girl asked, smiling at me.

Something "flashed" in my head and I saw a strange but stunningly beautiful world, probably, the one she had once lived in. This world was a trifle like the one we had seen (which she had created for herself on that "floor") but, nevertheless, it differed in the way a picture differs from the reality depicted on it.

A beautiful, bright, violet-blue sun merrily rose over the very lush emerald-green earth illuminating everything with an unusual bluish light. It was a *strange* and obviously *alien* morning. All the greenery, which exuberantly grew there, sparkled with golden-violet diamonds of "local" morning dew and, happily washing itself in it, prepared to meet the wonderful new day. Everything glowed with incredibly rich colours, too bright for our eyes accustomed as they were to everything "earthly." Far off, gentle rose-hued, almost "dense" curly clouds which looked like beautiful pink pillows curled in the sky covered with a golden haze. Suddenly the sky flared with gold; I turned around and stiffened with astonishment – an incredibly enormous, golden-pink **second** sun rose in kingly fashion from the other side! It was much bigger than the first one and seemed to be even bigger than the planet itself.

But for some reason its rays, unlike those of the first one, shone more softly and tenderly resembling a warm "fluffy" embrace. It seemed that this enormous gentle luminary was tired of its everyday troubles, but as a matter of habit still gave its last drops of heat to this incredibly beautiful planet. It was already "going to rest" and readily gave way to a young, "biting" sun which had just begun its celestial journey and shone fervently and merrily without being afraid to spill its young heat, generously floodlighting all around.

Astonished, I looked around and noticed a whimsical phenomenon – the plants had a **second** shadow, which for some reason very sharply contrasted with the lit part, as if the chiaroscuro was painted with bright, flashy colours, vehemently opposed to each other. In the dark part the air brightly twinkled with miniature stars which flashed at the least motion. It was extraordinarily beautiful and extremely interesting. The awoken magic world sounded with thousands of unknown voices, as if informing the whole Universe about its happy awakening. I felt very distinctly, almost physically, how incredibly pure the air was there! It exhaled an exquisite fragrance filled with surprisingly pleasant, elusive, unknown scents, reminiscent of roses, as if a thousand different sorts were gathered together. The enormous bright "poppies", which I had already seen, coloured everywhere, wherever one looked, red. It was only now I realized that Vaya had brought me the same kind of flower! I stretched out my hand and the flower fluidly flowed into my palm from her fragile palm and suddenly something strongly "clicked" in my chest. Surprised I saw that millions of striking unearthly colours flashed and an amazing crystal opened up in my chest and began to sparkle. It pulsed and changed all the time, as if showing newer and newer facets of its beauty. I stood stock-still with surprise, fully hypnotized by the show, and could not take my eyes off the continuously transforming beauty.

– There. – Vaya pronounced with satisfaction in her voice. – Now you can look at it whenever you want!

– Why is the crystal in my **chest**, when you put it in my **forehead**? – At last I dared to ask the question which had tormented me for several days. The girl was very surprised and, on thinking a little, answered:

– I don't know why you ask, you do know the answer. But if you want to hear it from me, all right: I simply gave it to you through your brain but it should be open where it belongs, in its **real place**.

– How do I know all that? – I was surprised.

The violet eyes studied me very attentively for a few seconds, and then an unexpected answer

followed:

– I thought so, you still sleep... But I cannot awaken you; others will do it and that will not happen yet.

– When will this happen and who will these others be?

– Your friends, but you don't know them right now.

– How will I know that they are friends and that they are exactly the right persons? – Puzzled, I asked.

– You will recall. – Vaya smiled.

– Shall I? How can I recall that which does not exist yet? – Dumbfounded, I stared at her.

– It does, only not here.

She had a very warm smile which made her very attractive. It seemed as if the May sun peeped out from behind a cloud and illuminated everything around.

– Are you completely alone here, on Earth? – I still could not believe that.

– Certainly not, there are a lot of us, only we are all different. We have lived here for a very long time, if you wanted to ask that.

– What do you do here? And why did you come? – I could not stop asking.

– We help when it is necessary. I don't remember where we came from – I've never been there. I just saw, like you do now... This is my home.

Suddenly the girl became very sad. I wanted to help her somehow, but, to my huge regret, I was unable to do that then...

– You want to go home very much, don't you? – I asked carefully.

Vaya nodded. Her fragile frame suddenly flared... and I was alone – the "star" girl had disappeared. It was very unfair! She could not simply go away!!! That should not happen! The real offence of a child, whose favourite toy was suddenly taken away, raged within me. But Vaya was not a toy and, frankly speaking, I should be grateful to her that she came to visit me at all. Well, the "emotional storm" destroyed the last grains of logic in my "suffering" heart then and total confusion reigned in my head. Therefore, there was no way to switch on my "logical thinking" and I was "broken-hearted" because of the frightful loss and "dived" deeply into an ocean of "black despair" thinking that my "star" guest would never come back to me. I wanted to ask her about so many things! But she disappeared so unexpectedly. Suddenly I felt shame. If all who felt the necessity could ask her as many questions as I wanted to, then she just would not have time to live! This idea somehow calmed me down. I should simply accept all the wonderful things she had shown me (even if I still did not understand them all) with gratitude and not moan and groan about not being provided with "everything" instead of stirring my becoming lazy brain and finding answers to the questions which had so tormented me. I remembered Stella's grandmother and thought that she had been absolutely right speaking about **the harm of receiving of something for free**, because the worst thing that ever exists is a person **accustomed only to taking**. Moreover, no matter how much he takes, he can **never feel the joy and satisfaction of achieving and creating anything personally**.

I sat alone for a long time slowly "digesting" the information, thinking with gratitude about the wonderful "star" girl with the violet eyes. I smiled knowing that now I would not stop and rest until I knew what those friends whom I did not know yet were, and from what sleep they would awaken me. Then, I could not imagine that no matter how hard I tried and did my best, it would happen over many, many years and, yes, my "friends" would **wake** me... But that would be an absolutely different thing from what I could surmise then.

But then everything seemed to me possible and I, burning with fervent ardour and having "iron" persistence, decided to try.

No matter how much I wanted to listen to the reasonable voice of logic, my disobedient brain

believed that in spite of the fact that Vaya obviously **knew** exactly what she was talking about, I would gain my ends and find those people (or creatures) who should help me to be rid of some incomprehensible "bear hibernation" long before it was promised to me. The first thing I decided to do was to try going beyond the limits of the Earth and see who would come to me there. Certainly, this was the most foolish thing one could think of, but as I strongly believed that I could achieve something anyway, I had to "dive" into new, possibly very dangerous, "experiments".

My dear Stella almost stopped "going for a walk" then and for some incomprehensible reason had "a splenetic fit" in her colourful world, not wishing to open to me the real reason for her sadness. But this time I succeeded in persuading her to go with me by arousing her interest in the danger of the adventure and confessing that I was slightly afraid of realizing that kind of "far-reaching" experiment.

I warned my grandmother that I was going to try something "very serious". She calmly nodded and wished me luck (that was it!). Certainly, her reaction roused a storm of resentment in me but I decided not to show her that I had taken offence and, pouting like a Christmas turkey, I swore to myself that today something would happen, no matter what it cost me! Well, something did happen... but not quite that which I had expected.

Stella waited for me, ready for the "boldest feats" and, gathering our nerve, we rushed beyond "the limit".

This time I could do it much more easily; maybe because this was not the first time that I did that, or because the violet crystal was "open." I was rushed out of the bounds of the mental level of Earth like a shot from a gun and getting there, I understood that I had slightly overdone it. Stella stayed at the "border" (upon which we had agreed beforehand) to secure me, if something went wrong. But it went wrong from the very beginning and to my huge regret Stella was unable to reach me where I was now.

The black, ominous space around me breathed with the cold of night. I had been dreaming about it for so long, but now it frightened me with its wild, peculiar calmness. I was absolutely alone without my "star" friends' reliable protection and my loyal friend Stella's warm support. Despite the fact that it was not the first time I had seen all this, I suddenly felt little and alone in this unknown world of distant stars, which did not seem friendly and well-known here, like they did if one observed them from the surface of the Earth. Bit by bit, a mean panic treacherously began to seize me, cowardly, squeaking with barefaced horror. But I was a very stubborn little being and decided that there is no use in fearing and lamenting and began to look closely at the place I was cast into.

I hung in the black, almost tangible, **emptiness**. There was nothing there but some occasional "falling stars" which flashed for fractions of a second, dazzling me with their tails. The so homely and well-known Earth twinkled with blue luminescence. It seemed to be very near, a stone's throw, but to my great regret it was an illusion. In reality it was very, very far away. Suddenly I experienced a wild desire to return!!! I did not want to "heroically overcome" unknown obstacles anymore. I just longed to come back home where everything was so familiar (my grandmothers' warm pies and my favourite books!), instead of hanging frozen in a black, cold "no man's land" not knowing how to get away from all this, preferably without any "horrific and irreparable" consequences.

I tried to imagine the only thing which came into my head – the violet-eyed girl, Vaya. It did not work for some reason; she failed to appear. Then it was my intention to open the crystal she had given to me. Immediately everything around me began to sparkle, shine and swirl in a frenzied whirlpool of the never-seen matters, I felt as if an enormous vacuum cleaner had sharply drawn me into somewhere, and...the already well-known, enigmatic and wonderful world, Vaya's world, unfolded its beauty before me. As I understood later on (too late, I would say), my *open* violet crystal was the key to this world. I did not know how far this unknown world was. Was it **real** this time? I did not know at all how I would get back home, and there was nobody who I could ask.

I saw a marvelous emerald valley floodlit with very bright, golden-violet light. The sparkling

golden clouds slowly drifted in a *strange* pink sky, almost covering one of the two suns. Far away the very high, pointed, *odd-looking* mountains shone with a heavy gold hue. Right near my feet a merry little brook murmured (almost like on Earth), but the water was not in the least earthly – it was "thick" and violet, and non-transparent. I carefully dipped my hand in it. The startling feeling was most unexpected, as if I touched a soft teddy bear... warm and pleasant, but not the fresh and moist feeling to which we are accustomed on Earth. I even felt doubts as to whether it **was** that which we call "water."

The "plush" brook escaped into a green tunnel which was formed by interlaced "fluffy" and transparent, silvery-green "lianas" thousands of which hung over the violet "water." They "knitted" a whimsical pattern which was decorated by tiny "stars" of white, aromatic, amazing flowers.

Yes, this world was extraordinarily beautiful. But I would give everything up in order to find myself in **my earthly** world, probably not so beautiful, but so dear and well-known! It was the first time that I felt terribly scared and was not ashamed of honestly confessing that to myself. I was absolutely alone and there was nobody who would give me any friendly advice on what to do next. Therefore, having no other choice and gathering my "trembling" will, I decided to **move anywhere** and not to just mark time and wait for something terrible (despite such beauty!) to happen.

– How did you get here? – I heard a tender voice in my exhausted with fear brain.

I turned around jerkily... and saw the wonderful violet eyes. Vaya stood behind me.

– Oh, dear! Is it really you?! – I almost squealed, being seized with unexpected happiness.

– I saw that you had opened the crystal and came to help. – The girl answered with all the calmness in the world. However, her large eyes again scrutinized my frightened face and deep, "adult" understanding glimmered in them.

– You have to trust me. – The "star" girl whispered.

I longed to say "**Of course, I trust you!**" and that it just was my silly nature which all my life forced me to "dash against rocks" and comprehend the world through those bumps. But Vaya perfectly understood everything and, smiling her amazing smile, softly said:

– Do you want me to show my world, since you are here?

I joyfully nodded, cheered up and was again ready to perform any "feat." I was **not alone** anymore, which was enough for all bad things to be instantly forgotten and the world become enthralling and wonderful again.

– But you said you had never been here? – I took heart to ask.

– I am not here now. – The girl answered. – My spirit is with you, but my body has never lived here. I have never known my real home... – The enormous violet eyes were filled with deep, non-child sadness.

– May I ask you, how old you are? Certainly, if you don't want to answer – then please don't. – I said, being slightly embarrassed.

– According to earthly time measuring, I am, probably, about two million years old. – The "girl" answered thoughtfully. I became weak in the knees. It just cannot be! Surely no creature is able to live for so long! Or maybe is able, depending on *what kind of a creature* it is?

– Why do you look so young then? Only children look this way in our world. But you know that, certainly.

– I simply remember myself the way I look and I do feel that this is **correct**, which means that it must be so. We live very long and, probably, I am young indeed...

My head began to swim from all this news. But Vaya was surprisingly calm, like she always was which gave me the strength to continue asking.

– And who do you call **adult** then, if they exist, certainly?

– They do, of course! – The girl laughed. – Do you want to meet one?

I could only nod, because I suddenly had a huge lump in my throat and completely lost my

colloquial skills. I perfectly understood that *right now I would see a real "star" creature!* And despite the fact that, as far as I could remember, I had been awaiting this moment all my conscious life, my courage for some reason, swiftly sank.

Vaya waved and the scenery changed. The gold mountains and the brook turned into a marvellous, *moving*, transparent "city" (well, it looked like a city). A man of very impressive appearance slowly came toward us along the wide, shining with silver, "road." It was a tall proud old man who could not be called anything other than – **majestic!** Everything about him was very **correct** and **wise**: his pure as crystal thoughts (which I heard very distinctly for some reason); his long silver hair which covered him like a glimmering cloak; his kind violet enormous "Vaya's" eyes and the diamond "star" in his high forehead which shone in the golden light.

– Peace to you, Father. – Vaya softly said, touching her forehead with her fingers.

– And to you, the *gone one*. – The old man sadly answered.

He emitted endless and everlasting goodness and care. Suddenly I wanted, like a little child, to bury my head on his knees and to hide from everything, even for a few seconds, inhaling the deep rest coming from him and not to think that I was afraid, that I did not know where my house was, that I did not know where I was at all and what was happening to me...

– Who are you, creature? – I heard mentally his affectionate voice.

– I am a human being. – I answered. – Forgive me, if I shattered your peace and quiet. My name is Svetlana. – The old man warmly and attentively looked at me with his wise eyes, approvingly for some reason.

– You wanted to meet the Wiseman. So, now you see him. – Vaya said gently. – Do you want to ask anything?

– Tell me, please. Does evil exist in your wonderful world? – I asked, although ashamed of the question.

– What do you mean by "evil", Human-Svetlana? – The sage asked in return.

– Lies, murder, treachery... Do you not really have such words?

– It was a long time ago... already nobody remembers. Only I do. But we **know** that it **was**. It is written in our "ancient memory" in order that we never forget. Did you come from a place where evil lives?

I sadly nodded. I was so sorry for my dear Earth and for life on it, which being so terribly imperfect, forced me to ask me this kind of question. At the same time I wanted very much that **Evil would leave our Home forever**, because I loved this home with all my heart and very often dreamed that one day:

– One would smile joyfully, being sure that people could bring only good...

– A lonely girl would cross the darkest street in the night feeling no fear that someone could commit an offence against her...

– Everyone could gladly open his or her heart without fear of a best friend's betrayal...

– People could leave any very expensive object right in the street without being afraid that it would be immediately stolen...

I sincerely, with all my heart, believed that somewhere there was a wonderful world where there is no evil and fear, but **the simple joy of life and beauty**... Therefore, following my naive dream, I used any slightest chance to learn how it was possible to eliminate Evil from our vital and immutable Earth, so that nobody would ever be ashamed to call himself Human. Certainly, these were the dreams of a naive child, but then I was just a child.

– My name is Atis, Human-Svetlana. I have lived here from the very beginning, I saw Evil... A lot of Evil...

– How did you get rid of it, wise Atis? Did someone help you? – I asked with hope. – Can you help us, or at least, give us some advice?

– We found the **reason**... and killed it. But your evil is not subject to us. It is different; just as you are different. **The stranger's good cannot always be good for you.** You must find your reason for yourselves and eliminate it. – He gently put his hand on my head and wonderful peace flowed into me. – Farewell, Human-Svetlana... you will *find* the answer to the question. Peace to you.

I stood deep in thought and did not pay attention to the surrounding reality that had changed long since, and we now "floated" on dense violet "water" standing on some unusual, flat and transparent device which had neither handles nor oars, nothing at all, as if we stood on a large, thin, moving, transparent glass platform. However, I felt neither motion nor rolling. It slid on the surface surprisingly smoothly which gave the impression that it did not move at all...

– What is it? Where are we going? – I asked with surprise.

– To fetch your little friend. – Vaya answered calmly.

– But how? She is unable to be here!

– She is able. She has the same crystal as you have. – There was the answer. – We will meet her at the "bridge". She gave no further explanation and soon stopped our strange "boat."

Now we were at the foot of a shining "polished" night-black wall which sharply contrasted with all the light and blazing objects around and looked like something artificial and alien. Unexpectedly the wall "dispersed", as if it was made of dense fog and a golden "cocoon" appeared with Stella inside it. She looked fresh and sound, as if she had just been out for a pleasant walk and, certainly, she was terribly pleased with all that was going on. On seeing me, her dear little face shone with happiness. As usual, she immediately began to chatter:

– Wow! You are here too! Oh, that's great!!! I was so worried! I thought something had happened to you. How did you get here? – Dumbfounded, the girl stared at me.

– I think the same way as you. – I smiled.

– When I saw that you were gone, I tried to track you down! I tried and tried and nothing worked until she came along. – Stella pointed to Vaya. – I am so grateful to you for that, girl Vaya! – She thanked her, using her funny habit of addressing several persons at once.

– This "girl" is two million years old. – I whispered in my friend's ear.

Stella stared wide-eyed, rooted to the spot, slowly "digesting" the stunning news.

– Two million, how can that be and why does she look so young? – The amazed Stella could finally exhale.

– She says that her kind live a very long time. Maybe your spirit is also from there? – I joked. Obviously, Stella did not like my joke, because she heartily objected: – How can you say that? I am like you! I am not in the least part a "violet" one! – It made me smile and I felt a little bit ashamed – my little friend was a real patriot.

As soon as Stella appeared, I felt happy and strong at once. Probably, our common, sometimes dangerous, walks on the "floors" very positively told on my mood, which immediately put everything in its place. Stella looked around with unconcealed delight. It was very obvious that she wanted to flood our "guide" with thousands of questions. But the small girl heroically restrained herself, trying to seem more serious and adult than she actually was.

– Tell me, please, girl Vaya, where may we go? – Stella asked very politely. It seemed that she still was unable to realize fully the idea that Vaya **could** be so "old"...

– Wherever you wish since you are here. – The "star" girl answered.

We looked around. We wanted to be in all parts at once! All was extraordinarily interesting and we wanted to see everything, but we understood perfectly that we could not be there eternally. I saw Stella fidgeting with eagerness and impatience and left the choice where we should go to her.

– May we, please, see what animals you have here? – Stella asked unexpectedly for me. Certainly, I would like to see other things but, well, it was me who gave her the option to choose.

We found ourselves in some kind of wood, a very bright and colourful one. It was absolutely

fabulous! Nevertheless, I thought for some reason that I would not wish to stay in such a forest for long. Again, it was too beautiful and bright, which even oppressed me a little, very different from our calming and fresh, green and light earthly forest. Maybe it is true that one should be where one truly **belongs**. I thought of our nice "star" girl. She must have missed her home and familiar environment so badly! Only now I could understand a little how lonely she must feel on our imperfect and sometimes dangerous Earth...

– Tell us, please, Vaya. Why did Atis call you a *gone one*? – At last I asked the question which had been obtrusively twirling around in my head.

– Long ago my family voluntarily went to help other creatures which needed our help. It often happens here. And *the gone ones* don't ever come back home... This is a choice of free will; they totally realize what they have decided upon. That is why Atis felt sorry for me.

– Who leaves, if it is impossible to return? – Stella was surprised.

– Very many do, sometimes too many. – Vaya became sad. – Once our wise men were afraid that we would not have enough *viilises* to render our planet habitable.

– What is a *viilise*? – Stella asked.

– We are *viilises*. Like you are humans, we are *viilises*. Our planet is called *Viilis*. – Vaya answered.

Only now I suddenly realized that the idea of asking this question for some reason had not occurred to us before! But it had to be the first thing which we should have asked!

– Did you change or you were always the same? – I asked again.

– We changed, but only inwardly, if that is what you meant. – Vaya answered.

An enormous, terribly bright, multicoloured bird flew over our heads. A crown of glittering orange "feathers" sparkled on its head. The wings were long and fluffy, as if the bird were carried on a multicoloured cloud. It sat on a stone and stared at us.

– Why does it scrutinize us so attentively? – Stella asked huddling up. It seemed to me that she had quite another question in mind – "Has this "birdie" eaten anything today?" The bird carefully jumped nearer. Stella squeaked and jumped back. The bird made one more step. It was three times bigger than Stella, but did not seem aggressive, rather curious.

– Why? Does it like me, or something? – Stella pouted. – Why doesn't it go to you? What does it want from me?

It was funny to observe Stella's attempts at self-restraint in order not to shoot off like a bullet from a gun. It was obvious that Stella did not cherish any kind feelings for the beautiful bird. Suddenly the bird opened out its wings and we were dazzled by the amazing radiance. The fog, like the one which we observed over Vaya, when we met her for the first time, slowly began to curl over the bird's wings. It became thicker looking like a dense curtain, and enormous, almost human, eyes looked at us from this curtain...

– Oh, is it turning into someone?! – Stella squealed. – Look, look!

Indeed, the sight was well worth looking at, because the "bird" suddenly started "morphing", transforming into either a beast with human eyes or a human with an animal body.

– What is it? – My little friend's brown eyes goggled. – What is happening with it?

The "bird" slipped out of its wings, and a very unusual creature stood before us. It looked like half bird, half human, with a large bill, three-cornered human face and very flexible body, like a cheetah's, with predatory, wild motions. It was very beautiful and, at the same time, very frightful.

– This is Miard. – Vaya introduced the creature. – If you wish, he will show you "animals", as you call them.

The creature called Miard began to acquire his fairy-tale wings again. He invited us to follow him waving with them.

– Why has it to be exactly him? Are you very busy, star Vaya?

Stella had a very unhappy face, because she was obviously afraid of this strange "beautiful monster", but she did not have the nerve to confess. I think she'd rather go with him than confess that she was terribly fearful. It is highly likely that Vaya read Stella's thoughts, because she hurried to calm her down:

– He is very affectionate and kind, you will like him. You wanted to see the living things, and he knows this better than all others.

Miard slowly came to Stella, as if perfectly realizing that she was afraid of him. But I felt no fear this time for some reason; rather to the contrary – he awoke my keen interest in him. He walked right up to Stella, who was almost squeaking inwardly from horror, and carefully touched her cheek with his soft, fluffy wing. The violet fog began to swirl over Stella's red-haired head.

– Wow! Look! I have the same thing as Vaya has! – The girl exclaimed enthusiastically. – But how did it happen? O-o-o, it is beautiful! The latter referred to the new place which suddenly opened before our eyes, we saw absolutely unbelievable animals. We stood on the hilly bank of the wide, mirror-like river, the water of which was strangely still. It seemed as if one could walk on it – it did not move. The sparkling fog like delicate transparent smoke curled above the surface of the river.

At last I understood that this "fog" which we saw everywhere somehow strengthened any action of the creatures which lived there: it made their vision brighter, served as a reliable means of teleportation and helped them in everything, whatever they did. I think that it was used for something much greater too which we could not understand yet.

The river meandered like a beautiful wide "snake" and, flowing easily receded into the distance, disappearing between succulent-green hills. Both its banks were covered with amazing beasts which walked, lay and flew. It was so beautiful that we stood absolutely still, staggered by the striking scene. The animals looked very much like extraordinary kingly dragons, very bright and proud, as if they knew that they were beautiful. Their long bent necks sparkled with orange gold, and crowns with scalloped edges reddened on their heads. These majestic animals moved slowly and regally; their scaly, pearl-blue bodies, which brightly flashed under the golden-blue sunrays, shimmered at every motion.

– It is so beautiful!!! – Delighted, Stella could hardly exhale. – Are they very dangerous?

– The dangerous ones do not live here. We haven't had them for a long time. I don't even remember for how long. – The answer sounded, and only now did we notice that Vaya was not with us and it was Miard who spoke to us. Stella looked around fearfully, apparently not feeling too comfortable with our new acquaintance.

– That means that you don't have any danger at all? – I was surprised.

– Only externally. – He replied – If we are attacked.

– Does that happen too?

– Last time it was before me. – Miard answered in earnest.

His voice sounded in our head softly and deeply, like velvet, and it was very strange to think that this unusual semi-human creature spoke our "language." But, probably, we had already become accustomed to so many different wonders that in a minute we found ourselves animatedly chatting with him completely forgetting that he was not a human.

– So, do you never have any troubles whatsoever? – Stella shook her head with a good dose of distrust. – But then it must be very boring for you to live here! – Her inextinguishable, earthly "thirst for adventure" spoke. I understood her perfectly, but we might find it difficult to explain that to Miard.

– Why boring? – Our "guide" was surprised, and suddenly, interrupting himself, pointed at the sky. – Look! These are Savias!!!

We looked up and froze. Fairy-tale creatures soared in the light-pink sky! They were absolutely transparent and incredibly colourful like every single thing on this planet. It seemed that

amazing sparkling flowers flew in the sky, only they were incredibly large... and each of them had a fantastically beautiful, unearthly face.

– O-o.... Look... it is amazing! – Absolutely stunned Stella whispered for some reason.

I think I never saw her being so shocked. But all this truly was well worthy of surprise. No imagination, even the most refined one, could ever depict such creatures! They were so light that it seemed that their bodies were woven of the fulgent fog. Their enormous wing petals were gently swaying nebulising the blazing gold dust into a fine cloud. Miard strangely "whistled" something, and the fairy-tale creatures began to descend forming an enormous "umbrella", flashing with all the colours of their incredible rainbow, over us. It was so beautiful that it took our breath away!

The first Savia which "landed" near us was a pearl-blue pink-winged one. She folded her shining wing petals in a "bouquet" and began to look at us with enormous curiosity feeling absolutely no fear. It was impossible to look indifferently at her whimsical beauty which attracted like a magnet and evoked the desire to admire it endlessly.

– Don't look too long. Savias charm. You will not want to leave. Their beauty is dangerous, if you don't want to lose yourself. – Miard said gently.

– But you said that there was nothing dangerous! It's not true then? – Stella felt resentment.

– It's not *the* danger which one needs to be afraid of or fight with. I thought you meant exactly that when you asked me. – Miard was distressed.

– All right, all right; obviously, there will be many phenomena and concepts which we will understand differently. That's normal, isn't it? – The little girl "nobly" calmed him down. – May I speak to them?

–Yes, you may, if you are able to hear them. – Miard turned to the Savia and showed something to her. The marvelous creature smiled and walked nearer to us. The rest of her (or his?) friends soared right above us, sparkling and shimmering in the bright sun rays.

– I am Lilis...lis...is... – The amazing voice rustled like an echo. It was very soft and at the same time very resonant (if it is possible to unite such opposite concepts).

– Hello, beautiful Lilis. – Stella joyfully greeted the creature. – I am Stella. And she is Svetlana. We are humans. And you are Savia, as we already know. Where have you arrived from? And what is Savia? – The questions rained down, but I did not even try to stop her, because it was absolutely useless. Stella simply "wanted to know everything!" She always was like this.

Lilis came very close to her and began to stare at Stella with her whimsical, enormous eyes. They were brightly crimson with gold dots and sparkled like gems. The face of this fairy creature looked surprisingly tender and fragile and had the form of a petal of our earthly lily. She "spoke" without opening her mouth, at the same time smiling with her little, round lips. But her hair was, probably, the most amazing thing. It was very long, absolutely weightless and almost reached the edge of the transparent wing. It didn't have a permanent colour and all time flashed with different and unexpected shining rainbows. The transparent Savias' bodies were asexual (like the body of a little earthly child) which transformed into "petal-wings" in the back which make them look like enormous bright flowers.

– We came from mountains-s-s. – The strange echo sounded again.

– Maybe you can tell us much quicker? – The impatient Stella asked Miard. –Who are they?

– Once they were brought from another world. Their world was dying and we wanted to save them. We thought at first that they could live with all of us, but they could not. They live very high in the mountains; nobody can get there. But if you look into their eyes long, they will take you with them... and you will live with them.

Stella huddled up and slightly moved aside from Lilis. – And what do they do when they take somebody?

– Nothing, they simply live with those who they take away. Probably, there was otherwise in their world and now they do that as a matter of habit. But they are very useful for us; they "cleanse"

the planet. Nobody got sick since they came.

– This means that you saved them **not because** you **pitied** them, but because you **needed** them! Is it correct – to use somebody?

I was afraid that Miard would be offended by her words (as the saying goes: Don't go into a stranger's house with your knee-boots on) and strongly nudged Stella, but she did not pay any attention to me and turned to Savia.

– Do you like living here? Do you miss your planet?

– No-o... It is beautiful-ul-ul here... – The soft voice rustled. – And nice-ice-ice...

Lilis unexpectedly lifted her shining "petal" and gently caressed Stella's cheek.

– A little one... Nice... Stella-la-a... – The fog sparkled over Stella's head for the second time, but it was multi-coloured now. Lilis gently flapped with her transparent wing-petals and slowly began to rise until she joined her flock. The Savias became agitated, then suddenly flared and disappeared...

– Where did they go? – The little girl was surprised.

– They went away. Here, look... – Miard pointed to the marvelous sunlit creatures which soared in the pink sky already very far from our place heading to the mountains. –They are going home.

Vaya appeared unexpectedly.

– It's time for you to go. – The "star" girl said sadly. – You cannot stay here so long. It is difficult.

– Oh, but we still did not see everything! – Stella was distressed. – May we come back here, dear Vaya? Farewell kind Miard! You are good. I will come back to you! – Stella said goodbye, as usual, talking to everyone at one and the same time. Vaya waved and we again begun to spin in the crazy whirlpool of shining matters and in a short time (or maybe it seemed short for me?) we were "thrown" out onto our familiar Mental "floor".

– It was very interesting there! – Stella began to squeak with delight.

It seemed that she was ready to endure the heaviest loads, if only once again she could go back to Vaya's colourful world that she loved so much. I thought that she really liked it so much, because it looked like her own, which she adored to create for herself here, on earthly "floors"...

My enthusiasm dimmed a little, because I had already **seen** this beautiful planet and now I madly wanted to see something else! I had experienced this dizzy "taste" of the unknown and I longed to taste it again... I already knew that this "hunger" would poison my further existence and that I would miss it all the time. Therefore, if I wished to remain a happy person in the future, I should find a way **to "open" the door into other worlds...** But then I hardly understood that it was not so simple **to open** such a door... and that lot of winters would pass before I could "go for a walk" wherever I wanted and that another person would open this door for me... and that my wonderful husband would be this person.

– Well, what we are going to do next? – Stella tore me out of my dreams.

She was disappointed and sad because she did not succeed in seeing more. But I was very glad that she again became herself and I was sure that from this day on she would stop "having the blues" and be ready for whatever "adventures" may appear.

– You will forgive me, please, but I think I will do nothing more today. – I said feeling terribly sorry. –But thank you so much for your help.

Stella shone. She adored the feeling of being **necessary**; therefore, I always tried to show her that she meant a lot to me (which was absolutely true).

– All right, we will go somewhere else some other time. – She consented complacently.

I think that she was also "worn a bit thin", but like always, she tried not to show it. I waved in farewell... and appeared at home, on my favourite sofa with a pile of impressions which now I had

to comprehend and "digest" slowly and unhurriedly...

32. Parents

By the age of ten I had become very attached to my father. I always adored him. Regrettably he had to move around very often in my early years and was at home too seldom. Any infrequent day which I succeeded in spending with him turned out to be an important occasion for me which I remembered for a long time and garnered every grain from every word he said, trying to keep them in my heart like a precious gift.

From my early years I always had the impression that I had to deserve dad's attention. I don't know where it came from and why. Nobody ever prohibited me from seeing him and talking to him. On the contrary my mother always tried not to interfere, if she saw us together, and my dad was always very pleased to spend his spare time with me. We went together to the forest, planted the strawberry bed in our garden, bathed in the river or simply talked, sitting under our favourite old apple-tree, which I liked to do most of all. My dad was a magnificent interlocutor, and I was ready to listen to him for hours. Most likely it was his strict attitude toward life, the way he established his priorities and his never changing habit of not getting anything gratis that gave me the impression that I must **deserve** him too...

I remember very well when, whilst being a child, I hung on his neck when he returned home from his trips, endlessly repeating how I loved him. And he looked at me earnestly and answered: "If you love me, you must not say it but always show me".

These words remained an unwritten law for me forever. Probably, sometimes I failed to "**show**" it properly, but always I tried to do my best.

As a matter of fact, I owe everything I am now to my father who sculpted the future "me" step by step, never indulging me despite that he loved me selflessly and sincerely. In the most difficult years of my life my father was my "island of peace", where I could return any time, knowing that I would be always welcome there.

He had lived a very difficult and stormy life and wanted to be absolutely sure that I would be able to stand up for myself in any situation, no matter how unfavorable, and that any misfortune could not break me down.

I can say from the bottom of my heart that I was very lucky to have parents such as mine. If they had been a little bit different, who knows where I would have been now and whether I would have existed at all...

I also think that fate brought them together for a reason, because it seems that they did not have any possibility to meet each other.

My father was born in Siberia, in a very far away city of Kurgan, which was not the place where his family initially dwelt. It was chosen for them by the then "*just*" Soviet government and was not a subject for a discussion...

So, one wonderful morning my real grandparents were rudely shown the door from their beloved and very beautiful enormous family manor, torn from their usual way of life and thrown into a terrible, dirty and cold carriage which went in the intimidating direction of – Siberia...

Everything about which I shall tell further I gathered using nuggets of information here and there – from memoirs and letters of my relatives who live in France and England and also in Russia and Lithuania. To my huge regret I could do this only many years after my dad's death.

My grandfather's sister Alexandra (later – Alexis) Obolensky was exiled with them and the Seriogins – Vasiliy and Anna – voluntarily followed him, because Vasiliy Nikandrovitch was not only my grandfather's *charge d'affaires* for many years, but also his closest friend. Probably one has to be a **true FRIEND** to have the courage to make a similar choice and go of one's own free will where they went, because they perfectly knew that they went to meet their own death which regrettably was called Siberia.

*I always felt very sorry for our beautiful Siberia – a proud but pitilessly trampled by bolshevist boots, land! Black forces converted it into an intimidating "earthly hell" cursed by people, just like many other things and places. No words would be enough to describe how much suffering, pain, lives and tears this proud but exceedingly exhausted land has absorbed ... Could it be that the "far-sighted revolutionaries" decided to slander and ruin it, choosing **exactly this glorious land** for their devilish aims, because once it was the heart of our pra-Motherland? In fact Siberia has remained the "cursed" land, where somebody's father, brother, son or even the whole family died, for very many people ever since.*

My grandmother who, to my huge regret, I never knew was pregnant with my dad then and bore the journey very poorly, but, certainly, there was no reason to hope for any help...

So, instead of enjoying the quiet rustle of books in the home library or the usual sounds of the pianoforte when she played her favourite works, the young Princess Elena listened to the ominous clatter of wheels which seemed to sternly count off the remaining time of her so fragile life now converted into a real nightmare. She sat on some sacks at a dirty carriage window and continuously looked at the last pitiful signs of the civilization which she loved and knew so well, moving further and further away.

My grandfather's sister Alexandra managed to escape with the help of some friends when the train stopped at a station. By mutual agreement she had to get (if she were lucky) to France where her family lived then. However, nobody had any idea how she could do it, but it was the **only**, although vague and of course last, hope which they could not permit themselves to miss being in such a stalemate. Alexandra's husband Dmitry was in France then and they hoped that he could try to help the grandfather's family to get out of the nightmare into which life threw them so pitilessly, using the mean hands of people who lost their human look.

When they were conveyed to Kurgan, they were settled in a cold basement with nothing being explained and no questions being answered. In two days some people appeared, saying that they came to "escort" my grand-dad to another "point of destination"... He was treated like a criminal, not allowed to take anything with him and given no explanation of where he was being taken and for how long. Nobody ever saw my grand-dad again.

Some time later an unknown soldier brought a dirty coal sack with my grandfather's personal things to my grandmother, again explaining nothing, thus killing any hope of seeing him alive.

Thereon there was no information about my grandfather's fate, as if he had disappeared from the face of the earth leaving no trace and evidence of his being...

The poor Princess Elena's tormented and exhausted heart refused to accept such terrible loss. She deluged a local staff officer with requests to shed light on the circumstances of her beloved Nicolai's death, but the "red" officers were blind and deaf to the entreaty of a lonely woman "from the nobility", as they contemptuously called her. For them she was just one of thousands of nameless "numbered" units which meant nothing in their cold and cruel world.

It was a genuine hell with no way back to her kind world where her house, friends and everything to which she was accustomed since her childhood and loved dearly, was... And there was nobody who would help or give the tiniest hope of survival...

The Seriogins tried to remain calm and collected and did their best to cheer up Princess Elena, but she submerged into almost complete numbness deeper and deeper and sometimes could spend days being indifferently-frozen and showing no reaction to her friends' attempts to save her heart and mind from submerging into the abyss of depression.

There were only two things which could return her into the real world for a short while – when someone started a conversation about her future child or there were any details, even the most insignificant ones, about the supposed death of her beloved Nicolai. She desperately wished to know what had happened and where her husband was or at least where his body was buried (or just left).

Regrettably there is almost no information about the life of these two brave and light people –

Elena and Nicolai de Rohan-Hesse-Obolensky, but even those several lines from two letters which Elena wrote to her daughter-in-law Alexandra, miraculously preserved in the family archive of the latter in France, showed how deeply and tenderly Princess Elena loved her missing husband.

There were only a few handwritten sheets of paper left; some lines are impossible to decipher. But even that which could be easily read yells with the deep pain of a human tragedy, hardly understandable and acceptable by those who have not been through it.

April 12, 1927. Extract from the princess Elena's letter to Alexandra (Alix) Obolensky:

"Today I got very tired. I returned from Siniachikha absolutely broken. The carriages, which are shameful even for cattle, are crammed with people We stopped in the forest; it smelled so deliciously of mushrooms and strawberries..... It is difficult to believe that the poor souls were killed exactly there! Poor Ellochka (the great princess Elisabeth Fedorovna who was my grand-dad's relative on the Hesse line) was killed here, in this terrible Staroselimsky mine. This is horrible! My heart cannot accept such a thing. Do you remember we always said on such an occasion: "may the earth rest lightly on you"? Great Goodness, how can such earth rest lightly?!

Oh, Alix, my dear Alix! How can one possibly get used to such horror? I am too tired to ask and abase myself. Everything will be absolutely useless, if the Cheka refused to send an inquiry to Alapaevsk..... I never know where I have to look for him and what they have done to him. I think about his dear face every minute... It's so terrible to imagine that he lies in some neglected pit or at the bottom of a mine! How is it possible to endure the everyday nightmare, knowing that I will never see him again? My poor Vasiliek (my dad's name) will never see him too... Where is the limit of their cruelty? And why are they called people?

My dear, kind Alix! I miss you so much! I wish I knew that everything is all right with you and dear Dmitry is with you in these difficult times If I had a snippet of hope of finding my beloved Nicolai, I think I would endure everything. My heart apparently learned to live with this terrible loss, but still hurts, because everything is different and empty without him".

May 18, 1927. Extract from the princess Elena's letter to Alexandra (Alix) Obolensky:

"Again the same nice doctor came. I cannot convince him that I just have no forces left. He says that I must live for the sake of the little Vasiliok... Is that so? What will he find on this frightful earth, my poor child? The cough recommenced and sometimes I cannot breathe. The doctor leaves some drops all the time, but I am ashamed that I don't have anything to thank him. Sometimes I dream about our favourite room and my pianoforte. My Goodness, how far off all that is! I wonder whether it existed at all. the cherries in the garden, and our nursemaid, so affectionate and kind; where is all that now? I have no wish to look at..... (The window?). It is covered with soot and I can see only dirty boots. I hate dampness".

It was extremely damp in the room, which did not become warm even in the summer, and my poor grandmother fell ill of tuberculosis. The stress, starvation and illness did their dirty job and she died giving birth without seeing her baby or having found his father's grave. Before death she made the Seriogins promise that they would do their best to take her newly-born son to France (if he managed to survive) to the grandfather's sister. Certainly it was almost "wrong" to promise anything in that wild time, because the Seriogins had no **real** chance to redeem the promise... However, **they did promise her** in order to alleviate the last minutes of her young life, so brutally crushed, and to help her soul, exhausted by pain, to leave this cruel world with hope, though quite a vague one... Although the Seriogins knew that they would do everything possible to keep their word given to Elena, at the bottom of their heart they did not believe that some day they could make it a reality...

So, in 1927 in the city of Kurgan a little boy was born in a damp and cold basement. He was Prince **Vasily Nikolaevich de Rohan-Hesse-Obolensky, Lord of Sanbury** – the only son of Duke de Rohan-Hesse-Obolensky and Princess Elena Larina.

He could not know then that he was absolutely alone in this world and that his fragile life now fully depended on good will of a man called Vasiliy Seriogin.

Just as well, the little boy also did not know that his father made him a precious gift – an incredibly "variegated" Family Tree, which his distant ancestors had woven for him, as if preparing the boy beforehand to perform some special and "great" deeds, thus laying on his fragile shoulders an *enormous responsibility* to those who had zealously woven his "genetic filament" uniting their lives in one strong and proud Tree...

He was a direct descendant of the great Merovingians, born in pain and poverty and surrounded by the death of his relatives and the pitiless cruelty of people who killed them. But it did not change the fact of who this newly-born man truly was.

His amazing dynasty began in the year 300 (!) A.D. with the Merovingian king *Conan I*. (A 4 volume manuscript composed by the famous French genealogist *Norigres* which is kept in our home library in France confirms this fact). His Family Tree grew and spread out intertwining in its branches such names as Dukes de Rohan of France, Marquises Farnese of Italy, Lords Strafford of England, Russian Princes Dolgoryki, Odoevsky and many others, part of who even the most skilled genealogists in the world – the British ones from the Royal College of Arms were unable to trace. They joked that it was the most "international" family tree they ever had to compile.

It seems to me that this "mishmash" did not happen by chance. In fact all so-called **noble** families had very high-quality genetics which, when mixed *correctly*, could create a **very high-quality genetic foundation** for their descendants' **spirits**. Fortunately my father was one of those descendants.

Most likely the "**international**" mixing gave a much better genetic result than a purely "**family**" one which has been an "unwritten law" for all European noble families for a very long time and very often ended in hereditary haemophilia...

But no matter how "**international**" my father's physical foundation was, his **SOUL** (I can say it with all responsibility) **was truly Russian to the end of his life** despite all, even the most amazing, genetic combinations.

But let's come back to Siberia where the "little prince", born in the basement, one fine day became **Vasiliy Vasilievich Seriogin, a citizen of the Soviet Union**, in order to survive and by unconditional consent of Vasiliy Nikandrovitch Seriogin's generous and kind heart. He had this name all his conscious life and was buried as such under a tombstone with the inscription "Seriogin's family" in the little Lithuanian town, Alitus, far from the family castles about which he never heard...

Unfortunately I knew about all that only in 1997 and by that time my dad was not among the living. My cousin Prince Pierre de Rohan-Brissac who had been looking for me for years invited me to Malta and told me who my family and I truly are. I shall tell about it later.

Meanwhile we shall return to the place where in 1927 Anna and Vasiliy Seriogin, the people with kindest hearts, had only one concern – to keep the word they gave to their dead friends and to do their best to take little Vasiliok out of this land "cursed by God and people" into a relatively safe place and later to get him to distant and unknown France... So they began their difficult journey and, on using the help of local connections and friends, took my little dad to Perm where they lived for several years, as far as I know.

The following "wanderings" of the Seriogins seem to me absolutely incomprehensible and seemingly illogical, because I have an impression that they "zig-zagged" all over Russia instead of going right to the place they had to. Certainly, everything was not as simple as it seems to me now and I am quite sure that there were thousands of very serious reasons for their strange itinerary.

Then they came to Moscow (where their very distant relatives lived), later was Vologda, Tambov and the last one was Taldom before their departure from Russia. It took them 15 long and very hard years after my father's birth to get to the unknown beautiful Lithuania and it was just half way to distant France...

(I am very grateful to the Taldom group of the Russian Public Movement "Renaissance. The Golden Age" and personally to Mr. Vitold Georgievich Shlopak for an unexpected and very pleasant gift. They found facts which confirm that the Seriogins lived there from 1938 to 1942. According to the data, they lived at 2a, Custarnaya str., not far from a school which Vasiliy attended. Anna Fedorovna worked as a typist in the district newspaper "Collectivny Trud (Collective labour)" (now "Zarya (Sunset)") and Vasiliy Nikandrovitch was an accountant in the local enterprise on grain stock "Zagotzerno".)

I think that during their wandering the Seriogins had to catch at any work to survive. Times were severe and naturally, they did not count on anybody's help. The wonderful Obolensky estate remained in the distant and happy past which seemed an incredibly beautiful fairy-tale. The reality was cruel and one had to reckon with it, no matter whether one liked it or not...

The bloody World War II was at its height and to cross the borders was an extremely complicated business.

*(I never knew **who** helped them to cross the front line and **how**. Most likely, **somebody needed very much** these three, if they succeeded in accomplishing the thing like this... I am also quite sure that somebody influential and powerful enough helped them; otherwise they could never cross the border in such a difficult time. But no matter how insistently I asked my poor patient grandmother, she always avoided answering this question. Unfortunately, I failed to find out anything about this matter).*

One way or another they found themselves in the unknown Lithuania... My grand-dad (I shall call him this, because I knew only him as my grand-dad) became extremely unwell, and they had to stop in Lithuania for a while. This short stop decided their further fate and also the fate of my father and all of my family.

They stopped at the small town of Alitus where they could find accommodation at an acceptable price, because unfortunately, money was a matter of some difficulty for them. And while they "saw how the land lies", they did not notice their being absolutely charmed by the beauty of nature, the cosiness of a little town and the warmth of people, all of which invited them to stay, even for a little while. Despite the fact that Lithuania already was under the heel of the Nazi "brown plague", it somehow preserved its independent and bellicose spirit which the most fervent servants of communism had failed to kick out of it, which attracted the Seriogins even more than the beauty of the local nature or the hospitality of people. So, they decided to stay "for a while" and it turned out that they stayed there forever. It was 1942 already and the Seriogins compassionately observed the country they liked so much being squeezed by the tentacles of the "brown" octopus of the *Nationalsozialismus* stronger and stronger... On crossing the front line, they hoped that they could reach France from Lithuania, but the "brown plague" shut the door into the "big world" for them (and thus for my father), this time forever.

But life went on and the Seriogins gradually began to settle down in the new place of dwelling. They again had to look for a job to have some means of existence. Fortunately, one could easily find a job in industrious Lithuania. Therefore, very soon life began to take its normal course and it seemed that everything was again well and quiet...

My dad began to "temporarily" attend Russian school (*Russian and Polish schools were not an uncommon thing in Lithuania*), which he liked very much and decidedly refused to leave it, because permanent wandering and changing of schools influenced his studies and what was more important – prevented him from having real friends without which it is hard to exist for any normal boy. My grand-dad found quite a good job and had the opportunity to "unburden his heart" in his adored forest at weekends. And my grandmother had her little new-born son and dreamed of staying in one place for a while, because she did not feel well physically and was extremely tired of the permanent wandering, just as was the whole family.

Several years passed unnoticed. The war ended long ago and life gradually came to normality in all respects. My dad was a diligent pupil and teachers predicted a gold medal for him when he graduated (which he did get).

My grandmother raised her little son enjoying tranquility and grand-dad at last achieved his long awaited dream to become engrossed in his favourite Alitus forest every day.

Thus, everybody was more or less happy and nobody wanted to leave this truly "divine place" and start on a journey again. They decided to give an opportunity to my dad to finish the school he liked so much and my grandmother's little son Valery to grow up a little more in order to endure a long journey better.

Days ran on unnoticed, months passed, making years, and the Seriogins still lived at the same place, as if forgetting all their promises, which, certainly, was not true. It simply helped them to get used to the thought that maybe they could never keep their word given to Princess Elena... All Siberian horrors were far behind, tranquil everyday life became customary and it sometimes seemed to the Seriogins that no terrible sufferings ever happened, as if they had dreamed them in a forgotten nightmare long ago...

Vasiliy grew, becoming a handsome young man, and it often seemed to his foster-mother that he was her own son, because she truly loved him. My dad called her *mother*, because he did not know the truth about his birth and loved her strongly in return, like he would love his real mother. He behaved the same way toward my grand-dad, who he called *father*. He sincerely loved him from the bottom of his heart.

So, everything gradually sorted out and the conversations about distant France became rarer and rarer until one fine day they totally ceased. There was no hope of getting there and most likely the Seriogins decided that it would be better, if nobody re-opened that wound anymore...

Meanwhile my dad graduated from school with honours and entered the Literary Institute by correspondence. He worked as a journalist in "Izvestia (News)" to help the family and dedicated his free time to writing plays for the Russian Drama Theatre of Lithuania.

Everything was all right, except for one very painful problem. My dad was a magnificent speaker (*I remember from my earliest years that he indeed had a huge talent for that!*). That is why the Komsomol committee of our town did not leave him alone, trying to make him its secretary. My dad objected to it as hard as he could, because he hated the revolution and communism with all his heart and everything that followed from these "teachings" (*even without knowing about his origin, because the Seriogins decided not to tell him for the time being*)... Naturally, he was a pioneer and a Komsomol member at school, because it was impossible then to enter any higher educational establishment, like institute or university, without it, but he categorically refused to go further than that. Also there was another fact which terrified him: the obligation to participate in punitive expeditions to get, so-called, "forest brothers" who were nobody else but young fellows like my father, whose parents were dispossessed as kulaks, and they hid in the forests fearing to be taken to the far away and intimidating Siberia.

The rule of the Soviet power during several years left no family in Lithuania which had not had at least one member taken to Siberia, and very often it was the whole family that was driven away. Lithuania was a small but very rich country with a magnificent economy and enormous farms, the owners of which began to be called kulaks in the soviet times and the soviet power actively carried out a policy of their dispossession... It was exactly the best Komsomol members who were chosen for these punitive expeditions to show a "contagious example" to others... They were friends and acquaintances of the "forest brothers" who attended the same schools, played together and went with girls to dances... And now somebody's mad will suddenly made them enemies and ordered them to exterminate each other...

He took part just in two expeditions, after one of which only two fellows out of twenty came back home (and my dad appeared to be one of these two), he got terribly drunk and the next day made a written statement where he categorically refused to participate in any similar "action" in the future. The reaction to this did not keep him waiting – he was sacked and lost the job he desperately needed. However, my dad was a truly talented journalist and another newspaper – "Kaunas Pravda" from the nearby town – offered him a job. But he did not stay there too long. A short call "from the top" and my dad lost his new work in the blink of an eye and once again he was politely shown the

door. This was how his long war for personal freedom began which I perfectly remembered too.

In the end he had to be the secretary of the Komsomol organization of our town, a position which he quitted several times, handing in his resignation, but it was rejected and he returned to the post. Later he became a member of the Communist party, out of which he also was ignominiously thrown and immediately taken back, because at that time there were not many Russian-speaking excellently-educated people in Lithuania. And my dad, as I've mentioned before, was a magnificent lecturer and different towns gladly invited him to give a lecture. The thing was that being far from his "employers" the subjects of his lectures differed from those they wanted him to give and he got additional problems for that too.

*I remember that in the time of Andropov's rule, when I was already a young woman, the men were **strongly forbidden** to have long hair, which was considered a "**capitalist provocation**" and (although it sounds today absolutely ridiculous!) the militia had the right to detain them right on the street and to **cut long hair by force**. It came into practice after one young fellow (his name was Calanta) set fire to himself on the central square of Kaunas – the second largest city of Lithuania (my parents worked there at that time). It was his protest against the suppression of the individual freedom, which frightened the communist bosses and they undertook "intensive measures" to fight against the then "terrorism". Some of those "measures" were most foolish and strengthened the dissatisfaction of all rational people of the Lithuanian republic.*

*My father, who was a **freelance** at that time and several times changed his profession, came to party meetings with very long hair (which I can say was absolutely fabulous). The party bosses were enraged and he was thrown out of the party **for the third time** and in a while was returned again **against his will**. I witnessed the whole "saga" and when I asked him why he constantly "ran into trouble", he calmly answered:*

*«This is **my** life, and it belongs **to me**. And **only I** am responsible for how I want to live it. Nobody on earth has any right to impose on me persuasions which I **don't believe**, and I **don't want to believe**, because I consider them a **lie**.*

*This is how I remember my father. It was exactly his **conviction of his absolute right to his own life** that thousands of times helped me to survive in the most difficult circumstances. He recklessly, I would say maniacally, loved Life! Nevertheless, he would never agree to do a mean act even if his life depended on it.*

This was how the life of the young Vasilij Seriojin was in Lithuania then – on one hand fighting for his personal "freedom" and on the other, writing wonderful verses and dreaming about "feats" (*my dad was an **incorrigible romantic** to the last days of his life!*). He did not have any idea who he was in reality and, if we discard the "biting" actions of the local "authorities", I could say that he was quite a happy young man. He did not have a "lady-love" yet, probably because his days were full of work or because he had not yet found his "**one and only true** one".

But at last fate decided that it was high time for him to stop being a bachelor and turn the wheel of his life toward the "female charm" which appeared exactly the "only and true" for which my dad had waited so persistently.

Her name was Anna (or Ona in Lithuanian) and she was dad's best friend Ionas (Ivan in Russian) Zhukauskas's sister. He was invited for the Easter breakfast that "fatal" day. My dad had visited his friend's place several times, but by a strange whim of fate he never saw her and certainly did not expect that on this spring Easter morning such a stunning surprise would wait for him there...

A brown-eyed dark-haired girl opened the door and in this short instant conquered dad's romantic heart for the rest of his life.

A little star

I was born in the land of snow and cold,

You grew up in the country of blue lakes...
Whilst a boy, I fell in love with a little star –
Light and shining like the morning dew.

Maybe you loved it too,
When in the days of sad bad weather,
You confided your maiden dreams to it,
Like to your closest friend.

Whether the rain poured or a
Snow-storm swept in the field,
We admired our star late into the evening,
Knowing nothing about each other.

It was the best star in the sky.
It shone brighter, lighter and clearer than others...
Whatever I did, wherever I was,
I never forgot about it.

Its radiant light warmed
My blood with hope.
I brought my whole love –
Young, untouched and pure – to you.

The star sang songs about you.
It called me day and night to the endless expanse.
And one April spring evening
It took me to your window.

I gently took your shoulders
And said, happily smiling:
"Not in vain I waited for this meeting,
My darling little star"...

My mother was absolutely charmed with dad's verses. He wrote her a lot of them and brought them every day to her work together with enormous posters which he drew himself (my dad was a splendid painter) and unrolled them right at her work table. Among the multitude of painted flowers she saw the big letters: "Annushka, my little star, I love you!" What woman could resist anything like this for very long and not give in? They never parted and spent every free minute together, as if somebody could take it away from them. Together they went to the cinema and local dances (which both loved very much) and went for a walk in the charming Alitus municipal park until one fine day they decided that it was time to look at their relationship a bit more seriously. They married soon, but only dad's friend Ionas (my mother's little brother) knew about it, because neither family would be delighted about their union.

My mother's parents saw a rich neighbour-teacher as her husband. They liked him very much

and thought that he would be absolutely right for her. And my dad's family was very far from thinking about any wedding, because my grand-dad had been thrown into prison as an "accomplice of the nobility" (they tried to "break" my stubbornly resisting dad) and my grandmother went into a hospital because of the nervous shock and was very sick. My dad was left with a little brother to look after and had to keep the house alone which was not a very simple thing, because the Seriogins lived in a large two-storeyed house (in which later I lived too) with an enormous old orchard around it. Naturally, all that required a lot of work to be properly taken care of.

Three long months passed and my dad and mum, already married, still were dating until my mother by chance came to my dad's and saw a very touching picture. My father stood in the kitchen in front of the stove and with an unhappy air "filled" a growing amount of pans with the semolina which he cooked for his little brother. But the amount of the "wicked" semolina did not decrease for some reason and my poor dad could not understand why. On doing her best to hide a smile so as not to offend an unlucky "cook", my mum rolled up her sleeves and began to put the mess in order, starting with the indignantly hissing stove completely covered with pans of semolina... Certainly, after that kind of "emergency incident" my mother could not calmly look at such "heart-breaking" male helplessness and decided to move immediately into this territory, still strange and unknown for her.

Although it was not an easy life for her at that time – she worked at the central post-office (to make her living) and every evening went for an access course to prepare for examinations to get into a medical school, she gave the rest of her forces and time to her exhausted young husband and his family without thinking twice. The house came back to life at once. The kitchen was filled with delicious smells of Lithuanian "zeppelins" which dad's little brother adored and my father, who had lacked home made food for so long, swallowed in immodest quantity. Everything became more or less normal, except for the absence of my granparents, about whom my poor dad worried so much and missed them terribly all this time. But he had a young beautiful wife, who did her best to relieve his temporary loss and, on looking at his smiling face, one could say that she fully succeeded in that.

Very soon my father's little brother got used to the new aunt and constantly tailed after her, hoping to get something delicious, or a beautiful evening fairy-tale, which my mother read to him before bedtime.

So, the days calmly passed in the everyday routine, then weeks. My grandmother came back home from the hospital and to her great surprise found a newly-made daughter-in-law... It was too late to change anything and they simply tried to get to know each other better, avoiding undesirable conflicts (which inevitably appear in any new and too close acquaintance). More precisely, they simply adapted to each other, honestly trying to avoid any possible conflicts. I always sincerely pitied that they failed to love each other... They both were (my mother still is) wonderful people and I loved them both very much. But when my grandmother somehow tried to adjust to my mother all the time they lived together, my mother behaved in quite the contrary way and by the end of grandmother's life sometimes showed too openly her irritation which wounded me deeply, because I was strongly attached to them both and did not like to get, as the saying goes, "between two fires" or take anybody's side.

I could never understand what caused this permanent "quiet" war between these two wonderful women, but apparently there were some very strong reasons for that or maybe they simply were truly "**incompatible**", as happens quite often to strangers who have to live together. One way or another, I was very sorry for that, because in general it was a very united and faithful family where everybody stood for each other with might and main and survived every misfortune together.

But let's come back to those days when everything just began and every member of this new family honestly tried to live in peace and friendship. My grand-dad came back home too, but to everybody's huge regret, his health sharply worsened after the prison. Most likely, it was the long wanderings of the Seriogins about unknown towns and the terrible time in Siberia that did not spare

my granddad's poor heart – microinfarctions followed one after another.

My mother made very good friends with him and tried to help him as much as she could to forget everything bad as quickly as possible, although she had a very tough time herself. In the past months she had managed to pass preparatory and introductory exams in a medical institute, but to her huge regret, her long-awaited dream was not destined to come true for the simple reason that in Lithuania one had to pay for a higher education and my mother's family, where there were nine children, lacked the financial means for that... That year her still young mother, my other grandmother, who I also have never seen, died because of the consequences of a nervous breakdown which had happened several years previously. She fell sick in war-time, on the day when she knew that there was a strong bombardment of a pioneer camp in the sea town of Palanga and all the surviving children were taken in an unknown direction. Her youngest son, the most beloved of all nine, was among them. He came back home several years later, but regrettably it did not help her much and she went out slowly during the first year of my mother and father's joint life... My mother's father – my grand-dad – had to take care of a very big family in which only one daughter – my mother's sister Domicella was married. Unfortunately he was a terrible "businessman". Very soon a woollen factory which he owned as my grandmother's "dowry" was put on the market for debt and my grandmother's parents did not want to help him anymore, because this was the third time he lost the property they gave them as a gift.

My other grandmother descended from a very rich Lithuanian noble family of the Mitruiliavichus, which even after dispossession of the kulaks had enough lands left in their possession. Therefore, when my grandmother married my grandfather (contrary to her parents will) who had nothing, in order to save face her parents presented a large farm and beautiful and spacious house to the newly-weds, which over time my grandfather lost due to his great "commercial" abilities. But because by that time they had five children, my grandmother's parents could not remain aloof and gave them a second farm with a smaller and not so beautiful house. Regrettably, the second gift soon disappeared too... A small woollen factory was the next and last help from my grandmother's patient parents. It functioned like a well-oiled machine and could bring a very good profit allowing the family a comfortable living, if managed correctly. However, by that time the misfortunes had affected my grandfather so that he indulged in "hard" liquor and therefore the total ruin of the family did not keep them waiting too long...

It was precisely my grandfather's careless "economy" that put all his family in a very difficult financial situation, when all the children had to work to maintain themselves and forget about their further education in higher schools or institutes. For this reason, on burying her dreams to become a doctor, my mother went to work at the central post-office, simply because there was a vacant seat at that moment.

So, the life of the young and "old" families of the Seriogins passed in simple everyday chores without any special (good or bad) "adventures".

Almost a year slipped by. My mother was pregnant, expecting her first-born. My dad literally "flew" with happiness and repeated over and over again that it would be a son. He was right – they did have a boy... But the circumstances of his birth were so horrific that even the sickest imagination could not have invented it...

My mother was taken to the hospital on a Christmas day shortly before the New Year. Certainly, everybody worried but none expected any negative consequence because my mother was a young and strong woman with the perfectly developed body of a sportswoman (she went in for gymnastics since being a child) and the general opinion was that she should give birth very easily. But evidently someone there "at the top" vigorously opposed, for some unknown reasons, my mother having a child... What I am going to tell further is far beyond all human concepts of mercy and honour or Hypocratic oath. That night a doctor on duty called Remeika saw that the delivery had complications and decided to call the chief surgeon of the Alitus hospital, doctor Ingeliavitchus who had to leave the festive table to come to the hospital. Naturally, the doctor appeared "a little" tipsy and on hastily examining my mother, decided right away: "Cut open!", apparently wishing to

come back as quickly as possible to the New Year celebration he had to interrupt. Nobody on the staff wished to contradict him and my mother was prepared for the operation. And than "interesting" things began to happen which made my long hair stand on end when I heard this part of the story.

Ingeliavitchus began the operation and, having applied the lancet on my mother, left her on the operating table! She was anesthetized and could not know what happened around her in that moment. But the nurse who assisted during the operation told her that the doctor was "**urgently**" called to take care of some "urgent case" and disappeared, leaving my mother cut open on the operating table... One may ask what case could be **more "urgent"** for a surgeon than **two lives that depended fully on him right now and which he left to the mercy of fate so easily?!** But this was not all yet. In several seconds the nurse was called from the operating-room, because the surgeon "urgently" needed her help in another case, and when she **flatly refused**, saying that there was an "open" person on the table, she was told that they **would send "somebody else" at once**. But nobody ever came...

My mother awakened with the awful pain and, on making a sharp movement, fell from the operating table. The pain was so brutal that she lost consciousness. When the nurse returned from the place she had been sent to the operating-room to check whether everything was all right there, she was absolutely shocked at what she saw there – my bleeding mother lay on the floor with a child falling out of her abdomen... The new-born was dead; my mother was dying too...

It was a terrible crime. It was a most real **murder** for which those who had committed it **must be** personally liable. Nevertheless, another "interesting" thing happened. No matter how hard my dad and his family tried to call the surgeon Ingeliavitchus to account, they failed. The hospital said that it was not his fault, because he was called to an "urgent operation" in the same hospital. This was absurd, but no matter how vigorously my father struggled, everything was in vain. In the end he left the "murderers" alone at the insistence of my mother, being glad that at least she was alive. Regrettably, she had to go a long way to be really "alive". When she underwent the second operation (to save **her** life this time), nobody in the hospital gave her a more than one percent chance of surviving. She spent three months on droppers and had numerous blood transfusions (she still has the list of people who donated their blood to her), but she did not feel better. Then the desperate doctors decided to send her home, "*hoping that she will get better much sooner in her own domestic surroundings*"! It was an absurdity again, but my worn out dad agreed to absolutely everything, if only to see my mother alive one more time. Therefore, he took her home without strongly objecting.

My mother was so weak that she could not walk for three months... The Seriogins took great pains to nurse her and my dad carried her in his arms when it was needed, and when a tender spring sun began to shine in April, he sat with her in the garden under blooming cherries for hours, trying somehow to bring life back to his extinct "little star"...

But the tender falling cherry petals reminded my mother of the tender and fragile child's life which, so untimely, flew away from her. The thoughts that she could neither see nor bury her child burned her exhausted soul and she was unable to forgive herself for that. In the end this terrible pain developed into serious depression.

At that time the Seriogins tried to avoid conversations about the terrible event despite the fact that the pain of loss still smothered my dad and he could not get out of the gloomy "island of despair" into which the misfortune threw him. There is nothing more frightful in the world than to bury your own child. And my father had to do it **alone**. He had to bury his little Sonny who he loved so strongly and selflessly, even without having a chance to know him...

I still cannot read without tears these both sad and light lines that my dad wrote to his little son, knowing that he could never **say** it to him.

To my Sonny

My fair eyed boy!

My joy, my hope!
Don't go away, my dear,
Don't leave me!

Get up. Stretch your little hands.
Open your eyes,
My dearest boy,
My gentle Sonny.

Get up and look and listen
To the birds that sing to us,
To the flowers that
Drink the May dew at dawn.

Get up and look, my dear.
Death will wait for you!
Do you see that Sunny May
Lives on graves too?!

Even the earth on graves
Flames with flowers.
So, why did you, my Sonny,
Live so little?

My fair eyed boy!
My joy, my hope!
Don't go away, my dear,
Don't leave me!

He named him Alexander, choosing the name on his own, because my mother was in the hospital. When my grandmother offered to help to bury the child, my father refused. He did everything alone from the very beginning to the end. I cannot imagine how much one has to suffer to bury a new-born son and to know at the same time that his beloved wife is dying in the hospital, but my dad endured it all without a single word of reproach to anybody. The only thing he entreated for in his heart was his beloved Annushka coming back to him until this terrible blow would knock her down once and for all and the night would fall on her exhausted brain...

So, my mother came back home and he appeared powerless to help her, not knowing how to take her out of that terrible "dead" state.

The death of little Alexander deeply shocked the Seriogins. It seemed that the sunlight would never come back into this sad home and laughter would never sound there anymore... My mother was still deeply "crushed". Although her young body gradually started getting well, submitting to natural laws, her wounded soul, like a bird that had fluttered off, was still far away and did not hurry to return, being deeply submerged in the ocean of pain despite all dad's efforts...

But soon, in six months, they had good news – my mother was pregnant again... In the beginning my father was frightened, but on seeing that my mother very quickly began to come back

to life, he decided to take the risk, and now everybody waited for the second child with huge impatience. This time they were very careful and tried to protect my mother from any undesirable mischance in every way. Regrettably, it seemed misfortune liked this hospitable door for some reason and it knocked at it again...

The doctors knew the sad story of my mother's first pregnancy and decided to secure against any contingency and do a Cesarean section before the contractions began (!). It is highly likely they did it too early... One way or another, a girl was born. She was given a name, Marianne, but unfortunately, she did not live long – in three days this fragile, hardly blossoming out life ceased for reasons that nobody knew...

There was a sinister impression that someone **strongly objected to my mother giving birth at all...** Although she was a physically and genetically strong woman, absolutely fitted for procreation, she was afraid even to think about repeating such a cruel attempt ever.

But a human being is a surprisingly **strong** creature, capable of enduring much more than he or she would ever imagine... and pain, even the most terrible one (if it does not tear the heart immediately) becomes dull with time and is ousted by hope which always lives in each of us. Therefore in exactly a year, one early December morning the Seriogins had another daughter who was born easily, without any complications and this happy daughter was me... However, it is highly likely that the birth would not have such a happy ending, if everything had happened according to the plan prepared beforehand by our "tender-hearted" doctors. One cold December morning my mother was taken to the hospital before the contractions began in order to again "be sure" that "*nothing bad*" would happen (!!!)... My father was terribly nervous, being seized with bad presentiments, and rushed about here and there along the long hospital corridor unable to calm down, because they had agreed that this was my mother's **last attempt** and, if something happened to the child this time, they were doomed to not having their own children. It was a very hard decision, but my father preferred to see, if not his children, but at least his "little star" alive, instead of burying all his family without a chance of understanding what it truly means to have **his family**.

To my dad's huge regret, it was Ingeliavitchus who came to examine my mother. He still was the chief-surgeon of the hospital and it was impossible to escape his "high" attention... On "attentively" examining my mother, he declared that he would come tomorrow at six o'clock in morning to do the next Cesarean section, whereupon my poor dad almost had a heart attack...

About five o'clock in the morning a very pleasant young midwife entered my mother's ward and to her huge surprise merrily said:

– Come on! Be prepared. Now we are going to give birth!

When my frightened mother asked "What about the doctor?" the midwife calmly looked into her eyes and gently answered that, in her opinion it was high time for my mother to give birth to **live (!)** children and began to massage my mother's belly softly and carefully, gradually preparing her for the delivery... And about six o'clock in the morning my mother easily and quickly gave birth to her first live child, which fortunately was me.

– Well, mummy, look at this charming doll! – The midwife exclaimed merrily, bringing the already washed, little and loud bundle to my mother, who was so happy to see her *alive and healthy* little daughter for the first time that she lost consciousness...

When at six o'clock sharp doctor Ingeliavitchus entered the ward, a wonderful picture appeared before his eyes – a very happy couple lay on the bed – my mother and me, her *live* newborn daughter. However, instead of rejoicing at such an unexpected happy ending, the doctor went absolutely mad for some reason and darted out into the corridor without saying a word...

We never knew **what truly happened** to my poor mother's tragically unusual deliveries. But one thing was absolutely clear – someone did not want any child of my mother's *to come into this world alive*. It was also obvious that the one who carefully and reliably guarded me all my life, this time decided to prevent the death of the Seriogins' child, somehow **knowing** that this would be the last one in this family...

This was how – with obstacles – my wonderful and unusual life, which my unforeseeable and quite complicated fate had prepared before my birth, began... Or maybe, it was someone who **knew** then that my life would be needed either for **someone** or for **something** and tried very hard in order that I could be born on this earth despite all "insuperable hindrances"...

33. Surprise

Time went by. It was my tenth winter that reigned outside, covering all around with a snow-white fluffy blanket, as if wishing to demonstrate who the absolute master of the moment was.

More people called at shops to provide themselves with the New-year gifts beforehand, and even the air "smelled" of the holidays.

Two of my favourite days of the year – my birthday and the New Year – approached. There were only two weeks between them, so I could enjoy their celebration without a long break.

I had been trying to worm a secret out of my grandmother for days, longing to find out what present I would get on my "special" day this year. But she did not yield for some reason, despite the fact that before it never was a problem for me to "kindle" her silence before my birthday and to know what "pleasantness" I was to expect, but this year all my "devices" did not work for some reason. My grandmother only enigmatically smiled and said that it was a "surprise" and she was absolutely sure that I would love it. So, no matter how hard I tried, she was firm and yielded to no persuasion and I had no choice but to wait.

Therefore, in order to occupy myself with something and not think of gifts, I began to make a "festive menu" which my grandmother let me choose at my discretion this year. I have to confess that it wasn't an easy task. She could do many culinary wonders and one has to puff and blow to choose from such "plenty", and it was quite a hopeless business to find something that she could not cook. I am absolutely sure that even the choosiest gourmets would find something with which to regale themselves in her kitchen! And I wanted very much that this time our home smelled of something absolutely special, because it was my *first* "**serious**" birthday and I was allowed to invite so many guests for the first time. My grandmother treated all this very much in earnest and we sat for about an hour, discussing which of her special specialties she could make for me.

Now I, certainly, understand that she simply wanted to make me feel good and to show that the **things** which were **important to me** were just as **important to her**. It was always very pleasant and helped me feel needed and partly even "important", as if I was a grown up who meant a lot to her. I think that the feeling that **someone truly believes in us** is very important for children, because we all need the support of *our self-reliance* during this fragile and strongly unstable time of child's maturing which is almost always a combination of a strong inferiority complex and extreme risk in everything that we try to test in order to prove our **human value**. My grandmother perfectly understood it, and her friendly attitude always helped me to continue my "mad" search for myself in any circumstances without fear.

At last we finished making the list for my birthday table and I went to look for my dad who had a day off and (I was almost sure) was somewhere in "his corner" enjoying his favourite pastime.

Like I thought, he was comfortably settled down on the sofa and peacefully reading a very old book – one of those which I was still prohibited from taking, for which, as I understood, I was still too little. Grey cat Grishka curled up on dad's knees with contentedly narrowed eyes, inspiredly purring the whole "cat-like orchestra". I sat down on the edge of the sofa, as I did very often, and quietly watched the expression on his face... He was somewhere very far away, in the world of his thoughts and dreams, following the thread which the author enthusiastically wove and at the same time placed the information he got on the shelves of his "logical thinking" in order to skip it through **his** understanding and perception and after that forward it to his huge "mental archive".

– Well, what do we have here? – Dad asked tousling my hair.

– Our teacher said today that there was no soul and all talk about it was just priestly invention

to "undermine the soviet man's happy psyche"... Why do they lie to us, dad? – I fired in one gulp.

– Because **the whole world** in which we live now **is built on a lie**... – My father answered very calmly. – Even the **word SOUL** is gradually falling out of use, or rather it is intentionally ousted... Look, before we had plenty of words with the root "soul": soulful, soul-searching, soulless etc. and now they are replaced by other words – emotional, contemplation, cruel... Soon there will not be any **soul** in Russian. The language became different – poor, faceless, dead... I know, you did not notice. – Dad affectionately smiled. – Because **it had been like this before you were born**, before that it was extraordinarily bright, beautiful and rich! It was truly **heartfelt**... Sometimes I have no wish to write whatsoever. – He fell silent for a few seconds, thinking of something and then added indignantly. – How can I **express my self**, if they send me **a list (!)** with words that can be used and those which cannot, which are a **"vestige of the bourgeois system"**... It's a complete absurdity...

– Then what? Is it better to study on my own than go to school? – Puzzled I asked.

– No, my little one, you **should** go to school. – And giving me no chance to object, he continued. – School gives you **"grains" of your foundation** – mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology etc, which I would simply not have time to teach you at home. Unfortunately you will be unable to grow your **"mental harvest"** without these "grains". – Dad smiled. – Only at first you will have to **"sift" these "seeds" very diligently to separate husk and rotten seed**. And the quality of the "harvest" you have in the end will depend entirely on you. Life is a difficult thing, you see. Sometimes it's very difficult to remain on the surface without sinking to the bottom. But there is no other way, right? – Dad tousled my hair again. He was sad for some reason. – So, you can choose: whether to be one of those **who are told how you should live** or be one of those **who think independently and search their way**... It is true that they constantly get hit on the head, but in return they always will hold it **proudly erect**. So, you should think pretty hard before you decide what you like more...

– Why then *when I say at school what I think*, the teacher calls me a *parvenu*? It's so offensive! I never try to be the first to answer, on the contrary – I prefer when I am left alone... But if I am asked, I must answer, right? For some reason they don't like my answers very often... What should I do, dad?

– Well it's the same question again – do you want to be yourself or do you want to say **what you are required** and live calmly? You must choose again... They don't like your answers because they **don't always coincide** with those that they **have already prepared** and are **always identical for all**.

– How is that – identical? I cannot think **the way they want**. People **cannot think in one and the same way!**

– You are wrong, my Light one. *It's exactly what they want – that we all think and act identically.*

– But it's wrong, dad! – I was indignant

– Look at your school friends more attentively. *How often do they say what is not written?* – I was confused... he was again right. – It happens because their parents *teach them to be just exemplary and obedient students and get good marks*. But they don't teach them **to think**... maybe, because they did not think either... or maybe because fear has already absorbed them... So, stir your brain, my Light one, to find on your own **what** is most important to you – **your marks** or **your own thinking**.

– Is it really possible to **be afraid of thinking**, dad? In fact nobody hears our thoughts. Why be afraid then?

– Well, they certainly won't hear... But *every mature thought forms your consciousness*, my Light one, and when your thoughts change, then you change too... If you have **correct** thoughts, they can displease somebody very much. You see, far from all people **like to think**. Very many prefer to shift it onto the shoulders of others, like you, and only be "performers" of other people's

desires for all their life. They are lucky, if "thinking" people do not fight for power, because in this case it is *not real human values* that go into action, but *lies, braggadocio, violence and even crime*, if they want to get rid of those who think otherwise... Therefore **thinking can be very dangerous**, my Light one. Everything depends only on whether you will **be afraid of it** or will **prefer your human honour to fear**.

I climbed onto the sofa and curled up next to dad, imitating our cat Grishka which was not very glad because of it. I always felt protection and peace being next to dad. It seemed that nothing bad can get to us or happen to me when I am next to him. Disheveled Grishka also adored the hours he spent with my dad and hated any kind of intrusion. He hissed at me and showed me in every way that I'd better go as quickly as possible. I broke into laughter and decided to leave him to enjoy the company of my father and went to stretch my legs a little and play snowballs with neighbouring guys.

I counted the days and hours to my **tenth** birthday, feeling almost "adult", but to my huge shame I was unable to forget about my birthday "surprise" even for a minute, which certainly, lessened my "adulthood". Like all children in the world I adored gifts. And now I spent days guessing what it could be that in my grandmother's confident opinion I would "like very much"? I just had to wait a little bit more and soon it proved true that it was worth doing.

At last my birthday morning came. It was cold, sparkling and sunny, just like a real holiday should be. The air was so cold that it seemed to "burst" with coloured little stars and almost "clinked", making pedestrians move quicker than usual. Every living thing exhaled steam which funnily looked like multicoloured locomotives hurrying in various directions...

After breakfast I could not keep still and followed my mother like a "tail", expecting that at last I would see my long-awaited "surprise". To my greatest surprise we went to the neighbour's house and my mother knocked at the door. I was puzzled – our neighbour was a very nice person, but what she had to do with my birthday?

– Aha! Here is our "festive" girl! – The neighbour said merrily on opening the door. – Let's go, Snow-storm waits for you.

I nearly fainted. Snow-storm was an amazingly beautiful horse which my neighbours had and very often allowed me to ride. I simply adored her! Everything was beautiful in this noble animal – her appearance, her sensitive "horse" soul and calm and reliable temper. As for me, she was the most beautiful horse in the world! She was silver-grey, dappled with light-grey and white spots, and had a snow-white long tail. Usually when I came, she always greeted me, touching my shoulder with her very soft nose, as if saying:

– Look what a good horse I am, take me to ride!!!

She had a very beautiful and elegant muzzle with enormous, soft and kind eyes, which understood everything. It would be a real "crime" not to love her.

Our courtyard was quite large and always full of various domestic animals, but we never could have a horse for one simple reason, that being we could not afford it. The price of an Arab stallion was too high for us, because my dad did not work full-time in the newspaper at that time, because he was engaged in writing plays for the Russian drama theatre and we did not have too much money then, although it was time for me to learn to ride a horse. So, the only possibility to do it was to ask to ride sometimes on Snow-storm which for some reason liked me too and was always glad when we rode together.

But lately Snow-storm was very sad and did not go out, staying in her courtyard. To my huge regret, I had not been allowed to ride her for more than three months. The thing was that her owner suddenly died three months ago. Most likely it was too hard for his wife to see Snow-storm with somebody else, because her husband and Snow-storm were very attached to each other. So, the poor horse spent the whole days in her stable (although very large), infinitely missing her beloved owner who suddenly disappeared somewhere.

It was exactly that wonderful friend to which I was taken in the morning of my tenth birthday.

My heart almost jumped out of my chest! I could not believe that now my greatest child's dream came true! I remember that since I managed to climb onto Snow-storm for the first time, I endlessly entreated my parents to buy me a horse, but they always said that "*it's not a good time for this and we'll do it, of course. I just had to wait a little*".

Snow-storm greeted me in a very friendly way, just she always did, but I saw that she had changed in some way over these three months. She was very sad. Her movements were slow and she was not too eager to go out outside. I asked the owner why Snow-storm seemed so different. She answered that poor Snow-storm, apparently, missed her owner, and that she was very sorry about it.

– Try, – she said, – if you can "revive" her, she is yours!

I simply could not believe what I just heard and swore to myself not to lose the chance! I carefully approached Snow-storm and tenderly stroked her moist velvety nose and began to talk gently to her. I told her how good she was and how much I loved her and that we would get on very well and how much I would take care of her. Certainly, I was just a child and sincerely believed that Snow-storm would understand everything I said, but even now, after so many years, I still think that this amazing horse truly understood me... Anyway, she tenderly touched my neck with her warm lips, as if telling me that she was ready to go for a ride with me.

At last I climbed onto her – being extremely nervous, I missed the stirrup several times. I did my best to calm down my agitated heart which almost jumped out of my chest and we moved from the courtyard, taking the familiar path which led us to the forest where we both loved to stroll. The unexpected "surprise" made me shaky and I could not believe that all this was truly happening! I wanted to pinch myself and at the same time I was afraid that I would wake up from this wonderful sleep and all would be just a beautiful festive fairy-tale... But time went by and nothing changed. Snow-storm – my favourite friend – was here with me and I lacked just a tiny bit in order for her to be really mine.

That year my birthday fell on Sunday. As the weather was truly magnificent, there were a lot of people outside. The neighbours strolled along the street, stopped to share the latest news with friends or simply breathed the fresh winter air. I worried a little, knowing that in a short while I would be an object of general attention, but despite my anxious state I wanted to look confident and proud on my favourite beautiful Snow-storm... I brought my "disheveled" emotions together in order not to let down my wonderful friend and quietly touched her side with my leg and we trotted out through the gate... My mother, father, grandmother and the neighbour waved, as if it was an incredibly important event for them too... It was very kind and funny and somehow helped me to relax at once, and we calmly and confidently went further. Neighbours' children came to the street too, waved and shouted greetings to us, making a real "festive fuss" which cheered up all the neighbours.

The forest appeared soon, and on turning to the well-known path, we passed out of sight. And here I gave free rein to my yelling of joyful emotions! I squeaked like a happy puppy, kissed Snow-storm's silky nose one thousand times (which amazed her greatly), loudly sang some ridiculous songs, all in all – I rejoiced as far as my happy child's soul allowed me...

– Please, my dear, show them that you're happy again. Please! And we will ride together a lot again! As much as you want, I promise you! Only let them see that you are all right. – I begged Snow-storm.

I felt absolutely fabulous with her and hoped very much that she would feel at least a tiny part of what I felt. The weather was amazing. The air almost "crackled" – so pure and cold it was. The white forest cover sparkled with millions of little stars; as if somebody's large hand generously strewed fairy-tale diamonds on it. Snow-storm friskily trotted along the path trodden out by skiers and seemed quite satisfied, beginning to come back to life very quickly to my enormous joy. My heart rejoiced. I was about to take wing with happiness, anticipating the joyful moment when they would say that she was at last truly *mine*...

In a half an hour we turned back to avoid any additional anxiety for my family which worried about me constantly. The neighbour was still outside, apparently wishing to see with her own eyes that everything was all right with both of us. My grandmother and mother ran outside at once and then dad appeared, carrying a thick multicoloured lace which he gave to the neighbour. I easily jumped from the horse and ran to him with my heart fervently beating. I hid my face in his chest, wishing and fearing to hear such important words for me.

– Well, dear, she loves you! – The neighbour said and warmly smiled. She tied the coloured lace onto Snow-storm's neck and solemnly brought her to me. – We brought her home for the first time with the same "lead". Take her. She is yours. I wish happiness to you both...

Tears glittered in my neighbour's eyes, apparently even the kind recollections still wounded her heart worn out with sufferings for her lost husband...

– I promise, I will love her very much and look after her very well! – Choking with agitation, I babbled. – She will be happy...

All around smiled and this scene suddenly reminded me of another one I had seen earlier. The only difference was – a man was handed a medal. I merrily laughed, firmly hugged my amazing gift and swore in my heart never to part with it.

Suddenly it dawned on me:

– Wait! Where will she live? We don't have such a wonderful place which you have. – I asked my neighbour, being slightly disappointed.

– Don't worry, dear. She can live here and you'll come to clean her, feed, look after her and go for a ride – she is yours. Just think that you "rent" a house for her here. I don't need it anymore, because I am not going to have horses. So, you're welcome to use it. And it will be a pleasure for me that Snow-storm will continue to live here.

I thankfully hugged my kind neighbour, took the coloured lace and led Snow-storm (now *mine!!!*) home. My child's heart rejoiced – this was the most wonderful gift in the world! And indeed it was very well worth the wait.

By midday I came to myself a little after such a stunning gift and began to make "spy" sallies to the kitchen and dining-room. It's better to say – I tried, but even my most persistent attempts to penetrate there, unfortunately, failed. This year my grandmother definitely decided not to show me her culinary "works of art" till the time of "celebration". I was dying to look, even out of the corner of my eye, what she had worked at so zealously for two whole days, accepting nobody's help and keeping everybody out.

Finally the long-awaited time came at last and my first guests began to appear at about five o'clock in the evening. Eventually I could admire the festive table. When the door into the living room was opened, I thought that I had got into a fairy-tale garden! My grandmother merrily smiled and I dashed to her and threw my arms around her neck, almost crying with the gratitude which overflowed me.

The whole room was decorated with winter flowers. Enormous cups of bright yellow chrysanthemums looked like numerous suns which made the room light and merry. And the festive table was a real work of grandmother's art! Stunning smells came from it and the variety of dishes shocked. There was a duck baked until it's crust was golden, in my favourite pear sauce where the halves of pears stewed in cream and cinnamon floated, and a juicy chicken filled with nuts and white mushrooms teased our nostrils with the tenderest smell of the mushroom sauce and made our mouths water. There was a huge pike in the middle of the table, baked whole with juicy pieces of sweet pepper in lemon-cranberry sauce. And the smell of thick, succulent turkey legs under a crust of cranberry mousse made my poor stomach jump.

Garlands of various smoked sausages cut in thin pieces and beaded on the thinnest small twigs like *shashlicks* decorated with pickled tomatoes and cucumbers "killed" with the smell of famous Lithuanian smoked food, not yielding to stunningly smelling smoked salmon around which there were small merry groups of juicy salt milk mushrooms in sour cream sauce. The golden

toasted round *pirozki* puffed hot steam spreading a delicious "cabbage" aroma. This abundance of my grandmother's most skilful "works" shocked my "hungry" imagination, not to mention the sweets, the top of which was my favourite tender curd pie whipped with cherries! I looked at my grandmother with admiration thanking her from the bottom of my heart for this fairy-tale, truly royal table! She smiled, being content with the produced effect, and began to enthusiastically invite my guests to the table, numbed as they were by such plenty.

There were a lot of "big" anniversary birthdays in my life afterwards, but none of them, even those celebrated in the most refined foreign restaurants, could ever surpass my amazing tenth birthday which my extraordinary grandmother organized for me...

But apparently it was too early for "surprises" to come to the end this evening. In half an hour, when the "feast" already was at its height, the air in the room suddenly began to vibrate as usual (for me) and I saw Stella. I jumped up with surprise, almost dropping my dish and quickly began to look around – to see whether somebody else saw her. But the guests were enthusiastically busy with the "fruits" of my grandmother's culinary art, paying no attention to the wonder-girl which suddenly appeared next to them.

– Surprise!!! – My little friend merrily clapped her hands. – Happy **big** birthday to you! – And thousands of the most whimsical flowers and butterflies began to fall from the ceiling, converting the room into a fairy-tale Aladdin's cave.

– How did you get here?!!! You said that you could not come here?! – I asked dumbfounded, forgetting even to thank the girl for the beauty she made for me.

– I did not know I could! – Stella exclaimed. – I just thought yesterday of those dead you had helped and asked Gran how they could come back. It appeared quite possible, only one has to know how! So, I came here. Aren't you glad to see me?

– Of course I am! – I hurried to reassure her, and feeling panicky tried to think of something which would allow me to talk both to her and my guests, giving away neither her nor myself. But another surprise, which complicated the already complicated situation, unexpectedly happened.

– Wow, th-oo many flower-th! It th-oo beautiful!!! – A three-year old child lisped, squealing in delight, spinning round and round on his mother's knee. – O-o-h, butterfly-th! They are th-oo big!

I stared at him stupefied and for some time was unable to utter a word. And the little one happily continued to mumble, as if nothing happened, and break forth from his mother's hands, which firmly held him, to "touch" all these bright and multicoloured beautiful things which suddenly appeared from nowhere. Stella understood that *somebody else* could *see* her and happily began to show him different funny fairy-tale pictures. The child was absolutely charmed and happily squealed in utter delight on his mother's knees...

– Girl, who are you girl?! O-oh, what a big bear!!! It's pink! Mummy may I take it home? O-o-h, birds! They are th-oo bright! And they have golden wing-th!

His blue wide open eyes shone with delight and caught every new appearance of the "bright and unusual". His happy face was radiant – the child accepted that naturally, as if everything should happen precisely that way.

The situation got totally out of control, but I noticed nothing around, thinking in that moment only of one thing – the boy saw!!! He saw the way I saw! So, it was true that there were such people like me somewhere! It means that I was absolutely **normal** and not as lonely as I thought in the beginning! So, it was really a Gift! Probably I looked at him too dumbfounded and intently, because his confused mother turned red and at once rushed to "calm" her son in order that nobody could hear what he was saying. She began to prove to me that "*he just makes everything up and that a doctor says that (!!!) He is very imaginative and there is no need to pay attention to him!*". She was very nervous and I saw that she was eager to leave our house as soon as possible to avoid possible questions.

– Please, don't worry! – I pleaded in a low voice. – Your son does not make anything up – he

sees! The same way I do. You must help him! Please, don't take him to a doctor anymore, your boy is *special*! And doctors will kill all that! Talk to my grandmother, she'll explain a lot of things to you... Only don't take him to a doctor, please! – I could not stop, because my heart was sick for this little gifted boy, and I desperately wanted to "save" him no matter what!

– Look, now I shall show something to him and he'll see and you don't, because he has a gift and you don't. – I quickly recreated Stella's red dragon.

– Wow! Wow! What-th this?! – The boy began to clap his hands in delight. – It-tha little dragon, ithn't it? Like in a fairy-tale? It'th red! Mummy, look! A little dragon!

– Svetlana, I had a gift too. – The neighbour whispered. – But I am not going to allow my son to suffer because of it like I did. I've already suffered enough for both... He **has to have a different** life.

I even jumped with surprise! It means that she **saw**! And knew! I was really indignant.

– Do you not think that maybe he has a right to choose for **himself**? In fact it's **his life**! And if **you were unable to cope with it**, it **does not mean** that **he will be unable too**! You have no right to take his gift away from him before he even understands that he has it! It looks like murder – you want to kill part of him *about which he has not even heard yet*! – I indignantly hissed at her. Everything inside me "reared up" because of such a frightful injustice!

I wanted very much to convince this stubborn lady to leave her wonderful child alone, but I clearly saw by her sad but very sure look, that I would hardly succeed in convincing her of something today and decided to leave the attempt for the moment and later talk to my grandmother, and maybe we could think of something. I sadly looked at her and once again asked:

– Please, don't take him to a doctor. You know that he is not ill!

Her only reply was a strained smile and then she quickly took her boy and went out, apparently, to take some fresh air which (I was sure) she needed so much.

*I knew this neighbour very well. She was a pleasant enough person, but what staggered me most of all was the fact that she was **one of those** people who tried to "isolate" me from their children and badgered me after the ill-fated case with "lighting the fire"! (Although her eldest son – I would like to give him his due – never betrayed me and continued to be my friend despite all prohibitions). As it appeared now she was the one who **knew better than others** that I was an absolutely **normal, not dangerous**, girl! And that I looked for a correct way out of that "incomprehensible and unknown" in which fate suddenly threw me, just like she did once.*

*Beyond all doubt, **fear** must be a very strong factor in our life, if a person is able to **betray and to turn aside so easily** from the one who needs help so much, who could be easily helped, if it were not for the fear which so deeply crept into one's heart.*

*Certainly, one may say that I don't know **what** happened to her once and **what** wicked and pitiless fate made her suffer. But if I knew that somebody at the beginning of his life had the same gift which made me suffer so much, I would do everything in my power to help or aim him in the right direction in order to prevent **another gifted** person "wandering in the darkness" and violently suffering like I did... And instead of helping, she tried to "punish" me, as others did, but they at least **did not know what it had been** and honestly tried to protect their children from what they could not explain or understand.*

*So, she came today to us as a guest, as if nothing had happened, with her little son who appeared **the same way "gifted" as I was**, and who she was very afraid to show to anybody in case that somebody saw that her dear child had exactly the same "curse" as I, was due to her professed concept. I was sure now that she was not greatly pleased to come to us, but she could not refuse the invitation, because her eldest son – Algis – was invited for my birthday and there was no serious reason to prohibit him from coming. It would have been too boorish and not "neighbourly", if she had done that.*

The reason that we invited her was very simple. They lived three streets away from us, her son

would have come back home in the evening alone. Therefore, we understood that the mother would worry and decided to do the only right thing in this situation – invite her and her little son to spend the evening at our festive table. As I understood now, the "poor thing" just suffered, waiting for a good opportunity to leave us as early as possible and go back home without any incidents...

– Are you all right, dear? – My mother's affectionate voice sounded alongside.

I smiled her as confidently as I could and said that of course I was absolutely all right. But my head was spinning from what was going on and my heart began to sink, because I saw that fellows were beginning to turn their heads toward me and I had to gather myself quickly and "set" the "iron control" over my raging emotions. I was "knocked" from my usual state and to my huge shame absolutely forgot about Stella. But the little one immediately reminded me herself:

– But you said that you did not have friends, and there are so many of them. – Stella said being surprised and even slightly offended.

– Those are not *real* friends. They are just guys who I live next door to or we study together. They are not like you. You are real.

Stella began to shine at once. I smiled at her in my "disconnected" way and feverishly tried to find a way out, having absolutely no idea of how to get out of this "slippery" situation and began to be nervous, because I did not want to offend my best friend but knew that soon my "strange" behaviour would be noticed and foolish questions which I had no desire whatsoever to answer today, would rain down upon me.

– Gosh, what yummy things you have here!!! – Stella jabbered, looking at the festive table in delight. – What a pity that I cannot try it! And what presents have you got? May I see them? – As usual the questions poured from her.

– I was given my favourite horse and many other things. I have not looked yet, but I'll show you everything!

Stella shone being incredibly happy to be with me here on Earth, and I was more and more confused, being unable to find a solution to the ticklish problem.

– It's so beautiful here and everything is so delicious! I am sure. You are so happy to eat such things!

– Well, I don't get this every day. – I laughed.

My grandmother watched me, apparently amusing herself very much with the situation, but was not going to help me for the time being, as usual first waiting to see what I would do. But, as bad luck would have it, nothing occurred to me, probably because of today's too stormy emotions, and I began to panic seriously.

– Aha! Here is your Gran! May I invite mine? – Stella gladly offered.

I almost shouted – *No!!!* – at once, but did not want to offend my little friend and with the happiest air I could make at that moment, I gladly said: – Of course, you may!

And the amazing old lady, who I now knew very well, appeared on our threshold.

– Hello, my dearest! I wanted to visit Anna Fedorovna and it resulted in me getting straight to the feast. You'll forgive my intrusion, please...

– Please, come in! There is enough room for everybody! – My father offered affectionately, and very attentively looked at me.

Although Stella's grandmother did not look at all like my "guest" or "schoolfellow", dad apparently felt something unusual in her and put all the "blame" for this "unusualness" on me, because usually I was responsible for every "strange" thing which happened in our house.

I was so embarrassed that I could not explain anything to him right now that even my ears turned red. I knew that later, when all guests were gone, I would tell him everything; meanwhile I could not meet dad's eyes, because I was not accustomed to hiding anything from him and was terribly ill at ease.

– What happened to you again, dear? – My mother asked in a low voice. – You seem to be up in the clouds. May be you are tired? Do you want to lie down?

Mother was truly worried and I felt bad to lie to her. Regrettably, I could not tell her the truth (in order not to frighten her again) and tried to assure her that everything was absolutely perfect with me and at the same time feverishly thought of what I have to do.

– Why are you so nervous? – Stella asked unexpectedly. – It's because I came?

– Of course not! – I exclaimed, but on seeing her intent look, decided that it was dishonest to lie to a friend.

– All right, you've guessed. It's just that when I talk to you I look "frozen" to others and it looks very strange. Especially it frightens my mother. So, I don't know how to get out of the situation in order that everybody feels good.

– Why did not you tell me?! – Stella was very surprised. – I wanted to make you happy, not to disappoint! I will go away right away.

– But you did make me happy! – I objected sincerely. – It's just because of them...

– Will you come again soon? I missed you. It's so boring to go for a walk alone. Gran is lucky – she is alive and can walk wherever she wants, even to yours....

I felt pity to this wonderful and kindest little girl.

– You come to me when you want, only when I am alone and then nobody can disturb us. – I sincerely offered. – And I will come to you soon when holidays are over. Wait for me.

Stella joyfully smiled and "decorating" the room with mad flowers and butterflies once again, disappeared. I felt empty without her, as if she took with her part of the joy which filled this wonderful evening. I looked at my grandmother, searching for support, but she and her guest enthusiastically talked about something and paid no attention to me. It seemed that everything got into place and all was well again, but I could not stop thinking of Stella, about her loneliness and how unfair sometimes our Fate could be. So, on promising to myself to come back to my faithful little friend as quickly as possible, I fully "returned" to my "living" friends, and only dad very attentively looked at me for the rest of the evening with surprised eyes, as if he tried to understand *when* and *what* serious thing he had missed about me.

When the guests began to leave, the "seeing" boy suddenly began to cry. When I asked him what happened, he pouted and lisped offendedly:

– Where ith the girl? And the bear? And there are no butterfly-th...

His mother gave a strained smile, took her second son who was reluctant to say goodbye to us and quickly went home.

I was very disappointed and happy at the same time! It was the first time I had met another child who has a gift similar to mine and I gave my word to myself that I would not calm down until I convinced his "unfair" and unhappy mother what an enormous miracle in fact her child was... He, as we all have, **has** to have *the right to free choice*, and his mother **had no right** to take it from him, at least until he begins to understand something.

I lifted my eyes and saw dad. He stood, leaning against a door jamb and all this time observed me with a huge interest. He came, tenderly hugged my shoulders and quietly said:

– Let's go and talk and you'll tell me what was that for which you fought so heartily...

Suddenly I felt so relieved and calm. At last he will know everything and I will never have to hide anything from him! He was my best friend who, unfortunately, *did not know even half of the truth* about what my life truly was. It was **dishonest** and **unfair**... Only now I understood how strange it was to hide my "second" life from dad all this time only because it seemed to my mother that he would not understand... I **should have** given him a chance a long time ago and I was glad that I could at least do that now.

We comfortably settled down on his favourite sofa and talked and talked for a very long time.

I was enormously happy and surprised that as I told him about my unbelievable adventures, his face lightened more and more! I understood that all my stories not only did not frighten him, but on the contrary – they made him very happy for some reason.

– I always knew that you would be special, my Light one... – My father said very seriously when I finished. – I am very proud of you. Can I help you in something?

I was so punch-drunk by his words that I suddenly started to sob violently. Dad lulled me in his arms like a little child, quietly whispering something, and I was so happy that he had understood me that I heard nothing. I only knew that all my hateful "secrets" were behind and now **everything would be all right**.

I wrote about this birthday because it left an imprint of something very important and very deep in my soul without which my story would be incomplete...

The next day everything again seemed ordinary and routine, as if an incredibly happy birthday did not happen yesterday...

The usual school and domestic chores occupied almost the whole of my time and the little bit that remained free was my favourite time, and I tried being very "thrifty" using it in order to know as many useful and "unusual" things in me and the surrounding world as possible...

Naturally, I was not allowed to see the "gifted" neighbourly boy. It was explained to me that he got a cold, but as I knew later from his elder brother, the boy felt great and obviously was ill only for me.

I was very sorry that his mother, who undoubtedly had gone along a "thorny" way of the "unusual", categorically refused to receive my help and tried to protect her nice and talented son from me in every way. But again it was only one of numerous **bitter and offensive moments** of my life, when *nobody needed the help I offered* and I tried to avoid such "moments" as assiduously as possible... Besides one cannot prove anything to people, if they refuse to accept it. I never considered it correct to prove my truth "with fire and sword" and therefore preferred to let it take its course until a person would come and ask me to help.

I became a little estranged from my school girl-friends again, because lately they spoke about one and the same things – what boys they liked most and how they could "get hold" of one or another. Frankly speaking, I could not understand what it was that so strongly attracted them so that they could pitilessly spend such valuable free time on it and be in ecstasy over everything they said to each other or heard. Apparently, I was not ready yet for the difficult "boys-girls" saga for some reason and therefore got a wicked nickname "The arrogant one" from girls. Well, I think I never was *arrogant*. The girls were simply enraged because I refused to take part in their "doings" for the simple reason that I **honestly** was not interested in them and did not consider it wise to waste my precious free time for nothing. Naturally my schoolfellows did not like my behaviour at all, because it *marked me out from the crowd* again and made me *different* from others, which in their opinion was "inhuman"...

This was how I spent my winter days – being half "rejected" by my school friends which did not distress me at all, because, on having worried about our mutual "relations" for several years, I saw that in the end there was no sense in that, because *everybody lived his life the way he considered right*, and what would become of us later was a personal matter. So, nobody could make me waste my "valuable" time on small talk, when I preferred to use it reading interesting books, going for a walk to the "floors" or riding Snow-storm on winter forest paths...

After my honest account about my "adventures" dad stopped considering me to be a "small child" (to my enormous joy!!!) and I was permitted to use his books which I previously had been forbidden to touch which gave me more reasons to stay at home, and combining such a life with grandmother's pies, I was absolutely happy and by no means felt lonely.

However, like it had happened before, I could not enjoy my favourite pastime – tranquil reading – for a long, because something "eccentric" would necessarily happen. So, one winter evening, when I was enjoying a new book, crunching the freshly baked cherry patties, the highly

strung Stella popped in and declared in a peremptory voice:

- It's so good that I found you. You must come with me at once!
- What happened? Come, where? – I was surprised at her unusual haste.
- To Maria. Dean is dead... Let's go, quickly!!! – The girl impatiently shouted.

I at once remembered the little, dark-eyed Maria who had the only friend – her faithful Dean...

- I'm coming! – I fluttered and quickly rushed after Stella to the "floors"...

34. Sorrow

Again we found ourselves in the same sullen and ominous scenery to which I have almost got accustomed, since visiting the Low Astral world so many times, if one can get accustomed to something like that at all.

We quickly looked around and saw Maria.

The little girl sat right on the ground, bent, her head drooping, seeing and hearing nothing around. The only thing she did was affectionately stroke her "gone" friend's shaggy and immobile body with her frozen palm, as if trying thus to awaken him. Severe and bitter adult tears streamed down from her sad and lifeless eyes like little brooks. Flashing like brilliant sparks, they disappeared in the dry grass in a split second, sprinkling it with pure and *living rain*. It seemed that this world, which had been cruel enough before, had become even colder and stranger for Maria. She was now absolutely alone, so amazingly fragile in her deep sorrow, and there is nobody left to console, caress or protect her. Her best friend, her faithful Dean lay like an enormous and immobile hillock next to her...

She pressed close to his soft shaggy back, unconsciously **denying** acceptance of his death, and stubbornly refusing to leave him, as if knowing that even now, after his death he still dearly loved and sincerely protected her. She desperately lacked his warmth, his strong "shaggy" support and the habitual and reliable "*their* little world" in which only the two of them dwelt. But Dean was silent, refusing to wake up. Some little sharp-toothed creatures darted about him trying to bite off a piece of his hairy "flesh". At the beginning Maria tried to drive them away with a stick but saw that the attackers paid no attention to her and gave up on it. Like on the "firm" Earth, there was the "law of the strongest", but when the strongest died, those who **could not get him when he was alive** were eager to repair an omission by "tasting" his dead spiritual body, at the very least.

On seeing this sorrowful picture, my heart began to ache and my eyes to sting treacherously. Suddenly I felt so sorry for this wonderful and brave little girl. I could not even imagine how she – poor lonely little thing – would now be able to stand up for herself in this frightful and ominous world.

Stella's eyes suddenly got wet too. Apparently the same thoughts visited her head.

- I am sorry, Maria, how did your Dean die? – At last I dared to ask.

The girl lifted her tear-stained face. I thought that she did not even understand what she was being asked about. She was very far away... Probably where her true friend was still alive, where she was not so lonely and everything was clear and well. She did not want to return here. Today's world was wicked and dangerous, and she did not have anyone who would support and protect her. At last she took a deep breath; courageously gathered her emotions together and told us the sad story of Dean's death...

– I was with my mother and my kind Dean watched over us as usual... Suddenly a *frightful* man appeared from somewhere. He was very bad. I wanted to run from him wherever my feet would carry me. I just could not understand – why. He looked the same way we do. He was even very handsome, simply very unpleasant. He emanated horror and death. And he laughed loudly all the time, which made our blood freeze. He wanted to take my mother with him, saying that she would serve him. My mother was breaking loose from his grip, but he, certainly, was far stronger. Dean tried to protect us in which he was always successful before. Only the man was obviously

special... He threw a strange orange "flame" into Dean, impossible to put out, and when Dean, even being on fire, continued to protect us, the man killed him with blue lightning which suddenly "blazed" from his hand. Here is how my Dean died... And now I am alone.

– Where is your mother? – Stella asked.

– She is still here. – The little girl was confused. – It's just she is angry very often... And now we don't have any protection. Now we are absolutely alone...

Stella and I exchanged glances. It turned out that the same idea dawned on us – Svetilo! He was strong and kind. We hoped that he would want to help this unhappy and lonely little girl and be her defender until she went back into her "good and kind" world...

– Where is this *frightful man* now? Do you know where he went? – I asked impatiently. – And why he did not take your mother with him?

– I don't know. Probably he will come back. I don't know where he went and who he is. But I know that he is very, very wicked... Why he is so wicked, girls?

– Well, we'll find out. I promise you. And now would you like to see a **good** man? He is here too, but, unlike that "frightful" one, he is truly very good. He can be your friend while you are here, if you want it, of course. Friends call him Svetilo.

– Oh, what a beautiful name! And a kind one!

Maria gradually came back to life and when we suggested meeting her new friend, she hesitated a little but finally agreed. The already familiar cave appeared before us, emitting golden and warm sunlight.

– Wow, look! It's a sun, right?! It looks like a genuine one! How did it get **here**? – The little girl looked dumbfounded, discovering such unusual beauty in this terrible place.

– It is genuine. – Stella smiled. – Only it was created by us. Go, look!

Maria timidly slipped into the cave and immediately we heard an enthusiastic squeal, just as we had expected.

She jumped outside, being absolutely stunned, unable to put two words together being so surprised, although we saw in her eyes, which grew big with wonder and delight, that there was a lot she wanted to say. Stella affectionately hugged the girl's shoulders and returned her to the cave... which, to our greatest surprise, appeared empty.

– So, where is my new friend? – Maria was upset. – Didn't you hope to find him here?

Stella was puzzled –what extraordinary thing could have happened to make Svetilo leave his "sunny" abode?

– Maybe something happened? – I asked, a quite foolish question.

– Of course, something happened! Otherwise he would never go away from here.

– Maybe that *wicked man* was here too? – Maria was scared.

To tell the truth, though this flashed through my mind too, I did not have time to say it aloud, because we saw Svetilo with three children. It was obvious that something mortally frightened them and trembling like autumn leaves, they fearfully pressed close to Svetilo, being too afraid to stir from his side by so much as a step. But the children's curiosity obviously overcame the fear and, peeking around from their defender's wide back, they examined our unusual trio with surprise. As for us, we even forgot to greet everybody and looked at the children with even greater curiosity, trying to figure out where they could have come from in the "low astral" world and what had happened here anyway.

– Hello, dearest... You should not have come here, really. Something bad is happening here... – Svetilo affectionately greeted us.

– Well, one hardly may expect something good in such a place. – Stella commented sadly smiling. – But why did you leave?! In fact any "bad" one could come and occupy the place while you are away.

– In that case you would "*fold*" everything back up. – Svetilo gave a simple answer.

The two of us stared at him in surprise – this was the most **appropriate word** for the process. But how could Svetilo know it?! In fact he did not understand anything about it! Or did he understand but say nothing?

– Much water has flowed under the bridge since we met last time, dear. – He said calmly, as if answering our thoughts. – I try to survive here and begin to understand something with your help. And as for my bringing somebody here, I cannot enjoy such beauty alone when the little ones tremble in terrible horror just behind the wall. All this is not for me if I cannot help...

I glanced at Stella. She looked very proud and of course was right. **Not in vain** had she created this wonderful world for him. Svetilo was truly worthy of it, but like a big child, he did not understand it. His heart was too big and kind and **refused to accept help without sharing it with somebody else**.

– How did **they** get here? – Stella asked pointing at the scared children.

– Oh, it's a long story. I called on them from time to time. They came to visit their father and mother from the upper "floor". Sometimes I took them to my place to protect them from getting into trouble. They are small and did not understand how dangerous it is here. Their parents were here and they thought that everything was all right. I was afraid all the time that they would understand that it was dangerous when it was too late... So, this "too late" has just happened...

– What have their parents done to get here? And why have they all "gone away" simultaneously? Did they all die? – The tender-hearted Stella could not stop asking.

– Their parents had to kill other people to save the children... for which they paid after death, like all of us... But now they **are not even here anymore**... In fact they exist nowhere... – Svetilo whispered very sadly.

– What do you mean "nowhere"? What happened? Did they manage to die **here** too?! How could that happen? – Stella was surprised.

Svetilo nodded.

– A *man* killed them, if "it" can be called man... He is a monster... I'll try to find him... to destroy.

We at once looked at Maria. Again it was a *frightful man* and he killed again... Apparently it was the same who killed her Dean.

– This girl – her name is Maria – lost her only protection, her friend which **was killed by a "man" too**. I think it's the same person. How can we find him? Do you know?

– He'll come of his own volition. – Svetilo quietly answered and pointed at the children who pressed close to him. – He'll come after them. He released them accidentally. **I** prevented him from having them.

Stella and I felt huge thorny tingles down our spine.

It sounded very sinister. And we had not been adult enough yet to destroy somebody easily. We did not even know whether we could do it at all. It's all very simple in books – good heroes defeat monsters, but in reality everything is much more complicated. And even if you are sure that it is **evil**, you need a lot of courage to beat it... We knew **how to do good** which, in fact, is not something everybody knows... but neither Stella nor I had learnt how to take somebody's life, even the worst one... And on having not tried such a thing, we could not be quite sure that our "boldness" would not let us down at the most crucial moment.

I was unaware that Svetilo observed us very attentively all this time. And of course our confused faces told him all about our "vacillations" and "fears" better than any confession, even the longest one.

– You are right, dearest. Only idiots **do not fear to kill**... or monsters... A normal person will never get used to it, especially, if he's never tried it before. But you will not have to try. I am not going to allow it, because, if you take revenge, even justly protecting somebody, **it will burn your**

soul and you will never be the same... Believe me.

Suddenly, right behind the wall, we heard a loud and terrible laugh the wildness of which made our hearts freeze. The children squealed and threw themselves down on the floor. Stella feverishly tried to close the cave with her protective shield, but failed, apparently being in the grip of deep emotions. Maria stood motionless, white like death and it was obvious that the recently experienced shock seized her again.

– It's him. – The girl whispered in horror. – It's **he** who killed Dean. And he'll kill all of us.

– Well, we'll see. – Svetilo pronounced deliberately and very confidently. – I've seen worse! Hold on, girl Maria!

The loud laughter continued. Suddenly I understood very clearly that a **human being could not laugh like that!** Not even lowest of "low astral" ones. There was something very wrong in all this, something "grated upon my ear". It looked more like a farce or a false performance with a very frightful, mortal end. Finally it dawned on me – he **was not** the man he appeared to be!!! It was just a **human mask**, but the interior was frightful and alien. In for a penny, in for a pound – I decided to try to fight him. But if I had known the outcome, I probably would have never tried.

The children and Maria hid in the deep niche which the sunlight did not reach. Stella and I stood inside trying to maintain the protective shield which for some reason broke all the time. Svetilo, trying to preserve his iron calmness, was at the entrance of the cave to be the first to meet the unknown monster and, as far as I understood, was not going to let him inside. Suddenly my heart began to ache badly, as if having a presentiment of huge misfortune.

The bright blue flame blazed. We gasped. That which was Svetilo just a second ago instantly turned into "nothing", having no chance even to start resisting. He turned into a transparent blue puff of smoke and went into distant eternity without leaving any trace in this world...

Before we had time to be frightened, the terrible man appeared in the entrance. He was very tall and to my surprise... very handsome. But the loathsome expression of cruelty and death on his refined face spoiled his appeal, and also there was a terrible "degeneration" in him, if I may define it like this... Suddenly I remembered Maria's words about her "monster" Dean. She was absolutely right – **beauty can be surprisingly monstrous; on the contrary, one is able to love dearly something "monstrous" which is good and kind...**

The terrible man boisterously laughed again.

His loud laughter repeated in my brain like a sickly echo, sticking in it with thousands of the thinnest needles, and my body, growing numb, gradually weakened becoming almost "wooden" as if being influenced by some very strong alien force. The sound of the mad loud laughter scattered into a firework of millions of unknown shades which came back into my brain, piercing it with sharp splinters. At last I understood that it was something like the strongest "hypnosis" which steadily **increased** fear using the unusual sound as an instrument, thus forcing us to dread the man.

– So, what? Are you going to laugh for long?! Or are you afraid *to talk*? We're tired of listening you! It's ridiculous! – I rudely shouted, unexpectedly for me.

I had no idea what had come over me and where I could find so much boldness inside me, because my head was spinning in fear and I became weak at the knees, as if I was going to faint right on the floor of the cave. But not for nothing do they say that sometimes fear can push people to perform big feats. Probably my fear went so beyond some limits that I somehow managed to *forget* about it. Fortunately the *frightful man* noticed nothing. Apparently he was taken aback by the fact that I had the nerve to speak to him in such an insolent way. Meanwhile I continued, feeling that *by all means I had to break* this "incantation" as quickly as possible.

– Well, what? Are we going to talk or are you only able to just roar with laughter? Have you ever been taught to talk?

I **intentionally made him angry** as much as I could, trying to get him out of his groove, but at the same time I was wildly afraid that he would finally **show** us that he could do **much more**

than talk. I glanced at Stella and tried to pass the picture of the *green ray*, which always saved us, to her. (*This "green ray" simply meant a very dense and concentrated stream of energy from the green crystal which my distant "star friends" once gave me. Its energy was qualitatively very different from the "earthly" one and therefore almost always worked faultlessly*). My friend nodded and before the *frightful man* knew where he was we struck him right in the heart... if he certainly had one at all.

The creature howled (I already understood that it was not a human being) and began to writhe, as if "tearing" off itself the stranger's "earthly" body which now became a huge impediment for it. We struck again and suddenly saw **two** different tightly grappled spirits which flashed with blue lightning and rolled along the floor, trying to incinerate each other. One of them was that beautiful human, and the other one... Well, no brain is able to imagine such a horror. Something incredibly scary and wicked which looked like a two-headed monster spitting green saliva and "smiling" with bared knife-like teeth rolled down the floor grappling with a human being. The green, scaly-serpentine body of the horrific creature was incredibly flexible and it was clear that the man would not stand long and without help the poor fellow had no chance to escape with his life, even in this terrible world.

I saw that Stella was trying to do her best to strike but was afraid to injure the human who she wanted to help so much. Suddenly Maria jumped out of her shelter and somehow grasped the terrible creature's neck, in a second she blazed up like a bright torch and ceased to live forever... Before we had time to scream let alone to understand anything, the fragile and brave little girl sacrificed herself in order that another *good man* could win, remaining to live instead of her... My heart stopped with pain. Stella began to sob... An incredibly handsome man of very robust constitution lay on the floor of the cave. However, he did not look strong at the moment, rather on the contrary – he seemed very vulnerable and dying... The monster disappeared and to our surprise, the pressure which just a minute ago threatened to crush our brains disappeared too.

Stella came to the stranger and timidly touched his high forehead with her palm. The man gave no signs of life. Only his trembling eyelids showed that he was still here and had not died for good, like Svetilo and Maria who now do not live anywhere...

– Why, Maria... How could she?! She is so small... – Stella whispered bitterly, swallowing tears. Shining large peas streamed down her pale cheeks, making wet tracks and dropped on her chest. – And Svetilo... How can that be? Tell me?! How!!! It's not a victory at all. It's **worse** than a defeat! A victory should not cost **such** a price!

What could I tell her?! Like her, I was deeply hurt and felt terrible. The loss burned my soul, leaving a deep bitterness in my memory, which still remembered them alive, and imprinted this frightful moment in it forever... But I had to brace up somehow because the frightened to death little children fearfully snuggled up to each other and there was nobody who would calm them down or caress them in that terrible moment. Therefore, I drove my pain inside as deeply as possible and warmly smiling to them, asked what their names were. The children did not answer, but only snuggled up to each other more strongly, understanding nothing of what was going on and where their newly found friend with a very kind and warm name Svetilo had disappeared to so quickly.

Stella sat, shrivelled up, on a stone quietly sobbing, wiped the bitter tears with her fist. Her fragile shrinking body expressed her innermost sorrow. On looking at her, grieving and so unlike my usual "light Stella", I suddenly felt cold and terrified, as if the bright and sunny Stella's world went out in the twinkling of an eye, and dark heart-scraping emptiness surrounded us instead...

The usual Stella's quick "coming to herself" did not work this time. Probably, it was too painful to lose friends dear to her heart, especially **knowing** that no matter how strongly she missed them later, she would never see them again. It was not an ordinary **death of the body**, when we all get a great chance to be incarnated again. **Their soul died** – that was exactly what had happened... And Stella **knew** that the brave girl Maria, the "eternal warrior" Svetilo or even the scary-looking but kind Dean could never be incarnated again, all having sacrificed their **eternal life** for other, probably very good but, *absolutely strangers to them*, people.

My heart ached unbearably the same way as Stella's, because it was the first time I saw how brave and very kind people... my friends... went away into eternity **of their own free will**. It seemed that the sorrow settled forever in my injured child's heart. However, I **already understood** that no matter how strongly I suffered and wished, nothing would bring them back. Stella was right – one **should not** pay such a price for victory. But this was their own choice and we had no right to deny them it. Regrettably, we had no chance and time to try to make them change their mind... Well, the living have to live, otherwise this irreparable sacrifice will be vain, which we should not allow under any circumstances.

– What shall we do with them? – Stella brokenly sighed and pointed at the bunched up children. – We cannot leave them here.

Before I had time to open my mouth, I heard quiet and very sad voice:

– I shall stay with them, if, certainly, you will allow me.

We jumped and turned around. It was the man who Maria saved and about who we had absolutely forgotten.

– How do you feel? – I asked as amiably as possible.

I **honestly did not bear any ill will** toward this unhappy stranger for whose salvation such a high price was paid. This was not his guilt and Stella and I perfectly understood it, but the frightful bitterness of the loss still covered my eyes with anger. Although I knew it was very unfair as regards him, I could not force this terrible pain out of me, holding on to it in order that later on, when I would be absolutely alone sitting "in my corner", I could give free rein to my bitter and heavy tears... Also I was afraid that the stranger would somehow feel my "non-acceptance" of him and thus his *liberation* would lose the importance and beauty of **the victory over evil** in the name of which my friends died... Therefore I tried to do my best to brace up and smile as sincerely as possible, waiting for the answer to my question.

Man sadly looked around, apparently understanding nothing of what had happened here and what had been happening to him in particular all this time.

– Where am I? – He asked in a low voice, hoarse with agitation. – What is this terrible place? It does not look like what I remember... Who are you?

– We are friends. And you are quite right. It isn't very pleasant place... Moreover, further on there are places much more frightful. Our friend lived here and he died...

– I am sorry, little ones. How did your friend die?

– You killed him. – Stella whispered sadly.

I froze and stared at my friend. The "sunny" Stella I knew so well, who always felt sorry for everybody and everything, would never make anybody suffer! It is highly likely that the pain of loss made her, as well as me, unconsciously angry at everybody and the little girl was unable to control it yet.

– Me?! – The stranger exclaimed. – It cannot be true! I never killed anybody!

We felt that he told the truth and **knew** that we had no right to lay somebody else's blame on him; therefore we hurried to explain what had happened here.

The man was absolutely shocked and fell silent for quite a long time... Apparently everything he had heard sounded absurd in the extreme to him and did not coincide at all with what he truly was and his attitude to such an inhumanly terrible evil.

– How can I make reparation for all this?! I cannot, right? It's impossible! And how I shall live with it?! – He clutched his head in despair... – How many have I killed, tell me! Can anybody tell? And your friends, why did they do such a thing? Why?!!!

– In order that **you** could live like you should... like you wanted to... not as *somebody else* wanted... to kill the Evil that killed others. That's why, probably... – Stella said sadly.

– I am so sorry, dear... Please, forgive me... if you can... – The man was absolutely broken-

hearted and a very bad presentiment suddenly "pricked" my heart...

– Wait a moment! – I exclaimed indignantly. – You **must** live now! Do you want to bring their sacrifice to nothing?! Don't you dare even think about it! Now you should do good things **instead of them!** It will be the correct thing to do. To **"leave" is the easiest way.** You have no right to do such thing.

The stranger stared at me astounded. It was obvious that he did not expect such a stormy expression of "just" indignation. And then he sadly smiled and quietly pronounced:

– You must have really loved them very much. Who are you, girl?

I had a tickle in my throat and was unable to squeeze a word out for some time. The pain of the terrible loss was so strong and at the same time I was so sad for this "lost soul" which would find it very difficult to exist with such a burden...

– I am Svetlana. And she is Stella. We just walk here – visit friends or help somebody when we can. To tell the truth we have no friends left now ...

– I am sorry, Svetlana, although it certainly will change nothing, even if I beg for your pardon all the time... What happened happened and I cannot change anything. But I can change **what will be**, right? – The man fixed his sky blue eyes at me and on smiling the sorrowful smile, pronounced: – And one more thing... You say that I have a free choice, but it turns out that it's not so free in the end, dear. It rather looks like atonement for the guilt, with which I certainly agree. But in fact it's **your** choice that I **must live** for your friends, because they gave their life for me. But I *did not ask* for it, right? Therefore **it's not my choice**...

I looked at him, quite dumbfounded. But instead of "proud indignation" ready to break loose from my mouth, the understanding of what he was saying gradually grew in me. No matter how strange or offensive it might sound, it was a sincere truth! Even if I did not like it at all...

Yes, my friends' death hurt me painfully, because I shall never see them again. I shall never lead our marvellous, "eternal" conversations with my friend Svetilo in his strange cave filled with light and heartfelt warmth and merry Maria will never show us interesting places which Dean had found and her laughter will never again sound like a merry bell... And it was especially painful that this quite unknown to us man will now live instead of them...

But on the other hand, he **did not ask** us to interfere. He **did not ask** anyone to die for him. He **did not want** to take somebody's life. And now he will have to live with this heaviest burden, trying to "pay off" the guilt with his future deeds which in reality **was not his guilt.** Rather it was the guilt of that terrible unearthly creature which, on seizing our stranger's spirit, killed "far and wide".

Yes, it was **not his** fault.

So, how was it possible to tell who was right and who was guilty, if the **truth** belonged to both sides? There was no doubt that in that moment life seemed me, a confused ten year old girl, too difficult and multi-sided to choose only between "yes" and "no", because there were too many different sides and opinions in every act we did, and it seemed incredibly difficult to find a **right** answer which would be **correct for all**...

– Do you remember anything at all? Who were you? What is your name? How long have you been here? – I asked to leave the delicate topic, unpleasant for everybody.

The stranger was engrossed in thoughts for a while.

– My name was Arnault. I only remember how I lived there, on Earth. And I remember how I "went"... I died, right? After that I remember nothing, although I would like to very much.

– Yes, you were "gone" or died if you are more willing to put it like this, but I am not sure that it's **your** world. I think you must dwell on a higher "floor". This is a world of "crippled" souls – those who killed or strongly offended somebody or even simply cheated and lied a lot. It's a frightful world, probably, that which people call Hell.

– Then why are **you** here? How could you get here? – Arnault was surprised.

– Well, it's a long story, but this is really not our place... Stella lives on the very "top" and I am still on Earth.

– How is that – on Earth?! – He was stunned. It means that you still *live*, right? But how did you get **here**, into such a terrible place?

– Well, to tell the truth I don't like this place too. – Smiling, I shivered. – But sometimes one can find very good people here and we try to help them like we helped you.

– So, what shall I do now? I in fact I know nothing here. And as it appears, I killed too. It means it's just my place. Besides, somebody should take care of them. – He affectionately tousled a kid's curly head.

The children began to look at him increasingly trustfully and a little girl clutched at his hand and decidedly was not going to release it. She was a tiny thing with large grey eyes and the very amusing smiling little face of a merry monkey. She would certainly be very nice, affectionate and everybody's favourite child in normal life on the "real" Earth. But here, after all the horrors she had lived through, her pure and risible face looked extremely exhausted and pale; horror and anguish constantly lived in her grey eyes. Her brothers were a little older, probably about 5 or 6 years old. They looked very frightened and serious, and unlike their little sister expressed no wish whatsoever to enter into contact with us. The girl was the only one of the three who was not afraid of us, because, on adjusting to having a new friend very quickly, she began to chatter merrily:

– My name is Maya. May I, please, stay with you and my brothers too? Now we have nobody. We will help you. – And turning to Stella and me, she asked. – Do you live here, girls? Why do you live here? It's so scary here...

Her manner of speaking – the incessant volley of questions and her way of addressing two people at one and the same time – strongly reminded me of Stella and I wholeheartedly laughed...

– No, Maya, certainly, we don't live here. It was **you** who were very brave to come here. One has to have a lot of courage to do such thing. You are really fine fellows! But now you will have to return where you came from. There is no reason for you to stay here.

– My mum and dad have died "for good"? And we won't see them anymore... Right?

Maya's plump lips began to quiver and the first big tear appeared on her cheek. I knew that if I failed to stop it, there would be a waterfall of tears which should not happen right now, considering everybody's highly-strung state.

– But you are alive, right?! Therefore, whether you want it or not, you will have to live. I think that your mum and dad would be very happy, if they knew that everything is all right with you. They loved you very much... – I said as cheerfully as I could.

– How do you know? – The little girl was surprised.

– Well, they performed a very grave deed, rescuing you. I think that one could do such thing only when he loves and cares for somebody very much.

– Where shall we go now? Shall we go with **you**? – Maya asked looking at me inquiringly, pleading with her enormous grey eyes.

– Arnault would like to take you with him. What do you think about it? His life is also not sweet and he has to get accustomed to many things to survive. So, you will help each other. I think that will be the right thing to do.

Stella finally came to herself and at once "rushed to the attack":

– Look, Arnault, how did it happen that this monster got hold of you? Do you remember anything?

– No... I only remember the light, and then a very bright sunlit meadow. But it *was not Earth*. It was something wonderful and absolutely transparent. There are no such things on Earth. But everything disappeared and I "woke up" here and now.

– What if I "look" through you? – Suddenly a quite wild idea dawned upon me.

– How is that – through me? – Arnault was surprised.

– Right! – Stella exclaimed here. – Why it didn't occur to me?!

– Well, as you see, sometimes something comes to my mind too. – I laughed.

I tried to "enter" into his thoughts – nothing happened. Then I tried to "remember" the moment of his "going away" together with him.

– Oh, it's terrible!!! – Stella squeaked. – Look, it's when they got hold of him!!!

I stopped breathing. The picture we saw was truly awful! This was a moment when Arnault had just died and his spirit began to go up along the blue channel and three terrible creatures sneaked into it right after him! Two of them were low-astral earthly spirits and the *third* one was very different, very frightful and alien, obviously not an earthly one. These creatures were very purposefully after the man, apparently trying to get hold of him for some reason. And he, poor thing, was absolutely unaware that somebody was hunting him and soared in the silence of the silver-blue light, enjoying the unusually deep and *unearthly* peace. He voraciously absorbed this peace, enjoying peace of mind and forgetting for an instant the wild earthly pain which had burst his heart "thanks" to which he got into this transparent unknown world...

At the end of the channel, right before the very entrance to the "floor", **two monsters** quickly darted right behind Arnault into the channel and unexpectedly merged in **one** which quickly flowed into the main one – the most loathsome, obviously the strongest of them. And it attacked... or rather it suddenly became flat, "spread" until it became like transparent smoke and on "wrapping" itself around Arnault, who suspected absolutely nothing, totally swaddled his spirit, depriving him of his former "me" and of his "presence" at all... And after that he dragged poor Arnault's spirit (*which had been just enjoying the beauty of the approaching top "floor"*) straight to the low-astral world, laughing with his terrible blood-freezing laugh...

– I don't understand. – Stella whispered. – How could they capture him? He seemed so strong. Let's see what happened before.

Again we tried to look through the memory of our new acquaintance... and finally understood why he was such easy prey.

Judging by the clothes and surroundings, it happened about one hundred years ago. He stood in the middle of an enormous room where two female bodies, totally naked, lay on the floor, or rather it was a woman and a girl of probably no more than fifteen years old. Both bodies were unmercifully beaten and brutally raped. Poor Arnault was deathly pale... He stood as if dead, motionless and probably did not even understand where he was because the shock was too terrible. If we got it right, it was his wife and daughter who had been subjected to such beastly violence... However, the word "beastly" would not be appropriate here, because *no beast is able to do what sometimes man is capable of*.

Suddenly Arnault began to yell like an injured animal and fell down next to his wife's (?) terribly disfigured body... Emotions raged within him like wild whirlwinds – rage changed to despair, fury clouded grief and turned into the superhuman pain from which there was no salvation. Screaming he rolled down to the floor failing to find the way out of his grief... until finally, to our horror, he became totally silent, no longer moving...

Of course, on producing such a stormy emotional "squall" and dying in the process, he became an ideal "target" to be captured by any, even the weakest, "black" creatures, let alone those which later pursued him so persistently to use his powerful energy body like a simple power "suit" to do their terrible "black" deeds with its help.

– I don't want to look at it anymore. – Stella whispered. – I don't want to see terrible things at all. Are they really humans? Tell me!!! Is it really right to do such things?! We are people!!! Aren't we?

Stella became really hysterical which was so unexpected that in the first seconds I became so confused that I did not know what to say. Stella was strongly indignant and even a little angry

which in this situation was quite acceptable and explainable... for others. But again it was so unlike her that only now I at last understood how badly and deeply the *endless* earthly Evil wounded her tender and kind heart, and how she must be tired of carrying human filth and cruelty on her fragile child's shoulders. I wanted very much to hug this nice, firm and now so sad human being! But I knew that it would upset her even more. Therefore I tried to be calm and do my best to assuage her "dishevelled" feelings, avoiding touching sore spots.

– But there are good things, not only bad! You just look around, your grandmother, for example, and Svetilo, and Maria. She lived only for the sake of others! There are many like them! You simply got very tired and sad because we lost good friends and therefore everything seems to be as black as night now... And tomorrow there will be a new day, and you will become yourself again, I promise you! And one more thing: if you want, we shall never come again to this "floor"? What do you think?

– I don't think that the reason is in the "floor". – Stella said bitterly. – Nothing will change whether we come here or not... The matter is just in the *earthly* life. It is wicked... I don't want to be here anymore...

The thought that Stella wanted to leave me and **go away for good**, terribly scared me. It was so unlike her! Anyway, it was not the Stella I knew so well and I wanted very much to believe that her impetuous love for life and her light merry temper would "make mincemeat" of today's bitterness and exasperation, and very soon she would be the same **sunny** Stella she had been quite recently...

Therefore, I decided to calm down myself a little bit, not to make any "far-reaching" conclusions and wait till tomorrow before undertaking any serious move.

– Look. – Suddenly Stella became interested to my huge relief. – Don't you think that it is **not an earthly** spirit? That which has attacked... It is too different from ordinary "bad earthly" ones which we saw on this "floor". Maybe it used those two *earthly* monsters because it could not get to the **earthly** "floor"?

Like it had seemed to me before, the "main" monster, indeed, was unlike others which we had seen here during our everyday "journeys" to the ground "floor". So, why not to assume that it came from somewhere far away? In fact, if a **good** one like Vaya came, then why not **bad** ones?

– Probably you are right. – I said thoughtfully. – It did not fight the earthly way. He had another, unearthly, force.

– Girls! Please! When shall we go anywhere? – The thin child's voice suddenly asked.

It was Maya. She was embarrassed by interrupting us. Nevertheless, she looked straight at us very decidedly with her big doll's eyes. Suddenly I became very ashamed that I was carried away with our problems and absolutely forgot that those tired and scared to death children were with us waiting for somebody's help...

– Oh, I am sorry, my dearest! Certainly, we shall go! – I exclaimed as merrily as I could and then asked Stella: – What shall we do? Shall we try to go a little bit higher?

We made a protective shield for the children and waited with curiosity for what our new friend would do. On attentively observing our actions, he very easily made similar protection for himself and now calmly waited for what to do next. Stella and I smiled with satisfaction to each other, understanding that we were absolutely right as regards him and that the low astral world was not his place... and who knew; maybe his place was even higher than we thought.

As usual everything around began to sparkle and shine, and in a few seconds we were "pulled" into the very familiar, hospitable and quiet top "floor". It was very pleasant to breathe freely again, not being afraid of some abomination jumping suddenly from round the corner and trying to "regale" itself with us. The world again was friendly and light, but still sad because we understood that it would not be so simple to expel the deep pain and sorrow from our hearts which our friends left on leaving us... Now they lived only *in our memory and hearts*, having no chance to live anywhere else. Then I was naïve enough to give my word to myself that I *would always*

remember them. Regrettably I did not understand then that our memory, no matter how perfect it was, later would be filled with the events of the passing years, and far from every face will be remembered as clearly as we remember it now, and every person, even a very important one, will gradually disappear in the dense fog of time, sometimes never coming back at all... But then it seemed to me that the wild pain would never leave me and stay with me **forever**...

– I've got it! – The already same Stella whispered with joy in her voice. – We can make him happy! We just need to look for one person here!

– Do you mean his wife? To tell the truth I thought about that too. Don't you think it will be too early? Maybe we should give him time to get used to being here?

– If you were him, would not you like to see them alive?! – Stella disagreed at once.

– As usual you are right. – I smiled to my friend.

We slowly "swam" along the silver path, trying not to disturb the sorrow of the others and give them the chance to enjoy the peace after everything they had gone through during this awful day. The children slowly came back to life, observing with admiration the marvellous scenery which passed by them. And only Arnault was very far away from us, roaming in his memory, probably reminding him of very happy events, and his refined and so handsome face lit up with a surprisingly warm and tender smile.

– See, he certainly loved them very much! And you say it's early! Let's look for them! – Stella did not wish to calm down.

– All right, let it be in your way. – I agreed easily, because it seemed correct to me too.

– Tell us, Arnault, how did your wife look? – I carefully began. – Of course, if it's not too painful to talk about it.

He looked in my eyes, very surprised, as if asking how I knew at all that he had a wife.

– It so happened that we saw, but only the end... It was so terrible! – Stella added at once.

I was afraid that the transition from his marvellous dreams into the frightful reality would be too cruel, but as they say "a word spoken is past recalling" and it was too late to change anything. So, we just had to wait whether he would wish to answer. To my huge surprise, his face lit up with happiness and he answered very affectionately:

– Oh, she was a real angel! She had such beautiful fair hair! And her eyes... blue and pure like dew... Oh, what a pity that you never saw my dear Michelle!

– Have you got a daughter? – Stella asked carefully.

– A daughter? – Arnault was surprised and, on understanding what we had seen, added. – Oh, no! It was her sister. She was only sixteen...

Suddenly his eyes were clouded by such acute pain that only now I understood how terribly this unhappy man suffered! Most likely that being unable to carry such beastly pain, he **consciously isolated himself with the wall of their former happiness**, trying to remember only the happy past and to "erase" the horror of the last terrible day from his memory, as much as his wounded and exhausted soul allowed...

We tried to find Michelle and failed for some reason. Stella stared at me in surprise and quietly asked:

– Why can't I find her? Has she died *here* too?

It seemed to me that something simply impeded our finding her in this "floor" and I offered to Stella to look "higher". We mentally slipped to the mental floor... and at once saw her... Indeed she was surprisingly beautiful – light and pure like a brook. Very long golden hair covered her like a golden cloak... I never saw such long and beautiful hair! The young lady was deep in thought and sad, like many others on "floors" who lost their love, relatives or simply because they were alone...

– Hello, Michelle! – Stella greeted her and getting directly to the essence of the matter, said. – We brought you a present!

The lady smiled in surprise and affectionately asked:

– Who are you, girls?

But Stella, not answering, mentally called Arnault.

No words can describe what this meeting brought to them. There is no need, I think. This kind of happiness can't be expressed in words, it'll fade. In that moment there were no happier people in the whole world, and probably on all "floors"! We were sincerely glad for them, without forgetting those to whom they owed their happiness. I think that both little Maria and our kind Svetilo would be very happy, if they could see them now, knowing that not in vain did they give their life for them.

Suddenly Stella became anxious and disappeared. I went after her, because we had nothing to do here.

– Where have you all gone? – Maya asked surprised but very calm. – We thought that you had left us for good. And where is our new friend? Did he disappear too? We thought he would take us with him.

We've got a problem. I had not the least idea what we should do with the poor children. Stella glanced at me, thinking the same thing and desperately trying to find some solution.

– I know what we shall do! – She merrily clapped her hands, like the "old" Stella. – We shall create a *merry world* for them to exist in. And maybe they will meet somebody, or some good being will take care of them.

– Maybe we should acquaint them with somebody. – I tried to put the lonely children's life as much in order as I could.

– I don't think so. – My friend answered very much in earnest. – Think yourself – not all dead children get this kind of thing. And, probably, not all here are taken care of. Therefore it will be honest regarding others, if we create a very beautiful house for them here until they find somebody. In fact there are three of them, which is quite helpful. Others are alone. I was alone too, I remember...

Suddenly she became confused, sad and somehow unprotected, apparently recalling that frightful time... I wanted to bring her back and mentally swamped her with a waterfall of fabulous flowers.

– Hey! – Stella laughed like a little bell. – Come on! Stop it!

– And you stop being sad! – I did not give up. – Look how many things we have to do and you are moping. Let's go and get the children settled!

Suddenly Arnault appeared out of nowhere. We stared at him in surprise... being afraid of asking. I even thought for a moment that something terrible had happened again. But he looked incredibly happy and I cast aside the foolish thought.

– What do **you** do here?! – Stella was sincerely surprised.

– Have you forgotten? I have to take the kids. I promised them.

– And where is Michelle? Are you not together?

– Why not together? Of course we are together! But I promised... And she always loved children. So we decided to be all together until a *new life* takes them.

– It's wonderful! – Stella was happy, and then jumped to another subject. – Are you very happy, right? Tell me, are you happy? She is so beautiful!!!

Arnault looked into our eyes long and attentively, as if wishing but hesitating to say something. Finally, he dared.

– I can't accept this happiness from you... It is not mine... It is wrong... I don't deserve it yet.

– What do you mean you can't?! – Stella almost choked with indignation. – Of course you can! Don't you dare even to try to refuse!!! Look how beautiful she is! And you say you can't...

Arnault smiled sadly, looking on the raging Stella. Then he affectionately hugged her and

quietly pronounced:

– You brought me unspeakable happiness and the only thing I brought you was such frightful pain... Forgive me my dearest, if you can some time. Forgive me...

Stella gave him light and affectionate smile, as if wishing to show that she *perfectly understood everything* and *forgave him everything*, and that it was *not his guilt at all*. Arnault could only nod sadly and pointing at the quietly waiting kids, asked:

– Do you think I can take them with me "upstairs"?

– Unfortunately, not. – Stella answered sadly. – They can't go there, they stay here.

– Then we shall stay here too... – A tender voice sounded. – We shall stay here with them.

Surprised, we turned around. It was Michelle. "Well, finally everything has been settled". – I thought contentedly. Again somebody had to sacrifice something voluntarily, and the simple *human good* won again. I looked at Stella. The little girl smiled. Again everything was all right.

– Shall we go for a brief walk? – Stella asked with hope.

I should have come back home a long time ago, but I knew that I wouldn't leave her alone for all the tea in China and nodded.

35. Isidora

To tell the truth I did not feel like going for a walk after what had happened, but I could not leave Stella anyway, therefore in order to make us both feel at least half-way good, we agreed not to go far but simply relax our agitated brains a little and give some rest to our pain tortured hearts, enjoying the silence and peace of the mental floor...

We slowly swam in the tender silver haze, totally relaxing our overstrained nervous system and submerging into magnificent peace incomparable with anything else, as suddenly Stella enthusiastically shouted:

– Blimey! You just look at that! It's so beautiful!

I looked around and understood at once what she was talking about.

Indeed it was extraordinarily beautiful! It looked like somebody created a genuine sky-blue "crystal" kingdom as if it were child's play! Surprised, we looked at the incredibly enormous tracery of icy flowers, sprinkled with light-blue snowflakes; and the shining icy trees the height of our three-story building which interlaced enter se and sparkled with blue flashes of light at the least motion of the "crystal" foliage. Surrounded by flashes of the "northern lights", the majestic icy palace proudly towered above this magnificent beauty, shining with the play of unseen silver-blue shades.

What was that?! Who could like this cold colour so much?

For some reason nobody came out to meet us. It was a little strange, because usually the hosts of all these marvellous worlds were very hospitable and benevolent, except for those who just came to the "floor" (in other words, just died) and were not ready to communicate with others yet, or simply preferred to suffer something very personal and severe alone.

– Who do you think lives in this strange world? – Stella whispered for some reason.

– Do you want us to find out? – I offered unexpectedly for me.

I did not understand where all my tiredness went and why all of a sudden I absolutely forgot about a promise which I gave to myself minutes ago *not to interfere in any event, even the most extraordinary one, till tomorrow* or at least until I had rested a little. Certainly, it was my insatiable curiosity which again snapped into action and which I still failed to learn to pacify, even when real necessity appeared...

Therefore, I tried to "disconnect", as much as my exhausted heart allowed, and not think of our unfortunate, sad and hard day, and readily plunged into the "new and unexplored", anticipating

some unusual and breathtaking adventure.

We smoothly "slowed down" right at the entrance to the remarkable "ice" world, as suddenly a human being appeared from behind the blue sparkling tree. It was a very unusual girl – tall and slender and very beautiful. She would seem very young, almost a child, if it were not for her eyes. They shone with quiet and light sorrow and were deep like a well of the purest spring water. The wisdom that lurked in them was so overwhelming that I felt Stella and I have a long way to go to comprehend it.

The stranger was not surprised at all at our appearing, warmly smiled and quietly asked:

– Are you looking for somebody, little ones?

– We were simply passing by, saw this striking beauty and wanted to look at it. Pardon us, if we intruded upon your privacy. – I mumbled, being slightly embarrassed.

– Of course, you did not! Get inside. It certainly will be more interesting there. – She waved us in with her hand and smiled again.

In a trice we slipped by her into the "palace", unable to hold our curiosity, which irrepressibly broke through, and were anticipating something very "interesting".

The interior was so stunning that Stella and I fell into a stupor with our mouths open, like hungry one-day nestlings, unable to utter a word.

The palace had no, let's say, "Floor". Everything soared in the sparkling silver air, giving the impression of shining infinity. Some fantastic "seats" which looked like groups of blazing dense clouds smoothly rocking in the air, now thickening, now almost disappearing, as if attracting our attention and inviting us to sit on them. Everything around was decorated with silver "ice" flowers, glittering and shimmering. The variety of their forms and patterns of the thinnest petals, worthy of the most skilled jeweller's work greatly amazed us. Giant, stunningly beautiful "icicles" hung somewhere very high in the "ceiling", blinding us with their sky-blue light and converting this fairy-tale "cave" into some fantastic "ice world" which seemingly had no end...

– Let's go, my dear guests, grand-dad will be unspeakably glad to meet you! – The young lady pronounced warmly, gently gliding by us.

Finally I understood why she seemed unusual to us. As the stranger moved, she left a sparkling "tail" of some special blue matter which shone and whirled around her fragile body like little tornados, scattering silver pollen behind her.

Before we had time to be amazed by it we saw a very tall old man with silver hair proudly sitting on a strange, very beautiful arm-chair, as if emphasizing his significance for those who did not understand. He watched our approach quite calmly, being not surprised at all and expressing no emotions, except for the warm, friendly smile.

The old man's white attire, shimmering with silver, flowed back and merged with his absolutely white long hair, making him look like a kind spirit. And only his eyes, mysterious in the same way as our beautiful stranger's, astounded us with their endless patience, wisdom and depth, and the infinity that shone through them made us shrivel...

– Good day to you, dear guests! – The old man greeted us affectionately. – What brings you here?

– Good day to you too, Grandfather! – Stella greeted him merrily.

I was very surprised to hear for the first time since we had become friends Stella using the formal way of addressing somebody. (*In Russian there is a polite or formal form of address which unlike English is written and pronounced differently from the informal one – E.L.*).

Stella had a very amusing manner of addressing everybody informally, as if thus emphasizing that everybody she meets, be it an adult or a child, is her old good friend and her heart is open to everybody, which instantly and totally won her the favour even of the most reserved and lonely people, and only very hard-hearted souls failed to open the door to her heart.

– Why is it so "cold" here? – As usual, the questions began to rain down. – I mean why do

you have such "icy" colour everywhere?

The young lady looked at Stella in surprise.

– I never thought of it. – She pronounced thoughtfully. – Probably, because we've had enough **heat** to last the rest of our lives. You see, we were burnt on Earth.

– What do you mean you were burnt?! – Stella was dumbfounded. – **Truly burnt?**

– Well, yes. It happened that I was a **Vedma** (witch) there. I *knew* a great deal... As did all my family too. My grand-dad was a **Vedun**, and my mother was very powerful **Vidunia** then. It means she **saw** that which others could not. She saw the future the same way we see the present. She also could see the past. She could do a lot of things and knew so much that nobody else knew. Most likely, ordinary people hated it. They did not like the "knowing" ones. Although, when they needed help, they came **exactly to us**. And we helped. And then **those who we had helped betrayed us...**

(*Vedma* is a knowing mother; *vedat* is to know; *videt* is to see. – *E.L.*)

The girl-witch's eyes grew dark and looked at something very far away. For an instant she saw and heard nothing around, going to some distant world which only she knew. Then she shivered and moved her shoulders, as if recalling something very frightful and quietly continued:

– So many centuries have passed, and I still feel how the flame devours me. That is probably why it is "cold" here as you say, dear. – Addressing Stella, the girl finished.

– But you can't in any way be a Witch! – Stella stated confidently. – Witches are old and ugly and very bad. So it is written in our fairy-tales which my Gran read to me. And you are good! And so beautiful!

– Well, there are fairy-tales and fairy-tales. – The girl-witch sadly smiled. – In fact it is people who write them. And probably somebody finds it much more comfortable that we are depicted as old and ugly. Thus it is easier to explain the inexplicable and cause hostility. A young and beautiful woman, when burnt, will gain your sympathy much easier than an old and ugly one, right?

– Well, I am sympathetic about old women too... if they are not wicked, certainly. – Stella said, casting down her eyes. – Any person is worthy of sympathy when confronting such a frightful end. – And, on moving her shoulders as if imitating the girl-witch, she continued: – Were you really-really burnt?! Being absolutely alive? It must be so painful! But what is your name?

As usual words poured down out of the little girl like from a machine-gun. I could not stop her and was afraid that the hospitable hosts would be offended in the end and we would turn from pleasant guests into a burden of which they would wish to be rid as quickly as possible.

But for some reason nobody was offended. Both the old man and his beautiful granddaughter answered any questions with friendly smiles, and it seemed that they sincerely enjoyed our presence for some reason.

– My name is Anna, dear. And yes, I was "truly-truly" burnt once... But it was a very long time ago. Almost five hundred earthly years have already passed...

I looked at this amazing girl in absolute shock, unable to take my eyes off her and tried to imagine through what nightmare this surprisingly beautiful and tender soul had to go!

They were burned at the stake for their Gift!!! Only because they could see and do more than others! But how could human beings do such things?! Although long ago I understood that no beast was able to do what man sometimes did. It was so wild that for a very brief instant I wished I were not called a *human being*.

This was the first time in my life when I really heard about **the real** Veduns and Vedmas, in the existence of which I always believed. And when I saw at last **the most real Vedma in person**, naturally, I longed to ask heaps of questions. My indefatigable curiosity "fidgeted" inside me, squealing with impatience, and begged to start asking *immediately* and of course, *"about everything"*!

In this moment, probably without noticing that I was deeply submerged in the strange world, so unexpectedly opened to me, I could not correctly and in time react to the picture which suddenly

mentally opened to me... and terribly real fire flared up around my body!

The tongues of the roaring fire "licked" my defenseless flesh, exploding inside my body and bereaving me of my mind... The wild, extremely cruel pain overwhelmed me penetrating into every cell of my body! It rose to an extreme height and from there pounced upon me in a squall of unknown suffering which could be neither calmed down, nor stopped. The fire dazzled me and twisted my spirit that howled with superhuman horror into a lump of pain so that I could not breathe! I tried to cry but could not hear my voice. The world collapsed, breaking into sharp splinters, and it seemed it could never be brought together. My body blazed like a terrible festive torch, reducing it to ashes; my wounded soul was incinerating too. I uttered a dreadful cry... and suddenly I found myself in my "earthly" room, my teeth still chattering with the unbearable pain which had seized me so unexpectedly. Still stunned, I stood in my room perplexedly looking around, unable to understand *who* could do something like this to me and *why*.

Despite the wild terror I somehow succeeded in pulling myself together and calmed down a little. On thinking briefly, I understood at last that most likely it had been just too *real* a vision, the perception of which fully repeated the nightmare that the girl-witch had once experienced...

Despite fear and the recent too vivid feelings, I tried to go back to the fairy-tale "ice palace" to my abandoned friend who, I was sure, was beginning to be seriously worried. But I failed. I felt like a squeezed lemon and had no strength left even to think of this "journey", let alone to accomplish it. I got angry at my "spinelessness" and tried to give it a go again, as some alien force pulled me into the already familiar "ice" hall where my loyal Stella rushed about in alarm.

– Oh, boy?! I was so scared! What happened? Thank goodness, she helped; otherwise you would have flown who knows where! – Choking with "just indignation", my little friend fired at once.

I did not understand yet myself how this kind of thing could happen to me, as I heard the tender voice of the unusual hostess of the ice palace:

– My dear, but you are in fact a *Darinia*! How did you get here? And you are *living*!!! Do you still feel pain? – I nodded with surprise. – You should not have *looked at* such a thing as this!

Anna affectionately took my head which still "boiled" with sizzling pain in her cool hands, and I soon felt the terrible pain slowly retreating and then completely vanishing.

– What was that? – I asked almost dumbstruck.

– You simply *looked at* what happened to me. But you are unable to protect yourself yet and felt everything. You are very curious. It's your strength, but also your *weakness*, dear... What is your name?

– Svetlana. – I wheezed, gradually coming to my senses. – And she is Stella. Why do you call me a *Darinia*? It's the second time I have been called this and I would like to know very much what it means, if I may, of course.

– Don't you know it?! – The girl-witch asked in surprise. I shook my head. – *Darinia* means "*giving light and guarding the world*" and sometimes even rescuing it.

– Well, I must learn to save at least myself, let alone the world! – I sincerely laughed. – And what can I *give*, if I don't know anything yet, but only make mistakes... I don't know how to do anything! – And, on thinking a little, I added in an aggrieved voice. – In fact **nobody teaches** me! Only my grandmother does it sometimes and Stella. And I want to learn so much!

– *The teacher comes when the student is READY to learn*, dear. – The old man said quietly, smiling. – And you have not understood yourself yet, even what you have already *opened* a long time ago.

In order not to show how his words strongly disappointed me, I tried to change the subject and asked the girl-witch the ticklish question which annoyingly spun in my brain.

– Forgive my indiscretion, Anna, but how were you able to forget such horrible pain? Is it possible to forget something like this at all?

– I did not forget, dear. I simply **understood** and **accepted** it... otherwise it would be impossible to exist further. – The girl sadly shook her head.

– How is it possible to understand **such** a thing?! And what one should **understand** in pain? – I did not give up. – Must it **teach** you something special?! I am sorry, but I never believed in this kind of "study"! In my opinion only **helpless** "teachers" use pain!

I boiled with indignation, unable to stop my scattering thoughts! And no matter how hard I tried, I could not calm down.

I sincerely felt pity about the girl-witch, but at the same time I was itching to know everything about her and that meant asking her a lot of questions which might hurt her. It reminded me of the crocodile which, on devouring the unlucky victim, wept bitter tears... However ashamed I was, I could not do anything with me. It was the first time in my short life, when I paid almost no attention to the fact that I *can hurt somebody* with my questions. I felt a burning shame for that, but I also understood that for some reason it was extremely important for me to speak about all that. So, I continued to ask "shutting my eyes to everything"... But to my great surprise and delight, the girl-witch was not offended at all and calmly continued to answer my naive child's questions, showing no displeasure whatsoever.

– I understood the **reason** for what had happened, and also that it probably was my test, on passing which, I discovered the surprising world where my grand-dad and I live now, and a lot of other things...

– Was it really necessary to go through **such atrocity** to get here?! – Stella was horrified.

– I think, yes, although I can not say it for certain. **Everybody has their own way**... – Anna pronounced sadly. – But what is most important here is that I succeeded in passing it and did not break. My soul remained pure and kind. I am not angry with the world and people who executed me. I understood **why** they destroyed us – those who were "different", who they called **Veduns** and **Vedmas**, and sometimes the "demon's children". **They were simply afraid of us**. They were afraid of our being stronger than them and incomprehensible. They hated us for **what** we could do, for our Gift. And also they envied us too much. In fact very few knew that many of our killers **secretly tried to learn everything we could do**, but failed. Probably, because their souls were too dark...

– How is that – **learn**?! Did not they **curse you**? Did not they burn you because they thought you were creations of Devil? – I was totally taken aback.

– That's right. – Anna nodded. – But at first our executioners tortured us brutally, trying to know the forbidden, which only we knew. And then they burned us, cutting out the tongues of many in order that we would not accidentally give away what they had done to us. You can ask my mother. She went through a lot of things, probably more than anybody else. That is why she could choose to go away so *far* after death, which none of us could.

– Where is your mother now? – Stella asked.

– Oh, she dwells somewhere in the "stranger" worlds. I will never be able to go there! – Anna whispered with a strange pride in her voice. – But we call her sometimes, and she comes. She loves and remembers us. – And suddenly sunnily smiling, added: – And she tells about such miracles!!! I wish I could see them!

– Can't she help you go there? – Stella was surprised.

– I think, no. – Anna became sad. – She was much stronger than all of us on Earth, and her "test" was much more terrible than mine. Probably that is why she deserved greater things. And she was much more talented, of course.

– But why did you need **such** a frightful test? – I asked carefully. – Why was your Fate so Wicked? In fact you were not bad; you helped others who did not have a Gift. Why did they do this to you?

– In order that our soul got strong, I think, that it could endure a lot and not break. There were a lot of those who broke. They **cursed** their Gift and renounced it before death.

– How is it possible?! Is it really possible to **renounce yourself**?! – Stella jumped up with indignation.

– It is, dear. You'd better believe it! – The amazing old man, who before was watching us without interfering in our conversation, pronounced quietly.

– See, grand-dad confirmed it to you. – The girl smiled. – Not all of us are ready for this kind of test. And not all can endure such pain. But the matter is not even in pain, but in the **strength of our human spirit**. In fact after pain there was **fear of what we went through** which tenaciously sat in our memory even after death and gnawed the remaining crumbs of our courage like a worm. It was exactly this fear that mostly **broke people who went through this horror**. One had only to intimidate them a little already in **this** (posthumous) *world* and they surrendered at once, becoming obedient "dolls" in stranger hands. And, naturally, these hands were not "white" at all... that was why and how "black" magicians, "black" sorcerers and similar to them appeared on Earth later, when their spirits came back there. We called them magicians "on the string". So, I think we did not undergo those severe trials in vain. Grand-dad did all of it. But he is very strong, much stronger than me. He managed to "go away" without waiting for an end. My mother could too. Only I could not.

– What do you meant to "go away"?! He had died before he was burnt?! Is that really possible? – I was shocked.

The girl nodded.

– But not everybody can do it, of course. It needs a lot of courage to dare to cut off one's own life. I did not have enough of it, but my grand-dad did! – Anna smiled proudly.

I saw how strongly she loved her kind and wise grandfather. My heart became empty and sad for a short instant, as if the deep and incurable anguish came back into it again.

– I had a very unusual grand-dad too. – I whispered.

The familiar bitterness squeezed my throat and I could not continue.

– Did you love him very much? – The girl asked sympathetically.

I only nodded in reply, indignant with myself for such "inexcusable" weakness.

– Who was your grandfather, girl? – The old man asked affectionately. – **I don't see** him.

– I don't know who he was... and never knew. I think you don't see him because he came to live in me after death. Probably, that is why I can do what I do... although very little...

– No, dear. He only helped you to "**open**". It's you and your spirit that do everything. You have a big Gift, dear.

– What is this Gift worth, if I don't know almost anything about it?! – I exclaimed bitterly. – If I was unable even to save my friends today.

Upset, I plumped into a fluffy seat without noticing its "sparkling" beauty, being greatly annoyed with myself for my helplessness and suddenly felt that my eyes treacherously began to be wet... By no means, did I wish to cry in the presence of these surprising and brave people! Therefore, in order to concentrate somehow I mentally began to "mill" the grains of information that I had unexpectedly got, in order to keep it carefully in my memory, without losing a single important word or missing any clever thought...

– How did your friends die? – The girl-witch asked.

Stella showed the picture.

– They might be alive. – The old man sadly shook his head. – There was no need for their death.

– What do you mean, there was no need?! – The dishevelled Stella jumped up with indignation. – In fact they rescued other good people! They had no choice!

– Forgive me, little one, but **THERE IS ALWAYS A CHOICE**. It is important to be able to choose **correctly**. Here, look. – And the old man showed the picture which Stella showed him a

minute ago.

– Your friend-warrior **tried to fight the evil here the same way he fought it on Earth**. But it is **different life** here, and **its laws** are completely **different**. Likewise **the weapon is different** too... Only you two did it **correctly**, and your friends made a mistake. They could live for a long time... Of course, everybody has the right to free choice, and everybody has the right to decide how he must use his life, but only when he **knows how** he would act and **knows** all possible ways. And your friends **did not know**. Therefore they made a mistake and paid the highest price, but they had wonderful and pure souls, so be proud of them. Only nobody ever could bring them back...

Stella and I were absolutely dispirited, and in order cheer up us somehow, Anna offered:

– What do you think if I try to call my mother in order that you could talk to her? I think it might be interesting.

I was absolutely enthusiastic with the new chance to know the desired! Most likely Anna had the measure of me, because it was truly **the only way** to make me forget everything for some time. Like the girl-witch said, my curiosity was my strength, but also my greatest weakness...

– Do you think she will come? – I asked hoping for the impossible.

– We never know if we don't try, right? In fact nobody will punish us for that. – Anna answered smiling at the produced effect.

She closed her eyes, and a blue filament, pulsating gold, stretched out somewhere into the uncertainty from her thin shining figure. We waited motionless, holding our breath, in order not to frighten off anything accidentally... Several seconds passed. Nothing happened. I already was ready to open my mouth and say that probably nothing would come in today, as suddenly I saw a tall transparent spirit, slowly approaching us along the blue channel. As she approached, the channel "rolled up" behind her back, and the spirit gradually became as dense as we were. At last everything was completely rolled up around her, and now a woman of unbelievable beauty appeared in front of us! She obviously was once an *earthly* creature, but at the same time there was something in her that made her **not one of us**... a different one, a distant one... It was not because I knew that she "went" to other worlds after death. She simply **was** different.

– Hello, my dearest! – The beautiful lady tenderly greeted us, touching her heart with her right hand.

Anna shone. And her grand-dad approached us and fixed his getting wet eyes on the face of the stranger, as if trying to "imprint" her amazing image in his memory, not skipping a single smallest detail, as if being afraid of seeing her for the last time. He looked and looked, not taking his eyes off her, and it seemed that he did not even breathe. The beautiful lady could not endure it anymore and threw herself in his warm embrace, and froze there like a little child, absorbing his wonderful peace and good, pouring from his soul, loving and worn out with suffering...

– Come on, dear... There, there... – The old man whispered, lulling the stranger in his large warm arms.

The woman stood, hiding her face on his chest, looking for protection and peace, like a child, forgetting about everybody else and enjoying the instant which belonged only to those two.

– Is that is your mother? – Stella whispered, stunned. – And why does she look **like this**?

– Do you mean, why she is so beautiful? – Anna asked proudly.

– She is certainly beautiful, but I mean another thing... She is **different**.

The spirit truly was different. She looked like a being woven of the glimmering fog, which now nebulized, making her transparent, now became more compact and then her perfect body became almost physically dense.

Her brilliant ebony hair fell in soft waves almost to her feet and just like the body, now became dense or nebulized into a sparkling haze. Her yellow and enormous eyes like those of a lynx which shone with a sharp light and shimmered with thousands of unknown golden shades were as deep and impenetrable as eternity. A pulsating power star, yellow like her unusual eyes, shone on

her pure and high forehead. The air around the woman trembled with gold sparks, and it seemed that her light body would fly up to infinity like a wonderful golden bird. She was really very beautiful with some unseen, enchanting and unearthly beauty.

– Hello, little ones. – The stranger turned around and greeted us calmly and added, addressing Anna: – What made you call me, dear? Has something happened?

Anna smiled, tenderly hugged her mother's shoulders and pointing at us whispered:

– I thought they should meet you. You could help them in what I cannot. It seems to me they are worthy of it. But forgive me, please, if I am mistaken. – Then she merrily addressed us: – Here, dearest. This is my mother! Her name is Isidora. She was the strongest *Vidunia* in the frightful time about which we have just spoken.

(She had an amazing name – Is-i-do-Ra, which means "The one who came out of light and knowledge, eternity and beauty, and always aspiring to attain greater". But I only understand that now; then, I was amazed at the way it sounded. It was free, merry and proud, gold and fiery like a bright rising Sun.)

Thoughtfully smiling, Isidora very attentively scrutinized our excited faces, and for some reason I very much wanted her to like me. There were no special reasons for that, except that I was wildly interested in the story of this marvellous woman. But I did not know their customs, or for how long they have not seen each other, therefore I decided to be silent for the moment. But Isidora began the conversation, apparently not wishing to tantalize me more.

– What did you want to know, little ones?

– I would like to ask you about your Earthly life, of course, if it's all right with you and if it will not be too hard for you to remember. – I asked feeling a little shy.

Her golden eyes became instantly filled with such deep and unbearable anguish that at once I wanted to take my words back. But Anna softly hugged me, as if understanding everything and telling me that it was all right.

Her beautiful mother looked like her deeply wounded soul soared somewhere very far away, in her still unforbidden and apparently very painful past. I stood motionless, being afraid to stir, expecting that she would say no and go away wishing to share nothing with us. Finally, Isidora roused herself, as if waking up from a frightful sleep that only she knew and with a friendly smile at us asked:

– **What exactly** do you want to know, dear?

– I accidentally **looked at** Anna and for a short instant felt what she had gone through. It was awful and I don't understand **why** humans did such a thing?! And whether they were **humans** at all after that? – I felt that indignation started boiling again in me and did my very best to calm down, in order not to seem a "silly little child" to her. – I have a Gift too, although I don't know how valuable and strong it is. I know almost nothing about it, but I would like to know very much, because now I see that gifted people even died for it. It means that the gift is valuable, but I don't know even how to use it for the benefit of others. In fact it is given to me not just for being proud of it, right? So, I would like to understand what I should do with it and what you did with it, how you lived. Forgive me, if it does not seem to you important enough. I will not be offended at all, if you decide to leave now.

I hardly understood what I was saying and worried like I never did. Something inside me prompted me that I needed this meeting very much and I should get Isidora talking, no matter how hard it would be for both of us.

But she, as well as her daughter, had nothing against my child's request, and on submerging into her distant past, she began the story.

– *Once upon a time there was a beautiful city – Venice. It was the most wonderful city on Earth! Anyway, so it seemed to me then...*

– I think you'll be glad to know that it still exists! – I exclaimed. – And it is truly very

beautiful!

Isidora sadly nodded and easily waved with her hand, as if raising the heavy "curtain of time". Incredible scenery appeared before our eyes.

The light-blue pure blue sky was reflected in the deep blue water right out of which the amazing city rose. It seemed that the pink domes and snow-white towers had miraculously grown straight from the bosom of the sea and now proudly stood shining in the rays of the rising sun, flaunting before each other the grandeur of numberless marble columns and merry flashes of multicoloured stained-glass windows. The light breeze merrily drove white little "caps" of curly waves to the wharf, which broke in thousands of shining sparks and playfully washed marble steps which went straight to the water. Channels glittered like long mirror-like snakes and played on the neighbouring houses with a merry spots of reflected light. Everything breathed with light and joy and looked magically fairy-tale-like.

This was Venice... The city of eternal Love and wonderful Arts, the capital of Books, great Minds and magnificent Poets...

I knew Venice, naturally, only through photos and pictures, but now this splendid city seemed a little different – more real and colourful and truly **alive**.

– I was born there and considered it an honour. – Isidora's voice began to purl like a quiet brook. – We lived in an enormous palazzo (this is what we called the most expensive houses), in the heart of the city, because my family was very rich.

The windows of my room faced east and the channel. I loved to wake up at dawn, watching the first sunrays which graually lit the golden flashes on the water covered by the morning fog...

The sleepy gondoliers idly began their everyday route, expecting early clients. Usually the city still slept, and only the curious and the hard-working merchants, which were always the first to open their shops, were about. I loved to come there before the streets and the main square was filled with people. I especially adored book shops, which I called on most often. The booksellers knew me very well and always reserved something "special" for me. I was only ten at that time, just as you are now... Right?

I only nodded, being charmed by the beauty of her voice, unwilling to interrupt the story which seemed a quiet and dreamy melody...

*– By the age of ten I could do a lot of things. I could fly, walk on air, treat people for the gravest illnesses and see **forthcoming** events. My mother taught me everything she knew.*

– What do you mean – "fly"?! Being in a physical body?! Like a bird? – The dumbfounded Stella could not restrain herself.

I was very sorry that she interrupted the magical course of the narration! But it was evident that the kind and emotional Stella was unable to perceive such stunning news calmly.

Isidora smiled at her lightly and we saw another, even more impressive, picture.

A fragile dark-haired girl twirled in the extraordinary beautiful marble hall. She danced some intricate dance, which only she knew, with the lightness of a fairy-tale fairy. Sometimes she slightly jumped up and... kept hanging in the air. And then she performed a sophisticated pirouette, smoothly flying several steps backward and all began again from the very beginning. It was so shockingly beautiful that took our breath away!

Isidora warmly smiled and calmly continued the story.

– My mother was a hereditary Vedunia. She was born in Florence – a proud and free city, which only had as much of its famous "freedom" as the incredibly rich but unfortunately not so omnipotent Medici, hated by the Church, could protect. And my poor mother, just as her predecessors, had to hide her Gift, because she descended from a very rich and influential family in which it was more than undesirable to expose this kind of knowledge. Therefore she, just as her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, had to keep secret their extraordinary "talents" from stranger's eyes and ears (and even from friends!), otherwise, if the fathers of her future possible

grooms knew about it, she could have never married, which is considered the greatest disgrace in her family.

My mother was a very strong and truly **gifted healer**. Whilst being very young she secretly treated almost the whole city, including the great Medici who preferred her to their famous Greek doctors. However, very soon the "glory" of mother's success reached the ears of her father, my grand-dad who, certainly, did not favour this "underground" activity too. So, my poor mother had to be married off as quickly as possible, thus to wash off the "forthcoming disgrace" of her frightened family.

Whether it was by chance or with somebody's help, my mother was very lucky. She married a wonderful person – a Venetian magnate who was a very strong Vedun himself... and who you see now with us.

Isidora looked at her extraordinary father and her shining eyes got wet. It was absolutely obvious how strongly and selflessly she loved him. She was a **proud daughter** who carried her pure and light feeling with dignity and she was not ashamed of it even in the far away new worlds. And here I understood how much I wanted to be like her! I admired her force of love, her force of a Vedunia and everything this extraordinary light woman represented.

And she calmly continued her wonderful story, as if noticing neither our "overflowing" emotions, nor the "puppy" delight of our hearts.

– It was then when my mother heard about Venice... My father could tell her about the freedom and beauty of this city, its palaces and channels, secret gardens and enormous libraries, bridges and gondolas and a lot of other things for hours. And my impressionable mother fell in love with it, without even seeing this miraculous city. She could not wait to see the city with her own eyes! Very soon her dream came true. My father took her to a magnificent palace, full of loyal and taciturn servants from who one did not have to hide anything. From that day my mother could be engaged in her favourite business for hours, not being afraid of being misunderstood or insulted. Her life became pleasant and protected. They were a truly happy married couple which had a girl in exactly a year. They called her Isidora. It was me.

I was a very happy child. As far as I remember myself, the world always seemed wonderful to me. I grew surrounded by warmth and care, among kind, attentive and very loving people. Soon my mother noticed that I had a powerful Gift, much stronger than hers. She began to teach me everything she could do herself and what my grandmother had taught her. Later my father was engaged in my "witch" education.

I tell all this, dear, not because I wish to tell the story of my happy life. I want you to understand deeper what will follow later, otherwise you will not feel the horror and pain which I and my family had to go through.

When I was seventeen, the rumours about me had spread far beyond the borders of my native city; and people who wished to know their fate came to me like an endless stream. I got very tired. No matter how gifted I was, the everyday loads exhausted me, and by the evening I was ready to drop. My father always objected to such "violence", but my mother (who once was unable to use her gift in full measure), thought that I was absolutely all right and **must** honestly work off my gift.

Many years passed. I already led my **own** life and had my **own** wonderful and loving family. My husband was a scientific man called Girolamo. I think we were destined for each other, because we never parted from the day we first met in our house. He came to fetch a book which my father had recommended to him. That morning I sat in the library and as usual studied somebody's work. Girolamo entered and on seeing me there was taken aback. His embarrassment was so sincere and sweet that I laughed. He was a tall and strong brown-eyed brunet who blushed in that moment like a girl which met her groom for the first time. I instantly understood that he was my fate. Soon we married and never parted. He was a wonderful husband – affectionate and very kind. When our little daughter was born, he became loving and tender father. Ten very happy and cloudless years passed. Our darling daughter was a merry, lively and very clever child. The Gift was gradually

shown in her too.

*Life was light and wonderful. It seemed that no **misfortune** could darken our peaceful existence. But I was afraid... It had been already almost a year that I saw nightmares every night – terrible images of tortured people and burning fires. It repeated and repeated and repeated, driving me mad. But most of all I was scared of a strange person's image which constantly visited my dreams and devoured me with the ardent glare of his deep black eyes without uttering a word. He was intimidating and very dangerous.*

*Finally it happened... The black clouds began to gather on the pure sky of my beloved Venice. Anxious rumors rambled throughout the city. People conversed in whispers about the horrors of the Inquisition and soul-freezing living human fires. Spain was on fire a long time ago burning out pure human souls with "fire and sword" in the name of Christ. After Spain the whole of Europe was seized with fire. I never was a believer and never considered Christ a God. But he was an extraordinary **Vedun**, the strongest of all the living. He had a surprisingly pure and highly-developed soul. And the killing "in the glory of Christ", which the church did then, was a terrible and inexcusable crime.*

Isidora's eyes became dark and deep like a golden night. Probably, everything pleasant that the earthly life had given her was over and another life – terrible and dark, about which we would soon know, began. Suddenly I had a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach and it seemed that I lacked air. Stella was incredibly quiet too. She did not ask her usual questions, but very attentively listened to what Isidora told us.

– My beloved Venice rebelled. People indignantly grumbled on the streets and gathered on the squares. Nobody wished to submit. The always free and proud city refused to take the priests under its wing. On seeing that Venice was not going to fall to its knees, Rome decided to undertake a serious step. Rome sent to Venice one of its best inquisitors – a mad cardinal, who was the most fervent fanatic, the real "father of the Inquisition" and who was impossible to ignore in any way. He was the Pope's right hand. His name was Giovanni Pietro Caraffa. I was thirty six then...

(When I began to **look over** Isidora's story, which seemed to me interesting enough to write about, in my way I was very happy to find one detail. The name of Pietro Caraffa seemed familiar to me and I decided to look it up among "historically-important" persons. And I found him there! Caraffa appeared to be an **authentic** historical figure. He was the real "father of the inquisition" who on becoming Pope *Paul IV*, put to fire the best half of Europe. Regrettably I found just one line about Isidora's life in Caraffa's biography which mentions the case of the "Venetian Witch" who was considered the most beautiful woman in Europe of that time. Unfortunately, it was all that could correspond to the story).

Isidora fell silent for a long time... Her amazing golden eyes shone with such deep sorrow, that the black despair "howled" inside me. This marvellous woman still kept inside her the terrible, superhuman pain which somebody very wicked had once made her experience. Suddenly I began to fear that right now, in the most interesting place, she would stop and we never know what happened to her next! But the amazing teller was not going to stop. Most likely there were some moments that still cost too much for her to go over them. Then her tormented soul protected itself, shutting firmly, refusing to let anybody in or remember anything "aloud", being afraid to wake up the burning, limitless pain which slept inside her. However, it was evident that Isidora was strong enough to overcome any sorrow, because she pulled herself together and quietly continued:

– The first time I saw him was when I calmly strolled along the wharf, speaking about new books to the merchants I knew very well, many of which had become my kind friends a long time ago. The day was very pleasant, light and sunny, and it seemed that no trouble could cloud that wonderful day. So I thought, but my wicked fate had prepared something completely different...

*Calmly talking to Francesco Valgrisi – the books which he published were adored by the whole of Europe – I suddenly felt the strongest blow to my heart. I stopped breathing for an instant. It was absolutely unexpected, but considering my many years experience, **I had no right to miss such a thing!** I turned around in surprise. Deep burning eyes looked right at me. I knew them at*

once! These eyes had been tormenting me for so many nights, making me jump in my sleep, dripping with cold sweat! It was a guest from my nightmares – unforeseeable and terrible.

The man was thin and tall, but looked very slender and strong. His thin ascetic face was framed by thick black hair strongly touched with grey and a neat shortly cut beard. The scarlet cardinal's soutane made him look alien and very dangerous. A strange golden-red cloud, which only I saw, curled around his flexible body. If he were not a faithful vassal of the church, I would think that I saw a **Sorcerer** in front of me.

His bearing and burning with hatred look expressed fury. For some reason I understood at once that he was the notorious Caraffa. Before I could understand what could cause such a stormy reaction (in fact not a single word had yet been said!), I heard his strange hoarse voice:

– Are you interested in books, Madonna Isidora?

Madonna was a respectful form of address to a woman or young lady in Italy.

My heart froze. He knew my name; but why? Why was this terrible man interested in me? My head began to spin. It seemed that somebody had gripped my brain in an iron vice. Suddenly I understood – Caraffa!!! It was he who was trying to **break** me mentally, **but why?**

I looked into his eyes again. Thousands of fires blazed in them, he having taken innocent souls to the sky...

– So, what books are you interested in, Madonna Isidora? – His low voice sounded again.

– Oh, I am sure not those ones which **you** are looking for, Your Eminence. — I answered calmly.

My soul was scared and ached, fluttering like a caught bird, but I knew that I must not show it to him in any way. Whatever it cost I had to behave as calmly as possible and try to get rid of him as soon as possible. The rumors said that the "mad cardinal" persistently tracked down his victims, who later disappeared without a trace, and nobody knew, where and how they could be found, or whether they were alive at all.

– I heard so much about your exquisite taste, Madonna Isidora! Venice talks only of you!! Please, do me the honour of sharing your new acquisition with me...

Caraffa smiled... his smile made my blood freeze and I felt an irresistible desire to run wherever my feet would carry me, if only I could never again see this insidious, refined face! He was a real predator and now he was hunting. I felt it with every cell of my body, every fibre of my frozen in horror soul. I never was a coward, but I had heard too much about this frightful man and knew that nothing would stop him, if he decided to get me in his tenacious claws. He wiped out any barriers, when the matter concerned "heretics". Even kings were afraid of him... I even respected him to a certain degree.

Isidora smiled on seeing our scared faces.

– Yes, I did. But it was a different respect than what you thought. I respected his persistence, his ineradicable faith in his "just cause". **He was mad about what he did**, not like most of his followers which simply **robbed, raped and enjoyed life**. Caraffa never took anything or raped anybody. Women as such did not exist for him at all. He was a "warrior of Christ" from the very beginning to his last breath. However, he never understood that he was **absolutely and totally wrong** in everything he had done on Earth, that it was a **terrible and inexcusable crime**. He died sincerely believing in his "just cause".

And now it was quite obvious that this fanatically mistaken man tried to get hold of my "sinful" soul.

While I feverishly tried to think of something, I had some unexpected help. My old acquaintance, almost a friend, Francesco who had just sold me some books, suddenly addressed me in an irritated tone, as if my indecision made him lose patience:

– Madonna Isidora, have you decided at last what you shall take? My clients are waiting for me, and I can't dedicate all my time only to you, no matter how I would wish it.

I stared at him in surprise, but fortunately intercepted his risky idea. He suggested me to get rid of dangerous books which I had in my hands in that moment! Books were Caraffa's favourite "hook". It was mostly because of them the cleverest people got into net which the mad inquisitor spread for them...

I left the greater part of the books on the counter at which Francesco immediately expressed "utter displeasure". Caraffa observed. I felt at once how this simple and naive game amused him. He perfectly understood everything, and if he wanted, he could calmly arrest me and my poor risk-taking friend, but for some reason he did not want to. It seemed that he sincerely enjoyed my helplessness, like a satisfied cat that clutched a mouse in the corner.

– May I leave you, Your Eminence? – I asked carefully, without hope of hearing an affirmative reply.

– To my great regret, Madonna Isidora! – The cardinal exclaimed with artificial disappointment. – Will you allow me to call on you some day? They say you have a very gifted daughter. I would like very much to meet her and have a chat with her. I hope she is as beautiful as her mother.

– My daughter, Anna is only ten, monsignore. – I answered as calmly as possible.

But my soul shouted with animal fear! He knew everything about me! Why, why did mad Caraffa need me? Why was he interested in my little Anna?

*Was it because I had the reputation of a famous **Vidunia**, and he considered me the bitterest enemy? In fact it did not matter to him **what** I was called, the "great inquisitor" simply considered me a **witch**, and he burned witches...*

*I strongly and selflessly loved Life! And like any normal person I wanted very much that it would last as long as possible. In fact even the most arrant scoundrel, which took the life of others, values every minute and every day of **his** precious life! Suddenly I understood very clearly that it will be exactly he, Caraffa, who would take my short life which I valued so much and I was not destined to live it right through.*

– A great spirit is born in a small body, Madonna Isidora. Even Jesus once was a child. I shall be delighted to pay you a visit! – Caraffa elegantly bowed and withdrew.

The world was collapsing. It fell into shallow pieces; each reflected the predatory, thin and clever face.

I tried to calm down somehow and not to panic, but failed for some reason. My usual confidence in myself and my strength let me down this time, and it scared me even more. The day was the same as it was just several minutes ago – sunny and light, but darkness settled in my soul. As it appeared, I had waited for him a long time ago, and all my nightmarish visions about fires were portents of the today's meeting with him.

On coming home, I persuaded my husband to take little Anna somewhere far away where the wicked Caraffa's tentacles would not reach her. Meanwhile I began to prepare for the worst, because I knew that his visit would not make me wait too long. I was right.

In a few days, my favourite black maid, Keya, (then it was in the latest fashion to have black servants in rich houses) reported that "His Eminence, the cardinal, expected me in the pink living room". I felt that something would happen right now.

I wore a light-yellow silk dress and knew that this colour became me. But if there was only one person in the world before whom I did not want to look attractive, it was exactly Caraffa. Regrettably I had no time to change and had to go just like this.

He waited, calmly leaning against the back of the arm-chair, studying some old manuscript, of which we had a countless amount in our house. I "put" on a pleasant smile and went down into the living room. On seeing me, Caraffa froze for some reason without saying a word. The silence dragged on and it seemed to me that the cardinal would hear how my scared heart beat treacherously loud... At last his hoarse voice sounded with enthusiasm:

– You look stunning, Madonna Isidora! Even this sunny morning fades next to you!

– I did not know that cardinals are allowed to compliment ladies! – I squeezed out a reply, exerting every effort to smile.

– Cardinals are people too, Madonna, and they are able to distinguish the beautiful from the simple... Where is your wonderful daughter? Will I be able to enjoy double beauty today?

– She is not in Venice, Your Eminence. She and her father left for Florence to visit her sick cousin.

– As far as I know, nobody is ill in your family at the moment. Who fell ill so suddenly, Madonna Isidora? – His voice breathed with undisguised threat.

Caraffa began to play openly. There was nothing left for me to do but meet the danger face to face...

– What do you want from me Your Eminence? Would be it simpler to say it directly, sparing both of us from this unnecessary, cheap game? We are clever enough people who could respect each other even having different views.

I became weak in the knees with horror, but Caraffa did not notice for some reason. He fixed his blazing eyes on my face without answering and noticed nothing around. I could not understand what was happening and this dangerous comedy frightened me more and more. But something unforeseen happened, something totally beyond usual concepts. Caraffa came very close to me, still fixing his eyes on my face, and whispered, almost breathless:

– You cannot be from God. You are too beautiful! You are a witch!!! Woman has no right to be so beautiful! You are from the Devil!

He turned and dashed from the house, as if Satan pursued him. I stood in absolute shock, still expecting to hear his steps, but nothing happened. Gradually I came to myself and managed to relax my stiffened body. I breathed deeply and lost consciousness. I awoke in bed. My dear maid Keya was giving me some hot wine. At once I remembered what had happened, jumped from the bed and began to rush about the room, having absolutely no idea what to do... Time went, and it was necessary to do something, to think of something, somehow to defend myself and the family from this two-legged monster. I knew that the game was over now and the war had begun. Regrettably, our forces were very unequal. Naturally, I could beat him in my own way. I could simply stop his blood-thirsty heart, and all these horrors would end at once. But the point is that, even at thirty six I still remained too pure and kind to kill somebody. I never took life; on the contrary I often returned it. I could not yet execute even such a frightful man as Caraffa.

The next morning I heard a deafening knock at the door. My heart stopped. I knew it was the Inquisition. They took me, accusing me of "verbiage and practising black magic, dulling honest citizens' minds by false predictions and heresy". It was the beginning of the end.

The room where I was taken was very damp and dark, but for some reason it seemed to me, that I would not stay too long in it. Caraffa came at midday.

– Oh, I beg your pardon, Madonna Isidora. You were given a room destined for another person. It's not for you, of course.

– Why all this game, monsignore? – I asked proudly (as it seemed to me) jerking up my head. – I would prefer the truth and would like to know what I am **truly** accused of. My family, as you know, is very respected and loved in Venice, and it would be better for you, if your accusations had **true** grounds.

Caraffa never knew how much strength I needed to look proud! I perfectly understood that it was highly unlikely that somebody or something could help me. But I could not allow him to see my fear. Therefore I continued, trying to drive him out of the calmly-ironical state which apparently was his peculiar defence and which I could not stand.

– Will you be so kind as to inform me of what I am guilty, or you will leave this pleasure to your faithful "vassals"?!

– I would not advise you to boil, Madonna Isidora. – Caraffa pronounced calmly. – As far as I know your beloved Venice knows that you are a **Witch**, besides, the strongest one that ever lived. But in fact you never concealed it, did you?

Suddenly I became absolutely calm. Yes, it was true. I never hid my abilities. I was proud of them, like my mother was. So, will I betray my soul and give up who I am in front of this mad fanatic?!

– You are right, Your Eminence. I am a Witch. But I am neither from Devil, nor from God. I am free in my soul, I KNOW... And you will never be able to take it from me. The only thing you can do is to kill me, but even then I shall be what I am. Only in that case, you will never see me again.

I inflicted a weak blow at random. I was not sure that it would work. But Caraffa suddenly went pale, and I understood that I was right. No matter how strong this unpredictable man hated women, a strange and dangerous feeling toward me, which I could not define yet, glimmered inside of him. But the main thing was that it **existed!** And only that was important now. Later I shall know what it was, if now I succeed in "catching" Caraffa on this simple woman bait. But I did not know then, how strong the will of this unusual person was. His confusion disappeared as quickly as it came. The cold and calm cardinal stood in front of me again.

– It would be an enormous loss for all who appreciates beauty, Madonna. But **too much** beauty is dangerous, because it destroys pure souls. And your beauty, I am sure, will leave nobody indifferent; therefore it will be better, if it simply ceases to exist...

Caraffa left. My hair stood on end. So huge a fear he spiked into my tired lonely soul, was. **I was alone.** All people I loved were somewhere on the other side of these stone walls, and I was not sure at all that I would ever see them again. My beloved dear child Anna huddled in Florence at the Medici's and I hoped very much that Caraffa did not know where she was. My husband, who adored me, was with her on my request and did not know that I was caught. I did not have the faintest hope. I was truly alone.

From that ill-fated day the endless trials of the famous "Venetian Witch", in other words – me, began. But Venice was a **truly free city** and did not allow the destroying of its children so easily. The Inquisition was hated by all, and Caraffa had to take that into consideration. Therefore I was judged by the "supreme tribunal of the Inquisition" which accused me of all possible vices, most of which I had never even heard of. The only light thing which happened in this nightmarish time was unexpected and very strong support of our friends, that forced Caraffa to be more careful in his accusations, but it did not help me to break free from his dangerous claws.

Time went by and I knew that the dangerous moment, when Caraffa would attack, came close. For the moment it was just an "ugly performance" which was played for more than a year almost every day. According to them, it had to calm me down somehow or even give some false tiny hope that everything would be finally over in the end and that maybe I could "happily go home". They tried to "lull" me, apparently wishing to strike even stronger. But Caraffa was wrong. I **knew** that he just waited for something. I did not know yet – for what.

And this day came at last. In the morning I was informed that due to the extreme importance of my "case" and the inability of the local inquisition to pass judgment on it, I was sent to Rome, to rely on the Pope's enlightened will, in order that he would pronounce "just sentence" on me.

It was the end. Nobody in the world could help me, if I got into the hands of the Roman Inquisition. Caraffa rejoiced! He celebrated victory. I was almost dead.

36. Isidora-2. Rome

In just a week I contemplated the "holy" city of Rome in the whole of its gloomy "grandeur". Save the beauty of palaces, cathedrals and churches, the city was very sullen and to my surprise, dirty. For me it was the city of my death, because I knew that there I could not break free of Caraffa.

I was lodged in a very large palace without as much as a single word of explanation, nothing at all. A mute maid served me, which portended nothing good. But the fact that I was lodged in a castle and not in a prison cell gave me a tiny hope of the possibility to defend myself.

I was wrong...

Caraffa appeared the next morning. He was fresh and very pleased which, unfortunately, portended nothing good for me.

He sat in an arm-chair right in front of me without asking permission to do so, by which he clearly demonstrated that he was master of the situation here and I was just a prisoner in a beautiful cage...

– I do hope that your journey was pleasant, Madonna Isidora. – He said in a deliberately-polite tone. – How do you find your apartment? Is there something you need?

– Oh, yes! I would like to go home! – I answered, trying to fit in with his tone.

I knew that I had nothing to loose because my life was about to be over. Therefore, I decided to deprive Caraffa of the pleasure of breaking me down and tried to do my best not to show him how scared I was.

*It was not **death** that I was afraid of. Most of all I was afraid of the thought that I would never again see those who I loved so strongly and selflessly – my family; that, most likely, I would never hug my little Anna again; I would not teach her what my mother had taught me and what I knew myself; that I would leave her totally defenceless against evil and pain and that I could not tell her what I had wanted to and **must** have told her.*

I pitied my wonderful husband for who I knew it would be extremely painful to loose me. How cold and empty his heart would be! I would never be able even to say the last "farewell" to him...

Most of all I pitied my father for who I was the sense of his life, his guiding "star" lighting up his heavy and thorny path. After my mother had gone I became everything for him that still remained to teach and hope that one fine day I would be the person into which he tried so persistently to "mould" me.

***Here was what I was afraid of.** My soul wept thinking of who I loved so much and who I was about to leave now... But that was not all. I knew that Caraffa would **never let me go for nothing.** I knew that he certainly would make me suffer greatly... But I did not imagine how inhumanly cruel this suffering would be...*

– It is the only thing that I cannot grant you, Madonna Isidora. – The cardinal answered harshly, forgetting his dulcet high society tone.

– Well, then, let me see my little daughter. – I asked, growing cold inside from an impossible hope.

– And that we shall certainly organize for you! A little later, I think. – Caraffa pronounced with unexpected satisfaction, turning something over in his mind.

The news staggered me! It turned out that he had plans regarding my little Anna too!

I was ready to endure any terrible pain but in no way was I ready even to think that my family would suffer.

– I have a question for you, Madonna Isidora, and whether you will see your daughter soon or you will have to forget about how she looks will depend on the way you answer it. Therefore I advise you to think very hard before answering. – Caraffa's gaze became sharp as a steel blade... – I want to know where your grandfather's famous library is.

So that was what the mad inquisitor was looking for! As it appeared, he was not so mad in the end... Yes, he was quite right. My grand-dad's old library had a wonderful collection of spiritual and mental wealth! It was one of the oldest and rarest in Europe, and even was an object of envy of the great Medicis who, as is generally known, were ready to sell their soul to get a rare book. But why did Caraffa need something like this?!

– My grand-dad's library, as you know, was always kept in Florence, but I don't know what became of it after his death, Your Eminence, because I have not seen it since.

It was a child's lie and I understood how naive it sounded... I was just unable to find another answer so quickly, but I could not allow the rarest works of philosophers, scientists and poets, the works of great Teachers to get into the dirty claws of the church or Caraffa. I had no right to let that happen! But having no time to think of anything better to protect it somehow, I fired the first thing that came to my strained mind in that moment. Caraffa's requirement was so unexpected that I needed time to think how to act later. As if eavesdropping on my thoughts, Caraffa pronounced:

– Well then, Madonna, I give you time to think. I advise you to refrain from making a mistake. He left... Night fell on my little world...

During this terrible time I mentally communicated with my dear extremely anxious father who, unfortunately, could not tell me anything that would comfort me, except for the only positive news – Anna was still in Florence, and there was nothing to fear, at least about her.

But my unhappy husband, my poor Girolamo came back to Venice wishing to help me, and only there discovered that it was too late – I had been transported to Rome... His despair was limitless! He wrote long letters to the Pope. He sent the notes of protest to the "mighty of this world" who I had helped once. Nothing worked. Caraffa was deaf to any requests and supplications.

– Could not you just disappear?! Or "fly away", as far as that goes? Why did not you use your abilities?!!! – The upset Stella exclaimed, unable to restrain herself. – **One always has to fight to the end!** My Gran taught me so.

I was very happy – Stella came back to life. Her spirit of a fighter perked up again, as soon as the urgent need appeared.

– I wish everything were so simple! – Isidora sadly shook her head. – The matter was not just about me. I had absolutely no idea about Caraffa's plans regarding my family. Also I was strongly frightened by the fact that no matter how much I tried I could **see** nothing. It was **the first time in my life** when my "vision" or my "witch talents" could not help... I could **look over** any person or event for a thousand years forward! I could predict even future embodiments with absolute exactness, which **not a single Vidun on Earth** could do, but **my Gift was silent when the matter concerned Caraffa** and I could not understand it. Any attempt to look into him failed, stumbling across his very dense golden-red protection which constantly "curled" around his physical body, and I was unable to break through it. This was something new and incomprehensible, which I had never experienced before.

Of course every member of my family (even my little Anna!) could create their own perfect protective shield and each did it in their own way making it uniquely **personal**. However, no matter how complicated it turned out to be, I perfectly knew that any time I could "get through" the protection of any Vedun I knew, if suddenly an urgent necessity arose, including the protection of my father who knew and could do much more than I. But I failed with Caraffa... He had some **alien**, very strong and very refined magic which I had never seen... I knew all Veduns of Europe. He was **not** one of them.

I, like anybody else, perfectly knew that he was a **true** "servant of God" and **faithful** "son of the Church", and due to general concepts in no way could he use what was called a "manifestation of the Devil" that we, Vedunias and Veduns, used! What was it then?! Could it really be that the **faithful servant of the Church and the Great Inquisitor was in reality a black Sorcerer?! Despite the fact that it was absolutely unbelievable, it was the only explanation** I could give. But in that case how did he combine his "holy" duties with "devilish" (as he called it) teachings?! Moreover, exactly that which he did on Earth was truly devilish and black...

I asked my father what he thought about it, when we had the next telepathic contact.

– It **not him**, dear... He is simply helped. But I don't know by whom. There is no such creature on Earth.

*From bad to worse! The world really turned upside down. But I promised myself to try to find out what this strange "saint father" used at the same time as pursuing and burning people who had the **same abilities**?*

*Because, if it was true and he used the "Devil's teachings" (as he called it), he, the Great Caraffa, **must end his "righteous" life on the stake, like those Veduns and Vedunias who he had burnt!***

But I was late...

The next morning I waited for Caraffa being decidedly determined to find out what this strange "holy father" used. But Caraffa did not come. He failed to appear the next day, and the next week... I could not understand whether it was just a break or he planned something very frightful as to my family. To my huge regret, it was neither of these two things, as I knew later. It was far more dangerous than any of his tricks... Very soon the constant ringing of bells and sad singing on streets prompted me – the Pope had died, which explained the protracted absence of my jailer. The next day, a mute maid, shining with happiness, brought me an elegant sheet of paper, which stated that Giovanni Pietro Caraffa – my most frightful and unforeseeable enemy – became the new Pope, Paul IV.

Now I had no choice but to wait...

In two days I was blindfolded and transported into a shockingly rich and defiantly beautiful palace. As I knew later, it was Caraffa's personal residence. He appeared in a week, neat and dangerous as always, in the "lustre of his unlimited power" and stretched out his manicured hand with the enormous shining Papal ring for me to kiss... I bent before him lower than before as propriety required, and also because I had not decided yet how I should behave toward him.

– How are you, Madonna Isidora? I do hope you are pleased with your apartment.

*Caraffa was extremely polite and satisfied, knowing that I was in his total power and now **nobody** could prevent him in anything.*

– I congratulate you on your victory, Your Holiness! – I said calmly, intentionally stressing the word "holiness". – I am afraid from now on I am too insignificant a figure to trouble the Pope with my presence... Will you give my case to somebody else?

Caraffa froze. He hated my calmness. He wanted me to be afraid.

– You are right, Madonna Isidora. It is highly likely that I give you to my best helper... Everything will depend only on you. Have you thought about my question?

*– Which books are you interested in, Your Holiness? Or you do want to find **everything** and destroy it?*

He was sincerely surprised.

– Who told you such nonsense?

– But only in Venice you've burnt thousands of books! Let alone other cities... Why else would you need them?

*– My dearest witch, – Caraffa smiled. – There are "books" and **BOOKS**. What I burned always fell into the **first** category. Come with me, I'll show you something interesting.*

Caraffa pushed the heavy gilded door and we found ourselves in a narrow, very long and dark corridor. He took a silver candlestick with just one thick candle burning on it.

– Follow me. – The newly made Pope stiffly ordered.

We walked for a long time, passing by many small doors from behind which no sound was heard. But Caraffa went along and I had no choice but to follow him. Finally we came to a strange "blind" door which had no handles. He pressed something and the heavy door easily moved, giving the way into an absolutely stunning hall... It was a library! The greatest library I've ever seen!!! The enormous space from floor to ceiling was filled with books! They were everywhere – on soft sofas, window-sills, shelves and even on the floor. There were thousands of them! I had a lump in

my throat. The place was much greater than the Medici library.

– What is it?! – Stunned I exclaimed, forgetting who I was there with.

– They are **BOOKS**, Madonna Isidora. – Caraffa answered calmly. – And they will be yours, if you wish... Everything depends only on you.

His flagrant look nailed me to the spot, which immediately made me remember, **where** I was and **with whom**. Splendidly playing on my selfless and infinite love of books, Caraffa made me forget for some moments about the frightful reality which, as it appeared, was going to be yet more frightful soon...

Caraffa was seventy then, although he was surprisingly young-looking. In the beginning of our acquaintance I even wondered whether there was a Vedun who had helped him, opening our secret of **longevity**! But then he suddenly began to get older very quickly and I forgot about it. Now I could not believe that this powerful and insidious man, who had unlimited power over kings and princes in his hands, just made a very "veiled" and vague offer to me... in which one could suspect some unhumanly strange drop of very dangerous love.

Everything inside me froze in horror! Because, be it true, no earthly force could protect me from his wounded pride and his black soul, vindictive in its malice!

– Forgive me my lack of modesty, Your Holiness, but in order to avoid any mistake from my side, will you deign to explain more exactly to me what do you mean by that? – I asked very carefully.

Caraffa softly smiled and, taking my trembling hand with his elegant and thin fingers, very quietly said:

– You are the first woman on Earth, Madonna Isidora, who, to my mind, deserves real love... And you are a very interesting interlocutor. Does not it seem to you that your place is rather on a throne than in a prison of the Inquisition? Think about it, Isidora. I offer you my friendship, **nothing more**. But my friendship costs a lot, believe me... And I would like very much to prove it to you. But everything will depend on your decision, of course... – And to my greatest surprise he added. – You can stay here till evening. If you wish to read something, I think you'll find here a lot of interesting things. Call a bell, when you finish, and your maid will show the way back.

Caraffa was calm and reserved which showed his complete confidence in the victory... He could not think even for a moment that I would turn down such an "interesting" offer, especially being in a gridlock, **which was the most intimidating**, because I was definitely going to say no to him. Only I had absolutely no idea how to do it yet...

I looked around. The room impressed me immensely! Beginning with the hand-made binding of the oldest books, the papyri and manuscripts on oxhide, to the latest printed books, this library was a fount of the world's wisdom, a real triumph of human Thought!!! Probably it was the most valuable library which man has ever seen! I stood absolutely stunned, charmed by thousands of volumes which "talked" to me and could not understand how those riches could go with the curses which the Inquisition so fervently and "sincerely" poured on everything like them? In fact the **real** inquisitors had to consider all these books the purest **HERESY**, exactly for which people were burned and which were flatly **forbidden** as the most frightful crime against the Church!

How then did all these invaluable books which were **burned in the squares to the last page** allegedly in the name of "expiation and purification of the soul" get into the Pope's basements?! It means that everything that the "fathers-inquisitors" said and everything they did was just a terrible veiled **LIE**! And this pitiless lie was deeply and firmly embedded in simple and open, naive and believing human hearts! Who would have thought that there was time when I was absolutely sure that Church was sincere in its faith! Because I thought that any faith, no matter how strange it seemed to be, **personified a sincere spirit and man's faith in something pure and high**, to which his soul aimed in the name of salvation. I never was a "believer" because I always believed exclusively in **Knowledge**. But I always respected other's convictions, because I was firmly convinced that **a person had a right to choose where he should direct his fate**, and no stranger's

will should force him **how** to live his life. Now I clearly saw that I had been wrong... The church lied, killed and raped, ignoring such a "trifle" as wounded and distorted human souls...

However, no matter how carried away I was by what I had seen, it was time to go back into reality which, unfortunately, was very far from bringing me anything of a consolatory nature...

The Holy Father Giovanni Pietro Caraffa loved me! Oh, Gods, how strongly he had to hate me for that!!! And how much stronger his hatred will be when he hears my answer...

I could not understand this man, although previously I could read almost any human soul like an open book. He was absolutely unforeseeable and it was impossible to catch the superfine changes of his mood which could entail horrific consequences. I did not know how much I would be able to endure and how long he intended to stand me. My life fully depended on this fanatic and cruel Pope but I knew exactly only one thing – I was not going to lie, which meant that I did not have too much life to live...

I was mistaken again.

The next day I was taken downward, to a sullen and enormous stone hall which did not go with the general style of this magnificent palace. Caraffa sat on a high wooden arm-chair at the end of this strange hall and looked like a personification of the gloomy resolution which could turn into the most acute evil right here...

I stopped in the middle of the room not daring to come nearer, because I did not know yet what he had expected from me. The Pope got up and statelily-slowly moved toward me. Something was wrong! He was too solemn and remote. Suddenly I clearly felt that my body was frost-bound by animal fear. But I was not afraid of him; at least not to such a degree! It was like a presentiment of something very bad, something that could freeze my tired soul... And I was unable to define – what that could be.

– Well, have you enjoyed reading, Isidora? I hope you had a pleasant day.

He addressed me simply by my name, as if emphasising that we did not need to stick to formalities anymore...

– Thank you, Your Holiness. Indeed you have a really incomparable library. – I answered as calmly as possible. – I think even the great Medici would envy you! But I would like to ask you a question, if you let me?

Caraffa nodded.

– How could this pure **HERESY** get into Your Holy House? And how can it still be there?

– Don't be so naive, Madonna! – Caraffa smiled indulgently. – **One must understand an enemy in order to defeat it**, and one can understand it only through knowing it. But in order to know an enemy, one has to study him very thoroughly. Otherwise it won't be a real victory...

– Has Your Holiness read all these books?! But a whole lifetime is not enough to do that!

– Well, it depends on how long the life is, Isidora, and **how** to read, doesn't it? In fact you do something of those tricks too, don't you?

Caraffa's eyes became sharp and piercing, as if he wished to look deep into my soul. And maybe he did?

He knew too much about me that only the nearest people to me could know. Therefore I decided to ask.

– You know about me such things which even my late mother did not. What does it mean, Your Holiness?

– Do you still want to face the truth, Isidora? I learned **everything** about you **that I wanted to know**. Does it frighten you? I had one of your teachers in my basement. He told me everything. Before that I did not know you as I do now.

Immediately I saw him. Indeed it was my teacher, the kindest and cleverest of all who taught me. He hung on a hook, in some terrible basement, totally covered with his own blood... And he was

dying...

– How could you do such a thing?! It is monstrous!!! What was his guilt?!

My heart broke to pieces refusing to accept the horror of what I had seen. It happened that I calmed down for some time and lost! Not in vain Caraffa was elected Pope. He was a true master of tortures, a black genius which could finally "lull" my everyday fear!

From the first day of being in his hands I subconsciously wanted so much to believe that I had a chance, although a tiny one, to escape. And I was caught like a blind kitten which did not have an opportunity even to open his eyes... And Caraffa strengthened my faith that I could have a fragile and tiny "chance", drop after drop, day after a day, being so calm and behaving like a man of the world, using the beauty of the rooms in which he lodged me and showing his stunning library the day before. And he succeeded – I believed... and lost.

– Oh, my dear Isidora, you are so clever, aren't you? Do you really think that I will believe that you are sincerely waiting for some "just" sentence... when it is **I** who pronounce it?

It was the **real** Caraffa – a fanatic-inquisitor which suddenly got unlimited power. And maybe he had aspired to exactly this kind of power for so many long years? But now it did not matter for me what he wished. Suddenly I understood very clearly that I could find myself in the place where my kind teacher was now, hanging on the same terrible hook, in any second... if Caraffa wished it.

– But what about God?! Aren't you really afraid **even of Him**?

– Oh, come on, Isidora! – Caraffa smiled rapaciously. – God will forgive me everything I do **in His glory!**

It was madness, and my fragile hope, writhing, began to die...

– Have you thought about my offer, Madonna? I hope you had enough time to get a clear idea of your situation and I won't have to inflict the next blow.

My heart grew cold with terror – what will be his "next blow"? But I had to answer and was not going to show how terribly afraid I was.

– If I am not mistaken, you have offered your friendship to me, Your Holiness. But **friendship, got by instilling fear, is worthless**. I don't wish to have this kind of friendship, even if I have to suffer. I am not afraid of pain. It is more frightful when the soul hurts.

– What a child you are, dear Isidora! – Caraffa began to laugh. – It's like books – there is "suffering" and **SUFFERING**. And I sincerely advise you not to try the second option!

– Anyway, you are a not friend, Giovanni. You don't even know what this word means... I perfectly understand that I am fully in your cruel hands, but I don't care what will happen to me now...

It was the first time I called him by his name and I did it on purpose, wishing to anger him. It was true – I was almost a child in everything that concerned evil and had no idea yet what this rapacious, but, unfortunately, very clever, man was truly capable of.

– Well, you have decided, Madonna. Blame yourself then.

His servant briskly took my arm and pushed me into the narrow corridor. I thought it was the end and now Caraffa would give me to the executioners...

We went deeply downward, passing a great number of small, heavy doors behind which I heard screams and moans; and I was sure that my time came at last. I did not know how long I would be able to endure the torture and how severe it could be. Nobody ever physically caused me pain and it was very difficult to judge how strong I could be. I lived all my short life surrounded by the love of my dear family and friends, and did not even imagine how wicked and cruel my fate would be... Like many of my friends – Vedunias and Veduns – I could not **see** my fate. Probably it was closed from us to prevent us from changing our life. Or maybe because, as all others, we must **live what** was fated for us, not trying to **go away** before time on seeing terrible things in our severe future.

*So the day when I did not have any choice came, or rather I did have a choice and **I chose it myself**. Now the only thing had to do was to endure what was coming and somehow to withstand 'til the end trying not to break...*

Caraffa at last stopped near a door and we entered. The cold horror chilled me to the bone! This was a real Hell, if it could exist on Earth! It was a triumph of atrocity beyond human comprehension... My heart sank.

*The whole room was inundated with human blood... People hung, sat, lay on horrific "instruments" of torture the purpose of which I was unable to imagine. Some absolutely calm, blood-stained men were unhurriedly engaged in the "work", obviously feeling no pity, remorse or the least **human** feelings... The room smelled of singed meat, blood and death. Half dead people moaned, cried and screamed and some did not have any forces left even to scream. They simply wheezed, unable to respond to torture like rag-dolls which fate mercifully deprived of any feelings...*

Something blew up within me! For an instant I even forgot that very soon I would be one of them... The whole of my raging force suddenly splashed outside and... the torture room ceased to exist... The only thing left was bare bloodstained walls and the frightful "instruments" of torture... All people – both executioners and their victims – vanished without a trace...

Caraffa was pale as death and looked at me, fixing his piercing terrible black eyes on me, in which one could clearly read spite, rage, surprise and even some strange inexplicable delight... He kept deathly silence. His internal fight was reflected only in his face. He was immobile like a statue... He was making up his mind.

*I sincerely pitied those people who had **gone** to "another life", so brutally tortured and certainly not guilty. But I was absolutely sure that my unexpected interference was an **escape** from those horrific inhuman torments. I saw their pure light souls going away to another life and sorrow cried in my frozen heart... It was the first time in the long years of my difficult "witch practice" that I took precious human life... I only hoped that they would find peace there, in that different, pure and tender world.*

*Caraffa scrutinized my face with a morbid concentration, as if longing to know **what** made me act like that, perfectly knowing that the faintest wave of his "holy" hand was enough to send me to the place of the "gone" people and make me pay for that very dearly. But I did not repent... I rejoiced that I helped at least a few to break loose from his dirty claws. It is highly likely that my face prompted him to something, because in the next instant Caraffa convulsively grasped my hand and took me to another door...*

– Very well. I hope that will please you, Madonna! – And he harshly pushed me inside...

And there... suspended on the wall like on a crucifix, my darling Girolamo hung... My tender and kind husband... There was no pain and horror in the world which would miss slashing my tormented heart! I could not believe what I was seeing. My soul refused to accept it and I helplessly closed my eyes.

– Oh, come on, dear Isidora! You'll have to watch our little performance! – Caraffa pronounced in a half-threatening, half-affectionate voice. – And I am afraid that you'll have to watch it to the very end!

So that was this pitiless and unforeseeable "holy" beast contrived! He was afraid that I would not break and decided to break me by the suffering of my nearest and dearest! Anna!!! Oh, Gods, Anna! A bloody flash flashed in my tormented brain – my poor little daughter could be the next!

I tried to pull myself together in order to deprive Caraffa of feeling completely satisfied in his dirty victory, and also of thinking that he succeeded in breaking me and prevent him from using this "successful" method on the rest of my family members...

*– Be reasonable, Your Holiness! What are you doing! – I exclaimed in horror. – You perfectly **know** that my husband has done nothing against the Church! How can you do such a thing?! How can you make innocent people pay for mistakes they have not made?!*

I perfectly understood that this was just small talk which will result in nothing, and Caraffa perfectly knew it too...

*– But Madonna, we are **very** interested in your husband! – The "great inquisitor" caustically smiled. – You cannot deny that your dear Girolamo was engaged in very dangerous practice which is called **anatomy**, can you? Isn't it true that this sinful practice includes digging into dead human bodies?*

*– But this is **science**, Your Holiness!!! It is a new branch of medicine! It helps future doctors to understand better a human body and therefore to treat patients more efficiently. Does the Church forbid **doctors** nowadays?!*

*– Doctors that are from God do not need this kind of a "satanic action"! – Caraffa exclaimed angrily. – **Man will die, if God's decided so**. It would have been better if your "doctors" had taken care of man's sinful soul.*

– Well, as far as I know, it is the Church that takes "care" of the human soul very strenuously! So I think very soon no job will remain for doctors... – I could not restrain myself.

I knew that my answers enraged him, but I could not help doing that. My wounded soul screamed... I understood that no matter how much I tried to "behave" myself, I was unable to save my poor Girolamo. Caraffa had drawn up some horrific plan regarding him and was not going to frustrate it, depriving himself of great pleasure...

– Do be seated, Isidora. You will see now that rumors about the Inquisition are not just tales... We are at war and our beloved church needs to be defended. And I, as you know, am its most faithful son...

I stared at him in surprise, thinking that Caraffa was gradually going mad...

– What war do you mean, Your Holiness?

*– The war which is every day around us!!! – Pope suddenly shouted being infuriated for some reason. – Which purges the Earth of people like you! **Heresy must not exist!** I will exterminate any manifestation of it – be it books, pictures or living people – as long as I live!*

– Well, as for books, I have a very certain opinion thanks to your "holy" help which somehow contradict your "sacred" duty about which you constantly speak, Your Holiness...

I did not know what to say, with what to make him busy or how to stop him to prevent him from beginning this frightful, as he called it, "performance"! But the "great Inquisitor" perfectly understood that I was just trying to mark time, being horrified by what could happen. He was a magnificent psychologist and did not let me continue my naive game.

– Begin! – Caraffa waved to one of the torturers and calmly sat in an arm-chair... I closed my eyes.

The smell of the singed flesh spread in the room, Girolamo began to scream wildly.

*– I told you! Open your eyes, Isidora!!! – The tormentor furiously shouted. – You must enjoy the extermination of HERESY the way I enjoy it! It is a debt of every faithful christian. Oh, I am sorry, I forgot with whom I have to deal... You in fact are not a Christian, you are a **WITCH!***

*– I suppose Your Holiness perfectly knows Latin... In that case you must know that the word "HAERESIS" means **CHOICE** or **ALTERNATIVE**. How can you combine two so incompatible concepts? There is not the slightest evidence that you leave the right for free choice to somebody or at least the tiny alternative? – I exclaimed bitterly. – Man **MUST** have the right to believe in what his soul reaches out to. You cannot **FORCE** man to believe because faith comes from heart, not from the executioner!*

Caraffa stared at me in surprise over a minute like at some bizarre animal... Then he shook off a stupor and calmly said:

– You are far more dangerous than I thought, Madonna. You are not only too beautiful, also you are too clever. You must not exist outside these walls... or you must not exist at all. – He turned to the torturer and ordered. – Continue!

Girolamo's screams penetrated to the deepest corners of my dying soul and, on bursting there with horrific pain, tore it to pieces... I did not know how long Caraffa was going to torture him before killing. Time crept terribly slowly forcing me die thousands of times... But for some reason, I was still alive and still observed... Frightful tortures were changed by more frightful ones. There was no end of them... The torturers passed from fire cauterizations to bone crushing... and when they finished that, they began to disfigure the flesh. Girolamo was slowly dying. And nobody explained to him why; nobody considered it necessary even to say anything. He was just methodically and slowly killed before my eyes to force me to do what the newly elected head of the saintly Christian church wished me to do... I tried mentally to talk to Girolamo, knowing that I could not tell him anything in other way. I wanted to say goodbye... But he did not hear. He was far away, saving his soul from the inhuman pain, and no matter how hard I tried to help him, it did not work... I sent my love to him, trying to wrap his tormented body with it and lessen the superhuman suffering, even a little. But Girolamo only looked at me with his eyes dimmed with pain, as if trying to grasp the only thinnest filament which bound him to this cruel but so dear world which began to slip from him...

Caraffa went mad. He could not understand why I remained calm, because he perfectly knew that I loved my husband very much. The "sainted" Pope longed to destroy me, but not physically. He wanted to trample my soul, to fully subdue my heart and mind to his strange and inexplicable desires. On seeing that Girolamo and I did not take our eyes from each other, Caraffa exploded – he shouted to the torturer ordering to burn out my husband's wonderful eyes...

Stella and I froze... It was too awful for our child's hearts to accept, no matter how experienced they were... Inhumanity and horror of what had happened nailed us to the ground preventing us from breathing. It could not happen on Earth!!! It just could not! But the endless sorrow in Isidora's golden eyes cried – it could!!! Oh, it sure could! And we powerlessly watched what happened further, not daring to interfere or ask any foolish questions.

For an instant my soul fell on it's knees asking for mercy... Caraffa felt it at once and fixed his burning eyes on me in surprise, not totally believing in his victory, but immediately understood that he rejoiced too early... I made an unbelievable effort and gathered all my hatred, and then I looked right into his eyes... Caraffa jumped back, on getting the strongest mental blow. For a second fright flashed in his black eyes, but it disappeared the same way as appeared... He was an uncommonly strong and resolute man who could be admired, if he were not so terrible...

My heart shrank from a bad presentiment... The torturer got an approving nod from Caraffa and like a butcher calmly inflicted an exact blow straight in the heart of the helpless victim... My beloved husband, my tender Girolamo ceased to exist... His kind soul flew away where there was no pain but peace and light... I knew that he would wait for me there too, whenever I came...

The sky fell, spewing forth streams of superhuman pain. Fierce hatred rose in my soul and destroyed all barriers, trying to break forth outside... Suddenly I threw my head back and howled the furious howl of an injured beast, raising my disobedient hands to the sky. And my luminous palms splashed out the "magic of death", which once my late mother had taught me, right at Caraffa. The magic streamed, shrouding his thin body with a blue halo of cloud. Candles went out and thick pitch-black darkness, seemed to absorb our life... And only Caraffa still shone with the ghostly white-blue light. For a fraction of a second I saw my death sentence in his eyes, wide with malice... But nothing happened to him! It was absolutely unbelievable! Should I strike any ordinary person with the "magic of death", he would not live for a second! Caraffa was alive and unharmed despite the blow that should have incinerated him. The only thing I saw was the blue flashing lightnings writhing around his usual golden-red protection. I could not believe my eyes.

– Well, well! Madonna Isidora rushed to the attack! – His mocking voice sounded in the darkness. – Anyway it is getting interesting. Don't worry, dear Isidora. We'll have a lot of unforgettable minutes to spend together! I can promise you.

*The torturer came back bringing in the candle. Girolamo's bloodstained body hung on the wall... My tormented soul howled, on seeing this sorrowful picture again. But I was not going to show my tears to Caraffa, not for the world! **Never!!!** He was a beast which adored the smell of*

blood... But this time it was blood **very dear** to me, and I was not going to give yet greater pleasure to this predator. I did not mourn my darling Girolamo before his eyes, hoping that I would have enough time for it, when he would go away...

– Take it away! – Caraffa sharply ordered to the torturer pointing at the dead body.

– Wait!!! Don't I have any right even to say goodbye to him?! – I exclaimed indignantly. – Even church cannot refuse me that! Or rather **exactly the church** should render mercy to me! Does not it call upon us to render mercy? Although, as far as I see, we will never get mercy from the Holy Pope!

– The Church owes **you** nothing, Isidora. You are a witch and therefore its mercy does not apply to you! – Caraffa pronounced very calmly. – Your weeping won't help your husband! You'd better go and think how to be more compliant, thus saving terrible sufferings both for you and others.

He withdrew as if nothing happened, as if he had not just interrupted somebody's precious life, as if his soul was in peace and quiet... If, certainly, he has one at all.

I was returned to my apartments without letting me pay the last tribute to my dead husband.

My heart froze in despair and sorrow, convulsively clinging to a tiny hope that, maybe, Girolamo was the first and last member of my unlucky family, who this monster in a papal soutane forced to suffer and took life from so easily. I knew that most likely I will not be able to endure either my father's death or Anna's, especially hers. But I was even more frightened by the fact that I understood – **Caraffa knew it too...** And I racked my brain, making plans – each one more bizarre than the previous. Regrettably, the hope of surviving, even if for a short period of time, in order to try to help my family melted like smoke.

A week passed. Caraffa did not appear. Maybe he (like me!) needed time to think over the next step, or maybe he was to see to other duties, in which I hardly believed. Yes, he was a Pope... But at the same time he was an **incredibly hazardous gambler** unable to skip an interesting party. And I think that the "cat-and-mouse" game he was playing with me gave him immense pleasure.

Therefore I did my best to calm down and find in my exhausted head any "clever" idea which would help me to concentrate on our unequal "war" which I could not win... However, I was not going to give up, because I considered a "**surrendered man**" much worse than a dead one. As I still was alive, I could fight, even if my soul was slowly dying... I must last long enough to have time to destroy this mortally-dangerous viper – Caraffa... Now I had no doubts that I **could** kill him as soon as a tiny opportunity occurred. The only problem was that I had not the slightest idea **how** to do that yet. Judging from my recent experience, I could not kill him with my "usual" way. So I would have to look for something different. Regrettably I had almost no time left for this.

Also I thought about Girolamo all the time... He always was my warm protective "wall" behind which I felt confident and protected... But it had disappeared and there was nothing to replace it. Girolamo was the most faithful and affectionate husband in the world and a very important part of my world grew dark, empty and cold without him. My life was gradually filling with sorrow, anguish and hatred, and the desire to take revenge on Caraffa, forgetting about myself and the thought of how small my force was compared to his ... Grief blinded me. It had immersed me in the abyss of despair and the only way to get out of it was to defeat Caraffa.

He came back into my life in two weeks. One early sunny morning he entered my room very self-confident, fresh and happy and pronounced with satisfaction:

– I have a surprise for you, Madonna Isidora! I think you will be immensely pleased.

At once I broke out in a cold sweat. I knew his "surprises". They never bring anything good...

As if reading my thoughts, Caraffa added:

– It's a **pleasant** surprise, really. I promise you. You'll see it yourself now!

The door opened. And a fragile tall girl entered it, watchfully looking around... Horror and joy seized me. I stiffened with astonishment... It was my daughter, my little Anna!!! Although it was

rather difficult to call her little, because she had noticeably matured and shot up over these two years, becoming even lovelier...

My heart rushed to her, letting out a mute cry, almost jumping out of my chest! But I forbade myself to hurry. I did not know what the unforeseeable Caraffa planned this time. Therefore I had to behave very calmly which was almost beyond my forces. Only the fear of making an irreparable mistake restrained my raging emotions which were trying to break out like a hurricane. Happiness, horror, wild joy and fear of loss tore me to pieces at one and the same time! Caraffa smiled being absolutely satisfied with the produced effect... which at once made me inwardly shudder. I did not dare even to think what could follow further... I knew that, if something terrible was to happen, the desire to protect Anna would be too strong to stand up against Caraffa... and I panicked, being afraid that I would be unable to say no to him whatever he would ask for.

But to my greatest surprise, his "surprise" appeared to be a **real** one.

– Are you glad to see your daughter, Madonna Isidora? – Caraffa asked smiling broadly.

– Everything depends on what will follow, Your Holiness... – I answered carefully. – But, certainly, I am unspeakably glad!

– In that case enjoy the meeting. I will come for her in an hour. Nobody will disturb you. And then I will come to fetch her. She will live in a monastery. I think it is the best place for such gifted girl as your daughter.

– Monastery?! But she never was a believer, Your Holiness. She is a hereditary Witch, and nothing in the world will make her different. **This is who she is;** and she will never be able to change. Even if you destroy her, she will remain a Witch! Just like my mother and me. You will be unable to make a believer out of her!

– What a child you are, Madonna Isidora! – Caraffa sincerely laughed. – Nobody was going to make a "believer" out of her. I think she can perfectly serve our saintly church, remaining exactly who she is, and maybe even more. I have very far reaching plans for your daughter...

– What do you mean, Your Holiness? And what a monastery has to do with it? – I whispered with hardening lips.

I was trembling. I could not understand nothing of all this, I only felt that Caraffa was telling the truth. The only thing that frightened me to death was what those "far-reaching" plans this frightful man could have for my poor girl were.

– Calm down, Isidora, and stop waiting for something terrible from me all the time! You are tempting fate, you know... The point is that the monastery which I am talking about is not an ordinary one... Not a single soul knows about it outside its walls. It is a monastery **exceptionally for Veduns and Vedmas**. It has existed for thousands of years. I was there several times. I studied there... But, unfortunately, I did not find there what I had been looking for. They rejected me... – Caraffa was engrossed in thoughts for a moment and, to my surprise, suddenly became very sad. – But I am sure that they will like Anna. And I am also sure that they **will have something** to teach your talented daughter, Isidora.

– Are you talking about Meteora¹, Your Holiness? – I knew the answer beforehand, but nevertheless asked.

¹Not to be confused (!!!) with Meteora monastery complex in Greece, Kalambaka. Meteora in Greece means "suspended in the air" which totally corresponds to the amazing view – the monasteries look like pink mushrooms which grow on the tallest apexes of unusual mountains. The first monastery was built approximately in 900 A.D. 24 monasteries were built between twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Only six of them "lived" till our days and still shock the imagination of the tourists, although the latter do not know one very interesting detail... There is one more monastery in Meteora where "curious" persons are not allowed... It was built (and initiated the buildings of others) by a gifted fanatic who once had studied in real Meteora and was banished from it. On getting extremely angry with the whole world, he decided to build his "Meteora" in order to gather other "offended" persons and to live their secluded life. Nobody knows how he succeeded in doing that, but then freemasons began to hold their secret meetings in his Meteora, which takes place once a year in our days too. Monasteries Great Meteoron, Rousanou, St. Nicholas, St. Stephanos, the Holy Trinity and Varlaam are situated very close to each other.

Caraffa's raised his eyebrow in surprise. He obviously did not expect that I had heard about it...

– Do you know them? Were you there?!

– I wasn't, Your Holiness, but my father was, and he taught me a lot of things (later I bitterly regretted I said that to him...). What do you want to teach my daughter there and what for? In fact you have enough proofs to declare her a Witch now. All the same you will try to burn her later like all others, won't you?!

Caraffa smiled again.

– Why did you grasp at this foolish idea, Madonna? I am not going to harm your dear daughter! She will be able to serve us perfectly! I have been looking for a Vidunia who is still a child for a very long time to teach her everything that Meteora "monks" know in order that later she would help me to search out sorcerers and witches, those like she once was. But she already will be **a witch from God**.

Caraffa did not seem mad, he WAS mad; otherwise it was impossible to accept what he was saying now! It was not normal, and therefore it scared me even more.

– I am sorry, if I misunderstood, Your Holiness... But can there really be **Witches from God**?!

– Well, of course, Isidora! – Caraffa began to laugh, being sincerely surprised at my "ignorance". – If she uses her knowledge and abilities **in the name of church**, it will come to her from God, because she will **do everything in His name**! Don't you really understand it?

No, I **did not** understand it! The man who said this had a quite sick imagination. The scary thing was that he **sincerely believed** in what he said! He was incredibly dangerous in his madness and had unlimited power. His fanaticism exceeded all bounds and **somebody had to stop him**.

– If you **know** how to make us serve the church, why do you burn us then?! – I took chance to ask. – In fact what we possess is impossible to buy. Why don't you **appreciate it**? Why do you continue to destroy us? If you want to learn something, why you don't ask to teach you?

– Because it is useless to try to change that which already **thinks**, Madonna. I cannot change either you or those like you... I can only frighten or kill you. But it will not give me what I have dreamed about for so long. Anna is still young and she can be **taught** to love God, without taking her amazing Gift. It is useless with you, because even if you swear to have the faith in Him, I won't believe you.

– And you will be perfectly right, Your Holiness. – I calmly said.

Caraffa rose to leave.

– There is only one more question and I ask you very earnestly to answer... if you can. Is your protection from the monastery?

– Like your **youth**, Isidora... – Caraffa smiled. – I shall come back in an hour.

So I was right. He got his strange "impenetrable" protection exactly **there, in Meteora!!!** But why then did my father not know about it?! Or was Caraffa there much later? Immediately another thought suddenly struck me! Youth!!! Here is what Caraffa longed for but did not get! Probably he heard a lot about how long the **real** Witches and Veduns live and how they leave the "physical" life. And he craved getting it for himself... to have time to burn the remaining "**disobedient**" half of Europe and then to rule the rest, representing a "saintly righteous man" which had kindly descended on our "sinful" earth to save our "hopeless" souls.

It was true. We could live long, even too long... And we "left" when we truly got too tired to live or considered that we could not help anybody anymore. The secret of longevity was passed from parents to children, then to grandchildren, etc., while in the family there was at least one **exceptionally gifted** child who could adopt it... But **not every** hereditary Vedun or Vedma could get immortality. It required special qualities which, unfortunately, not all gifted descendants got. It depended on the strength of mind, purity of heart, "mobility" of body and, which is most important, the level of their soul's development which should be very high ... well, and a lot of other things. I

think it was correct, because unfortunately, the ordinary human life, was not enough long for those who thirsted for learning **everything** that we – the **real** Veduns – could do. Well, those who did not want to know so much did not need such a long life. Therefore I think that the strict selection was absolutely correct. And Caraffa wanted the same. He considered himself worthy.

My hair began to stir, when I thought what this wicked man could do on Earth, if he lived that long!

But all these worries could wait, while Anna was here! Right now, nothing else mattered. I turned around. She stood without taking her enormous radiant eyes from me! In that moment I forgot about Caraffa and the monastery, and everything else in the world! My poor little child threw herself in my open arms and froze, endlessly repeating: "Mummy, mummy, mummy..."

I stroked her long silky hair, inhaled the new, unknown to me, aroma and clasping her fragile thin little body to my bosom, being ready to die right now, if only this wonderful moment could last forever...

Anna pressed close to me, firmly clinging to me with her thin hands, as if wishing to dissolve and hide in me from this world, which suddenly become so monstrous and unknown... which once had been light and kind, and so homely for her!

Why should we experience this horror?! What have we done to deserve this pain? There were no answers to that... Probably, they did not exist.

I was terribly worried about my poor little child! Even at her early age, Anna has a very strong and bright personality. She never compromised or gave up, fighting to the end despite any circumstances. And she was afraid of nothing...

"To be afraid of something means to accept the possibility of defeat. Don't let fear in your heart, dear". – Anna learnt very well her father's lessons...

And now, probably seeing her for the last time, I had to teach her the contrary thing – **"not to push her way through"** when her life depended on it. It **never was** one of my "laws" of life. I learned it only now when I saw her light and proud father dying in Caraffa's terrible basement... Anna was the last Vedunia in our family; and she **had to survive** by all means to be able to bear a son or daughter who would continue that which our family has kept so carefully for centuries. She **had to survive**... at any cost... except for treachery.

– Mummy, please, don't leave me with him! He is very bad! I see him. He is terrible!

– You what?!! You **can see** him! – Anna nodded, scared. Probably I was so dumbfounded that my appearance frightened her. – Can you go through his protection?

Anna nodded again. I stood, quite punch-drunk, unable to understand – **HOW** she could do that??? But this was not important now. **The most important thing was that at least one of us could "see" him, which meant that, maybe, we can defeat him.**

– Can you see his future? Can you?! Tell me, my sun, will we destroy him?! Tell me, Annushka!

I was trembling with agitation. I longed to hear that Caraffa would die and dreamed to see him defeated!!! Oh, how I dreamed about it! How many days and nights I made fantastic plans, each one madder than the others, only to cleanse the Earth of this blood-thirsty viper! But I could not do anything – I was unable to "read" his black soul. And now it happened – my little child could **see** Caraffa! I had a tiny hope. We could destroy him together, uniting our "witch" forces!

But I rejoiced too early... Anna easily read my raging with joy emotions and sadly shook her head:

– We will not defeat him, mother... It is he who will destroy all of us. He will exterminate very many people like us. There will be no salvation from him. I am sorry, mother... – Salty hot tears rolled down Anna's thin cheeks.

– There, there, my dear... It is not your guilt that you don't see things how we want them to be! Calm down, my sun. We are not going to surrender, are we?

Anna shook her head.

*– Listen to me, girl... – I slightly shook my daughter's fragile shoulders and whispered as tenderly as possible. – You **must** be very strong, remember! We don't have another choice. We shall fight anyway, only using other methods. You **will go** to this monastery. If I am not mistaken, wonderful people live there. They are like us, probably much stronger. You will be safe with them. And meanwhile I will think how we can escape from this man, from this Pope... I will think of something. You believe me, don't you?*

The little child nodded again. Her wonderful large eyes drowned in lakes of tears... But Anna cried silently... with salt, heavy and adult tears. She was very scared and very lonely, and I could not be next to her to comfort her...

The wind was taken out of my sails. I fell on my knees and embraced my dear girl, looking for peace in her. She was a mouthful of living water for which my soul, exhausted by loneliness and pain, craved! And now it was Anna who gently stroked my tired head with her little palm, whispering something quiet and calming. Probably, we looked like a very sad couple, trying to make our distorted life easy, if only for a brief moment...

– I saw my father... I saw him dying... It was so painful, mother. He will destroy us all, this frightful man... What did we do to him, mother? What does he want from us?

Anna was serious in a very unchildlike way, and here I wanted to calm her, to tell her that all of this is "not true" and "everything will be all right" and that I would save her! But it would be a lie, and we both knew it.

– I don't know, my dear... I think we accidentally appeared in his way. And he is the kind of person who wipes out any obstacles, when they interfere with him... and one more thing... It seems to me that we know and have something for which the Pope is ready to give a lot, even including his immortal soul.

– What is that he wants so badly, mother?! – Anna lifted her tear-stained eyes.

*– Immortality, dear... just immortality. But, regrettably, he does not understand that it is not given only because somebody wants it. It is given when **a person is worthy of it**, when he **KNOWS things which are beyond of comprehension of others and uses it for their good**. It is given to the **deserving people**... when **Earth becomes better** because **this person lives on it**.*

*– Why does **he** need it, mother? In fact immortality is when a person lives very long, right? And this is not very simple, right? A person makes a lot of mistakes, which he later tries to atone for or correct but often cannot, even during his short life that... Why does **he** think that **he** should be permitted to make much more of them?*

*Anna amazed me! When did my little daughter learn to think like an adult? Although, life was not too kind to her, nevertheless, Anna matured very quickly, which made me happy and worried at one and the same time... I was glad that she became stronger with every day and at the same time I was afraid that very soon she will be **too** independent. And I will find it very difficult, if I may need to persuade her in something. She always treated her "duties" of Vedunia very earnestly, loving life and people with all her heart and feeling very proud of being some day able to help them to be happier and make their souls purer and more beautiful.*

And now Anna met real Evil for the first time... which pitilessly burst into her still very fragile life, killing her dearly beloved father, taking me away from her and threatening to be a nightmare for her... And I was not sure whether she could find forces to fight alone with everything in case of her whole family dying at Caraffa's hands...

The hour flashed by unnoticed. Caraffa stood on the threshold, smiling...

*I cuddled my dear girl to me, knowing that I would not see her for a very long time and maybe never... Anna went to the unknown and I could only hope that Caraffa **truly** wanted to teach her for his mad aims and in that case she was safe for the time being... while she was in Meteora.*

– Did you enjoy the meeting, Madonna? – Caraffa asked, feigning sincerity.

– Thank you, Your Holiness. Yes, of course. Although I would prefer to raise my daughter **myself**, as it is accepted in the normal world and not to give her into the hands of strange people, only because you have a plan for her. Don't you think it is enough pain for one family?

– Well, it depends on the family, Isidora! – Caraffa smiled. – Again, there is "family" and FAMILY... and yours, unfortunately, belongs to the second category... you are too strong and valuable to just live without paying for your abilities. Remember, my "great Witch", everything in this life has a price, and one has to pay for everything, independent of whether he likes it or not... And you will pay very dearly. But let's not talk about bad things today! You had a wonderful time, didn't you? Till we meet again, Madonna. I promise you, it will be very soon.

I froze... How familiar these words sounded to me! This **bitter truth** accompanied me in my short life so often that I could not believe that I heard them from somebody else! Probably, it was really true – **everybody has to pay**, only not all did it voluntarily... and sometimes the payment was too high...

Stella looked intently into my face in surprise, obviously noticing my strange confusion. But I showed her that "everything is all right" and, on falling silent for an instant, Isidora continued her story.

Caraffa withdrew, taking away my dear little daughter. The surrounding world grew dark, and my devastated heart was slowly filled with black and gloomy melancholy, drop by drop. The future seemed ominous. I did not see the faintest hope or felt the usual confidence that no matter how difficult it was now, everything will somehow settle and all will be well in the end.

*I perfectly knew – it would **not be well**... We will never have a "fairy-tale with a happy ending"...*

I did not notice that the night had already fallen and still sat at the window, watching the sparrows bustling about on the roof, and thought my sad thoughts. There was no way out. Caraffa conducted this "performance" and it was exactly HE who decided when somebody's life will be taken. I was unable to resist to his crafty designs, even if I could now foresee them with Anna's help. The present frightened me and made me search even the least way out of the situation more vehemently in order to destroy this terrible "trap" which caught our tormented lives.

Unexpectedly the air began to sparkle with greenish light right before me. I became alert, expecting a new "surprise" from Caraffa... But it seemed that nothing bad was happening. The green energy thickened, gradually growing into a tall human figure. In a few seconds I saw a very handsome young unknown man... He wore a strange snow-white "tunic", girdled with a bright red wide belt. The stranger's grey eyes shone with good and invited me to believe him, even without knowing him. And I believed... On feeling that, the man began to speak.

– Hello, Isidora. My name is Sever. I know, you don't remember me.

– Who are you, Sever? And why must I remember you? Does it mean that I met you?

*I had a strange feeling – as if trying to remember that which never happened... but you feel that you **know** that very well from somewhere.*

– You were too small to remember me. Your father once brought you to us. I am from Meteora...

– But I never was there! Or do you want to say that he simply never told me about it?! – I exclaimed in surprise.

The stranger smiled, and for some reason his smile made me feel warm and calm, as if I suddenly found my old kind friend which I had lost a long time ago... I believed him... in everything, whatever he said.

– You must leave, Isidora! He will destroy you. You will not be able to resist him. He is stronger than you; or rather what he has got is stronger. It was a long time ago.

– You do **not** mean **only** his protection, do you? Who could give him such a thing?

The grey eyes grew very sad...

– *We did not. Our Guest gave. He was not from here and, unfortunately, he appeared to be a "black" one...*

– *But you do **see!!!** How could you allow it?! How could you admit him into the "sacred circle"?*

– *He **found** us, just as Caraffa did. We don't refuse those who can find us. But usually it never was the "dangerous" ones... We made a mistake.*

– *Do you realise what a terrible price people pay for your "mistake"?! Do you know how many lives went into the nonexistence being cruelly tortured and how many more will go? Answer, Sever!*

*I exploded – they called it just a **mistake!!!** An enigmatic "gift" to Caraffa was a "mistake" which made him almost invulnerable! And helpless people had to pay for it! My poor husband, and maybe, even to my dear little child, have to pay for it! And they considered it just a **MISTAKE???***

– *I beg you, Isidora, don't be angry. It won't help now... This kind of thing happened sometimes. In fact we are not Gods, we are people... and we have a right to be wrong too. I understand your pain and your bitterness... My family also died from somebody's mistake, which was even simpler than that one. It's just this time somebody's "gift" got into very dangerous hands. We will try to repair it somehow. But for the moment we cannot do that. You must go. You have no right to die.*

– *Oh, you are wrong Sever! I have every right, if it helps me to cleanse the Earth of this viper!*
– *I cried indignantly.*

– *It won't help. Unfortunately, nothing will help you, Isidora. Leave. I will help you to come back home... you have already lived your Fate here, you **can go Home.***

– *Where is my Home? – I asked in surprise.*

– *It is far away... There is a star in the constellation of Orion with a wonderful name Asta. This is your Home, Isidora, just as mine.*

*I looked at him in shock, unable to believe or even **understand** such strange news. My fevered brain could not squeeze it into any real **reality**, and it seemed to me that like Caraffa I was gradually going mad... But Sever **was real** and it did not look as if he was joking. Therefore, I somehow pulled myself together and asked more calmly:*

– *How did it happen that Caraffa could find you? Does he have a Gift?*

– *No, he does not have a Gift. But he has his Mind which perfectly serves him. He used it to find us. He read about us in a very old chronicle which he got who knows how and from where. But he knows a lot, believe me. He has a mysterious source from which he gets knowledge, but I **don't know** where I can find this source to secure it.*

– *Oh, don't worry! I **know** very well about it! I know where this "source" is! It's his staggering library where he keeps countless amounts of ancient manuscripts. I think it's because of them Caraffa needs his **long** Life... – I felt saddened to death and wanted to cry like a child... – How can we destroy him, Sever?! He has no right to live on earth! He is a monster which will take millions of lives, if nobody stops him! What do we have to do?*

– *You don't have to do anything, Isidora. You simply must go. We'll find a way to get rid of him. We just need time.*

– *And meanwhile innocent people will die! No, Sever, I will go only when I don't have a choice. Until then I will fight, even without having the faintest hope. My daughter will be brought to you, take care of her. I will not be able to do that...*

His luminous figure became transparent and began to disappear.

– *I shall come back, Isidora. – The affectionate voice rustled.*

– *Farewell, Sever... – I answered in a low voice too.*

– *But how could that be?! – Stella exclaimed suddenly. – You did not even ask about the*

planet you had come from?! Were you really not interested in that?! How could that be?

To tell the truth I also hardly could restrain myself to ask Isidora about the same thing! Her spirit came from the outside and she did not even ask about this! But to some degree I understood her, because it was too terrible a time for her, and she was mortally afraid for those who she loved so much and who she tried to save. Well, as for the Home... It can be found later, when there will be another choice save to leave...

– *No, dear. I did not ask because I had no interest in it, but because it was much less important than the fact that **wonderful people died**. They died in excruciating torments which only one man organized and supported. And he had no right to exist on our earth. That was the most important; the rest could wait.*

Stella turned red, being ashamed of her outburst, and whispered:

– Please, forgive me, Isidora...

And Isidora again "went" into her past and continued her amazing story...

As soon as Sever disappeared, I tried mentally call my father, but for some reason he did not answer. It seemed a little suspicious to me and expecting nothing bad, I tried again – no answer followed...

I decided not to give free rein to my fevered imagination yet, left my father alone for the time being and dived into sweet and sad recollections about Anna's recent visit.

I still remembered the smell of her fragile body, the softness of her thick black hair and extraordinary boldness with which my wonderful twelve-year daughter challenged the wicked fate. I was unspeakably proud of her! Anna was a fighter, and I believed that she would fight to the end, to her last breath, no matter what.

I did not know whether I could save her, but I swore to myself that I would do everything in my power to snatch her from the cruel Pope's tenacious claws.

Caraffa came back in a few days, being very disappointed by something and taciturn. He only showed me with his hand that I must follow him. I obeyed.

We passed several long corridors and found ourselves in a small study which (as I knew later) was his private office where he very rarely invited guests.

Caraffa silently pointed me to a chair and slowly took seat in front. His silence seemed ominous and, as I already knew from my own sad experience, never portended anything good. As for me – after the meeting with Anna and Sever's unexpected arrival, I was inexcusably relaxed, lulling my usual vigilance to some extent and missed the next blow...

– *I don't have time for courtesy, Isidora. You will answer my questions; otherwise somebody else will terribly suffer. So I advise you to answer!*

Caraffa was angry and it would be a real madness to contradict him.

– *I'll try, Your Holiness. What do you want to know?*

– *Your **youth**, Isidora, how did you get it? In fact you are thirty eight and you look twenty and do not change. Who gave your youth to you? Answer!*

I could not understand what it was that enraged Caraffa so much? During our acquaintance, quite a long time now, he never yelled and very rarely lost control of himself. Now I was confronted an infuriated man beside himself capable of doing anything.

– *Answer, Madonna! Or you'll see another, very unpleasant surprise.*

This statement made my hair stir... I understood that there was no way to avoid the answer. Something had made Caraffa extremely angry, and he did not conceal it. He was not in the mood to play games and joke. I had to answer, blindly hoping that he would accept a half-truth.

– *I am a hereditary Witch, Holiness, and for now – the strongest of them. **Youth** came to me by right of succession, I did not ask for it, just as my mother, my grandmother and the rest of Witches in my family. You must be **one of us**, Your Holiness, to get it. Besides, you must be worthy*

of it.

– Nonsense, Isidora! I knew people who **obtained** immortality on their own! And they **were not born with it**. So, there are ways. And you will open them for me. Believe me.

He was absolutely right... There were ways, but I was not going to open them to him. Never! No tortures could force me to do that.

– I am sorry, Your Holiness, but I can not give what I have not got myself. It is impossible – I **don't know how**. But I think your God would give you "eternal life" on our sinful earth, if he considered you worthy of it, would he not?

Caraffa grew crimson and maliciously hissed, like a poisonous snake, ready to attack.

– I thought you were cleverer, Isidora. Well, it won't take long for me to break you, when you see what I've prepared for you...

He sharply grasped my hand and rudely took me down to his horrific basement. I did not have time even to be scared, as we appeared before the same iron door behind which quite recently my poor husband, my tender and kind Girolamo was so brutally tortured to death... Suddenly a frightful, soul-freezing guess slashed my brain – father!!! That is why he did not answer to my repeated calls! Certainly it was that breathing with hatred monster which stood in front of me that caught and tortured him in the same basement, "purifying" his any aim with the blood and pain of innocent people!

"Oh, no! Please not that!!!" – My wounded soul uttered a frenzied scream. But I already **knew** that it was happening... "Somebody help me!!! Anybody!!!" But nobody heard me for some reason... And nobody helped...

The heavy door opened... The grey eyes, full of inhuman pain, looked right at me...

I saw my beloved father in the middle of the familiar death-smelling room in a thorny iron arm-chair, bleeding to death...

The blow was terrible! I gave a wild shriek "No!!!" and lost consciousness...

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I regained consciousness in a sinister cold basement intensely saturated with the cloying smell of blood and death...

My body had grown numb and ached, refusing to obey and "wake up", but my Soul soared in the light world of recollections, with the ease of a bird, snatching from my memory beloved faces and days of complete happiness when sorrow had not visited our life yet and there was no place for bitterness and pain in it. There, in that wonderful "gone" world, my adorable husband Girolamo still lived, Anna's merry laughter rang like a silver bell, my dear tender mother softly smiled at me in the morning and my kind and light father patiently taught me the wisdom of Life. This world was happy and sunny, and my soul strived for it, flying as far away as possible never to return.

But wicked reality did not let me go for some reason. It pitilessly knocked on my fevered brain to wake it up, demanding my coming back "home". My dear and imperfect Earthly world called for help... Caraffa lived... And while he breathed, there would be no joy and light in our world.

It was time to return.

On deeply breathing I **felt** my stiffened physical body at last. Life unwillingly, drop by drop, came back into it. I had no choice but to be brave.

The silence in the room was dense, thundering and viscous. I found myself sitting in a rough wooden arm-chair. Without moving or opening my eyes, I tried not to show those who could possibly be present there that I had awakened. I felt everything perfectly and intently "looked" around, trying to determine what was happening.

I was slowly coming to myself and gradually remembering what had happened; I suddenly saw very clearly **WHAT** the real reason for my sudden and deep faint was!

Cold horror squeezed my numbed half-awakened heart with its sharp grip.

*Father! My poor kind father was **h e r e!!!**, in this frightful bloody basement – this terrible den of horrific death... He had come next after Girolamo... He was dying. Caraffa's ominous trap had shut down swallowing his pure Soul...*

Being afraid to see something even more frightful, I, nevertheless, managed to gather my slipping away courage and lifted my head...

The first thing I saw right in front of me was Caraffa's black eyes burning with deep interest. My father was not in the torture chamber.

Caraffa's face expressed utter concentration. His inquisitive eyes were fixed on me, as if he tried to understand what was truly happening in my soul mercilessly mutilated by suffering... To my greatest surprise, his clever thin face expressed sincere agitation (!) which, nevertheless, he was not going to show me. On seeing that I regained consciousness, Caraffa instantly "put" on his usual indifferent mask and broadly smiling pronounced with feigned care:

– Oh, come on, Isidora! Why frighten all of us? I'd never thought that you could be so easily agitated! – And then added: – How beautiful you are, Madonna, even being so deeply unconscious!!!

*I looked at him unable to say anything, and a wild anxiety clawed at my injured heart. Where is my father? What would Caraffa do to him?! Is he still alive? I could not **look** it through, because my emotions impeded me from seeing the reality, and the **vision** slipped away from me. At the same time I was extremely unwilling to ask Caraffa about it, because I did not wish to give him even the least possible pleasure. Besides, no matter what had happened, nothing could be changed. As for what **should happen**, I was sure; Caraffa would inform me immediately and with the greatest pleasure. Therefore I preferred to wait.*

He was himself again – confident and "prickly". His recent "delight" and "concern" vanished without a trace. I think he was the most odd and unforeseeable human being in the world. His mood could change to the opposite in a few seconds, and he could sign your death sentence after giving the most pleasant compliment. He was unique in his unpredictability and he was perfectly aware of it...

*– Have you forgotten how to talk, Madonna Isidora? For Goodness' sake! Witches of **Your "calibre"** have to be much stronger! I always was sure about that. As far as I understand, you are considered a Warrior among them? In that case how could you swallow the bait of the simplest "human" emotions so easily? Your heart controls your reason, Isidora, which is impermissible for so strong a Witch as you! Don't you, the gifted ones, have a rule: "always be single and cold, if there is a war? Don't let your heart onto a "battle-field", or it destroys you". Aren't those your precepts, Isidora?*

*– You are quite right, Your Holiness. But it does not mean that I fully agree with them. Sometimes love of a person or humanity can do wonders on a "battle-field", don't you think so? Oh, pardon my naivety; I absolutely forgot that you are hardly familiar with these feelings. But, how well you remember **our** precepts, Your Holiness! Do you really hope to come back to Meteora some time? In fact the one, who gave you a "gift", has not been there for a long time; Meteora drove him out, just as it did you, did it not, Holiness?*

Caraffa's face turned mortally pale. His usual arrogance suddenly vanished and now he looked helpless and "naked". It seemed that he was desperately looking for a word and could not find it. Time stopped. The moment became dangerous – something had to happen right now... Every cell of my body felt the raging storm of his "black" anger mixed with fear, which was seemingly impossible to expect from Caraffa. What could this powerful wicked man be afraid of?

– How do you know it, Isidora? Who could tell you that?!

*– Oh, there are "friends" and **FRIENDS**, like you usually say, Your Holiness! – I answered, intentionally provoking him. – Exactly **FRIENDS** told me everything I wanted to know about you, with only one difference, though. You see, you and I use different methods to get the information we need. I did not have to torture my friends. They me told everything I wanted with pleasure... And*

believe me, it is always much pleasanter! Except for cases when one is addicted to tortures, of course... As it seemed to me, you adore the smell of blood, Holiness, don't you?

I gradually came to myself and felt my martial spirit coming back to me. Anyway, there was nothing to lose... It did not matter to Caraffa how pleasant I would be. He craved only one thing – to get answers to his questions. The rest was not important for him; except, maybe, for one thing – my complete and absolute submission. But he perfectly knew that it would never happen. Therefore I did not have to be either polite or even tolerable with him. And to tell the truth I sincerely and greatly enjoyed it.

– Don't you want to know what happened to your father, Isidora? In fact you so strongly love him!

"Love!!!" He did not say – "loved"! And that meant that my father was still alive! I tried not to show my joy and said as calmly as possible:

– What is the difference, Holiness? You will kill him anyway! And it already does not matter, whether it happens sooner or later...

*– Oh, you are so wrong, dear Isidora! It matters **very much** for anybody who gets into the basements of the Inquisition! You don't even imagine **how much**...*

*Caraffa was again **the "Caraffa"**, in other words – an ingenious tormentor which for the sake of achieving his aims was ready to watch the most atrocious human tortures and most frightful suffering of others with the greatest pleasure.*

And now, with the interest of a gambler, he tried to find any breach in my consciousness whipped by pain to the highest degree, no matter what it could be – fear, malice or even love. He just wished to inflict a blow using whatever feeling could open a "door"...

*But I resisted and did not yield. Probably it was my famous endless patience, which had amused everybody around me since I was very little, that helped me. My father once told me that I had been the most patient child that he and my mother ever saw and that it was extremely difficult, almost impossible, to find something that could drive me out of my wits. When others lost patience I still continued to say: "Never mind. Everything will be all right. We just have to wait a little bit." **I believed in the positive outcome even when nobody did.** Obviously Caraffa was unaware of exactly this feature of mine, despite being magnificently informed. Therefore my incomprehensible calmness which in fact was not calmness at all, but only my inexhaustible patience, grossly enraged him. I just could not allow his enjoyment of our deep and sincere pain, on having harmed us in so inhumanly wicked ways.*

Although, frankly speaking, I could not explain to myself some of Caraffa's behaviour which still remained a complete mystery to me.

*On one hand, he seemed to be sincerely entranced by my unusual "talents", as if it truly mattered for him. And also he was always sincerely delighted by my "famous" natural beauty which the delight in his eyes confirmed every time we met. And at the same time Caraffa was strongly disappointed when he saw any defect or even the least imperfection which he discovered in me and any of my weaknesses or even the least mistake which I happened to make from time to time, like any other vivid human being, sincerely enraged him. Sometimes it even seemed to me that I unwittingly destroyed **a non-existent ideal which he had created** in his mind.*

If I did not know him so well, I would be even inclined to believe that this incomprehensible and wicked man loved me in his own and very strange way.

*But every time my exhausted brain came to such an absurd conclusion, I reminded myself that **the matter concerned Caraffa!** He did not have any pure or sincere feelings at all, let alone Love. It was rather **his sense of ownership** which found an expensive toy and wished to see in it no more and no less than **perfection**, the way he understood it. And if a tiny defect appeared in this toy, he was ready to throw it right into the fire.*

– Can your spirit leave your body while you are alive, Isidora? – Caraffa's next unusual

question interrupted my sad thoughts.

– Of course, Your Holiness! It's the simplest thing that a Vedun can do. Why are you interested in it?

– Your father uses it to avoid pain... – Caraffa pronounced thoughtfully. – Therefore, there is no sense in torturing him by ordinary means. But I shall find the way to get him talking, even if it takes more time than I had thought. He knows a great deal, Isidora, more than you can imagine, I think. He did not open even half of it to you! Don't you really have any desire to know the rest?

– What for, Your Holiness?! – I said as calmly as possible, trying to hide my joy. – If he did not open something to me, it means that the time to know it has not come for me yet. **Premature knowledge is very dangerous**, Your Holiness. It **can both help and kill**. Therefore, one has to be extremely careful when teaching somebody. I think you should have known that. You in fact studied there, in Meteora, for some time.

– Nonsense!!! I am ready for everything! Oh, I have been ready for so long, Isidora! These fools just don't see that I only need to get Knowledge and I can do much more than others, or even more than they!

Caraffa was terrible in his "**DESIRE of the desired**" and I understood that he would break down ANY barriers on his way to get the knowledge... Whether it will be me, my father or even little Anna, he will get what he wants, he will "knock" it out of us despite anything, as he had obviously gotten everything his insatiable brain aimed for, including his today's power, the visit to Meteora and, certainly, a lot of other things about which I preferred to be unaware in order not to lose hope of a victory over him. Caraffa was truly dangerous for humanity! His extremely mad "faith" in his "genius" exceeded any commonly accepted norms of the highest self-importance that ever existed and intimidated with its peremptoriness when the matter concerned the things which he craved and **about which he had not the least idea**, but only knew that he **wanted** them.

To cool him a little, I suddenly began to "melt" right before his "holy" eyes, and in an instant totally disappeared. This was a child's trick of the simplest "waft", as we called the instantaneous displacement from one place to another (I think they call it **teleportation**), but I had to take Caraffa down a peg or two. I was right... When I came back in a minute, his dumbfounded face expressed total confusion which not very many, I am sure, succeeded in seeing. The picture amused me so that I could not help laughing.

– We know many tricks, Your Holiness, but they are just **tricks**. KNOWLEDGE is completely different. It is a **weapon**, and what hands it gets into is very important.

But Caraffa did not listen. He was like a child charmed by what he just saw and immediately wanted to **know about** it! It was a new unknown toy which he had to have right now!!! Any delay is intolerable!

But on the other hand, he also was a **very clever** man, and despite the ardent desire to possess, he was, almost always, able to think. Therefore in few seconds his face began to darken and his widening black eyes stared at me asking a mute, but very persistent question, and I saw that he at last began to understand the **real** meaning of the little "trick" I had demonstrated...

– It means that you **could easily "leave"** all this time?! Why did not you leave, Isidora?!!! – He whispered almost breathless.

A wild and unrealizable hope, the source of which apparently was me, burned in his eyes... But as I answered, he saw that he had been wrong, and to my greatest surprise, the "iron" Caraffa wilted!!! For a moment it seemed to me that something broke inside him, as if he had just found and then lost something vitally important and maybe even dear to him.

– You see, life is not always so simple, as it seems to us or as we would like to see it, Your Holiness. Sometimes we consider the simplest thing to be the most correct and real, but, unfortunately, it is not always true. **Yes, I could have gone long ago**. But what would it change? You would find other "gifted" ones, who, certainly, would not be as strong as I am, and try to "knock" the knowledge you are interested in out of them. And these poor fellows would not have the

slightest hope of resisting you.

– And you think that you have it, don't you? – Caraffa asked with a sickly tension.

– Man is dead without hope, Your Holiness; as you can see, I am still alive. Hope will glimmer in me to the last instant of my life. You see, we witches, are very strange people.

– Well, I think, that is enough conversation for today! – Caraffa exclaimed with unexpected malice, and before I could get scared, added: – You will be taken to your rooms. See you soon, Madonna!

– But what about my father, Your Holiness? I want to be present at whatever you do to him, no matter how terrible it may be.

– Don't worry, dear Isidora, I promise, you will see everything. It would not be so "amusing" without you! I am very glad that you conceived such a desire.

He complacently smiled, turned to the door, but suddenly remembered something and stopped:

*– Tell me, Isidora, does the place **from which** you "disappear" matter?*

*– No, Your Holiness, it doesn't. It's not like passing through walls. I simply "melt" in one place and appear in another, if this explanation can give you a picture. – And I added to finish him off. – Everything is very simple, **when you know how to do it...** Holiness.*

Caraffa devoured me with his black eyes for a moment more, then turned and quickly left the room, as if being afraid that I suddenly would stop him for some reason.

I perfectly understood why he asked the last question. From the minute he saw that I could disappear so easily, he raked his proud brain as to how he could "bind" me to something or put me behind stone walls from which I could never "fly" away... But my answer shattered his peace and quiet and my soul sincerely rejoiced at this little victory, because I knew that Caraffa would know no rest trying to think of the most reliable place he could hide me.

*Certainly, those were only amusing moments which slightly distracted me from the terrible reality, but they helped to draw my attention from it for an instant even in Caraffa's presence and not show how badly and deeply wounded I was at what was going on. I wanted to find a way out from our hopeless situation so much, wishing it with all the forces of my exhausted soul! But just my desire to defeat Caraffa was not enough. I had to understand **what** made him so strong and what the "gift" he had got in Meteora was and which I was unable to see, because it was absolutely **alien** to us. Therefore I needed my father, but he did not answer. And I decided to try to call Sever.*

Regrettably, no matter how hard I tried, he did not want to contact me too for some reason. And I decided to try that, which I had just demonstrated to Caraffa – to "waft" to Meteora... Only this time I had no idea where the monastery was... I ran risks, because if I did not know the "point of my destination", there was a chance that I could be unable to "assemble" myself at all. And this would mean death. But I had to try, if I hoped to get answers in Meteora. Therefore, I went there, trying not to think about the consequences...

I "tuned" myself in to Sever and mentally ordered that I show up where he could be at this moment. I never went to any place "in the dark", which, naturally, did not instill huge confidence in my attempt, but I had nothing to lose, except for victory over Caraffa, which was well worth the risk.

I found myself on the verge of a very steep stone precipice which "soared" over earth like an enormous fairy-tale ship... There were only mountains around – big and small, green and simple stone-grey ones, which turned into flowering meadows very far away. The mountain where I stood was the highest and the only one on the apex of which there was snow in some places. It proudly towered above others like a shining white iceberg the base of which hid an enigmatic secret, invisible to others...

The freshness of the pure and crisp air took my breath away! It sparkled in the rays of a burning mountain sun and its flashing snowflakes burst, getting to the "depths" of my lungs. I

*breathed easily and freely, as if it was not air that flew into my body but amazing **life-giving** force. I wished I could breathe it eternally!*

The world seemed beautiful and sunny! As if there was no evil and death; people did not suffer and a terrible man called Caraffa never lived on earth...

I felt like a bird, ready to spread my wings and rise high into the sky where no Evil could get me!

But cruel reality pitilessly returned me to earth, reminding me of the reason I came here. I looked around. A grey stone rock, licked by winds and shining with fluffy hoarfrost, towered right behind my back. And there... I saw huge and extraordinarily beautiful flowers which were scattered on it like white star dust! Proudly exposing their white, almost waxen, pointed petals under sunrays, they looked like pure cold stars which fell from the sky by mistake onto on this grey lonely rock... Unable to turn my eyes from their cold and enchanting beauty, I sat by the nearest stone, admiring the charming play of chiaroscuros on the blinding-white flawless flowers. My soul rested blissfully, voraciously absorbing the wonderful peace of this light and enchanting instant. Magic, deep and affectionate silence soared around.

Suddenly I shuddered. I remembered! The footprints of Gods!!! This was the name of these magnificent flowers! According to a very ancient legend which my dear grandmother told me a long time ago, when Gods came to Earth, they lived high in the mountains, far from the world's fuss and human vices. They spent long hours reflecting about lofty and eternal things, and closed themselves from Man by the curtain of "wisdom" and alienation. People did not know how to find them. Only a few were lucky enough to see THEM, but later nobody saw those "lucky" ones ever again, and there was nobody to ask the way to the proud Gods. But one day a dying warrior climbed high in the mountains, not wishing to surrender alive to the enemy.

Life abandoned the sad warrior with the last drops of his cooling blood. And there was nobody to say the last farewell and wash his last way with tears. Suddenly his glance, almost extinguished, caught hold of the marvellous and divine beauty! Innocent snow-white flowers surrounded him. Their extraordinary whiteness washed his soul, returning force that had gone long ago and called it to life. Being unable to move, he absorbed their cold light, opening his lonely heart to their caress. His deep wounds were healed right before his very eyes. Life came back to him, being even stronger and more vigorous than it was at his birth. He felt he was a hero again and rose... and saw a very tall Elder standing right in front of him.

– Have you brought me back, God? – The warrior asked enthusiastically.

– Who are you, man? And why do you call me God? – The old man was surprised.

– Who else could do something like that? – The man whispered. – And you live almost in the sky... It means that you are a God.

– I am not a God; I am a descendant of Him... A true one, that is true... Enter our abode, since you came. You have come to bid farewell to life with pure heart and thought... that is why you were brought back. Rejoice.

– Who brought me back, Father?

– They did it – the "feet of God"... – The Old Man nodded his head, pointing to the marvellous flowers.

Since then the legend about the God's Flowers began to spread. They say the flowers always grow where Gods live to show the way to newcomers...

*Being so engrossed in thoughts, I did not notice that I was looking around... and then I suddenly came to myself! The extraordinary wonder-flowers grew **only around a narrow dark crack** which gaped in the rock like an almost invisible "natural" entrance!!! The suddenly intensified scent prompted me to go there...*

I saw nobody. Not a soul came out. I felt uncomfortable about coming uninvited. Nevertheless, I decided to try and came to the crack. Nothing happened... There was neither special

protection nor other surprises. Everything remained majestic and calm like it was from the Beginning of Time... Besides, against whom does one need to protect oneself here? Only from the gifted ones who are exactly like the dwellers of the place. I gave a start. There is the possibility that another, partly gifted, "Caraffa" would be able to "find" them and could come here too!

I carefully entered a cave. But nothing unusual happened here, except that the air became very soft and "merry". It smelled of spring and grass, as if I was in a forest glade, not inside a naked stone rock. I went forward a few metres and suddenly realised that it had become **lighter**, although it should have been vice versa. The light streamed somewhere from above, and dispersed into a very soft "sunset" illumination here, downward. A strange calming melody began to sound softly in my head. I had never heard anything like this in my life. The unusual combination of sounds made the surrounding world light and merry... and safe.

It was very quiet and comfortable in the strange cave. The only thing that made me keep slightly alert was the feeling of somebody's observation which gradually intensified, but it was not unpleasant. It gave the impression of a careful parent looking after a silly little child...

The corridor began to widen turning into an enormous high stone hall framed with simple stone seats which looked like long benches cut straight into the rock. There was a stone pedestal in the middle of this strange hall with an enormous diamond on it which shimmered with all the colours of the rainbow. It sparkled and shone, dazzling me with multicoloured flashes, and looked like a little sun which for some reason somebody hid in the stone cave.

I came closer. The crystal began to shine brighter. It was very beautiful, but no more. It did not cause either a feeling of delight or that of joining something "great". **The crystal was material**, only incredibly huge and magnificent. But that was all. It did not bear any mystic or other meaning. It was just extraordinarily beautiful. I could not understand why this "stone", simple by appearance, reacted when somebody approached it? Could it be that human warmth somehow "switched" it on?

– You are quite right, Isidora... – I suddenly heard somebody's affectionate voice. – Not without reason the Fathers valued you.

I gave a start, turned around and exclaimed with joy – Sever stood alongside! He was the same way, friendly and warm, only a little sad, like a tender sun which was suddenly covered by a casual cloud...

– Hello, Sever! I am sorry that I came uninvited. I called you but you did not come. Then I decided to try to find you. Tell me what do your words mean? I am right about what?

He came closer to the crystal which began to shine brighter. The light dazzled preventing me from looking at it.

– You are right regarding this "marvel". We found it a very long time ago – many hundreds of years ago, and now it stands us in good stead. It protects us from the "blind" ones who get here by chance. – Sever smiled. – Those who "**wish but cannot**"... – and added. – Like Caraffa. But it is not your place, Isidora. Follow me. I shall show you your Meteora.

We moved further into the hall passing enormous white plates with carved writings.

– They don't look like Runes. What are they, Sever? – I could not help asking.

His friendly smile appeared again:

– They are Runes, only very ancient ones. Your father did not have time to teach you. But if you want, I shall teach you. Come to us, Isidora.

He repeated what I had already heard.

– No! – I cut short at once. I did not come here for that. You know that, Sever. I came for help. **Only you** can help me to destroy Caraffa. In fact there is some of your guilt too in what he does. Help me!

Sever grew even more sad. I knew beforehand **what** he would answer, but did not surrender. Millions of good lives were thrown into the scale, and I could not give up the fight for them so simply.

– I have already explained it to you, Isidora...

– So explain it to me one more time! – I sharply cut him short. – Explain to me how is it possible to sit around twiddling your thumbs when human lives go out one by one because of your error?! Explain how a piece of scum like Caraffa can exist and nobody shows any intention whatsoever of even trying to destroy him?! Explain to me how can you live when such atrocities happen right next to you?

Bitter offense boiled within me trying to break loose outside. I almost shouted, trying to reach his heart, but I felt that I was losing him. There was no way back. I did not know whether I could get here again and therefore I should use any opportunity before I leave the place.

– Look around, Sever! The living torches of your brothers and sisters burn all over Europe! Can you really sleep at night hearing them screaming??? Don't you have bloody nightmares?!

Pain distorted his serene countenance:

– Don't say that, Isidora! I've already explained it to you: we must not interfere; this right has not been given to us... We are keepers. We only guard **KNOWLEDGE**.

– Don't you think that should you wait a little bit more there will be nobody to keep your knowledge for?! – I exclaimed sorrowfully.

– Earth is not ready, Isidora. I've already told you...

– Well, maybe it will never be ready. And when you look at it from your unattainable "top" in several thousand years, you will see just an empty field, maybe covered with beautiful flowers, because there **will be no people** left on Earth and there will be nobody to pluck these flowers. Think, Sever, is this the kind of future you wish for Earth?!

But Sever was encircled within the solid wall of faith in what he said. Apparently they all strongly believed that they were right. Or there was somebody who once instilled this faith in their souls so firmly that they carried it through the centuries, without opening up and letting nobody into their hearts. And I failed to breach that wall, no matter how hard I tried.

– We are few in number, Isidora. And if we interfere, it is highly likely that we will die too. And then it will be very simple, even for a weak man, let alone somebody like Caraffa, to take advantage of everything we keep. And somebody will get his hands on the power over every living soul. This kind of thing happened once... a very long time ago. The world almost died then. Therefore, I am sorry but we are not going to interfere, Isidora. We have no right to do that... Our Great Ancestors bade us guard the ancient **KNOWLEDGE**. And this is why we are here, what we live for. We did not save even Christ once... although we could; despite the fact that we all loved him very much.

– Are you saying that one of you knew Christ?! But it was such a long time ago! **Even you** cannot live so long!

– Why is it a long time ago, Isidora? – Sever was sincerely surprised. – It was just several hundred years ago! And we can live much longer; you know that... as you would live, if you wanted...

– Several hundred?!!

Sever nodded.

– But what about the **legend**?! According to it a thousand and a half years have passed since his death?!

– That is why it is called a "legend". – Sever shrugged his shoulders. – If it was a **True** one, it would not need the bespoke "fantasies" of Paul, Matthew and Peter and others similar to them. And with all this going on, these "holy" people in fact **never saw a living Christ!** And he **never taught them**. History recurs, Isidora... So it was, and so it will be always until people finally begin to think independently. While the Dark minds think for them, only the fight will always rule on Earth.

Sever fell silent, as if deciding whether he should continue, but on thinking a little, began to speak again:

– From time to time the "Thinking Dark"ones **give a new God to humanity**, always choosing him from **the best, lightest and purest ones**, but **exactly those who are already not in the Circle of the Living**. Because, you see, it is much easier to "put" a false "story of his Life" on a dead one, and spread it all over the world in order to bring to humanity only the story "approved" by the "Thinking Dark", making people dive even deeper into the **ignorance of Mind**, swaddling their Souls in **the fear of their inevitable death** ever more strongly, thus putting **shackles on their free and proud Life...**

– Who are the Thinking Dark ones, Sever? – I could not help asking.

– It's a Dark Circle which comprises "grey" Volkvs, "black" magicians, finance geniuses (different ones in each period of time) and a lot of others like that. In other words, it is an Earthly (and not only) union of "dark" forces.

– Don't you fight them?! You're talking about it so calmly, as if it has nothing to do with you! But you live on Earth too, Sever!

Mortal anguish crept into his eyes, as if I accidentally touched something deeply sad and unbearably painful.

– Oh, we fought, Isidora! And how we fought! It was a long time ago. Then I was too naive, like you now, and thought should we show people where the truth and lies were and they at once would rush to the attack for the "right cause". It's just a "dream of the future", Isidora. Man, you see, is an extremely vulnerable creature which yields to flattery, avidity and the rest of "human vices" too easily. The first thing of which all people think is **their** necessities and benefits, and only then – about "other" living things.

The strongest ones crave Power. The weak ones look for powerful defenders without being interested about their "purity"; and all that has happened for centuries. That is why the lightest and best are the first to die in any war, and the "remaining" ones join the "winner". So it has moved in a circle again and again. **Earth is not ready to think**, Isidora; I know you don't agree, because you are too pure and light, but one person is unable to overturn the overall **EVIL**, even one as strong as you. The earthly Evil is too huge and unrestricted. We tried once... and lost the best. Therefore we will wait for the **right** time to come. We are very few, Isidora.

– Why then don't you try to fight differently? Why don't you wage a war which can avoid sacrificing your lives? You do have such a weapon! And why do you allow the profanation of people like Jesus? Why don't you tell people the truth?

– Because nobody will listen to it, Isidora. **People prefer a beautiful and calming lie to the soul-agitating truth**, and do not wish to think yet.

Look, even the stories about the "lives of Gods" and messiahs created by the "dark" ones resemble each other too much, right up to some of the details, beginning with their birth and ending with their death. It was done to prevent **anything new "disturbing" man**, to make sure that **something "usual and familiar" would always surround him**.

Once, when I was like you – a convinced and true Warrior – these "stories" staggered me with their barefaced lies and their "creators"' poor thought. I considered it a great error of the "dark". But now I understand that they were **intentionally** created **this way**, which was true **genius...** The Thinking Dark ones **know the nature of a "manageable" person too well** and therefore are quite sure that **Man will always follow readily the one who is very familiar**, but will **strongly resist and accept with difficulty the one who will turn out to be new for him and make him think**.

Probably that is why people still blindly follow "**resembling**" Gods, Isidora, thoughtlessly, without doubts or the need to ask at least one question.

I bent my head – he was quite right. People still easily yielded to the "**herd instinct**" which manipulated their pliable hearts.

– But each of them, who people **call** Gods, had **their own very bright and very different**

unique Lives which would beautify the True Chronicle of Humanity, if people knew about them. – Sever sadly went on. – Tell me, Isidora; has anybody on Earth read **Christ's true writings**? He was an outstanding Teacher and a remarkable writer! He left far more than the "Thinking Dark" ones, which created his false story, would ever imagine...

Sever's eyes became pitch-dark and deep, as if they instantly absorbed the whole of earthly bitterness and pain... It was obvious that he did not want to talk about it, but after a minute of silence he continued:

– He lived here since he was thirteen. And already then he wrote the chronicle of his life, knowing how strongly it would be perverted. Already then he knew his future and suffered. We taught him a lot of things... – Suddenly Sever smiled, on remembering something very pleasant... – The dazzling-bright Force of Life, like the sun, always burned in him along with wonderful internal Light. He amazed us with the boundless desire to **KNOW!** He wanted to know **EVERYTHING** we knew. I never saw such a huge thirst for knowledge! Except, maybe, in another one, likewise obsessed...

His smile became surprisingly warm and light.

– At that time a girl, Magdalena, lived here with us. She was pure and tender, like the morning light. Also she was incredibly gifted! She was the strongest of all I knew on Earth then, except for our best Volkvs and Christ. Yet being with us, she became Jesus's Vedunia... and his only Great Love, and later his wife and friend, sharing every instant of his life with him while he lived on this Earth...

On studying and maturing with us, he became a very strong Vedun and a real Warrior! Then his time came to say goodbye to us... Time came to do the duty for the sake of which the Father called him on Earth. And he left us. Magdalena went with him. Our monastery became empty and cold without these extraordinary children, now adult. We terribly missed their happy smiles, warm laughter and their joy when they saw each other, their irrepressible thirst for knowledge; iron Strength of Mind, and the Light of their pure Souls... These children were like suns without which our cold measured life grew dim. Meteora was sad and empty without them. We knew that they would never come back and we would never see them again.

Jesus became a steadfast warrior. He fought evil more furiously than you, Isidora. But he did not have enough strength. – Sever hanged his head. – He called Father for help. He had been mentally talking with him for hours. But Father was deaf to his requests. He could not; he **had no right to betray what he served**, for which he had to betray his son who he sincerely and selflessly loved. – To my great surprise, I saw tears glittering in Sever's eyes. – On getting his Father's refusal, Jesus asked all of us for help, just like you, Isidora. But we too said no to him. **We had no right.** We asked him to leave, but he stayed, although he perfectly knew what awaited him. He fought to the last instant... He fought for Good, for Earth and even for the people who executed him. He fought for Light. And people, "in gratitude", slandered him after his death, making a false and helpless God out of him... Although **Jesus was never helpless**: He was a warrior to the marrow of his bones, whilst he was a child, when he came to us. He called people to fight evil and crushed everything "black" wherever he came across it on his thorny way.

Sever fell silent and I thought that the story was over. Such deep and naked anguish flooded his sad grey eyes that I understood at last how difficult it must be to live on refusing to help the dear, light and wonderful people, seeing them off to their sure death and knowing how easily they could save them, just stretching out a hand... How **wrong** in my opinion was their unwritten "truth" about non-interference in Earthly matters until (at last, one day!) the "right" time **would come...** which by the way could never come...

– Man is still a weak-willed creature, Isidora. – Sever suddenly began to talk again. – Unfortunately there is both greed and envy in him, more than he can handle. People don't wish to follow the Pure and Light one yet. It **wounds their "pride" and strongly angers them**, because **he differs too much from the man they have become accustomed to.**

*And the Thinking Dark ones perfectly knew and used this and always easily directed people to **overturning and smiting** the "new" Gods, appeasing their "thirst" for destruction of something wonderful and light. And then they returned those new "Gods", already disgraced enough, to the crowd as Great Martyrs killed "by mistake"...*

*As for Christ, even crucified, he remained **too** distant for people; **too** pure. Therefore people sullied him with such cruelty after his death, mercilessly and shamelessly making him like them.*

So the fervent Warrior turned into a cowardly God which instructed people to turn the left cheek, if someone strikes you on the right one.... And only a pitiful laughing-stock at which they threw stones was left of his great Love... wonderful pure girl who was turned into a "fallen" woman rising from the dirt and "forgiven" by Christ...

People are still foolish and wicked, Isidora. Don't give yourself for them! In fact even on crucifying Christ, they cannot calm down all those years, wiping out His Name. Don't give yourself for them, Isidora!

*– But do you really think that **ALL** people are foolish and wicked? There **are a lot of wonderful people** on Earth, Sever! And not all of them need a "defeated" God, believe me! Look at me. Don't you see? **I** would need a **living** Christ, just as did his marvellous Love – Magdalena...*

Sever smiled.

*– That's because you are Is-i-do-ra. You pray to different Gods. Besides, they hardly need praying to! They are always with you and cannot leave you. Your Gods are Kindness and Love, Light and Knowledge and Pure primordial Force. They are Gods of Wisdom, and they are what we "pray" to. People don't acknowledge them yet. They still need another thing. People need somebody to whom they can complain about feeling bad; who they can accuse when having bad luck; who they can ask when they want something; who can forgive them when they "sin". Here is what man needs now. Lots of time will pass until man stops needing a God which would do everything for him, let alone, forgive everything. It's **too comfortable to refuse**, Isidora. Man is not ready yet to do anything on his own.*

– Show me him, Sever... – I asked in a whisper. – Show me what he was.

The air around began to vibrate with soft waves, sparkling and thickening, as if a mysterious invisible door was going to open. And here I saw them!

In a spacious stone cave two wonderful blond children merrily chatted about something, sitting beside a small natural stone fountain. The world around them seemed happy and sunny, absorbing the quiet joy which streamed out of their wonderful souls...

The boy was proud, tall and very slender for his thirteen years. Enormous internal force raged in him, but at the same time he was soft and very pleasant. He looked at the world merrily and ... very wisely, as if, inside, he was more than a hundred years old. His radiant blue eyes flashed from time to time with a steel grey colour, but then again sparkled with joy, admiring his charming and easily amused interlocutor.

The girl was extraordinarily attractive. She resembled a pure angel newly descended from the sky. She clasped an ancient thick book to her bosom and apparently was not going to let it go for all the tea in China. Wavy very long golden hair was tied with a blue silk ribbon which advantageously emphasized the colour of her laughing sky-blue eyes. Little dimples on the pink cheeks made her very sweet and merry like a May morning...

*The children were dressed in long snow-white identical garments girdled with golden belts and looked like a wonderful couple from a beautiful old painting... They were a wonderful match, complementing and giving each other the missing bits, thus creating **the whole** which was impossible to break... This was Jesus and Magdalena, the future Saviour of Humanity and his only and big future Love!*

*– But they are **completely different!** – I exclaimed, being sincerely surprised. – They are absolutely not like they are drawn! Aren't they really Jews?!*

– They never were. – Sever shrugged his shoulders. – It was people **who longed for power** that very "wisely" decided they should become the "**children of the killed God**" thus making the most dangerous people on Earth; the "**CHOSEN**" ones.

Jesus was the son of a White Volkhv and our disciple Vedunia Maria. They became his parents to bring his amazing Spirit to Earth.

I stared at Sever absolutely dumbfounded...

– But what about the Jews Maria and Joseph?! What about Nazareth?

– **Neither the Jew Maria nor Joseph was ever with Jesus**, Isidora. There was **Vedunia Maria** who wanted to come here, to Meteora, right before his birth in order for him to be born among Volkvs and Witches. But she was late... Jesus was born a week earlier, **AT DAWN** (na zare Rus. – E.L.) in a little house on the riverside. And his birth was accompanied by the Light Morning Star.

Our Volkvs hurried to **see** and protect him. And his Teacher and Father came to greet his newly-born son's remarkable Spirit.

The Volkvs called him to Earth to stop the "plague" which, like a spider, had already been spinning its black web for a long time. It was exactly the Volkvs who **sent** Christ to the Jews, but Jesus himself **was never a Jew**.

The Volkvs hoped that he would have enough strength to stop the "black" Evil which had begun to crawl all over the Earth. But Jesus failed, underestimating the "great weaknesses" of Man...

The Earth was not ready for His coming, just as it **is not** ready for the coming of the **KNOWING** ones, Idsidora. And we are not ready to help the Earth. When the **right** time comes, we will open the Doors. And maybe Light will triumph on Earth. But it will not happen for a very long time... Forgive me.

I exploded.

– So, what?! Are you just going to watch, twiddling your thumbs, how the best are destroyed?! But it's **your world** too, Sever! How can you let it die? To leave is **the easiest way**, or to WAIT. But won't such treachery pursue you for the rest of your long life? Will you really be able to live somewhere calmly without thinking about all who died?! **I don't believe in a beautiful future built on the deaths of others**, Sever! It's terrible. The world will never be the same, if we don't help it now! I ask you, help me, Sever...

I was ready to fall on my knees, if it could help, but I saw that it would change nothing. These people lived in **their Truth** – a very isolated and strange one. I could not understand why they were not ashamed of remaining aside, when thousands of the best and the most talented children of Earth were burning, damning their gift and dying in the most terrible throes? My heart sank – I could not fight alone. He was right – I did not have enough strength.

– How is it possible to accept such a thing, Sever! How can we let the "black" take our wonderful Earth? Don't your Great Teachers really **see** what is going on? How can one believe in something light after all that, Sever?!

– Earth will suffer very long and terribly, Isidora... until it comes to the very edge of destruction. And always **the best** will die for it. Then the time of choice will come... only the people will decide whether they have the forces to withstand the evil. We shall just indicate the way.

– Are you sure, Sever, that there will be somebody left to indicate to? Maybe it will be all the same for those who manage to survive...

– Oh, no, Isidora! Man is an extraordinarily strong being in his survivability. You cannot even imagine **how** strong he is! And the **true** Man never gives up, even if he remains alone. So it always was and so it will always be. The **force of Love** and the **force of Fight** are very strong on Earth, even if people do not understand it yet.

And there will always be someone who will lead others. The most important thing is that this

Leader will not be a "black" one. Man seeks an aim from his birth; and it depends solely on him whether he will find it himself or **will be given** it. People must **learn to think**, Isidora. Regrettably, today many consent to others thinking for them. While it happens, the Earth will lose its best sons and daughters who will pay for the ignorance of all "compromisers".

Therefore I won't help you, Isidora. And none of us will. The time to stake everything has not come yet. If we die now fighting for **the handful of the Enlightened**, even if their time to **KNOW** has already come, after that there will be nobody to "know" anything.

I see I have not convinced you. – A light smile touched Sever's lips. – In fact you would not be you, if I have... But I beg of you only one thing, Isidora – please, leave! This is **not your time**, and this is **not your world!**

I became awfully sad. I understood that I had lost here too. Now everything depended only on my conscience – whether I would agree to leave or I would fight knowing that there is not the slightest hope of winning...

– Well, Sever, I shall stay. May be I am not so wise like you and your Great ancestors, but I think that, **if they really were so "Great", you would help us and they would forgive you**, and if they did not, well, **maybe, they are not so "Great" in the end!**

It was bitterness that spoke through me, preventing me from thinking soberly. I could not accept the thought that there was nobody to wait for help from; that right here there were people who could help, but they did not want to. They "**defended**" **themselves with some higher aims**, refusing to interfere. They were **WISE**... But I just listened to my heart. I wanted to protect my dearest ones and to help others not to lose their dearest ones. I wanted to destroy Evil. Maybe, I was just a "child" in their "wise" understanding. Maybe I have not grown or matured, but even if I live a thousand years, I would never be able to watch calmly as somebody's atrocious hand kills an innocent and wonderful person.

– Do you want to see the **real Meteora**, Isidora? It is highly likely that you will never have another chance. – Sever sadly pronounced.

– May I to ask what the word Meteora means?

– Oh, it was a long time ago when we chose it. Now it means nothing, but once it sounded a bit different. It meant **WE- ARE THOSE-NEAR-RA** [my-te-u-ra – Rus.] which meant – those close to light and knowledge, keeping them and living in them. But then too many "know-nothing" ones began to look for us and the name changed. Many **did not hear** how it sounded, and many were not interested in it at all. They did not understand that even on entering here, they already joined **VERA** [faith (eng). **VE-RA=** to know Ra=**to know light and knowledge (E.L.)**], that it met them already at the threshold, beginning with the name and its **understanding**.

I know it's not the way you speak, and probably, you'll find it difficult to understand the language, Isidora, although your name belongs to it too. It is **meaningful**.

– You forgot that the language does not matter to me, Sever. I **feel** and **see** it. – I smiled.

– Forgive me, **the knowing one**. I forgot who you were. Do you wish to see what only the knowing ones have the right to see, Isidora? You will not have another chance. You will never come back here.

I just nodded, trying to hold back the wicked and bitter tears ready to stream down my cheeks. The hope of being with them, of getting their strong friendly support died, never even having fully thrived. I remained alone, without having known something very important for me. I remained almost defenceless against a strong and terrible man with the threatening name, Caraffa.

But the decision was made and I was not going to change it. Otherwise, what was our Life worth, if we have to live **betraying ourselves**? Suddenly I calmed down. Everything at last fell into place; there was nothing to hope for. I could count only on myself, and this was the point I must proceed from. And as for how it will end, I forced myself not to think about it anymore.

We went along a high stone corridor which broadened and went deep into it. It was as light

and pleasant as in the cave and only the smell of spring herbs became stronger as we went on. Unexpectedly a luminous golden "wall" with only one big shining Rune began to sparkle right in front of us. I understood that it was a protection from the "ignoramuses". It looked like a thick glimmering curtain made of some golden fabric, which I had never seen before, through which most likely I could never pass unaided.

Sever stretched his hand and slightly touched the curtain with his palm, and the golden "wall" disappeared at once, opening a passage-way into an extraordinary hall.

At once I had an acute feeling of something "alien", as if something told me that it was not the usual world in which I always lived, but in an instant the strange "alien" sensation disappeared and again everything became well as usual.

The attentive feeling of somebody's invisible observation increased. It was not hostile but rather resembled the warm touch of a kind old friend, once lost a long time ago and now suddenly found again.

A small natural fountain sparkled rainbow splashes in the distant corner of the hall. The water was so transparent that it was visible only in the iridescent reflections of light which shone on trembling mirror-like drops. On looking at this miraculous spring, I unexpectedly felt burning thirst and was going to ask Sever whether I could drink a little, as I immediately got an answer:

– Certainly, Isidora, try it! It is the **water of Life**. We all drink it when we do not have enough forces, when the load becomes too heavy. Try it!

I bent to dip into the miraculous water with my hands and felt an unbelievable relief, not even having touched it yet! It seemed that all my troubles and bitterness suddenly stepped back and I felt unusual calmness and happiness. It was unbelievable – in fact I had not even tried it! I confusedly turned around to Sever. He smiled. Apparently everybody who came across this miracle for the first time experienced the same feeling. I filled my cupped palms with water. It sparkled with little diamonds like the morning dew on the grass lit by sunrays... Very carefully, trying to not spill so much as a precious drop, I took a tiny sip. Unbelievable lightness spread all over my body! As if somebody pitied me and wiped off fifteen years with a magic wand! I felt light like a bird soaring high in the sky. My head became pure and clear, as if I was just born.

– What is it?! – I whispered in surprise.

– I told you. – Sever smiled. It is the *Aqua Vitae*. It helps to absorb knowledge, takes away tiredness and returns light. Everybody who lives here drinks it. It was always here as far as I remember.

He slightly pushed me further. And suddenly I understood **what** seemed so strange. The room **did not end!** It seemed to be small, but continued to "stretch" as we went! It was unbelievable! I looked at Sever again, but he only nodded, as if saying: "Don't be surprised at anything. Everything is all right". And I stopped being surprised...

A man "came out" right from the wall. I gave a start, but at once tried to pull myself together not to show my surprise, because it obviously was a quite usual thing for the dwellers of this place. He came straight to us and said with his deep resonant voice:

– Peace to you, Isidora! I am Volkhv Isten. I know it's a hard time for you, but you chose your way yourself. Follow me, I'll show you what you've lost.

We moved further. I followed the extraordinary human being who emitted unbelievable force, and sorrowfully thought how easy and simple everything would be, if he wanted to help! Regrettably, he did not want to...

I went, deep in thought, and did not notice when I found myself in a staggering space which was completely filled with narrow shelves full of an unbelievable amount of unusual golden plates and very old "scrolls" which looked like the ancient manuscripts that were kept in my father's house. The only difference was that those which I saw here were made of the thinnest unknown material which I had never seen before. The plates and rolls were of different size – very small and

very large, short and long, some of a person's full height. There were lots of them in this strange room.

– It is **KNOWLEDGE**, Isidora, or rather its smallest part. You can absorb, if you wish. It won't harm you and even will help you in your search. Try, dear...

Isten tenderly smiled and suddenly it seemed to me that I had always known him. A wonderful warmth and peace came from him which I so lacked in all these terrible days, struggling against Caraffa. Obviously he perfectly felt all this, because he looked at me with deep sorrow, as if he knew what wicked fate waited for me behind the walls of Meteora, and he mourned me beforehand....

I came to one of the endless shelves "stuffed" to the top with half-round golden plates to **see** them like Isten advised... But before I could stretch my hand a squall of stunning and marvellous visions poured down on me!!! The shocking pictures, which did not look like anything I have ever seen, swept over my exhausted brain with unbelievable speed, changing from one to another. Some of them remained for some reason, and some disappeared, immediately bringing new ones which I did not have time to scrutinize. What was that?! The lives of some dead people who lived a long time ago or the life of our Great ancestors? The visions changed each other, rushing with mad speed. The stream did not end, carrying me away in amazing countries and worlds, without giving me the slightest chance to awaken. Suddenly one of them flashed brighter than others and an astonishing city appeared... It was airy and transparent, as if being created of the White Light.

– This is a Holy City, dear, the City of our Gods. It has ceased to exist for a very long time. – Isten said in a low voice. – It's there from where we all came once... Only nobody on Earth remembers it. – Then he suddenly remembered something and added: – Carefully, dear, you will find it too heavy. Don't look anymore.

But I wished for more! Some burning thirst burned my brain, begging to continue! The unknown world beckoned and charmed me with its primordialness! I wanted to dive in it and submerge deeper and deeper to absorb it endlessly, not losing a single precious minute... which I knew I had very few left...

Every new plate demonstrated thousands of incredible images which were surprisingly bright and now **understandable** for some reason, as if I had suddenly found a magic key which had been lost a long time ago.

Time flew, but I did not notice it. I wanted more and more. I was terribly afraid that right now somebody would stop all that and I would have to leave this wonderful well of somebody's unbelievable memory which I would never have the occasion to perceive again. I felt very sad and bad, but, unfortunately, there was no way back for me. It was me who chose my life and I was not going to renounce it, despite it being incredibly hard...

– That will be it, dear. I cannot show you more. You are an "apostate" which **did not want** to know... And the way here is closed for you. I am sincerely sorry, Isidora... You have a great Gift! You could easily **KNOW** all of it... if you wanted. It did not come so easily for the majority of us... Your nature craves it. But you've chosen another way and that is why you must go away now. My thoughts will be with you, child of Light. Go with VERA. Let it help you. Farewell, Isidora.

The room disappeared. We found ourselves in a different stone hall which was also filled with a great number of scrolls, but they looked different, not as ancient as the previous ones. Suddenly I felt extremely sad. I painfully wanted to grasp these strange "secrets" and see the riches hidden in them, but I was leaving in order to never return here.

– Think, Isidora! – Sever said quietly, as if feeling my doubts. – You have not left yet. Stay. I only shook my head...

Suddenly my attention was attracted by the already familiar, but in the same way incomprehensible phenomenon: as we moved further, the room stretched **here too** with one difference, though. I did not see a soul in the previous one, but here I **saw** a lot of people – young and old, men and women and even children! They all studied something very attentively, fully

retiring into themselves and devotedly comprehending some "wise truth", paying no attention to the visitors.

– Who are all these people, Sever? Do they live here? – I asked in a whisper.

– They are Witches and Veduns, Isidora. Your father was one of them once. We teach them.

My heart ached. I wanted to howl like a wolf, pitying myself and my short lost life! I wanted to give up everything and sit down next to them – these happy Veduns and Witches – to get to know with my mind and heart the depth of this wonderful, so generously open to them, great KNOWLEDGE!

Burning tears were ready to roll down my cheeks, but I tried to retain them with all my might. I must not do it, because tears were the next "forbidden luxury" to which I had no right, if I called myself a real Warrior. Warriors do not cry. They fight and win, and when they die, there are no tears in their eyes.

Apparently I simply got very tired because of loneliness and pain and permanent fear for my family, and the endless fight which I did not have the least hope of winning. I needed a breath of fresh air very much which for me was my daughter Anna. But for some reason I did not see her, despite my knowing that she was here, together with them in this wonderful and strange "secret" land.

Sever stood next to me on the verge of the canyon. Deep sorrow hid in his grey eyes. I wanted to ask him, whether I would see him again? But I had not enough strength. I did not want to say goodbye. I did not want to leave. Life here was so wise and calm and everything seemed so simple and well! But there, in **my** cruel and imperfect world good people died and it was about time to return and try to save somebody. This was truly **my world**, no matter how terrible it was. And my father was there and, maybe, suffered cruelly unable to break from Caraffa who I decided to eliminate no matter what, even if I had to give my short and so dear to me life for it.

– May I see Anna? – I asked Sever with hope.

– Forgive me, Isidora, Anna must pass the "purging" from the vanity of the world before she can enter the same hall where you have just been. She cannot see you now...

– But why did I have nothing to "purify"? – I was surprised. In fact Anna is still a child and she does not have too much "dirt" of the world, does she?

– She will have to absorb too much – to grasp the whole of the endlessness. And you will never return there. There is no need for you to forget anything "old", Isidora. I am very sorry.

– So, will I never see my daughter again? – I asked in a whisper.

– You will. I shall help you. Now, do you want to say goodbye to the Volkhvs, Isidora? It is your only chance, don't miss it.

Of course I **wanted** to see them, the Masters of this Wise World! My father had told me so much about them and I had dreamed of meeting them for so long! However I could not imagine then how sad our meeting would be.

Sever lifted his hands and the rock shimmered and then disappeared. We found ourselves in a round hall with an incredibly high ceiling. The hall seemed to be a forest, a meadow, a fairy-tale castle or even "nothing" at one and the same time. No matter how hard I tried, I was unable to see its walls or what happened around it. The air twinkled and shimmered with thousands of brilliant "drops" looking like human tears... On subduing my agitation, I finally breathed in. The "rainy" air was surprisingly fresh, pure and light! It made the thinnest **living** filaments of the "golden" warmth run all over my body, spreading the vivifying force. The feeling was wonderful!

– Come, Isidora. Fathers expect you. – Sever whispered.

I took a step and the trembling air "moved" apart. The Volkhvs stood right in front of me...

– I came to say goodbye, Prophetic ones. Peace to you... – I said quietly, not knowing how I should welcome them.

Never in my life had I felt such complete and all-embracing Great FORCE! They did not move, but it seemed that the hall vibrated with warm waves of some extraordinary might.

*This was the **real LIFE!!!** I did not know what words could describe it. It shocked me! I wanted to seize it with the whole of my self! I wanted to imbibe it... or just to fall to my knees! Feelings overwhelmed me like a stunning avalanche. Hot tears rolled down my cheeks.*

*– Peace to you, Isidora. – The warm voice of one of them sounded. – We **FEEL** for you. You are a Volkhv's daughter. You will share his way. Force will not leave you. Go with VERA, cherished child...*

*My soul aspired to join them with the scream of a dying bird! My injured heart strived toward them, breaking against wicked fate... But I knew that it was too late, they were forgiving and... **feeling for me**. I have never "heard" before **how deep the meaning** of these wonderful words was. And now the joy of their marvellous **new sounding** swept over me, filling my injured soul with an avalanche of bottomless feelings, preventing me from breathing...*

*The quiet light sadness, sharp pain of loss, beauty of life which I **had to** live and enormous wave of Love which come from somewhere far away and, on merging with the Earthly one, flooded my soul and body, lived in these words.*

Life swept over like a whirlwind touching every "edge" of my self without leaving a single cell unfilled with the warmth of love. I was afraid that I would not be able to leave... and probably because of this dread I awakened at once from the wonderful "farewell", looking at the people, amazing in their internal force and beauty, standing next to me.

Tall old and young men dressed in dazzling white clothes, which look like long tunics, stood around me. Some were girdled with red belts, and the belts of two of them were wide embroidered with gold and silver.

– Oh, look! – Suddenly my impatient friend Stella interrupted the wonderful moment. – They look very like your "star friends" as you had showed them to me! Look! Could they really be them? What do you think?! Tell me!!!

*To tell the truth the Sacred City we had seen seemed to me very familiar. And also I had similar thoughts, as soon as I saw the Volkvs, but I drove them away, trying not to cherish vain "**rosy hopes**". It was too important and serious, and I only waved to Stella, as if saying that we would talk later, when we were alone. I understood that Stella would be disappointed because, as usual, she wanted to get an immediate answer to her question, but I thought that now it was not so important, unlike Isidora's wonderful story, so I mentally asked Stella to wait.*

I guiltily smiled at Isidora. She answered me with her wonderful smile and went on.

A mighty, tall, old man, who had something elusively similar to my dear father, who suffered in Caraffa's basements, riveted my attention. For some reason I understood at once – he was the Great White Volkhv.

His amazing, piercing and compelling grey eyes looked at me with deep sorrow and warmth, as if bidding me the last "Farewell"!

– Come, Child of Light. We shall forgive you...

Suddenly he began to radiate an amazing and joyful white Light, which on wrapping everything around with soft shine, tenderly embraced me, penetrating into the most secret corners of my pain-tormented Soul. Light pierced every cell, leaving only good and peace in it, "washing" out the pain, sorrow and bitterness accumulated over years. I soared in the magic radiance, forgetting earthly cruelty, wickedness and falseness. The only thing I felt was the marvellous touch of the Eternal Life. This feeling was indescribably delightful!!! I begged mentally – if only it would not be over... But on the whim of fate everything wonderful is also over quicker than we would like.

– We endowed you with VERA. It will help you, Child... Heed it... and farewell, Isidora...

Before I could answer, the Volkvs "flushed" with marvellous Light and, leaving the aroma of blooming meadows, disappeared. Sever and I remained alone... I sadly looked around. The cave

remained the same, enigmatic and sparkling, but the pure and warm light which got into the soul was gone...

– It was Jesus's Father, wasn't it? – I asked carefully.

– Yes it was, being the **grandfather of his son and great-grandfather of his grandchildren** whose death lies with heavy guilt on his heart...

– ?!

– Yes, Isidora. He is a person who carries the bitter load of pain. And you will never be able to imagine how huge it is. – Sever answered sadly.

– Maybe it would not be so bitter today, if then He had **pitied** the good people dying from stranger's ignorance and cruelty? If He had **responded to** His wonderful and light Son's call, instead of giving him to the wicked killers to be tortured? If He had not continued now just to "observe" from His height, how Caraffa's "holy" accomplices burn Veduns and Witches? Why is He better than Caraffa if He does not impede such an Evil, Sever?! In fact if He **can help but does not want to**, the whole of this earthly horror will be his responsibility for eternity! Neither the reason nor explanation is important when a wonderful human life is at stake! I will never be able to understand it, Sever. And I will not "leave" while good people are killed here, while my earthly Home is being destroyed, even if I never see my **real** Home. This is my fate and therefore – farewell.

– Farewell, Isidora. Peace to your Soul. Forgive me.

I again found myself in the room, in my dangerous and pitiless existence. Everything which has just happened seemed a wonderful dream which I would never dream again in my life... or a beautiful fairy-tale which certainly would have had a "happy ending" for somebody, but not for me...

I pitied my unfortunate life, but I was very proud of my brave little girl who would succeed in grasping the whole of this great Miracle... if Caraffa doesn't destroy her before she can defend herself.

Suddenly I heard the sound of a noisily opened door. The infuriated Caraffa stood on the threshold.

– Well, where did you "stroll", Madonna Isidora? – My tormentor asked in a feigned pleasant voice.

– I wanted to visit my daughter, Your Holiness, but could not.

It was all the same for me what he thought, and whether my "sally" made him angry. My soul soared far away, in the astonishing White City which Isten showed me, and everything that surrounded me now seemed distant and miserable.

Regrettably Caraffa did not allow me to enjoy my dreams. On feeling that my mood had changed, "his holiness" began to panic.

– Have you been admitted to Meteora, Madonna Isidora? – Caraffa asked as calmly as he could.

I knew that he simply "burned" inside, wishing to get an answer as quickly as possible, and decided to torture him until he told me where my father was now.

– Does it really matter, Your Holiness? You have my father who you can ask everything which I am unable to answer. Or you did not yet have enough time to interrogate him thoroughly, did you?

– I don't advise you to speak to me in anything like that tone, Isidora. His fate will greatly depend on the way you behave. Therefore, try to be more polite.

– But how would **you** behave, if it was **your** father now instead of mine, Holiness? – I asked, trying to change the subject which began to be dangerous.

– **If my father was a HERETIC, I would burn him at the stake!** – Caraffa answered with all the calmness in the world.

What kind of a heart does this "holy" man have, if he has one at all? If Caraffa could say such things about **his** father, what intentions could one expect from him toward **others**?

– Yes, I was in Meteora, Your Holiness, and I am very sorry that I will never go back there. – I answered sincerely.

– Have you been expelled from there too, Isidora? – Caraffa laughed in surprise.

– No, Holiness, I haven't. I was invited to stay. I left.

– That cannot be! Nobody would refuse to remain there, Isidora!

– Why not? What about my father, Holiness?

– I don't believe that he was permitted to stay. I think he had to leave. Probably his time was over, or his Gift was not strong enough.

I thought that he tried by all means to convince himself of what he wanted to believe.

– Not all people love only themselves, you know. – I said sadly. – There is something greater than power or force. There is Love...

Caraffa waved me away like an annoying fly, as if I spoken complete nonsense.

– Love **does not rule** the world, Isidora. And I do **wish to rule it!**

– **Man can do everything...** until he starts trying, Your Holiness. – I could not help myself, "biting" him.

Suddenly I remembered something about which I wanted to know and asked:

– Tell me, Your Holiness, do you know the truth about Jesus and Magdalena?

– Do you mean that they lived in Meteora? – I nodded. – Of course! It was the first thing I asked them!

– How it can be possible?! – I was shocked. – Do you also know the fact they were not Jews?

– Caraffa nodded again. – But you never tell about that! Nobody knows that! What about TRUTH, Your Holiness?

– Oh, don't be ridiculous, Isidora! – Caraffa sincerely laughed. – You are a child, upon my life! Who needs your "truth"? The crowd which has never looked for it?! No, my dearest, **only a handful of thinking ones need Truth, and the crowd must simply "believe"**. It does not really matter in what. The important thing is that people should **obey**. It does not matter what they are fed with for that. **TRUTH is dangerous**, Isidora. Where Truth is revealed, doubts appear, and where doubts are, a war begins. I lead my **OWN** war, Isidora, and for the time being I am enormously pleased with it! **The world has always been based on lie**, you see. The most important thing is that this lie should be **interesting** enough to lead dull minds. And believe me, Isidora; with all this going on, if you start proving the **real Truth** to the crowd, refuting their "faith" in God knows what, it will tear you to pieces.

– Can such a clever man as Your Holiness be satisfied with **self-betrayal**? In fact you burn **innocent** people on behalf of the slandered God which is innocent too, like them. How can you lie so shamelessly, Your Holiness?!

– Oh, don't worry, dear Isidora! – Caraffa smiled. – My conscience is absolutely clear! **It was not me who raised this God, and it won't be me who overturns him**. But I am going to be the one who will purge Earth of heresy and lechery! And believe me, Isidora, there will be **nobody** to burn on this sinful Earth the day I "leave"!

I felt dizzy. My heart madly palpitated, unable to listen to this delirium! Therefore, I pulled myself together as quickly as possible and tried to avoid discussing his favourite subject.

– Well, what about you being the head of the holy Christian church? Don't you really think that your **duty** is to disclose the truth about Jesus Christ to people?

– Exactly because I am his "deputy on Earth" I will keep silent, Isidora! Exactly that is why...

I looked at him with my eyes wide open and could not believe that I really heard all that. Caraffa was extremely dangerous in his madness and there hardly was a remedy which could help

him.

– That's enough small talk! – The "holy father" suddenly exclaimed, rubbing his hands with a satisfied air. – Come with me, my dearest. I think this time I will succeed in stunning you!

If he knew how well he constantly managed to do it! My heart ached, having a bad presentiment. But I had no choice – I had to go with him...

38. Isidora-4. The Loss

A little while later Caraffa almost dragged me along the corridor with a contented smile on his face until we stopped in front of a heavy door generously decorated with patterned gilt. He turned a handle and... Oh, ye Gods!!! I found myself in my favourite Venetian room, in our dear familial palazzo...

I looked around dumbstruck. The "surprise" came like a bolt from the blue! I did my very best to calm my heart, which was about to jump out of my chest; breath escaped me. Thousands of recollections spun around me, pitilessly plunging me the wonderful years which were lived through a long time ago and now almost forgotten, which had not yet been ruined by the malice of the cruel man who for some reason recreated them **here** (!) my happy world which had been lost long since... The miraculously "resuscitated" room was full of every personal thing and sweet trifle dear to my heart! I was afraid to stir in order not to frighten off the marvellous apparition from my past, unable to take my eyes off the agreeable surroundings I had been accustomed to a long time ago.

– Do you like my surprise, Madonna? – Caraffa asked, being enormously content with the produced effect.

The most unbelievable thing was that this strange man sincerely **did not understand** how deeply he wounded me with his "surprise"! On seeing **HERE** (!!!) that, which once was the real "hearth" of my family happiness and peace, I wanted to do just one thing – to throw myself at this terrible "holy" Pope and strangle him in a mortal embrace until his horrific black soul left his body for good... But instead of that I tried to pull myself together to prevent Caraffa noticing how my voice trembled and replied as calmly as possible:

– Forgive me, Your Holiness. May I be alone for a while?

– Of course, Isidora! The **apartments are yours** now! I hope you like them.

Did he really not realise what he did?! Or, maybe, he **perfectly realised** everything and it was just his restless brutality that was "having fun" and, being incapable of moderation, inventing new tortures for me?! Suddenly the burning thought flashed through my mind. What had happened to the rest? What became of our wonderful house which we all loved so dearly? What became of the servants and all others who had lived there?

– May I ask Your Holiness what happened to our family palace in Venice? – I asked in a hoarse whisper. – What happened to those who lived there? You did not throw people out on the street, did you? I hope not, they don't have any other place to live, Holiness!

Caraffa made a wry face.

– For Goodness' sake, Isidora! **They** are the last thing you should worry about now. Your house, as you certainly understand, has now become the property of our holy church, and everything that may relate to it is no concern of **yours**!

– My house, as well as everything it contains, Your Holiness, after the death of my dearly beloved husband Girolamo, belongs to my daughter Anna as long as she lives! – I exclaimed with indignation. – Or has the "holy" church struck her off the list of the living?!

I boiled with indignation, although I perfectly understood that my anger complicated the situation which was already quite hopeless without that. But Caraffa's insolence would not leave any normal person indifferent; I am sure, even when the matter concerned just the profaned recollections so dear to his heart!

– While Anna is alive, she will stay here, Madonna, and serve our beloved holiest Church! And if, unfortunately for her, she changes her mind, she will not need your wonderful house anyway! – Caraffa furiously hissed. – Don't be overdiligent in your zeal to find justice, Isidora! It can only do you harm. My patience has limits too... And I sincerely don't advise you to cross them!

He sharply turned and disappeared behind the door, without saying goodbye or informing me as to how long I could remain alone in my so unexpectedly resuscitated past... Time stopped, pitilessly tossing me into my lucky and cloudless days on Caraffa's sick whim, not bothering at all that such unexpected "reality" could easily stop my heart... I sadly sat on a chair beside the familiar mirror which once reflected the dear faces of my family... And now I sat in front of it absolutely alone, surrounded by darling ghosts... Sweet recollections... The force of their beauty suffocated me and the bitter grief over our lost happiness deeply wounded.

Once (It now seemed a very long time ago!) this enormous mirror witnessed how I brushed my little Anna's lovely silky hair every morning, playfully giving her the first lessons of "witch school" in her childhood... This mirror reflected Girolamo's eyes burning with love when he tenderly hugged my shoulders... This mirror reflected thousands of marvellous moments which I stored deep in my heart with great care and which now agitated my wounded and exhausted soul.

I saw my wonderful malachite casket there, right on the little night table. It had contained my beautiful jewelry, which my kind husband had so generously given me and which were a source of wild envy for rich and capricious Venetian ladies... Only now it was empty... Somebody's dirty and avid hands had "cleaned out" all the "shining knick-knacks", valueing **only their material worth...** but for me they were my memories of the days of my pure happiness: the evening of my wedding... Anna's birth... my victories, already forgotten long ago, or events of our family life, each marked by a new piece of art, the right to which only I alone had... They were not just very expensive "stones". They were my Girolamo's caring, his wish to make me smile and his way to admire my beauty of which he was sincerely and deeply proud and which he loved so dearly... And now these pure recollections were touched by somebody's lustful and avid fingers, on which our desecrated love shrivelled up, bitterly crying...

My favourite books were all over this strange "resuscitated" room and my old pianoforte sadly waited for me beside the window all alone. Anna's first doll which was now the same age as her unfortunate persecuted hostess smiled merrily, lying on the silk bedspread covering the wide bed. But unlike Anna, the doll could not feel sorrow and the wicked man was unable to wound it...

I growled from the unbearable pain like a dying beast ready to make the last mortal jump. Recollections burned out my soul, being so incredibly real and alive that it seemed that right now the door would open and smiling Girolamo would appear on the threshold and enthusiastically begin to tell the latest news of the day... Or merry Anna would rush in like a whirlwind, pouring an armful of roses onto my knees, exhaling the smell of delightful warm Italian summer. It was **OUR** happy world which **should not** be in Caraffa's castle! There should not be a place for it in this den of lies, violence and death.

But no matter how indignant I felt, I needed to regain my self-control, calm my thumping heart and banish the anguish about the past from it, because recollections, even the most wonderful ones, could easily shatter my life, now fragile enough, preventing me from doing away with Caraffa. Therefore I turned and left the room, trying to "protect" myself from very dear but at the same time deeply soul-wounding memories... There was nobody in the corridor. Apparently Caraffa was so sure of his victory that he had not left guards at the door of "my" apartments, or on the contrary – he understood too well that there was no sense in doing so, because I could leave him any moment I wished, despite any efforts and prohibitions on his part. One way or another, there was no stranger presence or any guard at "my" door.

Anguish throttled me, and I was eager to run wherever my feet would carry me to be as far as possible from that wonderful ghostly world where each recollection took a bit of my soul, every time making it emptier, colder and lonlier...

I was gradually coming to myself after the shock caused by the unexpected "surprise", as I

realized that it was the first time that I had walked alone along the fabulously decorated corridor, disregarding the unbelievable luxury and riches of Caraffa's palace. Earlier I had been given the opportunity only to go down to the basement or accompany Caraffa to some of his meetings, and now I observed with surprise the amazing paintings which covered the endless gilded walls and ceiling. It was neither Vatican, nor official Papal residence. It was **Caraffa's private palace** in which beauty and luxury did not yield, even to the very Vatican.

Once, at a time when Caraffa was not the "holiest" Pope yet but a fervent fighter with the "spreading heresy", his house looked like an enormous fortress of an ascetic, which truly gave his life for the "right cause", no matter how absurd or terrible it may seem to others. Now it was the richest man who "partook", with the pleasure of a gourmet, in his limitless power... too quickly changing the way of life of a true "monk" for the easy gold of the Vatican. He still piously believed in the rightness of the Inquisition and human fires, only now they were diluted by the thirst for the pleasures of life and his wild desire to attain immortality ... which no gold in the world could buy for him (luckily for all!).

Caraffa suffered... His temporally lasting splendid "youth" which was given to him by a strange "guest" of Meteora suddenly began to fade swiftly and his body was getting older much quicker than it would be if he had not tried the deceitful "gift".

The recently smart, slender and young-looking cardinal turned into a stooping and wilted old man. His personal "bunch" of doctors panicked! They honestly racked their clever brains, trying to figure out what was that "dreadful" disease that devoured their dearest "Holiness". But they could not find an answer and Caraffa rapidly got older before their very eyes. It enraged him, making him do the most foolish acts in the hope of stopping the escaping time which pitilessly flowed away with every new day like transparent grains through his senescent but still very beautiful thin fingers.

This man had everything. His power spread over all Christian kingdoms. Rulers and kings submitted to him. Princes kissed his hand. For all that his only earthly life was coming to an end. The thought that he was unable to change anything drove him to despair!

Caraffa was an extremely strong and resolute man, but his will could not give him his young years back. He was perfectly educated and clever, but his mind could not help him to prolong his so much desired life which was gradually slipping away... While wishing for and not getting what he desired, Caraffa perfectly understood that I **knew HOW** to give him that for which he was ready to pay the highest price in the world. I **knew HOW** to prolong his life. But the "holy" Pope also knew perfectly well that he **would never get what he desired from me**, which drove him crazy. The wild desire to live forever overpowered his human feelings, if he ever had any. Now he fell "ill" of this single idea and removed any obstacles in the way of his great, but hardly feasible aim. Caraffa became an obsessed man, who was ready to do anything to fulfill his greatest wish – to live **very** long, no matter what the cost.

And I dreaded every day, expecting that he would bring down his indefatigable malice on my poor father, or still worse – on my little Anna, instead of me. My father still was in the basement. Caraffa held him there neither letting him go nor torturing, as if he waited for something. It all was much more terrible than the most terrible reality, because the "holy" Pope's sick imagination (in my sad experience!) had no limits, and it was quite impossible to guess what future awaited us tomorrow...

Anna was relatively safe in peace and silence surrounded by knowledge and guarded by pure kind people. And she could be there until the unforeseeable "holy" Pope claimed her. Going deeply into my sad thoughts, I stopped at the open window.

The weather was uncommonly pleasant – soft, sunny and warm. It smelled of the waking earth and jasmine. Spring was gradually coming into its own. The succulent young grass was spread all over the courtyard of the castle like a fluffy carpet with shy blue-eyed forget-me-nots here and there livening up the grayness of its sullen high walls. The sparrows rushed about on roofs, "drunk" on the spring air. The world woke up, widely opening its warm and tender arms toward happiness. And only here, in the torture chambers of a frightful and cruel man death soared. I did not want to

believe that people were being tormented in the horrific Papal basements and dying on this sunny and merry day! Life was too valuable and wonderful for somebody's "holy" hand to take it so easily.

– What are you doing here, Madonna Isidora? Don't you like your apartments? – Caraffa's noiseless appearance interrupted my sad thoughts. – I asked you not to leave your rooms. I think they are spacious enough for one person, aren't they?

The Pope was highly displeased. He perfectly understood that nothing impeded me from "leaving" right away, if I wanted, and my "conditional" incarceration enraged him, preventing his complete control over me.

– So what are you looking for, Isidora? – Caraffa's tone became much softer.

– Nothing, Your Holiness. It's just here I can breathe easier. Recollections, you know, don't always appear pleasant... even the dearest ones...

– Would you do me the honour of having supper with me, Madonna? Lately I lack pleasant society very much... – He pronounced it in a man of the world's voice, unexpectedly changing the subject of the conversation.

I was absolutely taken aback, not knowing what to say. Of course, any spare moment spent with Caraffa could bring me that long-awaited chance which would help me to rid the world of his terrible presence. Therefore I agreed.

– I apologise for my dress, Your Holiness, but I don't have many changes with me here. – I answered in a high society tone too.

Caraffa smiled.

*– You know perfectly well Isidora that it's absolutely irrelevant regarding **you**! You would outshine any beautifully attired queen whilst being dressed like a shepherdess!*

He offered me his hand. I linked my arm through his and we went along shockingly beautiful halls and corridors until we found ourselves in a golden room richly decorated with wonderful frescos with a very long table crammed with heavy golden tableware in the middle.

– Oh, I did not suppose that you awaited guests, Your Holiness! – I exclaimed in surprise. – My dress is truly inappropriate for a dinner party. It can produce unnecessary rumours. Would not it be better for me to withdraw?

– Oh, stop the formalities Isidora! I wait for nobody. It's my ordinary evening meal, my dear. I adore having sufficient choice always and in everything, you see.

– How many dishes are here? – I could not help asking looking at this in surprise.

– It's never less than twenty five! – The Pope contentedly answered.

Oh, Gods! The greatest gourmet in the world would not need such an amount! This man knew no limits even in food!

– Be seated, Madonna! I do hope that one of these dishes will satisfy your refined taste.

I felt so terrible that unexpectedly for me I wanted to burst out laughing. Could I ever imagine that one fine day I would share the table with a man who I desperately wished to wipe off the face of Earth?! I felt a strange awkwardness and said:

– What made you invite me today, Your Holiness? – I asked carefully.

– Your pleasant company. – Caraffa broke into laughter, and on thinking a little, added: – I wanted to have a word with you about something important for me, Madonna, and I would rather do it in an atmosphere more pleasing to you.

A servant entered and, on making a low bow, began to try the first dishes. I felt really sorry that I did not have the famous Florentine herbal poison with me! It was painless and tasteless and could not be detected. This poison worked in a week. It killed princes and kings and, of course, it would calm down the mad Pope forever!!!

*I would never have believed that I could reflect on a murder so easily. My heart slowly turned to stone, leaving just a tiny place place for justice. I lived to destroy him, and it did not matter **how**.*

Anything would do. The main thing was to kill Caraffa in order that innocent people stopped suffering and this blood-thirsty and wicked man never again set foot on land. Therefore I sat now beside him, accepted his treating with a smile and chatted on different subjects... at the same time intently looking for any weak point that would give me an opportunity to get rid of his "holy" presence at last...

It was the very middle of dinner and we were still pleasantly "discussing" some rare books, music and art, as if he did not have a very serious aim, because of which he invited me to his rooms in such an improperly late hour.

It seemed that Caraffa sincerely enjoyed our conversation, as if he absolutely forgot about his "especially-important" aim. One has to do him justice. He was, indisputably, the most interesting interlocutor... if one could forget what he was in reality... In order to stifle an increasing alarm that grew in my heart I joked as much as possible. Caraffa merrily laughed at my jokes and told his in reply. He was courteous and pleasant, but despite his society gallantry I felt that he also tried to pretend... Although Caraffa's self-control was truly blameless, the feverish brilliance of his black eyes made me understand that everything was coming to a head at last... The air around us "crackled" with increasing expectation. The conversation gradually became petty, coming to the exchange of simple polite remarks. At last Caraffa began.

– I found your grandfather's books, Madonna. But they did not have the knowledge I am interested in. Do I need to ask the same question, Isidora? You do know what I am looking for, don't you?

That was exactly I had expected...

– I cannot give you immortality, Your Holiness; just as I could not teach you how to achieve it. I don't have this right... I am not free in my desires...

Of course, it was a barefaced lie. But was there really any other way?! Caraffa perfectly knew that and, certainly, he was going to break me again... He needed the ancient secret that my mother left me before she died more than anything in the world. And he was not going to retreat a single step. It was again somebody's turn to pay dearly for my silence.

– Think, Isidora! I don't want to do you harm! – Caraffa whispered with insinuating voice. – Why don't you wish to help me?! I don't ask you to betray your mother or Meteora. I only ask you to teach me what you know! We could rule the world together! I would make you the queen of queens! Think, Isidora...

I understood that right now something very bad would happen, but I simply did not have strength left to lie...

– **I will not help** you simply because, if you live longer than it is fated, you will exterminate the best half of humanity... the most gifted and cleverest. You do too much harm, Holiness... and have no right to live long. I am sorry... – and added very quietly. – In fact **our life is not always measured by the number of years we have lived**, Your Holiness, and you perfectly know that...

– Well, Madonna, as you wish... When you finish, you will be taken to your rooms.

To my greatest surprise he calmly rose and went away without saying a word leaving the truly royal dinner unfinished... His self-control shocked, involuntarily commanding one's respect and at the same time hatred of him for everything he had done...

The day passed in complete silence, the night was approaching. My nerves were strung to the limit. I expected something truly awful. Feeling it coming with the whole of my self, I tried to stay as calm as I could, but my hands trembled with wild overexcitation, and panic crawled into my heart freezing it to death. What was prepared for me behind the heavy iron door? What new atrocity did Caraffa invent this time? Unfortunately, I did not wait too long to know it. A small, dry and elderly priest came for me right at midnight and took me to the already familiar terrible basement...

And there... my beloved father hung high on iron chains with a thorn ring on his neck... Caraffa was sitting in his favourite enormous wooden arm-chair and sullenly looked at the scene.

He turned, giving me an empty and indifferent glance, and calmly pronounced:

– Well, choose, Isidora – either you give me what I ask, or your father will be burnt in the morning... There is no sense in torturing him. Therefore – you decide. Everything depends only on you.

The world turned upside down! I had to gather all my remaining forces in order not to fall down right in front of Caraffa. It all appeared very simple – he decided that my father would not live... and this was not subject to an appeal... There was nobody to stand up for us or to ask for protection. There was nobody to help us... This man's word was law, to which nobody dared object. Well, those who could dare simply did not wish to...

Never in my life had I felt so helpless and useless! I could not save my father. Otherwise I would betray what we lived for... and he would never forgive me for that. That is why I had to do the most frightful thing. I just had to watch how the "holy" monster called the Pope cold-bloodedly sent my kind father right to the fire...

My father was silent... I looked right into his kind and warm eyes and asked about forgiveness... because I could not do what I promised to do... because he suffered... because I could not save him... and because I was still alive...

– I will destroy him, father! I promise you! Otherwise, we all die in vain. I will destroy him, no matter what it costs me. I believe in it, even if nobody else does... – I mentally swore to him with my life that I would destroy the monster.

My father was unspeakably sad but still firm and proud. Only deep and unspoken anguish nested in his tender grey eyes... Tied by heavy chains, he could not even give me one last hug. And there was no sense in asking Caraffa. He would never allow it. The feelings of cognation, love or mercy were unknown to him... He denied their existence.

– Leave, dearest daughter! Leave... you will not be able to kill this monster. You will just die in vain. Leave, my dear heart... I shall wait for you there, in another life. Sever will take care of you. Leave, dear!

– I love you, father! I love you so much!

I was drowning in my own suffocating tears, but my heart was silent. I had to stand firm, and I did it. It seemed that the whole world had turned into millstones of pain, but for some reason it did not apply to me, as if I were already dead...

– Forgive me, father, but I'll stay. I'll try to eliminate him while I live and even if I am dead I won't leave him in peace until I take him with me... forgive me, please.

Caraffa got up. He could not hear our conversation, but he perfectly understood that something was happening between my father and me. He could not control this connection and the fact that he remained excluded enraged the Pope terribly...

*– Your father will be burnt at dawn, Isidora. It's **you** who kills him. So – decide!*

My heart went pit-a-pat and stopped... The world collapsed... and I could do nothing with it. I could not change anything. But I had to answer and I answered...

– I have nothing to say to you, Holiness, except that you are the most terrible criminal that ever lived on Earth.

The Pope looked at me for a minute unable to hide his surprise, and then nodded to an old priest who waited there and withdrew without uttering a word. As soon as he disappeared behind the door, I threw myself at the old man and, on grasping his dry senile hands, began to implore:

– Please, I beg you, Holy Father. Let me hug him for the last time! I will never again be able to do it... You heard what the Pope said. My father will die tomorrow at dawn... Have mercy, I beg you! Nobody will ever know about it, I swear! I beg you, help me! God won't leave you!

The old priest attentively looked into my eyes and, saying nothing, pulled a lever... The chains went down with a grinding sound and stopped low enough so that we could say our last farewell...

I came closer and hid my face on my father's broad chest, at last giving free reign to the gushing bitter tears... Even now, covered in blood and with his hands and legs shackled with rusty iron fetters, my father emitted wonderful warmth and peace and I felt comfort and protection! He was my once happy world which would be lost to me forever at dawn... Thoughts rushed through my head, each one sadder than the last, bringing bright dear pictures of our "past" life which slipped away from us with every passing minute, and I could neither save it nor stop it...

*– Hold out, my dear. You must be strong. You must protect Anna from him. And you must protect yourself. I leave **for your sake**. Probably it'll give you some time... to destroy Caraffa, – my father whispered.*

I grasped his hands in despair refusing to let go. Again, as it had been a long time ago, I felt like a little girl who looked for comfort on his broad chest...

– Forgive me, Madonna, but I must take you to your rooms, otherwise they can execute me for disobedience. I am truly sorry... – The old priest pronounced in a hoarse voice.

I firmly hugged my father once again, absorbing his wonderful warmth for the last time... and left the torture room without turning back and seeing nothing around, being almost blind from the constantly streaming tears. The walls of the basement "wobbled" and I had to stop, grasping at the stone ledges in order not to fall. Blind with unbearable pain, I plodded on without understanding where I was and where I was going...

Stella quietly cried, being absolutely unashamed of the large bitter tears that rolled down her cheeks. I looked at Anna. She tenderly hugged Isidora and it seemed that she went away very far from us, probably re-living those last frightful earthly days together with her mother... Suddenly I felt very lonely and cold, as if a sullen, black and heavy cloud covered everything around... My soul ached and became painfully empty, like a well, which once was filled with pure living water, but now ran dry... I turned to look at the old Man. He shone! A shining, warm, gold wave streamed from him, generously enveloping Isidora... Tears twinkled in his sad grey eyes. Isidora was very far away and continued her sad story, paying no attention to anybody.

Finally I found myself in my room and dropped on my bed. There were no more tears – just a terrible and naked emptiness and a soul-blinding despair...

I could not, did not want to believe in what was going on! Although I waited for it day after day, now I could neither realize nor accept this frightfully inhuman reality. I did not wish the morning to come... It will bring horror and I did not have my usual firm confidence in that I can bear all that without breaking or betraying my father and myself... The feeling of guilt for his suddenly and too prematurely broken life leaned heavily on me like a mountain... Finally pain stunned me, tearing my tormented heart into tiniest pieces...

To my enormous surprise (and most awful distress) I jumped out of bed because of the noise behind the door and understood that... I had slept! How could it be possible?! How could I fall asleep at all??? Probably our imperfect human body does not always submit to our desires and in some of the severest vital moments defends itself to survive. So I too, being unable to suffer more, just "went" away into rest to save my dying soul. And now it was late – they came to take me to my father's execution...

The morning was light and clear. Fleecy white clouds swam high in the pure blue sky; the sun rose victoriously, merrily and brightly. The day promised to be wonderful and sunny like the approaching spring! Among this fresh ready to wake up life, my exhausted soul writhed and moaned, submerging into deep, cold and gloomy darkness...

An enormous "ready to use" fire towered in the middle of the small sun-lit square, where I was brought in a covered carriage... I looked at it inwardly shuddering, unable to take my eyes from it. Courage left me. Fear came instead. I did not wish to see what would happen. It promised to be terrible...

Sullen and sleepy people gradually filled the square. They just woke up and were compelled to look at the death of a stranger which did not please them too much... Rome stopped enjoying the

fires of the Inquisition a long time ago. At the beginning there were people interested in the sufferings of others, but now, several years later, people were afraid that any one of them could be in this fire tomorrow. And native Romans abandoned their home town, trying to avoid troubles... They abandoned Rome. The city had just half the number of inhabitants that it had at the beginning of Caraffa's rule. Any more or less normal person refused to stay in it, if it was possible, which was easily understood – Caraffa ignored everybody. Be it an ordinary person or a prince of royal blood (and sometimes even a cardinal of his "holiest" church!). Nobody could stop the Pope. He never appreciated people as they were. They just could please or displease his "holy" eyes. Well, and the rest was very simple – if a person displeased him, he went straight to the fire and his wealth enriched the treasure of his "holiest" church.

Suddenly I felt a soft touch. It was my father! He was saying goodbye to me, being already tied to the nightmarish post...

– I leave, daughter... Be strong. It just is a transition. I won't feel pain. He simply wants to break you. Don't allow him, my joy! We shall meet soon, you know that. There will be no pain. There will be only light...

An executioner came to the fire, bringing the fatal flame with such an air of commonness that it broke my heart. He did it so easily and simply, as if he lit a fire in the fireplace of his house...

My heart began to palpitate feverishly and then stood still... knowing that exactly now my father would leave... I could not stand anymore and mentally cried:

– Father, please, think! It's not too late! You can "waft"! He will never be able to find you! I beg you, father!!!

But he sadly shook his head...

– If I go away, he will haunt Anna. And she will not be able to "waft". Farewell, daughter... Farewell, dear... Remember, I will always be with you. It's time. Farewell, my joy...

A bright shining "column" which shone with a pure bluish light began to sparkle around my father. This wonderful light seized his physical body, as if saying goodbye to him. A golden-bright translucent spirit appeared and affectionately smiled at me... I understood that it was an end. My father left me forever... His spirit began slowly to go up... and a shining channel, blazing up with bluish sparks, closed up. Everything was over... My wonderful kind father, my best friend was no longer with us...

His "empty" physical body flagged, hanging on ropes like a rag-doll... An Honourable and Honest Earthly Life was taken on the senseless order of a mad man...

I felt somebody's familiar presence and I turned around. Sever stood next to me.

– Have courage, Isidora. I came to help you. I know it's a hard time for you. I promised your father that I would help you...

– Help – in what? – I asked bitterly. – Will you help me to destroy Caraffa?

Sever shook his head in negation.

– I don't need any other help. Leave Sever.

I turned from him and continued to look at the burning remains of what was my tender wise father just a minute ago... I knew that he had gone and did not feel this inhuman pain... that now he was very far away from us, speeding into the unknown wonderful world where everything was quiet and well. But for me it was still **his body** that was burning. It was **his dear hands** that hugged me when I was a child, calming me down and protecting me from sorrows and troubles that were burning... It was **his eyes** in which I loved to look very much, seeking his approval, which were burning... It was still my dear kind father who I knew so well and loved so strongly... It was exactly **his body** that the wicked and raging flames now devoured with hungry avidity...

People began to break up. This time they did not comprehend the execution, because nobody told them who the condemned man was and what the guilt he died for was. And the man behaved pretty strangely. Usually people screamed terribly, until their heart stopped from pain. This one

was silent even when the flame devoured him... Well, as is generally known, any crowd does not like the incomprehensible. Therefore many preferred to leave the square, but the Papal guardsmen returned them, forcing them to watch the execution to the end. The crowd began to grumble with dissatisfaction... Carraffa's people took me and by force shoved me into another carriage with "His Holiness" the Pope inside... He was very angry.

– I knew that he would "go away"! Let's go! There is nothing to do here.

– For goodness' sake! I have the right to see it to the end! – I was indignant.

– Oh, don't be ridiculous, Isidora! – The Pope waved with irritation. – You perfectly know that he is not there! It's just a piece of dead meat that is burning. Let's be off!

The heavy carriage left the square, preventing me from watching how the earthly body of the guiltless executed wonderful man – my father – was burning all alone... He was just a "piece of dead meat" for Carraffa, as the "holiest father" had just said... My hair stood on end when I heard such a comparison. Even Carraffa should have an atrocity limit! But apparently, this monster has no limit in anything...

The frightful day came to an end. I sat at the open window, feeling and hearing nothing. The world was frozen and joyless. It seemed that it existed separately, not penetrating into my tired brain or somehow touching me... As usual the indefatigable "Roman" sparrows played and chirped on the window-sill. Human voices and the ordinary daily noise of a bustling city sounded below. But all this came to me through a very dense "wall" which almost did not let sounds in... My usual inner world had become empty and deaf. It became absolutely alien and dark. My darling tender father did not exist. He went away right after Girolamo.

But I still had Anna. And I knew that I must live to save at least her from the refined killer which called himself the "deputy of God" and the saintliest Pope... It was hard to imagine that, if Carraffa was just His "deputy", then what a beast his beloved God had to be?! I tried to come out of the "frozen" state, but apparently it was not so simple a task. My body did not obey, refusing to revive and my tired Soul longed for peace... On seeing that nothing was turning out right, I decided to leave me alone, letting everything run itself.

I left all thoughts and decisions and "flew" away where my wounded Soul aimed to save itself in order to have a bit of rest and forget about everything, going far away from the wicked "earthly" world to one where only light reigned...

I knew that Carraffa would not leave me alone for long, despite **what** I had just been forced to go through. On the contrary, he would think that pain had weakened and disarmed me, and maybe exactly in this moment try to make me surrender, inflicting the next horrific blow...

Days passed, but to my greatest surprise, Carraffa did not show up... It was an enormous relief, but unfortunately, it did not allow me to relax. Because every instant I expected whatever new meanness his dark and wicked soul would invent for me...

The pain was slowly becoming duller with every passing day, mainly, due to a stunningly unexpected and joyful event that happened a couple of weeks before – I could hear my dead father!

I was unable to see him, but heard him very clearly and understood every word, as if he were right next to me. At first I did not believe it, thinking that I simply raved because of total emaciation. But he repeated the call... Indeed, it was my father!

I was beside myself with happiness and all the time I was afraid that suddenly, right now, he would disappear! But my father stayed. Gradually I calmed down and at last could answer him...

– Is it really you!? Where are you now? Why can I not see you?

– My sweet daughter... you don't see me my dear because you're exhausted. Anna sees me. I visited her. And you will see me, dear one. You just need time to calm down.

Pure familiar warmth spread all over my body, wrapping me with joy and light...

– How are you, father!? Tell me how is this other life? What does it look like?

– It's wonderful, dear! A bit unusual and so unlike our former earthly one! People live here in

their **own** worlds. And they are so beautiful, these "worlds"! To tell the truth I have still failed to create one. Probably it's too early... – The voice fell silent for a second, as if hesitating whether to speak further.

– Your Girolamo met me, daughter... He is just as living and loving as he was on Earth... He misses you so much. He asked me to tell you that he loves you very dearly there too... and that he is waiting for you whenever you come... and your mother is with us too. We all love and wait for you, dear. We all miss you terribly... Take care of yourself, sweetheart. Don't give Caraffa the joy of taunting you.

– Will you come to me again father? Will I hear you again? – I begged, being afraid that he might suddenly disappear.

– Be calm daughter, now it is **my** world and Caraffa's power does not extend to it. I will never leave either you or Anna. I will come to you as soon as you call. Calm down, dear.

– What do you feel, father? Do you feel anything? – I asked, feeling slightly embarrassed about the naive question.

– I feel everything the same way I felt on Earth only much stronger. Imagine a pencil picture suddenly filled with colour – all my feelings and thoughts are much stronger and more vivid. There is one more thing... The sense of freedom is absolutely shocking! I feel as if I am the same as I always was, but at the same time I am completely different... I don't know how to explain it to you more precisely, dear... I feel as if I can embrace the whole world or easily fly far, far away, to the stars... Everything seems possible, as if I can do everything I wish! It's very difficult to convey in words... But believe me, daughter, it's wonderful! And there is more... I remember all my lives now! I remember everything that once happened to me... All this is truly amazing! This "other" life is not bad, I must say! Therefore, sweetheart, don't be afraid if you have to come here, we will all be waiting for you.

– Tell me, father... Do such people as Caraffa deserve to live this kind of wonderful life there? It's a terrible injustice, if this is the case! Will everything be like on Earth?! Will he never be requited?!!

– Oh, no my dear. It's not a place for people like Caraffa. I have heard that they go to a terrible world, only I did not visit it yet. They say that those people get what they deserve! I want to look, but did not have time yet. Don't worry, daughter, he will be punished accordingly when he gets here.

– Can you help me from there, father? – I asked with a hidden hope.

– I don't know, dear... I have not understood this world yet. I am like a child taking his first steps... I have to "learn to walk" before I can give you an answer... Now I must go. I am sorry, dear. First I must learn to live in both our worlds. And then I will come to you more often. Stand firm Isidora and do not give in to Caraffa. He will get what he deserves without fail, believe me.

My father's voice gradually became fainter until it thinned and disappeared... My soul calmed down. It was truly HE! And he **lived** again, only now in his posthumous world which I did not know... But he thought and felt everything, even, as he just said, far brighter than it was when he lived on Earth. I could no longer be afraid that I would never hear from him... that he had left me forever...

But my female soul, nevertheless, mourned for him and for myself, being unable to hug him when I felt lonely and to hide my anguish and fear on his broad chest, longing for peace and protection... I grieved that his strong tender palm could not stroke my tired head, as if telling me that everything would all right... I painfully missed those small and seemingly insignificant, but so dear and purely "human" joys, and my soul starved for them, unable to find peace. Yes, I was a warrior... but I was a woman too. I was his only daughter who always knew that if something happened, even the most terrible, my father would always be with me... I painfully missed all this...

I managed to shake off the sorrow that had swept over me and forced myself to think about Caraffa, which always sobered me up and made me pull myself together, because I perfectly

understood that this "calmness" was just a temporary respite...

But to my greatest surprise Caraffa did not show up...

Days passed. My anxiety grew. I tried to explain somehow his absence, but nothing serious came to my mind... I felt that he was preparing something, but could not guess what. My exhausted nerves were strained to the limit. Therefore, in order not to go mad from expectation, I began my everyday walks around the palace. I was not forbidden to go out, but at the same time it was disapproved of. Nevertheless, I decided to go out... despite somebody's possible displeasure. The palace appeared to be enormous and extraordinarily rich. The beauty of its rooms struck my imagination, but personally I would never be able to live in this flashy luxury... The gilt walls and ceiling were somewhat depressing; they suppressed the masterpieces of amazing frescos and strangled them in the blinding glare of the gold. I admired the talent of the painters, who created this miracle, for hours, being sincerely delighted with their exquisite craftsmanship. For the moment nobody disturbed or stopped me: although I constantly met people who, on seeing me, bowed and went farther, hurrying to attend their affairs. Nevertheless, this false "freedom" made me all the more alarmed. This "calmness" could not last forever and I was almost sure that it necessarily would "be delivered" of a terrible misfortune...

To avoid thinking of bad things, I forced myself to explore the shocking Papal palace every day as attentively as possible. I was interested in the limit of the permissible... There should be a "forbidden" place where the "strangers" were not allowed. Oddly enough, I failed to get any reaction from the guards... I could walk everywhere I wished within the borders of the palace, certainly.

So, freely walking about the Pope's dwelling, I raked my mind as to what this inexplicable protracted "break" meant. I knew that Caraffa was in his rooms, which meant that he did not go on long trips, but he also left me alone for some reason, as if he sincerely forgot about my existence...

I met a lot of very different people who visited the "holiest" Pope while I "walked" around the Papal residence. These were cardinals and some officials of high standing (judging by their clothes and how proudly and independently they behaved with others). But after they abandoned the Pope's rooms, none looked as confident and independent as they were before they had entered the Papal study, because, as I said before, nothing mattered to Caraffa, whoever stood in front of him, but HIS WILL. The rest had absolutely no importance. Therefore, quite often I saw very "battered" visitors who bustled to leave the Papal "biting" rooms...

One day, which differed in absolutely nothing from other "gloomy" days, I suddenly decided to fulfill that which had given me no rest for a long time. At last I dared to visit the ominous Papal basement... I knew that it certainly would be "fraught with serious consequences", but the expectation of danger is one hundred times worse than the danger itself.

So, I decided to go...

On getting down the narrow stone steps and opening a heavy, sadly-familiar door, I got into a long damp corridor which smelled of mould and death... There was no illumination, but I found no difficulty in moving, because I could always orientate pretty well in the darkness. A lot of small very heavy doors sadly followed one after another and were lost in the depth of the gloomy corridor... I remembered these grey walls, as well as I remembered the horror and pain which accompanied me every time I came back from there, but I ordered myself to be strong, not to think of the past and just keep going.

*Finally the terrible corridor was over... I peered into the darkness and in the end I discerned the narrow iron door behind which my innocent husband, my poor Girolamo died so brutally. Terrible moans and screams were usually heard behind it... But that day, for some reason, there was not a sound to be heard. Moreover, a strange dead silence reigned behind **all** doors... I almost thought that Caraffa had finally come to his senses! But then I pulled myself up – the Pope was not one of those who calmed down or suddenly became kinder. The matter was that after he had brutally tortured his victims until he got what he wanted, he forgot about them, leaving them to the*

"mercy" of executioners (like unwanted leftovers!)

I cautiously came to one of these doors and easily pressed the handle. The door did not give in. Then I began to grope, hoping to find a bolt. My hand found an enormous key. I turned it and the heavy door crept inside the torture room with a grinding sound... I slowly came into the room and found an extinguished torch. Regrettably, I could not find a fire steel.

– Look a bit more to your left ... – A weak exhausted voice suddenly sounded.

I gave a start. There was somebody in the room! I passed my hand over the left side of the wall and at last found what I had been looking for... The torch was lit and I saw large widely open cornflower blue eyes looking at me... An exhausted man tied with wide iron chains sat on the floor; leaning against the cold stone wall ... I could not see him well, brought the fire closer and jumped back with surprise. The person who sat on the dirty straw, covered with his own blood, was... a cardinal! Judging by his attire, he was of the highest rank, closest to the "holiest" Pope. What made the "holy father" treat his possible successor so cruelly?! Is it possible that Caraffa treated "his people" with the same cruelty he used on others?

– How do you feel, Your Grace? Is there anything I can do for you? – I asked, confusedly looking around.

I was looking at least for a mouthful of water to give it to the unfortunate soul, but there was no water anywhere.

– Look in the wall... There is a door... They keep their wine there... – The man whispered, as if eavesdropping on my thoughts.

I found the indicated closet. There was a large bottle smelling of mould and cheap sour wine. The man did not move. I carefully lifted his head by the chin, trying to make him drink. The stranger was still young enough – forty to forty-five years old – and very unusual. He resembled a sad angel tortured by beasts which, for some reason, call themselves "people"... His countenance was very thin, but very regular and pleasant. Bright cornflower blue eyes burned with mighty internal force in this strange face, like two stars... He seemed to me familiar for some reason, only I could not remember, where and when I could have met him.

The stranger quietly groaned.

– Who are you, Monsignor? How can I help you? – I asked again.

– My name is Giovanni... there is no use for you to know more, Madonna... – The man pronounced hoarsely. – And who are you? How did you get here?

– Oh, it's a very long and sad story... – I smiled. – My name is Isidora, and there is no use for you too to know more, Monsignor...

– Do you know how you can get away from here, Isidora? – The cardinal smiled in reply. – You got here somehow, didn't you?

– Unfortunately, nobody can leave this place so simply. – I answered sadly. – My husband could not... and my father could only go as far as the fire.

Giovanni looked at me very sadly and nodded, showing that he understood everything. I tried to make him drink the wine, but failed – he was unable to take even a tiny sip. I "looked" at him in my way and understood that the poor fellow's chest was terribly damaged.

– Your chest is broken, Monsignor. I can help you... if, certainly, you are not afraid to accept my "witch's" help... – I said, smiling as tenderly as possible.

He attentively scrutinized in my face in the dim light of the burning torch until his eyes, finally, lit up with understanding.

– I know who you are... I remember you! You are the famous Venetian Witch with who His Holiness refuses to part. – Giovanni pronounced quietly. – Legends are told about you, Madonna! Many in the Pope's surroundings wish you were dead, but he listens to nobody. Why does he need you so much?

It was obvious that he spoke with difficulty. At every sigh the cardinal wheezed and coughed, being unable to breathe normally.

– It's very painful for you. Please, let me help you! – I refused to give up, knowing that nobody would help him.

– It does not matter... I think it's better for you to leave this place as quickly as possible, Madonna, until my new jailers come or, which is worse, the Pope himself. – I don't think that he would be very pleased on seeing you here... – The cardinal whispered and then added. – Indeed you are extremely beautiful, Madonna... too beautiful... even for the Pope.

I stopped listening to him and put my hand on his chest. On feeling how the life-giving warmth flew into the broken bone, I disconnected myself from the surrounding world, fully concentrating only on the man in front of me. In a few minutes he breathed deeply but carefully and, on feeling no pain, smiled with surprise.

*– If you had not called yourself a witch, you would have been a Christian saint, Isidora! It's wonderful! Pity that you fulfilled this work in vain... They will come for me soon and I think **after** that I may need more serious treatment... In fact you are familiar with his methods, aren't you?*

– Will they really torture you like all others, Monsignor? You serve his beloved church! And your family, I am sure, is very influential! Is it able to help you?

– Oh, I think they are not going to kill me so quickly... – The cardinal bitterly smiled. – But one is forced to beg for death in Caraffa's basements long before it happens... Right? Leave, Madonna! I shall try to survive and will always remember you with gratitude...

I looked over the stone cell sadly as I suddenly remembered my dead Girolamo hanging on the wall which made my flesh creep... How long will this horror last?! Is it possible that I will fail to find a way to destroy Caraffa and innocent lives will continue to be broken one by one, with impunity?

Steps were heard in the corridor. The door swung open and we saw Caraffa on the threshold.

His eyes sparkled like lightning. Obviously some assiduous servant reported that I had gone to the basements and now His "Holiness" was going to vent his anger on the unfortunate cardinal who helplessly sat next to me...

– Congratulations, Madonna! I see that you obviously like this place, if, even being alone, you come back here! Well, allow me to give you pleasure. Now we shall organize a nice show for you! – He complacently smiled and sat in his favourite large arm-chair, obviously going to enjoy the forthcoming "show".

My head began to spin with hatred... Why?! Why does this monster think that any human life belongs to him and he has a right to take it when he feels like it?

– Your Holiness, are there really heretics among the faithful servants of your beloved church? – I asked in a heavily jeering manner, hardly restraining my indignation.

– Oh, this time it's just serious disobedience, Isidora. There is not a bit of heresy here. I just don't like when my orders are not fulfilled. And every disobedience needs a short sharp lesson for the future, doesn't it, my dear Morone? I think you do agree with me, don't you?

Morone!!! Of course! That is why this man seemed familiar to me! I saw him just once at the Papal personal reception. The cardinal delighted me then with his truly natural grandeur and the freedom of his sharp mind. I remember that Caraffa seemed then very benevolent and satisfied with him. Of what could the cardinal be so guilty now that the rancorous Pope dared to throw him into this terrible stone sack?

– Well, my friend, are you ready to acknowledge your error and come back to the Emperor to remedy it, or will you rot here until I die?... This, as far as I know, will happen in the very distant future...

*I froze... What did it mean?! What changed?! Caraffa was going to live **long**??? And he declared that very confidently! What could have happened to him when he was absent?*

– Don't waste your efforts, Caraffa... It's not interesting anymore. You have no right to torture me and keep me in this basement. And you perfectly know that. – Morone answered very calmly.

He still had his permanent dignity that once delighted me so sincerely. And here our first and only meeting rose up very brightly in my memory...

It happened late at night during one of Caraffa's strange "night" receptions. There were almost no expected visitors left, as suddenly a thin as a rake servant announced that his Grace Cardinal Morone had arrived and, besides, was "in a hurry". Caraffa was evidently pleased. Meanwhile a man entered the hall with a majestic step... Surely he was exactly the one who deserved the higher rank of the church! Tall, slender and smart, magnificent in his bright moire attire, he walked with an easy springy gait on the richest carpets, like on autumn leaves, proudly carrying his beautiful head, as if the world belonged only to him. Pure-bred from the root of his hair to the tips of his aristocratic fingers, he inspired involuntary respect, even in people who don't know him.

– Are you ready, Morone? – Caraffa merrily exclaimed. – I hope you will please us with your efforts! I wish you a happy trip, cardinal. Salute the Emperor on our behalf! – He got up, obviously intending to withdraw.

I hated Caraffa's manner of talking about himself as "we", but this was a privilege of Popes and kings and, naturally, nobody ever tried to dispute it. Such exaggerated accentuation on his importance and exceptionality sickened me. But, certainly, it perfectly suited those who had such privilege without causing any negative feelings in them whatsoever. Paying no attention to Caraffa's words, the cardinal easily went down on bended knee and upon kissing the "ring of sinners", he rose; looking very intently at me with his bright cornflower blue eyes. They reflected unexpected delight and obvious interest... which Caraffa did not like it at all.

– You've come here to see me, not to break beautiful ladies' hearts! – The Pope discontentedly croaked. – Have a pleasant trip, Morone!

– I would like to have a word with you before I undertake anything, Your Holiness. – Not being at all confused, Morone pronounced with all the politeness in the world. – An error on my part can cost us very dearly. Therefore I ask you to give me a bit of your precious time before I leave you.

I was surprised at the trace of prickly irony in "your precious time"... It was very subtle; nevertheless, it surely was there! Therefore I decided to take a closer look at the unusual cardinal, being surprised at his boldness. In fact nobody dared to joke and, moreover, sneer at Caraffa, which showed in this case that Morone was not afraid of him. I decided to find out **the reason** for his confident behaviour, because I never missed the least opportunity to get to know any person who could be of any help to me in the elimination of "His Holiness"... Regrettably, I was not lucky then... Caraffa took the cardinal into his study, ordering me to wait and even giving me no chance to say goodbye to the cardinal. For some reason I had a strange feeling of regret, as if had I missed an opportunity to get somebody's support...

Usually the Pope did not let me be in his study when he received people there. But sometimes, for one or another reason, he suddenly "commanded" me to follow him. I obeyed, thus trying to avoid yet greater troubles, otherwise it would be unreasoning behaviour from my side and, besides, there was no serious grounds to do so. That is why I always went with him, knowing that as usual the Pope would observe my reaction to one or another invited person with some incomprehensible interest. It was absolutely all the same to me why he needed this kind of "entertainment", but those "meetings" allowed me to divert my attention a little from my situation and therefore his odd invitations were worthy of not objecting to.

I never met Cardinal Morone again and soon I forgot about him. And now he sat on the floor in front me, covered with blood, but proud as usual, and he again got my admiration with his ability to keep his dignity even in the most unpleasant circumstances.

– You are right, Morone. I don't have a serious reason to torture you... – He smiled. – But do we really need it? Besides, not all tortures leave visible signs, do they?

I did not wish to stay! I did not wish to see how the monstrous "Holiness" would display his "talents" on an innocent person. But also I perfectly knew that Caraffa would not let me go until he enjoyed my torment too. Therefore, I pulled myself together, as far as my shattered nerves allowed me and prepared myself for watching...

A mighty executioner easily lifted the cardinal, tying a heavy stone to his feet. In the beginning I could not understand what kind of torture that was, but the answer did not keep me waiting... The executioner pulled a lever and the cardinal's body began to rise... I heard a crunch. His joints and vertebrae were dislocated. My hair stood on end! But the cardinal kept silent.

– Scream, Morone! Do me a favour! Maybe then I will let you go earlier. What happened to you? I order you. Scream!!!

The Pope went mad... He hated when people refused to break. He hated when people were not afraid of him... Therefore, the "disobedient" were tortured more persistently and wickedly.

Morone became white as death. Big drops of sweat rolled down his thin face. His self-control was awesome, but I understood that it could not last too long – every living body has its limit... I wanted to help him, to try to anaesthetize him somehow. At once an amusing thought came into my mind which I immediately tried to put into practice – the stone which hung on the cardinal's feet became weightless! Fortunately, Caraffa did not notice it. And Morone lifted his eyes in surprise and immediately closed them not to give it away, but I could see – he understood everything. And I continued to "practise witchcraft" to relieve his pain as much as possible.

– Leave, Madonna! – The Pope exclaimed somewhat chafed. – You hinder me from enjoying the show. I longed to see whether our dear friend managed to be as proud as he was before my executioner's work. You thwart it, Isidora!

It means that he, nevertheless, understood.

Caraffa was not a seer, but he somehow caught a lot of things with his incredibly sharp flair. So it happened now. On feeling that something was happening and not wishing to lose control over the situation, he ordered me to leave.

But now it was me who did not wish to leave. The unfortunate cardinal needed my help and I sincerely wanted to grant it. I knew that, should I leave Morone alone with Caraffa, there would be no knowing whether he would see the following day. Obviously Caraffa did not care a straw about what I wanted... Without giving me a chance to protest, the second executioner almost carried me out the door and urged me toward the corridor, came back into the room where a very brave, but quite helpless good man had to face Caraffa alone.

I stood in the corridor and tried to think of how I could help him. Regrettably, there was no way out of his sad situation. At least I could not find it so quickly... Frankly speaking, my situation was probably worse... Yes, Caraffa did not torture me yet, but the physical pain I would experience was less terrible than the tortures and death of the people I loved... I did not know what happened to Anna and, being afraid to interfere, helplessly waited... I understood from my sad experience too well that should I anger the Pope with some thoughtless action, the terrible result would not keep me waiting – Anna certainly would have to suffer.

Days passed and I did not know whether my girl was still in Meteora; whether the Pope came after her; whether everything was all right with her?

My life was empty and strange, if not to say desperate. I could not leave Caraffa, because I knew that if I disappeared, he would vent his malicious anger on my poor Anna. Also I was unable to destroy him yet, because I could not find the key to his protection which once he received from the "alien" man. Time pitilessly flowed away and I sharply felt my helplessness which together with the impossibility of acting began to slowly drive me crazy...

A month passed after my first visit to the Papal basement. There was nobody with whom I

could exchange a couple of words. Loneliness deeply oppressed me, and every passing day settled more emptiness seasoned with despair in my heart.

I hoped very much that Morone managed to survive despite the Pope's "talents", but I was wary of going back to the basement, because I was not sure whether the unfortunate cardinal was still there. My repeated visit could drive Caraffa really mad and Morone would have to pay for it truly dearly.

I remained shut off any communication and spent days in the total "silence of loneliness" until I finally could not stand it at all and dared to go to the basement...

The room where I found Morone a month ago was empty. I hoped very much that the brave cardinal was still alive and I sincerely wished him luck which Caraffa's prisoners lacked very much.

As I was in the basement anyway, I decided to explore it farther, and carefully opened the door...

An absolutely naked bloodstained young girl lay over a terrible torture "instrument". Her body was a mixture of living singed meat, cuts and blood, which covered her from head to foot... Luckily for me, there was neither executioner nor Caraffa in the torture room.

I quietly came to the poor thing and carefully stroked her swollen tender cheek. The girl began to moan. Then I carefully took her fragile fingers and slowly began to "heal" her... Soon pure grey eyes looked at me in surprise...

– Hush, dear... Be quiet. I'll try to help you, as much as possible. But I don't know whether I'll have enough time for it... You were severely tortured and I am not sure whether I can "patch" it all quickly. Relax, sweetheart, and try to think of something kind... if you can.

The girl (she appeared quite a child) began to moan, trying to say something, but for some reason words failed to come forth. She moaned, unable to pronounce clearly even the shortest word. The terrible understanding flashed through my mind – the poor child did not have a tongue!!! They pulled it out... in order that she could not say "too much", that she did not shout the truth when they burnt her, that she could not reveal what they had done to her...

Oh, my God! Were those who did all this really HUMANS???

I managed to calm my heart and tried to talk to her mentally. The girl could hear me, which meant that she was a gifted one! She was one of those who the Pope hated so furiously and brutally burned alive...

– What have they done to you, sweetheart?! Why have they taken your speech?!

I whispered punch-drunk, while my trembling hands tried to cover her body with rough rags.

– Don't be afraid, my dear. Just think what you would like to say and I'll try to hear you. What is your name, girl?

– Damiana... – The answer rustled.

– Hold on, Damiana. – I smiled as tenderly as possible. – Hold on, don't slip away, I'll try to help you!

But the girl just slowly shook her head, and a pure lonely teardrop rolled down her unmercifully beaten cheek...

– Thank you... for your kindness. But I am not long for this world... – her quiet "mental" voice rustled in reply. – Help me... Help me to "leave". Please... I cannot bear it anymore... They will come back soon... I beg you! They dishonoured me... Please, help me to "go away"... you know how. Help... I'll be grateful to you "there" too, and I always shall remember you...

Her thin fingers, disfigured by tortures grasped my wrist with an iron grip, as if she knew that I could really help her... that I could give her the peace she longed for...

Sharp pain twisted my tired heart... This sweet, brutally tortured girl, almost a child, asked me for **death like a favour!!!** The executioners had not just severely wounded her fragile body; they

defiled her pure soul, raping it too! And now Damiana was ready to "go away ". She asked for death as for relief, without thinking of rescue even for a moment. She was tortured and defiled, and did not wish to live... Anna appeared before my eyes... My goodness, was the same frightful end predetermined for her too?! Will I be able to save her from this nightmare?!

Damiana's pure grey eyes pleadingly looked at me. They reflected a superhumanly deep and wild pain... She could not fight anymore. She had no strength for this. And in order **not to betray herself**, she chose to leave...

What kind of "human being" could inflict such cruelty?! What kind of monsters trample down our pure Earth, desecrating her with their meanness and their black hearts? I quietly cried, stroking the sweet face of a brave unhappy girl who failed to live even a small part of her sad life... Hatred began to burn in my heart! I hated the monster which called himself the Roman Pope... the deputy of God... and the holiest Father... who enjoyed his rotten power and riches; while a wonderfully pure soul left life in his terrible basement. She left it of her own free will... because she could not endure the inhuman terrible pain which the "holy" Pope ordered his executioners to cause her...

Oh, how I hated him!!! I hated him with my whole heart and soul! And I knew that I would take revenge on him, no matter what it would cost me... for all who died so brutally by his order... for my father... for Girolamo... for this kind pure girl... and for the rest from who he easily took the possibility to live their dear and only in this body life...

– I'll help you, girl... I'll help you, dear... – I whispered, tenderly lulling her. – Calm down, darling, there will be no more pain. My father went there... I spoke to him. There will be only light and peace... Relax, sweetheart... I'll fulfill your wish. You will be leaving now. Don't be afraid. You'll feel nothing... I'll help you, Damiana. I'll be with you...

A surprisingly beautiful spirit came out of her disfigured physical body. She looked the way Damiana had been before she found herself in this damned place.

– Thank you... – Her soft voice rustled. – Thank you for your goodness... and for freedom. I shall always remember you.

She began to rise easily along the luminous channel.

– Farewell Damiana... Let your new life be happy and light! You'll find happiness, girl... and good people. Farewell...

Her heart gently stopped... And her soul, worn out with suffering, freely flew away where nobody could cause her pain. The sweet kind girl went away without knowing how wonderful and joyful her broken un-lived life could be... how many good people she could make happy with her Gift... how high and light her love, which she did not have chance to know, could be... and how happily the voices of her unborn in this life children could sound...

Damiana's face became peaceful and smoothed out after death. She seemed asleep, so pure and beautiful she was now... Bitterly sobbing, I sat onto a rough seat next to her empty body... My heart froze, filled with bitterness and resentment for her innocent broken life... A fierce hatred rose somewhere very deep in it, threatening to break forth outside and wipe this criminal terrible world from the face of earth.

Finally I managed to pull myself together, glanced once again at the brave girl-child, mentally wishing her peace and happiness in her new world, and quietly left the terrible room...

The horror I'd seen paralysed my mind, discouraging me from further investigation of the Papal basement... threatening to bring down on me somebody else's suffering which could be even more frightful. I was going to go upstairs, as suddenly I felt a weak, but very persistent call. Surprised, I strained my ears to hear it and finally understood that the call proceeded from here, from the very basement. On forgetting all my former fears, I decided to check.

The call repeated until I came right to the door behind which it sounded...

The cell was empty, damp and dark. A man sat on the straw in the corner. I came closer and

cried out. It was my old acquaintance, cardinal Morone... This time his proud face was red with scratches and it was obvious that he suffered terribly.

– Oh, I am very glad that you are alive! Hello, Monsignor! Did you call me?

He raised himself a little, wincing in pain, and very seriously pronounced:

– Yes, Madonna. I've been calling you for a long time, but for some reason you did not hear, although you were very near.

– I helped a good girl to say goodbye to our cruel world... – I answered sadly. – Why do you need me, Your Grace? Can I help you in something?

– It's not about me Madonna. Tell me, your daughter's name is Anna, isn't it?

The walls of the room began to swing... Anna!!! My God, not Anna! I grabbed a projecting corner in order not to fall down.

– Tell me, Monsignor... You are right; my daughter's name is Anna.

My world began to collapse, even without knowing what was happening... It was enough that Caraffa mentioned my poor girl. There was no reason to expect anything good of it.

– When the Pope was "busy" with me last night, a man reported to him that your daughter left the monastery... And for some reason Caraffa was very pleased. Therefore I decided to find a way to tell you about this. As far as I understand his joy brings misfortune to others. Am I mistaken, Madonna?

– No... You are right, Your Grace. Did he say anything else, even the smallest thing that would help me?

I asked in the hope of getting more, even the most insignificant "addition", but Morone shook his head...

– I am sorry, Madonna. He only said that you had been absolutely wrong, and that love never brought good to anybody ... if it means something to you, Isidora.

I could just nod, trying to put my scattering panic-struck thoughts together and not to show Morone how deeply his news wounded me. Nevertheless, I pronounced as calmly as possible:

– Let me heal you, Monsignor. I think that my "witch" help will be quite useful for you right now. And I thank you for the news... even though bad. It's always good to know the enemy's plans beforehand, even the worst ones, isn't it?

Morone attentively looked into my eyes; trying to find in them an answer to some important for him question. But my soul closed itself from the world in order not to sicken... to stand the forthcoming ordeal to the end... And the cardinal met now the generally accepted "high society look" which prevented him from getting into my horror-frozen soul...

– Are you really afraid of him, Madonna? – Morone gently asked. – You are in fact a thousand times stronger than he! Why are you afraid of him?

– He has something which I am still unable to fight... And therefore I cannot kill him yet. Oh, believe me, Your Grace, I wish I could find the key to this poisonous viper! – Calming down a little, I again offered: – Allow me to help you. I shall relieve your pain.

But the cardinal gently refused.

– Tomorrow I will be in another, quieter place. And I hope that Caraffa will forget about me for a while. But what about you, Madonna; what will become of you? I cannot help you from a prison, but my friends are quite influential. Can they be of any use to you?

– Thank you, Monsignor, for your concern, but I don't cherish vain hopes, hoping to leave this place... He will never let me go... or my poor daughter. I live to destroy him. There must not be a place for him among the living.

– I am sorry that I did not know you before, Isidora. Most likely we would have become friends. And now I bid you farewell. You cannot stay here. The Pope surely will come to wish me "good luck". He should not see you here. Take care of your daughter, Madonna... and do not give in

to Caraffa. *May God be with you!*

– *What God are you talking about, Monsignor? – I asked sadly.*

– *Certainly not the one to which Caraffa prays! – Morone smiled.*

I stayed a second more, trying to save the image of this wonderful person in my soul, waved a farewell and left the room.

The skies fell on me with the squall of anxiety, panic and fear! Where was my brave lonely girl now? What made her leave Meteora? For some reason Anna left my persistent calls without answer, although I knew that she heard me. It made me worry even more and I did my very best not to yield to the panic which was slowly burning my heart, because I knew that Caraffa would immediately take advantage of my weakness, and that meant that I would lose, even having not begun to resist...

I secluded myself in "my" rooms and "licked" old wounds. I did not hope to heal them but simply tried to be as strong and calm as possible in case the open war with Caraffa began... There was no sense in hoping for a miracle, because I perfectly knew that we were not a case for miracles... Everything that is to happen I will have to do by myself.

The impossibility of action was killing me, making me feel forgotten by everybody, helpless and unnecessary... Although I perfectly knew that I was wrong, the worm of "black doubt" gnawed my fevered brain, leaving there a notable print of uncertainty and regret...

*I did not regret that Caraffa had me, but I was panic-stricken for Anna. Also I could not forgive myself the death of my father and Girolamo, my dearest and best people in the world... Will I be able to avenge them some day? May be all are right, telling me that I could not beat Caraffa and that I will not destroy him, but foolishly die myself? Was Sever right, insisting on my coming to Meteora? Has the hope of destroying the Pope lived **only in me** all this time?*

*Also I felt very tired... unhumanly and terribly tired... Sometimes it even seemed to me that it was better to go to Meteora. In fact there were people that went there and for some reason they did not worry about people dying around them. They cared for KNOWING and getting the secret KNOWLEDGE, because they considered themselves **exceptionally** gifted... But if they truly **were** so "exceptional", why then did they forget the simplest, but in my opinion very important, precept of ours – **don't retire, if others need your help**... How could they close themselves so easily, even without looking around and trying to help others? How did they calm their souls?*

*Of course, my "indignant" thoughts did not concern the children of Meteora... It was **not their war**; it was **only the adults'** responsibility... The children will have to go a long way in cognition to be able to protect their home, family and all good people who live on our strange and incomprehensible Earth.*

No, I thought exactly about the adults... I thought about those who considered themselves too "special" to risk their "precious" life, about those who preferred to hide in Meteora behind its thick walls while Earth incessantly bled and lots of gifted people, like they were, went to their deaths...

*I always esteemed freedom and respected the right of free choice for anybody, but there were circumstances in life when our **personal freedom was not worth millions of lives of other good people**... In any case, this was **my** strong conviction and I was not going to change anything. Yes, there were moments of weakness when the sacrifice I was going to make seemed senseless and vain and would change nothing in this cruel world... But then the desire to fight came back... And everything fell into place and I was ready to return to the "battle-field", dedicating the whole of my self to the war and perfectly realizing how unequal the forces in it were.*

The chain of long and hard days continued to creep. I was still kept in suspense and nobody disturbed me. Nothing changed. Nothing happened. Anna kept silent, ignoring my calls. And I had no idea where she was or where I should look for her...

So, one day, being mortally tired of empty and endless waiting, I at last decided to carry out my old sad dream – to visit my beloved Venice for the last time. I decided to "waft" there to say

goodbye, knowing that I never could do it otherwise...

It was May and Venice was decked out, adorned like a young bride, to celebrate its most beautiful holiday – the day of Love.

Love soared everywhere. It saturated the very air of the city! Bridges and channels breathed it. It penetrated into every corner of the elegantly decorated city and into every fibre of **every** lonely soul which lived there... For one day Venice turned into a magic flower of love – burning, heady and beautiful! The streets of the city were swathed in scarlet roses which hung over the water like magnificent "tails", gently caressing it with their fragile scarlet petals... The whole of Venice exhaled fragrance, emitting the odour of happiness and summer. On this day even the most sullen inhabitants of the city left their houses and smiled broadly, hoping that this wonderful day whimsical Love would smile **even at them**, the sad and lonely...

The holiday began in the early morning when the first sunrays began to gild the city channels, heaping on them their hot kisses and making the channels shyly shimmer with red bashful flashes... The first love romances gently sounded under the windows of the still sleeping city beauties... And the magnificently dressed gondoliers had decorated their polished gondolas with festive scarlet the day before and patiently waited at a pier, hoping to get the most beautiful woman of this wonderful magic day.

There were no prohibitions in this holiday for anybody. Young and old poured out into the streets to partake of the forthcoming joy and tried to take the the best places on bridges beforehand to see as closely as possible the gondolas which carried beautiful as Spring, famous Venetian courtesans – those unique women, whose mind and beauty was a matter of admiration for famous poets and painters which immortalized them in their splendid poems and on their magnificent canvasses.

I always considered that love should be **pure**, and never understood or agreed with infidelity. But the courtesans of Venice were not just women who sold love. Apart from always being splendidly beautiful, they also were all excellently educated, far better than any bride from a rich and noble Venetian family. Unlike very well-educated noble Florentine women, the Venetian women of my time were prohibited from entering the public libraries and being "well-read", because the wives of noble Venetians were considered just a beautiful thing, which a loving husband kept enclosed in the house for the "sake" of his family... The higher the status of a lady, the less she was allowed to know. To the contrary, the courtesans usually spoke several languages, played musical instruments, read (and sometimes wrote!) verses, perfectly knew philosophers, understood politics, splendidly sang and danced... In short, they knew everything that, in my opinion, any noble woman **must know**. I always honestly thought that **should the wives of the nobility know even a bit of what the courtesans knew, then loyalty and love would reign forever in our wonderful city...**

I disapproved of infidelity, but also could not respect women who did not know (and did not wish to know!) further than what was inside the Venetian walls. Probably that was the voice of my Florentine blood that spoke, but I hated ignorance! And I disliked people who had unlimited resources to KNOW, but did not want to use it for that sake.

But let us come back into my beloved Venice, which, as I knew, should be preparing for the usual annual festival this evening...

Effortlessly I appeared on the main square of the city.

It seemed that everything was as it had been before. As usual Venice was splendidly decorated, but this time it was almost empty. I walked along lonely channels unable to believe my eyes! It was not late yet, and usually it was the time when the city buzzed like a beehive, anticipating the favourite holiday, but that evening beautiful Venice was empty... I could not understand where all happy faces were! What had happened to my wonderful city in those several short years???

I slowly went onto the deserted wharf and inhaled the so familiar, warm and soft salt air, unable to hold back happy and at the same time sad tears... This was **my home**, my truly beloved

town! Venice remained **MY** city forever! I loved its rich beauty and high culture... Its bridges and gondolas... And its singularity, making it a unique city built only once on Earth.

The evening was very pleasant and quiet. Tender waves gently whispered something and idly swished against stone portals... They fluidly rocked decorated gondolas and escaped back into the sea, carrying away the petals of roses which, on sailing away, looked like scarlet drops of blood which somebody generously sprinkled over the mirror of the water.

Suddenly a very familiar voice pulled me out of my sad-happy dreams:

– I cannot believe my eyes!!!.. Isidora?! Is it really you?!

It was our kind old friend, Francesco Rinaldi who stood dumbfounded looking at me, as if he saw a familiar ghost... He did not dare to believe that it was truly me.

– My God, where have you come from?! We thought that you had died a long time ago! How did you manage to save yourself? Did they really let you go?!

– No, they did not, my dear Francesco. – I sadly shook my head. – Unfortunately, I did not manage to save myself... I came to say goodbye...

– But, how can that be? You are here! And free! And where is my friend?! Where is Girolamo? I have not seen him for ages and missed him so much!

– Girolamo is not with us anymore, dear Francesco... just as my father...

Whether it was that Francesco was a friend from our happy "past" life, or simply I wildly got tired of endless loneliness, but, on telling **exactly him** about the harm that the Pope had done to us, I suddenly felt the unbearably superhuman pain... And at last I gave free reign to my feelings. The waterfall of bitter tears gushed from my eyes wiping off shame and pride, leaving just the thirst for protection and pain of loss... I hid my face on his warm chest and sobbed like a lost child looking for friendly support...

– Calm down, my dear friend... There, there... Please, calm down...

Francesco stroked my tired head, like my father had done it a long time ago. Pain burned, pitilessly throwing me into the past which could not be returned and, which no longer existed, because people who had created this wonderful past did not exist on Earth anymore...

– My home was always your home, Isidora. We have to hide you somewhere! Come to our place! We will do everything we can. Please, come to us! You'll be safe with us!

They were wonderful people, his family... And I knew that if I agreed, they would do everything to hide me, even if their life was fraught with danger because of it. For a short instant I wanted to stay with them so desperately! But I perfectly knew that it would not happen and I would go right away... In order not to cherish vain hopes I sadly said:

– Anna is in the "holy" Pope's claws... I think you understand what it means. And she is the only one who I have now... I am sorry, Francesco.

And then I asked about another thing:

– Tell me, my friend, what happened to the city? What happened to the holiday? Has our Venice changed like everything else?

– It's the Inquisition, Isidora... Damn it! It's all the Inquisition...

– ?!.

– Yes, dear friend, it sneaked even here... And the most frightful thing is that many people fell for it. Probably the wicked and insignificant ones needed something equally "spiteful and insignificant" to happen to open everything that they hid for many years. The Inquisition became the frightful **instrument of human revenge**, envy, lies, avidity and spite! You cannot even imagine, my friend, how low seemingly ordinary people can fall! Brothers slander brothers... children smear their old parents, wishing to get rid of them as quickly as possible... envious neighbours squeal on neighbours... It's awful! Today nobody is safe from the "holy fathers" visits... It's so terrible, Isidora! One only has to say that somebody is a heretic, and you will never see this person again.

It's a true madness... which uncovers in people the lowest and worst... How can one live with it, Isidora?

*Francesco stood stooping down, as if the heaviest load pressed on him like a mountain, preventing him from standing straight. I've known him for a long time and I knew how difficult it was to break this honest, brave, man. But that life hunched him, converting him into a confused senescent Francesco who could not understand this overall human meanness and baseness... And now, looking at my kind old friend, I understood that **I was right when I decided to forget my personal life, giving it in exchange for the death of the "holy" monster** which trampled down the lives of good and pure people. But also it grieved me bitterly that there were low and mean "people" that rejoiced (!!!) at the arrival of the Inquisition, and that the pain of others did not touch their stale hearts. Rather on the contrary – they remorselessly used the claws of the Inquisition to destroy innocent kind people! How far our Earth still was from that happy day when Man will be pure and proud! When his heart will not yield to meanness and evil...; and Light, Sincerity and Love will live on it. Yes, Sever was right – Earth was still too wicked, foolish and imperfect, but I believed with all my heart that some day it would become wise and very kind... only many, many years will have to pass. Meanwhile those who love it have to fight for it, forgetting themselves and their families, not sparing their earthly Life, their only one and very dear for each of them. Being absorbed with my thoughts, I did not notice that Francesco was watching me very attentively, as if wishing to understand whether he had succeeded in persuading me to stay. But the deep sadness in his soft grey eyes told me – he understood... And firmly hugging him for the last time, I began to bid farewell.*

– We'll always remember you, dear. And we'll always miss you... and Giralomo... and your kind father. They were wonderful and pure people. I hope they find another life more safe and kind. Take care of yourself, Isidora... no matter how strange it sounds. Please, try to get away from him, if you can... together with Anna...

I nodded and quickly went along the wharf, not to show how deeply this farewell wounded, and how brutally painful my heart-ache...

*I sat at a parapet and submerged into sad thoughts... The surrounding world was completely different. The joyful and open happiness which lit up our former life had disappeared without a trace. Could people really not understand that they were destroying our wonderful planet with their own hands, filling it with the poison of envy, hatred and malice; that, on betraying others, they immersed their immortal souls into the "black", thus closing the way for salvation? The Volkhs were right, saying that Earth was not ready... **But it does not mean that one has to give up fighting for it!** That one has to sit around twiddling one's thumbs and wait until it "grows up" some day! **We don't leave a child alone to look for the way of maturity on his own, do we? How then can we leave our Earth without indicating the way and hoping that somehow it will be lucky enough to survive on its own?!***

I did not notice how quickly the time flew and was very surprised that the night was falling. It was time to come back. Now my old dream to see Venice and family home did not seem such a good idea... It did not bring me joy, on the contrary – on seeing my native town so different, I felt bitterness and disappointment, nothing more. I glanced at the so familiar and once beloved scenery once again, closed my eyes and "wafted", perfectly understanding that I would never see it again...

Caraffa sat at the window in "my" room, being fully submerged in some sad thoughts, hearing and noticing nothing around... I appeared in front his "holy" eyes so unexpectedly, that the Pope gave a start, but immediately pulled himself together and surprisingly calmly asked:

– Well, well. So where did you walk, Madonna?

His voice and eyes expressed strange indifference, as if it was absolutely the same to the Pope what I did and where I went. It put me on my guard. I knew Caraffa quite well (I think nobody knew him fully) and this kind of strange calmness portended nothing good.

– I went to Venice, Your Holiness, to say goodbye... – I answered calmly.

– Where you pleased?

– No, Your Holiness, I was not. It's not the same city as I remember it.

– See, Isidora, even cities have changed in such short time, not only people... and the states, probably, too, if we look closer. Can't I change?

He was in a strange mood, very unlike him, therefore I tried to answer very carefully, not to touch by chance some "prickly" corner and get caught in the thunderstorm of his "holy" anger which can destroy a far stronger person than me.

– Was it not you, Holiness that I remember saying you would live very long? Has anything changed since then? – I asked quietly.

– Oh, it was just a hope, my dear Isidora! It was just a foolish and vain hope which was blown away like smoke...

I waited patiently for him to continue, but Caraffa was quiet, being again submerged in his sad thoughts.

– I am sorry, Your Holiness, do you happen to know what has become of Anna? Why did she leave the monastery? – I asked, almost without a hope for an answer.

Caraffa nodded.

– She is coming here.

– But why?! – My heart froze, having a bad presentiment.

– She is coming to save you. – Caraffa pronounced calmly.

– ?!!

– I need her here, Isidora. But in order that they let her go from Meteora, **her** desire was needed. So I helped her to "decide".

– Why do you need Anna, Your Holiness?! You wanted her to study there, didn't you? Why was it necessary to send her to Meteora then?

– Life is slipping away, Madonna... Nothing stands still, especially Life... Anna will not help me in what I need so eagerly... even if she studied there for a hundred years. I need you, Madonna. Precisely **your** help is what I need... And I know that I cannot persuade you so easily.

So, it came at last... the most frightful one. I did not have time to kill Caraffa! And my poor daughter had become the next on his terrible list... My brave sweet Anna... For a fraction of a second our fate suddenly opened to me... it was dreadful...

39. Isidora-5. The Darkness

Caraffa stayed for a little while in "my" rooms without uttering a word, then rose to leave and very calmly pronounced:

– I'll inform you when your daughter arrives here, Madonna. I think it'll be very soon. – He bowed with the air of a man of the world and withdrew.

I gathered what was left of my strength, trying not to give way to black despair, took off my shawl with my trembling hand and sat on the nearest sofa.

What could I, exhausted and lonely, do? How could I protect my brave girl who fearlessly entered into the war with Caraffa? What kind of lies did they tell her to make her leave Meteora and come back to this Hell on Earth cursed by God and people?

I could not even imagine **what** Caraffa had prepared for Anna... She was his **last** hope and his **last** weapon which, I knew, he would try to use in the best way he could to make me surrender, which meant that Anna would have to suffer terribly.

I was unable to cope with such hurt alone; I tried to call my father. He appeared at once, as if he awaited my call.

– Father, I am so scared! He is taking Anna! I don't know whether I will be able to protect

her... Help me, father! At least give me some advice...

There was nothing in the world I would not agree to give to Caraffa in exchange for Anna. I would agree to anything... except for one – the gift of immortality, which, unfortunately, was **the only thing** the holy Pope wished for.

– I am so afraid for her, father! I saw a girl here. She was dying. I helped her to go... Will Anna have to undergo the same severe trials too?! Is it possible that we will not be able to save her?

– **Don't let fear into your heart**, daughter, no matter how painful it is for you. Don't you remember what Girolamo taught his daughter? **Fear can make what you're afraid of, a reality. It opens doors.** Don't let fear weaken you before you even start fighting, my dear. Don't let Caraffa win before you even begin resisting.

– What should I do, father? I have not found his weakness. I have not found what he is afraid of... and I have almost no time left. What should I do, tell me?

I understood that our, mine and Anna's, short lives were coming to their sad end... And Caraffa still lived, and I did not know yet what I should begin with to destroy him...

– Go to Meteora, daughter. Only they can help you. Go there, my heart.

Father's voice sounded very sad. Perhaps, just like me, he did not believe that Meteora would help us.

– But they said no to me, father, you know that. They believe too strongly in their old "truth" which they once suggested to themselves. They won't help us.

– Listen to me, daughter... Go back there. I know you don't believe... But they are the only ones who can help you. There is nobody else to ask. I must go now... I am sorry dear. But very soon I'll come back to you. I will not leave you, Isidora.

My father's spirit began to "sway" and melt, and totally disappeared in a second. I confusedly looked at the place where his transparent body had shone just a second ago and realized that I did not know at all what to begin with...

Caraffa declared too confidently that Anna very soon would be in his criminal hands, therefore I did not have much time left for fighting. I got up, shook off my distressing thoughts and decided to follow my father's advice and visit Meteora again. Anyway, it could not be worse than it already was; therefore I tuned in to Sever and went...

This time there were neither mountains, nor wonderful flowers... I found myself in a spacious and very long stone hall, at the far end of which was something incredibly bright and appealing that sparkled like a dazzling emerald star. The air around it shone and pulsated, splashing out long tongues of green "flame" which flashed and brightly lit the enormous hall to the very ceiling. Sever stood near this extraordinary beauty, being deep in his sad thoughts.

– Peace to you, Isidora. I'm glad you came. – He warmly pronounced, turning around.

– Peace to you too, Sever. I came for a short while. – I answered, doing my best not to relax and yield to the charm of Meteora. – Tell me, Sever, how could you let Anna go? You knew **where** she was going! How could you let her go?! I hoped that Meteora would protect her, but it betrayed her so easily... Explain that to me please, if you can...

He looked at me with his sad and wise eyes without uttering a word, as if everything had been said and nothing could be changed... Then he negatively shook his head and softly replied.

– Meteora did not betray Anna, Isidora. It was **her** decision to leave. She is a not child anymore. She thinks and decides in her own way, and we have no right to keep her here by force, even if we are not in agreement with her decision. She was told that Caraffa would torture you, if she refused to come back. Therefore Anna decided to leave Meteora. Our rules are very strict and unchanging, Isidora. Should we break them, just once, the next time a reason to start quickly changing our life here would be found. This is unacceptable. We are not free to turn from our way.

– You know, Sever, **I think exactly THIS is your principle error...** You blindly locked yourself

into your infallible laws, which, if one looks at them closely, will turn out to be empty and even naive. You deal here with **outstanding** people, each one is a treasure. Those extraordinary bright and strong people cannot be adjusted to one and the same law! They simply will not submit to it. Sever; you must be more flexible and understanding. Sometimes life becomes too unpredictable, just like the circumstances, and you **can not judge identically the USUAL** things and those **beyond your archaic "limits" which you established a long time ago**. Do you really believe that your laws are correct? Tell me honestly, Sever!

Perplexed, he scrutinized my face, as if he could not decide whether he should tell me the truth or leave everything as it was to protect his wise soul from regrets.

– Our laws, Isidora, were not created in one day... Centuries passed and volkhvs paid for their errors. Therefore if something does not sometimes seem quite correct to us, we prefer to see the all-embracing picture of life without switching to individuals, no matter how painful it is...

I would give a lot, if you agree to stay with us! Probably one fine day you could change our Earth, Isidora. You have a very rare Gift and you can **truly THINK**. But I know that you will not stay. You will not betray yourself. And I cannot help you in anything. I know that you will never forgive us as long as you live... like Magdalena never forgave us for the death of her beloved husband Jesus-Radomir... We begged her to come back, offering protection to her children, but she never came back to us... We have been living with this load for many long years, Isidora, and believe me, there is no heavier load in the world! But this is our fate, unfortunately, and it cannot be changed until the real day of "awakening" comes on Earth... when we will not need to hide anymore, when Earth, finally, will be truly pure and wise ... and lighter... Then we will be able to think about **every** gifted one, being not afraid that Earth will destroy us, that Faith and Knowledge and the **KNOWING** ones will disappear on Earth, if we disappear...

Sever drooped down, as if in his heart of hearts he **disagreed** with what he just told me... I felt with the whole of my heart that he rather believed in what I believed. But I also knew that he would not confide in me, thus keeping him from betraying Meteora and his great Teachers. Therefore I decided to leave him alone and torment him no more...

– Tell me, Sever, what became of Maria Magdalena? Do her descendants live somewhere on Earth?

– Of course, Isidora! – Sever answered enthusiastically. It seemed to me that he was sincerely happy about the change of subject...

– After Christ's death Magdalena left the cruel and wicked land which had bereaved her of the dearest one in the world to her. She left taking her child-daughter who was only four years old then. And her eight year old son was secretly taken to Spain by the Knights Templar in order that he would survive and ensure the continuity of his father's great line. If you wish I'll tell the **true** story of their life, because what is given to people **today** is simply a story for the ignorant and blind...

I nodded.

– Please, tell me the truth... Tell me about them, Sever...

His thoughts flew far-far away, submerging into old, covered with the ashes of centuries, innermost recollections. And the surprising story began...

– As I have already told you before, Isidora, after the death of Jesus and Magdalena shameless lies were woven into their light but sad life, just as into the lives of the descendants of this outstanding and brave family... They were forced to "**wear**" a **STRANGE FAITH**. Their pure images were **surrounded by the lives of STRANGE PEOPLE** who had been long dead before they come into this world... **WORDS** they **NEVER SAID** were ascribed to them... They were made **RESPONSIBLE FOR CRIMES** which the **STRANGE FAITH**, the most lying and criminal one that ever existed on Earth, **HAD COMMITTED AND IS STILL CONTINUING TO COMMIT...**²

² Author's remark: It's been many many years since I met Isidora. And now, when I remember and re-live those

I felt that this story did not come easy to Sever. Apparently his big open heart still refused to accept such a loss and still strongly ached, but he honestly continued to tell further, perfectly understanding that later I would not be able to ask him anything.

*– Do you remember, Isidora, I told you that Jesus-Radomir never had **anything in common** with those lying teachings about which the Christian Church shouts its head off? It is **absolutely opposite** to what Jesus, and later, Magdalena, taught. They taught people the **real KNOWLEDGE**. They taught what we taught them here, in Meteora... And Maria knew even more, because she could easily get knowledge from Big Space, after she left us. They lived being closely surrounded by Veduns and gifted ones, who people later renamed "apostles"... which in the notorious "Bible" appeared as old and distrustful israelites... who, I think, **would betray Jesus a thousand times, if they could**. In reality it was the Knights Templar who were his "apostles". This Temple was not built by human hands but **created by Radomir's highest thought. It was a Spiritual Temple of Truth and Knowledge**. In the beginning there were just **nine** of those knights and they gathered together to protect Radomir and Magdalena in the strange and dangerous country into which their fate threw them so pitilessly. Another task of the Knights Templar was (if something terrible were to happen!) to **save the TRUTH** which these two wonderful and light human beings brought to the **Israelites – "hopeless souls"** – dedicating their Gift and pure Lives to peace on their dear but still very cruel planet...*

*– Does this mean that the "apostles" were **completely different people too**?! What were they? Can you tell me about them, Sever?*

*The story so captivated me that for a short moment I even succeeded in "lulling" my torments and fears and forgot the forthcoming pain! I brought down a squall of questions on Sever, being not sure whether there were answers to them. I was so eager to know the **real** story of these brave people, which would not be debased by the lies of the long five hundred years!!!*

*– Oh, they were truly wonderful people, those Knights Templar, Isidora! Together with Radomir and Magdalena they created a magnificent skeleton of COURAGE, HONOUR and FAITH on which the light TEACHINGS, which our ancestors once left to rescue our Earth, was built. **Two** of them were our disciples and also **hereditary warriors** from the ancient European aristocratic families. Here they became brave and gifted **Veduns** ready to do anything and everything to save Jesus and Magdalena. **Four** of them were **descendants of the Ruses-Merovingians** and also had a prodigious Gift, as did all their distant ancestors – the kings of Frankia... as well as Magdalena who descended from this amazing dynasty and proudly carried her family Gift. **Two** were our Volkvs who voluntarily **left** Meteora to protect their beloved Disciple, Jesus-Radomir, who went to meet his death. They **could not betray Radomir in their hearts**, and even knowing **what** awaited him, followed him without compunction. Well, the last, **the ninth** knight-defender, about who nobody knows and writes, was **Christ's brother**, the White Volkhv's son **Radan** (Ra-dan=given by Ra)... He managed to save Radomir's son after his death, but on protecting him, he, unfortunately, died...*

– Tell me, Sever, has it something to do with a legend about twins which says that Christ had a twin brother? I read about it in our library and always wanted to know whether it was true or just the next lie of the "holy fathers"?

– No, Isidora. Radan was not Radomir's twin. It would be an undesirable additional danger to the life of Christ and Magdalena which was difficult enough without it. Do you know that twins are bound too closely by the filament of their birth, and that a life-threatening danger for one can be a danger for the other? – I nodded. – Therefore the volkhvs could not make this kind of mistake.

– It means that not all in Meteora betrayed Jesus! – I happily exclaimed. – Not all looked calmly as he went to meet his death!

remote years, I was able to find (being in France) quite interesting material which confirms Sever's story about the life of Maria Magdalena and Jesus-Radomir. I think it will be of interest all who read Isidora's story and could probably help to shed some light on the lies of "the mighty of this world". You will find the material in the Addendum after Isidora's story.

– Of course not, Isidora! We all would go to protect him, but not all managed to step over their Duty... I know you don't believe me, but we all loved him very much... and, of course, Magdalena. It's just that not all could forget their duties and give up everything for one man, no matter how special he was. **You**, in fact, **give your life to save many**, don't you? Our volkhvs too stayed in Meteora to keep the Sacred Knowledge and teach other gifted ones. Such is life, Isidora... and everybody makes it better the best way he can.

– Tell me Sever, why do you call Frankish kings Ruses? Did these two peoples have anything in common? As far as I remember they were always called Franks? And later beautiful Frankia became France, did not it?

– No, Isidora. Do you know what the word "franks" means? – I negatively shook my head – "Franks" simply means **free**. And the Merovingi were **north Ruses** who came to teach free Franks the art of war, the ruling of the country, politics and science (just as they came to other countries, being born for teaching and the good of other people). Their correct name was **Meravingly** (We-Ra-in-Inglia; **we are children of Ra, bearing Light in the native Primordial Ingli**). But, of course, later this word, as well as a lot of others, was "**simplified**"... and it began to sound like "Merovingi". Thus a new "history" was created, saying that the name of the Merovingi had originated from the name of the king of the Franks, Merovech, although the name of the dynasty had **nothing to do** with King Merovech, especially taking into account that he was the **thirteenth** Merovingian king; would not it be more logical to call the dynasty by the the name of the **first** king? The same thing concerns another foolish legend about a "sea monster" which allegedly produced the dynasty of the Merovingi – this name, naturally, **has nothing to do with it**.

Apparently the Thinking Dark ones aim was that people would not know the **real meaning** of the NAME of the ruling dynasty of the Franks. Therefore they renamed and converted them into "weak, unlucky and pitiful" kings, once again distorting the **real** world history. The Meravingly were a bright, clever and gifted dynasty of the north Ruses who voluntarily left their great motherland and mixed their blood with the higher European dynasties of that time in order to produce a new mighty Dynasty of magicians and warriors who would be able to govern countries and people, which then inhabited a semicivilized Europe, wisely. They were wonderful magicians and warriors. They could heal suffering and teach the desrving.

All Meravingly wore very long hair which they **agreed never to cut under any circumstances**, because they got the Life Force via it. Unfortunately, the Thinking Dark ones also knew about that. Therefore the forced "haircut" of the last Merovingian royal family became the most terrible punishment. It happened after the treachery of the Jewish royal treasurer, who, using lies, cunningly set brother against brother and son against father in this family, and then easily played on human pride and honour... This was the first time a former stronghold was shaken in the royal family of the Meravingly and the firm faith in the unity of the Kin showed the first deep crack... The many centuries war of the Meravingly with the opposing Kin began to come to a sad end... The last **real** king of this wonderful dynasty Dagobert II was treacherously killed, just like many before. A hired assassin killed him at the hunt with a poisoned spear **in the back**. This was how the most gifted European dynasty, which brought light and power to the unenlightened European people ended, more precisely, was exterminated.

As you see, Isidora, cowards and betrayers of all times **did not dare to fight openly**, perfectly knowing that they could never win **fairly**, but **with the help of lies and baseness they defeated even the strongest ones**, using the honour and conscience of the latter to their benefit... and did not worry about their "dying in lies" soul. Thus, on destroying "the **enlightened** that impeded", the Thinking Dark ones invented whatever "history" **they wanted**. And people for whom this kind of "history" was created easily accepted it, even without trying to think a little... It is our Earth, Isidora. And I am sincerely sad and feel bad that we failed to wake it up.

My heart suddenly began to ache bitterly and painfully... That means that at all times there were light and strong people who bravely but hopelessly fought for happiness and the future of humanity! And, as a rule, they all died... What was the reason for such a cruel injustice? What was

the reason for this mortal end to happen over and over again?

– Tell me, Sever, why do the purest and strongest always die? I know that I have already asked this question... But I cannot understand it yet. Do people really not see how wonderful and happy their life would be, if they listened to at least one of those who fought for them so fervently?! Are you really right and Earth is so blind that it is still too early to fight for it?!

Sever sadly shook his head and affectionately smiled.

*– You know the answer to this question, Isidora... But you won't give up, even if this cruel truth frightenes you, will you? You are a Warrior and you always will be. Otherwise you would betray yourself and the sense of life would be lost for you forever. **We are what we ARE.** And no matter how strongly we change, our **core** (or our **basis**) will be **what our ESSENCE truly is.** In fact if a person is still "blind", **there is a hope** that one day he **might** "see the light", isn't there? Or if his brain still sleeps, it **might** wake up one day. But if a person is "rotten" to the core, then no matter how hard he tries, one day his rotten soul will out... and kill any of his attempts to look better. To the contrary, if Man is truly honest and brave, the fear of pain or the most terrible threats cannot break Him, because his soul, His **ESSENCE** will **remain** brave and pure **forever**, no matter how cruelly he suffered. But at the same time this is His weakness and misfortune, because, being truly Pure, He is unable to see treachery and meanness **before** it is obvious and too late to undertake anything to remedy the situation... He cannot foresee these kinds of things, because He never knows these low feelings. They **never are part of him.** Therefore the lightest and bravest people on Earth will always die, Isidora. It will go on until **EVERY** earthly human being wakes up and understands that **life is not a freebie**, that one must **fight to make it wonderful** and that Earth will not be better until he **fills it with his goodness and embellishes it with his labour**, no matter how small or insignificant it is. But as I have already told you, Isidora, it will not happen for a very long time, because today man is concerned exclusively with his **personal well-being**, without taking the trouble to think of why he came on Earth... Because every **LIFE**, no matter how insignificant it seems to be, comes on Earth with a certain aim, mostly to make our common **HOME** better, merrier, mightier and wiser.*

*– Do you think that an ordinary man will be interested in the **common good** some time? In fact many people are unaware of this concept. How can we teach them, Sever?*

*– It cannot be taught, Isidora. A **necessity** for Light and Good must emerge in people. They **must wish to change of their own free will.** Because man instinctively tries to reject everything that is forced upon him as quickly as possible, even without making a slightest attempt to understand anything. But we have digressed from the subject, Isidora. Do you wish me to continue the story of Radomir and Magdalena?*

I nodded an affirmative, being terribly sorry that I could not calmly converse with him, without worrying about the last minutes of my broken life which fate allotted to me or, horrified, thinking of Anna threatened with terrible danger...

– The Bible says a lot about John the Baptist. Was he truly with Radomir and the Knights Templar? His character is so surprisingly good that sometimes I doubted whether John was a real figure? Can you say something about it, Sever?

Sever warmly smiled, apparently remembering something very pleasant and dear to him...

*– John was wise and kind like a big warm sun... He was a father for all who went with him. He was their teacher and friend... He was appreciated, obeyed and loved. But he never was that amazingly beautiful young man that we usually see in paintings. At that time John was a quite old, but still very strong and firm, Volkhv. Grey-haired and tall, he looked more like a mighty epic warrior than a handsome and tender youngster. He had a very long hair, just as did all who were with Radomir. It was **Radan** who was that young tender man. He was extraordinarily handsome indeed. Like Radomir, he lived in Meteora from his early years with his mother, Vedunia Maria. Do you remember, Isidora, how many pictures there are where Maria is painted with two children of almost the same age? For some reason all famous painters drew them. Most likely, they did not*

even understand *WHO* in reality they drew... It is of interest that in all these pictures Maria looks **exactly at Radan**. Probably, being whilst a baby, Radan was the same merry and appealing being that he remained for the rest of his short life...

And there is another thing... if it was **exactly John** in these pictures, then how could he manage to **get old so rapidly by the time of his execution at Salome's whim**? According to the Bible it happened **before Christ was crucified**, which means that John could not be more than thirty four years! **How then did a softly good-looking golden-haired young lad turned into an old and quite unattractive Jew?!**

– Does this mean that the Volkhv John did not die, Sever? – I rejoiced. – Or did he die otherwise?

– Unfortunately, the **real John** was beheaded, Isidora, but the ill-will of a capricious spoilt woman had nothing to do with it. **The reason for his death was the treachery of a Jewish "friend" who he trusted and in whose house he had lived for several years...**

– But how could it be that he did not feel? How could he not see what kind of a "friend" this was?! – I was indignant.

– Probably, because it is impossible to suspect everybody, Isidora... I think they found it difficult enough to trust at least somebody and, besides, they all had somehow to adapt and live in that unknown country, don't forget that. It is why they had to choose the lesser of two evils. But it is impossible to foresee everything; as you perfectly know, Isidora... The Volkhv John's death happened in reality **after** Radomir's crucifixion. The Jew in whose house John lived with the late Jesus's family poisoned him. One evening, when everybody in the house slept, the host conversed with John and treated him to his favourite tea with the strongest herbal poison... The next morning nobody could understand what had happened. According to the host, John just instantly fell asleep and never woke up... His body was found in the morning in his bloodstained bed with... his head chopped off... The host also said that the Israelites feared John very much, because they considered him a mighty and unsurpassed magician, and **in order to be absolutely sure that he would never rise from the dead**, they beheaded him. Later the Knights Templar bought (!!!) John's head from them and managed to save and bring it to the Valley of Magicians, thus giving John this tiny but deserving respect and preventing the Israelites from desecrating him, carrying out their magic rituals. Since then John's head had always been with them wherever they were. It was John's head that was the reason for accusing the Knights Templar of Devil-worship two hundred years later... You remember the last "Knights Templar case", don't you, Isidora? It was exactly then they were accused of worshipping the "speaking head" which enraged the clergy.

– Forgive me, Sever, but why did the Knights Templar not bring John's head here, to Meteora? As far as I understand, you all loved him very much! And how do you know all these details? You were not with them, right? Who told you all this?

– Vedunia Maria, the mother of Radan and Radomir, told us this sad story...

– Did Maria come back here after Jesus's execution?! As far as I know, she was with her son during the crucifixion. When did she come back to you? Is it possible that she still lives? – I asked, holding my breath.

I wanted so much to see somebody from those honourable brave people! I wanted so much to "charge" myself with their self-control and force for my forthcoming last fight!

– No, Isidora. Regrettably, Maria died centuries ago. She did not wish to live long, although she could. I think her pain was too deep... She went with her sons to an unknown and far away country (many years before their death), and, on being unable to protect any of them, Maria did not return to Meteora, going with Magdalena instead. We thought then that she was gone forever... On getting tired from bitterness and losses after the death of her beloved granddaughter and Magdalena, Maria decided to leave the cruel and merciless life... But before "going away" forever, she came to Meteora to say goodbye and tell us the true story of the death of those who we all loved so much... Also she came back to see the White Volkhv for the last time... her spouse and faithful

friend who she was unable to forget. She forgave him in her heart, but to his great regret she could not bring Magdalena's forgiveness... So, as you can see, Isidora, the great Christian fable about **"universal forgiveness"** is simply a child's lie for naive believers to let them do any Evil, knowing that whatever they did, they will be always forgiven in the end. But one should forgive only that, which is truly worthy of forgiveness. Man must understand that he has to answer for any Evil he does... and not before some mysterious God, but before himself, making himself suffer cruelly. Magdalena did not forgive the White Volkhv, despite that she deeply respected and sincerely loved him, just as she could not forgive all of us for Radomir's terrible death, because it was **precisely SHE** who understood better than all that we could help him and save him from that cruel death... but we did not want to. Considering the White Volkhv's guilt too heavy, she left him to live with this guilt and remember it every minute of his life... She did not want to grant easy forgiveness to him. We never saw her again, or her children. Via a Knight Templar, who also was our volkhv, Magdalena sent an answer to the White Volkhv after he had asked her to come back to us: "The Sun does not rise twice in one day... The joy of your world (Radomir) will never come back to you, just as I shall not come back to you... I found my FAITH and my TRUTH, they are LIVING, and yours is DEAD... Mourn your sons. They loved you. I will never forgive you their death as long as I live. Let your guilt be with you. Maybe some time it will bring you Light and Forgiveness... but not from me." The Volkhv John's head was not brought to Meteora for the same reason. None of the Knights Templar wanted to come back to us... We lost them, just like many times we lost many others who did not want to understand and accept our sacrifice... who, like you, left, blaming us.

My head spun! Like a hungry traveller, I appeased my eternal hunger for knowledge and voraciously absorbed the stream of amazing information, generously given by Sever. I wanted much more! I wanted to know everything to the end. It was a mouthful of fresh water in a desert scorched by pain and anguish! I could not slake my thirst...

– I have thousands of questions! But there is not time... What should I do, Sever?

– Ask, Isidora! Ask and I'll try to answer you...

– Tell me, Sever, why does it seem to me that this story contains **two life stories** which are entwined with similar events, and they are **presented as the life of one person**? Or am I mistaken?

– You are absolutely right, Isidora. As I have already told you before, the "mighty of this world", who created the false history of humanity, **"overlaid" Christ's true life with the stranger life of the Jewish prophet Joshua, who lived one and a half thousand years ago** (by the time Sever told this story), and also with the life of his family, relatives, friends and followers. In fact it was exactly **the Prophet Joshua's wife, the Jewish Maria** who had a sister Martha and brother Lazarus. His mother had a sister Maria Jacobe. And there were others who **never were together with Radomir and Magdalena**. Just as well the stranger "apostles" – Paul, Matthew, Peter, Luke and others were never with them... **It was the prophet Joshua's family** that more than one and a half thousand years ago moved to Provence (which then was called Transalpine Gaul), into the Greek city of Massalia (now Marseille), because Massalia was a "gate" between Europe and Asia then, and it was the easiest solution for all "persecuted" to avoid pursuits and troubles. The real Magdalena moved to Languedoc **a thousand years later than the Jew Maria was born**, and she came back **Home**, instead of escaping from one lot of Israelites to another like the Jewish Maria who never was the Light and Pure Star which the **real Magdalena** was.

The Jewish Maria was a kind, but not bright woman who was given in marriage while still being very young. And she was never called Magdalena... They "hung" this name on her, wishing to unite these two incompatible women in one. In order to prove this ridiculous legend, they invented the false story about the city of Magdala which did not exist in Galilee in the life-time of the Jewish Maria... This outrageous "story" of **two Jesuses** was intentionally entangled so much that an ordinary person found it too difficult to get to the truth, and only those who were truly able to think saw **what terrible lies Christianity – the most cruel and blood-thirsty of all religions – brought**. However, as I have already told you before, the overwhelming majority of people **do not like to THINK** independently. Therefore they accept and take everything, whatever the Roman Church

teaches, on trust. It was so comfortable, and so it remained always. Man was not ready to accept Radomir and Magdalena's **real TEACHING** which required labour and independent thinking. People always liked and approved everything that was extremely simple and told them **what they should believe in**, what they **should accept** and what they **should deny**.

For a fraction of a second I felt terribly scared – Sever's words reminded me too much of what Caraffa had said! But my "rebellious" soul refused to agree that a blood-thirsty killer, the Pope, could be truly right in something...

– It was the Thinking Dark ones who needed this religion for slaves to strengthen their domination in our fragile and still **incipient** world... **to prevent him from ever being born...** – Sever calmly continued. – To be sure of success in enslaving our Earth, the Thinking Dark ones found this small, but very flexible and vain Jewish people, which only they could understand. By virtue of their "flexibility" and mobility, they easily yielded to the exterior influence and became a dangerous instrument in the hands of the Thinking Dark ones which found the Jewish prophet Joshua and slyly "interlaced" **the story of his life** with that of Radomir; thereby destroying his **real** biography and substituting a fake one designed to make naive human minds believe in this kind of "story". There is more. The Jewish prophet Joshua **had nothing to do with the religion called Christianity...** It was created by order of the Emperor Konstantin, who needed a **new religion** to give a **new "bone"** to the people who had slipped from his control. And they swallowed it without thinking twice... our Earth is still the same, Isidora. A lot of time needs to pass before anyone can change it. A lot of time will pass before people will want to THINK... unfortunately...

– All right, they are not ready yet, Sever... But you do see that people are easily open to new things! Does it not show that humanity (in its own way) is LOOKING for ways up to **genuine** things and that people aspire to TRUTH and there is simply nobody to show it to them?

– **It is possible to show the most valuable Book of Knowledge in the world a thousand times with zero result**, if a person cannot read, isn't it, Isidora?

– But you TEACH your students in fact! – I exclaimed with anguish. – They too **did not know everything at once** before they got to you! **So, teach humanity!!! It is worthy of not being let disappear!**

– Yes, Isidora, **we teach our students**. But the gifted ones who get here can do the most important thing – they are able to THINK... and the rest are still the "guided" ones. And we have neither time nor desire for them, until **their time** comes and they deserve some of us to teach them.

Sever was absolutely convinced of his rightness and I knew that no arguments could persuade him otherwise. Therefore I decided not to insist more...

– Tell me, Sever, what facts from Jesus's life are truly genuine? Can you tell me how he lived? And how could it happen that having such powerful and faithful support, he, nevertheless, lost? What happened to his children and Magdalena? How long did she live after his death?

He smiled his wonderful smile...

– You remind me of young Magdalena... She was the most curious of all and all the time asked questions to which even our volkhvs found it difficult to find answers sometimes!

Sever again submerged into his sad memory, meeting there those who he still deeply and sincerely missed.

– She was really an amazing woman, Isidora! She never gave up and did not spare herself, just like you... At any moment she was ready to give herself for those who she loved and who she considered more worthy, and simply – for LIFE... Fate did not spare her, bringing down the load of irrevocable losses on her fragile shoulders, but to the last moment of her life she furiously fought for her friends, her children and for all who continued to live on earth after Radomir's death... People called her the **Apostle of all Apostles**. And she truly was ... only not in the sense in which the "scriptures" written in Hebrew, a language alien to her in its essence, presented her. Magdalena was the mightiest Vedunia... **the golden Maria** – this was what people, who met her at least once, called her. She carried the pure light of Love and Knowledge and was completely saturated with it.

She gave everything to others, holding nothing back, not sparing herself. Her friends loved her very much and were ready to give their lives for her without thinking twice! They were ready to sacrifice themselves for her and the teachings which she continued to spread after the death of her beloved husband Jesus-Radomir.

– *Forgive me my scant familiarity, Sever, but why do you call Christ Radomir all the time?*

– *It's very simple, Isidora. His father and mother called him Radomir and this name was his **real name, his Family name** which reflected his true essence. This name had a double meaning. It meant Joy of the World (Rado-mir = Joy-world) and Bearing the Light of Knowledge (the Light of Ra) to the world (Ra-do-mir = Ra-to-world). It was the Thinking Dark ones who called him Jesus Christ when they fully changed the story of his life. And as you see, it has "stuck" to him for centuries. Jews always had a lot of Jesuses. It was the most ordinary and widespread Jewish name. However, it is quite amusing that it came to them from Greece... Well, Christ (Xristos) is not even a name at all. It means "messiah" or "enlightened" in Greek... I wonder; if the Bible says that Christ is a Christian, then how is it possible to explain the **pagan** Greek names with which the Thinking Dark ones labelled him? Interesting isn't it? And this is the smallest of numerous discrepancies which a person does not want (or is not able) to see.*

– *But how can he see them, if he blindly believes in what he is given? We must show that to people! They must know all of it, Sever! – I could not contain myself again.*

– *We **owe people nothing**, Isidora... – Sever answered sharply. – They are fully satisfied with what they believe in. And they want to change nothing. Do you wish me to continue?*

He again shut himself off from me with a wall of "iron" confidence in his rightness, and I had no choice but to nod in reply, hardly hiding the tears of disappointment... It was senseless even to try to prove anything to him. He lived in his "correct" world unwilling to be distracted by some insignificant "earthly faults"...

– *After Radomir's cruel death Magdalena decided to come back to her real Home, where she was born a long time ago. Perhaps, the yearning for our roots is inherent in all of us, especially when, for one or another reason, we feel bad... So she, broken-hearted, deeply-grieved, wounded and lonely, decided to come back HOME at last... It was in enigmatic Occitania (today France's, Languedoc) called **the Valley of Magicians** (or also **the Valley of Gods**), famous in its severe and mystic stateliness and beauty. Nobody who visited it once failed to fall in love with the Valley of Magicians for the rest of his life...*

– *Forgive me, Sever for interrupting you, but Magdalena's name... could it be that it came from the Valley of Magicians? – I exclaimed, shocked by the unexpected discovery.*

– *You are absolutely right, Isidora. – Sever smiled. – See – you **think!** The **Real** Magdalena was born about five hundred years ago in the Occitan Valley of Magicians and was named Maria – the Magician of the Valley (Mag-Doliny).*

– *So, what kind of valley **is** the Valley of Magicians, Sever? And why did I never hear about something like that? Why did my father never mention this name or any of my teachers ever tell me about it?*

– *Oh, it is a very ancient and powerful place, Isidora! It was a time when Earth had extraordinary force there... It was called "The Land of Sun" or "Pure Land". It was **specially created** many thousands of years ago... Two of those, who people called Gods, lived there once. They guarded the Pure Land from "black forces", because it had the Star Gates (or Gates between Worlds. Slavs-Aryans called planets Worlds – E.L.) which today do not exist, but a long time ago it was a place where people and news arrived from **other Worlds**. It was **one of seven** "bridges" on Earth, which, regrettably, was destroyed by Man's foolish mistake. Many centuries later gifted children began to be born in this valley. And we created a new "Meteora" for them there – strong but ignorant... It was called Raveda (Ra-veda=Ra-know). It was a sort of younger sister to our Meteora, where people were taught Knowledge, only much simpler than we were taught, because Raveda was open **for all gifted ones** without any exception.*

The Secret Knowledge was not imparted there but only that, which could help them to live with their burden and could teach them to get to know and control their amazing Gift. Gradually very different gifted people from the farthest lands of Earth, thirsty to study, began to come to Raveda. As Raveda was open to all, sometimes the "grey" gifted ones came there. They were also taught Knowledge in the hope that one fine day their lost Light Soul would come back to them. So, over time this Valley was called the Valley of Magicians, thus warning the uninitiated ones of the possibility of witnessing unexpected and surprising wonders – the fruit of thought and heart of the gifted ones... Six Knights Templar came there with Magdalena and Vedunia Maria. The friends of the Knights offered them to settle down in their unusual castle-fortresses which were situated on the live "Force points" which granted natural power and protection to the dwellers. Magdalena with her very young daughter withdrew to the caves, looking for peace for her wounded heart.

– Show me, Sever! – I could not help asking. – Show me Magdalena, please...

To my greatest surprise I saw a tender, blue sea instead of severe stone caves and a woman who stood on the sandy shore. I knew her at once. It was Maria Magdalena – Radomir's only love, his wife, mother of his wonderful children... and his widow.

She stood straight and proud, unbending and strong... Burning grief lived on her pure thin face... She still looked like the marvellous light girl who Sever showed me once. Only now, real "adult" sorrow darkened her cheerful beautiful face... Magdalena had that warm and tender female beauty which impressed both young and old, making them honour her, stay with her, serve her and love her, like one loves a dream which suddenly was incarnated in a human being...

She stood very calmly, intently looking somewhere far away, as if expecting something. A tiny girl – the second little Magdalena – pressed close to her knees. She looked shockingly like her mother – the same long golden hair... the same radiant blue eyes... and the same amusing and merry dimples on her tender smiling cheeks. The girl was surprisingly good looking and very cheerful. Only her mother seemed so sad that the little girl did not dare disturb her and was quiet and snuggled up to her, as if she waited for this strange and incomprehensible mother's sorrow to pass... The tender breeze idly played in the golden locks of Magdalena's long hair, sometimes touching her tender cheeks, carefully stroking them with its warm puff of sea air... She was immovable like a statue; but tense expectation was obvious in her sad eyes... Suddenly a white and fluffy point which slowly grew into distant sails appeared on the horizon. Magdalena revived at once, hugged her little daughter and said, as merrily as possible:

– Well, here they are, my treasure! You wanted to see where your mummy came from to this country, didn't you? Well then, you and I will sail far, far away until we reach the farthest shore where our HOME is... You will love it as strongly as I did. I promise you.

Magdalena bent over and embraced her tiny daughter, as if wishing to protect her from the troubles which her refined tender soul saw in their future.

– Mummy, tell me, will daddy sail with us too? We cannot leave him here, right? – She suddenly asked in surprise. – Why has he not been with us for so long? It's been almost two months since we last saw him... Mummy, where is daddy?

*Magdalena's eyes became severe and aloof... I understood that her little daughter did not know yet that her father would never sail with them anywhere, because two months ago he died on the cross... and it was obvious that poor Magdalena could not dare to tell this pure little human being about this terrible inhuman misfortune. **How** could she tell her – so tiny and defenceless – about it? How could she explain that there were people who hated her kind and light father, that they hungered for his death and that none of the Knights Templar, his friends, were able to save him?*

And she answered the way she always did – affectionately and confidently, trying to calm down her alarmed little daughter.

– Daddy will not sail with us, my angel, just as your beloved brother, Svetodar will not. They have a duty to fulfill. Do you remember I told you what a duty is? You do you remember, don't you?

We will sail with our friends, you and me... I know you love them. You will feel fine with them, my dear. And I shall always be with you. I promise.

The little one calmed down and asked, now a bit merrier:

– Mummy, are there many little girls in your country? Will I have a friend there? I am always with grown ups here... and they are not interesting to be with... and they cannot play.

– Why, dear? What about your uncle, Radan? – Magdalena asked, smiling. – You always have fun with him, don't you? And he tells you interesting fairy tales, right?

The little girl thought for a second and then declared very much in earnest:

– Well, maybe it's not too bad to be with them, with adults. Only I miss my friends anyway... I am small, right? So, I think my friends must be small too. And the adults should be at times.

Magdalena looked at her in surprise then lifted her daughter up and kissed her on both cheeks.

– You are right, sweetheart! Adults should not play with you always, just sometimes. I promise we will find you a best friend there! You will have to wait a little. But you can do that, right? You are the most patient girl in the world, aren't you?

This simple warm conversation of two lonely loving creatures became ingrained in my heart! I wanted to believe that everything would turn out well for them and wicked fate would avoid them; that their life would be light and kind! Regrettably, I knew that this would not happen, just as in my case...

Why did we pay such a price?! Why were our fates so pitiless and cruel?

Before I had time to turn around to ask Sever the next question, a new vision, which took my breath away, appeared...

Four persons sat on funny low benches in the cool shade of an enormous old sycamore. Two of them were quite young and very alike. The third was a grey-headed old man, tall and strong like a solidly protective rock. He held a boy of 8 or 9 years old on his knees. Of course, Sever need not explain to me who these people were...

I knew Radomir at once, because he still preserved a lot of the wonderful light young lad who I saw in my first visit to Meteora. Only now he looked notably grown up, more severe and more mature. His blue piercing eyes looked at the world attentively and hard, as if saying:

"If you don't believe me, listen to me once again; and if you still don't believe then, leave. Life is too precious to give it to unworthy ones".

*He was already not the "ever-loving" naive boy who thought that he could **change any human being**... that he could **change the whole world**... Now Radomir was a Warrior. His look said it very explicitly – his internal concentration, his ascetic and thin, but very strong body, the stubborn wrinkle in the corner of his tightly compressed lips, the piercing look of his bright blue eyes, which sometimes flashed steel... The unbelievable force that seethed in him made friends respect him (and enemies take him into consideration very seriously!) obviously showed the real Warrior, and not the helpless and softhearted God which the Christian church, which he hated so much, tried to make out of him so persistently. And there is more... He had an amazing smile, which very seldom appeared on his tired face, emaciated by severe thoughts. But when it did, the whole world around became kinder, warmed by his wonderful boundless warmth, which filled any lonely bereaved soul with happiness! It was this warmth through which Radomir's true essence and his true loving Soul was revealed.*

*Unlike him Radan (and it obviously was him) looked slightly younger and merrier (although he was a year **older** than Radomir). He looked at the world happily and fearlessly, as if no misfortune could touch him, as if any grief must pass him over... There was no doubt that he always was the life and soul of any party, lighting it with his merry and light presence wherever he was. It seemed that the young man sparkled with happy internal light which disarmed both young and old alike, making all love him unconditionally and guard him like the most valuable treasure which*

comes to make Earth happy once in a thousand years. He was smiling and bright like a summer sun, with a face framed by soft gold curls, and one wished to look at him admiringly, forgetting about the cruelty and spite of the surrounding world.

The third participant of the small gathering differed very much from the two brothers... First, he was much older and wiser. It seemed that he carried the whole of Earth's heavy load on his shoulders, somehow managing to live with it and not break, at the same time, preserving goodness and love in his big heart toward people around him. Compared to him, the adults seemed silly children who came for advice to the wise Father...

He was very tall and powerful, like a big unshakable fortress; tested by years of severe wars and troubles.... the look of his attentive grey eyes was prickly, but very kind, and the colour of his eyes amazed. It was incredibly light and bright, which happens only in youth, when the black clouds of bitterness and tears have not darkened it yet. This mighty and warm man was the Volkhv John, of course...

The boy calmly settled down on the old man's mighty knees and very intently reflected upon something, paying no attention to the people around him. Despite his young age, he seemed very clever and calm, filled with internal force and light. His face was concentrated and serious, as if the little one solved a very important and difficult task at that moment. Just like his father, he was fair-headed and blue-eyed. Only the features of his face were, to my surprise, soft and tender and looked more like his mother – the Light Maria Magdalena.

The midday air was dry and hot like a red-hot stove. The flies tired by the intense heat flew to the tree and, on idly creeping on its boundless barrel, buzzed annoyingly, disturbing the four interlocutors who were taking a rest in the wide shade of the old sycamore. It was pleasantly cool and green under the kind hospitable branches and the frisky and playful narrow brook which ran straight from under the roots of this mighty tree was the reason for it. It jumped on every pebble and hummock and merrily splashed brilliant transparent drops and hurried further, pleasantly refreshing the surroundings, making them pure and easily breathed. The people protected from the midday intense heat rested, enjoying cool and precious moisture... It smelled of earth and herbs. The world seemed quiet, kind and safe.

– I don't understand them, Teacher... – Radomir pronounced thoughtfully. – They are soft in the day-time, affectionate in the evening and predatory and insidious at night... They are changeable and unforeseeable. How can I understand them, tell me! I cannot save people without understanding ... What should I do, Teacher?

John looked at him very affectionately like the father looks at his beloved son, and finally pronounced in a deep voice:

– You know their language. Try to **open** it, if you can, because speech is a mirror of their soul. Once **our Gods damned this people**, because they came here to ruin Earth... We tried to help them, sending you here. And your Duty is to do everything to change their essence; otherwise they will destroy you... and then the rest of the living. **Not because they are strong, but only because they are lying and sly, and hit us like a plague.**

– They are far from me, Teacher... even friends. I cannot feel them. I cannot open their cold souls.

– Why do we need them then, dad? – The little "participant" of the party suddenly joined the conversation of the adults.

– We came to them to save them, Svetodar... to drag a splinter out of their sick hearts.

– But you say that they don't want it. Is it really possible to treat a patient, if he refuses?

– Truth Radomir, out of the mouths of babes! – Radan, who for the time being had limited himself to listening, exclaimed. – Think; if they don't want it, can you force these people to change, moreover the whole nation!? Their faith is alien to us and their concept of Honour, which in my opinion; they don't even have, is too. Leave, my brother! They will destroy you. They are not worth even a day of your Life! Think about your children... about Magdalena! Think about those who love

you!

Radomir only sadly shook his head, affectionately stroking his elder brother's golden-haired head.

– I cannot leave, Radan. I don't have the right... Even if I fail to help them, I cannot go away. It will look like I ran away. I cannot betray Father. I cannot betray myself...

– It is impossible to **force** people to change, if they don't wish it. It will be just a lie. They **don't need** your help, Radomir. They will not accept your teachings. Think, brother...

John sadly observed the dispute of his favourite students, knowing that they were both right and that neither would give up, each protecting **his** truth... They both were young and strong, and they both wanted to live, love, watch their children grow and fight for the peace, happiness and safety of other **worthy** people. But fate decided otherwise. They were both ready to suffer and even die for others, but in this case it was for **unworthy** people who hated them and their Teachings and unscrupulously betrayed them. It seemed a farce; an absurd dream... and John refused to forgive their father, the wise White Volkhv, who gave his wonderful, extremely gifted children so easily for the mocking delectation of the Israelites in order to rescue their lying and cruel souls.

– I am getting older... I am getting older too quickly... – John pronounced aloud, being lost in reverie.

All three stared at him in surprise and then sincerely laughed... He by all means was the last who could be called "old" with his force and might, enviable even for them, the young ones.

The vision disappeared. But I wanted to hold it so much! Emptiness and loneliness settled in my heart. I did not want to part with these brave people. I did not want to come back to reality...

– Show me more, Sever!!! – I voraciously begged. – They will help me to withstand to the end. Show me more of Magdalena...

– What do you want to see, Isidora?

Sever was patient and soft, like an elder brother, seeing off his beloved sister. The difference was that he saw me off forever...

– Tell me, Sever, how did it happen that Magdalena had two children and it was not mentioned anywhere? It should have been somewhere.

– Of course, it was mentioned, Isidora! Moreover, the best artists drew Magdalena proudly waiting for the heir. Regrettably, little is left of it. The church could not permit such a "scandal", because it did not fit the "story" it had created... Nevertheless, some dribs and drabs remained until now, perhaps by an oversight or carelessness of the mighty of this world – the Thinking Dark ones.

– How could they permit this kind of thing? I always thought that the Thinking Dark ones are quite clever and careful? It in fact could help people to see the lies which the "holy" fathers fed them. Am I right?

– **Has anyone seen it**, Isidora? – I sadly shook my head. – See... People don't give them too much trouble...

– Can you show me how she **taught**, Sever?

Like a child, I hurried to ask questions, jumping from subject to subject; wishing to see and know as much as possible for the time provided which was rapidly coming to an end...

I saw Magdalena again... People were sitting around her. They were of different ages – young and old, all long-haired, dressed in simple navy blue clothes. Magdalena was in white with loose hair which covered her like a beautiful golden cloak. The room where they all were resembled the work of a mad architect who had embodied his most shocking dream in the stone... It was a cave which looked like a majestic cathedral, which nature built there on a strange whim. The height of the "cathedral" was enormous; amazing "whining" stone icicles sped away straight "into the sky", merged into a wonderful pattern and then fell downward, hanging over the heads of the sitting people... Certainly, there was no natural illumination in the cave. The candles did not burn either, and the weak daylight failed to leak through the cracks. Nevertheless, the unusual "hall" was evenly

lit with a pleasant golden shine which came from no one knew where and allowed everyone to see each other without any problem and even read...

The people who sat around Magdalena were concentrating very hard and attentively watched her stretched forward hands. Suddenly bright gold luminescence began to appear between them. It gradually became more compact and then began to thicken into an enormous bluish ball until it came to look like... our planet!

– Sever, what is it? – I whispered in surprise. – It's our Earth, isn't it?

But he just gave me a friendly smile, answering and explaining nothing. Completely charmed, I continued to look at the extraordinary woman whose hands "created" planets so easily! I never saw the Earth from the outside, only in pictures, but for some reason I was absolutely sure that it was it. Meanwhile a second planet appeared then another one... and another... They spun around Magdalena, as if they were magic, but she explained something to the audience with a calm smile, as if it came effortlessly to her, and paid no attention to the surprised faces, as if she spoke about something very ordinary. I got it – she taught them astronomy! The subject which even in my time was not in favour at all and one could be easily sent straight to the fire for it... And Magdalena taught it already then – five hundred long years ago!!!

The vision disappeared. I was so stunned that I almost could not come to my senses and ask Sever the next question...

– Who were these people, Sever? They look identical and strange... as if they are united by a common power wave. And they wear identical clothes, like monks have. Who are they?

– Oh, they are the famous Cathars, Isidora, another name – the **pure** ones. It was people who gave them this name for their strict temperance, pure views and honest thoughts. Cathars called themselves "Magdalena's children or Knights"... which they were in reality. She truly **CREATED** them to carry Light and Knowledge to people after she was gone, in opposition to the false teachings of the "holy" church. They were Magdalena's most faithful and talented students. They were amazing and pure people. They carried HER teachings to the world, dedicating their lives to that. **They became magicians and alchemists, sorcerers and scientists, doctors and philosophers... The secrets of the Universe submitted to them. They became the keepers of Radomir's wisdom – the secret Knowledge of our distant ancestors, our Gods...**

Also they all carried in their hearts an ever-burning love for their "Fair Lady"... the golden Maria... their Light and enigmatic Magdalena... Cathars piously kept the **true** story of Radomir's interrupted life in their hearts and swore to save his wife and children whatever the cost, for which they all paid with their life two centuries later. It is a truly great and very sad story, Isidora. I am not sure whether you need to hear it.

– But I want to know about them, Sever! Tell me, where **all** gifted ones came from? Can it be the Valley of Magicians?

– Of course they can, Isidora. In fact **it was their home!** It was **exactly the place** to which Magdalena came back. But it would be wrong to do justice only to the gifted ones. In fact the Cathars taught even ordinary peasants to read and write. Many of them knew poetry by heart, no matter how unbelievable it may sound to you. It was the real Dream Country – the Country of Light, Knowledge and Verity created by Magdalena, which spread surprisingly quickly, involving thousands of new "cathars" who also were ready to protect faithfully the Knowledge they were given, as well as their Golden Maria – the source of it...

Magdalena's teaching swept over countries like a hurricane, leaving no thinking person indifferent. Aristocrats and scientists, artists and shepherds, tillers and kings joined the Cathars. The rich ones easily gave their riches and lands to the Cathar "church" in order to make its great power stronger and to spread the Light of its Heart over Earth.

– Forgive me for interrupting, Sever, but did the Cathars really have their **church** too? Were their teachings a religion?

– The concept of "church" is very different, Isidora. That one was not a church as we

understand it. Magdalena and her Spiritual Temple was the Cathars' church, that being the Temple of Light and Knowledge, just as Radomir's Temple, the knights of which were the Templars in the beginning (It was the King of Jerusalem Baldwin II who called the Knights of the Temple Templars.) They did not have a fixed **building** where people would come to pray. **The church of the Cathars was in their souls.** But it did have its apostles (or as they were called – **the Perfect ones**); of course, Magdalena was the first of them. **The Perfect ones** were people who had reached the higher stages of Knowledge and devoted their lives to serving it. They perfected their Spirit continuously, almost renouncing physical food and physical love. **The Perfect ones** served people, teaching them their knowledge, healing and protecting their ward from the tenacious and dangerous claws of the Catholic Church. They were amazing and selfless people ready to protect the Knowledge, Faith and Magdalena, who gave all this to them, to the end. It's a pity that almost all diaries of the Cathars were destroyed. The only thing we have is the notes of Radomir and Magdalena, but they don't contain the exact events of the last tragic days of the brave and light Cathars, because it happened two hundred years after the death of Jesus and Magdalena.

– Tell me, Sever, how did the Golden Maria die? Who had so black a spirit as to lift his dirty hand against this wonderful woman?

– It was the church, Isidora... Regrettably, it was the same church! It went mad, on seeing its most dangerous enemy in the Cathars which gradually and very confidently occupied its "holy" place. It became aware of its quick collapse and its objective was to kill Magdalena by all means, justly considering her the main "culprit" of the "criminal" teachings and hoping that the Cathars would disappear without their Guiding Star, having neither leader, nor Faith. They knew no rest until they achieved their black aim, but the church did not understand how strong and deep the Cathar's Knowledge and Teachings were. They did not understand that it was not a blind "faith", but **their way of life, the essence of what they lived for.** Therefore, no matter how hard the "holy" fathers tried to win the Cathars over to their side, the lying and criminal Christian church could not claim a single inch in the Pure Land of Occitania.

– It turns out that Caraffa is not the only one who did this kind of thing! Was it always like this, Sever?

I was horrified when I imagined the whole picture of treachery, lies and murder which the "holy" and "universally forgiving" religion committed in order to survive!

– How is this kind of thing possible?! How could you watch it and not interfere? How could you live with it and not go crazy because of it, Sever?!!

He did not answer, understanding very well that it was just a "cry from the heart" of an indignant person. Besides, I perfectly knew his answer... Therefore we were silent for some time, like lonely souls lost in the darkness...

– So, how did the Golden Maria die? Can you tell me about it? – I asked, interrupting the long-drawn-out pause.

Sever sadly nodded, showing that he understood...

– After that Magdalena's teachings had occupied the greater half of Europe, Pope Urban II decided that further delay would be lethal for his beloved "holiest" church. He had thoroughly thought through his devilish plan, and without delay sent two faithful "fosterlings" of Rome who Magdalena knew as being the Cathars' "friends" to Occitania. As it happens all too often, the outstanding and light people became victims of their own purity and honour... Magdalena opened her friendly arms to them, generously giving them food and a roof. Although her bitter fate taught her not to be too trustful, it was impossible to suspect everybody, otherwise her life and her Teachings would lose any sense. She still believed in GOOD, despite everything...

I saw them again...

Magdalena and her golden-haired little daughter now eleven or twelve years old stood at the entrance of the cave. They stood, hugging each other, still beautiful and looking so like each other, watching the last breathtaking instant of the amazing Occitan sunset. The cave entrance at which

they stood was situated very high in the mountains and opened onto a steep precipice. In the very far distance the stately mountains showed blue, wrapped in the haze of the evening fog. Proudly frozen like giant monuments of eternity and nature, they remembered Man's wisdom and courage... Only not the one who now killed and betrayed, ruled and destroyed. They remembered a strong and creative, loving and proud Man who created the wonderful reign of Mind and Light on this small but wonderful plot of land...

Right in front of Magdalena there was her favourite castle – the fortress of Montsegur which towered on the apex of the man-made hill... This friendly and unapproachable fortress was her real home for more than eight long years, just as it was the home of her beloved little daughter, the refuge of her friends and the Temple of her love. Her recollections – the dearest relicts of her life, her teachings and those of her family – were kept in Montsegur. All her Perfect ones came there to purify their Souls and get the Vivifying Force. There she spent her most precious and most quiet hours away from the vanity of the world...

– Let's go, sweetheart. The sun has already set. We shall **rejoice** at it tomorrow and now we should greet our guests. You like to socialize with people, don't you? Then you will entertain them until I am free.

– I don't like them. Their eyes are wicked... and their hands are restless all the time, as if they cannot find any place for them. They are bad people, mummy. Would you ask them to leave?

Magdalena laughed, gently hugging her daughter.

– Ah you, my suspicious little thing! How can we turn out our guests? "Guests" are meant to bother us with their presence! You know that, don't you? So, be patient, dear, until they go home. And maybe they will never come back and you will not have to entertain them.

Mother and daughter came back into the cave which now looked like a little chapel with a funny stone "altar" in the corner. Suddenly the complete silence was disturbed by the sound of pebbles which loudly crunched to the right and two men appeared at the entrance. It was obvious that they did their best to step noiselessly and seemed to me very unpleasant for some reason, I just could not figure out why. For some reason I understood at once that they were Magdalena's uninvited guests... She gave a start but also a friendly smile and, addressing the senior, asked:

– How did you find me, Ramon? Who showed you the entrance to this cave?

The person called Ramon coldly smiled and, trying to seem pleasant, answered in a falsely affectionate way:

– Oh, please, don't be angry, light Maria! You know that I have many friends here... I was just looking for you to talk about something very important.

– This place is sacred for me, Ramon. It is not meant for secular meetings and conversations. And nobody could bring you over here except my daughter, and she, as you see, is with me now. You spied on us... Why?

I suddenly felt an icy cold running along my back. Something was very wrong. Something terrible had to happen right now... I wildly wanted to cry out! I wanted to warn somehow... But I understood that I could not help them. I could not offer my hand through centuries. I could not interfere... I don't have this right. The events which were unfolding before my eyes had taken place a very long time ago, and even if I could help, it would be **interfering in history**; and if I saved Magdalena, many fates would change, and maybe the subsequent Earthly history would be completely different... Only two people on Earth had the right to do that and, unfortunately, I was not one of them...

Further events happened so quickly that they did not seem real...

Coldly smiling, the man called Ramon unexpectedly grasped Magdalena's hair from the back and with lightning speed stuck a narrow long dagger in her open neck... A crunch was heard. Magdalena hung on his hand, dead, without even having time to understand what happened. Scarlet blood streamed like a brook on her snow white dress... Her daughter uttered a shrill cry, trying to

break free from the hands of the second monster which grasped her fragile shoulders. But her scream was cut off – he broke her neck very easily, like a rabbit and the girl fell down next to the body of her poor mother who the fiend continued to stab – the bloodstained dagger pierced her heart again and again, and again... It seemed that he had lost his mind and could not stop... or could it be that his hatred which manipulated his criminal hand was so huge?

Finally everything was over. Without looking at what they had done, two heartless killers disappeared in the cave without a trace.

Only several short minutes had flashed by from the moment they unexpectedly appeared in the cave. The evening was still wonderful and quiet, but the darkness was slowly slipping down from the tops of the blue-hazed mountains. The woman and girl peacefully lay on the stone floor of the little "chapel". The heavy strands of their long golden hair mixed together and turned into a wide golden covering. It seemed that the killed ones slept... Only Magdalena's heart, still pulsating, splashed scarlet blood out of her frightful wounds. There were oceans of blood... It flooded the floor, making an enormous red puddle.

I was so horrified and indignant that I felt weak at the knees... I wanted to howl like a wolf, refusing to accept the terrible occurrence! I could not believe that everything happened so simply and unnoticed... so easily. Somebody **must** see it! Somebody **must** warn them! But nobody noticed or warned. There was nobody around in that moment... And two Light and Pure Lives broken by somebody's dirty hand flew away like doves into another unknown World where nobody could do them any harm.

The Golden Maria ceased to exist on our wicked and ungrateful Earth... She went to Radomir... or rather, her Soul flew to him.

I felt desperate pain and sadness for them, for me and for all who fought, still believing that they could change something... Could they really? Was there any sense in **this kind of war**, if all who fought died?

Suddenly another picture appeared right in front of me...

It was the same stone "chapel" and Magdalena's bloodstained body still lay on the floor. Knights Templar stood around her genuflecting... They all were unusually dressed in snow-white long gowns. They stood around Magdalena, dropping their proud heads and brooks of bitter tears rolled down their severe stony faces... The volkhv whose friend once was the Volkhv John was the first to rise. Carefully, as if fearing to hurt, he put his fingers into a wound and painted on his chest something which looked like a cross with his bloodstained hand...

The second volkhv did the same. So they rose one by one, reverentially immersed their hands in the holy blood and drew red crosses on their snow-white garments... I felt my hair beginning to stand on end. It looked like a terrible religious rite which I could not understand yet...

– Why do they do that, Sever? – I asked in a whisper, as if being afraid that they would hear me.

– It's an oath, Isidora. It's an oath of eternal revenge... They swore by Magdalena's blood – the most sacred blood for them – to avenge her death. It was exactly **then that the Knights Templar began to wear white tabards with red crosses**. Nobody outside their fraternity knew their true significance... For some reason all "forgot" very quickly that **before Magdalena's death** the Knights Templar wore simple brown loose overalls which were not "decorated" with any crosses at all. Just like the Cathars, the Knights Templar **hated the cross** in the sense in which the Christian church "honours" it. They considered it a mean and wicked **instrument of murder and death**. That, which they drew on their chest with Magdalena's blood, had a completely different meaning. It's just the church **totally "reshaped" who the Knights Templar were in reality "adjusting" them to its needs**, just as it did everything concerning Radomir and Magdalena.

The church **publicly declared Magdalena a prostitute** after her death, just as:

– It denied the fact that **Christ had children** and was **married to Magdalena**...

– It killed them both in the "**name of Christian faith**" with which they both **restlessly fought** all their life...

– It totally **wiped out the Cathars, using Christ's name** – the name of the man whose **Faith and Knowledge they taught**...

– It **eliminated all the Knights Templar, declaring them the Devil's henchmen, slandering and vilifying their deeds, and disgracing the Grandmaster who was Radomir and Magdalena's direct descendant**.

When it got rid of **all** who could point at the baseness and meanness of the "holiest" devils of Rome, the Christian church created a legend which was reliably confirmed by "undeniable proofs" and which for some reason nobody ever checked, or it occurred to nobody even to think about what was going on.

– Why has nobody ever said anything about it, Sever? Why does nobody tell about this kind of thing now?!

He did not answer me, probably considering that everything was absolutely clear without it, and there is nothing here to talk about. Bitter human offense rose in my heart for those who were gone so undeservedly... and for those who would be gone... and for him, for Sever, who lived and did not understand that **people had to know all of it!** They must know it to change and not to kill those who came to help them and to understand finally how precious and wonderful our LIFE is. And I knew that I would never stop fighting whatever it cost me, even for those like Sever!

– Unfortunately it's time for me to leave. I thank you for your story. I think you helped me to hold out, Sever... May I ask you another question which is not related to religion? – He nodded. – What is this beautiful thing that I see next to you? It looks like the one I saw on my first visit to Meteora, but at the same time it's different.

– It's a Crystal of Life, Isidora – one of seven on Earth. Usually nobody is able to see it. It defends itself from people... Strangely enough, it showed itself to you. Probably you are ready for greater things, Isidora. That is why I asked you to stay with us. You would achieve a lot, if you wanted. Think until it's not too late. I will not be able to help you otherwise. Think, Isidora...

– I thank you, Sever, but you know my answer perfectly well. Therefore let's not start everything again. Perhaps I shall come back to you... But if I don't, may you and your wards be happy! Maybe **they** will manage to change our Earth for the better... Good luck to you, Sever.

– Peace be with you, Isidora... I hope I shall see you in **this** life once again, and if I don't, I beg you, don't bear ill will to us there, in another world... Maybe some time you will understand **our** truth... Maybe it won't seem so wicked to you... Farewell, child of Light and may peace be in your Soul.

I sadly smiled at him, closed my eyes and came back "home"...

On coming straight back into "my" Venetian room, I was astounded by the scene I found there! The infuriated Anna, bristling like a trapped young animal, stood before Caraffa. Her eyes were flashing threats and it seemed that a little bit more and my bellicose daughter would lose control over herself. My heart almost stopped, unable to believe in the reality of what was going on! It seemed that my anguish which had been accumulating for several long months would break forth and drown my dear girl! Only now, on seeing her before me, I understood at last how infinitely and painfully I missed her.

Anna had grown up very much and looked even more beautiful than I remembered her. The severe imprint of loss was now imposed on the soft child's features of her sweet face, which made it more attractive and exquisite. But there was another thing that staggered me most of all – Anna was not afraid of Caraffa at all! Why? Has she succeeded in finding something that could save us from him?!

– Aha! Madonna Isidora! Very opportune! Please, explain to your stubborn daughter that nothing threatens you for the moment. She is truly impossible! I think Meteora spoiled her gentle

disposition. But we will correct it. She will not have to return there anymore.

– What do you mean by saying this, Your Holiness? You wished to make a "heaven-born" witch out of her, or have your plans changed?

I was extremely excited and in dread for Anna, but I knew that I must not let Caraffa see that. Should he understand that his plan was successful then Hell would seem to us a pleasant place in comparison with Caraffa's basements. Therefore I tried to look calm with what was left of my strength and at the same time did not take my eyes off my dear girl. Anna behaved so confidently that I wondered, what did they teach her in Meteora?

Anna rushed to me with open arms; paying no attention whatsoever to Caraffa's dissatisfaction. Her enormous eyes shone like two bright stars in the Italian night sky!

– Mother, dear! I am so glad that they lied!!! Everything is all right with you, isn't it? They have not tortured you. They have not harmed you, have they?

She grasped my hands, quickly touched my shoulders, attentively scrutinizing my face, as if wishing to be sure that I was truly alright, at least for the time being...

– Mother, I was so afraid for you! I was so afraid that I wouldn't find you alive!

– But I called you! I wanted to warn you not to come. Why did not you talk to me, dear? – I whispered, hugging my brave girl. – He deceived you, my joy!

But Anna just smiled happily, hugging me very strongly, and I had no choice but to do the same. She obviously was not going to listen to me, being absolutely sure that she was right.

– Well, I think that's enough hugs for today! – Caraffa discontentedly croaked. – Does not it seem to you, Isidora, that **now** you should be a little more compliant? Anna became a wonderful girl who any mother would be proud of. Her life should be very dear to you, shouldn't it? – He sustained a pause and then added: – It now depends only on you, my dearest Isidora... From this moment **everything** depends only on you.

On rubbing his hands complacently, Caraffa got up to withdraw.

– I have spoken to my father, Your Holiness... He told me about that other, distant life. I think you would be terrified, if you heard what awaits those like you there... criminals. Think, Holiness, perhaps you still have time to begin to repent... Perhaps you still can save your foul and useless life somehow!

It seemed that Caraffa became numb... He looked at me so surprised, as if he suddenly saw the ghost of my father instead of me.

– Are you saying that you **spoke** to your **dead** father, Isidora? – He whispered.

– Oh, yes, Your Holiness. He comes to me almost every day. You made a huge mistake if you thought that you could separate us. I am a Witch, you know, and he is a Vedun. So on killing him, you did us a tremendous service. Now I can hear him wherever I wish and talk to him... And you cannot wound him anymore. He is unattainable for your crafty designs.

– What did he tell you, Isidora? – Caraffa asked with some sickly interest.

– Oh, he told me a lot of things, Holiness. I'll tell you one day, if you wish. And now I would like to talk to my daughter, if you don't mind, of course... She has changed very much over these two years and I would like to get to know her...

– You'll have time for that, Isidora! A lot will depend on your behaviour this time, my dearest. Meanwhile your daughter will come with me. Soon I'll come back to you and I hope very much that you will talk in different way to me...

Icy horror of death sneaked into my tired Soul...

– Where do you take Anna?! What do you want from her, Your Holiness? – Fearing to hear an answer, I asked.

– Oh, calm down, my dearest. Anna is not going to the basements yet, if this is what you thought. Before I come to a final decision, I should hear your answer... As I said, everything

depends on you, Isidora. Have pleasant dreams!

On letting Anna go before him mad Caraffa withdrew...

*I waited for some very long minutes and tried to call Anna mentally. Nothing happened. My girl did not answer! I tried again and again. The result was the same. Anna did not answer. It could not be! I was absolutely sure that she **would be eager to talk to me**. We should know what we could do further. But Anna did not answer.*

Hours passed in terrible alarm. I ran my legs off, trying to call my dear girl. Suddenly Sever appeared...

– You try in vain, Isidora. He put his protection on Anna. I don't know how to help you. I don't know how it works. As I told you before, Caraffa got it from the "guest" which came to Meteora. I am sorry I cannot help you with it...

– Well, thank you for warning and for coming, Sever.

He softly put his hand on my head...

– Rest, Isidora. Today you will change nothing. And tomorrow you may need a lot of strength. Rest, Child of Light... my thoughts will be with you...

*I almost did not hear Sever's final words, easily slipping into the ghostly world of dreams... where everything was tender and quiet... where my father and Girolamo lived... and where **almost** always everything was right and well... **almost**...*

40. Isidora-6. Svetodar.

Stella and I were silent, being staggered by Isidora's story to the innermost of our hearts... Of course we were still too small to understand the whole of the meanness, pain and lies which surrounded Isidora. And certainly our child's hearts were too kind and naive to understand the horror of forthcoming ordeals that inevitably awaited Anna and her..., but something was clear even to us, so small and inexperienced. I already understood that everything that was presented as **truth** did not necessarily mean that it **was** truth; that in reality it could turn out to be the most barefaced lie for which, and this I found very odd, its inventors neither admitted responsibility nor were punished. People took everything on trust, like it went without saying. For some reason all were quite satisfied with it and nothing turned our world "upside down" in indignation. Nobody was going to look for the guilty. Nobody wanted to prove the truth. Everything was quiet and "windless", as if a dead calm of satisfaction reigned in our hearts without being disturbed by mad "seekers of truth" or the now lethargic human **conscience**...

Isidora's sincere and deeply sad story deadened our child's hearts with all-absorbing perpetual pain... It seemed that the inhuman tortures to which the stale souls of beastly executioners subjected this amazing and brave woman would never end! The mere thought of what could await us at the end of her staggering story terrified me.

I looked at Stella. My bellicose friend fearfully pressed close to Anna staring at Isidora with her eyes wide open... Apparently, the human cruelty stunned even her, so brave and uncompromising.

Of course, Stella and I saw much more than other children of 5 and 10 years old. We already knew what **loss** was and what **pain** meant, but still we had to live through a lot of things to understand a small part of **what** Isidora felt! And I hoped that I would never have to know this kind of thing in my own experience.

Spellbound, I looked at this wonderful, brave and amazingly gifted woman, unable to hide my sorrowful tears... How dare "people" call themselves PEOPLE doing such things to her?! How could Earth stand such criminal abomination at all, letting the criminals trample it down and not opening wide its depths and swallowing them?!

Isidora still was far away from us, in her deeply wounding recollections, and to tell the truth I **did not want** her to continue her story which tormented my child's soul, forcing me to die a

hundred times of indignation and pain. I **was not ready for it**. I did not know **how** to protect myself from such atrocity... It seemed that if her heart-rending story did not stop at once, I would simply die unable to hear it to the end. It was too cruel and far beyond my child's comprehension...

But Isidora continued to tell, and we had no choice but to join her and dive again into her ruined but so high and pure, un-lived LIFE...

The next morning I woke up very late. Apparently the rest which Sever's touch kindly gave me warmed my tormented heart and allowed me to relax a little to meet the new day with my head proudly lifted, no matter what it would bring... Anna did not answer yet. Obviously Caraffa was firm in his decision to prevent us from communicating until I broke or he needed it for some reason.

*Isolated from my dear girl but knowing that she is near, I tried to think of different methods of keeping in touch with her, although deep in my heart I perfectly knew that nothing would work. Caraffa had his reliable plan which he was not going to change to meet my wishes. Rather on the contrary, the more I wanted to see Anna, the longer he was going to hold her under lock and key preventing us from meeting. Anna has changed, becoming very sure and strong which frightened me a little, because I knew she took after her father in her stubborn character and could only imagine how far she could go in her persistence... I wanted so much that she should live! I wanted so much that Caraffa's executioner did not encroach upon her fragile, still unblossomed, life! I wanted so much that my dear girl had everything **yet to come**.*

I heard a knock at the door. Caraffa appeared on the threshold...

– *How did you sleep, dear Isidora? I do hope that the immediate proximity of your daughter did not affect your sleep?*

– *Thank you for your concern, Your Holiness! To my surprise I slept splendidly! Perhaps, it was exactly Anna's closeness that calmed me. Will I be able to talk to my daughter today?*

He was shining and fresh, as if he had already broken me, as if his greatest dream had already come true... I hated his confidence in himself and his victory! ... even if he had all reasons for this... even if I knew that very soon I would go away forever at this mad Pope's will... I was not going to surrender so simply. I wished to fight to the last sigh, to the last minute of my life on Earth.

– *So what have you decided, Isidora? – The Pope merrily asked. – As I already told you before, exactly on it depends how soon you will see Anna. I hope you will not force me to take the cruellest measures? Your daughter doesn't deserve her life being cut short so early, does she? She is really very talented, Isidora, and I sincerely would not like to harm her.*

– *I thought you knew me quite well enough, Your Holiness, to understand that threats would not change my decision... even the most frightful ones. I can die being unable to endure pain, but I will never betray which I live for. Forgive me, Holiness.*

Caraffa stared hard at me, as if he heard something highly unreasonable which very much surprised him.

– *Will you really not spare your wonderful daughter?! But you are more fanatic than me, Madonna!*

On exclaiming that, Caraffa leaped to his feet and withdrew. I stood absolutely rigid, unable to feel my heart or retain my scattering thoughts, as if I had spent what was left of my strength on this short negative answer.

I knew that it was an end... that now he will take Anna in hand and I was not sure whether I could find the strength to endure all that. I did not have any forces left to think of revenge or of anything at all... My body got tired and refused to resist. Perhaps there was a limit after which "another" life began.

I desperately wanted to see Anna and at least give her a farewell hug, to feel her impetuous force and tell her once again how strongly I loved her...

I heard a noise at the door turned around and saw her! My dear girl stood there, upright and proud, thin, unbent, like a reed which the oncoming hurricane tries to break.

– Well, have a chat with your daughter, Isidora. Maybe, she will be able to bring reason to your strayed consciousness! I give you one hour; try to become reasonable, Isidora. Otherwise this meeting will be the last...

Caraffa did not wish to play anymore. It was **his** life that was at stake, just as the life of my dearest Anna. And if he did not care a straw about her life, he was ready to do anything for his.

– Mother, dear! – Anna stood at the threshold, motionless. – How we are going to destroy him? We shall not be able in fact, mother!

I jumped up from the chair and ran to my only treasure, to my dear girl and pressed her to my bosom as hard as I could...

– Oh, mother, you will smother me! – Anna's laughter rang like silver bells.

My heart absorbed this laughter like one sentenced to death absorbs the warm parting rays of the setting sun.

– There, there, mother dear, we are still alive! We still can fight! You told me yourself that we would fight as long as we live... So let's think whether we can do anything to save the world from this Evil.

She again supported me with her courage! She again found the right words...

This sweet brave girl, almost a child, could not even imagine to what tortures Caraffa could subject her! What atrocious pain her soul could drown in! But I knew... I knew everything that awaited her, if I refused to fulfill his wish, if I refused to give the only thing the Pope craved.

– My dear, my heart... I will not be able to watch you tortured... I will not give you to him, my girl! Sever and those like him do not care who will be left in this LIFE... So why must we be different? Why must we worry about somebody else's fate?!

My words scared even me... however deeply in my heart I perfectly understood it was the blank despair of our situation that provoked them. Certainly, I was not going to betray that, for the sake of which I lived and my father and my poor Girolamo died. I just wanted to believe, if only for a fraction of a second, that we could get away from this terrible "black" Carrafian world, just like that, forgetting about everything... forgetting about others – people we don't know... forgetting about evil.

It was the momentary weakness of a tired person, but I understood that I did not have any right even to permit it. And to crown it all burning wicked tears began to roll down my face. But I tried so much to keep it from happening! I tried not to show my dear girl the depths of despair into which my pain-exhausted soul fell...

Anna sadly looked at me with her enormous grey eyes in which deep and very adult sorrow lived... She quietly stroked my hands, as if wishing to calm me. But my heart screamed a frenzied scream refusing to yield... I did not wish to lose her. She made the only remaining sense of my ruined life. I could not allow the inhuman creature called the Roman Pope to take her from me!

– Mother dear, don't worry about me. – Anna whispered, as if she had read my thoughts. – I am not afraid of pain. And if it is very painful, grandfather promised to take me. I spoke to him yesterday. He will wait for me, if we fail... and dad too. They both will wait for me there. The only thing I feel very bad about leaving you here alone... I love you so much, mummy!

Anna hid her head in my arms, as if looking for protection... and I could not protect her... I could not save her. I did not find the "key" to Caraffa...

– Forgive me, my sun, for letting you down. I let down both of us... I failed to find the way to destroy him. Forgive me, Annushka.

An hour flew by unnoticed. We spoke about different things and did not come back to the murder of the Pope, because we both perfectly knew that we had lost this time... It did not matter what we wished... **Caraffa still lived**, and it was the most terrible and the most important thing. We did not succeed in relieving our world of him. We had not succeeded in saving good people. He lived despite any attempts or wishes... despite everything...

– *Just don't give in to him, mummy! I beg you, don't give up! I know how hard this all is to you. But we all will be with you. He has no right to live long! He is a killer! And even if you agree to give him what he wants, he will destroy us anyway. Please, don't agree, mother!*

*The door opened and Caraffa again appeared on the threshold. But now he seemed very displeased with something. Well I could assume with what... Caraffa **was not** sure of his victory anymore. It perturbed him because he had only this last chance left.*

– *So, what have you decided, Madonna?*

I gathered the whole of my courage to prevent my voice from trembling, and calmly pronounced:

– *I answered this question so many times, Holiness! What could have changed in such a short time?*

I felt I was on the verge of fainting, but on looking into Anna's eyes shining with pride, all the bad things suddenly disappeared... So light and beautiful was my daughter in this frightful moment!

– *You went crazy, Madonna! Are you really able to send your own daughter to the basement so easily? You perfectly know what awaits her there! Come to your senses, Isidora!*

Suddenly Anna came close to Caraffa and pronounced in her clear ringing voice:

– *You are neither Judge nor God! You're just a sinner! That is why the Sinners Ring burns your dirty fingers! I think it is no accident that you wear it, because you are the meanest of them! You will not frighten me, Caraffa. And my mother will never submit to you!*

Anna drew herself up and..., spat in the Pope's face. Caraffa went mortally pale. I never saw someone turn pale so quickly! His face became ash-grey literally in fraction of a second... and death blazed up in his burning dark eyes. Still being in a "stupor" at Anna's unexpected behavior, I suddenly understood everything. She purposely provoked Caraffa in order not to linger over the outcome! She wanted a definite solution now to prevent my further suffering. She wanted to die as soon as possible... My heart was twisted with pain. Anna reminded me of the girl Damiana... She decided her fate... and I could help her in nothing. I could not interfere.

– *Well, Isidora, I think you will regret it terribly. You're a bad mother. And I was right regarding women. They all are the devil's brood, including my poor mother.*

– *I beg your pardon, Your Holiness, but if your mother is of the devil's brood, then who are you, being the flesh of her flesh? – I asked, being sincerely surprised with his crazy deductions.*

– *Oh, Isidora, I have already exterminated it in myself a long time ago! Only on seeing you, I again felt something toward a woman. But I see now that I was wrong! You're like the rest! You're terrible! I hate you and all like you!*

Caraffa looked mad... I feared that our end could be much worse than had been planned in the beginning. Suddenly the Pope abruptly jumped toward me and yelled:

– *Yes or no?! I ask you for the last time, Isidora!*

How could I answer this crazy man? Everything has been already said. So I said nothing, ignoring his question.

– *I give you one week, Madonna. I hope that you will be reasonable in the end and pity Anna... and yourself... – He grasped my daughter's arm and jumped out of the room.*

Only now did I remember that I needed to breathe... The Pope's behaviour astonished me so much that I could not come to my senses and waited for the door to open again. Anna offended him to death and I was sure that after he recovered from the fit of anger, he would recall it and take immediate measures. My poor girl! Her fragile and pure life hung by a thread which Caraffa's capricious will could easily break...

I tried to think of nothing for some time to give a short break to my fevered brain. It seemed that not only Caraffa but the whole world I knew went mad... including my brave daughter. Well, our lives were prolonged for a week... Could we possibly change anything? Anyway there was no

more or less worthy idea in my tired and empty head for the moment. I was unable to feel anything. I was unable even to be afraid. I think that people going to their death felt just like this.

Could I really change anything in seven short days, if I had not succeeded in finding the "key" to Caraffa for four long years? Nobody in my family ever believed in a fluke... Therefore it would be childish to hope that something would unexpectedly bring salvation. **I knew** that nobody would help us. Father could not help, if he offered Anna to take her spirit in case we fail... Meteora said no too... **We were alone** and must rely only on ourselves. Therefore we must think, trying not to lose hope to the very last moment, which in this situation was beyond me...

The air in the room began to thicken. Sever appeared. I only smiled at him, feeling neither excitement nor joy, because I knew that he did not come to help.

– I greet you, Sever! What brought you over again? – I calmly asked.

He looked at me with surprise, as if he did not understand my calmness. Probably he did not know that there was a limit for human suffering which is very difficult to reach... But if one succeeds, the most terrible things become absolutely insignificant, because there is no strength left even to be afraid...

– I am sorry I cannot help you, Isidora. Can I do anything for you?

– No, Sever. You cannot, but I'll be pleased if you stay with me a little... I'm glad to see you. – I sadly answered and then added. – We got one week... It is highly likely that after that Caraffa will take our short lives. Tell me, are they really worth so little? Are we really going to leave so easily like Magdalena did? Will there be really nobody who would cleanse our world of this monster, Sever?

– I did not come to you to answer old questions, my friend... But I must confess that you made me do a great deal of thinking, Isidora... You made me see what I have persistently tried to forget for years. And I agree with you – **we are wrong**... Our truth is too "narrow" and inhuman. It smothers our hearts... and we become too cold to judge correctly what is going on. Magdalena was right saying that **our Faith is dead**... just as you're right, Isidora.

I stared at him with utter surprise unable to believe what I heard! Was this the same proud and ever-right Sever who did not tolerate even the faintest criticism directed toward his great Teachers and his beloved Meteora?!!

I did not take my eyes off him trying to get to his pure but tightly shut soul... What could have changed the opinion he had held for centuries?! What could make him make change his mind and see the world in a much more human way?

– I know I surprised you. – Sever sadly smiled. – But the fact that I confided in you will not change the present events. **I don't know** how to destroy Caraffa. But the White Volkhv does. Do you wish to see him once again?

– May I ask what changed you, Sever? – I asked carefully, ignoring his last question.

He reflected for a second, probably, trying to answer as honestly as possible...

– It happened very long time ago... from the day when Magdalena died. I did not forgive myself and all of us for her death. But apparently our laws lived in us too deeply and I had no courage to admit it. When you came, you vividly reminded me of everything that happened then... you are strong and give yourself to those who need you the same way she did. You shook up the memory that I've tried to kill for centuries... You brought back to life the Golden Maria in me... I thank you for it, Isidora.

Pain screamed deep in Sever's eyes. There was so much that I was drowning in it! I could not believe that his warm and pure soul had opened, that he was at last **living** again! Sever, what can I do? Aren't you terrified that monsters like Caraffa run the world?

– I've already told you, Isidora. Let's go to Meteora again to see the White Volkhv... Only he can help you. Unfortunately, I cannot...

For the first time I felt his disappointment so vividly... he was truly disappointed by his

helplessness... by how he lived... by his out-of-date TRUTH.

It turns out that the human heart cannot fight with what it has become accustomed to or what it has believed in for its whole life... That is why Sever could not change his belief easily and totally, even though realizing that he was wrong. For centuries he lived believing that he helped people and he did exactly that, which one day would save our imperfect Earth, and help in its birth... He believed in goodness and future despite the losses and pain which he could have avoided, if he'd opened his heart earlier...

But probably we all are imperfect, even Sever. And no matter how painful our disappointment is, it is necessary to live with it, correcting some old errors and making new ones, without which our Earthly life would be unnatural...

– Would you find a little bit of your time for me, Sever? I would like to know more about what you told me the other day. I hope I did not tire you with my questions. If I did, tell me so and I won't bother you. But if you agree to speak with me, you'll give me a wonderful gift, because nobody else will tell me what you know while I am still here, on Earth.

– But what about Anna? Wouldn't you prefer to spend time with her?

– I called her... My girl does not answer probably because she is sleeping... I think she got tired. I don't want to disturb her rest. Therefore, talk to me Sever.

He sadly and understandingly looked into my eyes and quietly asked:

– What do you want to know, my friend? Ask. I shall try to tell you everything.

– It's Svetodar, Sever... What became of him? How has Radomir and Magdalena's son lived his life on Earth?

Sever submerged into his thoughts... Finally he breathed deeply, as if shedding the delusion of the past and began the next breathtaking story...

*– After Radomir's crucifixion the Knights Templar took Svetodar to Spain to save him from the bloody claws of the "holiest" church which tried to find and destroy him whatever the cost, because the boy was the most dangerous **living** witness and also a **direct successor** of Radomir's Tree of Life which would have to change our world some day.*

Svetodar lived and cognized the surrounding world in the family of a Spanish grandee who was a faithful follower of Radomir and Magdalena's teachings. To their great sorrow they did not have children of their own, therefore this "new family" accepted the boy very cordially, doing their best to make him feel as comfortable as possible. They named him Amori (which meant dear, darling), because it was dangerous to call him by his real name, Svetodar. It sounded too unusual to a stranger's ear, and to risk his life because of it would be more than unreasonable. Thus Svetodar became the boy Amori for the rest and only friends and his family called him by his real name, but only when there were no strangers near...

Very well remembering his beloved father's death and still cruelly suffering, Svetodar swore in his child's heart "to remake" this cruel and ungrateful world. He swore to dedicate his future life to others to show how dearly and selflessly his late father loved Life and how furiously he fought for Goodness and Light...

His uncle Radan stayed in Spain with Svetodar and was with the boy day and night, endlessly worrying for his fragile, still unformed life.

Radan adored his wonderful nephew and was always on his guard fearing that one day somebody would hunt them down and take little Svetodar's valuable life, for it was he who was destined to carry the torch of Light and Knowledge in our pitiless, but so dear and familiar Earthly world.

Eight tense years passed. Svetodar grew into a handsome young lad who now looked very like his brave father – Jesus-Radomir. He grew up and got strong, and the familiar steel which flared so often in his father's eyes began to appear in his pure blue ones.

Svetodar lived and studied very diligently, hoping with all his heart that he would, one day, be

like Radomir. Volkhv Isten taught him Wisdom and Knowledge. Yes, yes, Isidora! – Sever smiled at my surprise. – It was the same Isten who you met in Meteora. Isten and Radan tried to do their best to develop Svetodar's lively mind and open the enigmatic World of Knowledge for him as wide as possible in order that, in case of any misfortune, the boy could stand up for himself fearessly confronting enemies or losses.

Svetodar parted with his dear sister and Magdalena a long time ago and from that day he never saw them alive... Although almost every month somebody brought the latest news from them, his lonely heart deeply missed his mother and sister – his only real family, except for his uncle Radan. But even at this early age Svetodar learned not to show his feelings which he considered an inexcusable weakness for a real man. He aimed to grow into a Warrior, like his father, and did not wish to show people his vulnerability. So his uncle Radan taught him... and so asked his mother, distant and beloved Golden Maria, in her letters.

After Magdalena's senseless and terrible death the whole of Svetodar's inner world turned into endless pain... His wounded soul did not wish to put up with such unfair loss. Although uncle Radan had prepared him for the possibility of this kind of outcome a long time ago, the misfortune fell on young Svetodar like a hurricane of unendurable torments from which there was no rescue... His soul suffered, writhing in powerless anger, because nothing could be changed or brought back. His wonderful and tender mother went to a distant and unknown world, taking his little sister with her...

Now he was absolutely alone in this cruel and cold reality, having not become a truly adult man yet or understanding how to survive in this hatred and hostility...

But it was Radomir and Magdalena's blood that ran in their only son's veins, therefore he suffered his pain and remained the same firm Svetodar which surprised even Radan who better than anybody knew how terribly vulnerable one's soul could be and how hard it was to come back to a place which now was without those who you loved and missed so sincerely and deeply...

Svetodar did not wish to surrender at the discretion of grief and pain... The more cruelly his life "beat" him, the more furiously he tried to fight, cognizing the ways to Light, Goodness and salvation of human souls which wandered in the darkness... An endless stream of people came to him begging for help. Some thirsted for the healing of physical illness, some craved healing for their wounded hearts and minds and some simply aspired to Light which Svetodar generously shared with all.

Radan's alarm grew. The fame about his careless nephew's "wonders" crossed the Pyrenees... the number of people who wanted the new "wonder-worker"'s help grew with every day. And he behaved as if he did not notice the approaching danger and refused nobody, confidently following Radomir's footsteps...

Several restless years passed. Svetodar matured, becoming stronger and more composed. Radan and he had moved to Occitania a long time ago where, it seemed, even the air breathed the teachings of his mother – a prematurely dead Magdalena. The Knights Templar met her son with open arms, swearing to do their best to save and help him.

And the day when Radan felt real threatening danger finally came. It was the eighth anniversary of the death of Golden Maria and Vesta – Svetodar's beloved mother and sister...

– Look, Isidora... – Sever pronounced in a low voice. – I shall show it to you, if you wish.

A vivid but dreary and **living** picture opened before my eyes.

An importunate drizzly rain profusely sprinkled the sullen and misty mountains leaving a feeling of uncertainty and sorrow. A dark haze wrapped the nearest castles in cocoons of fog, converting them into lonely sentinels which guarded the eternal peace of the valley...

The valley of Magicians sullenly looked at the gloomy picture, remembering the bright merry days lit by the hot summer sunrays, which made everything around look even sadder.

A tall and slender young man stood motionless at the entrance of the familiar cave like a

sorrowful stone statue carved by an unknown master from the very stone of the cave...

I understood that this was the adult Svetodar.

He looked grown up and strong, imperious and at the same time very kind... His proud and highly held head told of his intrepidity and honour. His very long fair hair tied down by a red ribbon round his forehead fell in heavy waves on his shoulders, making him look like an ancient king... a proud descendant of the Meravingly.

Svetodar stood leaning against the moist stone, feeling neither cold nor moisture, feeling nothing...

Here, exactly eight years ago, his mother, the Golden Maria and his little sister, the brave and tender Vesta, found their death.

They were brutally and meanly killed by a mad and wicked man sent by the "fathers" of the "holiest" church.

Magdalena did not live long enough to hug her grown up son who, like she, bravely and devotedly followed the familiar way to Light and Knowledge and the cruel earthly way of bitterness and loss...

– Svetodar could never forgive himself for being far away when they needed his protection here. – Sever quietly continued. – Guilt and bitterness gnawed his pure and hot heart, making him fight yet more furiously with monsters which called themselves the "servants of God", "rescuers" of human souls... He clenched his fists and for the thousandth time swore to himself that he would "transform" this "wrong" earthly world, that he would destroy everything false, "black" and mean in it.

The Knights Templar's red cross glowed on Svetodar's broad chest... It was the cross that perpetuated the memory of Magdalena and no earthly force could make him forget the oath of the Knight's revenge.

The kindness and tenderness with which his young heart treated the light and honest people was equal to the severity of his cold brain toward the betrayers and the "servants" of the church. Svetodar was too decisive and strict toward himself, but surprisingly patient and kind toward others. It was people **without conscience and honour** that really repelled him. He did not forgive treachery and lies in any form and fought with this **disgrace of man** with all possible means, sometimes knowing that he could lose.

Suddenly, right in front of him, he saw a stream of very bizarre water in the grey shroud of rain which ran from the rock that beetled over his head. The dark drops sprinkled the walls of the cave leaving sinister brown traces on it... At the beginning Svetodar did not notice it, being deeply in his thoughts, but then, on looking closely, he gave a start – the water was crimson! It flowed from the mountain like a stream of dark "human blood", as if Earth opened its wounds, uncovering all man's sins, unable to stand anymore of his meanness and cruelty...

After the first stream came a second, then a third, followed by a fourth and so on until the whole mountain was covered with brooks of red water; there was so much red water... It seemed that Magdalena's holy blood called for revenge, reminding the living of her grief!

The seething red brooks merged into one in the hollow, deluging the wide river Aude which flowed in a stately way to the warm blue sea, oblivious to anything, washing on its way the walls of the old Carcassonne...³

Suddenly Svetodar watchfully pricked up his ears... but then warmly smiled.

– Do you again watch me over, uncle? I told you a long time ago, I don't wish to hide!

Radan came out onto a stone ledge, sadly shaking his grey head. Years had not spared him, imposing a harsh imprint of anxiety and loss on his light face... He already did not look like that

³ When I visited those sacred places, I knew that the water in the mountains of Occitania becomes red because of red clay, but the view of the running "blood" water produced an indelible impression indeed...

happy young lad – ever-laughing sun-Radan – who could once kindle even the stalest heart. Now he was a Warrior hardened by adversity who tried to save his most precious treasure – Radomir and Magdalena’s son, the only living reminder of their tragic lives... their courage... their light and love at whatever cost.

– You have a Duty, Svetodarushka... just as I do. You must survive whatever it may cost. Because if you are gone, it will mean that your father and mother died in vain and that scoundrels and cowards win our war... You have no right to do that, my boy!

– You are wrong, uncle. I have **my** right to do that, because it’s **my life!** I shall not allow anybody to make rules for it beforehand. My father lived his short life submitting to the will of another person... just as did my poor mother, because they tried to save those who hated them, fulfilling the decisions of others. I am not going to submit to the will of one man, even if he is my grand-dad. It’s **my life** and I shall live it the way I consider necessary and honest! Forgive me, uncle Radan!

Svetodar got impassioned. His young mind objected to an outside influence on his own fate. By the law of youth he wished **to decide his fate himself**, allowing nobody to rule his life. Radan smiled a sad smile, watching his brave charge... Svetodar was richly endowed with everything – force, mind, self-control and persistence; he wanted to live his life honestly and openly... Unfortunately, he did not yet understand that there could not be an open war with those who hunted him simply because **they did not have any honour, conscience, shame or heart.**

– Well, you’re right in your own way, my boy... It’s **your** life. Nobody can live it for you... I am sure that you will live it with dignity. Just be careful, Svetodar. Your father’s blood runs in your veins and our enemies will never give up wanting to destroy you. Take care of yourself, my dear.

He patted his nephew on the shoulder and sadly stepped back, disappearing behind the stone ledge, a second later a cry and much noise was heard. Something bulky fell down and then... Silence...

Svetodar rushed toward the sound, but it was too late. Two bodies lay on the stone floor of the cave grappled in a mortal embrace. One was an unknown man dressed in a cloak with a red cross and the second was... Radan. Svetodar shrieked and threw himself onto his uncle’s body which lay motionless. It seemed that life had already abandoned it, denying Svetodar the chance to say a last farewell. But, it appeared, Radan still breathed.

– Uncle, please don’t leave me! Not you, please... I beg you, don’t leave me, uncle!

Svetodar perplexedly embraced his uncle with his strong arms, carefully rocking him like a little baby, just like Radan rocked him so many times a long time ago... It was obvious that life was leaving Radan, drop after drop flowing from his rapidly weakening body like a golden brook... But even now, knowing that he was dying, Radan worried about only one thing – how to protect Svetodar... How could he persuade him, during these remaining seconds, of that which he failed to persuade him for those twenty five long years? How could he tell Maria and Radomir there, in that unknown world, that he failed to save himself and now their son is absolutely alone?

– Listen to me, son... This man... He is not one of the Knights Templar. – Radan hoarsely pronounced pointing at the killer. – I know them all. He is a stranger... Tell this to Gundomer... He will help... Find them... or they will find you. But it would be much better if you leave, Svetodarushka... Go to our Gods. They will protect you. This place is flooded with our blood... There is too much of it here... Leave, dear heart...

Very slowly Radan’s eyes closed. The weak hand unclenched and a knight’s dagger fell out on the floor, clanking. It was very unusual... Svetodar looked at it more attentively. It simply could not be! This kind of weapon belonged to a very narrow circle of Knights, only to those who once personally knew John. It had a gilded crowned head on the top of the handle.

Svetodar was certain that Radan had not had his own dagger for some length of time (it once remained in his enemy’s body). It means that today he snatched the weapon off the killer. But how could it get into **stranger** hands?! Could a Knight Templar betray the cause for the sake of which

they all lived?! Svetodar did not believe it. He knew these people like he knew himself. None of them could descend to such heinous depths. They would rather be killed than forced to betray. In this case who was that man with this special dagger?

Radan lay motionless and quiet. All earthly anxieties and bitterness left him forever... His face, hardened with years, smoothed out and he again reminded one of that merry young Radan who the Golden Maria loved so much and his brother Radomir adored with all his heart... He again seemed happy and light, as if all terrible misfortunes vanished and happiness and calmness reigned in his heart...

Svetodar was on his knees, not uttering a sound. His frozen body quietly rocked from side to side, as if helping to withstand this mean heartless blow... Here, in this very cave eight years ago Magdalena was killed... and now he said goodbye to the last member of his family, remaining truly alone. Radan was right. This place had absorbed too much of their family blood... Even the brooks were red... as if wishing to tell him – "Leave and never come back".

I was shivering with some strange fever... It was terrible! It was absolutely impermissible and incomprehensible. We **called ourselves humans!!!** Is there no limit to human meanness and treachery?

– How could you live with it for so long, Sever? How did you manage to stay so calm all these years, knowing that?!

He smiled sadly, leaving my question unanswered. And I, being sincerely surprised at this amazing man's courage and firmness, discovered a new side of his selfless and difficult life... his unbending and pure heart...

– Several years passed after Radan's murder. Svetodar found the killer and avenged his uncle's death. He had thought this man was not a Knight Templar, but they never knew who he truly was. However they managed to find out that before killing Radan, the assassin had killed an outstanding and light Knight who was with them from the very beginning. He was murdered with the only purpose of seizing his cloak and weapon to give the impression that it was the Knights who killed Radan...

The accumulation of these bitter events poisoned Svetodar's heart with losses. He had the only comfort left – his pure and true love... his dear tender Margaret... She was a wonderful Cathar girl, a follower of the Golden Maria's teachings. There was something in her that was elusively reminiscent of Magdalena... Whether it was her long golden hair, her softness, her slowness of motion or simply the tenderness and femininity of her face, but Svetodar very often caught himself looking for his dearest recollections, which had disappeared into the past a long time ago, in her...

A girl was born in a year. They called her Maria.

As promised to Radan, little Maria was taken to nice brave people – the Cathars – who Svetodar knew very well and trusted fully. They engaged themselves in raising Maria like their own daughter whatever the cost or threat. Since then it became a kind of tradition. When a new child was born of Radomir and Magdalena's line, he or she was fostered by people the existence of which the "holy" church did not even suspect. It was done to let them live their priceless lives to the end no matter how happy or sad they might be...

– How could they give their children away, Sever? Did the parents never see them again? – I was astonished.

– Why not? Of course they saw them. It's just the fate of each child was different... Some parents would live nearby, especially mothers. Sometimes they even lived with people who raised their child. There were different situations... There was only one thing that never changed – the servants of the church had no rest and followed in their tracks like bloodhounds, using the least opportunity to kill the parents and children with Radomir and Magdalena's blood in their veins, fiercely hating even the newly born child for it...

– How often did the descendants die? Did any of them manage to survive and live life to the end? Did you help them, Sever? Did Meteora help them? – I literally poured a squall of questions

on him, unable to satisfy my burning curiosity.

Sever became silent for a second, then he sadly pronounced:

– We tried to help... but many of them did not wish for our help. I think the knowing about a father sending his son to his death lived in their hearts for centuries, without forgiving us or forgetting. Pain can be cruel, Isidora. It doesn't forgive errors, especially those which are impossible to correct...

– Did you happen to know about any of these wonderful descendants, Sever?

– Of course, Isidora! We knew about all of them, although we did not always have occasion to see each of them. I think you too knew some of them. But let me finish Svetodar's story first. His fate was difficult and strange. Are you sure you want to hear it? – I nodded and Sever continued... – When his wonderful daughter was born, Svetodar finally decided to fulfill Radan's last wish... Do you remember, Radan, when he was dying, asked him to go to the Gods?

– Well, yes, but was it serious? What "Gods" could he send him to? It's been a long time since Gods lived on Earth!

– You are not quite right, my friend... Perhaps it's not what people mean by Gods, but there always is someone on Earth who temporally occupies their place and looks after Earth, preventing it from approaching too close to the precipice, so the life on it will not come to a frightful and premature end. The world has not been born yet, Isidora. You know it. Earth still needs permanent help, but people must not know about it... They must choose for themselves, otherwise the help will bring only harm. Therefore Radan was not so wrong, sending Svetodar to those who watch. He knew that Svetodar would never come to us. But he tried to save him from misfortune, because he was Radomir's **direct** descendant, his first-born son. He was the most dangerous of all, because he was the nearest and, if he was killed, this wonderful light line would never continue.

Svetodar bid farewell to his dear and tender Margaret, rocked his little Maria for the last time and left for a very long and difficult journey to the unknown northern country where the one to whom Radan sent him, lived. He was called a Wanderer...

Many years will pass before Svetodar comes home. He will come back to die, but he will live a full and bright Life. He will find Knowledge and Understanding of the world. He will find that for which he was persistently looking for so long...

I'll show them to you, Isidora... I'll show you that which I never showed to anybody...

Everything breathed with cold and space, as if I unexpectedly dived into Eternity... The feeling was unusual and strange. It spread joy and anxiety at the same time. I felt small and insignificant, as if somebody wise and enormous watched me in that moment, trying to understand who dared to disturb his peace. But soon this feeling disappeared, making way for an enormous, deep and "warm" silence...

I saw a boundless emerald glade and two men sitting in front of each other, crossing their feet... Their eyes were closed. Not a single word was pronounced, but it was clear that they talked...

I understood. It was their thoughts that talked...

My heart was pounding at mad speed, as if trying to jump out of my chest! I was doing my best to calm down, fearing to disturb these highly concentrating people who were in their enigmatic world. I watched them, holding my breath and trying to engrave their images in my soul, because I knew that this kind of thing would never be repeated. Nobody, save Sever, would show me the events so closely related to our past and our suffering, but still resisting, Earth...

One of them looked very familiar and, on looking closely at him, I recognized Svetodar... He was almost unchanged, only his hair had become shorter. But his face was much the same – young and fresh, like it was the day he left Montsegur...

The second one was also relatively young and very tall (which was obvious even when he sat). His long and "hoarfrosted" hair fell on his wide shoulders, shining under the sunrays with pure silver. The colour seemed very unusual and even unreal...

But it was his eyes which impressed me most of all – deep, wise and very large, they shone with the same pure silvery light, as if somebody's generous hand scattered billions of silver stars in them...

His face was hard and at the same time kind, concentrated and aloof, as if he simultaneously lived two lives – an earthly and a different and stranger one...

If I got it right, he was exactly the one who Sever called Wanderer, the one who observed...

Both men wore white long garments decorated with red and girdled with thick, twisted red cords.

The world around this unusual couple fluidly swayed, changing its outlines, as if they sat in a closed vibrating space to which only the two of them had access. The air was fragrant and cool. It smelled of forest herbs, fir-trees and raspberry. The light breeze, which puffed now and then, gently caressed succulent tall grass, filling it with the fragrance of far away lilac, fresh milk and cedar cones... The land was so surprisingly safe, pure and kind, as if the world's anxieties did not touch it, human spite passed it by and a lying and changeable man failed to set foot on it.

The two interlocutors rose, smiled at each other and began to say goodbye. Svetodar was the first to speak.

– I thank you, Wanderer... – He made a low bow. – I won't be able to come back, you know. I go home. But I remembered well your lessons and I shall pass them to others. You'll always live in my memory and my heart. Farewell.

*– Go with peace, son of light people – Svetodar. I am glad I met you and I am sad that I have to part with you... I have girded you with everything you could conceive and give to others. **But it does not mean that people will want to accept what you will want to tell them.** Remember, knowing one, **man is solely responsible for his choices.** Not Gods or fate – only man himself! And unless he understands it, Earth won't begin to change and become better... May your way home be light, devoted one. May your Faith keep you and may our Kin help you...*

The vision disappeared and everything around became empty and lonely, as if an old and warm sun slowly hid behind the black cloud...

– How much time has passed since the day Svetodar left home, Sever? I thought he had spent a very long time there, even may be his whole life.

– Well, he did spend his whole life there, Isidora – the whole long sixty years.

– But he looks quite young! It means that he also managed to live long without getting older, didn't he? Did he know the old secret or it was Wanderer who taught him?

– I cannot tell, my friend, because I don't know. But I know another thing. Svetodar did not have time to teach people what Wanderer had taught him for years. He was brutally impeded... But he could see the continuation of his wonderful Line – his little great-grandson. He had an opportunity to name him his real name. It gave a rare possibility to Svetodar – to die happy... Sometimes it is enough even this tiny bit to feel that your life was not in vain, isn't it, Isidora?

– Fate again chooses the best! Why then did he have to study all his life? What did he leave the wife and child for, if it was in vain? Or is there some great sense which I cannot understand, Sever?

*– You shouldn't grieve, Isidora. You **understand** everything perfectly well. Look at yourself, because the answer is your life... You fight, knowing perfectly well that you won't win. But can you really act otherwise?*

***Man cannot surrender, assuming the possibility of loss; he has no right to this.** Even if it won't be you but somebody else who will be aroused by your courage, after your death, everything you did was **not in vain**. It's just that earthly man has not grown up enough yet to comprehend it. Most people are interested in the fight while they are alive, but nobody thinks of what will be left after them. They are not able to "live for descendants" yet, Isidora.*

– It is sad, if you are right, my friend... But it cannot be changed today. That is why we should

let ourselves return to the subject of our conversation. Tell me how Svetodar's life ended.

Sever tenderly smiled.

– You changed too, Isidora. You threw yourself into assuring me that I was wrong as far back as our past meeting! You began to understand a lot, my friend. It's a pity that you leave for nothing... in fact you can do much more!

Sever fell silent for a second and then continued.

– After long and hard years of lonely wandering, Svetodar came back home at last to his dear Occitania... where sorrowful and irreparable losses were waiting for him.

His sweet and tender wife Margaret left this life before he could come back to share the difficulties with her... He also failed to meet his wonderful granddaughter Tara, his daughter Maria's child... and great-grandchild Maria who died only three years before, giving birth to his great-great-grandson. He lost too many members of his family... The load of losses on his shoulders was too severe, preventing him from being happy at what was left of his life...

Look at them, Isidora... They are worthy of your knowing them.

I again appeared in the place where the dead people, who have become very dear to my heart, lived a long time ago... Bitterness wrapped my soul in a shroud of silence, preventing me from talking to them. I could not address them. I could not even tell them how brave and wonderful they were...

Three persons stood on the apex of a high mountain... One was Svetodar. He looked very sad. A very beautiful young woman leaned against his hand and a little blond boy clung to her, holding an enormous armful of bright wildflowers.

– Who have you picked so many for, Bieloyarushka? – Svetodar tenderly asked.

– What do you mean? – The boy was surprised and divided the flowers into three equal parts.

– This one is for my mummy... this one is for my dear grandmother Tara and this one is for Grandmother Maria. Am I doing something wrong, grand-dad?

Svetodar did not answer but firmly clasped the boy to his chest. This wonderful tender child was the only one that he had... After his great-granddaughter Maria, who Svetodar never happened to see, died, the little one had only his aunt Marcilla (who was with them) and his father who Bieloyar almost did not remember because he always militated somewhere.

– You're not going to leave us, grand-dad, are you? Are you going to stay with me and teach me? Aunt Marcilla says that you will always live only with us. Is it true, grand-dad?

His eyes shone like bright little stars. It was obvious that the little one was in raptures at seeing such a youthful and strong grandfather who appeared as if from nowhere! And "grandfather" sadly hugged him and thought of those he would never see, even if he lived on Earth a hundred lonely years...

– I shall go nowhere, Bieloyarushka. Where would I go, if you're here? Now we shall always be together. You and I are a great force! Don't you think so?

The little one squealed with pleasure and pressed close to his grandfather, as if the latter could disappear as suddenly as he appeared.

– Are you truly not going to go anywhere, Svetodar? – Marcilla quietly asked.

Svetodar sadly shook his head. Where he could go? Here was his land and his roots. Here all those he loved had lived and died. And exactly here he came back HOME.

Everybody in Montsegur was unspeakably glad to meet him, despite the fact that there were none left who could remember him. But there were their children and grandchildren. There were his CATHARS who he dearly loved and respected.

*Magdalena's Faith flowered in Occitania like never before, spreading far beyond its borders! This was **the Golden Age of the Cathars**. It was a time when their teachings rushed all over many countries like a powerful and invincible wave, wiping out any obstacles in its pure and right way.*

More and more people joined them. And despite all the "black" attempts of the "holy" Catholic church to destroy them, Magdalena and Radomir's teachings won all truly light and brave hearts and all sharp and open to new things minds. In the farthest corners of the land minstrels sang marvellous songs composed by the Occitan troubadours, which opened eyes and minds of the enlightened, and amused "ordinary" people with their mastery of the romanticism. Occitania bloomed like a wonderful bright flower which had absorbed the Light Maria's vital power. It seemed that no force could resist this powerful stream of Knowledge, Light and universal Love. People still worshiped Magdalena here. They adored her as if she still lived in each of them... she lived in each pebble or grain of this outstanding pure land...

One day wandering among familiar caves, Svetodar came upon a new one which shocked him to the depth of his heart... There, in a quiet corner, his wonderful mother, his beloved Maria Magdalena stood! It seemed that nature could not forget this extraordinary and strong woman and its mighty and generous hand created her image⁴.

Svetodar turned around and saw another miracle – a statue of his sister was in the other corner of the cave! It obviously looked like a curly haired girl standing over something lying there⁵ (Could it be Vesta standing over her mother's body?) Svetodar's hair began to stand on end. It seemed to him that he began to go mad. He turned and quickly left the cave.

Later, when he recovered from the shock, Svetodar asked Marcilla whether she knew something about what he had seen. When he heard yes, tears of happiness washed his heart. His mother, the Golden Maria still lived in this land! The land of Occitania recreated this wonderful woman in itself, "reviving" Magdalena in stone... It was a true creation of love, but this time it was nature which was the loving architect.

Tears glittered in my eyes, but I was not ashamed. I would give a lot to meet one of them alive..., especially Magdalena. What marvellous and ancient Magic flamed in this outstanding woman's heart when she created her magic reign! It was a Reign of Knowledge and Understanding and Love was its foundation. But it was not that love about which the "holy" church shouts its head off, wearing this marvellous word out so that one could not hear it anymore, but the **wonderful and pure, real and brave, unique and amazing LOVE**, at the name of which the states appeared... and ancient warriors went into battle... new life was born... our world changed and became better... it was this kind of Love which the Golden Maria brought. And I wanted to bow exactly to this Maria... for everything she carried, for her pure light LIFE, for her boldness and courage and for her love.

Regrettably, it was impossible... She lived centuries ago and I could not be the one who knew her. Incredibly deep sorrow suddenly seized me. Tears poured down my cheeks like salt streams...

– There, there, my friend! Other sorrows await you! – Sever exclaimed with surprise. – Please, I beg you, calm down...

He tenderly touched my hand and sorrow gradually disappeared. Only bitterness was left, as if I had lost something light and dear...

– You must not weaken... War awaits you, Isidora.

– Tell me, Sever. Were the teachings of the Cathars called the Teachings of Love because of Magdalena?

– You are not quite right, Isidora. It was not the devoted ones who called it the Teachings of Love. It had an absolutely different meaning for those who truly understood. Listen attentively to the words, Isidora: love in French is amour, isn't it? Now divide it, separating the letter "a"... We'll have a'mort which means **without death**... Here is the true meaning of Magdalena's Teachings –

⁴ Nature created a statue of a beautiful woman with very long hair which wrapped her like a cloak in the corner of the cave. According to local Cathars the statue appeared right after Magdalena's death and it resembled her more and more with every new drop of water. Even now the cave is called Maria's cave and anyone can see a standing Magdalena there.

⁵ Occitania did not wish to forget them and created their monument, sculpturing dear faces drop by drop. They have been there for centuries, but water still continues its magic work trying to recreate the originals as accurate as possible.

the Teachings of the Immortals. *As I have already told you, everything is simple, Isidora. One only has to look and listen correctly... Well, for those who do not hear, let it remain the Teachings of Love... In fact this name is beautiful too and there is a bit of truth in it.*

I stood absolutely stunned. The Teachings of the Immortals! Da'Aria... So this is what Radomir and Magdalena's Teaching was in reality! Sever surprised me many times, but never before I was so amazed! The Teachings of the Cathars attracted me with its powerful and magic force, and I could not forgive myself that I had not spoken about it with Sever before.

*– Tell me, Sever. Is anything left of the Cathars' records? Something should have been saved, shouldn't it? Even if it were not the writings of the Perfect ones, then may be the writing of their students were saved? I mean, there should be something about their **real** life and teachings.*

– Unfortunately not, Isidora. The Inquisition destroyed everything everywhere. The Pope sent his vassals even to other countries to destroy any manuscript or any piece of birch bark they could find... We were looking for to save but could not save anything.

– But what about people? Could they keep something or could there be somebody who would save it through centuries?

– I don't know, Isidora... I think that, even if someone had a record, then it was changed over time. In fact it is in man's nature to refashion everything in his own way, especially when he does not understand much. So it is highly unlikely that something was saved as it was. It's a pity, really... We have Radomir and Magdalena's diaries, but they were written before the Cathars. Although I think that the Teachings had not changed since then.

– I am sorry for my confused thoughts and questions, Sever. I see that I've lost a lot refusing to come to you, but I am still alive and I can ask you while I breathe, right? Will you tell me how Svetodar's life ended? I am sorry for interrupting you.

Sever smiled. He liked my impatience and thirst for knowing everything I could while I have time. So he gladly continued.

– Svetodar lived and taught in Occitania for only two years, Isidora; but these years became the most precious and happy years of his wandering life.

He spent his days, lit by Beloyar's merry laughter, in his favourite Montsegur surrounded by the Perfect ones to who Svetodar honestly and sincerely tried to pass what the far away Wanderer had taught him for all those long years.

They gathered in the Temple of Sun⁶ which increased tenfold the Living Power they needed and also protected them from undesirable "guests" which wished to get there secretly unwilling to appear openly.

*Soon an unforeseen and quite amusing event happened, after which the closest Perfect ones (and later the rest of the Cathars) began to call Svetodar a "Fiery one". It happened during an ordinary lesson when Svetodar was slightly "careless" and showed the whole of his Spirit... As is generally known, all the Perfect ones were **seers** and the sudden appearance of Svetodar's blazing Spirit truly shocked them... Thousands of questions showered down on him, many of which even he could not answer. Perhaps only the Wanderer could, but he was unattainable and distant, therefore Svetodar had to explain it somehow to his friends on his own... It is unknown, whether he succeeded in doing so or not, but since that day the Cathars began to call him a Fiery Teacher⁷.*

Two years passed. Peace and quiet reigned in Svetodar's tired soul. Days ran by, carrying away old sorrows far, far away... Beloyar seemed to grow by leaps and bounds, becoming cleverer

⁶ The Temple of Sun was a tower specially built in Montsegur which let direct sunrays through the window at a certain time which made the Temple look truly magic. Also this tower concentrated and strengthened the energy which helped the Cathars who worked there to lighten the tension and spend less of their vital forces.

⁷ It's true that the name of the Fiery Teacher is mentioned in some modern books about the Cathars. Regrettably, it is not a real one... Probably Sever was right, saying that people redo everything in their way, having little or no understanding... For example, I found recollections of the "last Cathar" Deodat Roche who said that the Fiery Teacher was a Schteiner(!)... Here we go again. The people of Israel, which **never were** among **the real Cathars**, is forcefully "fastened" to everything Pure and Light...

with every passing day, excelling his older friends about which his grand-dad Svetodar was extremely happy.

But one of these lucky and quiet days Svetodar suddenly felt a strange and acute alarm... His Gift told him that a misfortune was knocking on his peaceful door...

It seemed that nothing changed. Nothing was happening, but Svetodar's alarm grew, poisoning the pleasant moments of complete peace.

One day Svetodar went for a walk with little Bieloyar (whose secular name was Frank) on the outskirts near the cave where almost all his family died. The weather was wonderful. It was sunny and warm and Svetodar's feet brought him to the sad cave... As usual little Bieloyar picked some wildflowers and grand-dad and great-great-grandson came to pay tribute to the dead.

It is highly likely that somebody put a curse on this cave for his family, otherwise it was impossible to understand, how they, so extraordinarily gifted completely lost their sensitivity, **when getting exactly into this cave**, and like blind kittens went straight into the trap which somebody had laid for them.

Bieloyar, who was merrily twittering his favourite song, suddenly became silent as always happened when he entered the familiar cave. The boy did not understand what made him behave like this, but as soon as they entered, his merry mood evaporated and sorrow settled in his heart...

– Tell me, grand-dad, why was somebody always killed here? This place is very sad. I "hear" it... Let's go away, grand-dad! I don't like it here... It always smells of trouble.

The boy's shoulders fearfully flinched, as if he truly felt the trouble. Svetodar sadly smiled, firmly hugged the boy and wanted to go out outside, as four unknown persons appeared at the entrance of the cave.

– You are not welcome here, uninvited ones. It's a family place of sorrow and entrance is forbidden to strangers. Leave in peace. – Svetodar pronounced quietly.

He was bitterly sorry that he had taken Bieloyar with him. The boy was scared and pressed close to his grandfather, feeling that bad things were about to happen.

– Well then, it's just a perfect place! – One of them burst out laughing insolently. – We won't have to look for anything else.

They began to surround the unarmed couple, obviously trying not to approach them too close for the time being.

– Well, Devil's servant, show us your force! – The "holy warriors" summoned up their courage. – What, your horned master does not help you?

The strangers deliberately made themselves angry, trying not to yield to fear, because they had heard a lot about the unbelievable force of the Fiery Teacher.

Svetodar easily pushed the boy behind his back with his left arm and the right one stretched toward the "guests", as if closing the entrance to the cave.

– I warned you, the rest is your business... – He pronounced severely. – Leave and nothing bad will happen to you.

The four defiantly roared with laughter. One of them, the tallest, took a narrow knife and, insolently swinging it, began to approach Svetodar... And here Bieloyar fearfully squeaked, slipped out of his grandfather's hands, rushed like a bullet to the man with the knife and began to beat his knees with a weighty pebble he had picked up on the way. The stranger roared in pain and hurled the boy like a fly. The problem was that the "guests" still stood at the entrance... and the stranger threw Bieloyar exactly toward the entrance... The boy thinly cried, turned over his head and flew into the precipice like a light ball... All of it took only several short seconds and Svetodar did not have time...

Blind with pain he stretched his hand to the killer, who flew in the air a couple of steps, hit his head on the wall and slipped down on the stone floor like a heavy sack. On seeing their fugleman come to such a sad end, his "partners" bunched back into the cave. But here Svetodar made a

mistake... Wishing to see whether Bieloyar was alive, he came to the precipice too close and only for an instant turned from the killers. Immediately one of them ran up like lightning and struck him in the back with his leg... Svetodar's body flew into the abyss following little Bieloyar... Everything was over. There was nothing to look at anymore. The foul "human beings", pushing each other, quickly got out of the cave...

A short time later a blond little head appeared at the precipice of the entrance. The child carefully crawled onto the edge of the ledge and, on seeing that there was nobody inside, began to cry bitterly... Probably the wild fear and offense and maybe injuries poured out with the waterfall of tears, washing everything he had just outlived... He cried bitterly for a long time, talking to himself, being angry and pitying, as if his grand-dad could hear him... as if he could come back to save him...

– I told you, this cave is wicked! I told you... I told you! – Convulsively sobbing, the child wailed – Why did not you listen to me! What shall I do? Where do I go now?

Tears rolled down his dirty little cheeks like a burning stream, tearing his little heart apart... Bieloyar did not know whether his beloved grand-dad was still alive... He did not know whether the wicked people would come back. He was simply very scared and there was nobody to calm him... nobody to protect him...

*Svetodar lay motionless on the bottom of the deep crevice. His widely open, pure blue eyes looked at the sky, seeing nothing. He went far, far away where Magdalene waited for him... and his beloved father with kind Radan... and his little sister Vesta... and his tender Margaret with his daughter Maria... and his unknown granddaughter Tara... And all those who died a long time ago, protecting their beloved world from monsters which called themselves **people**...*

And here, on earth, a man sat on a round pebble in a lonely empty cave... He looked quite small and very frightened. Bitterly crying, he furiously smeared wicked tears with his fists and swore in his child's heart that one day he would grow and remedy the "wrong" world of adults and make it joyful and good!

It was Bieloyar... the great descendant of Radomir and Magdalena – small, lost in the world of big people..., a crying Man.

41. Isidora-7. The Cathars

Sever's story flooded my heart with sorrow again. I asked myself over and over – were all these irreparable losses really inevitable? Was there any way to liberate the world from evil and spite?! This terrible machinery of global killing made my blood curdle, leaving no hope of rescue, but at the same time a powerful stream of life-giving force flowed into my wounded soul from somewhere, opening its every cell and filling my every sigh with resolution to fight against betrayers, cowards and scoundrels – those who killed pure and brave people, destroying anybody they thought might be dangerous for them...

– Tell me more, Sever! Tell me, please, about the Cathars. How long did they live without their Guiding Star – Magdalena?

Suddenly Sever became agitated and tensely answered:

– Forgive me, Isidora, but I think I'll tell you about it later. I cannot be here anymore. I ask you, hold on, my friend. Whatever betides, try to be strong.

He softly thawed and "wafted"...

Caraffa appeared on the threshold.

– Well, Isidora, have you come to any sane conclusion? – Caraffa asked without even greeting me. – I hope very much that you'll come to reason this week and I shall not have to resort to extreme measures. I told you quite sincerely that I did not want to harm your wonderful daughter; rather on the contrary, I would be glad if Anna could continue studying and cognizing new things. She still acts too tempestuously and is too categorical in her judgements, but she has

enormous potential. One can only imagine what she will be capable of if correctly developed! What do you think, Isidora? I just need your consent for this to happen and then everything will be well with you again.

– Save for the death of my husband and father, Your Holiness? – I bitterly asked.

– Well, it was just an unforeseeable complication (!). But you still have Anna, don't forget that!

– Why must I "still have" somebody, Your Holiness? I had a wonderful family which I loved so much and which was everything to me! But you destroyed it just because of an "unforeseeable complication", as you put it! Do people really mean nothing to you?!

Caraffa unhurriedly took a seat and pronounced with icy calmness:

– I am interested in people insofar as they conform to our holy church or their minds are exceptional and uncommon, which, unfortunately, can be found very rarely. An ordinary crowd does not interest me at all! This assemblage of ignorant meat is no good for anything except for fulfilling somebody's will and orders, because their weak brains are unable to grasp even the most primitive truth.

I knew Caraffa well enough, nevertheless, I felt dizzy. How can one live, thinking the way he thought?!

– What about gifted ones? In fact, you're afraid of them Your Holiness, aren't you? Otherwise you would not kill them so brutally. Tell me, if you burn them in the end, then why do you subject them to those inhuman tortures before they go to the stake? Is the atrocity you do when you burn those poor things alive really not enough for you?

*– They **must** repent and confess, Isidora! Otherwise their souls will not attain purity despite my committing them to the holy flames. They must be rid of the original devil in them. They must be purged of their dirty Gift! Otherwise their souls will come on Earth from the darkness and will again submerge into the same darkness... And I will not be able to do my duty – to join their fallen souls to God. Do you understand it, Isidora?*

No, I did not understand... because to me it all sounded like the ravings of the maddest madman! Caraffa's incomprehensible brain still was a riddle under seven seals for me. In my opinion nobody could guess it. Sometimes the Holy Pope seemed to be the cleverest and most intelligent person who knew much more than any ordinary well-read and well-educated man. As I told earlier, he was a wonderful interlocutor and his brilliant, tenacious and sharp mind totally captivated the audience, but sometimes... the things he "uttered" were very far from something normal or clear. Where was his exceptional mind in those moments?

*– I beg your pardon, Holiness, but you are talking **to me**! Why pretend?! What "God" are you talking about? And to what "God" do you wish to join the souls of these poor "sinners"? Besides, would you care to tell me what God you believe in? If, of course, you believe in anything at all...*

Contrary to my expectations he did not explode in anger. He just smiled and pronounced in a tutorial tone:

*– You see, Isidora, a person does not need God to believe in something. – He laughed on seeing my dumbfounded face. – It's rather funny to hear it exactly from me, isn't it, Isidora? But truth is truth, although I understand that it sounds extremely strange coming from the Roman Pope's mouth. But, I repeat, man **does not need God**. Another man is enough for this. Take Christ, for instance... He was simply a very **gifted** man, but, nevertheless, he was a **MAN**! He just needed to walk on water, bring back to life a half-dead person and to perform several other examples of "hocus-pocus", and well, we just had to **announce in the right way** that he was a son of God (and therefore almost God), and all went exactly as always – after his death the crowd joyfully followed its Redeemer... without having the least idea what it was that he had redeemed for them... As I already told you before, **one should know how to direct and prevail over people**, Isidora. Only then can you have them under your total control.*

– *But you will never be able to control whole nations! You'll need armies for that, Holiness! And even if we assume that you will subordinate them somehow, I am sure there will be brave people who will lead others to reconquer their freedom.*

– *You are absolutely right, Madonna. – Caraffa nodded. – Nations do not submit voluntarily. It is necessary to subdue them! But I am a not warrior and I hate militating. It causes huge and unnecessary inconvenience. Therefore in order to **subdue** them **peacefully**, I use a very simple and reliable method – I **destroy their past**, because man is vulnerable without his past. He **loses his ancestral roots**, if he does not have his past. And exactly then, confused and unprotected, he becomes a "tabula rasa" on which I can write **any history** I wish! Believe me, dear Isidora, I make people so happy, because, I repeat, **they cannot live without a past** (even if they refuse to admit it to themselves). And when they don't have their past, they are willing to accept any, if only not "to hang" in uncertainty which is much more terrible for them than any **alien** fictitious "history".*

– *Do you really think that nobody sees what is truly happening? In fact there are a lot of clever and gifted people on Earth! – I exclaimed indignantly.*

– *Why "nobody sees"? **The Chosen** do see and even try to show it to others. But we "**eradicate**" them from time to time and everything again falls into its corresponding place.*

– *The same way you once "eradicated" the family of Christ and Magdalena, or today – gifted ones? What is this "God" you pray to, Your Holiness? What is this monster which needs all these victims?!*

– *Well, since we begin to talk frankly, I **don't pray to Gods**, Isidora. **I am guided by REASON**. Well, only the helpless and poor in spirit and **those who got used to beg** for help, benefit and who knows what else, **need God**. They'll do anything, just to avoid fighting themselves! They are small fry, Isidora! And they are well worthy of being controlled! The rest is a matter of time. Therefore I ask you to help me to live long enough to have complete power over this insignificant world! Then you'll see that I was not joking and I shall have total control over Earth! I shall turn it into **my own** empire. Oh, I just need time! And you will give it to me, Isidora. You just don't know it yet.*

*I looked at Caraffa punch-drunk, once again realizing that he is much more dangerous than I had thought. I knew exactly that he had no right whatsoever to exist further. Caraffa was a **Pope which did not believe in God!!!** He was worse than I could imagine! It is possible to **try to understand** when a person does evil **in the name of his ideals**. It cannot be forgiven, but at least it can be understood somehow... But Caraffa lied here too! He lied in everything. And this was frightening...*

– *Do you know anything about the Cathars, Your Holiness? – I asked him. – I am almost sure that you read a lot about them. It was a wonderful Faith, wasn't it? Much more truthful than that of which your lying church boasts so much! It was something **real** unlike your today's gabble.*

I think I made him angry on purpose (as I often did!) disregarding the consequences. Caraffa was not going to set us free or spare us. Therefore I permitted myself this last inoffensive pleasure. But it appeared that Caraffa was not going to be offended. He heard me out patiently, ignoring my caustic remark. Then he rose and calmly pronounced:

– *If you are interested in the story of these heretics, do yourself a favour and go to the library. I hope you still remember where it is, you do? – I nodded. – You'll find a lot of interesting things there. Till we meet again, Madonna.*

He suddenly stopped at the door.

– *Yes, by the way. Today you can meet Anna. The whole evening is yours.*

He turned on his heels and left the room.

My heart sharply shrank. I missed my dear girl so much! I desperately wanted to hug her! But I was in no hurry to rejoice. I knew Caraffa. I knew that he could cancel everything just like that, if his mood changed a tiny bit. Therefore I mentally gathered myself and, having little faith in the

Pope's promise, decided to take advantage of the permission and visit the papal library which once had impressed me so much.

I wandered a bit in the familiar corridors and found the door I was looking for. I pressed a diminutive elegant lever and found myself in the same enormous room with books and handwritten scrolls up to the ceiling. Everything looked just as before, as if nobody ever took the trouble to use this amazing well of somebody else's wisdom; although I knew that Caraffa carefully studied everything, even the plainest book and each manuscript which got into this astonishing book treasury.

*I did not hope to find quickly that in which I was interested in this chaos and therefore I used my favourite method, that being "blind vision" (I think now we call this process **scanning**) and at once saw a corner with piles of the manuscripts I was looking for. There were thick and single-page ones, plain and embroidered with golden threads. It seemed that they invited me to have a look at them and dive into the captivating and mystic world of the Cathars about which I knew almost nothing, but which implicitly attracted me even now, when Anna and I were threatened with imminent danger without the least hope of rescue.*

A plain and well read book, sewn together with rough threads caught my attention. It looked weather-stained and lonely among the great number of thick books and gilt scrolls. I looked at the cover and saw unknown letters which surprised me, because I knew many of the languages known at that time. This raised my curiosity even more. I carefully took the book, sat on a free from books window-sill, "tuned" in to the unknown hand and began to "look at" the content...

The words lined up in a very unusual way, but they emanated such pleasant warmth, as if the book truly spoke to me. I heard a soft, tender and very tired female voice which tried to tell me her story.

If I got it right, it was somebody's short diary.

– My name is Esclarmonde de Pereille. I am a child of Light and a "daughter" of Magdalena. I am a Cathar. I believe in Good and Knowledge, just as do my mother, my husband and my friends. – The story of a stranger sounded sadly. – Today I live my last day on this land. I cannot believe it! The servants of Satan gave us two weeks. Tomorrow at dawn our time will come to an end.

I had a lump in my throat. It was exactly what I was looking for – the story of an eyewitness!!! It was the story of a person who experienced the horror and pain of extermination, who knew what the death of family members and friends was, who was a true Cathar!

*Well, as it appeared, **the Catholic Church lied** unscrupulously about everything and Caraffa was not the first to do that...*

The church restlessly threw mud at the stranger faith, but at the same time the catholic priests (highly likely following papal orders) secretly collected any information they could get – the shortest manuscript or any humble looking book – about the faith they hated so fiercely... They grabbed everything they could get by killing in order to study it secretly, as carefully as possible, to use any information they could comprehend to their advantage.

However they lied to people saying that all "heretical" books had been burned to the last sheet, because they brought the most dangerous teachings of the Devil.

Here was where the true records of the Cathars were kept!!! They were hidden in the den of the "holiest" Popes together with other "heretic" riches after their owners had been brutally killed.

My hatred of the Pope grew stronger with every passing day, although, it seemed, it was impossible to hate even more strongly. Exactly now, on seeing these shameless lies and cold and calculating violence, my heart and mind boiled with indignation! I could not think calmly, although once (it seemed a very long time ago!), when I had only got into cardinal Caraffa's hands, I promised myself never to yield to emotions in order to survive. Well, I did not know then how terrible and merciless my fate would be... And now, despite confusion and indignation, I forced myself to summon my strength and come back to the story from the sad diary.

Esclarmonde's voice was very quiet, soft and infinitely sad! But at the same time it was full of unbelievable resolution. I did not know her, this woman (or girl), but something very familiar was in her resolution, fragility and doom. I understood what it was. She resembled my daughter – my dear brave Anna!

Suddenly I felt an irresistible wish to see this strong and sad stranger. I tried to tune in. My reality disappeared, giving way to extraordinary images which came to me from her distant past.

Right in front of me I saw a poorly lit, enormous ancient hall and an exhausted pregnant young woman, almost a girl, on the wide wooden bed. I understood that it was Esclarmonde.

People crowded along the high stone walls of the hall. They were all very thin and exhausted. Some conversed in whispers about something, as if they were afraid of frightening off a happy delivery with their loud conversation. Others nervously walked to and fro, being obviously worried about the young woman's as yet unborn child.

A man and a woman stood at the head of the enormous bed. Perhaps they were Esclarmonde's parents or the nearest family members, because they looked very like her. The woman was about forty five years old, very thin and pale, but she carried herself with a proud and independent air. The man's state was more evident. He was frightened, confused and nervous. He endlessly wiped beads of perspiration from his face (although it was damp and cold there!). His hands were shaking but he did not hide it, being absolutely oblivious of his surroundings.

A long-haired young man knelt on the stone floor next to the bed. His attention was nailed to the young woman. He saw nothing around and, fixing his eyes on her, continuously whispered something to her, desperately trying to comfort her.

I tried to have a good look at the future mother, as suddenly, acute pain slashed through my body! I felt with the whole of my self how terribly Esclarmonde suffered! Probably her child which was just about to be born caused her seas of unknown pain for which she was not yet ready.

She impetuously grasped his hands and quietly whispered:

– Promise me. I beg you; promise me you'll save him... no matter what ... promise me.

The man answered nothing, only stroked her thin hands tenderly. He obviously could not find any consoling words appropriate to the moment.

*– He **must** be born today! He must! – Suddenly the girl cried in desperation. – He cannot die with me! What shall we do? Tell me, what shall we do?!!*

Her face was incredibly thin, exhausted and pale. But neither her leanness, nor frightful emaciation could spoil the exquisite beauty of her surprisingly tender and light face, in which now only the eyes lived. They were pure and enormous, like two grey-blue springs. They shone with endless tenderness and love, fixedly looking at the alarmed young man... and black despair was hidden in the depth of these wonderful eyes.

What was that?! Who were all these people who came to me from somebody's distant past? Were they the Cathars?! May be that is why my heart shrank painfully, because of the inevitable and terrible misfortune that awaited them?

Young Esclarmonde's mother (and it certainly was she) was anxious to the limits of endurance, but she did her best not to show it to her exhausted daughter who sometimes "went" away to the non-existence, feeling and answering nothing. She lay like a sad angel, leaving her tired body for some time. Her long, moist and silky hair scattered over the pillows, glittering with gold... The girl was truly very unusual. She shone with some strange, spiritually-doomed and very deep beauty.

Two thin and severe, but pleasant women approached Esclarmonde. They tried to convince the young man to leave the room, but he negatively shook his head and again turned to the young woman in the bed.

The illumination in the hall was very poor – just a few smoking torches hung on the walls on both sides, casting long swaying shadows. Once, this hall had been very beautiful. Skilfully

embroidered beautiful tapestries proudly hung on its walls. Merry multicoloured stained-glass protected high windows, enlivening the last dim evening light. Something truly bad must have happened to the owners so that the once wealthy looking room now appeared so neglected and uncomfortable.

I could not understand why this strange story entirely captivated me?! **What** was the most important in it: the event itself? A person or persons who were there, or that tiny unborn man? Unable to tear myself away from the vision, I thirsted to know the end of this strange and certainly unhappy story!

Suddenly the air in the papal library began to thicken. It was Sever.

– Oh! I felt something familiar and decided to come back to you. But I did not think that you would look at that. You should not read this sad story, Isidora. It'll just bring more pain to you.

– Do you know it? Then tell me Sever, who are these people? Why does my heart ache for them? – I asked, being surprised by his advice.

– They are the Cathars, Isidora... Your beloved Cathars the night before their execution. – Sever pronounced sadly. – The place you see is their last and dearest fortress which held out longer than others. It's Montsegur, Isidora... The Temple of the Sun... It is the Home of Magdalena and her descendants..., one of which is just about to be born.

– ?!

– Don't be surprised. The child's father is Bieloyar's descendant and correspondingly, Radomir's. His name was Svetozar or the Light of Dawn, if you like it more. It is a very sorrowful and cruel story (just as all their stories). I don't advise you to look at it, my friend.

Sever was concentrated and deeply sad. I understood that he did not find any pleasure whatsoever in the vision I was seeing at that moment, nevertheless, he was patient, warm and quiet as usual.

– When did it happen, Sever? You are not saying that we will see **the real end** of the Cathars.

Sever gave me a long look, as if he pitied me... as if he did not wish to wound me more. But I persistently continued to wait for an answer, giving him no opportunity to avoid it.

– Regrettably, I am, Isidora; although I would like very much to tell you about something more joyful. What you are looking at now happened in 1244 in March, in the night when the last Cathars' refuge – Montsegur – fell. They held out ten long months, freezing and starving, driving the army of the "santissimo" Pope and His Majesty king of France mad. There were just **one hundred** real knight-warriors and four hundred persons including women and children, and more than **two hundred** of the Perfect ones. They were besieged by **several thousand** professional knight-warriors, real killers who got carte blanche for the elimination of disobedient "heretics" and the pitiless murder of all the innocent and unarmed... in the name of Christ and the "most holy" and "all-forgiving" church.

Nevertheless, the Cathars held out. The fortress was almost inaccessible, and in order to beseige it the Crusaders had to know the secret subterranean passages or passable paths, which only the inhabitants of the fortress or the helpers from the neighbouring settlement knew.

But, as usually happens, treachery came "to the stage"... The army of killer-knights lost all patience, going mad from the irritating inactivity, and applied to the church for help, which of course helped using its most reliable method – bribery. It gave a considerable amount of money to a local shepherd to show the way to a "platform" (the nearest ground where it was possible to place a catapult). The shepherd sold himself, destroying his immortal soul... and the sacred fortress of the last Cathars.

It aroused my indignation so my heart began to pound with mad speed. Trying not to yield to black despair, I continued to ask Sever as if I still resisted, as if I still had enough forces left to look at this pain and barbarity...

– Who was Esclarmonde? Do you know something about her, Sever?

– She was the third, the youngest, daughter of the last seigniors of Montsegur – Raymond and Corba de Pereille. – Sever answered sadly. – You saw them at the head of Esclarmonde's bed in your vision. She was a merry and tender girl loved by all. She was bubbling and lively like a fountain... and very kind. Her name meant the Light of the World, but all who knew her tenderly called her "flash", because of her seething and sparkling temper, I think. But don't confuse her with another Esclarmonde. The Cathars also had their **Great Esclarmonde**, Lady de Foix.

It was people who called her **Great** for her firmness and steadfast confidence, for her love and helping hand, for protection and the Cathar's Faith. But it's another, very beautiful and (again!) very sad, story. The Esclarmonde you "saw" became Svetozar's wife, being very young. And now she delivered a child, who his father, due to the agreement with her and all the Perfect ones, had to take away from the fortress the same night to save his life. That meant that she would see her child only for several short minutes, while his father would be preparing for the escape... But as you have already seen, the child still refused to be born. Esclarmonde lost forces, which made her panic more and more. The two weeks which everybody thought were sufficient for her son to be born came to an end and the child refused to come into the world for some reason... Becoming absolutely frenzied and emaciated by attempting, Esclarmonde lost almost all hope that she would succeed in saving her poor child from the terrible death by fire. Why should he, still unborn, go through that?! Svetozar did his best to assuage her anxiety, but she could not listen, falling into a deep well of despair.

I concentrated on her again and saw the same room. About ten persons gathered around Esclarmonde's bed. They stood in a circle; all were identically dressed in dark gowns, and a golden shine flowed softly from their extended hands straight into the woman in childbirth. The stream was gradually thickening, as if they poured their remaining Vital energy into her...

– They are the Cathars, aren't they? – I asked quietly.

– Yes, Isidora, they are the Perfect ones. They helped her to endure. They helped her child to be born.

Suddenly Esclarmonde uttered a wild cry... and in the same moment the baby cried too! Gentle joy lit people's faces. They laughed and cried, as if they saw a long-awaited miracle! But perhaps it really was. In fact the descendant of Magdalena, their beloved and reverent guiding Star, was born! Radomir's blessed descendant came to the world! It seemed that the people in the room absolutely forgot that all of them would go to the fire at dawn. Their joy was sincere and proud, like a rush of fresh air on the expanses of Occitania scorched by the fires of the Inquisition! One by one, they welcomed the newborn and, happily smiling, abandoned the room until only Esclarmonde's parents and her beloved husband were left there.

The young mother looked at her boy with shining happy eyes, unable to pronounce a word. She understood perfectly well that these moments would be very short, because in order to protect his newly born son, his father would have to take him away to try to escape from the fortress before dawn... before his poor mother would go to the fire together with others...

– I thank you! I thank you for our son! – Svetozar whispered. Tears rolled down his tired face. – My fair-eyed joy... come with me! We all will help you! I cannot lose you! He does not know you yet! Your son does not know how kind and wonderful his mother is! Come with me, Esclarmonde!

He begged her, knowing the answer beforehand. He just could not leave her here to die. Everything had been calculated so well! Montsegur surrendered but asked two weeks, allegedly to prepare for death, but in reality they waited for the descendant of Magdalena and Radomir to be born. They hoped that after that Esclarmonde would have enough time to recover. Well, as they correctly say: "man supposes, fate disposes"... So it cruelly disposed... letting the newly born come to the world in the last night. Esclarmonde did not have any strength left to go with them.

And now she was going to end her short un-lived life in the terrible fire of the "heretics".

The Pereilles sobbed, hugging each other. They wanted so much to save their dear light girl! They wanted so much that she should live!

I had a lump in my throat. This story looked so familiar! They had to see how their daughter would die in the fire, just as perhaps I will have to watch the death of my beloved Anna...

The Perfect ones appeared again in the stone hall. It was time to say goodbye. Esclarmonde cried out and tried to get up from the bed. Her legs gave way. Her husband caught her, preventing her from falling down, firmly holding her in one last embrace.

– See, dear, how can I go with you? – Esclarmonde whispered. – You go! Promise me that you will save him. Promise me, please! I shall love you there too... and my son.

Esclarmonde burst into tears... She wanted so much to look brave and strong! But her fragile and tender female heart let her down... She did not want them go! She did not even have time to know her little Vidomir! It was far more painful than she had naively supposed. It was a pain from which there was no rescue. It was so superhumanly painful!!!

Finally she kissed her little son for the last time and let them go into uncertainty. They left to survive and she stayed to die. The world was cold and unfair. There was no place even for Love in it.

*Four severe men wrapped themselves in warm blankets and stepped into the night. They were her friends, the Perfect ones: Hugo, Amiel, Poitevin and Svetozar (his name is not mentioned in any **original** manuscript. It is simply said that the name of the fourth Perfect remained **unknown**). Esclarmonde wanted to see them off, but her mother did not let her. There was no sense in that. The night was dark and the daughter would just hinder them.*

This was their fate and they should meet it with head proudly lifted, no matter how difficult it might be.

The slope which the Perfect ones chose for their journey was very dangerous. The rock was slippery and almost vertical.

They went down on ropes tied to their waists to free their hands in case of something being wrong. Only Svetozar felt unprotected, because he carried the child who he tied to his body and gave him a poppy decoction (so that he would not cry). He slept peacefully on his father's broad chest. Did he manage to know what his first night in this cruel world was? I think he did.

He lived long and difficult life, this little son of Esclarmonde and Svetozar. His mother, who saw him only a short while, called him Vidomir, knowing that her son could see the future, that he would be a very gifted Vidun (a seer).

*– The church spread slander about him, just as about other descendants of Magdalena and Radomir, and he ended his life in the fire. But unlike many, who passed away long before their time, he would be **seventy years and two days** in the moment of his death. His name will be Jacques de Molay... and he will be the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar and also the last head of Radomir and Magdalena's Light Temple, the Temple of Love and Knowledge which the Roman Church was unable to destroy, because there always were people⁸ who piously kept it in their hearts⁹.*

I was absolutely punch-drunk, like I had almost always been after Sever's next story...

Could it really be that this tiny newly born boy was the Jacques de Molay?! How many different legends¹⁰ I heard about this enigmatic man! They told me about the many wonders which

⁸ The Knights Templar died, slandered and tortured by the servants of King and blood-thirsty Catholic Church. But the most absurd thing was that they died **in vain**, because **by the moment of their execution Pope Clement had acquitted them!** Only the document was "misplaced" for some reason and nobody saw it till 2002 when it was "miraculously" discovered in the Vatican Archives under number 217, instead of the "correct" 218... This document was called **the Parchment of Chinon**, from the name of the city where Jacques de Molay spent the last years of his incarceration and tortures.

⁹ Read the details of the real fate of Radomir, Magdalena, Cathars and the Knights Templar in the Addendum after the end of Isidora's story or in the book *The Children of Sun* when it will be posted on the web-site www.levashov.info for free downloading.

¹⁰ Regrettably, any truthful information about this enigmatic man, or even legend, did not come down to our days. Like Radomir, he was depicted as weak, cowardly and spineless, a Grand Master "incapable" of saving his great Order.

were directly related to his extraordinary life!

– Can you tell me more about him, Sever? Was he indeed a very powerful **prophet and wonder-worker** as my father told me?

Sever smiled at my impatience and nodded.

– Yes, I shall tell you about him, Isidora. I knew him for many years and spoke to him a great number of times. I loved this man... and missed him very much.

I did not ask why he did not help him during his execution; there was no sense in that, because I knew his answer beforehand.

– You what?!! You **spoke** with him?! Please, you'll tell me about it, won't you, Sever? – I exclaimed.

I know my delight looked rather childish, but it did not matter. Sever understood how his story was important for me and patiently helped.

– But before that, I would like to know what happened to his mother and the Cathars. I know that they died, but I would like to see it with my own eyes... Help me, please, Sever.

Our reality disappeared again, returning me to Montsegur where wonderful brave people, Magdalena's students and followers, spent their last hours...

Esclarmonde quietly lay on the bed. Her eyes were closed. It seemed that she slept exhausted by losses. But I felt that it was just her defence. She simply wanted to be alone with her grief. Her heart terribly suffered. Her body refused to obey... Just some moments ago her hands held her newly born son and hugged her husband. Now they went into uncertainty and nobody could say whether they would manage to escape from the hatred of the "hunters" which flooded the foot of Montsegur and the whole valley. The fortress was the Cathars' last bulwark. There was nothing beyond it. They suffered a crushing defeat... Exhausted by hunger and winter cold, they were helpless against the stone "rain" of catapults which was pouring down from dawn to dusk.

– Tell me, Sever, why did the Perfect ones not defend themselves? As far as I know nobody knew how to use "motion" (I think she was talking about **telekinesis**), "waft" and very many things like that better than they. Why did they surrender?!

– There were several reasons for it, Isidora. When the Crusaders began to attack, the Cathars did not give up, but after the cities of Albi, Beziers, Minerva and Lavours were wiped out and thousands of their habitants died in the process, it occurred to the church to use a trick which could not fail. Before the onslaught of a city, they would promise the Perfect ones, that **if they surrendered, nobody else would be touched**. Of course, the Cathars surrendered... From that day the fires with the Perfect ones began to blaze throughout Occitania. People who had devoted their whole life to Knowledge, Light and Good, were burned like garbage, converting beautiful Occitania into a desert scorched by fires.

Look, Isidora... Look, if you wish to see the truth...

Sacred horror seized me! What Sever was showing to me exceeded the limits of normal human understanding! It was Hell, if it truly existed somewhere...

Thousands of killer-knights vested in shining panoplies coldbloodedly wielded their swords against the people, who rushed about in horror – women, old men and children... They killed everybody who found themselves in the way of the faithful servants of the "all-forgiving" Catholic Church... Young men trying to resist fell dead being slashed by long knight's swords. Heart-breaking screams sounded everywhere... the clank of swords was deafening. The suffocating smell of smoke, human blood and death hung over the city. The knights ferociously butchered everybody, whether it was a newly born baby who her poor mother held in her outstretched hands, begging for mercy, or a feeble old man... They were all mercilessly slashed to death... **in the name of Christ!!!** It was sacrilege. It was so wild that my hair began to stand on end. My whole body trembled. I was unable to accept or simply comprehend what was going on. I wanted to believe so much that it was just a dream! I wanted to believe that this kind of thing **could not happen** in real life! Regrettably, it

was *reality*...

HOW could they explain this atrocity?! **HOW** could the Roman church **FORGIVE**(???) those who committed such a frightful crime?!

Before the beginning of the Albigensian Crusade, in 1199, Pope Innocent III "kindly" declared: "**Anyone professing their faith in God, which is not consilient with the church dogma, must be burned without the least regret**". The Crusade against the Cathars was named "**For the cause of peace and faith**"! (Negotium Pacis et Fidei)

Right near the altar a handsome young knight tried to crush an elderly man's skull... The man wouldn't die, his skull did not yield. The young knight calmly continued to beat until the man twitched for the last time and became silent – his thick skull cracked at last...

A horror-stricken young mother held out her child to a knight in supplication. A second later she held in her hands two even halves...

A little girl, crying in fear, offered her doll, her most cherished treasure, to a knight. The head of the doll was off and a moment later her owner's curly head rolled on the floor like a ball...

I could not stand it anymore and, bitterly sobbing, I fell on my knees... Was it HUMANS doing this?! WHAT is the word (is there one?) for those who committed this evil?!¹¹

I did not want to look at it further! I had no strength left... But Sever cruelly continued to show some cities and burning churches in them... These cities were absolutely empty. Thousands of the dead bodies covered their streets and rivers of human blood run through them. Wolves feasted on the streets of the deserted cities, sinking in human blood...

I was frozen in horror and pain, unable to breathe or stir...

What must "people" who gave similar orders feel?

I think, they felt nothing at all, because their ugly and stale souls were darker than the blackest night.¹²

Suddenly I saw a very beautiful castle the walls of which were ruined by catapults in some places, but mainly it remained intact. The courtyard was stuffed with dead bodies drowning in pools of blood. They all had their throats cut...

*– This is Lavaur, Isidora... a very beautiful and rich city. Its walls were the most unassailable. But Simon de Monfort, the ringleader of the Crusaders, was so enraged by unsuccessful attempts to take the city that he called on all the rag tag and bobtail he could find for help and... 15,000 "soldiers of Christ" which had responded to his call attacked the fortress... Lavaur fell, unable to withstand the onslaught; all its habitants, including **400 (!!!)** Perfect ones, 42 troubadours and 80 knight-defenders were brutally slaughtered by the "holy" executioners. Here, in the courtyard, you see only the knights who protected the city and those who could handle a weapon. Others (except for the burned Cathars) were simply left to rot on the streets after they had been massacred... The killers found 500 women and children in the municipal basement of the city. They were all atrociously killed right in there... without letting them come outside.*

A handsome well dressed young woman was brought into the courtyard. She was shackled. Her appearance provoked drunken whooping and loud laughter. Somebody coarsely took her shoulders and threw her into a well. Muted moans and screams were heard from its depth. They went on until the ringleader of the Crusaders ordered the well to be heaped with stones...

– This was Lady Giralda... a proprietress of the castle and the city... All subjects without exception loved her. She was soft and kind... and carried her first child under her heart. – Sever

¹¹ 7000 inhabitants of Bezier were burnt in Maria Magdalena's church on July, 22. **It was the Golden Maria's birthday**. They were executed together with 222 Perfect ones. Altogether more than 20 000 inhabitants of the city were exterminated, which was **all** the population of the city. When a confused Crusader asked the Papal Legate Arnaud-Amaury how he could distinguish the Cathars from the Catholics, the Legate uttered his famous phrase: "Kill them all! Surely the Lord discerns which ones are his". It happened exactly in Bezier.

¹² The King of France Philip August and Pope Innocent III calmly observed the burning of "heretics", i.e. the Cathars. Is it not an irony that the Pope's name was Innocent?

cruelly finished.

Then he looked at me and understood at once that I had no strength left to go on...

Terrible scenes ceased at once.

Sever sympathetically came to me and, on seeing how strongly I trembled, affectionately laid his hand on my head. He stroked my long hair, softly whispering soothing words. Gradually I began to come back to life after the terrible shock...

A swarm of questions obtrusively spun around in my tired head, but they all seemed now empty and inappropriate. Therefore I preferred to wait for what Sever would say.

– Forgive me for causing you pain, Isidora, but I wanted to show you the truth... in order that you understood the load that the Cathars had... that you did not think that they had lost their Perfect ones easily...

*– I don't understand it all the same, Sever! Just the way I could not understand **your** truth... **Why did** the Perfect ones **not fight** for life?! **Why did** they not use what they knew? In fact almost any of them **could exterminate the whole army in just a single move!** Why did they surrender?*

– Probably it was what I told you so often, my friend. They simply were not ready.

– Not ready for what?! – I exploded by old habit. – Not ready for saving their lives? Not ready for saving other people?! It's all so wrong!!!

*– **They were not warriors** like you are, Isidora. – Sever pronounced quietly. – They did not kill, considering that the world must be different, considering that they could teach people to change. They thought they could teach people Understanding, Love and Goodness. They hoped to give Knowledge to people... Regrettably, not all people needed it. You are right saying that the Cathars were strong. Yes, they were perfect Magicians and possessed enormous force, but they did **not wish to fight using FORCE**, preferring to use **WORDS**. Exactly that destroyed them, Isidora. That is why I tell you, my friend, that they were not ready. More precisely, it was the world that was not ready for them. It was exactly **force** that Earth respected then. The Cathars carried Love, Light and Knowledge. They came too early. People **were not ready for them**.*

– Well, what about those hundred of thousands who carried the Cathar Faith all over Europe, who did reach for Light and Knowledge? There were very many of them!

– You're right, Isidora... They were a lot of them. But what became of them? As I already told you, Knowledge can be very dangerous, if it comes too early. People must be ready to accept it, without resisting or killing. Otherwise this Knowledge will not help them, even worse – on getting into some dirty hands, it will destroy the Earth. I am sorry, if I upset you...

*– Nevertheless, I don't agree with you, Sever... The time you are talking about will never come on Earth. **People will never think the same way**. It's normal. Look at nature. Every tree and flower differs from each other. And you want people to be similar! Too much evil and too much violence were shown to man. Those with dark souls don't want to work and **KNOW** when they easily can kill or lie to get what they want. **One must fight for Light and Knowledge** and win! A **normal person should aspire** exactly to this. Earth can be wonderful and pure, Sever. We just should **show it HOW**...*

Sever was silent, watching me. I again tuned in to Esclarmonde, unwilling to prove anything more to him...

How could this girl, almost a child, endure such a terrible ordeal? Her courage amazed me, making me respect and be proud of her. She was worthy of Magdalena's line, although she was just a mother of her distant descendant.

My heart again ached for the wonderful people whose lives were broken by the church which mendaciously proclaimed "all-forgiveness"! Suddenly I remembered Caraffa's word: "God will forgive everything done in His name!" My blood froze thinking of such a god... I wanted to run wherever my feet would carry me, if only not to hear and see what was done "for the glory" of this monster!

Young exhausted Esclarmonde again appeared before my eyes... the inconsolable mother who lost her first and only child...

*Nobody could clearly explain to her **why** they had to go through this... why they, kind and innocent, had to die...*

Suddenly a thin breathless boy ran into the hall. He obviously came straight from the street because I could clearly see his breath.

– Madam, Madam! They are safe!!! Good Esclarmonde, there is a fire on the mountain!

Esclarmonde jumped out of bed, trying to run, but her body appeared weaker than the poor thing had thought... She fell straight into her father's arms. Raymond de Pereille caught his feather-light daughter and ran outdoors... And there, on the top of Montsegur, all inhabitants of the castle gathered. Their eyes looked only in one direction – at the enormous fire which burned on the snow top of the mountain Bidorta! That meant that the four runaways got to the point they had planned!!! Her brave husband and newly born son were safe from the savage claws of the Inquisition and could happily continue their lives.

*Now everything was all right. Now everything was well. She knew that she would go to the stake calmly, because her most beloved people **lived**. She was immensely satisfied that fate had mercy on her, allowing her to know that and **die** in peace.*

At dawn all the Perfect ones and the Cathars gathered in the Temple of the Sun in order to enjoy his warmth for the last time before departing to eternity. People were exhausted, frozen and hungry, but they all smiled... The most important thing was done – the descendant of Golden Maria and Radomir lived and there was hope that one fine day some of his distant great-grandchildren will reshape this monstrously unfair world and nobody will have to suffer anymore. The first sunray appeared in the narrow window! It merged with the second one, then the third... and finally a golden column began to shine in the centre of the tower. It gradually broadened, embracing everybody standing in it until the golden luminescence seized the whole space.

It was a farewell... Montsegur said goodbye to them, tenderly seeing them off to another life...

Meanwhile down, at the foot of the mountain, an enormous terrible fire was prepared; or rather it was a structure in the form of a flat wooden area with thick posts...

More than two hundred Perfect ones began solemnly and slowly to go down on the slippery and very stony path. The morning was windy and cold. The sun peeped from the clouds only for a short instant... for the last time to display its kindness to its beloved children, its Cathars going toward death... The leaden clouds crept up again in the sky. It was grey and unfriendly... and alien. Everything around was frozen. Wet air saturated thin clothes with moisture. The feet of the walking people froze to the bone, sliding on wet stones...

The snow still remained on mount Montsegur.

Down the mountain a short man, mad with the cold weather, hoarsely shouted at the Crusaders, ordering more trees to be cut down and thrown onto the fire. The fire did not want to burn properly for some reason, and the man wanted it to blaze to the skies! He deserved it. He had waited for it ten long months and now it finally came true! Yet yesterday he dreamed of returning home as quickly as possible, but malice and hatred toward the goddamned Cathars won and now he wanted only one thing – to see the Perfect ones, these children of Devil, burn at last! And only then, when they were turned into hot ash, would he go home with a peaceful conscience. This short man was a seneschal of Carcassonne. His name was Hugues des Arcis. He acted on behalf of His Majesty the King of France, Philip August.

*The Cathars continued to descend. Now they moved between two sullen armed rows. The Crusaders were silent, sullenly watching the procession of thin emaciated people whose faces for some reason shone with unearthly incomprehensible delight. It frightened the guards. They considered it not normal. These people went to their death. They **could not** smile. There was something disturbing and incomprehensible in their behaviour, which made the guards feel extremely uneasy and want to be far from this place and as quickly as possible, but duty did not*

permit. They had to obey.

The piercing wind blew about the threadbare and moist clothes of the Perfect ones and made them shiver and press close to each other; the guards prevented that, pushing them to move one by one.

Esclarmonde went first in this terrible funeral procession. Her long hair covered her thin figure like a silk cloak. The dress of the poor thing was terribly wide and hung like a sack. But Esclarmonde went with her beautiful head up and..., smiling as if she was about to meet her greatest happiness, not the most terrible death. Her thoughts roamed far away, behind the high snow mountains, where her dearest – her husband and her newly born son – were... She knew that Svetozar would watch Montsegur. She knew that he would see the fire when it cruelly devoured her body, and she wanted very much to look fearless and strong... She wanted to be worthy of him... Her mother was right behind her. She was calm too. Only salt tears glimmered in her eyes from time to time grieving about her beloved girl; but the wind snatched and dried them, preventing them from rolling down her thin cheeks.

The mournful procession moved in complete silence. Finally they reached the ground with the raging enormous fire. It burned only in the middle, perhaps waiting for the living flesh to be tied to the posts to devour it merrily and quickly despite gloomy windy weather, despite human pain...

Esclarmonde slipped on a hummock, but the mother caught her, preventing her from falling down. They were a very sad couple, mother and daughter... Thin and freezing, they walked erect, proudly carrying their bare heads despite cold, tiredness and fear. They wanted to look sure and strong in front of the executioners. They wanted to be brave and unbending, because both husband and father were watching.

Raymond de Pereille remained to live. He did not go to the fire with the others. He was to help others who remained to live and had nobody to protect them. He was an owner of the castle, a seignior, who by his honour and word was responsible for these people. Raymond de Pereille had no right to die. But in order to stay alive he had to renounce everything in which he had sincerely believed for so many years. It was much more terrible than the fire. It was a lie. And **the Cathars never lied...** They did not lie under any circumstances for whatever price. Therefore his life ended **now** with all... because his soul was dying; what remains will not be him. It will be just a living body, but his heart will go with his nearest and dearest – with his brave girl and his sweet faithful wife.

The same short man, Hugues des Arcis, stopped in front of the Cathars. Impatiently stamping his feet (it was obvious that he wished to be through with all this as quickly as possible) he began the selection procedure with his hoarse cracked voice.

– What is your name?

– Esclarmonde de Pereille.

– I am Hugues des Arcis. I act on behalf of the King of France. You are accused of the Cathar heresy. As you know, according to our agreement which you accepted 15 days ago, in order to be free and save your life, you must renounce your faith and sincerely swear to be loyal to the faith of the Roman Catholic Church. You must say: "I renounce my religion and accept the catholic religion!"

– I believe in my faith and will never renounce it... – a firm answer followed.

– Throw her in the fire! – The man complacently cried.

Well, that was all. Her fragile short life came to its frightful end. Two persons grasped and threw her on the wooden tower where a sullen insensible "executor" waited for her with thick ropes in his hands. The fire blazed there too... Esclarmonde felt a strong pain, but then she bitterly smiled to herself – very soon she would feel much more pain...

– What is your name? – Arcis continued his inquiry.

– Corba de Pereille...

In a short while her poor mother was thrown next to her.

Thus, one by one, the Cathars went through the "selection" and the number of sentenced increased. They all could save their lives. They "just" had to tell a lie and renounce what they believed in. None agreed to pay that price.

The fire crackled and hissed. The moist wood wouldn't kindle properly. But the wind became stronger and from time to time burning flames managed to lick at the convicts. Their clothing flashed, converting a person into a torch... Heart-rending screams resounded through the valley. It was obvious that not everybody could endure such pain.

Esclarmonde shivered with cold and fear. No matter how hard she pretended to be brave, she was shocked by the view of her burning friends. She was very exhausted and desperate. She wanted to call someone for help so much. But she knew perfectly well – nobody would come to help her.

She thought of her little Vidomir. She'll never see how he grows up. She'll never know whether his life will be happy. She was a mother just once. She hugged her child just a few minutes. And she will never give other children to Svetozar, because her life was over right now in this fire... next to others.

Esclarmonde breathed deeply, trying to ignore the beastly cold. What a pity that there is no sun! She liked so much to warm up under its tender rays! But that day the sky was sullen, grey and heavy. It said goodbye to them...

Doing her best to hold the salt tears, Esclarmonde lifted her head high. She wouldn't show how truly hard it all was for her! Not at any price!!! She will stand it somehow. It won't keep her waiting too long.

Her mother was near and was about to blaze up.

Her father stood like a stone sculpture, looking at them both. His hardened face was deathly pale. It seemed that life had left him, speeding away where they will go very soon.

She heard a heart-rending scream. It was her mother seized with flames.

– Corba! Corba, forgive me!!! – Her father let out a cry.

Suddenly Esclarmonde felt a tender touch. She knew it was her Light of Dawn, her Svetozar. He stretched his hand from far away to say the last farewell... to say that he was with her... that he knew how scared she was ... how painful it would be... He asked her to be brave...

*Wild sharp pain slashed her body. Here it was! It finally came!!! Burning roaring flame touched her face. Her hair blazed up... In a second her whole body was seized with fire... A sweet, light girl, almost a child, accepted her death in **silence**. Sometimes she heard her father fiercely crying her name. Then everything disappeared... Her pure soul went into the kind and right world, without giving up or breaking, exactly the way she wanted to go.*

*Suddenly, and absolutely out of place, singing was heard... It was clergymen who sang to muffle the screams of the burning "convicts". Their voices, hoarse from the cold, sang psalms about God's **all-forgiving kindness**...*

At last, the evening sun set on the walls of Montsegur.

The terrible fire burnt out, here and there flashing with dying red embers. Over the day the wind increased and now raged, spreading all over the valley black clouds of soot and cinder, seasoned by the sweetish smell of burnt human flesh...

A queer apathetic man rambled lost at the funeral fire, stumbling through the people... From time to time he cried out somebody's name, grasped his head and began to sob loudly and heart-rendingly. The crowd parted, respecting his grief. The man plodded slowly, seeing or hearing nothing... He was grey-haired, hunched and tired. Sharp gusts of wind blew about his long grey hair and tore his worn dark clothes... For an instant the man turned around and – oh, Gods! – He was a young man!!! His emaciated thin face breathed pain... His wide open grey eyes looked with surprise. It seemed that he did not understand where he was and why. Suddenly he gave a wild cry and... Jumped straight into the fire! Or rather what was left of it... People tried to grasp his hand

but failed. The man tumbled face downwards onto burning out red cinders, clasping to his bosom something coloured.

And then he stopped breathing.

Finally they dragged him out of the fire and saw **what** he held firmly clutched in his thin hardening fist... It was a bright hair ribbon which young Occitan fiancées wore before the wedding... which meant that several hours ago he was a happy young groom...

The wind still ruffled his long hair which had become grey over a day, softly playing with scorched strands... but the man already felt or heard nothing.

He again found his sweetheart and went with her, hand in hand, along the shining star road of the Cathars to meet their new star future... He again was very happy.

People, with their faces hardened in grief, still roamed around the almost extinguished fire... They did not feel the piercing wind and cold. They searched for the remains of their nearest and dearest, here and there rolling out from the ash the burnt bones of their sons, daughters, sisters and brothers, wives and husbands... or friends... Weeping was heard from time to time when somebody picked up a ring darkened in the fire... a semi-burnt boot... or even the head of a doll which rolled aside and had not burnt away...

The short man, Hugues des Arcis, was enormously pleased. At last everything was over. The Cathar heretics were dead. Now he could go home with a peaceful conscience. He cried to the freezing knight on guard to bring his horse over and turned to the warriors who sat at the fire to give them their last orders. He was in a much elevated mood. The long mission had at last come to its "happy" end... He fulfilled his debt and could honestly be proud of himself. A minute later the horse's hooves rapidly clattered on the road. The seneschal of Carcassonne hurried home, where an abundant hot supper and a cosy fire-place to warm his frozen and tired body were waiting for him.

Loud and sorrowful weeping resounded on the peak of mount Montsegur. It was the eagles. They saw off their true friends and owners on their last journey... The eagles cried very loudly... In the village of Montsegur people fearfully closed their doors; the eagle weeping spread all over the valley. They grieved....

It was the terrible end of the Cathar's outstanding empire – the empire of Light and Love, Good and Knowledge...

Somewhere in the depth of the Occitan Mountains the fugitive Cathars remained. They hid with their families in the caves of Lombrives and Ormolac, unable to decide what to do next... On losing the last Perfect ones, they felt like children without support and guidance.

They were persecuted.

They were the prey for which large sums of money were paid.

Nevertheless, the Cathars did not give up yet... They moved to the caves and felt at home there. They knew every turn and every crevice; therefore it was almost impossible to hunt them down, although the servants of king and church tried with all their might and main, hoping to get the promised rewards. They poked about in the caves, not knowing where to search. Many of them were lost and died there... Some of the lost went mad, failing to find the way back into the open and familiar sunny world...

The pursuers especially feared the cave of Sacani (Russian spelling of the cave's name-E.L.). It ended in six separate entrances which zig-zagged downward. Nobody knew their real depth. There were legends that one of them led straight to the underground city of Gods where nobody dared to descend.

The Pope waited a bit and then went mad. The Cathars refused to disappear! This little group of exhausted people, who he was unable to understand, wouldn't give up! Despite the losses and privations, in spite of everything, they still LIVED. The Pope dreaded them... He did not understand them. What was it that moved these strange, proud and impregnable people?! Why did they not give

up, perfectly knowing that they have no chance of rescue? The Pope wanted them to disappear. He wanted that not a single damned Cathar be left on Earth! He could not invent anything better than ordering them to be bait in the caves...

The knights were absolutely delighted. Everything now seemed simple and easy. They did not have to rack their brains as to how to catch the "heretics". They went to the caves "arming" themselves with dozens of trained hounds which had to lead them to the heart of the refuge of the Cathar fugitives. Everything was very simple. They just had to wait a little. It was nothing compared to the siege of Montsegur.

The caves accepted the Cathars, folding them in their dark moist embrace... The life of the fugitives became difficult and lonely; it was rather, simply **survival**... However there still were a lot of people who helped them. The Cathars still lived in some places of Occitania like the principality de Foix, Castellum de Verdunum and others under the protection of local seigniors. Only now they did not gather openly, trying to be more careful, because the Pope's bloodhounds had no rest wishing by all means to exterminate this Occitan "heresy" which was still hiding all over the country...

"Be assiduous in the extermination of the heresy by all means! God will inspire you!" – The Pope appealed to the Crusaders. And the messengers of the church really did their best...

– Tell me, Sever. Did any cave dweller manage to live long enough to see the day when he could go out to the surface without fear of being caught? Did anybody manage to keep his life?

– Unfortunately, nobody did, Isidora. The Cathars of Montsegur did not live that long..., although, as I just told you, there were other Cathars who existed in Occitania for a long time. The last Cathar was exterminated only a century later. But their life was already completely different, more secret and dangerous. The people frightened by the Inquisition betrayed them, wishing to save their own lives by treachery. Therefore some Cathars moved to the caves and some settled down in the forests. But that happened much later and they were more prepared to live this kind of life. As for those Cathars whose relatives and friends died in Montsegur, they did not want to live long with their pain. Deeply grieving for the deceased and being tired of hatred and persecutions, they finally decided to join them in another, more kind and pure, life. There were about five hundred persons, including old men and children. Also four Perfect ones came from the neighbouring town to help them.

In the night of their voluntary "leaving" the unfair and wicked material world all the Cathars went outside to breathe the wonderful spring air for the last time and once again to glance at the familiar shining of their beloved distant stars... to where their tired exhausted Cathar soul will fly very soon.

The night was tender, quiet and warm. Earth smelled of acacias, blossoming cherries and mother-of-thyme. People breathed the heady aroma, feeling almost a child's delight! It had been almost three long months since they had seen the pure night sky or breathed fresh air. But it was **their** land, despite everything that happened on it! It was their beloved Occitania. Only now it was invaded by the Devil's own hordes leaving no chance of escape.

To a man, all the Cathars turned to Montsegur. They wanted to look at their HOME for the last time. They wanted to visit their sacred Temple of the Sun once more. A strange long procession of thin emaciated people went up to the highest Cathar castle with unexpected ease, as if nature itself helped them! Or could it be the souls of those with whom they were going to meet very soon?

A detachment of Crusaders was still encamped at the foot of Montsegur. Obviously the "holy" fathers were still afraid of the "mad" Cathars as they decided to return and kept watch... The sad procession passed the sleeping guards like silent ghosts. Nobody even stirred.

– Did they "cloak themselves" then? – I asked in surprise. – Could **all** the Cathars really do that?

– No, Isidora, they could not. You forgot that the Perfect ones were with them. – Sever answered and calmly went on.

People reached the top and stopped. In the moonlight the ruins of Montsegur looked ominous and unusual, as if every stone, saturated with blood and pain of the executed Cathars, called for revenge...

Despite the dead silence it seemed to people that they heard the death screams of their family members and friends who had burnt in the horrific "purifying" papal fire.

Montsegur towered above them threatening and useless... like an injured beast abandoned to die alone...

The walls of the castle still remembered Svetodar and Magdalena, Bieloyar child's laughter and golden-haired Vesta... The castle remembered the wonderful years of the Cathars, filled with joy and love. It remembered kind and light people willing to be under its protection.

Now it had all vanished. The walls were naked and strange, as if the huge and kind soul of Montsegur flew with the souls of the burnt Cathars...

The Cathars looked at the familiar stars. They were so big and close from here! They knew that very soon these stars would be their new Home. The stars looked down from above on their lost children and tenderly smiled, ready to receive their lonely souls.

The next morning the Cathars gathered in the enormous low cave which was right above their favourite "cathedral" one... A long time ago Golden Maria taught KNOWLEDGE there, new Perfect ones gathered and the Light and Kind World of the Cathars was born, grew and matured in this cave.

And now, when they returned here, only like "splinters" of this wonderful world, they wanted to be nearer to their irreplaceable past... The Perfect ones gave a consolamentum to each of them tenderly laying their magic hands on their tired drooping heads until all those leaving were at last, ready.

In complete silence people lay down right on the stone floor, crossed their thin hands on their chest and calmly closed their eyes, as if they were going to sleep... Mothers pressed their children to themselves, reluctant to part with them. A minute later the enormous hall turned into a quiet burial vault of five hundred good people ... The Cathars... Radomir and Magdalena's Faithful and Light followers... who fell asleep for good...

Their souls flew where their proud and brave brothers waited for them, where the world was tender and kind, where there was no need to be afraid that somebody wicked and blood-thirsty will cut your throat or throw you in the Pope's "purifying" fire.

Sharp pain squeezed my heart. Tears rolled down my cheeks like hot brooks, but I did not even notice that. Light, beautiful and pure people left life... of their own free will. They went away in order not to surrender to the killers. They wanted to go away the way they wanted it, instead of dragging out a miserable wandering existence in their proud and native land – Occitania.

– Why did they do it, Sever? Why did not they fight?

– Fight what, Isidora? They lost their fight. They simply chose **HOW** they wanted to go away.

– But they chose **suicide**! Is that not punished by karma? Did they not have to suffer likewise because of it, there, in another world?

– In this case no, Isidora. They just "left", removing their souls from their physical bodies. It is the most natural process in fact. They did not use violence. They simply "left".

In deep sadness I looked at this terrible burial vault submerged in the cold absolute silence which was occasionally broken by falling drops of water. Slowly nature began to create their eternal shroud, paying tribute to the dead... Thus, over the years, drop by drop, each body gradually turned into a stone tomb, preventing anyone from desecrating them...

– Has the church ever found this burial vault? – I asked in a whisper.

– Yes, Isidora. It has. The servants of the Devil found this cave with the help of dogs. But **even they** did not dare to touch what nature had accepted into its hospitable arms. They did not dare to make their "purifying" and "sacred" fire there. Probably they felt that somebody else had done this

work already for them. Since then this place was called the Cave of the Dead. Much later, in different times, other Cathars and Knights Templar came to die there. Their followers persecuted by the church hid there too. Even now you can see the old inscriptions left by the people who took shelter there once... You can see many different names mixed with the enigmatic signs of the Perfect ones. There is the glorious House of Foix and the persecuted proud Trencavels. There sadness and despondency are adjoined to desperate hope...

There, for centuries, nature has been creating its stone "memory" of the sad events and people who deeply touched its huge loving heart.

There is a statue of a wise eagle-owl at the entrance of the Cave of the Dead which has been guarding the peace of the passed away for centuries...

– Tell me, Sever, the Cathars believed in Christ, did they not? – I asked sadly.

Sever was sincerely surprised.

– No, Isidora, it's a lie. The Cathars **did not "believe"** in Christ. They **appealed** to him. They **talked** to him. He was their **Teacher**, but not their God. One can believe blindly only in God, however until now I still fail to understand why one may need a blind faith? It was the Church that once again distorted the sense of others' teachings... **The Cathars believed in KNOWLEDGE**, in honesty and helping other, less lucky, people. They believed in Good and Love. But they never believed **in one man**. They loved and respected Radomir and adored Golden Maria who taught them, but they never made a God or Goddess out of them. For them they were symbols of Mind and Honour, Knowledge and Love, but they were **PEOPLE**, who, yes, fully gave themselves to others.

Look, Isidora, how foolishly the clergymen garbled even their own theories. They alleged that the Cathars **did not believe in the Christ-man** but in his **cosmic Divine spirit** which was **not material**. At the same time the church says that the Cathars declared Maria Magdalena the **wife** of Christ and **accepted her children**. Then how could **a non-material creature** have **children**, if we ignore, of course, the nonsense about Maria's "immaculate conception"? No, Isidora, regrettably there is nothing truthful about the Cathar studies left... Everything that people know about it is fully perverted by the "most holy" church to show it as foolish and worthless. But the Cathars taught **what our ancestors had taught**, what we teach, and that was **precisely what** the Church found the most dangerous. They could not allow people to know the truth. The church had to destroy even the least recollection about the Cathars, otherwise how could it explain what it had done to them? After it had wiped out the whole people, **HOW** would it explain to its followers **why and who** would need this terrible crime? Therefore there is nothing left from the Cathars teachings. I think it will be even worse in the following centuries.

– But what about John? I read somewhere that the Cathars "believed" in John and even kept his manuscripts as a sacred object... Is there is any truth in this?

– Only that they indeed deeply honoured John, despite the fact that they never met him. – Sever smiled. – Well, and also that the Cathars preserved the **real** Christ's Revelations and John's diaries after Radomir and Magdalena's death, which the Catholic Church tried to find and destroy by hook or by crook. The Pope's servants fiercely tried to find out where those damned Cathars hid their most dangerous treasure! Because, should it appear openly, the story invented by the Catholic Church would suffer a total defeat. But no matter how hard the church bloodhounds tried, they failed and found nothing save a few manuscripts.

That is why the only possibility for the Church to somehow save face in the case of the Cathars was to **pervert their faith and teachings so strongly that nobody in the world could tell truth from lie**, just as they easily did with Radomir and Magdalena's life.

Also the Church alleged that the Cathars had worshiped John even more than Jesus-Radomir. Only here they mean **"their" John** with his **false** Christian Gospels and **false** manuscripts... The Cathars honoured the real John, but, as you know, he had nothing to do with the church's John the "Baptist".

– You know, Sever, I have an impression that the church garbled and destroyed the **WHOLE**

world's history. Why did they do that?

– They did that to prevent man from thinking, Isidora, to **make obedient and insignificant slaves out of people** who the "most holy" fathers could "forgive" or punish at their own discretion; because, if man knew the truth about his past, he would be **PROUD** of himself and his Ancestors and **would never** put on a slave collar. Without TRUTH free and strong people became "**slaves of God**" and did not try to remember who they are in reality. This is our present, Isidora... and frankly speaking, it does not show much promise of changing for the better.

Sever was very quiet and sad. Perhaps watching human weakness and cruelty for so many centuries and seeing how the strongest died, his heart was poisoned with bitterness and disbelief in the forthcoming victory of Knowledge and Light... I wanted so much to cry out to him that I did **believe** that people would wake up soon! Despite spite and pain, treachery and weakness, I **believe** that Earth finally will not endure what is done to her children and will wake up... But I understood that I would not be able to convince him, because I must die soon myself fighting for this awakening.

But I had no regrets... My life was just a grain of sand in the boundless ocean of suffering. And I had to fight to the very end no matter how terrible it might be, because **even small water drops, dropping constantly, could wear away the strongest stone**. The same thing could happen to EVIL: if everybody destroyed even one grain of evil, it would finally disappear. And it is of minor importance if it does not happen in their current life, they would return to the Earth again and see that it was **THEY** who helped it to withstand! It was **THEY** who helped it to become Light and Faithful. I know that Sever would say that man was unable to live for the future yet... I know that was the truth for the time being; but in my opinion exactly this stopped many from making their own decisions, because people got used to thinking and acting "like everybody else". They are reluctant to be different or daring. They just want to live calmly.

– I am sorry that I made you go through so much pain, my friend. – Sever's voice interrupted my thoughts. – But I think it will help you to meet your fate. It will help to stand to the end...

I did not want to think about it... Just a little bit more! I shall have enough time to think of my sad fate; therefore I changed the painful subject and began to ask questions again.

– Tell me, Sever, why Magdalena and Radomir and many Volkhvs wore the sign of the royal "fleur-de-lis"? Does it mean that they were Franks? Could you explain that to me?

– To begin with, Isidora, it is a wrong understanding of the symbol. – Sever answered, smiling. – It was **not a lily**, when the Meravingly brought it to Frankia.

– ?!

– Did not you know that it was they who brought the symbol of a "three-leafed plant" to the then Europe? – Sever was sincerely surprised.

– No, I did not. I never heard of it and you surprised me again!

– Long-long time ago the three-leafed plant was a **battle symbol** of the Slavs-Aryans, Isidora. It was a magic grass which miraculously helped in the battle. It gave unbelievable strength to the warriors, healed their wounds and facilitated their departure to another life. This wonderful grass grew far away to the north. Only the Volkhvs could pick it. It was always given to the warriors who went to defend their Motherland. When a warrior went to a battle, he pronounced the usual incantation: "For **Honour!** For **Conscience!** For **Faith!**" accompanying it with a **magic motion**. He touched his left and right shoulder and at last the middle of his forehead with two fingers. This is what this three-leafed plant meant in reality and this was the initial meaning of the symbol which the Meravingly brought. Well, after the Meravingly dynasty was exterminated, new kings appropriated it, just as everything else, declaring it to be a symbol of the royal house of France. And the ritual "was adopted" by the Catholic Church which added to it a fourth, **lower** part... the Devil's part. Regrettably, history repeats itself.

Yes, indeed history does repeat itself... I felt bitter and sad. Was **anything real** in what we knew? Suddenly I felt that hundreds of unknown people looked demandingly at me. I understood,

they were those who *KNEW*, those who died protecting the truth... I felt that they bequeathed it to me to carry the *TRUTH* to the unknowing ones, but I could not. I was leaving... just as they did once.

Suddenly the door swung open and smiling merry Anna ran into the room like a hurricane. My heart jumped up and then sank to the precipice. I could not believe I saw my dear girl! And she smiled widely, as if nothing happened and she was absolutely fine and the terrible danger did not hang over our heads.

– Mother, dear, I hardly found you! Oh, hello, Sever! Have you come to help us? Tell me, you will help us, won't you? – Anna asked confidently, looking right into his eyes.

Sever just smiled affectionately and very sadly...

42. Isidora-8. The Key of Gods

Anna rapturously fixed her glittering eyes on Sever as if he could bring us salvation... But gradually the sparkles of hope in them began to fade away as the sad expression on his face told her: no matter how strongly he wished it, for some reason there would be no help.

– You do want to help us, don't you? Tell me, you do wish to help us, Sever.

Anna peered into our eyes, as if wishing to be certain that we get her right. It was beyond her comprehension. Her pure and honest heart was unable to understand the fact that someone **could** but **did not want** to save us from a hideous death...

– I am sorry, Anna. I can not help you. – Sever pronounced sadly.

– But, why?!! Don't you really feel sorry that we are going to die? Why, Sever?!

– Because I *DON'T KNOW* how to help you. I don't know how to kill Caraffa. I don't have the necessary "weapon" to get rid of him.

Still not wishing to believe, Anna insistently continued to ask.

– And who **does know** how to beat him? Someone has to know! In fact he is not the strongest one! Even grandad Isten is much stronger than he is! Right, Sever?

It was amusing to hear how matter-of-factly she called a human being such as Volkhv Isten "grandad". Anna took them as a faithful and kind family, in which all take care of each other and value each other's precious life.

Regrettably they were not this kind of family. Volkhvs led their own different and isolated life. Anna just did not understand it yet.

– Only White Volkhv knows it, dear. Only he can help you.

– If that is so, then why has not he helped us yet?! Mother was there, right? Why did he not help?

– I am sorry, Anna. I can not answer this question. I don't know...

Here I could not keep silence anymore!

– But you explained that to me Sever! What has changed since then?

– Probably me, my friend. I think you've changed something in me. Go to White Volkhv, Isidora. He is your only hope. Go, before it is too late.

I did not answer. Besides, what could I say? That I **don't believe** that White Volkhv would help? That I **don't believe** that he would make an exception for us? It was true, he would not! That was why I did not want to go begging. Maybe it was selfish or unreasonable, but I could not do anything about myself. I did not want to ask for help from a father who had betrayed his beloved son once... I did not understand him and was in total disagreement with him. In fact he **COULD have saved Radomir** but he did not want to... I would give a lot for a chance to save my dear brave girl, but unfortunately, I did not have it.

Even keeping their most precious treasure (*KNOWLEDGE*), Volkhvs had no right to harden

their hearts to the extent where they forgot about simple human mercy and destroyed any compassion they may once have had in their hearts! They converted themselves into cold and soulless "librarians" who piously protected their library. But the following question arises: **did they remember**, when immuring themselves in their proud silence, just WHO this library was intended FOR? Did they remember that our Great Ancestors left their KNOWLEDGE to help their grandchildren save our wonderful Earth? Who gave the White Volkhv the right to decide **on his own** when it would be **exactly the time** to open the doors?

It always seemed to me that those who our ancestors called Gods would not allow their best sons and daughters to die only because the "correct" time had not come yet! If the black forces slaughter all the enlightened, there will be nobody to understand the content of the library...

Anna watched me attentively, probably hearing my sad thoughts. Adult and severe understanding lived in her kind radiant eyes.

– We will not go to him, mother. We will try on our own. – Tenderly smiling, my brave girl pronounced. – In fact we still have some time left, right?

Sever looked at Anna with surprise but, on seeing her resolution, did not utter a word.

But Anna had already switched her attention and admiringly observed the riches that surrounded us in Caraffa's divine treasure-house.

– Wow, what is it?! Is it really the Pope's famous library? Have you often visited it, mother?

– No, dear. I've been here just several times. I wanted to know about some wonderful people and, for some reason; the Pope let me do it.

– Do you mean the Cathars? – Anna asked calmly. – They did know a lot, didn't they? However, they failed to survive. Earth was always very cruel... Why is it so, mother?

– It was not Earth that was cruel, my sun. It was people. But how do you know about the Cathars? I never taught you about them.

Anna's pale cheeks blazed with "pink" embarrassment.

– Oh, forgive me, please! I "heard" what you were talking about and was interested very, very much! Therefore I listened. Please, forgive me. In fact there was nothing personal in it, so I thought that you would not be offended...

– Of course! Only why do you need such pain? We've had enough of what the Pope does to us, have we not?

– I want to be strong, mother! I don't want to be afraid of him, like the Cathars were not afraid of their killers. I want you to be proud of me! – Anna said, lifting her head with dignity.

The strength of my daughter's spirit surprised me every day! Where did she get so much courage to resist Caraffa? What moved her proud passionate heart?

– Do you want to see anything else? – Sever softly asked. – Or it will be better that I leave you alone for some time?

– Oh, please Sever, tell us more about Magdalena! And tell us how Radomir died. – Anna asked enthusiastically and then quickly turned to me and added: – if you don't mind, mother, dear.

Of course, I did not! On the contrary, I was ready for everything, if only to distract her from thoughts about our nearest future.

– Please, tell us, Sever! It'll give us strength to stand to the end. Tell us what you know, my friend...

Sever nodded and we again found ourselves in somebody's strange unknown life... in somebody's long time ago lived and abandoned past. We found ourselves in a quiet spring evening saturated with southern smells. In the distance the sunset still blazed with the last specks of light, although the tired sun had already set a long time ago to rest till tomorrow, when it will begin its daily circular journey again.

Unusually enormous stars were gradually kindling in the quickly darkening velvet sky. The

surrounding world was calmly preparing to sleep, being interrupted now and then by the offended cry of a lonely restless bird or by the sleepy bark of the local dogs showing their tireless vigilance. As for the rest, the night seemed still, tender and quiet... And only two persons stayed awake, sitting in the garden behind a high clay wall. They were Jesus Radomir and his wife Mary Magdalena... It was their last night... before the crucifixion.

Maria was silent, nestling to her husband and putting her tired head onto his chest. She wanted to say so many things to him! She wanted to say so many important things while there was still time! But she could not find the words. All words have been already said. And they all seemed senseless, unworthy of these last precious moments.

In vain she tried to persuade Radomir to leave the alien land. He refused. It was so inhumanly painful! The world was quiet and protected, but she knew – it would not be like this when Radomir went away... Everything will be empty and cold without him... She asked him to reconsider... She asked him to come back to his far away Northern country or at least the Valley of Magicians to start everything from the beginning.

She knew that wonderful people were waiting for them in the Valley of Magicians. They all were gifted. There they could build a new and light world, just as Volkhy John had assured her. But Radomir did not want to... He did not agree. He wished to sacrifice himself **in order that the blind could see the light**... It was exactly the task which his Father, White Volkhy, placed on his strong shoulders... And Radomir did not wish to retreat... He wanted to be understood... by the Israelites, even at the price of his own life.

None of his nine friends, the faithful knights of his Spiritual Temple, agreed with him. None wished to give him into the hands of the executioners. They did not want to lose him. They loved him too much...

But the day came when, submitting to **Radomir's adamant will**, his friends and his wife (against her will) swore not to interfere in what would be going on... not to try to save him no matter what would happen. Radomir hoped that, on seeing the inevitability of his death, people would at last understand, would see the light and would manifest their own wish to **save** him, despite the distinctions of their faith or lack of understanding.

But Magdalena **knew** that it would not happen. She **knew** that this evening would be the last for them.

Her heart broke to pieces, hearing his even breathing, feeling the warmth of his hands, seeing his concentrated face unshadowed by the slightest doubt. He was unconditionally confident in his rightness. And she could do nothing, no matter how strongly she loved him, how furiously she tried to convince him that those, for whose sake he was going to die a terrible death, were absolutely not worthy of him and his sacrifice.

– Promise me one thing, my light one. If they manage to destroy me, you will go Home. – Suddenly Radomir demanded very insistently. – You'll be safe there and you'll be able to teach. The Knights Templar will come with you, they swore to me. You'll take Vesta. You'll be together. I shall visit you, you know that. You do you know that, don't you?

And here Magdalene finally exploded... She could not bear it anymore... Yes, she was the most powerful Magician. But in this frightful moment she was just a fragile loving woman who was about to lose her most beloved human being in the world.

Her faithful pure heart did not understand **HOW** Earth could to give its most gifted son to be brutally tortured and then killed? Was there any sense in this sacrifice? She was absolutely certain that there was none whatsoever. She was accustomed to the endless (sometimes hopeless!) fight since she was a child, but now Magdalene was unable to understand this absurd and wild sacrifice! Neither her heart nor her mind could accept blind obedience to fate, just in the vain hope of somebody's possible "awakening"! These people (the Israelites) lived in their isolated world, dead shut for others. The fate of a "stranger" did not bother them. And Maria knew – they would not help, just as she knew that Radomir's death would be senseless and in vain. And nobody could

bring him back, even if he wanted. It would be too late to change anything...

– Why don't you understand me? – Radomir suddenly asked, eavesdropping on her sad thoughts. – If I don't try to awaken them, they will destroy the future. Do you remember what Father told us? I **must** help them! Or at least I have to try.

– Tell me, you failed to understand them, right? – Magdalena whispered, tenderly stroking his hand. – Just as they failed to understand you. **How can you help people, if you don't understand them?!** They **think by way of different Runes...** if these are Runes at all. It is that they are **different** people, Radomir! Their mind and heart are unknown to us. No matter how hard you try, they **will not hear you!** They **don't need your Faith, just as they don't need you.** Look around, my Joy. It is an **alien home!** Your land calls you! Leave, Radomir!

But he did not want to countenance defeat. He wished to prove to himself and others that he did everything he could. So no matter how hard she tried, she could not save Radomir. Regrettably she perfectly knew it...

It was already the middle of the night... The old garden, buried in the world of smells and dreams, was cosily silent, enjoying the time of freshness and coolness. The world around Radomir and Magdalene slept carefree, having no presentiment of anything dangerous or bad. Only Magdalene felt that somebody pitiless and indifferent stood right behind her and chuckled gloatingly... It was Fate... inexorable and threatening ... It gloomily looked at a fragile tender woman who it still failed to break by troubles or pain...

In order to protect herself from all this, Magdalene clung with all her might and main to the old recollections, as if she knew that only they could keep her fevered brain from complete and irretrievable "black-out".

The darling years she spent with Radomir still lived in her tenacious memory... It seemed to her that it was such a long time ago! Or was it yesterday? It did not matter now – tomorrow he would cease to exist and their life together would indeed be **just** a recollection...

HOW could she accept it?! **HOW** could she do nothing, when her only love and dearest human being on Earth was going to die?!!

– I want to show you something, Maria, – Radomir whispered.

He moved his hand to his chest and took out ... a miracle!

A bright pulsating emerald light shone through his long thin fingers! The light seemed to be alive. It became stronger, filling the dark night space...

Radomir opened his palm. An amazingly beautiful green crystal reposed on it...

– What is it??? – Magdalene also whispered, as if being afraid to frighten it off.

– This is the Key of Gods – Radomir answered calmly. – Look, I'll show you...¹³

The crystal was material and at the same time truly magic. It was cut out of a very beautiful stone which looked like an unusually transparent emerald. But Magdalene felt that it was something much more sophisticated than a simple jewel, be it the purest one. It was diamond-shaped, elongated and the size of Radomir's palm. Every facet was fully covered by unknown Runes, apparently more ancient than those which Magdalene knew...

– What does it "say", my joy? And why I don't know these Runes? They slightly differ from those which the Volkhs taught us. Where did you get it?

– Once it was brought to Earth by our wise Ancestors, our Gods to create **the Temple of Eternal Knowledge** here. – Thoughtfully looking at the crystal, Radomir began. – It was brought to help the worthy Children of Earth to find Light and Truth. **It was this crystal that engendered on Earth the caste of Volkvs, Veduns, Vedunias, Darinias and other enlightened beings.** It was a

¹³ I was granted a permission to tell about the Key of Gods by the Wanderers. I had the honour of meeting them twice in June and August, 2009 in the Valley of Magicians. The information about the Key of Gods has never been given openly before.

source of KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING for them and a pattern for creating Meteora.

Later, when leaving forever, Gods entrusted this Temple to people, bequeathing it to them to keep and protect it, as they would protect the very Earth. And the Key of the Temple was given to Volkhvs to prevent it from getting to the "Thinking Dark" and their destroying of Earth.

Since then Volkhvs have kept this miracle for centuries. From time to time they pass it to the worthiest one to prevent the order and faith of our Gods from betrayal by a casual "keeper".

– Is it the Grail, Sever? – I could not help asking.

– No, Isidora. The Grail was never what this amazing Clever Crystal is. It was people who ascribed to Radomir what they wished be his... and a lot of what was not. **Radomir was a Keeper of the Key of Gods all his life.** But, of course, people, could not know that and therefore did not know rest until they found something of "his". At first they looked for a Bowl which allegedly "belonged" to Radomir. Sometimes they called his children or Magdalena the Grail. All this happened only because the "true believers" wished very much to have **proof of the verity of what they believe in** – something material, something "holy" which could be **touched...** (Regrettably, it happens even now, many centuries since). So "the Dark" ones invented a beautiful story for them to kindle sensible "believing" hearts...

Regrettably people will **always need relics**, Isidora, and if they don't exist, somebody will invent them. Radomir **never had** this kind of bowl because **he never had the "last supper"**... where he allegedly drank from it. It was the prophet Joshua who had the bowl of the "last supper", not Radomir.

Joseph of Arimathea indeed gathered a few drops of the prophet's blood. But this famous "Grail Bowl" was just the **plainest clay cup**, which the Jews usually used then, and which was not so simple to find afterwards. A golden or silver bowl decorated with precious stones (as the priests depict it) **never existed** either in the time of the Judaic prophet Joshua, or the more so in Radomir's time.

But this is another, although very interesting, story.

You don't have too much time, Isidora. I think you want to know something quite different which is much closer to your heart and maybe will help to find more strength within you to stand to the end. "The Dark" ones interlaced too tightly **the tangle of two so incredibly different lives** (Radomir and Joshua) and one has to have a lot of time to untwine it. As I said before, you will not have it, my friend. I am sorry...

I just nodded in reply, trying not to show how strongly this real **true History** interested me and how much I wanted to tell, even being on the threshold of death, truth from the unbelievable quantity of lies which the church rained down on our trustful earthly heads... But I left to Sever to choose **what exactly** he wanted to tell me. It depended on his free will – to tell or not to tell me this or that thing. I was unspeakably grateful for his precious time and his sincere desire to cheer up our sad last days.

We again appeared in the dark night garden, "eavesdropping" on Radomir and Magdalena's last hours...

– Where is this Great Temple, Radomir? – Magdalena asked with surprise.

– It is in a divine far away country... on "the top" of the world... (At the North Pole, former Hyperborea – DaArya), – Radomir whispered very quietly, as if he went into an infinitely distant past. – There is a holy **man made** mountain which nothing could destroy, be it nature, time or man, because it is eternal... This is **the Temple of Eternal Knowledge**, the Temple of our old Gods, Maria...

Long long time ago their Key sparkled on the top of the holy mountain – this green crystal gave protection to Earth, opened human souls and taught the worthy ones. But our Gods left and the Earth plunged into a darkness which man is, as yet, unable to defeat. He still has too much envy and spite in him... and laziness too...

– People **must awaken and see the light**, Maria. – Radomir said after a minute of silence. – And exactly **YOU** will help them! – He calmly went on, as if he did not notice her protesting gesture. – **YOU** will teach them KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING. You will give them real FAITH. You will become their Guiding Star no matter what happens to me. Promise me! I have no one with whom to entrust what I should have done myself. Promise me, my light one.

Radomir carefully took her face in his hands, peering in with his radiant blue eyes and unexpectedly smiled... The love that shone in these marvelous familiar eyes was endless and... the pain was deep... He knew how frightened and lonely she was. He knew how desperately she wanted to save him! Despite all that Radomir could not help smiling. Even now, in this frightful time for her, Magdalena remained surprisingly light and beautiful, as she always was, but even more beautiful! Like a pure spring of life-giving crystal-clear water...

Shaking himself, he continued as calmly as possible.

– Look, I will show you how to open this ancient Key.

Emerald flame blazed on Radomir's palm... Every Rune began to open up in the layer of unknown spaces, broadening and displaying millions of images which fluidly passed through each other. A marvellous transparent "structure" grew and spun, revealing newer and newer levels of the Knowledge which today's man has never seen. It was stunning and boundless! Magdalena, being unable to take her eyes off this magic, submerged into the depth of the unexplored, experiencing burning incinerating thirst with every fibre of her soul! She absorbed the wisdom of centuries, feeling how the unknown Ancient Magic filled every cell of her body like a powerful wave and then flowed into her! The Knowledge of the Ancestors flooded her. It was truly boundless. It carried her from the life of the smallest insect to the life of universes, comprised of millions of years in the life of strange planets and returned to Earth like a powerful avalanche...

Her eyes wide open, Magdalena heeded the outstanding Knowledge of the Ancient world... Her light body, free of earthly "shackles", bathed like a grain of sand in the ocean of distant stars, revelling in the grandeur and silence of universal peace...

Suddenly a fairy-tale Star Bridge unfolded right in front of her. It seemed that it stretched out into infinity, sparkling with the endless accumulations of big and small stars, lying like a silver road at her feet. A Human Being with shining golden aureola, which enveloped his body, waited for Magdalena in the middle of the bridge... He was very tall and looked very strong.

Magdalene came nearer and saw that not everything was "human" in this extraordinary creature... His eyes impressed her most of all. They were enormous and sparkling, as if carved out of a precious stone. They sparkled with cold facets like a real diamond and were insensible and aloof, just like a diamond itself.

The stately lines of the stranger's face were surprising in their sharpness and immobility, as if a statue stood before Magdalena... Very long and magnificent hair shimmered with silver, as if someone had accidentally spilled stars on it... The "Man" was very unusual indeed... But with all his "icy" coldness, Magdalene felt the wonderful peace and warm and sincere goodness which enveloped her heart coming from the stranger. But for some reason she knew that this goodness was not the same always or directed toward all.

The "Man" lifted his hand in welcoming gesture, his palm toward her, and affectionately pronounced:

– Stop, Star one... Your Way is not completed yet. You cannot go Home. Return to Midgard, Maria... And guard the Key of Gods. May Eternity save you.

Then the mighty figure of the stranger began to vibrate slowly, becoming transparent, being about to disappear.

– Who are you? I beg you, tell me, who are you?! – Magdalena cried pleadingly.

– I am Wanderer... we will meet again. Farewell, Star one...

Suddenly the marvellous crystal sharply closed... The miracle ended as unexpectedly as it

began. It became cold and empty around, as if it was winter.

– What was that, Radomir?! It is in fact far more than we were taught! – The astonished Magdalena asked without taking her eyes from the green "stone".

– I just opened it slightly for you to see. But it is just a grain of sand of what it can do. Therefore you must save it no matter what will happen to me... at any cost... including your life, and even the life of Vesta and Svetodar.

Radomir insistingly waited for an answer, fixing his piercing-blue eyes on her. Magdalena nodded slowly.

– He bade the same thing... Wanderer...

Radomir nodded, obviously knowing who she meant.

– For millennia people have been trying to find the Key of Gods. However, nobody knows what it truly looks like. And they also don't know its essence, – Radomir continued in a much softer way. – Many of the most unbelievable legends grew around it, some were very beautiful, others – almost crazy¹⁴.

Probably, somebody's generic memory awoke one day and a person remembered that something unspeakably great, given by Gods, existed somewhere. But WHAT it was, he could not figure out... Since then "seekers" have sought what they vaguely knew for centuries, going round and round, as if somebody had said to them: "go there, I don't know where, bring that, I don't know what"... They only knew that unbelievable force and extraordinary knowledge is hidden in it. Well, the clever always chase after knowledge and "the dark", as usual, try to find it to rule the others...

I think it is the most enigmatic and most desirable (for everybody in its own way) relict ever existent on Earth. Now everything will depend only on you, my light one. If I have to pass away, don't lose it ever! Promise me, Maria.

Magdalena nodded again. She understood – it was a sacrifice that Radomir asked her to make. And she promised him... She promised to keep the amazing Key of Gods at the cost of her own life... and the lives of her children, if necessary.

Radomir carefully put the green miracle into her palm. The crystal was living and warm...

The night was passing too quickly. It was already dawn in the east... Magdalena sighed deeply. She knew that soon they would come after him to give Radomir into the hands of jealous and lying judges... who hated this, as they called him, "alien envoy" with the whole of their stale souls...

Magdalena was silent, curling up in Radomir's strong hands. She simply wanted to feel his warmth... as long as possible...

It seemed that life left her, drop by drop, converting her broken heart into a cold stone. She could not breathe without him... without the man she loved so much! He was half of her self, without which her life was impossible. She did not know **how** she would exist without him. She did not know **how** she could be strong. But Radomir believed in her and trusted her. He left a DUTY to her which prevented her from surrendering. And she honestly tried to survive...

Despite being superhumanly concentrated, Magdalena did not almost remember further events...

There were alien people filled with incomprehensible spite...

There was pain and horror, watching Radomir suffering...

There was a tiny hope vanishing in an instant...

¹⁴ Many different legends abounded about the Key of Gods. People even tried to cover the greatest and biggest emeralds with writings in different languages – in Arabic, Hebrew, Hindu and even Latin... Regrettably nobody cared to understand for some reason that the stones **did not become magic** because of it, no matter how strongly one wished... On the photos you can see: the Iranian pseudo Mani, the Great Mogul, the catholic "talisman" of God, Hermes Emerald tablet and even the famous Indian Cave of Apollonius from Tyana which, as the Hindus assert, was once visited by Jesus Christ. More of that will be in my next book *The Holy country DaArya. Part 1. This is what the Gods knew about.*

And there was a CROSS... inhuman and frightful instrument of death.

She knelt beneath the cross and looked right into Radomir's eyes to the very last moment... till his pure and strong soul left the, already unnecessary, dead body.

A hot drop of blood fell on Magdalena's mournful face. It merged with a tear and rolled down onto the soil. Then the second one fell... So she stood without moving a muscle, motionless in her innermost grief... mourning her pain with bloody tears... Suddenly a wild beastly cry, even more frightful than that of a beast, shook the surroundings... The cry was shrill and drawling. It made the soul freeze. It squeezed the heart in an icy vicelike grip. It was Magdalena... Earth answered her, its old mighty body shuddering. Then the darkness came...

People were running around in horror like headless chickens, having no idea where their disobedient feet carried them. Like the blind, they ran against each other, jumping aside in different directions, and again stumbled and fell, oblivious to their surroundings... Screams sounded everywhere. Crying and confusion reigned at the Bald Hill and people who watched the execution there, only now began to understand truly what they had done.

*Magdalena got up. And again a wild inhuman scream pierced the tired Earth. Drowning in the roar of thunder, the scream wound around wicked lightnings, frightening the stale souls... **On freeing the Ancient Magic, Magdalena called the old Gods for help...** She called the Great Ancestors.*

Wind disheveled her beautiful gold hair in the darkness, surrounding the fragile body with a halo of Light. Frightful bloody tears still reddened her pale cheeks, making her almost unrecognisable... They made her look like a fearsome Priestess...

Magdalena called... With her arms pulled behind her hands, she called Gods over and over again. She called Fathers who just lost their wonderful Son... She could not surrender so simply... She wanted Radomir back at any cost; even, if she were fated to never talk to him again. She wanted him alive despite everything.

But Gods did not answer... Magdalena could not believe it! She did not want him to die. She did not want to lose him... Her pain was blinding... it was simply inhuman.

Her friends, the Knights Templar, came closer... Unable to tear Magdalena off the dead body, they respectfully waited. Her grief was so deep and hopeless that it touched even the most severe and hard-tempered ones...

*Then numbness came. She did not feel as she was taken aside and seated. She did not see who washed Radomir for the last time... She knew the only thing: **HE must rise!** And she had to help him in that...*

But the night passed and nothing changed. His spirit talked to her, but she stood, numb and deaf to anything, only endlessly calling Fathers... She still refused to surrender.

Finally at dawn the room was suddenly lit with the bright golden light, as if thousand suns were simultaneously switched on! And in this light a tall human figure, much taller than an ordinary man, appeared on the threshold... Magdalena understood at once – it was who she so fervently and persistently had called the whole night...

– Get up, Joyful one! – The visitor pronounced in a deep voice. – It is not your world already. You have lived your life in it. I'll show your new way. Get up, Radomir!

– I thank you, Father... – Magdalene whispered. – I Thank you that you heard me!

The old man long and attentively looked at the fragile woman standing before him. Then he unexpectedly smiled a radiant smile and very affectionately said.

– It is painful for you, Sorrowful one! And you are frightened. I am sorry, daughter. I'll take your Radomir away. He is not fated to be here anymore. He'll have another fate now. You wished that...

Magdalena only nodded, showing to him that she understood. She was unable to talk. She had so little strength left. Somehow she must endure these last, severest for her moments... And then she

would have enough time to grieve over her loss. The most important was that HE lived and the rest did not matter.

An exclamation full of surprise was heard. Radomir stood, looking around, not understanding what was going on. He did not know yet that he had another fate, UNEARTHLY one... He also did not understand why he still lived. He perfectly remembered that the executioners had done their job very well...

– Farewell, my Joy... – Magdalena whispered. – Farewell, my tender one. I will keep my promise and do all according to your will. You live... and I'll always be with you.

Again the golden light blazed up brightly, but now it was outside. Following it, Radomir slowly left the room...

Everything around was so familiar! But feeling alive again, Radomir knew for some reason that already it was not his world... There was only one thing in this old world that still was real for him – his wife... his beloved Magdalena....

– I'll come back to you... I'll come back to you, come what may... – Radomir whispered to himself. A vitmana hung above his head like an enormous "umbrella"...

Bathing in the rays of golden refulgency, Radomir slowly but confidently followed the shining Old man. Suddenly he turned around to see her for the last time... to take her amazing image with him. Magdalena felt terrific warmth. It seemed that Radomir's last look sent all the love they had accumulated for long years! He sent it to her to remember him too.

She closed her eyes to withstand... She wanted him to see her calm. And when she opened them, everything was over... Radomir was gone... Earth lost him, being unworthy of him. He stepped into his new, still unknown life, leaving the Duty and children to Maria... He left her soul wounded and lonely, but still loving and firm.

Magdalena brokenly sighed and got up. She simply did not have time to grieve. She knew that the Knights Templar soon would come to take Radomir's dead body to Holy Flames, thus seeing off his pure Spirit into Eternity.

* * *

You see two almost identical pictures by the great Italian artist **Raphael Sanzio** (Santi). There is an impression that someone intentionally "moved" the second picture downward to cut off the top with the "dangerous" object – a splendidly painted "flying saucer"... which existed in reality. Raphael was a very unusual person who often acted contrary to the church. As the famous Giorgio Vasari said, he was an "**atheist with luxuriant imagination**"... The picture on the left was painted in 1520, the last year of his life, and called "Departure". On causing a real storm of indignation in the church, the magnificent work was sentenced to elimination. Then the painter decided to play a joke on the Pope and painted the **second** picture, as if moving the whole composition downward and cutting the top (main) part of the picture where Christ was painted, which was prohibited by the strict canons of painting of that time. He called it "**Transfiguration**"... Regrettably, the artist died having not finished the second picture. His best students finished it and (at the will of the teacher) gave to the Vatican as a present. The Pope was enormously pleased with the picture and called it "one of the best" of Raphael's pictures...

* * *

The first to appear was, certainly, John... His countenance was calm and merry, but Magdalena read sincere sympathy in his deep grey eyes.

– Great gratitude to you, Maria... I know how hard it was for you to let him go. Forgive us all, dear...

– No, Father... You don't know... Nobody knows... – Magdalena whispered choking back tears. – But thank you for your sympathy... Please, tell Mother Maria that HE left... that he is alive... I'll come to her, as soon as the pain abates a little. Tell everybody that HE LIVES...

Magdalena could not stand it anymore. She did not have any human forces left. She fell to the

ground and burst into tears.

I looked at Anna. She stood petrified and the brooks of hot tears rolled down her severe young face.

– How could they permit this to happen?! Why did not they all make him change his mind? It's so wrong, mother! – Anna exclaimed with indignation looking at us.

She still childishly and uncompromisingly required answers for every question. But to tell the truth, I also thought that they should have prevented Radomir's death. His friends... The Knights Templar... Magdalena; but could we really judge from so far away what was the right thing to do for everybody **at that time**? I just wanted very much to see HIM, just as I desperately wanted to see the living Magdalena...

Probably this was the reason that I never liked to submerge into the past. Because the past cannot be changed (at least I could not do it) and nobody can be warned about the coming trouble or danger. The past was simply the PAST, when all good or bad things **happened** to some one long ago and I have no choice but to observe somebody's last good or bad life.

I saw Magdalena again. She sat alone on the night shore of the quiet south sea. Shallow light waves washed her bare feet affectionately and quietly whispering something about the past... Magdalena intently looked at the enormous green stone that peacefully lay on her palm, and very earnestly reflected about something. A man came unheard from behind. Magdalena sharply turned and then smiled:

– When will you stop startling me, Radanushka? And you are still sad! You've promised me! Why be sad, if HE lives?

– I don't believe you, sister! – Affectionately smiling, Radan sadly pronounced.

It was exactly he, the same as ever, handsome and strong. Only instead of joy and happiness black ineradicable anguish nested in his now lifeless blue eyes...

– I don't believe that you humbly resign yourself to it, Maria! We should have saved him despite his wish! Later he would have understood how terribly wrong he was! I cannot forgive it to myself! – Radan exclaimed in a fit of temper.

Apparently the pain from the loss of his brother sat fast in his kind loving heart, poisoning his days with irreplaceable sorrow.

– Please, stop it, Radanushka. Don't re-open the wound... – Magdalena whispered quietly. – Here! You'd better look what your brother gave me... what Radomir asked all of us to guard.

Maria stretched her hand and showed him the Key of Gods... It again began to open slowly and kingly, striking Radan's imagination. He like a child looked at it dumbfounded, unable to unglue his eyes from the beauty and utter a word.

– Radomir bade us guard it at the cost of our lives... even at the cost of the lives of his children. It is the Key of our Gods, Radanushka... a Treasure of Mind... It has no equal on Earth. And I think beyond it too... – Magdalena sadly said. – We all shall go to the Valley of Magicians. We shall teach there... We shall build a new world, Radanushka. We shall build a Light and Kind World... – She was silent for a few seconds and then added. – Do you think we can manage?

– I don't know, sister. I never tried. – Radan shook his head. – I was endowed with another duty. I must save Svetodar. And then we'll see... Maybe we succeed in building your Kind World...

Radan sat next to Magdalena and forgot his sorrow for a moment, rapturously looking at how the wonderful treasure sparkled and "built" its amazing levels. Time stopped, as if pitying these two people lost in their sadness... And they, lonely, sat ashore, closely snuggling to each other, watching the sea, which sparkled with emerald wider and brighter, and the amazing Key of Gods – the incredible "clever" crystal left by Radomir, burning on Magdalena's hand...

Several long months passed from that sad evening, bringing another severe loss to the Knights Templar and Magdalena. Unexpectedly Volkhv John, their dearest friend, Teacher, faithful and mighty support, died a terrible death... Knights Templar sincerely and deeply mourned over

him. When Radomir's death left their hearts injured and indignant, the loss of John made their world cold and incredibly alien... They were not even allowed to perform a funeral rite according to their custom (to burn John's distorted body). The Israelites just buried him in earth, which horrified all Knights Templar. But Magdalena succeeded at least in buying (!) his severed head, which the Israelites were very reluctant to give back, because they thought John's head **too dangerous**. They considered John to be a great Sorcerer.

So, with the sad load of terrible losses, Magdalena and her little daughter Vesta guarded by six Templars at last decided to start a distant and hard journey to the marvellous country Occitania, for the time being known only to Magdalena...

Then there was a ship... There was a long tiresome trip... Despite her deep grief, Magdalena treated the Knights with unchanged friendliness, composure and calmness during the whole of the endless trip. The Templars cherished her light and sad smile and adored her for the peace they felt being next to her... And she gave her whole heart to them, knowing how dreadfully the cruel pain burned their tired souls and tortured them over what had happened to Radomir and John...

When they finally reached the Valley of Magicians, they all dreamed of only one thing – rest from troubles and pain, insofar as that was possible...

Too much was lost... The price was too high.

Magdalena left the Valley of Magicians when she was just a ten year old girl and now she again "got to know" her proud and beloved Occitania, where every flower, stone and tree seemed familiar to her! She terribly missed her past and now she voraciously breathed in the Occitan air saturated with "kind magic" and could not believe that at last she came Home...

It was her native land, her future Light World which she promised Radomir to build. And it was **the land** to which she brought her grief, like a lost child looking for protection, sympathy and peace in his Mother...

Magdalena knew that in order to fulfill her promise to Radomir, she must be sure, composed and strong. But at that time she lived locked in her deepest sorrow and was dreadfully lonely...

Without Radomir, her life became empty, useless and bitter... He dwelt now somewhere far away, in the unknown and marvellous World, which her soul could not reach... But she missed him so much, in both human and womanly ways! Regrettably, nobody could help her here.

We saw her again... Magdalena was sitting alone on a high precipice covered by a carpet of wild flowers, her knees clasped to her chest... As had already become usual for her, she saw off the sunset – another day spent without Radomir... She knew that there would be very many of these days. And she also knew that she would have to get used to it. Despite the infinite bitterness and emptiness, Magdalena was very well aware of a long and complicated life waiting for her which she had to live **alone**... without Radomir. She still failed to imagine that, because he lived everywhere – in every cell of her body, in her dreams and vigils, in every object he had touched. It seemed that the whole of the surrounding space was saturated with Radomir's presence... And there was no escape from that, even if she wished it...

The evening was still, soft and warm. Nature came back to life after the daily heat and vigorously spread the smells of heated flowering meadows and pines... Magdalena listened to the monotonous sounds of the forest world. It was surprisingly simple and calm! Bees, worn out by the summer heat, buzzed loudly in nearby bushes. Even those industrious creatures chose to retire from the burning daily rays as far as possible and now joyfully absorbed the life-giving evening coolness. Feeling the human goodness, a tiny coloured bird fearlessly sat down on Magdalena's warm shoulder and expressed its gratitude with sonorous silvery warble...

But Magdalena did not notice it. She again sped away into the usual world of her dreams where Radomir still lived... She again recalled him... His unbelievable kindness... His exuberant thirst for Life... His light and tender smile and the piercing gaze of his blue eyes... And his iron confidence in the rightness of the way he had chosen. She remembered a wonderful, strong man who controlled the crowds whilst being a child!

She remembered his caress and the warm loyalty of his big heart... All of this lived now only in her memory, not yielding to time or going into oblivion. All of this was alive and aching.... Sometimes it seemed to her that a little bit more and she would stop breathing... But days passed and life went on too. The DUTY that Radomir had left was incumbent upon her. Therefore she did her best to ignore her feelings and wishes.

Her son, Svetodar, who she terribly missed, was in far away Spain together with Radan. Magdalena knew that it was harder for him to bear it... He was still too young to accept such a loss. But she also knew that he would never show weakness to a stranger, even while terribly suffering and grieving. He was Radomir's son... And this obliged him to be strong.

Several more months passed. Gradually, as always happens in the case of even the most frightful loss, Magdalena started coming back to life. Probably it was the right time to return to the living...

*Choosing the tiny Montsegur which was **the most magic** castle in the Valley (because it was constructed on the "transition point" to other worlds), Magdalena and her daughter moved there and began to settle in their new, still unknown, Home...*

Finally, keeping in mind Radomir's persistent desire, Magdalena gradually began to get her first disciples...

It was probably the easiest of tasks, because everybody in this amazing plot of land was more or less gifted, and almost everybody longed for knowledge. Therefore very soon Magdalena had several hundred very assiduous pupils. Very soon there were a thousand of them... and in a short while the whole Valley of Magicians was embraced by her teachings. And she took as many as of them as possible to distract herself from bitter thoughts and was unspeakably glad watching how voraciously the Occitans strived for Knowledge! She knew that Radomir would rejoice at it too... and accepted more pupils.

– Forgive me, Sever, but how could White Volkhv agree to it?! In fact they so carefully guard their Knowledge from everybody! How did he allow this kind of thing? In fact Magdalena taught everybody, not just the initiated.

– He did not. The White Volkhv never agreed to it, Isidora... Magdalena and Radomir went against his will, opening this knowledge to people. Even now I don't know who was truly right...

– But you saw how eagerly the Occitans absorbed this Knowledge! And the rest of Europe too! – I exclaimed with surprise.

– Yes, they did... But I also saw another thing – how easily they were destroyed... And this means they were not ready for it.

*– But when do you think people **will** be "ready"? – I was indignant. – Or it will never happen?!*

*– It will happen, my friend... I think. But only when people understand at last that they **are able to protect** this very Knowledge... – Sever unexpectedly smiled like a child. – Magdalena and Radomir lived for the Future, you see... They dreamed of a wonderful **United** World where there would be one Faith, one ruler, one language... And despite everything, they taught... resisting the Volkhvs... not submitting to White Volkhv... And for all that, they understood very well that even their distant great-grandchildren would probably not see anything of this wonderful united world. They simply fought... for light, for knowledge and for Earth. It was their Life... And they lived it faithfully sticking to it to the end.*

I again dipped into the past where this outstanding, surprising and singular story lived...

There was only one sad cloud which cast a shade on Magdalena's gradually brightening mood. Vesta took Radomir's loss very hard and suffered deeply. No "joys" could distract her from it. When she finally knew about what had happened to her father, she shut her little heart from the surrounding world and lived her loss alone, even keeping her beloved mother, the light Magdalena at arms length. She rambled aimlessly for days, not knowing what to do with this frightful grief.

Also her brother with whom Vesta used to share her joys and sorrows was very far away from her. She was too small to be able to cope with this severe grief which unexpectedly fell on her fragile child's shoulders.

She wildly missed her darling dad, the best in the whole world, and could not understand where those cruel people that had hated him and killed him came from?

She did not hear his merry laughter anymore. They did not go for their wonderful walks... There was nothing at all which would remind her of their warm and always joyful communication. Vesta's suffering was very deep and almost adult... She had only her memory of her father, but she wanted him back in flesh and blood! She still was too little to be content with recollections! Yes, she remembered very well how she used to curl up in his strong hands and listen to amazing stories, holding her breath and catching every word in order not to skip anything very important... And now her wounded little heart required all that back! Her dad was her fairy-tale idol... He was her surprising world, closed to others, where only the two of them lived... and now this world ceased to exist. Wicked people took it away, leaving a deep wound which she could not heal.

All Vesta's adult friends did their best to dispel her sad thoughts, but the child refused to open her grieving heart to anybody. The only one who could help was Radan, but he was far away taking care of Svetodar. However, there was one close to Vesta who tried as hard as he could to replace her uncle Radan. It was Red Simon. Friends gave him this nick-name because of the unusual colour of his hair – very bright red, but Simon was not offended at all. He was easily amused and merry and always ready to help, thus truly reminiscent of Radan. He was sincerely loved for that by the Templars. He was their "safety-valve" letting them endure the troubles, of which they had more than enough, with much more ease.

The Red Knight patiently came to Vesta every day and took her on thrilling long walks, gradually becoming a real trusted friend for a little girl. Soon everybody got used to his presence even in small Montsegur. He became a welcome guest and everybody valued him for his easy temper and consistently good mood. Only Magdalena was on the alert with Simon, although she could not explain the reason for her watchfulness... She was extremely glad, more than all, on seeing Vesta happier with every passing day, but at the same time she was unable to get rid of an incomprehensible feeling of danger coming from Knight Simon. She knew that she should feel only gratitude toward him, but the presentiment remained. Magdalena sincerely tried to pay no attention to her feelings and just be glad that Vesta's mood was improving, hoping very much that her daughter's pain would gradually abate over the course of time, just as her pain was dulling, and only deep light sadness about her kind dad would remain in her exhausted little heart... and recollections... They would be pure and bitter, as bitter as the purest and lightest LIFE sometimes can be...

Svetodar frequently wrote to his mother and a Knight Templar, who was with Radan to guard him in Spain, brought these letters to the Valley of Magicians and took the reply letters which contained the latest news. So they lived, without seeing each other. The only thing they had was hope that the happy day would come some time when they would finally meet each other... They did not know that this happy day would never come...

All these years after the death of Radomir, Magdalena cherished a dream in her heart. She wanted to visit the far North Country to see the land of her ancestors and to bow low to Radomir's home... She wanted to thank the land which brought up the dearest human being in her life. Also she wanted to take the Key of Gods there, because she knew that it would be the right thing to do... The native land would guard IT for people much better than she would do that.

But, as usual, life flew by too quickly, and Magdalena did not have time to fulfill her plan. And eight years later, after Radomir's death, a tragedy occurred... Sharply feeling it approaching, Magdalena suffered unable to understand the reason. Even being the strongest Vedunia, she could not see her Fate, no matter how strongly she wished it. Her Fate was hidden from her, because she must live her life fully, no matter how difficult or cruel it might be...

– Why, mother! Why can't all Veduns and Vedunias see their Fate? Why is it closed to them?

– Anna was indignant.

– I think it is so in order that we don't try to change what is destined for us, dear. – I answered without much confidence in my voice.

As far as I could remember, this injustice always revolted me! Why do we, the Knowing ones, need this test? Why could not we avoid it, when we were perfectly able to do that? But it was obvious that nobody was going to answer those questions. This was our Life, and we had to live it the way it was written by somebody for us. But we could make it so happy so easily, if those "at the top" let us see our Fate! But neither I, nor any of us (even Magdalena!) had any chance to do that.

– Also Magdalena was more and more worried about some weird rumors... – Sever continued. – Strange "Cathars" suddenly began to appear among her pupils. They quietly called upon the others to profess a "bloodless" and "kind" doctrine. They called for them to live without fighting and resistance. It was very strange and **by no means reflected** Magdalena and Radomir's teachings. She felt this was a dirty trick and a danger, and for some reason she always failed to meet at least one of the "new" Cathars... The alarm grew in Magdalena's heart. Someone wanted very much to make the Cathars helpless! Somebody wanted to breed doubt in their brave hearts. But who needed it? Could it be the Church? She knew and remembered how quickly even the strongest and most advanced states died, if they gave up fighting, relying on alien friendliness! The world was still too imperfect... and one should fight for home, beliefs, children and even for love. That is why Magdalena's Cathars were **warriors** from the very beginning, and that fully corresponded to her teachings. In fact she **never created an assemblage of humble and helpless "lambs"**; on the contrary, Magdalena created a **mighty society of Battle Magicians** destined to **KNOW** and to protect their land and all living on it. Therefore the **real Cathars, her Cathars, the Knights Templar** were brave and strong people proudly carrying the Great Knowledge of the Immortal.

On seeing my protesting gesture, Sever smiled.

– Don't be surprised, my friend. As you know, it is the same old story here on Earth – over the course of time the **real** History is re-written and the lightest people are reshaped... So it always was and, I think, ever will be... Therefore only the helpless Teachings of Love built on renunciation was left of the bellicose and proud **first** (and real) Cathars; and of Radomir too.

– But it is true that they did not resist, Sever! They had no right to kill! I read about it in Esclarmonde's diary! And you told me about it too.

– No, my friend. Esclarmonde was already a "new" Cathar. I shall explain it to you... Forgive me. I have not told you the **true** reason why this outstanding people were eliminated. But I never opened it to anybody. Probably the "truth" of old Meteora still prevails...It is too deeply embedded in me...

Yes, Isidora, Magdalena taught Faith in Good. She taught Love and Light. But also she taught it is right to **FIGHT** for this good and light! Just like Radomir, she taught firmness and courage. It was she to whom knights from the whole of Europe aspired after Radomir's death, because **exactly in her** they felt the brave heart of Radomir. Do you remember, Isidora, that from the very beginning of his life, Radomir called on all to fight? He called for fighting for the future, for children and for Life!

Therefore, fulfilling Magdalena's will, the **first** Knights Templars got faithful and reliable help. They recruited the Occitan knights-warriors, who in turn helped them to teach simple peasants the art of war in case of special necessity or unexpected misfortune.

The ranks of the Templars quickly grew, being replenished with interested and deserving people. Soon almost all men from the Occitanian aristocratic families belonged to the Temple of Radomir. Those who left for other countries returned at their families request to join the fraternity of the Templars.

Despite their perpetual involvement in this activity, the first six Knights Templar who had arrived with Magdalena remained her most favourite and faithful disciples; may be it happened

because they knew Radomir or for the simple reason that they lived for so many years together and became a united mighty force, but exactly these Templars were the closest to Magdalena's heart. She shared with them the Knowledge which she trusted to nobody else. They were the **real Warriors of Radomir**... And they became **the first Perfecti** of Mag Doliny (the Magician of the Valley).

The Perfecti were outstanding warriors and powerful magicians, Isidora, which made them much stronger than all the living (except for some Volkhs, of course). Maria entrusted her children's lives to them. She entrusted her life too. One day, feeling that something bad was coming, she decided to entrust the secret of the Key of Gods to them... which, as appeared later, was a terrible and irreparable mistake that in a hundred years destroyed the Great Empire of Knowledge and Light...the pure and wonderful Cathar Empire.

The hideous treachery (with the help of the church, surely) of one of the closest friends after Magdalena's cruel death, gradually transformed the Cathars, converting strong and proud warriors into defenceless and helpless people, making the Empire's Sun and Light vulnerable and easily attainable. As for the church, as usually happened then, it quietly and calmly continued its black job, sending dozens of "new" Cathars to Occitania who "confidently" whispered to others, how wonderful their life would be without murders and how pure their light souls would be without the shedding of blood. The Cathars listened to the beautiful sounding words, forgetting what Golden Maria had taught them.

In fact the quiet and loving people, like the Occitans, accepted the teaching which advocated staying away from blood and violence with much pleasure and readiness, therefore, some time later they were sure that it was **exactly that** which Magdalena had taught and that it was absolutely correct. For some reason nobody reflected on the following thing, even for a minute: **WHY** such "correctness" was openly taught only **after Golden Maria's cruel death**?

This was how over the years Radomir and Magdalena's teachings were transformed into a **helpless** Great Knowledge and there was nobody left to save and protect it... And the "new" Cathars surrendered themselves, their children and their wives to the mercy of fire and church... And thousands of Magdalena's Children burned without resisting or cursing their executioners. They burned, dreaming about a high star world where they would meet their Maria.

– How did that happen, Sever?! Tell me, if I have the right to know it...

Sever sadly nodded and continued.

– Oh, it happened in an incredibly foolish way, Isidora. It was so foolish that sometimes I cannot believe that it happened...

Do you remember I told you that once Magdalena let the nearest Knights Templar into a secret of the Key of Gods? – I nodded. – Unfortunately, none of the Knights Templars knew that one of them was a protege of the "Dark" from the very beginning... To tell the truth even he was completely unaware of that.

– But how is this kind of thing possible at all, Sever?! – I was sincerely indignant. – Does a person really **not feel that he does evil**?

– Well, you cannot fight what you don't see or understand, can you, Isidora? – Sever calmly continued, paying no attention to my indignation. – That was exactly the case – **he did not see and feel** what the "Dark" had inculcated in his brain, choosing exactly him as the helpless "victim". And when the right time came for the "Dark" the "order" worked without a hitch, despite what the person they had seized felt or believed in.

– But the Templars were so strong! How somebody could inculcate anything in them?

– You see, Isidora, it's not always enough to be strong and clever. Sometimes the "Thinking Dark" can find something that the targeted victim just does not have. And then this victim lives an honest life until the introduced thing snaps into action and the person becomes an obedient marionette in their hands. And even when the implantation begins to act, the poor "victim" does not have the least idea of what is happening... It is a terrible end, Isidora. I would not wish an end like this even upon my worst enemy...

– Do you mean that this knight did not know what terrible harm he did to others?

Sever nodded.

– No, my friend, he did not know to the last moment of his life. He died piously believing that he had lived a good and worthy life. He never understood why his friends turned their backs on him and outcast him from Occitania, no matter how hard they tried to explain it to him... Do you wish to hear how this treachery happened, my friend?

I nodded and Sever patiently continued the breathtaking story...

– When the church knew through the same knight that Magdalena was also the Keeper of the Clever Crystal, the "holy fathers" had an insuperable desire to get this amazing force in their hands. And, naturally, their desire to eliminate Golden Maria increased by thousands of times.

According to the plan perfectly designed by the "holy fathers", on the day when Magdalena **must die** an envoy of the church handed a letter allegedly written by Magdalena to the knight-betrayer. In this ill-fated "message" Magdalena "adjured" the **first** Knights Templar (her nearest friends) **never more to use a weapon** (even in defence!), **as well as other methods known to them that would take away somebody's life. Otherwise, – the letter stated, – the Knights Templar will lose the Key of Gods... because they will be unworthy of it.**

It was absurd!!! It was the most lying message they ever heard! But Magdalena was not with them... and nobody could ask her about anything anymore.

– But could not they talk to her after her death, Sever? – I was surprised. – As far as I know many Magicians can talk to the dead?

– Not many, Isidora... Many can **see** the spirits of the dead, but not many can hear them **accurately**. Only one of Magdalena's friends could freely communicate with her. But exactly he died within a few days of her death. She came to them in her spirit, hoping that they would see her and understand... She brought a sword to them, trying to show that they must fight.

The Perfecti were at a loss, adhering to one and then to another opinion. Their number now grew considerably, and although the new Perfecti never heard about the Key of Gods, the "letter of Magdalena" was announced to them to, except for lines not intended for their ears. Some of the new Perfecti wanted to lead a calmer life and preferred to believe the "letter". Those who were devoted to her and Radomir with their heart and soul could not believe that wild lie... But they also were afraid that should they make a mistake in their decision the Key of Gods, about which they knew very little, could disappear. The weight of the Duty lay heavy on their opinion and heart, creating shaky uncertainty and doubts...

The Knights Templar sincerely, but very reluctantly, tried somehow to accept this strange "message", especially because it allegedly was the **last** message and the **last** request of their Golden Maria. And no matter how strange this request seemed to them, they felt they probably should submit to it, at least those Templars closest to her... just like they submitted once to the last request of Radomir. The Key of Gods now remained with them and they were responsible for its safety with their lives...

But it was exactly they, the **first** Knights Templar, who found it most difficult. They knew and remembered too well that Radomir was a Warrior, just as Maria was, and nothing in the world could make them to turn back to their primordial Vera. Nothing could make them forget the commandments of the **real** Cathars.

And the first Knights Templar decided not to give up together with many of the new Templars.

Assuming that, maybe, they were going against Golden Maria's **last** will, they could not lay down arms so simply when some fifteen years after Magdalena's death, the army of the church sent its faithful servants to "pacify" the Cathars for good... to wipe them off the face of Occitania in order that new shoots of their light Faith would never appear and that their Ancient and Pure Knowledge would never be remembered on Earth...

But the number of the Knights Templar was too little compared to the "army of devil" and

hundreds of them died fighting thousands...

They sincerely believed in their devoted hearts that they **did not betray** Maria. They believed that they were right, despite the orders of friends and pressure from the "new" Cathars. But soon there were almost no Knights Templar or **real** Cathars left in Occitania...

Much later almost nobody remembered that once, when Golden Maria lived, these Teachings were completely different – strong, bellicose and proud.

I was sick at heart. Could somebody who was with Maria for so many years really betray her so terribly?

– Could you tell me, Sever, more details about the moment of treachery? I cannot understand it neither with my heart nor my soul, and even my brain does not accept it...

– I think it will be better, if I show it to you, Isidora, – Sever answered thoughtfully.

I saw a lonely, enormous, round and very old stone table in the middle of a small stone hall. It occupied almost the whole of the room. Its external circle was noticeably worn by the frequent pressure of human hands. Many fates were decided at this table; it "heard" many human thoughts during its long life...

Seven persons sat around the table. They were Magdalena and Radomir's old friends, the **first** Knights Templar. Radan was the seventh... On hearing through a messenger how cruelly Magdalena and his young niece Vesta died, Radan could not stay away. Leaving Svetodar (who also longed to go) in the charge of the Spanish friends, he came to Montsegur, but despite driving several horses to exhaustion, regrettably could not say a last farewell to Maria. The friends made a funeral fire for her and Vesta and the free spirits of Golden Maria and her beloved daughter flew to their new Home...

It was only in 2009, when I visited Occitania, I found out that Magdalena's Spirit was still on our Midgard-Earth, that she guarded here something very valuable and important for us all these long hundreds of years – she guarded the Key of Gods for people... And no matter how eagerly numerous "seekers" tried to get it, Magdalena remembered Radomir's request and kept it with her life, even after she had left it.

The Knights were sullenly quiet. Truly, what could be said to abate their sorrow? Their Golden Maria passed away... They were ready to give their lives for her. But it was **SHE** who died... And nothing could be changed; nothing could be done. This happened in 1094 according to the chronology of the life of an unknown Jewish prophet, of whom the holy church made a greatly suffering "son of God"... Magdalena was only twenty nine years old...

Finally, Radan somehow managed to pull himself together and pronounced:

– Tell us, Simon, how did it turn out that it was **exactly you** who appeared twice next to Magdalena on one and the same day? How did it turn out that it was exactly **you** to whom she gave the message? She **never wrote messages**, except to me and Svetodar. You perfectly know that Magdalena always preferred to **talk** to us. And she **never decided the important things alone!** She respected and loved us and would never agree to that kind of thing.

One of the knights was very nervous and highly displeased. To my greatest horror, it was the ever merry and pleasant Vesta's "friend", Red Simon... Magdalena was right. He brought a misfortune... without realizing it. Simon bristled and looked at others, apparently not knowing how to withstand this verbal attack; what to say that they would understand?

– So, how can you explain this "letter", Simon? – Radan repeated insistently.

– I told you, I don't know! – The knight offendedly exclaimed. – I, what a fool, tried to find you as quickly as possible and got mistrust in gratitude! I think jealousy blinds you; otherwise you would not offend me so wrongly!

The indignant Simon pulled out a tiny white sheet completely covered with neat large Runes – Magdalena's supposed "letter"... All the rest in the room were obviously confused. They had known each other for such a long time that it was truly impossible to believe treachery of any one of

them... But then why did that kind of thing happen?! In fact Maria never distinguished between any of them when discussing something truly important! They always acted all together in everything. And this "letter" turned the whole of the Cathar doctrine upside down and dramatically changed the sense of what Magdalena had taught for so long. Was it not really incomprehensible or, at least, very strange?

– Forgive us, Simon, we don't want to accuse you. But the circumstances are very unclear. – A Knight Templar pronounced very reservedly. – **How** did you find yourself next to Maria exactly at the moment when she wrote this ill-fated message? And how did you appear in the holy cave exactly when they were killed?! – And, on calming down, he added: – Did she say anything?

– No, she said nothing... She only asked it be read to you. – Simon pronounced with indignation. – If she had not died, would it really have seemed so strange!? Is it my guilt that I happened to be near? If I did not find THEM, maybe you would not know until now what happened to them!

It was very hard to blame him without knowing the whole truth. All of them were Knights of Radomir. They were closest battle friends who had gone a dangerous and long way together... But no matter how hard the Templars tried to think positively, the event aroused suspicions – everything coincided in a very unusual way...

I stood punch-drunk, refusing to believe that the most outstanding Empire on Earth was destroyed in so terribly simple a way! Again, this was another time. And it was difficult for me to judge how strong people were then. But the Cathars had the purest, invincible and proud hearts which allowed them to go to frightful human fires without breaking and betraying. How could they believe that Golden Maria would permit that?

Frankly speaking the plan of the church was a work of devilish genius... On the face of it, it even would seem that it brought only good and love to the "new" Cathars, prohibiting taking somebody's life, but it was only on the face of it... It reality this "bloodless" teaching totally disarmed the Cathars, making them helpless against the cruel and blood-thirsty army of the Pope. In fact, as far as I understood, the church did not attack while the Cathars remained warriors. But after Golden Maria's death and fulfillment of the genius plan of the church, the "holy" fathers had just to wait a little until the Cathars became helpless of **their** own free will, and then they would attack... when there would be nobody to resist, when there would be just a small handful of the Knights Templar left and when it would be very easy to defeat the Cathars, without even staining their delicate, well-groomed hands with Cathar blood.

These thoughts made me sick... Everything was too easy and simple and very scary. I desperately needed to avoid these sad thoughts and asked:

– Have you ever seen the Key of Gods, Sever?

– No, my friend. I have not. I saw it only through Magdalena, like you saw it today. But I can tell you Isidora that it **must not** get into "dark" hands, no matter how many human sacrifices it costs, otherwise Midgard-Earth will cease to exist... It is too powerful a force. Should it get into the hands of the Thinking Dark, nothing will stop their victorious march on the rest of the Earths (Planets)... I know how hard it is for your heart to understand that, Isidora. But sometimes we must think of the whole. We must think for all coming here... and see that they will have somewhere to come...

– Where is the Key of Gods now? Does anybody know that, Sever? – Anna asked unexpectedly in earnest, having been quiet until now.

– Yes, Annushka, partly I know. But I cannot tell you about it, unfortunately... I am sure about one thing though; a day will come when people will finally be **worthy** and the Key of Gods will shine again on the top of the Northern Country. Only long hundreds of years will have to pass before it happens...

– But we shall die soon. What is it that you're afraid of, Sever? – Anna asked severely. – Tell us, please!

He looked at her in surprise and, on waiting a little, slowly answered.

– You are right, dear. I think you deserve to know that... After the cruel death of Golden Maria, Radan took the Key of Gods to Spain to give it to Svetodar. He considered that, even being so young, Svetodar would save the treasure entrusted to him, even at the cost of his precious life if necessary. Later, when Svetodar left for the search for Wanderer, he took the marvellous treasure with him. And when he found him, spent sixty long and difficult years with him, before coming back home, he decided that it would be more safe and correct to leave the Key of Gods there, in the Northern Country, in case of something bad happening in his native Occitania. He did not know what waited for him at home and refused to risk the Key of Gods.

– So, that means that the Key of Gods was in the Northern Country all this time? – Anna asked in earnest, as if affirming what she just heard.

– Unfortunately, I don't know, dear. I have not heard about it since then.

– Tell me, Sever. Wouldn't you really like to see the new future? Would you not really like to see the new Earth with your own eyes? – I could not help asking.

– I have no right to that, Isidora. I have already had my days here and must go Home. It is time for me already. I saw too much grief here, too many losses. But I shall wait for you, my friend. As I told you, my distant world is your world too. I shall help you to come back Home...

I felt perplexed; understanding nothing of what was going on, unable to comprehend my beloved Earth or the people living on it. They were given wonderful KNOWLEDGE and instead of studying it they fought for power, destroyed each other and died... Thousands of them died before they had time to live their precious lives... and took away the lives of other good people.

– Tell me, Sever. Not all of the Knights Templar died, did they? Otherwise their Order could not spread out so widely later?

– No, my friend, some of them had to remain alive in order to save the Order of the Templars of Radomir. When the church attacked Occitania, they went to their friends from the nearby castles, taking John's head and the treasure of the Templars with the help of which they were going to create a real army which would act independently of Kings and Popes' wishes. They again hoped to recreate the world Radomir had dreamed about, but this time they wanted it to be free, mighty and strong¹⁵.

– Is it so that the Cathars were divided after Golden Maria's death into "new" Cathars and old warriors of Magdalena?

– You are right, Isidora. Unfortunately all the "new" ones died in the terrible Papal fires... and that was what the "holy" church aimed for.

– Why did not the Templars come back? Why did not they win Occitania back? – I bitterly exclaimed.

– Because there was nobody to win back, Isidora, – Sever whispered quietly. – There were just a few of the Templars who left Occitania. Other Templars died, protecting the "new" Cathars. Do you remember I told you that just a hundred Knights protected every Occitan castle or town? A hundred fought against tens of thousands of the Papal Crusaders. It was too much even for the strongest...

The new "Perfecti" did not fight, giving themselves and others for extermination. But if they had helped, the empire of Light would have flourished until now and you would have met living Cathars... Hundreds of the Perfecti burned (400 of them burned only in Besier!). Together with the Templars, they would smash any army! But they did not want to. And the Templars died for them, even understanding that they would lose, they could not calmly watch old men, women and children

¹⁵ You can read about the remaining Occitan Cathar-Warriors (Templars) in my book "The children of Sun" where you will find extracts of the original letters of Count Miropoix, a Warrior-Perfecti, who protected the fortress of Montsegur in 1244 and witnessed of the death of the Montsegur Cathars. There also will be some extracts from the real records of the Carcassonne Inquisition and secret archives of the Vatican.

die... They could not watch the best burn... burn because of the most foolish lies.

– Tell me, Sever. Has Golden Maria ever succeeded in visiting the Northern Country? – I asked, again wishing to change the subject of the conversation.

Sever attentively scrutinized my face, as if wishing to get down to my soul. Then he sadly smiled and quietly pronounced:

– You are very shrewd, Isidora... But I cannot tell you all of that. I can only answer – yes. She visited the holy Land of her ancestors... the Land of Radomir. Wanderer helped her. But I have no right to tell you more... Forgive me.

It was unexpected and strange. On telling me about the events which, in my understanding, were far more serious and more important, Sever suddenly refused to tell me such a "trifle"! Certainly, my interest became much stronger, allowing me to cherish hopes that somehow I would know it before I die. Somehow I will have time for that...

Unexpectedly the door swung open and we saw Caraffa on the threshold. To my surprise he looked fresh and satisfied.

– Well, well... Madonna Isidora receives guests! Very interesting. From the very Meteora, if I am not mistaken? The great Sever in person! Will you introduce me, Isidora? I think it will be very useful for all of us!

And complacently laughing, Caraffa sat himself on a chair with an air of importance.

43. Isidora-9. The loss of Anna. A Woman-Warrior.

Caraffa stared rudely at Sever as if the latter was a rare exotic animal. For some incomprehensible reason the Pope's face shone with confidence which frightened me more than his hurling "thunderbolts" of terrible dissatisfaction...

– Well, well, venerable Sever! We meet at last! Once I'd promised, I knew that you would come **to me**; I don't change my promises, as a rule.

– Don't flatter yourself, Caraffa. – Sever pronounced calmly. – I would never give you that kind of pleasure, as you know perfectly well. My interest is in Madonna Isidora. She is too valuable to be in your hands. But, of course, you are unable to understand that.

– Man's value depends on in what way he can be of benefit to God. Well, Madonna Isidora, as you know, is a witch... and a very mighty one. Therefore her attitude toward God does not leave a glimmer of hope of her changing for the better. And, thus, her "value" for me and our holiest church comes to zero, dearest Sever.

– Why do you keep her locked up then, ceaselessly killing her family one by one, Caraffa? – Sever asked frostily.

– Good heavens, dearest Sever! Madonna Isidora is absolutely free in her acts and decisions! – And caustically smiling, added: – As soon as she deigns to give to me what I ask, she is free to go wherever she wishes, even if it be against my will.

The room "sparkled" with tension. The conversation, unpleasant for Sever and me, portended nothing good. But, apparently, Caraffa pursued his own aim (as usual, unknown to others) which he was not going to uncover.

– Tell me, Sever, if Madonna Isidora is so valuable to you, why does not Meteora try to save her, hiding her behind its "magic" walls?

– Because people come to us only at their desire. We offered her to stay, but Isidora did not wish to.

Caraffa sharply turned toward me. The greatest astonishment was written on his face...

– So, it's true! You did not wish to stay **yourself**!

– I've told you but you did not believe me, – I shrugged my shoulders as indifferently as

possible.

The Pope was obviously dumbfounded. He was unable to understand why I did not want to protect myself from the danger that came from him?! Not to mention the chance to study the Knowledge hidden in Meteora...

– Tell me, Sever, how old are you? – Caraffa bluntly asked, sharply turning to Sever.

– Nine hundred and sixty three from the birth of your false God, – Sever answered calmly. – I think you're ignorant of other systems of chronology.

– But you look as if you're thirty... – Paying no attention to Sever's caustic remark, the Pope pronounced in a low voice. – This is what exactly I ask from Madonna Isidora!

– And she is absolutely right refusing to give what you ask for. Criminals have no right to live long, Caraffa, especially, those like you. It is highly unlikely that you will repent of what you've done, even if you live a thousand years, is it not? Moreover, there is no sense in it. In fact your God is in your soul, Caraffa... And there is no blacker soul in the world than yours. Therefore, no matter how long you live, you will do only black and wicked things to the end of your life.

– Well, we'll see! – Caraffa pronounced thoughtfully. – We'll see... No matter how strong Madonna Isidora is, she loves her daughter very much, doesn't she? Well, a mother's love, you know, works miracles sometimes!

Anna, silent until now, stepped forward and said as calmly as possible:

– So far we've heard only words from you, Caraffa. Do your business or don't talk about what you are not going to do! For it doesn't do the Roman Pope any credit at all...

– Anna!!!

It escaped involuntarily from me... Because I knew for certain – if my daughter were to get into the basement, she would not get out of there alive. All would be ended... for her... and for me.

– Well, Isidora, decide! Anna asked for that herself. Do you want to be free and quietly raise your wonderful daughter or will her life end right now... in the basement.

I turned to Sever in hope. He intensely decided something...

– Tell me, Caraffa, aren't you really afraid? You will live again after death... you know that. The thing is that your next life will not be pleasant like this one. Does not even this make you think?

*– Oh, my dearest Sever! It's nothing compared to the attempt to reach immortality **now**. I have staked everything on it! I shall get what I desire using anything I can, including crime...*

*I stood, unable to think... unable to come to any determination. There was only one thought in my head – **this is the end**... I shall never see my dear brave girl again! Caraffa has lost his iron patience and the most terrible events will happen right now...*

Anna looked me right in the eyes and... smiled. I knew she was trying to calm me down! Although I saw the animal fear that wildly squealed and tossed about deep in her heart; I felt it and was unable to help her, because I could not betray her or myself... or the dead. I could not betray other gifted ones, who lived in horror day after day expecting their terrible death!

I had to destroy Caraffa... in order that he did not destroy the Earth.

We were just specks of dust, my daughter and I, compared to all those he had murdered. The souls of gifted ones who died in torture called me every night, demanding revenge...

Our lives (Anna's and mine) did not matter, but for all that, I could not simply allow her to die. I could not reconcile myself to her murderer...

– Try to delay him, hold him up, Isidora, – I heard Sever right in my brain. – I will go to the White Volkhv.

And he disappeared, sharply thawing... Most likely, it was just me who heard his last words, because Caraffa perplexedly looked for several seconds at the place where Sever had just been. But, as usual, he very quickly came to himself and asked with surprise in his voice:

– So, what? He deserted you so easily! Now what can you tell me about your friendship!? Or

does nobody in Meteora know what it is?

– No, Your Holiness, they know. And this is exactly what he tries to prove now.

For a moment Caraffa was submerged in deep thought, as if deciding what he should do with us next. Suddenly he sharply turned around and shouted:

– Guards!

Two huge guardsmen barged into the room.

– Take her to the basement!

The guards sharply grasped Anna and dragged her to the door.

– This is the end. – I thought, paralyzed with fright.

But it was far from it. Anna sharply became straight and the two enormous guards flew to the door and fell on the floor like heavy sacks.

– Well, well... – Caraffa whispered, fixing his piercing eyes at Anna. – She is truly your daughter, Madonna. Let's try to do otherwise.

He clapped his hands, calling new guards.

– Take the girl to my rooms and don't let her out of your sight! – Caraffa sharply ordered.

I did not understand yet what he was going to do this time. I had to do something, to fight somehow... But how could I fight without understanding with what I should do it? It was obvious that Caraffa planned to do something to avoid Anna's influence. But what could that be? Regrettably only his sharp mind knew that. I fell into a stupor, unable to make up my mind to undertake further steps. I only hoped that Sever would appear soon...

*But he failed to do that. It was getting dark. Restless I passed the night imagining the worst. Only the hope that Anna still lived was throbbing in my horror-filled brain. Caraffa was going to torture her to break me. Therefore he would certainly find it senseless to torture Anna in secret. He wanted to hurt **exactly me**, and that gave me a tiny hope of seeing her once again...*

The morning came.

I was unable to fall asleep the whole night long and felt tired and devastated.

Uncertainty drove me mad preventing me from relaxing and thinking clearly. Anna did not answer my calls. Most likely Caraffa put his protective shield on her. But in my heart I knew that my girl was still alive.

Caraffa came in the late morning. To my surprise, he looked tense like an arrow ready to be released. His dictatorial eyes looked at me with prickly attention, as if deciding my sad fate right now.

– Come with me, Madonna! You will have to see a very unpleasant show. And it's totally your guilt, you know! I asked you to think, but you thought too long. I don't have any time left. I am sorry.

For some reason Caraffa was extremely angry. Something disturbed his sharp mind, but it was not fear of not getting what he desired. It was another thing which I could not catch yet. But he was obviously angry and nervous, giving me no time to understand what it was.

We came down to the familiar basement. Nothing changed there. People screamed like before. It smelled of death like before. And the blood froze in my veins in horror like before.

– Before we enter there, I would like to ask you once again, Isidora, whether you've changed your decision. – Caraffa whispered fixing his black eyes on me. – I would not like to torture Anna. Her life is very valuable. Don't you really feel sorry for her?

I gathered everything that was left of my wounded courage and tried to calm my trembling voice preparing an answer. I was on the verge of fainting. The body refused to obey. My weakness killed me. I was terribly afraid to see what was hidden behind the heavy door. I was not sure I could bear what the "holy" Pope had prepared for me.

– Of course, Holiness, I feel sorry for Anna... – I whispered in reply. – Like I feel sorry for all the ruined wonderful lives which have already passed... and for those which will pass... I am unable to understand you, Caraffa and, I think, nobody will... But believe me you'll have to pay very dearly for everything you've done.

– Oh, my dearest Isidora! It won't happen today! – Caraffa laughed. – And I shall think about what will happen in the future when it comes.

He turned a rusty key in the lock and slowly pushed the heavy door...

I saw a soul-freezing picture. In the middle of a small stone room Anna sat in a strange iron arm-chair, chained to it...

My heart sank... and stopped beating. How on Earth could I allow such thing to happen?! But my fevered brain firmly answered – you could!!! You had no choice.

Anna looked in my eyes, not frightened or begging. This girl showed much more courage than I had at that moment.

– Don't give up! Please, just don't give up, mother! – I heard.

Anna talked to me mentally, trying to support me. Knowing how much I love her, she was afraid that I would break. She was afraid that Caraffa would get that for which he had craved so badly. And then everything we had to go through would be in vain.

– Just like you, your daughter is so bellicose, Madonna. I had to replace eight executioners to tie her! We had to make her drink a poppy decoction to put her to sleep... Have some mercy on her, Isidora!

A corpulent executioner in a leather apron prepared some frightful instruments... no doubt to torture my beloved daughter... My dear and light girl...

My heart froze. It seemed that the world was converted into an endless solid pain. No longer feeling anything, I simply stopped breathing.

– Wake up, Madonna! What's wrong with you? Wake up!

Anxious Caraffa held a bottle of strong-smelling salts, bringing it to my nostrils from time to time, so willy-nilly I had to breathe the stale basement air. I felt like a wax doll. It was not good at all. Caraffa perfectly understood that he finally found that with the help of which he, probably, could break me. And, naturally, it was Anna who had to pay for it...

– Do you really hope that on living long, you will succeed in mowing down and clearing out all gifted ones? – I whispered on regaining consciousness. – It's madness, Holiness! People will always be born ... and the gifted will be born too. You will never succeed in destroying them all! Think better of it, while it is not too late. You have a brilliant mind, why do you use it for destruction?

Caraffa thoughtfully picked at a heavy gold cross hanging on his papal chest. It seemed that he had gone far away from the usual world into some unknown expanses... Regrettably, he was never absent for long...

– As I already told you before, Isidora, most people are stupid. Look around. There is a lot of cowards and idlers who will give everything only to remain aside feeling safe and protected! They believe that they live in faith and truth, spending whole days in idleness and enjoying the happiness of their stupid personal small world. They hide behind the backs of the brave and strong who they use and then destroy. One doesn't require a brilliant mind to do mean things, Isidora... – his "Holiness" gave a wry smile, went silent for a second and then added:

– But regrettably, there is another kind of people. Those who always stand ahead and their life becomes a light that points the way to others. They are incredibly dangerous! They don't think like others wish them to. They carry their damned light regardless of any danger without sparing their lives. You are one of them, Isidora, just like your sweet daughter Anna. That is why, to be perfectly honest, I will never let you go, even if you give me what I ask... You will stay here and be a queen, if you submit to me, or a prisoner, if you don't. I cannot free you... despite that I love you.

*I looked at him being absolutely numb, totally drowning in the madness of his reasoning. Although there was something in which Caraffa was, unfortunately, right. Too many cowards and scoundrels lived on earth. They were bogged down in consumerism, gnawing the "bones" of personal prosperity they were occasionally thrown, which suited Caraffa just perfectly. This was a crowd that was not dangerous for him. Well, Anna and I fell into the second, **dangerous** category.*

– Your Holiness, if you understand that you cannot break people like us, why do you try then? In fact Anna is very talented. Why don't you want to preserve her? She could help you a lot. Why do you kill her?

*– Because **you** are my only hope to get what I desire, Isidora. Therefore, Anna is my only trump which (trust me!) I will play without any scruples. Do you wish to think, Madonna?*

My head began to spin. How many times I intentionally imagined this moment to somehow adjust myself to it and survive! How many times I tried simply to "get used" to this idea in order that (when the time comes) not to go totally mad! But no matter how hard I tried the reality turned out to be much more frightful...

Somehow I managed to gather all my strength and my deadened lips pronounced words which pursued me for the rest of my short remaining life and which I was unable to forget even there, in my distant new world...

– I already gave you the answer, Your Holiness... Anna is not worth of millions of other good lives which you will destroy, if you live long... I cannot give her preference over those millions... despite the fact that she is my daughter.

– You are mad, Isidora! – Caraffa sharply pronounced, turned to the executioner and ordered: – Begin!

Bare horror yelled in Anna's eyes. I knew how frightened she was, nevertheless, my girl did not give up. And I could not betray her by surrendering to Caraffa...

The man came to the torture arm-chair and lifted red-hot heavy twig over Anna's hands. The smell of singed meat spread over the room. Anna began to scream. Immediately the tormentor clutched at his heart and slowly slipped down on the floor.

– Stop it, Isidora! Or I shall be obliged to send you out of the room! – Caraffa bawled.

– But it was not me, Holiness! – I gave an exhausted smile. – Anna is the strongest Vedunia. Did you really think that she would sit calmly while you torture her?

I was proud of my brave daughter, even knowing how cruelly she suffered. Her father's courage lived in Anna and she was not going to give her life easily. She tried to take with her as many of those inhuman creatures, which cause pain to other gifted ones, as possible.

– So, it was Anna again? But she could not. We made her drink herbs that close the outlet of her force. How could it happen?!

Caraffa let the cat out of the bag... He went mad! And I laughed in his face, having understood what truly happened here.

– Your Holiness, you have listened to some of the "broken" gifted ones, haven't you? But they did not know how truly strong Anna was. You knew it. So, you should not be mad, for that is in vain really!

Caraffa stopped right in front of me and gave an infuriated shriek:

– Can Anna go with her spirit out of her body? Answer, Madonna!

– Of course, she can, your Holiness! It is the simplest thing she can do.

It was a lie... But if it could save my girl from suffering, I was ready to repeat it again and again, a thousand times!

Caraffa intently reflected on something for a while.

– Well, Madonna Isidora, everything has been decided then. It's useless to torture Anna. She will kill all my executioners, which, forgive me, does suit me at all. She will repeat her

Grandfather's tricks and I simply don't have time for it. You will spend this night with your daughter, but it will be your last night together, because Anna will die in the morning. She will go to the fire... You have one night to change your decision, Madonna.

Caraffa whipped round and left the room...

We were taken from the torture cell and driven to a dark and dirty "cage" with nothing in it except for the straw on the floor, on which we collapsed firmly hugging each other, as if it could help us to survive... There was no hope for us, only black despair.

I held my treasure in my arms, my only, amazingly gifted girl, and grieved... Oh, if only Anna had stayed in Meteora! No Caraffa's force would get her there! But she did not stay... Fearing for me, she came here offering her life in return for mine. She knew that thus she would give me some time to try to kill Caraffa...

The images of our short life in the house of her father and grandfather, where I taught Anna to be strong so persistently, flashed before my eyes. There I repeated to her so many times how wonderful life was and how happy hers would be... But I was wrong... Anna's life ended right now, preventing her from feeling the happiness I had felt in my life...

We sat in the corner on the straw hugging each other with our numb hands. I stroked her twisted, blood-sticky, long hair, knowing that I did it for the last time. My eyes were dry, although my heart was torn with sobbing. I think the pain was too strong to wash it with tears.

Firmly pressing Anna to my chest, I felt how quickly and cruelly time flowed into "nowhere", carrying away the last hours of her surprisingly-brave life.

The night came to its end. And like it was the night before my father's murder, I dozed! I gave a start and jumped in horror to wake up my dear girl. But Anna did not sleep. She gently stroked my face with her now disfigured thin hands and quietly whispered:

– You are so beautiful, mother... I love you so much! I beg you, hold on! Don't give up! It's all the same for me now... It's deliverance. There will be no more pain. So dad told me. I know they are waiting for me. And then we all will wait for you. Hold on, mother! Hold on, dear!

Her voice was cracked and so sad! I would give myself one hundred times, if only she lived! But regrettably it was not we who commanded our fate – lying and mean ones did...

– Mother, will you forgive me for not being able to help you? I tried so much... but I failed. – Anna whispered. – I feel so guilty!

Somebody's wicked invisible hand squeezed my throat. I could not utter a word of answer.

My soul screamed, but nobody heard it...

How could I outlive such a torture?!!

How could I watch the only one left in my life die, my marvellous girl, blood of my blood who gave such happiness to people in her short life that others could not in all their long ones?

*What **EVIL** could she have possibly done to Earth to be killed so brutally? What has my light pure child done? She has not even had time to understand what **LIFE** really is!*

– Mother, look! The sun is rising!

Anna's enormous eyes shone... I understood – she had overcome horror and pain. She had crossed the border behind which a person feels no fear. She tried to pass with dignity, as her Grandfather had asked her, just like he did.

– Destroy him, mother! You are alone now. Maybe Sever will help you. Caraffa has no right to live. Destroy him, mother.

Guards appeared in the doorway. Anna got up, proudly tossing her long mane, and fixed her ardent eyes on my face.

– Everything is all right, mother. I am not afraid. I am not afraid at all! They are cowards. They hate us and therefore they burn us. I love you, dear. I love you so much!

Caraffa stood on the threshold.

Oh, how much I hated him!!! If hatred could kill, he would be dead a long time ago! But he continued to live... And I was going to die.

*– I suppose that you keep sticking to your opinion?! – The "holy" Pope asked me, attentively looking into my eyes, and on thinking a little, added: – Come on, Isidora! This is **your daughter** that will die in fire! What's wrong with you, Madonna!?*

*I found myself lying on somebody's hands. My brain refused to understand what was happening and my poor heart threatened to stop unable to endure such pain... Anna sadly looked into my eyes, trying to support... **She** was trying to calm me down!!!*

– Where is your heart, Madonna? – Caraffa asked, openly exposing his bitterness. – Are you really so bad a mother?

– Leave her alone, Caraffa. It is I who decides my own fate! – Anna angrily shouted. – She will never comply with your request, no matter how strongly you wish it! Get out!

A grimace of rage distorted Caraffa's face. He sharply turned to leave the room and hissed:

– Well, in this case I should not be better than you! You are a mother who sends her child to death... You are a monster, Madonna!

This was precisely how I felt! But should I save Anna, she would never forgive me, on the other hand, letting her die in fire, I betrayed her as her mother. Was there any way out of this vicious circle? There was none. I sincerely began to think that hundreds of those who fought, who believed and in whom the truth burned so brightly died, as if there was nobody to save them...

I remembered Magdalena... Radomir... Vesta... How badly they hindered the Thinking Dark ones! How all-consuming the hatred in the hearts of the killers, who destroyed their Light Lives, must be.

– Mother! Wake up, mother! – I heard Anna's agitated voice. – Are you all right, mother?

I just nodded, understanding that I must summon my strength and go.

The carriage which carried me was comfortable and soft. That which carried my poor Anna was made of rough planks and slightly bearded logs. Her hands tied by rough cordes to the logs rubbed against them, and I saw how thorns every now and then pierced her maimed skin, cruelly hurting her, but Anna only smiled. Her consciousness was long since beyond the verge of reality, very far away, where pain already did not matter, because it could not get her anymore...

Finally we reached the little square where my father had died several months ago... The memory of that still brightly lived in my heart, refusing to fade... And today Anna's fate was about to join to these mournful recollections! I could not believe it! I could not accept it with either my mind or my heart! But it was happening. It was real and Caraffa personified that reality.

– Well, Isidora, I am extremely disappointed in you. You are not what I imagined and you are not worthy of being loved...

He scorched me with his gaze full of hatred and waved his hand, ordering it to begin.

I looked at a frightful "show", feeling nothing, understanding nothing... It seemed that somebody had "switched off" all my feelings, feeling sorry for my dying soul... Someone still wanted me to live.

– I am sorry, Isidora. I lost. I cannot help you. The White Volkhv said no to me. – A tender voice pronounced quietly.

Sever stood behind my back. I only nodded, unable to say anything. The last hope disappeared. The only thing that was left for Anna was to die with dignity...

I looked at her, wishing to memorize every line of her wonderful face. Turning into stone and becoming deaf, I absorbed her light which flowed and filled with its golden stream all people around... Unexpectedly, as if they felt it, people became silent. And in a short while the square exploded with with loud cries:

– Mercy upon her!!! Save her youth! Let the girl go!!! Murderers! Spare the child!

A fragile hope glimmered in my heart, but Caraffa cruelly strangled it at once. He angrily waved his hand, ordering to begin the execution.

Anna stood at a post light and pure, as if the terrible reality did not touch her. She did not take her shining eyes off me and smiled.

– Be brave, mother! Don't give in to him! – Anna mentally told me. – I will always love you... even there. Don't forget me, mother!

My heart thumped in iron vice. I lacked air... It seemed to me that I was going to go with Anna, unable to endure this pain anymore. But I did not know how inhuman this pain was about to become...

– I am sorry, mother, but you have to help me. I cannot go away by myself... Will you help me, mother?

*Suddenly the surrounding world disappeared somewhere. Only my beloved girl was left and to my horror she asked me to help her to go away... which meant that she asked me **to kill her, stopping her beating heart.***

The whole world turned upside down. My physical body refused to obey... I was scared that I would die failing to fulfill my daughter's request! Anna could not help herself. I was left to save her from the suffering from which there was no other way to be rescued...

The executioner came and set fire to the dry straw... The flame blazed easily and victoriously, merrily climbing higher and higher, threatening to seize the helpless body...

– Farewell, mother! – Anna exclaimed. – Farewell, dear!

I tried to help her, but for some reason failed! I scolded myself for faint-heartedness. I tried again. Anna looked at me seized with flame and mentally begged:

– Mother, help me!... Mother!!!

Once again I gathered my last forces and at the same instant her fragile body was helplessly hanged on cords...

My wonderful daughter, my light girl was dead. I killed her, opening the way for her into a longed-for eternity... Afterwards I did not remember anything...

Days flew by... I was ill...

My consciousness constantly fell into nonexistence, now returning for a short while, now going for long, long hours, thus rescuing me from plunging into complete madness. The hours of rest replaced the hours of delirium, where familiar images were exchanged for unknown ones, making my soul yell and writhe and seek sanctuary...

It seemed sometimes that I had gone at last... I saw dear faces – father, Girolamo, Anna... They smiled at me, thus helping me to survive. Sometimes I saw Caraffa's image. For some reason he was always extremely worried... His black eyes devoured me, as if looking for an answer...

*Finally, over some time, the fever began to retreat. Days seemed clearer, the state of delirium disappeared. It seemed that the most frightful thing had passed, or so others thought... The most frightful thing for me was my awakening and remembering what had so cruelly tossed in my fevered brain in the lonely island of black-out. I remembered Anna's death and boundless pain gushed like a waterfall into my withered soul! To my surprise the pain **REVIVED** me! Probably all other feelings were simply dead in my soul a long time ago.*

One day I heard the voice I wished to hear most in the world:

– Mother! Oh, mother, I worried so much about you!

It was my sweet child... My Anna!

To my utter surprise I wanted to see Caraffa! Most likely my heart tortured by misfortunes and sufferings wished to harden. As usual, I did not expect too long...

*It was a warm and light morning. The smell of jasmine wafted through the open window. The sun tenderly and proudly shone, as if telling me that it was time to get back to **LIFE**. I lay, still*

helpless, but quickly gaining the strength, which my last and only aim required...

The door noiselessly opened. Caraffa quietly entered the room.

But what was that? What could have happened to him? The Pope's face was weary and old and grown lean. His eyes were feverish... It seemed that Caraffa had aged by twenty years!!! What could have exhausted him so terribly?

– At last you awoke, Madonna?! Thank God! I had lost any hope of seeing you alive! My doctors gave way to despair! They said that your brain went into darkness... that you would never return. Oh, I am so glad! I greet you, Madonna!

Dumbfounded by the stream of his stormy delight, I could not utter a word. Unexpectedly the Pope began to fuss and on growling out that he would come later, darted out of the room...

What could that mean? Was it a proof that he sincerely worried about my health? Or he simply was afraid that if I die now, his dream will never come true? I think that only he was able to understand himself. I decided not to rack my brain concerning his person and again submerged into a saving dream.

I did not know how many days my escape into "between worlds" lasted. Was it days or weeks, and whether it mattered at all? The most important thing was that it helped me to endure the loss of my girl and not to break. The rest was not important. Now I was absolutely alone and had no reason whatsoever to worry about my family. They all, killed by Caraffa, went to the best world... I could fully dedicate myself to revenge without being afraid of the consequences, because now he could kill only me alone.

Unexpectedly a terrible thing happened! Stella, Isidora, Anna and everything that surrounded me disappeared!!! I felt that a huge vacuum cleaner pulled me in and I appeared in my usual physical world, where my indignant grandmother waited for me. As usual I jumped into my abandoned physical body... or rather I tried to jump. The feeling was terribly unpleasant! I felt as if my poor spirit smashed into a cold iron barrier. I cried out in my fright and stared at my grandmother.

– I cannot enter for some reason! Something keeps me out!

Indeed it was very scary. I saw my frozen physical body which simply **did not want to let me in!** I knew that **I was not dead**, but for some reason I failed to get into it.

– Granny! Please, help!!! – I cried being scared out of my wits.

Or rather it was my spirit that cried and nobody except my grandmother heard it.

Gradually the "door" into my physical body began to open and at last I fluidly slipped into what on Earth was called **ME**...

– What? Were you going to leave? Are you tired of carrying this burden? Don't even think about it, dear. Your life will be very long. So, live!

I saw that my grandmother was very alarmed which did not happen often and I could not understand what the reason was for that. I visited the floors almost every day and it never caused any trouble. What could have happened to make her so nervous?

– Do you know what time it is? – Grandmother asked hardly restraining her indignation.

I shook my head negatively. When she brought a clock right to my nose, I was terrified – my journey had lasted **FIVE HOURS!!!** I never I went for a walk there for so long! I did not quite understand why it was so bad, but judging by the way my physical body felt it was clear that I had come very close to a line behind which everything could have ended very badly for me. My body was unusually cold, as if I was in a refrigerator. It did not want to obey. It did not want to get warm. Grandmother put me into what felt like a boiling-hot bathtub (then we did not have a central heating and heated the water on the stove), apparently preparing it before I came. My teeth chattered from a strange internal cold and I could not speak. This strange cold became stronger, although it seemed that everything should be vice versa. On seeing my helpless attempts to say something, grandmother finally warmly smiled:

– All right, be silent, little traveller... But you should remember very well – when you are alone, never go so far for a long time. If I had not backed you up, you would be dead by now...

I felt icy tingles down my spine! How can it be? Does it mean that I could not visit the floors for as long as I wished?! Does it mean that my body has limitations and there is a definite period of time for which I could be out of it? But grandmother never told me about that before!

She kept me in the very hot water for about ten minutes then wiped me dry and put me to bed, covering me with all the blankets she could find in the house. Nevertheless, I still felt cold...

Very soon my temperature sharply rose. It must have been very high because I tossed about in bed, delirious. I did not remember that. My faithful grandmother told me about everything much later. The fever and delirium lasted two days. Mother thought that I just had a severe cold. And grandmother, naturally, kept silent about the real reason.

Two days later the fever finally abated. I had a very good nights sleep and woke up fresh as a daisy ready for new exploits. And then I remembered what had happened on the floors during my unexpected "leaving" and the thought of what I might have missed pierced my mind!

– Grandma!!! Granny dear, I have to go back there!!! – I gave a frenzied shriek.

I was so bitterly disappointed that everything happened so foolishly! Isidora has certainly left and now I will never know how her story ended! I will never know what had happened to her and Caraffa! How could I miss **THAT**?!!!

– Grandma! Dear, please, help!

I was in the grip of such deep emotion that I almost lost my voice. I was ready to go through fire and water and promise to do anything, if only she helped me! Although I did not even know how she could, I felt that she knew something and therefore she was able to help me somehow.

But grandmother did not answer; apparently, she was out in the garden. I tried to get up but the room at once begun to whirl and I fell down on the floor slap-bang failing to grip the bed. It was a hopeless undertaking. I was very weak and understood that it was out of the question to continue my journey now. The bitter child's offense gained the upper hand over me and I burst into tears, forgetting about my "courage and strength" with which I constantly tried to imbue myself..

Grandmother came in approximately half an hour later and found me in my bed, upset and blubbering. She knew exactly that I would never cry without a good reason. Therefore, she attentively looked into my eyes, sat on the edge of the bed and quietly, as usual, pronounced:

– Well, what do we have here? Tell me.

I tried to tell her Isidora's story as detailed as possible. She listened attentively, without interrupting or correcting, and when I finished, sympathetically said:

– And you grieve now because you'll never know the end of the story?

I nodded.

– Remember, my dear. Everything that happens in our life always happens for a reason. Probably she wanted you to hear her story for some reason.

– But I am still little. What can I do? – I was honestly surprised.

– But you will grow up, and who knows, maybe you can help people to know about Isidora.

– How will I help, if I don't know what happened to her next? – I was indignant.

– I'll help, dear. You need to get a bit better, then I'll help you, – grandmother answered very calmly. – But you must promise me that you won't be there very long!

– But how will you help me, if Isidora has already told everything? It's too late! – I was terribly distressed.

– It isn't, dear. I'll help you to return to the moment from which you left, – grandmother said with all calmness in the world.

As usual, I showered her with questions. But she paid no attention to them, only commented that it was possible to do many other things, much greater than that, but it was too early for me to

know about them... And no matter how zealously I pressed her, I succeeded in nothing.

Several days later, as soon as my mother went to work, grandmother mysteriously looked at me and seriously pronounced:

– Well, are you ready, little traveller?

I had a lump in my throat. Frankly speaking I did not entirely believe that the miracle was possible, but grandmother was my only hope and I could not miss the attempt.

Suddenly, grandmother and my room disappeared, and I found myself **in exactly the same place and time** I left several days ago, as if I had just left it right now! The squeaking Stella threw herself to me:

– Well, really! I thought you had disappeared! And you are here!! Very well then; please, continue, Isidora!

Stella always was herself, even when sad and incomprehensible things happened. And I dearly loved her for that.

Isidora smiled and quietly continued her story...

Still being unable to leave the room, I spent the days in complete tranquility. Caraffa did not appear for some reason. I thought that he could not decide what to do next. It fully suited me, because it gave me an opportunity to recover forces which I needed for the struggle against him.

I felt very strange most of the time... There was no pain, or rather there was nothing. As if somebody pitied me and put all feelings into a pitch-dark room and tightly closed the door and I could not open it. It was the right thing to do. It was much easier for me. It gave me a spark of hope to stand to the end and wreak vengeance on my enemy.

I wanted so much to see Sever, but he also did not come for some reason. I missed his wonderful stories and the lack of his warm support made me sad. He became my real friend, and I had almost no friends left. The world that surrounded me was intimidating and cold without any faint resemblance of humaneness.

*At last, one fine sunny day Sever appeared. He seemed different in some way. I just could not catch in what. Harsh and at the same time sad, he attentively scrutinized my face long enough, as if looking for confirmation that I lived... that I will **LIVE** ... for the time being...*

– Hello, Sever! I am very glad you came.

– Peace to your Soul, Isidora. Have you succeeded in withstanding, my friend? Forgive me for all your pain. I was unable to help you.

– I think I have, Sever. Caraffa cannot frighten me anymore. He has nothing left that could break me. And that is why I am stronger than he. Now I will fight him until I destroy him.

– Are you sure, my friend, that your heart will not let you down? You became so calm and remote! – Sever continued to peer into my face, as if he tried to understand whether my soul was still alive.

– Don't worry, Sever. I have enough strength to live while Caraffa lives. But I don't want to talk about him today! Tell me, my friend, can you give me the next present today? Can you tell me about Vidomir? Do you remember you promised me that?

He again looked at me attentively, but on seeing just a sincere request, nodded with relief. I knew that my calmness surprised him just as much as it surprised me... as if I became a stone on which I wrote my story now.

– What would you like to know about him, Isidora? – Sever tenderly asked.

– Everything since that day when he managed to escape the death in fire... – I smiled. – Everything since his birth.

Sever nodded, and at his wish the "door" into the past was open for me again to tell me the next unique story...

– After the four fugitives made an enormous fire on the Bidorta mountain – a sign for

Montsegur – they got warm a little and continued their hard journey which had to bring them to their friends, to the secluded castle of Usson. The castle was hidden from the curious eyes by the surrounding mountains and seemed to be the most suitable place to hide the priceless guest for a while.

It was an outstanding place, Isidora. And the owners (seigniors) of the castle were outstanding people too, especially Lady Esclarmonde de Usson. Oh, yes! Do not be surprised, my friend, in that terrible time the Cathars had **five** Ladies Esclarmonde! They said that this name brought luck to the person. Well, to my mind, it was quite the contrary... But the name was truly very beautiful. I will tell to you a little bit about Lady Esclarmonde de Usson... She deserves that people know the truth about her. Exactly the truth, not those fables which the church spread about her... – and on catching my interrogative look, Sever sadly answered: – Yes, my friend... It is another sad story about an amazing person, a woman-warrior, whose life was extraordinarily brave and light and around whom the "dark" later created a disgusting image. Like Magdalena, she was depicted as a "woman of easy virtue" and a "mad witch" who roamed lost about the Occitan Mountains. There was even a certain "brother Robert" who confirmed in written form to the Inquisition that he met the naked Esclarmonde in the wood surrounded by a pack of white wolves... which had human faces¹⁶ ...

She was an illegitimate child of Raimond Roger, Count de Foix, and the Abbess Ermingarda. The girl was given the name Esclarmonde d'Alion.

At that time it was quite normal for a rich seignior to have as many illegitimate children as he was able to maintain. The difference between them was whether the mother of a child was rich and noble or not. If she was a noble lady, the father adopted the child without any problem, just as happened in this case...

One day, or rather night, Count Raimond hunted wolves in the forests of Ariege and got lost, being too carried away by the chase. After the long and tiresome search for the way home, exhausted, he suddenly felt, as if somebody quietly called him and saw a very high white stone wall right in front of him. It was the famous Nunnery of Ariege.

The Count demanded that someone bring the Abbess over to get shelter for the night. A tall and charming young woman went to meet him. It was the Abbess of the monastery – Ermingarda...

Count Raymond had the reputation of being a great admirer of female beauty. One of his nicknames was "Raimond the Beloved". Certainly, the charming Abbess did not pass unnoticed by him. The next morning Abbess Ermingarda had just an afterglow about her and the head of an enormous wolf he had killed was nailed to the door of the monastery.

As Ermingarda was of noble blood, she soon had to leave the monastery and return to her family lands in Telho to avoid dishonour and wait there for the forthcoming delivery. Several months later she had charming twins, a girl and a boy. Poor Ermingarda did not have the chance to see her children because she died in childbirth. Count Raymond knew about the newly-born children and took them under his tutelage. Regrettably, a year later Count Raymond was wounded at the siege of the castle Miropoix and soon died.

His children grew very strong, clever and handsome which caused delight in some relatives and a bit of envy in others, because the enormous family de Foix-Miropoix-Pereilles to which the children belonged now did not regard with favour too handsome and too clever illegitimate relatives. Therefore, the children were taken out of sight for a while – the boy was sent to study in a monastery (to correspond to his position in society later), and the girl was settled in the manor of Belpech under the supervision of Count Raymond's faithful vassal, the old Raiax...

This is an **official version** of Esclarmonde de Usson's life told by the holy church... and local notaries at the insistence of interested people, if any...

The **real** life of this unusual girl, and later amazing woman, was (as you already know!) a

¹⁶ You may read a detailed description of Lady Esclarmonde de Usson's amazing life in my next book *The Children of Sun*.

little different. Regrettably not one "official" letter or document tells about it. Moreover, the servants of the church destroyed everything truthful that was written long ago, because they were afraid that people would believe the old legends and set out in search of **truth** about an outstanding woman-warrior which still lived among her Occitans...

Legends called her **living Temple of Ancient Gods**.

Friends called her an **Avatar of the Ancient ones**.

Well, the church saw her as an **incarnate Antichrist, blue-eyed Devil** or simply a Witch. It placed a huge reward on her head, if only not to see her alive anymore...

But the Cathars, especially the "old" ones, admired her outstanding courage and loved her big and pure heart which gave light and peace to everybody...

– Where did you get all these details, Sever? You tell everything so minutely, as if you knew her. – I could not help asking.

– Just a few persons knew the truth of her birth, Isidora. I was one of them. I came at the time of her birth to "rejoice" for her Life... She was a **Battle Magician**... not taught, but born with this rare gift. I named her Rada (giving Ra). Then nobody knew what unforeseeable and difficult Fate awaited her.

From the beginning of her life the girl was clever and tenacious. Whilst she was a still little child, Esclarmonde could communicate with warriors who had died a long long time ago. She could easily move very heavy objects without touching them and speak mentally. She was very talented, and sincerely proud of that. I visited her now and then to advance her studies in the necessary direction. Every time I was surprised how quickly and correctly the brain of little Esclarmonde worked! She always reached for new Knowledge. She wanted to know **EVERYTHING** and **NOW** independent of how difficult it was or how hard she had to work to get it! She showered the old Volkhv Raiax, appointed to look after the girl almost from her birth, with her eternal "why"s? He did his best to satisfy her thirst for knowledge, but she always found newer and newer questions...

Years flew by. Esclarmonde grew up. The amusing curly haired little girl grew into a beautiful young woman who surprised with her strength and wisdom even the Eldest ones. She became a fearless warrior. The strangers called her a "wild huntress" while her friends and followers called her a "sunny warrior".

That was a time of terrible human fires, devastating sieges and long and bloody war with the "servants of God". Esclarmonde zealously fought for Occitania. She fought desperately, with all her might and with any weapon that was at her disposal. Count Miropoix, who loved her very much and was sincerely afraid for his indefatigable relative, tried to somehow hush the bellicose Esclarmonde. But in reply to his admonitions, Esclarmonde fought more furiously for her Cathars... She fought both with magic and ordinary weapons. She wielded a sword splendidly (thanks to her uncle, Count Miropoix). She led her warriors at night. Each of them was ready to give his life for her. She knew her beloved mountains well enough and arranged night raids, sharply diminishing the number of church warriors which surrounded Montsegur. In the day-time, knowing the places of their camps, Esclarmonde used her magic and brought down rocks on them, set their tents on fire and frightened their horses. She fought... and was ruthlessly hunted... Crusaders were afraid of this marvellous, fair-haired and blue-eyed Witch, who fearlessly attacked them from the most unbelievable and unexpected sides, exterminating them like a flock of ravens which devoured her beloved Occitania. Esclarmonde fought.

But she was almost alone. All defenders of Montsegur were inside the besieged castle. But Esclarmonde was kept out there. Her uncle, being the head of the defenders of the castle, ordered her to fight outside, probably trying to protect the girl from their bitter and tragic fate.

Being a Perfecti, Count Miropoix, as well as his bellicose niece, knew very well different sciences, alchemy and, of course, the military art chronicles of the Slavs-Aryans. So before he began a battle, he drew protective signs of warrior-Aryans on the faces of his warriors which horrified crusaders. When they saw the knights covered with strange signs on the walls of

Montsegur, and the same signs on the wonderful face of a long-haired woman who attacked them from the rear, they began to panic. As is generally known, crusaders considered themselves fearless warriors, who were not afraid of "either God or devil", but as soon as something mystic or incomprehensible appeared, their bravado suddenly disappeared without a trace... And they became just the ordinary frightened people who avoided the incomprehensible within the limits of the possible.¹⁷

Esclarmonde did not limit herself to the battle raids. She also delivered food to Montsegur at night, which was more dangerous than a battle. The Seneschal of Carcassonne, Arsis, ordered his warriors on pain of death to watch every path or crack that would serve as a passage-way to the castle. But Esclarmonde knew the most carefully guarded secret of the underground tunnels and came right into the "internal" (as it was called) underground room of the castle. And, certainly, she was awaited so much! These arrivals helped the famished people exhausted by the long siege to restore a bit of their forces to stand to the end. She was glad when she saw how their faces grew lighter. She did not think of herself or remember about fear. She truly was an **old** Perfecti, young Esclarmonde. She was one of those who still fought...

Wishing to protect his sweet but absolutely disobedient niece, her uncle decided to take serious measures. He found a wonderful husband for her. His name was Bernard de Usson. He was thirty eight years old, twenty years older than Esclarmonde. Despite such a difference in years, Esclarmonde sincerely loved her husband who was a faithful and kind Cathar and helped his brother in Faith to endure those frightful days.

It was 1243. Montsegur, a sunny sacred object of the Cathars, still held on. But Esclarmonde knew that it would not last long. She knew that Montsegur would fall in a year.

Seigniors de Usson hurried to reinforce the castle, preparing it for receiving refugees from Montsegur in case some of them succeeded in surviving. Esclarmonde's husband, Bernard, concluded a treaty with the Spanish mercenary Corbario's hirelings and transferred to them 150 'livres melgorien', which at that time was a significant amount of money. It was paid for help in the liberation of Montsegur which, unfortunately, never came.

Disappointed by the treachery of the Spaniards, Seigniors de Usson, nevertheless, did not fall in despair. Realizing the danger that threatened Montsegur, they decided to offer their help to Svetozar and Esclarmonde to protect their child – the descendant of Radomir and Magdalena – ready to come into this dangerous World. The castle of Usson was the most protected of all that remained and was very close to Montsegur. Therefore it was the most comfortable refuge for the fugitives exhausted by hunger and continuous insomnia. The help was accepted with gratitude.

They met at Bidorta Mountain where Svetozar had to give the sign to Esclarmonde that they all were well and that her son was alive.

The night was slushy and misty. Large drops hung in the air, sticking to their clothing... The benumbed fugitives shivered from the piercing cold but did not stop, wishing to go away as far as possible. Little Vidomir peacefully slept in the arms of the unknown woman, unaware of the fact that his mother very soon would go to her death. Esclarmonde clasped a newly-born child to her bosom and with every minute grew into his little world with the whole of her heart, knowing that she could never part with him even for a second... until he grew up into a young Vidomir.

She did not know yet how tightly capricious Fate would bind their lives together...

44. Isidora-10. Vidomir. Sleeping kings

The night was chilly and pitch-dark. But knowing every cavity, every unexpected turn, in the area, Esclarmonde confidently conducted the fugitives to the hospitable castle of Usson, where her

¹⁷ The official records of Carcassonne inquisition contain the information about the knights-warriors of the Cathar Perfecti, Count Miropoix, "coloured" with old symbols.

anxious husband Bernard impatiently waited for them. The new-born Vidomir never woke up during their arduous journey. The poppy decoction which he had been given before the escape worked without a hitch and the child peacefully saw his first earthly dreams, unaware of the surrounding world. Esclarmonde moved gently trying not to disturb him. Her soul trembled, knowing that a part of Magdalene and Radomir reposed in her hands. It seemed to her that they approvingly smiled at her from their heights, as if sending their thanks and support...

Unexpectedly the branches crunched. Some unknown people blocked their way. Esclarmonde counted. They were seven of them... impudent and cruel, armed to the teeth crusaders.

She understood that they had no chance of surviving. The fugitives were extremely tired and hardly could hold a weapon. Firmly clasping the child to her chest with one arm and closing her eyes, Esclarmonde lifted her hand toward strangers...

– It's the Witch, run! The Witch!!! – A crusader yelled.

But it was too late. They all fell on earth and became silent. It was hard to say whether Esclarmonde killed them or only put them to sleep, but obviously it required a lot of her forces. She heavily sat down on the soft earth and smiled, giving the fugitives to understand that everything was all right with her.

– We have to go, venerable... – Svetozar whispered, stumbling. – If this is an ambush, they knew about us. We have to go, Lady Esclarmonde.

*On hearing how bitterly he sounded her name, she lifted her eyes in surprise. And then she understood! It was extremely hard for Svetozar to pronounce this name, knowing that **his** Esclarmonde was still alive out there!*

*– Call me Rada, – she whispered. – This is my **real** name.*

Svetozar thankfully nodded. He indeed tried to address her as little as possible to avoid pronouncing her name. Obviously, the pain from the loss of his wife clouded the reality, and it was too much for him to bear to call another woman by her name. Esclarmonde understood.

She felt forces beginning to appear in her as if from nowhere. Was it Magdalena? Esclarmonde often felt this marvellous woman around her. She felt how she helped her and taught her how to survive.

– How could it be that nobody has heard about her, Sever?! How could it be that people know nothing about her?! – I exclaimed.

Sever sadly smiled.

*– Why do you think they don't know? They do know... **only not who she truly was**. You repeat the same questions, my friend. It is Earth... and its laws are still the same.*

At last they got to the castle and could calmly sit down and take a deep breath... Emaciated to the limit, three of them fell thankfully into a deep sleep right where they were. Only Svetozar looked into the emptiness with blind eyes, certainly trying to talk with his Esclarmonde while still there was time... He could not forgive himself that he had left her and she would die alone... He tried to give her his forces... at least what had remained of them.

*The master of the castle did his best not to disturb Svetozar respecting his pain and understanding the hopelessness of his situation. He helped the best way he could, but **that** was not in his power...*

Finally the frightful morning came. People gathered in the main hall and kept silence. Everybody had somebody in Montsegur. And now the only thing they were left was to bid the last farewell. And even that they could only do from a distance...

Esclarmonde looked into the distance, trying to think of those who did not let her to share their wicked fate and stay with them... her beloved uncle... her aunt Corba... her cousins... her friends. She came to them so many times, invigorating them with her words of support. And now they all went to their death... without her...

Suddenly she roused herself and sharply darted out of the door. Nobody stopped her. Nobody

even tried. Everybody went through their personal pain...

Esclarmonde could not just watch... She wished to fight! She was not able to simply stand aside, seeing her friends off to death! The girl ran, gulping the moist and cold air. She ran like lightning feeling no tiredness in her feet. Her faithful Warrior soul yelled, expelling her pain. She would take her vengeance!!! She would take as many of them as she could!

And she ran... and ran...and ran...

Over some time the Woman-warrior stood on a high mountain right in front of Montsegur at the level of the fire of the convicted....

The sun peeked out for a minute and lit up her thick fair hair, shrouding her fragile figure with a blazing halo. The woman stood motionless, as if expecting something. And now people began to shout in pain. At the same time the singing began. The monks sang! In that moment a howl was heard from the distant ranks of the besieging army. Yes, yes! It was exactly a howl! It was Esclarmonde's revenge. Having no right to die (being responsible for the life of Vidomir), she could not reconcile herself to the loss so simply. She exterminated crusaders by her magic... by her real force with which old kind Gods endowed her... The Crusaders never understood the mysterious way in which more than a thousand of them "went to their eternal peace" in terrible agony that day...

And Esclarmonde, hardening in her grief, looked at the frightful human torches, swearing in her heart that she would avenge every single one... that she would not know peace until the last guilty one died...

At the same time in the castle of Usson Vidomir woke up surrounded by unknown people. This was how his complicated and long life began at the will of fate. There was always somebody who worried for him and guarded him... as if he was destined to survive by all means... to fulfill by any means possible that which was so persistently predetermined for him...

Sever fell silent, going somewhere very far away, into closed and inaccessible, to my heart, expanses. What did he see in his recollections? What did his Soul, exhausted by losses, grieve over?

We became silent, each thinking of his own things, until, deeply breathing, Sever at last came back into his ordinary soft "presence".

The surrounding world was the same, joyless and cold, and only Isidora's light face, she having been through the pain of frightful losses, warmed us like the warm pure sun...

– Tell me, Sever, – Isidora could not help asking with hope, – Did the Seignors of Usson survive? Were they able to escape the claws of the "holy" Inquisition, even for a few years?

– Seignor Usson was not. He was burned, for helping the Cathars, on the central square of Perpignan several years after the fall of Montsegur. He never saw his Esclarmonde again... and she remained to live for many many years. She is alive now...

– Alive???... Now!!! But how many years has she lived?! What is she like Sever? – Stella was shocked.

We were just children then, but even children could be well terrified on hearing this kind of thing...

– Don't be frightened! – Sever smiled. – It's not as scary as it seems on the face of it. A lot of KNOWING ones went to the future at that time. They were called "Sleeping Kings" and many of them still sleep.

I never saw the Sleeping Kings or Queens, but recently I succeeded in communicating mentally with one of them, when my husband, Nicolai Levashov, restored his body after many years of "hibernation".

Now I know seventeen of these outstanding people. Some of them crossed the border of time alone and some came with the whole family, including children... Regrettably, in a few tens of thousands of years, somebody found them by chance and threw them into a landfill like used materials. It's true that not all of them succeeded in lasting to the the moment when a Knowing one, just like them, could awaken him or her... People are cruel and pitiless... and Earth is still merciless.

Who will want to hear that somebody slept for several tens of thousands of years in order to wake up one day with only the aim of helping others? Who will want to know that this is possible? And what incredible sums of money will the rich pay to sleep a few thousand years?

Esclarmonde was one of these amazing "sleeping" ones. Regrettably she was found by the wrong people... The church came across her by chance, searching for a completely different thing. On declaring the cave of Massabielle and the city of Lourdes "holy", the church still tries to understand what they really found.

– *Tell me, Sever, can we help these people in anything?! – Isidora sadly asked.*

– *No, Isidora. It was their choice...*

Those were the last lines that Svetlana wrote on November 7, 2010. Several days after, on November 13, 2010 she was murdered...

The sorrow in my eyes
Will remain forever.
My soul cries
A river of grief.

Epilogue

Svetlana's amazing book will never be completed. Not because she had nothing left to write about, but because she is not with us anymore. Only the last two chapters remained to be written, but, she was deprived of the chance to do that.

Neither I nor she was in a hurry to promulgate all that we had been through for many years. We'd been badgered from as early as 1993, and the persecution still goes on. It became particularly aggressive after my return to Russia in 2006. Almost every week our ill-wishers arranged ugly things for us. Their activity in France increased notably after I had installed a psi-field generator in our estate in 2003 and "miracles" began to occur there. I have written about them at length in the series "The Source of Life". The French authorities tried everything possible and impossible to expropriate our *Château*, together with all its "miracles", by lawless actions within the limits of the law, skillfully manipulating it.

If people only knew, in what conditions Svetlana wrote her book! During the autumn of 2008 and the winter of 2009 she typed the chapters sitting in front of the computer in gloves and winter clothes. Only her amazing green eyes, which would change colour from sea-green to emerald, peeked out of the thick scarf. Breath coming out of her mouth was visible because the temperature in the *Château* was below zero, just a little higher than outside. Nevertheless, Svetlana kept writing and shifting into the past to extract minute details of the past events she wrote about. Then she would browse through mountains of books and search the Internet for any information which could solidly confirm the Truth of her account.

The most amazing thing was that she always found confirmation of what she heard and saw during her time travels back to events which happened in her childhood. She dug up evidence about a Venetian witch called Isidora and a blood-thirsty Chief Inquisitor named Caraffa (later Pope Paul IV) and a lot of other information. She gathered thousands of unique photos for her future books and dreamed about a time when she would be able to write her *DaArya* and *The Children of the Sun* and continue her autobiographic *Revelation* where she had time to tell us only about her childhood.

The book does describe what happened to her in her childhood, but because of that it became more a story about the many outstanding people she knew due to her distinguished talents. The book became a hymn to the magnificent heroes of the past, whose names either fell into oblivion (as happened to Isidora) or their actions, and the memory of them, was totally perverted, just as it was with Radomir (the true name of the White Hierarch who we know as Jesus Christ – *E.L.*) and Magdalena.

She could return their good name to just them by telling people about their actions and feats. And how many real heroes are there for whom she is unable to do so? Her new books will remain unwritten!

Her book has brought the Light which people needed so much in order to preserve high moral standards, which lately have been hugely and outrageously corrupted. She gave examples of how genuine people fought (and died) not for their own benefit, but for the sake of Truth, in order to bring the radiant future, for others, slightly closer.

Svetlana proved with her life, which many will call heroic, that she has the right to occupy a fitting place next to those courageous people about whom she wrote in her book. She never considered that she did something heroic. She simply did what her conscience and heart prompted her to do. The enemies fiercely attacked her after every chapter of the book. Certainly, she had the protective structures I had created for her but, even when a person wears body armour, a bullet that strikes it will knock him metres sideways, badly hurting the body and marking it with bruises.

And if bullets pound the body armour incessantly, day after day, year after year, then I think there is no need to explain what a person may experience. We must also take into account that all the "bullets" are of a different calibre and that the enemies wait for any opportunity to inflict a blow on the most unprotected place which immediately appears as soon as a person manifests an emotion that opens his protective system.

I "rewarded" both the performers and initiators of the attacks every time according to their "just deserts", but their number did not decrease. Complete ignorance of what happened to their predecessors, self-confidence and, certainly, their avidity pushed them to perform their dirty deeds. They beat Svetlana in order to prevent her travelling back in time and, consequently, telling people the truth about events of the past centuries.

This spring the blow was one of the strongest, but I succeeded in saving her. The enemies managed to damage her memory very seriously. Almost two months of her life were totally erased at once and if I could not stop this process, her memory would have been totally destroyed. I succeeded not only in halting the memory loss but also in recovering what had been erased. This attack did not stop Svetlana! As soon as she summoned enough forces to sit in front of her computer, she immediately proceeded to write new chapters. Permanent stress and blows greatly damaged her eyes. She almost grew blind. I regularly worked on returning her sight to her. Every time she could see better, she immediately rushed to the computer and continued writing... This was how the last chapters appeared. She feared not having the time to write the final two chapters of her first book which regrettably became the last.

The enemies began to deliver their blows on Svetlana incessantly after our interference in the summer events of 2010 and the carrying out of other actions directed at preventing the Black from "slamming the door" so that the whole World would be destroyed. The last time we fulfilled a serious task was at the end of October, 2010. Then Svetlana gathered all her forces to bring it to an end. We succeeded in destroying a very dangerous system which the parasites prepared as a farewell "present" to all.

And they fell into a wild frenzy and began to attack non-stop, especially at night. We could not have a good night's rest. Sometimes we managed to sleep a bit in the morning, because the strength of the enemies' blows weakened with the sunrise, just as it should be in the case of evil spirits. This went on day by day, especially in the last year. It was so hard for her. Sometimes I could see tears in her beautiful eyes, but later Svetlana said: *"Don't think that I've surrendered. It's just that people's treachery and meanness hurts too much. You open your heart to them and get a "knife in your back" in return"*.

Svetlana looked at the world with the innocent eyes of a child. Her laughter, which has sounded very rarely lately, was always filled with purity and light which in some miraculous way imbued my heart with healing ease and joy.

A few days before her murder she shared her plans with me, regarding her new books. She regretted that she could not type and see anything on the computer screen even with a magnifying glass with the highest magnifying power. All the time she asked me when I would restore her sight so that she could finish at least two last chapters of the first volume of *Revelation*. She so much feared not having enough time to complete it!

I told her that she rushed to the computer too soon, that she should not do that when her sight became just slightly better and that the Dark gave me little chance to restore the sight to at least an average level, inflicting blows into the visual areas of the brain, into her wonderful eyes. She understood that and at the same time did not accept. Lately she often said that everything would be all right, but she would be gone. She was afraid that something could happen to her and there would nobody with her; that I would not be beside her. She feared that, and that is precisely what happened.

On November 11, 2010 a very powerful blow was inflicted upon her already strongly worn little heart, but that time the Dark failed to achieve their black aim. I succeeded in restoring the damage quickly enough. I had been insisting on a new qualitative transformation for several days

now which, once realized, would leave the Dark boiling with malice and impotence because of the impossibility of doing anything to her. It was exactly each new qualitative transformation of the brain and spirit which I carried out in the past on a regular basis which allowed me easily and quickly enough not only to stop the attacks of the Dark, but also to eliminate the systems of which the perpetrators were part.

Each transformation resulted in serious qualitative changes which sometimes deeply amazed Svetlana and me, and that was not an easy task, because we have seen and experienced a lot in the course of our fight with the Dark of every stripe. This time the transformation should have become the next turning point of our evolutionary development.

I was impatient to carry out this work as soon as possible. But the time difference of two hours between Moscow and France and the fact that almost every day I had to spend from 9 to 10 hours on the phone helping people with their health, in meetings with different people, let alone many other things, meant that I could not do this kind of work, which required time and concentration, earlier than 1 a.m. Moscow time. By this time I felt quite fatigued and Svetlana was tired too. Besides, this kind of work usually lasted one and a half or two hours, and it was very difficult to fall asleep afterwards, both for me and Svetlana.

Svetlana pitied and wished to spare me in the first place, because she knew that my morning phone marathon ran from 9 a.m. to 12 midday, and the evening one began at 6 and by 10 p.m. it turned into a squall of calls which rarely ceased before 1 a.m. Svetlana knew that I could not talk or work with her on Skype or phone with total calmness and ease, when my work phone was "red-hot" with calls from people who needed my help. I could not allow myself to leave them unanswered while being busy with another, albeit very important, thing.

I became tense, Svetlana perceived that and felt slightly hurt when I said that people were waiting for my help, and replied: "*And what about me, am I not one of those people?*" "*Of course you are, – I reassured her, – You are the most important person in my life, but we can find time for talks and work, while many people are not in such a privileged position and are unable to call me or get my help at any other time*".

Thus, we mostly could have time for our needs only on weekends, on condition that neither she nor I had any urgent meetings with other people.

There were also other impediments to carrying out the new transformation I had planned. On Thursday, November 11 Svetlana got the next blow to her heart. I had to find time in my daily routine and restore it. But lately the transformation still could not be done at night—Svetlana was on her last legs because of severe fatigue after the blow and the loads which I had to employ on her to bring her to a relatively normal state. She almost fell asleep in front of the monitor when we chatted on Skype that night, nodding after every word. We both laughed at it and she went to bed when our Skype conference was over at 23.38. As usual she called me from her bedroom, I put a protective night shield on her and we wished each other goodnight.

In order to let her get a break, resting from the huge overloads which her body underwent while the Dark attacked her I remained awake during the whole night, protecting her from new assaults. Certainly, I did not tell her that I stood guard over her night's sleep. If she had known about it, her outrage would have been infinite. She always said that anything could happen to other people, including her, but I must be always in good form, ready to fight the Dark and win...

She did not think of herself even while being in precarious situations that threatened her life. She worried about our cause, for the sake of which we did not fly away when our star friends came to take us with them. Knowing that, I was a bit cunning when answering her question about when I went to bed. I said that I fell asleep earlier than I did yesterday, without specifying that yesterday I went to bed at about seven o'clock in the morning and today about six. I told her the truth, without going into details.

Besides, I often did not sleep while repulsing attacks directed toward me, studying the attackers and at the same time producing new counteractive measures which I later used to protect

Svetlana. She slept very well at night from Thursday to Friday, falling into deep calm sleep. But on Friday, November 12, the Dark began to inflict powerful blows from that very morning, which was extremely unusual. We talked several times on Skype that day. First conversation was at 12.30 Moscow time and lasted almost twenty one minutes, then we chatted at 1.34 for one minute and the last time I spoke to her on Skype was at 2.51 p.m. for 10 min 11 sec. This also was the last time I saw her alive.

I regret so much now that I did not speak to her longer and insist on having the transformation done. Svetlana said that she would lie down and have a quick nap and then we would definitely carry out that work. It was obvious that the deep sleep she had that night was not enough for her to have recovered from the recent blows. She slept till the evening and called me from her mobile, saying that she had overslept and hurried to walk the dogs while it was not too dark. She called me several times from that walk and asked for help, because the assaults had started again...

There was no usual Skype video conference on the evening of her murder. She called me by phone and I called her back. We talked for several minutes. Those were the last minutes I heard her amazing voice. Few know that Svetlana was a professional singer and not just a singer, but a star! In addition to having a surprisingly beautiful and tender voice, she graduated from the Vilnius conservatory. Her voice was (my hands resist writing this word) not only beautiful and tender, but also very strong.

She sang pop music and travelled all over the Soviet Union with her group – from Far East to its Western border, from Far North to the Pamir and Altai mountains. It would be easier to say where she has not been. She told me when their group went to the Pamir Mountains an excursion was organized for them. A guide led them to a very beautiful place with a rock hanging over a precipice. While the guide described the sights of the place in glowing terms, Svetlana went to the edge of the rock and sat down with her legs dangling in the air.

When the guide saw her there, his face went ashy. He crawled to her, begging her not to stir or move. Surprised by his reaction, she calmly put her feet on the rock, got up and joined the others, and the guide followed her crawling... When she told me about that, smiling the way nobody could smile, she confessed that now she hardly dared to do such a thing. But I am sure, if the necessity had arisen, Svetlana would have done it without thinking twice.

She proved her bravery in deed repeatedly over the whole time we were together! People who are not afraid of anything do not exist. Heroes fear the same way others do. The difference between them and others is that heroes are able to suppress the fear generated by the instinct of self-preservation and do what they should do; at the same time they don't flaunt it but consider that anybody could act like this. There is another thing about heroism. It is one thing to gather one's strength to accomplish just one heroic act, basking for the rest of one's life in the rays of glory, and quite another to accomplish a feat every day and not consider it some special act of heroism to boast of in front of others. Svetlana was exactly this kind of person.

During all those amazing years which we spent together, we *were* together despite the enormous distances by which the enemies separated us. Her big warm child's, in the best sense of this word, heart shrank in fear, but despite that she went and did what needed to be done, not for her personally, but for the cause, for the sake of other people who would never know what she'd been through for that.

More of it later...

Someone may say that there were many concert groups that toured all over the Soviet Union. It is true; there were a lot of them. Svetlana sang her songs in several languages – Russian, Lithuanian and English. She was a remarkable singer, a real star. Regrettably, not very many people had the opportunity to hear her. She did not appear on TV, but that did not mean that she was insufficiently talented. Too often, a gift or a talent matters less in the modern world than who's son or daughter you are, or how much money is in your pocket, or what "uncle" or "aunt" stands behind you. This is how the things were in Soviet times and this is exactly how they are now. Nothing changed whatsoever. I do not describe Svetlana as a talented singer to praise and idealize her, not at

all! There are facts that confirm it. When the Lithuanian audience chose ten hits of the 20th century, two of her songs got onto the list, one of which occupied the top spot in the ranking! It was people's hearts responding to her song that voted for it.

She left the stage at the peak of her popularity as a singer because of her former husband's treachery who composed the songs and was her guitar accompanist. Only a very strong person is capable of doing such a thing! There are stars which repeatedly announce their retirement from the stage but are still there, despite there being little remaining of what they were in the days when their creativity bloomed, that is if they were anything at all to begin with.

I often asked Svetlana to sing something for me, but she always replied – some day, later. And now this "later" will never come. To tell the truth I did hear her voice on a vinyl record. It happened in 1997. I had the record but nothing to play it on. Therefore, I went on a search for a good record player and found just what I needed! With impatience I put the record on the turntable, the needle slowly went down onto the black surface of the disk and... I heard nothing. Only when I bent over the player very closely, almost sticking my ear into it, could I hear a low singing. Examination of the player showed the absence of an amplifier – I had bought just the "wheels".

Her voice purred very gently and low like a crystal-pure brook and I wanted to hear it loudly in all its beauty as quickly as possible. At once I went to buy the missing parts and returned with a very good "Sony" music system which had an amplifier and powerful speakers. I messed about with it long enough, assembling it and connecting the record player to it, and finally I could make myself comfortable and listen. The needle of the record player was new and of high sensitivity and when it touched the record, I submerged into Svetlana's singing. Some damage to the disc created noise; nevertheless a very tender, gentle and light voice was streaming out of the speakers. My heart ached at once; I felt incredible warmth and sadness. I did not understand the words of the song which she sang in Lithuanian, but the tender sadness of it touched the very remote corners of my soul. Over time I knew the words and understood the reason for my sadness.

Later I brought the vinyl record to a sound recording studio to convert it into a CD. I also asked them to remove the noise from the record, and after a while I could listen to Svetlana's voice in its primeval beauty. It is of interest that Svetlana sang this one in very low voice, but not because her voice was weak, by no means, but because she was singing a lullaby. She has a very good, operatic voice, but exactly her softly quiet singing flowed into me like light and with unbelievable tenderness. When Svetlana was far away from me, I listened to her songs, especially the lullaby, over and over again, and her singing always filled my heart with boundless sadness. Certainly, "tastes differ", but I think that in this case the matter is not only in my perception.

According to professionals I have a very powerful voice. Indeed I do. I could easily make everything shake in a Kharkov University Hall which was large enough, using no microphones, and not only there. So, I can say that it is quite easy to sing at the top of one's voice, having such a powerful instrument, but to sing something in a low voice, so that all would hear it, is very difficult. So, the matter here is not in my partiality, but in truth.

It is of interest that Svetlana did not tell me for a long time that she graduated from a Vilnius conservatory, getting Master of Music in Voice and Piano Performance and that she was a star in Lithuania.

When she left the stage being at the peak of her popularity, she once and for all left her former husband, despite his pleading on his knees to forgive that misunderstanding which never would be repeated again. But she was unable to forgive his treachery. She left the apartment, which she had earned by herself, to him. In short, she behaved like the man should have behaved.

On sharply dropping her singing career at its peak, Svetlana did not fall into panic or depression. She mastered a new profession, that of fashion designer, getting a second higher education. She achieved success in this, which was not lesser that of a singer. She was engaged in batik creating. Let's not forget the fact that those were the Soviet times when to make one's way through was very difficult. Moreover, it was very complicated to find materials of at least decent quality and the necessary dyes to achieve the colour spectrum she needed. That is why Svetlana

began to dye the batik in her kitchen, adding the dyes in appropriate ways and proportions to get this or that play of colour or a transition of one colour into another.

And then she sewed colourful dresses using her own designs. Her works were very popular, including among foreigners. Japanese and West-Europeans readily bought them up, I suspect, for far less money than her works cost in fact. To tell the truth Svetlana told very little about herself, wild horses wouldn't drag it from her. Her batik designer works had got the highest awards at many exhibitions when they came there from Japan and Western Europe. I don't know how long she was doing this. She mentioned it in passing, complaining that it was almost impossible to find materials and dyes in the USSR to make her ideas a reality. On exhausting the creative potential of batik maximally, she began to immerse herself in other activities. Nevertheless, her dream to create beauty disappeared nowhere and was realized much later, in the USA, but I shall tell about it in detail in my autobiographical book *The Mirror of My Soul*.

I think I shall put on my web-site a disc which recorded the showing of Svetlana's first fashion collection in 2000. Regrettably, it became the first and the last demonstration of her creations in the field of fashion, which she prepared almost all by herself from the very beginning to the very end! Fashion critics called her the best designer of the 20th century. It is of interest that such high esteem was expressed by a particular critic much feared by most fashion designers. His negative comment could well mean the crash of their career. It is one thing when a positive, and even high, estimation is given by a paid journalist, but his public declaration was a complete surprise even for Svetlana.

Nevertheless, the world of "high fashion" organized a very united badgering for her which was difficult to imagine. I shall write about all of it later, showing step by step everything we went through together. Now I would like to throw some light upon those moments of Svetlana's life before we met, almost twenty years ago, about which she told me and about which she can not tell anyone anymore with her wonderful vivid language of not only a gifted writer, but also a gifted Person in every respect.

When Svetlana was a teenager, she got meningitis in a very heavy form. The headache was so severe that even morphine injections were unable to take the pain away. After a while the doctors said that they could not prescribe morphine as an analgesic anymore, otherwise she would become a drug addict and that she should face the unbearable pain alone, without any help from medicine. Anyone else in her place would have found the necessary stuff, by appealing to narcodealers, to seize that infernal pain at least for the time of the narcotic oblivion. Svetlana declined that option. Besides, she continued to work full-time, so that nobody even guessed that she had an unbearable permanent headache.

Svetlana also told me that her father and she had been "crazy" bibliophiles. In order to buy or exchange a book they were interested in, they were ready to go to the ends of the Earth or give a month's salary for it. And they did it, they went and they paid! One day Svetlana went "book hunting" in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas, if I am not mistaken, which ended in a very interesting meeting.

When she finally got the book she wanted, Svetlana sat down on a bench in a shady alley, submerged in her thoughts, quite sorrowful ones (for which she had every reason, but they were very personal and I shall not write about them). When she came to herself, she saw a middle-aged man sitting beside and attentively looking at her. He asked her what happened that such a wonderful face expressed such a deep sadness. Svetlana desperately needed someone to somehow unburden her heart. A casual sympathetic person was a gift of fate for her, but very quickly the conversation turned to other subjects and they began to discuss the sense of life and other subjects which had given her no rest since her childhood and pushed her to search for answers to her questions in the wisdom of the East and other books which promised to open all the secrets of being to a reader.

However, these books gave her nothing but disappointment! They only lured with their promises of enlightenment, and then everything would come down to the idea that only the "great consecrated" could get these revelations, which for the rest, they said, were premature or even

dangerous, both for them and for the surrounding people! What a nice strategy! I would call it a Hodja Nasreddin strategy. (Hodja Nasreddin was a satirical Sufi Turkish figure of the 13th century – *E.L.*) The strategy was the following: when Hodja's stubborn donkey did not want to move in the necessary direction, he hung a carrot on a fishing-rod in front of the donkey's nose and turned the rod where he wanted to go and the stubborn donkey reached for such a close, juicy and sweet carrot and carried his master wherever he pleased. Svetlana and her father, Vasilij Vasilievich, searched for books on occultism and eastern teachings hoping to find the answers to their questions there. In vain they hoped for that. The books promised to do so, but did not keep their promises. They gave unintelligible verbiage instead of clear explanations.

So, Svetlana and a strange man had a long heart-to-heart talk. Surprised, she discovered a very clever and erudite person in many subjects which interested her in this unexpected and accidental interlocutor. They talked. Time flew. It was getting dark. Svetlana came to her senses, thanked the man for such a soul-healing conversation and rushed to the bus station to catch a bus to Alitus, the town where she lived. On bidding farewell, her interlocutor said that if she needed to, she always could find him on this bench. The words surprised her a bit, but she did not pay too much attention to them. After a while she visited Kaunas again and remembered the man with sad eyes, sat on the bench and submerged in her thoughts. Unexpectedly, she saw him again. They began to talk and again the time flew by imperceptibly.

Only when the situation repeated for the third time, did Svetlana gather her courage and ask who he was and how he appeared beside her on the bench. The man sadly smiled and said that he had liked to sit on this bench; that he was a nuclear physicist-engineer and got a mortal dose of radiation at work and now he was slowly dying and his body was in coma.

Svetlana was not surprised at the answer, because whilst being a child she often helped the dead to perform the transition, but this was the first time this kind of thing had happened to her. In her childhood she had to go with her spirit out of her body in order to see the spirits of the dead, but this time she saw the spirit of a dying person while still being in her body. Svetlana perfectly saw and heard his spirit, the way she saw and heard other living people.

She was enormously surprised, because this happened to her for the first time. Several times she met this man's spirit. On one of her visits to Kaunas she arrived with her only object being to talk to him, he appeared again and he was different. The mysterious stranger said that he had waited for her to say goodbye, because his physical body had already died and it was time for him to go. She felt deep sadness losing this man who became her good friend. But life is life and death is death and they have their laws...

I did not sleep the whole night from Friday 12 to Saturday 13 and went to bed at 8 a.m., being glad that it was Saturday and I did not have to begin my morning working a phone marathon. Therefore, I could allow myself to be a bit lazy. I knew that Svetlana slept normally at night and the attacks of the Dark usually come to naught in the morning and during the day. I would like to explain one thing. My keeping awake at night to guard Svetlana's sleep from blows does not mean that I sat in the night, looked at the ceiling and muttered to myself something like "The Dark go away. I am coming". The thing is, if I fell asleep, then my spirit went to do the main work and left its clones instead to defend Svetlana (and not only her). Clones are certainly a good thing, but they are not me.

Therefore, in order not to fall asleep, I watched TV, wrote something or played computer games to keep myself in the active state. I went to bed in the morning only when my eyes began to close on their own and my head began to drop on the keyboard. Despite the absence of morning calls on Saturdays and Sundays I usually woke up at the same time I did on working days, but on realizing that it was the weekend, I stayed in bed as long as I pleased, time and again falling into a deep sleep. Saturday, November 13, did not differ in anything from other Saturdays and Sundays. It was already midday when I finally decided to stop idling and get up.

I got washed, shaved and dressed and began to await calls from Svetlana. About 3 p.m. Moscow time I made the first Skype call and then called by phone. Nobody answered me. My heart

started aching and the thought "How is Svetlana?" began to hammer in my head. But I calmed myself, because we had agreed that she would call me at the least danger. Before, I sometimes called her on her mobile and caught her at the instant when she was going to fall asleep and after that she found it difficult to do it again. That is why we agreed that if I called her either on Skype or the landline, which she had at the ground floor, she would call me back at once either by phone or Skype, if she was awake.

I called her several times on the night of Friday to Saturday and the very latest was a Skype call at 6 a.m. It was highly likely that on seeing that call Svetlana decided to spare and not disturb me, knowing that I slept very little during several nights and had no time to take even a one hour nap in the day-time. It would have been better not to spare me that day! She would be alive then! I would have carried out the next modification of the brain and this ultrasonic weapon which had a romantic name "Music in the stone" would fail to get her. But then I did not even know that such a weapon existed. Well, I will not run ahead of the events which were arranged that tragic day in some incongruously strange way, which had never been observed before...

So, this man, or to put it more precisely his spirit, became a new starting point for Svetlana in her search for understanding of her true self and of what happened to her in our *Château* on November 13, 2010—her mean murder. Whether it was a coincidence or not, she was murdered exactly on 13 and on Saturday!

The meeting with the spirit of the dying nuclear physicist-engineer showed a new facet of her abilities which began to sparkle with all the rainbow colours of the purest diamond. Svetlana thought that her illness had put an end to the abilities she had had in her childhood, but the conversations with a sudden interlocutor proved otherwise. He also confessed that he realized how much he and other scientists were blind, not seeing the truth which was right in front of everybody's eyes.

Certainly, there always will be ill-wishers which may say with a grin that a continuous strong headache forces a person to see even stranger things than that and will be way off the mark!

Later Svetlana found out that the man had really died that day and he was the person who he said he was. The most important thing here was the fact that the stress caused by the strongest headache took Svetlana to a fundamentally different level of interaction with other levels of reality, when she did not need to leave her physical body, as in her childhood which she described in her autobiography which will remain unfinished forever.

Many people cannot even imagine what a shy and modest person Svetlana is (I consciously write about her in present tense, because only part of her, her physical body, which, nevertheless, was infinitely dear to me, died). I made quite an effort to convince her to write her autobiography which she called "Revelation". She constantly asked me whether it would be really of interest to anybody.

Then, like a child, she rejoiced at every single reader's comment on the chapters she had written. Cordial words warmed her heart and like the living flame of a candle dispersed the thickening darkness and illuminated a tiny island in the middle of that insanity, which the enemies organized for us, where she could breathe freely and derive her strength to write again despite everything...

The meeting with this man's spirit served as a new push for Svetlana to get to know herself and her abilities. She was eager to find out and understand what happened to her and to learn to control her abilities. And she left for Moscow to find the answers to her questions. She came to Moscow as a TV reporter on the European TV channel "Antenna", its Polish department. It is of interest that she arrived in Moscow at the end of the spring of 1988, almost at the same time as I did. However, three long years separated us from each other!!! It is likely that we visited the same places and, as it turned out later, had common acquaintances, but only in the second half of April 1991 did our paths join, not to be separated anymore. It is not important that the enemies took a lot of care to put borders and oceans between us for many years, because these obstacles were unable to split us.

Our feelings and attachment to each other grew stronger with every day, every month. The enemies are impotent to understand why neither distance nor the problems, with which they bombarded us, could separate our hearts and souls, but on the contrary, strengthened our feelings. I'll tell why. They apply their own standards, which are no higher than the animal level of existence, to others. If a male does not have a female beside him, he starts looking for a substitute, sometimes for several. Or, if a female does not have a male near her, she will certainly find one to replace him. They do not understand that man and woman are not simply male and female. They do not understand that even animals have feelings, rather than just instincts! Their animal level consciousness (not even that of a reasoning one) cannot understand that we passed this phase long ago and go along the evolutionary path of actual Man, as I call this phase of evolutionary development, where the animal elements are very far from playing a leading role.

What a pity that I shall never know lots of things about Svetlana's life before we met. Certainly, I can scan many things, but only that which I would want to scan. A scanning can be compared to the reaction of a person to an unexpected sound. On hearing it, he turns his head toward the source of the sound and sees with his own eyes what or who produces it. Besides, everything I can get by scanning will be, nevertheless, my perception of the events, and her amazing perception of the surrounding world disappeared together with her for good. Svetlana will never tell anything more with her melodious and tender voice or write the lines which come alive in the eyes of a reader. Many things will never happen because of the mean murder from round the corner. She was killed and the killers did not show their faces. This is not the behaviour of a warrior, even an enemy one. Only degenerates which have nothing human in them kill like this.

On Saturday, November 13, I called Svetlana six or seven times on the landline phone, leaving messages which each time became more anxious. I made many Skype calls and after 6 p.m. Moscow time began to call to her mobile. There was no answer. I became seriously worried. I switched onto a scanning mode and got reassuring news. Svetlana was sleeping soundly. It calmed me down. I waited some time and scanned again. Svetlana continued to sleep. When I tuned in on her, she asked me: "Help me to wake up!" I did what she asked and began to wait for her to return to her normal waking state.

Usually she needed half an hour to be completely awake. Right after waking she was always in semi sleep; although she did everything that was needed, even answered questions, but then remembered nothing of it. Only on being completely awake, was she ready to interact with the surrounding world. I waited some time and began to call to all phones and Skype, waiting for her call. I was anxious but the scanning showed that Svetlana was alive which calmed me a little. I even began to watch the film "The gold of fools" at 9 p.m. Moscow time to take off the unrest. Somewhere at 9.35 - 9.40 it was as if something exploded in my head and I immediately tuned to Svetlana and got the shocking information: "Svetlana is dead".

Several times this kind of information had been palmed off on me before, but I always scanned again, more deeply and thoroughly, and always found Svetlana alive. This time I saw that no dirty trick was played on me which upset me very much. I began to worry very seriously. I started calling again on all phones. Nothing. My agitation began to increase. Relatively recently I asked Svetlana to give me our housemaid's mobile phone number, just in case. Frederic is her name. There was a holiday in France, but nevertheless I decided to call her. She did not pick up the phone and I left her a message that I would be very grateful if she went to our *Château* and checked how Svetlana was. At 22 hours 11 minutes Moscow time I heard a Skype call. Exited, I rushed to my working study and saw with enormous joy a Skype call from Svetlana. I cursed quietly, blaming myself for letting panic seize me and pushed the button "Video Call"...

In Moscow Svetlana very actively worked as a TV reporter. She was able to do that which was considered impossible. She was charged with filming material about the Russian Orthodox Church. She managed to get an audience with Alexis II and, on seeing her for first time, the Patriarch said to her: "You are not a simple woman, Light-and-Lucid one". Very quickly they became friends and he gave her all his direct telephone numbers and said that she could call any

time day and night. They met very often and conversed a lot, discussing different subjects. When Alexander Men was killed, Alexis II called her first to convey this sorrowful news. He introduced Svetlana to an elder called Sergiy who in Svetlana's opinion was a volkhv and keeper of old knowledge.

Their cordial relations played a crucial role in Alexis II's decision to let the film crew with which Svetlana worked to film the Patriarch's chambers and the altar in Sergiev Posad. Nobody ever was allowed to do that. Soon a documentary was broadcast all over Europe which got several awards, but Svetlana's name was not mentioned in the list of the members of the production, although it was Svetlana who directed the documentary while her chief was in Warsaw. Probably they considered it sufficed simply to pay her salary and have all the credits left for them.

Svetlana was a creator and never strived for over-emphasizing what she had done. She never grabbed anything for herself, even when this something was hers. She was not a plunderer. She was a warrior, but never strived for anything for herself. It vexed her, but she did not want create any problem for anybody and always hoped that a person would act according to his or her honour and conscience. Regrettably, very few acted like this.

Also Svetlana filmed so-called "freaks"—people who possessed paranormal abilities – in Moscow for Polish television. She made video reports about Paul Globa, Tarasov, Anatoly Kashpirovsky and many others. She devoted particularly a lot of her time working with Kashpirovsky. At first Svetlana was sure that his aim was to bring good to people. He promised her to help too and take away her permanent headache, but in fact it disappeared nowhere. But soon she was disappointed in this man who never felt any love or compassion for people but used them as an instrument to achieve his ends.

Disillusioned, she told me that Kashpirovsky ordered that all letters with negative results of his healing sessions be thrown in a garbage bin, but there were lots of them – sacks of readers' letters were thrown out. A case which happened once during his performance became the last straw. An old man had a problem with his heart during the session and Kashpirovsky did nothing to help him. Moreover, after the performance he commented something like: it's good that the old fool did not kick the bucket during the performance. I think further comments are unnecessary.

After this Svetlana refused to do anything for this person, but he had been harassing her for a long time, calling and threatening her and her son. He also called several times when we were already together, saying that she would be very sorry about her refusal to work with him and threatening that he would make her headache unbearable, if she did not obey him. He said and did, and I had to remove his "gratitude" to Svetlana for all good things she'd done for him.

Also Svetlana got into the sight of the Soviet black freemasons. A Leo Orlov was a very influential figure in 80s and 90s in the USSR. Ministers and other officials who occupied important posts in the government often visited his apartment, groveling before him. He told Svetlana that it was he and others like him actually ruled the country and all these officials were just lackeys. Svetlana told me that Leo Orlov often invited her to attend the performances of the artists who demonstrated telepathic and other paranormal abilities to the public and insisted that she impede them from doing what they did. And many were in difficult straits during the performance.

Leo Orlov was incredibly happy about all that, but Svetlana felt quite the contrary thing. Certainly she was pleased and interested in checking her force and abilities, but she felt sorry for the performers who puffed and blushed on stage, not understanding why they were unable to do what, earlier, they had done easily, and she quitted doing that. Leo Orlov introduced her to many people and most likely had big prospects for her, but our meeting ruined all his insidious plans. When he understood that Svetlana was lost to his aims forever, he began to play minor dirty tricks on her. He destroyed her foreign passport which was kept in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR and when Svetlana came there to take it, they said it had been cancelled. Svetlana was very worried that he would do some harm to me or her, because she refused to introduce me to him, although he was very interested and asked her several times to do that. I did not have the least desire to meet this person and she backed me up in that decision...

So, full of joy I pushed the button "Video call", but instead of Svetlana I heard Frederic's disturbed voice. She was so agitated that she could not switch on the video mode and at once forgot many English words. With bated breath I asked her whether she found Svetlana and she answered affirmatively. She said that Svetlana was lying with her face downward in the office near her computer. Frederic was in shock. I turned off Skype and called to her myself. This time I saw Frederic's face. She was scared and confused. I asked her once again where Svetlana was and she answered me again that she had found Svetlana lying on the carpet in the office face down and turned the Skype camera at her. Being in the grip of deep emotion, Frederic did not turn on the overhead light and everything around was illuminated very poorly by just one reading-lamp. In its dim light I saw Svetlana lying on the carpet, face downward. My eyes refused to believe that what I was seeing was real, but the computer camera is not an illusionist and is unable to create illusions.

I asked Frederic to immediately turn Svetlana upwards and to check whether her hand was warm. Svetlana's left arm was relaxed and still warm. Her right hand was clenched into a fist. I asked Frederic to check whether Svetlana had pulse and breath. I still hoped that she was unconscious which happened many times before. When she was beaten so that she was unconscious for hours, the pulse was hardly felt and the breathing was very weak. For several minutes Frederic could not understand what I wanted from her. Finally she understood and answered negatively. The last hope that I was mistaken and Svetlana was alive disappeared.

Frederic turned the camera more and I saw Svetlana, her face and how she was lying, shrinking from pain like a little girl, with a clenched fist. She continued to fight even at the last moments of her life. I understood that Svetlana was really dead and that her death came when I heard in my head "Svetlana is dead".

I began to work with her immediately, realizing that her heart was blown from within. I tried to grow new tissues, but the blood did not flow in her vessels anymore.

When the ultrasonic weapon exploded her heart, blood gushed into the pericardium from the left ventricle and quickly filled it, tightly squeezing Svetlana's heart. Therefore, even if I had grown the tissues to heal the breach of the myocardium, the pressure of the leaked blood would not have allowed the heart to be started again. The enemies took into account even such details, perfectly knowing that I had rescued her from death repeatedly, and they did not want me to do the same that time too.

In this kind of situation it was necessary immediately to pump out blood that squeezed the heart. I continued to work with Svetlana and asked Frederic to call the ambulance, hoping that they would be able to release her heart from the squeezing pressure of the blood. Frederic went to meet the ambulance at the gate and I continued to work with Svetlana. They came in fifteen minutes, checked the pulse, breathing and did nothing more, despite the fact that the body was still warm and there were no sign whatsoever of rigor mortis which there should have been by then.

They did everything correctly according to their procedures. The point is that in such situation the first thing which must be done is to release the heart from the pressure of the blood, but it should be done in the very few first minutes after the accident. So, the paramedics did nothing. I watched what was going on through the Skype camera and continued to work realizing that they would not help. I looked at Svetlana lying there, so very near—just stretch out a hand and you'll touch. But thousands of kilometres lay between her and me. I looked and looked at Svetlana, and continued to work in spite of everything.

I still hoped that I could think out something to save her, but in order to do something radical, I needed Svetlana's help, and now she could not help me in this situation. Drastic measures require a jeweler's work. The least missed detail threatens to provoke catastrophic consequences on a planetary scale. In this moment there was nobody beside me who would be able to replace Svetlana even temporarily.

One of the paramedics noticed that the Skype camera was switched on and turned it from Svetlana. Before that I watched them making a cardiogram which showed a straight line some forty minutes after their arrival. It slightly surprised me that they did not do that immediately, but

probably they needed the straight line just for the record. When the camera began to show the dark corner of the room, I turned off Skype and continued to work with Svetlana without seeing her.

I called telepathically our friends, both on Earth and in Space asking to do something. In fact Svetlana is dear and important not only for me and, if I had no right to return her, then they had that right! I offered myself instead of her, if it was necessary that one of us died, but I heard in reply only "you must go through it".

Why? Why must I go through it? Did Svetlana and I have not enough tests which were unthinkable for most people? We served and still do, people and truth, despite the fact that for that we got nothing but problems and attempts to physically eliminate us!!! We did not do that for the sake of glory or rewards but for people who will never know the majority of things that we did. We worked for the sake of justice, because we could not behave otherwise, could not pass by lies and slander, perfectly understanding that if we frustrate the next plan of the Dark, a squall of blows would rain down on us, both from the physical and other levels of reality. We gave up our personal happiness for the sake of making others happy, who do not even suspect what we have done and will continue to do in order that healthy and happy children will be born on Earth...

There is still a lot of work to do, but now Svetlana cannot be with me at the physical level and I will be unable to hug her, to look into her beautiful and radiant eyes. And she will never get under my arm again. Svetlana often joked: "I want to get under your armpit". Lately she asked me that very often. Like a nestling, she wanted to hide from meanness and feel protected...

One day Svetlana told me this story. Her son Robert came to Moscow for summer vacations and, on hearing her stories about different "miracles", asked her to show him something. In that moment they were in the subway and Robert asked her: "Mummy, can you stop the train?" Like a little, and a bit mischievous child, she answered: "Let's try!" and the train stopped in a minute and everything submerged into darkness. This frightened Svetlana herself. The train remained motionless for quite a long time until the power supply was re-established. It was the first and the last time that Svetlana used her abilities without thinking about the consequences.

Her abilities manifested spontaneously several times. They did it especially often when we met in April, 1991. Then I carried out the transformation of her brain and began to work with her chronic meningitis. Not only her headache gradually disappeared but the brain, being released from the long captivity of the pus, began to straighten out like a compressed spring and surprise her with different unusual manifestations. Certainly Svetlana would describe all that with the brilliance of the eyewitness, but I try to depict everything as I can and remember, and my description will never be able to approach her perception, because we saw and see the world differently. Regrettably, she will not be able to write what and how she felt, like she did the first volume of her "Revelation".

One day, when her brain was in the process of getting rid of the pus and an enormous haematoma in the area of the fontanelle, she came to my place and asked for help. This was what happened. When she strolled the Old Arbat, her favourite Moscow street, all the people which walked there unexpectedly began to speak in her head. She heard a frenzied cacophony of strangers' thoughts which burst into her consciousness without asking permission. She tried to get away from the crowd as quickly as possible and, having called me, got to my place. I worked with her and made everything so that she could get telepathic information only when she wished it. Later we quite often watched the American film "Scanners" and the plot of the film was clear and very understandable for Svetlana, especially the scene when a protagonist unexpectedly started hearing people's voices in his head at the train station and their quantity increased until they drove him crazy.

Svetlana experienced all this herself and was surprised at how the director of the film managed to convey almost everything with such correctness. It could be only in one case – he had a reliable source of that information. Most people who watched this film did not even suspect that the events shown in this film were not somebody's fantasy but the truth. Of course in reality a person's head did not blow up like a cabbage because of a scanner's action. The action of a scanner-killer make the vessels of the brain blow up which results in a stroke and rapid death, although the

person's cranium remains whole and unharmed. It's just the director of the film found a very expressive method to show how a person dies, when the vessels of the brain explode, without changing the essence of what is going on in reality. The bursting head is more illustrative than showing how a person twitches and drops dead, because the camera could not show what happened within the human cranium and that's all.

As long as I worked with Svetlana, her brain, which was oppressed by the consequences of the serious meningitis for a long time, got rid of the blockings which had restrained her natural abilities and prevented them from manifesting in full measure. It was exactly the rapid release from the blockings which resulted in the avalanche of telepathic information. Her brain tried to break through the shroud of the consequence of her illness and when it got unexpected help, it rushed forward with all its huge potential. What a pity that Svetlana will be unable to tell about all that herself!

From the very first day of our acquaintance Svetlana absorbed the information I gave her like a sponge. We sat up till the deep night conversing and she kept asking about everything. At those moments she looked like a wanderer in the desert which had spent a long time without water and having finally found an oasis with pure cold water was unable to leave the spring or slake his thirst. Only in Svetlana's case it was a spring of knowledge which I gave her. She was very surprised in the beginning that it could not be found anywhere, why the answers to her questions, which she sought from her childhood, existed and nobody speaks or writes about it, why they can be found only in private conversation with me.

She told me how many different books she had read, how many people she had met in the course of life, searching for answers to her questions and she met me only due to her casual meeting in the hotel "Kyevsкая" with the journalist from Donetsk called Valentina. And then late at night, when the subway was closed, I took my Mercedes and drove Svetlana to her hotel through the sleepy and empty Moscow. Then I lived in my aunt's flat, my mother's sister's place, in Butovo and taking the Warsaw highway got Svetlana to her place at high speed, as quick as the wind. It happened almost every day till my first visit to Archangelsk which I made at the end of June - beginning of July, 1991.

Svetlana wanted very much to go there with me, but did not dare ask, and I found it awkward to offer that, because I did not want her to interpret it wrongly. It was our first parting. I knew that she had wanted to come with me when I came back and began to tell her what happened in Archangelsk. I told her how I gradually, from performance to performance, created the optimal way of co-operating with all categories of my audience – from mere gapers to the people who came to know something new and get some understanding of the surrounding world...

Regrettably, no reply followed my appeals. My mind perceived the phrase "You have to go through that", but my heart refused to accept it. When others found themselves in a similar situation, it was me who made the decision as to whether or not a person should be restored and that certainly did not happen to all, only to those whose role was key and not just for our planet, Midgard. No matter how bad I felt, I had no right to restore all my lost comrades-in-arms, because it is absolutely prohibited to return people to life at your own discretion and desire. Otherwise, anybody, who lost his nearest and dearest, would have the moral right to require that his beloved husband, wife, child, mother, father, brother, sister or friend should be returned to life, and would be absolutely right—they did not love their beloved less than I loved mine. And I would have no right to refuse them from there on! I think there is no need to explain what consequences all this might have.

Therefore, when I failed to bring Svetlana back to life at once after the murder, I appealed to my friends to make a decision, because I could not be sure of my own unbiased attitude to what had happened, which is absolutely understandable. However, in my heart of hearts I hoped that my friends would make a favourable decision which would fill me with ineffable joy, but instead I only heard the reply: "You have to go through that". My whole self rebelled against it; I could not

understand the reason for such a decision then and cannot do it now. I was not the only one who needed what Svetlana did and, which is the most important, what she had not done. People needed her in order to get up from their knees and feel themselves people, not a bunch of rams, which parasites used to call them behind their back and lately say straight to their face.

All she did and was going to do, but was maliciously prevented, was necessary for Russia which she loved infinitely. She is needed to re-establish the truth about the Glorious past and Great people, which has brought so much to so many that there is not time and space enough to enumerate even its most important deeds: it has been being eliminated physically for the last thousand years, together with its Great Past, Great Culture, Great language and its Great Soul which others cannot understand yet! It does not mean that I am writing these lines being completely confused or creating an illusion of something that never existed in the past and does not exist in the present, as I am sure some would say who, due to some "strange" coincidence, all belong to the social parasites' side.

I perfectly realize that there are enough traitors, scoundrels and scumbags among the Russians. However, they are a minority. Their number would be even less if young and immature souls had not been corrupted by the parasitic world-view for the last thousand years. In her first and last book Svetlana has shown a lot of truth which the parasites carefully concealed in order to preserve their power which they usurped illegally using lies, treason, false evidence etc. Thanks to her gift which many tried to ruin (but failed) Svetlana showed **Radomir and Magdalena's real life, love and allegiance to duty** to people! What "speaking" names they have!

They bear so much information for Russians; one needs just to reflect a little and try to penetrate into the sense of the Russian words. It's not easy, of course, because Russians are taught their culture and language by anyone who feels like it—Germans, Jews, Georgians—who willingly change them as they please, and we, the native people of our country and our land which our ancestors generously impregnated with their blood, humbly accept that. We are even reproached with calling ourselves Russians or Ruses! Our native language is so distorted by strange "rules" that we have ceased to understand the sense of it. Jesus Christ from Nazareth—this is the name under which all know Radomir, having no clue that neither "name" nor place have anything to do with him.

Christ means "Messiah" in new-Greek. It is not even a name! And he is not from Nazareth, but was born at dawn (*na zare* – in Russian). A bearer of any other language will hear nothing in the word "Na-zare-th"; only a Rus would clearly understand the meaning of these two words merged together. However, millions of Ruses have not reflected upon or paid attention to it, but Svetlana did! She paid attention! It was she who discovered his true name—Radomir—the Joy of the World! It is a Russian, Slavonic name, therefore it was diligently "forgotten". Maria Magdalena was prepared another fate: although her name remained undistorted, she was converted into a prostitute, something she never was! She was Radomir's faithful wife and fellow-fighter.

They left her name, more precisely her nickname, most likely because they either did not understand what it meant or considered that people would never discover what was behind it. It is true; the word "Magdalena" says nothing to people of other nationalities. Who knows what names, surnames and nicknames people may have! This word can come to life only for a Rus and only when he or she begins to think over the sense and meaning of native words. The majority of Ruses did not perceive the word "Magdalena" as native, being intoxicated by a pseudo-religion which was imposed on us a thousand years ago. But they should! If they would shed an alien delusion from their minds, at least sometimes, then the strange word "Magdalena" will turn into words which even a child can understand, "Magus Valley" (*mag doleny*—in Russian).

In other words, Maria Magdalena was born in the Valley of Magicians which still exists in the south of France and which Svetlana visited during the last two summers. She climbed the rocks where the ruins of the fortress belonging to the Cathars (or Albigensians) were and descended to the karst caves—the last shelters of the last followers of Radomir's real teaching, which Maria Magdalena, his beloved wife and comrade-in-arms, preserved and brought to people. Svetlana walked in the dark in these caves, illuminating her dangerous journey by the light of a pocket

flashlight and at risk of falling into kilometre-deep cracks which crossed the narrow path every now and then.

She visited Maria Magdalena and their little daughter's burial place. They were killed by a merciless assassin who did not hesitate in killing a defenseless little girl after he stabbed her mother before her very eyes. Svetlana described all this in her awesome book, but so much more she has been prevented from telling! Nevertheless, she could bring this truth to people and a lot of other things...

On Saturday 13, I informed several of our mutual friends about the tragedy. On Sunday some of them called me back and said that she was, in fact, all right and alive and I could calm down. Of course, I understood that they said it with the best of intentions, wishing to help, but at the same time I was bitterly vexed, because they were so sure of their rightness, whilst being very far from it.

I had done everything I could to save Svetlana, but for the reasons I mentioned earlier I was unable to start her heart again because the blood which filled the pericardium squeezed it. I needed only a minor thing—that being that someone would release the pressure around her heart, but nobody did. The impossibility of carrying out the simplest procedure—mechanical pumping out of the blood—resulted in the irremediable—I was unable to bring Svetlana back!

The exactness and objectivity with which Svetlana could obtain information distinguished her from almost all clairvoyants and other people with paranormal abilities, who in most cases see and hear what they want to see and hear. I wished so much that those who called me and said that Svetlana was alive were right! But when I already could not see her, I knew that her body was lifeless and it was so painful, but it was the **truth**, not a sweet and soothing lie.

Is it possible that the reason why our friends refused to restore Svetlana was to make me go through the hardest test of all to see whether I would renounce the cause of my life, to which Svetlana devoted her life too—the fight with parasites of all stripes both on Midgard and far beyond its limits?

If the Dark had offered to bring Svetlana back in exchange for my refusal to continue that to which we devoted our lives, I would have most decidedly rejected it, despite the fact that I wanted to see her alive more than anything else in this world, to hear her beautiful voice, to admire her fathomless eyes and incredible smile which switched on the light in my heart and filled it with soothing warmth, as if the Sun peeped out of a cloud. I would have rejected it, even knowing that my heart would bleed incessantly! Even in order to see her beside me again, I would have never been able and will never be able to betray that to which I dedicated my life and Svetlana gave hers; more precisely it was maliciously taken from her. These are not just beautiful words. It is my lifelong position and I don't care what objections someone may produce on this occasion...

I could not sleep in the night from Saturday to Sunday. My soul ached unbearably. I sat at my computer and began to write a poem dedicated to Svetlana's memory. When I wrote down the last line, the insufferable pain remained. There was no question of falling asleep and I began to write the Epilogue to Svetlana's book. I wanted to tell people more about Svetlana—what she was (and is) like. In the morning I did fall into a short slumber only to emerge from it and plunge into my pain again...

On Sunday I asked some of my friends to help me with a French visa as quickly as possible. They responded immediately, despite it being a weekend.

I must admit that the enemies chose a perfect time for their last attack. Svetlana was alone in the *Château* from Wednesday till her murder on Saturday. On November 11 to 14 there were some holidays in France and our housekeeper, Frederic, visited her family and Svetlana remained alone, just with our dogs, Ramzes and Cori. So, the scoundrels chose precisely the time when nobody would be beside her.

Some time before, at the end of September, her "best friend" Emma betrayed Svetlana, depriving her of the possibility of free movement and connection with the outside world, because Emma worked as a secretary-interpreter. Svetlana told me that they parted with each other on a

Saturday on good terms—I even listened to Emma’s message on the answering machine where she wished her a pleasant weekend in an absolutely normal voice and confirmed that she would be in the *Château* as agreed. She came on Monday but was already on edge and when Svetlana asked a simple question as to why she did not switch her mobile on, as she had asked her to do, just in case of urgent necessity, Emma answered very rudely, said a lot of unpleasant things, turned her back and left. Svetlana just had time to ask her to think about her behaviour and call her.

Svetlana never got a call from her "best friend", instead she received an official letter accusing her of creating stressful job conditions as a result of which Emma had become depressed and notifying her that she was to be called into court on November 19! Everything was presented in the worst light possible for Svetlana. Emma wanted to accuse her of causing depression to a worker. However, when I listened to Emma’s message on Svetlana’s answering machine, there were no depressive notes in her voice and intonation, on the contrary, it sounded quite merry and satisfied. What could have happened during that Sunday, considering the fact that Svetlana had not communicated with her that day?

And if Svetlana did not communicate with her "best friend", then who did? What was said and quite possibly offered, so that on Monday morning Emma came to the *Château* being absolutely out of her temper and behaved in such outrageous manner. It was a hard blow for Svetlana. She did not expect treason. Prior to that, she told me that two years ago one of our gardeners began playing dirty, accusing Svetlana of creating stressful job conditions, as a result of which he said he had sunk into depression. He wanted Svetlana to pay him a life allowance the size of his present salary and if he died, she should pay it to his wife and children. It was completely absurd! I sincerely think that there are strange, to put it mildly, laws in France. He even got a medical certificate upon which to ground his claims.

It was only when our friend Gerard Chartier insisted, Svetlana hired a lawyer and the latter invited Terry to check his diagnosis with an expert, who quickly determined that the man was a total malingerer. But even then Svetlana did not sue this man for slander and attempted fraud. She felt pity for his children because she would, without any doubt, win the case and then, instead of getting a well-to-do life, Terry would lose everything and his family would end up in the street. Svetlana could not bring herself to do similar things, but Terry could. He could calmly deceive and invent such a slander. The question is, whether he thought it out by himself or somebody prompted him, and possibly paid some money.

Later there was another similar case, but with more grave consequences for Svetlana, which for some reason began right after Terry’s dishonest claims brought no result. The name of the new scoundrel was George. He belonged to an old Polish aristocratic family, but, in fact, any street cleaner would be more of an aristocrat than George.

By the way, Emma showed a lot of indignation at these people’s behaviour. She said to Svetlana how low it was and how could people do such things after all the good that Svetlana had done for them.

And when George failed in his machinations, an "indignant" Emma came to the scene with the same intention! I shall not describe George’s shady deal. There was everything there—from repeated forgery of Svetlana’s signature to financial machinations.

Emma who Svetlana considered the closest friend inflicted the most treacherous blow. It happened at the beginning of October of this year (2010) when the matter with George’s fraud was finally over. At once the question arises: was it by chance that each new act of meanness began immediately after the previous one had failed? The answer is obvious: someone stood behind these people.

Certainly, the puppeteers used people’s weaknesses—avidity, cowardice and falseness and did that with incredible diligence from year to year, continuously creating problems for us which we had to solve willy-nilly. The badgering at all levels did not begin yesterday or a year ago. It began as early as in the Soviet Union in 1989, at first it was me they acted against, and then against us. It became especially intense when I succeeded in coming back to my Motherland, to Russia, despite

all the impediments they had organized to obstruct it. Before that they prevented us from meeting for **three years!** Svetlana lived in France and I continued to live in San Francisco.

Before that happened Svetlana usually got permission to enter the USA from the immigration service, because she had a right to remain on the territory of this country while I had the right to work there. In 2003 she visited the USA for the last time, because when she went to renew her permit to enter the country, to replace the expired one, she was denied it under the pretext that my status had already been cancelled, which was not true. I shall write about it in my autobiographical chronicle when I come to that and they will not prevent me from finishing it like they did with Svetlana.

Svetlana did not wish to live with the uncertainty and went to France without having a document which permitted her to come back to the USA. She was enormously upset about all this and was afraid that they would never let us meet again. On her arrival in France, Svetlana went to the American embassy in Paris to get a visa. In the beginning everything was all right and she even paid for a multi-visa for three years. Regrettably, her joy did not last for long. When she came to the window to fetch it, she was told that they could not give her a visa, because her status depended on my work status and therefore she was not entitled to one.

At once we remembered the Soviet times: people came across serious bureaucratic obstacles there when they decided to move to another place. In order to get registered in another place of dwelling a person had to present the authorities with a certificate from the place of his work, but in order to get fixed up in a job, he should present a certificate from the place of dwelling! Similar bureaucratic games were played there: American immigration authorities denied Svetlana new permission to enter the country, because my status was cancelled (about which they informed her in writing) and the American embassy in Paris refused to issue a visa, because whatever status I had she had too.

Three long years of phone talks began. Of course, before that we also often communicated by phone, when she attended to her designer business, first in Beverly Hills in California, then in Paris and in our *Château*, but, nevertheless, we saw each other very often, especially when Svetlana began her designer activity in Los Angeles.

From the autumn of 2003 we had **only** phone communication. Svetlana was afraid that we could never meet again. We both perfectly understood that they tried to separate us but despite living apart, we became closer to each other with every passing day and continued to work together against social parasites. We met after three long years, when I got a new passport at last and was coming back to Russia. Thanks to the help of our friends, Svetlana got the Russian visa quickly and I booked a ticket on the San Francisco-Moscow flight with the change in Paris for me and for Svetlana the Paris-Moscow one, so that she had her seat next to mine. When I arrived in Paris and headed from the gate where the airplane from San Francisco came in, to the Moscow departure gate, I saw an anxious Svetlana. On seeing me from far away, she stopped for an instant and then stretched out her hands like a little girl and ran toward me...

On Monday morning, November 15, it turned out that to get a visa urgently I needed a death certificate. I called Frederic and asked her to get it. She informed me that according to French law, a death certificate could be issued only after Svetlana's autopsy, which was scheduled for Tuesday, November 16. I informed my friends who were helping me with the visa about that and they said that I should at least send a telegram. I called Frederic again and she went to a post-office. She was told there that they could not even send a notarized telegram about a death without a death certificate. In short, the telegram was sent only in the latter half of Monday: Frederic sent it on her own behalf saying that Svetlana was dead. Nevertheless, the French embassy agreed to issue a visa for me and my friend Alexander Fadeev who volunteered to go to support me in such a hard time and I am grateful to him for that. The problem with visas was solved, although we could only get them on Tuesday, November 16. Alexander went to the embassy and finally fetched our six month multi-visas.

When the matter with visas became more or less settled, it was still Monday and Alexander

wanted me to choose the time and day he should book the tickets. He was constantly on the phone with his acquaintances from a travel agency and I had to make a decision. There was not much sense in arriving in Paris late at night on Tuesday and I decided to depart in the early morning on Wednesday, November 17. We had to leave home at 3.30 a.m., so I also did not sleep on Tuesday too, although I did try. We came to the airport, passed registration and customs very quickly and began waiting to board. The airplane took off in time, but Alexander and I failed to relax during the flight, even for a minute. The thing is that we both are almost two metres in height plus my not being "Thumbelina" size so sitting in very narrow passenger seats in economy was a genuine torture for us. We almost could not move in these seats and had nowhere to place our feet for four hours, but it was of little importance, because I was glad, if one could say that under these circumstances, that I could go to France and would see my Svetlana...

Each time when I remember our meeting in Charles de Gaulle Airport after our living apart three long years, I see shining Svetlana with outstretched arms running toward me. Such moments are imprinted into your memory forever and come back to life every time you think about them. By the will of fate and enemies this meeting became our **last** meeting and our **last** joy, because there was a **last** parting, when Svetlana was so close to me for the last time. Like any of our partings, it was a sad one, when my heart was encircled by deep sorrow, because we could not be absolutely certain that there would be a new meeting, taking into account the life we led. But I would have never even supposed that this would be the last time I could see Svetlana in the flesh with my own eyes; the last time I would hug her and then never again see her alive. I always thought that most likely it would be me who would die at the enemies' hands, because almost always the earthly enemies attacked me first, and only then Svetlana. And enemies from "there" almost always attacked us simultaneously, and I had to find a key to their next dirty trick, give it a work-out on me and then free Svetlana. It happened often enough, especially for the last four years, after I returned to Russia. They severely attacked before that, and those attacks were quite serious, but only after my return to Russia did the social parasites go absolutely wild. I shall describe in the *Mirror of My Soul* to what tricks the USA authorities resorted to prevent me from leaving the country.

The parasites beat us so severely that it was out of the question to carry out any joint work without solving the next problem and repairing the damages primarily because I did not want Svetlana to be working at full stretch and wearying, which always happens, if one works whilst having serious injuries. They did not attack us just at other levels of reality; they used any possibility to organize murderous assaults at the purely earthly level too. Last year, when Svetlana went to Occitania for the first time to carry out her research related to Maria Magdalene and the Cathars, our friends warned me that the parasites had staged the next hunt for her and me. I strengthened Svetlana's protective structures and everything turned out all right then, although it was not difficult to organize an accident in caves full of deep cracks and precipices. Almost each time when Svetlana abandoned the *Château*, I reinforced her protection to prevent, for example, a truck "accidentally" coming into an opposing lane, etc. I would like to say that I was warned about the forthcoming attempts which special services of different countries had prepared for us from comrades-in-arms who worked precisely there. So, the provocateurs will have no chance to yell that I invent some phantom attempts and then "heroically" overcome them!

To tell the truth I found the logic of those "true seekers" very strange. When I described the numerous attempts at our physical elimination, first mine and then Svetlana's, they furiously yelled that I "jacked-up my price", and thus self-advertise and create a heroic image, etc. When in the end the enemies succeeded in reaching Svetlana with their filthy claws, they began hysterically to yell that "he could not even protect his wife!" Well, those parasites can wriggle out of any situation! They jabber about that despite the fact that I repeatedly wrote and said that in order to create any protective structure I must know against what weapon I should do that.

I am not good at all at inventing means of destruction. My brain does not work in this direction, but if I come across something like that, I always found the effective counter-action. Like I succeeded in creating an anti-weapon against the infrasonic one which was considered to be

absolutely invincible, against which no defence existed, because it penetrated everywhere: air, earth, water and thick lead plates. Space was the only place where one could hide from it, though with one condition—all means of communication should be disconnected. Now protection against this weapon exists and has already saved the lives of several people, but Svetlana paid with her life before it became possible. She continues to rescue lives even after her death!

By the way, I would like to say a few words about protection. I created it for many members of our Movement on simple carriers like rings, pendants or key-trinkets. The only condition for the protection to produce an effect is that the person should have the above-mentioned objects in the moment of danger. Not once have I ever been informed that on having serious accidents, their owners and people next to them were not safe and sound even when the cars had a head-on collision! Regrettably, my protection did not extend to people in other cars which participated in these accidents and people died. One man informed me that he had this kind of an accident—a head-on collision—and it was not him who drove the car and had my protection but his son and there was a dog in the car too. So, none of the three had any injuries whatsoever, not a scratch! There are a great number of other cases when my protection was this effective, although there was not this kind of visual confirmation. Several times I had to create even a new protective device, because the stones in the carriers were split, when they took the blow. It is of interest that the split was ideally straight and the stone itself was not damaged, only split into two halves...

Many of you had already become acquainted with Svetlana while reading the chapters of her book, but she did not have time to write so many things about her life. She did not speak much about herself. She always was very modest, I would say too modest. She never considered that which she did was something special and important, but in reality it was. Sometimes we talked about one or another subject and, being carried away, she started telling very interesting facts from her life. It is a pity that she did it so seldom. To tell the truth I learned about many events of her life when I read the chapters of her book—she found it unnecessary to tell me about all of it. Of course, our being constantly busy with our work, when little spare time remained, was one of the reasons for it. And Svetlana found no sense in talking about her childhood experiences when matters of a planetary scale and even more were at stake. She genuinely believed her own affairs were not worthy of attention. Nevertheless, we did have those rare precious spare moments when she shared some of her recollections with me.

One day we discussed the subject of languages: where this or that language originated and when, etc., and Svetlana told me about one case from her childhood. As many probably know already, she was born in Lithuania in a small town called Alitus. When the time came, she went to school and as all schoolchildren in Lithuania, she studied Lithuanian. The teacher of Lithuanian began the lesson telling the children what a great and mighty language Lithuanian was, about its antiquity, etc. When he finished Svetlana raised her hand and asked him a question which simply stumped him. She asked that if Lithuanian was so ancient and great, then why there was not a single book or document written in it older than the 15th century (if am not mistaken)? The teacher had no answer to her question and he strongly disliked her for that, nevertheless, Svetlana always had "excellent" in his subject.

Svetlana's question will not seem strange for a little school girl, if we take into account that she read a lot of different books whilst being a child of preschool age and certainly, was much more evolved and educated than her class-mates. However, there were some aspects which Svetlana's teacher did not know or was unwilling to touch. First, the Lithuanians belong to the kin of Sviato Ruses, in other words they are the Ruses and Slavs. Second, the Lithuanians are the bits and pieces of the once powerful tribe of the Western Ruses—the Veleti (Lutici), the majority of which was destroyed by the Germans during the 7th to 9th centuries A.D. I shall remind that using deception and treachery, German tribes managed to wipe two powerful tribal unions of the Western Ruses—the Venedi and the Veleti off the face of the earth and occupied their lands.

It is of interest that even modern history preserves a version that denotes the name of Lithuania as originating from the word *lutiy* (fierce), but it is not mentioned that once there was a

powerful tribal union of Western Rus—the Lutici! Someone conceals very diligently the traces of this sad genocidal tragedy of the Western Rus. Besides, that version reveals that Lithuanian princes united many lands of the Kievan Rus after a supposed Tatar-Mongol invasion (1237-1242)¹⁸ and that the "savage" Lithuanians adopted the culture and language of Kievan Rus. In other words, the Lithuanians spoke Russian, or at least its dialect, in the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania¹⁹. But that is not all!

The Lithuanians, more precisely the Lutici, preserved Vedic traditions longer than anybody else and were converted to Christianity only in the 13th to 14th centuries and began to practice Catholicism. The languages began to differ from each other precisely thereafter. The same thing happened to Swedes and not only to them, but to all tribes which were Germanized. If we take into account all the abovementioned, we can understand why the teacher of Lithuanian was unable to answer the seemingly simple question of his inquisitive pupil...

In France Alexander and I went through the customs without any problem, like all others though. We did not book a car for rent beforehand, because there was no way to do that the day before the flight. Therefore, on arriving in Paris, we went to the airport car rental service, hoping that we could rent a vehicle right on the spot. On spending some time in line, we were informed that we could not get a car there without an advance order. It disappointed us a little, but I asked the manager of the company whether we could rent a car without a pre order. He advised us to go to the "Hertz" company. There we could not only get a car without any pre-order but also choose a quite spacious vehicle.

I picked out a Mercedes-Benz which turned out to be silver and almost new. On dealing with all the formalities, we were ready to move, but came across a problem. The GPS was in French and we failed to load new data into it. Alexander took the wheel and we drove, hoping that we would see road signs which would indicate the direction we needed but that did not happen. On circling around for about 30 or 40 minutes in search of the necessary exit in the direction of the city of Tours, we decided to stop and try another approach, since we had the GPS in Russian. It required just several minutes to connect to the French navigational system, Alexander entered the address of our *Château* and finally we got what we wanted—the device began to work! Everything went all right afterwards. Many kilometres lay ahead of us. On making myself comfortable in the seat, I became "disconnected" from time to time, because of the monotony of the road and lack of normal sleep for a long time. In approximately an hour we had a situation. Alexander "switched off" for several seconds. He had not slept for several nights too.

So, we were both "out" for several seconds. When Alexander fell asleep, my protection system worked. I woke up immediately and said "wake up" to Alexander. It happened at the last moment, when the car rushed toward the concrete road safety barrier at a speed of 130 km/h. Alexander woke up at once; his reaction was instant—the car just slightly touched the barrier with its wheels. After a while Alexander stopped the car and examined it. To our surprise everything was all right. There was not even a scratch, not to mention anything serious. If it were not for my protective system, on hitting the concrete barrier, the car, probably, at such a speed would have turned over on the road in intensive traffic with all the effluent consequences.

But my protection and Alexander snapped into action very well. So, we deprived the parasites of the pleasure of burying Svetlana and me at one and the same time. Thereon our travelling adventures were over. There are a lot of toll roads in France; the payment is relatively small, but still... Thanks to our GPS, we got right to the gate of the *Château*. I called Frederic and she came in

¹⁸ According to traditional version of history Kievan Rus was under Tatar-Mongol Yoke from 1223 to 1480 and paid a levy to Tatar-Mongol khans. In fact the Yoke never existed. The Great Tartary, the mother country, sent their army to its western provinces to prevent the bloody christening, which cost 9 millions lives to the Slavs of Kievan Rus, from spreading further. Later the historians ascribed this outrageous human extermination to the never existed Yoke. (See Nicolai Levashov's articles [The Untold History of Russia-1](#) and [The Untold History of Russia-2](#)). (E.L.)

¹⁹ The **Grand Duchy of Lithuania** was an Eastern European state from the 12th/13th century until 1569 on the territory of modern Byelorussia, Lithuania, Ukraine, part of Russia, Poland, Latvia and Estonia and then as a constituent part of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth until 1791. (Wikipedia)

ten minutes and told us that the *Château* had been sealed up by *the Gendarmerie* and that we could not even enter the kitchen which was not sealed before. It was getting pretty dark and I declined Frederic's offer to make a tour of my property. She gave me the address of the hotel where she had reserved rooms for us, Alexander entered it into the GPS and we went there. It was located in the small town of Chinon, eleven kilometres from our *Château*.

We quickly found the place where the hotel was, but did not immediately find the hotel itself, although we passed by it a couple of times. On wandering a little, we finally found it and occupied our rooms. After all the scrapes and adventures of the last days Alexander and I thought only of one thing—to stretch out our legs as soon as possible. We found a restaurant which was still open, had a quick bite and left to have a little rest. Frederic informed me that tomorrow, November 18, I would have an appointment with a Detective Inspector at 10 a.m. Alexander and I already knew where *the Gendarmerie* was.

In the morning we found out that yesterday's journey demanded payment; our legs suffered from muscle spasms, which was not highly surprising—sitting without any opportunity to stir for four hours and then driving for several hours adversely affected us. It appeared that nobody took into account people with a height of two-metres or higher, and the air transporters show no interest whatsoever in where people of such height will put their feet after squeezing themselves into the narrow seats of a plane. Well, this was just a "lyrical" digression...

On Thursday, November 18, we came to *the Gendarmerie* at 10 a.m. I gave my name and said that I had an appointment for this time. Certainly, I spoke English. The French do not like the English much and try to avoid speaking their language, except for cases when it is absolutely necessary, even if they speak it quite fluently. By 10 o'clock an interpreter from Russian into French came and the conversation-interrogation began. The Inspector immediately stated that the case was under the direct control of the Public prosecutor of the French Republic and asked Alexander to wait for me outside. Alexander asked me to give him a ring when the interrogation was over and returned to the hotel.

The first question I was asked was how did I know that my wife was dead? He was surprised at the fact that I had called our housekeeper and asked her to check whether everything was all right with Svetlana. When Frederic found Svetlana, her body was still warm. It was also warm when the gendarmes arrived at the *Château*, which happened not earlier than two hours after her death, the Inspector said. The fact that I tried to return Svetlana to life, regrettably, with no success for the reasons I mentioned earlier, resulted in the life in the cells of her body continuing to glimmer long enough, but the blood constricted Svetlana's heart and prevented me from starting it up. I did not tell him everything. I just said that I felt that something was wrong and called Frederic.

The conversation-interrogation lasted seven and a half hours! Certainly, the circumstance that we communicated through the interpreter made it that long; nevertheless, seven and a half hours remain seven and a half hours. Many questions were asked about the time, when Svetlana worked as a high-fashion designer.

Few knew that Svetlana was honoured with membership of the so-called Syndicate of High Fashion where she was the only one from any of the former Soviet Union countries! She was nominated as the best designer of the 20th century which created many enemies in the world of high fashion, first of all because she was independent, which many hated. I shall write about that in my autobiographical chronicle. All that became the reason for almost unanimous boycott of her which the owners of Houses of Haute couture organized, mainly because her creative work threatened them with enormous financial losses. The thing is that most designers of "high" fashion are unable to create anything really new, but only copy what people have already forgotten. They call that a collection "inspired" by the work of, for example, Christian Dior, who, by the way, bought the sketches from a designer called Erte, a talented Russian artist of an ancient Russian noble family, whose real name was Roman Petrovich Tyrtoov (Roman de Tirtoff). But this is a story of another day. By the way, Svetlana wanted to write a book about the world of "high fashion" where she would expound her view about it which is far from the glossy image that has been created.

I also told the Inspector that Svetlana worked on books about the Cathars and real Templars, the Great true past of our civilization, including France, and that her death put an end to all that. At the end of the interrogation-conversation he asked my opinion concerning the way Svetlana was murdered. I told him that I knew who killed Svetlana and how, only I did not have proofs. The Inspector nevertheless, asked me to express my version of the events which I did. I told him about the infrasonic weapon and principles of its action. Oddly enough, he did not consider my words a fable or the delirium of a madman, on the contrary, he listened to me very attentively and after we finished he went to report the results to the Public prosecutor.

He was absent for approximately half an hour. When he returned he said that now he would give me Svetlana's passport and telephone and tomorrow morning, despite City hall being closed because of the weekend, he would issue Svetlana's death certificate without which it was impossible to begin the preparations for her funeral. Tomorrow they would remove all the seals from the *Château* and I could enter it. Whereupon he said that despite all above said and the fact that they did not find any traces that belonged to strange persons the investigation of Svetlana's death continued, which means only one thing—her death was not natural and thus he confirmed my version of the events. He handed Svetlana's passport and telephone to me and saw me to the door. He also told me in English about an interesting fact: when I crossed the French border, access to my web-site became denied! Isn't it interesting? First, the officer let me understand that he was familiar with the content of my web-site. Second, he can fluently read English, because I still don't have a French version of the site. And third, somebody had blocked access to my web-site for the French.

I came back to the hotel, where Alexander expected me, and called Frederic to tell her that I could meet Gerard Chartier at 6 p.m. who had been waiting for me since 2 p.m. We came when it was already dark, I apologized to Gerard once again for such a delay, but he perfectly understood that the duration of the conversation-interrogation did not depend on me. Gerard almost does not speak English; therefore Frederic became an interpreter from English into French and vice versa. We were introduced, although we knew a great deal about each other as Svetlana often told me about him. Gerard said that I must re-draw and sign a lot of documents because Svetlana was gone...

Svetlana was gone... My whole self refused to accept it, despite the fact that I saw with my own eyes through Skype her body lying on the floor in the room of our *Château* and the paramedics reading her EKG thirty or forty minutes after their arrival which showed a long straight line. Despite all that my soul did not want to accept the fact that her physical body was dead and I would never hear her sweet-sounding voice, see her amazing smile, hear her silvery laughter and look into her divine eyes... It seemed to me to all be a bad dream and I have but to open my eyes and it will vanish at once and I shall hear a Skype or phone call and my dearest will say to me with her sweet crystal-clear voice: "Wake up, sleepy-head! How long will you sleep!" But my eyes were open and everything that was happening was not a bad dream. It was particularly hard in the morning: when I opened my eyes and still did not realize where I am and what day it is, but then the concrete block of complete awakening falls on me and I understand that it is not a bad dream but cruel reality.

Nevertheless, a hope still glimmered at the very bottom of my heart that all that was an unhappy joke. I constantly had the impression that Svetlana would unexpectedly appear and say: "Hello! Here I am!" My consciousness furiously struggled to accept the fact that someone could bring himself to murder her. But someone could indeed...

My memory brings to light a lot of events and facts about Svetlana: what kind of person she is, what a great heart and soul she has. One day Svetlana called and asked me to contact our friends in San Francisco and tell them that on such-and-such a day their daughter Veronica will drown. It is of interest that our friends were spending their vacation with their children in Hawaii exactly at this time—June 2004 or 2005. Certainly, I conveyed her warning and also put a protective shield on the girl at the insistence of her parents. Certainly, nobody said anything to her about drowning but that day Veronica stayed very much away from water, even the pool. If Svetlana had not warned about the danger, the little girl, most likely, would have drowned. However, Svetlana rescued people not

only with her gift of foresight, thanks to which Veronica and many other people remained alive: very often her gift helped to prevent catastrophes and cataclysms of both planetary scale and much greater during our work on different problems and tasks, but not only them...

In summer, 2005 a small event, on the Universal scale, happened which demonstrated Svetlana's character and selflessness. It had been a long time since Svetlana had called Zita, our St. Bernard dog, and was very worried for her pet. She went to look for her and after a while she found her in our large summer pool where she had fallen and could not get out. The water level in the pool was 70 cm lower than the concrete edge and Zita had no chance of getting out on her own. Zita came to the end of her endurance and she began to drown. Without thinking twice Svetlana jumped into the pool to save her favourite pet.

Zita began to swallow water and, on seeing that, Svetlana undertook a desperate attempt to push her out of the pool. Svetlana could not reach the bottom with her feet at the point where the dog was and Zita was an adult female St. Bernard and weighed quite a lot. Several attempts to push Zita out failed. Every now and then Svetlana's head disappeared under water, but she did not leave Zita and went on trying to push her out of the pool. Finally she made it! I still wonder how on earth she managed to do it. Only then Svetlana, tired and exhausted, allowed herself to get out of the pool, being incredibly happy that she had found Zita in time and saved her—some ten or fifteen minutes more and Zita would have drowned!

This event clearly shows Svetlana's nature, her selflessness. She loved life very much. She loved every single living creature: any tiny blade of grass, any small bush, tree, bird and animal. And she loved people and always treated them with open heart, which in some miraculous way she managed not to harden despite numerous treacheries, although her small and at the same time enormous heart bled every time when people she trusted wounded her with their betrayal, not only when the Dark directed their mortal blows into it. She has always believed (and still does), no matter what, in the best in people, that everybody has a living soul. She just could not act otherwise, but many (not all) to whom she opened her heart and soul deceived her, fearing for their own skin, or for the sake of profit, or because of their envy that they could not be even one percent of what she was! Svetlana never concealed her face or hid behind somebody's back. She knew why she fought and for the sake of what she risked her life almost every day, often several times a day. She was (and is) a Light Warrior in the fullest sense of this word. She is Valkyrie and Dara in one person! (Dara is a Slavonic name meaning a present, gift – *E.L.*)

On Friday morning, November 19, Alexander and I left the hotel where we had to spend two nights. Frederic called and said that the *gendarmes* had removed the seals from the *Château* and now I could enter my own house. On checking out from the hotel, we loaded our things in the car and went there. Frederic opened the gate and for the first time since the end of 1999, when I bought the *Château*, I entered it. This was not at all the way I imagined this moment. I dreamed of arriving in France incognito to surprise Svetlana: arriving at the *Château*, asking Frederic on the quiet to open the gate, driving to the doors, gently entering, and saying loudly: "Hi, here I am!" ... And now I am in the *Château*, but joyful Svetlana does not run to meet me; her sunny smile does not shine on her face; her crystal-clear voice does not sound in the hall... Here are her shoes; her clothes are hanging on the racks. Traces of her presence are everywhere I look. It seems that Svetlana will come out of a room right now, but a moment passes, then another and Svetlana does not show up. No, this was not the way I imagined my appearance in the *Château* after so many years of it being impossible to do that.

Fate presented me a sad "gift"—to enter it when the dearest creature of all is not in the world of the living. Some times the thought flashes through my head: should we maybe have left the Earth when our friends came to fetch us? Then Svetlana would be alive, and we would continue our common cause together! In fact most people want nothing except for filling their stomachs with food and getting "pleasures", as they understand them, and for the sake of that they are ready to be slaves, betray, kill, lie... But I drive that away at once. Svetlana and I remained on Midgard-Earth not on somebody's order or requirement, but of our own free will, because this planet is our home.

And everything we have done was not done for the sake of glory and rewards, but because it is our debt and duty to do everything we can to release this wonderful planet from the power of parasites.

Svetlana has already given her life for that aim, and I shall continue this cause while my heart beats! I do not know how long that may be, *à la guerre comme à la guerre*, but as long as it continues to beat I shall not leave the chosen path, whatever the cost might be! Once Svetlana's Granddad told little Svetlana: "nobody can take honour and human dignity from man, only he can let go of them." It really is so! The slave philosophy, being a social weapon invented by parasites grossly distorted the consciousness of the Ruses and other native people of the Light Rus. It is time we took off the stupefying shroud from people's consciousness: any awoken person who reads Svetlana's and my books inflicts a blow on social parasites, weakens their power and strength and instills ever stronger and stronger fear and panic in them. The parasites are perfectly aware that the earth now begins to rock under their feet and that their parasitizing, sweet for them and bloody for the rest, is coming to an end. Those still asleep are awakening and this is inevitable, despite the parasites' loud yelling that they bring goodness and light to people. However, they do not specify that their "light" is darkness and chaos for all other people which should be either eliminated or turned into slaves! ...

In the second half of Friday I got Svetlana's death certificate and the address of the hospital where her body was. Everything happened as in a bad dream, only there was no way I could wake up from it.

Whilst a child I had "bad dreams", only later I understood that they were real. In them a monster pursued me with but one intention—to get me for its breakfast, dinner or supper, I did not specify what kind of meal I was intended for. So, the monster went hunting and I was the prey. I still remember the acute feeling of danger and the feeling of game ensnared in a trap. And when the monster opened its mouth anticipating a banquet, a precipice opened wide under my feet and I fell into it, screaming and unexpectedly found myself in my own bed sweating all over...

I did not understand then where this precipice suddenly appeared from and why on falling in it, I appeared in my bed or, in my body, as I would say now. Everything seemed strange to me then: monsters that hunted me and the precipice which appeared as if from nowhere. Then I was glad that I did not become somebody's breakfast or dinner. Then everything ended very well, but this time the bad dream continued. I opened my eyes and nothing disappeared, everything happened in reality.

Oh, how I would wish it to be just a bad dream! Regrettably nothing changed because I wished that...

And tomorrow, Saturday, November 20, I will have no illusion regarding Svetlana's death. I will see her body; the body of the dearest creature on Earth who I have not seen for four long years. It will be my first meeting with Svetlana in four years. It was not the kind of meeting with Svetlana I had dreamed about, but I was glad to have at least this. I was afraid that they would not give me a visa and Svetlana would be buried without me and I would not even see her for the last time. So, the next morning Alexander entered the address of the hospital in the city of Tours into the GPS which was located thirty kilometres from our *Château* and we set out on our sad journey...

Thanks to the GPS we could find the hospital very quickly, but came across a small problem. All inscriptions were in French, as they certainly should be, and we were unable to identify where the morgue was. I went to the hospital's waiting room, showed Svetlana's death certificate to a receptionist and when she began to explain me something in French, I said that I spoke English, but she did not.

A nurse who spoke English more or less fluently appeared in fifteen or twenty minutes and explained the way to the morgue. We went down there, rang the bell, I showed the death certificate again and with my gestures explained that I would like to see my wife's body. It took several minutes for them to understand what I wanted. After several minutes more I was invited to a special room where they brought Svetlana's body. It was incredibly painful to see the body of my dearest person lying on a morgue carriage.

It had already been a week since Svetlana was murdered. Her body was cold; the rough traces of the stitches of the autopsy were clearly visible. I felt how the indignation rose in my soul—did they really have to shred her body? I sat down next to it and began to stroke her forehead and hair; she loved so much when I did that. I stroked her hair and spoke to her. I knew that her spirit was near me and she heard my every word. I spoke and kept speaking to her and continued to stroke her hair... This was the way we met for the first time after four long years of living apart...

Her skin was of quite normal colour. It glittered and gradually became warm under my hand. It seemed that Svetlana just slept; if it were not for the total immobility so unusual for a living thing, one might think that she was submerged in a lethargic sleep. However the stitches left no doubt about the reality, despite her healthy skin colour. Even death could not fully kill the life in her. I would gladly die instead of her. I have seen the face of death thousands of times, but how unbearably hard it was to see the lifeless body of the person who was more precious to me than anything else in my life, more precious than my own.

I am not afraid of death. The most frightful thing for me is to see the death of my nearest and dearest. At once I begin to think that I spent too little time with her, did not say as many warm words which could give her additional strength as I should have, that I should have insisted more strongly on carrying out new transformations. When I saw Svetlana's infinitely tired eyes, I felt pity and agreed to wait when she asked me to postpone the work for tomorrow or the weekend when I had a lesser work-load. When I remember all that, I start to blame myself that I did not insist and convince her to carry out the transformation despite her tiredness, then, probably, Svetlana would be alive even after such a blow. So it had happened that the realization of my fundamentally new solution had been postponed for the third week. The anxiety grew in me, and on Friday, November, 12, after the new powerful attacks had begun, I said to Svetlana that tomorrow, no matter what, I would perform the new transformation of her brain which would bring us to an absolutely new level with which the Dark could do nothing... But the transformation was never performed and now I see Svetlana's lifeless body and my soul is torn into billions of pieces of pain...

One person e-mailed me that he was a dark in the past and that he often had to kill people that were dear to him and that the Dark were strong also because they do not have emotions, and that in order to win over them, one has to learn from them to be indifferent to everything. Maybe the Dark indeed are exactly that way, but I am not going learn it from them. Nobody was or is able to feed on my pain, because a long time ago I made all my emotions mortally dangerous for the Dark. If they intend to taste my emotions, a very unpleasant surprise is waiting for them—on getting into a Dark; they would begin to transform him.

In addition to that, I long ago created a "float" system for Svetlana and me, when a change of emotional level automatically changes everything else, so that even very strong emotions do not violate our harmony and balance. Besides, almost nobody ever can see a storm of my emotions. First, to cause such a storm is very difficult, and second, if this happens, it hardly manifests in outward appearance. I hold everything within myself. One of the reasons for that is if I splash out my emotions, it can lead to quite deplorable results, about which I shall not write here and now. However, the ability to control emotions does not mean their absence! I was never an insensitive blockhead, who did not give a damn, and I never will be—a living soul can not be indifferent to the suffering and pain of others. However, the reaction of a living person must not be in lamentations and consolation, but in an active action! Any action is impossible without a keen and passionate heart, only then can you consider yourself Man!

Certainly, it is hard to smile or laugh when your soul suffers. You have to acquire this skill, no matter what, in order that parasites will not be able to rejoice at your grief, and you will be able to continue fighting with them even being in this state, increasing your persistence a thousand times. That is really what you should be able to do in order that enemies can never break your will or force you renounce the cause of all your life.

Two hours flashed like one minute, absolutely unnoticed, and although nobody disturbed me all this time, I understood that I could not sit next to Svetlana forever...

However sad it was, I had to leave. I kissed her beautiful eyes and lips and bade farewell 'til the next meeting. When I left the room with Svetlana's body in it, I asked a hospital attendant about their working hours, more precisely, using a great deal of gestures, I showed that I would like him to write down the working hours of the morgue. They worked seven days a week and visitors were allowed from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., which was the only good news, if I may say that. The point is that on Friday, November 19, I spoke to a funeral parlour employee about the time of Svetlana's body cremation and the date was set at November 24, 2010, at 2 p.m. He also said that on November 24 at 10 a.m. he and his assistant would arrive at the morgue and transfer the body into the coffin; whereupon it would be closed and a police commissioner would seal it up, and the sealed coffin would be cremated.

Thus I had four days for visiting Svetlana. Four days. Fate favoured me with four meetings for four years of our living apart—one day for each year! What irony! The countdown began; the moment when Svetlana's body will be cremated inexorably became closer with every passing day. Alexander and I came to visit Svetlana every day (I don't want to write "to the morgue") and I spent more than two hours with her. Each time I was surprised at the fact that the colour in her face and the state of her skin were quite normal, there were no signs of death whatsoever. And each time the thought flashed through my mind: maybe I should not cremate or bury her body and try to do something to return Svetlana to life, but each time the traces of the autopsy extinguished my last hope of returning life to **this body**.

The work of the pathologist did not leave a single organ unharmed by the scalpel. They even dissected her skull and withdrew her brain. I have no doubt whatsoever that Svetlana's autopsy was not an ordinary one, taking into account the close attention which the authorities paid to the case. They perfectly knew (although, not all of them) who Svetlana was and enjoying their complete immunity and total lack of control, they undoubtedly took samples of her tissues for studying, and most likely her whole brain. The parasites are dying to know how the human brain can do unbelievable things, from their point of view. Their hidebound minds cannot understand that all "magic" abilities are formed on levels inaccessible to the scalpel of a pathologist; nevertheless they continue to look for a black cat in a black room, when in fact the cat has never been there...

One day I paid attention to the fact that ichors continued to ooze from the stitches despite the fact that it was the tenth day after Svetlana's death. Nadezhda Jakovlevna Anshukova, who has worked all her life as a doctor, explained to me that it was an indication of a violent death, because, if a person dies of natural causes, his body produces a lot of adrenalin and the blood quickly coagulates, but if the death was violent and very rapid, then the adrenal glands do not have time to produce adrenalin with all following consequences. So, that fact served as another confirmation that Svetlana was murdered.

Svetlana's skin became healthier, acquiring more colour and elasticity with every day. Certainly, it also happened because every day I spent two hours with Svetlana's body and stroked her forehead and hair. My life-force filled her, and the cells of her body gradually came back to life, but it was out of question that Svetlana herself could come back to life after the autopsy. If I had been beside her, when all that happened, I would have been able to return her to life. It is highly likely that, if I had been beside her, nothing would have happened to her at all or we would have died together. Svetlana always told me that she would never remain alone, without me, not for the world, and her dream was that when the time came, we would be gone together. It happened that only the first part of her wish came true and it was me who remained alone, and we will be unable to leave this world together...

Every day the moment drew nearer when Svetlana's body would disappear in the fire forever, burning the vessel which contained her beautiful and brave spirit. Every bit of my soul stood up against it. Her body was the only thing that was left for me from her in this world. Although I could speak to her spirit, it was not enough for me. I often remembered and still do Svetlana's words that she wanted to see the victory of Light exactly with these eyes and exactly in this body, no matter how imperfect it was, because we came through everything exactly in this body, and exactly in

these imperfect bodies we performed and continue to perform that, in which our spirits could never succeed before (and not only our spirits)...

Wednesday, November 24, when I could have the opportunity to see Svetlana for the last time, inevitably came. Alexander and I arrived at the morgue by 9 a.m., the car from the funeral parlour came later, and the last preparations for the funeral began. I brought Svetlana's clothes and gave them to the morgue workers. In ten or fifteen minutes I was granted the last meeting with her. Svetlana lay in the coffin and this sight looked so desperately unnatural to me, but it was real. A couple of days earlier I had cut off some of Svetlana's hair. Being not sure whether I could do that once again, I asked the funeral parlour employee to do the same thing. Before he closed the lid of the coffin forever, he cut off some of her hair and I asked him to cut off her ponytail fully, which he did, whereupon I arranged her hair so that Svetlana's face was beautifully framed by her wonderful hair even after such a "haircut"... Svetlana's hair...

Several years ago a French hairdresser had given her a very bad hair-do, probably being jealous of her beautiful hair. Later she had to have another hair-cut to repair the damage and her hair became too short. Svetlana asked me then whether I could grow her hair, like Richard did to his beloved Kahlan from Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth* series. I said "why not" and began to work with her hair. Despite continuous stress which does not favour rapid growth at all, but on the contrary often becomes the reason for its shedding, I succeeded in making it grow.

Svetlana's death prevented me from growing her hair the way she had wanted. Nevertheless, I managed to do a lot for that. Ten days prior to her murder, she sat before the web-camera and loosened her wonderful wavy hair. It shimmered in the dim light of a reading-lamp and cascaded down her shoulders and breast. Svetlana said that her hair was already below her waist and continued to grow which surprised even her. She also said that she could finally get it the shape she wanted and then I could continue growing it. And now once again her wonderful hair was cut by a clumsy hand, this time not out of malice...

When Svetlana's body was moved into the coffin, her hands appeared uncovered and I took her right hand which easily yielded. I kissed it and then took her fingers and crossed with mine and pressed them against my face. There was no *rigor mortis* in her fingers whatsoever, they were just cool and remained flexible, as any living person's. Probably, later the church would wish to declare her relics imperishable, but nobody ever will be able to use Svetlana's body for their own ends. She wanted her body burnt after her death according to our ancestors' customs.

Ten minutes later a police commissioner sealed the coffin when the lid was firmly screwed down as she watched and it was transferred to the crematorium. We followed it in our car and entered the coordinates of the funeral parlour into our GPS. The ceremony was to begin in three hours and we decided to come back to the *Château*, where Frederic was waiting for us with the flowers which I asked her to order. December 1 was the day of our wedding anniversary; it was 19 years in 2010 and I asked Frederic to buy 19 lemon and green orchids. Svetlana loved orchids, especially those, with enormous wonderful flowers. Moreover, Svetlana's birthday was on December 15 and I asked to order an enormous bouquet of yellow roses...

Few people attended the farewell ceremony—only those who already knew about her death. I did not inform our friends about the funeral and few gathered in the funeral hall at 2 p.m. I laid all the flowers on Svetlana's coffin, as did others who came to see her off on her last journey. Everything was covered in beautiful flowers. She was a wonderful flower of Life herself and left us surrounded by beauty. The funeral parlour employee intoned the standard speech for such cases as these in French without the slightest knowledge of what an unusual person—a woman-warrior—he saw off with cold official words, but it was not important. The most important was what people who gathered there felt in their hearts, according to their understanding of who Svetlana was.

Everybody sincerely grieved over her. The ceremony lasted about twenty minutes, whereupon the coffin with Svetlana's body slowly went down to the crematorium. We had to remove some of the flowers. I wanted all of them going into the flame together with Svetlana's body, but the orchids were so enormous that they would hinder the functioning of the oven. Only yellow roses—the roses

for her birthday—were left scattered on the coffin. When everything was ready the throat of the oven opened and the coffin with Svetlana's body, surrounded by yellow roses, slowly went into flame. A wonderful flower of Life, which Svetlana was and is, or rather her physical body, was leaving surrounded by beautiful flowers. A minute more and the oven doors closed, cutting that, which quite recently was the body of my dearest, my wife, from the surrounding world forever...

Certainly, it was just a physical body. Everything, who and what Svetlana was, did not burn, but, nevertheless, something elusively special did burn together with this body, something unique, and exclusive. Anyone who attentively read her unfinished book will understand what I mean. Although the killers interrupted the narration on her childhood years, and she was deprived of the chance to tell us all the chronicle of her life, even as a child Svetlana manifested the features of her soul, like selflessness and purity and the character of a warrior, which few succeed in gaining during a whole lifetime. And this was only the beginning of Svetlana's life! How many amazing things about her life we shall never know, because the enemies took this opportunity from her. However, even that information which Svetlana had time to write in her first and now last book impresses both with the surprising depth of thought and content and the amazingly beautiful and rich Russian.

After the funeral we all arrived at the *Château* and honoured the memory of Svetlana. Her favourite orchids and other flowers surrounded her photo in one of the halls. Her photo where Svetlana is full of life and joy decorated with beautiful flowers left nobody indifferent who saw this combination. Usually, the person's photo becomes "empty" after his death. A photo is always connected to the person and when he dies and, therefore, the spirit exits the body, the connection between the photo and the spirit disappears, just as with the physical body. People, who are able to see and feel this kind of thing, can easily detect it. The same way one can tell whether a person is dead or alive and determine his or her location, just having his photo or a personal belonging. So, all Svetlana's photos remained alive after her death. Probably it is related to the fact that I "tied" her spirit to me as she asked, or because Moreover, her presence on the photos does not decrease, but on the contrary, increases.

Svetlana... Svetlana... How many unbelievable abilities and talents were gathered in her! In one of Svetlana's visits to Malta, she was allowed to visit the Maltese presidential library, which was previously the library of the Grand Masters of the Order of Malta, where a lot of unique manuscripts were collected. So, several manuscripts were brought to Svetlana. In half an hour she asked them to bring more. She was looked upon with surprise and asked about the reason for changing her mind about reading exactly these manuscripts. Was she not brought what she had ordered?

Svetlana answered that she was very grateful and those manuscripts were exactly what she needed, but she had already read everything. Her words surprised librarians and, on seeing surprise and bewilderment on their faces, Svetlana asked them to open any manuscript at any page and tell her what paragraph they want her to recite. And when the page and paragraph was indicated, Svetlana reproduced the text from her memory! The librarians' surprise was infinite and when Svetlana asked them to bring more books in thirty or forty minutes, nobody asked the reason for such an unusual request.

I also can convey the essence of the content of a book or letter without opening them, but I never could reproduce word for word from a book or document which I read in similar manner. What I can do is to look through hundreds of pages for several minutes stop exactly at the place of a book which I looked for or I needed, but I could never reproduce the content of the pages which I skipped. It allowed me to work with books very quickly, but what Svetlana could do was something unbelievable. She could return mentally to the time when she looked through the pages quickly, stop at the necessary page and read it at normal speed while the book was not in her hands!

It is almost the same phenomena when she displaced herself into her own past and re-lived what happened to her in her childhood. She did not recall her child's years, like everybody usually does. Thanks to this ability she was able to convey word for word both what happened to her

personally and of what she became a witness. It gave her a happy chance to reproduce the stories of all her childhood heroes, including Radomir and Magdalena, with her inherent unique gift of a talented writer.

When Svetlana and I visited Malta by invitation to the Presidential ball at the end of July–beginning of August, 1997, an unusual event happened there. Dark forces found the way to block highly developed spirits. First, the bearers of alpha-genetics or, as they are called in the Old Testament—strong people—had imposed upon them the idea of celibacy and service to the strange God in military orders, mainly the younger sons of the aristocratic families. Thus the majority of them did not have children and their highly developed spirits were doomed to eternal captivity being bound to their dead bodies. The thing is that the Maltese Knights, dead in wars, or from wounds, illnesses, or natural reasons, were buried in stone crypts or cells where their bodies could not decompose without the access of air and their spirits could not be rid of the dead bodies and became the eternal captives of these stone prisons.

The result of that was the following: thousands of highly evolved spirits were excluded from the circulation process. Therefore, spirits of a considerably lower level of development were incarnated into the alpha-genetics instead of them, which had deplorable consequences: rapid degeneration of alpha-genetics of many people and kin. In addition to that, the most prominent people had their heart and other organs extracted after death and buried separately from the body. Few knew that that happened according to the rituals of the Black Magic–Voodoo, because it was presented to people as a "sacred" church ceremony of providing higher honours to such important people! As a result of such "honours" all carriers of such genetics and their descendants had weak hearts and increased vulnerability in exactly those organs which were eviscerated from their distant ancestor...

There are a lot of churches and cathedrals in Malta where people walked right over the graves of knights of the Maltese order, and the most noble of them had their personal crypts. So, the captivated spirits appealed to me through Svetlana asking to be freed from the most frightful captivity one can imagine, which for many of them lasted for centuries. We picked out one evening and I began to work to free these unfortunate spirits from the captivity of the Dark. It's a pity that few could see the striking sight of thousands of luminous spirits, soaring in the evening Maltese sky over all islands. They slowly went up over the dry land and, on moving away, dissolved in the sky. The unprecedented sense of relief which came from them was almost palpable...

After Svetlana's funeral on November 24 I decided to check the answering machine of the home telephone, because it was precisely this phone that received the call which killed Svetlana. I did not do it earlier, because I was not sure about my reaction to the infrasonic weapon, although I had already had some experience of "interaction" with it, in all senses of this word. I wanted to be sure that I could see Svetlana off on her last journey, and only then could I risk myself. When I was completely alone (to avoid the slightest chance that anyone might suffer accidentally), I began to listen through the record. It contained the earlier messages which Svetlana wanted to keep. She erased my messages which I left during the night from 12th to 13th of November.

There were two or three of my messages which I left on Saturday before 6 p.m. Moscow time or 4 p.m. French time, but all my following messages up to 9.30 p.m. Moscow time were absent. Not once, but exactly after 6 p.m. Moscow time I called her on all phones several times per hour!!! Someone had erased all these messages! The question arises: who erased my messages and why? In fact the *Château* was sealed by *the Gendarmerie*, and nobody could penetrate it, except for the policemen who inspected it investigating the crime. This means that someone among them knew very well how Svetlana was murdered, and his task was to destroy the only material evidence of the murder—the record of the call which killed Svetlana.

But this person did not know exactly what message was fatal, because it was buried among my numerous messages. To search among them for the message which killed Svetlana meant listening to all the messages on the answering machine, and that meant that the listener would be another dead body as soon as he started reproducing **that message!** Undoubtedly, this man did not

want to be dead, therefore he erased not only the message which killed Svetlana but also a dozen of mine without listening! I consider this fact another proof that Svetlana was murdered...

After the funeral I decided to look through the content of Svetlana's computer. I hoped to find the materials she had worked with and did not have time to complete. Svetlana shared her plans for the nearest future with me and told with joy and satisfaction that she could "dig" out the information which would put the next spoke into the parasites' wheel. She asked me to make covers for her future books *The Children of the Sun*, *The Templars* and *DaArya*. We discussed it long enough shortly before her murder and I asked her to think about what she would like to see on them. Svetlana was happy about all that like a child, her eyes lit up and a burning desire appeared in them. For a short while she forgot about the problems which heavily burdened her and the treacherous behaviour of the people who she had trusted and to whom she had opened her heart. Lately I had seen her in such good spirits very rarely. Only, when we worked together solving one or another problem, did Svetlana revive and become herself despite her tiredness because of such enormous loads. Work and her books always made her happy, despite the darkness which surrounded us and which became especially dark after I returned to Russia in 2006.

I shall write about all that in my Bio at length, if I have time, but Svetlana lived in an incessant hell precisely after I returned to my Motherland. Parasites of all stripes went absolutely mad: they had made our life complicated before too, but after my return they attacked us continuously from all possible and impossible levels of reality. I don't remember a single day for the last four years which would pass without attacks from both other levels and the purely earthly one. Very often they were inflicted simultaneously from all levels! And I had to deal with them again and again, and restore the damages in Svetlana and me. But before the "old wounds" could heal, new blows poured down and then new ones ...

But Svetlana did not surrender despite all that being very hard for her and a constant pain in the neck, hers. They failed to break her, no matter how hard they tried. Yes, there were tears in her eyes when those who she trusted betrayed her, tried to deceive and swindle, but she always wiped away tears of vexation, not of weakness, and fought the enemies, like a **warrior**. Svetlana was and is an amazing person, amazing woman. Maybe some day I shall tell you who in fact Svetlana was (and is) there, in Big Space, and what we succeeded in doing in these earthly bodies...

But now it's not the time, and people will not understand that correctly, because all that will be beyond their comprehension, and everything that lies beyond comprehension frightens not only little children, about whom Svetlana wrote in her book but big children too. Only big children, already totally reduced to zombies by parasites, often behave worse than little children. Therefore, that will be the story of another day.

I found it painfully sad to examine Svetlana's computer, because she could never do that herself. I felt as if she disappeared from Life with every minute, with every day. Her bank account was closed; all official papers, taxes, etc. are redirected to my name, because it is impossible to do anything without that in France, even if you wish. Her name disappears from the bills which come to the *Château*. It is very sad to watch all that—there was a person once and now there are no reminders of her. It always happens, but Svetlana is a special case. She left her book, although incomplete, although she did not have time to tell about the most interesting events of her life, but people had the chance to feel the truth in what she wrote with their hearts and souls! And this is what the enemies will never be able to destroy, distort or pervert.

I looked for new materials in Svetlana's computer about which she told me, but which I had not seen; she usually asked me to be the very first reader of the chapters of her book.

The first joy came when I found part of the new chapter of *Revelation*. Svetlana wrote the last lines on November 7, 2010, just a week before her murder. I united it with what Svetlana had sent me before and got quite a good part of the chapter. Although it remains uncompleted, even that little bit, which Svetlana managed to write, fascinates, and it becomes terribly painful because nothing will follow...

The second joy came when I found a big enough part of Svetlana's new book *The Templars*.

Although this book Svetlana could not finish too, even uncompleted, it will be the next "bomb" which will tear off the lies with which parasites covered the good names of Light Warriors which they eliminated and then slandered their very memory. Svetlana managed to find irrefutable proofs that will make all the phrase-mongering on this subject which occupied thousands of pages in thousands books grow dim and fade.

On destroying the real Templars, parasites perverted and distorted the essence of what this organization was. The Templars were the first who understood the strategy and tactics of social parasites and began to create their own financial system as a counter-system to the parasitic one and achieved enormous success. Their financial system turned out to be much more powerful than the parasitic one. On finding out from where the winds blew, the parasites hurried to inflict the blow first, using their obedient slaves—the Pope and greedy, ambitious and mendicant Philip the Fair, the French king, as their instruments. It was exactly the Templars who created the first banks! After they were eliminated, social parasites took advantage of this invention, bringing the parasitic essence into it. Since then the Templars' counter-weapon against parasites became social parasites' faithful servant. Svetlana managed to find a lot of very unexpected and, frankly speaking, sensational things for her book. Although it will remain uncompleted, the material she managed to find and write became her next feat!

Oh, Svetlana! How many things you could give to people! How much truth you could bring to them, passing through yourself all pain and suffering of those, whose names had been cleansed of dirt thanks to you! How many names undeservedly forgotten or deliberately concealed by the parasites you opened up to the people, and how many more you would have opened, if it were not for your mean murder!!! Few know that at the end of May, 2010 the enemies inflicted a very strong blow at your brain, when your short-term memory was almost fully destroyed and several months of your long-term were wiped off, and if I had failed to stop this process, who knows what would have come of it in the end! Few know that while I restored the damage done to your brain, the attacks from all levels continued, but despite that, as soon as your memory was more or less recovered, you rushed to write the penultimate chapter of your *Revelation*!

It was still very hard for you after such damage to displace yourself into the distant past to reproduce the events which have helped (and still do) people to wake up, to feel that they are **people** again, not that faceless mass or sheep, as parasites call them behind their back. You hurried to bring truth to people—the truth which is more frightful than A-bombs or any other weapon, because it opens people's eyes and, on knowing it, they do not allow anyone to make fools of them anymore. This truth resonates with them at the level of genetics, except, certainly, for the geneticists of social parasites which it drives wild and mad, because they begin to understand that they are losing their foothold, while they thought that they had already won totally and irrevocably.

You were afraid of only one thing; that you would be unable to finish you story about Isidora, which also became the story of Radomir, Magdalena and their children! You were prevented from doing so many things! So many magnificent ideas which you nurtured forever remained as such! How many splendid plans which we discussed will never be carried out, because nobody but you could do that! I shall complete some of them, but many, many things will forever remain a maliciously killed dream.

How many remarkable things will forever remain unpronounced by your splendid voice! How many people could be saved by the truth which you were prevented from bringing to them! Everything that you did was for the sake of others, getting in exchange the hatred of enemies and gratitude of friends the number of which constantly grew, as people read your book which gradually appeared on the web-site, chapter by chapter, which now will remain uncompleted forever. Few know that in July, being not quite recovered from that blow and many subsequent ones, you gathered all your strength and helped me to destroy the climate and geophysical weapon on July 20 and 22, 2010, when social parasites wanted, literally, to roast central Russia and destroy several million people. And then the social parasites lackeys yelled from all corners that it was all of natural causes and that the summer of 2010 was hot because the Sun was very "active" which was the

reason for such anomalous heat in Russia!

It is of interest that, for "some" reason, the raging Sun burned out only central Russia, and the rest of the world did not have any idea that our luminary flew into a rage! How we rejoiced, when in a couple of hours after we eliminated this antihuman weapon, large drops of heavy summer showers began to fall onto withered earth and later the sky poured down continuous streams of water! Certainly, it did not happen everywhere at once, but the process started and went on. More summer showers poured down their waters on the earth covered by cracks. And when the geophysical weapon was eliminated on July 22, the anticyclone began to move, breaking predictions of different "specialists" which had promised that it would stay motionless till December.

You continue to fight with parasites even after your death by the mere fact of it. They fear you even after your death, when they see that people perceive and get saturated with your truth which you brought and continue to bring. They were scared about the reaction to your murder and began to publish different interviews with different pseudo-Svetlanas through their lackey-provocateurs, like Mr. Malyshev and Co., and tried to cover your name in mud, insolently falsifying everything they could! But none knew that you will continue to fight them after death. They did not know that you left such a "bomb" which will leave no stone unturned regarding their pitiable attempts to throw mud at you and it will become absolutely clear who in fact Mr. Malyshev and the like are and whom they serve...

My epilogue cannot be endless, but that does not mean that I shall stop telling your story when I put a full stop on this text, not at all! I shall continue to tell about you in my autobiographical chronicle, because our biographies interlaced so closely that they became one and continue to be such...

Nicolai Levashov

January 13, 2011

P.S. Svetlana and I also spoke about her last chapter of the first volume of *Revelation* where she was going to finish Isidora's story. Unfortunately, Svetlana could not write it down, but I shall convey the final lines about the fate of this outstanding woman in my own words. I ask you not to judge me too severely, I cannot write like Svetlana:

... The day of Isidora's execution came. Caraffa did not give the order to torture her, because he was afraid of losing all his obedient butchers. Besides, he needed to get Isidora to give him the secret of physical immortality, and broken bones and a disfigured body would not be helpful in this matter, especially taking into account Madonna's character. Caraffa understood that if he was not able to break her by torturing and killing all her family, there was no sense in torturing Isidora herself. He was no fool and thought that only the threat of death could force her to fulfill his demand. He, like many others, measured all by his own yardstick – it is one thing to watch others die and quite another to burn in the fire of the Inquisition himself...

The day was sunny. The sunrays tenderly touched Isidora's face, whispering to her: "... you should not be afraid of us". Birds twittered, passing the sad news of the forthcoming execution to each other; the grass whispered to all about it too. A puff of breeze touched Isidora's wonderful hair, blowing her locks about creating an impression that they were alive and shone from within. Isidora looked incredibly beautiful in the sunrays. It seemed that she was filled with light.

She was carried to the place of her execution in an open wagon. Many gapers gathered on the square, but there were none among those, that came to watch how an "allforgiving" church would burn a person in the name of God, who would throw a stone, rotten vegetables, or fruit at Isidora. Her beautiful face and her luminiferous appearance at once extinguished any desire to bait a woman sentenced to burn alive in any fancier of similar "entertainments".

Caraffa watched the preparations. The hope that in the last moment Isidora would surrender

and reveal the secret of eternal life still glimmered in his devilish mind. Meanwhile Isidora was tied to the post, and everything was ready for the execution. The executioners waited for his signal to begin. The crowd behaved very strangely. There were no screams and mockery which so often accompanied similar spectacles. Complete silence reigned over the square. Even being tied to the post, Isidora remained majestic and beautiful. There was no fear in her eyes, only universal sadness.

Her whole mien, her proudly lifted head could not leave anybody indifferent. Shy screams were heard at first: "Mercy on her! What is her guilt?!" And soon the crowd exploded with screams, demanding the execution be cancelled. Caraffa waited for exactly this moment to undertake the last attempt to get his desire – the secret of immortality.

He came to Isidora and said in a low voice:

– See, Madonna, even the crowd does not wish to see you seized with flame... Let us make all of them happy, Madonna. The crowd will be happy about saving you from the fire, rejoice at realizing that they overcame their fear of the holy Inquisition and be awfully proud of the victory. I will get immortality and be happy too! You, Madonna, will be alive and nobody could reproach you for treachery or cowardice. All will think that you were freed by the crowd... So decide, Madonna, I cannot wait an eternity, the torches of the executioners are already lit, and you need to hurry with your answer. I've shown too much patience and waited for your decision too long...

Isidora looked into his eyes and smiled. And this smile said everything to Caraffa. He understood that Isidora would never give him the secret of immortality. He disappointedly waved his hand and stepped back from her...

– The one sentenced to burn does not wish to repent of her sins, and I have to give the order to begin the execution, no matter how sorry I am to do that, – Caraffa said, addressing the crowd, and then again waved his hand...

Obedient to his will executioners brought the torches to the straw, and soon the first tongues of flame appeared. Dry firewood kindled very quickly, and the light wind which quite recently caressed Isidora's hair now blew up the fatal flame. Isidora had always adored watching the lively flames in her fire-place, when the merry tongues enthusiastically pounced on the fresh log. And now these tongues of flame slowly approached her and, with the same enthusiasm, were ready to convert her body into ashes...

Isidora was not afraid of death. She was ready for it a long time ago. More precisely, she was not dying for the first time. She died every time when her father was executed, her beloved husband was killed and her dear wonderful girl was burnt. She died every time when the devil in papal clothing killed hundreds and thousands of gifted people; therefore her own life was important to her only while she could fight this monster. It's a pity that the only thing he achieved was to watch her withstand the most frightful thing, the execution of her family, without breaking.

There was only one thing which Isidora regretted in this moment, that being her failure to destroy this monster in human guise. His protective field remained impenetrable despite her numerous attempts. Meantime the flame reached her feet, her clothes began to smoulder, a bit more – and she will turn into a blazing torch. Isidora was not going to wait for this moment. She concentrated on her heart and with the force of her thought made it contract ever more rarely and finally it twitched for the last time and stopped forever.

Isidora quickly and easily left her body and watched from the outside how the avid flame devoured the vessel of life, which she had just abandoned. Isidora was not willing to wait for the moment when her body would burn completely. She looked at her enemy. Caraffa vexedly watched how his hope to become immortal burned in the fire. He had failed to break this woman after all. His face grew lean and became old. This was how Isidora saw him outside her body... and on seeing this; she finally understood how Caraffa's protection was arranged.

His protective structures were built on the magic of the dead, and Isidora was able to see that only on leaving her body. Why could not she understand it before! Indeed the Dark ones think in an

absolutely different way. But now she knew and did not linger! She had more than enough force as her burning body was splashing out its vital force. Isidora quickly began to untwine the patterns of Caraffa's previously impenetrable protective shield and soon it disappeared without a trace; the moment of truth and justice came. Isidora never thought that it would happen after her death, but the most important thing here was that she at last got a chance to stop this Pope-monster. She gathered all her pain and sorrow about the gifted ones, who Caraffa had killed, and inflicted the blow... Isidora put all her unspent love of a mother, wife and daughter, all her unspent faith in light into the blow and splashed it out on this enemy. Unexpectedly for everybody Caraffa suddenly clasped his head in his hands, fell down and began to writhe in pain like a snake, continuing to hold his head, as if somebody was trying to tear it off. At the same time he emitted an inhuman howl which gradually died out, just as did Caraffa.

Dead silence reigned in the square where Isidora's body continued to burn. At first nobody understood anything. Not everybody saw at once that the hated by all Pope was truly dead, but when they finally understood what had happened, the crowd exploded with screams, cursing the Pope. Nobody feared him dead. Someone yelled to go raid the Papal palace and the crowd gushed there. It looked like a mudstone stream which converted everything into chaos on its way. Isidora saw how the crowd swept away the guards of the palace and threw itself into smashing not only the busts of Popes but also the precious works of art.

With deep sadness Isidora looked at how the most valuable and unique library collected by Caraffa was destroyed by the crowd in a split second. People threw priceless manuscripts and books into the fire, tore them to pieces and trampled some with their feet with animal joy. She saw how the accumulated fear of the Pope-despot vented itself on unique masterpieces. She saw people shoving everything more or less valuable into their pockets, not understanding that what they had destroyed was exactly the most valuable of what was in the Papal palace – manuscripts, books, pictures...

Watching all of it, Isidora understood why Sever told her that people are not ready yet and that the time had not come yet. But at the same time she understood in what Sever and others were not right! If we just wait for people to be ready, it will never happen! This was the major error of the Light ones. On understanding that, she felt infinitely sad. The Dark ones won, because they never waited for a right time. They acted in any circumstances and until the Light Forces understand this simple truth, the Dark will always win.

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