

An impressionistic oil painting of a coastal scene. The sky is filled with thick, textured brushstrokes in shades of blue, grey, and white, suggesting a cloudy day. Below the sky, a dark, rocky shoreline stretches across the middle ground, with waves crashing against the rocks. The foreground shows the calm, greyish-blue water of the sea, with some darker patches of rock visible beneath the surface. The overall style is painterly and atmospheric.

Anna Efimenko

# 125 RUS

The Far East novel

Anna Efimenko

**125 RUS. The Far East novel**

«Издательские решения»

**Efimenko A.**

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A man with a mythical name and sealed lips goes into the unknown. Mystery of Primorye penetrates into him through A — Airport and a voice from a voice recorder, B — Bagulnik flowers and Bays with the ancient Chinese names; C — the city of Vladivostok surrounded by the ocean, where one can sometimes get lost on edge of reality and fiction, as if in an inaccurate reflection of sea water... Will we find out what really happened? Can we dare to get to the last letter of the alphabet?

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# 125 RUS

## The Far East novel

**Anna Efimenko**

*Translator* Olga Simpson

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*Like a driven wave,  
Dashed by fierce winds on a rock,  
So am I: alone  
And crushed upon the shore,  
Remembering what has been.*

*Minamoto no Shigeuki (1<sup>st</sup> century AD)*

## Prologue

My father threw me out of home in early June, at the beginning of summer.

Does a person with a clear and well spoken voice sounding like a devastating thunderstorm have any advantages of a man being mute from birth but not deaf? He certainly does, and this advantage is highly consequential. Time and time again, I kept coming to such a conclusion during my life, not long enough and quite uneventful. Making a start on events described in the book, the episode is further proof of that.

Having returned from my walk (I liked to take a walk with Marina every night in the local park), I found my father drunk and overly talkative. No wonder, this combination often ended up with controversy, bad arguments, and aggravation of conflicts, being sanded-down and trampled within time. In our case, the arguments usually quickly slowed down, as directing all his energy to his verbal apparatus, the father expelled saliva, made jokes, becoming sarcastic, while masterly inventing new denouncements. In turn, I shook my head or nodded depending on the situation, and made violent gestures. Not receiving any reprisal from me would only be a reflection of his aggression being voiced upon me, my father used to shrug his shoulders, spitting out, “Phooey on you!” and then disappear to the kitchen, where he had wine and read thick books half the night. In the morning, I often found him asleep on David Chandler or Horace Vernet’s endpapers with an empty bottle of Chardonnay nearby.

On such days, I took the keys to his car and drove away to the quarry with Marina or somewhere else further on, such as the lakes. There, we made bonfires and jumped through them, waving savagely with our hands, feeling something akin to pagan ecstasy. I brought photocopied sheets with fragments of my favorite poetry, so that Marina could chant them to me. She kept reading Eugene Onegin and Childe Harold to me a thousand times. The image of a romantic hero, disappointed and lonely, leaving his native land and going far away to meet new unknown horizons, somewhere to the east, to exotic countries, had always been very close to me, and Marina called this an incomplete phase of childish outburst.

By and large, I agreed with her, because age and the course of life slowly but surely thinned off the whole spiky nihilism of the brave young protesters, rolled the sharp corners of their characters smoothly, leaving no chances, but even any desire keep holding their own line, the one which had been already bent and curved in the past. Nevertheless, I have always sincerely admired people who live with an idea, as well as music, and other arts – honest people, targeted to their destiny. I was really fascinated by the French students in 1968 or those who chained themselves to the Pentagon in protest against the Vietnam War (Just listen: “Protest opposing...” these two words speak for themselves). Unfortunately, I got information about the majority of such examples only from print publications, chronicles or TV, I never watched it personally. However, deep inside, I always hoped, if not being on barricades, but at least to raise my collar with thunderous brows and, hobbling like someone you know who, get away somewhere *for good*.

The chance to do this fell upon me on that ill-fated night when in the midst of another heated argument my father uttered suddenly giving me his scathing look, “Get the hell out of here by tomorrow! Of course, I won’t kick you out tonight, Ajax, but be gone by tomorrow.” Looking about the room, the population and comfort of which was created by a rack with discs, pots with cactuses and my father who hated me, I’d got some flash in my mind that could only happen in dime novels, “All right, here’s for nothing. At least for me. As they used to sing in an ad when I was a child, *Once in a lifetime kind of thing*.”

So, I put a pile of credit cards with different balance accounts into my wallet and a bundle of banknotes which had been put aside for buying my own car and our shared living together with Marina in future, then I started packing my suitcase. Looking at all this, father snickered, switched



on a music player and left to the kitchen with utter disregard. Wasting a good half-hour with a broken suitcase zip, I got the second flash on my mind, this time it wasn't worth a novelette, but a comedy movie. Half of my clothes (I should note, the best half) was spinning and spinning in the drum of the washing machine while I was having arguments with my father. They were absolutely unsuitable to be piled in such a dried condition. Then I started to lose my temper.

Dumping my wet belongings mixed with normal ones, not forgetting about the precious records, pages from books copied by hand for the sweet memory, three notepads (one to be kept into a breast pocket, together with a pen), personal cleansing and two pairs of glasses (sunscreen and with dioptrs), I forcefully zipped the mischievous zip, lifted the collar of my cloak up by sharp movement, gave a cold-hearted look to the bloody house and headed out of this place.

Hardly had I a cigarette outside, when a taxi arrived to pick me up right away, of which I was quite happy about, it was simply that I didn't expect such a quick response in the middle of the night. I was about to write Marina's address in the notepad, as something (I called it Providence later) stopped my lean hand. A teen idol was offering to win the prize, continued to pour from the blue screens somewhere at the back of my mind, "Once in a lifetime kind of thing." I remembered while being a schoolboy I read a lot about the Second World War, and my late grandfather sent me a map of the place where he lived all his life: there was a war with Japan, there was the Hasan battle... On the back side of the map there was a globe, dotted with a grid of meridians and parallels, and a scenic airliner flying around it. Under the simple drawing there was a darkened inscription, "Welcome to our region!" At this point, I stopped thinking as if there was the beginning of the white film on the audio cassette – the right signal that the tape recorder would stop playing itself soon. This side of the recording was over. This side ended.

I dropped my pen, rummaged impatiently along the rubber car mat and as soon as I found my writing device again, I could write only one-word "Airport" and placed the notepad before the taxi driver (who had already started whistling impatiently). He gave me a price, I nodded, and we drove off.

The second surprise for the evening after my father's weird behaviour was the cost of air tickets. It was so expensive that it seemed reasonable to me to save money buying a one-way ticket. True, inadequate ideas often come to my head, but fortunately, I have no regrets, and the above action is not an exception. While waiting for flight check-in, I tried to contact Marina to be able to write a message to her when I would hear the beeps. However, her phone was turned off, which is quite normal for a person who gets up for work at six in the morning. I had my poor luggage registered and was figuring out what kind of mildew the hidden clothes would cover after many hours in the air being put in the bowers.

When the flight was announced, coming to the security lane, I suddenly looked back and thought about something which was very typical for such a situation, "Am I doing the right thing? What awaits me in a completely unknown land? What will I gain there and what will I lose here?"

But there was nothing for me to lose, my whole former existence, if it had any value, would not slip like a sand into a gigantic immense place without leaving any single meaningful memory. Coming on board the ship, nineteen-year-old Harold didn't torment himself with doubts, didn't analyze and didn't go for doubting anything. He had always been my favorite hero, and I never missed a chance being like him once again.

Well, today, in general, it was possible to arrange a tribute concert with my participation, so successfully I fit into all Byronic stencils:

*Apart he stalked in joyless reverie,*

*And from his native land resolved to go,*

*And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;*

*With pleasure drugged, he almost longed for woe,*

*And e'en for change of scene would seek the shades below.<sup>1</sup>*

I straitened my shoulders proudly and moved forward, deliberately laming on one leg. A great many of people call their alter ego for help at critical moments: a certain confident, strong personality, which, it seems to them, is able to cope with unexpected problems. So, I stepped aboard a mighty airship! The next chair was occupied by a girl whose behavior promised me a perfectly quiet flight before the takeoff. She put some eye drops into her weary aqua blue eyes, put her headphones on, and wrapped herself in a blanket. I was on the phone with Marina at the last moment, «Flying off to Vladivostok. I'm going to text you later with more details when I have a chance.» A few moments later, a female voice with a metallic sound asked all passengers over the loudspeaker to turn off their electronic and radio devices. And in ten minutes, it was all over.

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<sup>1</sup> CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE by Lord Byron. CANTO THE FIRST.



## Chapter 1

### A – Airport

*“Vladivostok” is an international airport located 44 km from the city of Vladivostok, which is connected by road and passenger rail services to the airport station 6 km from the airport. There are a number of direct international flights to Seoul, Beijing, Dalian, Harbin, Osaka, Niigata, Toyama, as well as several seasonal international charter flights, mainly to China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. It operates inland daily flights to Moscow, Khabarovsk, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. There are flights to St. Petersburg, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg and other Russian cities. There are two passenger terminals and one cargo terminal at the airport. There are also two airfields: “Knevichi” designed for local and long-distance airlines as well as “Lake springs” for local airlines.*

*(Source: ru.wikipedia.org)*

I arrived in the Primorsky Krai at four o'clock in the afternoon. My plane landed at Knevichi airport, designated strangely enough as the air gates of the main city of the region (though you could read the huge letters on the terminal building saying, “Vladivostok Airport”). Not far from here, at a distance of five kilometers, there is a small town called Artem. Miners used to live there, and the settlement was established thanks to the coal extraction, even the three jimmies are depicted lightened by the cheerful sun on the coat of arms. While two main enterprises being developed, aviators and energy men had become the majority of Artem.

During the flight I was reading a book, given to my father by my grandfather Henry. The book was titled “Civil Aviation of Primorye. Over the centuries.” It contained interesting destinations listed, or to make it sound better “air links”: Sidatun, Laulu, Terney... Most of them are Chinese names. During politically sensitive years, they were given rather down-to-earth Russian names, like, for example, the village of Melnichnoye. However, Terney kept its beautiful and proud name as a reminder of the French mark in the history of Primorsky Krai.

*“Passenger flights Moscow-Vladivostok have been carried out on the Il-12 aircraft since 1948”.*<sup>2</sup> I don't have the imagination to feel what it's like to overcome such vast distances being on such a tiny aircraft by today's standards. But the back side of the mirror exists – people of the post-war era couldn't overcome major distances on such a huge aircraft as the one that had just taken me to Primorye.

I twisted my neck trying to see the local landscape through the blindness of the window. I saw a bluish mountain range, spreading along the horizon as far as the eye could see when I left the aircraft and walked into the world. “It should be Sikhote-Alin<sup>3</sup>”, I was full of childish rosy cheerful enthusiasm and continued glancing to the ridge of fells, reminding me of the Wizard of Oz and the Emerald City. The fells is a combination of sharp mountains and sloping hills. The definition “sopka” (fell) is a password to the Far Eastern diaspora for the West.

Receiving my luggage, I found myself on the terminal square and decided to ask around how to get to Artem that was supposedly nearby. In the parking, a lot of bored taxi drivers immediately expressed their desire to take me even to the end of the world for the right fee. But my gestured requests to take me to Artem were flatly refused. “Artem?, it is not far from here and unprofitable for us”. However, there was another man who could understand me as I fiddled with my map. At first, he advised me to wait for a bus number seven, but I did not have a desire to study the local flavor in public

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<sup>2</sup> Civil Aviation of Primorye. Over the centuries. Jubilee edition.

<sup>3</sup> Sikhote-Alin is a series of mountains of volcanic origin in the Far East of Russia. It is a water divide for the Amur River, as well as for Sea of Japan and Strait of Tartary.

transport. That was the reason I place myself in a taxi and hastily scribbled in a notepad: “I would like to have a look of Artem and listen to your story about it”. The taxi driver nodded being slightly lost.

In the next five minutes, after a short trip along the highway with tired fields stretched around, bloodlessly embraced by the same fells, we ended up in the town.

Artem was planned as a city on flat land, which provided suitable conditions for an airport to be constructed, the runway, in particular. It’s about twenty kilometers to the seaside – quite far away by local standards, considering that the city of Vladivostok is surrounded by the sea almost everywhere.

My newly-minted guide was not interested in whether it was my first time here: that answer was obvious. The man showed me a couple of main attractions of the city from his driving seat: A road-header, installed on the pedestal as a symbol of miners labor and a Fighter Yak-38 placed forever in Aviator Park, the monument to the aviator’s feat. The majority of residential areas had five-story buildings. Near the city, there were mines. So five floors were the maximum permissible standard for a building.

In the town there was also a bus terminal, behind it, there were rows of dusty green private houses, gradually turning into small villages with nice names such as “Krolevtzy” and “Knevitchi” already mentioned. The sky was cloudless. The sun, a heater, gaining momentum. Having dropped me at the bus terminal, the taxi driver summarized the purpose of my trip with the wording, “Craving for new impressions, change of pattern.”

Was I hungry for a new experience? Definitely, if they suppressed at least for a moment and covered this uneventful and squalid emptiness, which I ran away from to another end of the world. Oh, Primorye, be my life-giving water, become a potion that cures any ailments.

I remember, there was an Italian fairy tale called «Happy Man’s Shirt». The plot: the king’s son plunged himself into black melancholy, and only a certain shirt could save him. The final is open: Having finally found a completely happy man in the wilderness, the king and his servants, who wanted to save the prince at any cost, were extremely disappointed – there was no shirt on the lucky man. But let’s imagine that the king got what he wanted and the prince recovered. What does this mean? A worthy successor to the throne, a prosperous state. The prince will be busy with the country’s affairs, and will enjoy himself as befits the monarchs to somehow relieve tension: balls, hunting, horseback riding. No painful thoughts alone, everyone is happy. The question is whether he really needs it? Whether he was more ambitious, he would pretend that he cared about worldly affairs just like his royal forefathers. Had he been bolder, he would have built himself a hut in the forest and led a hermit’s life. The prince was quite comfortable in his palace apartments, staring at the open window mournfully and not letting anyone in. He had no other wishes, as it could be seen from the fairy tale. Buddhist postulate has always seemed controversial to me stating that any desire causes suffering and that, if we get rid of desires, we directly get rid of suffering. What to do if there are no desires, but nevertheless, suffering is present (see the story about the poor prince)?

I have no craving for adventure, impressions. I just can’t stand the monotonous continuation. Too hastily, as it seemed, having left my former routine existence, I hoped most (and still hoping) to find my way to be right. Because for the past ten years I can’t remember a day when everything would be really good. Cloudless. Who was there crying heart out, looking at the clouds? It seems it’s Virginia Woolf – a great episode, very close.

If the phrase “it makes me sick to my stomach” could be applied not only to indicate sickness, I would say so about the clouds. I am still reeling and cringing at the sight of people scurrying back and forth, their petty worries and this eternal good heaven, a gigantic dome sheltering us from the evil blackness, from the cosmic abysses. No, I do not need either life-giving water of Primorie, or a happy shirt, if after that I stop thinking about the noble sky by accumulating the bourgeois Zufriedenheit<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> “Contentment, satisfaction” (German).

I wrote in German because the adjective “bourgeois” is always looking for its twin brother – the adjective “philistine”. So, remembering Mrs. Dalloway by Woolf I immediately remembered Steppenwolf. Hello, Hesse.

The bus was about to arrive and take me to the capital of the Primorye Region, where I would be able to lie down on a comfortable hotel bed, and also find out what degree of oxidation and decay the contents of my suitcase had undergone. Then I would plan to find out the address of the nearest dry-cleaners immediately.

## Chapter 2

### B – Bagulnik

*Rhododendron Mucronulatum is a shrub with elliptic-lanceolate [people call it Bagulnik — note made by me, Ajax] It is considered to be the most decorative and the most powerful species in this group. In the wildness, old specimens reach 3—5 meters (with a stem thickness up to 10 cm), and grows to 2.5 meters when cultivated. It has purple flowers and relatively large leaves (5—7 cm long, 3—4 cm wide), which mostly fall in the winter – only rare leaves stay on the plant bordering the buds on the top of one-year shoots. This species is more demanding for soil moisture during its period of growth and is resistant to winter periods (it grows well even in the south of Primorye, where cold, snow less and dry winters are common).*

*Rhododendron Dahuricum is extremely winter-resistant with an abundance of flowers, a half evergreen deciduous shrub (part of the leaves overwinter). Its size impressive in adulthood: 2—2.5 m in height and about 3 m in diameter. This is a relatively drought-resistant and photophilous species; Rhododendron Dahuricum blossoms are less lavish if there is not enough lighting. Its heavily branched canopy is decorated with large funnel-shaped flowers of lilac-pink-violet shades.*

*Rhododendrons bring joy to people and call them to be committed to good, because these plants are Divine. Long ago, when God left the sinful Eden to Heaven, He wanted to take away all the beauty of the Earth from people. But His Love for people and Hope overcame a just anger: God left people these divine plants – rhododendrons. But they do not grow everywhere, only in hard-to-reach places – such as high mountains and gorges, on seaside cliffs and scree, at glaciers and waterfalls.*

*(Source: “Rhododendrons of Primorye”,  
an article by N. Ya. Reznitsky)*

I'm on the bus, which should take me to Vladivostok but for some unknown reason there is a sign “The Second River”. Everything has a double name here that refers to the airports and the destinations. Judging by the map, the road runs along the Sea of Japan, but I can't see it, only the eternal fells are visible from the windows. Now and again bright purple specks flash on the fells. This is Bagulnik. That's how the special species of the rhododendron is incorrectly called here.

Within two seats in front of me, a ruddy-faced old woman is carrying a few stems strewn with dark purple flowers in a basket. This plant grows on the slopes, and I heard that you often see them in cemeteries (Is it because there are graveyards on the slopes, and everything is generally located on the slopes?). The purple ribbon winds its way down the slopes, it's getting dark, where it's about to become night and when the mist cheats by swirling mysteriously. A sign could be seen displaying directions to the Garden City – Bagulnik Garden City?

Leaning against the glass, it seems as if someone else's distant memories can be heard through the items: the hum of an electric train, a water pump on Sedanka (just remember another Chinese name), rusty boats and maple leaves that have fallen too early... Never seen them before, but it might be that someone has been recently leaning against this bus window?

The air gets fresher at night with each passing minute, and fresher beside the sea with every kilometer traveled. I can't stand the twilight, my eyesight gets worse, it becomes inconvenient to write. But everyone is entitled to their own views. For me, the evening sun is heavier than the lead, and it lies down with golden pollen on the delicate flowers of Bagulnik with warm «Good night, I will warm you again tomorrow». And they regally fall asleep, not looking down, where it is scary and dark and where the roots and foothills are covered with mist.

How desperately I would like to write something worthwhile, but instead, having thrown one stiff foot to the other, twisting the pen with my fingers, I bent down focused over my empty multi letters...

Just a detail: the closer to Vladivostok, the landscape becomes hillier and the colors of the forest become brighter. At the bus stops, the walls are decorated with mosaics with marine fauna images: seahorses, octopuses for example. Two lanes of the road from Artem becomes four, and eventually six as we approach the big city; a wide six lane highway, crowded with white and silver cars.

Well, looks like I arrived to a big city. In the middle of the roadway, there is a pompous coat of arms, and the drawn tiger welcomes the guests. Of course, it doesn't look like a «welcome» but growls somewhere else. The heraldic King of the Taiga looks down so regally, of whom I imagine the tiger being a hospitable host who meets the newly arrived, yet a formidable defender who promises rapacious punishment to those who come to Vladivostok with evil intentions...

There are two stone walls right next to the road with a height of a house, no less. The first wall is dedicated to the forest, or the taiga to be more precisely. It is carved with acorns, sultana, tiger (you can't do without it) and ginseng. The next wall is longer than the previous one, it starts and ends with anchors, and there are jellyfish, starfish, mermaid and Neptune (or Poseidon – for those who prefer Greece like me) displayed in the center.

The Second River is just a name of another bus terminal, which was kindly explained to me. To get to the center, I would have needed to take a city bus. But I would rather pay more to Artem the taxi driver, as he had already taken this far anyway, and besides, he could tell me all sorts of different things. As they say, a miser pays twice. To get from the airport to the hotel you need to change three times. In three stages (I hope that only in three!).

The Second River is a landmark. Here, Osip Mandelstam died of exhaustion in 1938. What I have printed out from the site dedicated to Mandelstam, being at home: *“At the end of 1929 in Primorye, the branches of the Far Eastern camp (Dallag, later called Vladlag) and the transit camp The Second River (Vladivostok) were organized, from where the prisoners were brought to Kolyma on the steamships to the North-Eastern camp. The prisoners of Dallag and Vladlag worked in Vladivostok for construction and loading works in Nikolsk-Ussuriysk and Spassk-Dalniy, they extracted gold on the island of Askold, coal in Suchan and Artem, harvested forests in the taiga and went fishing along the entire coast of Primorye. By 1937 the number of prisoners here reached 70 thousand people.”*<sup>5</sup>

I also won't get lazy to rewrite an even more unpleasant and mysterious passage: *“In the bus terminal area (at the Second River) in the 1930s there was a camp – a transit point for prisoners. This camp was located virtually on the marshland, where it is said that during the construction of the Bus Terminal they constantly ran into mass graves of corpses. Not surprisingly, no one builds residential buildings on this flat area! But they have constructed a parking lot, a market and a supermarket. The House of Youth nearby (which, they say, not so long ago was on fire)”*<sup>6</sup>. The great poet of the Silver Age perished from hunger in the local camp. Another version of the cause of his death was due to an epidemic of typhus.

I have heard, that flowers of Bagulnik along with carnations are often placed in cemeteries. Nobody knows where the grave of Mandelstam or the other prisoners are. In the plural, in the infinite plural.

Well, I will keep trying to get to the center of Vladivostok. Walk around wherever I like. Marina and I talked a lot about the tremendous use of loneliness for a creative and sensitive person. In the end, I had a lot of money with me and the most important set of necessities:

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pseudology.org/Mandelstam/Memuars/Monument.htm>

<sup>6</sup> see *ibid.*

*My grief – prophetic, pertinent,*

*My freedom – quieted and distant,*

*And ever-laughing, mocking crystal —*

*A numb and lifeless firmament.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Collection of poems by Osip E. Mandelstam. Translated by Andrey Kneller.

## Chapter 3

### C – City of Vladivostok

*Vladivostok (founded in 1860) is a city and port in the Far East of Russia, the administrative center of Primorsky Krai, the final destination of the Trans-Siberian Railway. It is located on the coast of the Sea of Japan on the Muravyov-Amursky Peninsula.*

*(Source: telephone directory)*

...The salt on my cheeks, the wind in the disheveled blackness of my hair, the ultramarine disease corrodes my eyes to the very bottom, to the core of the eyeball, and I enjoy every sigh, every slow glance, every step up and down, through countless staircases, climbs and descents of this city. A Panoramic view of the Golden Horn Bay from Eagle's Nest Hill – I have never seen in my life such beauty before. From a great height, you contemplate the majestic bridges, and the sea surrounding the city, or, conversely, the city that surrounds the sea. Little bit more, and you can spread wings (or gills – they have the chance to be drawn around the neck because of the tropical humidity), drive off mountainous, angular land, steep asphalt curls, winding streets and fly forward, up high, to all four corners of the earth, because the ocean extends only here in all directions. Not warm turquoise, covered in white sand, but a real ocean, wild and untamed, thick, iodous and calcareous, spitting out the curls of seaweeds, which the coastal wind gathers into balls like a tumbleweed.

Military ships are always proudly alert with a sullen look facing the distant shores, ready to face an enemy at any time. They defend our lands in the East. In the East, the sun rises – appearing from the ocean abyss like a red-hot five-rouble coin, a gold medallion, a fireball. Own the East ('Vladey-Vostokom')! A cannon shot is strictly on schedule every midday; military and merchant ships are large and small, different ships being on a raid; Vladivostok was a closed city from 1953 till 1991, only USSR citizens could live there and visit it.

From time immemorial, Vladivostok is called «Haishenwey» in Chinese which means the city at Cape of Tre pang or Tre pang Bay. Since ancient times there is a legend about the blessed blue tre pang that inhabits these waters (people call it sometimes 'sea cucumber'). The Japanese were less poetic – during the Meiji period (1868—1912) they tagged Vladivostok existed in those times Uradzio which meant the salty bay.

I stopped at a hotel near the Sport Embankment, in a room with the Amur Bay view. Ninety percent of the guests are either Chinese, Japanese or Korean. There is a corner with a microwave and a large thermos on nearly every floor as an extra convenience: So, to save money, you don't need to have a meal at a restaurant every day. When I went down to brew a cup of freeze-dried noodles, a Japanese said to me, "Konnichiwa"<sup>8</sup>, which I answered back with formal and polite bow. The language barrier, which in my case becomes a barrier in the literal sense, because my mouth has not uttered a sound for all my life, has not allowed to get acquainted with Asians. Instead, I made friends with a local barman named Sergei. He is about my age, working shifts on the ground floor, where a porcelain white cat flaunts itself on a bar counter, screwing up its eyes and squeezing a fake bottle of Asahi with its paw – Seryoga calls it a 'beer kitten'. My communication with the barman began, as expected, from a sheet of paper on which I wrote the name of the desired drink, and then he smoothly flowed into his story about the latest news in the city at Cape of Tre pang, as well as endless monologues about cars. Practically everyone here has Japanese cars with a right-hand drive, most of them are white. This combination of sparkling white cars, marine, and blue sky, coupled with tightly whitened snow-white clouds, seems very harmonious. So, walking along the Ocean Avenue

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<sup>8</sup> "Hello" (Japanese).



you suddenly realize that the traffic jam on the road is moving only in two directions: to the sea or in the sky. Well, I fancy both directions, which means that this is my city. And I shouldn't have to waste time in getting my own car (a lifelong dream is finally taking shape).

To the unpleasant: the adventures of my such and such washed belongings did not end. They continue, but, alas, already without me here. As I accidentally took someone else's suitcase, which was an absolute copy of mine. As soon as I began unzipping such an unusually pliable zip, I already felt something was wrong, but when I found the knots and skeins of leather and jeans items of microscopic size inside, I realized that the luggage was my curse during this journey. Nevertheless, I'm writing a diary, the paper is patient. I will say this. I won't be doing anything since I can't contact the airport and share my troubles. Being a mute person, it is physically impossible, and I have no intention to go back to Artem and the airport.

In this identical suitcase, there was something quite intriguing, in particular – a voice recorder with recordings of people. As far as I could tell, these are patient's conversations (pleasant voice, an interesting manner of pronouncing words, but sometimes like chewing words) with a psychotherapist. As it can be concluded from the answers of the girl, which resemble just a stream of consciousness, that the doctor uses hypnosis as one of the methods of treatment. I write a personal diary, but the paper is patient, so such a fugitive as your humble servant, is going to listen to all sessions with unconcealed curiosity and write them down in his all-merciful patient notepad: because some of the records I had already listened to are of great value for my modest travel essays. Perhaps it should be illustrated with an example,

*“What does Vladivostok mean to you? Why do you speak of it as the only native element?”*

*“There is nothing, there never was anything, never no. Oh, hell, it's blowing my mind! It's no good. Lord, why are the words so flat? They are lifeless, they do not have a milliliter of water, and wherever there is water, there is life. When Mira asked me as a joke what kind of dream I had as the most erotic, I answered that the dream was me being a late teen-ager, in the late afternoon, where my friend and I kept drowning each other in the lake with water-lilies like languid flowers along the banks, and one of us happened to be put under water now and then. Damn it, and there was also a time when it grew dark, my parents went out for a visit, I couldn't stop crying when night came to Vladivostok. And there was an episode at school. I was sharing a desk with a guy who, yes. I sat next to him and drew pictures in a notebook: I drew myself without a face, suddenly, behind my back there was an indestructible army of fish, and my shoes were stuck with seaweed.*

*And there was another episode, my brother... Oh damn, and this is making my head hurt – Gods, give me the strength to write a story about this! – my brother is in a pale yellow cream shirt, with hair inherited from me and my father – straight, dark, laid on one side – I met him in a dream at the square of his native town, the town of mines and the airport. The brother raised his hand and said, “I don't believe we've met!” Oh yes, my brother lives under the seabed, he had always lived somewhere under the bitter sea, in Podmorie (under the sea).*

*Mira and I drove around Podmorie, and her mobile phone slipped out of a crumpled pocket and fell under the sea for fish to have fun. I've never been scared to drown. I preferred blue, light blue, emerald, green in the draperies – everything to satisfy the lords of the depths, the guards of musky seas... More downstream the memory: mother and father were standing on the pier near the huge museum cast-iron and salty anchors. Mira was next to me, I saluted to her, pulled out a huge shell, and put it to my ear. Mira looked with her slanting little eyes (eyes full of water, eyes full of life), «What can you hear over there, inside the shell?» I hear the music of a drowned piano, its keys are drunk, they are wooden and swelled, everything gets drunk from the water... Have you ever seen how the ship goes? She sways, all the ships are constantly drunk, all the drunken ships walk staggering – they need it to have hauteur, they face a long way to get back to the ground. While in the lake, for example,*

*intoxication is different, as they are deep and dark, like graves with water lilies on top, in the evenings they are being poured with azure, heaven «farewell».*

*We will never choke, unless sobbing our hearts out. My stillborn brother lies at the seabed, all in pearls and mother-of-pearl, but I am thrown to the shore by a huge wave, which was called existence. This tsunami is called life, and I lie on the sand, blind with the light, and my shoes are really stuck with seaweed. And I gasp, and whisper, "Water, water, water." Or as I still remember a little in German, "Wasser bitte gib mich Wasse."<sup>9</sup>*

*But life leaves me to die here, in the world under the sun and the moon. Once, fishermen will pack me in their weather-beaten nets so that I can't scare their babies. They will take me to the heart of the water, and I will fall face down."*

I could hardly breath while I was putting it down. A number of images steadily drawn to something familiar, so very famous... And I remembered it! Hello, Arthur Rimbaud:

*And from that time on I bathed in the Poem  
Of the Sea, star-infused and churned into milk,  
Devouring the green azures; where, entranced in pallid flotsam,  
A dreaming drowned man sometimes goes down.<sup>10</sup>*

How could there be so much decadence? I've just talked about sparkling cars and almost forgot to say about alabaster-white gulls in open areas – so where did the drowned people with sea kale on shoe soles appear from? Why does Vladivostok seems so gloomy for a girl from the record tapes while I perceive this city as extremely life-affirming? I can't connect the two perspectives together, the circle closes on some kind of muffled anthropological thoughts, that we all came out of the water, and Rimbaud, as an affectionate song on the radio, continues humming in my mind,

*Foam of flowers rocked my driftings...<sup>11</sup>*

It is necessary to change the subject, and it would be better for me to wind down and write about heraldry. I have already mentioned a roaring tiger on the coat of arms. So, on March 16, 1883, Alexander III approved the coat of arms of Vladivostok, which showed the following: "*On the green shield there is a golden tiger, rising on a silver rock, with scarlet eyes and tongue, in the free part to the left there is the coat of arms of the Primorsky Krai. The shield is decorated with a gold crown with three prongs, behind the shield there are two golden anchors, laid crosswise and tied up by St Andrew's ribbon*"<sup>12</sup>. Over time, the coat of arms has undergone changes that are quite typical for the changing epochs. Thus, during Soviet times, a sickle and a hammer were added to the two Admiralty anchors, the Amur tiger and the mural crown, and the entire composition was twisted with guard ribbon. And the passion for minimalism prevailed at the beginning of the 21st century, and the tsar of the taiga remained alone, without anchors, towers and everything else. Thumbing through the highways atlas and a map of the Primorsky region, I find another funny detail: The bays are named after the ancient Greek heroes (in fact, they were named after the first ships moored here, which in turn were named as heroes of Homer's poems). I have already counted three: Ulysses, Patroclus, Diomed. And on the Russian island, there is Ajax Bay, my namesake. Are there more successful coincidences?

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<sup>9</sup> "Water please give me water." (German)

<sup>10</sup> A. Rimbaud. Drunken boat. Translated by Oliver Bernard: Arthur Rimbaud, Collected Poems (1962).

<sup>11</sup> see *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Coats of arms of cities, provinces, regions and settlements of the Russian Empire by P. Winkler.

My phone is always on, but during my staying in Vladivostok, no one has sent a message to me. Marina, of course, was offended, and my father doesn't care how I live and where. And I live perfectly well. In these areas, you can not leave bread on the table – it can get damp through the day, but you can breathe the sea, look at the sea and be proud of a small part of the sea that bears your name.

The silence of the hotel room is broken by the sound of a bell signaling the arrival of the elevator to the floor. The Chinese are speaking in their own language. The neighbors have a TV on: Channels, of course, are Asian. I've read that there were quite large Japanese, Korean and Chinese communities in Vladivostok until the 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1939, all of them ceased to exist... But despite the signs with hieroglyphics, Chinese flea markets and architectural exercises such as pagodas, I could hardly call the city Asian. Someone noticed that Vladivostok is a cross between St. Petersburg, Odessa, San Francisco and Istanbul with an exceptional local flavor.

I turn on the recorder and get ready for a new trip to the Pacific coast, having changed the refill in a ballpoint pen and opened a clean page in a notepad.

*“Why do you want to kill Mira?”*

## **Chapter 4**

## D – Distant geographical names

Localities		
Old name	New name	Location
Wangou	Chistovodnoye	Lazovsky district
Iman	Dalnerechensk	
Khutsin	Maksimovna	Terneysky district
Laulju	Dersu	Krasnoarmeysky district
Lnfudznn	Rudniy	Kavalerovsky district
Nakhtakhe	Krepostnaya (uninhabited)	Terneysky district
Pkhusun (Pfusung)	Moryak-Rybolov	Olginsky district
Sidatun'	Melnichnoye	Krasnoarmeysky district
Sudzukhe	Zapovedny	Lazovsky district
Suchan	Partizansk	
Tetyukhe	Dalnegorsk	
Hunhuz station	Buynevich	Pozharsky district
Yanmut'khouza	Topolevij	Chuguevsky district
Rivers		
Old name	New name	Location
Beitsukhe	Marevka	Krasnoarmeysky, Pozharsky districts
Daubikhe	Arsenyevna	Anuchinsky, Yakovlevsky districts
Yodzykhe	Dzygitovka	Terneysky district
Lefu (Lefa)	Ilstaya	Mikhailovsky, Khorolsky, Chernigovsky districts
Ljanchikhe	Bogataya	Vladivostok city
Maikhe	Artyomovna	Shkotovsky district
Mongugai	Barabashovka	Khasansky district
Pakshekori	Karasik	Khasansky district
Sandagou	Ussuri	Chuguevsky district
Sedanka	Bolshaya Pioneerskaya	Vladivostok city
Suifen	Razdolnaya	Nadezhdinskij Oktiabrskij, Ussuri districts
Ciao-Nantsa	Pritochnaya	Krasnoarmeysky district
Fujin	Pavlovka (gets into the Ulakhe river)	Kavalerovsky, Chuguevsky districts
Handa ou	Terrasnaya	Pozharsky district
Yandzygou	Pavlinovka	Ussuri district

I can be called Alexander, I can be Alexei, and maybe even Akim... Naturally, I'm not a Greek. Fortunately or unfortunately, but not a Greek. I didn't give back a little paper with my usual name, but slightly corrected it, modified it a little bit. There are two heroes who participated in the siege of Troy – Ajax the Lesser, son of Oileus and Ajax the Great, son of Telamon. There are two bays on the Russian island, not one, as I thought before: Ajax the Lesser and Ajax the Great.

In Homer's Iliad, both Ajaxes were often in arms together. The only difference was that the Lesser was not as strong as the Great. They both defended the ships, fighting for Patroclus's body. Ajax the Lesser is peculiar, among other things, with all kinds of atrocities and misdemeanors, such as, for example, raping of Cassandra, violation of an oath, blasphemy. By the will of the great Olympians, Athena and Poseidon, Ajax was swallowed up by the sea. Not far from the cliffs of Capelfis, formidable Athena hit his ship with a thunderbolt, but the hero escaped, clinging onto Whirling Rocks. Poseidon killed him splitting the rock with his trident. The role of Athena was not so significant in the Odyssey: Poseidon drowned the ships, and threw Ajax into the sea, splitting the rock.

*And so he would have fled his doom,*

*albeit hated by Athene,*

*Had he not let a proud word fall*

*in the fatal darkening of his heart.*

*He said that in the gods' despite  
he had escaped the great gulf of the sea;  
And Poseidon heard  
his loud boasting,  
And presently caught up his trident  
into his strong hands,  
And smote the rock Gyraean  
and cleft it in twain.  
And the one part abode in his place,  
but the other fell into the sea,  
The broken piece whereon Aias sat at the first,  
when his heart was darkened.<sup>13</sup>*

On holiday, Marina gave me a silver fork with a tiny handle engraved with open-work letters, "I'll save Ajax from Poseidon's trident". Looks like when I'm on the Russian island and find myself on my name-bearing bay, I'll have to stick a fork into Poseidon's eye before he sticks a trident in my ferry. Although I did not anger the sea deities. Moreover, I changed my place of residence. Now I live practically possessed by them, where behind my window there is still nothing but the sea, and all roads and high-rise residential buildings are inconvenient at the level of lateral view and do not attract attention.

In time immemorial my damn father, studying the belongings of his late grandfather, found an entertaining book – Dictionary of Chinese toponyms in the territory of the Soviet Far East published in 1975 compiled by F. V. Soloviev. The introduction says that geographical names are a sick topic in the Far East, since they give food to endless disputes about the owners of these lands – Russia or China.

My damn father kept the dictionary as a true relic, not even allowing me to scan the pages. Arriving in Vladivostok, I solved a long-standing problem within a day: A barman Seryoga sent me the whole book by e-mail, and a couple of hours later, I left the copy center on Aleutskaya street, holding more than a hundred hot freshly printed sheets in a folder.

Now I will return to the penultimate paragraph and give an example. A barman's friend suggested that we go to the "Turtles" on the weekend. "Where?" "On the Ambavozes," said Sergei. Opening the precious dictionary, I found the following explanation:

*Ambabosa (Turtle) is a lake on the northwest coast of the Ussuri Bay in Primorsky Krai. The name has Chinese origin, formed by the components: baths – the prince; ba – eight; on – the lake; tzu is a suffix. Vannaboztzy means Turtle Lake. Hydronym first appeared on the map in 187 spelled like*

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<sup>13</sup> The Odyssey by Homer (translated by S.H.Butcher & A.Lang).

*Uvambaboza. By the end of the XIX century the first part of the name (Wamba) was reinterpreted into Amba meaning Tiger in Tungus-Manchu. Ambapoztzy means Tiger Lake.*<sup>14</sup>

So turtles, after all? Or tigers? Anyway, “Vanbapoztzy”, inconvenient for Russian-speaking citizens, had been gradually transformed into what my fellow said, “Ambavozy.” Though the dictionary gives a very strange interpretation – where it is eight princes or the prince of the eight turned into turtles?

However, the riddles did not end there. Two maids were overheard at the hotel: “It’s cold to swim on Shamora.” “You would rather go to BOMBovozy!” Formed from the two roots well known to the Russian ear, the name Bombovozy is easier to pronounce than Ambavoz, and sounds much more impressive than any Turtles. However, for young people, there is another pronunciation variant like “Bombiki” apart from Turtles, in particular for the females.

Waves are high enough on Ambavozy, as if after a strong storm but the water is warm. Quite near the bay, there are rows of holiday homes. Seryoga’s Dacha (a holiday home) is over there too. While he was arranging some kind of barbeque place in the courtyard together with his girlfriend, I went out to look around. The road went uphill, houses ended at the top and a forest started with a black wall of trees. I went upwards, keeping away from the allotments and closer to the forest, looking at the plum trees and kicking stones under my feet.

In the middle of holiday homes, a lousy stain of a huge burned-out house was rising which made you feel scary while passing it nearby. It stood on high metal stilts so that one could climb down to the very bottom of the structure. That’s what I did. Crawling on my knees through mugwort jungle among partially rotten stilts, I just hurt my hands with fragments of broken glasses. I kept running into the strangest items now and then: a broken comb with a scrap of someone’s hair, a rusty harmonica, twisted tapes of a light-struck film. Beside mugworts, there was also myriads of fairy-mushrooms. It was a culmination of Gothic horror, a miniature of the Castle of Otranto. When I got out of there, I walked around the burned house. The run wild imagination pictured what could be hidden behind the smudged windows and the elaborately carved shutters of the three-storey bulky thing.

The sun was going below the horizon, cuckoo tune was making you feel depressed, the sharpness of vision faded in the evening twilight. I came back to the path leading to the top of the hill, and climbing up, I settled on the edge of the forest sitting tailor-fashion and took out a voice recorder from my breast pocket. I saved for the long-awaited dessert the answer to the question, “Why do you want to kill Mira?” especially looking for a suitable environment. I was looking for something exciting to make blood turn to ice, the cuckoos kept singing, and the burned-out estate full of ghosts made you feel scared with its fragments of old combs. All right, let’s go...

*Sometimes she might be called Mirabel or probably Miroslava, or even Mirra, with two rolling “r’s”. But it’s easier for me to call her with four letters, which were pinned down in the past before our era, before Christ, on the parent’s car. It was called Mira Daihatsu, it was blue, with three doors and very small. This car was crashed in an accident. Being extremely short, Mira kept smacking me across the head with her short little hands when I was learning to drive. Patting me on the shoulder, challenged me, “Keep steering, my young pianist.” or, “Keep driving, my young pianist.”*

*She killed everyone who dared to offend me. Yes, yes, she just came and made at point blank. But I won’t tell you about this. Mira hates that I don’t eat, but I always have an answer, “How can you think of food recalling the siege of Leningrad?” Even Mira can’t argue with that.*

*She still does not confess what she is really after and believes that it’s too early for me to see corpses and blood. But I can still see it. When I put her contact lenses in special containers, through the transparency of the solution, I see the reflected faces of those whom Mira was likened to... When*

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<sup>14</sup> Dictionary of Chinese toponyms in the territory of the Soviet Far East by F.Solovyov.



*I wash off her flower dress from splashes of someone else's blood... I am aware of everything. I know that she dyes her hair in red so that the blood of being killed by her is not so noticeable until Mira gets to the bathroom and find peace in the cold silence of the tile.*

*Once Mira gave me a Hohner harmonica when I was hopped up on blues. She bought this gift in Paris being together with Jean-Baptiste at that time. Mira was so angry that even slapped my face when I dropped the harmonica in a barrel of water at our dacha, it was on Amba...*

I stopped the recording. I got up and walked away from the forest edge, trying to move as quickly as possible. Down the hill, skipping along.

## Chapter 5

### E – Eponymous settlement of de Vries

*Being a Heligolander, James Cornelius De Vries was an Earl and a merchant (according to another version his name was John, not James), who arrived to Vladivostok in 1865 intending to open trade and become a farmer having settled in the harbor. James Cornelius chose a peninsula that goes into Amur Bay. The peninsula got its name De Vries (people call it “difris”).*

*There are lots of legends about this place, which is considered an abnormal area. There are two legends about the tragic death of the Earl's young daughter. The first says that she drowned because of unrequited love, and the despairing father planted “Love Alley” in his dominions to commemorate the memory of his late daughter. The second legend narrates about the difficult conditions to overcome small distances. Back then, you had to cross the sea by boat to get from De Vries to Sadgorod. Once the boat capsized, and all of its passengers drowned, including the Earl. Nowadays, there is Cape of Drowned located on the peninsula in the vicinity of the cemetery, which indicates that the legend number two might be quite a real story.*

*(Grouped from various sources by me)*

Does anyone know how to keep firmness of the spirit and clarity of mind, while everything happening around is suddenly weaved into a web of mystical coincidences and regularities? How to be guided, analyzing a similar situation – rational or instinctively?

I will try to tell everything from the beginning what happened to me during my short staying in Primorye. Sometimes I'll lose my train of thoughts, running to extremes or going off the rails, deviating from the essence of the matter and pouring out unnecessary details.

So, I'm Ajax. I stay in a central hotel where I can watch Amur Bay from the window day by day. I have acquired peace, or at least trying to find it. After all, wise psychologists, and even people are now and again talking that you will stay calm if you surround yourself with shades of blue. In my room, there are the following items available — a double bed, a TV set with many Asian cable channels, a table which I am writing it and not only this, a refrigerator and an ashtray. Of course, there is still a bathroom with a toilet. In the wardrobe on the top shelf, there is a thick warm blanket folded, so I can live through winter in the same city. If I have some money left, of course. If not, I'll rent an apartment in Lighthouse, my favorite area in Vladivostok.

Lighthouse or Egersheld: that's where the bus routes end, a pile of steel rails clinging to the ground keeps empty trains that have nowhere else to go, except into the sea waves with all the weight of wagons to the bottom of the sea... Lighthouse is the place where Vladivostok ends, as well as Russia and the whole continent, there is nowhere to retreat.

At the very beginning of this epic at the airport, I took the wrong suitcase, brought it to the hotel and only then opened it. I decided it to be too much to go back and give the suitcase to the owner (a female owner to be more specific). Moreover, being a downright scoundrel I poked my nose into other people's luggage. I found a voice recorder with a patient's sessions (obviously, the current owner of my suitcase) recorded by a psychologist. She says something inconsistently, then stretches words. Sometimes it's interesting to listen. For example, I really like this passage:

*Vladivostok stretches its tentacles in all directions, except for the northern one. There, on the top, taiga presses it down with its tiger paw, the dominions of the sea monster ends in the north. Vladivostok avoids cedars and wild animals. The city is drawn by photos of Svetlanskaya street, traffic jams, traffic junctions and sometimes – by its militarism: brave sailors, a green submarine, forts... I want to leave it from my mind, even for a little while, but it doesn't give me a chance. Having reached Lighthouse,*

*to the very edge, when suddenly the southern arm of Vladivostok grabs me and drags me back. A giant Octopus with searchlight eyes, sparkling in the dark not with phosphorus, but with the electric lighting of houses and street lamps doesn't give an objective judgment.*

*The one who had once lost his Vladivostok, would face a sea monster. I left the city near Trepang Bay, and the blue trepang took away my luck. You do not even see a line of fortune on my palm. My hands are smooth and slippery, always cold, my skin is wrinkled on the pads of my fingers as if I do not get out of the water for days. I try to eat very little, and my parents take me to hospitals, they feed me through droppers – oh, hell, this is making my heard hurt, yes.*

*Dagon, Kraken, anyone – a sea monster does not want me to tell the rest about it. Vladivostok lets out a thick fog when I want to make a picture of high hills. It splashes water in the underground passages. Once it even drowned my piano, and let someone prove me that this is just a coincidence. Yes, yes, if I tell anyone, they can just recall that film with Holly Hunter, where the piano drowned... And the heroine is dumb, she has a notebook with a pencil on her neck... Do you remember this movie?*

I might find a link where it doesn't exist in principle. I try to stick to this version. On the other part, a lot of things annoys me. For example, any mention of the piano reminds me of my father, let him be three times cursed. And she keeps moaning and groaning about this piano in almost every record. And she constantly repeats that it is necessary to kill Mira.

Mira as I could understand it – is either the older sister, or the governess, the mysterious one who destroy everyone and kills. And Mira must be controlled not to put an end to the bloody massacre but in order to – attention! – gain spiritual freedom.

Everyone has his issues, and some of them are not inferior in size to Madagascar, probably this is exactly the case of my Anya (I got her name from the voice recordings too). But what might be of interest – she's got my bag with my diaries and notebooks. Does she read them? Does she try to grasp what was being described as I listen to her narration and translate them into the canvases of manuscripts? Life can be very random sometimes: two strangers first rummaged in, sorry, each other's underwear, and then dissect ("hurt") each other's brains, still not meeting and not even having a visual idea of his opponent.

I have a bad feeling. And it will come true in the near future. Because otherwise, nobody will be curious. Because if you have managed to get into this mess with a claim to Haruki Murakami's lamb bestsellers, be so kind as to get yourself in trouble, warm up the audience's interest, don't be sceptical – it's so boring. Better solemnly summarize in the end that this Anya with her voice recorded is your only and the last love and you are off to find her experiencing a series of incredible adventures. The public will cry of amusement. Standing ovation. Booker, awards, Nobel Prize, translation into sixteen languages, screen version. In the end, we all have to match the story.

I must say fiery speeches, put people's hearts on fire. But alas, I can't. Sometimes I wonder what the hell, I have a tongue in my mouth. Taste buds? The Creator believes that it is more important to distinguish the taste of food than to pick up the phone and say, "Hello." It's more important than calling for help. Shout, "Fire!" Sing a song.

Pathetic.

Anya tells how she was given a certain thing, subsequently lost. And she gives the exact coordinates of the place where the gift has been lost. A couple of days ago, by the will of fate, I found myself in this area, at a dacha place owned by my new acquaintances, and quite accidentally, I found this lost piece literally in 30 meters from the location indicated in the record. This is a harmonica. Covered with rust, it lies on the table in my hotel room, where I put down all this. Anya says she accidentally dropped the gift into a barrel of water and never saw it again.

I picked up the harmonica and exhaled it with all my might. And there was a sound. My mouth has not uttered a single word in my life, but I can use other means to express myself.

In my recent dreams Marina who is a beacon of far-abandoned land, comes to me and tells me that the bay is shallow at first glance, but in fact, oh, it is very deep. Cold water is down there. But that was not Marina, but the drowned daughter of Earl De Vries. Marina is translated as – marine. What primitive parallels I am enclosed and haunted. But these parallels must be developed, two mirrors should be placed opposite each other and be challenged with uncertainty: what can you see in the mirrored corridor? For example, Marina's face, which I held thousands of times in my hands, kissing thousands of times – in my dream, it was white and swollen staying in the water for long, eaten by fish. Sea monsters will not give back his daughter to Cornelius De Vries, the place was not so shallow as everyone used to think.

I was just very clumsy and gnawed by gluttonous fish when I thought about her. Probably, I would like to do many things and much would have happened, if I had at least a little faith in the favorable outcome. But there are words that you do not want to use because of their pretentiousness: Love, for example. The love exalted by poets, decomposed into components of tenderness and respect, love bloodsucking — I did not believe in it and could not believe even for Marina's precious and admiring glance. I never managed to do something good for her, I could not write with curls, red ink, «Marina, I love you.»

And up to this day I am powerless, and the wind blowing from the sea takes my letters to her from the table to the floor. And I'm doomed to suffer, smoke in the middle of the night, blowing smoke out the window with a view of Amur Bay – but, fortunately, this time I'm alone. I will not disturb anyone, I will not break anyone's peace.

## Chapter 6

### F – Far-away Settlement of Emar

*...Recalled the happy times being students, when we went hiking along the area, sang with a guitar beside the fire, fed mosquitoes and roasted on the sun like savages on the sand of Yemar Bay, which was called Yumora, unlike Shamora or Feldgauzen Bay...*

*(The city on Muraviev Amursky's peninsula  
by V.K.Karinberg)*

*...Now, Christina lived looking forward for Valerka's vacations. She was dreaming about summer. She dreamed how they would go for a holiday somewhere to Shamora, or to the Three Little Pigs Bay or to Yemar, simply called Humora – vibrant beaches in Shamora and Humora Bays, the legacy of the Japanese staying in Primorye...*

*(When you call me by V.V.Turenko)*

Tonight Mira was killed.

Or not Mira. You must agree, when someone is killed next door of your hotel room, you can't help recalling the events of the last criminal chronicles on television or the recently read detective. And I've heard so much over the past few days that, as Carthage must be destroyed, Mira must be killed, that I haven't been particularly impressed with the doctors were scurrying back and forth along the corridors, people in uniform and frightened Chinese, who stuck their heads out of their rooms, attracted by noise.

To be honest, I even expected something like this. Woken up in the middle of the night, got nervous and smoked in the window, as promised in my last epistle to Marina. All the windows were wide open, staring with teary windows at the Amur Bay where the cold and otherworldly evil was coming. The ink sea proved to be infernal, promising. I smoked and waited for some small earthquake, something that would break the silence.

Time stopped. My watch does not have a second hand, so I could not see it with my own eyes, but I counted the seconds. At last I heard this damn popping sound. It broke the silence.

I was able to exhale, the forces of evil retreated, the sea boiled with waves, the mobile phone's display blinked. Mira was killed next door from me. Or someone else. Do not ask me to describe the deafening firefight – at first it seemed as if a heavy book fell on the floor in the next room. "Walls made of cardboard," this was my first thought, not aware of the coming chaos. I grinded out my fourth cigarette and went to bed.

With respect to the detective genre, I was awakened by a deafening cry of the maid in the morning. After half an hour several dozens of feet were stumbling along the corridor. Officers of the law also looked at me to ask if I had noticed something suspicious at night. Oh, yes, Comrade Senior Lieutenant, what about the ocean standing still for a few minutes?! I tried to convey this to the other person, demonstrating porsh pretzels in the air with my fingers and silently opening my mouth, like a fish grabbing air bubbles. "Ah, he is a deaf mute," man in uniform waved his hand at me. Deaf mute person brought more benefits than mute in my case. You could pretend to be a dummy as much as you like, and it should work in this situation. I was stuck to the door eye for a good half an hour.

The Chinese chattered fearfully. The prosecutor's office and police ransacked the ill-fated room 912 for evidence and other interesting things. Finally, the doctors took away the stretcher with a cold corpse from the guest house, which was my neighbor or female neighbor just yesterday. Having put on the face either the expression of madness or foolishness, worthy Yushka (hello, Platonov!), I looked out into the corridor.

For a split second, I was immediately shown two proofs of my spurious theory. First, the *female* arm hung down out of the cellophane film, which the doctors wrapped the body in, and helplessly waved in the air as the stretcher moved. Hence, it was just a female neighbor. Secondly, the film covered only the face of the victim, but not the entire head. Why it happened, I didn't not know, but I could only say that I saw a strand of tangled and wrinkled *red* hair. I put my own life at stake that it was Mira! No one else should be there. And it was more prudent for me to return to my room and wait for a happy moment.

Getting down on the carpet, I picked up the harmonica which Mira gave to Anya a thousand years ago. Coming back to the city, I managed almost immediately to clean the instrument from rust and discover the inscription engraved on it: "Protège Anne du silence des bois."<sup>15</sup> I fixed the harmonica next to Marina's long-time gift to me, echoing almost synchronously: "I'll save Ajax from Poseidon's trident".

I am also, of course, part of the entire web of story lines. At least, for this reason I can declare that the killed one was called Mira and that this is Mira coming out of our stories. Yes, yes, ours, because I have already copied most of them from the record to the notebook. And this means that my Mira was killed last night; I had a premonition, got out of bed and smoked a few cigarettes. Even the sea held its breath, intrigued by the fact whether Mira would be finished or not. I got into someone else's story, sorting out mess created by someone else and trying at the same time to be a know-it-all. But somehow, according to unknown mystical laws, the voice recorder turned out to be just at my place. What will I get next?

Bible. Book of books.

...I'm a foolish Yushka, with an unbuttoned and twisted collar, with my eyes clapping and saliva splashing out from blissfully smiling corners of my mouth, a harmless deaf mute jerk, who went out to the corridor again few hours later taking rubber gloves with me.

"The room is sealed." But there's nobody inside. And there is nobody on the floor. No newcomer pulls his belongings on wheels, no guest goes out to make his noodles in a cup. Let the surf outside the window quiten down again and let me slip away unnoticed. And if I pop out noticeable – so what, this dumb disabled person has just mixed up the numbers and got the wrong door, you see? Is it possible to blame a flawed person, whom nature dealt short, for such a misbehavior or bring him into custody?

There was nothing left in room 912. I kept looking in vain for red hair on the pillow. I vainly moved the furniture, fearing to tear gloves and leave prints for hypothetical fingerprint identification. I found nothing to go on, anything that even more grotesque theories of total involvement could be developed. Finally, I remembered about the warm winter blanket, which was stored on the top shelf of the wardrobe in every room of the hotel, and then I had finally some luck. I grabbed a heavy Bible in a strict black cover out of the depth of the wardrobe. Perhaps, the Holy Scripture was of no interest to the law enforcement bodies. Unlike me, who instantly caught the importance of the printed text and got even more frightened.

What was hidden under the blue-black leather binding with the golden cross in the middle? No, there were no letters or diaries (even though let it be considered my prerogative). So what did I discover by opening such a great book? Only letters and lines. Such as, for example: "Au commencement, Dieu cré le ciel et la terre."<sup>16</sup> That's right, heaven and earth. Then the Lord was ready to create the blessed city of Vladivostok on the shore of the Sea of Japan. And how many women lived in this city during the hot June in that year? Approximately half the population. Whom of these women wear long red hair? Two-thirds are crossed out immediately. Finally, who of them

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<sup>15</sup> "I'll save Anna from forest wildness." (Fr)

<sup>16</sup> "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth..." (Fr.) Genesis, Chapter 1.

speak French? Who is capable to read the Bible and make inscriptions on a harmonica? And now, let someone try to prove to me that the murdered one was not Mira!..

My speculations were interrupted by someone's uninvited footsteps, approaching the door of the room 912. My heart began to pound. Of course, I instantly climbed under the bed and figured out from there what I would tell the sign language interpreter in the nearest police station. The shadow of the unknown stopped on the threshold and did not come inside, as if he was expecting something. Everything looked like a low-budget thriller, I already imagined the Shadow or Someone coming through the door and leaning towards me ominously. Yeah, if Mira was killed tonight in this very bed, what would you expect being here? What the hell am I doing in this place? Being curios? Seeking for truth? It sounds ridiculous. I covered ten thousand kilometers on air, arrived to the land of unprecedented beauty. A woman was killed next to my door. I secretly sneaked into her sealed room and now someone creepy came after me – that sounds like a grotesque truth.

The shadow disappeared. I stuck my head out under the bed, instinctively fearing that an ultralight, noiseless invisible, quietly climbing onto the bed during this brief time limit, was about to grab my hair and yell into my ear, "Aha! Gotcha!" But there was no one else in the room or outside the door. The shadow was gone. I listened to her outgoing step wishing to calm down. Clack, clack, she was definitely going away. Aha, heels! Looks like, it was another mysterious stranger. Someone I already know. Oh, God, I'm such an idiot. Who could come here except her?!? What a holy fool I am, why couldn't I guess earlier?

The heels clacked reaching the hall, a bell tinkled, an elevator arrived. At first I wanted to go after her, paint words with my fingers in the air and give her voice recorder and her other belongs back to her. Then I imagined how ridiculous it would look, and decided to leave it as it was. I got up, dusted myself, trying to breathe smoothly, standing in a cursed place and pressing the French Bible to my chest with cold hands.

She left a present. While I was scared trembling under the bed, she pushed a photo under the door. It was old-old, black and white with vintage yellowish, shabby corners, discolored with time. In the photo, a group of young people were located near a cliff on the seashore. Two young men were putting up a tent, three girls smiled in the lens. The guys were dressed for camping: sweaters, sports pants, sneakers. One of the girls who looked older than the rest was wearing a summer dress with a flower pattern, the other was wearing a knitted sweater and jeans, the third one was dressed in a long cloak. The one in the knitted sweater hugged another young man who was holding a guitar in his hand, wrapped in a plastic bag, but not in a case. In general, it was an ordinary shot of a camping trip of young people. I turned the photo, on the back side it was signed with soft pencil: "L'Emar – L'Humour – La Humora."

Next to the photograph under the door there was a small package consisting of several sheets. Unfolding the package, I was stunned: Japanese symbols. That was all I need for entire happiness. I learned Japanese myself and could translate basic texts. But I didn't have a dictionary with me – nothing... Great, damn it! To solve this grotesque thriller they needed no one other but a dumb polyglot. That doesn't make it any better. I left Mira's room, carefully folding one trophy into another: photo of teenagers and a package with Japanese riddle was hidden between the pages of the Bible. Coming back to my room, I took out the key. Suddenly I was seized by a wild fear that, and most important, who could have visited my chambers? Some strange things were going on here, and I didn't want to go back to my place for the moment.

Instead, I went down to the bar lit by a languid neon, where Seryoga poured me some whiskey. While my body being intoxicated, the mind was getting more and more sober, fear gradually gave way to alertness. Someone was playing strange games. One person had already been dead. Hence, the game was vicious. After a while, I showed the photo to Sergei. He turned it in his hands, looked at it, then gave it back.



“If it isn’t Yumora,” said the barman holding back an old crumpled photo to me. “This is Yumora.”

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Yumora Bay was a truly magnificent sight in the rays of the setting sun. I climbed onto a steep rock and watched the green waves rushing onto sharp stones and breaking into smithereens. In the evenings, as always, the sea was like mint jelly. Yumora (officially called Yemar) was a wonderful place for camping. Everything was breathing freedom here.

I breathed freedom, standing on top of a steep rock, and the wind blew in my face. I closed my eyes and breathed freedom into my lungs, where there was still space free from detective puzzles and psychotherapy sessions. This space is still vacant, blown by the ocean breeze, wide open. Is this a place for the heart? I just have to put my right hand to my lips, and then to my heart: that’s all the love in my language. Plus ten letters of confession being written. And what is in return for such insignificant labor? Tenderness, caring and affection, songs, poems, a cozy joint routine, the excluded possibility of being a black sheep or save face.

But I step aside.

My favorite characters of my childhood are asocial and rugged... Heathcliff who ruled Wuthering Heights with an iron fist, it was possible to get on the right side of him, he wasn’t evil, he was in love. It whitewashes him and justifies all the horror he has arranged. Heathcliff stands on the mountain, his heavy gaze is directed far beyond the horizon. Heathcliff wanders through the heathland with his cloak fluttering in the wind...

Perhaps, Ajax stood on top of a cliff on Yemar as if in a black and white movie with a crackling sound and blue clouds thickened over his poor head. His brain was haunted by the events of the mad day.

Ajax shuddered. The wind got stronger. The sea, which suddenly got still last night, was vicious and was nearly boiling – so these high waves looked from above. It was boiling mint jelly somewhere down there... Mint of Yumora. There was Old Yumora on the yellowed photos.

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