

*Anastasia Novykh*  
**EZOOSMOS**



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### **Аннотация**

Hidden reality is present in people's lives every day. Perception of its secrets helps one not only to gain experience of living in this world, but also to make a step in the investigation of one's own self... Numerous of so-called people's diseases, sudden depressions, suicide attempts, accidents, murders are the results of the hidden forces activity. In the past, there used to be those who actively opposed them, defending people from the other side of reality. The scales of Good and Evil are in hands of a human. Ezoosmos determines everything.

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# Anastasia Novykh

## Egoosmos

### Part I

#### An Unusual Fishing

Those were last warm days of the passing summer. Everyone used that time in one's own way appreciating such a generous benevolence of nature at its true value. Some were contented with observing sunny day views through windows, instead of rainy images that were common for this summer period. Some hastened to take the air, walking along those few islands of green that were miraculously preserved in the middle of grey asphalt-and-concrete composition of urban civilization. And the most adventurous ones longed for nature, in order to have a full-fledged vocation, gather enough strength and impressions see the coming winter out.

Three cars, packed with those desiring to have a first light fishing, worked their way round holes and bumps along a wood road. The driver of the leading car was a fair-haired man with blond-brown moustache. He looked about 30, average height, athletic build. Friends treated him with respect and called him 'Sensei' as he had been heading oriental martial arts circle for many years and was famed for his skill among professionals. His primary activity, however, was medicine. Vertebrology in particular. Sensei was quite out of the ordinary, interesting man with vast mental outlook and inexhaustible sense of humor. Therefore, the number of those willing to spend time with him even at such a 'quiet arrangement' as fishing, turned out to be enough and to spare as usual.

Sensei's old Soviet car "Moscvich" blinked its stoplights twice, and the cars that followed it stopped. The driver cast a glance examining a gauge of the road, which ended at a broad clearing. And with an irony he asked a tall guy, who sprawled on the passenger chair: "Well, where have you taken us to, fatherland's son born out of wedlock?"

"Me, taken?!" Eugene answered with a grin, and then added mischievously: "But... Sensei, it's you who drives. I'm merely showing the way to the radiant future!"

Sensei smiled together with other guys. Looking about at the brake along the wood road and at the glade ahead, Eugene said in jest: "Yep! It looks like the place."

"It looks like, it looks like!" his friend Stas could not contain himself any longer. Stas sat in the rear seat holding a large bottle in his hands that was filled with water and bait for fish of prey – loaches. "The sun has risen already. It's just the time of biting! And here we are in the thickets checking your fourth looks like."

"I told you I'd been here two years ago," Eugene started to make excuses and added poetically, "I recall there was a forest, a clearing, a river... That was a top-class place! Oodles of fish! There were splashing ones this big!"

At these words, trying to impress on the others, he began to stretch his hands wide to show the size of fish. But his spread was obviously limited by the inside of a car so as to illustrate more precise "parameters" of "monsters" found in the river. As people jokingly say, the longer the fisherman's arms, the less trust there is to his stories.

"Pull the other leg, Eugene! There're none such in nature," pronounced senior sempai Victor, a stocky guy who was sitting near Stas and eating a bun.

"There are too! Sure thing, there are," Eugene persuaded fervently. "Sensei, tell them..."

"Well why there aren't? Everything's possible nowadays," Sensei agreed with a smile. "And those, with two heads and three tails..."

The guys laughed, while Eugene waved his hand at them with feigned offence.

“Oh, why would I talk to you... I’ll see you boast about when you catch such a bomber.”

With those words, he left the car in businesslike air and went ahead to examine the passage to the river as well as the surrounding country.

“Stas, take a walk with him,” Sensei suggested, when laughter in the cabin faded more or less. “If the place’s good, we’ll stay here. Or we’ll drive about till the evening with this apology for a guide.”

Stas nodded and carefully handed the bottle over to Victor.

“There you go, the valuable cargo. And mind you don’t eat them, gormandizer!” he wagged his finger in jest.

“They’re kind of languid,” Victor observed with irony examining the “field car-aquarium”.

“What would you want? Poor things got sick of such a trip,” Stas complained in a fit of temper, who devoted the whole overnight to laborious procuring of this dainty for catfish. “It’s no joke, they make this land journey for the first time, and Eugene turned out to be among the guides. Good heavens!”

“Yeah, no luck,” Victor sympathized with laughter.

Stas got out of the car and hastened after Eugene, who rounded the kink.

It should be noted that there gathered quite a diverse public in the cars if judge from age and profession. For example, Victor, who rode in Sensei’s “Moscvich,” was an investigative officer. Eugene and Stas, apart from their “lifetime” pursuit of unceasing training, during their “recess,” so to say, earned their living as mechanics in auto repair shop. The fourth passenger in Sensei’s car, Ruslan, a lean medium-sized chap with slightly worked out muscles, was a common factory worker.

The other car, called “doggy” among the folks, was driven by Volodya, a stocky man of sturdy build with determined features. He was a head of special mission unit for several years already. Near him were his colleagues and friends: Bogdan, Oleg, and Seva (or as he was called, Svat). Notable for their military bearing, they were also distinguished for their peculiar manner of communication, which develops among people who were in the services together for a long time. The fourth passenger, who sat next to Volodya, curiously enough, was of a quite different social environment. It was not for a month as Valera came out of prison, where he had served another term. He was Volodya’s friend since childhood and a neighbor. In outward appearance Valera was not much different from Seva or Oleg. An ordinary young lad, medium-sized, average built. His face, however, bore a particular imprint of life in a prison. One could read distrust in a somewhat stern look, even a hidden threat for anyone, who would dare violate his personal space.

Behind the wheel of the third car, ‘Volga’, there was Nikolai Andreevich. His passengers were young individuals, who had just recently graduated from university Andrew, Nastya, Tatyana, and Kostya. One wouldn’t call this merry crowd a company of inveterate fishermen, excluding Nikolai Andreevich, of course. Quite the opposite. The company was so full of buoyant youthful energy that no respected fish would have approached such laugh-n-noise generators that are all about tricks and unrestrained chattering about every trifle in the world. This atmosphere could be endured, perhaps, only by a psychotherapist (not too long at that), Nikolai Andreevich being such, by the way. But everyone in the car was too anxious so as not to miss such a rare opportunity of breaking away for a holiday together with Sensei. That’s why they thrust themselves as “fishermen” in an alleged effort to improve in their piscatorial skills as well as in knowledge of the area’s flora and fauna.

Such was the big, motley company looking forward to arrival of their walkers Eugene and Stas. In was but in ten minutes that this impressive couple went back at a jog trot with joyful news. Already from afar, they started to make signs at car drivers and their passengers that the fishing place was finally found. Eugene tried to mime that there’s a whole plenty of fish varying in size. He showed the sizes comparing them to different body parts of his companion.

“It is there!” Stas panted out, getting into Sensei’s car together with Eugene. “First go straight, then to the right. There’s a convenient path to the river.”

After tedious waiting and coping with the last yards towards the long-expected aim, the cars drove out at a clearing located on a bank of a small river. The place turned out to be beautiful indeed. There was a smooth wind in the river in this spot. Coniferous trees mixed with broad-leaved trees surrounded the clearing. The air was sweet with aroma of conifers. The green clearing was lit with bright sunrays that created splashes of light reflecting from diamond dewdrop placer. All this, along with the view of the far bank, created a truly enchanting picture of nature.

A sandy slightly downgrade shore was not yet touched by a gross imprint of a boot, and that unspeakably gladdened inveterate fishermen of our big company keen to some local fauna. Content with appearance of the place, everyone started to make up for lost time. “Experienced fishermen” headed by Sensei seized their fishing implements and went straight to the river to set everything up, with such passion at that, as if they had merely ten seconds to fulfill their fisherman’s dream. The others started to pitch a campsite.

After common preliminaries were concluded, and the folks fortified themselves with a light breakfast, most of the company dispersed alongshore – some with a spinning reel, some with a fishing rod. With their fishing “arsenal”, almost everyone decorously seated themselves at a respectful distance from each another in secret hope of a felicitous catch just at their chosen spot.

The riverside in the wilderness was swiftly filled with paraphernalia of civilization. Should a New Guinea’s Papuan happen to be here, he would examine all these queer articles for a long time. And if someone explained the purpose of each article to him, including various super cool fishing accessories, the Papuan would laugh for a day or two at the fact that some smart merchant had been able to fool so many people. An entire tribe, what do you know! But there was no Papuan around, and the fooled people believed firmly that the purchased stuff would help them lure the cunning fish out of the river.

Eugene alone stayed in the “camp” and it was just because his fishing net got tangled. The lad belonged to that extreme category of “fishermen” who cannot bear to sit with a fishing rod for hours. He liked the fish to be caught at once and in loads. Eugene could also chase after fish one-on-one when submarine hunting. At least, there was a peculiar sporting blood in it – who wears out whom. But to sit idly contemplating the water from the riverside was not his trip. That’s why Eugene always took his “tangle” net for fishing. It was as easy to fish with it as it can be: setting nets, driving fish into them, and there you go – now you can cook fish soup! That’s all there is to a “wet work”. That’s why Eugene was not being deceitful when he promised a grandiose catch as he pinned his hopes on this safe bet option. However, an unexpected misfortune occurred. He did not check the net at home and he also did not exert himself with conscientious packing at his last fishing. That’s why he got such a stable result. The “tangling net” fully justified its name this time matting sinkers and floats badly. No matter how hard the lad tried his efforts got nowhere.

But Eugene wouldn’t have been Eugene if he had given way to despair or showed that things weren’t going his way. At any rate, he could not allow it to happen in front of girls. So, he explained his prolonged stay at the camp during the most appropriate time for morning fishing by “purely gentlemen’s motives” – telling punning stories to girls so as to render “invaluable assistance” in women’s toils of washing dirty dishes after a raid of such a “starving bunch”. In brief, Eugene did not waste time even here.

Sitting in a folding chair, he “sympathized” the girls in good faith: “...that’s in our technological age when cosmic saucers furrow the celestial space, when humanity has automated manufacturing by ninety percent, these fragile, tender fingers are to perform infinite number of movements over that dirty, modernized human trough of abdominal satiety, this monstrous implement that favors lust of flesh, its stomach and pride...”

At this time, there appeared an SUV on the provisional forest “road” that the cars of this company struggled through. The SUV stopped at the glade passage. A lean man got out of the car. His hair was light and thin, his small beard was reddish, and his face was somewhat pale. Camouflage fishing smock was rather big and looked as though it was off somebody’s back.

Eugene discontinued his ardent speech addressed to “working-people” and turned his eyes towards an intruder with curiosity. Noticing fixed attention directed at him, the SUV driver thrust his hand into his trousers’ pocket. Then, playing with a car key with the other hand he waddled towards Sensei’s “Moscvich,” the rear of which slightly stuck out at the “driving lane.”

“Well, whose jade sprawled here halfway?” the stranger said deliberately vociferously and kicked the car wheel couple times.

Eugene sprang up from his seat right away and nearly choked with his saliva – that much he wanted to pant out to the uninvited guest’s face.

“Yo, man, what this leg-throwing is all about?!”

“So, it’s your rattletrap then?” he asked with a jeer.

“Mine or not, what’s the diff it’s got to do with you?”

Eugene walked up to Sensei’s car hastily. He took out a not-too-clean handkerchief and made as though he wiped last specks of dust from it. After demonstrating such an evident love of domestic cars, Eugene assumed the threatening attitude of a fervent owner.

“Now then, what’s the matter exactly?”

“What’s the matter?!” the car driver voiced indignantly. “Left this junk in the middle of the road and there he asks what’s the matter! Decent cars can’t go through.”

“Do you call this tractor a decent car?!” a flame of patriotic sentiments flared up in Eugene in a flash. “One would only race rhinos in Africa in it, not break wind along decent Slavic passages. Besides, there’s plenty of space here. No harm will be done to your tractor, if you shift its tracks a bit towards the bushes.”

“Yeah, right! And who will paint and glaze my car afterwards, you?”

“Well, why not paint it, if there is such a need? I might as well cover it with drawings so that you wouldn’t wish for more. Its own jap mother won’t recognize it! Just give me a minute, I’ll get some tools...”

And Eugene swan about towards the tents, as if intending to keep his word momentarily. After making several steps, he came to a standstill and, pulling a not very bright face, he turned back and thoughtfully remarked: “I say, man, it just flashed across my straight gyrus... What on earth would you need this passage for? There’s only a steep ahead. This place is occupied. There’s a lot of us here too! Won’t you find other places for yourself? The river is big enough.”

“What for?! I’ve been feeding the fish here for an entire week. Served them different dishes like in a restaurant. And here you all are on a lured spot...”

“But, I kinda got them food too!” making barefaced single-minded countenance, Eugene exclaimed happily. “One could say gave up the last piece of bread, all for them scaled-fish! Oh, my,” he drawled, “we might have fed them up through and through! I should not wonder if it lies at the bottom of the river like a pig after dinner, lazy to lift its tail upwards. And I rack my brains why it doesn’t bite. The poor things just got distended...”

The girls listening to this conversation laughed gently.

“Listen man! Maybe, we just ‘dynamite’ this impudent fish?”

“Do what?!”

“I’m saying, did you happen to take along some dynamite?” Eugene asked expressly loudly with clear interest.

The driver beamed a gap-toothed smile failing to keep a dead-pan before such an ardent speech of the odd fellow.

“Don’t fret, I’ll get it out without that all right.”

Eugene glanced at that 'dentist's gladness' smile and said with sympathy: "Do you know, by chance, if fish have heart attack?"

This question seemed to draw the stranger away from the line of captiousness, as he answered shrugging his shoulders: "I don't know. Maybe. Since it has a heart, then heart attacks can happen."

"Oh, I see now."

"What do you see?"

"I was thinking how you were going to get it out."

"Oh, bother!" the man latched on. The SUV driver laughed good-naturedly together with Eugene. Then he spoke in level tones: "All right, then, call the owner of the car."

"I'm for him. What, do I not look like?"

"You?" the man hemmed. "You've not enough wit... and moustache too."

Eugene was just about to open his mouth to argue about his effulgent intellect, but after hearing about the moustache he stopped short and took a good look at the driver.

"Come on, now, call him," he hurried observing Eugene's reaction.

"What do you need him for?"

"I need him, full stop. Should I report to you, or something?"

"Well, have it your way, man," Eugene warned him in jest to be on the safe side. "You've asked for it yourself. I tried my best to make it safer for your persona..."

With that he moved towards the river and passed out of sight behind the waterside slope.

Sensei and Nikolai Andreevich were sitting on a snag that seemed to have seen quite a lot of fishermen's second principal "operating tools" in its recumbent life. Both men with fishing rods in their arms were watching their floats in such a manner as though fish was just about to bite. Eugene came down the sand fill. The fishers were so focused on the process that no one paid attention to his coming. The lad looked at the floats rocking gently in the water and asked an eternal question of a traveler passing along the shore.

"Well, does it nibble?"

"Ah, just small fry," Sensei answered with eternal reply of a fisher.

Eugene lingered for a moment in secret hope that a grandiose biting would start at his presence. But with no sign of that momentous event he returned to the urgent subject.

"Hey, Sensei! There is a cheeky fellow looking for you. He's come on an SUV. He hold himself so high-flown..."

Keeping his eyes on the float Sensei smiled and asked: "Skinny, with a thin red beard?"

"Yes."

"Turn him out!"

"OK," Eugene rejoiced and started climbing up the sandy slope.

"Hey, wait!" Sensei called after him. "I'm joking, you know... He's a parson."

"A parson?!" Eugene slid down the slope in ineffable amazement. "The parson who, you said, would join us to fish?"

Observing confused the confused guy's face, Sensei nodded with laughter and stood up to come out of his "fishing ambush".

At the sight of his friend, Father John (or Vano as Sensei called him since childhood) seemed to have transformed right away. One wouldn't recognize a former SUV driver in him. He assumed a humble posture and took on long-suffering air.

In uncommonly heartfelt voice, laying stress on "o"s, the guest started pouring out his complaints and admonitions: "What in the wide world is going on? It not enough that I'd barely found you, God being my helper at that, now there's also this arch adolescent indulges in vile blasphemies. It almost came to manhandling..."

And so, Father John drew an intentionally vivid picture of his acquaintance with Eugene, winning the audience naturally on him. Then, he delivered a short edifying sermon on the topic



that one ought to love one's neighbors. With a serious look on his face, Sensei 'attended' unto Father John's touching speech, nodding in response and casting reproving glances at Eugene. The latter even got embarrassed at such words of the priest. The tips of his ears turned red as if he were a delinquent teenager. And when the guy – with the aid of flaming speech of the priest – was driven into a condition of browsing grass under his feet, wishing to sink into the ground for his behavior, before Sensei first of all, Father John suspiciously stopped short. Eugene was silent at first, depressed with shattering 'accusation'. Then he raised his 'madcap' timidly and... saw Vano and Sensei shudder in silent laughter. That's when Eugene finally grasped the concealed meaning of the aforesaid.

"Gee whiz!" he breathed out with relief.

All three let out a booming laughter. The laughter as a bait lured the guys and girls. After calming down, Vano heartily greeted Sensei and shook hands with the rest. Changing to ordinary pronunciation he observed in jest: "No, really, I've been puzzling out your maneuvers for two hours. I thought we agreed to meet in a different place..."

"I passed the word to you as it was explained to me," Sensei said merrily, pointing to Eugene.

"Now, that's who explained it to you?!" Vano exclaimed with a laughter. "No wonder you turned out here then. Pretends to be Ivan Osipovich!..."

"Do what? Which Ivan Osipovich?" Eugene didn't get it.

"Susanin, young man. Susanin. It's a shame not to know one's history," Father John uttered with reproof.

The entire company rolled with a new fit of laughter. The name of a renowned peasant of Kostroma uyezd (district), who led a party of Polish-Lithuanian interventionists into impassable dense forest, glued to Eugene through life by widely different people at that. But he did not seem to be daunted by that a bit. Quite the opposite, it stirred up pride in his historical compatriot.

Being in the focus of everyone's attention, Eugene feigned a smile, shrugged his shoulders and pronounced: "Even Homer sometimes nods. You never know what happens in life. Incidentally, the motto of my ancestors has it that all happenings of life in their incidents and opportunities are divided precisely into two halves. May be and may not be."

By these words he called forth a new hailstorm of jokes and laughter. Later on, when everyone managed to figure out who is who and what place they occupy under the sun, there began a hospitable welcome of the dear guest. In an attempt to rehabilitate himself before the newcomer, Eugene started fussing about, which was unnatural for his mischievous nature, offering a verity of services. He aided in parking the SUV near the "best tree on the glade" that in his opinion cast the widest shadow. He thoughtfully carried Vano's fishing tackle to the bank of the river and even inflated his rubber dinghy.

Such a valuable addition to fisherman's accessories as a means of travel by water ineffably inspired the gathering. As would be expected, the right of "the first rowing" was passed to inveterate fishermen. Along with Vano they started to plough the waters in turns in quest of a decent fish biting.

As of Eugene, as soon as he made sure that the object of his "first-sight affections" swam out a considerable distance, he smiled slyly. His eyes lit-up with mischievous twinkle. While everyone was consumed with the process of morning fishing, "Susanin's descendant" set out to implement his much suffered insidious intent. Especially as, in his opinion, there was not much of a true fishing to look forward to as such because of his hopelessly entangled net.

Having found an empty water bottle, Eugene learnedly made an unpretentious sprinkler out of it by pinning several holes in its cap. Then he filled it with water and made his way to the provision tent where he generously poured sugar into the bottle. Next, he thoroughly shook up his "detonating mixture", got out of the "bunker" and looked at the dinghy with a happy grin. The guy sashayed towards the SUV, walked round it casting amorous glances at this foreign monster. He

glanced back and, seeing no unnecessary witnesses, with unspeakable pleasure, he started to plot a sweet water trail from an anthill located behind the mighty trunk of the “best tree on the glade” that cast a blissful shadow – the car was parked next to it exactly owing to Eugene’s exorbitant endeavors – towards the hateful “tractor”. Whistling a patriotic tune to himself, he threw some sweet water on the wheels and lower door chinks of the SUV with particular inspiration.

The guy regretted a single thing: there were no spectators of the scene who would appreciate at its true value the inventiveness and acting talent of the performer. Only a bird sitting on a top pine-tree branch with its head bent awry was curiously watching the fuss of a ground biped which was absolutely incomprehensible for its bird’s nature. Having emptied the entire bottle, “avenged Susanin” had a sigh of great relief and, as if being a devoted Green Peace member, started delightfully watching how the first scout ants were successfully overcoming the invisible distance he had drawn. Eugene’s mood turned apparently better. However, his crazy enthusiasm did not run out at that.

Having waited until the sun slightly warmed up the water, Eugene decided to indulge in underwater hunting and to catch at least one worthwhile fish. He glanced over the water expanse in search of a fish Klondike and rested his gaze on a boat drifting near the far bank and attracting him like a magnet. Vano was there for already half an hour with Victor who had offered himself to be Vano’s fishing mate. And suddenly Eugene’s advantageous mind was visited by his unfailing “muse” – a gorgeous mythical woman with an inexhaustible sense of humour as the guy visualized her.

Having unpacked a massive aqualung, sweating over its weight, Eugene carried it to rush bushes, making a small detour through a forest so as to remain unnoticed. And, at the very moment when the guy was enthusiastically putting on the aqualung, the rush bushes began rustling suspiciously. Stas’ crown came into view in the middle of the bushes. Eugene’s friend appeared at the most interesting point, as they say.

“Oh! And I’ve been thinking where you are! I saw you taking the aqualung and walking to the forest, as if you were going to dive. I decided to please myself with such an entertaining spectacle.”

“No way!” Eugene grinned. “Don’t you dare touching my bright idea with your dirty hands!”

Right before Stas’ appearance, Eugene was completing to invent his great maneuver on how to convince the men fishing nearby that not simple fish could be found in this place, but gigantic ones similar to sharks. He was enjoying himself with such idea of a true fishing commotion. Stas’ appearance didn’t make a part of Eugene’s strategic plan, for he had always believed: if two people came to know something, than even a pig could find it out. Yet, at the same time he was eager to impart his huge idea of a laughable enterprise with someone. And who else could size up such submarine performance, but Stas who’d always been an unintentional witness of Eugene’s lifelong adventures? In his turn, Stas was bored of their unsuccessful fishing. Thus, when Eugene expounded his idea to him, his friend not simply supported it, but expressed his eagerness to participate in Eugene’s underwater adventure, having added the initial plan with some new refined details. Stas brought his aqualung to the departure point, i.e. to the rush bushes, put on the equipment and submerged simultaneously with Eugene, believing they both remained unnoticed by their half-asleep fishing companions.

The couple swam under Vano’s inflatable boat at the depth. At that moment, Victor was sitting at the stern with a fishing-rod in his hands. Fish was not biting at all, and it seemed like it even didn’t approach the fat worm which Victor had dug out in his grandmother’s kitchen garden the day before. Victor strenuously fought sleepiness, trying to focus his eyesight on a steadily wavering float. However, his pupils were further turning towards his bridge, and his eyes were closing all by themselves, temptingly replacing the monotonous river view with a sweet, untroubled dream. Only thanks to his incredible will effort, his vigilant conscience and the awareness of his fisherman’s duty, Victor periodically managed to unfasten his lead-like eyelids.

Vano was sitting at the other side of the boat with a spinning rod. His fishing was much more vigorous. He continuously dropped out his minnow into the water, now here, now there, not losing hope to catch at least something. It seemed like this man was not even familiar with “tiredness”, “sleepiness”, “dejections” notions. While Vano was recurrently winding the fishing-line round the spinning bobbin, his glance roved over the water surface not far from the boat. Then he looked askance at dormant Victor, archly smiled and providently moved aside from the boat edge. He quickly reeled the fishing-line on and began to replace the minnow with enthusiasm, as if nothing had happened.

At that very moment, “the saboteurs” were already straight at the planned whereabouts. Eugene carefully swam up to the worm inertly twitching on Victor’s rod and strongly pulled the fishing-line. Slumberous Victor nearly flopped into the water from surprise, having clutched at the rod instinctively. An excessive dose of adrenalin burst into his blood, like a sudden hurricane, and agitated sundry dust-forming “trash” in his human brain “garret”, namely some archaic hunting instincts. Victor’s eyes turned round in a flash, and he excitedly called out to Vano, having completely forgotten that “fish preferred silence”:

“I got it! I caught it, I caught it!”

The fishing-line tightly stretched, having bent the rod into a steep arc, and started to spin. Not believing his fishing luck, Victor persistently endeavored to pull it.

“Wow! What a fish! It’s probably a huge pike!” he kept saying boastfully, concentrating his delighted gaze on the muddy water depth.

Vano imitated sheer elation for his companion on his face and began helping him fussily with advices how to drag out the huge fish. Fishing passion was flaring up “on board”.

“Look, look how strongly it’s conducting!” the “happy fisherman” was bragging about, dizzy with his unprecedented luck. Victor even half-rose in agitation. “Give me the net, I’ll lead it closer now!”

At that moment, the fishing-line sharply stretched towards the middle of the river, and a mighty blow at the boat bilge immediately followed. Because of such an unexpected tremor, Victor, being busy with his “huge pike” chase, failed to keep the balance and fell overboard. The instinct of self-preservation in the face of such river monsters prevailed over the fishing instinct. Having dropped the rod, Victor started getting back into the boat at an unbelievable speed and, being panic-stricken, nearly overturned it together with Vano. If it were not Father John’s timely assistance, nobody knew how everything would eventually end.

“Wow! Wow!” Victor repeated like saying a prayer, with his teeth chattering either of cool water or of fear. “Have you seen this? It’s given such a blow! It’s probably this big, not less...”

Along with these words, his fishing “disease” further expanded.

“Yeah, looks like an old cat-fish,” Vano nodded, diligently expressing an awakened interest of an amateur fisherman.

“A cat-fish?! Wow! Yet, have you really seen it?! There is a whole shoal of them here! It’s dragged such a rod away, skunk!”

“Well, this cat-fish weighs something around sixty kilos,” the fishing-mate stirred up the passion and started plying the oars. “My spinning rod definitely won’t help us to cope with them.”

“Yeah,” Victor agreed, secretly being happy that their boat was rapidly moving away from the place of his recent “joy” which had ended with a total horror for him. “We need a stronger fishing-line, and bigger hooks...”

Evidently, the experienced fear caused Victor’s continuous verbal outpouring. On the move, he began to contrive fabulous methods of catching those huge fish.

Still, the most interesting the situation appeared for the rest of the company who were waiting for the two unlucky fishermen on the bank. Having dropped their rods, the other guys perplexedly witnessed Victor’s unbelievable overboard acrobatics and the next happy “rescue of the drowned

man” scene which was immediately followed with the high-speed rowing towards the bank. Having felt himself on the ground, Victor finally grew bolder. He started excitedly telling the others about his nearly lucky catch as well as about his heroic fight with the river monsters in the water where he had almost seized the huge fish by the tail... As everyone knows, the biggest fish caught is always the one which certainly gets away from the hook at a crucial moment of a fight.

The flaming fishing and hunting passion spread among the others, being stirred up by Vano a great deal. Everybody started strenuously getting ready for the trophies capture. Some brought huge hooks, some got capron lines... Someone warned that it was better not to go into the water, for he had heard a tragic story about some enormous cat-fish which had swallowed a whole god, and that there were also cannibal cat-fish. Then, a whole serial of various “reliable” cases followed. After all the thriller stories, the guys began to construct “a super-tackle”, a single one for everybody by the way.

Vano morally supported their fishing initiative as he should, but didn’t take any active part in the “project” implementation. He kindly put his boat at disposal of the enthusiasts, and joined Sensei and Nikolai Andreevich who were peacefully sitting far from the entire fuss, on their favorite snag.

“What is this panic all about?” Sensei interested.

“Well,” Father John waved his hand, “your Susanin has played an amphibian. He and his friend have put on aqualungs and are pulling our leg.”

“A-a-ah... This guy is capable of anything like this... As a matter of fact, fishing is a very useful thing... especially for developing one’s imagination.”

They laughed looking at the guys on the bank. By that time, Eugene and Stas had already approached the group as if nothing had happened. They actively joined the general fuss, pouring oil on the flames with passionate speeches and intensive gesticulation.

The “wonder-fish” catching lasted for about three hours. The guys thoroughly furrowed the river space by turns, trying to find Victor’s “valuable take”. In the end, fairly having fagged out their vigor and overstrained their nerved, they all got tired and almost lost hope of catching anything at all.

In the afternoon, the “wonder-fish” secret got disclosed in a very trite way. And the main thing was that it was disclosed by the inimitable humorist who had been the one to make the others swear of non-disclosure of this, nearly “government level” secret... At first, everything went right according to the plan. Eugene even decided to demonstrate courage and heroism of a fearless swimmer in front of the gazing fishermen. The water had already got warmed enough, but nobody really hurried to get into it after all those thriller stories. Only Eugene indulged in swimming with pleasure, diving like a duck in various places in quest of big cat-fish.

Suddenly, being at the deepest part of the river, the guy started to flounder desperately, as if he was drowning. First, everyone thought it was his next tomfoolery. Yet, such of his actions were usually followed with some comic speech declaring all the “heroic merits” of his, whereas now he was speechlessly floundering, disappearing under the water from time to time. Stas was the first one to rush to his help. Bogdan and Svat jumped into the water right after him without hesitation. At that moment, Eugene had finally managed to free himself from something, and he started swimming towards the bank at such speed which probably exceeded the dreams of Olympic swimming champions. Like a shot from a gun, he got out of the water, turned round dread and began looking narrowly at the place where he had nearly drowned.

“What’s happened?” the guys asked, coming up running.

“Have the cat-fished attacked?!” agitated Victor tried to elicit.

“There’s no cat-fish!” Eugene began to jabber very seriously. “Stas and I, we’ve played a trick on you with the cat-fish. But now somebody has been really pulling me to the depth. It’s something

very strong and shaggy! It's a total horror! It's still giving me the shivers. I've released one foot, but it grasped me by the other one with its claw! I wanted to dive under it, but it's soooooo huge..."

Sensei who was just passing by the group, stopped, listened to their conversation for a while and looked at the place showed by Eugene on the water. Then he glanced at each of the present, smiled and went his way to get extra hooks.

The crowd was listening to Eugene's words with distrust when suddenly he fell into a silent stupor. His fastened his eyes upon the water. Everybody looked in that direction, too. Rising from the abyss, there appeared an odd monster overgrown with long slime. It slowly started approaching the bank. The people were standing motionless: some couldn't move because of interest, some – because of a natural weakness. While the "monster" was gradually showing its human body from the water, and its upper part was clearing from slime, the dead-stopped guys began to give signs of life. In the end, the object of Eugene's enormous fear became completely transformed into Vano who shook off the last "flock" of slime, dipped into the water and walked to the bank with his customary gap-toothed smile, sleeking his hair with his hands.

"Well, how is the cat-fish?" he teased Eugene archly, and the entire crowd rolled with laughter.

After this incident, nobody was afraid of entering the water any more. The guys were heavily splashing in the river, having thoroughly scared away even the smallest fish. Vano was actively stirring up all that chaotic young enthusiasm with an interminable stream of jokes. He impressed Eugene so much that the latter became friends with him and discovered him as an irreplaceable mate for his "funny affairs" without even noticing it. Almost everyone abandoned fishing and devoted themselves to full-blooded rest. Only Sensei was still sitting on the bank with his rod, as a faithful fisherman. Vano and Eugene could stand it no longer, pointedly swam up to Sensei's rod and started to tug by the fishing-line one after another, imitating a mighty bite. Sensei tolerated their mockery for a while and then he gave in and said with a smile, "If fishing wasn't so calming, I would "drown" you both long ago, crucians."

Eugene cried out optimistically in response, "Fish does not drown in the water!"

And Vano teased Eugene right on the spot, "Hey, you, amphibian! Haven't you confused something about what does not drown in the water?"

Hilarious laughter resounded above the river again.

\* \* \*

When the group blissfully stretched themselves out in the sun after their "water treatment", Volodya took a seat near Sensei.

"Nothing?" he pointed to the fishing float.

"Nothing," Sensei answered with a slight sadness.

"You'd better abandon this hopeless occupation," Volodya advised with a smile. "I believe no decent fish has ever been found here."

"E-e-eh, no..." Sensei drawled persistently, but then added after a pause, grinning, "Do you know a folk fishing token? 'Good biting comes either before you start fishing or after you've already made off'."

"Exactly! So, you better make off, as those "most honest" fishing folks recommend", Volodya proposed with a laughter.

Sensei supported his joke, "Are you delicately hinting at the "law of nature" under which honest people cannot be good fishermen?"

They both laughed, recalling the widespread fishing tale.

"I'd like to catch at least a single decent one. With such ones," Sensei pointed at his bottle with several little herrings peacefully swimming inside, "my cat won't even let me in the door".

Volodya grinned again and looked towards the forest. Valera came out of it and walked to the camp, dragging along a dry tree trunk.

“Oh, Valera... dragging another log...”

Sensei turned round.

“Fine fellow. He is stocking firewood for tonight, in contrast to others,” he looked at Volodya unambiguously, and then uttered, “including myself”.

“I’ve proposed him to go swimming, but he keeps holding himself aloof from the group.”

“The feels shy. He’s in a new company for the first time. He knows nobody here, except you.”

“It’s true,” Volodya said in a bass voice. “By the way, I wanted to talk with you about him. He’s a good guy, although he’s got quite a hard destiny. He needs help in order not to get into trouble again... We were friends since childhood. He’s my neighbor. We used to attend gym together, and hung out in the same street company... His parents works in the North while Valera was brought up by his grandmother. She’s a really nice woman. Well, when his parents came back to live with him, Valera turned fourteen. And then his “merry life” started. His father started drinking alcohol and beating his mother. She wouldn’t wait long, divorced him and married another man. Yet, her second husband proved to be not better than Valera’s father, and brawls in the family became even more frequent and worse. Valera became very irritable, for reason or without it. For the first time he went to jail by total foolishness. He had then just turned eighteen. A month before he was supposed to go to the military service, he thrashed a man in a street fight. They imprisoned him for a year, after which he was released. He tried to find job, but no one would hire him. Moreover, his stepfather was nagging him with claims that he didn’t want to support a criminal at his expense. To cut a long story short, he had no money, but wanted to have many things like most young people. Well, as a result, he got imprisoned for another three years, this time for a robbery. When he returned from jail, the situation at home was as bad. He didn’t have any opportunity to rent an apartment, and so he got drawn into a gang again. He moved to an apartment in the neighboring district, married a nice girl, but less than in a year he got in trouble once more. They exposed him, fool, to a very serious crime, and he got into jail again... It’s good they’d condemned him to only five years. And, while he was imprisoned, his wife left him, and his parents died in a car accident. His granny was his only close relative remained, but she’s about eighty years old... He’s been released just recently and is still under criminal department control... So, he’s got a really tough life. But, in general, he’s a not a bad guy.”

“Indeed, not a bad guy... having three criminal records only,” Sensei grinned.

“You see, it’s just because he’s life turned the wrong way. I know him for so many years! I sent him letters to jail, to support him morally, so to say. We corresponded particularly frequently during the last four years. It would be good to settle him somewhere, so that he won’t break loose again... You see, he is a weak-willed, wavering guy...”

“Wavering, you say?!” Sensei grinned again and gazed at Volodya strangely.

The latter got confused.

“Well, what if he gets under somebody’s influence again or does something inappropriate...”

“All right, we’ll think something out.”

\* \* \*

With the company’s bywords and jokes, the evening stealthily approached. Oleg and Stas started exercising. Such habit which had become a daily physiological need for many of the guys present contagiously affected the others. The guys from the special operations group practiced a slightly different training technique than Sensei’s disciples, which generated mutual interest of the two exercising parties. One word led to another, and the guys began to share their accumulated “military” and “civil” experience. Unnoticed, it came down to little sparring bouts.

Meanwhile Father John, Sensei, Volodya and Nikolai Andreevich were still trying to fish, catching some tiny ones, which could be used “at least for a smell of fish-soup” as they said, and inconsolably waiting for bells jingle on the “track” which could signal of some big bite. Should they had been very old men, they would hardly be interested in anything except the fishing-rod and the fishing process itself. However, they still had young blood running in their veins, therefore they further more often cast glances at the sparring guys. Finally, Vano couldn’t resist such temptation any more, left his rod to Volodya’s charge and walked towards the fighters.

“Oh!” Sensei grinned. “If this priest got imbued with training, it means an edifying process will start now. Let’s go and see.”

When they approached, Father John was already in his repertory. Stas had accidentally injured Eugene’s lip during the sparring bout, when they both were just trying to demonstrate an interesting clench to Volodya’s guys. Father John began to bustle about Eugene like a caring hen about her chicken, applying a cold compress made of a wet handkerchief to his lip nearly by force. Eugene was waving away in amazement first, saying there’s no problem at all, but then he surrendered to Father John’s pressure and persuasion. Such scene automatically attracted the attention of the rest of spectators.

“You see... you see... it’s always like this: if one’s mind is stupid, his body suffers,” the priest was explaining Eugene the sense of his blunder. “The God’s power must be inside you. Without it, your body is a mere dust, the infinity of suffering.”

“But, in the end, the infinity of suffering upon training leads to ‘the body position steadiness upon fighting’,” Eugene responded jestingly, attempting to stand up from the “penal and injured” beam.

However, the priest who had evidently not finished his edifying homily yet, put his hand on Eugene’s shoulder and riveted him to his previous spot. It was much more comfortable for Father John to preach from above than to “breathe in the navel” of this nearly two-meter-high giant.

“Not really, not really... God’s Spirit is the main thing in a human being. It’s exactly it, and not the transient flesh, is the real source of power. You should rely on it...”

“... but help yourself, too,” Eugene interrupted Father John friskily, making another attempt to stand up.

But Vano seated him with his “iron” hand again. The priest shook his head and looked at Sensei who had just approached them. Imitating an old-mannish voice, making his favorite accent on “o’s”, Vano quoted the poem, “Look at this modern youth! Their deeds, their words! When we very young, we were not foolish like this! Instead, we asked advice: ‘May I do this, or may I do that?’”

Sensei and Volodya smiled, looking at the priest.

“What I’m trying to explain you, little fool, is that you should rely not on your muscles, but on the God’s Spirit which is inside you,” Father John continued to preach to Eugene. “Without it, you are deprived, mere outcast of flesh!”

“Me, deprived?! Mere outcast of flesh?!” Eugene lost his temper and rose at his entire robust enormous height opposite to the skinny priest.

The funny side of the situation caused loud laughter of the group watching what was going on. Vano looked at Eugene’s mighty trunk with pumped muscles, eyed him all over contemptuously, waved his hand and said:

“Weakling! Don’t you think it’s the real power?! It’s only a swollen bag with bones inside it. Should you blow on it, it will fly. I can now show you what the real God’s power is like, accumulated through incessant praying sacrament.”

With these words Father John raised his forefinger instructively, and then pointedly started to strip his upper trunk part. A pitiful sight appeared before the present – a thin, bony priest looking as if he had recently been released from the Buchenwald torture-chamber. There was not a single

shadow of muscles on his body. Only unusually thick veins were peeping out from under the priest's pale skin, which made him resemble a belly-pinched cow in a careless farmer's cattle-shed. But this important feature along with uncommonly broad wrists and enlarged elbow and shoulder joints could be noticed only by a true pro. For others, his appearance most likely evoked pity and burning desire to give this underfed miracle of nature some foodstuff as soon as possible. Even Eugene who had first got enflamed of fighting, stopped short and cooled down right after seeing such walking skeleton.

With unconcealed smiles on their faces, everybody was looking at the strange priest calling opponents to test his destiny. One would think that even a single finger touch could spill this poor fellow. Driven by either sympathy or respect, no one dared to approach Father John who had managed to become a friend for all of them in less than twelve hours.

"Well?!" the priest pompously put his arms akimbo, standing all alone in wait-and-see position. "Who considers himself strong? Step forward. Even two, three or eight people at once. The power of Spirit is a great power. It is capable of much more than this."

Seeing sympathy and compassion on the guys' faces, Sensei came to Father John's rescue, "Come on, come on, don't hesitate, skeptics. If the father discourses he can, it means he really does."

After such "blessing", the people somewhat began to stir. Seeing Vano's serious sparring mindset, Eugene came up to Sensei and, failing to find appropriate words in his vocabulary to fully express his indignation, he stretched his arm into the priest's direction couple times.

"Sensei, how is it possible?!" his compassionate nature finally expressed itself. "I might even kill him accidentally. I wouldn't take such a sin upon my soul... You know my blow..."

And, not finding proper words again, Eugene stroke a heavy Yoko kick on a nearest tree which was much bigger in size than Father John's trunk. The mighty blow made the tree shudder, and dried branches began to fall from the top.

"But how?!" he repeated his question.

Remaining absolutely indifferent to Eugene's demonstration, the priest instructively uttered in response:

"A man's power is not in his flesh, but in his soul. Jesus spitted upon a fruitless fig-tree, and it withered, whereas your power has only made the branches fall down."

"OK," Eugene puffed up, being ready to prove his case in action.

That was exactly what Vano was hoping for. He livened up and started to stir up the audience's passion like a barker in a marketplace.

"Who else wants to experience the power of the inner spirit? Only this one?" the priest pointed to Eugene. "One is as good as none against such a tremendous power... Come on! Some other daring should join him... I earnestly and very seriously recommend you to display yourself, for I'll show it first and last time."

The guys smiled understanding his message in their own way and began to nominate candidates for sparring with the skinny priest, rather for fun than a real fight. Meanwhile, Sensei just grinned enigmatically, and then warned them, no one knew whether jokingly or seriously, "Look, but remember: eyes may deceive. The priest is fond of fooling. When he speaks in such a way, one should be on the alert. I advise you to fight in full contact," and then he added with a note of black humor: "so that this time won't be the last time for you."

Finally, eight guys intending to participate in the joke surrounded Vano at a distance of two to three meters from him. Eugene specially occupied the position right in front of the priest. On one hand, Father John had managed to involve him into sparring. Yet, on the other hand, the guy sincerely pitied the priest. "He doesn't even imagine what power he faces, – Eugene was thinking to himself. – Three special operations officers who have been at many hotspots, plus our guys. Why



is he kicking against the pricks? They will make mincemeat of him here with a single stroke... A single stroke?!»

At that moment, an “excellent idea” came to Eugene’s mind. He decided to play a “noble knight” – to be the first one to attack Vano and knock him down to the ground with a simple hold, so that the priest would be insured from strokes of the other assailants and from corresponding possible “multiple injuries”. After all, it’s customary not to hit a man when he is down. Inspired with such an idea, Eugene took a fighting stand, displaying readiness with his entire appearance. Then, right off the bat, he jumped up to Vano striking a punch into his chest, being absolutely sure that the priest would be on the ground after it. Yet, nothing of the sort happened!

Father John was freely standing with one foot put forward. But, exactly at the moment of the stroke, his lean body quickly and easily moved aside like a plumelet blown by hurricane. Eugene’s crushing punch driven by the force of the guy’s over one-hundred-kilo weight passed by the priest’s chest at some several centimeters distance. At that very moment, Father John’s veins got unusually swelled, and Vano’s right hand flew out towards Eugene’s chest, like a bullet upon a gunshot, delivering a mighty open-palm counter-blow which resembled a bell stroke. Contrary to all laws of physics, the “noble knight’s” body was thrown from the priest’s bony hand at such a speed as if Eugene had full-pelt collided into a train making up for a 24-hour delay. Before the “noble knight” had time to touch the ground, the other fighters who had been previously standing with smirks on their faces, reacted to Vano’s attack immediately. Or rather, their brains reacted, having been prepared for various extreme situations during years of training. The subconscious evaluated the conditions and, having immediately blocked all emotions, switched on the self-defense instinct to secure their own safety.

Stas was on the right, closer to the priest than anyone else. Therefore, upon Vano’s demonstrative counter-attack, he promptly delivered a Mavashi kick. However, nearly at the same moment when Stas’ foot had just lost contact with the ground, Father John squatted and, with adroitness of a panther, made a heavy ankle trip on Stas’ pivot leg. Both guy’s legs flew up into the air, and he tumbled down on his back, though he immediately mechanically made a roll-over to a safe distance. Only thereafter Stas began to come to his sense and to evaluate what had just happened. Recovering from the heavy collapse, his body evidently wasn’t in a hurry to join the fight again. So, Stas had an opportunity to behold this grandiose sparring bout in all details. Eugene was just in the process of scrambling out of the near bushes, and his delighted eyes were also glued on the scene of the frail priest’s incredible transformation.

In the meantime, Vano was gracefully settling scores with the rest. His legs were showing up by turns in the middle of the general conglomeration of moving bodies. Following Stas, three of the fighters flew out of the general circle with a time difference of couple seconds, being by no means driven by their own intention to experience all the pleasures of such aerobatics.

Andrew adroitly managed to escape from the line of Vano’s attack couple times, but very likely because the attack was directed no at him specifically. Inspired with such an unreal hope for a possible victory, the guy conducted a violent attack. Snatching a moment when Vano’s face was remaining exposed, Andrew delivered a straight and mighty Mae Geri kick. Yet, the priest’s body immediately bent backward like a pendulum. Vano promptly hit the approaching foot up, thus having sharply accelerated its movement. And, instead of letting the guy who had lost his balance “quietly” land on his back, Vano stroke a kick into his buttocks in such a way that Andrew had sharply changed his flight trajectory from free-vertical to forced-horizontal, and flew to the bushes like a torpedo. Apparently, he had irritated the priest with his jumps and leaps too much.

During that demonstrative flight, without any mutual coordination, Kostya and Ruslan – the remaining fighters – quickly jumped aside from Father John, not intending to test their further destiny with similar sensations of weightlessness. Father John suddenly found himself on his own, so he turned round and beckoned these two:

“Please, be my guests...”

To which words they answered, smiling:

“No, thank you, father. We already made our communion in the morning...”

Such answer made everyone laugh and cleared the air conformably. The atmosphere got filled with indefatigable humor and good-natured jokes from the side of both Father John and those who had experienced the “God’s power” of the skinny priest on themselves. When all fighters had taken the vertical position and began to discuss their extremely fleeting fight admiringly, Father John robed his “camouflage” clothes back on. Joining the conversation, he instructively raised his finger to the sky and uttered significantly, “Now you see, kids, what powers the God’s faith and service to God give us...”

Then he smiled, cast a sidelong look at Sensei and added, “...Well, together with long years of friendship with Sensei, of course.”

The crowd responded with laughter again, recalling various curious incidents related to “long years of friendship with Sensei”.

After that case, Vano’s authority inside the company became still higher. It rose particularly and excessively in estimation of Eugene who endeavored to please the priest in every possible way after his unforgettable flight. He even helpfully offered to clean his SUV which already turned into “the most outstanding and practical car on our roads” on the guy’s lips. He said such a luxurious, splendid vehicle should not be dirty during the night when its owner slept inside it. I should better be brought into the proper brilliant and shining condition right away, and so it would be both pleasant to look at it and easier to breathe inside it. Father John did not particularly resist such “open-hearted” Eugene’s offer and silently, though with a cunning smile, handed him the keys.

First of all, Eugene moved the car to a new place, claiming the ground was flatter there while the river was not too close. After that, he took a bucket and hastily ran to take water, being accompanied with other guys’ jokes like “the priest’s footman”, “preparing to take monastic vows”, etc. But Eugene only smiled in response. He washed both the SUV exterior and interior with such thoroughness and care as if he had long ago dreamt of cleaning Father John’s vehicle.

\* \* \*

The deepening gloaming had nearly changed into the night when the company finally calmed down after their Oriental combat passions. Having taken sits closer to the campfire after supper, everybody was extending pleasure, slowly drinking the sweet-scented herbal tea.

Light breeze was blowing. Stars were twinkling in the sky, loose. Warmth of the fire, freshness of invigorating piny air and a charming picture of the stars were creating a feeling which many people apparently experience when they escape from the civilized, smoky and mechanized box of the city to the freedom of animate nature. It was so pleasant to sit in such a quiet night, to talk easily and to glance now at the fire, then on the sparking sky.

“What a beauty!” Tatyana said looking up. “The stars are so bright, so attractive...”

He hardly had time to describe her impression, when Kostya wedged himself into her world of charms with his usual logical intelligence showing.

“This is because we are sitting close to water. Moreover, the city illumination is far from here. The air is rarefied. Therefore the stars are so bright.”

Andrew hemmed and couldn’t refrain from a sarcastic remark:

“You have such an amazing anatomy of thinking, pal! Should there by lieutenant Rzhevskiy with us, he would already fought a duel with you, kicking straight on your face. The lady is saying about stars to you, while you are responding about the rarefied air.”

The company burst out laughing. Kostya was assailed with jokes and anecdotes from every quarter, and he was hardly able to parry those with his favorite aphorisms, begetting still more

laughing. In the end, failing to stand such a verbal pressure, the guy jokingly attacked Andrew who had been the “scandal” instigator.

“It’s always like this! As one French comedian said, ‘He has touched me all over! I’m only a target for his pointed arrows’.” Then, looking at his friend with reproach, he recited his pet poem which he usually used when he wanted to escape from a tickler, “I know, monsieur, how telltale you are. / Your head is chock-full with examples. / But isn’t it enough? Take care of yourself. / And give me away to my destiny.”

“Well, what can I say?” Andrew was at a loss. “A true diplo-mat! What I do respect him for is that when he abuses you, you feel pleased with the way he’s doing it.”

To that, Eugene grinned and cast a sidelong look at the priest, “Such evening as tonight can turn anyone into a skilled diplomat.”

Everybody laughed again. Yet, when the laughter ceased, a lasting pause set in. The people got reabsorbed in silent observation of the stars and the fire. Tongues of flame were ardently performing their charming dance to melodious crackle of burning brushwood. Such passion made shafts of sparkles fly up in a spinning whirlwind, continuing their rash “pas” in the darkness space. And this made them look like a multitude of tiny starlets living in their single inimitable instant.

Scrutinizing the celestial bodies, Nikolai Andreevich was the first one to disturb the silence.

“Indeed, the starts are extraordinary... It’s so incredible to think how many worlds are around us, how many galaxies living their own separate life, colliding, scattering, collapsing... Tremendous disasters happen somewhere out there, while somewhere else new forms of life are being born. And this entire life is permanently in full swing in this vast Universe. If you only imagine those enormous masses and sizes, those stupendous velocities of galaxies movement of several hundred kilometers per second, and this entire gigantic process, you automatically face a question: who are we at all, compared to these zillions of stars? Not even a flash... Yet, we are aware of this seething life. And we are not just aware, but we also perceive and study the processes of life creation and of such huge objects destruction. There is an impression that we are allowed to glance through a keyhole of the universe only with one eye, to see both the microcosm and the macrocosm.”

“Why with one eye?” Ruslan asked with a chuckle.

“Why do you ask why?” Kostya responded with humor. “Surely, in order to bate our curiosity to the way the others live. It is the eternal issue of domicile, really!”

Nikolai Andreevich smiled and said, “I believe, if it’s all about the issue of domicile, we would not be given such detailed information in formulas and figures, in thorough confirmations of the evident which are provided for human brain. A different question is more appropriate here: “What for?” Obviously, in order for us to understand something, something very important about ourselves, our essence, our nature...”

Father John nodded agreeing with him.

“Perhaps, the reason God doesn’t hide His keyholes from us is that He knows our nature and wants us to delve deeper into the laws of His creation ourselves, so that in execution of those laws we, as His children, could become participators of His perfect creation. In Bible, in the cathedral epistle of St. Jacob, chapter 1, line 25, there are the following remarkable words, ‘...the one who delves into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and resides in it, being not a forgetful listener, but an executor of deeds, will be blessed in his deeds’.” And, having finished the quotation, he supplemented his speech with an explanation, “He’ll be blessed, because he has understood the essence correctly.”

“Yea-a-ah,” Nikolai Andreevich drawled pensively, he then brightened, having recalled something, and addressed Sensei. “By the way, I had a unique patient, an astronomer. It was an ordinary depression case. He felt lonely because his wife had abandoned him for another man. So, the scientist quite interestingly expressed his mental state, associating it with the life of stars. The

main thing was that he did have an understanding, though in a peculiar veiled form, that loneliness was actually an illusion of one's mind, its fiction, for objectively a person was always socially surrounded. Thus, the feeling of loneliness appears mostly because of one's inability to adapt oneself to society. The astronomer used to interpret his thoughts in the language of his profession. As he said, if we look at a star, it seems to be a lonely object. Yet, indeed, it's only an illusion of our naked eye, for even modern telescopes distinguish three to five hundred stars in one such star."

"Oh, there are even more interesting things than this!" Eugene waved his hand, demonstrating good knowledge of the subject. "If you take a modern microscope and examine this one..." his forefinger pointed at father, but then his eyes timely came across with the priest's eloquent stare which made Eugene sharply change the direction of his finger to the opposite side where Stas was sitting. "...this suspicious individual, you'll find so many stuff there!.. A whole Universe of diverse community of fleas, microbes and various disgusting parasites."

"It's you who are a disgusting parasite!" Stas countered with a smile. "It can be seen even with a naked eye..."

The entire company burst out laughing. Once the revelry abated, Nikolai Andreevich continued, "Well, this only proves the fact that stars and people are creatures resembling one another in many ways. Everything's like in our life. Stars like people "live" in groups – in accumulations in which they are connected between each other by forces of mutual gravitation. And the most interesting thing is that, just like in human society, stars most often make up binary systems..."

"What systems?" Victor asked.

"Double systems," Sensei explained. "It's like two suns rotating around a common center of masses."

"Yes," Nikolai Andreevich confirmed. "That astronomer told such systems are very stable... And, in addition to double ones, there are also three-, four, fivefold stars. To tell the truth, these are rarer than double ones. And he surely paid particular attention to the threefold stars phenomenon, comparing it to his own situation. It turns out that triple stars cannot coexist stably. You know why? Two stars simply discard the third body, while they themselves may steadily rotate side by side during a long period of time."

"It's a natural law of mechanics," Sensei uttered, shrugging his shoulders. "The third body disturbs movement of the other two and usually leads to such system decay."

"Amazing laws which in many respects coincide with human society!" Nikolai Andreevich said.

"It depends on how you look at that society," Svat chimed in with a chuckle. "Especially, at a trio. If a trio includes a woman, it's a delicate issue, I agree. But, if it's a male company, they can occasionally form systems so stable, especially in drinking, that their mutual gravitation is truly marvelous. And the main thing is that there mostly gather not four or five of them, but exactly three, not more and not less."

"This way, it is easier to think. A certain integrity of mind is generated," Bogdan remarked with a grin.

"It's correct," Oleg confirmed and specified. "Four is already an excess, one is excessive."

"The most interesting thing is that it's just the same up there," Nikolai Andreevich pointed at the sky, laughing with all the rest. "Fourfold, fivefold stars make insecure groups which dissociate much faster. Surely, same laws of nature operate there. Such cohabitations of stars may form and decay many times throughout their existence. And, as my patient explained, a star may constantly change its partners. For example, in compact star accumulations a star may fly from one "company" to another as many as six times during its lifetime..."

Eugene archly glanced at Father John.

"Father, it's a heavenly adultery. How does the church tolerate this?"

Father John made a “clever” face, looked at the stars and declared in priestly voice, “It’s all God’s will, child.”

It made everyone laugh again.

“It’s probably true,” Nikolai Andreevich nodded merrily and addressed Sensei again. “In general, I had not a patient, but rather a whole well of psychological arguments for our depression clients. He infected me with his comparative analysis so much that, after our conversations, I became interested in his science myself. He even brought me books on amusing astronomy.”

Sensei grinned and asked in jest, “I haven’t quite understood who was the patient out of you two?”

“Well, sometimes such cases may take place in medicine,” the psychotherapist supported his humor with laughter. “You know, at times some doctors say: “Sometimes you come across such a “talented” loony who can bring you into his own condition without you batting an eyelid”.”

The group burst out laughing again.

“Yet, can you imagine what I’ve read in those books?!” Nikolai Andreevich continued, enthusiastically sharing his impressions. “It appears that in complex star systems consisting of a hundred, two hundred, a thousand stars the situation with their interaction is completely different from that in simple accumulations. A star cannot feel each of its neighbors anymore. Instead, it feels the overall field, and so it moves evenly enough. It looks as if the influence of the neighbors is smoothed out.”

“Such stable groups may often be found in galaxies,” Sensei remarked as if it went without saying.

“Exactly! I’ve noticed this, too. Everything is like in human society. Mass psychology on stream! A mass grades a person’s individuality, i.e. it equalizes completely different people in many respects and imparts new qualities to people belonging to it. Let’s take Le Bon’s concept, for instance. What are the main distinctive features of an individual inside a mass? Firstly, it’s anonymity, disappearance of the conscious personality. Secondly, it’s predominance of the unconscious personality, deterioration of intellect and rationalism. Thirdly, it’s orientation of the mass’s thoughts and feelings into one and the same direction. And the main thing is formation of an aim in individuals to immediately implement the ideas they’re being inspired with. We may say, it’s almost like in star systems.

“However, there are also other amazing facts. I became interested to discover specific figures, i.e. the number of stars in such complex accumulations, for in the human society, and even in the animal world we view something similar. Biologists conducted quite interesting studies on mass psychology with comparative analysis of animal behavior. Processing various data, scientists discovered an optimal size of a human group – not more than one hundred fifty people. Moreover, this number may be applied to various communities, starting from a tribe of hunters or collectors, right up to church, military, corporate groups. And it all began with biologists’ observation of baboons and chimpanzees behavior, when they determined a positive correlation between the size of a cortex, namely of its frontal and temporal parts, and the size of an animal pack...”

“What is correlation?” Victor interested, not really understanding Nikolai Andreevich’s professional language.

“Well, it’s interrelation, interdependency... So, they were observing apes during those experiments. The apes were living in groups consisting of about fifty specimens each. All pack members knew each other. Furthermore, they were even involved in various types of relationships: they were friends or at odds with one another, they entered into diverse alliances. Based on the observations, the scientists made corresponding calculations taking into account the size of a homo sapiens brain and came to the optimal size of a human group – not more than one hundred fifty people! As they also determined, if a community grows larger, people start feeling themselves aloof inside it. Hence, they simply lose capability to follow everything happening inside the group.

As a result, the group loses its individuality and then splits into separate groupings. And the main thing is that it becomes almost impossible to rule over such group. What does it mean? It means that assistants become necessary. Consequently, a management system originates... So, stars and humans have much in common."

"Naturally," Sensei ascertained evenly. "It is the world of the matter. And its laws apply to both microcosm and macrocosm. The matter is characterized by a certain reasonable organization, by certain laws of survival and limited time of existence. The matter is starting and ending. Hence, it's no wonder stars and humans are so similar."

Sensei took some brushwood and added it to the fire.

"And it relates not only to humans, but to the rest of the animated world as well. Let's take ants as an example at least. Do you know how organized their life and their infrastructure are? They set up new colonies where each member fulfills a strictly defined function: some ants gather food, others defend the colony, still others are occupied with ventilation or establish new shafts, and some others fight. In the colony, there are pilferers, parasites, hangers-on, and there are "slave-holders" as well. In other words, they have the same hierarchy, the same organization... A similar situation is on the level of galaxies, if we enlarge the scale. They snatch matter and planets out of one another, they "eat up" each other, they collide, they scatter. Well, humanity behaves just like this, too... Even in a small group someone aspires to become a leader. Two leaders cannot get along together, so there is always a conflict."

"That's true," the psychotherapist agreed.

"So, the matter is the matter. Nevertheless, despite such, say, isolation, all the matter is closely interconnected."

"How come?" Andrew didn't understand. "Does it mean I'm connected to some star or some microbe living in a distant galaxy?"

"Yes," Sensei answered simply, putting another portion of branches into the fire.

Andrew raised his eyebrows with astonishment.

"Are you familiar with such concept as gravitational fields?" Sensei asked Andrew.

"Well..."

"Properties of these fields are far from being thoroughly studied by the modern humanity. Yet, gravitational fields are characterized by tremendous velocities. If we compare their velocity with the velocity of light, it would be same as comparing a speed of the most up-to-date sky-rocket with a speed of an old, feeble tortoise. For gravitation fields, no concept of distance actually exist, instead there is a concept of instantaneous transference. And, owing exactly to the general gravitational field the basic element of which is the Po particle, each atom on the tip of your nose is connected with each atom of the sun, of other planets and stars, and even, as you've said, with each atom of a microbe living in some distant galaxy... You see, the matter as such is a gigantic organism which is permanently altering because of its energies transformation..."

"It's so difficult to imagine such tremendous infinity with hundreds of milliards of stars as a single organism," Volodya said in bass voice, looking at the night sky.

"Nevertheless, it is exactly as I've described," Sensei uttered. "For instance, in our head there are also milliards of nerve cells which virtually form their own galaxies flaring up from the birth moment. There are about one hundred thousand chemical reactions taking place in one's cerebrum each second. And, should we look at this from the position of a micro-creature, say, some quark "inhabiting" one of those cells, for this tiny creature the cerebrum would also seem to be an unexplainable, unknowable infinity. It's normal... Our mind is very limited. Moreover, we are never left in peace by the animal nature with its egoism, with its self-assurance that it's the "hub" of the global evolution, and its "irresistible" corporal appearance. Whereas, what are we in fact for such a tremendous organism? Only dust of the long ago extinct stars."

"In what sense?" Svat didn't get it.

“In direct sense,” Sensei responded. “Have you ever thought of what is your organism in reality?”

“Well, it’s clear. Muscles, bones, blood...”

“You should scrutinize it deeper,” Sensei advised in a friendly way. “In reality, it’s a certain set of chemical elements which consists on average of 65% of oxygen, 18% of carbon, 10% of hydrogen, 3% of nitrogen, and of 1% of everything else.”

“But what about bones?”

“Bones are also a sheer chemistry, an original “depot” of mineral salts. They are made of calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and about thirty other microelements. Well, and there is water, of course, the notorious H<sub>2</sub>O. Now, think what the stars, say, in our galaxy are made of. Surely, they’re made of the same chemical elements, where hydrogen and helium are ones of the most prevalent... As I’ve already said, there is a total mass of the matter. By means of certain forces, sets and combinations, it is transformed into various material objects. For example, new generations of stars are permanently created out of interstellar gas by dint of condensation, and planets are formed out of dust, i.e. of the same set of chemical elements contained in that gas. What is the light of stars maintained with? With the discharge of nuclear energy in their kernels during the process of synthesis of heavy elements such as carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, silicon, iron and so on. And, when the lifetime of a star comes to its end, the star gives the major part of its matter back to the interstellar space, enriching it with heavy elements. There is a usual phenomenon of gigantic explosions of so called super-new stars which actually produce almost all chemical elements.”

“The elements contained in Mendeleev’s table?” Oleg inquired.

“Well, let’s say – contained in the complete table including those elements which have not been discovered by this humanity yet... And again, the discharged gas becomes a construction material for new accumulations of stars, for planets and for life on the latter. Thus, it turns out that the same matter of which, say, our Solar System, our Earth and we all were made, had been repeatedly used for composition of stars which had existed previously.”

“You discourse the truth indeed, my son,” Father John echoed. “That’s why the Holy Bible says that God created a man out of earthly dust and breathed life into him, and the man became a living soul.”

“Absolutely right. Consequently, if a person wastes prana, i.e. the vital energy “the ”breath of life”, on his or her Animal, his or her material, such person will, unfortunately, turn into dust, take it for all in all, whereas if a person spends prana on his soul growth, some completely different laws came into action – the laws of the spiritual world. It surely does not mean that the human matter won’t be further processed and used to fertilize the earth. Physical body is a mere shell for maturing of the spiritual substance, and it is mortal like any matter. Nevertheless, if inside this shell a synthesis of the thought power, the soul and the “breath of life” takes place during the shell existence, a completely new spiritual creature is born, say, a Personality of eternity, whom the laws of matter have no influence upon.”

Sensei fell silent. All of a sudden, Valera who had not said a word throughout their conversation asked unexpectedly, “And what is life in its genuine sense?”

Sensei looked at him attentively and answered quite bluntly, “It’s nothing, but ezoosmos – the inner impulse of energy.”

After this answer, everybody was silent for a while, evidently thinking over what they had just heard. Then Kostya started ratiocinating aloud, “However, if life is a mere impulse of energy, then, in principle, there should be quite a lot of such energy including rational one. Yet, so far, for example, they even haven’t discovered another planet like ours possessing the necessary conditions for the rational life development. So, we are indeed solitary in our rationality.”

“I have to “disappoint” you,” Sensei said ironically. “There are milliards of such planets as ours! And there are zillions of such individuals sitting by the fire and looking at the sky. But these facts really convey nothing.”

“Why don’t they contact us if that is so?”

Eugene grinned, having recalled something funny, “Why would they contact such humanoids who live in their social mess and are constantly whimpering and complaining? Do you know the recent rumors?” He bent forward and whispered conspiratorially as if communicating some supersecret information, “They say that the lack of contacts with the Earth from the outer space definitely confirms the existence of rational civilizations out there.”

The guys laughed looking at the “humanoids expert”.

“No, joking apart!” Kostya objected, adjusting the eyeglasses which had moved down from his nose bridge. “What rational life may possibly exist in the outer space, if there is nothing at all there, except dust and other stuff of that sort?”

“Rational life exists not only on other planets, but even in the cosmic space itself,” Sensei returned to him. “That life certainly differs from our air-breathing form which needs oxygen. The main thing for any life is the energy impulse, i.e. ezoosmos. Such impulse can be given, for instance, by thermal energy, by the energies of electromagnetic, gravitational fields and so forth. And life will be generated by such impulse, but it’ll be a life different than biological. Our mind has become accustomed to think only amino acids may be construction blocks in living organisms of rational beings, and so we simply don’t want to see and to accept anything, but such belief. Yet, if we consider amino acids, these “bricks” are scattered all over the space, however this doesn’t mean anything. Amino acids as such are far from being a “house” in which rational beings are settled. They are only “bricks” which are still to be put together to make the “house” shape.”

“How may an alternative life look like otherwise?” Kostya asked in bewilderment.

“Well, for example, there are rational beings with corresponding intellect who live outside any planets, in the inter-cosmic space. They occupy vast territories. It’s actually one of the biggest populations of rational beings... What they are composed of cannot be even called a matter in our human understanding. If you use the earthly language, the structure of their, say, “cells” (the latter containing nothing similar to amino acids) reminds a form of little retort, little cylinders. But, once they match together, they change their shape. Those are isolated particles. Their structure is much more organized and much higher than ours... In its natural state, such creature is not very long, though it depends on its “age”. Their sizes may vary from several millimeters to several meters. When such creature resides in quiescent state, it disintegrates and merges with the outside world, whereas upon travel it simply organizes itself, and that’s all... In principle, these creatures can get on any planets.”

“On ours, too?” Ruslan wondered.

“Naturally. Although it’s difficult to see them with a naked eye here. Some modern equipment would be needed, since they move at totally different speeds... They can organize themselves, they can fall into separate parts, but even during such disintegration they continue existing on the energy level, and they can reintegrate themselves if needed. They can also easily pass to a parallel world...”

“Well, if these rational beings do exist, we should somehow feel their presence,” Kostya declared.

“By no means. We simply cannot intersect with them due to their velocities, therefore we cannot feel them either. Nevertheless, it’s possible to record their movement. When they enter our atmosphere, the isolated groups of their “cells” draw together. During their movement, they resemble something like an oblong body with a spire winded around it. The spire looks like a rod in a manual meat grinder. At that moment, perhaps, it might be possible to record them with modern devices, at that filming must be very rapid and thoroughly focused on these objects. As for any other method... In principle, they discharge no energy. They expend the obtained heat on



themselves. Their accumulations may also be seen, if we follow the thermal energy distribution along the spectrum: the temperature of the sunbeams, for instance, usually decreases behind them, because the process of “absorption” takes place.”

Having considered for a while, Kostya asked another question, “By means of what do these creatures move?”

“By means of sliding on gravitational fields. They use gravitation for travel. Their movement resembles rotation of spires. In the case of our atmosphere, there’s appears an impression as if they are revolving the air, although it’s not like this in reality. Such spiral movement is connected with our magnetic fields.”

“Is it possible to catch such creature?” Andrew expressed a “wild idea”, being probably incited by a primeval hunting instinct.

“To catch?” Sensei grinned. “Well, it would be same as trying to catch a fish with a sweep-net rim without a net.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s not that easy. Our inter-atomic, corpuscular cellular distances are too big for us to feel the movement of these creatures through us at least somehow. We are the void for them.”

“What do you mean?” Father John wondered.

“Well... What is a human being or rather its body in the largest accounts? It’s the void. If we look inside our microcosm, we would see that our molecules, atoms, electrons are at big distances from each other. And, the further we delve into their division, the more void we’ll discover. The void inside a human body mounts to about 97.7%. In principle, if we remove the entire void, the remainder of the human being would figuratively go through an eye of a needle... In the case of those creatures, we cannot get in touch with them because there are two hindering factors: the interatomic distances and the acceleration in time. As I’ve already mentioned, their ezoosmos operates at a different frequency. Therefore, we actually don’t intersect. It’s a paradox of the parallel which have been neither described nor studied by the modern science.”

“I haven’t quite understood...” Andrew said.

“Say, for example, while I’ve been telling you all this, zillion neutrinos has passed, or rather has flown through our bodies, and none of you have even felt them. Yet, incidentally, one neutrino consists of five Po particles, while “little retorts” of these creatures consist of three Po particles each. Furthermore, during our existence we move at a certain speed in a certain time flow,” Sensei explained patiently. “These creatures are omnipresent exactly due to the fact they can freely accelerate, whereas we are incapable of what they do since we can’t get out of this time; we are limited here. You see, for a transfer we need... say, to accelerate our inner energy potential in order for us to move to another time or another parallel together with our astral, mental and other shells. The acceleration must occur on that level, and then – yes, we would move. But, again, how would we move? We’d disappear here and appear in a more accelerated time. However, should we appear in that world, we’d basically get into a similar parallel with possibly same seas, skies, sun, yet we’d find ourselves in a completely different world which naturally does not intersect with ours due to its frequency characteristics. For instance, on a site where we have a building located, there would be a desert or a forest.”

“Yes, the world is much richer in life than we think,” Nikolai Andreevich uttered, “and we are far from having perceived it.”

“Of course, it is far from being perceived,” Sensei agreed. “Humanity, say, is only starting to graduate from the kindergarten and to open the school door a little. How many time has passed since sciences began developing? Little more than 160 years have passed since transformer and electromagnetic induction were invented; nearly 60 years passed since the atomic nucleus was split; just 30 years ago computers with bubble-forming memory appeared... These all are elementary

knowledge... and the time terms are minimal, given the humanity age! These are only the first steps in perception of the manifold world...

“Forms of life are really numerous! If people have time, they will be able to study the parallel paradox, too. There’s nothing complicated in it. It is necessary only to... Let’s not go into details though. To cut a long story short, there’s nothing complicated. With the modern technology development, it’s perfectly real to move to a parallel world and to find there a fully rational life with a corresponding intellect. Why searching for this life somewhere on Mars with its dangerous microbes, if it’s right beside us? There’s plenty of life everywhere. In the largest accounts, the Universe is the life itself, the life in the most extensive manifestation and diversity.”

The night coolness had fallen long ago, and so the warmth of the campfire was becoming further more perceptible and pleasant.

“In that case, what is the exit to Nirvana?” Stas asked. “Is it an exit outside our time cycle? An exit to another parallel?”

“Not at all. It’s the exist outside all parallels, outside time and space. It’s the exit from material Universes... If we look deeper into it, what is life inside a human form? It’s a temporal residence of the spiritual substance in alternate forms of high-molecular conglomerations of the matter. Say, it’s a shell for ripening of an internal fruit which is actually the soul. In such time-space-limited shell the fruit only changes its bodies. Once a human being becomes spiritually mature, he or she simply leaves.

“A person experiencing spiritual unfolding realizes who he or she is, and where he or she has come to. Our Universe is only one of material parallels. There are several parallels inside it, too. All of them are interesting, and all are inhabited. And it’s perfectly normal and natural. Any parallel inside the Universe is material and exists in its own time, with its own speeds, with its own sort of the matter. Yet, the exit outside the matter boundaries to the spiritual level... is much more significant. It is the exit to God’s reality. Unfortunately, it’s difficult to tell or to explain more precisely, because we are restricted by our material mind with its associative perception... In principle, there is much more interesting outside the material world.

“Any person may move to God’s reality, for we have a part of that reality inside us, that is the soul. However, the paradox is that people are too absorbed in the matter, therefore they mistakenly believe that the soul is only a fiction and the moments of their illusive body existence is the real life.”

“I don’t quite understand... How can this body be an illusion, if I can fully feel it?” Valera asked perplexedly.

“Your body is a mere focused wave which receives a short impulse in the form of prana, the vital energy. What you call “life” is a time period from the moment of this wave appearance after the impulse, including the time of its speed race all the way to its total fade. It’s a too transient term. You don’t even have time to notice when your life’s already over. So, the main question is how you will use your lifetime during its race, how you will spend the power of the inner impulse which you’ve been given?”

“But how could I rationally use it, if all events happening in my life do not depend on me? Every day is filled with some new troubles, with continuous pressure of problems.”

“Remember: everything is inside you! Once you change from the inside, the world around you will change as well. Material problems are only a temporary occurrence, a certain trial to test you... You don’t imagine how material your thoughts are, and how they utilize the power of your attention. If you keep giving priority to your negative thoughts – to cacodemon, it’s totally your fault that your troubles have become chronic. Whereas, should you be giving priority to positive thoughts, i.e. should you be daily stimulating your agathodemon center of positive thinking, you’d be surprised with your inner transformation and with the way the world would be changing around you as if God Himself had turned His eyes on you and started helping you. You’d experience

indescribable internal sensations of the Presence. When you reside in boundless Love to everything you are surrounded with, when you give this Love to God, your soul, being His part, is awakening. When your soul awakes, the one who will change in the first place will be you. And, when you change, you'll reveal a completely different reality along with such opportunities which you've never dreamt of..."

This conversation which had automatically quieted our entire company, was interrupted as suddenly as it had begun. Once Sensei stopped speaking, the silence ensued being disturbed only by the crackle of burning-out coals. Everyone was sitting tacitly, submerged in the secret world of his or her thoughts. The campfire flame was going out leaving a reminder of its bygone existence in reddish cracks of the scorching coals, while the latter were gradually getting cold and turning into a pile of ashes.

It was already around two a.m. The light breeze had long ago fallen. Fish wasn't biting as before, and so the bells wouldn't emit a single sound. Sensei glanced at his watch with a highlighted bar and said, "Well, while there's such a silence, I propose to take a little nap before the morning fishing session."

Victor hesitated, "I guess if people go to sleep now, anybody will hardly be able to wake up at five a.m. Not so much time is remaining..."

"Don't worry. I guarantee nobody will oversleep," Father John assured him with a cunning smile. "I have an excellent alarm which will arouse our entire fishing camp with its jingling."

Sensei looked at his friend and grinned, "I hope your alarm won't scare away the remaining fish."

"Well, this is what I cannot guarantee at all," Father John uttered ironically.

The company started breaking up one by one, putting away their fishing accessories.

Sensei was reeling on somebody's rod carelessly left near the beam on which they were sitting, when suddenly Valera approached him. He began helping him to untangle the fishing-line, using the torch for highlighting. It was obvious that the guy wanted to ask something, but wouldn't dare. Seeing his hesitation, Sensei said genially, "Is there anything you'd like to ask?"

Valera got a little shy and said after a short pause, "Yes... Does God really exist?"

Sensei looked at him attentively.

"Are you sure you're ready to hear the answer? It might change your entire life," and, having been silent for a while, he added, "If you're simply interested in this subject, there are plenty of books published, just get them and read. Here, there is the priest sitting who's a good interlocutor as well."

Valera looked straight into Sensei's eyes.

"It's not a mere interest for me. I'm ready to hear the answer from you."

"Yes," Sensei responded affirmatively. "God does exist."

\* \* \*

The night was slowly turning over its position, giving away to the dawn. Darkness was replaced with dampness which, like an apprentice practicing painting, first drew a slipshod sketch of a general plan of the nature contours, and then thoroughly set to draw every smallest detail with its "pencil". The picture was gradually becoming more distinct, the shades were turning further more contrasting. Soon, the dawn itself as the main artist got down to work, painting the ready sketch with a manifold scale of colors. Birds started to perform their usual morning ritual, filling everything around with their harmonious singing. And, all of a sudden, in the middle of that wonderful melody, there rang out such a chaotic sound resembling the roar of a bear awakened in winter that the frightened birds lapsed into silence all at once.

Everything happened as follows... Eugene got cold-bitten in his sleeping-bag and woke up of an unusual feeling as if his body was in an uncomfortable position. He tried to open his eyes, but surprisingly saw only impenetrable darkness. Drowsy, not being aware of anything, he decided to turn over to another side, believing he was having a dream. Instead, however, he only managed to make some strange budging, as if something was firmly holding him. At that moment, his panic-struck consciousness started working towards complete awakening. The guy suddenly understood that his hands were tied in front of him, a mask was covering his eyes, and the sleeping-bag was tightly corded to his ankles. Yet, the main thing was that his legs were hanging up while his head and the upper part of his back were resting against something soft.

Eugene's sleepiness immediately vanished. He started wriggling strongly, attempting to free himself of the unexpected captivity. With each movement the "pillow" under his head was becoming further lower as if it was sinking. Moreover, something little and tickling started to creep all over Eugene's face and neck, and to bite his body parts aggressively without distinction. As soon as the guy, with his hands tied, managed to tear off the mask which had appeared on his eyes during his sweet sleep no one knew from where, and to unzip his sleeping-bag, he saw the total horror of the situation. The sleeping-bag in the foot area was corded with a rope tied in such an intricate knot which was got further more tightened with each movement of the body. The rope itself was attached to a thick bough of "the best tree on the forest meadow", while his head appeared to be leaning against a big ant hill. Endeavoring to free himself, Eugene had involuntarily scattered the upper part of the hill, and hordes of tiny warriors immediately rushed to attack the offender of their house. The guy started to wave his tied hands, trying to flap away his "yesterday's allies", but thus he only worsened his "tickling state".

In silence of the dormant nature there resounded round oaths assigned for those who had hit upon such a joke. The voice of a "roaring bear" alarmed the entire camp like a sudden banshee. Drowsy guys with eyes crazy of the unexpected interruption of their sleep leaped out of their tents and cars. Meanwhile Eugene was attempting to unshackle himself, showing fair slipping-out mastery and demonstrating the power of his pumped abdomen. His thoughts were strenuously oriented to the special operations group members whom he suspected of the trick. Who else could fasten such wrecker knots so professionally? It surely couldn't be the priest. And it could hardly be anyone of Sensei's disciples, because there were completely different people and totally different relations among them.

Oddly so say, the special operations group was the first to come to Eugene's rescue. His liberation was accompanied with such wild emotions from both sides that all other campers gathered on the meadow. Nikolai Andreevich and Sensei came up as well. Later Vano joined, strangely having a much fresher appearance than everybody other. For Sensei it was quite enough to glance at his childhood friend to clearly see what had happened. He smiled, gravely sighed, shook his head reproachfully and turned his eyes away. While Eugene like a koala bear was taken down the tree, and Volodya was jestingly convincing that his guys had nothing to do with the trick, everybody completely woke up. Most interestingly, it was five a.m. sharp, i.e. exactly the "getting-up time" promised by Father John the day before. Vano hurried to laugh off with a joke that it's a mere random coincidence.

When the general fuss had abated, and everyone got occupied with one's morning toilet, to his great surprise, in addition to all the "pleasures" of his awakening, Eugene discovered granulated sugar in his "sweet drowse" (his sleeping-bag). And, all of a sudden, it dawned upon him who had been the author and the performer of the cruel plan, of the abrupt impingement upon his precious person. Not hesitating for even a minute, with his arms put akimbo, Eugene resolutely approached Vano who was squatting down on the river bank at that moment, adjusting his fishing tackle. Remembering his last day's flight well enough, to be on the safe side, Eugene stopped at a certain distance from the priest.

“So, it’s you?! It’s been you who has arranged a “sweet morning” for me!” Eugene shouted accusatorily as if he was a public prosecutor.

“I listen to you attentively, son,” Father John uttered with his inimitable smile.

“How could you?! I’ve recognized my guilt, I’ve honestly and industriously washed off my “sins”, where as you!.. These are ants, man! They are predators! What if they’d wormed into my ears or my nose?! They could.., they could...” Eugene wasn’t able to find appropriate words to express his indignation. “Eat my brain!”

“Brain?!” Father John wondered and genially added, “Don’t grieve, my son, nothing like this may threaten you. And, as for the sins washing-off...” a merry zest gleamed in Vano’s eyes. “Well, if you insist...”

“Me?! I...”

Eugene didn’t even have time to blather in response when Father John adroitly caught the guy’s waving hand and easily threw him over in the air, applying fighting aikido elements. At that, he managed to flip Eugene’s body in such a way that it flew off to the water couple meters from the bank. The guy fell down into the river heavily like a weighty sack, accompanying his drop not only splashes, but with whole fluvial “tsunami”. When Eugene emerged in horror, his first exclamation was, “What for?!”

Father John grinned and answered as of nothing had happened, “You see, son, I’ve returned the favor, too. I’ve washed you clean with the holy water from feet to head.”

“Inquisitor! Souls’ oppressor! But the water is so cold. It’s like in hell here...”

“In hell?! It is such a trifle compared to the real hell. You cannot even imagine what some of such floundering “waterfowls” will face there...” Father John started frightening the company with his black humor.

The entire scene made all spectators laugh, while Sensei was looking at the stirred water from the steep bank and shaking his head, “These saboteurs have scared away the very last fish. Apology for such fishermen...”

\* \* \*

The morning turned out to be marvelous. The weather was nice and quiet. Everything would have been perfect, except for the fact big fish wasn’t biting as before. Oddly to say, Father John sat on the bank to fish together with Eugene, although they kept teasing each other all the time. To put it more precisely, Father John set to fish while Eugene started assisting him, pinning fishing “delicacies” onto the fish-hook. The guy got so imbued with this occupation that he even showed a remarkable creativeness in it, having brought dozens of various beetles, little spiders and slippery grubs from the forest. They used everything possible to lure the fish, lavishly throwing the bait into the water, however the result remained unchanged. Only small fish was biting. Willy-nilly, they indeed arranged a whole eating festival for the fish, having overfed it with the most exquisite forest dainties. In the end, Eugene and Father John performed a ceremonial “absolution” for all the caught little fish. They delivered an edifying speech to the fish on how not get caught in the future, in case the fish would come across hooks filled with free bait, as well as on how the fish was supposed to earn its living through hard work. Then, accompanied by Eugene’s festive piping of some merry song, they set the little fish free, having thrown them back into the river.

Having lost interest in fishing, Eugene and Father John began to make up practical jokes to be played on other the fishermen and totally worn out the entire company. Once they got bothered with this as well, they started chaffing each other, practicing composing of new jests. Naturally, Father John particularly excelled in inventiveness. Owing to his efforts, Eugene was finding ants in his sandwiches and other food during the entire day. In general, despite their “interpersonal opposition”, they completely supplemented each other. Sensei even jokingly nicknamed them “the

two halves of Aesop's soul". The ancient Greek cracked slave fabulist would have probably been ineffably surprised in his VI century B.C., if somebody had told him about such an unexpected reincarnation of his soul in the distant future.

The day flew past in an eyewink. As early as at the lunch time, following Valera's example, the entire company simultaneously began gathering brushwood for the campfire and thus cleaned the forest territory adjoining their meadow without even noticing it. As a result, they brought a whole hill of dry branches and logs. After the lunch, the camp turned somewhat deserted. The special operations group headed by Volodya decided to examine the area along the river in a quest of good fishing places and promised to return not that soon, whereas Valera desired to stay.

Evidently, Volodya's guys got very much carried away with the fishing "hunt", for when the company was already finishing their supper, there still hadn't come back. Valera even decided to walk along the bank to look for Volodya in the same direction as the special operations group had walked away, and also to check the remote fishing spots for biting. He reported this to Sensei. After Valera had left, Eugene proudly stated concerning the entire "squadron" disappearance, "See! They haven't taken me with them, that's why they have got lost."

In response to his words Vano promptly remarked, "Without you, they definitely have more chances to get back."

Eugene made a comical face, and the guys burst out laughing of his clownery over again.

By the way, as early as during the supper Eugene had made everyone laugh again with a scrupulous inspection of his food, checking each centimeter of it like a customs officer. Fortunately for him, there appeared no "enemy saboteurs" there. So, by the tea time he already somewhat relaxed. The guy was victoriously looking at Vano who was sitting opposite to him, demonstrating his total control of the situation. When Eugene was handed over a glass of tea, he decided to drink it even without adding sugar so as not to swallow another Father John's bait. Having taken the glass from Nastia with an aromatic hot drink, he noticed floating tea-leaves in the glass and mildly cooed with a smile, "Hey, girls, who has made the tea? You should have taken the boiling water. See, the tea leaves are all on the surface."

"What do you mean, Eugene?" Tatyana wondered. "The tea's packed in bags."

After her words Eugene immediately stopped smiling. He started scrutinizing the "tea-leaves" in his mug. Stas curiously glanced into Eugene's mug, too, and ascertained with a snicker, "Yes, these are the ants."

"Oh, my God! But how?!" he was totally positive the girls would have never made such a provocation. Eugene caught Vano's cunning look and only now noticed the teapot next to him. "How dare you! The Green Peace will pursue you! You're the violator of the international convention! It's a shocking! I'll complain to the United Nations! I'll send a letter to Pope!"

Eugene kept funnily expressing his indignation for another half an hour, announcing aloud an approximate list of his "complaints" each of which was certainly followed with Vano's hilarious comments. Some of the present eventually got abdomen aches of interminable laughter caused by the couple's jokes. Luckily, the process of "official letters" composing was timely interrupted by Nikolai Andreevich who decided to spend the time more rationally using it for talking with Sensei, especially since it was possible to discuss some vital topics openly, when no "unauthorized persons" were present. Although there was Vano with them, he didn't ask any superfluous questions, and Sensei himself didn't hesitate to tell about everything freely in his presence. Nikolai Andreevich waited a little while until the company stopped laughing after another jest and tactfully started to turn the conversation to a different direction.

"Yet, indeed, where is our special operations group?"

"Probably, they have found a splendid place, given they've given up the supper," Victor surmised, swallowing up cookies one by one.

“Yeah, when fish bites, you forget everything in the world. An entire prostration in time,” Nikolai Andreevich jested. “Speaking about time, by the way. I wanted to question you about it in detail long ago,” he addressed Sensei. “I often experience such periods, particularly after meditations, when a subjective notion of time nearly disappears. I’d say, there ensues an effect of some crystal clear consciousness. Work capacity increases tremendously. When you work with documents after meditating, there’s such an impression as if you possess an entire library in your head, and all the necessary information easily rises to the consciousness surface.

“Generally speaking, the time phenomenon has interested me as such long ago. And I have so many questions. Well, everything’s quite understood with the official part: in science time is used as a unit to measure certain periodical processes. Obviously, in philosophy time is a state of matter, a form of successive change of events. Clearly, it’s connected with space. And, while the universal characteristics of time are duration, inimitableness and irreversibility, the characteristics of space are extension and the unity of discontinuity and continuity. This all seems to be clear enough... However, in the highest accounts... In my opinion, there exists a tremendous difference between how we measure time and how we actually live it. I’ve got such an impression as if there are several kinds of time perception in our consciousness simultaneously fighting for suffrage. One perception is scientific endeavoring to substantiate precision and quantitative expression of time rules. The other perception is social which aspires after violating these rules. The third one relates to the effect of subjective time perception, for instance, during meditations. The fourth one strikes with its phenomenal occurrences in stress situations. In this connection, I have a whole series of questions to ask you. But, first of all, I’d like to know what is time in reality?”

“Time?” Sensei shook his head and said. “You’re initiating a big subject... In principle, you’ve noted correctly that time is quite a relative concept. Judging about time significantly depends on who, from which reference system and for what purpose is observing this phenomenon. Considering its manifestation in reality, time may be subdivided into:

1) veritable time which straightly depends on the power of Allat; if you remember, everything in this world (whether it’s matter or energy) including time exists only thanks to Allat which I’ve already told you about;

2) global time (or absolute time) is the time period passing from appearance to complete disappearance of the matter on a scale of the Absolute;

3) objective time is our habitual time-calculation in seconds, hours, months, years which are conditional to the time of the Earth’s revolution on its axis and around the Sun, i.e. to physical processes steadily recurring in equal time intervals;

4) subjective time is an individual perception of time by each person.

“But, for you to realize these processes better, I shall, perhaps, explain these time concepts on a figurative demonstration. – Sensei asked the guys to give him a box of matches and took one match out of it. – Here, look. Let’s assume that this match burning from the moment the fire appears until the moment the shaft completely burns down is a process from rise to destruction of entire matter. Thus, the moment of movement when I take this match, carry it to the box, apply force to strike fire, when the match lights up and until its full combustion – all this figuratively is the flow of the veritable time on the global scale, i.e. the moment of rise, action and disappearance of Allat power in the process of creation and destruction of the matter. For our human understanding, in this time there’s no present, but only past and future.

“The global time is the time movement from the moment the first spark blazes up until complete combustion of this match. At that, it would be more correct to characterize the entire process during combustion of the match not with its head placed in an upright position, but rather with its head directed downward. Now, note the difference in the flame movement speed.”

Sensei stroke the match, demonstrated the even slow flame movement when the sulphuric head was upright and promptly turned the match over to place its head downright. Moving upward,

the flame quickly enveloped the match shaft. Sensei promptly put out the fire in order not to burn his fingers.

“Let’s stop this moment,” he uttered with a smile. “Please, draw attention to the sections which the fire has already enveloped in the upturned position of the match.” Sensei circled the match. “So, roughly speaking, on the global scale the same process takes place. The Universe enlarging at a progressing speed inevitably accelerates the global time, however it by no means affects the veritable time. In modern physics, there is an axiom relating to time: events which are identical in all respects occur over the equal periods of time. The global time is relative for human understanding, because logical assessment of the process takes place by means of material structures of the brain. Consequently, the current science believes there’s no actual physical process in nature with the aid of which the global (the absolute) time could be measured. That’s why there exists such a postulate that the time flow depends on the velocity of a reference system movement.”

“How come?” Andrew did not get it.

“Well, like I’ve already said, opinions on the time flow much depend on what point of a reference system the process is being observed. For example, imagine this experimental match to be of a giant size, say, of a kilometer length, while you are an observer (i.e. in our case, you are a point of the reference system). And, in order to study the burning process, you have settled yourself on an elevator or on a gigantic lifting crane installed parallel to the match.”

“Aha-a-a!” Eugene “caught” the idea and uttered wistfully, “I imagine myself in a special helmet, dressed in fireman’s clothes, with a fire extinguisher in my hands.”

The guys grinned, and Stas jokingly complained to Sensei, “Oh, Lord! It’s totally impossible to run mental experiments with him! I’ve just imagined myself in a white laboratory gown of a scientist, with a young female assistant next to me, when this grubby character with a fire extinguisher in his hands has wedged himself into my bright association!”

“Exactly!” Kostya echoed.

The group grinned.

“Well, this is already a matter of individual quality of perception,” Sensei said half in jest. “So, imagine that the burning process has started, and the flame (which in our comparison represents the born Universe beginning to enlarge) has gone upwards. If the velocity of your movement on the elevator equals to the speed of fire movement, you will perceive time as relatively still. If you start moving faster than the flame, you’ll get an impression that the burning time is slowing down. And, once you move slower than the flame, you’ll see the time has accelerated.”

“How is it possible?!” Kostya wondered. “And why would I guess relying on my personal perception, if I can use a seconds counter, for instance?”

“What an earthed-minded dimwit you are!” Eugene grinned genially. “Using a seconds counter for cosmic measurements!” at that, the guy expressively beckoned to the earth and then to the sky.

The company burst out laughing over again, while Sensei responded, “It may be funny, but Eugene is right in a sense. What is a seconds counter? A device to measure time intervals in, say, seconds. Yet, what is a second? It’s only a relative unit. Its definition repeatedly changed along with scientific knowledge growth in this issue. The current definition of a second was adopted in 1967. Now, people apply the “second” name to a time interval which contains a certain number of periods of emanation of cesium atom wave having a certain length. As of today, it’s considered to be the most accurate of all major SI unit standards. What further could be said here?!” Sensei pronounced the last sentence with a double meaning. He was silent for a while and then continued, “The objective time in our match burning example is the moment of physical and chemical processes taking place during combustion. Well, and the subjective time means individual time perception of a part of the process.



“However, since the global time constantly accelerates, the objective time accelerates accordingly, though from the perspective of human subjective perception the objective time does not change, i.e. we still have 24 hours a day. Thus, we face a time paradox: on one hand, time accelerates, and a person feels it. As the saying goes, I have hardly had time to wake up on Monday when Saturday has already come. Yet, on the other hand, from the perspective of physics, the objective time seems to remain stable, I mean years, months, days, hours, seconds. And the entire time phenomenon is conditional, in the first place, to the fact that time and also space are the concurrent characteristics of the matter. Should there be no matter, there would not be neither time nor space. Besides, time and space are closely related to gravitation.”

“Gravitation?” Nikolai Andreevich asked to repeat in astonishment.

“Yes. Time, space and gravitation are the properties of Allat which reveal themselves in the energy of the Po particle. Allat is the first cause of rise and existence of the material world. And it was exactly the inner impulse forward of the Po particle energy which generated time. Nowadays, time can be defined as a tremendous energy under a tremendous density... Time, gravitation and space are all inherent in the material world. In non-material or spiritual world, in God’s reality or no matter how you otherwise call that world beyond the verge, no concepts of time, space and gravitation exist at all.”

“But what does exist there?” Victor wondered.

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