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**Radio Night**

Novel

(Original Ukrainian title: Радіо Ніч.

Translated German title: Radio Nacht. Roman)

448 pages, Clothbound

Release of the German edition by Suhrkamp: October 2022

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Sample translation by Mark Andryczyk

I was no longer myself, I was another, yet it was on this account that I became properly myself.

Robert Walser. *The Walk*<sup>1</sup>

There will be the roar of crumbling mountains and of flooding seas, and the moaning of fires and an enraged wind.

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Christopher Middleton and Susan Bernofsky in Robert Walser. *The Walk*. Translated by Christopher Middleton and Susan Bernofsky. New Direction Books: New York, 2012. 67-68.

*If God is our father then the devil is our bosom buddy.*

*You are listening to Radio Night, and with you is Yosyp Rotsky, aka—Yos. It's just turned twelve o'clock here, and I'll be here 'till morning. Today is December 13<sup>th</sup>, a Friday—as you can see, everything is just perfect: the worst number of the worst month on the worst day of the week. A wonderful opportunity to spend some time together.*

*I'm not alone within these walls. The little green bonfires on the studio's world map show me where my listeners are and, if I weren't such a bastard then I'd passionately proclaim that, today, I've even managed to become happy because there are so many of you. And your numbers are growing.*

*And so, I (admittedly—almost happy) observe this positive development: how both hemispheres are gradually becoming covered with scattered green dots, here, there and everywhere, and how some of them melt into little green enclaves. A pretty impressive start for such a simple, so to say, downright homemade radio station.*

*My clock shows minutes past midnight. And “my” is based on where I am located. The place where I am hiding is behind four walls... Yes, once again, I am in hiding, although it's kinda getting old!.. Ok, let's try it another way: the place where I find myself within these four walls is especially well located for someone who is going to be announcing what time it is. I am approximately in that place where it begins to be counted down. Do you remember basic geophysics? No, I am neither in Greenwich nor in Algiers, not in Mali or Burkina Faso, not in western France or eastern Spain. Try to guess where I am.*

*Let the wind be a hint for you. You cannot hear it on-line, but it is there. It is on-line, none-the-less. Believe me, it's raging beyond these walls. I can't hear it either but I am sure it is there. It is definitely there and, heading Northbound towards Spitsbergen, it takes along with it everything it is able to grab: splinters of boat organs, airplane wings, the souls of pilots, scraps of canvas, chunks of bark, the mysterious scents of lichen, wooden whistles, their sounds, the feathers of birds. Helpless northern angels are swimming in its flow, like whales.*

*The second hint concerns them—the whales themselves. They are here too, close by, moving, like somnambulists, along their paths in the vast silence of depths, swaddled in a layering of warm blubber and the massive swathe of water. And I am right next to them. I am in an ocean, but nobody can tell in which of the two. Am I still in the Atlantic or already in the Arctic? Where*

*are their borders? The Norwegian or Greenland Sea? Moreover, these days, in the midst of winter and the December night, they're all Arctic-like. A hundred devils in their mouth, a sea wolf would say.*

*You haven't guessed yet? Two hints are not enough? There won't be a third one.*

*I am on an island without a name. It's the Prime Meridian. It's six minutes after the zero hour Greenwich time and the new day known as December 13<sup>th</sup> has just begun. Everything east of me has already crossed its border. For those of you who are to the west, it is still to come. You are just approaching your December 13<sup>th</sup>. I am saying this especially for listeners on Baffin Island because a few green dots on the map attest to the fact that they are there. Additionally, today I have listeners in Berlin, Massachusetts, and, strangely enough, also in Berlin, Connecticut, and also in Athens, Kentucky and Athens, Illinois, in Versailles and Russia (both of which are in the state of Ohio), in Italy and Odessa (both—Texas), in Palermo on the island of Sicily and in North Dakota, in three Petersburgs and in Pittsburgh, in the Jericho that is in Tasmania and in the Jericho that is in California, in the Bethlehems of Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina and New Zealand, in all four Jerusalems of America and in the fifth one, the real one, and in numerous other cities and locations such as Hallelujah, Nebraska.*

*There is something that I need to tell you about tonight. Yes, specifically tonight, with its darkness stretched out almost to the max. With its darkness pulled on top of our feeble heads, like a giant opaque black blanket. Another week—and the longest night will be upon us. But I don't want to postpone anything. Yesterday barely witnessed the light of day. Some four hours or so of a faint heavenly blotchiness, lead waves, lead cliffs, lead on the horizon and beyond it, a handful or two of snow passing through, wind and a moderate, seven-knot, yet six-day, storm. The day concluded having barely begun: at 2PM it suddenly got dark and a whole colony of sea birds shouted their last "farewell" while I walked back and forth along the indoor terrace.*

*You know, I want to warn you about something. All of you, you who are still listening to me and you who are still arriving. So, here it is. I surely won't rescue you and probably won't be able to help you in any way. But, either way, I will fill your night with insomnia. This radio is for those who:*

*are on the edge*

*are stuck in a corner*

*see nothing before them  
don't sleep at night  
don't want to sleep at night  
don't sleep at all  
don't sleep and contemplate  
lay motionless with eyes wide open*

*For those like you I have a bit of my favorite music.*

*Today, I began with the joke: "If God is our father then the devil is our closest buddy." (I originally said "bosom", but this works too. The closest, the best.) My tale will touch on that somewhat. If I were not me, then I would continue by declaring, in a serious timbre: "This story is about the difficult relationship between the narrator with his father and with his closest friend. About the unbearable choice between respect for the former and an attraction towards (to avoid saying love for) the latter."*

*But my clock shows eleven minutes after the zero hour, and it is time for music.*

***Lubomyr Melnyk. Ripples in a Water Scene.***

## 1

The International Interactive Biographic Consortium (IIBC)—an institute so influential and respectable that I have been attempting to earn the right to become its member for two decades now—assigned to me the task of writing the all-encompassing, annotated, life story of a certain Yosyp Rotsky. I accepted this assignment not only with an undisclosed, deep gratitude but with a corresponding fathoming of its particular complexity. Because I'd never done anything like this. Everything I knew about this person, whose life path I was supposed to document from A to Z, without any fabrications or blank spots, added up to just about zero and consisted of only a first name and a surname.

Moreover, even those minimal facts didn't seem overly certain. In particular, the first name. Is it really Yosyp? Or the somewhat more archaic—Osyp? Or, perhaps, Yosyf? Not to mention Josef or Józef? Perhaps it could be Joasaph or Josaphat?

Yosyp Rotsky. A pretentious hybrid of Brodsky and Roth. The latter, by the way, based on his place of origin, is also Brodsky, more accurately, Brody-sky. But I digress.

After a series of meditations and a scrupulous combing through of all available network resources I came to a few initial conclusions. First and foremost—that Yosyp Rotsky really did exist and, perhaps, continues to exist. In other words, he is in no way a product of the imagination a particular Consortium member. No one from the Consortium was trying to disseminate yet another biographic fabrication—I would confirm this even if tortured. Also, why was he, Yosyp Rotsky, so needed by the Consortium. I surmised that the answer would begin revealing itself as my investigation progressed.

At first, there were just tidbits. I managed to find out that Yosyp Rotsky had studied music to a certain level, and that he, possibly, knew how to play a few keyboard instruments. At the beginning of the 1990s, he was in a certain band and even toured (in his words, *gigged*) with them in Serbia. Though, it may have been Macedonia. He never mastered the Serbian language but he would often imitate various Serbo-like phrases. In that manner, staring at something with some especially attractive lines or curves, he could emphatically say “kákova málitsa!”, which, according to him, could mean “what a chick!” in his native language.

He always liked to try and use words that he had just invented. Some of them would reappear occasionally, while others would only surface once.

In his former life, which took place at the turn of the sixteenth century, he, by the way, also was a musician but, it seems, a much more accomplished one.

Besides that, I discovered that Yosyp Rotsky would fairly often wear monochromatic, mostly light-colored, shirts. Although he looked quite good in black. Perhaps this could be explained by heterochromia—the rather rare phenomenon when a person's irises are of two different colors. It is known for sure that one of Rotsky's eyes was greenish. Whether it was the right one or the left one—I was unable to determine. Nor the color of the other eye.

Yosyp Rotsky left his country by force. There are ample reasons to believe that this was tied in with the failure of a revolution, in which—both in the revolution and its failure—he played a more than minor role. Hence—his very likely participation in a certain political assassination. A

successful one, it seems.

That's basically all I knew about Yosyp Rotsky when I set off on a journey to continue my investigative maneuvers. I won't mention every specific element of my confusing trip, individual parts of which seemed hopelessly absurd and led me, most likely, straight into a boundless dead end. But I will nonetheless recall how I finally chanced upon an insurmountable obstacle in the form of a notorious Swiss prison, which I had to drive around, unable to pass through it. That failure forced me to bite the bullet and became, in its own way, a pivotal moment for me.

Last year, in December, I ended up in Nosorohe—not a town but a true city located near one of the seventy geographic centers of Europe, in its somewhat more Eastern variant. The Carpathian Mountains acquire a rather exotic volcanic character there and their spurs, overgrown with walnut and chestnut groves, form full cascades of both steep and gentle slopes, to which, for over nine centuries, the abovementioned city perfectly sticks. To be honest, it wasn't named Nosorohe when it was founded but later, during the rule of the twenty-sixth baron Florian-August. That is, around the end of the fifteenth century.

I wasn't able to rent right away the same dwelling where, just a few years ago, Yosyp Rotsky was supposed to have lived, but I was able to rent it, as the dimwitted middleman said, *for the same amount of dough*, which, taking into account today's stagnant inflation, should be considered to be a discount that has yet to be earned.

That is how I became an inhabitant of that, only at first glance, not very outstanding place. The building, in which I temporarily occupied half of the ground floor, was a several-storied example of architectural uncertainty which, with all its strength, pressed up against the rocky-sandstone, so-called *wild*, foot of Castle Hill—as if it was attempting to disappear forever, hiding itself in its bosom. Perhaps the only thing special about the building was its basement—and not the room itself, but the club that was located there. Although, it was generally inactive. Or, if not, then it was sparsely attended. I only hung out there once—on the evening of the day that I moved in. It was a classic dive bar that had been filled with smokers for so many years that it was impossible to air out that smell. Additional attributes of its old-school vibe were the toothpicks provided not only on the tables, next to the salt and pepper shakers, and also, for some reason, at the bar. Only a bottle of mustard was missing. No one from among the staff there rushed to address my insincerely feeble interest. Actually, the insincerely apathetic bartender did cough up that, up until recently, there had been a different establishment down here and that he had no clue who

would hang out there. More accurately, he had only a clue, a rather miserly one: “Some kind of immigrants”. The local *Frankovka* turned out to be a less-than-average version of this worse-than-average wine and there was nothing particularly pleasant going on in the bar’s interior. For example, there was nothing in my sightline that could illicit the phrase “kakova malitsa!” Laboring through my second glass, I settled the tab and went up to my room.

Closer to the middle of the month, when the days get critically short and shamelessly murky, especially in a ground-level apartment at the foot of Castle Hill, the only mystical event of my life took place. Working through yet another stack of documents one afternoon, none of which provided me with anything useful whatsoever, and having glanced out the window at the snow’s halfhearted attempt at finally abandoning restraint and coming down full strength, I gave in and yawned and, after pausing for a second, decided to take a nap on the temptingly accessible couch. Along my way from being half-asleep to sleeping I managed to register that a change was taking place: beneath me, that is, in the basement, all sorts of sounds, of different timbres and volumes, could be heard, which indicated that there was an animated moving of furniture and setting up of instruments taking place. Perhaps not all of them yet. Regardless, it was clear that the club’s sound guy was dealing with the drums.

The second thing that I managed to do was to recall that it was Friday and, thus, that there would be a concert this evening.

The third thing came right after the second one. Everything was as it had been then. I was no longer myself—I was Yosyp Rotsky. I was lying on that very same couch, but in his time. It was he who had heard all those noises downstairs. And I was to become dissolved in all that was to come. That is, in a different time and in different days but also at year’s end and also in that apartment.

Downstairs, the bass drum was being setting up in the same manner—protractedly, mind-numbingly, and repetitively-methodically. There was nothing unusual about that. Living above a club meant you would have certain inconveniences, especially on Fridays and Saturdays. The club was called Xara Morgana (or Khata Moprana—both ways of writing it were utilized equally), and Yosyp Rotsky had never set foot in there. But he had already gotten used to all those pre-concert noises on Friday afternoons. And, actually, to the concerts too. They didn’t all sound equally hopeless, Yosyp Rotsky would have said, if he had been asked. But there was no one to ask him.

Ok, so nothing inappropriate took place in the basement.

However, what was very inappropriate, if at all possible, was the ringing of his doorbell. Yosyp Rotsky did not go to the door. Nobody, not one soul, was supposed to be bothering him today. No date, no sex-séances nor other intimate happenings were planned for this Friday. Regardless, the ringing multiplied into a series of ringing, short and long, which then turned into knocks. The mystery guest was displaying both a determined importunity and somewhat of an impatience.

For the first time, Rotsky was upset that the door lacked a peephole—one should have installed a long time ago. He hesitated a bit, standing motionless in front of the door. His well-trained imagination had already managed to envision several news ticker lines, an hour or two later, sharing hot info about yet another member of the list having become liquidated. It could be *them*, for example, because why not, Rotsky presumed. Finally, waving his hand, in his mind and, in his mind, saying: “Got to die with my boots on!”—he opened the door.

The dude on the other side of the door was a cloud of intense perfume smells. Out of that cloud, his first words sounded, and those words were: “Hello, I am your prey.”

This was said in Rotsky’s native language. Which he himself had forgotten how to speak over the past few years.

“Hello, I am your prey.”

“You’re my spray?” Rotsky asked.

“No, your prey. But in a positive sense. As in for a hunter. You are a hunter and I am your prey.”

Rotsky stared at an ideal bald head, a shiny, knee-like head. He had to look up a bit because Rotsky was not especially tall.

“Myroslav-Yaromyr Servus,” the bald guy introduced himself. “You can use the shortened form: Myromyr or Slavoyar. Myrko. Or Yarko. We’re neighbors. I am below you. I’m the owner of Xara Morgana. I trust we don’t disturb you too much.”

“Well how nice of you,” Rotsky muttered.

“Yes, I know. Will you invite me in?”

The perfumed cloud floated into the vestibule. Rotsky thought he’d guessed correctly that it was “Gravity Master” by Klaus-Johann Béranger (saffron, cinnamon, evening jasmine, ash and, above all else, muskrat).



“Your nostrils don’t lie. It’s on purpose: to mask the sulfur,” Baldy commented, laughing at his own joke and assuredly sliding over towards the living room.

It wasn’t only to his bald head that idealness was attached. The ideal hairlessness also included a lack of eyebrows and eyelashes. An ideal tightness of ideally fitted clothes left no chances for creases. And all those precious jewels in his nose, ears, around his neck and fingers and on his lapels! And each one of them would need to be very carefully stared at and symbolically explained.

“I didn’t just come here to say hi,” making it to the end of the corridor said the guest, turning around and looking at the host, who was trailing behind, somewhat lost. “I have a propo...”

He was cut off by Edgar. The latter fully assessed the situation at hand and, with an abrupt fluster, flew up from his usual spot on the closet. It looked like he was set to attack that ideal bald head with his beak and with his talons.

“Don’t be afraid, he is a scholar and a poet. He won’t attack, although he is enthralled by your bling,” Rotsky assured nervously, letting the guest into the living room, and, with him, the raven.

Edgar adroitly perched himself on Rotsky’s shoulder (on the left one, as usual) and with avid interest watched the bald one as he flopped onto the couch on the other side of the room.

“What a beautiful nevermore,” Servus complimented him. “Have you had him for a while?”

“Two millennia,” Rotsky said, after which Servus nodded, fully understanding him.

“Mr. Yosyp,” he began to say demonstrating that he is taking the bull by the horns right away.

“Just Yos, please,” Rotsky interrupted him.

“Great, Yos,” the guest acquiesced. “Well, if that’s the case then just call me Meph. But let me forewarn you: not Mephisto. Don’t even dream of it.”

“That’s a pity. Where does Meph come from then?”

“Well who the hell knows. Mephodius? That’s what I was called once among a group of anonymous patients. Everybody received a made-up, working name. My circle had a Mrs. Amfa, a few Kreckes, old Jah, young Barbie, and the unforgettable pair Tram and Dolly. And I became Mephodius.”

“Mephodius, Meph. It works.”

“I think it’s because I was on Mephedrone back then. I loved it—you know, got in a warm tub and inhaled it. Snorted it, tasted it. It’s sad, and scary, thinking back...By the way, is there a bath in your apartment?”

Rotsky was still trying to come up with an answer to that question that wouldn’t sound stupid when Edgar, not finding anything in this stranger that would set off any alarms, flew off of his favorite shoulder, this time barely noticeably, and landed on a very old chest of drawers in the opposite corner of the room where he vigilantly remained on guard.

And then a conversation ensued, which, according to most versions, could not have lasted less than an hour.

But it is difficult to call something that was mostly a monologic stream, a conversation, in the strict sense of the word. Meph spoke for the majority of the time and Yos, although he knew from the outset that he would undeniably answer “no” to every proposition, for the most part, listened attentively. Excessive politeness, like tallness, was not one of his traits and the word “no” (which he would pronounce more like *nope*) had been one of his top five words for half of his life already. Nonetheless, he—how strange! — remained patient and listened, not sure himself why the hell he was being so damn tolerant.

“Yos,” Meph said, “I am your longtime fan, not an old fan, but a longtime one, although you may doubt that there any such people left anywhere in the world. Well, I’m one of them, maybe—the only one. I was blown away, Yos, when I found out that you will be living right here, above me, it’s nothing less than a blessing imparted on my establishment, some sort of God’s dew. You are above us, like that God, Yos. I know you from your live shows, from your recordings, and from *that* winter too, when you wore a mask. I have a collection of your autographs, Yos. I’ve come for your soul.”

*(Are you sure you haven’t confused me with someone else, —Rotsky countered. — I’m not so important, man. My soul in particular.)*

“God forbid, man” Meph countered, “the Devil you say! Well here is some proof for you,” and he produced from his smartphone: photos, videos, audio recordings. Rotsky, Rotsky, Rotsky, see for yourself, I am you prey, Yos, I’ve been your prey for thirty years now. Your work accompanied me when I was growing up. I wore those same hairstyles—like the one you have now. Before problems led to hair loss. In my youth, I too would tilt my head to the side and stroke my chin. And I’d walk around with a raised collar, with my hands in my pockets. I lived according

to your style and also lived your style, Yos. I lived by your name. You know how much money I plugged into that whole revolution, just for your sake? And tens, and hundreds like me? We brought everything there: food, medicine, clothing, wood, smokes, weapons, nerves, lungs, cocaine. Immediately responding to the Leadership's request, Yos. I didn't trust any of them as much as you, Yos. I didn't trust any of them, but you— I did, Yos. While you were still there we knew why. Just take a look: this one and that one will be rubbed out tomorrow, this one will be crushed, this one eventually turned everyone in, these two, one after the other, went missing without a trace that very night and this one—will get a lengthy sentence, this Easter, and you and I are immigrants. So many stories, all in one photo, take a look, Yos.”

(Rotsky, slowly flipping through the smartphone files: *And what's next? Shall we set up a group of repressed political-outlaws?*)

“Close,” Meph countered. “You almost got it.”

(*But that's so boring, — Rotsky. — I don't even have the words to express how boring.*)

“Immigration is a country in which one usually sleeps poorly”, —Meph countered. “And when you do fall asleep then you'll dream something so terrible that you better not wake up: because you'll choke on your own howling, like on vomit. I think that it's PoG—pangs of guilt. Stones and other WoS—weights on the soul. And all that kind of stuff. And you ask yourself, you keep asking. Why did they pop—literally, popped it into his lungs with a stitching awl—that one, and not me? Why did the sniper get this one? I was only a meter away, and without any shield to speak of? Why didn't I get a miscarriage? Why am I not sent to a prison barrack for seven hundred fifty years, ten months, and three weeks? Because I'm here and they are there? Well why am I here? Why does that one suffer from tuberculosis while I'm opening a new club?”

(*Just don't believe that this is a mission, Meph. Because it's a coincidence.*)

“How can one not believe it, Yos? After all, every coincidence is kind of a mission. For example, I coincidentally dreamt of a name. I coincidentally put together a club with that name. For that to happen I had to coincidentally get this basement. I got it. More precisely, the keys to it. The keys fit—and it opened. And then—the first, coincidental guests. They coincidentally began gathering there. They need a place to tuck away together. These are first-wave migrants, still radiating the warmth of home. But warmth fades—and they want to be among those similar to them. Don't you see what's going on? How our country moves away from itself—full speed ahead? Heading anywhere—anything but staying there. He who stayed behind has died, the regime

swallowed him up, his every bit. Even in this shithole of the Carpathians there are already two million of our people. In another year it will be five, because everything that can is bailing. Listen, even here, at the periphery, we make up twenty percent! And what about in the capitals, the centers? And, of course, it's the youth, the youth. And any hole-in-the-wall on the other side of the border is better than home! But they cling to some sort of ropes, to memory. And it's not only them, it's not just a gathering, it's some sort of community. We need you, Yos. In order for the gathering to become a real community, it needs you. Some kind of, you know, guide, vector, rod, anchor, piston.

*(You mean a striptease?)*

“Ha, we feature stripteases, for your information, on Sundays. But we need you on Thursdays, Yos.”

*(Why Thursdays?)*

“Because Mondays are our days off, the club is shut down. On Tuesdays—lessons, discussions, panels, meetings, master-classes for coffee-lovers, a cigar club, a vegan swap meet. On Wednesdays, we have a whole bunch of events that begin with the letter F: a futbolteque discoteques, films, freak shows, free jazz, flamenco, French discos, fuddy-duddy fests—and, once a month, evenings for same-sex couples. On Fridays—a night of young bands called “New Ears Eve”, the debuts of new groups. On Saturdays—invitation-only parties for sponsors and donors. And on Sundays—striptease shows. As you already know, Yos. Well, and Thursdays will be your nights.”

Edgar, who had been getting ready to comment from the top of his chest of drawers for some time now, rather clearly, although with his characteristic grunting, asked the same questions again: “Why Thursdays?”

Without batting an eye, Servus spread his arms and explained, not to the raven but to Rotsky, “All the other days are taken. The week is full.”

And then—already more focused and seriously, as if summing up with a dramatic finish (the club's sound guy had finally left the drums alone and proceeded to start torturing the bass):

“Yos, come back. Why did you disappear? Your charisma forbids this. A personality like you is critically important. Just between us, I believe that the youth here are losing a connection with their homeland—their dad's land—too quickly.”

“Dad's land? I don't like that word,” Rotsky became somewhat perturbed. “It would be

better if you called it deadland.”

“I don’t think that time has come yet. But the time has come for me to go,” he got up off the arm chair and glanced over at Edgar, just in case.

That latter did not respond in any way but didn’t take his eyes off of him.

“What is it that I am supposed to do?” Unexpectedly for himself, once again, asked Rotsky.

“Music.”

“I haven’t played in a very long time.”

“That’s why I am saying: come back. I can pay you rather well.”

“Thanks. But I am fully and limitlessly monetarily secure.”

“I can pay with things other than money.”

Irritated because he should have put an end to all of this a long time ago and, moreover, that he shouldn’t be asking anymore questions, Rotsky, nonetheless, asked:

“With what then?”

They were standing in the vestibule and Meph reached for the handle of the door to the apartment but stopped and looked once again, more attentively, not so much at Rotsky as at Edgar, who had once again perched himself on his shoulder, the left one.

“You really do have eyes with two different colors. That’s a sign of being a chosen one, right?” And he continued: “The price can be high. For each evening that you perform—an additional year of your life. By the way, I was able to get an authentic Schellenberg from the early 30s. An odd sound, but it need to be tuned. Would you like to play on a Schellenberg?”

“I don’t even know what to do with those remaining years that I have been given. And here you’re adding on more of them,” Rotsky smiled somewhat askew, but as narrowly as possible, so as not to expose the corners of his mouth, which had been vacant for a long time now. “But thanks anyway for your proposition.”

This time Meph’s hand, with all of its jewels, did grab the door handle and the door opened.

“I’ve said what I wanted to say and am leaving you. Leaving you, I hope, in doubt. Or, at least, in the dusk.”

It would have been more accurate to have said “in perfume”. But dusk was indeed intensifying.

The door slammed shut and Rotsky, not without relief, but also not without some bravado, glancing at his own shoulder with his left, eye, the greenish one, asked:

“So, what do you think about all that, old pal?”

That penultimate word was not just used for familiarity’s sake. According to Rotsky’s calculations, Edgar was over two hundred years old.

2

Yosyp Rotsky became acquainted with Edgar, who was not only black-winged but black through and through, just a few months before this sudden visit. Wandering along Castle Hill’s serpentine trails, as was his habit, he noticed on a grassy roadside a vociferous and vehement quarrel taking place between a flock of crows and a lone raven. It was unclear what it was about: inter-breed bird spats don’t necessarily fall under people’s area of expertise. Rotsky guessed that it was a typical clash between the urban and the rural. The former hadn’t yet mustered up the courage to attack but continued to surround the latter one. At the same time, they openly called for others like them to join in. If their numbers grow they’ll probably end up going on the attack, Rotsky surmised. However, as someone who propagated the idea of a complete disengagement from the occurrences of nature, he limited himself to observing for a while longer.

Soon his prediction proved to be true: more crows were arriving rather quickly and their conduct was becoming increasingly more aggressive. The raven showed no signs of surrendering and, in response to the first semblance of an attack, he went into a cautioning war dance. “If you mix-in with the crows, then crawl like they do” Rotsky quoted what used to be a favorite song of his before making exaggeratedly dramatic steps towards the roadside. This frightened the attackers somewhat, a few of them paused, and when he suddenly and wildly shouted “Leave him the fuck alone!”, they became startled and this gave the black loner the opportunity to raise his wings and escape in a free flight above this never-begun theater of war.

Satisfied with their reaction, Rotsky joined the raven’s flight with his gaze for some time: from one chestnut to another, then onto a maple reddened by autumn, continuing onto one of the cliffs, and then—higher, describing irregular circles above the wall’s perimeter. Afterwards, he found him in one of the castle’s arrow slits, where that one was resting, it seems, for a bit and this was all so gothic that Rotsky decided there and then to name him Edgar.

Half an hour later, idly wandering over to the farthest of the Old Castle’s courtyards,

where, on that day, a recently-arrived African hundred was setting up their heavily tattered and weathered, yet still brightly-colored tents, Rotsky sensed that someone was ever more frequently appearing behind him. No matter where Rotsky would go, no matter where he would turn within those castle labyrinths—the raven would follow him. And whenever Rotsky would stop, so would the raven. Moreover: he gawked at him and tilted his head a bit to the right just like Rotsky had the habit of doing. And the feathers around his head stuck up like Rotsky’s always-raised collar. And if he, the raven, had worn pants, then the tips of his black wings would never enter his pockets either. Two ravens in a pod, Rotsky thought to himself.

Another half-hour later, temporarily having lost sight of his new companion, Rotsky decided to take a short break out on the terrace below the October sun, where he ordered the best banush in the city from a Syrian man he knew. That there existed a certain mismatch in culinary traditions between the Syrian man and the banush had not bothered Rotsky for some time now. Because regardless of whether that should bother anyone or not, this Syrian guy’s banush (no, not couscous and not pilaf, banush!) was without equal. Grabbing a spot at the first available table, Rotsky, bowl in hand and on an empty stomach since morning, resolutely submitted to the cornmeal’s scrumptiousness. And just then, something large and winged gracefully lowered itself onto his left shoulder. Startled from shock, Rotsky remained motionless for some time. He had no interest in having a massive raven’s beak thrust into his ear and destroy his eardrum. He was already experiencing a ringing in his ears occasionally. But Edgar was not exhibiting aggression so Rotsky lifted the already lukewarm bowl of banush up to his beak. The bird did not refuse it. They split the portion.

When Rotsky set off down the hill to go home, Edgar demonstratively escorted him, soaring from one spot to another, rushing ahead of him and then waiting for him to catch up: light posts, an old telephone booth, the roof of a pharmacy, the gate to the palace garden, a neglected architectural monument to the twenty-sixth baron of Nosorohe densely covered with the slogans “bloody scum”, “white trash”, and “go fuck yourself you fucking rapist”, from there to the fence of the orangery and then to the porch of the police station in the historical Stachelmayer Villa. He once mistakenly flew down Bonifate Alley but, realizing that Rotsky was making a right turn, immediately corrected his mistake. When Rotsky hovered above the combination code to his entrance way, Edgar watched him carefully from the top of the John-Paul II column: “I can see you, but you can’t see me.”

That is how he discovered Yosyp's place and remembered it.

From that time, a more focused watching of one another began—a cautious, two to three-week process. Rotsky would run into the raven near his apartment almost daily. The latter would sometimes pretend that he didn't care and that he was there solely by chance. Other times he was acting quite demonstrably, perching himself on Yos's windowsill, which seemed to have been constructed in a width perfect for him, and inquisitively surveyed his room. Setting off for his usual stroll to the castle, Rotsky would make sure to remember to bring a pack of chicken scraps or crackers with him. Edgar started responding to his name being called. To throw him off a bit, Yos would occasionally call him "Vranac" in his broken-Serbian. Was he aware that it meant not "raven" but "black horse"? We don't know. All we know is that Rotsky, in his day, had emptied not one bottle of the Montenegrin wine with that name. Or maybe it was Macedonian?

Closer to wintertime (that day, Rotsky was actively airing out the room following the visit of a certain female guest the previous night, who, amid countless sexual tricks, managed to smoke a pack and a half of Chesterfields) the raven decided not to restrict himself to the windowsill and, after carefully looking around, entered the room.

"I see that you're not against sitting out this cold snap at my place," Rotsky empathized.

Edgar gracefully rose off the desk and quickly carved out a spot for himself on an old, stout wardrobe (a historian of furniture could surmise that it was made by crude epigones of the late Baroque). The space between its top and the ceiling was more than ample, even for such a Great Bird.

And that is how they lived—not like full bosom buddies but nonetheless very amicably. Each one minded to one's own duties and neither of them pressured the other nor forced him to do anything. Thank God, a perfectly-intact cardboard box with the name "Norddeutsche Kaffeewerke" on it was found in the building's courtyard. Rotsky accurately spread out along its bottom a few of the countless newspapers which he had found in the apartment that were from the times of the *victorious people's rule*—complete sets from all the years and decades of the 60s and 70s, including all of its achievements, fluctuations, and anti-party conspiracies. For some reason, Edgar had no problem possessing such a nest.

"I don't know what he sees in me," Rotsky will soon say to a few of his nighttime lady guests. "Maybe my heterochromia?"

But all jokes aside. His concern for his co-habitant led him to ornithological studies,



especially, ravenological ones. He had loads of free time so he even decided to risk going to the city library where, no doubt, there had to be lots of fundamental studies of the raven type, maybe even in Latin. However, he didn't make the trek all the way over there (the public library took up a floor and a half of the former small country palace of the Nosoroh barons)—the internet would suffice for this first round.

From it, Rotsky learned all kinds of useless information about ravens. For example, that they are very messy birds. "If that truly is the case, that is, if this is not just some kind of sham, then Edgar is an absolutely, atypical, nonstandard raven," Rotsky will share his new life discovery with certain, enthrallingly attentive female partners.

The newspapers in the Norddeutsche Kaffeewerke box did not need replacing very often. Edgar was very tidy.

Besides tidiness, Rotsky's second favorite trait in Edgar was his lack of pickiness in what he ate. If not for it, Rotsky would be in a bind: he already hated having to feed himself, let alone having to cater to the whims of a bird. But there were no whims and Edgar (besides those instances when he would fly out of the apartment to get some air—no one knows what really took place then) happily ate whatever he was given. For example, shrimp. Rotsky noticed that Edgar really liked to tear at their shells with his beak.

"When summer arrives, I'll try to get him some crayfish," Rotsky would soon enthusiastically promise more than one of his nighttime lady friends.

Even though the internet indicated that the average life span of a raven was 17-40 years, Yos already knew: his roommate was over two hundred years old. How else would he be in possession of such a metaphysical knowledge, of such a sharp intellect?

When Edgar would periodically perch himself on his shoulder, Rotsky would follow him with his green eye and ask: "Are you Huginn or Muninn? Thought or Memory?"

"He's a thoughtless Memory, a memoryless Thought," Rotsky will soon recite to his last lover, quoting an unknown line of poetry.

It was a mutual familiarization and bonding. Finally forced to care about someone other than himself, Rotsky passively overcame his loneliness, into the cold comfort of which his present circumstances had chased him. And although it had been so comforting for him these past months

there, in that loneliness, a concern for an other, especially for such a special other, also befitted Rotsky. Because any way you look at it, it's a smart compromise: you retain all your freedom (well, almost all, of course), and, as a bonus—a co-inhabitant and an interlocutor, a living black soul.

A loner not by choice but by necessity, Rotsky unearthed a bit of hope in the possibility of outsmarting and dislodging all this determinism.

Some time ago, while serving time in a Swiss prison, he considered (in their language it would be “mit dem Gedanken spielte”) that, because of his undertaking, *they* would never leave him alone. He, Yosyp Rotsky, promulgated himself too radically. His performance, his feat, turned out to be such an unprecedented, unheard of, unfeasible and, on top of all that, disparaging defiance of all subordinations that it couldn't ever be washed away, and that the punishment for it had to take place with maximum unrestraint and, to put it mildly, disproportionality. Moreover, after the sudden death of *the penultimate dictator of Europe*, the regime had had a chance to regain consciousness, to quickly readjust, and to patch internal divisions between alliances, financial-industrial families and other clans, in order to finally designate one of the many illegitimate sons of the recently-removed dictator as his successor, in essence forcefully removing him from a very successfully-developing career as a television stand-up comic and quite brutally thrusting him into the chair of the state leader.

That's why a prison, especially a Swiss one, couldn't not have been seen by Rotsky as being one of the safest places for someone in his situation. And when he left there, he almost got blown over by a gushing, oncoming wind of uncertainty. The world outside the corrective facility was boundless and carried in it a boundless potential for reprisal. It's a good thing that Rotsky had a detailed, step-by-step plan consisting of a complete dissolving-disappearance-nonexistence in that world. It's a good thing that this plan seemed to be going successfully and that Rotsky was laying low on the absolute bottom in a peripheral, Subcarpathian town in a fairly small, unnaturally peaceful, and generally-ignored country. It's good that his safety cushion was filled with more than enough money to allow him to lead a basic and unseen subsistence.

For what reason? Rotsky did not yet know.

Killing time on the internet one day, he chanced upon a freshly published (*they* would say—*leaked*), that very morning, list of the thirty-four. It was a hit list and it had been assembled

by the, then unknown, League of Orderlies of National Unity. In a short preface, its anonymous representatives heralded the *warranted execution* of the individuals listed below, *whose anti-state, schismatic activity must be terminated immediately by the healthy and non-apathetic forces of the nation*. The repeated emphasis on the claim that *the LONU is a purely activist-led organization that does not now, and never will, have ties to the special forces of our country*, as is always the case in such instances, should lead one to believe that the opposite of that was true.

Those who figured in that list were, for the most part, so-called cultural activists but it also included other dubious categories such eco-terrorists, animal rights advocates, investigators of corruption networks, civil society leaders, and, simply, moral authorities whose field of activity was non-specified and murky. Almost half of the list was made up of women and this could have reflected a peculiar respect towards gender equality, in particular, and towards progressive western standards, as a whole. Having read his name listed in a rather prestigious place towards the top of the list, Yosyp Rotsky felt a sense of relief: they haven't forgotten him.

However, this brief moment of vanity was replaced by that self-irony that was dearer to his soul. Just what I needed, he thought to himself—to melodramatically become enamored by my own glory due to the silly jokes of a bunch of fifth or, at best, seventh graders! And even if it wasn't one of them—one of those virtual kids who are constantly overfed with gadgets and burgers—who initiated this unamusing game, but some, for example, crazy computer freak, or a serial killer-obsessed binge watcher, then what will come of that? Nothing, nothing will come of it, Yosyp Rotsky tried to convince himself.

But, when he would occasionally return to the bookmarked tab for that list, and read through it, he couldn't help but be impressed with the exceptional and, at first glance, almost unnoticeable skill of the compilers. The combination of names and, correspondingly, of people, as well as their consistency with whimsically twisted bridges of meaning here and there, sometimes seemed to him to be so comically-eclectic and completely unprovoked that the idiom about apples and oranges had nothing on them. A hit list so perfect in its absurdity could only have been compiled by those who had gotten seriously stoned, Rotsky surmised, not without respect. Well, if their grass is so potent, then shall I not dare to show my face anywhere, he thought, becoming indignant.

Actually no, he wasn't becoming indignant, he was only nagging a bit. He was incapable of becoming indignant, because any sort of indignation lay beyond his nature.

However, Rotsky realized that not sticking out too much was indeed a pretty good idea when he confirmed that the list of forty-four—how can it be said more delicately?—was being updated every now and then. That is, some of those who were on it really did die, which the League of Orderlies of National Unity readily announced with vulgar triumphalism. Actually, at that moment, he would have been totally correct in referring to that list as the list of forty-one: three poor souls that were present in its initial version had been executed over rather equal intervals of time. There were still some names ahead of Rotsky but he would sometimes catch himself spending a long time picking out a shirt to wear before heading out of his apartment. It's good that most of the ones he had in his closet were light blue and grey: blood stains would stick out more on those than on black or brown ones. And yet, not as overly-dramatically as on white ones.

In his rather modest wardrobe Rotsky had a few favorite linen shirts sown in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Any of those would have been a good match.

In fact (although he didn't know it at that time) Rotsky wasn't only not exaggerating the danger—he was downplaying it. The danger was twofold and moving towards him from two different directions. And they differed in the fact that one wanted him dead while the other wanted him alive. And it was because of this, that Rotsky had a chance.

But let's not jump ahead, all in due time.

The maximally concealed life that he had been living up until now experienced very few changes. Except that now, when he would go on his jaunts to the castle and back, Rotsky would wear eyeglasses that were darker than usual. It made perfectly good sense to hide the natural color of his eyes, both of the colors.

Everything else went on as it usually did: strolling around the city, cooking the simplest meals possible, one and a half to two bottles of wine at evening, books (mostly Robert Walser, whose autistic prose Yos fell in love with back in his days in the Swiss prison), music, from all of its epochs, and innumerable mixes, which he had compiled, God knows for whom besides himself, having taken the stumbled upon "Radio Paradise" as an example. And, also, infrequently going on dates, which Rotsky, somewhat vulgarly, referred to as erotrips.

His life was not so bad—it was quite good, in fact, especially when taking into account that it could have ended a long time ago. Staying in, sitting out, and lying low on the bottom, like a crocodile in the mud? One gets use to that and there is even a certain comfort in doing so. But for

how long? Until the end of your days? Well then what sense was there in dragging them out as long as possible?

The intrusion of that egg-head fan of his and the subsequent invitation to Xata Morgana became an event of extraordinary importance for Rotsky. Instead of tossing it, this intrusion, away, like a dream—not a bad one, just a senselessly embarrassing one—Rotsky would increasingly more often catch himself pondering this dream or, more precisely, the demons of a past life that it stirred. In my life, Rotsky will brag to one of his *malitsas*, I was a star. And then he'll correct his inaccuracy: no, I was once a star. Over the course of my life I was once a star.

(However, in that life, in the previous one, he didn't only have to wear dark glasses but a mask as well. His face was not to be recognized. He was an unrecognizable star, a conspiratorial exaggeration. Mehr schein, als sein.)

Christmas and the inexorable New Year's that followed it covered him with a sticky calendar horror. In full force, actually, three times that, Rotsky was confronted with the realization that, in fact (in fuck!), he is now just living out his years. That the days pass and so do the nights. That the sun rises and it sets. That, one day, some complete strangers will find his rotting corpse only after they've broken down the door to his apartment. Now that version with the bloodstains on that light-blue shirt from Bangladesh doesn't look so bad and, at least, is more aesthetic. And if a video of his execution should pop up on the web, caught on tape inadvertently by nearby surveillance cameras, then it could be said that his life turned out pretty darn well, in the end. And what about death? Rotsky asked himself. Well it will turn out ok too, because it will be sudden. "Got to die with your boots on!"

In January, he noticed that the days flew buy even faster than in December. Although it seems like they should be longer. The passing of days became a pestering thought that nagged at his bones and joints. On top of that, the 23-year-old Columbian girl Arabella, who, according to her promo-video was endowed with a size-4 bust, and whom he had invited on an erotrip scheduled for the first weekend of February, bailed at the last second, canceling her flight to Barcelona and sticking him with having to pay for the ticket.

And it looks like he also failed in February, but in its second half. A group of local hipsters, copying still-somewhat-hip trends in the street culture of larger cities, rolled an old and painted (aren't they all?) piano out onto the sidewalk in front of their café. Rotsky was able to successfully pass by it many times without even having slowed his step. But that time—had Edgar,

who was sitting on his shoulder, whispered something?—he didn't pass it by.

He touched (oh, how long it had been!) the keyboard. He wasn't able to do much. His fingers were not obeying him. The music didn't want it. Well, it was -10 Celsius outside and 2AM. Hopefully, no one heard that crap.

A week later, Rotsky dialed up Myromyr-Slavoyar Servus (aka Meph) and asked him whether those Thursdays were still available.

“So, Orpheus finally decided to descend into hell?” For some reason the owner of Xata Morgana did not seem very happy.

That December-time enthusiast, who had almost choked on love and fanaticism back then, had gone away. In his place a cold pragmatist-employer had materialized:

“What kind of honorarium are you looking for?”

(That is: perhaps he was happy but he wasn't showing it.)

“Let's start with a bowl of soup,” Rotsky answered.

Meph remained silent and Rotsky was forced to add.

“As in my former life, I will agree to be receive a payment-in-kind.”

“You'll get a kind of payment too,” Meph promised.

*That was Lubomyr Melnyk. “Ripples in a Water Scene”.*

*And I'm Yosyp Rotsky, and I'll never be able to play like Lubomyr Melnyk. But I do have a radio, which you are listening to tonight. My radio is this night, and the clock shows zero hours and seventeen minutes.*

*We are only just beginning, there is much time ahead of us, and I've picked out some music with...no, not piano music in the academic sense but, let's just say, music featuring clearly noticeable keyboards. But not exclusively featuring them. That is, all kinds of music.*

*I played some keys back in the day. No, I didn't study at a conservatory, although I slept there for a few nights. By the way, that was during the peak of my popularity. After hearing that phrase, you probably think I'm some sort of self-centered fool. The Peak! Of My! Popularity! Please try to ignore that: sometimes I get a bit carried away. I will get better at this as I mature. I still have several lives ahead of me.*

*So then. I am a rock musician. Today, that's a half-forgotten world. Or course, I'm exaggerating a bit with all that half-forgotten stuff. But, nonetheless, I sometimes ask myself: isn't*

*it finally time to agree that the best days of rock music are in the past? That it will never again sway the foundations of this world the way it did back then. That is, not in my time, but a bit earlier. Neither before that time, nor after it, was there, or will there ever be, such a widespread shock caused by music, such a dependence on it, such a massive focus on it, and within it, by several generations.*

*You are correct, this is very personal. This is the ex- in me speaking. For those like me, everything in this world has been forgotten, or at least half of it has. That is why I so want to remind you of us—those that have been forgotten—and of myself. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, when I was living my previous life, I had a portative organ, more precisely—a harmonium. Some good people sewed a special goat skin case for it. I could drag my instrument along its little wheels but, more often, I would carry it, along snows and unpaved ways. We were constantly traveling, from estate to estate, from castle to monastery, from town to city, from a feast to a holiday. Back then, in our part of the world, war was frequent and cruel, lots of slashing and burning, without even mentioning the plague and leprosy, or the harsh winters that lasted half a year, or the brigandage on the roads. In any case, we were already playing Prog back then. And we weren't always being chased off of podiums because of it. And when they did chase us off them, then it wasn't always accompanied by booing and cursing. And when there was booing and cursing, then it wasn't always accompanied by beatings with poles.*

*You know what? There is nothing better than the music of the 70s. You think my old age made me say that? No way. It's not a matter of age, or taste. It's something that I can prove objectively, as a musician. Using fingers, notes, and recordings. Never—not before, nor after the 70s—did musicians establish for themselves such absolutely pure and unattainable goals. I have a right to such an opinion because I wasn't playing yet in the 70s. In the 70s, my self was still in a state of formation, as was my concept of what constitutes good music. And thank God I wasn't playing anything yet at that time. That's why there is nothing personal in that opinion. Except for, of course, my teenage ecstasies.*

*What has been totally forgotten about today is our band. And it had a fucking long history, with some real breakthroughs! We began in those times when we were all still trying to sing like Lennon. And finished, that is, fell apart, scattered into non-existence, into dust—when the next generation to come along began blaring their piece-of-shit mix of lame pop songs and rap from the stage.*

*One time we even went on a tour of Serbia. Or was it Macedonia?*

*We managed to go through several different styles and names.*

*The first was “Doctor Tahabat”—I got it from a book, whose author shot himself in the head on Sunday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933.*

*Generally speaking, we flipped through a bunch of books, searching for names for our various projects. Dictionaries of philosophy worked best for this: pick a page number, slide your finger blindly down the page and you can get “Absolute”, “Eidos”, “Catharsis”, or “Chiliasm”. And then you are amazed how it all comes together. You name the group “Abstractions of Existing Endlessness”—and that’s exactly how it sounds. In the early days of Doctor Tahabat, when we were still looking for a bass player and for a singer to be our front man, the first one came from “Vedanta” and the second one from “Vendetta”.*

*We began and ended with Tahabat, but at the beginning, as you’ve already heard, it was “Doctor Tahabat” and at the end—simply “Tahabat”. A couple of groupies begged us to bring back the original name and we did, but not that whole name, which they had prayed for down on their knees in front of our zippers. And why not the whole name? Because we didn’t want to come off as being too accommodating. (But, to be honest, “Doctor Tahabat” had already been shut down. That is, it had been legally blocked since, behind our back, our first manager Fuzz Phaser registered it in his own name).*

*Between the first name and the last one there are thirteen other ones. I can’t remember all of them just like I can’t recall—spontaneously, without preparing for it—every one of our musicians and pseudo musicians. Because it seems like everyone played with us! Countless, not documented by anyone, tumbleweeds. Actually, if I were given one whole day to remember, a piece of paper, a pencil, and a little bit of inner peace, then I’d recall all of them. But where I am to get these four necessities, especially the last one?*

*I am able to remember some of our names only because I like them to this day. For example, we had our “Lemko period”, when we are all really into a specific style of Folk. Correspondingly, we called ourselves “Pentatonica Garden”. And a few other variants as well: “Pentatonica Pub”, “Pentatonica House”, and “Pentatonica Blues”. However, columnists (music critics still existed back then) would often shorten those names. If you should rummage through fanzines from that time and come across the group “Penta”, then that would be us.*



*Later we were more into New Wave and called ourselves “Streamco”. Switching to indie, we changed one letter and became “Screamco”.*

*I also recall that we played a certain variant of Gypsy Punk and began calling ourselves “Pope of Roma”.*

*After that we adopted a Zen/Post-ambient style and started referring to our group as “Hamaliya Himalaya”.*

*And then, moving through Death Metal and Industrial (the group “Hell In A Handbasket”) we got to Noise and now we were “Cata-clyster”. Our only album from that time was not just any album, it was “AlBomb”.*

*Unfortunately, everything started falling apart when we changed our name to “The Period”. At that time, a petite and clamorous female vocalist with a compact rear end and immeasurable ambitions found us. And she drove us into an impasse. Her book, featuring rather scandalous memoirs, was published recently. She’s tossed a lot of rocks into my yard. Now there is nothing left in that yard but rocks.*

*What else?*

*In my country, someone came up with this notion that radio must be cheery. That each and every Shit-FM has the splitting of its listeners’ sides, with the unfunny humor of its radio personalities, as its obligation. The timbre of their voices, the banal jokes disseminated on air by those voices, and even the weather forecasts and exchange rates—all of these had to help maintain a positive mood, complementing that horrific, easy-listening music. But that’s not what you’re going to get from me.*

*Because you’re listening to Radio Night.*

*With you ‘til morning is Yosyp Rotsky and we’re going to talk about love, sex, and porn. But not just about that. Half past twelve is about to arrive. That’ll happen while the music is playing, just about in the middle of the song. Now I am going to play something that you never would have expected from me. Nonetheless.*

***Elton John, I’ve Seen That Movie, Too.***

Essentially feeling my way around as I delve deeper into Yosyp Rotsky's life story I inevitably stumbled upon the need to, as much as the situation allowed, investigate the chronicle of the place in which I ended up living for the time being. Conducting research in several archives and in the city library, of course, turned out to be not so easy, and the clouds of dust that were raised by my investigative work, for a while, resulted only in an allergic reaction and several hours of exhaustive sneezing. Moreover, right from the start, I sensed an unintentional, yet rather nasty, resistance from the personnel there. And I wouldn't just chalk that up to the way that locals usually act towards a stranger.

But I am capable of being patient and easy-going—otherwise I couldn't even dream of a career in the IIBC. My methodical perseverance, as well as my commitment to an objective, were beginning to reap rewards. And I couldn't go without a pair of symbolic presents for certain functionaries, more accurately, female functionaries. Regardless, I was now armed with incomplete but accurate knowledge about the basement that Yosyp Rotsky encountered when it was the Xata Morgana club.

That basement had been notorious for many, many years. In the period between the Hussite wars (that is, the fifteenth century) all the way up to the Napoleonic ones, it was a torture chamber that had, over the years, assembled an increasingly cleverer, and technically more cutting-edge, collection of devices. Thus, we have almost 400 years of nothing but tortures, screams, cries, bloody sweat, and the crushing of human dignity and reproductive organs. It was a commander of Napoleon's garrison, a dedicated fan of Rousseau and Voltaire, who finally reformed the space into a gunpowder storage room. Military needs dictated new pragmatics, and gunpowder turned out to be more important than the crushed bones and torn muscles of the accused.

But all wars come to an end, including all of the Napoleonic ones. And now, instead of powder kegs, wine barrels were rolled down to the cellar. That is how the First City Winery was founded in Nosorohe, which, in a nod to earlier years, and not without merriment, was called "Under Torture", proving that, even in this shabby, distant-from-any-major-city-center, Subcarpathian, remote town humanity also spiritedly and jokingly parted with its past. Alternative

names for the wine bar were “Under Pressure”, and “On The Cannon Bullets”. People couldn’t resist twisting the second one of those into the raunchy name “On the Balls”.

Notwithstanding all the wit regarding those names, the commercial effect of the wine bar did not withstand any criticism. The remarkable collection of whites, reds, and rosés that were brought in not just from Italy or Spain, but also from California itself, didn’t enjoy any demand or even a smidgen of attention from the local connoisseurs, whose taste in wine was amply satisfied by the local plonk, which by then was already known as *Frankovka*. The most attentive among all of you remember how skeptically I described this, shall I say, booze, after that forced degustation, during which I had to drink roughly two glasses of it.

The Winery, the First City one, went bankrupt after a while and the cellar became a secret temple for occultists of a spiritual-necromantic persuasion. Their séances were seldom documented so I had a hard time discovering anything about this period. Because of a gradually increasing fascination with Tarot cards, the temple rather painlessly transformed into a gambling parlor and then—due to a series of financial machinations—into a bourse for philatelists, at which more than one young high schooler spent ten or more kreuzers that had been given to him by caring trustees, purportedly for an afternoon snack—back then known as a *jause*.

Afterwards, I managed to track the existence of a hypnotic rehabilitation facility for mentally damaged veterans of the Great War. We know nothing about the number of people that it rehabilitated but we can guess that another wave of screams and cries was there which, this time, emanated from the subconscious. All of this later becomes an illegal bordello featuring exclusively under-aged personnel of both sexes—and the relatively long existence of this project (almost ten years) is baffling. How was it possible for such a small and, most importantly and without exaggeration, then-proper-conservative city, to keep this, putting it mildly, atypical business, a secret for so long remains a mystery to this day and leads one to suspect that there was a shaded but very powerful and, perhaps, demonic side to the city’s, at first glance, dull and God-fearing existence.

It’s as if the circle had become complete with the second war and the basement once again became a torture chamber, and for a long time at that—for about ten, or even twelve, years because, at first, executions were conducted there by the Gestapo and then by the Red partisans and later by the special punitive authorities of the new regime, which regarded itself to be the *victorious people’s rule*.

Then, that is sometime from the mid-1950s, a truly uninteresting period begins that featured the repairing of umbrellas and irons, the re-filling of soda siphons, and the storage of paper for recycling. Finally, right after the new, Harvard-influenced government announced the adoption of a free market system and monetary reform, the cellar began to be settled by the homeless, whose—it's sad but true—numbers steadily grew in those first reform-era years.

When Myromyr-Slavoyar Servus, fleeing from his country because of the conclusive stamping out of the revolution, arrived in Nosorohe (for the time being, he thought then, after which will come Vienna, Amsterdam, and London) and was thinking of ways to fill—newfound, for an immigrant—painfully-free time, he began seeking a space for his new establishment, for which he already had a name, because, according to him, it came to him in a dream. You and I now know that he put it this way: “For example, I coincidentally dreamt of a name. I coincidentally put together a club with that name. For that to happen I had to coincidentally get this basement. I got it. More precisely, the keys to it. The keys fit—and it opened.”

How much of what he said is true and how much isn't? First of all, it's not really true that he dreamt of the name Xata Morgana: in his dreams it was Xata-MorgueAnna and he came up with Xata Morgana only after he woke up. Besides that, one should approach the word “keys” with scrutiny. It seems that what Servus had in mind was certain connections he had with two or three individuals in the city administration. It is they who supported his idea and, having become rather stimulated by a whole series of tempting propositions, honestly concerned themselves with the issues of the new immigrant community in their city, one which is open to the world and, taking advantage of a certain charitable scheme, gave the cellar, which stunk not just from a lack of being washed, to Servus.

No one knows what happened to the homeless. Perhaps they were relocated into a shelter, or maybe they were taken to one of the mountain meadows where there was a severe lack of shepherds. No matter what, the Nosorohe city administration cared very much about its friendly, post-liberal profile and always searched for the least painful and most gentle manner of resolving social problems. That's why the slogan for its territory was “Openness and Warmth”.

Meanwhile, Xata Morgana was rapidly reconstructed and redecorated and, within a month, was transformed into a community space with a bar, a kitchen, a small dance/concert hall, and a few private rooms in which various activists from the latest wave of immigrants would gather. Mostly, of course, loud youths from all corners of the recently-abandoned homeland, which were

given not just political asylum by the open neighboring country but also the opportunity to receive an education at its universities. They would arrive every week: taking advantage of the chance to do so while the regime was still letting them go and before it shut its jaw. So they flowed out in myriad streams heading for the West, mostly to this one, the closest one—and among them were true enemies of the regime, as well as its fake enemies, and, also, those who weren't enemies at all, and even its secret supporters, who nonetheless decided to take advantage of a situation that allowed them to *bail* and happily settle in a warmer, more ordered, and noticeably brighter life *beyond the hill*. And they, I will add, settled into that life beyond the hill in places like Nosorohe—even though, in their dreams, what they saw was Lisbon, or Barcelona. For some reason, only those two centers of attraction. Lisbon, Barcelona.

So that's the place where Yosyp Rotsky arrived on a certain day towards the end of the winter, taking two stairways down.

"Well look who's here—you're the best, Yos," Servus greeted him right at the doorway. "When should we start cooking that first bowl of soup?"

"Right now, if you want," Rotsky muttered but added, just in case: "Actually, I didn't come here to pig out. Show me the space."

What happened to that bored-indolent telephone Servus! He's now once again ideal, neat and clean-shaved, once again swaddled in that impenetrable, several-kilometer long Gravity Master cloud. Like Rotsky, he placed his hands in the pockets of his pants and led him to the bar counter.

"And where's your black-hued bodyguard?" He tossed over his shoulder, half turned around.

"He's flying around the orangeries. We're not together all of the time you know, he is an independent creature," Yos explained.

"Well tell him I said hi," Servus pulled a hand out of his pocket and gestured towards the bottles. "Tequila, bourbon, grain alcohol? We have Zaza's homemade *chacha*."

"Ok, let's have a bit," Rotsky nodded, and the clumsy bartender, who looked more like a bouncer, poured him a half of a 250-gram glass, the first sip of which lit up his innards with a white grape fire, leading Rotsky to agree, without thinking, with that which all bartenders say: "Good choice."

There was almost nobody hanging out in the club at that time of day. Yos caught the quick glances of a few servers, mostly female ones. Who are you? Why are you here? But in a minute or two, when Zaza's *chacha* began performing its inner-warming song, Yos imagined that those glances were filled not just with inquisition but also with a sultry affection and that he would never again regret that he showed up in this place.

And that he would, possibly, be here day and night.

Servus led him through the basement like the captain of a ship that was rocking gently on a wave of *chacha*, cutting through the space and making stops in front of some of its compartments and cabins: that's the place where the audit council meets, here—the executive Consortium of the LFP (The Liberation of the Fatherland Party), together with the internal security service—“for obvious reasons: representatives of the Regime never sleep but instead slither around beyond their borders, Yos”, here are some more rooms, for “chess players”, for billiards, a smoking lounge, for tea ceremonies, a break room for the strippers, a massage room, a bureau of political analysis, a computer studio, an editorial office, a make-up room, a general storeroom, a machinery room (today, a bomb shelter), a back-up toilet, and further on, as the guide promised, “another set of stairs heading downwards.”

The place where they led really was quite impressive: it turns out that there was a coarse, tortoise-shell covered wall there, and in it, a bare iron gate, and the clever Servus, using a different key, that is, one belonging to an earlier era of lock making, opened it with a resonant and lengthy, pre-historic scraping. Beyond the gate, according to Servus's explanation, “the SSP, subterranean space of potential” lay—a massive system of abandoned corridors, rooms, and halls, built by Turks, who had been captured at war in the 1770s. The smell emanating from there was that of an absolutely dark wasteland and Servus yelled something unintelligible into it setting off an echo. He then added that, according to his leads, those corridors stretch out under Castle Hill to the castle casemates, from where one can go up, if not into the barron's chambers, then, “without any doubt, Yos”, up to the commandant's offices.

“Many detainees were dragged in here on their stomachs! Right into my club!” Servus either chortled or snickered.

“What, weren't they able to conduct the tortures in the castle?” Rotsky asked.

“Eveline the Speechless, the spouse of Florian-Augustus, the twenty-sixth baron of Nosorohe, was a lady who possessed both a devout heart and absolute pitch. The nighttime

shrieking of the tortured interfered with her vigils. Moreover, her husband would constantly disappear during his hunting trips,” Servus explained.

Afterwards, he once again yelled something foul into the darkness, as if parting with a bogged-down monster there and, after listening to the echo for a bit, closed the gate with a screech.

“So, how do you like it?” Servus asked when they returned upstairs to the bar counter.

“Life’s good,” Rotsky estimated.

His shot glass, and the remaining *chacha* it contained, had been waiting for him all this time. However, Rotsky reacted to the bartender’s attempt to refill the glass by covering it with his palm.

“How about a cocktail?” The bartender raised his eyebrows. But Rotsky turned that down as well.

“His favorite cocktails are Molotov’s,” Servus nodded at the bartender. “Do you remember the twentieth on Courier St? Our legendary twentieth? The twentieth barricade? He was in charge there.”

Rotsky didn’t want to get mired in a painful topic and, thus kept quiet. He just realized why he—for a second—was thinking that the bartender should have had a balaclava on his head. Then came the snow, toppling over the white sky with slabs, terribly thick, the biggest snow of the year, the main event of the year, unbearably sticky and even stickier—because of the blood: Rotsky and some other guy were dragging the body of a third man, whose intestines were spilling out, and while they were lugging him for those ten meters or so, so that they could hide behind the barricade, the puffy white layer below his body became soaked in a wide bloody stripe, which, having just made an appearance, immediately began whitening and disappearing into nothing, disguised by the thick snowfall.

What’s craziest is that the guy with the intestines, they say, survived.

For Rotsky it seemed that he had said that sentence out loud.

Servus looked away. But Rotsky wouldn’t have asked him anyway which barricade it was that he had been commander of. Something else was said:

“Don’t purchase a Schellenberger. Well, you can purchase one if you want. But I’m not going to play on it.”

“You don’t want to do it?” Servus became concerned. “C’mon...”

Rotsky interrupted him:

“No need. I’ve got another idea.”

And the idea was this.

According to his request, Servus was to arrange for a minor, so to say, decoration. In one of the corners, on a raised platform (so it could be seen from anywhere), they built a glass, transparent booth, and inside it, a makeshift radio studio. But no, this was not at all supposed to be a real radio station. Rotsky’s program was not designed to be broadcast over the airwaves—it was to be only for the guests of the establishment, for regulars and for random visitors. This was an internal radio, or, better yet, an improvised theater of monologues featuring elements of a radio program. At least that’s how Rotsky described it, and Servus, predictably, loved it.

Living a life with lots of free time, Yosyp Rotsky spent much of it listening and re-listening to music—old, new, familiar and unfamiliar. In the past few years, searching for it had become much easier: it seems that all of it, all that had appeared and that continues to appear in the world, is digitized, loaded up into the web and presented, no—flung in one bunch, into general use. After one or two quick moves, you can get everything—from a mannered popular song that spun on an easy-going great-grandfather’s turntable while great-grandmother was painfully giving birth to his seventh offspring, to yesterday’s hopelessly performed risky premier on stage at the Metropolitan Opera. Everything became accessible and it became so immediately, from the first try—even recordings that were seemingly gone forever, damaged, erased, or lost without a trace in thousands of trash dumps of nonexistence that were your teenage life, back when music formed everything else (one’s worldview, taste, traits, sex glands, and moral convictions). Search engines learned how to find anything anyone could possibly imagine in a moment’s time. Once you figure out how to think like they do—all music is at your disposal.

Taking advantage of his permanent vacation, Yosyp Rotsky compiled dozens of mixes of songs. The formation of each one of them became a tense game of remembering and reimagining. He would combine and shuffle, develop themes and crash timbres. Links and segues were key. Their semantics could not be too personal, but they were fully capable of replacing meanings with signs and, evolving to semiotics, could strive for a general universality. The epitome of happiness was that first listening of each new mix, from beginning to end—everything that was happening there, within the songs and amidst the pauses between them.



This activity had been taking place for several years and even the Swiss detention did little to slow down the path toward, perhaps, the One and Only Mix. Because even though the prisoners' access to the memory of the computer servers was restricted by the hour and by the day of week, their own memory could work non-stop, 24/7, and, in comparison to those who lived idly in the free world, in a much deeper and more intense fashion too.

And now the time to share these fragments arrived. Rotsky would bring them in on a flash drive and present them from his glass booth. The public, scattered throughout the club, would either listen or wouldn't. Although it was difficult to do the latter: the sound set-up for the 'radio-show' literally dazed and captivated, so for those who didn't want to give in it was easier to simply exit the club. On the first Thursday, most of the people did just that. They bolted one by one or in large groups. And it became worse a quarter into the program when the bolting became massive. But then the situation stabilized somewhat, the exodus slowed and, after the one-hour program concluded, eight weirdos or so still remained in the club. But even a start like that, to an extent, satisfied the good-natured Servus.

Rotsky fell in love with radio during those same teenage years in which he fell in love in general. But these kids, who were born and grew up in a completely different technological environment and never experienced how a radio receiver-buddy could blow you away with its crackling and its gurgling—when special authorities would attempt to suppress any *subversive* foreign radio station coming through it—oh no, in no way could such kids become easy prey. They had come to expect *live music* or a *cool DJ* and most of them didn't understand what this boring old fart was trying to do and why he was contorting up there. But they weren't all that successful in becoming bored: from Thursday to Thursday, Rotsky would increasingly become accustomed to his mission, he took the bull by the horns, drilled into, and subdued them and their resistance with his sound bulldozer, transforming it into its opposite, he felt and embraced, struck them with the back of his hand, tore them into pieces, whipped and caressed them, crushed their skulls and blew them away, he petted them below their bellies, he pinched their nuts and licked their clitorises, and he did all of this—having forgotten about them, about their presence here, and about everyone and everything in general, having fully submerged his mind into the music and history of his memory. Over an hour or two (his program did not have a set duration) he flipped mountains upside down, juggled styles, rhythms, and names, sewing his beautiful suites together with orchestras, soloists, guitars, Jazz improvisations, Sympho, Progressive, Prog- and Post-rock,

standards, African or Creole voices, Japanese songs from Canada's western coast, Corsican and Georgian polyphonic singing, chamber concerts, 50s electro music, 60s electronica, 70s electropop, 80s electro-punk, 90s electro-indie, the electro-rave of the aughts, and the cyber-drive of the 10s and 20s, pathétique sonatas, Hawaiian ukuleles, Jamaican trombonists, Ethiopian trumpeters, Provence troubadours, Somalian pirates tossed onto the beach, Transcarpathian contraband smugglers shot dead in their beat up Jeeps, and, of course, organists, harpsichordists and harpists, and also pianists and, in general, keyboard players in all possible formations.

Once, a girl there brought him a glass of wine, straight into the booth and in the middle of the program. At that point, Rotsky had already finished his first glass and he was out of wine. From then on, a ritual was born: the more glasses Rotsky would drink throughout the night, the more fun was had by everybody around him. Rotsky wasn't getting buzzed, he was creating a buzz.

New fans of his were emerging and more and more would gather in Xata Morgana to listen to *the dude with the bird*. Edgar would always accompany him to the booth and, leaping off his shoulder, would settle into his spot between the club's monitor speaker and the microphone. Rotsky never lost hope that he would eventually speak. On the fourth Thursday, the club was completely packed. After the program, everyone gave a standing ovation. This was followed by countless photo sessions with arms behind waists and—inadvertently—buttocks and, for some reason, autographs.

"When I was fifteen, I only listened to forbidden music," Rotsky said into the dictaphone of a young reporter from the local immigrant portal "Our Hromada". "You, kids, were born in much freer times and the combination of words "forbidden music" may seem absurd to you. Can love be forbidden? In our country, today—yes."

That interview was already made available to the public by the following morning, with the hypothetically-intriguing, moderately click-bait title "When I Was Fifteen I Made Forbidden Love."

Enjoying what he saw on the monitor, Myromyr-Slavoyar Servus broke out into a super-wide, happy smile.

It is naïve to think, parroting Yosyp Rotsky, that this wonder, this sudden explosion of success, was bought on exclusively because of his, Rotsky's, talent and passion. It's true, Rotsky was fantastic. But secret and arranged stimulation was also involved. That was taken care of by

the club's head honcho, who was not fully satisfied with the cash coming in from the previous Thursdays. Ultimately, the financial side of the venture was not paramount for Servus. But who said secondary matters shouldn't be considered as well?

It was he, Meph, and his underlings, who sent onto all relevant platforms and groups a series of hashtags such as #HeroAmongUs and #Rotsky'sFeat. The overall style of these announcements was that of suggestion and insinuation, which people, who more or less understood the context, would consider to be blatantly obvious. Flowing from these posts was the idea of Yosyp Rotsky's direct involvement with the unexpected liquidation of the Dictator, Europe's penultimate one. Until recently, one could conceivably be convinced of this, having watched a 4-second video of the moment the *attempt* happened. And one could no longer find that video: any search that had the words "Dictator" and "attempt" in it would produce the message 404.

It's fitting that Yosyp Rotsky, who had avoided social media like the plague, could not have guessed that, in those few days, he had managed to rise from being a quirky and marginal radio DeeJay to a fearless hero of resistance. On the fourth Thursday, all of them—leaders and activists, the hopes of the nation, the flowers of immigration, *our hromada*, independent businessmen, intellectual planktons, anonymous Gastarbeiters, conformists, escapees and forced refugees, and, first and foremost, students of IT, medicine, economics, and culturology—rushed into Xata Morgana, in one breathing and aroused mass, in order to see for their own eyes and be with not just anyone but with its great avenger. The word "avenger", by the way, they would write with a capital letter, like the word "Messiah".

Notwithstanding all of his, until recent times, impeccable discretion, Rotsky was not on top of this change. He somewhat blindly attributed the sudden unleashing of this bottomless success, as we already know, to the singularity of his "radio show" and to his aptly selected music. He was not at all astounded by the directness with which one girl after another would drape themselves over him in the club. He effortlessly returned to his previously-lived polygamous style—and his affairs, mostly short-lived and brisk, fluttered as if in a kaleidoscope. And it is worth taking into account the circumstances of the place: Rotsky's apartment, I remind you, was located directly above the club and more than one *malitsa* treated this obvious convenience as a convincing argument.

For some reason, all of their names (Rotsky noticed this a bit later) began with the letter A: Ariadna, Adriana, Arianda and Ariana, Arina, Aliona, Alyona, Aksana (there were two with

that name, at the beginning and at the end), Aksinia, Alina, Alisa, Antonina and Antonia, Aneta and Annetta, who were very similar in some way. There was also Adel and Adelaida. There was Annamaria and also Anna-Maria, and Alpha-Omega was there too. There was a good amount of them.

Edgar, ever the counter, for example, lost count. But he did not condemn his chum or, at least, didn't show signs of it.

Maybe because, from the heights of his wise two centuries, and taking into account Rotsky's age, he understood perfectly well: how many more such ladies are to come for him! Let them help to keep him going. The only questions being – going where?

Most of the time, as we already know, Rotsky was going with them to his apartment.

Edgar's mention of the specifics of his co-inhabitant's age were as sharp as ever. Yosyp Rotsky had lived up to that gracious stage in which he was finally able to have completely free sex. Not a jerky and naïve post-puberty, not the hoarse and trembling dependence of a 20-year-old beginner, not the calamitous, spasmodic despair of a 40-year-old teenager-playboy, ready for any kind of jarring recklessness—if only the difference in age were more than twenty—no, he was led by the restrained and enjoyable pickiness of an experienced and almost supersaturated expert, capable of assessing, choosing and establishing, first and foremost, purely erogenous parameters. A sort of measured circling of his raven buddy, of an old hawk, above the valley of Boundless Spoils, when life demonstrates a willingness for the final time and the proposition exceeds the demand. Or, in other words: when the ability to love and to fall in love again has been exhausted according to nature's progress and has disappeared forever, just like that, while—on the contrary!— so much sex has now surfaced that it is too much for just one person, catastrophically, immeasurably too much, but it is just the right amount for everybody and for each of them, for everything that exists, and not just for some one and only, who—you know—will never be again, because she already was.

Rotsky's parties at Xata Morgana, thus, became hip and even occasionally replicated. And who's going to lay low when glory, albeit fleeting and local, has embraced you so passionately! And aren't all glories fleeting and local?

On the sixth or seventh Thursday, Outsiders started showing up at the club. The Outsiders stood out so much not because all the attendees up until now knew each other so well, no. Actually, the circle kept widening, so the appearance of new faces was expected and desired.

But the Outsiders were outsiders—and that is what distinguished them. Their outsidersness could be felt three meters away. And they couldn't, and didn't want to, speak the local language. In fact, they didn't speak at all.

So, what's the problem? The open city Nosorohe, the pearl of kindhearted Central-Eastern Europe, accepted refugees to its liberal open womb: come to me everyone, find your second home. The Africans and the Afghans, the Lybians and the Lebanese, the Syrians and the Assyrians, the Roma, the Urums, the Rumeiis, and everyone, everyone else—willkommen!

So then why would the appearance of a few strangers in the club seem so odd? They're just checking out the local scene. They are simply examining the landscape and searching for their niche.

But that is precisely it: in the niches. Because the Outsiders did not look at all like those kind of searchers. Who cares about niches when you are the lords of life!

Yes, it was the Mob. Its people. Not the Regime's—they were still putzing around. While the Mob was already here.

#### 4

No Mob of any sorts would have been keeping an eye on Rotsky if it weren't for the almost twelve months that he spent in a prison in the Swiss city Z. For that is how long the investigation into his, to put it lightly, controversial act lasted.

Yosyp Rotsky was transferred to the correction facility (Justizvollzugsanstalt) in Z. three days after he was apprehended in the Alpine grand-hotel Waldheim and a quick trial resulting in his arrest. The apprehension took place practically at the scene of the crime and along its hot trail. Official documents indicate that the apprehended individual did not try to escape and resisted neither the hotel's security guards nor to the cantonal police whom they had alerted.

The unusualness of the situation and, first and foremost, its excessively loud resonance—both within the country and internationally—didn't give the court much time to ponder and deliberate. Luckily for Rotsky, the court also decisively rejected the heated call for extradition, which was made by the accused's home country. The government lawyer appointed to Rotsky immediately focused the attention on his status: the latter was still in the process of being granted asylum and, since the reprisal he was to receive if he had returned home promised to be certain and exceedingly harsh, Rotsky could assuredly expect a positive decision. However, the incident in the Waldheim Hotel now markedly worsened his chances and, in general, noticeably complicated the situation.

The court was granted all four of the fundamental reasons to, for the duration of the investigation, confine Rotsky in a—as it is said in the language of his home country—remand prison, that is, using the language of their own country, *Untersuchungshaft*. Just one reason is enough to render such a decision, while here there were all four. Had he remained free, the accused could have: escaped and hid (*Fluchtgefahr*), clouded—that is, interfered in—the progress of the investigation (*Verdunkelungsgefahr*), repeated his offence (*Wiederholungsgefahr*) or, finally, committed any other criminal act (*Ausführungsgefahr*). One could expect just about anything from a guy like that.

Thus, Yosyp Rotsky could not avoid being confined behind bars. And it wasn't ending up there that he found strange but something else—certain details. For example, in the *admission facility* (or how the hell do you translate *Eintrittsabteilung*? how do you not feel like a enrollee?) they took into storage his modest personal watch and replaced it with a prison one. Rotsky even quipped in the direction of the head reception officer: “And now I finally have a Swiss one”. The latter, on the other hand, not inclined to joking around with new arrivals, continued his routine of noting Yosyp's biometrics (height, weight, as well as fingerprints) and got stuck for a while on the entry “Eye Color”. Finally, his job-nurtured intuition led him to jot down something intermediary like “grau-grün” or “blau-grau”. And, with that, the admissions procedure was completed—and Rotsky, as if he were a first-year student, was officially admitted.

The correction facility in Z. is a rather noticeable mix of times and styles. In the beginning, it was a newly arranged farmyard of an important Cistercian monastery, which, irreversibly entering an era of increasingly aggressive secularization, finally came under the care of the worldly authorities, who, without wasting too much of their time finding a better use for it, on a certain day

towards the end of the century before the previous one, brought onto its territory the first group of murderers, rapists, and thieves, totaling fifty-three individuals. From that time much had changed in the canton's penitentiary system – mostly in the direction of being less severe, but not only. The farmyard grew a few additional hectares and received some new houses, which were, in an architectural sense—excessive, in comparison to the historical monastery core, which had once been included in all existing registries of architectural monuments —mostly featureless. And Yosyp Rotsky was packed away into one of those buildings, and that is where, in a cell two-meters wide and three-meters long, he was kept for most of the time that he was in the prison. Instead, he spent the lesser part of his time there in pre-deportation detention (Ausschaffungshaft): shortly after he received the final rejection for asylum, he was transferred to a different building, which, it seems, had much more spacious cells—capable of holding close to ten temporary unfortunate souls, each of whom was being prepared for extradition beyond the borders of the so desirable, although not equally hospitable for all of its guests, Switzerland.

Concerning the Z. correctional facility, people well-versed in Swiss detention centers say “kein guter Ort”. As if there exists any prison in the world about which you would say the opposite! But attaching such a succinct and almost inseparable phrase to Z. at least implies that somewhere in Switzerland there is a more comfortable prison. How analogous facilities looked in his own country Rotsky could only know from hearsay, a few films, and a handful of books (which he, unfortunately, did not read carefully enough at the time), as well as from the bottomless depth of existing criminal folklore, first and foremost of the musical variety, which he, while briefly balancing on the edge of sliding into playing in a wedding band, he also played a bit: two or three wedding bashes plus a few farewell parties for those being sent off to the army, no more.

The first thing he taught the director of the prison in Z., when the latter had desired piano lessons, was the song “Murka”<sup>2</sup>. The director was in the midst of organizing a Christmas party with a common Christmas tree for the inmates and the prison personnel during which he would numb everyone with a couple of musical numbers performed by himself. And “Murka” was a perfect fit.

What he thought he knew about the joints and slammers of his native country allowed Rotsky, during one of the first lessons, to state, with an informal bluntness that was surprising even to him: “For someone with your job, I would say that you're rather refined.” This concerned, for

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<sup>2</sup> A Russian criminal song.

the most part, his fingers, but the director, a lean and, like Rotsky, light and boyish (and, thanks to ever-present glasses, a bit botanical) sort, replied with emphatic dryness—so as to try to put an end to this: “I have a degree in pedagogy and am a lecturer in language and literature”. Rotsky froze somewhat and explained that, in his country, that job is usually occupied by people in uniforms, that is—officers, “with knuckles like sledgehammers, necks like oxen, and I won’t say a word about their faces, because even my native language lacks the words to describe them.” “That’s a stereotype,” the Swiss director refuted him. “In reality, a prison is a bad place in any country (kein gutter Ort—that’s exactly how he put it). And we, it’s guards, are as unhappy as our prisoners.”. “You should try to switch places, just to be sure of that”, Rotsky almost replied but decided not to provoke him. Their external similarity hinted at a fully cognized fondness between them. Sometimes they recalled brothers, but no one would dare indicate which one was the younger of the two. It looked like each of them were the younger.

Rotsky gave lessons throughout October and November, for three days a week. However, because of work, the director wasn’t able to show up for almost a quarter of the planned meetings, and thus an opportunity arose for Rotsky himself to play. Sometime in the future the last of his lovers will ask him what he did all that time while in prison to which Rotsky will reply: “I jammed on the keyboard”, and this would not be too much of an exaggeration.

The director was trying to convince him to put together a separate program and to perform, at the start, in the prison, and then outside of it, in town, for example at the KulturKasino, with its 450-seat hall. “Will I be brought in under escort?” Rotsky wondered. “That I cannot promise you,” the director shook his head. “But I can promise you a honorarium. You won’t escape, will you?”

No, the slammer in Z. didn’t seem like hell. With great exaggeration—like a purgatory. A rather pure purgatory, by the way. No lice-infested barracks with goners, no sweat and stink, no walls soaked in tuberculosis bacillus. No walking dead, no prison swill, no underfeeding, no *tiutielku v tiutielku*. No cold, no wild heat. No turnkeys, no crims, and no prison bitches. No beatings, no tortures, no rapes, no psycho, no cell. No croaking.

But with the groaning—of a few hundred grown and sad men. It seems that they have everything that they need here: music classes and a fitness room, language courses and a library, a computer lab and a soccer field (not, not a golf course), a sauna and healthy meals three times a day with both vegetarian and vegan options, and six hours of sleep, and dreams, and secret views



of the lake, where there is freedom and liberty. (For the sake of them, those views of the lake, Rotsky, several times, took advantage of the right for voluntary physical labor and worked at the vineyard from where one could, at least with one eye, first one of that color and then one of the other color, steal a glance of a slice of the lake's surface and own it for just one moment, because that was enough.)

They have everything that they need here—if only they correct themselves, take the right path, get conscientious, and honestly repent. But what do they do?

Sometimes they slit their wrists. They go insane. Slam their heads against the walls. They swallow forks and syringes. They do drugs and masturbate. They hallucinate. They sodomize and rape each other. *Kein guter Ort.*

And they do that even though almost a third of them—those who have lighter sentences, shorter terms, softer verdicts—are in so called half-incarceration (*Halbgefängenschaft*). In the morning they go free and, taking care of the duties of their professional jobs all day, obediently return behind the gates, to their cells, behind the bars, to their Cistercian penitentiary with its six-hour cleansing sleep, in the evening. If not for their chronically grey faces no one on the outside would even think that they were prisoners.

Yes, it is important: besides their healthy agricultural work (cheese factories, cowsheds, poultry farms, gardening and viticulture), fresh air and ecologically, impeccable meals, three times a day, what their faces give off most of all is their greyness, at all times.

This assortment of the convicted as well as those, like Rotsky, who were still under investigation, offered a vast criminal diversity. Petty shoplifters and increasingly clumsy pocket-thieves, rare and romantic robbers of banks and post offices, stealers of the most dizzying models of cars, of jewelry as expensive as sizeable estate and of squeaky old bikes, forgers of watches and time, computer cheats, the exposed and disgraced corruptionists, rapists, pedo- and zoo-philés, murderers. There are few of the latter, and, if the investigation should go sour, Rotsky would have a good chance joining their ranks.

Like in all the others in this country, the prison in Z. is somewhat of a jail of nations. That is, Rotsky is not the only foreigner there. A whole legions of foreigners is found there: Moroccans and Albanians, Georgians and Copts, Turks and Uzbeks, one or two countrymen, Ethiopians and Indians (or some kind of Roma?), Romanians, Serbs and those who were, until recently, known as Russians. Rotsky even babbled with the Serbs (or were they Macedonians) a bit, recalling his past

concert tour and utilizing such self-defense sayings such as “liepoie vremeco” and “vrlo perfektno”. The Serbs smiled at this and the oldest of them had really bad teeth while those of the youngest were gold. There were several of them, those Serbs from Macedonia.

And one American, too. Like a lone finger. Like Rotsky.

“At night they groan together as one foreign legion”, he had jotted down in the distant cubbyholes of his memory. “It’s easier for the locals. They have visitors bringing things. And condoms are free for those. For the foreigners, who are mostly illegals and loners, only a lawyer may show up from time to time. But he doesn’t put out. Foreigners satisfy themselves with nighttime groaning. I sometimes do as well.”

Rotsky would dream about his own nighttime radio. He would even set aside special words and phrases for it, for a later day.

He had ventured beyond the boundaries of that establishment only twice during that time. The first time—when he was driven to the grand-hotel Waldheim for a crime scene reenactment. The second—when the director brought him to his house to play for his wife’s birthday.

Was this some form of abuse of the rules regarding one’s position at work, Rotsky never did find out. The director was a leftist—a socialist, and anarchist or perhaps a green, so he may have treated such rules dialectically.

Rotsky took advantage of both trips out of the prison to the fullest.

In the grand-hotel he (having arranged it with her earlier) dropped in on Anastasia, whom he would call Anesthesia,—a lively Portuguese chick, who was one of the waitresses that had happily agreed to all his propositions in the past. While the *Betreuers* were searching for him in the locker rooms and showers on the basement floor, Rotsky traveled through the workers passages, which he knew well, to get to the wing in which the servants lived—and Anastasia let him in. The crime scene reenactment turned out to be successful for Rotsky. He was able to come twice. Anastasia, it seems, did too, but you never really know with her.

He was not able to go as far in the director’s house but he was entirely successful in getting the attention of a pair of underage-looking twins, who seriously flustered him with their incidental touches and other tricks. The Director and his wife, who was also a teacher at some unusual school for pupils with either special talents or special needs, with their well-trained pedagogical eyes, must have noticed all those moments of scintillation but did not get in the way. There simply could

not, it seemed to them, exist any possible danger—and, either way, Rotsky could not allow himself to *bollix up* the situation. On the other hand, that evening he, without holding back, played better than he had since the barricade days. He even enjoyed it himself. And the audience—it's not that it was completely blown away but it did become excited and took on a more positive mood.

One day, spending several hours in the prison music room, Rotsky was working out “Beyond the Pale” on the keyboard. It's wasn't that difficult a task so he rather briskly dashingly figured out the refrain and, enthralled by the variety of parallel paths returning to the theme, he didn't notice that Jeffrey Subbotnik, the abovementioned lone American, ended up bedside him. Continuing to playing the song with four hands turned out to be fun: the American, though occasionally making mistakes, always did so nimbly and they would sometimes break out into solidary musical laughter. Rotsky was the one who would usually take the theme. Subbotnik would counter with the downbeats. They left the music rooms almost as friends. Which they later became. They never became friends, they always remained almost-friends.

Jeffrey Subbotnik (in other versions—Jerry Sabbatnik) was not a musician. Although among musicians, especially stars and especially from the U.S., there are many who prefer to pay taxes in Switzerland, usually acquire real estate there and some kind of *deal* with the local community about a yearly transfer of funds in a fixed amount to support its needs. Subbotnik, although not really a star (and if one, then not a show-biz star), also signed that kind of *deal*. But perhaps he didn't follow it quite so tidily, which is the reason he's behind bars in Z. They accused him of—nothing new here!—avoiding the payment of an almost astronomic level of taxes. According to the particular imagery of the Swiss language, Jeffrey Subbotnik should have been referred to with the strong word *Steuersünder*, and it's unclear which of the semantics—the economic one or the religious one—was to hit him harder.

Actually, this exhausted man, whose skin was of a color that looked unhealthy even against the general greyness of the prison, and who was the only one of this whole criminal congregation for whom his prison clothes, that very same color grey, fit in a strange way, was someone much larger than just a banal tax sinner. The investigation into his chief offence had been taking place now for several years, during which he, although wasting away and degrading physically, nonetheless never gave in.

Jeffrey Subbotnik (and the entire prison knew about this) was a genius. The major accomplishment of his life was the 22<sup>nd</sup> version of the game powxq, better known as the Game of Hemispheres or Brain Power,—a mix of a financial pyramid, mystical-occultic practices, an online-casino, scientology, neuropsychology, combinatorics, crypto-currency chains and—pay attention!—*the virtually-ritual financism* of a new generation. The leading investigators of the United West, whose head was immersed in the clever intricacy of being in and out of prison, could not come to an agreement and firmly forward the case, with its hundreds of thousands of pages, to the proper place—to the court. Certain elements—some important, some not so much—definitely slipped through and the complete picture was not coming together, even though some episodes seemed to have been cleared up and ratified, and the puzzle that had been assembled by the painstaking analytical work of dozens and hundreds of detectives was, any minute, capable of shattering for good into a million Brownian particles.

Subbotnik, however, sensed the end. His initial deposit (basically all of his capital) was slowly, yet steadily, drifting into the zone of their apprehension. They were getting closer. It was becoming just a matter of time. Unless they made some sort of epic mistake, which was something he could not count on.

Besides that, he was muzzled with one of the world's ten fatal, incurable diseases and four options unfolding before him.

Contact between Rotsky and Subbotnik became more frequent when the lawyers of the latter, leaning on the latest medical results, succeeded in gaining another win and the rules regulating movement within the territory of the penitentiary for this VIP-prisoner, *taking into account humanitarian expediency*, were loosened in some instances. They began meeting up not only in the music room or in the library but also at walks. During one of them Subbotnik unexpectedly laid out for Rotsky the first part of his proposition. Rotsky understood nothing. The only thing that he was able to ascertain from Subbotnik's plan was a sense of unmerited, unmotivated, boundless, absolute, and foolish trust.

“Why me?” Rotsky asked. “Who am I to you?”

“As a high level financial machinator, I value human righteousness above all else,” Subbotnik explained.

“Righteousness?” Rotsky multi-colored eyes became round. “Aren’t you confusing me with someone else?”

“Not at all, “ Subbotnik assured him. “You don’t look like an alcoholic, a junkie, or a gambler. You can be given a serious sum with hope that you won’t go and squander it all immediately after getting access to it. For me that is a sign of ample righteousness.”

“Not being an alcoholic is a sign of righteousness?” Rotsky laughed. “I thought the opposite was true.”

The final word was left unspoken because their increasingly lively exchange of thoughts got the attention of a *Betreuer*, who blew into his whistle and then approached them in wide strides. (I will take this opportunity to note: the penitentiary in Z., for a while, rejected the politically incorrect concept of Anseher, that is—warden, instead using the more humane *Betreuer*—trustee.)

This episode, unnoticeable on the surface, but key, was preceded by two others, and both had ties to music. Or, is it better to say—were tied to it. Each of those played a special role in Subbotnik choosing Rotsky. Stricken by a deathly illness and awaiting a crucial operation, Subbotnik didn’t notice himself, how his original and refined religiosity, which had been nurtured for decades, was transforming into all-encompassing superstition. He began to live according to indicators, signs, and signals from There. His final path (From There? But what if it’s Into There?) would hover, no joke, in front of him, so he constantly and nervously would listen in, look into, and take in. And he also recalled: any situation that contained an alternative, could become an object of his intense play with the inevitable. A kind of maximally simplified demo-version of Hemispheres.

If the director comes to work today on a bicycle, then this. If in a pickup truck, then that. (The director, as a staunch eco-activist, would use his bike much more often so a game with the director’s method of transportation was not a fair one.)

If he’s able to sleep six hours in a row without a spasm, then this. If not, then that. (Spasm-less nights were much less frequent, a game with this would be one of blatant failure.)

If the Eagles beat the Lions, then this. If they lose, then that. (Finally a game with the same chances: that season both the Eagles and the Lions were an even match.)

And if you are destined to meet a man with eyes of two different colors then it’s worthwhile to look and see which of them he closes last before falling asleep.

And so on.

The first incident that led him to the idea with Rotsky was that four-handed performance of *Beyond the Pale*. This time, however, a public one—on Good Friday as part of a concert program featuring the inmates expressing their gratitude to the prison staff. The performance by the piano duet Rotsky/Subbotnik, although it lasted exactly as long as the length of that song in the original (only three minutes and six seconds), it stirred the Betreuers into an astounding fervor and, stunned by their success, the performers were forced to play the same exact thing two times in a row as an encore. For Subbotnik, these were his first and last fifteen minutes of fame. Fifteen—that’s counting the ovations and the encores.

The second incident warrants closer attention. It was brought to Z. prison by that icon of neo-actionism, the hybrid great-granddaughter of members in both the left and right wings of the Socialist Revolutionary Party Dasha Etkin-Utkina, better known as daShootka, “a melancholic provocateur who works within technological and landscape contexts of transmuted post-identity” (as art critics characterized her). daShootka’s look was “something between an Orthodox saint and a classic shot putter” and was famous throughout the world for her wax-like pale skin, like that of grey opium decadents, and for her metal talons. She used the latter to scratch out for herself not only permission from the canton prison directors to conduct her social-artistic experiment but also a considerable amount of money to, to say it mildly, support it.

She started showing up at the prison in the spring. Almost a hundred and a half mature and sad men came to the casting call. daShootka was to hear out every one of them. She moved about the prison space, fully consistently with that which the glossy published, on an electric wheel barrel, which she had constructed herself. Her wax-like paleness fit in quite nicely with her somewhat Caucasus region (those in the know would specify—Armenian) look, which the glossy would also highlight. Her great grandmother’s cupronickel cigarette holder (the only thing she was able to save from the hands of the Bolsheviks) and Indian eucalyptus cigarettes— everything was as it should be. It was also confirmed that she liked to refer to herself as a “complicated babe”, while being over fifty years old.

Could she really be so complicated? Rotsky thought to himself as he set off for the casting call. In his youth, people like that could make him suffer a bit. But everything turned out alright: daShootka only touched his lean torso in a few places and was obviously satisfied with his chest. “Good skeleton”, she complimented him.

daShootka's project was to be called "101 ZoneAngels". daShootka was preparing it for one of the most prestigious events in Europe—some kind of super-hyped up bienale, triennale, or even pentennale. The final aim was to recreate *the private space of the prisoner*, today's solitary cell, *with a maximally careful choice and assortment of objects, parameters, and proportions*, in which a phonogram will play, non-stop, the layered voices of the one hundred and one *present*. Each of the voices sings his own song, it's the personal choice of the prisoner: *the border of his freedom—singing his own song*. Such a massive layering of voices, melodies, words, and languages leads to the appearance in space of something incredibly strange, *an imaginary-audio substance between symphony and cacophony*. Each of the one hundred and one songs can be listened to individually through a special interactive catalogue, which, allows one to pull up a photo of the prisoner-performer, learn about his life, find out about the reason for, and length of, his incarceration, *absorb his suffering and expectations*. You can even write him a private email; it will be stored on the jail server and the prisoner will read it the day that his sentence is over and he leaves the correction facility in Z.—perhaps friendly parting wishes *for a good start to a new path*.

(The final eight words, taking into account its, well, very suave idealism, do not fit at all with the subversive-coarse daShootka style. Attentive observers could assume that this was a formal, yet probably inevitable, compromise made with the canton directorate.)

The song that Rotsky sang (they say, Monty Python's "Always Look On the Bright Side of Life") was supposed to be one of a hundred and one but turned out to be one of a hundred. That is, there were two people that, without arranging it ahead of time, sang the very same song and unwittingly shortened the number of ZoneAngels by one. Jeffrey Subbotnik (and he was the second one) could not but see in this yet another Sign, sent from There. From that time on, he no longer deliberated over the choice of the Guard.

*It's almost one. This is Radio Night. Hello to everyone who has joined us. In the past quarter hour the amount of you in the West has increased. We now even have listeners in Boulder, Colorado. How are you doing on that side?*

*The number of those farther East has lessened: they are falling asleep. Good night, my eastern friends.*

*I began this night with words, which many of you have, probably, already forgotten. But I want to return to them.*

*If God is our father, then the devil—a bosom buddy.*

*For someone this is nonsense, for someone else it's cheap audacity, and for others still—blasphemy. I need to provide a bit of an explanation here. I know, explaining a joke is like dissecting a frog. You understand it better but the frog dies in the process. What vindicates me is that I have not yet told any jokes.*

*If God is our father, then the devil is the bosom buddy, who was your neighbor growing up. A bit older and, it seems, somewhat more experienced. He is like a Mentor: he both teaches and sets an example. Even though Father long ago forbade any relations with him, they continue to exist—as we see it, secretly. But Father cannot not know about them. He cannot not know about anything, in general. He would like to not know about something but he cannot.*

*This is approximately how this eternal drama, or, where necessary—comedy, looks. I am referring to childhood. The rupture between the father and the buddy appears at a rather young age. My father was an absolute god. To be true, for only one person in the world—for me. In that sense, I am the son of god. I grew up among moderate atheists and the word “god” was heard very infrequently in my childhood years. The word was shunned but the concept wasn't. The concept was indistinguishable from my father. If, in this world, there existed someone who created me, gave this creation a significance and, regardless of his greatness, loved me, someone so little and probably not worthy of love, with his boundless love, then that was my father.*

*My buddy, three to four years older than me, would visit our home. He was our neighbor. I won't venture to say whose family was poorer—his or mine. I suppose we were equally poor. But my parents were able to purchase a TV earlier. So he would come over to watch TV, and for a snack, and, in general. I wasn't over at his house as often as he was at mine. At this point, no analogy with the devil exists.*

*But everything is just beginning.*

*My family had caught him lying more than once. Me too, but my lies were not of the practical variety, that is I lied purely for creative reasons. I lied not expecting that anyone would believe my lie. For example, I lied that on my way to the music school I had seen a horned alien, who was covered in scales and wrote dirty words on the building walls with his tail, arranging*



*them on a stove. I learned these words from my buddy, and I learned that they were dirty ones from my mother.*

*As for my buddy, he always lied with a concrete aim in mind. He mostly lied to me because his inborn acumen led him to lessen the dose of lying he gave to adults. Because of his goal-oriented lying he was able to gradually acquire a considerable amount of influence on me. I would take certain things out of our house which he liked and would give them to him. Sometimes they wouldn't need to be taken out—I took care of this at home. That is, I would put them in his pockets. Like, for example, those hunters' cartridges from father's drawer.*

*Father saw everything—that is why he is god. Maybe not right away, not there, and not in the act—he wasn't at home when my buddy would visit us. More precisely, my buddy wouldn't visit when father was at home. But god sees everything even from afar. He notes everything and forgets nothing. He would like to miss something and forget something, but he cannot. Occasionally, father would go to my buddy's parents and demand that this or that be returned.*

*A silver family ring.*

*A Stylograph fountainpen.*

*Cartridges for a wild boar.*

*He was even able to grab some things back from them. One time he was able to get back his father's bronze cigarette case, which caused a half hour argument and two bottles of vodka. Unfortunately, father was a heavy drinker and this cut down his authority among the neighbors. My buddy's parents would sometimes prop him up in the doorway. I don't know whether my buddy's father was also a god for his son. If so, then this was a war of the gods. And, in that case, my god would go on the attack—and usually lost.*

*My buddy liked to make fun of my drunk father. He would comically mimic his wobbly walking and slurred speech. And he would do it in front of the girls. I couldn't understand what it was that drew him to those bimbos, with constantly scratched up mosquito bites on their calves. Jealousy was tearing me up inside, I wouldn't sleep at night out of fear that he would abandon me. I hated him for making fun of father that way. And I hated father for providing more and more occasions to get made fun of. I was also made fun of—for the color of my eyes. For two colors, to be more precise.*

*My buddy would still hang out with me from time to time. From a certain moment on, all he would talk about was what girls have and what needs to be done with them to get pleasure. I*

*didn't want to believe this and my buddy assured me that he touched all of those zones, that that's the way it is, and that he's just looking for further opportunities. One afternoon, he pulled out his huge rod and began playing with it, insisting that I do the same with mine. This was crass and embarrassing but I couldn't disobey him. His rod incredibly quickly stiffened and exploded, like a kombucha mushroom in a three liter jar. Mine—which amazed me even more—began doing something similar. We were caught in the act by my father. He (which will become known later) had been fired a few days earlier but he hid this from us and he would head out of the house every morning—as if everything was the same, at eight thirty. But now he would return whenever he felt like it. More accurately, when he would get sick of rambling about the park at the edge of the city and killing time by the lake. And then the answer to the question of why is he going to work with a book becomes clear. That summer, father read stories about Father Brown for the twelfth time. Or Stories from one Pocket and Stories from Another Pocket? Before re-reading the stories, father would carefully wrap the book in a newspaper—so the book's cover wouldn't get damaged. Enough about that: I was recounting how he busted us.*

*Of course, he chased my buddy away. I was prohibited from having any contact with that wanker whatsoever. Thus, any future relations between me and my buddy had to remain secret.*

*They ended half way through the fifteenth year of my life, when, all at once, I lost god, the devil, and my virginity. Having divorced father, my mother takes me to live with her and her new husband, which means—moving to a different city. I shout into her eyes that I won't survive this. As you can guess, I didn't keep my word.*

*In exchange for the album of postal stamps I gave to him as a parting gift, he granted me participation in a half hour of jactation with his older cousin. He provides me with a share of an opportunity. That is what real buddies do. He came after I did.*

*Sometime that very year both of them run into misfortune. That is, into two separate misfortunes. Father drinks himself to oblivion and he is forced into a dispensary where he is accidentally killed with some type of improper injection. As for my buddy, out of nowhere he begins twitching his face and winking at someone invisible. Everybody thinks he's doing this to get out of his army duty. Turns out, it's worse than that.*

*My god died, my devil lost his mind. I was left alone with myself.*

*Twenty years later, I found the courage to have a concert in my native city. We were driving towards the stadium along what used to be my street. The guys asked if we could stop by the corner*

*store. It wasn't around when I lived there. Neither was the tattered fat guy in an unwashed t-shirt and flannel pants, who was collecting empty mugs. "Hi there, it's me", I said to the poor devil. I don't think he remembered. But he winked at someone, who he saw instead of me. At someone invisible.*

*We've got four minutes after one.*

*And we've also got **Soap & Skin, Spiracle.***