

SUNDOWNING DIARY

PART 3

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Chapter 7

Give me a break

Funny experience it was, taking a public bus, having twenty hundred dollars in pocket, just eager to discover the notion of public transportation. My dad – the very oil magnate I mentioned before, was so angry to hear me taking a trip to Buzovna beach – lying 35 km to the east of the capital – Baku- without necessary precaution – without my personal giant size bodyguard, Jafar- and putting my life and his reputation in danger. I barely stepped in inside the bus when I heard driver roaring like a bear;

“ Hey , are we going to wait for you all day, little rascal.. Chop-chop” – he said – old man in his late 60’s, with peculiar purple long scar on his nose, like he just survived a live-or-die kind of fight.

Bus was so crowded that, it was impossible to take a soon-to-be vacated seat for at least an hour, only women and children sitting, remainder, squeezing on each other somehow to get the best position near the middledoor to be able to get off without getting polished shoes dirty or potentially without falling victim for local “goldfinger” pocket-pickers, most of them holding from straps hanging from shiny overhead bar. I’m yet not mentioning the terrible heat.

Nevertheless, I did not give a damn about being robbed or assaulted inside overburdened public bus. The problem I pondered on was, how I was supposed to pay a bus fare and the how I was supposed to get off from this “human jungle”. It has been my first experience with everyday social hardships of lower income population that I had later learned comprised absolute majority in my country. I

recently watched the news feed describing living in skid rows of Western countries, people having sex in midst of a dirty and dark streets, drug addicts engaged in needle-sharing “business” in the corner, beggars and bums scuffling over a wallet they had found. I was so irritated with that view, that imagined all low income people as dirty as them, like it was their mistake for getting fired, becoming failures and losers and spits of society.

But that day, I felt for poor people, for the first time I – myself became one of them – people rushing to work, rushing to earn money with their blood and sweat in an unfair work conditions, sacrificing their youth, energy, precious time, to make both ends meet, to feed their kids.

All those thoughts had been disrupted by squeaking voice o midage gypsy woman.

“Ay camaat, kimin nəyə gücü çatırsa kömək etsin. (You all good people, help me with whatever you can,) - she urged the commuters nearby, amplifying her call with hysterical cry and tears. – *And olsun ki, dilənçi, qaraçı deyiləm, yeganə ümidim sizsiniz* (You might think I’m beggar or gypsy, but I swear I’m not, you’re my last hope). *Oğlum sətəlcəm olub, ölüm ayağındadı, əməliyyatı üçün pul yığram* (My son is in deathbed suffering from pneumonia, I’m collecting donations for his surgery) – she showed the photo of purportedly her son in deathbed that very much looked like a high definition photo taken by Associated Press photographer for covering some humanitarian crisis and hunger story in Yemen, rather than, amateur photo of Azeri kid in his “deathbed” .

As a youngster spending at least 1 hour daily surfing in net, it was crystal clear to me that, the photo was fake , I mean, it was not the picture describing the agony of his son, but a HD photo of some Middle Eastern kid downloaded from internet.

But the thing is, people hypnotized by her voice, believed her charade, as I saw her begging bawl filled with Manat notes rather than coin gapiks, some naïve women putting at least 5 Manats – that could pay the bus fare for at least 25 people and prayed for the healing of her so called “son”.

After bus driver dropped her off at nearby stop, I saw well groomed old man with, with 60’s spy hat on his chubby and bald head, anxiously gazing out of window, straining all his facial muscles to sharpen his impaired vision looking at a certain point, and get frustrated each time bus left certain area behind, making him look like an Indian wobbling his head, after each such cycles. I automatically grabbed from his brown coat in order not to lose my balance as bus driver made rather harsh stop.

“I think its it. I’m totally sure, the very naughty corner, - he said loudly with a jubilant voice, - this is a corner that sucks human flesh and blood daily, every single day, at least one brutal fight, one deadly accident, one deadly car crash in this doomy and dreadful area. – nobody paid attention, thinking of him as a crazy old man, except me, for some reason he turned to me and said

“ You see, young kid, I’m neither lunatic nor idiot, I’m 72 year old retired physician, and I’m telling you this is one hell of a cursed place. The first time I experienced supernatural environment of this place more than six decades ago, driving bicycle on the way home, and assure you with a quite low speed, I bumped into another cyclist same as my your age, head-on, can you believe it, crush of two bicycles, look – he showed and old age scar on dorsum of his left hand.

“I believe you grandpa” – I said in a cordial tone.

“Give me a break, and you believe his bullshit” - I heard horrible voice, right behind my ears, turned back it was a thin and tall punk, with long black hair, and metal, piercing and chain all around his body, with scent of alcohol coming out of his ugly mouse

“You mind your own business” - I replied blatantly

“Hey little moron,--burp- this time nasty smell much more heavier made, raged nearby standing women – already irritated with the shortage of fresh air inside overburdened bus- who attacked him , slapping and scratching his face, all other passengers stepping aside and not meddling, and justifying the passenger justice, punk only hiding his face and begging them to stop amidst laughter of onlookers, including myself.

Driver intentionally pulls to the side of the road, stops the bus and opens the middle door for him to escape. He almost jumps out of bus, stumbles his left leg and falls onto concrete pavement. I turn back to an old man, to check his reaction and see a vacant seat ready to be taken by a fat woman – one of attackers, mysterious grandpa vanished, I look around no sign of him inside bus. “He must have gotten off...”- nearby man says seeing me looking for him astounded. “from the front doors”.

“Mister Driver please stop!” – “let me get off”- I said as bus gradually gain the speed and close the middle door. Nevertheless he stops one more time, risking to lose his license, for stopping in the middle of the road, causing impediment for cars behind.

I look around to get familiar with the area that very much resembles evacuated industrial district, with closed and rotten “Soviet Era” factories and

other storage facilities, including 3-4 apartment building for current retirees that used to work in those factories, lying almost 1 km all along the road. Old grandpa standing in front of seem to be working but still dirty grocery store, astonished to see me there, hit the bricks and made hasty right turn at a narrow alley.

I don't know why but I felt an utmost urgency to chase him and ask him to finish his story, out of purely 'kiddish' interest. As I was turning the corner, I heard loud sound of explosion 200 meters behind me, on highway. Here you go. He was right about a curse or something paranormal originated on this street. It was a car that exploded, dunno whether hit by terrorist group that was quite unlikely, or blasted after massive crash. I hoped the driver or passengers were alive.

Feeling no obligation to rush to the scene and somehow help or assist – that was quite strange, I moved on and turned right, like a piece of metal attracted by the magnet. Someone suddenly attacked as I felt strong arms grip me in a violent manner and shoving me back, further through the dark alley, towards a waste container. I was unable even to move finger or somehow resist this bastard. Oh my God.

I recognized his appearance. It was him, the old man – the storyteller – WTF. This old “wrestler” pinned me against the dirty, brick wall, still gripping my shirt and flesh with his left hand (that terrible hurt), freeing his right hand for something unexpected as I heard a familiar click of a folding pocket knife. Then he went whispering that creeped me out most of all

“Are you alone? have you been followed?”

“No, please let me go”

“Stop whining you little piece of shit” - “You wearing golden watch ha?”

Indeed, it was expensive Swiss watch with my initials engraved on it, a gift by my late uncle whom I loved most of all in this life before he died in a car accident. “What a stupid of me not to notice”. Old rascal was going for my watch when I stopped his hand, whilst tip of a knife still pressing my throat.

“Please, not my watch, it holds so many memories...damn it...My left pocket is full with money. Take all but not my watch please...”

He stopped for second and then tried to check whether I was telling the truth.

“Any trick and I'll slice open your throat...all right?”

“Yes...promise..”

He put his bulky hand in my pocket and pulled out the stack of cash, dazzled by the view green notes, the easiest bonus of his entire life. “Can you believe it ! Are you some kind a millionaire or what?” – he didn’t count just put the money into inside pocket of his coat, picking my watch with his greedy old eyes.

“Now I’ll take this watch”

“But I gave you all of my money”

“In a black market such watch can be sold for five thousand manats....so whom are you kidding?”

“But I told you it is my precious belonging, I have memories”

“Screw your memories” he gave me slap with his free hand and went for my watch again. This time I exerted all the energy that early teenager may have, and kicked him in the balls. But for my surprise, it didn’t hurt him. Instead, I felt cold piece of steel going inside me, that gashed open my lower abdomen. Soon hot pain scattered all around my body; speed of leaking blood adjusted by my heart beat. I was gradually losing my consciousness, greedy coldblooded granpa who gave no damn about my state, pressed me from my throat for me to stay stable, and pulled out the watch.

“Hey...what’s going on here?...i heard familiar voice that made old bustard stop as he was caught red handed. “You piece of trash...I knew there was something wrong with you, let the boy go”. He must have though old man was trying to molest me or something. Grandpa didn’t risk his trophy and ran away. I immediately collapsed falling onto tiny pool of blood of mine. I felt someone holding me in friendly manner.

“ Oh my God, he stabbed poor little guy... Help! We’ve got wounded minor here. Help!.... “everything gonna be OK kid, don’t worry , we gonna get you to hospital and everything just gonna be fine.”

For the last time I made huge efforts to open my eyes. Believe me or not, he was young drunk punk who had been kicked out of bus by bunch of angry commuters. The man with whom I argued before.

Chapter 8

“European perch fishing”

Latvia, Jurmala, International Medical Center

Dr. Soborski hesitated to approach a woman seemed to be not sad but raged with her husband's death. How the heck, he's gonna tell her about his organ donation. She was standing in the dimly lighted waiting room of hospital with obvious tension on her face muscles. She hardly looked at others, staring at a white panel counter, then at glazed ceramic tiles of the floor, engaged in a mind game of how to terrorize the 'head physician'.

Dr. Soborsky, in his sweaty olive scrub stood in front of her and introduced himself.

“Mrs. Avots I'm afraid to tell you that your husband has passed away. We did all our best. I'm sorry”

Shocked by the news, Flora grabbed doctor's arm so firmly, his face went all red as tears were streaking down her cheek.

“But how, I...Me...was..” – she stammered her excuse for being late.

“It's not your fault, he was all time unconscious after admission, I'm sorry to inform you that it was calmly executed suicide. He intentionally burnt himself, his burns were so severe he had almost lost 80-90 percent of his skin, there's nothing we could do about it. I'm sorry”

“ I wanna see him, I wanna see my husband”

Soborski did his best to handle the situation, but this woman seemed to be totally out of control.

“I'm afraid to tell you that, it's not possible right now”

They both looked back to identify the source of noise of something smashing and cracking on the floor. It was a cordless work telephone unintentionally dropped by nurse, who tucked the phone between her ear and shoulder, writing a note simultaneously. They focused back in conversation.

“What you mean by that, not possible” she said wiping her tears.

“Mrs. Avots, I’m sure that would be quite news for you, but your husband was organ donor, I mean he enrolled for organ donation program before this incident. Right now our team is retrieving the “thing”...

Words were too shy to come out of his mouse, he was hesitating to say “brain”

“Screw you, you must be kidding me, he would have never done this, organ donation, no hell, I know my husband.”

Soborski did his homework, so came prepared with red folder on his right hand, which until that moment had been only insignificant detail of so called dialogue.

“Here is your husband’s written consent... he did donated his brain for medical research purposes, for treatment of Alzheimer and Dementia patents. Body will be handed over after procedure”

“I forbid you...Don’t!”

“Mrs. we don’t actually need your permission. We learned he filed for divorce before committing suicide , so technically you have no right to obstruct this donation. You just sit there tight, and we’ll let you know when we’re finished. It won’t take long, I assure you. 20-30 minutes tops. I’m once again sorry for your loss”

“You bastard” - she jumped on him like a rabid dog, slapping, scratching his face and screaming at the same time. Doctor didn’t hit him in self defence, trying to ward off next blow. All medical staff and relatives (of patients) in the waiting room agitated by the scene, the nurse who just dropped the phone ran for help. Doctor reached for his left pocket, picked something and handed to a nurse. Nurse without questioning, injected it into shoulder of frenzied woman. It was a strong sedation shot that made her pass out within a seconds.

The glimpse of less blue more green sea, sensing of salty humidity and scent of a grease from a previously caught fish, supported by gust of a strong wind stabbing from the neck, an old fat man mumbling something inaudible with rod in his hand, checking the drag on the line. I was sure I’d never seen him before. I looked around but this time there was not any sign of my limbo pal Herman. But scenery was really breathtaking.

“I told you son, perch would bite the best before the rain, didn’t I?”

Why the heck did he call me his son and why I was holding fishing rod same as him, like a pro. Until this moment I didn't have any slightest idea or clue about fishing. That was what any kid my age would have wanted to be part of, but not me for sure.

It was late afternoon and shadows had already begun forming on the water. I dropped the red coated carbon fibre rod off, and made huge effort not to lose my balance as I was standing on uneven, rough and slippery rock that had been dampened by occasional high waves.

Although not so easily accessible from the shore the set of highrising rocks , were stretching along the shore 25-30 meters, convenient spot for old school fisherman, because it served frontwall for deepwater seething with fish and eliminating need for long casting from sand. He wore green, bulky overalls, just like me.

“Why did you drop your rod, son. How many times did I tell to be careful with this set I bought from Japan. 320 dollars son, 320 dollars, almost 20 percent of my monthly income. I'm not a kind of person to waste his money on weekends. You should learn your fisherman alphabet, Herman. Don't disappoint me.”

Herman? Ok then. This must be used to be father of my friend. Suddenly he jerked his rod, like he felt tug on his line and began reeling fast.

“Where are we and what year is it ?”

“Ha?” – he turned facing me but old hands still doing his thing, pulling the line. He sounded astonished though. “What did you say?”

Another tug, this time savage one , that almost pull the rod off his hands.

“Holly-molly. That's must be something big.I think I'v hooked it. Son we've got a bonus, can you believe it. We gonna catch a big fish today. Mother of bass, maybe.What a luck.”

It was out a long distance. He started fighting this fish, gave another jerk and reeled and raised pole up high to keep resistance off the line.

“What you're waiting for, bring the net”

“He's right, you better hurry” I heard familiar voice from behind. It was him – the very Herman in person, sitting on a wet flat rock and smoking with a heinous grin on his face.

“So where are we now Herman, another day from your childhood “paradise”. Last time you said by eliminating your depressing school time memory, I’ll wake up from coma.”

“Hey, what take you so long. I said bring the net” – Herman’s father said furiously raged.

“You’d better hurry, Tural. Don’t get him angry, you cannot miss that moment – its brilliant. His gonna get the biggest trophy of his life...”

I was moving really slow and carefully watching every step, not slip and fall down from the edge. From look on his face, he was already smash me into pieces for acting slow. He wildly grabbed the net from my left hand seeing me staggering

Something big popped up from the water and splashing the water and resisting . Herman’s father made his best to bring the big fish up from the depth but the fish retaliated by a sudden pull that made him loose his balance and slip off the rock into the sea.

“Oh my God !” – although I knew this was not real, I was shocked by the fact that person just fell from edge and his probable going to drown. “What should I do? What should I do?!”- there was no sign of him on the water, just white blanket of bubbles on the surface and carbon fiber rod drifting by the rocks. I looked around saw nobody but his son Herman, indifferently witnessing the whole incident. But this time no smile on his face.

“ What did you do to save him?”

“Hmm...Who me?...I did nothing, I can’t swim you know. I just stood there and watched”

“But we cannot let him die like this. Its inhuman.

“No...that’s ok, he died many years ago...on the other hand you can ask for help, you see a man diving 100 to the east. I see his dark snorkel from here, maybe he could help you”

“Screw you, I’m going to save him myself, you heartless piece of shit”

“But don’t forget you’re wearing overalls” he said as I jumped from the edge. I forgot the fact that with overalls on me I’ll not be able to swim and water will fight to fill inside those overalls eventually pressing me downward .

Even best swimmers cannot rise to the surface with heavily leaked overalls. After first touch with water, I felt heavy burden on my body, pressure bludgeoning

my nostrils, and cold liquid rapidly filling inside, turning my overalls into balloon as I was submerging gradually.

Death through suffocation in a turbid waters of Baltic sea, not exactly what I was hoping for. Moving my cupped hands through the water, didn't help me to push to the surface, fastening submersion instead.

According to Orłowski J. drowning is caused by an inability to maintain the airway clear of water long enough to breath normally. If you normally save some air in your lungs, you somehow increase your chances of survival, thus your lungs serve kind of lifejacket helping you ascent. No air in the lungs, you better pray there'd be someone by you, because you will be crushed by a panic attack, that would make you breath in water instead of air and you'll pass out.

Aspirating up to 0.5 liter of seawater, your lungs would lose its normal functioning posing risk of kicking the bucket. Expiring oxygen level or increasing carbon mass, is not the main issue in terms of for how long you'll be able to hold your breath.

The main factor is buildup up nerve impulses from respiratory lung cells to particular center of brain responsible for respiratory control. In other words, static lungs of yours complain to your brain, that something is not right. Agony of suffocation in real is one thing, drowning in a mid-coma condition through other person's life experience, mixture of bad memories is another thing.

Although, water was turbid from wild stream and winds, I could see Herman's father lying on the seabed with no vital signs. I was still holding my breath relentlessly hoping for help.

Suddenly I felt a shadow moving behind me, like someone or something was going to catch me. I turned to face half rotten face of a deadman with half exposed skull right under my nose, in a diving suit. Terrified and shocked I screamed, giving out army of bubbles, eventually breathing in the water. Dead diver trying to explain me something by persistently pointing to his wrist, as I was gradually suffocating but my eyes yet fixed on him. This time he approached and grabbed me with cold fingers once again asking for something with strange hand gestures. Seconds later, I blacked out.

Chapter 9

Snap

Swaddled babies raining down from top of a building, crashing cars in the middle of the street, big fish swallowing in Herman's father, a women splitting open her veins in a hot tub, me running from dead men walking in the woods, all

ending with my getting stabbed, getting smashed, turning into a jelly or eaten alive by forest zombies. I could no more distinguish between dream and reality, so realistic was the sense of death and resurrection .

Next time I open my eyes, it's a dark and narrow room with rainbow glowing lights of a particular device, it's definitely not my home and definitely not a bed I'm lying on. First I had no idea where I was. It took me several seconds to realize I was inside hospital ward 'glued' on a life support with all supplementary wires, tubes and needles, without hearing inherent beeping sound of machine my whole survival depended on .

Have I been awakened from a long and tedious dream or it was a next episode from Bad Memories developed by my 'friend' Herman. I couldn't move my limbs, felt numb from top to toe, only capable of zooming my eyes and occasionally turning them left and right. I saw someone napping on sofa bent in a half-circle , in position of double knee hug, that made it difficult to see her or his face.

I tried to call him/her, but like something was pulling my tongue backward and I couldn't utter a single syllable.

"I hear you brother, no need to bother. Just ask whatever you want and you'll get your answer"

Did I hear it from a person lying on sofa or it was swindler figment of my imagination. I was sure it was voice of teenage girl like me.

"No brother, you're talking to me, the one lying on the sofa"

WTF. Without any sign of her lips moving, I could yet hear her voice.

" No wonder, brother. I'm not lying to you . But there's definitely something wrong with my dream. Cos I nap and talk to you at the same time. ...Any idea why I call you my brother.

At last she turned to his left shoulder and I saw her face for the first time. Where did I see this face?

" I dunno my brother." she said still not moving her lips with eyes closed which creeped me out most of all. " Today I'll visit Samira in her forest cabin, you know she collects the water from hundred years old icebergs, Zam-zam from Mecca, holy water from Vatican. She say she have a perfect combination – blue liquid that will heal my sickness.

What kind a sickness I wonder? Let me guess she suffer from dementia like me. She portrays myself in my dream?

“No my brother, wrong guess. I’m maori girl and my problem is more like an addiction rather than sickness. I eat human flesh”

I felt something crawling on my right arm, but my reflexes failed to toss out the imminent danger and stood still. It was a freak of a nature, mustached and bearded female-like creature with two pairs of eyes and long dirty hair, chewing my fingers and sucking all the blood coming out and I could do nothing about it. My heart stopped for a moment.

“ No, don’t stop your heart, it not healthy for my stomach, I don’t like black rotten blood, I want it fresh” this time she said uttering it from her ugly mouse, fangs and lips covered all over in red.

Maoris – as far as I remember from Jules Vernes they were indigenous population of New Zealand before British colonization and hannibals eating the flesh of their enemies. I don’t know whether it was Hermans or my speck of kidtime memory . But it all didn’t matter. The problem is nothing could stop her from what she wanted. Except...

“Taboo, Taboo” I said in their language indicating that arm was holy and I forbid her to eat it and it really worked.

Out of a sudden, I felt all my body trembling like subtle leave of an orange tree and somehow lifting upward toward the chess ceiling, my chewed off left arm still in the mouse of ugly female Hannibal but watching me startled raising up. Black and white background, gradually turning into green and blue.

Once again I find myself underwater but this time not sinking but ascending all the way to the surface, hugged by the diver.

He brings me onto low lying rock and I finally breath in a fresh air. I check out my limbs, and find everything intact and working perfectly well, even lungs free from salty waters of Baltic Sea. Diver sits beside me, and take of his swimming mask and snorkel. Slowly memory came back and I recognized him. My God... I see my late uncle in person.

“Where is my watch nephew?”

“What?”

“The watch I gave you last summer”

Now I can see the whole picture. Skulled diver pointing to his wrist was my late uncle and trying to ask about the watch. What was the clue, another masked memory trap the combination of bad and good.

“On your feet boy” he ordered with a harsh army voice.

I did as I was told to. 150-200 meters to the left I saw Herman’s father fishing at the same spot with his “naughty” son sitting on the rock like nothing happened.

My uncle – the very autocrash victim risen from the dead, stretched his legs and took off fins, eyeballing me suspiciously.

“Your’re in big trouble, Tural and the thing is I can do nothing about it.

“To be honest, its not something new for me. I just try to wake up for real. Irony is I’m stranded in this God damned unknown lands created by my donor’s unhealthy imagination. ” Its seemed to me the most appropriate answer.

“Beware him Tural...”

“Whom?”

“Him” he pointed to Herman standing on the rock and staring at us”

“He has no good intentions for you, he’s not helping you to wake up, instead gradually embroils you to a deeper limbo, setting you his own memory traps. He can turn huge disaster for you. Try to evade him, keep low profile, don’t get caught in his memories.

Take refuge in your own memories. I can’t rescue you every time. He’ll get rid of me after this conversation. I’ll teach you the technique of strolling between different memory blocks. You can simulate desired scenarios having greater control over your actions and thoughts.

“Uncle, I’m exhausted. I only want to wake up. Just show me the way out.”

“You are the way out. You’re like a warrior inside enclosed ring fighting with Herman. Two goes in, one gets out. It’s a door between death and life. You make him suffer and don’t pity him. Terminate him once and for all, and wake up healthy person completely cured from your condition. You’ll not remember anything about this encounter and all your hardships.

“But how I can’t fight him by evading him”

“I’ve already figured it out. Walk away from him for a while, he’ll chase you in your own memory blocks. Advance your ‘in-between strolling skills’ and then give him a fatal blow after a while, by accessing his worst memory, the darkest

secret he hides even from himself. The sign for such memory is pine tree. Remember.

“OK.”

“And remember to get bring back my watch, return it, it will boost your swiping-strolling skills. I’ll take it from your as soon as you salvage it. Understood?”

“Affirmative”

“Currently you stand in a neutral zone, he cannot trespass or assail. We’ll use that canoe and take you to the other coast through the safe passage. As soon as we land, I’ll train you how to swipe-stroll in between memories. Its impossible to do it here. But from there on, you’re on your own.

We descended down stair-like rocks until reaching wet and loose ground where red canoe had been tied to a thick pole.

“Get on board!” – he commanded

He untied the rope and move the boat a little further as soon as I made myself comfortable. Then he hopped in, took a seat, grabbed the oars and began paddling staring at highrising rock where Herman was standing alone, no sign of his father this time. Boat moved 100-200 away off the beach, when we saw the opposite coast surrounded by thick woods. Can you believe it.

“ I don’t get it. Is it not Baltic sea or we are just crossing some kind a Latvian lake.?”

“You see it is conflict of memories and perception. Your donor have never been in the middle of a sea, I’ve never seen what its like either. So therefore, crossing the sea for you is a matter of 10-15 minute. And besides we are entering your memory limits from neutral zone, you better watch around and show some vigilance . Don’t lose the sight of a shoreline.

Surface of water was creepy calm, like something bad’s gonna happen. I didn’t like this feeling and prayed to reach the land safe. Sudden gust of wind blowing out of nowhere wobbled our boat a little bit. At first uncle froze, doing his best to grab some sound with his eardrums, he looked so panicked. Then put on some effort paddling furiously while mumbling something and cursing.

“You want me to paddle, uncle!”

“No you just sit tight, watch your left.” I heard as large wave hit our boat, splashing cold water all over my face and soaking my shirt.”

Then boat began to tilt crazily out of a sudden , it was unlikely hit of wave, more like something hitting from behind .He paddled as quickly as he could. Another tilt, stronger this time, that almost capsized our boat. He carefully reached my side and handed me the ores, checking the sky which turned grey-black out of the blue.

“Take the ore and paddle just like you’ve seen me doing,” he said panting “ I check whats going on”, “Who knows, maybe it hit the rock, we must be passing the shallow line”. He bent toward the left edge of the boat, gradually putting his right arm inside the water, submerged up till the shoulder, “palping” to be sure something was hampering the free float of our boat.

“Are you not afraid of the shark, his sick person with sick imagination, I’m sure he’d be happy to see you cut into pieces.”

“Don’t be stupid...This is no habitat for sharks, and besides...” he stopped with look on his face saying “ wait a minute”.

“No...absolutely nothing...I checked...” he was interrupted by a next crazy tilt, that almost made him fall from the edge. It was a human hand rising out of water, emerging from the opposite side of a boat, holding thick rim, then second hand, with all muscles fixed, tightening and pushing up the whole body of monster- Herman- in person....this time not in his ragged coat.

“Look his coming...his coming ” – he was already on board when uncle turned to see what was going on. Herman was coming for him rather than myself. Hefty waves and strong gusts of wind stopped.

“ Run, Tural ,run! I’ll try to stop him” what he meant by saying run, there seem to be no alternative but throwing myself into water. Next seen I see, the two wrestling each other, Uncle on top of him, stifling my “buddy” with all his anger accumulated.

“Can I help you”

“No...me holding him, is temporary...You must stay away from him. Jump off board and swim away, sorry kid, but this is where I have to say goodbye...And remember about the watch....return it”

So frustrating it was to find and to loose your favorite person at a same hour, in abstract terms for sure. I wished our boat had sunk.

“Goodbye Uncle”- I took a deep breath, holding an air in my lung sufficient for rapid –non stop cross. Relaxed my hands, held my fingers together and took a quick plunge into ice cold water. After I was in the water, I adjusted my body into front crawling position, gliding my left and then right hand, keeping my elbow high as arm enters the water, always keeping my head down and eyes focused on imaginary bottom line of the sea, small kick serving me as a rotor, giving enough propulsion to swim fast forward.

I swim non-stop, without breathing in with my mouse between each third stroke until I see ragged bottom of the sea crystal clear. My palm touch the ground, I get out of water crawling and breathing in and out crazily.

Thin mist made surroundings unrecognizable, still my eyes searched for the boat in the middle of the sea. I listened for any sign of uncles whereabouts. No sounds of fighting, no screams, nothing at all. Just natural sound of the forest and soft and treacherous waves washing the shore. I stood up after while, peered over the thick forest, yet without any slightest clue where to go or what to do. I couldn't stop shaking, after a cold plunge. It took me several minutes to relax as I heard sound of a rustling grass and too loud footsteps like somebody was parading through the concrete alley rather than wet ground.

Something strange animal size of a dog emerged from the woods running fast toward me. I didn't panic until I saw it from a close range. It was member of “canis familiaris” with particular exception. German shepherd dog with human head.

“Bismillah (My God). – I shuddered with horror.

“Don't be afraid...Just swipe and turn the page- he spoke like normal person but panting like a dog- but he was indeed a dog- while uttering the words.

“You mean hitting with a stick --- hitting what”

“Hit the ground and grab imaginary edge of the page and turn it.”

I found an iron L curved pole, and did what as I was told to. Hitting the ground and then turning the invisible page.

Flash! Background and all surroundings change into some dim lighted interior packed by unknown people sitting by the windows, some of them talking, some of them dining. I was sure it was a dining car of an express train, as I felt floor under my feet moving smoothly, a view from the window, interchanging. There was no sign of my provisional penghou instructor – human face dog disappeared. My outfit had changed as well, me wearing black elegant suit. It was totally dry and my shaking had stopped. Whose memory block it might be, I wondered. But quite many elements looked familiar. Can you believe it! “It was projection of my early childhood memory.

Me travelling with my businessman dad - not oil magnate those days but aspiring entrepreneur with quite decent income - from St. Petersburg to Vienna. I remember we had major weather issue - 1 week blizzard all over the Eastern Europe with gusts of wind reaching 24-30 meters a second, that caused closure of all major airports with thousands of flights cancelled. So in order to attend important talks with his potential buyers in time, he had to embark on his longest business trip to Europe. And he took me as well with written consent of my mother.

However this time I was travelling by myself and in capacity of my "father".

I was standing on the doorway when I was approached by sweet looking, blond attendant who wore red vest over white shirt and long white apron - with fake smile on her face.

"Good evening sir! Do you have a company or you'll be alone?"

I stared at her dazzled by her beauty.

"No, I guess I'll be on my own"

"We are overcrowded tonight, so we have to have you seated next to other customer. Is it O.K. with you?"

"As far as I know I have no choice"

"Oh I'm sorry for trouble, sir. Let me have you seated next to that gentleman. Follow me please"

Indeed, there was no vacant table. She accompanied me to table on the right corner near the doorway, where overweight man with flabby face, bulky neck and Conquistador style beard wearing circle eye glasses, that made him look like kickass professor, an expert for explosives if you will, rather than fat old nerd - was seated. He was doing something with his finger nail, I dunno, polishing or rubbing out of anger.

"Please take this seat. Here you go" she handed me white softcover menu with too simplistic design and ordinary font size and alignment, nothing exceptional. "You check out menu, and I'll be back in a minute"

Overweight man didn't even bother to glance at his new dining companion, yet scratching his thumb wildly and occasionally watching out the window, shifting back at his peculiar finger job. I took initiative to break the ice between me and my fellow passenger as I didn't want to experience inconvenient silence while eating my food.

“Good evening”

“Evening” he replied with a coarse voice still,

“Where are you heading for?”

“Same place you are, nowhere.”

He finished with his irritating engagement and two times knocked the table, sweeping all tiny dermal fragments off the table with his right palm. Perhaps it was a new method of calling the waiter. Indeed, same pretty face girl approached the table once again smiling.

“Oh...I see you already got acquainted”

“Not yet darling, but we’re on process you bet” he replied with intimidating smile that made her’s disappear instantly.

“Are you ready to order?”

“Sure...We’ll have Stolichni salad for two, baked potatoes with fried ham...Oh. I forgot, my fault. My friend is a Muslim, so for him fried ribs instead.

“And what can I get you to...” she was interrupted by a loud noise of women weeping crocodile tears and shouting something in German - uttering train of short syllables what indicated she was swearing, and got a glass of red wine thrown on his husbands face, leaving the dining car immediately.

“Oh I’m sorry, It’s rare to see couple fighting in our restaurant. So what can I get you for a drink”

“ Well, apricot kompot will do”

“Ok...I’ll be back with your drinks and meal. Enjoy your conversation”

He stared at me as soon as she walked away. I felt like something had burnt or irritated my throat and it became dry. Too much realistic for person in a deep coma.

“So what you’re are up to, kid”

“My name is Tural”

“Your name is irrelevant right know, please answer my question”

“Dining?”- I pretended to be jerk which angered him most of all.

“Oh seriously”

“I want to get out of here and wake up”

“Now you’re talking...OK...- he paused as prettyface waitress served the table helping her position the plate and tucked unknown currency notes into string of her apron as if he was tipping the stripper. Her face grimaced with sharp irritation, and she made huge effort to put back raped smiled on her face. But she thanked him and left uttering everlasting phrase to “enjoy our meal”

“So” – he continued as we began our supper. It can sound strange but I was so hungry that I could devour whole cow for a meal. “I know your story with your rascal Latvian friend, that both of you fight for dominion over personality of Tural who will eventually wake up from comma one day. That you’re looking for pine forest- his darkest memory he’d been hiding from you all these time.

I nodded and took spoonful of salad.

“ You see, I can show you the shortcut and give some tips how eradicate him once and for all , but you’ll have to I do know the shortcut, but you’ll have to run errands for me.”

“How can I trust you. Maybe you’re one of Hermans memory projections that who had assailed my memory block under mask of someone else. Convince me its not a trap.”

“Trust me or not, I don’t care. But frankly saying, you don’t have much choice, do you.” he wiped the grease off his lips with napkin and leaned back against the soft cover of comfortable and roomy seat. “You don’t even have time to doze off for few hours – don’t think of me as a madman and no kidding,- it’s possible to nap within a dream, especially for lucid dreamer like yourself, you see it’s a hybrid state of waking consciousness and dream,therefore everything is so real for you right now, so keep it in your mind - we are about to reach the next station within several minutes tops, train will no longer run across the neutral lands and he’ll be waiting for you, with his horde of monkeys to catch you and pull into his memory block.

“So you mean I must jump off the train before train reaches the station.”

“You’re smart kid, do your math”

“OK...” I said still suspiciously.

“All right”

“So...what can i do for you... to show me the shortcut”

“Follow me. People get suspicious” he said standing up and putting some money under the empty glass of served kompot- which indicated he was coach passenger rather than sleeping car passenger, thus for latter all meals were included at no additional charge- and heading toward the end of dining car . I still couldn’t get used to walking on a bouncy moving train, with motion of coaches changing dependent on speed of a train and condition of tracks. He walked from dining car to vestibule opening to sleeping car holding stainless steel handle and then crossing next car, with narrow passage. He turned to me abruptly.

“You’ll attend world war I battle in southern Iraq- battle of Shaiba as an Ottoman soldier trying to regain Basra from British troops. You’ll be flag-bearer of your platoon. Carry it till the outskirts of the city and you’ll instantly advance to a certain memory block adjacent to “pine forest”. You can’t pass the border without you platoons flag. You have to stay tight.

We heard a loud whistle blowing outside indicating that the train was approaching the station. He smashed the pane of a window with his bare fist what shattered the glass into small pieces and ordered:

“Jump, now!”

“Right now, from this window,...are you serious?”

“I’m damn serious. So jump off the train until we reach the station”

He pushed me out as I bent towards the smashed frame to evaluate my options. Floating on air for a couple of milliseconds, I landed hard on a stiff ground with my right shoulder, and ached for a while, watching the train disappear into horizon. It was middle of the night and found myself by the edge of field. Thinking of “sundowning”, - my condition- I prayed the God, not let another panic attack happen forgetting that I was totally cured and the fact that those lucid dreams with all their misfortunes were direct outcome of my recovery. All those thoughts were disrupted when massive artillery shell hit the ground and exploded 100 meters away.

Chapter 10

Let me know

The man who had been waiting for her was sitting in brown old General Motors sedan parked in a dark alley. He flashed the headlight twice to give her a signal. At first , Flora hesitated a little bit, but then pulled herself together and approached the car with firm and resolute steps. She wept off her tears as soon as she got into car. They didn’t bother to greet each other, and kept silent for a while, staring through the dirty, blurred windshield. Silence was interrupted by a click of headlight switch that turned off the lower beam.

“Do you mind if I smoke”- he asked after he turned off the engine.

Flora shook her head to say “no”. Fume of a slim cigarette had comforted her a little bit, as it reminded her of Herman.

“Ok then...Did you figure it out, I mean all what I'd told you the other day on the phone”

“Yes”

“So what is your answer”

“I'll do it.”

“My assistant hacked the database of a fund dealing with organ donations, it was not an easy job getting access to system,...I'm not gonna bother you with all technicalities, but we really did a great job...we've got all necessary information on recipient, his name, his address, we made a background check and some research based on those files and attached extras, you know.”

“Extras? Like what?”

“Like, they faked the medical report and the cause of death. It was not a car accident, a car engulfed in fire after allegedly head on collision, he committed suicide, an act of immolation”

“Oh my God...” she made her best not to cry and show her weakness. Thick red folder appeared on his lap.

“ So did you bring the money”

“How much?”

“Oh please don't start it. I think I' made myself clear yesterday. There's no room for negotiations about the price. We did what we did. And this tiny amount will barely cover our expenses. It had been pro bono, if you will. So ten thousand dollars, U.S. Cash!”

“Ok...I got it.”

His moneythirsty eyes shined as she reached into her right coat pocket. What she took out was not a stack of money for sure. It was snubnosed silver revolver aimed towards him. She caught him unexpected, he winced back.

“I don’t have any money. But I’m desperate woman, nothing to lose after the death of my husband. Think about that. Hand me over the folder or nothing can stop me from pulling the trigger.”

“You cunt...you’re gonna regret it...bitch.” he said as passed the folder.

“Call me whatever you like, pride is nothing but a blurred memory for me now.”

“You cunt....you gonna pay for that,...we gonna find you after all.

“Good luck with that” – she slammed the car door closed behind her and ran to dark corner where she emerged before and disappeared from his sight completely .

The end of part three

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