

THE DAWN OF AIVAZ

By

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Translated from Serbian by Ivana Mihajlovic

To members of my family who gave me their moral support while I was writing this book and to Jelena Popovic whose help made publishing of this book possible.



PART I

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This is a story my Grandma never told me. I delayed writing it down as long as I could, but suddenly, something in me broke and what I am writing now I am spilling out in one breath, without pause. My hand is hastening on its own toward the inevitable end.

I was mistaken in believing that man feels relieved when he writes about what is in his soul, and that this was the reason people kept diaries. It's harder for me now than when I first walk on my life's Path, because I feel fear, not for myself, but for you, the reader, since this story has the power to drive you mad. I fear your fate. I could have told you one of my Grandma's beautiful stories, but I had the inner urge to tell you my own. It is a story hard to read and still harder to believe. The Path to self-realization is long and you can walk on it for many years. You will believe me only in the end.

You were probably taught that a man should find himself in work, artistic creation, science or love. That is a deceit which only consciousness intoxicated with ignorance can accept. As only a few members of the "tribe" of enlightened people know, there is only one journey: to yourself, through yourself, and into yourself. By reaching the depths of yourself you will also reach your heights – that is when the farthest worlds will become closest to you. When you accept and begin to love yourself, you will radiate love upon everything that exists. There is only one gate which leads to the truth, God or infinity, call it whatever you want. Focusing on yourself here and now opens you to all that is human, cosmic, and eternal. Because of that, although I am fighting back my desire to preach, I have to reveal the secret which I finally grasped after years of searching: one who searches for what is valuable outside himself in the seductive values of this world, falls into the sleep of ignorance. One who looks deeply within himself, will awaken.

Some mystics have said that it is most difficult to raise oneself to God's level of perfection. Now I know that it isn't any less difficult to dive into the bottom of oneself. These are two edges of the same dagger; one couldn't exist without the other. This is what I want to talk to you about, despite the anxiety which is holding me back. I see clearly now. I have a penetrating look – I see through people, places, and time. I see the farthers corners of this universe and

many previous universes. When I direct my gaze backwards, I know my journey didn't start on a summer afternoon in the deserted stable on my Grandma's estate, although an efficient chronologer would begin the story at that moment. Truly, in this life, however, that moment was exceptionally important.

A strange transformation occurred while I was writing this story. Everything in it is fictitious while the story itself is real. You have heard many stories that the storytellers swore were truthful. There is no reason to doubt them – for the most part, they are honest people. But my story is a wholesome lie. I suspect you won't believe me but I can't do anything to disperse your scepticism. Other people might support your disbelief. They might swear that everything in my story is truthful, even revealing proof for parts of the story which I actually made up, believing that I was playing a game with the seduced people who will read this until the end.

However, I will not hide from you what is bothering me. While I am writing down what my imagination has woven, I realize that lies have their own ultimate laws. I believed I could concoct my story the way I wanted. But now I feel overwhelmed with an emotion similar to the chill which creeps into my bones, knowing that I can write in only one way. I am compelled to talk about imaginary events in a predestined way, deprived of the slightest freedom. What my imagination creates was determined from the beginning of time. An uneasy laughter is welling up in me now because I see clearly that my words will bring you unrest and you won't find peace until some day you write your own book of lies.

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With shaking hands, I packed my things in a bag. Mother told me to pack carefully so I wouldn't wrinkle my clothes, but I did not care for her words. I knew that in a situation such as this, she couldn't control me the way she usually did. When you are told that your brother has passed away, you don't worry much whether your son's shirts are wrinkled in a suitcase. While mother was aimlessly wandering around the kitchen, with a glassy look directed somewhere far away, she didn't notice me or my brother, and behaved as if she didn't hear father's words of consolation. Her lips were twisted, her chin trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

In two days I was to finish the fourth grade and my mother was to have brought my brother and me to Grandma's in Violin Do. Our departure was accelerated in a way, that was painful for my mother. Her sister-in-law had sent us a telegram: "Our dear Lazar has passed away. Funeral is on Wednesday."

Father began one of his long stories about life and death, but no one really listened to him. My brother's gaze worriedly followed our mother, who was silently crying, while I concentrated on photographs and expectations which my family couldn't have dreamed of.

I had gooseflesh on my hands. I am ashamed to say that I wasn't trembling because of sadness for my dead uncle. My feelings were far from unpleasant. In front of my eyes was the image of an old stable at Grandma's estate at Violin Do. It was filled with old things, piles of books, and broken, rusted tools, which uncle Lazar, now dead and harmless, forbade me from entering. The stable was a paradise for anyone attracted to the right things and while I was packing my shirts in the bag, my body was shivering as if my uncle's death was an unexpected gift from heaven.

We arrived at Violin Do by train in the early afternoon. Father couldn't come with us for the funeral, because overnight he got back pain due to his lumbago. We were familiar with sudden illnesses. Whenever someone he knew died, he suffered from lumbago, and reclined in bed on his back, stiff as a plank with a martyr's expression on his face. At those times, he impatiently screamed at my mother, who took care of him, and complained that my brother and I were inconsiderate and ungrateful. His younger brother Malden effortlessly made correct predictions about father's attitude during the funerals of cousins and friends. He would nod sarcastically and say, "Our dear Petard will be sick. He doesn't want to get shaken."

Violin Do is a sleepy town in Pomoravlje where everyone knows everyone. Hotel "Central" is on the main street, and next to it are an agriculture school and a fire station. The town was dusty during summers and muddy during winters. There were just a few people on the scorching streets. Mother walked slowly and with dignity, as if she was already walking in the funeral procession. From time to time my brother glanced at me, trying to determine how sad I really was. Both of us speeded up when through the old orchard we saw glimpses of Grandma's white house.

The estate stood out from its surroundings. It was located some distance away from the last houses in Violin Do. The house was over one hundred and fifty years old with thick walls and two levels - quite unusual for the time it was built. Above the ground floor were several small rooms and a glass-covered veranda.

The outside walls, painted white were covered up to the roof with old, gnarled grape vines, which sagged toward the end of summer under the weight of ripe, dark grapes. In front of the house, turned toward the east, was an abandoned raspberry orchard lined with barberry, which was once cultivated. The southern side of the house was protected from the sun by the wide bushes of tall hazel tree greenery. Under the hazel tree bushes, between two large stones covered with thick moss, the creek came to the surface and a small stream of water, after running in a short semicircle through the old orchard, emptied into a hole in the ground, which the older relatives customarily called a fishing pond. It was covered with cattail, surrounded with weeping willows, jasmine and elder bushes. Next to the pond, three massive oak trees spread their branches.

As far back as I can remember, my grandma's estate was reminiscent of something which gained beauty as it was decaying. Its decay began after World War I when my great-grandfather Vuk died. In a quarrel, an Austrian colonel kicked him in the stomach. Grandfather suffered for three days before he left his body. The downfall of my mother's family began at that moment. Grandma spoke in a melancholy tone about how the estate had looked in her youth. My mother, aunts, and uncles each had their stories. Sometimes, in albums with thick covers of polished brown leather, I saw faded photographs of the estate in old times; the pond was clean and bordered with a woven wicker fence, fruit trees were whitewashed with lime, and rows of beehives were kept under them. I like the estate better now, all overgrown with grass which reached to my waist, thick, crack-opened apple and pear tree trunks with many bird nests and the mysterious rustle.

From stories I've heard, I know that before I was born, many children came to Grandma's house over the summers. My memories came from my aunts and uncles who sometimes visited Grandma. On the second level, accessible by polished wooden stairs, lived my Uncle Lazar with his wife. Lazar was Grandma's youngest son, my mother's brother with whom she had a good relationship. Grandma never visited his part of the house because of his wife. The two didn't speak for years. My aunt was a willowy woman with a somewhat dark complexion and bright, shiny eyes. By the age difference she could have been his daughter. She was a real beauty, tall, with a haughty stance, uncommon for Gypsies. That she was a Gypsy, I learned many years later.

Uncle Lazar used to come to Grandma's early in the morning for coffee, raspberry preserves, and a glass of cold spring water. They would sit on the porch in wide wicker chairs, shaded from the early morning sun by a dense grapevine. He sipped his coffee while telling Grandma stories from the newspaper, which was delivered early in the morning by the milkman. She would slowly nod her white head, sometimes commenting on the news she heard. They

never mentioned his wife. Mother's oldest sister Vera would sit to the side, seemingly uninterested in their conversation, but occasionally she would look at them with her sharp and penetrating scorpion eyes. Nothing went unnoticed by her - she was a woman you didn't play games with. Several times, I overheard fragments of conversations which adults had and which contributed to dark stories about her in my mind. I felt uncomfortable in her presence and fearful when she looked me in the eyes. I remembered the silent thrill which crawled in her voice when seasonal laborers talked about chicken slaughtering in her presence...her nostrils shivered and her eyes acquired a warm shine, as if the hand of evil had polished them as smooth as glass.

She was standing now in front of the open wooden gates. A black banner, attached to a short pole, hung above her head. Seeing her, mother sobbed loudly. As if responding to her, Vera moaned: "Alas, my Milica, why did we live... to bury our most beloved brother!" They hugged each other and stood at the gate for a while, slowly rocking their bodies back and forth. Vera patted my brother and me on our heads, took a suitcase from my mother's hand and helped her into the house, supporting her by her hand as if she needed assistance, helped her into the house. Mother continued to cry while she hugged relatives in the dining room. Grandma got up from her old chair and stretched her hands in mother's direction with tears in her eyes. She embraced her shoulders and, pressing her head against mother's, she said: "Milica, my Milica..."

"How did he die?" asked Mother in a soft voice.

"In his sleep, Milica, in his sleep. A kind death." Grandma pulled my brother and me toward her and for a while, the four of us stood, embracing in the middle of the dining room, surrounded by cousins wearing black and some neighbors.

"Wonderful death", my mother affirmed, "wonderful death, wonderful; it is obvious he was a good man."

People always talk nicely about the dead. Whether it truly was a wonderful death was hard to grasp, but Uncle Lazar had a nice life. In his youth, he hunted and courted young schoolteachers from Vilin Do. After he got married he spent time hunting, grafting fruit trees, and breeding bees. However, few people spoke positively of him because of his bad temper – his sudden outbursts of anger made people around him freeze with fear.

I carefully looked around the dining room. Women in black were drinking coffee from the porcelain cups which were taken out from cupboards for formal occasions; through the wide open double-doors, a large group of neighbors was

sitting under the old walnut tree, drinking brandy from small glasses and smoking. Uncle's double-barreled shotgun was not in its usual place, on the wall. While I was wiping my face with a bare hand, from the sweat and saliva left after cousins' kisses, I wondered who had put the double-barreled shotgun away. I could only have guessed its location.

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During the funeral, Grandma held herself as dignified as an elderly princess, weary but composed. She accepted the condolences of the elderly Vilin Do ladies as if she was carrying out a gloomy, but temporary duty. While we listened to priests whose black robes and singing made me feel anxious, her face was motionless, as if carved in wood. Not a single line on her face moved when Uncle's hunters fired a two-gun salute, which echoed back from the hill behind the agriculture school. Squeezing my hand firmly, my brother silently cried. I didn't. I had a lump in my throat, and had a hard time swallowing it to free myself from the disagreeable tightness. It was far worse to become aware that you had killed someone, no matter how long ago it had happened. That was true misery.

While the gravediggers shoveled soil into the grave, I walked back to the house with my head bowed, as if thinking about my Uncle. No one noticed me. It was his wife's loud wailing that got people's attention. At the orchard gate, I began to run. I stopped when I reached the house and paused to quiet my breathing - I entered the house slowly with my head bowed and immediately began to look for my uncle's double-barreled shotgun which was missing from the dining room wall. For years had hung on a wide brown leather strap, all shiny from use, not upstairs in his part of the house. The house was spacious, filled with antique furniture of oakwood, smelling of wax, thyme, rose oil and leather. Girls from the neighborhood were preparing food for guests in the dining room and kitchen, and that's why I continued to walk slowly, as if thinking about the deceased. I entered the guest room and looked behind the cabinets filled with fine china. When we were leaving for the funeral, I noticed that my aunt had locked the upper level of the house so I couldn't go up there. I went into the spacious cellar where I saw a large, honey extraction machine, several metal cans, a wooden shelf with jars filled with honey, and two old armchairs with broken armrests. It seemed that my search was in vain; but looking in places around the house where I didn't expect to find a double-barreled shotgun was like cutting

wild grass around the entrance of a temple into which I finally entered. That day I stepped into the stable for the first time.

I climbed to the top of a barn which was leaning against the stable, and crawled inside the stable's attic through a window from which the glass was long gone. To avoid falling through the rotten planks, I walked along the beams, scaring away pigeons nesting under the roof, and using the ladder, I lowered myself onto the stable's floor, which was covered with wide, smooth stones. My eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness. There had been no horses in the stable for a while; over time it served only as storage for discarded objects from the house. The stable was spacious and unlit, filled with piles of outdated newspapers, old-fashioned trunks with bronze locks, broken cabinets, barrels filled with empty, dusty bottles, and old clothes. On the stable's ceiling, the wood planks were partially rotten and bits of old hay and spider webs hung through their wide openings.

I began a systematic search of the stable. I lifted the top of the largest trunk and took several stacks of newspapers with pre-war dates. Old clothes were under them, and the smell of mothballs filled my nostrils. Three or four trunks were too short to hold a shotgun, but perhaps Vera had disassembled the gun? Usually, I give up quickly, but this time persistence inundated me – as if I felt a presentiment of a gold vein. I believed I was searching for a shotgun then - I was naive. I stopped looking for a gun in the early afternoon when my mother, standing on the porch of the house, called my name, holding her hands around her mouth so her worried voice could be heard far away.

The following morning, my persistence paid off. From the bottom of the wrecked manger filled with old clothes, I pulled two long sabers, heavy with sheaths, and from a trunk coated with bronze locks, a short dagger with a handle decorated in Arabic letters. Although heavy, it rested comfortably in my hand. In a tub, I found two small old-fashioned guns with handles decorated with mother-of-pearl.

That night, I took the dagger and one of the guns to the farthest section of the estate, overgrown with knotty gnarled willows, and hid them inside the tree trunk cavity of a big oak tree, cut open a long time ago. It was a hiding place which Grandma's hired laborers rarely visited when they came to cut the grass. The ground was moist and shaded and pieces of the old tree trunk protruded from the ground. Holding the dagger in my hand and with a pistol under my belt, I transported myself into the past. Behind the tree trunk, a lonely bulrush grew from the moist ground. Holding a dagger in my right hand, I forcefully swung my hand up in the air and bulrush, cut askance, silently fell on the thick grass. Subsequently, behind me appeared the shiny, almost oily shaved head of a large

Turk. On his bulging chest, was a red velvet vest hemmed with golden thread. The blade of the dagger fell in the middle of his skull, and blood gushed out in streams. After him appeared another one and then the whole group of Turks and Tartars, all naked to the waist. Slashed, they fell on top of each other, while horses reared and neighed and the field roared with cries, the clatter of arms, and moans. Those live images made my jaw stiff and my breathing fast.

Now I know that those weren't daydreams. I had transported myself by astral means into the past and into the akasha, where I revisited my experiences from a long time ago. When you enter into the akasha, you experience strong feelings: you don't believe that you are only observing it yourself, but feel that you are actively participating, as if completely absorbed in the heart of the event. From some undefined emptiness behind my head, a condensed river of live images flew over sandy dunes, human and horse's bones, bloody shields, wide open skulls, and grassy hills drenched with dark blood; those images were more powerful than any sights I had seen with my own physical eyes.

I covered the pistol and dagger with hay. No one could find them there – laborers, afraid of snakes, hesitated to put their hands into tree cavities. Then I returned to the yard; walking through high grass and climbing over the barn, I entered the stable.

Standing in half-darkness, I wondered how my life would change when I found my uncle's double-barreled shotgun. I had its image in front of my eyes: smooth butt in a red-brown colour, like the colour of wild chestnut; thick leather strap and dark, chrome-treated barrel, still smelling sour from burned powder. As I already mentioned: at that time I thought I was searching for the shotgun.

I couldn't find it over the next couple of days. It is time now for me to confess something which may be difficult to comprehend. While I was inhaling the stale air in the stable - looking into cupboards, lifting stacks of newspapers and old clothes and searching under them, I had the feeling that someone was watching me. For a while I thought that it was just my fear of being discovered, but in time, the feeling became more defined. It was as if some being, endowed with consciousness, floated on one side of the edge of my field of vision, persistently and carefully following what I was doing. The uneasiness I felt increased. I wasn't able to see "it" by gradually moving my gaze. When I focused my gaze in the direction of this unusual image, it glided sideways, constantly keeping the same distance from my focus of clear vision. Suddenly moving my eyes, I looked into the corner of my field of vision and it was as if I saw something then, but my experience was brief and undefined. I thought perhaps my uncle's death had disturbed me, that memories of him had encouraged my imagination and feelings of guilt, because I wanted to acquire

something that belonged to a dead man. After a few days, I realized that I had actually seen someone, and that realization was followed by a tender but pleasant shiver mixed with the premonition of a forthcoming adventure.

In time, that being and I made a connection and set rules which were shaped little by little by our interactions. When Someone flickered too long in the corner of my eye, making me nervous while I was searching in the half-darkness, I would concentrate, as if addressing him in my thoughts - I know you are there but please, leave me alone for a while. Someone would disappear then. Sometimes he wouldn't disappear and that was during moments when I was on track to discover something important. It was as if he was giving me directions. The flickering on the edge of my field of vision in those situations became stronger, making me more nervous, until finally I would do something unexpectedly: make a move with my hand or take a step toward the precious discovery. I had the feeling that I was getting closer to something mysterious, like coming closer to the entrance of a temple in a dark forest. Then, my father arrived at Vilin Do.

He arrived on the morning train, but I didn't know that because I was in the stable. During dinner he was sombre and talked very little, which indicated trouble; since when he was in a good mood, he wouldn't stop with his long, empty sermons. In other instances, he would give a speech about the difficulties of lumbago; the spine's vertebrae suddenly pressing the nerve, making every move a real ordeal and coming to a funeral almost impossible. After dinner, in an exaggerated manner he wiped his mouth with a white linen napkin which he kept on his lap, praised Vera's tasty food, and then turned to me with an ominous tone: "We need to talk." Vera glanced at my father and me and barely nodded as if confirming agreement with my father.

He took me to the kitchen and with an imperious gesture, he showed me where to sit down. "I won't beat around the bush", he said, the one who avoided saying anything directly all his life. "Vera complained that you were doing all kinds of things here."

With an innocent face I shrugged my shoulders.

"Don't act dumb!" he yelled, red in the face. "Don't you dare enter that stable again. Do you understand?"

I nodded affirmatively but it was not enough in this situation. "I asked, do you understand? Don't shake your head like a mute."

"Yes, I understand." He suspected that the family knew why he hadn't come to uncle's funeral, so now he was unleashing his anger on me.

“Smart kids read books during vacation to learn something useful or they play in the fields, breathe fresh air for good health, but you, you are crawling into a stable full of junk – rusted blades, dust - anything could happen to you.” His remark that anything could happen to me contained, aside from a warning, the prediction of the mysterious, even forbidden knowledge. Nothing could spark my curiosity more than such stupid prohibitions. It is so strange how the Truth finds the right way to bring us closer to It. Someone’s love, the directions of a wise man, or the warnings of a man with an ossified imagination, all these were references to the secret words of poets, magicians and mystics.

The following night, after father’s departure for Belgrade, it rained and thundered loudly. When I got up, the sky was clear and the grass in the orchard drenched with moisture. I went to the orchard after Grandma warned me not to get wet, but when I got to the oak trees, I decided not to go to the stable. Instead, I went to a large hole in the field from which laborers dug clay for brickmaking. It wasn’t the first time I had been there. Sometimes when the ground was moist, I would go there to make figures of clay soldiers and animals.

That morning, the soft, yellow clay was in abundance. I made a knight with a shield and mace in his raised right hand, but the figure was out of proportion and the mace was too large. I squished the figure and the slippery clay oozed between my clenched fingers. I tried to make my uncle’s double-barreled shotgun from memory. It was no use - no one could had made out what it was. Nervous, I had a premonition of the reason why I was not succeeding. Someone was flickering in the corner of my eye, that morning the first time outside the stable. My fear turned to irritation. I had to figure out who or what it was! I quieted myself, focused on the horizon, where tall poplar trees behind the agricultural school met with the clear sky, and for a while I kept my gaze fixed in that direction. Suddenly, I shifted my sight to the right corner of my field of vision. I saw him! It was for a brief moment, but still, it lasted longer than on any previous days, long enough to perceive him completely.

I had seen a man of unidentified age. Not just an outline of a man but live man who was looking at me intensely. He had a long white beard which reached almost to his waistline and shiny white hair, but his face was rosy just like a healthy village kid. He looked serious, almost austere; characteristic of dignified old men who knew a lot. However his eyes were smiling. Then, as if he was being pulled by a silk string, he glided back to his place in the corner of my eye, where I sensed him rather than saw him.

I stood, immobile, with my thoughts disconnected. From Grandma’s laborers and Penga, the blacksmith, I had heard stories about ghosts, vampires who suck blood from adults and children alike, or thieves who hide under beds at

night in the houses of honest people at night, waiting for the members of the household to go to sleep, so they can slaughter them with unsheathed knives. On nights when I had a hard time falling asleep, those images swirled in front of my eyes, drying my mouth and making my blood beat in my ears. I didn't feel fear or discomfort now. I was as surprised as if the ground under my feet had suddenly opened – but after surprise, came tranquillity.

I returned to making clay soldiers but this time from the beginning, they came out quite well. I made horses which drew the two-wheelers. Even the Indian riders looked good. Usually, I had the most trouble with horses. Some would come out short, with heavy legs – looking more like pigs as their legs bent under the raider's weight. Now, I made beautiful figures of horses with slim but firm legs. I was overwhelmed with pleasure. And then - listen carefully – then I made a figure of myself. It was a funny-looking figure of a clay boy with short, spread legs and a neckless head attached almost directly to the shoulders; nevertheless, there was some tension in that figure, like a tense bow. My clay self-portrait was turned slightly to the right, as if I was trying to see something secretive. My hands were pressing the clay fast, without pausing, and in my consciousness, there was only surprise at the accidental witness of the creation.

Shortly afterwards I made another figure, also positioned to the right, and while I was finishing his beard with several strokes of my index finger, I had the feeling that I had done something significant. At that moment, I found out his name, although I hadn't attended to him in my thoughts. His name was Spirilen. I didn't have to think of him as 'Somebody' anymore. I heard myself pronouncing in a loud, somewhat drawling voice: "Spirileeeeeeen." I'd never heard that name before nor had I ever heard a more beautiful name. There was beauty in it like the gurgling of a mountain spring; dignity and depth like an endless midnight sky, and it was sweet like the love song of a nightingale. Spririle-e-e-e-e-e-e-en, I said again and my high-pitched voice seemed warm and soft.

At that moment I noticed that the clay statue was pointing with raised hand next to the figure of me. I looked in the direction of his stretched hand, and through thick hazelnut bushes – I could just barely distinguished Grandma's stable. He was instructing me. Without a doubt, I knew I was on the threshold of something important.

I walked fast while wiping the sweat from my forehead with my muddy hands. Getting closer to the barn, I walked faster and finally began running. I entered the stable in the usual way - over the barn's roof - and only in a familiar half-darkness which offered protection, did I relax. I didn't know where to begin, what to do or why I had come, but I knew that I was at the only place I had to be at that moment. I sat on a small wooden trunk and kept quiet for some time in the

darkness, which was intersected by slanting rays of sun with flying dust particles in them. My thoughts wandered. Spirilen, Spirilen, Spirileeeeeeen...His discerning eyes laughed at something which was flickering deep inside me, asking to be released.

For no apparent reason, I stood up from the wooden trunk I was sitting on and lifted its bulging, heavy lid. I hadn't opened that trunk until then. It was half-full of old books and notebooks containing writing in faded purple ink. I took one book, glanced through it and dropped it on the stable floor. I looked through more books, one after the other. They all had thick covers and the writing was in French or German. Only one book was printed in Serbian. It had a dark-brown leather cover worn out from frequent use, like a saddle from riding. Among all the smells in the stable, I felt the scent of the leather cover. I opened the book.

Without realizing it, I had at that moment stepped onto the Path. To be precise, it was actually my return to the Path I had walked on in the past. I wish I could say I remembered everything I had read, every word and thought. Nothing of the sort. I couldn't even remember the author's name. All my attempts later in life to remember it faced a wall of oblivion, and I was honest enough with myself to reject the seductive assistance offered by partial memories, overbuilt by my imagination. It wasn't "Yoga Sutras" by Patanjali or "India, the Treasure of Wisdom" by Jevtic or "Jnana Yoga" by Yogi Ramacharaka. I vaguely remember the presentation of secret masters, Grand White Lodge, callings of the Path, which attract followers like mermaid's songs to lost sailors; another passage about the awakening of chakras, the opening which unbolts the unthinkable cosmic space to searchers of secret knowledge; passages about earthly death and rebirth.

Sitting on the trunk reading, I forgot where I was. I don't remember getting off the trunk and reading while leaning against it. Only the prickly pains in my elbows and my disagreeably numb folded legs reminded me of the passage of time. Never has a single human voice attracted me like the words in that book. I was under the impression that it was written only for me, that the writer was standing in the half-darkness of a stable behind my shoulder, whispering his secret messages. There were a lot of things which I, among all people, could read between the lines. The feelings of the Follower who stepped on the Path which this book talked about, were the feelings I shared at that moment; the words echoed in me like silver bells. I stood in front of that book as if like in front of a mirror. I could discern the author's conclusions while they were being created. I was only listening while the book was clearly reading the words written inside of me, recognizing this and getting excited. As much as I was reading the book, it was reading me.

Several times during the afternoon, I thought that Spirilen had moved in the half-darkness. As if, after spending a long time in one spot, he suddenly shifted to another. Those were rare moments when my thoughts drifted away from the text. I didn't notice when it got dark outside. My face was pressed to the pages of the book since it was becoming hard to see the words, but I kept on reading.

Although the book seemed to be written for adults and educated people, I understood it without much effort. There was nothing confusing in the secret science of turning people into super humans, similar to gods, who gained magical powers and took control of their destinies. These were enchanting discoveries. They had the same effect on me as the sound of a horn coming from a distance, approaching closer, so that it inundated all my senses and absorbed my entire being.

"Where were you so long?" Grandma asked with relief in her voice, lifting her eyes from my brother who was curled on the floor by her feet, "I was so worried about you." She was sitting in her wicker chair covered with a soft plaid thrown by the open dining room door. My younger brother Dimitrije was daydreaming, leaning on her forearm with his eyelids half-closed. When I stepped into the gas lamp light, he lifted his head with reprimand written all over his face.

"I was at Uncle Penga's", I said, knowing that Grandma doesn't like that man or his family. During the day she couldn't check whether I was with them. "We played nicely."

"You shouldn't go there too often", Grandma said, squinting her eyes. Penga the Gypsy was a blacksmith with three children who I played with sometimes. He was able to lick red, burning iron with his tongue. Before I discovered the mysterious world of Grandma's stable, his blacksmith shop was the most attractive place in Vilin Do. The Pengas' ate at the shop, and in the evening they didn't light a gas lamp but ate by the light coming from the blacksmith's fire. The family always had several cousins for dinner, and there I could hear stories about ghosts, witches who wander through villages at night, and buried treasure you could find with the help of a miracle plant. If you find a woodpecker's nest with its brood in a tree cavity, Penga said, with the whites of his eyes shining in the dark, cover the opening with hay and put a red scarf on the ground under the tree. To buy its brood's freedom, the woodpecker will bring a miracle plant and place it on the scarf. Then you should cut your finger and put the miracle plant on the cut. The wound touched by the plant will heal and the magic plant will stay with you forever. Someday, it will take you to a buried treasure.

Kaya, Penga's older daughter, taught me how to use a spell to make a snail release its tentacles. I would hold the snail in my left hand and, making circles in the air with my right, I would sing rhythmically:

*Release your tentacles, snail,
If you don't release them,
I will kill you,
With an axe over your head,
In the green grass.*

And truly, the snail would raise its tentacles right away. I never told Grandma about the spell, the song or the rest of what I had heard or learned at Penga's house. She showed her disapproval in an indirect way. I didn't understand why, until one year when I came to Grandma's for Djurdjevdan, Saint's Day. Many years later, I found out that it was Saint's Day for all the Gypsies. At Penga's house, I had roast lamb and scallions and when I praised the taste of their lamb in front of Grandma, she stiffened and her voice lost its usual sweetness: "Do not forget, Bogy, nobles eat roasted lamb for Christmas and Gypsies for Djurdjevdan." Since that time, I hid what I did with Penga's children and everything that happened in his blacksmith shop.

Grandma nodded at the plate filled with food, which was sitting at the corner of the table, and said: "Eat your dinner and then I'll tell you a nice story."

I pulled a small chair to the other side of Grandma's armchair and took her warm hand: "I can't, I ate with them. Tell us a story." After the miraculous visions that the book had evoked in me, I didn't feel hunger although I hadn't eaten the whole day. My brother pressed his body against Grandma's even more. With his eyes half-opened he gently rubbed his head over her thigh as if he was stroking it. I was suddenly very sleepy. Grandma smiled contentedly. She had that same smile on her face when she was beginning her stories. Through the open dining room door we heard the croaking of frogs in the fishpond and fireflies turned on their flickering green lamps, above the raspberry bushes.

"There was once a young shepherd whose parents were very poor. He couldn't go to school with other children but he tended sheep in the grove to feed his family. One day travelling Gypsies were passing by, and they stole the boy. They covered his eyes with a scarf and hid him in a wagon so he couldn't see where they were taking him. He heard only the sound of church bells in his village, becoming more and more distant. The small shepherd never forgot that sound."

I felt faint sadness. I clearly heard the sound of bells becoming distant in the silence. For a moment, I thought that Grandma had chosen this story to discourage me from visiting Penga, the blacksmith, but I had no fear. The story directed my attention not on fear of Gypsies but toward the far horizon where something was waiting to be discovered.

“The boy grew up with travelling Gypsies, learning to like their way of life. Sometimes he remembered the sound of his village bells and then he wondered - what had happened to his home, parents, brothers and sisters? One day when he was already an old man, the memory of the sound of bells created great unrest in him. He couldn’t find happiness in his travelling way of life anymore; he longed to return to his hometown”.

My throat tightened. Although this story appeared to be different from the story I had read in the book in the stable, some invisible thread connected them.

Grandma went on with her story, but her voice was becoming quieter until it turned into a whisper: “The boy left the travelling Gypsies and set out to search for his village. He wandered through different countries, went from one village to another, carefully listening to the sound of their church bells. He hoped that one day he would recognize the sound he was looking for. During his travels he heard many bells but none produced that heartbreaking sound of farewell and he wasn’t deceived by others. He searched for years for the sound of bells from his village.” I was fully awake and my breathing became shallow.

“One night, tired from his long walk, he sat by the road to rest ...He was an old man by then, and he had lost all hope that he would ever find his home. He thought he was looking for something which didn’t exist or perhaps was the fruit of his imagination; he thought he was deceiving himself... He decided to come to terms with his destiny and give up on his search. At that moment, from a great distance, he heard the familiar but weak sound of bells. He walked in that direction”. For some time, only the croaking of frogs and my breathing were heard. “The closer he got to the village the faster he walked. Something inside him knew that he had found what he was looking for. Following the sound of bells, he finally found his way home. And then, the miracle happened. Everything was like before. There were his brothers and sisters, parents and friends. What happened, his parents asked him? All my life I have been searching for my real home, he said, and now that I have found it, I see that I never actually left it. I was only dreaming that I was wandering, searching for a path to the place where I already was.”

The story alarmed me. It was rather different from Grandma’s other stories, and the effect it had on me was similar to the effect of the book I had

read. The story didn't have extravagant clothes, glamorous castles or magicians. A poor girl didn't marry her prince nor did the youngest brother, considered half-witted, defeat the terrible dragon and win the hand of the emperor's daughter. Yet, Grandma's story and the book I had read made me realize that I was standing in front of a blurred mirror - that very little was needed for the image to become clear again. A solution, some kind of unusual reward, awaited the detained boy at the end of his life, after he had lost all hope that what he was looking for existed. The strange book suggested that the same outcome would result to one who followed the direction it recommended. Something unknown enveloped me, something without a name, some mixture of threat, mystery, and hope. While the song of crickets faded into the night's darkness, I became anxious. "Grandma", I said, "I don't completely understand this story." I didn't dare mention the book from the stable.

She was silent for a while. She looked at my brother asleep with his head resting against her thigh. She stroked his head and whispered: "You will understand when you grow up."

"You know what?" I said firmly. "I will write it down so I don't forget it."

Grandma placed her hand on my cheek. She didn't stroke it. Staring into my eyes, she held her dry, warm palm on my face. "Don't worry, Bogica", she said with confidence, "you will never forget this story."

Silently I slid into my bed, feeling that something important was waiting for me; as if barefoot I had come silently across a sleeping wild duck with golden wings. Lying in my bed, I was filled with uncertain hopes as I listened to my heartbeat overshadowing the sound of barking dogs in the distance. Through the window above the bed, I saw a fraction of the familiar purple sky, dotted with stars, which calmed me down before sleep. That night, the sky looked different or maybe it just seemed to me, because everything in my head was spinning. One star silently fell. It soared over the part of the sky framed by the window, lasting too briefly for me to make a wish. I expected to see another falling star, and decided what to wish for: to hear the story I had never heard before - the one, I was certain, Grandma was keeping inside, saving it for some other distant time; to live my life the way the leather-covered book described; to depart my physical body and wander far into astral worlds until I reached the Grand White Lodge...I forgot all about my uncle's shotgun. While I was slowly drifting into sleep, through half-closed eyes, on the sky I saw a star which I hadn't seen before. Its light came through the veil of darkness, flickering powerfully in the dark sky.

~~-4-~~

“Grandma, who are the people who run the world from the Grand White Lodge?” I couldn’t ask my father or mother such a question and especially not Vera, because she would figure out that I had entered the stable against my father’s ban. What Grandma heard from my brother and me remained buried in her always.

“Where did you get that, Bogi?”

“Some of my friends talked about it at school.”

She smiled, knowing I was lying. She threw a quick glance at the photograph of a man with a shaved head and dark piercing eyes, which was hanging on the wall next to the bookshelf, and said: “They are very honest and powerful people who take care that no great harm befalls those of us who are not so gifted.”

“I know that, but how do they achieve those great powers?”

“They learn a lot every day, every year throughout their lives, and in this way, they achieve great, great knowledge. You’ve heard people say – knowledge is power.”

I carefully continued reading the book in the stable. Many times I returned to the parts of the text which excited me. It seemed that acceptance into closed circles of power happened when man least expected it. I had a hard time accepting one of the statements. It was that man strains to achieve power, hoping to be accepted into the Grand White Lodge, only to realize one day that he has already been there for a long time. This statement confused me and, after reading it several times, it started to irritate me because I constantly visualized a theatre lodge decorated with gold wooden ornaments, looking like an antique frame of some great painting in which men and women were sitting gracefully. When man stops lying, the old book said, and when he stops desiring what belongs to others, stops cheating or talking viciously about others – maintaining g this attitude for many years - his spiritual eyes open and beings from higher worlds get in touch with him, passing secret knowledge and powers to him; he begins to read messages which, for the rest of us mortals, are invisible.

Deep within me I knew that those words, although unbelievable, were truthful and that only a few, selected individuals could understand them, while immature people would ridicule them. These were extraordinary powers: by mere desire a man could become infinitely small and reach the nucleus of an atom or infinitely as big as the whole universe, light as a feather so he could walk on water and rise high above, or powerful enough to reach any place in an infinitely large world, able to fulfil all wishes and achieve everything that such a superhuman desired. Strangely, I was most impressed with a story I read toward the end of the book, about a boy who had a sudden desire to find out who he was. Who am I? I had heard this phrase several times in adult conversations but I had never completely understood it until I'd read this story. Now I will tell it to you and, although many years have passed since I read it, I am certain I haven't forgotten much about it.

The Teacher

There once lived a curious boy who spent his time looking for unusual things. One day he asked himself a question: Who am I? Although he had asked himself that question before, this time he couldn't free himself from it. He tried persistently but in vain to get rid of it because it disturbed him. But the more he pushed this question away the more tenacious it became.

The curious boy asked his parents and schoolteachers and they all said that the answer to that question could not be learned in school. They said that in faraway countries there are teachers of wisdom who knew the answer to that question. They cautioned him that he must be a grown and mature man to deserve having the wise men transfer such knowledge to him.

Waiting to grow up and become mature, he continued with his daily life. There were days when the question: Who am I? returned sometimes disturbing him a lot. He tried to force it away, tried to be a good son to his parents, and when he grew up, a good father to his children. One day, his restlessness became so powerful that he decided to go into the world, to look for wise people who could calm his wondering. His wife tried to talk him out of it, saying that if he couldn't stay home for her sake, he should at least do it for their children.

So, the curious man once again decided to stay home and take care of his responsibilities. When his children grew older, he couldn't resist his desire any longer, so bidding farewell to his family, he went off to wander

the world, looking for the Teacher who could give him an answer to his question. He met different people; some who told him to give up his search and others who suffered because they also sought an answer to the same question. Some tried to answer his question, but he didn't find anyone's answer completely satisfactory. He met strange people and had unusual experiences on his travels. He learned many things and passed along his knowledge to others. He was capable of knowing when a person was telling the truth or lying; he could distinguish between those who cheated and those who were generous. There were many wise people who knew the answers to many questions but not the answer to his question. Very often he came across people who looked for his advice and consolation, who were grateful when he helped them.

He visited many well-respected spiritual Teachers, listened to their sermons and admired their wisdom, but he couldn't find his Teacher. He spent many years wandering and eventually began to lose hope that he would ever get the answer to his question. One night in a forest, he was caught in a big storm so he looked for a place to hide and spend the night. He saw a pale light in the distance and began to walk toward it. He reached the hut of a poor man and found that the light coming from the house was a fire seen through the open door. When he looked inside the hut he got surprised. His Teacher was sitting by the fire. He knew he had finally found him, undoubtedly. Standing at the threshold, instead of greeting him, he said: "I finally found you."

"I have waited for you a long time", the Teacher said. "Lie down and rest; a great job is waiting for you tomorrow."

Exhausted from the long journey and finally at peace since he had found his Teacher, the Student slept for a long time. When he awoke, the sun was high in the sky and the Teacher was not in the hut. In his place on a wooden chair he found a thick, old book. He waited for his Teacher for some time, swept the meager hut, and made himself something to eat.. When the Teacher did not appear in the evening, he was worried, wondering if anything had happened to him. He thought his Teacher may have left some instructions for him in the book ,so he picked it up from the chair and began to read.

The book's content surprised him. His entire life was described in great detail, his words, hidden thoughts and all of his experiences. He read until he fell asleep. The next day he continued to read... he was reading the book for a couple of days until he reached the end of it. In the end, the book literally said: "...and he read the book to the end."

Then, all letters disappeared from the book as if some invisible hand had erased them, and he realized who he was. After so many years,

he finally knew who he was. He approached the Teacher's chair and, without hesitation, sat in it. He relaxed and entered into a deep meditation. He knew that, in this way, he was calling his first Student and that he would have to wait for him for a long time.

At that moment, on the opposite side of the world a ten-year old boy suddenly felt a shocking restlessness that he had never experienced before. For the first time he asked himself the question "Who am I?"

When I reached the end of the story, which affected me like a seductive whisper, it seemed that my life took a turn into a new, previously unknown direction, like a river changing its flow. I walked out of the stable delirious, squinting my eyes to help me focus on the blurry images in the half-darkness. I heard frogs in a pond, large cockchafers and stag beetles flew by me in the dense twilight, and a dog barked in the distance. Feelings of strength filled me; I felt uplifted and suddenly older. I knew without a doubt that some day, I would step into the Grand White Lodge, like stepping into the center of a thunderbolt, because my place was there.



PART TWO

-1-

It was very hot inside the meeting hall at the Center for Social Work in Staniste. The nurses who brought children to the center were sweaty and nervous. The chief nurse who, I met had several times when I visited the “Crib”, the center for orphaned children, held the corners of a big table, trying to push it against the wall. “Help me, I can’t do it myself”, she said, irritated.

I got up from my chair while my shirt drenched from sweat, remained glued to chair’s back, and grabbed the opposite end of the table.

“Where do you want it?”

“We need to make space in the middle where the children can play. The future parents will sit there, against the wall. We need to make sure that they can see the children and choose the child they want to adopt. We can’t just foist the children on them, can we?”

“Children are not foisted”, I said. “They’re getting new parents today, a family...”

She looked at me heatedly but said nothing. Boranka, the Center’s pedagogue, approached me and, looking at me closely, she quietly said: “Calm down! When you get to see the Old Man be careful what you say, you are impulsive...”

Old Man was the President of the municipality who I had to report to after the completion of the adoption process. Judging from the voice of the Center’s director, Petar Opancina, and the expression on his face when he passed Old Man’s orders, I couldn’t expect anything good from that conversation. There was a faint possibility that because the Swedes were adopting the children, the meeting would be completely forgotten; however, Boranka’s words dispersed all hopes I had. Everyone expected that Old Man would teach me a lesson. Finally, my turn has come.

I got him angry two weeks ago, at an inter-municipal meeting on adoption, when I fought for permission to be granted for foreigners to adopt the abandoned children from Staniste. Old Man had gained significant political points in prior

years, fighting against children leaving the country. “Our society gives them all the opportunity for healthy development and to become useful members of our community.” He came out with this phrase at so many meetings that municipality administrators and social workers began to repeat it.

In my report, the one which angered him, I explained the childrens fate. In simple words, when they turn eighteen, they had to leave the Center. It represented their whole world and had given them feelings of security and protection. After leaving girls often became prostitutes and boys offenders. I used several facts that I had collected from the police station, without telling the commander why I needed them. Later, Old Man pulled the police commander’s ears too. I described the life the children probably would have in Sweden. Future parents who wanted children waited their turn to adopt for almost ten years. Now, suddenly they had a chance with us. With Germanic precision they submitted the required documentation: proof of home ownership, income from well-paid professions, at least one hundred thousand crowns in the bank, and a promissory note that required them after their death, to leave all their assets to the adopted child. In an overheated meeting room, the educational requirements signed and certified by the court sounded quite unrealistic: when children finish middle school, they can choose whether to study at Uppsala, Stockholm University, or Sorbonne. “Compare that life”, I said, “with the situation of these young boys and girls here; it comes down to drifting around the bus station and prison arrests due to the offences they commit as a result of their poverty.” My report, I was told later, caused Old Man to burst out in anger.

I could have acted differently but it wouldn’t have softened him. For Old Man, University diplomas had an irritating effect. To people who had them, he had to show superiority and dominance. He planned to do the same to me.

“Make sure he doesn’t provoke you. He will insult you for sure, but you just stay cool”, Boranka continued to talk quietly. “He asks educated people if they have diplomas, as if he doesn’t know, and then, he tells them to wipe their asses with them.”

The children entered the meeting hall silently, furtively glancing at us. They held hands and walked one behind the other. The nurse held the first child by the hand. Behind them entered the second nurse, carrying a large cardboard box. She placed it on the floor in the middle of the room, and took out brightly colored toys. The head nurse said, in an affected cheerful voice: “Come children, to play. Here, take toys, don’t be afraid! Today your moms and dads are coming to take you to your new homes.” The children stood silently,, gathered in a group in the middle of the room like scared chicks. The head nurse approached them and started to put toys in the children’s hands, one after the other.

Soft noises were heard, the door opened, and Director Opancina's big head showed up at the door. He had a strong wide jaw and, under his short-sleeved shirt, his hairy forearms and hands could be seen; they were large enough to strangle a wolf. On a wide, acne-scarred face, his small, cunning eyes danced. His neck was thick with wrinkles of fat below his nape and he had a massive double chin. Following him, the Swedish couples walked into the room, walking stiffly, with tense faces. I counted seven couples. With a broad hand gesture he showed them to the chairs lined against the wall and then he turned to me: "Hey, Bogdan, tell them to sit down and make themselves at home."

I was the only English-speaking person at the center and I was expected to translate. I invited them to take a seat and added: "We hope this will be a joyful day for you and the children."

The act of adoption was sufficient reason for joy, but there also were additional events. After checking the children playing in the room, the foreigners who adopted were taking the center's employees out to lunch at the hunters' farm. It was cheap for them to wine and dine all of us: social workers, pedagogues, sociologists, our driver, the accountant and typist, twenty-three all together. On such occasions, everyone was present, no one was sick or unable to come.

I had already been working six months at the Center for Social Work at Staniste. No other psychologist wanted to come to this shithole, so they took me without a contest. I wasn't too busy except in the beginning of the school year, when children were tested and those with lower intelligence separated into special classes. The rest of time, I spent reading in my office.

I couldn't hide the uneasiness which I felt in situations similar to the adoption process. Nurses would bring children from the orphanage, which outnumbered the number of potential adoptive parents. Lucky children would be adopted and taken to a different world, while the rest of the children were taken back to their hog pens. For the last six months I had witnessed many dishonourable situations. Aside from Old Man, other small-time politicians collected cheap political points at meetings at the municipal headquarters, insisting "that our children should not be given to the foreigners" and they would almost succeed in it, if only "The Crib" wasn't full of abandoned kids. People gossiped that our director Opancina accepted bribes to allow Scandinavians and Dutch to adopt children from Staniste. At the workers' meeting when I suggested that we should only bring in children equal to the number of potential adoptive parents, Opancina shot back at me: "Why don't you mind your own business? Stop coming late for work and acting smart!"

The children were dressed in clean clothes and had their hair combed. They were busy with toys which were brought in for this occasion and otherwise kept locked up in the closet. The Swedes, stone-faced and wide eyed, were sitting on the chairs against the wall watching the children. Standing next to them was the interpreter from the Swedish Embassy, who was shifting his weight from one foot to another. One nurse straightened the dress of a three-year old girl, furtively looking at the Swedes. Opancina placed himself between the potential parents and the children and, waving his short, fat hand in a commanding way, he signaled to me to approach him. "You tell them to take good care of our children when they take them back to Sweden... I made it clear to people the last time that our kids are not to be dragged off to foreign countries."

All the children were about two to three years old except for one boy, who was at least five. He was ugly, with a bulging forehead and watery blue eyes. Yellow snot from his nose slithered down his light moustache. He couldn't breathe through his nose because he had a cold, so his mouth hung open all the time. He wore short faded jeans and his white underwear showed under his trousers. He was deeply engaged in playing with a small car that had a siren – it wailed when he pushed the car across the floor. He moved the car monotonously on the floor over and over again. While I was looking at that child I had a premonition that no one would want to take him. I looked at the Swedes and it seemed that a lean woman with cropped grey hair, high cheekbones and slanted eyes, was watching the boy.

The Center's secretary, a man with the bulging eyes of an alcoholic, leaned over to me and said confidentially: "The couples submitted all the necessary documentation, showing that they would be acceptable parents: they all have harmonious marriages and their finances are very stable. All documents were translated at the Embassy." His breath, smelling of brandy and oily cheese, struck me. This one began drinking early, I thought. He wanted to say something more but I waved my hand. "I checked their documents, no one drinks." I did that very carefully yesterday. Aside from the desire to perform my job well I was driven by an unhealthy curiosity. How different will the fates of the adopted children be compared to those who remain at the orphanage?

The grey-haired Swedish woman was looking at the boy with snots, who was still concentrating on his toy car.. I approached him and with the handkerchief from my pocket, I wiped his snots. One layer of dry snot remained under his nose, which looked like the rest of his face around the nostrils - red and swollen from the cold. He was shaking his head while I wiped him. Today your mothers and fathers will come to take you home. This was a cruel story for the children no one would take. Will this boy get lucky? The woman's gaze was fixed on him although her expression was more of pity than of genuine interest.

“Bogdan, come to translate.” The director waved his hand in my direction. “Tell them that the child does not have epilepsy or any genetic disease.” It was a two-year old girl with shiny hazel eyes. She was sitting on the lap of the future mother, squeezing a doll just a little smaller than her.

“How could we know at this age if she has any genetic disorders?” I said. “They can see that the child is active, shows interest in her surroundings, and doesn’t have physical anomalies.”

“I know, I know, but tell them something like that, that she is not autistic and... you know..some psychological stuff of yours.”

“The girl is healthy and normal,” I said in English looking from the woman to her husband. “According to our analysis she doesn’t have any trace of illness.”

“We would adopt her even if she wasn’t healthy”, the woman said. “We have been waiting for such happiness for ten years.” Her eyes were warm and shiny, and she was on the brink of tears.

I repeated the same words about the health of children three more times. While I was saying them, I looked askance at the woman who was deciding whether to take the boy with snots. She was looking at the ground, and her forehead was wrinkled. Her husband was sitting motionless next to her.

One of the nurses approached her, smiling, and then she turned to me: “Please, colleague, could you translate for me?”

“I understand.... a little”, the Swedish woman said in Serbian. I remembered reading a written statement in their file that she and her husband attended Serbian language courses at Stockholm University so they could communicate more effectively if the child was of speaking age. They had thought of everything.

“Really?” the nurse said with wide-open eyes, nodding. “Wonderful, fantastic. You know, couples like you are rare. I wanted to tell you, but you probably already know - younger children get attached to new parents more easily.”

“Yes, I understand...” the Swedish woman said with raised eyebrows, expecting this sudden statement to be clarified.

“If you wish, we can take my car to Subotica. There is another center there called ‘Our Child’ and there are many young children there, a year to a year and a half... even younger. Boys and girls... you can choose.”

“Yes”, the Swedish woman said and then turned to me and added in English: “That may be the best.”

“What did she say?” the nurse asked me. She had bleached blonde, wool-like hair and golden caps on her side teeth. She was entirely focused on her idea to go to Subotica with this couple and to leave the boy with snots. It was too late to stop this new initiative. The Swedish woman had made up her mind. She said a few words to her husband and he stood up obediently. “We will cover the travel expenses to that place”, she said to me.

I waved my hand. It was over - a better life had touched the boy with snots just for a few seconds, and then, it had slipped away. The nurse and Swedish couple stepped outside. The Swedish woman walked slowly. She stopped at the door and turned back, holding the doorknob in her hand, thinking for a few moments. In the middle of the room, the boy was pushing the car back and forth, imitating the sound of the siren. She watched him with her head bent, while the nurse fidgeted impatiently in front of the door. The woman threw one last glance at the boy, waved her head as if coming to grips with her fate, and closed the door behind her.

“Let’s go to my office so the parents can sign the adoption contracts. Tell them that”, Opancina addressed me. Another nurse was picking up the toys from the floor and putting them in a cardboard box. She took the little car from the boy with snots. He didn’t object, he only opened his mouth a little wider for a second. Murmurs and giggles were heard from the hallway. It was the group of social workers. Great expectations, I thought, lunch and all.

“You, Bogdan, cannot come with us. You must go to your meeting with the President,” Opancina said to me at the door. “Don’t make him wait”. He quickly looked at his wristwatch and then at me as if looking at a prisoner sentenced to death who had only thirty minutes to live. I didn’t answer. I turned, walked to the window and looked out - warm air danced above the dusty main street. My throat was tight and I could hardly swallow. I was not made for this kind of work, I thought, or life with these people. This wasn’t what I wanted. Psychology, psychotherapy, giving children up for adoption.... lunches at the hunter’s farm. Faces flushed from wine and roast meat and toasts for the happiness of adopted children. I decided to stay in the room and wait until everyone was gone, and then go to pick up my things and catch a bus for Belgrade. I saw my father’s face before my eyes. I will tell him what a rotten

place this environment is, and I didn't care what he thought. I had heard his opinions many times. And the President of the municipality will have to wait for me for quite some time.

At that moment, someone pulled on my T-shirt. I thought it was Boranka. She would start to preach about how I have to be a mature person, accept reality and control myself when Old Man starts to humiliate me. I didn't want to turn back, but she pulled my shirt with impatience and determination. I turned around with clenched teeth to tell her to leave me alone.

It wasn't Boranka; it was the boy with snots. He was pulling my shirt with both hands. He was standing right next to me with his head bent backwards so he could see me. "Sir", he said, with a worried look on his face, "when will my mom come to take me?"

I was silent, my throat tight. One part of my life was over. Never again will I try to live the way the majority of people do. Everyone has his or her own path in life. Who said that? Nietche? There is one road in the world where only you can go, don't ask where it takes you, just follow it. I had to find out why the boy with snots had such a dismal destiny, which caused my stomach to swirl and my throat to tighten. But, before I left, I had to face Old Man. I couldn't run away because of this poor boy and so many others like him. My attitude with the old bastard will give the children strength. They will need it when they face evil people in life.

-2-

The municipal building was the nicest in Staniste. It belonged to the Dobranskis, an old merchant family, from before the war. The building walls were almost one meter thick and during hot spells it was quite pleasant inside. Linden trees with huge tops, grew in front of the main entrance; the lawn was fenced with short plants and looked neat and manicured. I opened the front door of dark brown wood, and stepped inside. The house had the old oak parquetry on the floor. A red carpet ran through the middle of the hallway to the President's office. The Secretary's room was the one before his. I stopped in her room for a moment. Across from the window, there was an enormous tile stove and on the wall next to it hung a stag's antlers. I carefully inspected the details on the tiles and began counting the antler's branches.

At that moment, I remembered the dream I had last night. It appeared before me suddenly, as if emerging from dark waters. My dream was pleasant but contained some concealed threats, as if part of a myth filled with dangers. I was crossing a bridge above a vast abyss, and suddenly, I saw a light on the other side of the bridge... I heard a high-pitched voice calling my name. No use to delaying, I thought. I took a deep breath, knocked on the door, and entered without waiting for an answer.

Old Man was sitting facing me behind a huge desk covered with green cloth. To his right was the municipal secretary, listening to him with an attentive expression on his face. On the left, leaning back in a leather armchair with crossed legs, was the editor of "Backa" newspapers, Marko Medenica, a colonist from Lika who I knew superficially. The secretary, a woman with a big behind and chest, was standing next to the journalist, holding paper files in her hand. Old Man turned his tiny, pig-like eyes on me, bending his head backward, acting surprised and with fake kindness in his voice he said: "Aha, there you are my champ. Finally, a chance to see you..."

"Good day." I was determined not to let him upset me and I felt self-assured like never before. I also decided to tell him I was quitting my job, at the end of our conversation.

"We haven't met yet," he said, tittering. He looked at the secretary and then at Medenica. "I have seen you walking our muddy streets in your white socks. No wonder, a real gentleman from Belgrade."

"Please, tell me what you want. You didn't invite me here to admire my white socks."

"Well, well, listen to him", he said nodding three times like he was approving. He squinted his tiny eyes and looked at me attentively for some time. "Here's what it is, young man. You are not doing your job properly."

I hesitated for a moment and then said: "What is it that you are not satisfied with?"

"With nothing you do, you hot shot from Belgrade. You are not doing what I am paying you to do."

"The director didn't have any objections about my work."

"Opancina? He is a bigger fool than you are."

I hesitated to tell him that he was the greatest fool of all and that I was quitting my job, but this conversation wasn't over yet. I put my hands in my pockets, watching him.

“Here's what it is”, he began, again accenting every word. “Our accountant is complaining that a lot of money is spent on social cases. If we take in all desolate subjects and pay for their support in centers, we will become as poor as they are. Do you understand? Your job is to protect the municipality's interests, not to waste funds of our workers.”

“Those wretched people have the right to social help.”

“Our socialist state takes care of them, don't you preach to me about who has rights. My municipality is not the only one responsible for them. You turned it into a milking cow for all those social parasites. You were told what to do and you are playing dumb. Or maybe you are dumb, huh?” Smiling, he looked at the people in the room and then fixed his gaze on me again. “They say you have some diploma, huh? It is worth nothing if you don't know how to do the job you are paid for. Now listen carefully. Let Steva from the Center teach you what to do with those social parasites. Do you understand?”

I was silently waiting for him to unload his heavy artillery. He blinked several times, looked at everyone in the room, and said: “What kind of people do we get here? His father probably had to sell seven cows to educate such an ox.”

Medenica affectedly sneered and the secretary looked at the floor. “Is our conversation over?” I asked, breathing heavily.

“What do you mean, our conversation?” said Old Man with his voice sounding threatening. “It's over when I say so!” He scratched his chin and squinted his eyes. “You said you have a diplooooooma. Now listen carefully...” Self-assured, he nodded twice and said: “Here, with me, you can wipe your ass with it!”

I was getting ready for those words hoping that I would be able to talk back to him in an icy tone. But I didn't. Heat spread through my body, weighing me down and my palms were sweating. I took a deep breath, almost filling my lungs completely, and said in a trembling voice: “At least I have something to use to wipe my ass with – a university diploma. You can wipe your ass only with your finger, the one you use for signatures!”

Old Man's head bounced backward, Medenica's lips puckered, and the secretary looked at me with wide-open eyes and then she lowered them again to

the floor. I didn't give him a chance to respond. I turned, left the office, and closed the door on that period of my life.

-3-

News travels fast in a small city. In the morning, most knew I was leaving and rumor of my clash with Old Man was gaining in details and tension. While I was packing my books in a suitcase, Djuka, the owner of the apartment where I rented a room, let Boranka in. "I heard everything", she said, "Everyone is buzzing about how you spilled it all in his face. I am sorry you are leaving but at the same time I feel some satisfaction. He deserves that, the old bastard. Do you want some coffee?"

"Sure."

Djuka's coffee didn't agree with me; it felt as if I had poured it down my neck. I wanted to get on a bus as soon as possible, to look behind at the dusty roads of Staniste, the municipal building, church, and the entire time I'd spent there. I'll never come back here again, I thought, and with that thought made a powerful decision. "You know what," I said to Boranka, "let's say our good byes here. It wouldn't be good if those bootlickers see you outside, with me."

She nodded with a smile of gratitude. I had saved her from a great deal of trouble; she hesitated to ask me to remain inside. She was a girl you could talk to for hours without getting bored. Men confided and complained to such a girl, about their wives and girlfriends, but no one looked at her as a woman. With her flat chest and flat behind, high forehead beaming with real intelligence – she was the worst amalgamation for finding a partner in life.

"May I hug you?" she said quietly.

"Of course. Just be careful I don't contaminate you with rebel ideas!"

She kissed me on both cheeks. I felt the scent of her freshly washed hair, the warmth and smoothness of her cheeks. Too bad, such a girl will lose out repeatedly to dummies with big breasts and miniature brains. Well, that's life.

At the bus station, which had only four platforms, I bought "Politika" from a newspaper stand. Taking my money, the seller smiled at me in a friendly

manner. Did he know about my clash with Old Man? I looked at the cover page and heard: “Doctor, doctor!”

A woman of about thirty-five, with symmetrical facial features and grey eyes, walked toward me. Her skin wasn't fresh or made-up; her hair was of the colour of wheat and she wore it up, in a bun. It was no use telling people in Staniste that you were not a doctor. If you worked in any kind of therapy, you were a doctor. She stretched her hand to me and said in one breath: “We heard you were leaving. I was looking for you at your house... my father wants to thank you. Please stay just for a few moments. Do you remember me? I am Milijana.”

She wanted to thank me? Then, I remembered. She had a mentally retarded sister about thirty years old, with long, slim arms covered with dark hair, an indented forehead and protruding jaws, like a Neanderthal. She brought her to my office three months ago and holding her hand, standing at the door, she said: “I have a great favour to ask. Only you can help me.”

Her retarded sister pulled her hand away from her sister's, and making indistinct moaning sounds, she leaned over my desk, pulled my head close with her hairy hands, and kissed me several times with her plump lips, moist with dribble.

“Please don't... don't get upset, please!” Milijana said hurriedly, trying to drag her sister away from me. “Kaya only wants to show you her affection.” She walked around the desk and wiped her sister's saliva from my forehead and cheeks with her handkerchief. She took Kaya by the hand and made her sit down on a chair next to hers.

“You know, she was in a center for handicapped people here in Staniste. Everything was fine; we knew the caretakers and visited her regularly. Then, they closed the center – you probably know that – and moved her to Vrbas. It was horrific there,” she said, making a face as if she had taken a bite of something dreadful. “Some aggressive patients there.... they bit her and beat her up...”

“I don't see how I can help.” I still felt saliva on my face. I hesitated to wipe it off while she was looking at me.

“You can, doctor, you can help! It would be enough if you could write your opinion, that Kaya must have home care. Please! We would get financial help and she could stay with us. There are six of us and only our father is working. My sisters and I will take care of her.” She talked fast as if she was afraid I would leave the room. “You saw how she approached you. Father said

that the doctor could help her stay at home with us. Kaya puts all her hopes in your hands.”

I hesitated for a few moments and then wrote my findings. I increased her intelligence level and insisted that she needed to be cared for at home. Now I had to go to their house and listen to their words of gratitude.

“I am sorry, Milijana, but I am in a great hurry,” I said, “My bus is arriving any minute.”

“But please!” She was almost begging. “I couldn’t face my father without you. We heard that you lost your job because you protected people like... our Kaya. Father said you were the only real man at that center. The rest are administrators without hearts and souls...”

When we entered, the father of the family was at a neighbour’s house and Milijana’s younger brother ran over to get him. They accommodated me in an old armchair, offered me some coffee, and gathered around me. “Don’t worry,” Milijana said. “Our godfather will take you to Belgrade by car; you’ll get there faster than by bus.”

The initial conversation was forced, but after a while, I relaxed. “People in Staniste say that they at the center treat those who God didn’t give sapience, miserably,” their mother told me. She was a woman with a dark, dried-out face, wearing a black scarf on her head. Her appearance had the stamp of desolation – she had given birth to a retarded daughter and had to carry that cross until she died; she did it with a pauper’s nobility as if making sacrifices for her daughter every moment of her life. I was about to say that it wasn’t true but Milijana said with hesitation: “People say that employees from your center put those miserable souls on buses and send them to far away cities – Skopje, Sarajevo.. anywhere. They give them a one-way ticket and if those poor creatures are capable of understanding anything, they tell them that someone is waiting for them at the other end. They put a loaf of bread in their hands, promise all kinds of things, and get rid of them.”

That was the truth. Municipal secretary insisted on such a procedure, justifying it because other municipalities were doing the same thing. Some feeble creatures who were sent away showed up after a month or two at our bus stop. Some had toured Yugoslavia this way several times. People at the center called that “the retard tourism.”

My shirt buttoned up to my throat felt uncomfortable so I raised my hand to unbutton it. With my elbow I knocked over the cup of coffee placed on the hand rest. It fell to the floor and broke. It was an old ceramic cup, all scratched

inside from years of washing. I felt very uncomfortable, like a chump in this meagre home. "Excuse me, please," I said, "I am very sorry about this." The pleasant feeling I had vanished in a second.

"Please don't mention it," Milijana said, "it's nothing, a real trifle."

"I'll make some more coffee," the mother said and hurriedly went to the stove.

Younger sister, dressed in faded jeans and hand-knit blouse of uncoloured wool, wiped the spilled coffee with quick moves and smiled at me. Crazy Kaya, mumbling, began to pull her sister's hand. I didn't understand what was she trying to say but members of her household did. The younger sister in jeans, whispered something in her ear, pointing with her fingers in my direction and at the door. Everyone laughed except their mother, who shook her head and said: "Don't scare the poor thing."

"Vesna was joking with Kaya," explained Milijana to me, "she said that my father will beat you when he returns home because you broke the cup. Don't be angry, that's how we joke with her sometimes. She is like a child."

I held the second cup of coffee in my hand. I wondered when the father was coming. I noticed that crazy Kaya sat by the door on an old trunk, hugging her knees with her slim arms. People in Backa kept kindling wood in those trunks. She watched the door, focused, like a dog when it senses the return of its master. She didn't have wits or feelings, I thought, but she was experiencing things through her instincts. I was wrong, like so many times before when I had acted like an expert of the human soul.

We heard a cough or rather someone clearing their throat; and a large man with an impressive moustache, appeared at the door. Next to him was a thin man with a nose like an eagle's beak, who curiously looked around the room, resting his eyes on me. "Here's father!" said Milijana loudly, pointing to the large man. Father stepped closer to me with wide open arms as if he wanted to embrace me, but Kaya suddenly hung herself on his stretched arms, letting out quick guttural sounds. He stopped, looked at her with surprise then looked at me, while Kaya's sisters and brother spoke at the same time in voices which didn't express humour but sympathy.

"My God, she is so good!", Milijana told me. Her eyes shone and her chin trembled as if she was going to cry. "How much gratitude and love she feels toward you! Do you know what she said to father?" I shook my head silently. "She said that she broke the coffee cup and asked him not to beat her for what she had done." She covered her mouth and chin with her hand and said: "This is

her way of thanking you for what you've done for her. She doesn't know much but she knows how to sacrifice for others."

My throat tightened. "The world would be a better place if there were more souls like her", I said sincerely. The old man embraced me and spoke of something which I only partially heard; he apologized for being late, but he was looking for his best man to take me to Belgrade. Kaya was squeezing his hand on her chest while Milijana was shifting her tear-filled eyes from me to Kaya.

Those images ran through my head while I was sitting next to their best man, who was driving the car. I was grateful that he was silent most of the time. The feelings of bitterness which weighed me down after the confrontation with Old Man and the unease I felt about facing my father, had disappeared like a bad dream does after awakening. Warmth filled my chest and throat, and the fields around us, all yellow with stubble after the wheat harvest, looked even brighter in the morning sun. You may think I am exaggerating but Kaya's readiness to sacrifice for me was a powerful support to me at times of faintheartedness and disappointment, and those times were coming my way. I am not ashamed to say that there have been only a few who loved me like that retarded soul. Only two boys loved me more than she did.

~~-4-~~

"Father is waiting for you to have coffee and talk", Mother said through the half-opened door. She put on an effort to sound casual, but I easily sensed her worry about what was coming. The night before I had fallen asleep late; my head felt heavy and my whole body was overwhelmed with some undefined tension. Father would hardly miss an opportunity to compare his ethical behaviour with my irresponsibility.

After waking up, I stayed in bed for a long time, awaiting the conversation with Father and Lidia, and reviewing of my life so far. It was filled with long lines of contradictions, sudden shifts from one state into the opposite, short-lived enthusiasm about something new and the depressions which followed. I faced it with honesty; it wasn't the time for excuses, there were no witnesses. I was soft and tolerant with inferior people – cleaning ladies, maids, unqualified laborers, but I was constantly in confrontation with dangerous and powerful people. I love truth above else all in the world, yet in the most disgusting way, I was cheating on Lidia. I love people from the bottom of my heart and for some of them I

would do what I wouldn't do for myself; still, I insulted many friends with my unmeasured words. Why I am telling you this now? I had to finally find out completely and unconditionally whether I was the one who hurt others, the one who loved them, the one who sneered at them or the one who cried watching a movie about some abandoned child. I was being pressed by those questions from every direction like a bunch of thorns; the desire to find out who I was became so powerful, it seemed I could burst.

Father was sitting at the kitchen table, which was covered with a chequered red and white plastic tablecloth. He was holding a cup of coffee in his hand, sipping from it, with a gloomy expression on his face. Mother sat clenched next to him, and stretching her neck, she looked around the kitchen as if seeing her pots and pans for the first time. She looked everywhere except at me. I sat at my place across from Father like in the old times when I was a decent son he could be proud of in front of neighbours and office colleagues. Behind Father's back stood the kitchen credenza which mother had brought him as a dowry, with its neatly stacked plates and teacups in an order which didn't change for years. I was getting ready to leave that well-known world which once gave me strength but now evoked quaky irritation.

"You don't know even how to say good morning", father said, nodding his head sadly.

"If I said good morning you would ask me if I had washed my face, and then I would hear that the tradition among our people is that no one bids good morning with an unwashed face, and so on and on...I know all of it, I've heard it hundreds of times."

There was a short silence. What else could I say to this man who was convinced that he was a role model for sound living? Conversation with him made no sense.

"Mother said that you have left the job...Is that right?"

"Of course it is."

"For you it is of course. What a smart man is ashamed of, a lunatic is proud of. What are you thinking of doing now? What will the gentleman live on?"

"Don't be afraid, you won't be feeding me."

"And I won't", Father said with resolution in his voice, placing his coffee cup on the table.

“Bogy wants to go to Sweden to find some work there”, Mother said trying to make peace, still not looking at me. “It seems the salaries are good there.”

“What kind of work?”, Father said, looking at her askance, frowning. He was becoming irritated. Apparently, mother hadn't mentioned to him my intention to leave for Sweden. Now that he heard it, his planned speech began to crumble. “What Sweden for God's sake? They can't wait there for someone like your son to come? One must really stumble there. They don't pay there without hard work.”

“Like you know, since you were in Sweden?” I leaned with my palms on the table surface, and they began to sweat and stick to the tablecloth. When I thought that this man slept with my mother, that he was jigged and moaned over her - that notion, which came often to me recently, stirred the desire in me to scream loudly.

Father squeezed his tiny eyes behind thick glasses and his mouth turned into a thin line. It looked like his nose had grown even bigger and that the grey hair on his head had become thinner. He had never gone outside the country. From Srebrenica in Bosnia he moved to Tuzla where he would have spent his entire life if it hadn't been for the war. He ran away and found himself in Beograd. Instead of travel stories I heard many times how he should have gone to Vienna before the war, but he didn't because he didn't want to leave my pregnant mother. This ought to create the impression that only his dedication to the family prevented him from achieving an important career. Usually on Saint's Day, after several glasses of red wine, he slowly and graciously talked to our guests about how honest and esteemed by everyone our family was, having had a long merchant tradition. We sent caravans with prunes to Istanbul and lumber to Vienna and Budapest. Several times he was about to travel too, but some sense of duty for the family always interposed.

“You know very well why I didn't! Someone had to feed and school the younger brothers and sisters. If I was like you, they would be digging corn somewhere now. But I am not, and today they are respected, worthy people.”

“Mladen too?”

My uncle Mladen was the only exciting person in father's family. He didn't finish school and rarely worked, but he was a man you could talk to until late at night without getting bored. The family whispered about his love adventures while he was a young man in Tuzla and Sarajevo. He aroused my interest in yoga and I got my first book on the occult from him for my

seventeenth birthday. It was “Personal Magnetism” by Abby Nauls. That naively-written book inflamed my imagination and stayed in my memory.

“Nice role model you found? Do you want to end up like him? What exactly do you want in life?”

“I don’t know but I know what I don’t want. Did you ever have a second look at life around you? I am sick of it!” Heat spread through my body and I began to talk faster: “Instead of real values illusory and deceiving ones are imposed. All the people you appreciate have the value of rag dolls. They are geared only toward easygoing and empty lives. Their apartments, marriages, their entire lives look like waiting rooms for some better tomorrow which isn’t coming. For them there is nothing more then eating and drinking and some empty social recognition.”

I wanted to tell Father that only Mladen of his entire family had something inside of him which could inspire a man to think, but his question about what I wanted in life interrupted me, although I had steadily focused on it since my high school days. Who am I, where am I from, what is the purpose of life, why am I here?.. Yeah right, try explaining that to a man who spends his life talking about how smart he was when he ran with his family from Bosnia and saved our heads; who thinks only about retirement, and tries to convince everyone that family was honest and honourable and that we sent caravans with prunes to Istanbul. He couldn’t understand so many things. He was bent, his right shoulder apparently lower then the left, and he was one of those thin men who develop a belly due to weakening muscles; yet he believed that mother had been lucky luck for marrying him.

“You don’t know what you want?! Let me tell you something, sonny. All children cry when they enter this world, but you, you howled, protested and resisted like no normal child ever did, and you are still doing it! What did I do to offend God so to be given such a son?” he launched in his victim’s voice, but almost instantly a cunning shimmer brightened his eyes behind his thick eyeglasses. “So, tell me, I am not as educated as you are, how many years do you need to figure out what you want?”

“What I want in life?” I felt an urge to say something as hard as a rock, to condense into one sharp comment all those years of thoughts roaming through my head, but I couldn’t find the words to express it. I repeated: “I know what I don’t want. I don’t want to spend my life thinking about bonuses and retirement. I don’t want to create two, three children who will live the same kind of life after me. I will not...” I was about to open my mouth and list all those things I have itemized to him so many times before in similar conversations, but I hesitated. It

was no use; he believed that his way of life was the only good one and that people like me were good-for-nothing failures. That ossified belief was impossible to alter. "I want to know who I am", I said, calming myself down. "That's what I want." For a moment I felt calmed. That response came from my entire being; there was nothing to add or take away. Yes, that was it. That was the only answer worth living for.

"Eh, my son", he nodded as we were saying goodbye. "Farewell to reason! They don't teach these things at schools. Lost poets and painters deal with these questions, spending their lives at bars, all those bearded bums who have nothing in life."

I was calm and felt that everything in my head was as clear as if I had poured a bucket of cold water into it. My reply to him was mostly a conversation I had with myself: "Of course that's not learned in schools. That is exactly the saddest thing about the society we live in. I haven't met a man who knew who he was. But it is possible to find out. Where, how? I don't know that. But I know it can be done."

Father silently looked at me as if he was beginning to understand that I was sick with a vicious and treacherous disease not curable by intelligent words. Finally, he said: "You are going to Sweden to work as a physical laborer.. To roam around with the diploma in psychology we sacrificed so much for...and what will you do about Lidia?"

That was weighing me down. That Lidia would follow me in my attempts at "finding myself", by working as a physical labourer in Sweden - I didn't have any illusions about. She was brought up well and had a very exact system of values she couldn't depart from, even if she had wanted to. She was tolerant during my studies because she believed that my plans to go to India in search of myself and the solutions to life's ultimate questions, would just go way. Her ideal was to live comfortably, which meant me getting a job in Belgrade, buying an apartment, furniture, carpets, and curtains and having children, who would, being the best students, recite poetry at school assemblies.

"Well, if she wants to wait for me, she must give me a chance for a couple of years. If she doesn't want that, she should look for her happiness elsewhere."

"To wait for you for years while you are exploring who you are with some bums? How many years has she already waited for you to finish university? My son, you have lost all logic. Such a girl...such a girl..."

I saw askance that Mother was slowly nodding her head. Her eyes were filled with tears and her chin was trembling. Her world was collapsing because of

my strange lunacy which she wasn't able to grasp. She believed that my problems would disappear when I graduated. Mothers rarely like their son's girlfriends, but she was in love with Lidia. The two talked for hours in the kitchen, Lidia got mother's recipes for cakes and traditional dishes and tolerantly accepted her advice. She wasn't pretending; it was a sincere relationship between the two people sharing the same value system and identical image of life. You could easily imagine Lidia, thirty years from now, having a similar conversation with her son's girlfriend.

"I admit that Lidia is a worthy person. Otherwise, I wouldn't have spent all these years with her. But I can't do anything differently. If I stay here, she would have a miserable man by her side for the rest of her life. Is that what you want? There is only one solution to my problem, and only I can find it."

Mother and Father looked at me silently. They didn't comprehend what was going on with me nor did I for that matter, but they felt that I was besieged by a force they were powerless to control. I felt emptiness in my stomach when I said: "I am going to the train station to buy a ticket to Stockholm."

It was past ten o'clock when I came home with a second-class ticket in my pocket. I would travel via Budapest, Prague, East Berlin, Sasniz and Treleborg. I found Mother at the same place by the kitchen table as if she hadn't moved at all, but Mladen was sitting in Father's chair. Since I began to work at Staniste, we rarely saw each other. I had hoped that our last encounter would take place in his studio, not in Mother's kitchen where Father could show up any minute. He was sitting at the table in his customary manner. A filterless cigarette was burning glued to his lower lip, and he bent his head sideways trying to escape the smoke which rose above his eye. His forehead was sweaty, he was red in the face and his eyes had a blurred look. He looked like he had had a drink or two. Even now, there was a glass in front of him. He unbuttoned his shirt and his grey undershirt became visible, under which his white body hair protruded. I was amazed of how much he had aged.

"Where have you been, my beautiful boy?", he said with a voice cracked from the cheap tobacco. There was an opened pack of "Drava" in front of him. Those were the cheapest cigarettes, smoked by construction laborers and porters at the train station. "Come on, sit down a little with your old uncle. Your mother told me that you are going on a long journey - who knows if we'll ever see each other again?"

"Why wouldn't we see each other? Are you burying me?" I sat across from him. I had the desire to unburden myself in front him but it was hard in Mother's presence. I felt that due to my planned departure, I somehow had

become more important and I wanted to remove attention from myself by engaging in sincere conversation.

“Lidia waited for you until just a moment ago and then she left. She said she’ll call you in the morning,” Mother said softly. I didn’t respond and she walked out of the kitchen, dragging her feet and swollen ankles.

Mladen was looking at me with his head bent to one side, squinting with the eye over which smoke was floating. “It is not up to me to give you advice, you have more schooling than I, but I always regretted it when I made hasty decisions” he said. “Why don’t you wait for a couple of days? If your decision is good, you will want the same thing even then. And if it’s not...you will change your mind.”

“I don’t want to delay. If I don’t do the right thing now, I’ll change my mind, for sure. I know myself; I am like that. I am going and whatever happens, happens. Nevertheless I’ll be back some day. I am not going to life in prison.”

Mladen curved his lips and took the last puff from his cigarette. “It’s not that easy, Bogi. A man feels ashamed to return defeated. Many of my friends stayed in France to wash dishes and work at stinky factories. Human vanity is a deadly disease.”

“Did my father send you to talk me out of it?”

“Yes”, he said simply and extinguished his cigarette butt with his thumb, all stained yellow from the tobacco. “But regardless of him, I want to say a few words. I understand your Father, although I rarely agree with him. I am not going to try to convince you; I hate when someone does that to me. Simply – I don’t have many people closer than you. Do you understand?”

The excitement was starting to overwhelm me and then I felt uneasiness. I didn’t want our conversation to end with mutual crying.

“As a matter of fact, I am on your side”, Mladen said, looking beside me. “We have had many conversations but I haven’t told you this. I have a strong feeling that times have changed. Or to be exact, they are currently changing.” He slowly pulled out a new cigarette from the pack, licked its top and continued as if he was in a dream-like frame of mind: “Something has happened on the level of collective consciousness. With each day, there are more search-oriented loners, individuals far too independent to be able to fit into some dumb job which tirelessly repeats itself, but at the same time, these people are too weak and isolated to significantly change society in accordance with their visions. You are one of them and the same quality in me – and there isn’t much left of it – can be

found in you." He took a long puff from his cigarette. He did that in conversation when he was searching for the right word. "From your father's side comes my significant anxiety that you will begin to search for yourself wholeheartedly, but that you will finish empty and defeated. You will understand – as I did." He took a new puff, gazing into the distance, through the wall. He saw his own world, perhaps his youth, betrayed plans, grand ideas which never came through.. great loves, tragic loves, betrayed friendships.

"My intellect is telling me that your father is right, but... I was never reasonable. My heart is telling me that you are doing the right thing and that you should leave, regardless of the fact that you're leaving good parents, a girlfriend, friends, and the place you grew up...everything that makes a good life. Of course, don't repeat my words to your father during an argument. He would take it as profound treason."

I shook my head and he looked toward the kitchen door as if checking to see if Mother or Father would appear, and went on: "You know, I should have gone away many years ago..." He looked into the distance for a while with glassy eyes, and then, he continued: "Maybe I would have started to drink there as well, it's hard to say. But I knew for sure that I would begin to drink if I stayed here. Still, I stayed because I was weak. The small, safe pool seemed better than the wide ocean waters. I was scared...not too much, but I would be lying if I said I wasn't. That fear confined me to dream my dreams through books and stories shared at the bar's table with drink."

I loved Mladen and I knew his life story, but he had never admitted his own defeat in such simple words. There was some tragedy in his words, which brought tears to my eyes. He smiled sadly and continued: "All archetype stories talk about entering into the unknown world and returning from it with experience which you couldn't gain at home. A man returns more mature, more intelligent, transformed, in short, as a truth-seeker who used his life wisely. You can do that. It was your father's duty to have children, to achieve the respect of people, to give advice to others which they wouldn't follow, and to die feeling of honours. There is nothing wrong with that. But such a life is not for you. You have a mission."

He swallowed his spit with difficulty, as if choking. There was silence in the kitchen so tense you could almost scratch it with a fingernail. "I blew my chance and because of it, I am a failed man. We both know that. I wouldn't like the same thing to happen to you. Wise men say - whatever you do, you'll have at least one regret. You'll regret it if you leave. If you stay – the same. I am not an expert in giving people advice - except in bars – but I can tell you this: it's better to regret doing something than not doing it. You'll have hard moments, but you'll

endure.” He bent his head to the other side, smiling more to himself than to me and asked: “Have you read the story ‘*The Adventures of a Young Man*’...I think it is by Hemingway?”

“No, I don’t remember.”

“I don’t like his style that much, he writes too simply, but that story is good. It’s obviously autobiographical. The main character is a young man from an American province who wants to become a writer. A few hundred people live in his village; everyone knows everything about each other, a real province. He is suffocating in it, he wants to go into the wide world to fulfil his dreams, to become something and somebody.” He smiled again. “You recognize that, don’t you? The young man writes a little for the local newspaper. One day, he’d had it enough – he plans to leave everything and go to New York! His parents try talking him out of it, his girlfriend, relatives, friends...but he feels there is no life for him in the village. He has a slight coldness in his heart...” Mladen looked at me furtively and then again directed his gaze in the distance. “He decided, to leave no matter what...To avoid quitting halfway, he doesn’t accept his father’s money for a train ticket by starts put on foot, hiding on freight trains with hobos...As times goes by, his motivation diminishes, the life he left behind becomes more attractive, and New York seems so far away, while world fame is even farther. After a few days, he gets thrown off the train in some godforsaken village, hungry, tired and half-broken. Even worse, wet snow begins to fall. He finds shelter in a deserted stable and waits for the snow to stop. But, as it happens in life – it snows and snows. He is already hesitating. He lies in the hay in wet clothes, frozen, hungry, and all the time dreaming of his home, mother’s cherry pie, his girlfriend, friends...all of it now seems like a wonderful dream. At the same time, he is ashamed to give up; he knows that he will be sneered at in his small village. It snows like there is no end to it, the whole day, the whole night and the entire next day. He makes a decision: he will carry on for three more days. If snow doesn’t stop in the evening of the third day, he will send his father a cable, asking him for the ticket money and he will go back home. If the weather improves, he’ll continue his journey.”

Mladen wholly absorbed me in his story. His words were turning into live images; I could feel the inner struggle of the young man, wet clothes on his neck and the smell of wet hay on which he was reclining. “Of course” he continued, with half-closed eyes, “on the evening of the third day it was still snowing...The young man entered the train station, just a hut with no one in sight. A middle-aged man was sitting next to a telegraph with a green visor on his head and those black casings on his sleeves – clerks once wore those to protect their shirts from getting dirty. The young man asked if he could send a telegram on his father’s

charge. He could, everything was all right, here's the form. He wrote: 'Dad, send me the money for the ticket. I am coming back home.'

“Aaaahhhh, said the clerk when he read it, the young man is on his adventure, to conquer the world, but has changed his mind. The young man got fired up - that is no concern of yours, he said. Don't be mad, said the clerk. I don't have bad intentions; on the contrary, I really like you. You know, you remind me of my youth. Thirty years ago I left our godforsaken village to conquer the big world. I travelled the same way you did without money; I wanted to be independent from the start. You wouldn't believe it, but it snowed then as well. I was frozen and hungry - no one would take me in for the night or give me a piece of bread - and I said to myself - I'll endure for three days and if the snow doesn't stop I will get back home. It wasn't easy. I don't know if you believe me but I endured three whole days. They felt as long as three hungry years. On the third day I sent my father a telegram and I returned home.”

Mladen was completely immersed in telling the story. His gaze went even farther, his eyes parallel and eyelids lowered half way; sitting in front of me was that clerk, with black casings over his sleeves telling his life story. He went on, slowly pronouncing his words: “And you know what, said the telegraph clerk, I spent my life here. I have a good wife, two grown children and a wonderful grandchild. I became chief of the telegraph night shift. When I count it all, I think I am a satisfied man up to a point. However, I often go back to my adventure, in my thoughts, especially at night when I can't sleep. And I wonder...” Mladen's trembling voice got disconnected. For a second I thought he would cry. He took a deep puff from his cigarette and went on: “I wonder, what my life would be like if the damn snow had stopped on the third day? When the young man heard that, he took the form, crumpled it, threw it into a wastebasket, and stepped outside... Of course, he continued his journey and the world gained a great writer.”

Mladen's voice, chin and hands were shaking. With creased forehead, he looked at his glass of brandy, slowly nodding as if he was walking among his thoughts. “You know, Bogy, when I read that story I saw my life. That night I got drunk out of misery.” He was silent for a while, still nodding, and then he raised his head, looked at me with wide-open eyes, and said firmly: “Go to the world Bogy! There isn't better school in life. Endure everything that comes your way and when it gets so difficult that you begin to consider giving up, open this paper. You will find something in it which will help you at that moment. This is a genuine talisman and there aren't many like this.” He handed me a folded paper sealed with a red wax stamp, and continued: “It won't be easy but it has to be like that... The human soul is like a chestnut - it has to go through fire to become sweet.

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Stockholm. I never suspected it would be so important for me in this incarnation. Over the past years, indistinct thoughts of London, San Francisco, Rishikesh in India or Lassa in Tibet came to me, mixed with images of nameless villages along the Himalayan slopes. I didn't suspect then that over an extensive period of time I would be playing hide and seek with myself and that from time to time, I would come across the mirror which I had placed on the Path – and step back from my own image because it was different from what I expected to see. Life would be boring without those surprises and our True I, or Atman, as the Hindus call it, could bear anything except boredom. That's why he separated himself from All-Source of the infinite perfection, which could only be infinitely boring, and he set off on a long adventure to find himself, pretending he didn't know he was the one he was looking for.

I expected to find occultists with profound knowledge and clear vision about individual and social proceedings, new age magicians with ancient memories and everlasting knowledge, mystics difficult to reach because they avoided curious beginners like buzzing mosquitoes on balmy night. This belief, deposited over the years drop by drop, becoming as rigid as a cave's stalagmite, couldn't accommodate different thoughts, doubts and uncertainties. During my short stay in Stockholm, my expectations burst and collapsed. I found myself next to the potato peeling machine in the kitchen of "Foresta" hotel, amidst a group of Yugoslavs. Each one had his personal story about coming to Sweden, and all those stories resembled each other like apples in a basket.

On my departure I made an oath to avoid compatriots, but fate, that tricky lady with unclear eyes, quickly reminded me of Mother's words, that whenever man makes an oath against something, what happens is just the opposite. You can go far away from home but you carry relationships you want to escape with you like a hunchback carries his hunch. At times you may believe that you have changed, but in your unconscious mind there are mechanisms which will recreate former relationships and attract similar persons.

All kinds of people worked at the hotel. There were South Americans with tanned skins, dark eyes and protruding cheekbones; German and Austrian students; humble Japanese who saw a boss in everyone and did everything they

were told to do; Finns who were alcoholics; Greeks with their round wives; and loud Turks and Pakistanis who argued a lot and threatened each other with long knives. Toward the end of summer the American students arrived, fugitives from the Vietnam War. The building where hotel staff lived, mainly foreigners, had a spacious communal room with light green walls. The hotel hostess in charge of personnel brought me there on my first day, and with a sour smile as she was encouraging me, said: "You will be pleased, there are a lot of Yugoslavs".

On the counter in the corner there was a coffee machine and, by the door, a Coca-Cola vending machine. About ten people were sitting on metal chairs with upholstered seats, watching television. At the table next to the entrance a young man was sitting; he had small eyes and a fine nose and I remembered him from the streets of Belgrade. I used to see him mornings at in the ticket line at the cinema and in the promenade on Knez Mihailova street. Now he was sitting alone holding a cigarette in his hand. "We know each other, right?" he said. I nodded, smiling superficially.

"When did you come?" he asked, inviting me by his hand gesture to sit down, and then added hopefully, leaning over: "You play preference?"

"No", I said, with discomfort.

"Eh, too bad...and chess?"

"Of course."

"Not bad. All jobs here are stultifying, but we have to kill time somehow. I am Relja." He shook my hand hastily as if there was so much we had to do together and then he added softly: "Our people here are strange. You could suffocate from laughing, as they say: a lunatic is screwing the confused."

He cast a furtive look around the room and told me in a conspiratorial voice, barely moving his lips: "The one in the corner is Doctor Tasic. He is a sexual maniac. After you meet him, five minutes later he talks about how many Swedes he has screwed."

"What kind of work do you do?"

"We all do the same work here. Unskilled jobs - dishwashing, cleaning, taking out garbage. Everyone who comes here must do that for a year; Swedes don't give you permits for better jobs. Are you the diskare?"

"What's that?"

"A dishwasher."

“No, I peel potatoes.”

“That's not a bad job,” Relja said. “You are alone, and you don't have to listen to stupid conversations. Our people here either lie, boast or complain and ask you for money”. He turned in his chair and addressing the people gathered around the TV, he said in a loud voice: “Here, another compatriot has arrived.”

I had a forced smile on my face. For a moment I was glad that none of them came to shake hands. A tall young man with black receding hair and dark circles under his eyes poured himself coffee at the counter. He quickly looked at me from head to toe as if making an estimate and asked: “Did you bring plum brandy and our cigarettes? This American shit cannot be smoked”.

I shook my head. Doctor Tasic walked toward the exit, then stopped briefly by our table and said: “It's not so bad being here until you find something better. What is your profession? I am Doctor Tasic.” He had a deep voice which aroused confidence. I didn't remember the names of any others at that moment.

For a couple of days I felt good and secure. I had a place to sleep, good food was in abundance, and I worked just a little. I was getting three times more money than Lidia, who worked as an engineer in Belgrade.

Hotel workers, foreigners, were able to get rooms in a building behind the hotel. They put me in a room with Nail Becic, a Bosnian who had lived alone until now, in the largest room in a staff building. He arrived in Stockholm from a Bosnian village, just a few days before me. He was a strongly built young man with slumped shoulders. He stammered, and when his stammering interrupted his talking, he became quarrelsome and aggressive.

Every night a group who worked at the “Foresta” and at some other Stockholm's restaurants, gathered in our room. They played chess, cards and drank plum brandy smuggled from Yugoslavia. On one of the first nights there, I met Bane Deflish.

You could never say that he had come to Sweden to work. Bane Deflish! Famous Bane Deflish from Belgrade's Terazije. He was about forty tall, compact, and already a little heavy but always with a freshly shaved face and hair anointed with walnut oil. He had thick, nicely sculpted eyebrows which he raised to accent his words and the dark eyes of a man who knew women. He left the impression of always wearing the uniform of a seducer: a navy blue blazer, grey trousers of fine thin flannel, white shirt with striped tie, and carefully polished black shoes. I remembered him from Belgrade as a seducer about whom all kinds of gossip was spread. His nickname, Deflish, evoked veneration among us younger kids. It was a beautified abbreviation for Bane Deflator, because

rumours claimed that many girls had lost their virginity to him. Now, although groomed, he resembled a heavy cat weighed down by age. "There is no happiness in jobs which Yugoslavs and Turks do," he repeated often. "I only wish I could plunge at some rich, old lady." He worked as extra help in a restaurant and now for the first time in his life, he had to lift something heavier than women's legs.

In that company I quickly earned some respect since I played chess better than the others. It wasn't difficult – they played a bar chess, from move to move; no one knew anything about chess theory. Ever since high school, I had learned the king's gambit, Spanish and Italian openings and few versions of Sicilian. That was enough to earn me an undeserved reputation as a chess master. In a room full of tobacco smoke, we played tournaments until late at night and I had a reserved, first place. During some games there were a lot of noisy conflicts, swearing, and toppling of figures.

Bane Deflish didn't play chess. When we invited him for a game, he just raised his eyebrow. That wasn't entertainment worthy of a seducer with a threatening nickname. My attention often drifted in his direction although I didn't want it to. There was some nobility in him, typical for men who knew how to engage women. With it came confidence in the way he placed orders to a waiter in a restaurant, the elegant gesture with which he shook off the ash from his cigarette, and the manner he excused himself when going to the restroom. When he scratched his head, he did it using the manicured long nail of his right hand's little finger, so he wouldn't mess up his smooth hair, shiny from oil. He spoke about women in an entirely different way from the other men who gathered in our room. He didn't mention a bottom, breasts, legs; he asserted details not many people paid attention to. "Well," he would say, nodding his head in a significant manner, "that woman was not a beauty but she had lovely arms, beautiful knees, and nice ankles." When he spoke of someone who was absent, he would mention the person's sexual status: "He is a handsome man successful with womeeeen," and he would significantly scratch the part in his hair with the nail of his small right finger.

Right from the first encounter with Doctor Tasic, you regarded him as a sexual maniac. Stories of his sexual achievements were generously mixed with facts which, he stated, were proven in science or could be supported by witnesses. When he was present, no one doubted his stories but the moment he left, he became the main topic of conversation for quite some time. He had a nickname Doctor Three-Penis, and he didn't object to it.

Desimir, the retired low-ranking officer who came to Sweden to earn money for a new Volkswagen, spent time in our room when he was off duty. He

worked two shifts, shared the room with seven other compatriots, smoked cigarette butts, and walked to work for about an hour every day so he did not have to pay for the tram fare. When talking, he used short, simple sentences like he was chopping wood. He had sharp facial features, deep wrinkles on his cheeks, penetrating grey eyes and a sharp cleft in the middle of his chin. He talked little about his soldier's life, but exhibited entrenched veneration toward habitual order and hierarchy. On the third night since my arrival at Nail's, when Doctor Tasic left after telling one of his highly creative stories, Desimir asked us: "Did you hear what he talked about?"

"I don't believe anything he says", Bane Deflish said, "that man knows only how to lie. Who saw all these women he had sex with?"

"It's not just the number of women," Desimir said, slowly taking a puff from a cigarette made of collected cigarette butts. "Listen to the lies he told me the other day... Allegedly, he travelled from Yugoslavia by car and in a day and half he whizzed through Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany up to "Shtockholm" (Desimir pronounced Stockholm the way Germans do). He stopped overnight only in Prague. And then, listen to this. He drank a litre of whiskey along the way, and didn't feel it, so he drove on to a hotel. At the front desk was a Check girl, beautiful as an angel. She said to him, Sir, would you like me to come to your room and fix your bed? Sure, said Doctor Three-Penis. She took him to the room, he jumped on her immediately, and they did it. He said, I screwed and screwed and screwed her three times in a row until I got bored. And then she said, Sir, I have a younger sister at home, Anuska, and she's even better than I. Should I bring her? Sure, said Three-Penis. She brought her, and there, he said, in front of the older sister I screwed Anuska too, three times repeatedly!"

Desimir took a deep puff and raised his right index finger in the air: "Now you tell me, where's the logic in that? How could she leave her job at the front desk to go and screw around with him?"

The good mood I was in when I came to that environment lasted about fifteen days. Then I got depressed. People around me made me feel as if I hadn't left home. Same faces, conversation about cigarettes and plum brandy, detailed descriptions of sexual encounters with Swedish and Finnish women, rough humour I had gotten sick of at home before I left for Stockholm. I made an effort to feel like I had changed inside but I couldn't because my plans to search for myself and not waste time on trivial matters, collided with the harsh reality. There were no Masters of the Grand White Lodge here, authorities of ritual magic which made the cosmos shake, and no attractive women with narrow waistlines and voluptuous breasts who initiate mature Followers into sexual alchemy on silk bedding.

I thought of my father, who would triumph if he knew where I was, Mladen's image came to mind and his expectation that I would endure throughout dry periods, memories of pleasant moments with Lidia, and the blurred contours of my mother sighing in her kitchen. Like a thief another thought sneaked in - that I now found myself in the same situation that I had run from, that the state I was in I created myself to avoid facing today something which will also be waiting for me tomorrow. People we escape emerge again from the shadows with altered features but with identical tendencies toward us and all over again, they press on our weaknesses like on bare wounds.

I couldn't return home without some valuable experience but such an experience wasn't happening. Instead of the deep occult experiences I had dreamt about in Belgrade, I was peeling potatoes and gaining weight. I didn't see what I could do to change that. I was only waiting. My wet snow didn't stop falling for months.

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Isolated in my world of potatoes, I was on a low level on the hierarchy of the hotel staff but I had some independence as well. I wasn't forced to fight with drunken Finns or to listen to the boasting of my compatriots who worked on a huge dishwashing machine and disposed of hotel trash. If you do your job well the boss leaves you alone. I could think, remember the past and daydream. After some time, I started bringing books and reading them after I had finished my job.

One day I decided to behave as a mature person. I would do this job for a year or two, save money, and then go back home. That decision relieved the tension I was feeling for quite some time. Normal life was what I needed, enough with craziness. With money in my pockets I wouldn't feel defeated and if I still wanted to do the things my heart desired, I would do them the way smart people did, by studying the literature.

I made french fries, put half a bag of potatoes on the steel table top I worked on, and covered it with a clean, dry rag used for floor washing. Leaning on the table, I sank into "*A Practical Course in Qabalistic Symbolism*" by Joseph Knight. It was right after breakfast, everyone was busy on their own jobs, and all conversations had ceased. I heard the sound of wooden clogs but I didn't turn around because cooks often passed behind me minding their work. Someone came quite close to my back and stopped there. Slowly I raised my eyes from the

book and looked back. It was the head cook, Haling. He was surveying the room: french fries soaking in cold water in the metal tub, potatoes which I had carved in a special way for the banquet in the formal ballroom, and the shiny surface of the surgical steel table. If you have never worked in a restaurant you would have never thought that he was a cook. I was surprised, when I was looking for a job and entered the kitchen of the “Foresta” hotel. He was sitting in his cabin by the telephone with a few coloured buttons like he was commanding a complicated aircraft. In a suit of grey lustre with a navy blue tie, freshly shaven and scented, he looked like an American manager. He stared at me with his small, bright blue eyes, shook my hand with a strong handshake, smiled warmly and said: “I am Haling, the head cook. Tell me what you want.”

He wasn't smiling now. He looked like he was appraising something in me. I slowly put my hand over the book. Haling squeezed his small eyes and then, bending his head slightly, tried to see the title of the book under my hand. Then, he smiled. “As long as you are doing your job properly I have no objections to you reading here in your spare time.” His eyes were now wide open and their blue colour gained a warmer hue. “How are we doing with celery and carrots? Do we need to order?” he asked.

“No, I think we have enough.” I stood stiffly with my hand on the book.

He shifted his weight from one leg to another and, with a drawl in his voice, asked: “May I have a look at that book? I think I know it.”

“I don't think so”, I said, searching for words that would not insult him, “that is something...sort of...those things interest only a small number of people.” I handed him the closed book so he could see the title.

“It seems that I fall in that small number category,” Haling smiled. “That is a good book. The second part about Tarot is slightly too conservatively written for my taste. Besides, Knight couldn't write anything bad. His real name is Basil Blackstone... I know him a little. He is a man of wide interests, which isn't that typical for an Englishman. He designs theatre sets, plays chess, violin. Fortunately he doesn't try to feed his family with any of those loves. He earns his livelihood doing what he knows the best – as a professional occultist. In a way we are colleagues, I live on stomach alchemy.

My tension disappeared. After so many years I had finally met a soul mate and in the hotel kitchen. Until now I only heard advice to come to my senses because I would go mad if I continued on with my deviations.

“Is this his only book?” I asked.

“As far as I know, it is. But he has published many articles in occult magazines.”

“How does he look?” That had bothered me a for long time. How does an adept person look, a man who devotes his life to the alternative and surreal, to the world of invisible phenomena whose repercussions uninstructed people ignore by existing on a physical plane as the only reality. “I am certain that he is an unusual person,” I added, trying to convey by my tone of voice all the seriousness that this question had for me.

“You’re wrong,” Haling said and then, leaning forward, he asked me in a somewhat lower voice: “How many years have you been involved in these matters?”

“About ten,” I replied, then continued quickly: “Actually I can’t say that I am involved...I read, I practiced pranayama for several years, concentration...I left off and then continued again...I didn’t achieve much although I don’t want you to think that I wasn’t doing it seriously. There isn’t anything in the world that interests me more that the occult, but I lack significant experiences. Obviously, they are happening to other people.”

“Differences are illusory. Everyone has the same experiences, sooner or later.”

“That is what yoga and vedanta teach but I believe in them less now. Why is it that Blackstone can write such a book and I can only read it?”

“Well, exactly because of the differences between you - which are illusory.”

“Then I would like to experience the other side of the illusion.” I said that without thinking, the words smoothly gliding out. I was surprised by them but Haling wasn’t.

“How do you imagine Blackstone?”

“It’s hard to say but I know how he doesn’t look.” I was happy that I had found a way to express my thoughts faithfully. That rarely happens in conversations. When I think alone, my thoughts are clear; they flow freely and logically lead from one to another. Faced with higher authorities, I get confused easily. Either I say what I wasn’t thinking, without knowing why I said it; or, most often, I keep silent about my deepest beliefs so that the other person doesn’t dispute them and get me into trouble. I think of strong arguments when the talk is over and then I feel angry about my late realization. “Yes”, I repeated firmly, “I

know how this man doesn't look. He doesn't have to have a white beard to his waistline, but you know... appearance tells a great deal."

"Well, you see, you're wrong there too. A person's appearance reflects his inner life only to a point, but the appearance of a known occultist never relates to our expectations. There is an instructive story by Somerset Mougham – *Cane Merchant* – I always remember it in similar conversations. I can't go over it now...it's time for coffee, people are going to the dining room..."

"Oh, please, tell me!" I wanted this conversation to last as long as possible. "Mougham is my favorite author. *Razor's Edge*' I have read several times. I haven't heard about that story. Please!"

Squeezing his eyes shut, Haling looked above my head: "Well, in short, he was travelling across Spain. He was a young author then and he wanted to visit a famous Spanish poet whom he admired. With difficulty he found the street where the poet lived, entered the courtyard, and asked the maid to announce him to her master. He sat on a bench in the yard remembering everything he knew about the poet. At that moment a tall, handsome, noble man with the head of a lion and a gracious facial expression appeared at the stairs. Mougham thought that he looked exactly how he had imagined the famous poet would look. But the man said to him: "Young gentleman, you have the wrong house. The distinguished poet and I have similar names. He lives in the house next to mine. By the way, I am a cane merchant."

I was surprised by Haling's last sentence. His eyes grew larger; as if he expected a reaction from me. I was on the threshold of some new cognition but I didn't know what. For a moment, I thought that he was trying to communicate something to me, that his words were hiding some veiled secret.

"Aha, aha..." Haling said slowing nodding his head while he was looking at me fixedly, "you're right. The poet certainly looked like some merchant." Exactly the same thought was shaping in my mind and Haling took the words out of my mouth.

"Now go to the dining room", he said. The focused expression on his face was gone. "Your coffee is getting cold."

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Toward the end of August, walking through Gamla Stan, the old part of Stockholm, I discovered the best bookstore in town, "Nordiska Bukhandeln". It was just a few rooms attached to one another filled with books. In the last in the line of similar rooms, wooden shelves were filled to the ceiling with psychological and occult literature. The manager of that section behaved with the intimacy similar to a restaurant manager who served good food. He approached me while I stood at the entrance hesitating where to begin to search through such treasure, and stretching his dry hand to me he introduced himself shortly: "I am Oke Wilkinson. It would be my pleasure if I could be of any help to you."

He was a man in his sixties, short but stout with long hair, which curled on his neck, and a goatee with an occasional grey hair. On the right lapel of his grey tweed coat he wore a symbol which I was unfamiliar with, a red and white circle separated by a vertical gold sword. He addressed me in Swedish but I could understand what he said. "I am sorry, I only speak English," I said. "Oh, is that so. Could I help you?" He looked like a goat who spoke English with an Oxford accent.

"Actually I am just looking...maybe I'll pick something." I wanted to look through that treasure without rushing or anyone watching over my shoulder.

"Books are for reading and beautiful women are for looking", he said, smiling pleasantly and directing his look at his assistant. She was a slim young woman with short black hair and grey eyes, who looked like an Italian. She smiled and addressing me she said: "Please, just go ahead. We really have valuable books. Everything of value in this field which gets published, we acquire after fifteen days." She spoke English clearly and sounded like a bell, like an English teacher when she addresses her students.

Next to the bookshelves there were a few armchairs of polished leather where people sat, read or looked through books. A young man with receding hair, and very thick lenses on his glasses was standing by the bookshelf. He turned and looked at me. Some of the books were my old acquaintances. I knew them from catalogues; some I had read a while ago and some which Mladen had given me I had in my small library in Belgrade. I found *'Tarot'* by Sadhu Mouni and I gazed through well known chapters. That Englishman whose real name I

didn't know now lived in Australia and practiced theurgy with a group in Melbourne. Out of all the occultists he had the strongest influence on me. No, I thought, actually it was the unknown writer whose book I had read a long time ago at Grandma's stable in Vilin Do. Which book was that? Which author? My God, how much time had passed since then and how many things had happened? Will I amidst the multitude of books find that book? My thoughts were interrupted by a soft, singing voice: "That is an excellent book about tarot, maybe the best from the classical works." The young man with the receding hair and glasses was standing right next to me. He held an open book in his hands but his gaze was nailed on mine. Behind the thick glasses, his eyes were barely noticeable, blue, watery and tiny.

"Yes, I know. I have read it. But there is a better one on tarot."

"I don't believe it. Which one would it be?"

"The book this one was translated from. You know, this book is not completely original. Sadhu Mouni took an old Russian book on tarot, translated it into English, changed a few things and published it as his original work."

"Really?" said the balding young man. He leaned even closer to me and his tiny eyes widened behind his glasses. "I was certain he only used the scripts of Petrograd's professor Mebes as a reference. Did you have that in mind?"

"I thought the same thing until one day I discovered the original. It was published in Shanghai by a group of occult émigrés, in Russian."

"Have you seen that book?"

"Of course, the way I am looking at this one now."

He blinked several times. "How interesting. Our group worked for couple of years by this book. We thought that it was, for the most part, original."

"Your group?"

"Yeah...Not even Oke Vilkinson knows that there is an original in Russian. And he is a great expert on occult literature, particularly old manuscripts and rare books." He turned around but Oke had disappeared. "Do you speak Russian?"

"I wouldn't bet on my Russian, but I can use it in literature."

"That's enough. May I ask where you are from?"

“From Yugoslavia. If it’s not a secret, what kind of group is it?”

His insecurity, brought on my assertion that Mouni’s book was not original, disappeared immediately and his voice sounded composed: “It’s not a secret. The time of secret societies is long gone. Every last Saturday of the month we have a meeting with lectures and discussions in the hall at Medborgar Placen. We advertise it in ‘Dagens Niheter’ ...and many people come. We haven’t been introduced...I am Bo Nielsen.”

I pressed his hand. It was small, cold and moist but his squeeze was surprisingly strong. With his glasses and receding hair line, narrow shoulders in an oversized checkered shirt, he looked like a book moth. His words caused me to tremble inside. I didn’t dare let him go. When I told him my name, he bent his head, sticking one ear out toward me as he was hard-of-hearing. “People call me Bogy for short.” I had already learned that it was useless to try to teach Scandinavians how to pronounce our names correctly.

“Oh, is that right,” he said. “I went through your country hitchhiking. It was interesting. I remember eating some huge breads...and beer was so cheap. What else do you read?”

“Anything I can lay my hands on without any particular order: Freud, Nietche, Bergson, Havelock Ellis, Suzuki, Vivekananda, Russian mystics, Blavatska. My family was horrified with some of those bookshop; they gave me well-intended advice to throw them away or to burn them, or else I would go mad. They could usually provide example of a distant relative who ended up in the mental institution.”

“So you don’t have a group of like-minded people?”

“No, I am a loner. Maybe there are people with similar interests but I haven’t met them. It’s easier for you, in Sweden, you meet similar people, talk...”

“You are wrong. The Path is always lonely, although here you can constantly rub shoulders with the occults.”

I thought of my father. “It is not the same if your relatives and friends are giving you their support or if they consider you a lost sheep and a dawdler.”

“Affiliation with a group doesn’t take away your difficulties. But it certainly makes the circumstances of everyday life more bearable. As a matter of fact, we have a lecture tomorrow – why don’t you come?” He took the information card from his checkered shirt pocket. It had a simply drawn map on

the back side to help people find the place and slipped into in my hand. “And now, unfortunately, I must be off... Tomorrow at seven.”

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The hall at Medborgar Placen where members of the Spiritual Association met was larger than I expected. It had about seventy seats of fake leather and half that number of people were talking in the hallway, standing in small groups. I looked for Bo Nielsen. “Young friend, welcome.” It was Oke Vilkinson. Smiling, he stretched out his hand. I took it without looking left or right, but looking askance I noticed that the group’s attention for a moment turned to me. “Bo told me over the phone that he invited you. Come, let me introduce you to the others.” He gently took me by the elbow and led me to the closest group. “This is our friend from Yugoslavia. Maybe we’ll see him more often.”

That comment to me sounded like the mysterious opening of a temple door. People looked at me pleasantly. A thin, middle-aged man dressed in a saffron-coloured robe of Indian saniyasin caught my attention. At first I thought he was a Hindu because his face was the colour of dark copper. He told me his name. A young man with long hair tied in a pony tail, wearing faded blue jeans and a jacket, shook my hand powerfully and with a strong American accent said: “Glad to meet you, I am Jim. How do you like Stockholm?”

I shook hands with two women and a slim young man with an intent expression on his face. One of the women, a very young Swede with sparkling teeth and a translucent complexion, nodded in a polite but cold salutation. The other woman, about forty, looked Spanish or Italian. Her hair and eyes were dark but her name was Scandinavian. “Astrid”, she said simply. “Doctor Astrid Monti”, added Otto Vilkinson, accenting her title. She held her hand in mine for a moment. “I was twice in Yugoslavia. I love the Adriatic...so much sun and Dubrovnik is a real jewel. It is the most beautiful city in the world after Florence.”

“Yeah,” said Jim protractedly, “a really beautiful city. I spent two days there.”

“You’re right”, I said, nodding, “but Stockholm is magnificent.”

Doctor Monti grimaced: “Stockholm is beautiful in summer but I wouldn’t wish anyone to live here during winter. It’s humid, dark, cold...People become

depressed, it's hard to communicate with them and they drink too much. How long are you staying?" While she talked, she looked at me intently. I regretted having worn an old shirt and jeans. Doctor Monti wore a simple, well-cut suit of dark brown silk. I wanted to tell her that I wished to stay as long as possible but Oke Wilkinson apologized for interrupting our conversation, grabbed my elbow, and took me away to introduce me to others.

The lecture was given in English and what surprised me was that English was the language mainly used in conversations. The lecturer was an older, tall Swede with a heavy, bulky body. He who wrinkled his hairy white eyebrows while talking about the astrological influence of transit occult planets - Uranus and Neptune over the natal Sun. He spoke simply without the usual vagueness so typical of the majority of astrologers. He used short sentences and supported every statement with examples from his archives.

My attention drifted from time to time because astrology didn't interest me very much. Many of my acquaintances, with the exception of Mladen, believed in astrology. For me, it was an uninteresting discipline, correct in its theoretical grounds but incorrect and inapplicable in practice. Mladen supported his position simply: "Out of fifty thousand professional astrologers in the USA none predicted the breakout of the Second World War." That information alone had more power than all astrological assertions. If everything was subordinated to stars, why would a man struggle to change anything?

The lecturer advised the audience to complete a six month astrological course at Stockholm's University as a basis for astrological practice. He admitted that even after 40 years of studying astrology he hadn't become a good predictor. "When an occurrence happens it becomes clear to me afterward what influences created it. I have had very little success making predictions, ahead of the occurrence. However, this shouldn't discourage us from studying this science. I'll give you some facts written by no one else but the great Onore de Balzac in his *Philosophical Studies* from 1836."

He paused for a moment to look at his listeners. Focus on him immediately grew. "Those studies actually exhibit a world view which is an amalgam of alchemical and astrological apprehensions, derived from the studies of two famous brothers: Lorenzo and Cosmo Rugieri. Pay attention to the following quotation by which Balzac is ending the second part of his text: 'Lorenzo and Cosmo had for a student a famous Count Saint Germaine who caused much perplexity during the time of Louis the XV. That famous alchemist wasn't less than 130 years old at the time. He enjoyed talking of the important part he played in Bartholomew's night and during the reign of the Valor dynasty. Count Saint Germaine was one of the last alchemists who correctly interpreted that science.

After him, it was only Fulcanelli. However, Saint Germaine didn't write anything. Qabalistic science from this study originates from that mysterious person."

The lecturer cleared his throat and took several sips of water. He nodded as if he was agreeing with Balzac and continued: "One of the most respectable persons of the sixteenth century was the personal doctor of Lorenzo Medici, father of Catherine Medici. That doctor was known as the Old Rugieri not to be confused with his two sons, Lorenzo Rugieri who, qabalistic writers called the Great, and Cosmo Rugieri, Catherine's astrologer. The Old Rugieri was so respected in the house of Medici that two dukes - Lorenzo and Cosmo - were godfathers to his sons, so they were named after them."

Only a man who takes a serious approach to astrology could collect this information. The lecture was becoming more interesting. Moving his grey eyebrows the lecturer continued: "*As a mathematician, astrologer and doctor of the house of Medici together with the famous mathematician Basileo, he made a horoscope for Catherine Medici... In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Old Rugieri was a leader of the secret university which produced such men as Cardin, Nostradamus and Agrippa, all of whom were physicians of the house of Valo. Catherine's horoscope predicted the main events in her life with such precision that those who negated occult sciences were devastated. Her horoscope predicted misfortunes which, during the siege of Florence, marked her birth, her marriage to a son of the French royal house, her husband's unexpected rise to the throne, the birth of her children and their number. It was predicted that three of her sons would be kings, her two daughters would be queens and they would all die without offspring. The horoscope came true with such accuracy, that some historians without adequate knowledge thought that it was written after the described events took place.*"

If that was true, I thought, such predictions were extraordinarily correct. Usually astrologers boast about their successes in the past, but if you ask them to predict the immediate future, events that could be checked after a short time, they hesitate, making limp excuses. At the same time, astrological notions of zodiac signs as psychological types of personality are not groundless. I became of this by carefully observing the appearance and attitude of people. Men and women born in a sign of Taurus mainly have fine facial features. Their noses are nicely cut and their ears are pretty and positioned close to the head. A sagittarius talks very fast; rarely will you meet a Sagittarius who slowly chooses his words. Scorpios have shiny eyes and during conversations, they look at people intently. A man born under Scorpio is usually aggressive, while a woman has a calm and relaxed exterior, while underneath she is bursting with emotions. The most surprising characteristics belong to women born under the a sign of Capricorn.

Cold gracefulness and elegance crown even those who come from the most modest backgrounds. By marriage, they often improve their social status.

After the lecture, Oke Wilkinson thanked the speaker and invited us: “Ladies and gentleman, let’s move to the cafeteria!” Conversation concentrated on occult subjects. My tension was gone and with it the certainty that I was among the selected individuals I had dreamed of for years. These were ordinary people, like everyone else, far from the exciting beings from my imagination. Mainly they were both, sensitive and conceited, with definite tendencies toward fancy talk. Their thoughts were incomplete; the speaker was usually forcing himself to evoke the impression that he was suppressing much of his knowledge. Several had strong foul breath which was perceived even from a distance. Many were chain smokers - the man in the sanyasin robe and I were the only non-smokers. He sat across from me, a little bit to the left. He was smiling calmly, radiating permissiveness, but it was obvious that he was straining to act like that. To only critical comments by the long-haired Jim, he reacted with apparent distress and his hands began to shake.

“That is nonsense”, Jim said, shaking his head so that his ponytail swayed left and right, “all those stories about India and sages somewhere far in the caves. No one has ever seen them – they don’t exist. Those are concoctions; some kind of occult fantasy. The best yoga and Zen today are practiced in the United States.”

“How can you say something like that?” sanyasin said. His eyes widened, nostrils trembled and his voice became irritated. “How do you know that?”

“I am saying so because I know. I have visited all the famous ashrams in India. I have been in Oroville, Rishikesh, everywhere. Believe me, I didn’t go there as a tourist. I studied with gurus. What did I see? Every one of them shelters himself behind the authority of some Teacher of his. Only three of them dare to say that they are Sad-gurus.

“May-be that’s how many there actually are”, sanyasin said, closing his eyes for a second.

“Man, the saddest truth of all is that not even those three are.”

“You are way too confident.”

“It is not a matter of confidence but of first-hand experience. They don’t fulfil the criteria for Sad-gurus which they established themselves. It’s clear, no mysticism in it. You can simply observe if they are doing what they are preaching.”

“To know if someone is a Sad-guru you have to be close to his level. No one who is on a lower plane could judge their status,” said sanyasin. “That is like an elementary school student evaluating work in higher mathematics.” He looked at the people at the table for a moment and then leaned back in his chair with his hands folded on his chest.

“Far from it”, said the young American. “Why would a sage judge if someone was his equal or not? That problem interests only us because we are actually looking for such a Teacher. We are those elementary school students. Anyone who doesn’t want to be misled could easily.... if you are next to that man for some time, you know who and what he is. I am not capable of laying a golden egg but I can very well distinguish it from a rotten egg. India today is a basket full of spiritual rotten eggs and that should be said clearly to everyone who rushes there. The average occultist in the West is not capable of understanding that in essence there is no difference between people. Toilet paper used by grand masters has the same colour stains as the one we use!”

“Those are harsh words for a young man who only recently stepped on his Path,” sanyasin said in a shaky voice. He swallowed his saliva and the corners of his lips trembled as if he was driving away a fly.

“Take it easy, Bengt”, said the Swede with bushy eyebrows who had given the lecture on astrology. “Jim is only expressing his opinion... using language perhaps not so common in our circle. But his reality doesn’t have to be yours, actually it never is.”

“Everyone has the right to an opinion. But the Follower needs to know that he can only judge another person’s consciousness level if he is immediately above his own. Christ’s closest followers doubted him at the crucial moment. Paul persecuted him, Judas betrayed and Peter renounced him.

Jim nodded. “The trouble is that those stories serve as a hiding screen to numerous usurpers. Deceit is always evil, but when it’s done on a spiritual search, well, it’s a crime! Why did I claim that the best yoga today is practiced in the States? Because the majority of teachers over there honestly admit what they are not. You see, they know only somewhat more than you do and yet they’re teaching you. That’s OK. But when someone claims to be the True Teacher or Avatar, he is deceiving you from the start. Listen, in India I met several people whose students claimed they were Avatars; they didn’t object to it. That opened the door for a procession of other mystifications. You know - Himalayas, stories about thirty years of meditation in a cave, their great Teacher from whom they received the secret knowledge. Unfortunately, he is already dead so no one can confirm his wisdom, the stories about miracles, and all of that... When such a

fake Avatar misleads people, they are truly deluded. They will need ten to fifteen years to recuperate.

“Young friend”, said sanyasin, now calm, “life is simple for you. You have no dilemmas. Everything worthless is in India and everything valuable in the West.”

“I never said something so stupid.”

“But that is concluded from what you’ve said.”

“No, it isn't. What I want to say is, that a man can't solve the problems which he faces by running off to the East. He drags his problems along like his own shadow. And the fake authorities will not help him.”

Emotionally, I agreed with him although I wasn't capable of expressing my feelings with such simple words. I hadn't gone to India, I had come to Sweden - I could have gone further to Pamir, Tibet, wherever - I still couldn't escape my shadow.

Oke Wilkinson took a sip from his glass. “I think you are talking about same things, Jim. As you said, everyone is trying to get rid of his own burden. Both of you are attracted, as Jung said, to the riddle of fate of human being, that tiny unit which is the base of the entire universe. If we read Christian doctrine properly, even God seeks His purpose in it. Many roads lead to that goal. Bengt goes to the East, Jim studies with the instructor in the States. So, let us wish good luck to both of you. Now it's time to drink something stronger. What do you think, where could we go?” He narrowed his eyes, looking at all the people present, keeping his gaze a little longer on Doctor Monti.

“Yes”, said Astrid Monti, “we could go to my place, although I don't have anything special...just some plain scotch.”

“Thank you, Astrid”, said Oke smiling. “A person can always count on you.”

They forgot all about me and that suited me. I decided to fall behind unnoticed at the exit. Astrid Monti interrupted my thoughts. Leaning over the table, she lightly touched me on the arm. “Come with us. There is a place in the car. I don't live far away.”

“Thank you, but I don't drink alcohol.”

“Really? Then you're missing a lot in life. I adore good scotch. I would walk to the other side of Stockholm for a glass of good old cognac.”

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I waited for that meeting for a long time. The man who Astrid called the Teacher lived in his temple in Enshede, Stockholm's suburb only a five minute walk from her house. It was a small wooden hut with a kitchen, where he prepared his food, and a larger room where he received his students. Two Siamese cats kept him company. Sometimes he came to Astrid's for tea. The week before I went to his hut twice and, hiding behind the trunk of a tall spruce tree, I tried to figure out what was going on in there. I didn't see much, especially if I take away what my imagination added.

The Teacher knew classical Buddhism well but his teachings were largely concentrated on the school of Light Zen. In his work with people, he used koans such as: "Where is the darkness in light?" and "Why does a poor man hide his treasure?" Astrid warned me that he was unconventional in his relationships, perhaps too spontaneous: "Don't be surprised because he loudly snorts, burps and doesn't cover his mouth when he yawns."

His attitude towards Followers reminded me of Krishnamurti's: He is not a Teacher and doesn't have students because each person is a Teacher to himself and a man gains knowledge only by submerging in himself. Similarly to Krishnamurti, students gathered around him. Beginners expected to be exposed to strenuous meditations, but his work was reduced to occasional conversations, work on koans and techniques designed to direct students into taking responsibility for their actions and for all their experiences. I was fine with that. I wasn't willing to undergo the harsh discipline of an apprentice; all I wanted was to observe the Master in his everyday life. This was such an opportunity.

Astrid Monti's living room was at the same time a place for conversation, tea parlor, and a library filled with selected works on oriental philosophy, tantra and Western occultism. The floor was covered with several rugs in dark colours and the bookshelf, aside from books, contained large wooden statues from Bali. On the walls without books hung a few mirrors in brass frames and under them, leaned against the wall, were Arabic swords with wide shiny blades.

On Tuesday nights, a wide circle of people gathered at her house. There were members of the Vedanta society, students of different Teachers of Yoga, some of whom had recently returned from India, theosophists and

antrophosophists who gave each other secret defamatory looks other, qabbalists with long beards, and people who considered themselves magicians. There were persons you didn't expect to meet at such a place. One of those was Joran Gustafson, a professor at Stockholm's University, who claimed that modern physics was completely identical to Advaita Vedanta. He was truly passionate about quantum physics and talked excitedly about waves and particles as if he was talking about lustful woman in stead of science.

Some of the guests carried sharp-pointed crystal pendants, telling everyone that their subconscious spirit was communicating with them through those instruments. I saw people whose point of view toward the elementary questions of life was narrowed down to the correct nutrition: vegetarians, fruitarians who consumed only fruit, and people who ate only raw food and made squeamish faces when cooking was mentioned. Young women came dressed in saris, wearing malas around their necks, with little photographs of their Teachers made into pendants. You couldn't find out their real names; they introduced themselves as Sister Satya, Sister Parvatti, Sister Purvananda, Sister Mayananda, and many other Anandas.

Discussions evolved around different topics but of the illusory variety two issues were dominant for the majority of the New Age groups. The first was sex. Could a person become self-realized, enlightened, and finally liberated without giving up sexual contacts? The second, which was perceived only through indistinct hints, was whether some people had knowledge which was inaccessible to others.

The evenings when Astrid invited only selected people were more pleasant. Then, I had a premonition that it might possible to meet the unpredictable Non-Teacher and spend some time in his presence. When Astrid called me on the phone, by the tone of her voice I felt that such a rare event was about to happen. "Bogi" she said, "could you come? It will be a small gathering". I had the impression that she was smiling on the other side of the telephone line.

"Roshi is coming?"

My feeling was right. "A-aa!" she confirmed in a manner characteristic of Swedes when they produce a sound by inhaling the air asthmatically.

There were more people in her living room than would be expected for a selected company. To the right of the Teacher, comfortably seated in an armchair, was Jim, still wearing his faded jeans. Opposite him sat Astrid, who had opened the door for me. Next to her, with clumsily folded legs, was Joran Gustafson wearing a martyr's expression on his face. I recognized a plump

woman in a sari who introduced herself as Tara Devi, and Bengt, who hadn't changed his sanyasin's saffron robe. Behind them were Bo Nielsen and a man with long hair and a beard who I hadn't met before.

I greeted the Teacher quietly and lowered myself onto a thin cushion next to Astrid. My gaze was fixed on Roshi. He continued to talk to Joran Gustafson without paying attention to my arrival. His looks didn't surprise me: a short, fit man in his sixties, with the soft movements characteristic of people who practice Tai Chi for years. His complexion was yellowish, his eyes small and calm. His freshly shaven head reminded me of an egg shell. He had a pleasant though high-pitched voice, so that without looking who was talking, you would have thought it was coming from a boy's throat. Jim spoke to him quietly, but I didn't understand his words because of his American accent, and the Teacher laughed conspicuously. It was a spontaneous giggle, resembling the laughter of a drunken peasant when he finally got a joke, too spontaneous for a spiritual Teacher. I remembered Astrid's warning about his informal attitude.

Jim and I were drinking strong black coffee with cream while everyone else was having aromatic jasmine tea. Kneeling on the floor, Roshi noisily sipped his tea. He would take a sip, keep it for some time in his mouth as if evaluating the taste, and then swallow it. He spoke English with a strong accent.

Joran said to him: "Teacher, you sneer when psychological powers are mentioned, yet you sometimes read thoughts. I am convinced of that."

Roshi raised his eyes from his cup, looking at us. "A long-time teacher of Zen wrote a nice verse about it:

*"Magical powers and supernatural:
Drawing water from a well
And chopping wood."*

We kept silent for some time. I had read those words many times before. It was strange how this time they had a powerful impact. As if he was reading my thoughts, he looked at me and softly smiled at something only he could see.

"The Light Zen is so simple and yet so difficult to express with words", Astrid said. "It seems impossible to simply describe it"

Roshi gargled another sip of tea in his mouth, swallowed it and looked through the window: "In essence, it is a practical philosophy, the real meaning of what Buddha himself preached. That is, is a philosophy of the transcendence of the mind, by which we reach Tatagata or the body of truth".

I bet not one of the people present understood the meaning of his last sentence. A man with long hair who was sitting behind me said: “I am sorry if my question appears to be out of context. Where are centers of Light Zen located in the West”? And then hastily he added: “I am sorry, I didn’t introduce myself. Alan...Alan Rice.”

Roshi shook his head nervously: “I am often asked that. The only answer is that there are no such centers, because the Light Zen is decentralized philosophy. There is no person who could be Roshi or Guru. That aspect of the Light Zen gives its philosophy the freedom to flow in many directions, allowing people to accept it within their individual level of understanding.”

“I understand”, said Joran, “but could we at least know the basis of that teaching?”

“If you must call it by that name, the basis is the authentic light power of a mind which can be described as a light of reason. The other name for it is Buddha, who is the creator of light.”

“I read that the essence of the mind is light, but I am afraid I have never heard that Buddha is a creator of light.” Alan’s voice had an analytical tone common to a professor of mathematics. “Is that mentioned in the Buddhist canon?”

“Yes”, Roshi answered, “in the earliest of texts Buddha was sometimes mentioned as a bearer of light, almost like Lucifer in the West. One text mentions him as a newborn sun which has corona around it. It is also said that Buddha could illuminate the world. If you take away those poetic expressions, what remains? Self-induced power, which precedes all things.”

“I understand what you’re trying to say. But I wanted to ask, what is the historical basis of your teaching?”

“From manuscripts found in Tun-Huang, the principle that Zen transfers light is clear. Every Roshi is a source of knowledge for himself, there are no successions from Buddha to patriarchs – which is a simple mystification made up by contemporary amateurs.”

While Roshi was slowly talking, Bo Nielsen was wiggling on his cushion which produced the sound of crushing silk and then, he spoke: “But Teacher, if you allow me, all Zen authorities trace their succession all the way back to Buddha. That is why they are considered authorities. That is stated in a sacred text ‘*Transfer of Lamp*’”.

Roshi waved his head. “That is a fable, created by Zen practitioners from the time of the Sung dynasty. They collected parts of older texts and wrote a new one, suitable for their theories. In 'Avatamsaka Sutra' it clearly says that Kashyapa and other authorities were capable of transferring a canon but not all of Buddha's teaching, which is based on the principle of light.”

“Could you at least describe to us the light principle in general?” Alan's voice sounded as if he wasn't expecting a precise answer. He was right.

“It is the uncatchable thing, like a slippery fish in a hand”, said Roshi. “If I describe it by saying that all created things come from the light principle, while it remains uncreated and unmovable, what could those words explain? It is like looking at a faraway mountain immersed in fog. You yourself must go on a road toward it.”

“What you just said is a principle of Tao”, said Bo Nielsen. Roshi blinked several times but said nothing. Alan Rice broke the silence: “Isn't it because of our need to think too much and express ourselves through thoughts? That is the way we were created.”

“Mmmmmmm”, Roshi mumbled so it wasn't clear if he was agreeing or searching for the right words to say. “There isn't much to say about that. Every man has contact with the light principle. Everyone can gain higher consciousness from it. It is given to us by nature. Yet because of our tendency to hold on to the visual world instead of the essential one, we lost our ability to communicate with it although it is the essence of our being. When Buddha attained complete enlightenment, he stepped into what could be called the primordial light. Of course it is free from phenomena.”

“But Roshi, if you please,” said Joran Gustafson, “how can we understand all that in everyday life?”

“When you completely merge into the light principle, and because light completely un-conditions the unhealthy state of a being, you will experience more complete bliss. Even when you are in pain, this light will take you to a Buddha state.”

“I am glad to hear that, Roshi,” said Jim. “It means that it isn't only intellectual gymnastics. Something's happening in a being which helps him in everyday life.”

“Why aren't we aware of the light which is within us?” This question ruptured out of me as if I had suddenly spit.

Roshi threw a quick glance at me as if judging whether I was worthy of a response. “Because we are glued to our visual aspect of life. When man sinks into the world of appearance, he turns his gaze away from the truthful source. He merges with a world of birth and death and he suffers to the extent that he is connected to that world. Buddha talked about that situation, saying that it resembles a king who spends far too much time with his counsellors, forgetting that he is a king. We must untie ourselves from the world of phenomena... Yet, that is a long and strenuous road.”

“It is hard to define any kind of Zen”, Bo Nielsen said, “Could you at least tell us how the school of Light Zen is different from other schools of Zen? There are so many opinions.”

“Yes,” said Roshi. “Opinions are like asses; everyone has one.”

Astrid stirred, turning halfway backward, hastily saying: “Roshi dislikes arguments about categories of Zen. He has his Path and he doesn’t like to repeat what he has already said many times about contemporary schools, which were created as Light Zen, although the new Teachers didn’t mention it...Would you like to clarify karma for us? After so many years many of us are confused ...karma, destiny, free will...it’s all confusing.”

Roshi cheered up: “Karma, expressed in different words, means that everything in the universe and human mind is connected with everything else in a lawful way in the present, past and future. Limited understanding of karma comes from looking from the past at the future; however everything is connected on many levels. If you comprehend karma schematically, it will seem to you that one thing originates from the other as a line of causes and consequences, while actually there is no linear connection. When man becomes enlightened everything that remains is old karma which oozes from his former burden.”

He looked at us as if wondering if we had understood what he said and then continued: "When you take action with a specific intention, it is like throwing a stone into a puddle. The stone will create waves – that is action. After enlightenment you don’t identify yourself with motives, which were part of the ego; there is only a clear consciousness and in that state you don’t create karma. When karma is exhausted, you cease to exist. That is what the being becomes at the end of the road. You exhausted your karma and it is no more, nor is there one who created and emptied it. In other words, during the occurrence when everything influences everything else, you simply ceased to exist as a separate being. You are still ALL because you were ALL.” He laughed loudly like a person who had told a good joke.

“That is in total accordance with quantum mechanics”, Joran said with satisfaction. Then Jim spoke, not paying any attention to Joran's words: “Thank you Roshi for such a concise presentation on a subject which thick books were written about, but many people use the notion of personal karma like an excuse for non-performance, in other words - I have my karma and this homeless person who is asking me for ten cents has his. Who am I to intervene and change his karma by giving him the coin?”

Roshi quickly shook his head in disagreement: “His karma is that you have SUCH karma. His karma is that you don't intervene. He remains hungry, so that is HIS karma. Everyone's karma is connected to everyone else's. Do you understand? The fact that you've met a homeless person is part of your karma and will affect you until you exhaust its influence. You, with all your ignorance, are my karma and I am yours at this moment. Buddha proved that karma is demonstrated through desires. If you are not tied to your desires, there is no karma. When you are free from desires, you have no desire to give a coin to a homeless person and have no desire not to give it to him, but you can do it with complete freedom, because you are untied.”

“It seems there is no place for free will”, Tara Devi spoke for the first time.

“The greater your attachment to the visual world and its web of desires, the less free will you have. I could say that, I am going to a restaurant tonight and it seems to be an expression of my free will. But if you know my background, the behaviour of my parents and ancestors, all that influenced me, you can foresee that I'll remain in my current position on the pillow. When I exhaust these influences and begin to liberate myself, predictions are less accurate and freedom is greater. When you are not somebody or something, but you are nobody and nothing, then you have free will. Do you understand, you have free will when there is no one who would have it.”

Bengt, who until then was silent like he was agreeing with Roshi in everything, said: “I don't understand. All my life I have wanted freedom of will. If I don't gravitate to free will, then who does?”

“It depends on the one you experience as I. If you feel that you are someone who thinks, I want freedom of will, then you certainly don't have it. You ARE freedom of will but you don't HAVE free will.” He looked toward the window and said: “It's late. It's getting dark.”

“I'll turn on the lights”, said Astrid getting up from the armchair.

“No need to. I have to go. Jim, would you walk me? You have an umbrella and it seems that it has started to rain.”

“It’ll be my honour”, Jim said slowly. His voice was deeper than usual. His desire to argue, to persuade and to confront was gone. We got up; the conversation was over. Roshi and Jim walked out first. Jim opened his umbrella, took Roshi under his arm and led him into the dark. He was a whole head taller; it looked as if he was protecting a small-framed girl from the rain. At the massive wooden door I stopped laterally, waiting to get out last. It was dumping outside; it has gotten colder and darker.

“Bogi”, Astrid said, standing at the threshold. I turned back, buttoning up my hooded raincoat. She had a few raindrops on her forehead. She squeezed her eyes to protect them from the rain. “You’ll get wet. Why don’t you stay for dinner?” She smiled in the half-darkness. Blood rushed to my cheeks. I felt hollowness in my plexus as if I’d suddenly been hit. With stiff legs I stepped backwards. Moving forward, she took my hand and led me across the threshold. I turned and looked at the group disappearing into the damp darkness. Astrid closed the door behind us.

The living room looked more spacious now and it was warm. She said: “I’ll make us some dinner.”

“You don’t have to trouble yourself.”

“Why? You’re not hungry? Suddenly I am starved. I had completely forgotten about food while the Teacher was here.” She opened the kitchen door. It glided on small wheels and opened by an indentation in the wall. “There isn’t much. I’ll make us some chicken sandwiches. Don’t stand there, make yourself comfortable. Take off your raincoat, for God’s sake.” She opened the kitchen cabinets. “I have a bottle of white wine. Like it?”

She brought a white tablecloth from the kitchen and spread it over the round table. She placed plates, utensils, a candlestick with three candles, and a vase with carnations. I watched her skillfully setting things on the table. She smiled and said: “It’s done. Come to the table.”

She put a sandwich on a plate, some shrimp and few leaves of green lettuce. We ate for some time in silence. She raised her eyebrows: “Tasty?”

Swedes eat the worst food in Europe, and their sandwiches are no exception. Instead of bread they eat thin slices made of oats, dry and tasteless like paper. You can’t properly hold them in your hands because they usually crumble.

“Great”, I said. “I haven't eaten something this tasty in a long time. I want to thank you for inviting me. For me this is a precious experience. I dreamed of finding myself in the presence of a spiritual person.” She smiled. She ate slowly with accented nobility, as if she wasn't chewing but touching the strings of an invisible instrument with her teeth. She washed down each bite with the wine. She was looking at me, tilting her head to one side. “If I only knew ...I would have gotten some good cognac.”

“It doesn't matter,” I said, “I cannot drink it. I am surprised that people who are on the Path drink alcohol, smoke...” I hesitated. I didn't want to spoil her good mood.

“It's time for you to get to like some things.”

There was promise in her voice. It seemed to be infused with memories of former lovers, significant looks, poetry, touches of hand and skin, sufferings of break-ups. Now she looked extraordinarily attractive. How old was she? Thirty-eight, forty maybe forty five? With the approach of night she looked even more attractive in her warm home filled with occult books, dark furniture and carpets which muffled steps. The faint scent of her perfume lingered in the room, mixed with the smoke of incense.

“You know what,” she said, “let's listen to some music after dinner. I love Tchaikovsky, how about you?”

I nodded. Hopefully, she won't ask me questions about classical music. I was tense but my self-confidence was rising, the wine was beginning to work. I took a few sips from a glass. What do I want? The woman had asked me to stay for dinner. We are all alone in the house - she took my hand...everything leads to the conclusion that she had invited me to spend a night with her. Yet, I felt restricted and acted stiff and tense, and the condescending smile appeared often on my face. There was a slight suspicion that she was testing me and that perhaps every attempt at physical closeness would be received with criticism about my immaturity toward the Order. Astrid solved my hesitations simply. She moved the round table closer to a wide sofa, placed glasses with wine on it, and brought a box of chocolate candies. “I'll be a minute,” she said “just to take a shower”.

I sat at the sofa's edge. A very fine lady. Before going to bed with a man she always takes a shower, although she probably has had several already. Should I simply take off my clothes and stretch out on a sofa? There was no sheet or a blanket on it. I simply sat there waiting. She showed up wearing a white bathrobe and carrying a sheet and two blankets. “You make love in your clothes?” With a quick shoulder movement, she got rid of her bathrobe and laid

completely naked on the sofa without covering herself. She moved the blankets quickly down to her feet. While undressing, I glanced at her. She was slim and well-preserved. Her breasts were small and a little droopy. Her legs were nicely shaped with somewhat large feet. Leaning over the table she poured some wine. "Love is a tender plant and needs to be watered. The best way is to use good liquor".

"Is that proper stuff for members of Odin's Order?"

"Certainly. It is a real necessity for everyone who loves life as I do. As a matter of fact that is the only thing I am certain of. You are like that. You shouldn't suppress it. Just relax and be yourself, be part of life. Half of hermetic training is based on opening the suppressed parts of the personality."

She put her head on my shoulder and moved her hand gently over my chest and stomach. My breathing became shallow and rapid. She laughed and said: "A young man is the most perfect instrument in the universe. Wherever you touch it - it plays."

-10-

Astrid lit a cigarette. "It was nice, wasn't it? All those words you told me, I love it."

After my vulgar outbursts and obscenities that I wasn't able to control, I expected rebuke, cold disdain and the hurt response of a well-behaved lady but instead I got words of praise. I told her she was a whore with a slippery hole instead of a brain; a hooker, cheap soldier's bitch who gives herself for a bottle of beer. I threatened to rent her by the hour to harbour workers, to take all her screw money and to beat her if she didn't make enough of it. I shouted that sperm would start coming out her ears. She loved it without a doubt. I remembered Mladen's comment on women: "You have to treat ladies like whores and whores like ladies. That is the only wisdom." He was right as far as this Swede was concerned.

"Slavs are the best lovers," Astrid said blowing smoke. "They are dedicated and sensitive. Americans are short-distance runners, Germans have no imagination, and Swedes are good for nothing."

"I see you have international experience."

“No wonder. I have travelled a lot and Stockholm is full of foreigners.”

We were quiet for some time. She followed the vein on my forehead with her finger, touched my lips and tousled my hair with her fingers. “Life is wonderful sometimes. My formula for happiness is simple: I am free to do what I want and I love to have a sensitive man around the house. Houses without men smell of mould. I have a friend three years younger than me. She has been living alone for two years since her divorce. She said that a man in the house bothers her. Good Lord, I am good for nothing when I am alone!” Deep puffs from her cigarette lighted her face. “My husband was Italian. He taught me how to really enjoy love, to eat and drink while making love – food tastes differently then. At first I was shy, and now”....she laughed.

“You shouldn’t have gotten a divorce.”

“Everything comes to an end. Women were objects for him, trophies of some sort - he was full of himself. While I loved him it didn’t bother me. That’s life...nothing lasts forever. Freedom is a precious thing. In a relationship every attempt to restrict the freedom of the other person is a great evil. Have you read “*A Book of Law*” by Aleister Crowley?” I shook my head. “Epochal work...He was the first man who saw both the human and divine in a woman.”

“It sounds great but I don’t believe in it. It is impossible to have a clear heart and yet give the freedom we want for ourselves to another person. I met many people who claimed to be orthodox telemites saying that everyone has the right to make love with whomever, however they want, that sort of thing...And when his wife goes to bed with another man, then what? Their reaction is: I don’t want to play this game any more, give me back what’s mine...”

She looked at me from an angle, not lifting her head from the pillow. “Yes, that is my problem too. When I fall in love I become possessive, I want the whole man for myself. If that doesn’t work I don’t say anything, I don’t nag but I become nervous and itchy. Fortunately I don’t fall in love every day. Are you sleepy?”

“No, just the thought of rising early in the morning spoils the fun. Same job every day, same faces, peeling potatoes...everything is the same.”

She nodded with understanding. “I can try to get you a better job. Besides, you don’t have to work for some time.”

“What do you mean?”

“Stay here. Marrien is studying in Erebro and she’s staying there until summer. She’ll be back home for Christmas just for a couple of days. You wouldn’t mind that. She has her own life and doesn’t interfere in mine.” Marrien was her daughter that she rarely mentioned.

“No, I couldn’t accept that”, I said but my voice didn’t sound too convincing.

“Why not? Is it hard for you to accept the support of a middle-aged woman?”

“That’s not it. Many men would gladly support you. I left my home primarily because I wanted to be independent.”

She played with my hair and scratched the back of my head with her nails carefully and tenderly. I closed my eyes in pleasure. She stroked my thigh with her other hand taking me by the balls and squeezing them gently. She pulled my head close to hers so that her lips were touching my ear and whispered: “Will you stay, you naughty boy?”

I could hear the deep sound of my heart beating. I placed my knee over her thigh and spreading her legs I mounted her in a single movement, without the support of my elbows. She began to breathe heavily. “You are insatiable,” she said, but her words were an invitation and acceptance. I could do anything I wanted with her and that thought filled me with warmth. She asked” “Do you love me?”

“Who wouldn’t love such a whore? Go to work bitch, satisfy your customer!”

“That’s right”, she said and threw back her head, eyes closed, “that’s right, talk dirty to me. Break me! Destroy me!”

-11-

The phone woke me up. I looked at the big clock on the wall, it was nine. I let it ring. I wondered what I should do if someone said something in Swedish. Finally I picked up the receiver. “Hey Bogi. Did I wake you up?”

“No way. I was lying in bed thinking of you.”

“Great, I love small lies. Did you have breakfast?”

“Not yet. I’ll eat in the city.”

“You didn’t see it... I made you some breakfast. I want my beautiful boy to eat and rest. If you get bored, I put a movie ticket in a pocket of your jeans.” She laughed loudly. “I’ll hurry home. I love you so much.”

I hung up. Under the window on a table I saw a wooden tray with my breakfast. Orange juice, two boiled eggs, butter and toast. She didn’t tell me which theatre the ticket was for. I stretched my hand but couldn’t reach my pants. I got up, took a bite of toast and washed it down with orange juice. It was getting lighter outside and the grey light slowly filled the room. I thrust my hand in a pocket of my jeans. It was empty. My fingers felt thick folded paper in the other one. I took it out. Two, one hundred crowns bills folded in four. Unused, still smelling of the sweet odour of newly printed money. That was my movie ticket. Two hundred crowns, my weekly pay at the “Foresta”. I felt warmth in my stomach like I had drunk hot tea.

Stretching so hard that my joints cracked, I sat on the edge of the sofa and began to eat. I ate slowly, sipping orange juice. It was of the colour of a duck’s beak and had a faint sourness. I was thinking if I should go to the city. I could probably go to Heteriet in the center of Stockholm - there was a movie theater which had matinee shows. Or may-be I could visit some bookstores? Should I go to “Foresta” and tell Haling I had found another job? What would he say? I could actually choose what to do. I smiled, hit the open palm of my left hand with the right fist, and went back to bed. The blankets smelled of her perfume. I turned sideways, moved a blanket over my head and curled up. I was tranquil in a warm nest. I felt sleepy again, full and content. Sinking into sleep, I wished to live off women forever.

-12-

Ten minutes was keeping me from my moment of fate. Standing in dirty snow by the road in front of Sven Ackerman’s house, I waited. A spacious garden in front of the house was filled with pine and birch trees. Attached to two tall columns, torches were burning at the entrance and an orange light cheerfully danced on the surface of the smooth snow. All night long I had felt anxiousness mixed with awe which was now growing into tension and fear. I couldn’t wait for those ten minutes to pass for the most significant event of my life to happen.

My heart was beating like a powerful drum and vibrations spread to my hands, head and neck arteries. My right hand was buried inside a pocket of the American military coat I wore. In it I was squeezing the talisman Mladen had given me on my departure. Was this the right moment to take it out? All who would witness my initiation had gone through the same experience so it wasn't meant for super humans only. I was feverish, my mouth, dry and my feet couldn't remain calm for a single moment. Have I ever been in such a tense situation – was it a feeling like before a fight? I took the folded and stamped paper from my pocket, and bending it several times, I broke the seal. The thick, smooth outer paper contained a smaller piece with three written words. I turned to a flickering torch for some light and looked at words for some time incapable of comprehending them. “Just relax yourself” was written in Mladen's handwriting. Disappointment overwhelmed me. I expected help, some strange energy to unfold from the paper to protect me and give me strength. Instead I had three useless words. I forced myself to relax from the top of my head to my feet and felt that the tension was diminishing.

At exactly eight o'clock I knocked on the door with an old fashioned bronze knocker. “Hey Bogy!” A beaming Sven Ackerman was standing at the door. “Welcome Bogy, we have been waiting for you.”

“Thank you, Sven,” I walked into the house as if stepping into new life. The air in the house was calm and pleasantly warm with the faint scent of burning candles and frankincense. Oke Wilkinson, Haling and Astrid were seated in a spacious hallway. They nodded at the same time and Astrid smiled at me. I took off my hooded olive-green military coat. Sven took it and put it in a closet under the stairs which led to the rooms upstairs. “Come with me to change”, he said.

Through a narrow corridor with walls lined in dark brown wood he showed me into a small room filled with stale air. “Here we are”, he said, addressing a middle aged man with a face full of acne scars. He was standing next to a round table on which brocade and sateen ritual clothes had been placed. The table was the only piece of furniture in the room. I saw robes of vivid colours on hangers in a half-opened closet. “This is Bogy. Did you make a selection?”

“Aaa-aaaa!” he confirmed, inhaling. “I think this will fit.”

With a formal gesture he lifted a long sateen hooded robe from the table like waking a sleeping princess. The robe smelled of frankincense. Sven Ackerman leaned over and in a secretive tone asked me: “When did you take a shower?”

“Before I came here.”

“That’s sufficient. Now undress.”

They looked at me with surprise when I took off both my shirt and vest at the same time. With my shoes and corduroy pants off I remained in undershirt and shorts. I hesitated for a second.

“Undress completely”, Sven Ackerman said. “You mustn’t have any ordinary clothes on.”

Feeling uncomfortable, I undressed. I stood naked and barefoot in the middle of a room with two Swedes. It was getting colder and I had goose bumps on my back and legs. It didn’t last long. Like skilful maids they dressed me: long white shirt made of fine batiste and over it a heavy ritual robe of black sateen which came to my ankles. The Emblem of the Order was embroidered over the left side of the robe: red-white circle separated with Odin’s gold sword pointed upward. Ackerman tied a white silk rope three times around my waist and tied it in a knot. “Can you breathe?” I nodded. “Let’s go then.”

The middle of the dining room was set like a temple entrance – the walls were covered with large tarot cards in bright colours. Oke Wilkinson was there, with his protruding goatee. He wore a dark, lavender robe with a white sleeveless coat which had an embroidered golden cross and a red rose in the middle. A wide white ribbon with rhomboid shapes and golden crosses hung around his neck all the way to the floor. He had a golden sceptre decorated with astrological symbols of planets in his right hand. “Stand next to me”, said Oke. I approached him from the right side, the way Astrid had taught me. He smiled: “You look like you were born in that robe. It is obvious that you were a ritual magus in former lives. Where is the band for the eyes, Sven?”

Sven Ackerman came from behind and tied a thick black velvet band over my eyes. He tied it so tightly that white spots appeared in my field of vision.

“Do you know when you speak as a Candidate and when Ego and True I speak?” asked Haling in a deep voice.

“I do”, I said, with my throat tight.

“Then let’s go.”

Haling took me by the hand walking just a step ahead of me. I dragged my feet over the parquet floor, walking carefully so I wouldn't step on my robe. Then we stopped and Haling knocked three times on the door with the sceptre. My

hand holding his began to sweat. Barely making a sound, the door opened and warm air saturated with the fragrance of burning candles, frankincense and incense sticks filled our nostrils. Gently dragging me, Haling walked me into the room and then freed my hand. A few drops of holy water were sprinkled over my face. Someone carrying a censer swayed it left and right and the metal sound of chains was heard.

“Who is it?” It was Haling’s deep and resounding voice. Tranquillity filled me when I realized he had the role of True I in the ritual.

“Human Being searching for the secret and purpose of life.” I wanted to say those words in a strong voice but they came out muffled as if coming from under a pillow. “My soul is wandering in the darkness searching for the light of hidden knowledge. With my whole heart and soul I believe that I will find Light and Truth in the Holy Order of Odin!”

Oke Wilkinson took my left hand and led me two steps forward. My legs felt stiff when I walked. Pressing down with his hand he directed me to kneel. I was in front of the temple.

Oke Wilkinson in the role of my ego whispered: “Get all the knowledge you can find. This is the way to become the strongest!”

Haling said: “Listen to me! You have begun to play the only worthy game of this world: the game of hide and seek with Truth. What you are looking for is too obvious to be hidden, discovered or lost. What you are searching for can neither be taken, seen, nor understood... But one can become it!”

“How?” The question contained my uncertainties and pleadings. “I implore you someone tell me: how, when and where do you find it?”

My Ego spoke through the firm and suggestive voice of Oke Wilkinson: “Be brave! Many have died on that road. Ascend yourself to the heights which no one has ever attained and you will be praised to eternity.”

I put special effort in the following words, like reciting a poem: “Oh, dear and ultimate shelter! Oh, home fenced with tall wall! Let me in; let me through the jaws of the dragon, through scorpion tongs, through a ball of poisonous snakes. If I have to, I’ll die to be truly reborn.”

With a hint of puzzle in his voice, Haling said as True I: “A hundred fishes started to search for the fish called Hundredfish.”

I answered with a question: “Will someone wake me up from this poisonous dream?”

“Three snakes crawled the world searching for the serpent called Threeserpents,” Haling continued.

“My whole life is a necklace of fake pearls,” I said, and that wasn’t only because of the ritual – it was the truth about me.

Oke Vilkinson, my ritual Ego, was urging me: “Find a jewel no one has ever found! Knock long and persistently and the door will open!” He knocked three times and the sound echoed in the temple like in an empty grave.

“Who are you?” Haling asked with the voice of True I.

“I am Myself!” I replied readily. “I’ll conquer death and deserve eternal life!”

“He who wants to conquer death must first conquer me”, my Ego said.

“How long will you think that I am not you?” asked Haling, with a note of desperation, and then with a prophetic declaration he said: “Because a soul is enlightened by the soul and everything else is darkness!”

I replied with firmness in my voice: “I swear I will find my True I!”

Physically I felt relaxed but spiritually I was as sharp as a razor and for a split second I thought that Mladen’s words had begun to influence me in a vague but perceptible way.

I knew the text spoken by Ego and True I was an introduction to my part but I hadn’t thought much about it before. I felt those words were an eloquent mix but then Haling said something which surprised me: “What you have been broken off, remained whole.” I stopped. What he said in the role of my True I had a meaning which I wasn’t able to grasp at that moment. I felt like I was suddenly diving into deep water. I said: “I am in darkness. Let someone light up my way and I’ll do everything possible to reach the end.”

“Who are you?” Haling’s voice sounded like a temptation of fate.

Oke Vilkinson quickly whispered: “You are the best, the strongest, the biggest.”

“I am You!”, came from me. I imitated Haling’s voice.

“At last, you have recognized yourself!” Haling’s voice contained power and joy which was turning into the bliss of solution. He continued in the same voice: “Let’s praise this moment! What else do you want?”

“To serve the Truth as a Follower.”

“Do you have the necessary virtues?”

“Yes, Soul of my Soul,” I said, making ritual gestures for the four mystical virtues: clenched fist – to want, open hand over heart – to dare, right index finger on a temple – to know, and then the finger over closed mouth – for silence.

“You, who have four virtues and know who you are, come in.”

I took two steps and entered the temple. I placed my open hand above my heart.

True I was warning me: “Ahead of you, brother, is hard work full of doubt, suffering and disappointment.”

“I am ready to suffer because of the Truth. I am ready to be tortured by doubt on account of the Truth. I am ready for disappointment because of the Truth.”

“How will you serve?” asked Haling in a warning tone.

“I’ll give all I have...”

“That’s a start!” said Haling hastily, as interrupting me in the middle of a sentence.

“I’ll give all I do...”

“That’s the way!” he declared, raising his voice.

“I’ll give all that I am...” I said, feeling complete at that moment. I sensed the power of the ritual not so much as an energetic structure that I felt veneration for, but as the means to discover myself and the Path as One.

“That is fulfilment!” said Haling and immediately lowering his voice, he warned: “Be aware, there is no going back from this Path.”

“There has never been one.”

“Beware, the Path is full of traps.” True I continued making warnings in Haling’s voice.

“The Truth will illuminate the Path for me.”

“Beware, maybe death awaits you.”

“The Truth is with me and the Truth is eternal life.”

“Do you know where the Path will take you?” Haling’s voice resonated with caution, anxiety and hope.

My confidence grew and my voice sounded unusually strong: “From abysmal nothingness to the starry heights the Path is always one: from me, through me, to me!”

“What is the key?” True I continued.

“Love!”

“What is the secret?”

“I am Light! I am Love! I am the Truth!”

After a short silence disturbed only by the sound of the censer, someone swayed around me. Haling touched my elbow - a sign for me to rise. He removed the band from my eyes. I was able to see through numb eye-lids.

In front of me on a narrow rectangular altar, placed between black and white columns, were the following; a cross, four symbols of the elements: pentacle, sword, chalice and stick; some fresh bread; dishes containing wine and salt; a lamp with a shade of red glass; and a basket filled with rose petals. Behind the altar on a small wooden bench three hooded individuals sat, totally immovable. Each wore different colour robe; a blue, yellow, and a bright red. The room was spacious with white wallpaper and many candles burning, some on the walls and some on the floor. Behind the hooded persons, two large Tarot cards hung on the wall lit by a ceiling light. The card on the right represented a magus and the one on the left was the ninth card: Hermit or Hidden Light.

“Young Brother”, the magus in the blue robe said, “what is your name?”

I answered in Latin: "Omnia Sacrificabo Praeter Libertatem!" That meant: I Sacrifice Everything Except Freedom.

They were silent. Only the rhythmical sound of the censer was heard, the sputter of frankincense on coal, the and deep breathing of Oke Vilkinson behind me. Had I made a mistake with the Latin words? Maybe my name was too pretentious? The three hooded ritual masters suddenly said in one voice:

“Brother Omnia Sacrificabo Praeter Libertatem, we accept you into the Order of Great Odin!”

-13-

Dear Lidia,

This is difficult to write because I know I will cause you pain but I need to tell you this: I must search for my happiness somewhere else! I am not a marrying type; I feel a strong desire to be free and I cannot tie myself to one person. Thank you for the wonderful moments, days, and years we've spend together. You are the best thing which happened in my life but I am certain that you don't want to walk over the same steps with me. Please forgive me.

Bogy

A sigh of relief came to me when I dropped the letter in a mailbox. I'd left behind yet another part of my life. Enough with pretence, sitting on two chairs, and feeling guilty. I was sad but content. By writing this short letter I had stopped cheating on Lidia. If I continued delaying of my break up with her I would go on cheating on her and myself. It was better this way, painful but fast and honest.

“What happened to you?” asked Astrid at the door.

“I did something I delayed far too long.”

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“At such moments I become aware how the present is turning into the past.” Astrid was talking slowly and dreamily. “I love the past. I can hardly wait for an experience to end. When it does, it gains beauty and significance which it didn't have while it was happening. Even suffering, tears, and farewells...”

The radiators were hot and the fire in the fireplace enhanced the feeling of warmth. I was sitting on a rug with my socks on leaning against the sofa. Astrid was on the floor beside me with her head resting on my thigh. The only light in

the room was coming from the fireplace. In its cheerful reflections her face looked attractive and mysterious.

“Everything is different with you. You are young, full of hope, you think the entire world is yours. Haling is favouring you as much as he possibly can.”

“Maybe he has reasons for that.”

“Don’t kid yourself. Your gift for ritual magic is not crucial. He received the most valuable of initiations from one of your compatriots.”

“Haling? From a Serb?”

“Yes, a Serb from Hercegovina. He was the most important person in an organization called “Young Bosnia”. They killed Prince Ferdinand.

“I don’t believe that. If such a man existed I would have known about him. Maybe there were people who initiated the First World War but there isn’t anyone who could be a teacher to Haling.”

“No one is prophet in his own village. Anyhow he is widely known as a man who had political ideas for the organization of Europe. As an occultist he was known only to a few people such as Haling. He was a real adept.”

“Who told you that?”

“Haling. He doesn’t keep it a secret.”

With my hands I moved her head onto a pillow and then got up, leaned on the fireplace, putting one hand on the top.

Astrid got up from the rug leaned against the sofa and lit a cigarette with a lighter. Under the lighter’s flame it was obvious that she was smiling. “Does this excite you so much? That man had one of your complicated names – you could hurt your tongue pronouncing it – Dimitrije Mithinovic.”

“Is he alive?”

“Mithinovic? No, he died in London at least ten years ago. He initiated Haling there, right after the war. He published his works under pseudonym Nemo, which suggests that he lacked an Ego.” She took a deep puff from her cigarette. “He initiated Alan Watts and some other famous hermetics and painters – Mondrian and Kandinsky. I missed that chance, as did many others for that matter.”

“He initiated Alan Watts? What did he teach? Zen?”

“No. Mithinovic had his own system like other independent adepts. He visited many schools but he didn’t enrol in any of them. All that came from others influenced him but what he came up with was his own.”

“How come his system is not known?”

“It is the higher mathematics of occultism. Aldous Huxley especially appreciated him. Mithinovic knew Crowley, Diane Fortune, Gurgieff... Actually, before the war he had a reputation in your country as a specialist on culture. He was editor of some magazine in Bosnia which printed the first work of your compatriot, Andric a Nobel winner. May Britt Nielsen, who translated Andric into Swedish told me that. Mithinovic had visions for the future, he worked on uniting Europe many generations before DeGaul. I met him in London. He was at his end then, suffered from kidney failure and very swollen, but I knew I was next to a real Master. When you are in the presence of such a personality you can’t be mistaken.”

“How did he look?”

“We always imagine those people in a different way. If we hear about them from others or when we read their works, we are usually disappointed. Still...I must admit that he looked extraordinary. Tall, strong man with a shaved head although he wore a half-cylinder. He had thick bushy eyebrows; people say that whoever saw his eyes from close range couldn’t forget it. He carried a stick with an amber handle. I was naïve and surprised by the contradictions I discovered about him. I was even more surprised that he didn’t hide them. He was a passionate chain-smoker and preferred long Virginia cigars.” She smiled, took another cigarette from her pack, lit it and continued: “He drank whiskey in large quantities...boy, could he drink. That didn’t bother anyone because he was a real magus and teacher on the same level as Gurgieff....They appreciated each other. Mithinovic immediately knew who was who. He valued Crowley although they met only briefly. That meeting later directed me to Telema.”

“You were his student?”

“I wish I could say I was. I spent only a short time with him so he didn’t initiate me. I went east to Sri Aurobindo and intended to concentrate on his teachings on my return from Oroville, but I was too late. He had already departed his body. I met a few of his students. A large group was always around Mithinovic. Women adored him and were afraid of him at the same time. How should I put it; there was something in him that made people scared. ..It could easily have been his look. When I met him in London he lived close to the British

Museum. It was a rare privilege to be invited over and that's exactly how I always felt, not only at the beginning...Yes, he was an unusual, many-layered individual. You discovered new things about him all the time. Later I found out that he wrote poetry. People say it was extraordinary. That is third-hand information. I couldn't read his work because of the language. He wrote about humanity, fate, and cosmic issues so he was both a poet and herald.

“What is his system based on?”

“It is hard to say in a few words. Theosophists stated that he dealt with black magic but they say that for half of the people I know. There were two qualities about in him that you could notice. One was social – I told you that he worked on achieving political utopia, a united Europe. It was utopia because he talked about it half a century earlier than anyone else...His other interest was in the occult – his genuinely valuable teaching about principles which grounded the universe and the human beings in it: unity and differentials. In short: clear differences signify unity because one cannot exist without the other. When theosophists talk about the victory of good over evil, about taming an animal within oneself and all those sugar-coated stories, they show ignorance about the basic principles which control the dual existence of universe and humans...Good and evil are two sides of the same thing; one ultimately gives birth to the other. Many people know that, but the master knew how to explain it as the operative basis of behaviour so that you would never forget it...he was a genuine adept.”

“Adept? Are you serious? An adept for me is someone who overcame human weaknesses, and not only knows more than others but is ethically superior. Yet Mithinovic drank and smoked....”

“Your attitude reveals the naïveté of a beginner. You shouldn't expect those people to live like saints...because they are not. We cannot judge them by regular standards. Adepts must have some human weaknesses so they can remain incarnated in human bodies.”

I stood by the fireplace waiting for her to go on. The pleasant atmosphere of relaxation was completely gone. How could I have forgotten that name? I had vague memories of him, blurred and indistinct like sounds under water. Of course... he was Grandma's and Grandpa's friend with whom my Grandma had corresponded long after Grandpa's death. His photograph was hanging on a dining room wall in Vilin Do next to our family photographs. Large smoothly shaven head, dark penetrating eyes, bushy eyebrows. There was a voiceless threat in his image, a deep and furtive roaring similar to underground waters. I tried to remember Grandma's occasional comments about his irregular letters from London.

“What else do you know about him?”

“Only second-hand information. Haling believes that he was a Master of the Grand White lodge. Awkward stories circulated. Philip Mere, an English writer who was married to Mithinovic's sister, wrote in his autobiography that he almost fainted when he met with him for the first time. Some people said that blood came through their noses in his presence. These recollections are similar to the descriptions McGregor Metters, the leader of Golden Dawn, gave about Grand Masters.

“I believe less that those Masters ever existed. Some people’s imaginations work overtime; stories are told over and over again and after a while myths about secret leaders of occult brotherhoods, blood coming from noses and similar stories are born...”

“Listen Bogy. Theosophical stories about Grand Masters certainly represent occult fantasies of the nineteenth century - they are a mixture of a bit of science and quite a bit of the fantastic. Yet those Intelligences do exist.” She looked at me for a few moments. The cigarette was burning slowly between her fingers. She looked through the window into the winter darkness. She talked slowly as if she was carefully selecting every word:

“The decision to step on a Path doesn’t genetically alter a human being. He still needs to perform his physiological functions because such are the laws of metabolism on a physical level of existence. Occasionally, he gets in touch with higher Intelligences and that contact becomes more frequent and longer the further he gets on the Path. The cosmic energy begins to transmit through him because he is more porous than other people. In essence it is a phenomenon similar to artistic inspiration or scientific discovery...Are you following me? The basic mechanism is prolonged concentration on one goal, focused thinking about one thing or problem. People constantly absorb energy from higher levels but the majority are not aware of it. Do you understand? The difference between an occultist and a lay person is that in fact the occultist does that consciously and thus more effectively. When he is well on a Path he gains the ability for longer contacts with higher levels of consciousness. That is energy and it is presented in different forms. Some people see and talk to angels; some see God, some aliens from space ships.”

She extinguished her cigarette with her index finger and as if she was thinking aloud, concluded: “Artists achieve inspiration, scientists solve a problem, and primitive people see ghosts, fairies and demons. Because we live in a technical society it is no wonder that cults about aliens from other civilizations flourish. Some see saviours in them.”

Her words sounded reasonable. She lowered her voice like she was warning me: "That can be a dangerous process. Sometimes a cosmic flywheel engulfs a man, showing no mercy. That is a case of egomania. Man cannot distinguish between himself and the force which took over his consciousness. We have a few such cases in our brotherhood."

"What happened to those people?"

"Mental institution. The Follower must have firm contact with a physical plan of existence – a profession, marriage, children, job..." A quick smile appeared on her face and she added: "Even if it is potato peeling. Haling would leave you to peel potatoes at 'Foresta' as long as you don't decide to look for something else yourself. Magus lives with his head in the heavens and his feet on the ground!"

Haling's image came to my mind. Is he an adept as I thought he was after our conversation? I didn't know what to say so I kept quiet.

Astrid went on: "I wanted to warn you to expect reactions soon because you have had many compressed experiences." She smiled sadly and added: "When reaction occurs emotional relations are usually the first to go."

"Cosmic energy, Intelligences, divine powers.... I must say I am sceptical...these are exciting things which always happen to others. Somehow Intelligences never come in touch with me."

Astrid looked me in the eyes. Fire reflections danced on her face. I could see her scorpion, shiny eyes piercing and focused. "Don't be so sure," she finally said.

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I was standing in the middle of the ritual room in Sven Ackerman's house, dressed in a ritual robe made of thin blue cotton. I wore blue socks and a thick silk rope tied around my waist. My role was of Hesed the carrier of cosmic energy, fourth sphere on the Tree of Life. The remaining nine participants wore robes in corresponding colours of Sefhira they represented. Astrid, in a role of carrier of energy of Mars, wore a fire-red tunic and thin iron chain with a small dagger around her waist. Fair-haired Gunila, dressed in green silk with copper bracelets and a chain around her waist, stood behind me in the place of last

Sephirot on the right column of the Tree of Life. Men gazed at her a little longer but she was looking only at Haling. He took a deep breath and exhaled through his mouth: “Let’s begin.”

I was tense although this was an easy performance. Spheres in their correct positions were drawn with chalk on the floor. Wearing a white robe, Haling stood at the top of the Tree representing Keter, the highest Sephirot. He had a white band around his head and white slippers on his feet. He watched us for a few seconds in silence and then, closing his eyes, he began reciting the evocation in a high, trembling voice:

“Brothers and Sisters, let’s allow the following vision to appear in our spiritual eyes....We are standing on top of a high mountain lit by golden rays of emerging sun. Over our heads is the gigantic figure of the Sacred Guardian Angel. His golden locks radiate glistening light upon us. At the foothill below us are the shining cities of A-thl-aaan-tieeesss”

I shivered. The image created in my mind was so vivid that the radiating blazing light of Guardian Angel and the emerging sun almost blinded me. I squeezed my eye-lids shut.

Haling continued: “Let’s vibrate together: Eeeeeee-heeeee-jeeeeee!”

“Eeeeeee-heeeee-jeeeeee”, I vibrated deep in my throat. Voices around me engulfed me like a wave and I had a sinking sensation in my upper stomach, hands and mouth. Haling vibrated formulas of Hohmah and Binah and we followed him in one voice. It was a powerful vibration and the physical energy set in motion overpowered the total of our individual energies. Vibrations of Sephirot Hesed, which I represented, caused strong trembles in my body below my diaphragm and in my face and calf muscles. The trembling in my plexus and genitals increased and a seizure formed in my throat. I felt an urge to open my eyes and tell Haling what was happening to me, but my eye-lids were squeezed shut, causing many white spots to appear in my field of vision.

“Eeeelohiiiiim Giiiibooor,” Haling vibrated the formula and it sounded like he had a copper bell in his throat.

“Eeeelohiiiiim Giiiibooor”, I vibrated inside my body because my tight, crooked lips weren’t able to let out a single sound. In my lower stomach and chest I felt a noise like the buzzing of bees. Vibrations lifted a curtain over my long-time memories and live pictures appeared in front of my eyes. Trembling I was transported into a strange dark gorge overshadowed by steep cliffs. Falling water roared in the vibration similar to one I felt internally, powerfully shattering against crystal cliffs. Birds flying upward into the stormy sky let out screams and

the fiery, shaking land tore the intestines out of wild creatures. “Giiii-booooo-rrrr”, the buzzing from my body spread to the ground. My body was trembling violently and slowly I began to levitate. Still shaking, I moved to one side. Even with my eyes shut I could see Haling, Gunila, Oke Vilkinson, the ceiling and floor of the room. The space and people in it were illuminated by a lilac light similar to moonlight. From an angle, I saw my own stiffened body, my pale face wet with sweat and I heard buzzing coming from my chest and inside. Every part of my body flickered like a swarm of tiny frightened birds. I was confused. My body was there but no one was in it.

Suddenly Haling decreased the power of vibrations. The rest of us followed. The vibrations subdued and then slowly stopped. For a while we heard them disappearing in a distant tremble. The storm was over. I returned to my body and distinctively felt myself coming back into my chest and eyes as if emerging from behind a firm partition which separated me from the world.

“Brothers and Sisters, let’s open our eyes”, I heard Haling’s words. The images of people and shapes of things were blurry. I shook my head and the images cleared. I heard Haling’s words: “Let’s close the temple.” I saw him clearly now. He made the ritual movement of closing - like drawing curtains over a window. We did the same. One by one we stamped our right foot on the floor, signalling to the unconscious mind that we had returned into the level of material reality. In his white robe, a smiling and beaming Haling looked like a newly-forged sword. He looked at us and said: “Thank you all on the successfully executed operation. Let’s take off our robes”.

“I had a fantastic experience”, I suddenly said. “An astral projection! I parted from my physical body....”

“Really? Keep your fantastic experiences for later!” Bengt Falk interrupted, looking at me from the corners of his eyes. Just by looking at you he knew how to pull your ears like a naughty child’s. His blond hair was smoothed over his head; he wore spectacles with wire frames and when he looked around he did it without moving his head – he only shifted his ice colour eyes.

“Bogy”, Haling faintly reprimanded “first we’ll take off our robes and enter information about this operation in our diaries, without delay. Then we can talk about our experiences”.

While Haling was talking, Bengt Falk fixed his gaze on me. I felt his cold intolerance. Half an hour later, when we had tea in the dining room, he looked at me in the same way. Astrid, sitting next to me and noticing Bengt’s stare, gently squeezed my knee under the table. I squeezed her hand back in response. She

smiled and addressed Haling: “This was an exceptionally good experience, Bjern. What fantastic energy!”

“Yes”, answered Haling, “sometimes the group is harmoniously assembled. We’ll try two more times in this formation to check if today’s result was only accidental or because of the composition of the group.” He kept his look on Joran Gustafson and me. “Today we had two newcomers.”

Bengt Falk shifted in his chair as if looking for a more comfortable position. “I wouldn’t give much importance to that, Bjern. The astrological constellation for ritual work is extremely advantageous today. The Sun is in conjunction with Saturn.”

“But allow me to say, Bengt, we've had advantageous constellations several times in the past but we didn’t achieve such a result. It is obvious that other factors were influential.” Astrid tried to keep kindness in her voice but it came out tense. “We have to continue in this formation.”

“Astrid, Astrid,” Bengt Falk raised his eyebrow, “where will your tendency toward the exotic take you?” Joran didn’t interest him at all; he was aiming at me.

“To positions opposite yours. Love as a motive is more fruitful than intolerance.”

I wished I could leave. Very little remained of my desire to share my experience.

“It seems we activated some negative energy as well,” Oke Vilkinson said over his tea cup. He squinted his eyes and shifted his sight from Bengt to Astrid. “I’ll never forget when I headed the ritual for the first time. It was somewhere ab-o-o-o-ut nineteen thirty five or thirty six...doesn’t matter. We gathered at late Jon Abenbery’s...he made a wonderful small temple which had to be formally opened. I headed the group of five. I learned the text by heart. We agreed to be serious: no laughing or jokes...you know how those serious things can sometimes become irresistibly funny. I recited the evocation and they repeated it after me. I didn’t tell them ahead of time that we had to repeat the text in the same way three times. The first time everything went fine. Then I said the words for the second time. They repeated them quite seriously but I noticed they were wondering if I was putting them on. Stressing that they should repeat the evocation in a serious fashion for the third time, very loudly and formally, I said: ...And one more time! And the four of them unanimously stormed: And one more time!”

Everyone laughed except me. I had a big lump in my throat and my mouth was dry.

“Good humor on the Path is necessary like spice in a dish, and it has to be preserved”, said Joran Gustafson. “May be you heard that Gustaf Meyrink lit a match to better see the face of a demon he was invoking.”

“Yes”, Harold Jensen, a member of the Inner order of Odin’s brotherhood, confirmed “hermetists worth mentioning all had the ability to notice the comical element in everything, even in the things closest to their hearts.”

Haling nodded, smiling: “The Omnipotent must have a caustic sense of humor....At the moment of mystical inspiration, Sri Aurobindo said that God was like an everlasting child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden. I can’t give up feeling that the Lord is actually a great comedian. The creation of our world, as we know it today, is perhaps his best joke.”

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Joran Gustafson, professor at Stockholm University, didn’t have much of a professorial appearance. He looked like a middle-weight category boxer who had taken too many hits. His head was square and firmly attached to a heavy neck; he had a flat nose, freckled face and red hair cropped short. One would think he was a slow thinker but when he talked about quantum mechanics he did it passionately with powerful thoughts like wild pounding waves. “Listen,” he urged, “quantum mechanics merges with deepest mysticism and because of that scientific circles shut their eyes before it.”

We were having tea at Astrid’s and someone had mentioned the conflict between science and mysticism. Joran reacted hastily, like an arrow released from a bow kept drawn for a long time. I was mistaken in expecting him to torture us with long soliloquies. “You wouldn’t believe it, but the majority of electrical engineers completely misunderstand the basis of modern physics. Let me ask you a test question... You know that the fastest running light in the universe is the speed of light – 300.000 kilometers per second. Now imagine this light is running from one source in two opposite directions. It runs 300.000 kilometers per second on one side and the same on the other. What is the distance speed between the two rays?”

“It’s clear as day”, Jim said, “the distance speed is double. It is clearly like one plus one is two.”

“Incorrect, of course!” announced Joran with obvious joy in his voice. “The same answer was given by the majority of electrical specialists. It may seem illogical to laypeople but those two rays move at equal speed – 300.000 kilometers because nothing can move faster in the universe!...This is one of those unbelievable facts that modern physics is discovering. You see, until recently, consciousness was exiled from physics. But consciousness.... consciousness...” he raised his open hands in the air like he was holding a Holy Grail, “consciousness is the crucial factor in the new physics. No one knows what consciousness is - it is a philosophical question because it represents the greatest mystery of all. We know what consciousness does and in physics it performs miracles!”

“You will tell us now, right?” Those were Jim’s words. It seemed he wasn’t too excited at the prospect of a long lecture spiced with indistinct formulae, quotations from scientific magazines, and messianic beliefs that Christ was a quantum physicist.

Joran wasn’t touched by Jim’s words... “The best way to describe consciousness is by using a metaphor, such as the ocean of consciousness or something which permeates the universe. Before the beginning of quantum mechanics it was well known that human beings were conscious. It is known that animals have limited consciousness. Some ancient philosophers, such as followers of Vedanta, claim that everything that exists is conscious. According to them, a stone is conscious, a single hair is conscious and so is this cup. That’s why they teach that consciousness permeates everything that exists. With the introduction of quantum physics we began to discover a new role of consciousness. What is the fundamental act of consciousness?” He looked at us as if he was expecting an answer, and after few seconds he continued: “It is an action in which something is noticed. You have to bear in mind that in classical branches of science such as physiology, perception is an act which happens outside of the field of physics. The light hits the eye’s retina; you formulate idea and so on. Before quantum physics people didn’t understand that the act of watching something influenced what you looked at. Now we know that the act of observing smaller objects, say subatomic particles, disturbs them so much that we can never get the complete picture of what they look like. As soon as you begin watching them - they change!”

Jim squinted his round eyes until they became narrow slits. “Are you trying to say that the conscious act of looking affects what we are looking at in such a way that it touches and alters it?”

“Exactly that!”

“Consciousness almost becomes one with it, by mixing with it in the process of observation?”

“Exactly!” Joran Gustafson’s voice was becoming louder and faster. “Like an enormous ocean wave, consciousness floods and washes down everything, including water bubbles and the vibrations it carries along. When a conscious act happens – the huge wave becomes a small bubble and turns into a particle.”

“What you are saying, Joran, is that my consciousness makes the physical universe disappear by turning it into foam”, I said, confused about such a possibility.

“Yes, at a basic level. Allow me to paraphrase Newton, although he is a creator of a mechanical image of the world. When I look at what quantum mechanics imply I feel like a child on the banks of an enormous ocean. I sense that we are at the brink of a huge, unprecedented discovery something like the nature of God or the human soul. Something similar to this will come out from quantum physics because the basic groundwork on which modern science stands is faltering; notions of matter, space and time are breaking and disappearing like sandcastles. We are coming to the same conclusions as the ancient Hindus – everything is one. Consequently, it means that what a single individual does on a planet affects us all - on this planet and maybe in the entire universe. We are tied together in a delicate, hard to see connection.”

“So you claim that this table isn’t firm but it is made of hardly noticeable foam?” Harold Jensen knocked on the table with his finger next to his drink. His voice had a slight note of irony.

“Not only is it not firm but it greatly represents an empty space made of probabilities and blurry haze like the one we have in our heads.”

I felt it was time I said something. “Physics is the basic groundwork of science. If everything in it is blurry and uncertain, that means that the basis of our entire reality is blurry and narrowed down to probabilities?”

“Yes, because quantum physics deep inside resembles the human mind - new ideas and thoughts are constantly emerging, transforming, and mixing with one another.... appearing and disappearing. The notion that big things are not made of smaller things - like the big building made of bricks – has crucial importance in breaking the old image of the world... Things are built of entities – there isn’t any other more suitable expression – and they don’t have

characteristics unless you watch them; then they come into existence. Of course it sounds unbelievable, but it is true!”

“Like the Indian notion of maya”, I said.

“Exactly like maya. Until it is observed by a being enriched with consciousness this world exists in some strange state which is indescribable. It is the state of pure potential. When we look at it with consciousness it becomes absolutely ordinary. It is understandable that many scientists who gained their reputation in classical physics dislike quantum mechanics. Einstein is one of them. He said that it makes him truly unhappy.”

“If everything is connected then there are no differences between I and this chair”, I said, believing I was making a strong argument.

“There is a difference because your consciousness and mine are creating it, exactly what I already said. Consciousness alters observed objects. We are more willing to accept these ideas when they come from Indian sages. But the basis of Western conclusions is drawn from experimental science. You see, a psychologist conducted an experiment: he wrote down the statements of several Yoga teachers and mystics from around the world, he cleared them of expressions which could lead to the discovery of their origins. He also wrote down the statements of famous physicists on similar topics and eliminated the scientific terminology. He mixed them into one text and gave it to a group of students asking them to separate the statements into two categories. The first had to correspond to the physicists’ beliefs and the second to the mystics. Do you know what happened? They couldn’t find any differences between the two and the separation was made solely accidentally.”

I didn’t utter a single word again until the end of the evening.

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For quite some time my relationship and life with Astrid was a source of pleasure and security. Pleasure was first to go while security lasted somewhat longer, but my desire for her imperceptibly thinned over time. I felt it was because of my knowledge and experience - I have outgrown her. She had many good qualities but I began noticing her vices. She knew more than I did but over time I realized that her knowledge came from reading literature and having endless conversations. She lacked deep basic experiences. What she gained from

rituals over many years I learned in less than two. She and the circle of people who gathered at her house had no occult powers. They only talked about them.

Astrid looked bad in the morning. Her face had an ashen colour, her voice was cracked from smoking, and her eyes were blurry. She shaved her legs secretly and on days when she didn't expect visitors she wore thick layers of oily creams over her face. I discovered a number of things about her which made it hard for me to relate to her although she had spent twenty years in a spiritual atmosphere in the company of occultists, and various periods of time with several Teachers about whom people whispered dramatic stories.

I couldn't accept her opinion that my desire to experience a truthful occult occurrence was only a reflection of my immaturity. I took it as an excuse for the lack of real powers and a more perfect personality. Why should people search for deeper meaning in life, the secrets of the cosmos and their own personalities if twenty years later they remained the same: weaklings, lovers of cognac who only repeated rumors about miracles and true Teachers?

Whenever I expressed my long-time desire to experience enlightenment she gave me the same advice: "Look deep within yourself." Since I know myself, I knew was already doing this. How many times had my father accused me of being obsessed with myself and the occult rubbish which he insisted would eventually drive me crazy?

I could hardly find in myself what I was looking for in others. There was no white lodge within me, Grand Masters or clear goals. There was only an indefinite inclination to go somewhere, do something to finally realize, accept and love myself. After so many books I'd read and initiations I'd gone through, I still didn't know who I was. Stories that this was most difficult state didn't comfort me. On the ring finger of my right hand I wore a ring made of Lapland's gold which Astrid had given me for Christmas. Three days later I went to a goldsmith to have its value appraised. I felt uncomfortable doing this as I wasn't quite sure if I would refuse her next gift. My Inner Teacher wasn't appearing; instead I was slowly sinking into a state which was actually worse than the one which made me leave Belgrade. Where did that young man go – who had been ready to starve and freeze to death to reach a realization of who he really was? Who knows what I would have found if I had looked deeper within myself?

When Astrid was at the congress on child psychiatry in Amsterdam, such thoughts ran through my head almost constantly. On the third day after her departure, I collected my books, clothes, toothbrush from the bathroom and I moved to Nail's, leaving a farewell note for her on the table. For a while I tried to

imagine the look on her face when she read the note but there wasn't much satisfaction in it.

Haling was sitting in his glass cabin like a captain battle ship captain giving orders to cooks. Approaching his cabin I had a feeling I was about to face a firing squad: "Good morning, chief Halting. Would it be possible to get back to work? Any kind of job will do." He looked at me as if he knew my story and said: "I'd love to have you back in the kitchen but we closed that job. We get frozen French fries from the factory." There was a short silence and then he added: "Come back tomorrow at the same time... I'll find you something."

It had gone better than I expected. Kitchen personnel changed very often; people came and went; there were many new cooks. No one thought about me while I was gone and Halting certainly didn't have any need to talk about me. They probably thought I was in Yugoslavia.

I got to work on a huge dishwasher. It looked like a long metal tunnel where metal baskets filled with dirty dishes disappeared. Dishes were sprayed with hot water mixed with detergent and then rinsed with streams of clean water. Clean plates, cups, saucers and pans came out on the other side of the machine. The job wasn't difficult, but it was boring. People confront a lot on those kinds of jobs. Three men, who I found working there, hated each other. Warm steam mixed with the smell of detergent came from the machine and we were sweaty all the time. The worst part of this job was the fact that you could never finish it. I remembered my old job with sadness - I had been alone all the time and could read after I had finished peeling the potatoes.

Two Macedonians I hadn't met shared Nail's room. On the third day since my return I got a room in the attic and switched with them. Every night a large group of people gathered in our room. Some who I knew from before had left. The famous Three-Penis, Doctor Tasic, had vanished. There were some new people but relationships and conversations were exactly the same as they'd been before I left for Astrid's.

The loudest was Milo Milovic, a painter from some remote village under Cetinje. He didn't possess a speck of doubt that he wasn't a genius. After a while I wondered where he got such incredible faith in his own mission in life. It allowed no space for hesitation, different points of view or other roles people had in life except as spectators mesmerized by his art. He talked me into coming to his barrack to look at his paintings. I did it with hesitation because I didn't know how to pretend, which was necessary if you didn't want painters to hate you. I wasn't a connoisseur of paintings; I only liked surrealism - strange places and figures beaming with light, wandering in the cosmos. Different schools and

periods, including the Renaissance, for me represented earthly art. Surrealism was the only truthful art representing both worlds - parallel universes.

What I saw in Milo's modest atelier surprised me. Actually "surprised" is a weak expression; his paintings shook me. His paintings illuminated some powerful force which merely used him as its instrument. They were like powerful lenses reflecting faraway cosmic energies which radiated messages from other worlds. The force of his paintings gave the impression that Milo didn't use a brush to add paint but instead hit the canvas with his fists.

"I'll tell you something, Bogy, because you are the only one who can understand me among the brothers who gather there: I want to discover the magical purpose of things and beings which ancient people knew. I have to do it... I feel and I know that every grain of sand and every drop of water has a miraculous soul connected to everything that exists."

"You are on the right track to find it." There was no need for me to pretend, I meant sincerely what I said. Nothing could shake his belief that as a creator he was equal to God. He was married to Rachel, a Swedish woman, and he called her Rake. Sometimes he brought her to our gatherings at Nail's and when he asked her to pour some water for him or light his cigarette he did it with guttural noises, which sounded like collecting phlegm in a throat before spitting. When he wasn't around, people talked about her going to bed with anyone with a hard on, and as far I could see there was no doubt that the stories were true. Here and there she pinched someone's cheek when making her way through a crowded room; she brushed her body against the hands and elbows of men, while leaning over the table to hand Milo a cigarette or a lighter, with breasts coming out of her brassiere. Sometimes people discussed sincerely telling Milo what was his wife doing behind his back. One evening after visitors had emptied several bottles of brandy, Rodja, not the most diplomatic person in the world, spilled: "Hey Milo, how can you tolerate your Rake changing men like socks?"

There was dead silence in the room. Instead of hitting him with a bottle, spilling blood or breaking bones, Milo simply turned his head and with despise in his voice, he said: "Five hundred years from now no one will remember skeletons who fucked, but the entire world will know about my art."

How was it possible to create structure of such force from man's consciousness, I wondered. How much easier and simpler would life be for me if I had at least a part of such exclusiveness in recognition of my selfworth?

I felt disconnected from those people, but I had to admit that conversations and rude jokes sounded good after two years of discussions about higher states,

awakening of Kundalini, Blavatska, Steiner and Meher Baba. Now people looked at me with a mixture of respect and malicious joy. I thought perhaps Nail had mentioned that before my return to "Foresta" I had been supported by a wealthy Swedish woman - which was the dream many of them had. They suspected that she had dismissed me, otherwise I wouldn't have returned to their company. This was considered a major fall in social status so they avoided asking me where I had been before. I noticed Bane Deflator's quick look at the ring which Astrid had given me, and the wristwatch; how his eyes moved up and down while he was calculating how much it all cost. He tried to make me talk about what had happened: "You don't make a good life on sweaty jobs. That's for small people and physical workers; there is something better for a smart man." He said that, leaning forward and squinting his eyes as he looked at my ring. When he said it again, I put my hand in my pocket.

He had gained weight noticeably. His double chin was spilling over his buttoned shirt and his belly protruded under his jacket, which had stains and shabby sleeves. Not much remained of his previous nobility. He used street slang more and it seemed he specially accented it. He confided me in a low voice so that no one else could hear him and demonstrated feelings of depression. "The other day I ran into some oldie. I thought she was loaded but I was mistaken ... Cheap bitch! If you pulled her by her feet in the air and hit her against the wall probably her eyes would fall out sooner than a single crown. We went to her place... when I took her clothes off it made me sick. Her breasts came over her stomach, her stomach came over her cunt... I couldn't get it on."

I went to bed. I couldn't fall asleep for a long time listening to their conversation, the slamming of chess figures against the board, echoes of "motherfucking" and "fuck you". That didn't bother me. I felt like I had taken a bite of my mother's homemade donut filled with plum jam after eating tasteless ready-made cakes.

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I unlocked the front door of Astrid's house in Enschede but the chain was on so. I rang the bell and waited with ominous premonition. It had been two months since I'd packed my things and left and meanwhile I hadn't heard anything about her. I didn't see people who could have told me something. In the beginning at Nail's, I felt liberated, then everything became routine and finally I began thinking of her more and more, especially at night when I couldn't sleep.

Imperfections about her body faded away and I missed her sense of humor, her somewhat artificial but noble attitude, her taste in food and drink, and her house so comfortable and cosy. With time sex with her gained in value as did her temperament and fondness for nastiness in bed which was different from her refined attitude when she was not in bed – all became appealing to me again. I was prepared to say that I had come to return her house key and also give her a chance to seduce me again.

She opened her eyes in surprise when she saw me. “Aaaa, it’s you... how come... suddenly?”

She wore a terry bath robe, her hair was slightly dishevelled and her cheeks rosy. I sensed her perfume mixed with the smell of wine. “It’s maybe good that you have come at this moment... So, come in.”

Roshi was sitting on a leather sofa covered with a blanket in the dining room. He was naked with a bathrobe casually thrown over his thighs. His short, skinny legs, covered with random patches of hair, were crossed like he was sitting in a restaurant. He nodded in my direction without moving a single feature.

So that was it. While I believed she was in Amsterdam, Astrid was banging him in his so-called temple. She inclined toward unusual behaviour and relationships, which surprised people in her circle but, one would not have believed it possible to find Roshi in such a state.

While I was thinking how to act, Astrid said: “Well, have a seat with us! We have some great wine.” She pointed in the direction of a table with a half-finished bottle. Two empty bottles were on the floor next to the sofa.

“That’s not my favorite drink,” I said. “I’ll let you enjoy it.” I turned and put my hand in my pocket. “I came to give back your house key.”

I had a hard time taking the key off my key chain; I placed it on a table next to the sofa. She walked me to the door, opened it, and said: “I wish you all the best...because I am so happy...the happiest ever.”

Her words could be trusted. She looked younger than she had during the last several months; a smokey look in her eyes, cheeks flushed from freshly stirred blood, her movements swift and light. She had a new passion and there was nothing I could say about it. I knew I would have a hard time falling asleep that night. I almost turned my back when Astrid suddenly said, like she was attempting to comfort me: “Gunila Beriman asked about you...She’d like you to call.”

She was handing me down to another middle-aged woman as if I was a relay baton, I thought. I turned and through my clenched teeth, I said slowly: “Thanks, but no thanks. I have had enough of older women!” I left, wondering if my words had stung her deep enough or if she was invulnerable in her love. I was right: I didn’t fall asleep that night until dawn.

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In those days, feelings of satisfaction came over me only briefly. I wasn’t supported by a middle-aged woman anymore and, and despite the dirty work I did, I felt much better. Like a whore who retired, got married, raised her kids, and got tired but of honest work. Every third day I was free and I spent time in my room doing nothing because we got company later in the evening.

I got restless one afternoon. I leafed through the pages of the books I’d read. Half an hour later I was holding “*The Book of Law*” by Aleister Crowley, which Gunila Beriman once brought me as a gift when she visited Astrid. The first time I’d read an old edition of the book was in Belgrade, and it didn’t make a deep impression on me. This was a much nicer. The text on the right of each page was printed in red letters and on the left was a copy of Crowley’s handwriting of the text written in Cairo in 1904. The opening sentences grabbed my attention and I read the book intently for over half an hour, while standing by the window. Something long forgotten began raising its head, overwhelming me.

“Hadit! Manifestation of Nuit,”- the beginning had an effect on me like a sound of the a horn on a hunting dog. “Unveiling of cosmic company...Every man and woman is a star...All numbers are infinite...There is no difference in it....” Some parts of the text I understood clearly while others I comprehended through intuition. They were hazy like fractions of higher mathematics but my presentiment suggested an inner coherence. The occult name of the text was “Al”, which according to cabbalist numerology is number 31, one third of number 93, which represents the value of thelema or will. Obviously thelema was not pointed out as a term which represented will in a narrow sense, but it meant bringing man’s conscious personality closer to a genuine individuality and a final merging of the two. The book indicated the aspirant’s goal to constantly express his own truthful individuality instead of being submerged into a limited ego-personality.

In the middle was Aivaz, a messenger of the higher worlds or the higher level of consciousness. A short introduction described how in a mediumistic trance Crowley accepted the Book of Law; that description had a stronger influence on me than the text itself. When I reached the end of the book, I was restless. I sat in an armchair to collect my impressions but I got up and began pacing the room with fast steps. I was certain I had discovered something of genuine value and decided to learn the text by heart. Only then, I was certain, would it begin to live and work for me. I had to clarify some parts of the Book and there was no better person to ask than Gunila Beriman. Her number was in my telephone book.

“The book represents Western tantra, there is no doubt about it,” Gunila said to me. We were drinking whiskey in her apartment in Kungsgatan. I had a little trouble drinking it while she apparently enjoyed it. Holding a glass in one hand, Gunila leafed through the book with her free hand. She was obsessed with thelemite texts. She had visited Crowley in an old people’s home in Hastings after the war and talked about it to whoever would listen... She wrote and privately published the book “*Crowley and Liber Al*” about the philosophy of Thelema and Crowley. “Gunila is a nice person”, Astrid used to say, “but be careful, don’t ever mention Crowley in front of her. When she starts talking she can’t stop”. Bengt Falk commented on Gunila with more cynicism. “A-a-a-a-a-a-“, he remembered, “Isn’t that the lady who once talked to Crowley and later wrote a book about it?”

Her talkativeness didn’t bother me now; I wanted to get from her as much information as possible. She took a sip of her whiskey and tapping her index finger on the book in her lap, she said; “Actually, Liber Al is projective text, like a poem, and the reader enters his own subconscious contents. Some parts indicate sex-magical operations and people understand them in different, and sometimes contradictory ways. That is the book’s greatest quality. The book talks to everyone according to their level.”

“It bothers me when the text says that its author, Crowley, doesn’t understand the text completely, that another person will come, after him, who will clarify the meaning. Who could understand the text better than the person who created it?”

“Like others, you are confusing two issues. Crowley is not the creator of the Book; he was only the person who wrote it down; a medium who received the holy text. Of course Crowley didn’t understand the text entirely. Someone else will come after him, no doubt about it!” She was pressing the open book with her index finger like pressing on the chest of a sleeping prophet to wake him up. Her

eyes were wide open, glowing with a shine I hadn't noticed before. Something indicated that a new prophet was not that far away.

“That fact opens the door for many mystifications”, I said carefully. “I heard from Astrid that a few people have appeared, claiming they were new prophets who would over shine Crowley.”

“Many people say so but only one Being will clear up the Book and...well, the Book doesn't say that person has to be masculine.”

I refrained from answering. With such individuals there isn't much sensible discussion; dialogue with them is emotional, they know everything because they feel it. If I wanted to hear more from her I had to refrain from expressing my opinions. I nodded two or three times, absorbed in my thoughts as if I had learned many things from her words. She became lively; swiftly she grabbed a piece of paper and a thick marker. “I'll show you something you can't find in literature. Fools don't know what a cross stands as a symbol for. Some naive Christians believe that a cross is a symbol of Christ's crucifixion. Look at this!”

She drew a wide, blue, horizontal line, broken in the middle, and above it a continuous, vertical line. “Tell me, which of these two lines is a passive, female, and which one is an active, male line?”

“There is nothing to think about. It's obvious which one is passive”.

“Of course... the horizontal line with the opening in the middle. That is a cosmic principle of womanhood; it allows an active masculine principle to enter. Watch now!”

She quickly drew a vertical blue line right through the opening on the horizontal line, like she was piercing it, and then connected the two lines to make a cross. She looked at me for a while with her head up. “Of course, the cross is a symbol of the union of masculine and feminine, active and passive principles. There are infinite number of ways this union is achieved. On a human level - it is the union of a man and a woman – two principles of polarity become one and the polarization is neutralized. Although it lasts for only a short time, it shows the path of the highest neutralization and the return into the ever-source which we long for during our conscious evolution.”

This garrulous woman had some clue about a few things and moreover, she was becoming more attractive to me. She had a flat, almost pancake-like behind and slim legs, but her breasts were luxuriously voluptuous for a Swedish girl. Her face looked as if it was composed of the wrong features. You would

expect such bright blue eyes to be large and calm. But her eyes were small, constantly jumping from left to right while her eyebrows followed those moves in a fast ruffling motion. Her nose was symmetrical but heavy and meaty, her lips were plump and wide, and her ears positioned like small fans. It was hard to define a talkative woman as a lady, even harder when she swung her large breasts like this one did. Yet, there was some powerful animal magnetism about her. Watching her lips move and her teeth shiny from saliva, I had the desire to ask if Crowley had banged her in his old age when she visited him in the Hastings.

“Mouth?” she said, leaning closer to me like she was reading my mind. I smelled her whiskey breath mixed with heavy perfume coming from under her blond hair and armpits.

“In his diaries Crowley uses a ciphered name for mouth ‘Pe’, but you cannot discover it easily in context.” With a fast motion, she finished her whiskey, turned a piece of paper over and on the clean surface she drew a circle and the symbols of yin and yang. “If these are positive and negative poles, masculine and feminine, where are their heads and legs?”

To my surprise, I saw two figures: an active and a passive tadpole biting each other’s tails. “Do you think that yang and yin are symbols of oral sex?”

“You are a fast learner.” Her nostrils opened and closed fast and the air going in and out made a whistling sound. She filled her glass to the top and refilled mine. She drank while watching me, emptying almost half of the whiskey from her glass. Her eyes were riveted to mine. “People rarely get that. They are attracted to the symbol but they don’t know why. In this union, the elixir stays in the mouth and not a drop of the precious liquid is wasted. If the operation is successful, the liquid loses its bitterness and becomes sweet.”

She slipped from her chair and sat on a leather stool right next to me. Placing her left hand on my knee, she continued to talk fast as if her time was expiring. “Taoist sages knew the secret of sexual occultism for centuries. The essence of this operation is the idea presented in the drawing which is a symbol. It represents the spirit descending into matter – an idea or thought which refines liberated energy! Do you understand? Without it, it is only a case of two or three spasms accessible even by animals. You’ve probably heard people comment that human brain with its billions of neurons is the most perfect computer in the universe? Well, any illiterate peasant is able to create it! Right?”

She chuckled. “Opposite this act, a psychical image permeated with concentrated energy signifies the Great Work. It represents an authentic alchemy – a metamorphosis of crude elements into everlasting gold, not merely the

cooking of liquids into retorts! Alfred Gruber from German's Saturn Brotherhood initiated me in the Sacred Art".

"I never thought about yin and yang in such a way but I figured out long ago how to utilize my sexual energy. I didn't require an initiation for that."

"You? What do you mean?"

"Everyone can reach that conclusion if they concentrate on the idea of energy long enough. Everyone talks about the necessity of concentrating on the mental image. In Joseph Knight's book, I found his description of magic bacchanalias and a comment that the man who conducted them required sexual energy for other matters. That was when I figured out the whole thing."

She squeezed my thigh above the knee. "That was self-initiation! People struggle for years to realize that while some discover it in an informal way. Yes...I remember now, your Venus is in Scorpio. That is the best position for sexual magic."

"What about you? Where is your Venus?"

She stretched her meaty mouth into a wide grin and slowly, putting her hand on my lap, she said: "My Venus is between my legs."

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At Stockholm's occult congregation after listening to discussions about *Liber Al*, I understood why there were so many different opinions on the book. Gunila was right; it was a projective test and people needed to fully invest themselves in it. What she didn't understand was that it was primarily stimulus for attaining a much deeper level of being, a level where the individual merges with the collective unconsciousness. When Nuit, the goddess of infinite space appears, she turns into a tiny dot, Hadit, which is a clear example of the infinite wave collapsing into a tiny particle.

Sitting by the window in my room, I stared into the distance. No other book has ever moved me so much except the one I'd read in my Grandma's stable in Vilin Do. I felt the same now as I had then – like someone was pushing my nose into an obvious truth – like thrusting a young cat's nose into a milk

bowl – I was now deeply immersed in the truth I had tried unsuccessfully to avoid for many years.

A shiver similar to what I'd felt before the initiation into Odin's Order overwhelmed me when I stepped into Gunila Beriman's bedroom. It served as a ritual lodge - no chairs or armchairs to sit on, so I had to choose between the floor and a wide French bed - I chose the floor, which was covered with a thick Vietnamese rug. On the walls were huge reproductions of Austin Osman Spare's drawings - an English painter with a reputation as a sexual maniac. He was a skilful draftsman but the themes of his drawings would interest a specialist in sexual psychopathology: witches with drooping breasts, hermaphrodites, a tree with a broken trunk in the shape of a huge hairy vagina; and penises, penises everywhere, erect, interlaced, some enriched with eyes and legs.

After our first sexual contact this was supposed to be an official thelemite initiation. The Order of Oriental Templars had existed in Sweden, but Gunila wasn't concerned about levels of hierarchy. Her manner provoked harsh criticism among members of the society and it was rumored that she would be kicked out of the Order for her sacrilege of royal skill – a beautified expression for sexual operations.

I worried if I could have an erection in this ritual atmosphere, but Gunila dispelled my doubts. She took my hand and walked me to the wide bed where, in theatrical fashion, she proclaimed: "Frater Omnia Sacrificabo Preter Libertatem, enter upon your free will into Nuit's temple!"

Those words expressed so dramatically would make any clear-headed person laugh, and my fear that I would not be able to respond like a man disappeared quickly. When you have such a hot-blooded woman for a partner, with a full and lustful mouth, you don't have to worry about that.

She poured champagne in two glasses and handed one to me. "To eternal love!" she said, adding in the same tone, "Nuit and Hadit."

"Nuit and Hadit", I repeated after her as we emptied our glasses. It was the least exciting moment because I disliked wine. She pointed the bottle in my direction, but I refused shaking my head. She poured some more in her glass and finished it without batting an eye. This one will get drunk, I thought. We drank bubbly wine as the Book of Law ordered, our energies lifted immediately, and Nuit and Hadit united. I was surprised at what followed.

"The space is expanding", I heard Gunila's voice, which was quickly becoming more distant. And surely, the space was expanding - thrusting me into a different, wider space. I don't know how else to describe it. I felt the extension

of space and a peaceful motionlessness at the same time. There were no other sounds except our two hearts beating. I was seized by a maelstrom and while it was sucking me in, faster and faster, I had a conscious image of swirling dervishes with arms stretched in the air, and then, suddenly there was a powerful sound HUM! HUM! HUM!

My exhausted body reclined next to Gunila's. She breathed heavily, with her eyes closed. Blonde streaks of her hair were pasted all over her sweaty face. I didn't have enough strength to squeeze my hand into a fist – my fingers felt weak, almost frozen. I was unable to grasp what had happened. Undoubtedly, I'd had an unusual experience but I wasn't able to comprehend its significance. My impression that the operation's goal was to engage the highest possible energy was confirmed later on. That energy had to be directed into a clear and vivid image of the desired goal. How was that possible – when a human's consciousness was blurred, the borders of things and bodies vanished, and images entered into the consciousness against the practitioner's will?

I decided to devote myself entirely to learning the holy art regardless of the amount of time and effort required. I was convinced I would persevere. Then I met the alchemist.

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Jean Deska claimed to be an alchemist and many of the people I met at Astrid's assumed that he was. Long before I met him, Astrid had told me in a whisper - as if someone could hear us - he had built and equipped hospitals in Kenya and Uganda with his own money - no one knew where it had come from. In his own way, which I labelled spiritual slandering, Oke Wilkinson confided that the same gentleman provided large financial donations to libraries and orphanages in France and that he alone had financed the construction of a church in Lion - from the bottom to the top cross of the church's cupola.

Jean Deska didn't look like an alchemist. He had dark-olive skin, a long bent nose and the small restless eyes of a man who could count fast. He dressed as if he was getting ready for a cruise on a yacht with some distinguished party – a navy blue blazer with gold buttons and a silk scarf in neutral colours around his neck. His hair, saturated with pomade was combed close to his head and parted in the middle. Someone could easily have portrayed him as a Levant's thief

rather than as a the follower of a sacred skill. However, after spending some time in his presence, you simply knew that you had met a real alchemist.

When I insisted on more information about him, at first Oke Wilkinson refused to give it to me, saying that it was better not to inquire too much – as if some danger existed – then, finally he said, like he was reading from a biography: “He founded a group ‘Cosmic Philosophy’ in Lion and collaborated with them for several years. In 1960, he left the group and moved here to Stockholm where he had grown deep roots.”

Oke gave me an introductory text of the alchemist’s lessons. I found out that Deska had experienced his first spiritual awakening in the temple of Mont-Saint Michel. He was only twelve then and from that occurrence commenced a life of spiritual experiences throughout European and American esoteric circles. He studied and practiced alchemy, kabala, and related fields for sixty years. For a while, he worked in the field of nuclear physics and even owned an electronics company.

“I believe every word he says”, Oke told me in confidence. “Reason tells me that among all the people I’ve met, he comes closest to the absolute accomplishment of the Great Work - it would be wise to ask him to take me in to study with him, even though I am relatively old. Nevertheless...a man’s heart doesn’t admit arguments of reason - mine belongs to heavenly bodies and their influence on human fate.”

“You said he made gold. That isn’t consistent with what real experts say,” I said, although the statement that Jean Deska succeeded in something which thousands before him did not, surely tickled the imagination. “The creation of gold is a metaphor for psychological and spiritual maturity.”

“Well, I can tell you that he is an accomplished alchemist. I believe that he achieved gold in the physical and spiritual sense. That’s why I respect him highly. You would be convinced if he allowed you to know him better”.

I was lucky. Jean Deska did allow me to spend some time in his proximity, to listen to his words and, I must say with some reservation, to let me know him better, which wasn’t a simple matter. For over two months I saw him twice a week, and during that time I lost interest in ritual magic, in my emotional relationship with Gunila, and in the stories of Odin’s brotherhood members.

Jean lived in a beautiful home in Hagsetra, one of Stockholm’s suburbs. A line of sparse pine trees separated his house from his neighbours. The house had a feeling of wealth about it, but without visible luxury. He received me in his study, which looked like the atelier of an architect or chemist. His housekeeper

let me in. She was a slim woman with wide eyes and dark circles who knew nothing about alchemy. She showed me into his study, where I usually found him by his desk, which was covered with sketches and colour drawings – it seemed he was busy drawing maps.

My questions were probably boring, almost intrusive, but he didn't show any annoyance. "Oh, please, sit down, sit down. Annette will serve us some tea now", he said during my first visit. Until then, I had met him once or twice at the Medborgar Placen meetings and at Astrid's. On the wall above his desk was a copy of a famous engraving showing Paracelsus in his alchemical laboratory – he was standing with hands leaned on the desk. Next to him was a thick book and a globe presenting the source of light.

I expected to see test tubes, retorts, a burner...but there were none. As if he was reading my mind, he said: "My laboratory is in the basement. It's much more convenient there for practical work. Here, I am occupied with theory". With a slow gesture, he indicated the rows of books and manuscripts on the shelf to the left and right of his desk. Across the room the fire was burning in the fireplace, and with the exception of that restless light, only one lamp above his desk was on. In the room full of shadows, Jean Deska didn't look like a Levant's merchant ready to deceive you; the dominant impression was of something mysterious and subdued. We talked about everyday matters – both of us laying the groundwork for more worthy subjects. He didn't look surprised that I was earning my livelihood as a dishwasher in a hotel. "That is a monotonous job and in such monotony, the ideas of creative people get ripen" he said. "Jack London had the same job."

For over an hour I played up to the right question – like a lover hesitating to ask a girl out on a first date. Finally, I stumbled: "I am sorry but I am a total ignoramus. What is a goal of your science: Is it the creation of gold, spiritual development or both?" I kept it a secret that I had already discovered a reasonable answer to that question at Jung's and that Oke had clearly pointed out a second, more exciting possibility.

"You know, there are many dreamers in the world and many mental patients as well...An authentic alchemist does not gravitate toward the wealth and gold of this world, although that could be the initial desire among the majority. There is nothing wrong with financial success - it cannot be accomplished without great work anyway. Our highest goal is the perfection of humans, the union between humans and the divine nature. There is no better comparison for such achievement than, for example, a birth in a religion or attaining enlightenment in Buddhism. Oneness is the state of a soul, a state of being, not simply a higher level of "knowing". One who attains it cannot avoid

producing gold, even if he wanted to.” His last sentence was accompanied by a forced smile - as if he was justifying himself, his own prosperity, because of the gossip about his great wealth.

“That reminds me of an occult’s metaphor – I don’t remember where I read it – a man who meditates for years will find gold wherever he sticks his shovel”. While I was saying it, I immediately felt my own disapproval in my rush to make a good impression – as if I really had something to contribute to such important matters.

Bending his head to one side, he said: “I haven’t heard that metaphor but it communicates well the ultimate outcome of alchemy. You see - alchemy demands a holy trinity from its followers: fanatic devotion, mystic faith, and the persistence and conscience of a scientist. There aren’t many people like that, not only in Odin’s Order but in any other field of ‘other world’s matter’. ..If those three qualities dominate for many years, sure...such a man will find gold buried in many places.”

He drank his tea with milk in the odd way, that many Russians did – he poured it in a saucer and slowly sipped it.

“The alchemist’s desire, and everything else is subservient to it, is to penetrate the deepest secrets of nature, cosmos, and God and through identification with the Divine, they hope to gain ability to achieve something over time – time measurable in years or decades – not time for which nature requires millenniums and eons to complete. Yet, many ignorant people don’t understand that the greatest secret of alchemy is to master and control time - not to turn crude metal into gold.”

Rumors claimed that he had stopped taking students a couple of years ago. After his lectures on the philosophy of the cosmos, numerous people harassed him and that obviously held him back. Since that time, his point of view was that everyone had to reach self-realization individually, completely unrestricted. Otherwise, it was impossible to achieve it - especially standing in the shadow of a person like he was, projecting on him the expectations our fathers failed to fulfil.

“How much time does a person need to find out if alchemy is right for them? Someone can waste years before realizing that it wasn’t the right thing for him...How would he know if he is not escorted by an experienced guide in his walk on a Path?”

“That is a typical Western-style question. How much is something? How much time? How much do you love me? I have over 60 years of experience in

esoteric fields. I clearly remember, when I was a boy, entering a Gothic cathedral for the first time ...I had a strong impression that something important was recorded there – a message for later generations – for me, for people before and after me. Wisdom and sacred skills collected throughout centuries would live on continuously in such a. But, they didn't. The question which concerned people for a long time - Is there Ariadna's connection which can take us back into the labyrinth of strange mysteries which Gothic architects knew about?"

He slowly stretched his lips into a smile, which suggested that he was one of the few who knew the answer. He said: "You actually asked me two questions. The main problem you face on the Path is that you cannot have a priest or guru by your side. The initiation involves exposing oneself completely before the temple door. It is a disaster to know that some guru is watching your back. You can achieve it only if you are completely free. The Eternal Father cannot recognize one of his sons if the son is still an earthly slave – no matter in which part. Freedom is the first virtue you must achieve in order to be initiated." He placed his tea cup and saucer on the table and, as if he was making a conclusion, he said: "Of course I only mean inner freedom."

"But the spiritual teacher is the mask of God. His presence is necessary because the student is incapable of enduring direct contact with the Divine - a person cannot look directly into strong sunlight."

"There is some truth in your words. The majority of spiritual Paths require an intermediary – like the need for sunglasses when you look into the sun. In alchemy, there are no intermediaries. No worthy text about a productive alchemist even remotely refers to a Grand Teacher. That is why the alchemy Path is long and difficult. In order to master time, you must not think about it."

It took me over three weeks of frequent visits to finally ask him a question about initiation into alchemy.

"What is our initiation?" He seemed to be searching for words which I could easily understand. "That is a total insight of the obvious. Alchemy is the only Path which has objective control in the laboratory. If your experiments confirm that you have exceeded the material laws of the universe, it means that you are an alchemist who experienced inner awakening. Of course, that corresponds to the laws set by Paracelsus – with a wide gesture he pointed at the drawing on the wall – you will not transform anything unless you transform yourself first."

"But that is the case with every genuine initiation. It is always about self-transformation." I had the impression that his arguments should be refuted.

“Is it with every one?” he said, as if he was disappointed. “There is a major difference there. You see, you are initiated into Odin’s Order... Everywhere around you are archetypal of images: people in ritual clothing, solemn ritual words...Nothing’s wrong with that, but alchemical initiation means real contact. It enables the internal “I” to connect with the physical body. The first contact cannot be articulated in an intellectual way – it is accomplished through intuitive or symbolic experiences. To become an alchemist, you must have a noble heart but at the same time you have to have a sound mind to recognize everything without the help of rituals: gestures, sounds, colours...You must be alone, completely alone.”

I was about to ask if alchemy was for me. Instead, I stumbled over a feeble-sounding question: “Is alchemy for everyone?” It was obvious he wouldn’t say, yes alchemy is for everyone. Without any indication that my question was inappropriate, he said: “Not everyone can become an alchemist. We are at the beginning of our growth yet at the end of time we’ll be eternal. Alchemy enables us to walk faster along the Path, to cast off our earthly burden sooner. It is just one of many Paths, but for some of us, the most dear.”

“It seems essentially different than what it represented in the middle ages. Most of contemporary alchemists quote Jung and cling to archetype psychology – yet, these are new elements.”

“It didn’t change essentially, it simply adapted to the new studies of evolution and to new circumstances.”

“If the main goal of alchemy is to control time, then what is its basic philosophy...I mean every alchemy, European, Arabic or Chinese?”

“Yeah,” he said, drawling as if allowing himself extra time to choose words which a layperson could understand. “Alchemy is the science of life and consciousness. There is a very strong connection between the substance of life and consciousness. Alchemy provides skills to manipulate life and consciousness into matter, so that the problems of internal disharmony and contradiction are solved. The Source Being created matter so that it could move down into it and develop from it. If you could read between my words you would understand that an absolute being is self-created - we too have to create ourselves after that image to become self-created people.”

“Where is God, Jean?” I rushed my words again. I should have said “Mr. Deska”. It seemed I didn’t know my place in the relation to him. This time he kept his gaze on me for a while as if he was thinking over if I had crossed the line of appropriate behaviour.

“That is a steep ground”, he shrugged his shoulders like a man who was humbly avoiding the final answers to eschatological questions. “I don’t believe that God exists in a personal sense. Some people who have experimented with eternity have answered to that question...They found out indirectly that things are truly the way they are, because they can’t be different. In the entire universe, only God has completely developed his potential and crossed over the ultimate boundary – time.”

“Experiments with eternity?” The conversation was becoming extremely exciting. “If I may ask, what are these experiments about and who performs them?”

“Through a special process, you comprehend and recognize who you are, where you come from, and where you are now. That experiment is very complicated to perform because the contact with eternity makes life on earth very difficult and causes suicidal tendencies. Man longs to free himself from his limited state and is tempted to do that in the fastest way – by killing his body. That’s why it’s not for everyone. You have to have your feet on the ground, head in the heavens, a generous heart, and cold reason. I believe the answer to the question you just asked is – no, alchemy is not for everyone”.

“You are probably right. The sentiment that all roads are open to everyone was created by modern authorities, Aleister Crowley, for example. I don’t know if you have heard of him?”

He didn’t say anything so I assumed he wasn’t aware of Crowley’s work. I continued with more confidence: “Crowley teaches us that the real essence of alchemy is sexual. The sexual act is evidently a neutralization process for basic cosmic polarities: male and female. And alchemy also gravitates to that principle, doesn’t it? Crowley received an extraordinary, stratified text from a higher level of consciousness....”

“I’ve read the Book of Law”, he said, more loudly than before; as if he wanted to keep me from continuing. “Aleister Crowley...his life was really tragic. He didn’t comprehend the text which came through him. It was predicted in the Book, as well as his destiny. ‘Slaves will serve’, it says in one place in Liber Al, and indeed, Crowley was the unconscious slave of a higher power – and, his entire life, he strained to present himself as a Logos of a new eon. For a rational person, it is abnormal to take a man with a pathological disease seriously. He presented his disease as a virtue. Psychopaths do that, but it is hard to believe that normal people accepted it that. Did you read his diaries?”

“I didn’t want to. People write diaries not for themselves but to impress others.”

He got up from his armchair and, from the bookshelf, as if he had anticipated it, he took a hardcover book. He leafed through the book, stopping at a particular page: “Listen to his words. He wrote this in Chafalu, in the so called thelema monastery. His wife Lia Hirsih, who bore him a child, assisted in his homosexual operations: ‘...after lunch I invited Mr. X. It was an operation number sixty, taking place in my anus. The operation lasted for a long time. Lia had to masturbate Mr. X until he reached an erection, and with her hand, she introduced his penis into my anus. The orgasm was savage and strong...’”

He raised his eyes from the book and looked at me with a quizzical look. “Do you know what Crowley’s ritual initiation in Ipsimus consisted of? No? Psychiatrists call it coprofagy or eating of excrement. It would be tiring to read and disgusting to listen to all details. His partner Lia Hirsih relieved herself – she emptied her intestines – and Crowley ate her excrement. There are many disgusting details in his description - he wrote, that in the end, he experienced great ecstasy. Only a distorted man can eat a pile of feces and assert, that in such an act, he had reached the level of Christ and Buddha.”

The expression on my face proved that he had achieved the desired effect. He continued in a calmer voice: “Otherwise, there is hidden and valuable information in the Book. Future generations will eventually disclose it.”

Deep inside, I felt relieved. I felt as if I had touched something slimy with my bare hands and I thought how lucky I was to have come across an alchemist. If I hadn’t, who knows how many years and how much effort I would have invested in spreading the teachings of a man who ate feces to prove that he was a new Christ.

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My contacts with the members of Odin’s Order gradually diminished. All the attraction was gone. Sometimes at meetings, I felt like a stranger who merely observed what was going on. The last great anticipation and excitement I had felt, was before I joined the Order’s Middle level. Even then, disappointment awaited. The Initiation into the Middle level was dull, without the supremacy of the initial initiation. Lars Helstrem, the Master of the ritual, presided over it like some municipal registrar who routinely weds dozens of couples. He talked in a

monotonous, squeaky voice, shifting his gaze over everyone instead of focusing it on me - he acted as if he believed he deserved a higher place in the Order's hierarchy.

I was introduced to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet – which I already knew and to the king's and queen's colours of Sephira on the Tree of Life. I received a sealed letter containing a key for the union with my unconscious spirit. I was allowed to open it only after midnight, but I suspected that it would lead to yet another disappointment. I was right. The key for my unconscious spirit, which had such importance for me, was a piece of cardboard with a coloured hexagon drawn on the base in shades of complementary colours. If you looked purposely at those coloured fields, they became stronger and shinier in intensity. That process eventually provoked a light state of trance suitable for self-suggestion. Alas! The exercise was described in detail in William Battler's book, *"The Training and Work of a Magician"*, which I'd received from Mladen many years ago. I worked on that exercise for several days, hoping I would reach the state of self-hypnosis. The results were meagre, so I gave up. Was *that* the key that brothers and sisters had whispered about for months?!

I wondered if I would be disappointed again even when I got accepted into the Inner Order, which I had anticipated for years. What should I expect then? People say that some members of the Inner Order get instructions from the secret leaders who have watched over Odin's Brotherhood for almost four centuries. Those were Cosmic Intelligences whispered about through tightly closed lips – if anyone tried to learn about them before the proper time, he was considered a inept peasant. I was ready to bet that the whole thing was just another sugarcoated lie.

The members of the Inner Order were no different from any other members. Certainly they were educated but they didn't possess any of the occult powers they talked about incessantly. Some of them were neurotic, some depressive, and I found out that the majority of them suffered from sexual problems. Oke Wilkinson inclined to drinking, so even he was no exception. A few times after parties at Astrid's, he walked home staggering. Many members smoked; some were chain smokers. If they were not able to smoke for hour or two because of a meeting, for example, they fidgeted in their chairs as if they'd had a sudden haemorrhoid inflammation.

I was most disappointed when I realized that I was superior to the others in regard to several important matters. Both our written materials and conversations constantly stressed that the basic instruments for successful magic were engagement of emotions and creation of sharp and vivid images. There were just a few who could control these abilities. During ritual, we were required

to visualize a waterfall with white foam on the surface, gardens of fragrant, tropical fruit, and a fresh breeze cooling our faces - the majority made sour faces, typical for Swedes - those were the same people who later claimed to be entirely immersed in archetype images.

During that period only thoughts of the shining sun made me close my eyes because the image's intensity could blind me. When the word "child" was mentioned I could distinctively feel the gentle warmth of a child's neck and smooth cheeks, almost as if I had stroked the back of my hand over it. According to my judgment, and I am certain I was quite modest about it, only two or three of the members were my equals. Haling was the only one above me, no doubt about that. The difference between him and the majority of brothers and sisters was that he never spoke about his ritual experiences. He had no need to say anything, it was obvious what was happening. He looked as if he was cast from one piece of material, and he spoke from within - he had something which made him that way but, at the time, I couldn't figure out what it was. Many years later, I realized that Haling was the only man in Odin's brotherhood who knew who he was. The others didn't. From them came parts of books they read, phenomena they'd experienced, assumptions about what would impress others the most, and above all, concentration on how to show and keep an important image of themselves. My disappointment with them now was equal to the vastly inflated perception I'd had before I met them. Also, there were some other unpleasant experiences.

I got attached to some people and suffered when we parted. Jim was getting ready to spend some time in Alicante in Spain, and from there, he planned to continue his trip to the States. When he told me that, I slapped him at the back, laughed, and said: "Who knows how many broken hearts you will leave behind before you reach San Francisco," but for a few days, I was almost sick from feeling deserted.

Before initiation, I made a pledge to keep quiet about the ritual and the knowledge I'd gained. Jim didn't care about that. "Come on, you're a smart guy, don't fall for their shitty mystifications. Tell me - how did the circus show go?"

I told him about my impressions. "I don't understand, Jim... what's going on? The first initiation was extraordinarily exciting; I felt an authentic energy which shook me from head to toe. It was one of my deepest experiences."

"What happened? In the beginning it was an original ritual which couldn't leave anyone unaffected. Then ego games began - a smaller group of people tried to show that they were the chosen ones. They invented rituals, stories about Grand Masters from the Himalayas or Count Saint Germaine...They claimed they

were connected to those individuals and similar bullshit. It would have been wiser if they had stayed with the authentic ritual. I've heard from other people that it was a valuable experience for them too. Because of that, I avoid occult organizations like the plague. I experienced similar things at home more than once, so I had enough to last me a lifetime."

"Jim, write just a few words....when you get time."

His smiled sadly. "It would be great if I were that kind of a guy, but I am not. You know, I have a notebook full of addresses of good people who I spent some time with, somewhere in the world. I was certain I would stay in touch with them for years yet I haven't written a word to anyone, ever. I would lie if I promised I'd write, but I'm certain I'll never forget you! Be sure about that." Suddenly, he drew me closer, hugging me hard. I couldn't speak. I become rigid in such situations and the words I wished I'd said, come to me later when I was thinking about our farewell. He said: "Actually, we'll be together all the time. We are on the same Path, all of us, seekers of the Truth are closer to each other than to the people we work, eat or share the same bed with. Fate is looking after us. God is the greatest sage in this universe and he certainly knows what he's doing....and the two of us...we are on his team. Come on, give me a smile, you look like you will make me cry. The world has become smaller, I am certain we'll meet again while we are still in these bodies."

At that moment, in spite of my sadness over his departure, I was certain he was right. I was wrong. I never saw him again.

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"Our inner experiences belong to the spiritual world and the material world is separate aspect. You have to achieve harmony between the two, and spiritual life must not have any negative consequences on your everyday life."

Jean Deska said this in his customary way, sitting in his armchair holding a teacup in one hand and a saucer in the other, slowly sipping his tea. Later in my room, stretched out on my bed, I would analyzed his words – they would sounded ordinary, like what I'd read so many times, accepted and digested already. But now, in his home, with the flames from the fireplace making his facial expression seem mysterious, those words had the sound of profound wisdom.

“How can we judge the level of our own spiritual development...the level of harmony we have achieved?”

“It requires 12 incarnations in this world to cause rain or snow. One of the great alchemical procedures facilitates a change in the consciousness level of matter, which, if it happened spontaneously in nature, would require hundreds, even thousands of years to complete. Man is like a sculptor who is sculpting himself. He emerges halfway from a shapeless stone, holding a hammer in one hand and a chisel in the other - he sculpts his own perfect image in stone, removing anything that hides his perfection. That’s why you have to walk through your own inner experiences, as if your inner self is your best teacher.”

“Mr. Deska, you mentioned that the old Egyptians introduced alchemy in the initiation. However, some wise people say that alchemy originated in the Atlantis.”

“The entire Egyptian civilization originated in the Atlantis. Egypt marked the end of Atlantis and the beginning of a new civilization. Before the Egyptians initiated civilization, all of humankind was travelling downward – it was the time of involution - after Egypt, mankind as a whole began to ascend.”

“One thing comes to mind,” I said quietly. “In different parts of the world people left signs of time engraved in stones; for example, Stonehenge, Egyptian pyramids, creations of the old Mayas...”

“Mmmmmmm...yes, yes, those structures point out key ideas representing the collective consciousness of mankind. An alchemist knows that everyone has a gift of psychological ability to accept those ideas, but not everyone accepts them in the same way. They are like underwater currents, which can only be perceived by those who dive into deep water. Those are real psychological abilities, not telepathy, precognition or the power to hypnotize frogs. In essence, psychological ability is the level on which we permit ourselves to sense things around us.”

“Then, why do people avert themselves from it?” My initial rigidity and hesitation to express my opinion, had disappeared within the last ten days.

He turned in his armchair halfway in my direction, placed an empty saucer on the table, and stretched out his open hand – as if he was waiting for me to place my thoughts in it. Then he continued in a voice louder than usual: “Because, they are afraid that through enlightenment they will lose their identity. In order to develop his perceptions, a man must relieve himself from the fear of lost identity. A man who suppresses any content of his consciousness buries the true source of self-wisdom and real truth about himself.”

“If we freed the powers of our unconsciousness, there would be chaos.”

“You’re wrong. Consciousness about our corrupt nature as an indivisible part of our being doesn’t mean that we will become an embodiment of evil. On the contrary, we become complete beings with the freedom of choice. You see, traditional Christianity stresses the bright side only. Christ is the light without a shadow. However, the ancient Greeks knew that the wholeness of human beings must be accepted. Do you realize that the ancient Greek god Pan, the one who Christian fathers later used to create the figure of Satan, means 'all'? Do you understand that it doesn’t mean only light but all of it: light **and** darkness? Have you noticed an obvious contradiction in orthodox Christianity? Satan or Lucifer is the great prince of darkness. But his name means 'light-bearer', the one who brings light. He is a modernized Prometheus who brings light to man. When you suppress a part of yourself, you cut that part off. You walk in only one direction, like an automaton.”

He was right. Ever since I could remember, I felt I had to do some things although I didn’t want to. Most of the time I felt like an automaton, because, somehow it wasn’t worth it to resist.

“Do you want to know the truth about yourself?” This was not a question, but a continuation of his long monologue. “If you want it, you have to be completely open. Enlightenment is a mirror of your image, and you can achieve it only if your eyes are wide open. To attain freedom, an alchemist vigilantly observes his personal fantasies, visions and dreams because it is in his consciousness that cosmic energy reveals itself. An average person avoids awareness of his surroundings and, at the same time, he avoids the realization of his own inner contents. What confines him are his limited beliefs. What happens within the borders of his beliefs, he calls reality; everything outside those borders, he experiences as unreality. However, *everything* that exists: this cup, a dream, a thought is more or less real.

He paused longer than usual. He narrowed his small eyes as if trying to see through the bookshelf across the room. “I don’t want to insult you, but perhaps you haven’t read Charles Darwin’s diary?”

“No, I’ve only heard of it.”

“It is the most interesting material and an alchemist apprentice never overlooks it...”

I was in a state of absolute relaxation. Such moments in his presence were the most pleasurable. He evoked casual stories, anecdotes about famous alchemists which just remotely appeared like gentle slandering; in short, he

talked about his experiences. His words turned into captivating whirlpools, difficult to resist. My anxiety that his questioning would expose my meagre knowledge, and that he would sense my weaknesses, entirely disappeared. The room was filled with the fragrance of musk incense and the taste and warmth of tea in my mouth had a calming effect.

“The ship which Darwin sailed on was called 'Beagle' and, for that time period, she was quite immense. She had, I believe, five masts. Darwin industriously collected plant specimens on his journey and kept detailed notes of his observations. One day, they reached Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost part of South America, where they intended to refill supplies of water and food. The ship anchored at a nearby shore, where they noticed an Indian village. With the translator and a few sailors, Darwin got into a small boat and soon they reached the shore. Then they traded glass beads, mirrors, knives and axes for food and water while Darwin inquired about the Indian's customs. Look what happened! The Indians told them that they admired their courage because they had the guts to sail over a huge ocean in such a small ship. They pointed at the small boat which had brought them ashore. At first, Darwin believed that the translator had made a mistake in interpretation, but they kept repeating the same answer to his question.”

Jean Deska smiled like a man who knew what was happening behind the scene. “It took Darwin quite some time to understand the cause of the confusion. You see, those Indians believed that it was impossible to make a larger boat than the ones they had. That limited belief had incredible repercussions...” He looked at me, opening his small eyes wide. “Not a single inhabitant of that Indian tribe could see the huge 'Beagle' anchored only a couple hundred yards away from the shore. Because of their beliefs, they simply couldn't see the real ship, only an empty space.”

Jean was a master of narration. He waited for my reaction before continuing: “Only one man from the village could see the boat. Who do you think it was?”

I was about to open my mouth to say that it was probably an innocent child - like the outcome in the story about the emperor's new clothes, but he spared me from such banality: “The only man who could see the boat was the village shaman...he was trained from childhood to see the invisible world!”

It was hard to add anything coherent to a story with such a surprising turn of events. Everywhere around us are parallel worlds which we don't see because of our self-imposed limitations. “Mnnn-nn-nn,” as if he was agreeing with my thoughts, “Alchemy opens a man's eyes to worlds unapproachable to layman

because they refuse to see them. Not seeing is usually a form of defence. An alchemist accepts many things as reality and also the existence of different levels of reality.”

“I understand. Please go on.”

“All forms of energy have some consciousness; they are aware of something. At a basic level, we could say that this flame – he pointed casually in the direction of the fireplace – is conscious, because it has the ability to incite changes and to react to something. The flame absorbs oxygen and it is aware of it. If we attribute a personality to it, it is extraordinarily limited and simple compared with the personality of an animal, not to mention a human being. All objects, thoughts, creative ideas, feelings, and dreams have personality. An alchemist tries to communicate with all these personalities in the broad world around him. He knows without a doubt that it is possible to communicate with the fire in the fireplace, with a cup of tea or with a thought. Communication doesn’t develop only through human speech since there are infinite numbers of languages. Music and the creation of morning dew on the grass is language too....The entire world that surrounds us, visible and invisible, addresses us all the time in many forms of languages. The follower on the Path tries to hear many different messages which come to him and attempts to answer them.

“Steiner writes about similar things in his books. I don’t remember if he clearly mentioned alchemy, but his recipes for holistic agriculture resemble alchemy.”

Jean continued to talk as if he hadn’t heard my words. “If we acknowledge that language transmits communication, we can conclude that all forms of energy create a cosmic language, which has an unlimited number of dialects. People don’t listen to cosmic language, not wanting to lose the solid ground they stand on, and we must understand that fact. An alchemist is not afraid of getting lost; he has nothing to lose except his ignorance and he is aware that wherever his imagination takes him, he will find gold.”



THIRD PART

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My return to Belgrade was accompanied by a naïve expectation that everything I had left behind had changed. For the first couple of days I searched for changes but after a while I unwillingly admitted that there were none. Some things and some people were only slightly different. Mladen's fingers were stained more from tobacco, his voice was more raspy than before or perhaps it just seemed like that to me; Mother dragged her feet over the kitchen floor with more difficulty, my brother had become a financial manager of some company selling electrical goods, and my father was surprised to see me in one piece. Brother later told me in confidence that Father, in spite of the post cards I'd send from Stockholm radiating optimism about my new life, was concerned that I might have been sending them from some camp for political emigrants.

With effort Father hid his surprise when I gave out my gifts. My presents didn't fit into his vision of the prodigal son's return. For mother, I brought a brooch made of wrought Lapland's gold, a 'Samsonite' briefcase for my brother like the ones the business people in Stockholm carried, and a silver cigarette case with engraved initials for Mladen. Before the war, my father was a manager at 'Bata' shoe store in Tuzla, and shoes were one of the rare things he knew something about. His eyes widened when I handed him a pair of Bally shoes of dark brown leather with thin, flexible soles. "Oh, thank you, you shouldn't have, you shouldn't have..." Even in such a situation, he felt one thing but spoke of another.

"Did you bring something for Lydia?", mother asked timidly. "She is really a good girl. She came to visit me almost every Saturday."

Since my letter in which I broke off my relationship with her, Lydia had dated two men. I didn't know either of them and sometimes I wondered what they looked like. From the occasional letters Mother sent me, I knew that Lydia came to visit her regularly and that she attributed great importance to that fact. Apparently, Mother wasn't able to handle our break up.

"I didn't bring her anything. We haven't been together for a long time."

"Eh, son.... you're not together, but she loves you and she has waited for you to come back. She's coming tonight to see you."

I shrugged my shoulders to show I didn't care, but I felt a sharp stabbing sensation inside my chest. My relationship with Astrid, some passing affairs, and finally the relationship with Gunila Beriman had all been very exciting. My ego inflated when I thought of who my lovers had been, and the status they had in the occult hierarchy, but looking forward in time those relationships were brought down to the level of mucus. They didn't contain a tiny bit of the emotion I experienced when I was next to Lydia. Conceited stories about links with the universe through orgasm, a new eon of liberation of human beings...those were simply goldplated frames for the discharge of sexual energy. No one but Gunila spoke in such elevated terms about the relationship between a man and a woman – I am Nuit, you are Hadit – yet there wasn't a speck of love in our relationship; we banged each other like lean pigs. I don't believe that excited wild beast ever loved anyone for even a moment like Lydia loved me. True love was unreachable to such women, like music was to the deaf.

“Son, would you mind, but I'd like to give Lydia this brooch,” mother said in a quiet voice, which contained concern that I might suddenly burst. “When will I wear it? I don't go out; I am old and jewellery is for young people....”

“Give it to Lydia if you wish, it's yours.”

Mother didn't give the brooch to Lydia - I did. She came into our apartment looking stiff and tense, her voice changed from what I remember and she offered me her hand as if greeting a distant relative. Sitting around the table we had a banal conversation about our mutual friends. From under her lowered head, Mother was looking back and forth at Lydia and me, Mladen smoked his strong “Drava”, and Father fidgeted in his chair trying to think of something wise to say. After a while, Mladen finished his apricot brandy, which was transparent like vodka, and finally said: “Bogy, Bogy, you've changed a lot. That is what happens to people in the big world. Tell me something about **our things!**”

In three years, he'd received only two letters and a few postcards from me. He was burning with desire to hear in details what had happened to me. I hesitated because it was not the right moment for such talk - I wanted to have a private conversation with him. Expecting that, father became restless and with uneasiness in his voice, he said, “I don't want to intrude,” and he got up from the table.

“No, no, sit down, please. Mladen and I will talk tomorrow, please tell me now how things are here.”

It was almost midnight when I left to walk Lydia home. She lived with her parents and a younger sister in a quiet street next to the botanical garden. The

sweet fragrance of blooming linden trees awoke in me a strange feeling of past and present tightly interlace. So many things had happened since that time, but still perceptions from the past were alive, penetrating and prevailing in the present moment. Lydia pointed at the dark windows of her apartment and said; “I can’t invite you upstairs, my family is already asleep.”

“It’s all right, I am very tired,” I said, and slowly drew her closer to me. She rested her head on my shoulder. I heard her rapid and shallow breathing and inhaled the scent of her hair; it was the same as long ago. Her gentle scent and the fragrance of linden trees, made my throat tight. “So much time has passed,” I said, feeling my blood pulsate in my neck. “My God, so much time!?”

“In the beginning, time passed very slowly, but now...it is as if you had never left.”

“I feel the same, all that time seems like a dream I just woke up from.”

“There’s nothing stranger than time,” she said.

I didn’t want to disturb the merging of past and present, longing that it would last forever while familiar fragrances mixed together had the power of a deep and dark river. My tiredness was taking over and, leaning on her, I was faintly sinking into a half-sleep.

“See you tomorrow,” I said.

“I’ll call you, I can’t wait.”

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The next morning I laid awake in bed for a long time, feeling disconnected and without thoughts, in a state of a pleasant numbness. I heard the phone ring in the hallway and soon Mother appeared my door with a phone in her hand. “Someone is looking for you. Do you want to take it?” The tone of her voice clearly indicated it wasn’t Lydia.

“This is Igor Vislavsky. I’d like to see you... I want to organize several public lectures for you and a place for your articles in my magazine. Now I am editor-in-chief.”

“How did you find out that I was back?”

“Eh, how...this is the Balkans, news spreads quickly from mouth to mouth, like a folk song. You are a man of the world now. I’d like to talk to you and have an interview. Don’t even think you can get out of it!”

Igor Vislavsky had studied philosophy as one of the best students of his generation. Three professors had fought over him for the place of an assistant, but his troubles began when he registered a sect philosophy and religions of a new era for his doctorate thesis. Professors didn’t know anything about that field so he had to leave, wandering in London for a couple of years. He’d apparently had a real hard time because he said that he’d pulled his doctorate out like a tooth with crooked roots.

He was waiting for me at the outdoor coffee shop of the restaurant “Russian Emperor”. He had brought a few copies of the magazine “*Alternative*”, where he was an editor-in-chief. I came with Lydia. Sitting next to me, she silently followed our conversation.

“Here are a few copies of our magazine; you can have a look at your leisure. You know, I am trying to educate our readers gradually. Most of them in their letters ask to read about yoga, or get practical advice...I must compromise, I give them a little bit of that, I stimulate their psychogenic zones by slowly introducing more serious subjects. Of course, it will take years.”

Vislavsky hadn’t change much. With his short hair and narrow face, and bulging back of his head was prominent. His slanting brown eyes had a soft shine and a refined sweetness. There was an innocence about him, but I remember that before my departure for Stockholm he had worked as an officer of ideological development of young people with the City Committee of the Communist Union. People abhorred him and they were probably right in doing so. One time I asked him: “Igor, should I watch what I say in front of you?” and he simply replied, as if my question related to the field of oriental philosophy which we discussed frequently: “Yes, avoid unpleasant topics.” It was strange how he’d succeeded in reconciling those two very opposite choices.

“I don’t want an interview now,” he said, pointing at the copies of the magazine. “First, look at the level of our main articles and pay attention to the interviews. I try to have at least one in every issue although it’s hard to get hold of interesting people. Look at this, for example. Dragos Brozovic, a graduate of the Fine Arts Academy in Rome, uses hyperborean motives in his paintings, claiming – and I think he sincerely believes it – that the center of ancient civilization was around the North Pole, which at the time was a tropical zone. A sudden disturbance in Earth’s axes changed everything. He paints Atlantis and superhumans, and he believes that he is one of them. He knows the ancient

philosophy well, especially Plotin, claiming that he studied him for nine months. You know, no one is interested in knowing what some worker in a foundry thinks.”

“Sure.” That was all I could say. I was about to ask if he still worked for the City Committee, I didn’t want to ruin our meeting. It was a beautiful day, the beginning of June, warm but not too hot and the tables at Russian Emperor’s terrace were all taken. I sipped Turkish coffee which tasted like it did in the good, old days, so different from the Swedish filter coffee from vending machines. Lydia kept her warm palm on my forearm and our knees were touching under the table.

“What did you do mostly?”

“Peeled potatoes and washed dishes in a hotel.”

“Fuck that, I mean seriously.” He quickly turned to Lydia and said: “Sorry, Lydia, journalists have dirty mouths.” He went on: “Your first love was Yoga. Have you remained faithful to it?”

“The first love cannot be forgotten,” I said, looking at Lydia. “Well, I mainly studied Western hermetic traditions.”

“I heard rumors that you had become a member of some occult brotherhood based on Scandinavian mythology. Is that true?”

The question popped out like a jack-in-a-box. I had briefly told Mladen about my initiation and to Boranka from Gradiste, who knew about my interest in “those things”. How was it possible that news about my joining Odin’s order had arrived in Belgrade before me?

“What is your overall impression of the current alternative scene; which direction is dominant....I mean, is it Indian philosophy, Zen, classical Buddhism, shamanism...?”

“In Sweden, I read about the alternative in catalogues of world famous publishers. You probably used the same sources. Interest in transcendental meditation is expanding due to the popularity of the Beatles, and some other cults. Certainly you’ve heard about the Hare Krishna movement? You can see them everywhere in Stockholm: at airports, subway stops, on the streets...What fascinates me is something that is not widely known, and probably never will be because it’s so particular. I am talking about the quantum mechanics which has a lot in common with Eastern mysticism, particularly Yoga and Vedanta. Alchemy

belongs to that category, but it is considered more serious. Only a handful of people are capable of that approach."

While I was saying that, I had a vague awareness of Jean Deska standing next to me, listening to my words and nodding his head. I sensed an internal urge to continue: "It is unreasonable to offer people final solutions, my impression - which is quite subjective - is that matter changed significantly in the beginning, organisms and life forms...but the last several thousand years we haven't change physically, only on the level of collective consciousness. For us, it became what water is for fish and that change is happening very quickly."

I paused for a moment. It seemed like I was giving a lecture, but he said: "Go on, go on, please."

"Until recently, man explored the outside world with his five senses, gaining control over it. That was our evolution. Then, as we crossed the threshold of awareness we found ourselves in new territory, we became multi-sensorial, we were no longer confined to experiencing reality only through our five senses. By becoming multi-sensorial, we exceed the limitations of our senses and begin to experience reality on a deeper and more complete level."

"Yes," he nodded, "many people are convinced that something radical is happening right now. Something which has no precedent in the history of mankind. We could compare this new development only with the phenomenon of self-consciousness - when man moved beyond the simple mechanism of action-reaction into being conscious of himself. What is happening now is a new, even more important step. It is fascinating to see so many Paths opening up, leading toward the same goal...What do you think about Krishnamurti? He fell into oblivion for a while but now the number of his followers is increasing."

"You're right, his popularity is suddenly growing. I've met many people who consider him a Teacher, although he resolutely rejects such a role. He teaches that you shouldn't do anything, there is no reason why you should exert effort. Be what you are, simply wake up and accept your already enlightened state. I couldn't adopt anything from his teachings, it's not my cup of tea. It seems too simplified, it suggests an overly easy solution for our bitter complaints. I haven't met anyone yet who accomplished anything according that philosophy in life. I saw many who were trying. The passage from the *Upanishads* seems closer to the truth - it is hard to walk on a sharp razor blade, that's why, sages say, the road to salvation is difficult...Hey Igor, we must be off, we need to visit many relatives."

“I know, you are sold out, but please find some time for our interview. After we are done with it, you can start writing - an article in every issue.”

“I want to authorize the interview before publishing. I know how you journalists operate, you throw something out, change something.... journalism performs plastic surgery on the truth. Since you are a communist, when *you* lie, you don't think of God.”

“An ex-communist! I gave returned red membership booklet because I couldn't stand the situation. You know, it was the Communist party that taught me how to lie. The party's statute clearly states: Do not be open in the face of your class enemy. Well... Seriously, here's my number. Don't let me wait too long! Many will bother you, it has leaked out that you are back and that you did some admirable things over there. There are several registered organizations here: The New Acropolis, Transcendental Meditation... Both theosophists and antroposophists are coming together but still clandestinely. You'll see, they'll call.”

Suddenly he became silent, with a questioning look on his face. There was something at the tip of his tongue, he was choosing words to ask a question. Did I meet a famous occultist in Stockholm? Did I experience an astral projection? Was I able to make people turn when I sent telepathic suggestions into the back of their heads...? I was wrong. He asked what I have been asking myself for all these years: “As far as I've heard, your main problem was that you didn't know the answer to the question, who am I? Have you found an answer?”

I lowered my eyes to the ground. Lydia's body turned stiff in tense expectation. I raised my head and looked Igor in the eyes: “I had strange experiences, deep experiences some people write books about, but, no, I haven't passed that exam yet. If I had, I believe my life would be fundamentally different. One of the rare thinkers who understood that said, that a man who knows who he is, could laugh even in hell. I couldn't do that.”

His lower jaw suddenly dropped: “I hoped you would say that you had found your answer. Because, I agree, that is the fundamental question of human existence.”

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Igor Vislavsky was right. Two days after our conversation Petko Sretenovic called: "It would be an honour if you would join us at our meeting on Saturday. Of course, I'd like to have a private conversation with you before that."

"I want to know who comes to those meetings, the topics of your discussions... I don't like empty conversations about miracles, mystifications..."

"Of course, of course, I understand but it cannot be explained just like that, over the phone. You understand the country we live in. Perhaps you would like to come over to my place? I live near the soccer field at Karaburma."

Petko Sretenovic's apartment was on the fourteenth floor, and the view extended far across the Danube; you could even see the outline of Pancevo. He received me in his living room, where photographs of the moon's surface and drawings of UFO's hung on the walls. Somewhere in the middle of his bookshelf was a helmet made from pieces of folded aluminium foil. Some years ago I'd heard stories about that helmet – it was used for meditation and contact with extraterrestrials. I tried to remember who had told me, before my departure for Sweden, that Petko liked to show off with this helmet in front of people who didn't have much technical knowledge.

"We had to name our society," he said. "You know, since biblical times something comes to life only when it gets a name."

He had a stout, strong figure, a heavy neck, and a short but wide forehead with three deep wrinkles in the middle of it. He was looking at me intently, as if assessing me.

"And what name did you chose?"

"Parallel Worlds, the Society for Exploring Outer Worlds. Our society's basic rule is tolerance. We have amateur scientists, theosophists, antroposophists, yogis, astrologers....It is most important today to get in touch with extraterrestrial civilizations so we focused our efforts in that direction. The fundamental problems of our planet cannot be solved by the same people who caused them, so we need help from a higher level." He creased his forehead,

looking at me from an angle, judging if I was on the same page with him. Apparently not satisfied with what he saw, he put more energy into his words: “Some very important people have a critical attitude toward such activities, but they will come around when they see the indisputable proof. Extraterrestrial civilizations do exist and the fate of mankind depends on whether we going to make a contact or not.”

“Do you believe that they are on a higher level from us?”

“Certainly! They have solved problems of illness, poverty, war, and morally, they are much farther above us.”

“So, *we* couldn’t decide on a contact?”

My comment seemed to cause uneasiness. The wrinkles on his forehead grew deeper: “It doesn’t have to be that way. They will do what they have to do but a great deal depends on us. You know, proof of contacts with extraterrestrials accumulated for over a thousand years, but preceding generations interpreted it in a religious context: for them, those were angels, divine beings, god’s messengers....Today, we live in a technological civilization and obviously we will interpret those occurrences in an accurate way. We *know* that they arrived on cosmic ships – COSMICSHIPS – it was not some pestilence from the sky, satanic temptation or similar stupidities. The consciousness of modern man has changed. Today, no one cares if the mother of Christ was a virgin or not, we are interested in what is up there.” With his short, fat index finger he pointed at the wall across the room, so I turned to see what it was – something that looked like a washed-out graphic: ”That is a copy of a copper engraving made in Zurich in the eleventh century. A great number of cosmic ships appeared over Zurich in 1036. You could see them clearly, as well as the people looking into the sky and pointing at those ships. We were not ready for a contact then, today we are.”

I weighed my words carefully: “That is quite possible, but how do you see my place in your society? I am interested in our civilization, not extraterrestrials”

“We recognize people from all convictions. We are stronger together. We have heard a lot about you”, he smiled encouragingly, “and your interests are not so different from mine. I am convinced that the great spiritual Teachers came from somewhere, they converted into human bodies to look like the rest of us, while in fact, they are higher Intelligences, emissaries of developed cosmic civilizations. Their mission is to prepare humankind for an upcoming close encounter. Are you free on Saturday night?”

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A house in Senjak, which belonged to former opera singer Paulina Popovic, was the meeting place of the Parallel Worlds Society. Although she was the widow of a pre-war iron merchant, the communists hadn't confiscated her house because her nephew was a member of Tito's attached battalion, during the war. The remnants of former wealth were still visible. Elite guard's swords and Turkish yataghans hung on the walls and old-fashioned guns adorned in silver were displayed in a glass case. The living room was spacious and the Persian carpet on the parquet floor had been on by her husband's ancestors for over a hundred years. In the corner, across from the tall, narrow windows was a huge pale green tile stove, displaying a relief of Theses holding Medusa's head. The room smelled of sandal oil mixed with parquetry polish and antique oak furniture.

The group of men and women reminded me of my first meeting at the Medborgar Placen. I felt a brief tension but obviously not the shudder created by great anticipation. I was able to assess and look through these people in just minutes, and in what I saw, there was no reason for further curiosity. It was like reviewing book I'd already completed; the style might be different but the content was the same.

"Tonight, Mrs. Markovic will give a lecture on the contacts Helena Blavatsky had with the Grand Masters, and spiritual vision as an instrument of perception of highly developed personalities. Being an admirer of both Blavatsky and Steiner, Mrs. Markovic is an exceptionally suitable presenter, a rare find."

Petko Sretenovic talked slowly, accenting every word. His gaze glided over the participants, creating an impression that it was a rare privilege to be at such an important place. "A quick reminder, a discussion after the lecture is desirable. Also, I have the great privilege of presenting to you Mr. Bogdan Zivotic who recently returned from Stockholm, where – he raised his head on his short, fat neck in a meaningful way – he spent several years studying alternative and hermetic sciences."

Faded ladies and bearded gentlemen looked at me for a while. That was the only moment that evening when I felt uncomfortable. Among the powdered faces I recognized Maria Jakovljevic, who, on the eve of war, had gained a

reputation as a great connoisseur of classical literature and philosophy, but shortly after, was forced out of the University for using unverified information as original work. She watched me with her head bent to the side, and it seemed as if she was wondering whether I deserved to hear the confidential thoughts of this crowd. Sitting on a backless kitchen stool next to her was a twenty-year old girl with high breasts and clever eyes behind nicely framed glasses, and for a moment, I was glad I had come without Lydia.

Mrs. Markovic, a thin woman with a pale wrinkled face, poorly dyed blond hair and protruding eyes gave us a forced smile and began her lecture: “According to my modest knowledge, the reason Helena Petrovna Blavatsky founded Theosophical and Rudolf Steiner the Antroposophical Society, was to assist in speeding up the evolution of mankind as a whole, and to create a favourable atmosphere for these societies to engender the formation of Adepts in the next millennium.”

Her remark about the creation of Adepts in this century provoked changes in the physical posture of some members. They raised their heads and looked dumbfounded.

She continued her stories about Blavatsky’s long journey until the contact with Grand Teachers was made, laws of karma, Himalayas, egregors....Mentioning egregors as a group consciousness which outlived the deaths of physical bodies of some of its members -was not an original theosophical idea and Mrs. Markovic obviously took it from Eliphas Levi. That was a lone breath of fresh air in her otherwise stale story. She continued referring to details which could be found in many overly tedious theosophical books, which even theosophists avoid. Blavatsky was a genuine Adept and a messenger of cosmic worlds. She didn’t have literature at her disposal so she obtained information by reading akasha. She was able to do so because she had a gift of spiritual vision like hardly anyone else in the history of mankind. At this statement, several of the antroposophists began to fidget in their chairs. She seemed to sense the need to ease their poorly hidden agitation, so, with a gentle look on her face, she added: “ Only Rudolf Steiner demonstrated similar powers of spiritual vision.”

She ended her lecture by inviting all to use their knowledge of Adepts who had cleared the way, and to build our own house of knowledge from things old and new. She particularly stressed her last words, informing us that it was the end of her lecture. She received courteous but lukewarm applause.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you...” said Petko, getting up from his chair and after surveying us all, adding: “it would be good to conclude tonight’s lecture with a fruitful discussion.”

There was a rather long silence and then Dr. Vasic, clearing his throat, said: “Well, since everyone is hesitating, someone must break the ice.” Until retirement Dr. Vasic had remained an associate professor on the Faculty of Philosophy Department. Without serious published works, he couldn’t become a fulltime professor. It was known that he was the first in Serbia to work on spreading Freud’s teachings. Shortly before the war, some student of Freud from Hungary, applied on him the school’s analysis, which was interrupted by war, but since that time, the reputation of a psychoanalyst followed him. It was strange how he succeeded in combining theosophy and psychoanalysis. Stroking his grey beard, he spoke in a deep voice:

“I would like to point out the fact that Freud was among the first to accept the existence of different levels in the human being, which we acquired from the East via Madame Blavatsky. Of course, the theosophical understanding of the constitution of the human being is rather complex. In the spiritual world man emerges as a threefold spirit and one of his aspects always remain in spiritual sphere. We don’t have those instances in psychoanalysis, but the important matter is that Freud also understood man as multidimensional: Id, Ego and Superego.” He looked over the audience as if evaluating the impression he’d, and after clearing his throat, he continued:

“I have to warn those present of the following. The mature person has difficulty accepting total surrender to a Teacher who makes decisions for him - something many people insist on these days. Throughout his maturity, the human being overcomes the umbilical cord which ties him to his parents, and it is quite astonishing that he replaces one dependency with another. Some people would like to transfer the responsibility for their lives to Mahatmas, same as a child who does the similar thing with his father.”

“For me, the basic question of spiritual growth is the cleansing of karma”, announced a grey-haired woman of at least eighty, with graceful manners and a pleasant voice. A few people nodded.

“You are right, Vanda. We mustn’t forget that cleansing of karma is merely the other aspect of the spiritual evolution”, Paulina added.

Soon, the discussion was reduced to standard phrases so common in theosophical circles, words of gratitude for previous speakers, and a look into the far horizon when we would become God’s fellow tribesmen. My

peacefulness shrank. Their presentation acknowledged only the past. No fresh tributaries, new challenges, notions of connection with contemporary systems. Although there were some younger people in the Parallel Words Society, spiritually it was a place for old people, many of whom were dying out. To ventilate somehow the stale atmosphere, one should use the language of personal experience. Under their polished dignified forms, the Society's atmosphere represented a retreat from any immediate confrontation with life. Obviously there were much they didn't know, so I began:

“I don't know how much it is known, but Blavatska brushed against us at one moment in her life. John Simonds, considered to be a reliable writer, cites in her biography 'The Lady with Magic Eyes' that she lived in Serbia for a while, where she headed a chorus at King Milan's court.” Everyone in the room became quiet, focusing their attention on me. They were not aware of this information, so I elaborated: “My distinguished predecessors pointed out that theosophy and anthroposophy sources made spiritual visions of Blavatska and Steiner. However, a spiritual vision is an uncertain source of information and often leading to erroneous conclusions.”

“That only happens with spiritual visions of common or unstable people but not with an authentic Teacher, such as Helena Petrovna”, Vanda said.

“It happened to her as well”, I said, while tension suddenly grew in me. “The entire passages of 'The Secret Doctrine' were literally transferred from Yang's 'Oriental Wisdoms', she didn't discover it by reading the akasha.”

“That is possible”, said one of the antroposophists, “but the spiritual vision of Rudolf Steiner has the deepest respect among many great contemporaries.”

“I believe it is true. I believe that his visions were for the most part true, but, sometimes they were wrong.”

This was too much for the group of antroposophists. “Be more precise, Mr. Zivotic, which of the Teacher's visions was wrong?” said an elderly man wearing thick glasses, behind which his small brown eyes could hardly be perceived.

“Gladly”, I said. “I wish they were all factual but unfortunately some are not. In the scope of his famous lectures, 'The Karmic Relations', Steiner made many mistakes which cast suspicion on the accuracy of his intuitive visions; many of his conclusions were...pardon the expression...preposterous. For example, his encounter with Nietzsche - he claims that he clearly felt how Nietzsche's ego and his astral body longed to leave his physical body, but that Nietzsche's physical and ethereal bodies were so healthy and strong that they

couldn't allow it to happen. However, at the time of the encounter, Nietzsche was suffering from the third stage of syphilis, so his body wasn't healthy at all."

This was a strong argument. I felt confident, so I continued: "Also, in 1924 Steiner visited so the called King Arthur's castle in Tintagel. He described how deeply impressed he was when he saw it and talked at length about his spiritual visions of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table who had gotten in touch with him. Nevertheless, archaeological digs irrefutably prove that the castle was actually built six hundred years later."

The antroposophists looked at me with empty eyes. They were caught without a thought and I could expect a long-term gossip behind my back when we say good bye. Although I wondered if further information would be unbearable, I continued: "It is not my goal to criticize a highly gifted personality, but I must point out the following. I didn't read the fashionable book of Edouard Schure 'Great Initiates' but some people who did point out that Steiner's work 'Christianity as Mystical Fact' is similar to it, almost a carbon copy of Schure's work, and Schure published it 20 years before Steiner. Some of you probably have read that valuable book which I unfortunately missed?"

Silence reigned in the large room. I heard myself talking and I felt sorry that my father wasn't there to witness this. "Certainly", I continued, "there are deep truths in Steiner's work and everyone who searches for them will find an inexhaustible spring of knowledge in his words. Steiner was far ahead of his time. Nevertheless, not everyone agrees with some of his statements...I remember one more inconsistency. According to Steiner, Alexander the Great's motive in conquering the world was to expand knowledge and spirituality. However, from a psychological point of view, Alexander was an egomaniac. His motive was the same as most other conquerors: regardless of the number of human victims and the misfortune of thousands of innocent people, including women and children, he wanted to conquer the world for self-glorification. In his egomania, he believed he was God, yet he had the failings of an alcoholic. In an outburst of alcoholic rage he murdered his best friend."

"Certainly, people have different opinions about many things and everyone has the right to express his point of view", said Petko Sretenovic hastily. "At the end of this interesting discussion, I'd like to have a moment of your attention. Every day there is more irrefutable proof that in the past, we had been visited by representatives of extraterrestrial civilizations. We transmit and glorify facts which we receive from Western countries, but please remember that we have equally valuable facts on our own threshold. Let's stress again what appears in the frescoes in Sopocani monastery – cosmic ships, undoubtedly. Well, here's what I want to point out today. Pay attention because this will

certainly surprise you. These are the memoirs of a Serbian author, Sava Tekelija, who wrote about his travels in the 18th and 19th centuries.”

He held up a small, thick book with a blue cover. On the cover page was a portrait of the writer, looking a bit like Casanova. He opened the book and continued: “The style of the book and the language are emblematic of his time, but the facts it points out have encouraging importance. The biography is entitled in language typical of the time – *'The Description of Life'*. Tekelija was a collector of artefacts and the owner of one of the largest libraries in the country. I emphasize that Tekelija wasn't an irresponsible, sensational-loving individual; he was the author of valuable grammatical, political, legislative and literary annals, a poet, a polemist and writer of travelogues. This is what he said about particular experience - that is of interest to us:

“On November 18 in Galsha, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, I was standing in front of a hut when I saw a light coming down fast from above. I was just a few steps away and I thought it might be a man holding a hoe, which was reflecting sunlight. When it lowered to the ground, its height was below the waist and it almost looked like a man in metal armour shining in green light. It caught my attention and I approached the light closer. The 'thing' was coming toward me at a human pace, and while I walked toward it, I came across a mound of grapevine leaves which obstructed my view for just a minute. While I went around the grapevine the 'thing' disappeared. I reached the spot where I last saw it but there was nothing. I turned around and looked everywhere but there was nothing in the vineyard. The scene lasted exactly seven and a half minutes. *Dicite physyci quid hic, dies fruit, sobrius fui, sol splendebat.*” Petko looked at us and said: “I don't want to offend anyone but just in case some of you are not completely fluent in Latin, I'll translate. Literally, it means”, he pointed his right index finger at the text as if he was going to penetrate the book, and accenting his words heavily, he reported: “Doctors, say what was that - it was a day, I was sober and the sun shone.”

A few persons sitting across from me shook their heads emphatically as if Sava Tekelija's observation delivered the coup-de-grace to official science which didn't acknowledge the existence of extraterrestrial civilization. “This is an extremely significant fact”, Dr. Milosevic said. “I must admit I hadn't come across it yet. Many thanks, Petko. It's fantastic, fantastic!” He was a skinny and pale man with a thin voice, wavy hair, and decelerated movements. He was Paulina's lover, twenty years her junior.

“I think we ought to do anything in our power to make that fact accessible to our friends in other countries,” Paulina said. She was sitting on a love seat next to Dr. Milosevic, holding his hand. “We so often undermine valuable things

originating on our grounds. It is time to change that. I'm not thinking primarily of Tesla, the greatest genius in the history of mankind, but of Kremna's Prophecy. The prophetic accuracy of future events and the technical inventions of Kremna's Prophecies surpasses Nostradamus. I think that the time has come for someone to write the biography of Dimitrije Mitrinovic, who..." She glanced quickly at the audience of theosophists and anthroposophists, "...perhaps he didn't attain the level of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner, but who still undoubtedly deserves more recognition. Jesus himself said that no one can be a prophet in his own village."

"Certainly, certainly," Petko said, with a sour face since the conversation had moved away from Sava Tekelija.

"You are right, Mrs. Paulina," I said. "I had to go to Sweden to hear of him for the first time. Some very prominent occultists were his students. My grandmother corresponded with him for years."

"Really?", said Paulina. "If his letters exist they are valuable documents. You know, I am fascinated by his personality."

"Certainly," said Petko Sretenovic. "I'd like to conclude our very productive meeting. We should continue with informal conversation. I'd like to thank Mrs. Markovic for her wonderful and instructive lecture and all which contributed to this worthy discussion. Hopefully, our society will have more of such significant meetings in the future."

Mrs. Paulina's housekeeper placed a huge teapot and a bowl of homemade biscuits on the table next to the wall. My initial impulse to have a cup of tea subsided when I smelled of it. It was some kind of herbal tea, chamomile or mint, hard to say. The smell of it reminded me of my childhood sicknesses and provoked disgust.

I looked for a girl with high breasts when I heard her voice: "I wanted to hear more about your experiences in Sweden." She was standing behind me, smiling.

"It wasn't tonight's topic, and there isn't much to say about it. Experience is one thing and talking about it is something else."

"It becomes boring when the same things are gone over so many times." She quickly glanced at the people in the room. "Do you understand what I am trying to say?"

“You mean, it happens here quite often?” I asked in a subdued voice. Two middleaged women talking next to us were watching me with suspicion. Suddenly, I smelled the strong stench of brandy and then heard a hoarse voice. “It is the only thing that happens here”. I turned around. Maksim Draganic, called Maks, an actor at the National Theatre, had approached us from behind. I’d noticed him in the corner of the room during the lecture. He had a small frame, dark Mediterranean complexion, and several days growth of beard. He had reputation for alcoholism and sarcasm. The society tolerated him because of his role as Gurgieff, the main character in Peter Brook’s film “Meetings With Remarkable Men”. He shook my hand with his sweaty palm. “Mirjana represents the spiritual level of this distinguished group.” His smile, which looked more like a convulsion, revealed short yellow teeth covered with thick plaque.

“Yes”, said the girl, “I am surprised how quickly the original ideas of mystical teachings get degraded. Blavatska said herself that a *theosophist is one who does theosophy*. It is the person who applies it in practice. There isn’t anyone like that here. With one hand she leaned against the dark oak bookshelf while gently stroking her hair with the other. “You know, a normal sexual relationship is treated here as a fall into a matter...I am Mirjana.”

She offered me her hand. It was warm and dry in a pleasant way, and I held it little longer than I should have. She smiled and said: “I study psychology.”

“I won’t hold that against you”, I said, and laughed. She blinked several times, smiled, and said: “That is the comment of a person who knows a lot.” Pointing at Dr. Vasic, added: “Excuse me for just a moment, I need to ask the distinguished doctor something”.

“If not for the case of anaemia, there would be more falling into a matter,” Maksim Draganic whispered, smiling ironically. He looked at me directly and the bad odour of brandy coming from his mouth, forced me to step back.

“Anaemia? What do you mean?”

His smile turned into an unpleasant grimace: “An intimate friend of Madam Paulina, Dr. Milosevic, is terribly anaemic. Whenever he has a hard on, all the blood from his brain rushes down, so he faints...I guess, there’s something good in every evil.”

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I began my lectures to the Parallel Worlds Society. Although they provoked criticism among the elderly ladies and gentleman, my talks were more interesting than anything else they had heard before. Petko usually gave a short introduction, preparing listeners for my point of view, which they experienced as rather excessive. After my presentations, his concluding comments tried to soften my words. The society had about forty members – fewer than I'd expected, and customarily no more than half came to our meetings. The dominant people were Petko Sretenovic, Maria Jakovljevic, Vanda and Paulina. With Paulina Petko acted in a condescending manner since without her house the society would surely fall apart. During several meetings, she and Dr. Milosevic spoke highly of the struggle against man's animal nature and the permanent danger that results from falling into a matter. Paulina threw her head back and spoke excitedly about a moment when such a spiritual attitude would become habitual.

At the fourth or fifth meeting, I don't remember exactly, I witnessed the scene that Mirjana had talked about. Paulina and Dr. Milosevic were sitting on a sofa holding hands, with depressed looks on their faces. A few of the oldest members of the society were calming them. At first I thought that a family member had died. Paulina didn't let me guess for long. She looked at her sad intimate friend, lowered her gaze and slowly pronouncing her words, she reported: "We fell into a matter again."

Their "falling into a matter" happened approximately once a month, followed by a period of fighting over the animal nature in humans. I noticed that Paulina, a talkative devotee of Blavatska, demonstrated greater interest in me than would be expected of a woman her age. She acted differently when other members of the group were present. In rare moments when we were singled out for just a second, she stared at me from an angle, a bit longer than women usually do during common conversation. That kind of look was typical for a quiet woman, moments before she began to talk in a sweet, confidential voice. One afternoon I was among the first who arrived, so she took me into the room next door to show me her portrait, made by Paja Jovanovic. With hesitation she said: "I didn't want maestro to make my portrait, but my late husband insisted."

At the time her portrait was made, she was much younger and more attractive. In the painting, she wore a light blue evening dress with a deep décolletage which somewhat exposed her rather voluptuous breasts. Her skin was girlishly smooth and her gaze directed into the distance as if she had surpassed earthly values and was only attracted to elevated faraway goals. The portrait didn't show any connection to the opera or a theatre. Painted behind and around her were dense, dark clouds with a bright red light over them, like a reflection of a faraway fire. It seemed like the young beauty was amidst a war being waged in her honour.

“I feel I don't deserve to be part of the gallery of distinguished personalities painted by Mr. Jovanovic”, she said modestly. “He portrayed the majority of royal heads in Europe. Tito insisted that Mr. Jovanovic should make his portrait but Mr. Jovanovic eluded it. You know, the old gentleman knew who was who...”

“Certainly”, I said, “but your place *is* among those people.”

She smiled and her withered powdered face, wrinkled even more around her mouth and eyes. “Rumors have it that you practiced sexual magic?” It didn't sound like a question but rather a steadfast assertion.

I quickly glanced at her neck and bust. Her ample breasts from the portrait had disappeared, looking, under her silk dress, like two empty socks. “People say all kinds of things. Similar rumors followed Dimitrije Mitrovic, who you admire so much. In fact, sexual magic is just a way to transform the crude form of exposed vital energy into something spiritual. Some people turn to it looking for a safety vent for their disturbances.”

“Oh, is that right”, she said, looking briefly at the open door of the living room. Petko was coming in with tightened lips. The welcoming expression with which he greeted the members, like a convivial host, was gone. “Did you see that shamefulness on television?” I wanted to say that I wasn't watching television but Paulina spoke ahead of me: “What do you mean, dear friend?”

“Giving a shameful hour to so-called explorers and in prime time. Do you know who their members were? Grownup blockheads, college dropouts, and the sons of some less insignificant politicians. They had unlimited resources, which they spent on some camping trip, instead of using those finances on genuine amateur scientific organizations. Last night, I watched one of them stick a thermometer in a stream to measure the water temperature.” He spread his arms and threw his head back in frustration. “Come on, please...*That* was scientific research!? Anything is possible in this country.” He stopped for a moment and

face expression changed: “I read your article ‘*Chakranauts of Inner Worlds*’ in ‘*Alternatives*’. Great article, really great.”

“I’ll read it tomorrow”, said Paulina, looking in my direction and smiling. Her readiness to “fall into a matter” was growing steadily. I nodded without saying a word. I couldn’t risk conceding that the article was great but I was happy when I saw it printed. I read it twice and somehow it seemed better than before; it gave the impression of a completed work. Besides, the fee I got from Igor for only one article was much higher than average and that filled me with satisfaction.

Most members of the Parallel Worlds Society strived to give the impression that they were above earthly ego games, but every article I wrote, energized the meetings by provoking questions and poorly concealed criticism, usually beginning with “Your article is good, but...” Two or three women began to squirm around me so openly that falling into a matter had become a real possibility. Their criticism was odd and somewhat late in coming, because they already knew the content of my article. Namely, I would first give a lecture to the society, then I worked on the article a little longer, before finally giving it to Vislavsky.

Mirjana pulled her chair next to mine. “Could I address you in informal ‘you’? OK, I am glad....I expected you to be more explicit in your description of sexual energy control methods....You could have done a better job than persons who only repeat what they’ve heard from others.”

“You mean when I mentioned Crowley?”

“Yes”, she said simply, “as if you’d bit your tongue at the crucial moment.”

“Those articles are not suitable for detailed explanations of his methods. Lectures at the society are even less so. I am collecting material for a book about Crowley, Jung, and Wilhelm Reich. Maybe I’ll work on the practical side of his methodology. But...there is a lot in his teaching I don’t agree with; some things even provoke repulsion.”

She looked at me under half-closed eyelids, and smiling like an experienced woman she asked: “Which things?”

“Crowley turned his sexual deviations into a philosophy. In Thelema, the foundation of his teaching is total freedom of the human will. Moreover, at the beginning of the century he preached about the freedom of women. That was

both courageous and progressive, but what repulses me, is his obsession with the dark side of man.”

She stared at me inquisitively and I continued: “Putting a red elixir in his mouth – sperm mixed in the vagina with menstrual secretions – evokes disgust, although I try to evaluate things without prejudice. In Morocco or Tunisia, I don’t remember where exactly, he conducted sexual operations with some 14 years old boy. He described it in detail in his diaries. That *was* pedophilia in spite of his bragging that he was the logos of the new eon, Avatar, a new Krishna, Buddha or Christ. A few of my acquaintances are homosexuals. They are mostly sensitive artistic souls and essentially, unfortunate people. I have nothing against them, but – I stopped for a second to look for the right words – as some poet said, I dislike their technology.”

She laughed and said: “People say that you are the greatest follower of Crowley’s teaching.”

“It is impossible to put a stop to such rumors. Once, like all beginners, I had the expectation that people in our domain were ethically more perfect than so called common people. That was a misconception. There is more talking behind our backs here than among painters, actors, and poets... There isn’t a greater envy than spiritual. As far as Crowley is concerned, in my forthcoming book I’ll try to separate his teachings about freedom of will from his psychopathic personality... You see, he talks about love all the time but you can’t find a speck of it in his diary. He was exceptionally selfish and arrogant. However, his followers, especially young people, uncritically accept everything of his as proof that he was a logos of the new eon who overcame the banalities of this world.”

“He has a reputation of being the most horrible man in the world and Satan’s servant!” One of the antroposophists, Milorad Prlja, said. Standing to the left of me, he apparently had heard part of our conversation. About fifty, he had watery eyes and a compassionate expression on his face. His body was narrow and when he leaned over closer to us to hear better, he almost looked like he had a hunchback.

“Eh, journalistic exaggerations and rumors! Among so many Nazi criminals, how can he be the worst?! It was said that Rudolf Steiner raped his niece, right? Do you believe that? Outside the theosophical society, Blavatska had a reputation for smoking like a Turk, swearing like a sailor, and making love like Cleopatra. In the beginning those are irritating rumors, but if a man is clever, he will accept it as something sad but unavoidable.”

“Ugly rumors follow the great man but dreadful people and satanists do exist. You cannot deny that.” Vanda said, slowly approaching us, forcing Prlja out with her shoulder. A circle of listeners slowly formed around us and a new discussion about black magic, well-spiced rumors, and slandering concealed under a thin mask of concern for the purity of our direction, was about to begin. I felt butterflies swarm in my stomach. It was time for me to pull out.

“You’re right, Vanda. Nevertheless, among students of the great Teacher, you will hear behind the back talks about another great master and vice versa. In fact, the problem has existed since the beginning of time, since the creation of the first spiritual group, and it is hard to determine what causes it. The only thing we can do is to prevent it from overpowering us. It is some sort of a spiritual disease – you become what you think.”

“But Bogdan, please, certainly an ethical man could express his disagreement with black occultists and surely he is obligated to condemn them?” Only Vanda’s voice was heard and the atmosphere in the room grew tense, like a taut cord before rupturing. I was on the verge of destroying the reputation I had gained in this society. It was my characteristic gambit that I had played so many times and regretted later. I was rocking in front of a fire as if someone else was deciding whether I should charge through it or go around it. I chose the second alternative. I counted until seven and then, slowly said:

“Of course, that is what an ethical man has to do. However, the best way to demonstrate our disagreement with evil people is to ignore them, because subsequently we can resist the vicious disease they spread. We are the creators of our own karma and the unpleasant, even horrifying consequence of the effect evil people have, is that it could drop on us, even without our verbal consent. You see, – I threw a quick look at the group, who was listening attentively – wise people teach us about wisdom through metaphors...perhaps you know about the story of the two wolves living in the heart of an old Indian?”

I was certain none of these people, who spent their time leafing through dusty books had ever heard the story Jim told me in Stockholm. “Well, an old Indian was teaching life wisdom to his grandson, who believed that his grandfather was perfect, and the grandfather told his grandson, I am not as good as you think. Two wolves, one good and one evil, live in my heart, fighting bloodily. His grandson asked him, which of the two will win?”

I paused for a moment, looked at Vanda and then at the rest of the group. I felt like a first-class actor who completely ruled a moment of deceptive expectation. Finally, I said: “The one I feed, said the old Indian.” In the short-lived silence I quickly added: “Please excuse me now, I have to leave.”

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“I want to talk to you in private. Won’t take much of your time”, Helena Slapsek told me at Paulina’s after her lecture on her impressions of India. She had spent fifteen days in India with a group of tourists and hesitantly committed to talk about her short sojourn. Her lecture was tedious, without moving or unpredictable Experiences. She talked about her visits to Sai Baba’s ashram and Swami Jnanananda’s, unsuccessfully trying more than once to add zeal to her words. We got the impression that her experience didn’t actually originate in India, but came from a newspaper article. In response to the usual questions about meeting people with supernatural abilities, she shook her head and said: “No, I wasn’t interested in that. I was focused on the spiritual Teachers whose practices are changing the consciousness of mankind.”

“We can talk at my place”, she said, “I live nearby.”

We walked toward her home, but never reached it. She unloaded her story in a couple of minutes: “I must tell you, Bogdan, that I am terribly disappointed. I didn’t dare speak about this at Paulina’s; it could have shocked some members or given the impression that I was venting my personal disappointments.”

“Please go on, I have seen all kinds of unusual things related to our work.”

“Well, I don’t know where to begin...You know, India was not what we believed it was, yoga was not what we expected it to be, and Teachers were not the way we hoped they would be.”

“Dear Helena, the hill looks enchanting only from afar...Thomas Mann said that.”

“I wasn’t expecting an enchanting encounter with India, but what I saw... I don’t know, perhaps it would have been better if I hadn’t gone there at all. We all comprehend India poetically. I remember one of the Greek sages – I don’t recall which one – who said that a real poet must sing about myths, not about a real life. For people with our expectations India should remain a dream, not a filthy, sweaty, and scabby reality.” She shook her head, twisting her face as if lepers had appeared in front of her. “You cannot imagine the dirt, poverty, and desperation among those people. We filled ourselves with stories about the

tranquil acceptance of reality even if it was horrifying. But, there is nothing of the sort in India. Hundreds of beggars and cripples pester you everywhere, asking for alms, trying to rob you...dust, mud, blind children, no hint of spiritual life.”

“Well, you didn’t go to Hawaii, you must have known that India meant poverty.”

“My greatest disappointment wasn’t the poverty that you witness everywhere, but yoga, Teachers....it’s better I don’t talk about that. All those legends, that when a student is ready a Teacher will appear and so on, are plain mystification. There are many people around Sai Baba, who believe that they are prepared for the ultimate encounter, but what kind of meeting with the Teacher who will change your life is it, when there are fifty thousand people sharing the same hopes?”

“It is probably the reason why Jung, when he visited India, didn’t visit a single ashram. He knew what was waiting there.”

“I’ll tell you what was hardest for me. Please Bogdan, keep it to yourself. I told you I was in Swami Jnanananda’s ashram. We corresponded for a while before my trip. The Ashrams were unbelievably dirty. Filth everywhere, no place to wash, and Hindus don’t wash. And toilets? It was hard not to vomit when you got close to one, every time you have to fight millions of dirty flies which get into your eyes, nose, mouth...Yuck!” She jerked her head, putting her hand over her mouth so she wouldn’t vomit.

“Just between the two of us, I went there to get a diploma. You know, Jarmila Nikolic, who claimed she was the only master of yoga in Yugoslavia – and by the way, she doesn’t recognize you and says ugly things about you – she bought her diploma from Swami, for ten bucks... Yes, you wouldn’t believe it but that’s the cost. I bought one too. While I was talking to him – in spite of everything, Swami is an agreeable man – I mentioned that I had worked on meditation for several years with my group and briefly described the entire process. He asked me some questions and I thought he wanted to point out possible mistakes, to correct me and offer clever advice. But, no! You would never guess what he said! He asked me to write everything I’d told him about meditation in English, and requested permission to use that text in his satsangs. Well, at that moment, my whole world collapsed!”

“I have never heard anything like that. I won’t tell a single word about this to anyone.”

“Please don’t. It’s shameful for both of us.”

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Lam began to employ my thoughts more and more. I tried to resist it for some time, because it was reminiscent of Petko Sretenovic and his stories of spaceships, superior cosmic civilizations, and the urgent necessity to get in contact with extraterrestrials as soon as possible. I saw Lam's portrait in a book by Ken Hamilton, who headed Tiphonian UFO's. Crowley drew it around 1919 and showed it at a small exhibition in Greenwich Village in New York. Lam looked like extraterrestrials are portrayed today: big bold head with bulging forehead, tiny tight lips, and two small holes representing nostrils. He didn't have ears - a detail which gained significance over time. Only his eyes were different. Contemporary images of extra terrestrials show large, almond-shaped eyes while Lam's were like narrow slits; he looked like a snake with an enormous human head. If he had arms, Crowley's drawing didn't show them.

My obsession with Lam grew suddenly, like an unbearable itch seeking relief. After some delay, I felt compelled to turn my attention to it. I made a new column in my diary – Lam. With a vertical line I divided the page into two halves - on the top left I wrote, "What I don't know about Lam", and on the top right, "What I do know about Lam". Following this classification I entered all I knew and didn't know about him. Essentially, my knowledge came down to some information from Hamilton's book, which didn't say much. I retrieved any relevant information from deep inside my memory - he looked like Tesla in a famous photograph – his head bent down, smoothed hair parted exactly in half, and a pointed beard like the tip of a shovel.

In the evening, I placed a diary under my pillow and concentrated on Lam's image. It was difficult. Disconnected thoughts came to my mind and I alternated between daydreaming and sleeping. I discontinued that routine after a while. Two or three days later, I had a remarkable dream. I dreamed I was walking on a bare field covered with sand and stones, with scattered traces of dry, yellow grass. I felt depressed and tired. Someone called my name from afar. I walked in the direction of the voice and suddenly found myself in my own bed, feeling wide awake and tense. My anxiety was rising swiftly as if I knew that something dangerous was sneaking in from behind. Fog or some kind of white smoke was coming through the closed door. Suddenly, from the dense smoke, Lam's image was somehow shaped. He was enormous and it appeared that his

head filled the entire space in front of me. He looked at me fixedly with tiny eyes, emitting an intense energy which took my breath away.

I couldn't move my hands and breathing was difficult since my entire body was weighed down in a powerful convulsion causing pain and suffocation. My thoughts ceased and vanished into empty consciousness. His small lips opened and he spoke, yet no sound was heard – the sound materialized in the back of my head. I couldn't understand his words and in spite of painful convulsions, I forced myself to amplify the sounds in my head. Quite distinctively I heard: "I performed through Tesla. The code is in the name."

It seemed like he nodded his huge head and then suddenly his image faded and I could see through him across the room and through the darkness. His image disappeared completely and with it, the tension in my body dissolved and I felt like I had fallen back on the surface of my bed. I felt more relaxed, my breathing deep and rapid like I'd done strenuous work. I tried to get up and write down his words in my diary, but it seemed that my will had deserted me or that the links between my conscious effort and my muscles had disconnected. I began repeating the message so I wouldn't forget it: "I performed through Tesla. The code is in the name. I performed through Tesla..." I went on for ten, fifteen minutes - I wasn't sure and then my ability to move my body returned.

I got up slowly, as if afraid that any sudden movements would paralyze me again. I turned on the desk lamp and recorded the event. When I wrote "Tesla" in bold letters it seemed that the light in the room amplified. Finally, I understood Lam's message. The word Tesla read from right to left, like in Hebrew, broke into two words: "al" and "set". Goodness, how come I hadn't noticed that earlier? "Al" meant God and it was also the second name for the *Book of Law*, and "set" was Set or Aivaz. I got up from my chair, with my eyes still glued to the written text. Sure, Lam was one of Aivaz's manifestations and that was Tesla as well. Undoubtedly, he performed through Tesla who, from the dense darkness where he existed as a minute primordial spark, ruptured into a huge flame illuminating the present and many more centuries to come.

That was the explanation of Tesla's magic powers, which surpassed the abilities of other scientific giants. I vaguely remembered Tesla's statement about his life in a parallel universe, presented in a short form in the text "*My Inventions*". I walked toward the bookshelf and my hand decisively found the book I was looking for. I turned two pages in the book and Tesla's words were right there: "*Instinctively I crossed the borders of the small world I was familiar with, and saw new sights. In the beginning, those sights were extremely indistinguishable and blurred; they disappeared when I tried to focus on them but little by little, I somehow made them steady, powerful, and clear so that they*

finally formed into genuine things. Before long, I discovered that I felt best when I extended my vision to the farthest point possible, and while I constantly received new impressions, I began to travel; of course, only in my mind. Every night and sometimes during the day when I was alone, I began my journey to visit new places and countries, to live there, meet people and get to know them better. No matter how impossible it seemed, the fact was that those people were dear to me as much as people from real life, and their actions had the same effect on me.”

I read Tesla’s description of the state he was in before making significant discoveries, which were painful and dangerous, and his eventual state of delight. His words, which I had carelessly overlooked in the past, caught my attention now:... *”To my great surprise, I understood that my impressions from the outside influenced every thought I had. All my actions were influenced in similar ways and moreover it became perfectly clear that I was simply an automat with a gift of mobility, which reacted when stimulated by sensory organs and thoughts and behaved in accordance with them...”*

That was it! Aivaz demonstrated his own self through Tesla, like he did with so many others, and when he had exhausted their ability to pass through and transform his communication into applicable knowledge, he discarded them and searched for new bearers of his violent revelations. Tesla spoke of a cosmic sadness which sometimes came over him, and when I pondered his fate, I felt as if a fraction of his sadness also filled my soul. Aivaz abandoned Tesla like an empty shell, leaving him to spend the last thirty years of his life feeding pigeons on the squares of New York City.

Aivaz, the universal field of cosmic consciousness used everything and everybody. For a daydreamer, the truth speaks through his imagination and he is convinced he was only dreaming. A liar believes he lied and the truthful loving man trusts he told the truth. Aivaz sucks in beings such as Tesla on this planet, creating in their souls the idea of sacrifice for others, so like a flame, they spark into the sky for a short time and illuminate the evil-fertile darkness around us. All of them serve their purpose: to open new, deeper layers of truth for humanity. Our first step on the Path is driven by our Ego motive - to attain power, love and self-confidence, but as the walk continues, a new set of laws is created, quite independent from the ones at the starting point.

Fear came over me that such a force had engaged my being as well, forcing me to live like an automaton so that I could serve the accomplishment of goals I knew nothing of. I grasped that Aivaz was a divine tyrant who, without mercy, directs people to follow fate’s path, while at the same time, his own situation is tragic. He can’t get himself back in any other way except through a

man, so subsequently, he longs to merge into a human mind and to engage it so he can identify himself. When, in a short-lived mystical experience, a man identifies himself with Aivaz, he pressures him to remain in that identification, so that through the highest form of consciousness on this planet – as a man – he can realize himself.

My feeling of panic was powerful. I had to calm down, so I closed my eyes and focused within. For a moment, I perceived a grey emptiness filled with irregular reddish spots. Like swift flames, memories of my past stiffness and the letters in Tesla's essay returned to me, followed by a sudden image of an enormous face. I felt like the interior of my skull was a window through which I had glimpsed a view of eternal cosmos. I felt the icy smile on his face at my predestined fate.

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I began to have sudden insights, to read the history of humankind from a different perspective, searching for secret signs which only knowledgeable people can comprehend, the way Rudolf Steiner had vaguely suggested. My insights came after a brief crisis during which I was certain that I was on the wrong track. When I gave up and accepted my defeat, the insight would appear like a sudden strike of a match in a dark room, illuminating in a novel way the relations between appearances and objects.

I meditated for some time on the significance of my drowning experience when I was seven, when I saw my entire life in fine detail. That was my most dramatic experience, stronger than my first initiation into Odin's Sword. Long ago I noticed that the Christian baptism ceremony had degenerated over time, becoming just a faded image of the original ritual. Nowadays, the priest just sprinkles the baby's head with holy water, while during the time of the first Christians, he sank the novice's head underwater and kept it there for a while. It was no use resisting; the priest wouldn't let go, no matter what.

It seems that laxity occurs over time in every religion. Who would get baptized today if it meant going to the river and sinking a newborn baby into the water? I remembered a Zen story in which Roshi sank a novice into the water until he almost drowned. The student, who had come to find enlightenment, often asked Roshi when he would attain it. The Teacher gave him evasive answers so the student began to doubt his Teacher's ability to enlighten him. He decided to

get to the bottom of the matter before he left his Teacher, so for the last time he asked – when will it happen? Then Roshi invited him for a walk. When they came to a deep stream, Roshi asked the impatient student to carry him on his shoulders to the other side. When they reached the deepest waters, Roshi suddenly grabbed the student by his neck and pushed him underwater. At first the student was content - there at last something is happening - now I will become enlightened, he thought. But Roshi kept him firmly underwater, there was no enlightenment, and he was running out of air. The student released some air from his lungs just to give Roshi a hint that the situation was becoming dangerous, but Roshi didn't care. Memories of rumors about his Teacher came to him, that he was crazy, an impostor and a dangerous man. The student felt he was dying and began a terrifying fight for his life -- at that moment Roshi released him. Gasping the young man got out of the water inhaling air to the bottom of his lungs, while Roshi shook him violently, screaming in his face: "When you desire enlightenment like you desired air, *then* you will become enlightened!"

I figured that this was the basic meaning of Christian baptism – you will find God when you desire Him as powerfully as the breath of life!

Nevertheless, that conclusion was drawn superficially based on what I already knew. It was not a sudden insight -- which is the only way of arriving at true cognition -- when known elements suddenly shift into a new and previously unknown wholeness. Insight came when I stopped searching in rituals or past knowledge, looking for something hardly anyone has ever experienced.

It happened to me in bed one early afternoon right after a short but deep dream so profound that it seemed I was in a state suspended from intellectual thought. Time passed but I didn't move. Then something clicked in my brain and I understood matter in an absolute way. It struck me: Of course priests hold a novice under water until he almost drowns - only then can they pull his head out and ask him what he experienced. If his answer is not correct they plunge his head underwater again. They repeat the process until the wheel of karma moves and the novice looks back over his past lessons to benefit from them in the future.

The symbol of the cross and Christ's crucifixion was a jewel for meditation. I didn't dwell on the sexual-magical symbolism of a cross – what I learned from Gunila Beriman. The descent of the vertical leg of a cross, represented the masculine principle going through the passive female, represented by the horizontal leg. I didn't go much further than that – obviously that was a metaphor for the descent of the divine principle of consciousness into matter. I realized that the word "mother" has roots in the words "matter" and "uterus". The uterus gave birth to a being who was half-god and half-man, the God-man,

they call Christ in the Christian doctrine, a unity of the horizontal symbol of matter and the vertical symbol of the divine consciousness from which God created matter.

I wrote my insights on paper the moment they came to me and the outline for my book on Jung, Crowley and Reich slowly began to form. When I made myself sit in front of the typewriter with discipline, it was like squeezing a drop of water from a dry cloth. My thoughts were austere and meagre without a trace of the liveliness which overwhelmed my consciousness when I talked to people or meditated in solitude. However, when insights did occur, the truth poured out like potent water. I was excited about writing and reading what I'd written. Good writers were most certainly in a similar creative state, and that is how their words ignite readers. I was successful during rare moments of insightful experiences. The rest was just strenuous digging of infertile ground, a hard labour without payment in sight.

Soon, I realized that I had selected three very unsuitable people for the book. Jung was far too extensive, Crowley nutty in his writing as well as in his behaviour, while Reich dispersed his attention in many directions – from neuromuscular blockades to flying saucers which steal orgonic energy from Earth's atmosphere. I noticed a paradox in my relation to the written text. Experienced people advise us to write about something we know very well. The paradox with me was that only through writing about my subjects, was I able to get to know them better. When after much tension, erasing and adding I wrote a clear sentence for a prospective reader, the material became clear to me too.

Jung surprised me. He didn't offer the ultimate solutions for mankind as Crowley and Reich did; he gave the impression of struggling within himself and afterwards trying to offer answers to a few of his closest students. Jung didn't have teachers because Freud was not his teacher in a classical sense, but more his stimulus to focus on the internal life of a man and that was where his lessons with Freud ended. As a replacement for teachers, his dreams instructed him and, starting from there, he developed several valuable and clear theories, but in an effort to present them he wrote twenty voluminous books.

It required great courage – at the beginning of the twentieth century – to publicly claim that the alchemy of the Middle Ages was a forerunner of profound psychology; that religion didn't mean faith but rather unity of man with his true nature - from which he was separated long ago. Jung must have had an insight when he realized that the word "re-ligere", from which the word religion originated, means to re-unite again. What were his thoughts when he realized that the number 12 has archetypal roots in the Western civilization? Today, it seems simple to notice the manifestation of that number - in the calendar, the 12

apostles of Christ, and the 12 signs of the zodiac. However, Jung was clever to pinpoint and connect the various places on a map where Hercules performed his 12 grand feats. I could only imagine his tiny eyes shining behind a pince-nez when he saw the sign of the cross appear on the map.

These was enchanting information but much stronger was the influence of uncompromising fulfilment of Jung's own mission in life. Don't pay attention to those who tell you that you are driving yourself crazy, Jung was saying between the lines, nor those who tell you that you are making a mistake asking you to return to a way which is – according to their belief – the right one. Dream what you want to dream, go where you want to go, be what you are because this life is unrepeatable. Always keep in mind – *you* are the door which you were unsuccessfully looking for, until now.

Taming such multilevel and complex scientific material about Jung, confirming it to my needs, and comparing it with what I knew about Crowley and Reich, surpassed my abilities. Reluctantly, I had to admit this to myself, in an instantaneous burst of writer's honesty, so I decided to work slowly, perhaps few years, and avoid stepping into the shallow waters of quick conclusions. I knew that works which fall into the wide category of the occult, swarm with such failures.

Sometime later, my fate rewarded me with an exciting insight. I don't want to bore you with a long description of my reflections, efforts and disappointments. For some time, the belief that Shakespeare had possessed secret knowledge and that it was possible to trace it in his works, had occupied my attention. My persistent efforts to grasp some additional meaning from his writing were unproductive. The quotation, commonly cited in many occult books, "There are many things between heaven and earth, my Horatio, which we don't dream about", naturally, didn't satisfy me. One afternoon I was resting in the kitchen on an old sofa which I'd named the "insighter", because of the many insights which I'd experienced on it. Suddenly I sat up in bed. Powerfully, a verse from "*Romeo and Juliet*" came to me. I couldn't remember the verse exactly but undoubtedly it talked about blood in the veins. I got up from my bed, and walked, not in my usual fashion, but like a spiritual robot, toward the bookshelf where I kept the "Digested Encyclopedia". I searched for a reference to Harvey. That was it! Shakespeare, who died in 1616, employed information about the circulatory system which only Harvey discovered in 1629, thirteen years after Shakespeare's death!? During Shakespeare's time, until Harvey's discovery, it was believed that through arteries and veins circulate spiritus or air! Yet Shakespeare mentioned blood circulation in his works.

Then chess! Until my departure for Stockholm I had spent immeasurable time staring at the chess board. I understood it as a game which didn't hide anything – it was more intellectual than cards, dominoes or billiard, but still - just a game. At that time, the insight never occurred that I Ching, tarot, and chess were sides of a three sided pyramid reaching the same point. Chess was invented as an instrument which transfers the secret code of unearthly consciousness. Yang and Yin, black and white squares, 8 horizontal and 8 vertical – was an obvious course toward the infinite. That was it! I remembered an old Egyptian myth about the creation of the world when the creator said: “I am the one who becomes two. I am the two who becomes four. I am the four who becomes eight. I am the eight who returns and becomes one.” Harmonious penetration of two basic polarities, black and white, light and dark, positive and negative through infinity. Sixty four squares, each corresponding to I Ching hexagrams and every one containing its own secret message. The king, which represents the symbol of an atman can lose all figures except himself – he cannot be destroyed, he can be taken only by checkmate, caught in a planetary prison so he can experience the drama. My fate compelled me to play a thousand chess games, hoping that perhaps one would help me understand its simple message. However, I was blind to the obvious until this special moment in my development.

Eastern religions dictate that the objective of man's inner struggle is the harmonious unification of opposites. In the West, only alchemy has the same goal, as Alchemist from Stockholm indicated. Looking from the outside, that goal is represented as a search for balance with nature. Western religions perceive consciousness through the division of good and evil. Their goal is to fight for one side, the one which is perceived as good, light, and clean so that, simultaneously the dark side of reality is totally suppressed. In the external world, achievement of that goal is experienced as victory over nature, instincts, and their submission to it. That is called civilization. The dragon, a three-headed beast symbolizing natural forces, is celebrated in the East, while in the West, Christian saints stabbed him with a spear.

In that insightful process, you become an accomplice with the one who created forms, occurrences and relations, in a way that with your consciousness, like a light which illuminates, you fit into them like a hand fits into a glove. Those are rare moments when everything is broken into pieces and then put together all over again; until then the invisible ties with the new suddenly raise the level of reality. Every single one of those short moments, like an echo, reflects the deepest cognition which existed in its origin and which was waiting to unite with us in the end. Regardless of the variety of information and depth of knowledge, the insight into until then invisible ties occurs when they are briefly engaged and overwhelmed with indifference.

I was content because my experiences from Stockholm, had integrated in me and were directing me toward goals I once only daydreamed of. Life was becoming full of with promise like an undiscovered mystery. Then I got a court summons.

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“Irena says that you are the father of her child” Dragana Drobnjak said to me. Everything about her – head down, bent back and the unhappy expression on her face – affirmed that she was uncomfortable talking to me about the child. She refrained from looking me directly at me, as if she was partially guilty for this newly created situation.

“But Dragana, how is it possible? She left for the States in January of that year. The child was born there, sixteen months since she last saw me. How could I be the father?” When a neurotic woman accuses you in court of being the father of her child, logic deserts you and waves of anger begin to form. I was on the verge of an outburst, ready to break furniture and insult innocent people.

“I don’t know, I really don’t. When I listen to you it sounds like you are telling the truth. When I am with her, it seems she is right. I can’t do anything about that. You two have to clear up this matter.”

“It is impossible to clear this up with her. I have tried several times. She is like a mad person. She knows I am not the father of her child. How come she didn’t come forward when I worked in that godforsaken village? Now that I am publishing articles in the newspaper, earning a reputation, now she has remembered me...All I am asking of you is to point out to her that because of her actions, the child will suffer the most. That child has a father, wherever he is.”

“I tried already....I told her. She became hysterical, she said all kind of things about you. I never thought that a man I once loved could be such a pig, she said.”

I felt my hands tighten but I restrained myself. “Dragana, please just look at the facts. You know how much time she spent in the States. We are not children, we know how long a pregnancy lasts.”

Dragana shook her head and said: “You were together for seven days at Zlatibor in that period. She came home for a month believing she could continue

her relationship with you. That's when she conceived. It didn't work out so you split."

"That's a lie!"

"Her mother said the same thing I just did. She is very disappointed with you. Irena said that you, very dishonestly, pressed her not to file charges. Her present husband - an experienced attorney - trusts her completely. He says men will spend loads of money on restaurants, cars and the rest but they run away like crazy from paying child support for kids they fathered."

My face twisted. "It's not about money, Dragana...If that was my child I would have given him...Look, I don't have children, but that boy could show up at my door someday, when he is fifteen or sixteen, and ask to talk to me like to a father who denied him."

She raised her head and firmly said: "You know what, Bogy? I don't want any part in this. You two are grownup people, so do something about it without me!"

I wandered aimlessly all afternoon. I passed by my old neighbourhood where none of my childhood friends lived any longer, visited my school's playground now cemented and ugly, and the old tram station where we hung on to trams. I thought I would go to the movies just to divert my thoughts but the desire disappeared in a second. That wouldn't be of much help at the moment. That crazy woman could destroy my life. This situation could follow me for years. Not many people believed me. A few friends cracked jokes about it and those who were on my side showed their support by cursing and providing evidence from their own lives that women were whores.

"There must be a solution," I said to Lydia that evening, "I am certain of that."

"You ought to calm down, you are too edgy. You will make the situation worse." She paused for a second and then continued: "You could do something foolish."

Her words suggested fear that in an anger outburst, I might beat Irena up or injure the child.

"What kind of foolish thing?" I said, while my resolve to handle the problem with a cool head disappeared in a second. I jumped from my chair and kicked the closed door of our room forcefully. Looking around, I searched for something to vent my fury on, and with clenched teeth, I used my fist to hit the

glass shade on a desk lamp – a wedding gift from her mother. The sound of broken glass falling on the floor stopped me. The back of my hand was bleeding. Lydia was silent and her eyes were wide open. She had witnessed outbursts of my anger before, but the intensity of this one astounded her.

“Don’t be angry with me,” she said, “my parents may think we are fighting. Please try to calm down...you’ll harm yourself. When you act like this, you are spitting on your entire life, everything you lived for. How many times have you talked about the law of karma: if you can’t change something, you are obliged to accept it.” She kept silent for a while and then softly continued: “This is a lesson in the school of life - an ugly one - but you have to learn it. I don’t know anyone who has been in a similar situation. I have to learn something myself, it’s not easy for me either.”

I fell asleep just before dawn and slept not longer than an hour or two. During the night I tried to relax by breathing rhythmically several times but it didn’t help. While I shaved, I looked at my exhausted face in surprise, as if I was looking at someone I could recognize only with difficulty. It was a balm morning when I left the house, uncertain that I would find a solution to my problem. It felt unbearable to stay inside, closed up in the apartment where time was at a standstill. I walked halfway across the city and went downhill to Kalemegdan. I sat on an old brick rampart and stared into the water. Riverboats passed, dragging barges, and the voices of people on the boats could be heard from the distance, some kind of life was going on there. Further down, along the Danube behind Student's bath, I could barely see the sand dunes. Throughout my elementary school years, secretly, I went there to swim as early as May. We cut school, Zoran Lukovic and I, and leaving our clothes on the sand, we bathed naked. Now that distant life seemed like a fairy tale. I didn’t value the happiness of those moments. I experienced every mode of torment while I became aware of happy moments only after they had passed. It seemed like I had gone to some other world during those moments.

I felt strong pulsation in my solar plexus. Even if I forgot about my problem for a brief moment, the painful stabbing began all over again. I couldn’t sit straight so I had to bend over and scrunch myself. Time went on and it was already eleven. Sometimes a truck boomed down the road and in the silence which followed, I felt my loneliness even more intensely. From where I was sitting, I could see a War Island and crows which soared into the sky, lazily stretching their wings. I stayed on my back with my eyes closed for a while. I saw images of Irena and her husband – an elderly lawyer with the watery eyes of an alcoholic. He was old enough to be her grandfather, yet she married him. She would love him until his last dime. The week before we talked in his office, after he avoided seeing me for a long time. I begged him to bring Irena to her senses

and offered him the indisputable proof that the child was not mine, at least I believed that at the time, the same reason I gave Dragana. He was a rag of a man and a faded one too, washed out rag. Who does he defend in court? Talking in nasal voice, he refused to take part in our dispute. “You know what, I have seen it all in my practice. You claim one thing, she claims another. Irena is my wife and I have to be on her side.”

Clouds travelled slowly above my head, and for a while I played my favorite childhood game: searching for the familiar faces of people and strange creatures. In clouds, like in projective tests, I should see my unfortunate situation, images of Lydia, Irena, her husband....I found nothing of the kind. Instead, I saw a beautiful image of a giant with a white beard and hair who was, with his cheeks puffed, blowing air into the sail of a small ship without a crew. Little lambs played in his white beard and there was a dog that closely resembled my Grandmother’s dog from Vilin Do. Birds with unfamiliar names were calling each other and near the river bank I saw fish wriggle.

I woke up. I had slept over two hours in the grass without a cover and I wasn’t cold. Clouds were still travelling overhead but now they were darker and fuller. I lay on the ground, empty headed, looking toward the sky oblivious to time. I lifted myself into a sitting position. The painful stabbing sensation in my plexus was gone, replaced by a gentle and pleasant warmth. I sat on the grass and stretched my arms. Something had changed – I had a pleasant feeling, without tension, which I could use to solve my problems. In my head, I saw images of Irena and her husband, Lydia and the friends I’d complained to. I recalled that I had loved Irena for a few days and that memory didn’t cause any protest or aggressiveness in me. I thought of that unfortunate child. What does he look like? Did Irena even try to make his actual father accept him or was it just a one night stand at some drunken party, befogged in a cloud of marijuana, so that she didn’t even know his name? I had to solve the problem with that child without any further delay.

With that thought in my mind, I didn’t feel I had a problem at all. That woman I’d spent time with had a problem and so did the unfortunate child. I felt surprised, I was ready to laugh. Of course, everything was clear. There was only one thing I had to do as soon as possible and that was to face the potential consequences! I’ll go to that child and tell him in front of his mother that I was not his father and then she could do whatever she wanted. If the court declared me for his father and established a child support – so what? I’ll pay, that’s the least of the evil. I don’t spend time in bars, and without a car there is no need to pay for gasoline or repairs like my friends had to. I have to learn something - it was clear. This was the lesson in the school of life which I talked to people about so many times. Now the preacher has to eat the mush he gave others for so long.

I was certain I would have an insight in the next couple of hours. I got up, cleaned the grass from my clothes, and walked to the city.

In a candy store downtown I bought Lydia's favorite candy box with a picture of a girl with a lute on the cover. I told the salesgirl it was a gift so she wrapped it in decorative paper and put a colourful band around it. I walked over to "Zlatnik" and made dinner reservation for the same table where Lydia and I had spent a couple of pleasant evenings. She will be happy when she finds out where we are going and the moment she sees me she will know that I made a correct decision and the crisis had passed.

Irena and her child lived in her husband's house on Red Cross. The yard's gate was unlocked. The house was old, with moss covering the roof tiles, but it was large and well-preserved. I walked through the yard, which was paved with uneven stones, and knocked at the door; without waiting for a reply, I went in. I found myself in a spacious living room filled with old furniture, shabby rugs, and a crystal chandelier. There was wallpaper with a red motif and a few oil paintings in gold-plated frames on the wall. I didn't see Irena, but her husband was there, sitting in an armchair reading the papers. On the table in front of him was a coffee cup and a half empty glass of water.

He lifted his goggle-eyes above the glasses positioned in the middle of his nose and an expression of surprise enveloped his face. I wasn't interested in long conversations; I wanted to tell the child the truth in his mother's presence and leave. But the old man outwitted me. His lips curved into a smile, he looked at the open door of the next room, and with youthful enthusiasm in his voice he shouted: "Stevica! Come here! Your father has come to see you."

This turn of events unnerved me completely. I was about to say that he had made a mistake but at that moment a boy appeared at the door. He was about five or six, with a small head and fragile body. A lock of hair fell over his pale forehead, touching his wide, brown eyes.

His mouth was small, half-open, while the small teeth of his upper jaw protruded between his lips. His hair covered his ears so they couldn't be seen. He was wearing a striped sailor shirt and suspenders on his short pants, which exposed his scabbed knees.

The look of his wide-open hazel eyes affected like a violent hit with a fist into my solar plexus, so I couldn't breathe. No one had ever looked at me like that. That look was a combination of surprise, astonishment, and thrill. Happiness radiated from his face so strongly that I could feel it like a warm wave splashing over me. He dropped a tiny metal car from his hand and it landed by his feet. I

had a strange urge to pick it up from the floor and put it back into his hand but the expression on his face and his big eyes paralyzed me.

The boy clenched his hands into fists, pressed them against his chest, and suddenly from his small mouth came: “Daddy, I have been waiting for you! I knew you would come someday!”

My vision clouded and everything around me disappeared except that little face with the wide open eyes. My knees weakened and I thought I would collapse. I’d been prepared for everything else except this. This was a pivotal turnaround, as if an invisible sorcerer had waved his hand and altered the lights on a stage: Everything was completely different and behind the veil of illusions a hidden truth appeared. There was nothing left of my original decision. No one had ever looked at me like that. No one had ever called me Daddy. And, I was certain, no one had ever loved me like that.

I collapsed into an old armchair and the candy box slipped from my hand to the floor. I knew I would accept this child because I was the one he loved, not the possessor of the seed which created him. That boy would fulfil me for the rest my life and I knew that nothing and no one could force him out. I wanted to say “Yes, here I am”, but a spasm in my throat didn’t let me utter a single word.

Instead, the old lawyer said: “Come on, Stevica, approach your father, don’t be shy.”

The boy smiled faintly and slowly came closer. He looked somehow familiar as if I had met him in my dreams, in my imagination or in an unenlightened past life. He was somehow like me in a way I couldn’t grasp.

He wasn’t handsome but I felt I could melt in happiness if I could only put his head on my chest, hug his small body, and smell the scent of his hair. Something like a sharp dagger stabbed me in my chest. I knew why we were alike. Like me he was searching for real love, and he had finally found it. I had too, at the same moment. Love -- unconditional, unattainable and not fought for fell on both of us as a grace from heaven. If I succumbed to it I could break down in front of this boy. With great effort I restrained myself from shouting and my mouth simply turned into a grimace while tears silently rolled down my face. The boy came closer and hugged, me raising his small body and resting his head on mine. “Don’t cry Daddy, I am the happiest ever”.

Tears came down my face uncontrollably and my nose was running. I wasn’t able to do or say anything coherently. I reached for the candy box and handing it to him, I spoke for the first time: “Take this Stevica, this is for you.”

Hesitating, he took the candy box, which was too heavy for only one hand, so he took it with both hands. “You shouldn’t have spent money, Daddy.”

“It is nothing, Stevica. I will buy you something more beautiful than that. Tell me what you want?” The cramp in my throat loosened and I was able to utter short sentences clearly.

He stepped an inch away from me and lowered his gaze. It seemed he was thinking of what he could ask me for and hesitated to say what it was.

“Tell me, Stevica, tell me.”

“You shouldn’t buy me anything, Daddy,” he said, and I felt the tightness coming back to my throat. “I would like to help you with something.”

“Just name it.”

“Well, you know, I watch you at Kalemegdan every Sunday morning when you practice archery. I hide in the bushes around the fortress and watch you – you draw a bow and then go to get arrows. I wish you would let me get those arrows for you, so you don’t have to. It would be...you know...as father and son.”

I hugged him so he wouldn’t see the tears gathering in the corners of my eyes again. As if through a haze, I saw the old lawyer, silently wiping his tears with the entire palm of his hand, nodding slowly. “Of course son, we will always go there together.”

Stevica walked me to the garden gate. My hand was resting on his narrow, bony shoulders. He was squeezing my hand gently as if he was hiding from someone. “Come again”, he whispered.

“Don’t worry, I will.”

That night in bed, I talked to Lydia for a long time. All over again I was surprised by her goodness. She accepted the sudden turn of events as the best possible solution for all of us. She cried when I told her about my meeting with Stevica.

“That boy is really lucky. I always dreamed that someone would love me like that.”

“I love you more than ever” I said and kissed her on the forehead. “That little boy brought so much love to me that now I feel I could love the entire world.” I took her in my arms and held her closely ...We fell asleep at the crack

of dawn. The scent of her skin filled my nostrils, calming me down like the warm touch of a mother's hand. In silence, I felt tranquillity, sweet exhaustion, and overflowing joy.

You have probably guessed. Nine months later, Lydia bore me a child, our son Nenad.

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The next few years melted in my memory like a procession of dense images. I lived in a way my father would probably call normal, except I didn't have a regular job. I earned more money than Lydia, with her full time job, and that fact confused my father. A job was something steady for him, like religion. When his friends wondered where I was I employed, he somewhat nervously replied that I was a "freelancer". Mother confided this information to me at some point.

Remembering that time, I see myself mainly with Nenad. I spent a great deal of time with him. I took him to the park in the morning, fed him patiently, and had shallow conversations with the mothers of other kids. I have vibrant images of myself sitting on a park bench, patiently answering questions from women around me about what kind of food I give him, immunizations and children diseases. I remember that I lost every feeling of disgust toward feces and the smell of urine, during that time when I changed his diapers.

With Nenad in my life, even after many years I felt a genuine fear when he almost choked on a bite of food. I could still see his purple face and remember how my legs trembled when I shook him and hit his back with my fist, until he coughed up a piece of meat. Until he was born, I flattered myself on not being scared of anything, on having freed myself from all fears, but then, the fright for him materialized, and I felt no desire to get rid of it.

Every Sunday I would take Stevica with me to the archery club at Kalemegdan; then we went together to our home for lunch. It seemed to be the beginning of a kind of normal life, and I took a pleasure in it. Life was easygoing, except when Nenad got ill. I do not like to admit this, but his sicknesses, which people around me took as normal for a child, created in me the fear that he was going to die. In such situations, I would become nervous, scream at Mother and Lydia, and ask advices from many different doctors. I was not able

to confess my fear that he could die, but I expressed my exaggerated worry as the possibility that "something could happen to him".

My feeling of relaxation was gradually and imperceptibly, overpowered by unrest. When I was in a good mood I regarded my uneasy as a spiritual itch, but it sometimes turned into a depression. My memories from Stockholm faded away and I began to look at myself as an occult retiree. Sometimes, I thought that my spiritual life had ended with the operations I'd performed with Gunila Beriman. As the years went by, my former experiences seemed more valuable. Not only the ritual of initiation - which by now had gained the unrealistic fogginess of a beautiful reverie, but the conversations I'd had at Astrid Monty's apartment, my companionship with Jim, and the alchemist's words which stayed with me as if engraved into solid wood. I wondered what happened to him, what kind of experiences had that strange man gone through? The time I'd spent in his home, now seemed like a precious gift. Perhaps I could have asked his permission to follow him in his travels, or at least I could have tried to do so. I blew my golden opportunity and I was left only with regrets, which here, in a life still like aquarium water, developed even more.

My reputation as an occult expert grew and I often got letters from anonymous people looking for advice. Sometimes, someone unannounced showed up at my door yearning to talk to me. In the beginning it comforted me, but over time, it began to bother me. People came on Sunday afternoons, sometimes late at night, apologetic but persistent in their appeal that I see them and listen to their troubles.

I contributed to Igor Vislavsky's magazine and wrote sporadically for three other popular weeklies. I gave lectures at open speaker's platforms; appeared a few times on television and began to write, speak and think about matters which I hadn't experienced myself but had only read about. In short, I began to rely on libraries, speaking not from within but conveying information without personal insight.

And then, I made a pivotal decision. I would conclude the long delayed book about Jung, Crowley and Reich and put an end to such kind of life. I would direct myself toward new experiences and somehow incorporate them into my current life. Give to the Caesar what is Caesar's and to God that which is God's. Without this second one, my life was lethargic misery.

It seems that my decision set in motion a chain of events, each one shaping another. My childhood friend, Jovica Sokic, offered to allow me to live rent-free in a house at Kotez Neimar. Jovica's elderly aunt, who he lived with, had passed away and he was leaving for New Zealand for two years. I liked the house. It had

large rooms filled with antique furniture and a wonderful garden with a huge, old cherry tree in the middle. Located in a quiet neighbourhood, the house was still centrally located. We now lived in a two-room apartment, which Lydia got from her factory, but when Nenad started school, we felt cramped in it.

With the aunt not yet cold, we moved in, a day before New Year's Eve. As a return favour, Jovica asked us to organize a forty days since death memorial. I agreed to do so, but while I was saying the words of promise I had a strange premonition that I would avoid it. A short-lived guilty conscience was more bearable than the effort I would have to put in for the memorial.

We hired household help and created the conditions I needed to finally finish my book. Yet, the dry period continued. It didn't matter that Ivanka brought coffee for me, placing it silently on my desk, or that I spent half the day undisturbed in my study, with a view of the quiet street. It took a bizarre event to finally jolt me from my long lasting apathy.

The main source of information about Jung was his autobiography. I spent most of my time studying his occult and mystical experiences. Describing his period of extensive loneliness after his break with Freud and the entire psychoanalytical milieu, Jung said that his home was filled with tension. Days and nights ghosts appeared in the house - which he interpreted as a manifestation of his uptight psychic energy - so the house echoed from the strange sounds, which sometimes turned into a loud beating. One afternoon, wrote Jung, the entire family was having coffee in the garden. The large bell at the gate, pulled only by hand, began to ring by itself. At the gate there was no one. Immediately after that event, Jung fell into a deep mediumistic trance and, in that state, he received the text of a strange book "*Seven Sermons to the Dead*". He wasn't ready to publish the book under his name. He used his pseudonym, Basilides of Alexandria, while his students kept the secret about the identity of the author of this mystic and mediumistic message for years, so as not to damage his reputation.

"I write about Jung's occult experiences while I have never experienced anything similar myself", I complained to Lydia.

"What do you mean?" her question contained too much doubt. I stopped for a moment because I realized that it was far from the truth that I had never experienced anything similar. On New Year's Eve, the second day after we moved into the house, a thick water glass, standing on the table between the two of us, exploded suddenly.

“It is often a sign that someone in a family has just passed away”, I said to Lydia, calling her and my parents on the phone to check if they were alive. Since that evening, very often, strange sounds were heard from the attic - like someone dragging a full sack, knocking, squeaking, and the sound of a whip cutting the air.

“It seems that Grandma is complaining because we didn’t hold a memorial”, Lydia said one evening. From that time on, our reaction to the strange sounds accompanied words such as – Granny’s doing it again. Our housekeeper, Ivanka, was a clear-headed woman from the village. When Lydia told her about the strange sounds, which were heard all night long, she laughed and said: “Eh, Madame Lydia, you are an educated woman, how can you believe such things?!”

It was end of February one day, around noon, warm like in April and the snow, which had fallen on previous days, was suddenly melting. Intoxicated by the warm sun, I fell asleep. Lost in my dream, I heard a loud ringing but I had a hard time waking up. Ivanka came into my room running, all white in the face, and shaking me to wake me up, she almost screamed: “Nobody’s at the door!”

I couldn’t understand what she was saying. The doorbell was still ringing. I walked to the entrance door. It was covered with glass and through it, I saw heaps of dirty snow in the garden and the electrical bell, which was ringing. There was nobody at the door. Ivanka had been washing the dishes when the doorbell rang, and realizing that no one was at the front door, her rationalism was quickly replaced by a powerful fear. It was an old-fashioned doorbell; I had to unwind it several times to make it stop.

“Perhaps there was a short circuit in the installation caused by dampness”, I told Lydia when she came home from work, when I described to her how Ivanka had gotten scared. During the next couple of days, the doorbell rang day and night, so finally I had to replace it. Whatever the reason was that it rang in a such strange and enduring way, it was probably an unambiguous case of synchronicity with the description of Jung’s experiences, which I thought of and wrote about in those days.

It was hard to grasp why that event aroused me from my immobility, but, I sent a letter to Ken Hamilton in London. He jealously guarded his privacy and no one knew his home address, so I sent him a letter via his publisher. I didn’t have much hope for an answer, but still, it came very quickly.

Dear Frater Bogdan,

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law!

With great pleasure I read your letter. You are the first person from Yugoslavia interested in Aleisteir Crowley. I feel that your intention to write a book about Crowley is very important for the further expansion of human consciousness on this planet. I am offering you all possible help. Above all sources you should use, I recommend "Confessions", namely, his autobiography. If your book seems to be progressing, I will place at your disposal some of his unpublished letters and photographs.

I can meet with you next Tuesday from 10 to 11 am. My address is Primrose Gardens 39 (please, don't give it to anyone else). You can reach me by Edgware Rose train or any other train which runs to Collingdale. Get off at Brent Cross station and from there, make a right turn on the second street. As soon as you cross Crescent Road, on the other side starts Primrose Garden. It would be my pleasure to meet with you.

Love is the Law, Love under Will.

Frater Aleyin, 489

I arrived half an hour early at Brent Cross station. I stopped for a cup of coffee at some shabby coffee shop run by a white-haired Hindu. It was morning, no one else was in the café except us. While I sipped thin English coffee, slightly stronger than sugary water, I wondered what Crowley's housekeeper and secretary looked like since no one ever saw his photograph. I'd probably be surprised again; people always looked differently than what we expected.

I wasn't surprised when Ken Hamilton opened the door of his house. He extended his hand, faintly squeezed mine, and said: "Welcome. I hope you had a good trip." He was about sixty, and dressed as conservative English gentleman from the upper middle class – chequered dark grey jacket, grey trousers in fine thin wool and brown, shiny leather shoes. His olive coloured shirt matched a reddish wool tie. His hair was dark, without grays, combed tightly, like a Hungarian. Only his eyes didn't fit into the overall image of a well-to-do, reserved gentleman.... Light green, clear and transparent – quite rare for elderly people, his eyes were wide open so he looked completely focused on his companion. You might even think that his eyes were made of glass or that he was using some eye solution – like women in show business did.

I expected him to greet me with the traditional thelemite's greeting, "Do What Thou Wilt Shall be The Whole of The Law". I was glad when he avoided that clumsy introduction. He took me upstairs to his study. The walls were covered with books, paintings and drawings. I recognized several drawings by Austin Osman Spare, made in ink and coal. I'd seen reproductions of the same

drawings saw in his books “*Cults of the Unconsciousness*” and “*The New Life of Magic*”.

“I prepared sandwiches and some sherry. Please, help yourself.”

The leather armchairs were shiny from long use, the carpet thin, and the books on the bookshelf were old and mostly unfamiliar to me. A thin cotton curtain over the window guarded the empty street I had taken on my way to his house. The room, in total harmony with him, had an aura of decency and longevity, because nothing had changed in it for years.

“I would be much happier if you were writing a book just on Crowley, but of course, that is exclusively your decision”, he said with a pleasant smile. Sitting relaxed in an armchair across from mine, he crossed his legs and entangled his fingers, resting them on his lap.

“Those three men seem different just at the first sight. They actually have a lot in common. For example, Wilhelm Reich goes hand in hand with Crowley. He pointed out, most clearly, what happens when the expression of life’s energies is blocked and suppressed by social taboos. I wouldn’t be surprised if he had known of Crowley’s teaching. Of course, there’s no such information.”

“I understand what you’re saying, but sexual energy and the use of it are consistent with the methodology of Thelema. Teachings of free will and total liberation of the human being are of crucial importance.”

“That is exactly what Reich talks about. Suppression of a free flow of sexual energy leads to the creation of neuromuscular blockages, neurotic shields which armour the human body. It is hard to imagine a spiritually liberated man who is physically blocked.” I thought for a moment that I was headed toward the disagreement with him, ruining my visit a place only few can access, but he calmed me down: “Maybe you are right. My familiarity with Reich is not strong. I’ve read only one of his books. That was a long time ago, and I don’t remember the title. Tell me something about yourself.”

“There isn’t much to say; occultist’s lives are like eggs, all appearing the same. Several years ago, I was initiated into a brotherhood in Stockholm. The ritual left a strong mark on me, but the experience weakened over time. People swarm around me, but I feel lonely. There is no one similar to me who I can share my experiences with, and worst of all is that I have no new, worthy experiences. I had a few deep insights in one period of my life, but no new ones recently.”

I hoped he might direct me to a practical way of getting out of my spiritual apathy. If he could just say one word, a crucial one, which could help me launch a torrent of former insights all over again; but, he disposed of my expectations. “That happens.... What was the name of your brotherhood in Stockholm?”

“Odin's Sword. That is the official title; some people simply call it the Odin Order.

“A-a-a-a-, Haling,” he pronounced, with a slight surprise.

“You know Haling?”

“I never met him personally. We corresponded for some time. As far as I know, he left the organization to go his own way.”

Obviously, I seemed surprised. Quickly, he nodded in sympathy and added: “That happens often. People are together as long as they feel the need for mutual psychological and spiritual interaction. When such relationships reach the bottom, they have to part even if they don't want to...let's talk about your book. You will write it in your native language, right? I am ready to help you, but the best time would be when you complete the first draft of your manuscript. You should send me a short abstract of your manuscript and I'll do what I can. Have you read Crowley's *“Magical and Philosophical Commentaries of the Book of Law?”*

“No, was that book published?”

“Yes, recently John Simonds and I published it....I can give you a copy...Actually, it will be my pleasure to give you a copy of the book as my gift.” He slowly rose from his armchair and went over to the bookshelf. He visibly dragged his left foot, not like a lame person but like someone who suffers from a hip ailment or arthritis. He took a hardbound book with a dark blue cover and handed it to me with a smile. The cover page had a golden print copy of the Stele of Revealing, where Nuit was presented as a firmament, the goddess of infinite space. “The text is rather heavy. Crowley wasn't trying to write clearly. He required the reader to make an effort to understand him. It surely would help you.”

I opened the book. The text of the *Book of Law* was printed in red letters, while Crowley's comments were in black. On the cover, I noticed the book's price for Great Britain – 25 pounds - and that notion briefly filled me with satisfaction. Not everyone can get such a book. How would he feel if he found out that I had criticized Crowley quite a bit? I was holding the book in one hand as if I was weighing it and hesitantly, I said: “I don't agree with Crowley in many

respects. You know, his teachings about the free will are fascinating, but he was...it seems to me, a broken personality. In relation to his students, he was selfish and intolerant.” My own words surprised me, so quickly I added: “Well, certainly you know that well, since you were with him.”

He dispelled my feelings of unease with simple words: “Crowley was a multi-levelled and multi-dimensional personality. Different people experienced different aspects of his personality, certain that they knew him completely. But that was a mistake...Some people saw him as a selfish person - even an egomaniac, others regarded him as a Grand Teacher, and some as an embodiment of love...it all depends on what aspect of his personality they looked into. As you probably have read, some saw a satanic prophet in him. He offered a pretext to such people, he often did it on purpose.”

“Some of his personality characteristics are unacceptable to a normal person. He declared coprophagy – eating of feces – to be the highest ritual of initiation in Ipsimus. Even with the uppermost level of tolerance, that is unacceptable.”

Ken Hamilton slowly got up from his chair, dragging his foot walked to the window; for a while, silent, he stared outside at the empty street. Then he turned to me. His face and glassy eyes were expressionless, and slowly, as if evaluating how much I could bear or understand, he said: “The majority of people look at such an act with total disgust, but, Crowley was not a psychopath. The purpose of the ritual was to prove in the most difficult way that he had overcome the duality of this universe.” Slowly pointing at the book on my lap, he added: “On the twenty-third page of the first chapter, you’ll find his comment - that the one who destroyed the personal feeling of duality is above all people. A genuinely enlightened being sees one in all. You probably know how a Zen teacher answered his student’s question of what is Buddha?” He stopped and an ironic smile spilled over his face. In a stronger voice, he said: “Buddha is dogshit! The Teacher didn’t intend to undermine Buddha - all Zen masters feel deepest respect toward him. His answer represented an expression of knowledge by an enlightened wise man, that duality causes all our problems. The one who overcomes it escapes the trap of a dual universe.” He looked at me for some time with faintly detachable curiosity, and then his looked at his watch.

“It’s time for me to leave, Mr. Hamilton”, I quickly said and got up. “Thank you for seeing me. I will send you a concise resume of my manuscript, when I finish it.”

“No need to be so formal. You can call me Ken. I’ll see you out.” With difficulty, he walked behind me down the wooden stairs. He opened the entrance door with his left hand, stretching out his right for a handshake.

It was my last chance to ask for help. “I need to ask you something. Earlier, I had many contacts with Aivaz and worthy insights, but for the last couple of years I have been totally sterile; nothing valuable is coming my way. That bothers me. Do you have any advice for me?”

He smiled sadly and his eyes lost their former shine. Slowly nodding his head, he said: “That is our fate, Bogdan. Contacts with a higher Intelligence are similar to an artist inspiration - we can’t force them. They come and go as they want. It is ours to accept them like gifts of fate.”



PART FOUR

-1-

AST was organized in a conference hall of the Royal International Hotel. I knew that part of London between High Street Kensington and South Kensington. A large group of people gathered in front of the training room on a Saturday, at eight-thirty in the morning. They were mostly people of independent professions - journalists in jeans, talking loudly and gesticulating; somewhat standoffish managers in elegant suits, musicians with long hair, and conspicuously dignified photo models. Talking to them, I discovered that they largely knew what would happen at the training. Their voices resonated with concern and the expectation of an illuminating experience. Some of them had gone to an evening introductory seminar, and had heard of profound experiences from people who had already completed the seminar. A few of them loudly expressed their anxiety that AST would not be able to eliminate their problems - the primary reason they had come. I suspected that their fear was caused by the exact opposite risk – what if AST really did change their lives?

Recognizing the emotional state of other participants didn't relieve my anxiety. If I experienced my troubles in a new way, would I be able to endure the break with old ties and the creation of new allegiance? What would happen if life really changed, if I didn't have to play the usual games - games I was sick of, but which gave me a sense of security? Above all, what if I understood, entirely and forcefully, that no one else - only I - was responsible for ugly the experiences of my whole life – an insight I found out from people who had completed AST?

An older man of medium height, in a Harris tweed jacket, took my wristwatch, placed it in a paper bag with my name on it, and pinned a white button, which said BOGY in bold letters, on my lapel. He shook my hand vigorously and said: "Welcome Bogy, I wish you a successful training."

A red-haired man with thin wire-framed glasses asked me something I couldn't understand. At that moment the wide conference room doors opened. A curly-haired man in his thirties, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt and striped tie, announced in a sharp voice: "I am Jake, the first assistant at this training. Listen carefully to what I have to tell you: You can enter the training room now. There is no talking! No smoking, eating or drinking....You are not allowed to use

the toilets until the trainer says you may do so. Please fill in all the seats in each row starting from the front. Do not leave any seats empty!”

I tried to find a seat in the first row but when I finally got there through the pushing crowd, all the seats already taken. I sat in the second row and while I looked around the spacious hall, I became aware that I was ready for what was about to happen. In the past, I would have sat in the back; I’ve changed, now I was ready to expose myself to different experiences at such seminars.

I estimated that there were about two hundred and fifty people in attendance. Everyone wore a button with a nickname that we were supposed to use. Dark red, velvet curtains were drawn over the windows and the lights on the ceiling and walls illuminated the room like it was a television studio. We faced a fairly large podium, which looked like a theatre stage; in the middle of it was a wicker rocking chair and a huge chalk board. Jake climbed to the stage and in a strong, officer-like voice, he declared: “It is a great honour for me to be an assistant at the seminar personally headed by Robert Ackerman! Listen carefully to what I am saying! When you want to speak during training, ask for a microphone first. Is that clear? You are not allowed to take notes during the seminar! Your only goal is experience. Try to understand that completely – **experience!**”

I found myself between a balding man in his thirties with glasses and a middle-aged, thin woman with pockmarked skin and an anguished expression on her face.

“Have you read ‘AST: The Game of Life’ by Fleming?”, the balding man asked me quietly.

“No. I’ve read all I can get my hands on, but I haven’t heard of that book.”

“Too bad. That book is by far the best. Fleming is a man with an exceptional memory; he remembered and wrote down all the seminar techniques in the book. I feel like I have already gone through the seminar. Yet, I have stage fright.”

I was just about to tell him that mine had vanished, but then I felt a butterfly flicker in my solar plexus. Time passed and Ackerman was not showing. Something wasn’t working in the organization of the seminar. Talking to people around me, I gathered that the majority had come on the recommendations of friends and relatives and most of them had read something about the seminar. AST terminology was used all the time: here and now, opening of a space, giving freedom to another person to express himself, sharing experiences with others...My feelings of superiority returned. I didn’t have to

read all four books about AST. Right after I finished the first book, it was clear how AST was constructed and from where Ackerman had borrowed elements for the seminar. 'Here and Now' was pure gestalt, a semantic process he took over from Wittgenstein and Korzibsky, opening of a space and processing was a mixture of everything, mainly sciologargic communication and the psychology of Carl Rogers. All in all, it looked like Zen for the masses. All that was needed were two weekends to observe the new synthesis.

Some systems expose followers to physical exercise and movement. AST keeps them nailed to their chairs fifteen hours a day. Other systems use Sanskrit or Sufi terms and newly created words, which supposedly add a scientific component. AST's coaches use street language, mainly names of genitals and sexual acts, all directed toward finding ways, through vivid insults, to discover painful areas in seminar participants. The goal was to re-stimulate people. Part of re-stimulation was cigarette and coffee prohibition, starvation, and many hours of sitting until bladders are filled to the bursting point. Ackerman adopted his name after the successful German banker who fascinated him. Before that, his name was Michael Rosenberg and he led training courses for salespeople. "*I was able to quickly teach people to get what they wanted*", he wrote in the booklet, some sort of public autobiography, "*but when they got what they wanted, hey, listen, that wasn't what they really wanted, because they'd never experienced it*".

"Experience" was one of AST's key terms. "*Language is a shaky thing*", Ackerman taught further. "*Psychology is a dead end science. None of the tens of thousands of psychologists can give you real experience. Even if they tell you what it is, you don't get it, you simply get a verbal definition of an experience. That is yet another verbal shit, an additional shit on a collection of shit, tall as a mountain. For example - money. All of us Americans talk about money all the time. Money is a symbol of emotional security. Pay attention, people, money is not an experience of security. People want the experience of security and pile up the money, working round the clock to achieve it, but still, they are not gaining security. They buy stuff, which goes hand-in-hand with security, but there is no money in the world which could buy the experience of security. Unconscious barriers prevent man from experiencing security. If he succeeds in recognizing those barriers which separate him from security, he might end up having less money, but he will certainly have more experience.*"

I waited for the seminar to begin, thinking that yet again, I am putting a chip on a new number, with equal hope and scepticism. At the beginning of my search, there was always more energy; criticism came later, with the inevitable difficulties, and firmly grew until I parted with the teaching and the system. In those years of naiveté, every new occult book, from the first page, aroused in me a state of bliss, like a new love - more exciting than the one before. This time, I

had some healthy restraint. I was certain about one thing – no matter how content I might be in the end, AST was not the answer to all my questions. I had a thought - firm and clear like a piece of ice – that I would never find a final solution, because there isn't one. The recognition was followed by a cynical certainty that probably, sometime in the future, I would believe again that I'd found the golden key for every door.

Suddenly, Ackerman appeared on stage. He looked exactly like the photographs in his books on AST. About thirty-five, tall, slim but strong, he wore a grey wool vest and a blue shirt with a collar pulled over the vest. He had on flannel creaseless trousers and loafers of soft brown leather. His nose was bent like a Semite, and although his complexion was dark, his Germanic blue eyes almost looked as if he was wearing coloured contact lenses. He moved with ease on the stage, like an actor or television host. One of the assistants ran to him with a microphone. Ackerman took it in his left hand, and with clenched fist and an ominous expression on his face, he began:

“I see what you're doing, people. You are not able to follow a single instruction. You were told - no conversation, and yet, all of you are prattling like drunken grandmas. No talking! Do you understand, you horses and oxen, no talking! Here, we have it my way and no other. Do you know what you are? You are intestines. It gets into you on one side, and gets out on the other, but there is no major difference. Hey you, intestines, get real, you buckets of shit, piles of brainless meat, wake up.”

A nervous giggle was heard from the back of the room.

“Someone is laughing back there,” Ackerman threw a perilous look at the last row. “Aren't you ashamed of yourself? You piles of meat, you don't even know who you are. You have permanent visiting circuses in your heads. You are intestines, and what I want you to do is to have a good look at yourselves, and understand that you are nothing more than that. That is enough for a start. Does anyone here have the balls to understand that, and publicly tell everyone that he is a shitty intestine?”

Silence filled the room. I heard my neighbour's deep breathing. A few people from the first row turned around, looking about the room, expecting someone to get up. Hesitantly, one hand went in the air. It belonged to an elementary student who wasn't certain that he knew the answer to the teacher's question. “Give him the microphone,” Ackerman told his assistants, and one of them skilfully passed the microphone to the man sitting in the middle of a row. “Get up and talk into the microphone so everyone can hear you.”

It was a young man with a pale face and long hair. Holding the microphone close to his mouth, he softly said: “I am an intestine. OK, so what?”

“Very good”, Ackerman addressed him in a friendly manner. “Thank you, Josh, for your courage. At least you have a chance of getting experience at AST. Those other wise men don’t! They think they’re wise, because they’re saving their asses, waiting for someone else to put out a shoulder for them. Only because of this man with a little courage, I’ll tell you a well-kept secret of Tantra Yoga. The secret of sex. I’ll tell you all you need to know about sex so you can have a happy sexual life. Do you want to hear it, ha?”

Silence reigned, necks got extended, and someone’s mouth remained wide open. Noisy breathing was heard in the third row.

“I’ll tell you people!” screamed Ackerman: “When you want to fuck, you fuck! And when you don’t want to fuck, you don’t fuck! That is the secret, there is no other.”

The silence continued for a little longer, and then bashful giggling was heard from the back rows, two or three people applauded and finally a loud applause filled the room. It alternated from stronger to weaker like a wave going up and falling down. This was skilfully executed, I thought.

We worked on processes. It was clear that Ackerman took them from already established systems: Spiritual Dynamics of Alexander Evert, Subud, Jung’s guided imagination, Jolin’s Insight, from Source System and some others where I couldn’t figure out the origin. The names of processes were obviously changed. He made an introduction into the core of AST. It was simple. We needed to understand that our lives were built on the wrong foundations and to have a hope that we could become alter them. His entire attitude suggested that, and he didn’t miss a chance to verbally express it, as well.

“I am your trainer,” he said, in a piercing and unnaturally loud voice, “and you are AST participants. I am here because my life is okay and you are here because your lives are a worthless piece of shit.” He was standing in the middle of the podium talking into a microphone, not moving a single part of his face or body. Only his eyes travelled over the listeners, left to right.

“Your lives are messy shit. You have probable theories about life, big ideas or entire systems of belief. You are trying to be sensible, and even worse, you are sensible! You paid 175 pounds for this training, hoping that your lives would become better. And over the next four days of training, you will put great effort in preventing yourself from having a better life. You paid all that money to get a better life, and I will tell you what you will get for it – NOTHING!”

Silence. Ackerman was pleased with the impression he had made. He looked like a man who enjoys the sound of his own voice. “You think here you will learn the secret of a successful or happy life; or some similar shit. That’s bullshit! Life is a game. To have a game, something must be more important than something else. If something is already more important than something which is not, there is no game, the game is over. Put into your empty heads what I tell you now: life is a game in which what is not is more important than what is. Life is a game and living is not a game. Living is experiencing the experience here and now, any kind of experience. There’s nothing mystical about it, except for fools.”

A young man with high cheekbones, dark hair and complexion, wearing an elegant suit of dark lustre, suddenly got up from his chair. “Let me tell you something...”

“Sit down, Chato!” Ackerman stopped him in a harsh voice. “Raise your hand and ask for a microphone, you know the rules.”

Chato who looked like a South American businessman, sat back down and raised his hand; the assistant ran to hand him the microphone. Visibly restraining himself, he looked at Ackerman from an angle: “If that is true, that what is – is, why doesn’t a bum stay in bed in the morning? And remain there forever? He would gain the experience, wouldn’t he?”

“**Of course he wouldn’t get the experience!** Bums and losers are kept in bed by un-lived experience, tension and fear of facing life and EXPERIENCING IT! If such a bum experiences his fear, he ceases being a bum! He can get out of bed or not, but he remains in it - to avoid experience.”

With a short, quick gesture Ackerman indicated that Chato should sit down, and, quickly glancing over the room, he continued: “I have to say straight away – AST is **nothing! You get from AST, what you get.** You’re already getting it, but you are dumb turkeys so you don’t see it. If you were smart, you would get up, take your 175 pounds and leave. Then you would get your money back too. But you are stupid and your stupidity will cost you exactly 175 pounds and four days of heavy drag. Anyone have something to say?”

A hand from the second row, to the left of me, suddenly went up. “Ben,” said Ackerman, shifting his weight from left to right, so he could read the name on the button. “Get up, take a microphone and say what you will.”

Ben was a bearded, skinny young man with long hair, and glasses with thick lenses. He wore a cotton, multicoloured dress which covered his legs to the ankles, typical for followers of eastern traditions and people who spend time in the East. “Friends who recommended AST to me said that it is condensed and

effective Zen training. Instead, I listen to you – and pardon my honesty – an unrefined person, insulting everybody all the time and making inaccurate generalizations. Maybe some people are dissatisfied with their lives, but it is untrue that the lives of all of us are worth nothing.”

“I understand you, Ben.” Holding a microphone next to his mouth, Ackerman got off the stage and approached the first row, so that he was facing him. “Ben, you have an agreeable theory that AST has to be similar to condensed Zen training and you decided to get rid of all that doesn’t fit your theory. Just think about how you would experience life with such a theory? You have been doing it for so long.”

Ben made an effort to stay calm. “I am sure of one thing, Zen Roshi would never be so insulting.”

“I wouldn’t bet on that. As far as I know, many Zen Roshis beat their students and when they’re not beating them, they mainly scream at them.”

“But you cannot present people with valuable knowledge about life by insulting them.”

“Of course, that’s why I said that you will get one big nothing. You paid for it and you will get it. And Ben, you stupid masturbator, shut the fuck up and sit down!”

“Someone is sick! This lady back here is not feeling well!” the voice was heard from the back rows.

“Shut up, you asshole!” Ackerman said in a threatening voice, focusing his eyes at the other end of the room. “You know the rule: if you want to speak, raise your hand. I give you the microphone and you speak in it. Do you get it, stupid?”

“I am feeling sick”, the woman said in a shaky voice, covering her throat with her hand.

“Give her the microphone,” Ackerman said to an assistant. “Say what you want, you crying cunt.”

Silence. The woman’s voice was weak: “I’ll vomit, I feel sick of it all.”

“I understand, you crying cunt. Give her a bag to vomit in. Here’s the bag, so go ahead, unload.”

“I can’t breathe, I’ll vomit, I’ll suffocate,” the words were hardly coming out. She wore an elegant Chanel suit in a mousy grey colour; blonde hair

gathered in a bun, exposed long, thin neck. Her face turned grey and tiny drops of sweat came through a thin coat of powder on her face.

“Listen, Jane, at AST it is necessary to talk clearly. Do you want to breathe or vomit or suffocate? If you want to breathe – breathe. If you want to vomit – you have the bag. And stop creating a circus in front of hundreds of people!”

Yet another hand was in the air. “Ok, I can see you, Michael,” Ackerman said. “get the microphone and say what you have.”

“As a human being, I am insulted when I watch how you humiliate this lady. You could give her the bag without nasty insults.”

“I understand you, Michael,” Ackerman said in a kinder tone. He returned to the farthest side of the podium and relaxed as he sat in the rocking chair. He tied his microphone to the opening on his vest, crossed his fingers together on his chest, and rocking his chair, he continued: “Let’s see what just happened here. Jane wanted to vomit – we gave her the bag. You want to defend a lady – we gave you the microphone. We treat you both equally. Understand?”

“You could have helped her as a human being.”

“Sure I could have. That is the game which Jane probably plays often in her surroundings. Poor Jane, poor little Jane. She forces all of us to see that she will vomit. We have to be caring to her. I helped her in my way and you helped her in yours. It seems that mine is better, because – pay attention Michael – **she didn’t vomit**. Okay, Michael, sit down!”

Ackerman got up easily from his chair and walked to the board in the middle of the podium. “Listen carefully, people. You function similar to laboratory rats. If you put a rat into a labyrinth which has three exits, and you place a crumb of cheese in front of the third, the rat will quickly learn to go to the third exit.” He quickly drew a line, which forked into three lines, marking the third with a little cross. “Man will learn the same - that is the similarity between a man and a rat. The next day, he wants the cheese – so he goes back to the third exit and gets it. Still, the difference between the man and the rat is damaging for man. If the next time you don’t put the cheese at the third exit, the rat will come there two to three more times and then stops. He will look for cheese someplace else. And a man? He will continue to go to the same place until the end of time. Until the end of time, I say, although there is no cheese there and it never will again.. Why, you turkeys and assholes, why do you do that? Because, you created a BELIEF that there is cheese for you at the third exit. And you will go there until you die, no matter what wise people tell you. You will defend that belief with your nails and teeth. But there is no cheese there, understand that

once for all, you piles of shit, **no cheese!** To your disadvantage, you are not clever rats, you are people. You are intestines full of shit, you have belief systems that whole books are written about, you have philosophy, and some even have diplomas in that field. But, **you don't have the cheese!**”

One hand rose. “Jack, go ahead.”

A man in his fifties with grayish hair, wearing a striped suit, took a microphone from the assistant and, taking a deep breath, said “You know what, Mr. Ackerman, a man has to believe in something.”

“That is another one of your stupid beliefs, Jack.”

Jack looked at the faces staring at him and said: “A man is not a man if he doesn't believe in justice, truth...God.”

“Another belief, Jack.”

“But you also believe”, he said, pointing his index finger toward Ackerman, searching with his eyes for support from other participants. “You believe that all beliefs are damaging.”

“Who says so?”

“I do, because it's obvious.”

“Another one of your beliefs and another reason your life is in chaos.”

“Say, in front of everyone, aren't all beliefs wrong for you?”

“No, you naïve fool.”

“Then you believe that most beliefs are bad?”

“Not at all!”

“Then, what do you believe in?”

“Nothing. That is what I have been trying to tell you for the last two hours. **I don't have beliefs, I have the cheese!**”

“But you believe that something is true or false.”

“No, I don't believe either. I take the cheese.”

“Well, you are just playing with words then.”

“Exactly, Jack. I am just playing with words and my life is okay. You believe in words and they are playing with you. That’s why, Jack, your life is worthless. There is no cheese there, Jack.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Sure you don’t, Jack, it’s OK not to understand.” For the first time, something like a smile appeared on Ackerman’s face. “Think how boring the rest of your time at AST would be if you understood that.”

Time went by and none of us knew what part of the day it was. Our bottoms hurt and the pain in our backs and necks was becoming stronger. Our stomachs growled, bladders were full to bursting, and mouths were dry. We felt sleepiness and numbness, with eyelids closed halfway. When someone closed their eyes even for a moment, Ackerman spotted it like a hawk and screamed: “Keep your eyes open! You can sleep, but keep your eyes open!” Like the rest of the group, I gradually began to believe that he was superior to us. No matter how boring and senseless the comments of the participants were, Ackerman devoted his full attention to them, sharp as a freshly forged sickle. He wasn’t listening to only the words, but he unmistakably grasped the emotional ground they were coming from. He approached concepts from every angle, twisted comments around and upside down like a pair of socks, while the participants drifted deeper and deeper into fogginess. The day seemed endless.

“Responsibility”, Ackerman wrote in big letters on the board. “Do you realize that you are responsible for your experiences? Of course not! You are not able to grasp that. That’s why your life’s in deep shit”.

No one reacted; fogginess reigned over the consciousness of two hundred and fifty people, with an expression of numbness on our faces. It was late and we wanted this to finally end.

“Don’t sleep, look here!” Ackerman was screaming. “At this moment you must take responsibility for communication, because we are studying it, right? We communicate. When I communicate, I am responsible for how you will understand me. On the other hand, you are responsible for how you will understand me, and most importantly, you are responsible if you add or lose anything in my words. Just now, Maryann called me an awful, rude person. I understand that. Let’s suppose that I felt angry or insulted. If I had those feelings, I am exclusively responsible, because I added them. She sends me words, but she didn’t send me anger. I created anger myself!”

He watched from the podium with his wide blue eyes, looking for reactions among the group of two hundred and fifty people.

“I’ve called you assholes many times. Understand my message and notice if you added anything to it: anger, fury or an insult? You adhere to anything that comes your way. Your shitty nature placed it there; the fact is that you are machines who, at the push of a button, react in this or that way. You are insulted because I called you assholes. Great! Bitterness is created in happy families too. The important thing is to notice that it comes from you, not me. I only send you the words ‘you are assholes’, nothing else. Everything else is your creation. Who else but you only, could be responsible for that?”

No one said a word, no hands were in the air and everything he said seemed indisputable, any probable argument was inadequate to challenge his statement.

“We’ll work on one process now,” Ackerman said in a calm voice. “When we finish it, you’ll have a break, go to the restroom and have something to eat and drink.” A sigh of relief spread throughout the room. “The process is called location of space in your own body and relaxation. I want you to do it well, don’t just act like you are doing it, which is what you do in real life. Do you understand?” For fifteen minutes he described the process in detail, repeating and stressing the elements of the process two or three times. It was a kind of relaxation exercise, used at many seminars and described in several books, but Ackerman acted as if he was revealing a secret to the participants.

The process lasted longer than half an hour. At the beginning, I had difficulties following it because I was thinking of food and orange juice. Gradually, the process took over and I forgot about my body. My neighbour, loudly groaning and crying, disturbed my concentration. Ackerman’s messianic boastfulness had tightened my nerves twice, but I had to admit that the process was enhanced because he guided it, rather than having us do it all alone. In the end, the feelings of hunger and thirst were gone, only a bladder urged to be emptied.

When I returned to my seat, Ackerman was sitting in his chair. He enthusiastically watched the participants entering the room, like he couldn’t wait to go on. Something must come clean - he honestly earned every penny. Over the break, he had changed and now had on a striped white and blue shirt.

“In AST, there are several axioms. Those are, as you already know, obvious truths. You will eventually experience them in that mode, at the end of training. You are not able to do that at the moment. The man who can’t see the obvious is a fool. Do you follow me?” Using chalk, he wrote in big letters on the board: “You are perfect.” He looked at us, lifting an eyebrow. “That is the first

axiom of AST. You are perfectly packaged the way you are now, but there are some barriers which prevent you from experiencing it.”

“The second axiom actually relates to those barriers, which prevent you from experiencing your own perfection. That axiom is: resistance causes persistence. **Resistance causes persistence of experience.**” He wrote those words on the board, under the first axiom, then turned, looked left and right about the room, holding up his index finger, all white from the chalk. "It is a terribly simple matter which influences your life horribly! As long as you are resisting various experiences, they persist. The only way to get rid of some experience – emotion, pain, anything, is to accept it. It doesn't mean to ignore it, to pretend it's not there or to convince ourselves that it's not there - which is what some people, who practice autosuggestion or similar shit, do. To ignore something is an expression of resistance, and every resistance causes persistence. Understood?”

“Charlotte, take the microphone,” he addressed a woman who had raised her hand. She was about forty, with a somewhat nervous appearance, and her skinny face was covered with a thick layer of make-up. She blinked quickly several times and said: “My entire life I was taught that human beings have to control negative emotions. Doesn't that mean that we should face them and change them?”

“Yes, that means exactly that. And you know, Charlotte, it bloody well doesn't help. People have been resisting for centuries, trying to control it, but unsuccessfully. **Listen people!** That is a paradox and a nasty one, as well. An attempt to change most likely leads to the persistence. If you're angry and you try to suppress your anger, it will continue to exist. Either in the same shape or changed. If you're tense and you try to relax, you will still be tense. If you have a headache and try to resist, your head will still hurt. Is that clear?”

“It's only your belief,” the woman said, leaning forward. Ackerman's monologue had given her a chance to calm down. Her nervousness had disappeared; she emerged secure, ready to fight for her point of view.

“I don't have a belief, that is my direct experience! If you work the way you should at this training, you will have it too.”

“How does that differ from a belief?”

“Like day and night.”

“But I don't see how anything can stop existing.”

“It is clear like two and two are four: to double the experience will cause it to disappear!”

“Now, what does that mean? If I am unhappy, I should be unhappy once more and then I’ll become happy?”

“To double the experience, you stupid woman, means to get completely in touch with it, to experience it totally, to build its elements one by one. And when you completely recreate it, it disappears.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it with my own eyes.”

“Don’t believe anything. How many times, stupid, do I have to repeat that for you? Experience it!”

“OK. I feel anger toward you. How should I duplicate it?”

“Anger toward me? Very good.” Ackerman slowly walked to the edge of the podium, and faced Charlotte. “And you want to get rid of it?”

“Well, of course, that’s what I just said. How many times do I have to repeat it?”

“Very good, Charlotte, you are a fast learner. And now let’s see how you can duplicate your anger. Close your eyes and focus - what do you sense in your body?”

“I feel pressure in my stomach, shaky hands, and I feel your conceit.”

“Okay. We have two experiences and one belief. The belief about my conceit we’ll leave to you, but now, I want you to look at those two feelings. Which part of your hand is trembling?”

“Fingers.”

“Experience that trembling the best you can. Did you do it? Very good. Now tell me where exactly do you feel pressure in your stomach?”

“Somewhere here”, Charlotte said, indicating her stomach with her index finger.

“How deep is that pressure in your stomach?”

“Well...about three inches.”

“How do you experience that pressure?”

“Like a squeezing above my belly button.”

“Fine. How big is that squeeze?”

“Like my fist...actually a little bigger than my fist.”

“How deep does it go into your abdomen?”

“I don’t know exactly...about two inches, may be little more.”

“Very good. What shape is that pressure?”

“Round, like a ball.”

“Excellent. What colour is that pressure?”

“Colour? What do you mean - colour?”

“Exactly what I said. Which colour?”

Charlotte was silent for a whole minute. Only the soft sound of an air conditioner could be heard. Someone cleared their throat, and Charlotte said:

“Dark red colour.”

“Very good, the pressure is a dark red colour. How big is it?”

“Like a golf ball.”

“Which colour?”

“Like a red hue.”

“How deep does it go into your abdomen?”

“It’s right beneath the skin’s surface.”

“Now tell me how big is the pressure?”

Charlotte was silent. She creased her forehead like she was trying to see an unclear image in the distance.

“Come on, Charlotte, we can’t wait indefinitely. We rented the room for only two days. How big is the pressure in your stomach?”

“I can’t feel it...actually, it’s gone.”

“I understand,” Ackerman said, standing very close to Charlotte. “Do you still feel anger toward me?”

Charlotte laughed with relief. “No, I don’t feel anything like that. On the contrary...”

“You doubled your feeling of anger part by part and it disappeared, didn’t it?”

“Well, yes.”

“Thank you, Charlotte,” said Ackerman, in the tone of a lawyer who had successfully completed the cross-examination of a witness and won the case. “You cooperated well, I appreciate that.”

Applause swept through the room. This thing really worked, without a doubt, faster and more effectively than anything I’d seen before. The process didn’t last longer than five minutes.

“Some of you have a headache, right?” Ackerman asked us, getting back to the middle of the stage. “I don’t mean migraines which you suffer from often and have had for years. Those could be taken care of through our processes, but they require a special approach. I was thinking of headaches which started here, a couple of hours ago, which interfere with giving the training your undivided attention. Any volunteers? Jad, come to the stage.”

Jad was a bolding,, fat man in his fifties, with a red face and big red sideburns. He had on a bright multi-coloured shirt with drawings of palm trees. He wore cowboy boots with high heels and his belly fat spilled over the waist of his jeans.

“How long have you had a headache?”

“I would say one hour.”

“Are you willing to experience your headache in front of the entire group, and if it disappears to let it go away, and if it stays to let it stay?”

“Yes”.

“Okay, Jad, close your eyes and describe your headache. Don’t give us your beliefs, points of view, what you think of it or similar shit. Describe your experience of a headache.”

“It is...how should I put it...a painful pressure in the head.”

Holding a microphone close to Jad's mouth, Ackerman surveyed the participants. "Where in your head? Tell us, exactly where?"

"Here, behind my eyes."

"Very good, Jad. That is good information about your experience. How big is your headache?" The participants had completely calmed down and only deep breathing could be heard.

Jad thought for a few moments before he replied: "It is as big as a coca-cola can, going from one temple to another."

"Great. What colour is it?"

"Something... like purple."

"Very good. What kind of shape does it have?"

"Cylindrical, with very sharp edges."

"Excellent, cylindrical with very sharp edges. How deep is it behind the eyes?"

"About half of an inch. It starts there and goes deeper, about three inches."

"Very good," Ackerman was pleased and began to ask questions more quickly because Jad was answering without hesitation. "How big is your headache?"

"I already said, like a coca-cola can or beer can".

"What colour?"

"Bluish."

"Okay, what shape?"

"It's a ball."

"How big?"

"Like an egg."

"Excellent. What colour?"

There was total silence in the room. I clearly heard the rapid breathing of a person next to me, and the sound of a slim woman swallowing her saliva.

“Bluish like a fog.”

“What shape?”

Jad knitted his red brow, shiny from sweat, and creasing his eyebrows toward the center of his face, he formed two deep wrinkles in that area. “It got foggy...Round shape...like an ice cream scoop, but the shape is unclear.”

“Okay, how big?”

“Like a ping-pong ball.”

“What colour?”

“Like a fog. That is, a white colour with a little blue.”

“Fine. How big?”

Jad was silent for about twenty seconds. My neighbour was breathing more rapidly.

“It’s almost gone.”

“I understand. It’s almost gone means it’s still there. Say, how big is it?”

“Like a peanut, but it’s disappearing.”

“Excellent. What colour?”

Again, ten seconds of silence, and then Jad shrugged his shoulders and said: “It’s gone. It’s disappeared.”

“Do you feel a headache?” Ackerman asked nonchalantly, bending his head to one side, like a man who has engaged himself in such a performance many times.

“No, I don’t feel it at all.” Jad opened his eyes, with an expression of empty consciousness, closed them, keeping them shut for a while, then opened them again, and looking about the room, he firmly said: “It’s disappeared. Disappeared!”

“Thank you, Jad. You worked well on the process of duplication of the experience.”

This time the applause was louder and lasted much longer.

“There is always a reason or cause why you are doing something. That is what they teach us in school. Is that right?” Hesitation was in the air and none of the participants raised their hands. “I am asking you, is that right? Frances, take a microphone?”

Frances was a slim woman with short auburn hair and large earrings. She was holding a microphone close to her mouth and talked with her head bent to one side, looking like a middle school student answering her teacher: “Of course, there is always a reason why we do something.”

“Nonsense!” Ackerman suddenly cried out. “There is only one reason for all you have done: you have done something because you did it. **That is the only reason!**”

“You think so?” asked Frances, stretching her neck and bending her head to the other side. “I am sure that I came to AST to check if my husband was right when he told me that it was a valuable seminar.”

“Foolish woman! You came to this seminar because you came to this seminar. You don’t believe that?” He threw a quick look at the audience from left to right. Let’s see now.” Walking to the edge of the podium, he came closer to Frances, and facing her, he stretched both hands in front of her, like he was holding something. “Here, Frances, imagine that I am holding a vanilla ice cream in my left hand and a chocolate ice cream in my right. Choose the one that you like.”

Francie bent her head from left to right and through tightened lips, she said: “Vanilla.”

“Okay Frances, why did you pick vanilla?”

“Because I prefer vanilla ice cream.”

“Very good. Tell us out loud, so that everyone can hear you, why do you prefer vanilla ice cream?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Because it’s tastier.”

“Okay. Why is vanilla ice cream tastier?”

“I don’t know, I never thought about it.”

“I can see that you are someone who doesn’t think much, your husband does that for you. But, think now and tell us: why is vanilla tastier for you?”

“Because it has somewhat tender, pleasant taste.”

“Clear. But tell us now, why does vanilla have tender, pleasant taste?”

She shook her head: “I wanted to say that it has that kind of taste for me. For someone else, it probably doesn’t have that taste.”

“Of course, Frances. But why does it have such a taste for you?”

“Well, I don’t know. Since my childhood, I have liked the taste of vanilla.”

“Tell us why have you liked the taste of vanilla since your childhood?”

She knitted her brow. “Stupid question. Probably because of my taste buds.”

“And so on and so on – we can go on like this until tomorrow morning,” Ackerman said loudly, addressing the entire group. “In one seminar, a man was giving me new reasons for half an hour and we went far away from the real reason why he chose one ice cream flavour over another.” He paused for a few moments and then said - accenting every word: “Frances chose vanilla because she **CHOSE VANILLA!** There’s no other reason or explanation for it. I am standing here talking because I am standing here talking. You are sitting and listening because you’re sitting and listening. There is no other reason, you turkeys and geese. Understand once and forever, **you are the only cause of your experiences.** And that is why only you are responsible for all your experiences – not your father and mother, the corrupt state, criminals on the streets or politicians. Only you and no one else.”

He took a thermos from the table by his right hand and slowly drank a few gulps, after a job well-done. “As long as you shift responsibility to others, you are a consequence, an effect, not a cause,” Ackerman continued, pointing his index finger toward listeners as if poking us in the eyes. “As long as you do that, you will have shitty lives and you can’t change it. You will be the consequence, consequence, **CONSEQUENCE!** You will never be the cause, cause, **CAUSE!** You couldn’t find anything in the world for what you are not responsible!”

From the last row, one hand got in the air. “Okay George, take the microphone.

George, a short man with grey hair and greyish beard, took the microphone impatiently and chocking from the desire to speak, said: “You want

to say that I am responsible for the migraine which I am suffering from since childhood?"

"Of course, who else could be?"

"Foolishness. My mother suffered from migraine her entire life and everyone else in her family. So did my grandmother. It is the hereditary illness, there isn't a bit of my responsibility in it. It is not my fault."

"I am not talking about faults, I am talking about responsibility."

"Well, mister walking encyclopedia, certainly I'll not take the responsibility for my migraines. I said it was hereditary in my family."

"That is your experience. You are the one feeling the pain, right?"

"Yees." George's defence was suddenly melting away.

"And who is the source of that experience?"

In distress, George looked at Ackerman without answering. "I am", he finally said, and then pointing at his chest with his index finger, he confided: "Do you really think that I am the cause of such experiences?"

"You are the cause of your experience of the migraine, you are the cause of the experience of pain in your head, back, arms, ass, anywhere.... you are the source of experience when at night you are riding your wife. No one can experience that in your place. No one else can be the source of your migraine. And when it stops, you are the source of that experience as well. Are you listening to me? You are the source of everything; you are responsible for all your experiences!" Ackerman turned to other participants while George, absent-mindedly, like a robot, gave the microphone to the assistant.

"That goes for all your experiences! Arthritis, asthma, nervousness, menstrual pains, anger toward bosses and children. It is all yours. **You are the source of your experiences**", he paused for a few seconds and nodded. "When you understand that and begin to accept responsibility for every experience you experience, then your life will become valuable. The circus in your head tells you that you are the way you are because of your parents, bosses, politicians... That means that you are a consequence, consequence, CONSEQUENCE! And now, here's a \$ 64,000 question: If your life is worthless, guess who is making it that way? Does anyone know the answer?" His eyes were wide open. "**Exactly - you, yourself.** Only when you accept that you caused all your experiences, will you be able to change them. Penelope, take the microphone."

Penelope was concentrating for a while with her eyes tightly shut. She was a woman about 45, with a wrinkled face and wheat coloured hair. She opened her eyes, looked at the people to her left and right, and then slowly but firmly said: “My father left my mother and me long time ago...and I don’t even remember him. I can’t take responsibility for his leaving mother and me, because I was only three months old at the time. Do you understand?”

“And what kind of experience did you have because of that?”

“Same as any other child in a similar situation. I grew up without my father and suffered a lot. You would too, if you weren’t playing that transparent game of the almighty trainer.”

“Who created your experiences of suffering?”

"I told you clearly – my father!"

“Nonsense, Penelope, that man loved you.”

“What did you say?!”

“Exactly what I said. Your father loved both you and your mother. How do we know that? Very simple – BECAUSE HE LEFT YOU! He gave you a chance to mature, to become strong individuals. In short, he enabled you to gain real experiences. Because you didn’t understand that is what makes your life the way it is.”

“Wait, this is simple manipulation! What do you say about God?” screamed a young man from the third row, wearing an orange robe. He had a long hairy beard and long hair and wore a mala around his neck, with a picture of Bagvan Rajnish.

“Raise your hand, Robert, and ask for a microphone!” Ackerman told him seriously. “What is manipulation?”

“During meditation I had a deep insight that our lives were predestined. What is happening to us is released by our karma from past lives. There are no accidents; our experiences are predestined!”

“What do you know about God? The only thing you can be certain of is your own experience.”

“That’s what I am saying. My experience tells me that God exists; I experienced him!”

“Experienced him? Well, go on, Robert, describe your experience of God.”

Robert turned left and right. A group of Bagvan’s students was sitting around him, dressed in the orange robes of sanyasins. “You are provoking me on purpose...OK, I’ll tell you. I experienced God through meditation, moments of bliss and unity with the universe. If you haven’t, then you can’t talk about that experience with me.”

“I accept that your experience is valuable, Robert. There’s no problem with that”, Ackerman said agreeably, nodding his head, while tiny sparks twinkled in the corners of his eyes. “So what kind of conclusions did you make after that experience?”

“God exists! He is omnipresent and all-knowing. Our experiences are predetermined.”

“Wonderful”, said Ackerman, turning toward other participants. “Do you fools understand what Robert just did? On his otherwise valuable experience, he glued on a limited belief. I’ll tell you something Robert: continue to believe! Continue to live a chaotic life and to believe that God is responsible.” He paused for a little while, and with an expression of curiosity on his face, he asked: “And when do you intend to stop blaming God for your life?”

“I don’t blame anyone, least of all God. I feel the deepest love toward him.”

“You are so stupid that you don’t understand that what you’re saying is: ‘If my life is worthless, it is because it is predestined by God be to so.’ You are giving up on life, blistering your ass in meditation, waiting for a miraculous moment of unity with the universe, so that you can forget what is happening to you at this moment. Doing so, you are discarding that experience as well!” Quickly and decisively, Ackerman walked along the edge of the platform, alternately looking from the participants to Robert and back. “For me, that is okay. There are many robots here who can keep you company. And now, you should know this: whenever you turn off your experience so that you cannot take responsibility for it, you are sacrificing the integrity of your being, creating additional barriers!”

“I have the impression that whatever you say here is intended to make us feel defeated. That is your unique goal”, Robert said softly and with resignation.

“That is not my goal, you stupid. But rest assured that I am not paid to be defeated. Let’s say that I am gaining all the time, and in the end you will not be a loser.”

A girl with a freckled face, a white hair and eyelashes took the microphone. Her hair was gathered in a ponytail. Her facial expression showed that she was having fun in the situation which Ackerman had created. ‘Some things you’ve said here are not hard to accept. We are responsible for many of our experiences. But, I was mugged on the street. Please explain to me’ – she stretched her lips into a grin – “how am I responsible for such an experience?”

“Of course you are! You are the only responsible because you’ve created it!”

“And what about the mugger? He isn’t responsible?”

“Of course he is. He is responsible for his experience a equally as you are responsible for yours – not less, not more.”

“So both of us are responsible for that experience?”

“Yes, everyone for his own.”

I don’t know why my throat tightened at that moment. Ackerman was silent for a while. He raised his head as if he had remembered something and then said: “I have good news. Now it’s time for a break.”

“Enlightenment”, wrote Ackerman on the board, and then turned around with the chalk in his hand and addressed us in a calm voice, as if he was confiding in us, “Enlightenment is knowledge that we are machines. We have reached the end of our seminar and before we part, I thought you should know that. I am sorry if you expected something else, sugary stories about God, omniscience and omnipotence, cosmic consciousness, anything that sounds magnificent.... However, the knowledge that you are machines is enlightenment. You won’t hear this from any yogi, but it’s true.”

We were at the end of the second day and the expectation of a dramatic outcome made the air in the room so dense that it could almost be touched. A hand was in the air and the assistant hurried to bring the microphone. A man rose hesitantly. It was is neatly shaven and had a Scandinavian face with symmetrical features. He looked like a successful manager of a large company. In a voice full of self-assurance, he announced his manifesto of independence: “I am Randy Burack! I make decisions for myself and I am not a machine!”

“Don’t misunderstand me, Randy.” Ackerman’s voices became softer and warmer. “Your attitude shows that you are feeling attacked and the expression on your face says that you are defending yourself. I’m saying that the machine Randy Burack is something bad. I said that you will be enlightened when you realize that you are a machine. Sit down, Randy.”

Ackerman slowly walked to his chair, sat comfortably in it, and put his fingers together on his chest; he began to rock slowly forward and backward. Time passed and he was still rocking in his chair, silent. Then he said: “We have reached the end of your training. Yes, this is the end. You thought you would fly into the sky...you won’t, you are at the level where you have always been... Where you’ve spent your entire life...in which you will live from now on.” He spoke slowly in a deep voice, pausing like he was thinking aloud and that he was addressing not only us but also making a final bill with himself. While he was talking, his face was expressionless, only his lips were moving. The participants listened to him completely frozen, with their jaws relaxed or with a grimaces on their faces. I felt disbelief and tightness in my throat, similar to what I’d felt in my childhood when mother told me that she had to leave the house and wouldn’t be back for a while.

“Since the moment you came into this world, you have been under the influence of the machine which you call your spirit. Since that moment, everything was stimulation-reaction, stimulation-reaction. Yeah, that’s your life.” He paused for a time, slowly and uninterestingly shifting his gaze from the left to the right side of the room.

“You’re machines,” he repeated in a stronger voice. “You have never been anything else. You lead completely mechanical lives...only stimulation-reaction...stimulation-reaction...Your lives are nonsense...You are wound in a such a way that you believe that you have an aim...but you’re only conditioned to believe that. Sometimes you think that you love...a marital partner, children, father and mother...you are programmed to believe that. If you were programmed differently, you would feel something else.”

Someone began to sob softly. Most participants sat immobilized and stared at Ackerman with disbelief, the grimaces on their faces becoming more prominent. My lips began to shake. I couldn’t believe that someone could trick me like this. Suddenly, AST’s complete structure was exposed and clear like a lone ball on an empty pool table. First, he exhausted people by restricting their freedom to move, by constant insults he elevated himself above the rest and at the moment when they were crying for a sense of security to, he, as an all-powerful authority, points out that they are wound up, behaving in certain and predictable ways. I believed that no one except me noticed the obvious

contradiction of his basic premises. If we are programmed to behave in certain way, then we cannot be responsible for our acts.

“You’re machines.... You have never been anything else”.... continued Ackerman, his monotonous voice blending in with the rocking of his chair. “You don’t have control over your lives...they are senseless. And now, while you feel the tragedy of it, you are only listening to the tapes in your mechanical mind...you are only playing tapes and listening to them...Your belief that after the training you wouldn’t have the same lives was yet another tape which played in your mind these two days.... There are no changes, everything is the same like it always was...you’ve paid 175 pounds to remain the same...”

He squinted his eyes and focused, looking around the room. “Just note how your spirit is resisting this simple truth, playing the old programs “This is not true”, ‘this is ridiculous’, ‘this is deception’. You believe you are free because some thought from your old tapes flew mechanically through your mind, the thought said ‘I am free’...after which came the second thought ‘Yes, that’s right, I am free’...” Someone in the audience burst into loud laughter but Ackerman continued as if he hadn’t heard it: “You’re sitting in your chairs telling yourselves that’s yet another of his tricks...he’s going to turn the whole thing around and show us that we are magnificent, enlightened beings.” A smaller group of people laughed, slowly at first and then louder.

“There’s no trick, we’ve reached the end of the training.” Ackerman slowly rocked in his chair, holding his crossed fingers on his chest. “There will be no turnaround...you’ve got what you’ve got. I told you at the beginning...you get from AST what you get. So, you’ve got it...you are machines...that’s all that you’ve ever been.” Some participants sobbed more loudly, some were laughing. “There’s no more.... the training is over...you’re machines.” A group of people began laughing. “Every thought you have, you just have. You are not controlling it...it simply comes and goes.... That’s all...there’s nothing else...you don’t understand that.” He shrugged his shoulders like he was saying, there’s nothing I can do about it.

I looked inside myself, it seemed never more intently, and I didn’t notice a state or a thought, which he was expressing in his assertions. I wanted for a moment to scream to the group of people, hey, he is making fools out of you. Get real! I suppressed that desire; I wanted to see his show until the end.

“All your life you ran away from the simple fact that you were a machine...you pretended to control your mind and made an effort.... Well, no need to worry...everything is all right.... only a machine doesn’t want to be a machine...And I’ll tell you something important now for what you’ve paid 175

pounds.” He raised his voice just a bit. “You are now enlightened...understand... **enlightened!** You paid good money for me to tell you that you are an enlightened machine. Enlightenment is...**knowledge that you are a machines.**” Laughter began in one part of a room and like a wave took over the entire room. “Acceptance that you’re a machine...that is enlightenment...**there’s no more.**”

Loud laughter on the left was strongest of all. Some participants remained seated, enchanted and astounded. “That’s a cosmic joke!” someone screamed, not bothering to ask for a microphone.

“Sure, that’s that...”, Ackerman said, spreading his hands in front of the participants with his palms turned upward, like he was showing them that he had nothing. “You paid 175 pounds to hear that joke”. Deafening laughter spread through the room. Now at his every word, half of the participants were shaking from laughter. Some still looked deep in thought; I saw several people with expressions of obvious anger. The same anger overwhelmed me. I wanted to tell him that I saw through him, that his system didn’t change the lives of people any more than some good movie in which people cry of laughter or sorrow.

“What do you want now, Tamara?” Ackerman said, acting irritated. “Haven’t you had enough of everything?” Now I was able to predict his behaviour, the modulation of his voice and almost the words he would say.

“I want to say,” said a woman who was holding her stomach like she was giving birth, “that those 175 pounds are the best invested money in my life.”

“Big deal, “ said Ackerman, shrugging his shoulders, “the machine congratulates itself for being a machine. The machine accepting that it is a machine. Big, big thing. Tom?”

“I know that I am a machine”, Tom said, laughing with his mouth wide open, “but I don’t know if I am now, enlightened in my machinery, still stupid and an asshole?”

Extending his neck in overacted nobility, Ackerman said: “An asshole is a machine that thinks that it is not a machine. And the enlightened man” – he had a demented expression on his face – “**an enlightened man knows that he is a machine.**”

I felt the desire to either burst into tears or die of laughter. All processes during those two days were clear to me. I could compare them with experiences which I’d had before, by noticing both the strong and weak points of Ackerman’s seminar and to following my reactions. Now suddenly I sensed that I could see

through walls, through Ackerman and those naïve people who wanted to get back home had become enlightened for 175 pounds.

“Okay” said Ackerman, after a job well done, “those who think they didn’t get what I promised, stand up.”

This was yet another trick. He promised we’d get what we get and certainly we couldn’t get anything else. I got up and my neighbour looked at me with surprise. I looked around the room. Another fifteen people besides me were standing, with expressions of confusion, hate and anger.

“Johnny, do you want to say something?” Ackerman asked indifferently.

The young man looked around the room with an expression of surprise: “I don’t understand - why is everyone laughing?”

“Not everyone is laughing,” Ackerman said. “I am not laughing, nor are you.” Those were the words which I predicted he would say. I had entered deep under his skin.

“Okay, but the majority is laughing. What’s so funny?” Johnny’s question followed an explosion of laughter.

“You see Johnny, that’s life. People who are laughing are laughing because they are laughing. People who are not laughing are not laughing because...they’re not laughing.”

Quick spasms in my body left me breathless. Well, that was the greatest swindle of all; the man was selling water at the riverbank. Images of parents and friends flew before my eyes. I saw myself trying to explain to them how this man was making money on New Age fools who are looking for enlightenment. He treats them badly for two days and then he tells them that they will stay the way they have always been. One machine was communicating to other machines that they are machines. I had to tell this man what was he doing to lay people for a great deal of money. Focused on Ackerman, I was only somewhat conscious how my neighbour, shaking from laughter, poked me with his elbow while he was wiping tears with the other hand, and how the skinny woman on my other side was screaming, pressing both fists over her chest as if she was having a heart attack.

“Okay,” said Ackerman “give the microphone to next person.”

That was a skinny man with a red face and partially balding hair. His right hand, slim and stiff, he held next to his chest while he took the microphone in his left. He pushed himself to speak but nothing came out from his throat.

“Let’s go, Peter, we don’t have three days for you.”

“No one had time for me,” Peter said, moving his lame hand with effort. “I believed that AST would help me to bear life more easily.”

“We have learned, Peter, that every belief is bullshit. You need experience, not a belief.”

“The experience I get is sad. I am the same invalid I was before the seminar.”

“You’re getting that experience?”

“Yes, there is nothing better in me.” There was a weak hope in Peter’s voice that Ackerman would do something to transform him from an invalid into an ordinary man.

“Okay,” said Ackerman, “so your experience is that you are an invalid. You can keep it or you can change it for a different one. Only you can decide. Sit down! Give him the microphone,” Ackerman pointed at the man standing to the left of me. His hair was dyed a dark blue, the colour of ink. From conversations I’d had with him during breaks, I learned that he was a musician. He had a soft, feminine voice and gave the impression of an being an intellectually-oriented homosexual who was suffering because of that.

“If everything we got here is nothing, then there was no point in coming to your seminar,” he said apologetically.

“Of course, I told you that at the beginning, didn’t I?” A wave of deafening laughter spread throughout the room. “But, still you stayed until the end and you’ve got what you’ve got. I kept my promise. Sit down!”

I felt strong anger toward Ackerman but even stronger animosity toward the audience, that herd of sheep, so easy to manipulate. He looked at me and in a more energetic voice, he said: “This one will be my golden medal. Give him the microphone.”

I held the microphone tightly in my sweaty palm and without blinking stared at Ackerman. I felt tense like I used to in my youth a moment or two before I would rush into a fight. Ackerman turned his head, trying to read my name from the button.

“Bogy, you are a simple coward. You are afraid to admit the obvious.” A new wave of laughter filled the room. I wanted to tell him that I wasn’t afraid but it struck me that I shouldn’t defend myself. Ackerman is constantly attacking, so I had to strike back with the same intensity.

“You are a son-of-a-bitch. You left your own three children to starve and now you are bragging in front of naïve people. You left your children in poverty, where is your responsibility?” A sigh of surprise or astonishment, I couldn’t judge, came from the audience.

“Bogy, you are a coward. You’ve filled your panties in fear.”

“Ackerman, your mother was registered by the police like as a prostitute and you have been treated for syphilis. I have a copy in my pocket of your hospital file.” This time expressions of surprise and disgust were heard. He blinked a few times. There was a short pause; he was searching for a way to respond to me. In some books about AST I’d read that he’d left his first wife and kids to find their own way in life. The statements that his mother was a prostitute and that he was treated for syphilis were nonsense but they turned out to be useful.

I was surprised how quickly he dropped out of his role but I knew it was only the beginning. I expected another hit below the waist and reminded myself that I mustn’t be passive, not even for a second. I sifted through the dirty tricks I’d learned in my youth on the streets of Belgrade. Ackerman walked slowly to the edge of the podium. In the silence which followed, only the sound of the air conditioner was heard, unnoticeable until then.

“Bogy, you are the greatest coward I’ve ever seen in my life. Only a coward defends himself from the truth with such repulsiveness. My mother is an honest woman; she has a medal of honour from the Second World War.”

Shaken, he positioned himself for my hook. I couldn’t miss that opportunity. I screamed into the microphone as loud as I could: “It is well known to everyone, Ackerman, that your mother actively helped the allies in the war – she spread syphilis among German soldiers on the western front!” Loud laughter spread through the room. Participants began to enjoy the performance like a good boxing match. I felt strength rising within my body but I kept my guard.

“Bogy, out of fear of your own truth, you are ready to do anything. Shit froze in you from fear!” This time laughter was heard. I was searching for some dirty words to get him back, but I was so focused on his offensive that my memory was like an empty board. I struck back with this:

“Ackerman, you are a machine! The fact that your mother is a prostitute doesn’t change a thing. Here, listen – I turned back and addressed the audience straining my vocal cords – the machine is protesting, the machine is defending itself. The machine is playing a tape, which says, my mother didn’t fuck Germans for money. Big deal, Ackerman, we have two syphilis patients, two machines, both enlightened. One screwed Germans for money, the other makes money here.”

I noticed an expression of disbelief on his assistant’s faces, they’d gathered in the passages between the rows, facing me, hesitating, waiting for his command. Some people giggled, others shifted wide-eyed from me to Ackerman. He began to walk to the edge of the podium and in a didactic tone he addressed the audience: “There is always some problematic type at these seminars. They are not here to become better and to offer themselves as better human beings to others. They are here to throw landmines on all that we want to accomplish. Okay, Bogy, give the microphone to a next person.” A few people applauded in approval. The assistant ran over to me and stretched out his hand to take the microphone.

“Oh no, the machine must play yet another tape and kindly ask me to give the microphone back. My tape says that I am not giving it back without a kind request.”

He was capable of recuperating quickly after a blow. He smiled and stretched his hands toward me: “Here Bogy, I am kindly asking you to give the microphone to this gentleman. He would like to continue with the process.” A group of participants applauded.

I shoved the microphone into the assistant’s hand and walked between rows toward the exit. I’ve heard Ackerman’s uplifting voice, “Neal, what do you have to tell us?” There were more than a hundred people in the hallway right around the entrance. At the end of AST training, future participants can get inside and observe as guests, and share the euphoria with the participants. Someone looked curiously at me. “What’s going on?” asked a skinny young man in glasses, with chicken pox scars on his face.

“Ackerman is waiting for you to give him 175 pounds to tell you that you are enlightened.”

In a Greek tavern where I’d eaten for two days in a row, I ordered a double donner kebab and a coke. I was taking big bites, a taste of meat mixed with cabbage salad in my mouth. I felt hot and still shaky. Bastard, at least I had told him what I thought of him. If I hadn’t, I would have reproached myself and

probably taken it out on some innocent person who had never heard of Ackerman and his AST. I finished eating and sat relaxed and satisfied. In a state of calmness, I thought that AST was a good system, after all. Those two days helped me understand that no one else but me is responsible for my life and experiences, no matter how much I seemed to be influenced by others. It was a pity that the Seminar was directed at insulting people; it could have been done differently. This way it was faster and more euphoric for the participants and the end was more spectacular.

I was contemplating if I should ask for my money back. There were professionals at AST who specialized in the denial of refunds. They would write the check improperly or send it to a nonexistent address, but a persistent man could get his money back. I had read this in a book about AST. At present, I only needed a good night's sleep and tomorrow I would think what do with Ackerman. It was late; I looked at my left wrist, but my watch was not there. They had taken it from me before the beginning of the seminar. I felt uneasy about going back amid many excited people who saw me as a loser, to ask for my watch. That was the most valuable thing I owned, a gold Omega that reminded me of Stockholm, Astrid and the Odin Brotherhood. I felt like I had before my initiation. No use to delaying, although my legs felt heavy, I had to go back.

I was relieved when I saw only a small group of people in the hallway. The huge two-panelled door of the conference room was wide open. The room was empty. "I want my watch back," I said to the assistant at the front desk who was filing new applications. "I forgot to get it back."

"Oh, yeah," he said, "you can go to the celebration room. Everyone is there. Your watch is with Mr. Ackerman. Come in." He showed me the room next to the conference hall. I walked in slowly, without knocking. Ackerman and his assistant Jake were sitting in armchairs of dark brown fake leather, talking. On a small round table with a glass top was my Omega.

"Come in, Bogy, and please, sit down," Ackerman pointed at an empty armchair across from him. I was surprised by his appearance. The first three buttons of his shirt were undone, revealing a white undershirt, dark from sweat. The hair which fell over his brow was sticking to his wet skin. He was leaning back in his armchair, not relaxed but exhausted. His face was pale and dull, and the piercing energy which had illuminated him during the seminar had disappeared.

"I forgot to get my watch."

He pointed at the table. “I looked at your application, you are a psychologist. Do you know what it means to leave a valuable thing with someone?”

“I wouldn’t say that there is anything positive in that”. I put the watch on my wrist and added: “We had an unpleasant conflict.”

“Why unpleasant? Conflict is simply a phenomenon in human relations. It is neutral by itself. Our response and the outcome can be either good or bad. We have choices in how to settle a conflict; it is an opportunity to learn something and grow further.”

“I didn’t learn anything from it and I’ll bet you didn’t either.”

“You would lose your bet. I learned that there are people who I am incapable of taming even in the last phase of the seminar...and I learned that I have to perfect that phase to be as effective as the others. You know, you are not the first person I wasn’t able to deal with at my seminars. As far as you’re concerned, I think you’ve learned that you can oppose an authority in front of two hundred and fifty people, in spite of the inhibitions that you feel. I am right, yes?”

He’d hit the target with just a few simple words he’d set in perspective what I’d I had in mind since I left the seminar. with just a few simple words, set in a perspective. “Yes, I think you’re right.” Ackerman was no longer a prosecutor talking, who humiliated people with dirty words. He had turned into a sensible and mannered expert of human nature.

“I waited for you to come for your watch. I have a proposition for you. Jake – he turned to his assistant – could we have a minute, please.” He seemed energetic again and there was a questioning look on his face.

“A proposition? Let’s hear it.” I had a feeling I knew what he wanted. He liked my Omega and he wanted to get it for a little money. I have never seen a nicer watch. It was made of dark gold, thin, almost like a gold coin, simple and elegant, like expensive things could sometimes be. The band was made of dark brown snakeskin, which nicely toned down the gold colour. This time my premonition proved false.

“I can train you as an AST trainer. You are capable of it. The job is exciting and pays well. Of course, you would have to learn so much more.”

He surprised me. I wished my father were present to hear this, or Mladen and Lydia, even some of those bloodless theosophists. “I must say that I am

flattered, but.... It's not for me. I want something deeper. I am thinking of going to India to some ashram or to Japan, to a Zen temple. AST is essentially created on manipulation, although, I must admit, it provokes some deep insights."

"Which one for example?"

"I can't speak for the others. I personally realized that I was the creator of all my experiences and that no one but I am responsible for what is happening to me. And I am sincerely grateful to you for that."

"Thank you for telling me that." He was silent. For the first time since I'd entered that room, he wasn't looking at me. He spoke, carefully choosing his words. "You must know that valuable axiom is not my original. I took it from Lon Raphael Hibner. Have you heard about Sciolargy?"

"Sure. I don't know much about it. They use an electronic instrument, it is some kind of scientific mysticism."

"I have spent several years with old Lon and I owe him many things...as for your lack of desire to become a trainer, you are making a mistake, but that is your decision and I respect it. You haven't had a chance to see people who'd experienced AST, after a year or two. They become different people. The method is manipulative but the result is a deep and valuable transformation. The trainer opens the eyes of hundreds of people and of himself personally, of course." He leaned back in his chair as if tiredness had taken its toil and shifting his gaze from me to the front door, he continued in a deep, serious voice:

"Commencing with the axiom you mentioned, evolves another one which has great value in everyday life. Not only that we are responsible for our experiences, but we also select them. I mentioned it at the seminar, but it gets lost for many people. Of course, we are not always capable of choosing the best experiences. It is easier to be a rat than a lion. I hope I am not boring you?"

I shook my head. Since the moment he'd offered to help me become an AST trainer, our conversation engaged my undivided attention.

"In a book by Victor Hugo – you've probably heard of him – he describes how a prisoner after spending many years in a jail, a prisoner got rejected like a sick dog by everyone, until some good priest offered him a place to sleep. Not only that, but the priest invited him to dinner, at the repulsion of his maid. During dinner, the former prisoner - I believe he was called Jean Valjean - noticed the expensive silver utensils. At night, he got up from his bed, stole them and ran away. The police caught him, found the silver utensils; they arrested him and brought him back to confront the priest. In such a situation, how would we react

if we were in the priest's shoes?" He nodded his head slowly like he was agreeing with my unspoken thoughts. "We would create the experience of a robbed and hurt person, angry with the former prisoner who took advantage of our kindness! But, the priest chose to have a completely different experience". Ackerman nodded, squinting at me. "He said to the police something like, no, this is a huge misunderstanding. I have GIVEN this gentleman those silver objects, as a gift. Good man, I gave you those silver candlesticks as well, but you forgot to take them with you. Please take them now, and have a safe journey."

Ackerman paused for a short time, and then he spoke from deep within: "That generous man chose not to be robbed!" Inadvertently, I leaned closer to him, and my eyes got wet. "Instead of sending that man to a life in prison, he chose a completely different experience – to give away the most valuable possessions from his home. What is the difference between those two experiences? In one case we would have had a hurt prosecutor who would have contemplated of human ungratefulness for the rest of his life, and also a desolate person in prison for life."

He paused again. Once more I had to admit that he was a master of narration, drawing me more powerfully into his story.

"The priest instead chose to produce two happy people: a God's man who can understand and forgive everything, and a former prisoner who at that moment turned into a noble man. The rest of his entire life, the former prisoner dedicated himself to helping the unfortunate people."

He stopped talking and looked at the ground. Then, raising his head, he slowly looked around the room. That approach was already familiar to me yet it made a strong impression on me, even against my will. His face was serious, but somehow it seemed that he took off the mask and the embodiment of the successful and self-assured individual, was gone. "Yes," he said, still deeply engaged in his thoughts, "there are many unhappy people in this world and some of us are trying to help them. Everyone has his or her own way... mine is to guide this seminar and I am certain that I do it well. But I have always admired that noble priest – I wouldn't be able to accept his way." He was silent for about twenty seconds, and then he said: "Now you must excuse me, Bogy. I am terribly tired and I still have things to do."

He got up and strongly shook my hand. When I reached the door I turned back, feeling that I was leaving a man whom I would never forget, and I told him sincerely: "You should put the story of Jean Valjean into your seminar. I am certain that it would have a dramatic effect on people."

“Thank you, Bogy, maybe I’ll do it.” When I had almost stepped out, he laughed and added: “Listen, the story about syphilis, wasn’t bad at all.”

-2-

Igor Vislavsky got me interested in Sciolargy. Working on his thesis on sects and cults, he devoted much of his attention to Sciolargy because it was greatly expanding at the time. “It is the only sect that uses an electronic instrument, the emotiometer,” he told me. “A man can pretend or lie, but electronics don’t lie. There must be a lot of value in their teachings. Many of the members are well-known intellectuals, actors and directors. They represent half of Hollywood.”

At first, the promotional materials Igor gave me made me think twice about Sciolargy. It could be conceived as a pseudoscientific cult, with flying saucers and creepy healing methods. The handwritten letter, which I received in response to my questions, began with “Dearest Bogdan” and ended with “We love you”. The members were interested in my work, the welfare of my family, and my personal happiness. Their brochures exploded with optimism. Photographs showed many happy faces combined with the comments of organization members: “Sciolargy brought me back to life”, “Now I am a completely free person”, “In Sciolargy, I found my happiness”, all of which clearly resonated that their training, conducted with scientific precision, awakened and developed occult abilities and that this planet was far too limited for their games.

It was a cult, no doubt about it. In Sciolargy, everything was subordinated to the personality of Lon Raphael Hibner, called intimately and in short: L-R-H. Their technology, emotiometer, processing methods, and overall achievements were all fruits of his genius. Failures were assigned to someone else – splintering members or enemies in an alienated, animistic world filled with suffering and crime. All books and articles listed in their many publications bore his signature. He was the embodiment of God, all others were his Followers. He carried on his back a mission for clearing the planet of evil and he was devoted to that with his entire being.

Basic Sciolargy organizations or Orgs were webbed throughout Western European countries and the United States. Above Orgs were Adept Orgs, and there were three of them: in Copenhagen, Los Angeles, and Green Hill, a little

town close to London. I went to the basic London Org on Charring Cross Road. It was a warm day in September, and the entrance door was wide open. The front desk resembled a bookstore; everywhere on the shelves were Lon's books with coloured covers. The front desk clerk looked at me intently with his lips stretched into a smile. "I am so glad you came. Please sit over there, a very important person will see you in a few minutes." At Sciolargy, the important people always talk to you because in the Org, there are no insignificant people, and all clients are given special treatment.

The important person who received me was Tom Word, a registrar with bulging eyes, frizzy hair, and swift movements. He considered me closely, illuminated by some light from within, as if I had discovered a cure for cancer. "Do you have a nickname? Okay, Bogy. How was your trip, Bogy?" He told me that it was a great pleasure for them that I had come to Org. I noticed that he affirmed everything I said. Silence is unacceptable at Sciolargy, no matter what is said. The communication must flow all the time, because Lon discovered that it was the basic process of the human being.

"Do you have any questions? Please, Bogy, take a seat. You must be tired after your trip." His office was a tiny room with cork insulated walls and was separated from the front desk, behind me, by a glass window. A colour picture of Lon Hibner was on his desk. It showed him standing on the command bridge of a ship, in an admiral's uniform, gazing toward the open seas.

"You know Tom, I rely on my experience. However, isn't it a bit strange that the press is strongly attacking you for taking people's money, breaking up marriages, and separating families and friends?"

Tom nodded, expressing his complete understanding. "A-a-a-a, I know what you're saying. You've heard all kinds of stories about us...Let me explain the situation by using an example. You see, there is a typical married couple. What kind of life do they have?" He looked at me with his bulging eyes for a while, and then quickly said: "I'll tell you. They get out of their beds in the morning, go to work, which they don't like, come back home, feeling the same unhappiness from the morning, they eat and then they watch television. They sit and stare for hours at the TV screen." Stretching his neck, he turned his head to one side and opening his mouth, he made a stupid grimace. He stared at nothing in the same position for ten seconds. I laughed. He focused on me again, which flattered me more than any words.

"You know what I'm saying? Well, one day, such a man comes to us. He heard from his acquaintance that Sciolargy helped him. He also heard all kinds of stories, like you did, but still, he came. I know the story well because the same

thing happened to me...and to all of us for that matter. The man began to process....” He nodded several times and then looked at me, silently, raising an eyebrow. I was supposed to understand that it was the most important day in the life of that man. Tom smiled with new, greater warmth, and spread his hands as if he wanted to embrace the entire room. “That man, after the first process, said goodbye to his unhappiness.” Tom started speaking in a rapid and loud voice: “He underwent a fantastic experience at Lon’s processes, one he’d never dreamed of. He stepped onto a path of total freedom! He changed his entire life...and, what happened to his wife?” He clenched his body and returned a stupid grimace to his face. “That woman is suddenly feeling threatened. Her husband is changing and she is remaining the same in her unhappiness. She feels threatened and so do his friends. You know for yourself, Bogy, it is a sad truth that so many people are trying to keep us in a rut, where they stay because they haven’t got enough strength to pull themselves out...And then, the wife begins to complain – her husband’s changed, he’s not the same man.” Tom’s face lit up and he was shook his head, smiling as if he saw with his own eyes what he was talking about: “Well, of course he changed! He became interested in his life! He found his path to freedom.”

We were silent for a while and Tom looked at me fixedly, with wide open eyes and smiling face. Voices and giggling were heard from the waiting room. That did not divert his attention. “I’ll tell you something, Bogy. You shouldn’t be insulted because it is for your own good. Do you know why I am here, at this place?” I felt my eyebrows rise. As if he was waiting for it, he simply said: “Because my life is OK. And because it’s my duty to help you.” He paused. “And you know why you are here? I’ll tell you –because your life is not worth much! You have only one duty – to become a happy and free human being. I also have only one duty, like everyone else at Org – to help you achieve that goal. Look at the world outside! It is full of suffering, crime and hatred...and look at our people. Did you see any miserable faces here? Did you see an unhappy man? You didn’t! Everyone here is happy. We have one mission only – to help you. Your duty is to let us do that. Nothing else.”

Something inside me gave in. “Okay Tom,” I said, holding a bundle of money in my pocket in my sweaty palm. “I’ll pay for a hundred and fifty hours of processing. When do we start?”

-3-

Willie Duffy was smiling all the time except when we faced engram. By the definition of Lon Raphael Hibner, engram was a psychical image of some painful event which contained pain, unconscious, realistic or imaginary threat to the existence of a person. You would think that Willie smiled even while dreaming. He had clear, blue eyes, a freckled face, and blond hair the colour of ripe wheat. His face was oval and pale and his nose was unusually thin for a former boxer. He cracked jokes all the time wandered around the rooms at the London center, soundly greeting people by waving his hands as if he was at a ceremonial rally. With Willie nearby, it was hard to feel boredom or depression.

Now we were in a session and in front of an engram. His face was motionless and his blue eyes wide open.

“Go to the beginning of that experience! Tell me when you’re there!” he was giving commands mechanically, always in the same way, that he’d practiced hundreds of times, the way processors were trained by the majestic Lon. Although he was addressing me, his eyes were fixed on the emotimeter’s screen.

“I can’t, Willie,” I said. “I want to, but I can’t.

“Okay. I’ll repeat the command: Go to the beginning of that experience! Tell me when you’re there!”

“I can’t. I feel nauseous.... I’ll vomit.” I felt heaviness and a dull pain in the right part of my forehead, my stomach revolted and my mouth filled with salty liquid that I didn’t have time to swallow.

“I understand what you’re trying to say. Tell me, when did you become sick?”

Someone could think that Willie was concerned for my health. I knew that his only goal was to bring me back to the session and to what would come after my answer. That was pure technology, predictable like a well-developed chess move. Your move was followed by his, completely defined, practiced, showing no trace of emotion or sympathy, which would only weigh down the process. I

knew the game well and yet I replied with difficulty: “It began five, six... maybe ten minutes ago.”

“Okay. I got that. Those things happen in a session, but if you endure for just a little longer, you’ll feel better. We’ll go through it together. I’ll repeat the command: Go to the beginning of your experience! Tell me when you are there!”

“I want to go home”, I heard my weakening voice. “I am too tired and useless. I can’t go on.”

“Okay, you’ll go home when we finish. I’ll repeat the command: Go to the beginning of that incident. Tell me when you’re there!”

I looked at his freckled face and felt that I was slacking. He could go on like this until late at night, midnight or the next day. He mustn’t let me out of a session. For a couple of days, he was quite agreeable. Now I hated him for buzzing around me like a hornet. He was sitting across from me, leaning forward as if getting ready to greet me. We were separated only by his emotimeter. The processing room was small with walls lined in thick cork so that it muffled sounds – crying, moans and sometimes, the howling of clients. I’d heard those sounds many times coming from different processing rooms at Org’s, muffled like under a thick hood. It was my turn now to experience the same. I’d read quite a bit about passing through engrams, and accepted it as a valuable and interesting way of facing unconscious content. I expected an exciting event – getting to know my own universe within, a struggle with the monsters of Id, something of an internal Odyssey. When a person is reading or thinking about the process, it seems attractive, but when you’re experiencing it, it’s torture.

“Go to the beginning of your experience! Tell me when you’re there.”

“Okay,” I said. There was no use resisting him. He had trained for three years not to give in to client’s pleas. “Okay, Willie. I am there. I can see the beginning.”

“Very good. Go in your mind through the entire experience. Tell me what you see.”

Following his commands, I dived deeply into occurrences on the time track, like digs into my soul. The feeling of nausea which always followed confrontation with engrams stirred up, becoming intense, and it suddenly inundated me. I was facing some horrible experience. It was hardly an experience. It was an image, vague and blurry, like an appearances from the ancient past, but it still belonged to me. I clearly felt that.

“I see a group of horsemen riding. I can’t see them clearly...it is probably night or they are in some fog. I don’t know where they are going, but they bring evil...they will kill or something like that...”

“Okay,” Willie said, without any change in his voice, “go in your mind from the beginning to the end of the incident. Tell me, what happened?”

That command irritated me since I began with processing. “I told you I can’t see clearly! It is not an experience, but an image. I can see it only for a second...people in the dark, horsemen...I am losing it all the time...I feel dizziness in my head and I am nauseous.”

“Okay, when did it happen?”

I hesitated. Questions about the time of the event on my time track perplexed me. I had difficulty saying that something had happened to me eight hundred years ago or four million years ago, and I often felt inner pressure to say something like that. Now I felt that it had happened two hundred and twelve years ago and I knew that I would fall apart if I didn’t say it. I didn’t like to pick centuries, millenniums, and eons just like that. I’d rather keep silent about the period when something had happened, but Willie was here, an Irishman persistent as a bullterrier. He was my first processor and I was his hundredth or thousandth client. All my predecessors tried to be evasive in a similar way. He used words, compressed into commands, like a surgeon using his scalpel.

“I’ll repeat the question: when did it happen?”

“For God’s sakes, Willie, how should I know? You want me to tell you - ten thousand years ago? I’ve had enough of these Sciologargic stupidities! I don’t know, why don’t you ask your Lon?” My voice changed, it was becoming hoarse like I was being strangled.

“Okay, I understand you,” continued Willie, with unshakable dedication. “Do you have any thoughts about what I’ve asked you?” His eyes were fixed on the emotimeter scale. Something was happening there and he saw it. I was silent, and a knot was forming in my stomach.

“I’ll repeat the question. Do you have any thoughts about when this event happened?”

I didn’t say anything. More and more pictures swarmed in front of my eyes, the sense of time was forming almost exactly, and my inner pressure to tell the time when I experienced it became stronger. I would feel better when I said it.

“Yes, yes, that’s it”, said Willie, following the movement of emotimeter, “Which thought was that? Aha...that’s it!”

“Two hundred and twelve years ago,” I heard my voice, sounding worse than before. Something was strangling me, I couldn’t swallow because there was a lump in my throat, no matter how much I forced myself to do so, my lips would turn into a grimace, and tears filled my eyes. I felt saltiness in my mouth. I squeezed the electrodes in my hands even harder.

“Very good,” said Willie, “the needle floats on your statement that it happened two hundred and twelve years ago. Tell me, when exactly did it happen?”

“Around 1773, maybe a year earlier or later.”

“Okay, tell me exactly which year?”

“1773.”

“Great,” said Willie. His voice, trained to almost mechanical monotony, couldn’t hide his satisfaction. “In which month did it happen?”

“I think, in September.”

“Very good. Where did it happen?”

“In Russia.” Now, information and images were coming by themselves.

“Okay, what did you do there?”

The worst was starting. I knew I had done something inhumanly repulsive. Tears filled my eyes and the tightening in my throat intensified. Through a small window in the processing room, I tried to avert my attention to the roofs above walls of blackened bricks, and drive away the images in my mind which were coming from the darkness. But no, a freckled Irishman, immersed deeply in the session, showed no mercy, burrowing through me like a hog through a peasant’s bag.

“Keep your eyes closed. Go to that incident in your mind!”

“I am there.”

“Great. Tell me what you see.”

“People... those horsemen. I am somewhere there. I can’t see clearly, darkness is everywhere...it’s night time. I know I will do evil...to people, children.”

“Okay, I understand you. Tell me exactly what you see! What have you done?”

In a reflection of fire coming from a poor man’s shack, I saw horrified people on their knees begging for mercy, frightened children who were dying of fright, crowded into a herd. I felt worse and worse. A scream was forming inside me, not in my throat but much deeper, in my gut, some kind of painful moan as if I had escaped half-slaughtered under the murderer’s knife.

“I’ll repeat my question. What have you done to those people and children?” Willie’s voice was coming from a distance but it wasn’t less inexorable.

“All imaginable evil...I am raping some woman, she’s screaming...I ordered children to be killed....some old women...I see blood.”

“I understand....What else did you do?”

“Everything...I said everything.” My throat was hurting me, torn from tightening and hissing.

“Okay. Look at it more clearly. Do you have any other image?” Through the slits of my eyes I can see how Willie is fixedly looking at the emotimeter’s scale. “That’s it...which image is that? What happened?”

I was in front of a hay-roofed shack, blackened from smoke, and people inside were pushing each other in mortal fear. For a moment, I saw mothers, feeling a presentiment of the approaching death, covering their children’s eyes with their hands. I was holding a knife with a handle sticky from blood in one hand and a firebrand in the other. I lifted my hand and touched the hay roof and the blaze seized the meagre hut. “I burned some shack. Those people and children burned inside of it, I hear them screaming. Willie, are those horrible details necessary? I can’t look at it.”

“I understand it’s difficult. What else have you done?” Willie wasn’t giving up. He would probably lose his rank as a processor if he stopped even once. In a scientific manner, like an experienced surgeon, after he cut off my spiritual lesions, Willie mercilessly squeezed all repulsiveness from them, as if engaged in the most serious work in the world. By clearing my engrams, he was clearing the entire planet - the way Lon Hibner taught him. For a client, every

erased event on the time track, filled with agony and torture, was a crack in the wall of an imprisoned life and a step forward to freedom. He continued: “What else have you done?”

“This is already too much...I have sinned my soul forever.”

“Okay...but look a little more. I am getting something on the meter. What is that?”

“I don’t know, I don’t see anything else. The same images are coming back.” I felt a little better now. The worst was behind us. The boil had split open.

“Okay, go to the beginning of the event. Tell me when you’re there.”

“I am there.”

“Quickly go through your mind from the beginning until the end. Tell me what you see”

“I see myself in a group of horsemen...rebels...I don’t know exactly. It’s dark, I can barely see. We are arriving at some village...The people there did something to make us angry....A-a-a-a, now I know. Someone among them had denounced us. We are seeking revenge. I ordered the killing of some people - including children - in the village. I caused evil...they are frightened, terrified...I approach them slowly...I have a knife in my hand. I...killed them. Butchered them...I burned a house. I see flames; I hear the screams of women and the cries of children. They are burning alive like chickens...”

Mother of God, it’s incredible what lies in a man?! In a well-mannered man, who thinks he couldn’t kill an ant.

“Okay, go on”, says Willie.

“Some man, I put a rope around his neck and I am dragging him through mud. I am on a horse, cheering. Willie, I am enjoying that. Goodness, what kind of evildoer was I?!”

“Very good. Do you see any other image?”

“M-mmmm...no.”

“Very good, go to the beginning of the event.”

“I am there.”

“Go quickly in your thoughts from the beginning to the end of the incident. Tell me what you see.”

“I see myself riding a horse with a group of crooks...Mothers covering the eyes of their children in front of my knife...a burned house...a human body on a noose...”

“Very good”, Willie continued, “go to the beginning of the incident.”

I felt better now. The boil was empty. There was some repulsiveness left and Willie was routinely clearing it. “I am at the beginning.”

“Okay. Go quickly through the event. Tell me what you see.”

Images disappeared and with them all the suffering, misery, and desperation. I forced myself to see what was left but I was seeing only emptiness. Some weak agitation was in my field of vision, then for a second I saw the pallid picture of a body on a noose. It flickered, disappearing and reappearing.

“I see a man with a noose around his neck. The image is almost wiped out”.

“Okay, go to the beginning. Tell me when you get there.”

“I am there.”

“Quickly go through the event from the beginning to the end. Tell me what you see.”

I forced myself to see something on the dark screen of my consciousness. There was only emptiness and a feeling of joyful flickering, then laughter rising in my chest. I shook off the bag of thorns from my wounded back.

“There is nothing, Willie, everything is wiped out.”

“Very good,” said Willie. Tiny wrinkles appeared around his blue eyes while his lips stretched into a smile. “The needle on the meter is floating. The event is wiped out.”

I felt relieved and confused at the same time. How was it possible for suffering, misery, and torture to disappear by facing images from the past? How advanced was this processing compared to psychoanalytical philosophizing, which lasts for months, on the subject of how we hated our fathers and sexually desired our mothers? Everything is explained to you but the suffering remains, staying with you, dragging along for years.

In Sciology, the processor makes you go through the event which is loaded with charge several times and during each visit, images fade away and the charge subsides until it completely disappears. In its place, what remains is just emptiness in the consciousness and warm tranquillity. Every broken chain of similar experiences, filled with misery and pain, turns into a funeral procession of painful memories. In the end I felt I could fly, breathe freely or laugh. The only remaining trace of my suffering was my shirt, wet in front from my tears. Now the room looked more beautiful and sunny and the dark brick buildings of London, which I saw through the window, seemed peaceful and dignified.

“We’ll take a break”, said Willie, turning off the emotimeter. You can leave the electrodes.”

I looked at the round clock on the wall. It was hard to believe that the session had lasted two and half hours. My fingers were stiff from squeezing the electrodes. “Willie, it seems like an unreal dream. I know what happened, I know what I did, but there’s no suffering. How’s that possible?”

Willie smiled contentedly. “That’s what happens. Humanity will be forever grateful to Lon Hibner, for his Sciology. Incredible man, incredible processes, incredible experiences! What would our life be without him? Write a report about the session and give it to the director of process. Let’s have some lunch now.”

-4-

The Academy occupied the entire next to last floor of London’s Org. Above the entrance door, there was writing in golden letters: “*Through this door walk the most valuable people on the planet.*” Exactly at nine o’clock in the morning, I passed through that door. “I was told to contact you,” I said to Don Glaskin, the director of the Academy.

“A-a-a-a-, yes!” he said, with a powerful handshake, smiling as if I had just given him happiness. “Welcome to the Academy. I hope you understand the significance of this moment.” Then he added: “In every processing you enter a phase when it becomes necessary to gain theoretical knowledge as well.”

“I am quite happy with practical work; I am not much interested in theory.”

“One doesn’t go without the other. I looked at your file. You are constantly asking processors for reasons; you repeated many times that you need to know what you are doing so you can do it in the best way. Isn’t that right?”

He was right. When I didn’t know what the goal of a process was, I became nervous and quarrelsome. I nodded unwillingly. Stroking his beard, he smiled contentedly. He took me to the table where Alberto, the Spanish guy, who hung around Org all the time, was already sitting, and showed me the chair next to his, adding: “This will be your work place.” He handed me a thick package of printed materials. “You must not take any material outside the Academy. If something is not clear, **you’ll ask me only!**”

There were fifteen of us in the room. I knew most of them from walking around the Academy. They were all absorbed in the materials, reading in silence. For a second, Alberto lifted his head, looked at me and silently nodded. No conversation was allowed here, no exchanges of ideas or philosophical arguments. The introductory text which I had to study was entitled “*How to Protect Sciolargy as a Cleaning Instrument of This Planet.*” On the first page, there was a remark, by Lon Hibner, printed in red letters, the same script I’d noticed at the beginning of every book: “If, during reading, you come across a word you don’t quite understand, do not continue to read until you have understood the meaning of the word with the help of your dictionary!”

Using the dictionary I cleared up the meaning of a few words with ease but my troubles began with the expression “sheep’s skin”. That was a term used by university students during the middle ages. Right in front of me on the table were several large dictionaries but I couldn’t find that expression in any of them. I raised my hand and Don Glaskin approached me, moving silently between the desks.

“I can’t find the meaning of the expression 'sheep’s skin'.

“That’s what the dictionaries are for.”

“I couldn’t find that expression in any of the dictionaries.”

With his jaw clenched, he leafed through all the dictionaries on the table between Alberto and me. “We’ll look in a *Dictionary of American Idioms*” he said and walked up to a shelf with more encyclopedias and dictionaries, to the left of his desk. After a few minutes he placed an open dictionary in front of me and said: “Read this.”

Sheep’s skin was an archaic expression for a diploma, which university students in the middle ages used to get written on sheep’s skin. “You should have

told me right away what it means, if you knew it.” He must have known it because students of the Academy had come across that expression before me. He looked at me with surprise; he never expected such ignorance. In a low but firm voice, he spoke, accenting every word: “Of course I knew – I am the Director of the Academy! In Sciolargy, we don’t give meanings of words to anyone. We are directing them to the SOURCE, so that they will find the information for themselves...If I tell you the meaning of a word, you could pass it on someone else, that person could also pass it on to someone else, so that instead of using the most precise science about the human spirit, **which Sciolargy is**, we’ll be playing the game of broken phones.” He inhaled deeply and went on: “My job at the Academy is not to give my own opinions, but to direct you to the SOURCE. Our sources are dictionaries and Lon’s words. **Remember this forever,**” – he raised his bony index finger – “Sciolargy is not what just anyone says. Sciolargy is what Lon says in his books, materials and tapes. **And nothing else!**”

Many elements of processing which were unintelligible during sessions gradually became clear. The simplicity of spiritual technology undoubtedly was the product of a man capable of synthesizing many known teachings. The Sciolargy processor didn’t waste the client’s time by listening to stories of his unhappy childhood, relationship with parents or interpretation of dreams. In a process called R-7, which Willie applied to me, the processor immediately started with the problem and guided me through the thoughts and emotions of earlier events, where the problem had initially been established. Every new encounter and confrontation with the event eliminated the charge, allowing my memory to reach yet another even earlier event, when a similar experience had happened to me. As a result of moving through the chain of similar events, I was able to confront myself with the primary or original - the deepest source of my problem. When I confronted and saw the problem as it was, the entire chain of events disappeared and the problem itself was gone.

The simplicity of the technique surprised me. Why had psychologists never thought of that? Then I remembered that Freud, at the start of psychoanalytical genesis, contemplated summarizing endless free associations into a purposeful group - of similar experiences - starting from the initial one. He revealed this idea in a document called “*Two Short Articles about Psychoanalysis*”. He brushed up against the discovery of this powerful and simple method, but he stopped short of fruition. The time was not ripe for R-7. Ideologies and scientific discoveries have their own time frames. Different points of view, dominant in one period, supersede new ideas, and also those for which the time isn’t ready.

I learned that the goal of basic Sciolargy processing was the state called Katar or Pure Being. It is achieved by eliminating the emotional charge from all

repulsive experiences. That charge prevents the human being from functioning like a faultless computer with an available data base. When incorrect information is removed from a computer, it produces only correct results. An analogous process occurs when a man achieves the state of Katar. He acts, thinks, and feels optimally, within the framework of available information.

By the third lesson, I had come across Lon's teaching about the essential structure of a man. The human being is comprised of physical body, the mind, and Monad, which is his True Being. Monad develops the human mind like an instrument; it enters the physical body so that it can acquire experiences in this universe. The physical body is a machine, functioning on burning carbo-hydrates and fat. The mind is an instrument for solving problems in the physical and social world. Monad adopts a series of bodies and when one of them gets worn-out, it moves into another, changing bodies like clothes or vehicles of physical movement. This belief is almost a carbon copy of the teachings about Atman in Yoga and Vedanta.

Lon Hibner had abandoned the term "man" because it overstressed the physical aspect of a being. He discarded the term "soul" at the very beginning of his teaching, because of the confusion with Christian doctrine, which states that a man has a soul. Then, who is the owner of the soul? Hibner said, no, you don't have a soul, you are a soul or Monad. He took the name Monad from Leibniz, but he somehow kept quiet about it as with many other things, for that matter.

I was surprised by Monad's characteristics, which Hibner authoritatively described in his texts. Monad doesn't have length, mass, energy, or position in space nor is it limited by time. It has three characteristics: it is omnipresent, it is able to notice things and phenomena, and it makes decisions - by which it creates experiences. Although it is omnipresent and static, it gives the impression of moving because it takes different views in order to gain experience in this universe. Every time Monad enters into the material universe, it confronts limitations. It appears through an alternate identity, some kind of temporary personality, created in order to attain a particular goal, which is always an experience of some kind.

Because Monad periodically changes bodies as vehicles through which it manifests itself, it gives an impression of a wanderer, going from body to body, in the infinite row of lives, until it exhausts all experiences which are possible to have in this universe. In a material titled "*From Life to Life*", Lon asserted that through processing, he discovered that Monad enters into a new body in different moments - conception, during pregnancy or sometimes even months after the birth of a physical body. I supposed that because of this viewpoint Lon was forced to explain the phenomenon of the existence and activity of Monads

outside the physical body. He called it exteriorization, but what he actually was referring to was astral projection, which occultists wrote about in the last century. That phenomenon directed Lon to select it as the final goal of processing in Sciology. Monad's existence outside the physical body was the ability of conscious existence and performance inside and outside the human body, which was called Operational Monad or OM. Capable of existence outside the body, OM perceives the world and influences it more effectively than when it was trapped within a single body and identified only with it.

I wondered if anyone at London's center had ever achieved the state of Operational Monad. Probably no one had. Even if someone had, they expertly hid that ability. A number of times after the processing session was over, while I still had the electrodes in my hands, the examiner asked me a question: "Are you exterior?" Right after, keeping his eyes fixed at the emotimeter needle, without waiting for my answer, he would announce: "I'd like to indicate that you are exterior." It was intended to persuade me that I had achieved something significant. I felt strange and rebellious in those moments; my vision was clouded, I trembled inside, and felt that somehow I was wider than my body. Yet, I wasn't able to function properly without it. Something had happened in those moments but it wasn't exteriorization as Hibner defined it. "OM is an individual capable of functioning independently from the physical body - regardless of whether he is having it or not." I compared that state with the astral projections I experienced a long time ago, working on books by Ophiel and Maldoone - it didn't even come close.

More than technical descriptions, I was excited by my own conclusion: If a Monad can move from body to body, adopting its view- point, then nothing can prevent it from choosing a different planet or a galaxy for a stopping point. Being omnipresent, a Monad could choose view- points everywhere. It is not limited by the highest speed in this universe - the speed of light - because it travels by the speed of thought, which is infinite. For a moment I believed the presumption that at least some of the Earth's inhabitants consist of visitors from other planets and worlds.

During the break, in the centre's cafeteria, I sat next to Britta Schwartz, a German with pale blue eyes. She was OM-3, or Operative Monad of the third level, and people at Org looked at her with veneration. To me, she did not appear to be a being gifted with supernatural powers: she was often late to the Academy, smoked two packs of cigarettes a day, and suffered from migraines.

"How is it going?"

“Bad”, I said, anticipating the next question. This OM-3 was rather curious, she couldn’t keep silent longer than ten seconds.

“Could I do something for you, get you a cup of coffee?”

I shook my head. “No thanks. Who ever tried English coffee knows why English people drink only tea.” I kept silent for a while. Was it worth asking her anything? I was almost certain she would tell me to look at Lon’s original materials. Over her cup of coffee she gave me a curious look, getting ready to ask the next question. I was quicker than her. “I am reading about Earth being a prisoner’s planet - a prison for Monads. I don’t quite understand...who sets those traps to capture them? What are the goals of beings that do that?”

“That is studied on OM levels. Then, you will face many fascinating discoveries.”

“But I’d like to know that now – who created body Monads who create problems for Katars? I am certain it didn’t come from Mars or Sirius or I don’t know which star.”

She looked at me sideways. “It’s nice to be certain,” she said, and finished her English coffee.

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Reluctantly I left my questions about cosmic traps for Monads and the presence of a Being in all dimensions and universes for a later time when I could get a chance to experience them. I was more engaged now on Lon Hibner’s teachings about the origins of our problems and methods for removing them. His interpretation contradicted everything that I have had learned so far. Man himself creates his subjective world, vision of life, and relationships with others, including himself – that I accepted a long time ago, thanks to Ackerman. Hibner’s description of the way a human being creates and destroys his world opened my eyes completely. I had to admit that I hadn’t find that information in my favorite books - starting with the American guru Ramacharaka, and the contemporary teachers - Vivekananda, Sivananda, and Ramana Maharishi.

I was convinced, that the subjective universe of every person looks like a pool filled with water. If it contained conflicts, suffering, pain, and other spiritual impurities, we could alter it by pouring into it - through autosuggestions and

meditation - positive mental and emotional contents, as if adding clean water. After a while, clean water will prevail and we'll have a consciousness clean as a mountain lake. Based on Lon's simple statements and convincing examples, I understood that such procedures don't remove the existence of primary negative contents, but only conceals them temporarily. They will appear in a person's consciousness someday - in ten days, ten years or in the next incarnation. Remembrance of my past experiences came to me, and everywhere I found confirmation of Lon's teaching. Don Gleskin's voice interrupted my deep contemplation: "Bogy, it's time for a checkup."

Inflexible like a monument, he conducted a checkup at his desk. I sat across from him and took the emotimeter's electrodes in my hands.

"How do you feel?"

"I am a little tense. It's always like that when I am on a meter."

"I understand. Tell me what are the four basic states of existence?"

"Making the first decision; changing the current state; existence; denial of truth and duplicating or repeating the initial decision." I spoke quickly and with confidence.

"Very good. Tell me now, how can the first decision disappear from existence?"

"There are three ways: When a Monad accomplishes its decision in this universe; when it duplicates it in consciousness; and when Monad revokes its primary decision."

"Okay, give me an example of the first mode."

The topic was interesting, and I had mastered it completely. I answered his questions quickly, like I was reciting a poem learned by heart in elementary school. When I mentioned that the decision could be un-created by meditation, Don Gleskin raised an eyebrow: "What meditation?"

I knew I had made a mistake. For Lon's followers there was nothing more valuable than processing. All other systems of spiritual development - meditation, yoga techniques, even naïve acts like relaxation, were impermissible deviations. Conciliatory, I said: "There are some methods of meditation and some other processes by which it is possible to un-create undesired states created by former decisions."

“That’s black Sciology,” said Gleskin firmly. “People who practice such methods are deceiving naïve people, giving them temporary wins. Those people are suppressive personalities who stole some of Lon’s processes, but are unable to apply them properly. Sciology is the only way to total freedom of a Being. For the first time in the history of this planet we have an unerring technology, which Lon Hibner developed.”

I was about to say that Ackerman’s processes were simple and effective but he cut me off: “Let’s get back to our work.”

I continued to recite my poem until it was over.

“Ooooookay,” said Don Gleskin, sounding slightly unhappy because there was nothing for him to correct. “Remember this. When you become OM, you will forget all that prattle about meditation and systems outside Sciology. Those techniques were created to stop humanity on the road to total freedom.”

I thought for a few moments about what to say: “However, there are some well-intentioned people who help others as much as they can. Not everyone is a suppressive person.”

“Mainly, they are. When they aren’t, then they are subconsciously serving forces that are fighting against freedom of Being. You will be convinced when you reach the level of OM.”

To become OM was an almighty magic amongst people at Org who were below that level. I felt a growing desire to get to it as soon as possible, so that I could determine if they were mistaken or correct.

He interrupted my thoughts: “Go to the TV room and ask the person on duty to show you tape number fourteen; it’s Lon’s lecture about Gopal Khan. Your awareness about the possible states of existence will stabilize. That is a very useful lecture....” He was silent for a moment, and then, as if he was telling me something very important, he added: “Like all other of Lon’s lectures.”

“That is an extremely valuable lecture,” said Walter Garrison, the person on duty in the TV room, when I told him which lecture I wanted to watch.

“I know,” I said, “that is an extremely valuable lecture like all of Lon’s lectures.”

Walter didn’t notice the tone of my voice, nor the expression on my face. “Of course,” he said with conviction, “take a seat in the middle chair.”

The film was in colour and of very good quality, like it wasn't a copy. The sound of a trumpet introduced the image of a grand white ship on blue water. "*Somewhere on the Atlantic*" was written in the upper screen. Lon Hibner was standing at the command bridge wearing an admiral's uniform with gold trim. The next scene showed a large room with an audience and Lon Hibner on a podium, with a small microphone attached to the lapel of his blazer. He had receding, fire-red hair and transparent green eyes. He was well-built with a wide chest out of which came a resonant and piercing voice, like it was coming from a deep well: "The topic of tonight's lecture is the cycle of action and the possible states of existence. You don't need any introduction; we'll get to it immediately."

He gave the impression of being a resolute man, who knew what he was talking about, and who was transferring his knowledge to others in a simple way. He briefly talked about what I have already read in the materials at the Academy.

"The cycles of action we encountered for the first time on this planet in Indian philosophy. Everything that exists in this universe is subordinated to it, absolutely everything." He said that looking at the listeners with his head slightly bent, almost like treating those who didn't believe his words. "The cycles of action means: beginning, perseverance and end. Brahma the creator, Vishnu the protector, and Shiva the destroyer. I will explain this cycle so that you can operatively apply it in process of liberation of Monads."

He coughed and it resonated deeply in his lungs. "The cycle begins with the first state of existence - making a first decision. From that time on, continues creation, creation, creation...and it doesn't stop until the original decision is un-created by the creation if it's an identical duplicate." He paused as if he was waiting for listeners to ask the wrong question, which he would answer with only one correct answer, and then he continued: "What happens if the Being achieves its decision?"

"That decision will disappear into emptiness!" thundered the audience, all in one voice like soldiers administering an oath. Lon, obviously pleased, squinted his green eyes. "And what will happen if it fails? Surely, the being is making a ruinous decision, a decision of defeat, which is the basis for counter creation. The cycle of action doesn't end with counter-creation. It only creates an energy ridge of two opposite forces, which are set in motion by two resisting decisions; original decision and ruinous decision. When you suffer a defeat with your original decision, you can suppress it, look down on it and ignore it, but you can't discreate it, because you didn't create the perfect duplicate of it."

Silent, he looked at the audience, smiling with his large, full lips: "We'll be able to see the confirmation of what I just said in the example of Gopal Khan,

an infamous Persian mogul from the seventeenth century...There are two versions of his life story; one is with a happy and the other with an unhappy ending. I'll start with the story with the happy ending. Listen carefully! Gopal Khan was a man obsessed with beauty. Although he was exceptionally wealthy, he lived in a modest palace. Once, when he was returning from a hunt, he looked at his palace and made a decision: I'll build my dream palace."

"Listen carefully. He didn't have any image of his dream palace in his consciousness, nothing specific. He had made a pure decision. I'll repeat – the state of our existence at the moment we make the decision is known as the first decision or original decision. Okay, what happened next? Gopal Khan called the court's mason and told him what he wanted. Together they developed a plan for a perfect palace, and skilled craftsmen prepared a model of the palace. Hundreds of workers got down to work, and four years later the palace was finished. Gopal Khan stood in front of it and when he saw its beauty, he addressed the members of his court, with tears in his eyes: "That's it! That is the palace of my dreams!" He moved in, lived there for the rest of his life and died with a feeling of completion."

Lon looked at his listeners approvingly. He continued in a deeper voice. "That was the version with a happy ending. As with everything else, a happy ending is not so interesting. Monad is attracted to dramatic experiences, because only in drama does it feel that it is really living. Let's take a look at the unhappy version. The story is identical to the first one up to the point when the construction of the palace begins. After two years, when half of the palace was finished, Gopal Khan travelled to visit his friend, an Indian maharaja." Lon was telling the story in a relaxed way, as if he was in a restaurant with friends. Suddenly his tone changed; he accented the drama which began to unfold in front of our eyes: "In his absence, hordes of barbarians attacked Gopal Khan's kingdom and demolished it – the half-finished palace was destroyed, the skilled mason and the workers killed, the palace model shattered, and his entire treasury plundered. When Gopal Khan returned and saw the chaos, he buried his head in his hands and lamented: "I will never accomplish what I wanted." **Be careful now!** At that moment he made a ruinous decision which substituted for the original one." With an index finger, Lon tapped his temple and added: "Let's remember, the first decision was - I'll build the palace of my dreams. Standing on the ruins of his palace, he made the second decision of defeat: **I'll never accomplish what I wanted.** The second decision didn't dissolve the first. From then on, both decisions existed in the spirit of the miserable Gopal Khan. That state of existence we call change of existing state."

Lon Hibner either had stage experience or he was a born actor. He lowered his head on his chest, bent his shoulders, and kept silent for a while. No one

moved. His deep breathing was heard through the microphone. He continued slowly, in a voice which displayed reconciliation with fate: “In the following years Gopal Khan continued to rule his kingdom the best he could. He built a new palace without paying much attention to how it looked. He said to himself that overall it wasn’t so bad. I have a roof over my head and my kingdom is on the road to recovery, he thought. Psychologists and psychiatrists and all those ignorant brothers would conclude that he reacted as a mature person, who accepted reality. We call that state **existence**. Remember this well! **Existence is an agreement with what is, because of our defeat we gave up on what we wanted.**”

He shook his head and squinted his eyes, as if viewing the scene of his faded dream: “Nevertheless, Gopal Khan never recovered from his defeat. When he thought of his dream palace, he sighed and suffered. The lavish life he lived couldn’t help him forget his dream. He pushed away his painful vision, seeking oblivion in hashish, sex, overeating and gambling. That’s how he spent the rest of his life, trying to find salvation in oblivion. This state of existence we call **denial of the existent**. Nevertheless, it was of no use, it didn’t help him. Gautama Buddha said: You become what you resist.”

Lon got up from his chair and began walking on the stage in elastic steps, so unlikely for his large body, like an actor preparing to deliver striking monologue. He bent his head and narrowed his eyes: “Let’s presume that Gopal Khan continued to try to build his dream palace. Yet, without money and an experienced mason he couldn’t succeed. Probably he would have said on his death bed: I tried until the last moment, but a man can’t get in life what he desires most.” Lon walked to his chair, placed both his hands on the back support and resolutely said: “The greatest lie here is the idea of one’s life. When someone declares what Gopal Khan said on his deathbed, it means he believes that he is only a body, not the eternal Monad, which **uses bodies** until it achieves the original decision. Let’s suppose that a Buddhist monk was beside his deathbed...or any of you, boys and girls. That person would tell him: Your highness, I have good news for you. It is a misconception that you live only once; you’ll live again because there is a next life. Identify your ruinous decision and accomplish your vision in the next life! If he believed in it, Gopal Khan would certainly say: Really? Then I will build my dream palace in my next life. All that I need is to be born into a healthy body and royal family. That reminds me that my daughter, who is married to raja of Kashmir, is pregnant. I should die as soon as possible.”

Lon paused and then declared the indisputable conclusion in a piercing voice: “That shows us how we can remove life’s see-saws which create so many problems. We need to remove the second, ruinous decision and allow Monad to

continue to forcefully pursue its work toward the realization of the original or primal decision.”

Pleased, he grinned widely and added: “That’s all for today. I hope this lecture was useful.”

It was for me. That day, I understood how I had created my subjective world, how I kept it in existence, and how I discreated it. Although I didn’t see the image in front of my eyes, I realized that I was on the stage of my life where I always have been. I was the director, actor and spectator. There is no other.

-6-

“Bogy, you have a call. Go upstairs in Tech.” I was in the reception room waiting to be processed. My first thought was that something was wrong. Processing was a sacred activity and everything was subordinated to it. Why are they now calling me in Tech, which was short for the Department of Technical Services? While I walked up the narrow wooden steps, my uneasiness grew. Alberto made a wide hand gesture, pointing at the door of the room next to Tech. “One very important person wants to talk to you.”

My tension subsided. I had learned that all people in Sciology were very important. I smiled in the corners of my mouth and opened the door. I was taken aback by the appearance of a man sitting alone in the room. He truly did look very important. Tall, strong chest, wide shoulders, tanned, with grey eyes and a strong jaw. He wore a dark navy uniform with symbols of Cosmic Orgs on his sleeves. He was leaning forward slightly with his elbows on the table and his fingers crossed. He looked like an energetic American CEO, who was selling computers all around the globe.

“Bogy, it’s my pleasure,” his smile revealed a line of white teeth. He got up and stretched his hand across the table for a handshake. He breathed forcefully; probably with one squeeze he could extract juice from a raw potato. “I am Willis. Joe Willis. Sit, sit please!” he directed me to the empty chair. “I’ll get to the point immediately. OK?” I nodded.

“Okay. You see, our people told me about your wish to establish Org in your country. I have some great news for you.”

“That’s my desire, but it won’t be easy. Yugoslavia is a communist country. Everything that comes from the outside world is interpreted as an attempt by foreign powers to overthrow the country’s autonomous system. I am determined to try...I’ll do my best...whether I’ll succeed, I don’t know.”

“Don’t hesitate, Bogy! You made the decision, now you need to put it to work. We’ll help you. Actually, not many people get the kind of help which we’ll give you.” He paused and looked at me fixedly with his grey eyes. He expressed himself clearly and went straight to the point. His words were like short bursts of fire which eliminate every hesitation. What kind of help will I get? Orgs usually overwork a person. My uncertainty didn’t last long.

“Lon wants to see you! Do you know what that means?” His eyes were piercing like a laser beam. “Not many people have such luck. That means that Lon appreciates your decision to establish the first Org in a communist country. The moment is right for that part of the planet to be cleaned from suffering, crime and unhappiness. This is a new game conducted on higher levels. Those who will participate in it are really lucky.”

If he wanted to surprise me, he succeeded. Everyone at London’s Org dreamed of earning a sudden invitation to the admiral’s ship ‘Jupiter’ and meeting with the Old Man. What will they say when they hear that it was I who was going? Did Alberto know? Hardly... The Californian executive hadn’t told anyone why he had come from Green Hill to London. As if following my thoughts, he said: “It’s top secret. Not a word to anyone concerning where you are going. Is that clear?”

Too bad I wouldn’t see the expression on Alberto’s face when he found out who had called me. I couldn’t mention it nonchalantly to Don Gleskin, either. I knew that if they knew the news, they would pretend that they were happy for me. They would probably say: great, big deal – and then go for a session with a processor to discharge their own betrayed expectations. I wished I could tell Willie what was going on. He would probably be happy for me. He would also be sorry because they bypassed him. Five years of hard work at London’s Org from morning until night for a couple of pounds per week, and now, he was seeing me off to ‘Jupiter’. I straightened my back in the chair. “When am I leaving?”

“You’re flying out tomorrow morning. Don’t worry about the plane ticket; everything has been taken care of.”

“I need to inform the Director of Processing to postpone my session.”

His suntanned face turned scornful. "He knows. You won't be processed here any longer."

"I paid for it."

"I know. Your money was transferred to a Cosmic Org. You will be processed there from now on."

That meant that I would never have another session with Willie and that I was leaving people in London Org who I had begun to like. Departure! There was sadness in the thought. Willis continued his job the way he was taught at the Cosmic Org. For a moment his face again acquired a scornful expression. "You are forever finished with processing here. You'll be processed in Lon's immediate surroundings. Bogy, you are a VIP, do you understand?" he pronounced his words brusquely, like hitting the table with his fist. "V-I-P, do you know what it means?"

"Never heard of it."

"V-I-P means.... **very important person**. You influence public opinion in Yugoslavia with your activities and articles in various publications. As such, you deserve Lon's standard technology. That means: the best Processors, the best Supervisors, and the best Directors of Processing. I saw your folder. Many mistakes were made here in your processing. That is over now, **you deserve the best.**"

I remembered Willie, singing happily after a successful séance with me, loudly greeting people left and right while walking through the hallways of the center, like some proud boy. It wasn't fair to talk that way about people in basic Org, but I knew that this engine of a man was allowed to say anything he wanted - because everyone exerted all their strength to get away from this place and seize an opportunity with the Advanced or Cosmic Orgs. Thank God that none of the people I liked were present. I know that Californian handsome would have said the same things if they had been present, except he would have felt greater pleasure.

"People here put forth great effort so I could get the best," I said conciliatorily. "And I believe I did."

"You know what," he said, like he was ending a mindless discussion, "I wouldn't bet on that. John Harry will give you your ticket. Say goodbye to everyone, and off you go."

No one knew where I was going, but by the fake smiles of the people shaking my hand, it was obvious that they knew that I had beat them. Tony Brown, the Director of Processing, offered his hand with a melancholy expression on his face which he didn't try to hide. His eyes were red from exhaustion as he slept only 3 to 4 hours a day. The rest of the time he worked in his room or washed hallways and windows at the center. "I don't know where you are going, Bogy, but I am certain that it's a big deal for you." He suspected where I was going. As if he was confirming that, he added: "I knew you were lucky the first moment I saw you in our Org. Did you talk to Joe Willis about your processing here?"

"Of course, I told him that I'd gotten the best service here and that I was sorry that I was leaving."

"Don't be sorry. I don't know where you're going, but I am certain that you are moving to a higher level of responsibility. Be happy about that."

Alberto, leaning with one hand on the wall, nodded with serious expression, and the rest followed the same gesture as if it was a compulsory ritual, but it was hard for them to hide their sadness. "Send us a postcard", Alberto said, "we'll be happy to know how you're progressing."

"Unfortunately, I can't do that." Everything came to a standstill. I had made a mistake. There was only one place in the world from where it was impossible to communicate with other people. That was the Non-Com Zone or Non-Communication Zone, the place occupied by Lon Hibner at the moment.

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I arrived at the Non-Com Zone the next day, in the afternoon. I landed at the small airport near Corfu under the scorching sun. The buildings were painted white while windows and doors in azure blue. The sky hot from the sun had almost a white colour. Two young men waited for me after the customs control. They wore sunglasses, jeans, and white shirts. "Welcome Bogy", said the older one with a serious face. He had thin lips and prominent jaw muscles. He shook my hand powerfully. "I am Verner and this is Ricky." I noticed the familiar Sciolargic look - focusing straight into a person's eyes with total confrontation. I noticed that these two were karate experts. There were large, bulging callouses on their fingers grown after many years of practice.

“Let’s go immediately. You have to talk to one very important person.”

“I know”, I said wondering if I’d have time to take a shower. Outside the airport building the air was heavy from the heat - about 40 degrees Celsius. Verner walked quickly, looked at me sideways, surprised, and asked: “You know?”

I laughed shortly. “Yes, of course. I never talked to an unimportant person in Sciology. Everyone is ve-e-e-ery important.”

“I understand what you’re saying.” It was his neutral acceptance of my communication and I felt hesitation in his voice. My humor was inappropriate; he unquestionably knew that I was a VIP and any indiscretion could cost him.

We got into a covered jeep and Verner and I sat in the back seat. I placed my bag next to me. Ricky drove in silence. We passed white houses and the asphalt road was almost white from the heat; and air circulating through opened windows couldn’t bring freshness. I wondered where "Jupiter" was docked. Ricky didn’t enter the city but took a roundabout road and quickly continued driving into the interior of the island.

Verner handed me dark sunglasses and said: “Put these on.”

“I don’t need them.”

“Just put them on. It is a security measure.”

I got it. They were cheap sunglasses but the surface was covered with a thick coat of dark blue colour, so that nothing could be seen through it. They served as an eye cover so I couldn’t see where we were going. I put them on but sideways I could see rocky ground covered with scarce bushes and stunted conifer trees. We stopped in front of a tall white wall with a grey, two-sided gate. Two young men holding walkie-talkies in their hands opened the gate. With their short hair and suntans, they looked like karate students in a summer training camp. They didn’t respond to my greeting, and closed the gate without saying a word. “Ricky will show you where you’ll sleep. Later, call the director of Tech”, Verner instructed.

The sleeping room looked like one in the Army. There were bunk beds of untiled boards, bare stone floors, and bags stuffed under beds. I chose the lower bed that had clean bedding. I tried to put a bag under the bed but the entire space was already taken. I put my bag on a bed on the opposite side from the headboard. I didn’t mind such accommodations; I waited for my meeting with the Old Man.

Otto Olsen, the Director of Tech was a freckled Scandinavian with large ears, a face from the sun, and blond hair. He immediately shattered my hope that I would meet the Old Man right away. “You will be processed until level OM-3 before you are invited for a conversation with Lon. Thus, you will complete your mission in full to help Lon clean this planet. When you are ready, Lon will personally tell you what to do.”

Tech was located in a small room on a ground floor. Otto was sitting by the desk, which held an ancient-looking phone and a pile of letters. Folders with the names of uncleared people were scattered everywhere on the desk. This was obviously a temporary accommodation for the organization. Regretfully, I realized that I wouldn't be processed on a ship. I checked Otto out. He was about 90 kilograms and lean. He emanated the security of a man who performs the most important thing in life – serving God in person.

“My money was transferred here but I don't know if it covers the expenses. I paid until level OM-1.” The last \$500 I kept stashed in my jeans belt, determined not to touch it no matter what. I hoped they wouldn't ask me about money when I was on the emotimeter.

Otto's face had the superior smile of a man who conveyed a feeling of security to others. “That's been taken care of. You'll be processed until level OM-3 free of charge. Do you know what that means?”

The Scandinavian was beginning to irritate me. I was supposed to be grateful to him and appreciate his importance. I am grateful to Lon for such a gift. I am speechless...”

There was a stony expression on his face. “You are not allowed to leave the place. Talk to the room head if you need anything. During your service, if you come across any village people, don't speak to them. If you can't avoid a conversation, tell them briefly that we are filming a movie. Under no circumstances should you reveal that Lon is here.”

So, Lon is here. I wouldn't be meeting him on the ship. I didn't know what it meant - where was "Jupiter" and why had the free seas been abandoned? But, I didn't ask because I would have given the impression that I didn't know how to behave at such places. This was a temple. Otto said Lon's name by raising his head, with protruded chin, like a black grouse ready to sing. The word L-O-O-O-O-O-N was a cosmic evocation of God's fame - thank you for your merciful existence and contribution to the most dramatic match since the creation of the universe.

“Lon is here.”

“Yes.”

“When do I start processing?”

“Soon...in the afternoon.”

It seemed he had made a mistake and I wanted to sting him a little. No processing was done without a folder. The Supervisor had to look at my folder, which contained descriptions of all the sessions I'd had so far, so he could create a program for my future work. With a naïve expression on my face, I said: “I think it'll be difficult. My folder is in London's Org.”

His laugh was terse and arrogant. “Your folder is here. It came at the same time you did. Your supervisor is already working on it.”

That meant that someone else had travelled on the same plane. They were really effective. Nothing was forgotten or surrendered to chance; it was always known who was responsible for what. Unwillingly, I compared myself with those people represented by Otto. Would I ever change? I inclined toward procrastination, delaying duties I had to undertake, being a master of quickies. Which process needed to be done on me so I could resemble this robot, devoted to only one goal without a bit of reservation or hesitation?

“Thank you Otto,” I said, and swallowed hard

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From some indications and parts of other people's conversations in the dormitory, I concluded that the days of Sea Org were finished and Lon accommodated himself here together with the majority of his eminent associates. Why had it happened, no one knew. Non-Com Zone operated in hectic conditions, resembling cramped beehive. The Academy was situated in a stone, ground house that was at least two times smaller than the Academy at London's Org. The sight inside were well known to me: tables covered with figures of clay dough which were used by new students to show in a tangible way that they understood the process which they were undergoing. Pairs of people in confrontation were looking intently, with numb expressions, at each other. Some were reading confidential materials and some had headphones on and were deeply immersed in Lon's lectures. Several big photographs of the Old Man hung

throughout the house and a huge, gold-plated bust of Lon was behind the chair of the Academy Director.

Peter Crowley was the Director. He was a man in his thirties with a sailor's beard, twitching face and a raised left eyebrow. Slim and pale, he wore a navy blue jacket with signs of Cosmic Org and a tie, tied in a small knot over a snow-white shirt. His skin was dry as if he didn't have sweat glands. When he walked in uniform steps between rows of chairs, he looked as if he was counting them and when he leaned back in his armchair, he crossed his hands on his chest while his eyebrow lifted a little more.

I was destined for a surprise at the very beginning. I was on the second half of the first page of confidential material, reading about the power of pure intention, when a middle aged man with freckles approached me: "I am David Dunlop. Come with me, Bogy, we're going to have a session."

The processing room was the smallest ever. The wall behind David's head, facing me, was covered with Lon's photograph, showing him in a white shirt with a silk scarf tied around his neck. I looked at David carefully, while he was preparing his emotimeter. I liked him. He gave the impression of being a modest man, without a trace of arrogance which wouldn't tolerate insubordination.

"It's okay to begin?" he simply asked without a hint of command in his voice.

"Yes, sure."

"The supervisor had a look at your folder. You will skip some levels because you exceeded them. I'd like to rehabilitate the Katar state which you experienced in March, which was then invalidated and suppressed."

"Katar?"

"Yes, it's obvious from your folder."

"Not to me."

"Do you have any objections to my comment that you experienced Katar in March?"

"Certainly. I have no abilities for the Katar. I am full of holes like a Swiss cheese."

"I understand. Tell me who is responsible for your current state?"

“No one except myself.”

“Very good. The needle floats at this statement. Tell me, who created your past experiences?”

“I did, who else?”

“Excellent. The needle is floating. Who will create your experiences in the future?”

“I will, that’s clear.”

“Thank you. Your needle is floating again. Now close your eyes and have a good look at your life. Tell me, is there a single experience which you didn’t create yourself? When I say create, I think: either you created it yourself, or you contributed to its creation or you let others create it for you.”

In front of my eyes appeared parts of events which I had once experienced as unpleasant and painful but now appeared to be empty, like squeezed lemons. When I concentrated on other beings as potential causes of those experiences, they became empty and then disintegrated. Everywhere, I was in the center of the image. I tried to remember my favorite painful memories which I used as excuses for my limitations and failings. Again I was in the center, like an axis around which the wheel was turning. When father threw me in the corner of a room when I was five, so that I sprained my hand, I thought momentarily that I wasn’t responsible for that experience. The thought was short-lived; I knew immediately that it was I who decided to fall in that way and also that I had provoked my father before that.

I remembered Eleanor from high school, who cheated on me with Nikola Milin. There was a weak outline of suffering but immediately a fast-forwarded movie played: I, with my short haircut in a green shirt, telling her that every person has the right to freedom of choice and that fidelity was a provincial blunder. I felt anxious after saying those words but I persevered and kept repeating them...The mere thought of some experience would already impose the conclusion of who pulled the strings and was the only spectator of the show at the same time.

I opened my eyes. “I created everything. There is no experience to which I didn’t add, at least.”

“Very good, Bogy. How do you feel?”

I felt tears gather in my eyes, but without a feeling of sorrow. They were tears of loving happiness. I had known that I was the sole creator of all the experiences in my entire life, but somehow I had forgotten it. That memory came back to me and now nothing could ever take it away or obscure it. I saw Ackerman's image and, without a doubt, I knew that he had started that process in me. It continued through Lon's lecture about Gopal Khan. I remembered Joe Willis' words that many mistakes were made in my processing. It originated when I was told that I had to clear events from my past and conclude that they'd influenced me, created happiness, unhappiness, whatever. In that way, they pushed me into processing from a position of consequence, while I was the cause of my overall experiences. The past didn't influence me. With this realization I could focus on any experience from my past and drive it out at the same moment. I couldn't recognize my father, mother, unfaithful girl, country, communists, thieves...anything as a causes of my painful experiences.... Only I and I again. That's where the story begins and ends.

For a short time I thought of OM's abilities, occult powers promised in Sciology's promotional material and my past hopes that I would attain those when I reached the Katar state. I sneered at myself. Magical powers – like chopping wood and drawing water from a well. The thought of occult powers disappeared like a spiritual childhood game which I had already played. What occult powers - when there is one which contains all of it. I was the center of my whole universe. I created it with my decisions – some of which I saw in my faraway past, before the chain of lives began. David smiled, patiently waiting for me to start talking.

“How do I feel? I think you know it very well. There is nothing else but me, I created everything! How could I have been so stupid and not see it before? David, how's that possible?”

At that moment I knew what he would say. He smiled even more and opened his mouth to answer my question. I leaned over closer to him and spoke, at the same time he did, so that our words coincided: “That's what happens.”

He smiled, nodded his head, giving me a credit: “You learn fast, Bogy.”

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David let me have a walk after the session. “Don't go to the red zone,” he warned me, “Lon is there with his family.” I couldn't see how large the estate

was; the area behind the dormitory building was covered with tall pine trees. I haven't felt so good in a long time. I chose a shady spot under the group of tall pine trees, and stretched out on the ground. I remembered March in London and how I felt after the session, walking along Oxford Street. The Director of Process, Jean Louis, told me that they couldn't process me because I was in **the dissociated state**, my needle on the emotimeter was floating all the time.

I walked the street singing or humming melodies within. I couldn't stop the simple songs which twirled in my consciousness while I was eating. I sang while softly leafing through books in a bookstore, I fell into sleep with a song on my lips, and right after waking up I began to hum the same melodies. Clearly, that was the Katar state, which I had suppressed because I was directed to do so. I didn't feel sorry, the same state returned to me, this time with my complete awareness of what was happening. Using the emotimeter, David Dunlop brought it back with several simple questions.

My relaxed state was disturbed by loud curses coming from the eastern part of the forbidden zone. The voice was forceful, deep and piercing: "Bloody bastards, I'll teach you a lesson. Sons of bitches, motherfuckers, you are all the same. How many times do I have to tell you what to do?!"

The deep and sharp voice sounded familiar. Someone was in the middle of a terrible session. I remembered my first sufferings and screaming and felt satisfaction that it was behind me. A girl who was eating a sandwich, leaning on a pine tree, looked at me with an expression of unease, and then looked in the direction of the voice. I nodded and said: "Sometimes sessions get rough."

"Oh, no, that's the Old Man screaming. Someone messed up." Her words surprised me. She explained: "The Old Man believes that he shouldn't suppress negative energy within."

"Is that customary here?"

She shrugged her shoulders apologetically: "For the Old Man, it is. And for his Messengers. Be careful, don't mess something up." There was a hint of danger and warning in her words. My feeling of relaxation was gone. I got up and returned to the Academy.

"We are now transferring you to the '**very confidential materials**'. You are entirely responsible for them," Peter Crowley said, handing me the extensive materials in a thick blue folder. "Read carefully the handling procedures. They are on the first page. You have to comprehend every word in tech material. If there's the slightest vagueness, ask me. Clear?" He raised his even eyebrow higher.

“Yes, it’s clear.”

“You have to take a vitamin mixture regularly, plus calcium and magnesium. I’ll give it to you every morning. Clear?” He took a handful of different pills from a plastic bag in his drawer. There were so many they could easily cover the entire palm of a hand. “Take them right now!” He pointed at the water fountain in the corner of the room. “Do you have any questions?”

“Am I going to take all these pills every day?”

“Of course, while you’re at OM processes. Take your vitamins and get back to work. You must not take ‘Very confidential materials’ outside the Academy. You mustn’t show them to anyone, no one except you can see them. Clear? You are responsible for them.”

“What about when I go to the toilet? If someone reads it when I am not here?”

“Every time you exit the Academy, you must ask for my permission. Only when you get it, can you go out. Whenever you go out, you have to hand me all the materials, even if you leave just for a brief moment. You’ll get them back when you return. Unauthorized persons from lower levels must not cross that line.” He pointed to a red line which separated the room in the Academy into two parts. I hadn’t notice it before. “But that’s not your problem. I take care of that. You mustn’t talk to anyone about the ‘Very confidential materials’, **absolutely no one**. That includes people who are on OM processing. You mustn’t ask them any questions, inquire what is happening to them, and so on. Is that clear?”.

I was late in replying and, leaning over his desk closer to me, he repeated it accenting every word: “Is that cleeeaaar?”

It would be hard to talk normally to this man and establish a friendly relationship. He was a clone of Don Gleskin from London’s Org, but based on his obsessive drive for word-for-word, he was even worse. My nerves got tense. I leaned over to him and said: “Of course it is cleeeaaaaar.” His eyebrow lifted little higher, but he didn’t say anything.

‘*Very confidential materials*’ began in the customary way: This is a chance given to very few people on this planet. The meaning of every word had to be understood with the help of a dictionary and persons from lower levels were not allowed to see the material because they could get seriously ill even if they read just a part of it. Sometimes even death could occur. Well, well, you exaggerated it, the Old Man, I thought against my will. I decided to uncritically accept

everything that followed, to avoid any problems with Crowley. Carrying out this decision was difficult because I came across problems right from the beginning. With hesitation I looked at the ext which was titled “OM-2: *The History of Sector Number 9*”:

“95 million years ago, in this part of the universe named Sector 9 a Confederation of 76 planets was established under the name Galactic Confederation.

75 million years ago, a monstrous despot, Demin Jurg, came to power in the Confederation by means of conspiracy. He faced the problem of overpopulation. On the planets of Galactic Confederation lived an average of 170 billion inhabitants, while on some planets with favorable climates, lived 250 billion people. His solution for the problem of overpopulation and the mass implantation of Beings was appropriate to his psychopathic nature, making him the most infamous criminal of all times in this MEST universe (universe of; Matter, Energy, Space and Time).

Event No. 2

Demin Jurg’s solution to overpopulation is called Event No. 2. It was performed in three phases: capturing, packaging and implantation of free beings.

Capturing:

Demin Jurg ordered his mercenaries to capture the surplus population. They were killed by poisoning, electric shock, and by suffocation in special chambers. Monads were frozen by glycol and ethanol, packed in small containers, and transported to the Earth, which was the a prisoner’s planet. At that time, it was called Terrulack.”

I stopped reading and looked around. Short cardboard screens separated me from the rest of the students at OM courses, but judging by the amount of material in front of them, I concluded that they were reading the same text that I had. With their heads lowered and focused on reading, they didn’t seem to express any desire to comment on what they were reading. I become aware that Peter Crowley was looking at me like a falcon ready to dive. I lowered my head and continued to read.

The content reminded me of science fiction. Once on Earth, frozen Monads were placed at the base of volcanoes in Asia and America. Hydrogen bombs of great strength were placed in the volcano’s opening which destroyed the physical bodies of the Monads. Monads flew in the air with great velocity created by electronic winds. Then, they were caught on electronic traps, which

glued them on magnetic bands. The bands were then taken to laboratories - electronic places of torture. The first implant was created there, setting the standard for deviation in attitude. Its essence was implantation of false ideas which, in later incarnations, were experienced as the deepest convictions and attitudes. Such beliefs prevented people from becoming free Beings. The method contained extremely effective electronics hypnoses with powerful posthypnotic suggestions which endured through a series of incarnations. Our need to subjugate to authority was inserted in us, as well as a feeling of fear - creating sickness whenever we had thoughts of independence, setting ourselves free from limitations or abandonment of the Earth.

I was confused. Everything described in the material seemed quite impossible, but I was ready to accept it as a possibility. If the theory turned out to be true in processing, I wouldn't reject it even if I wanted to. I'd had incredible experiences in former processing, recalling memories of past incarnations on other planets and wrongdoing I'd committed then. Something else was bothering me. In the Moral code of a Processor, the first article said: "*Never give your thoughts and final statements to your client. He has to reach them himself. His reality is made and caused only by his own experiences.*" Forcing someone else's opinions on a client was called the evaluation and was considered an ethical crime. Why didn't they let me come across experiences about implants myself, instead of exposing me to the evaluation? Does that mean that all people have exactly the same experiences? Could anyone avoid implantation?

"Have you read the material?" Peter Crowley was standing next to me with his stony face.

"Yes. I have some questions about it."

"Keep it for a session. The person on duty will take you to the processing room."

I felt better when I sat across from David Dunlop. He was capable of understanding other people. He listened attentively to what I had to say, although his responses led me into emptiness. "I understand what you're trying to say. Let's start with a session. Is that OK with you?"

"It's not OK, you didn't answer my questions. The Moral Code of a Processor has been violated. Lon Hibner made an evaluation for me."

"I understand, but wait until processes are over and then form your judgment." There was a slight resignation in his words. Obviously, I wasn't the first person to make similar comments.

“I’ll try to do that.”

“Close your eyes and go into the past in your mind 75 million years ago.”

I was moving into the past with enormous speed. The timeline which directed me to the past looked like a misty path divided into sections, like the vibrations of hot air above the road in summer. While the great speed of time was taking me away, I heard sounds, similar to electronic music. I felt the moment when I reached the past, 75 millions of years ago, but there was nothing there.

"Tell me when you are there!"

"I'm there."

"Tell me what you see."

For some time I hesitated. I had a premonition this was not going to end well, but I had no choice. "The time track is completely clear. No charge, no implantation, David. Then, I was not in this universe."

“I understand you. Where were you then?”

All I saw was agitation, a vortex, a state in which there was no up or down, no space, time or time track. It was pure consciousness, consciousness about consciousness. I had consciousness that I was consciousness without any content, like a sound which hears itself. Nothing else. How long this state lasted was hard to say. Actually, it was nonsense to talk about time, because there was none. An instant was equal to trillions of eons. At one moment, that state was interrupted and from a pure consciousness about consciousness, I entered into consciousness about space. There was some reaction on the emotimeter because I heard David: “That! That! Which thought was that?”

“That I entered some world.”

“Very good, tell me what do you see?”

The whirlpool was slowly settling and some kind of contour was appearing. I sensed things rather than saw them. “I entered into this universe. Some white planet”. I saw white everywhere and a light permeated me. In my field of vision was a transparent being, similar to a dragonfly wing, slowly moving. It seemed to be hovering in the air, without desires, decisions, aims. There were other beings, almost in the same shape and state of consciousness. Not only did they permeate as far as my thoughts reached, but they also had complete consciousness about their mutual sameness. The focal point of the entire scene, was the first being I noticed, and its simple processes, interior and

exterior at the same time, were clearer to me the processes of other beings. I felt a spasm in my throat, a clench in my chest, and a thought which penetrated every boundary - that white was the essence of beauty, the firstborn child of light.

“Tell me what’s happening there.” I heard David’s voice from afar.

I felt uneasiness in my chest and heard myself talking in a shaky voice: “Nothing, there was nothing, so nothing could have happened. That is my genuine home, the planet of happiness. I was simply happy there without doing anything. That was that and nothing else.” I opened my eyes and looked at David, but now I had the same feelings as then.

“Very good,” said David. “How do you feel?”

“Terrible. I shouldn’t be here. I don’t belong here, I am only a guest on this planet. I feel sadness for my spiritual home. I’ll die, David, I’ll vanish here.”

“I understand. What is the name of that planet?”

I had the impression that he was emotionally following me from afar, that similar feelings awoke in him. “I don’t know. I really don’t. Whatever I say would sound like I was making it up.”

“I understand. Just tell me what is it that you think you’re making up?”

“I’m not sure...Shona or something like that.”

“Okay, how do you feel?”

“Fine. The horrific pressure is gone.”

“Nice. Show me with your hand where that planet is located.”

This request seemed stranger than everything else. “How do I know David?”

He nodded with understanding and his expression showed complete confidence. “I understand it’s difficult. Still, show me with your hand where that planet is.”

My will deserted me, I was empty from myself, a zombie who follows an invisible program. My right hand lifted by itself in the air as my surprise grew. My stretched index finger moved slowly, stopping above David’s head for a second, then went up a little more and moved to the right. The hand stopped in the air and all suffering was gone. I knew that my genuine home still existed

there, not a millimeter to the left or right but exactly there, and that I'd return to it some day.

“Okay. How do you feel now? What happened to your sadness?”

“It's gone. Gone completely.”

I was astounded. I learned in Lon's materials that orientation in space and time disconnect negative emotions, but this was the first time I had experienced it. So much pain disappeared in one instant?! The Old Man interlaced some science fiction into the processes, no doubt about that, but he definitely knew how to solve some problems. For a moment I thought of Belgrade's psychologists and psychiatrists who were playing endless games - Oedipal complex, oral and anal phases, and similar contents. What ignorance they live in?! They don't even dream of the technology of Lon Hibner. I thought that it would be valuable goal in life to transfer this knowledge to them. Immediately, I gave up. They would burn me like a sorcerer. Nobody is as obstinate and immovable as people who invest their lives in a delusion.

“Okay”, David smiled happily, “this is the end of the session.”

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The dining area where more than 40 people ate was a huge stone room with a floor made of coarse boards which still smelled of pine trees. People came in two groups to have their meals and I belonged to the second. The huge fan on the ceiling was insufficient to cool off a bunch of sweaty bodies. Curtains of green cotton were drawn over the windows. They partially stopped the sun from coming in, but they also stopped the air circulation. Sweat ran down my temples, behind my ears, and down my back. I had already tried to take my food tray outside but the person on duty told me to come back. If discipline becomes the only goal, then the stupidity will rule. Sweat was rolling down my body and I was becoming nervous.

On the other side of the room the “ignored” sat. They were people who had violated discipline or hadn't succeeded in accomplishing set tasks. As a sign of their unenviable status, they had to wear dirty rags tied around their right hand. The men were unshaven, wet from sweat and dirty. While in the ignored status, they were not allowed to bathe or shave. I looked continually in their direction. If humiliation becomes a form of sacrifice for great things, you can

humiliate people endlessly. When some of them caught my look, looking under their eyes, they kept it on me for a second or two and then immediately lowered it to the floor. On the bench against the wall, all yellow in the face with long, dishevelled hair wet from sweat, sat John McAllister. He wasn't eating. He stared at his plate, slowly mixing his food with his spoon. He was the first Katar in the history of humankind. I remembered his printed statements in "*Cosmic Traveller*", Sciology's magazine of higher levels of consciousness which I read before I came to London's Org. My entire life was preparation for this training, he wrote. Thanks to all beings that helped me on that path. My greatest thanks to Lon Hibner, that incredible Katar who smoothed the path for all of us. Thank you, Lon, a thousand times, thank you in the name of the entire humankind. What did the first Katar in the history of humankind do so wrong that he is sitting now in the group of isolated individuals with a rag around his hand, with his dirty face covered by a beard? I didn't dare to ask anyone, although it was a challenging question. Even if I did ask, no one would have the guts to tell me.

Among the ignored people was a pale boy of about seven. My neighbour Gregg Kimble told me in a subdued voice, that the boy had committed great evil to his mother in the line of former incarnations. In relation to her, he was a suppressive person. Mother found that out during Lon's special process "Discover the key enemy".

"He had to go through ethical clearing before processing", Gregg told me, quickly winking and waving his head. That was the saddest boy I've ever seen during the time I've spent in Sciology. His parents sat to the right of us. His mother spoke loudly, often interrupted by a girl, their daughter of 12 or 13, with a liberated attitude and loud laughter.

"What kind of food is this?" I asked Gregg while I was waiting for the person on duty to bring me my lunch tray. The previous day I ate lukewarm slops. Gregg had a sense of humor which he turned on, though quietly: "Food? It's just little better for ass than a cock!"

I didn't have a chance to check that out. "Bogy, come with me immediately." Standing next to me was one of those short-haired humanoids in the uniform of Cosmic Org. "Now" meant that I had to get up and go with him without question. While I walked through the dining hall three steps behind him, my feet felt weak. He brought me into the Service of Dissemination. A grey-haired, thin man I'd never seen before stood in the middle of the room. With eyes glaring from some internal fire, he shook my hand and said: "Congratulations Bogy, Lon wants to speak with you."

The moment had arrived. Although I felt excited, I thought that it would have been much better if they only notified me a couple of hours earlier. I was about to ask for permission to take a shower or at least brush my teeth, but the grey-haired man didn't let me ask. "Let's go", he said, gesturing to the guy who brought me that he was dismissed. We passed through the narrow corridor, pleasantly cool, and came to a door which had a gold-plated plaque. In large letters it said "**Admiral's Cabin, No Entrance**". The grey-haired man pressed a doorbell, and the green light above the door, which I hadn't noticed earlier, came on. He stiffly straightened himself, slowly pushed the door open and, holding me by my upper arm, brought me inside.

The Old Man was sitting behind a massive writing desk of dark oak. Two pairs of sciologists wearing Cosmic Org uniforms were standing on each side. I knew from before that they were members of the highest management. The Old Man was talking to Lawrence Mayo, who was standing on his right side, and he continued to talk when we entered. His voice was deep, familiar from the tapes I'd watched, and he appeared to be in a good mood. The officers were smiling, nodding their heads.

I watched him closely, quite astonished by his appearance. He was much older than he appeared in his photographs and movies, and much heavier. Actually, he was a tall, heavy man. An admiral's shirt, adorned with epaulettes, stretched over his protruding belly, exposing large breasts, almost as large as woman's. He had a fat double chin and his eyes, transparent green eyes in the photos, were actually brown, while the whites of his eyes were stained yellow. His face was swollen, like the face of an alcoholic after a long drinking spree. His fiery red hair was ashy grey, full of dandruff, receding in the front. He was missing a few teeth in his upper jaw and the rest were dark fragments. His thick lower lip had a cigarette glued to it. While he spoke, he moved the cigarette with his lips and inhaled the smoke. He was an aged wild boar with shaggy hair, overweight from lack of exercise, but his aura filled the entire room with suppressed energy. The officers' stretched necks and fawning smiles, showed who the boss was. No joking there.

"...Fifteen years have passed since then and now is the moment to transfer that knowledge to OMs who are mature enough for those experiences. Like all majestic things, this one is very simple. I've spend 14 days closed in room in a complete darkness. In everyday conditions, melatonin is produced in the dark. Fourteen days of complete darkness, covered my brain with melatonin and activated my pineal gland to an unimaginable intensity. Between the fourth and seventh days, a man begins to see three-dimensional images and thoughts beyond the language."

I was completely focused on his words. What he was talking about drew my attention with irresistible power. For a moment I wondered if he was aware of my presence because this information was not for everyone. As if responding to my wondering, he glanced at me and continued: "After ten to twelve days, a man begins to see ultraviolet and infrared rays. Do you understand what that means? In the dark you can see the energy field of a man. Images from the experiences externalize and the man moves around capable of experiencing virtual reality. Those images are the language which DNA is using."

He looked at the two officers on his left and then slowly looked at the other two on his right. The slow movement of his head stressed the forceful gaze of his blurry eyes. When he looked at them, the officers tucked in their tummies and raised their heads. His body language worked like a loud command. He cleared his throat and in a deep voice said: "I want you to organize everything that is needed for that experiment. Understand, everything!"

"It will be done!" The four officers said in one voice. There was no place for doubt in their metallic voices.

"That experiment will help me to confirm the idea that – by controlling breathing and sound - it is possible to consciously reprogram the genetic code and reality of an individual. If my idea is correct, then other persons can also have similar experiences. That will be the beginning of a new internal technology, far superior to the current ones based on the e-meter. Do you understand what that means? It means that we could entirely change the reality of a human being and program his time track with only positive and divine experiences, while the process is measured by minutes. Buddhism, taoism, yoga, years of suffering in Himalayan caves and temples, will become artefacts in the antique shop of history. We can declare with confidence: Hey planet, here we come!"

I had a strong feeling that I was among those chosen for this incredible experiment. The feeling overwhelmed me like a wave. Lon didn't let me stay for long in that state of mind. He looked at me and in a voice which lost its prophetic tone, said: "Well, Bogy, welcome. I don't have much time. That's clear to you. The boys are telling me that you are ready to established Org in Czechoslovakia. Right?"

"No," I said smiling against my will. My tension disappeared and I felt good. "Not in Czechoslovakia, in Yugoslavia. Americans are always mixing up those two countries". At my words, the officers became nervous and visibly upset and Lawrence Mayo had an unhappy expression on his face.

The Old Man's mood drastically changed. He thought for a few seconds, and the nostrils of his meaty nose quickly opened and closed. "That's all the same bullshit," he said. "Those communist countries are even worse than the West, which stinks from decay."

"You are probably right," I said conciliatorily. My anxiety was fading away and along with it my belief that his conscious mind was unerringly processing information like some perfect computer. "I'll do my best, but if it is going to work, I don't know. As you said, it is a communist country. Every organized group of people which is not under the paw of the communist party is considered an enemy and is prosecuted."

"Don't hesitate, Bogy! You know that Monad's pure decision is powerful. Nothing can stop it!"

Silent, I was looking for words to respond. He went on: "We'll give you all possible support. Guardian Org will be behind you and our ethical officers as well. They will figure out a way to break through the soft plexus of communism. You shouldn't appear under our name. For the time being it would be best for Org to be introduced as a group fighting against drug addiction, something like the Red Cross or Salvation Army. Our boys will think of something. It is necessary to involve people from communist institutions into our processes. They should be promised a solution to their sexual problems or something like that. Those bastards are mainly impotent, their children are drug addicts and violators. Their weak spots need to be uncovered and we'll work on them. Our boys from Ethical Org will do that. Your job would be to assemble people. Understand? Czechoslovakia will be the soft plexus where we will strike into a pigsty of communism."

I almost laughed aloud: "Not Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia...."

Raising his right hand, Lawrence Mayo made a semi-circle in the air, as if giving me a sign to be quiet.

"Whaaaat! You are going to correct me!?" The Old Man's nostrils were wide open, and his voice gained the power of a denied Messiah.

"I just wanted to eliminate possible confusion, to point out to you..."

"You have nothing to point out to me!" He raised his voice and his face reddened. The Officers stiffened again in tense silence. "You have to keep quiet and listen. Is that clear?"

The words I was about to say to summarize the possibilities for the founding of Org in Yugoslavia got stuck in my tense throat. My world was collapsing. In front of me was a man who taught the ways of perfect communication to thousands of people, but he himself didn't follow the basic principles. I had learned from him how important it was to use words which are clean from incorrect meaning. That warning was posted at the opening pages of all materials. A strong feeling of injustice mixed with disappointment overwhelmed me. I was ready to do anything to establish Sciology in Yugoslavia, but now, its source seemed completely different from what I'd been prepared to put all my efforts into, without questioning the cost. I felt the old, familiar feeling which I have described to you many times – I felt a hot emptiness spreading in my stomach and pins and needles in my fingers. I made an effort to restrain myself. Quietly I said:

“I am sorry, I learned from you that a misunderstood word always creates confusion in consciousness.”

The Old Man's turned even redder and a thick blue vein appeared on his brow. “What”, he screamed, “you are going to clear confusion for me. Who brought you here, you son-of-a-bitch?!” He looked left and right at the horrified officers. “You'll go to isolation for ten years, fucking bastard! Son of a damn bitch!”

My beliefs, hopes and conviction that Lon Hibner was the amazing Monad who would lead us into the fight to clean up the planet and this section of the universe, and that it was my exceptional luck that I could help him in that task, disappeared completely. Feelings of injustice and protest began to boil and inside me suddenly spilled out when I saw mother's image in my mind, her sweaty red face, swollen hands from washing the family's dirty laundry in the bathtub, while my father was reading newspapers.

“Leave my mother...leave her alone. Do you hear me?”

The Old Man stared at me in disbelief with his eyes wide open. That lasted several seconds and then, forcefully, he slammed his large fist on the desk, and the ashtray, box of cigarettes and telephone with many coloured buttons, jumped into the air. He got up from his chair and roared: “You are going to threaten me?! Motherfucker bastard! Of course your mother is a stinky communist whore! In isolation! Now! What are you waiting for, you sons-of-bitches?!”

Paralyzed until then, the officers ran up to me. One grabbed my hair, bending my head backwards, while the other twisted my hand painfully and the tendon felt like would burst. Someone pulled my leg and knocked me to the

ground. I saw Lawrence Mayo's startled eyes, and felt his hand strangling my neck. I wanted to shout, "Fuck you, I'll walk by myself!" but I couldn't utter a word because of how tightly he was holding me. They raised me to my feet and dragged me outside. The Old Man was roaring curses, one after the other. The door closed and his voice was suddenly silenced. They pulled me down the stone stairs into the basement. "Put the bastard here," Lawrence Mayo growled, "Put that bastard here!"

I am finished, I have no hope, I thought. They were animals waiting for the old boar's sign, to slit a man's throat or spill a child's brains against the wall. I remembered stories of people who disappeared from Org, which I'd read in Kaufman's book "Inside Sciolargy". He listed the names of several unfortunate people, who supposedly had committed suicide, information Kaufman doubted completely. Now I knew those people hadn't killed themselves.

Mayo held my hair with one hand while opening a narrow wooden door with the other. Someone forcefully pushed me inside with his knee so that I fell on a stone floor in the tiny room. The door behind me closed with a bang. I stayed on the ground for a while and then slowly lifted my head. A strong pain pulsated in my neck. It was dark so I had difficulty seeing anything but shapes around me. I smelled the stench of stale air and sour wine, felt the silence and dampness. In the corner of the room was a straw mattress. There were no windows, only faint light between the rafters on the ceiling. I crawled to the mattress and toppled over my back. My arm hurt, my neck had a tingling sensation, and my right ear was deafened from a hit. But, I was alive. What would happen next, I'll see. My father would have been happy if he'd known what had happened to me. I had heard his preaching since childhood – you can't fight those above you, you should kiss the hand you can't break...I have told you hundreds of times...don't rock the boat.

What would a clever and mature attitude be in this situation? To clench my teeth, endure humiliation and after collecting information about they had, to tell Old Lon to go fuck himself. In fact, I would be willing to endure anything if Sciolargy was what I had believed it was for a long time. But it wasn't! I was sure of that. It was a rotten matter when the one who created the system didn't follow it. Operational Monad, amazing OM processes, my ass. None of them were capable of leaving their body and operating outside of it. People?! What people!?! Those were doormats without a will, used by the Old Man to wipe his ass. OM who ruled by cosmic forces but couldn't differentiate Czechoslovakia from Yugoslavia?! I didn't miss the ashtray full of cigarette butts on his desk. Kaufman wrote that the Old Man smoked four to five packs of cigarettes a day and from what I saw, he was right. Operational Monad, cosmic energies, bullshit. And his rotten teeth, crying for a dentist's pliers. That was it – total

disappointment in all those crazy stories and promises of total freedom. I regretted that I hadn't shouted a few insults – that he was a fat pig whose breath stank, whatever...I stopped for a moment. Hatred was hissing from me. I should have...I should...

Some agitation began at the bottom of my conscience. I felt as if I had already experienced what was happening or that I'd been in a similar situation or room. This basement reminded me of the corner of my grandmother's stable. The light in the stable came in the same way, between the ceiling boards. The same stale air. One more thing was similar – something wiggling and running away from me, like a fish jumping from a hand. My thoughts slowed down, almost stopped, my consciousness was left empty for a brief moment. I had the impression that someone was watching me from the side, and like back then in the stable, there was no fear, only excitement. Spirilen? I remembered my rituals with him. I focused at one point on the wall and then as fast as I could I turned my eyes sideways, and his pink, smiling face flashed in an instant, and then disappeared again.

Sudden peacefulness took over the little basement room. I still felt fear about what was ahead of me, but I knew I had acted in a way I wouldn't be ashamed of later. I remembered my clash with the president of the municipality in Staniste, when I quit my job. I would do the same thing again. I would to survive and get away from here. It was not probable that they would "commit me to suicide". There would be some dirty tricks and dishonourable acts, I was certain about it, but I'd survive. They probably will mistreat me some more, I'd have bruises, I would scream but I would live my life free from yet another illusion.

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They brought me in to face the Ethics Board, made up of Lawrence Mayo and two officers who I'd seen earlier in the dining hall. I knew that one of them was called Bob Kosinsky. They sat close next to each other around a small desk, with my folder in front of them and grave expressions on their faces. Two short-haired karate experts brought me in, holding me tight by my forearms. I was standing in front of them with a dirty rag around my wrist which they'd put on me right after they took me out of the cellar where I'd spent the night and part of the morning. They took away my watch so I wouldn't know what the time was but judging from the heat I assumed it was close to noon.

Lawrence Mayo took a deep breath and said: “You performed a terrible ethics offence. As a consequence, your attitude has the status of **treason**. You will remain in that status until Lon Hibner himself, decides otherwise.” I shrugged my shoulders and he went on: “While you’re in a status of treason, you have no right to use soap or to shave. You can take a shower once every seven days, without the use of soap or other personal hygiene articles. It is forbidden to have tea and coffee and you are not allowed to smoke. You are not allowed to take off the symbol of treason from your hand.” He pointed at the grey rag on my hand. “You are forbidden to talk to people from our Church or outside of it. No conversation is allowed except communication with people who have you under supervision. Is that clear?”

“There is nothing to be clear. I want to go home.”

Lawrence Mayo got even more serious. “You know very well that you can’t go anywhere. You signed a contract for a hundred thousand years. Now you have to go through **repentance**. Understand, repentance, so stop acting like a child. Do you understand the conditions of your status?”

“Foolishness,” I said, making an effort to make my voice sound calm, “I never signed anything. What contract? What hundred thousand years?!” The contract of hundred thousand years was signed by people who entered Cosmic Org. Many of them felt like they had returned to Cosmic Org because during processing, they experienced memories from former times when they were officers of Cosmic Orgs on other planets and in other universes. Signing a contract for a hundred thousand years was an illusionary trick to tighten up the organization and cease all contacts with Mirfaks, or all people outside Sciolargy.

I was surprised how much they were shaken by this simple statement. Mayo blinked his eyes several times and looked at one and then the other ethics officer like he was pleading for help. “You are trying to say that you are not a sciolarg?”

“Of course I am not. I was a client of Lon Hibner’s organization and I paid for my processing. After what I have experienced here, I have had enough of it and I want to go home. You have no right to keep me here. You’ll have great problems if you do. I left a letter with the Yugoslav Embassy in London containing information about where I was going.”

I knew what had happened. Those robots couldn’t understand that Lon had invited someone for a specialized mission who didn’t commit to organization and didn’t sign a crazy obligation of a hundred thousand years. Most likely, the Old

Man himself didn't know that. When they tell him, the one who had made the mistake will be in big trouble. Those three will do anything to save their skins.

Bob Kosinsky decided to take the matter into his hands. He cleared his throat and addressed me, trying to appear calm: "Listen, Bogy. No one wants to keep you against your will. A mistake was made about you and someone at London's Org will suffer consequences because of that. Even if you were one of us, you would be thrown out now. Your attitude toward Lon – and you are aware of what he has done for humanity – shows that you have a dirty conscience. We studied your file..." With an expression of sadness, he shook his head. "You performed a great number of terrible crimes in former lifetimes. You have no place among us. I am sorry, you had a rare opportunity to clear yourself and achieve spiritual freedom in this life."

"Cut the bullshit, Bob." The whole matter was taking a different course. They had to let me go, and they were trying to do it with the fewest consequences. Part of the plan was to create feelings of guilt in me – however unsuccessfully. I felt superior, like an elegantly dressed gentleman in front of a group of ragamuffins who had suddenly dropped their trousers. For a moment, I wanted to tell them everything that had piled up in me all this time: about the humiliation of the old members, slave's obedience, lies about OM levels which they sell for a great deal of money, and the way they treated John McAlister, the first Katar in the history of mankind, but the guardian inside me woke up and reminded me not to blow the balloon over its limits.

"You had a chance which you won't have ever again in many future lives. But, that's your problem...Only one thing remains: let's talk about your relationship to the Church of Sciolargy after you leave. It's your duty not to mention a word of our technology to anyone else under any condition. If you are asked about us, you are allowed only one answer 'No comment'. Are you ready for that?"

"If you leave me alone, it's OK."

"Your intention was to write a book about Sciolargy, right?"

"I am not interested in that story any longer. The only thing I want is to never see you again."

"Very good. We have the same yearning about you. Still, if you write a book, you are obliged to submit a manuscript before publishing it, to our Guardian's Org for review and permission. If you don't do that, I wouldn't like to be in your skin. You know that we can destroy you, your family, and the publisher who dares to publish such a book."

I nodded. I remembered the material I had secretly read in Guardian's Office in London Org, with instructions on how to handle the enemies of Sciolargy. To destroy me, when I finally got out from this den, they couldn't, but they could make my life miserable, that was true.

“Do you want to add anything?”

Many experiences flew through my mind. I will never again see the people I liked at London's Org. Their images passed through my mind quickly. They will remain in the past forever. I felt some sorrow about departing, but the longing for home, Nenad, Stevica, and Lydia was stronger.

“I feel gratitude toward some people in Sciolargy. They've helped me and I will never forget that. I paid honestly for that. For me, Sciolargy is buried in the past. I want to go home to my children and friends.”

When ties are broken, departure flows smoothly. I finished my conversation with the commission on Friday at eleven thirty. Early in the afternoon in Corfu's harbour, I got on a boat to Athens. On Sunday evening I was sitting in my apartment with Nenad on my lap. I smelled coffee and fresh baked cake, and my phone never stopped ringing. I felt that Sciolargy and old Lon Hibner were now far behind me.

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“I can understand your disappointment in Sciolargy. It is the only imaginable feeling for every thoughtful man who wishes well for himself and others. Sciolargy is spiritual fascism and you have no place there”, Ken Hamilton wrote from London. He replied unusually quickly to a letter I sent 15 days ago. Usually, I waited two months for his response. “ All things taken into account, you were lucky. Many people were blackmailed for years, their marriages and families were destroyed and financially, they were totally ruined. It's hard for people to grow wiser.”

He mentioned his research in contacts with primordial cosmic Intelligences buried in collective unconsciousness and told an interesting modern magician and medium Peter Perriot who, in the middle of Chicago, runs a lodge named the Nest of Fire Snake. *“He is a real expert, and according to my estimation, the strongest medium on the planet at the moment. If you want to write your book about mystic cults, it would be good for you to get in touch with*

him. His lodge has exceptionally good documentation and good relations with many prominent occultists and mystics especially from Haiti and South America. Also, he has an exceptional operational method for the development of consciousness and he is passing it on to people, free of charge. I think that collaboration with you will be beneficial to him as well. As a matter of fact, I can write to him and mention your name..."

I read the letter three times. Indeed, I had escaped from the claws of Sciology less bruised than the majority of other apostates. Only some faint anxiety remained about the possibility that they could cause damage to me – send a discrediting letter to Lydia – which they often practiced – but soon the thought went away. I am far from their reach and if I give up on writing the book about the Old Man and his rotten kingdom, they'll leave me alone. If I had known earlier about Perriot, I wouldn't have lost so much money and time on Sciology. Two thousand pounds I had shovelled into the Old Man's pocket. The Nest of Fire Snake sounded like the organ's music from the depths of the cosmos. But, thanks very much, never again anything similar to Sciology. Satisfaction inundated me for a while because I had grown wiser. Never again, I repeated aloud, putting Hamilton's letter in the envelope.

That afternoon I played my first game of chess in two years with Stojan Filipovich. Stojan had become an associate professor at the Department of Archaeological History. He returned recently from a French school in Athens, enthusiastic about his scientific research. He was once a master candidate at the chess club "Avala", and he still played so well that he could give me a pawn advance. Between moves, he talked excitedly about the significance of the discovery of a tombstone in Corinth. "It became clear that in Greek war camps at the time, there were three thousand hoplites, not seven hundred as it was originally thought. Do you understand the significance of that?"

"Sure," I said. I listened to his lecture, getting a little nervous because he was beating me game after game. In game openings, he would put me in a subordinate position and press me hard until the end of the game.

"Have you been to Athens?" he asked, looking at the chess board.

"Yes. Actually I just went from Piraeus to the train station."

"Did you visit the Acropolis?"

"I didn't have time for that and it was terribly hot. I could hardly wait for the train to start moving."

“That was a mistake. That is one of the axes of our entire culture. You should have seen it.”

“You know what, old boy? If Eleusians Mysteries were still going on, I would have stayed for days if necessary, regardless of the heat. But to climb up to the Acropolis under the scorching sun...”

“Don’t be a primitive. Here’s checkmate!” he put his queen in the eighth row next to my king, like he was punishing me from my primitivism. “You could have surrendered up five-six moves before....you had no counter strategy. Next time, don’t miss the Acropolis. It is not only an architectural monument but a cornerstone of our civilization in general.”

“Buddy, don’t be so edifying. We learned in high school the significance of the Acropolis for our civilization. Let me tell you something I heard from an architect and painter who was, as you are, in love with the Acropolis, until he saw the authentic monuments.”

“I’d like to hear which ones?” His brow was strained, all wrinkles disappeared as if ironed out.

“The man, Milan Hirsh, believed that the Acropolis was the ultimate achievement of the world’s architecture. Then he left for the East with a group of hippies. He claimed that he visited every country in Southern and Eastern Asia. He spent eight to nine months there and got completely cured of Western culture and monuments. He said, I thought that the Acropolis was the highest peak in architecture which ancient civilization could reach, until I went to the East. There, I realized that the Acropolis was just a simple matchbox. Great, a box of matches. In Burma or Laos, I don’t remember which, there is a Valley of a Thousand Temples. Hirsh said it was called by that name because there are thousands of deserted temples there. Every one of them was carved in rock and every one is a grand sculpture. Stone walls and columns of temples were also carved. He became dizzy from such a concentration of creativity. If he visited one temple a day, he said, he would need a couple of years to visit them all. It was then and there that he realized that the Acropolis was just a box of matches.”

“He must have been under the influence of drugs. The East is not my specialty, but I doubt the story. Where exactly are those temples? I’d like to check it out.”

“Here’s his number, so ask him yourself.” I pulled a piece of paper from my pocket to write Hirsh’s number on it. It was the envelope with Ken Hamilton’s letter in it. I stopped for a moment. I wasn’t interested any longer in making Stojan check Hirsh’s experiences. I wanted to read Ken’s letter one more

time, actually the part where he wrote of Peter Perriot. While Stojan was writing the number, I told him I had to go.

“No revenge? You lost four games.”

Instead of revenge, I sat in the garden of the “Moskva” Hotel, ordered tonic water and opened the letter. Peter Perriot sounded French. The Nest of Fire Snake evoked associations of comics about Konan, powerful magic practiced in the Amazon jungles, and legends of the Atlantis.

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Dear brother Bogdan Zivotic,

My good friend Ken Hamilton from London, England, suggested I write to you because you are interested in my magical systems and studies within the Fire Snake framework.

His word is my guarantee that your interest is genuine and that you’re a respectable individual. Please feel free to write to me about what interests you and I will reply to the best of my knowledge. I would be very happy to share all insights contained in my materials if you need them in your research.

Brotherly yours,

Peter Perriot

Dear brother Bogy,

With great pleasure I allow you into my field of consciousness. Let me tell you right away that you are a genuine magician. I have been waiting for you for some time to contact me, because you were my student and associate in many previous incarnations. Many magic powers are asleep in you. My job is to

awaken them, so that I can, with our joint efforts, bring you back to the place where, according to cosmic hierarchy, you should be.

Because we were so close to one other in the highest magical spheres, I am sending you the text of a revelation which I just received from AIWAZ, a powerful cosmic Intelligence, who is, during this period, pouring powerful currents of psychic energy into our planet.

Yes, sexual magic plays an important role in all the systems which I am developing now. It represents an operational method for becoming ONE WITH AIWAZ. Now, it is stronger than ever before and remains a great secret. Through my spiritual mediumship I am further developing that method, and I am getting back information in the form of revelations, which I am writing down in the state of a trance. I am connected with AIWAZ, you are as well, even though you are not aware of it. It is not the same Intelligence that Crowley was in contact with. No, not at all. Crowley's Aiwaz was a "local" and personal intelligence, and it used Crowley to transfer messages which were important for that period in the Spiritual evolution of humankind. Our AIWAZ is a universal, cosmic Well, which the Hindus call Brahma. If you analyze the letters of his name, you'll see that it means ALL, from "A" to "Z". Please, study carefully Aiwaz's communication which I am enclosing, and just ask if you need help with anything. Remember that HE is with you, because whenever I unite with him in a state of deepest trance, I am directing the light of his energy to you.

Brotherly,

Peter Perriot

Dear brother and student Zivo,

With great pleasure I received your letter and photograph which helped me set up stronger telepathic communication with you. I am sending you a photo of me without a beard. I shave only from spring to autumn. You can start telepathic communication with me via photograph anytime of the day although the contact is much stronger during nighttimes.

Through meditation on my image you can enter into a field of timeless consciousness which we shared in our previous lives. In the beginning you will have difficulties and your impressions will be unclear, but gradually we'll be

able, through the development of occult imagination, to permeate each other completely. In that way you will be able through me to get into the consciousness of AIWAZ.

At the moment I have many “students” but only two real students. You are a student AIWAZ mentioned in communication as Sagittarius, and the second student is a Scorpio who lives in England.

Now please read carefully the following words. It is the will of AIWAZ that you be his messenger for Slavic nations. The reason is not what you’ll be doing in a material sense, but what you will be doing by power of your magic imagination. His communications will be a tool for transferring currents of cosmic consciousness which will be directed through your will and imagination. Based on His communications I will develop a formula by which I will transform you, my brother and student, into a cosmic Ipsi-simus. If you pass all tests successfully, and I believe you will, through the initiations I will administer, you will become Cosmic Ipsi-simus of Sagittarius. In this period of time only one such Conscious Being could exist, and that is BOG-dan ZIVO-tic. Ken Hamilton informed me that you had an insight into the structure of your name. It truly is an occult formula of Aiwaz’s consciousness for the sign of Sagittarius. I addressed you as “Zivo” at the beginning of my letter, because that word read in cabbala tradition from right to left is AIVAZ. Your name, in a ritual of Christian christening, is, so to speak, imprinted on your brow. It is a finger on your destiny.

At this moment on our planet there are twelve incarnated beings who will be the messengers and guardians of a new consciousness. I worked with them in the ancient past in Lemuria and the Atlantis. At this moment I don’t know all twelve adepts, but soon they’ll identify themselves to me, because they make up the top of the pyramid of cosmic brotherhood which will transmit the new consciousness to mankind.

Brotherly,

Peter

Dear Zivo,

Thank you for your elaborate letter. I will answer your questions in detail.

First, some physicists are already working on the ideas of AIWAZ-PHYSICS which will result in a mixture of the exact and occult sciences. One of my students, through channelling, receives messages from Albert Einstein whose ideas represent an important contribution to our science. A second important scientist is Dr. Gerald Noulton, who worked for NASA and conducted significant research on the influence of strong magnetic fields on human consciousness.

Secondly, AIWAZ-PHYSICS will be our Sacred Book and a technical manual, because it will contain a complete system of magic which will be available to all who are ready to enter the sphere of Aiwaz's energies.

Thirdly, and I am risking insulting you, I'd like to turn your attention to the concept of hologram in a new physics, which you might be aware of. Every part of a hologram, even the smallest, contains its wholeness. Such part of a limited Aiwaz-consciousness, I dare to say, a Micro-Aiwaz, in 1935 transmitted to Crowley a message that the old magic, practiced until then, would be replaced by a new one which would be totally sexual. That happened exactly on the day when my physical body was born. But Crowley didn't succeed in developing that system. In Crowley's OTO system, the foundation of magic was human sexuality but, according to Aiwaz, it was inferior, thus the foundation of a new magic will be a cosmic sexuality. It will lead toward the neutralization of the basic cosmic polarities because its main element is the energetic tension which exists between cosmic Yang and Yin.

Fourth, you will initiate candidates who join our sphere, into the Aiwaz system, because, after HE initiates you several times, you will bring to HIM other people. For those who you initiate, you will become the Aiwaz, since he will use you as a vehicle of manifestation of his consciousness. Over the course of dramatic and exceptionally strong initiations, others will unite with Him and even assume his image for a while, the same image which will appear before you when you see Him for the first time.

Fifth, the mechanism of initiation which you will use to initiate them, I am unable to see clearly at the moment. You will either develop it yourself or adopt it from someone who was not totally aware of its significance. Thus, I can confirm that it will really be the 12th level of initiation.

Let the Divine consciousness permeate you,

Peter

Dear Zivo,

I'll try to answer your questions briefly but be aware that only your personal experience can provide real answers.

Many years ago, in a former incarnation, I was a Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. In St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow I conducted a liturgy. At that time among the group of believers was an Englishman, Aleister Crowley, who was so inspired by my liturgy that he used it to construct a Gnostic mass, which has been used by OTO ever since. Sometime later, I departed my human body. When I reincarnated as Peter, very early in my childhood, I perceived that Aiwaz would help me to achieve a completely new level of consciousness. Aiwaz's system is all-inclusive, and as I already have told you, his name means ALL. You will be initiated into energies which originate from gods of our solar system and then from a higher and more perfect Intelligence which arises from AIWAZ consciousness.

As I have already told you, Crowley's Aiwaz was something else, a microcosmos of the great Macrocosmic Aiwaz. He, who we discover in the depths of our Being as ALL, cannot be tied to the past. He is past, present and future. Crowley only had his name but not his essence. Crowley's Aiwaz scorned Christ and spit on Mohammad. Ours is Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, all at the same time, because he is ALL, as his name says. A man finds in him the reflection of his present spiritual level. People who approach him openly, with love as the essence of their beings, will gain from the depths of the cosmos an incredible cosmic love.

Brotherly, Peter

Dear Zivo,

I received your two letters, from November 17th and 27th. I was glad to hear that you received the tapes of my lectures and that you are happy with what they talk about.

I'd like to tell you something important, which will help see you through your development in the best possible way. Read these words carefully. As you

already know, Blavatsky is a source of Cosmic Consciousness of a new era because all roads lead to her. Last night, Aiwaz brought Blavatsky to me so that through her, he could deliver a message for you. In circumstances such as this, he uses more than one mediator. Blavatsky addressed me in Russian, which I was able to understand because I was in astral body from my previous life when I was a priest of Russian Orthodox Church. She said in verbatim: "Ken Hamilton had only discovered transplutonic planet Isis. When you, Peter, initiate Zivo in Aiwaz mysteries, he will discover all the secret planets, not only one." That means that you'll become a Cosmic Being who will, through Enlightenment, perceive himself as cosmos. Then Blavatsky reported information about your magical abilities, and she also said that she initiated you into a magic of the highest cosmic level in which unification of positive and negative cosmic polarity happens not on physical level but on a level of cosmic consciousness. She also told me that the two of you were a magic couple for Slavic nations and that she was born in a sign of Leo so that she could most effectively fit with you.

I believe that you will feel a strong energy in this communication of Blavatsky and AIWAZ because she is an instrument for transmission of Aiwaz's energies in his Russian vibration. Allow me to tell you, that at certain moments, especially when I am writing to you, I become one with Aiwaz and consequently all energy which flows from me to you is really HIS ENERGY. When I open up completely, and I am able to do so in special moments, I AM AIWAZ and when you come here, you will also become one with HIM and after that your consciousness will never be separated from him. Because HE chose you! You are the essence of the element of fire which is closest to Him, because he is the pure akasha.

Brotherly, Peter

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The conveyer belt at O'Hare Airport in Chicago was getting empty fast. Just a few people were waiting. I glanced over at several single men because the rest were families with children and married couples. Two men had beards. None of them looked like Peter from the photograph. Where is he, why wasn't he waiting for me as we agreed over the phone? I put my suitcase next to me and a bag over my shoulder. How much longer should I wait? The conveyor belt stopped moving. It was empty. Everyone left. I was standing there trying to decide what to do. A new group of passengers filled the room. A flight had

arrived from San Francisco. From the opening on the conveyor belt, a new heap of luggage appeared. No use waiting any longer. I followed the sign for a taxi stand.

A chubby African-American woman drove the cab. She stopped her taxi in a quiet street in front of a new fifteen-story building. With masculine force she got my suitcase out of the trunk and with a gloomy expression took ten and half dollars and left without thanks. I entered a glass hallway. Inside the door was closed. In the middle of the hallway behind the closed door was a stand covered with thick transparent tile, with tenant's names on it. The name before last was Peter's. I rang the bell and the red light next to his name came on. I waited for a little while and pressed the button one more time. There was no reply. Something bad had probably happened, there was no doubt about it.

I took my luggage and stepped outside the building. Just a few people were on the street. A lonely runner in a jersey and shorts moved rhythmically, swaying his arms and hairy legs. I stopped by a small laundromat where some overweight, middle-aged African-Americans were sitting waiting for their laundry. It was getting dark and chilly. The bank of Lake Michigan could vaguely be seen at the far end of the street. It looked as large as the sea – you couldn't see across it. Dampness and cold wind from the lake was freezing my fingers, and I regretted not bringing my gloves. I was very tired. I had to find a place to sleep tonight. I turned around. There was nobody on the street. I took my I Ching book from my bag. I looked at the hexagram which I gotten before my trip: *"A traveller is lonely on his journey, tired and in a bad mood. The feelings of happiness which he had at the beginning of his trip fade away and he is looking for a place to rest his head."* I never suspected that the hexagram would become reality, literally. Something unexpected had happened to Peter, I was sure of that. He hadn't come to the airport and he wasn't at home. Or he was testing me in some way?

I walked the opposite direction from the lake. At the first crossroad I looked left and right. There was no sign of a hotel anywhere. I read the name of the street – it was Delaware. I turned right. This was a busier street than the other with more people and cars. Street lamps were turned on. I was hungry. I stopped in front of a McDonald's, thought for a moment or two, and continued to walk down the street. The strap on my bag was painfully pressing my shoulder. There was no hotel in sight and the street seemed endless. I turned around and began to walk back. I remembered my first night in Stockholm, at an overnight stay for bums on Slusen, Nail Becic. What should I do? How much longer should I walk around Peter's building? I didn't know where was he working or whether he had any family in Chicago. It was completely dark when I came back in front of his

building. I pressed the intercom button next to Peter's name for a while. No answer.

I decided to walk in the opposite direction this time, grab a cab and go to the closest cheap hotel. It was night time. I touched a pocket-knife in my jacket. I decided to come back to his building one more time in the morning. If I don't find him, I'll go to California to the Zen temple where Bob Metro lived, the man I corresponded with for quite some time.

"Bogdan!" The shout roused me from my thoughts. Before I saw him, I knew it was him. He approached me with wide open arms. He looked the same as in the photograph, but younger. I had imagined this encounter and lived through it so many times. Now I was standing on a windy street, with a suitcase in my hand, totally exhausted and numb when I saw him. He embraced me tightly, saying a couple of indistinct words about the change of time, the plane and airport. I was stiff and he let me out of his embrace.

"Give me your suitcase so I can help you. I live a hundred yards from here."

"I know, I looked for you there already."

"Goodness, how did you feel when you didn't find me? What an unpleasant misunderstanding. Give me your bag at least."

His voice was deep and he talked a little faster than over the phone. I understood what he was trying to tell me. "The time you gave me was New York's time. Chicago is one hour behind New York. That's how we missed each other. I didn't expect to see you on the street."

I looked at him while we walked. Disappointment from the beginning. Although he looked the same as in his photograph, the impression was somehow different. He was dressed in wrinkled pants, held up by a thick rope instead of a belt, faded shirt of thick cotton and a grey padded vest over it. His woollen cap came down to his brows. His beard was long and thick, with a few grey hairs, and the rest of his face was shiny from sweat. In the photograph he looked like some Russian monk from a faraway Siberian monastery, hard as a monument, or an ataman from Caucasus from the time of Stenka Razin. He was of my height but substantially heavier and looked taller than he really was. He reminded me of the untidy Americans who cruised through Europe in summer, dressed like hippies and carrying backpacks. He walked slowly, shifting his weight from one leg to another. "The most important thing is that you are here. We'll have enough time for our work."

He spoke slowly, in a deep voice, and my impression changed yet again. Now he looked like a middle-aged archaeologist who didn't care about his appearance and who digs, eats, and sleeps with his workers.

He unlocked the glass front door through which I had looked with longing two hours ago and took me into the elevator. It felt warm after the cold and damp wind from Lake Michigan. He opened the door of his apartment and, letting me in first, he said: "We'll leave our shoes here. Do you want to take a shower right away?"

"No, I am too tired."

"Let me show you around."

By the American standards, the apartment was cramped. It had a small kitchen and two rooms. The entire floor except in the kitchen and bathroom was covered with dark red synthetic wall-to-wall carpet. I smelled the strong scent of incense. With a wide gesture, Peter showed me a small room: "That's my ritual lodge." There was no bed in the room, just a Japanese tatami. Shiny black fabric – silk or sateen, covered the tatami. Under the window, on a metal stand, was a black, square mirror. It was big and looked like an architect's drawing desk. To the right of the door was a sofa of soft brown leather. There was no other furniture in the room except paintings on the wall. I recognized some from the photographs Peter had sent me in his letters. The largest painting got my attention. It was hard to grasp what was on it. It was made using painted circles, similar to the technique used by the Croatian painter, Bahunek. It was hard to distinguish a human figure in the painted background. It reminded me of the Lisher's colour test plate. The figure was seen for a brief moment and then it blended with the background. Peter caught my look. "Aiwaaaa-zzz-z", he said, imitating the buzzing of bees.

"Is that his portrait?"

"Conditionally speaking, it is. This is how I saw him once in my consciousness. Let me show you the other room, where you'll sleep."

The long hallway that connected the room and doors to the left led to the bathroom and kitchen. The second room overlooked the street. It was considerably larger, separated in two by a thick, cherry-coloured velvet curtain. The window covered the entire wall and to the left Lake Michigan could be seen and to the right Chicago's center and many skyscrapers lit by numerous lights. The sky was reddish like the reflection of a faraway fire. The back part of the room, separated by the curtain, was filled with furniture. In the middle was a dark, massive wooden desk and a couple of smaller cabinets and trunks against

the wall. Two long swords under the painting attracted my attention. I expected smaller swords handy for rituals like the ones we'd used in Stockholm during rituals with Haling. These were massive, so even a strong man had to hold them with both hands. Among the many paintings on the wall I recognized two reproductions which I'd seen in Ken Hamilton's book: a "Monster from the Lake" and "Fairy of the Lake Lay". They were copied in a naïve style. Only the paintings of Aiwaz impressed me. I recognized him immediately. His image was again hard to distinguish from the background, like a patch of fog from the depths of the cosmos. He had a golden light around his head - or was it a gold aura? I looked at both paintings alternatively. His image appeared and disappeared. I had a moment of doubt: a universal Brahman divinity with an aura? The painter had gotten something wrong.

"You should take it easy," Peter said. He changed had from his hippie clothes to a long cotton dress which came to the ground. Now he looked much taller and larger. He took off his socks and sat on the sofa, tucking his bare feet under him, looking me attentively.

"Finally you're here. We can talk a little."

"I am very tired and sleepy."

"I understand. You have been travelling for a long time and this unpleasant misunderstanding... You should get a good night's sleep. I am not going to work for two days, until you get used to things."

I sank into a soft chair and felt the urge to lie down and close my eyes. Peter was looking at me closely, smiling. "You look the same as in the photos you sent me."

I shrugged my shoulders. I could hardly keep my eyes open. What I had expected from our first encounter disappeared completely: identification with a Teacher who I'd been with in former lives, mutual experiences, and flashes of consciousness which illuminate the path of faith. Nothing of the sort, only a wish to sleep. He nodded his head. "Important work is ahead of us. You'll rest for a day or two and then we'll focus on rituals. We'll do them regularly. We need to prepare your personality as a vehicle of manifestation. Feel like you are at home. Don't hesitate to look at my things freely, papers, letters... you can read them if you're interested, you'll find many things in boxes, chests. If you get hungry during the night, help yourself from the fridge, an apple, anything you like - some people like to eat at night. I'd like you to stay here a long time, six months, if you can. You are so exhausted; you can barely keep your eyes open."

"Yeah, terribly exhausted."

“Sleep now, we’ll talk tomorrow.” He got up easily, unusually agile for his heavy body. “Good night.”

I sat at the edge of the bed for a while, feeling heaviness in my head, disappointment, reconciliation with the disappearance of my hopes. I had to lie down. I undressed and stretched out on the bed. The pillow smelled faintly of perfume. As if some woman had used it for so long that washing couldn’t get the scent out. A woman? That relaxed me completely. I saw clouds and Nenad’s image smiling at me. From a hazy background, Stevica emerged running toward me carrying arrows in his hand...It was snowing somewhere. I walked over it and I wasn’t cold. I saw a glacier. I reclined with my back on sand and slowly began to glide downward. I glided and glided...slowly immersing myself into warm water. I was deeply under water. I heard faraway, hardly audible voices and then silence, silence...A tiny light flickered in the distance.

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Half an hour or more I was in bed, drowsy. I heard Peter in the kitchen and the sound of water from the bathroom. How is this going to turn out? Reluctantly I had to admit that I was completely disappointed. Peter seemed to be a person with a lot of knowledge but the story ended there. I hadn’t come because of that. He was not the man he presented in his letters. He was an eagle who cried loudly but couldn’t take off. Even a man more naive than I wouldn’t believe that he was Ipsimus and a chief of the cosmic council of Grand Masters who ruled the fate of the planet. But he wasn’t crazy, either. He was an ordinary man and as such could never develop me into a cosmic magus. That was nonsense. I thought of everything I hated about myself – fits of anger, aggressiveness, readiness to sneer at others, the need to relieve my intestines, morning breath, and – my hopes which made me travel half of the world, that all of that would disappear in some mysterious way.

My disappointment slowly turned into self-animosity. I was the greatest fool I knew and I had taken off on yet another trip to find that out. I had invested everything into a golden egg, but it had cracked and now the stench was spreading around me.

The acceptance of that notion brought me short-lived relief. This will be a good way to finally grow up emotionally. However, could any occultist meet my expectations? People were so surprised when they met me: “I imagined you

differently”, ”I was sure that you were a little older...” I remembered Haling. For a long time I only saw a cook in him. He was a cook but an occult expert as well. I saw the image of Roshi, who Astrid had an affair with. Only during our first meeting did I see in him an enlightened sage. Later I thought that he must have lived a good life in Sweden due to his abilities to mystify matters which anyone could find already digested in books. If I had met him someplace else, I would have bet that he was just a foxy peasant from some Asian godforsaken place. Thanks to his ability to mystify things, he banged Astrid. Enlightened sages? They banged each other behind my back like lean pigs. Then Ken Hamilton! Like some pedantic accountant or postal clerk, pale and a little swollen in his ironed suits which he wore trying to create the impression that he was a member of the English upper-middle class. And, all the sciolargs with dirty nails and greasy hair, who appeared to be effective individuals but only in roles which they had been trained for. Once outside this impersonation their main concern was how to pay the rent and car instalment. Astrid had quite a bit of knowledge, but she fell in love easily. At one time I could do with her whatever I wanted; she shoved money in my pocket so she could keep me close to her.

Suddenly I reached a decision. Chances were that I had made a mistake, that I would turn out to be a stupid fool with naïve expectations. I’ll stay here for a month and postpone all conclusions until then. Then I’ll tell him what I think of him and our mutual errors. I felt better.

The curtain which separated the room in two opened and Peter’s face appeared. He didn’t have his glasses on and he wore the long robe from last night, with a silk cord around the waist. His hair was still wet from the shower. “Good morning, Bogy. Did you sleep well?”

“Mmmmmmm”, I nodded.

“Did you dream about something?”

“I don’t remember anything.”

“I dreamed quite a bit. I couldn’t interpret them; dreams are sometimes strange.”

Mother of God, Ipsisimus who didn’t know how to interpret his own dreams! Every old woman in Eastern Serbia can do it. Still, I remembered the decision I’d made and suppressed my critical thoughts. He walked to the window and looked outside. It was a clear day. The noise of the city was coming through the closed window. From plastic boxes, some climbing plants with dark green leaves and no flowers, grew next to the window. On the window ledge I saw a small watering can which looked like a toy.

“I always wondered what Yugoslavs were like. I sometime mix up Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Most of my students were from Haiti. I have a couple of Russians and Poles but you are the first Serb. You know, I felt your strength, all the time. You are fire. That excited me.”

His last words stirred my caution, was that the rattling of a snake in the grass? I had to clear any potential vagueness about our relationship, as soon as possible. I didn't know what kind of attitude he expected from me. “Your letters had a great influence on me.” While I was saying those words I felt a weak echo of my previous expectations. As if those letters were not written by the man sitting across from me. “Written words have never seemed more alive and powerful. I wondered many times, why did you choose me? I dreaded that one day you would tell me that you'd made a mistake. Sometimes I thought all kinds of things. That you are...” I hesitated for a moment, and then just said it, “a homosexual.”

His expression didn't change. He watched me without saying a word, waiting for me to go on.

“I figured that was stupid, it was probably my anxiety from facing significant changes. America is full of homosexuals, I thought, you didn't have to bring someone from the another part of the world for that.”

He nodded and smiled. It was easier to go on. “I wondered how you found me. I know that there were many indications – my name and the rest...I had many insights as well, that I wrote you about it. Sometimes I thought that it was the fulfilment of the wildest boyhood dreams. Still, I doubt it all, very often. I thought that we both were making a mistake, that we were driving each other crazy. The history of the occult is full of it. For example theosophists...Many brag about their contacts with the Great Masters, convincing one another that they were the chosen ones. This whole story about Krishnamurti and the second coming of Christ...”

He sat in a chair across from me watching me fixedly. Finally, he said: “The fact that there are thousands of bad painters doesn't mean that the great painter doesn't exist. Naturally, bad painters believe that someday, the world will recognize their greatness. What differentiates the Great Master from a dilettante is his work. I discovered you by reading the akasha. We were together many times. Memories from the remote past break through our consciousness with difficulty, especially at the beginning. Later, it's easier.”

I thought for a while. “Why didn't I have any memory of you during my processing in London? In Sciology I revived memories from fifteen to twenty

lifetimes before this one; they were all painful memories, murders, violence, nothing valuable..." I stopped for a second. "Actually, I do remember one occult experience. It was probably at the Atlantis. I was a priest and during a ritual I sacrificed a woman in a temple...That is my current wife. Terrible experience..."

"Memories with importance for a present moment come back to us. When a man goes to Sciolargy for processing, he experiences memories which are significant for that situation. If you were a Hindu, probably you would have memories of rituals in the goddess Kali temple."

The sound of a police siren was heard from the street. Stroking his beard with his right hand, Peter went on: "You are approximately three hundred trillion years old, measured in earthly time. You appeared an unlimited number of times in different bodies, like an actor in different roles. To say that you are forty years old would be the same as telling an experienced actor touring some province that he began acting half an hour ago – when he appeared on the stage in the provincial theatre. Do you understand?"

"Will I have any memories of my work with you?"

"Even if you try to avoid it, you wouldn't succeed. Memories about our work will emerge after the initiation weakly at the beginning, but much clearer later on. In fact, in your unconsciousness rests a very powerful conviction that you're the magician chosen for Aiwaz's mission. Your attitude on a physical plane also confirms that." He looked above my head. Squinting his eyes, he looked into the distance like he was remembering something, and then, he simply said: "Would you have even come here if something wasn't forcing you?"

I wanted to say that I was perhaps curious, desiring to achieve occult powers, looking for an adventure or that I, honestly speaking, had perhaps made a fool of myself, but every single thought somehow vanished before it developed. I didn't say anything.

"Actually," he continued still looking above my head, "your letters were unmistakably signs from Aiwaz himself. He used you to send me messages." I swallowed my spit. He appeared mesmerized like he was in a gentle trance. "Do you remember one of your first letters, in which you asked me if there were any contradictions in your horoscope? That morning before I received your letter, I fell into a deep trance. Aiwaz, speaking directly to me, gave me a significant message. I wrote down both my questions and his answers. The pressure of energy was extraordinary – at some point blood ran down my nose. He told me that I would create a new system of magical cosmic initiation by which I would,

above all, expand the spirituality of two people: a Sagittarius and a Scorpio. While I was recuperating after the contact, I was in a great torment – who are those two people? How will I get in touch with them? I was exhausted and thought that a walk would help me get back in shape. I went to the post office to collect my letters from the post office box. I was in delirium in entire time, like after an electric shock. I was certain that the solution would appear suddenly from an unexpected source. It's always like that. Does that happen to you, too?

Without saying a word, I shrugged my shoulders and he went on: “Usually I get about twenty letters a day – I have an extensive correspondence with people from all around the world. This time there was only one letter. I opened it without looking for the sender's name.” He stopped talking for a moment and looked straight at me. His voice became deeper and his pupils widened. I felt excitement coming over me, fear and veneration, it was hard to say. He sipped his tea slowly as if giving me time to pull myself together. “Do you remember your first letter? It began with ‘Dear Teacher, I have a question for you. I am a Sagitarius...’ I didn't read the whole letter, just looked at the signature. That was your first letter, which you signed simply as Zivo.”

Peter smiled with the corners of his mouth. “Aiwaz guided your hand while you were writing that letter although it is not apparent to you now. The same evening I received the continuation of His communication.”

I felt vibrations in my hands, plexus, and around my mouth. My disappointment was disappearing. A wave of energy filled the room becoming very intense. There was no need for words. I was at the right place, for the first time in my life I'd stepped into a holy place. Like he was reading my thoughts, he drank his tea and said: “That is how the Path is pulling us toward it.”

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Americans say “downtown” for the city center. Until now, I thought it meant some lower part of the city. In the downtown was the post office where Peter had his postal box. He typically walked to the post office along Michigan Avenue as some kind of daily ritual. It wasn't noon yet and there were not many people inside. We stopped in front of symmetrical rows of iron boxes. He unlocked his box and took out a handful of mail with coloured stamps. We walked back to the apartment again, and half an hour later I was sorry Peter didn't drive a car. On the ground floor of some nondescript building of grey brick

was the bookstore “Osiris” and Peter took me inside with the confidence of a regular visitor. The red-haired salesperson with a freckled face smiled at him warmly and said something which I didn’t understand. “Yes”, he said “time changes. Bogy, you can have a look at the books.”

I sensed an assumption in his tone that I hadn’t had many chances to be at such a place. I came closer to the bookshelves on which books were sorted according to topic areas. The excitement which I always feel in front of books disappeared quickly. The majority of these books I have known for a long time. I found them in the catalogues of publishers or I saw them in bookstores in London and some I knew even earlier, at Oke Vilkinson’s in Stockholm. Many I owned or had read. Several books on the use of crystals in therapy were new to me. There was a photocopy of a manuscript written on a typewriter “*Znus is Znees*”, an autobiography of Russell, Genesthai, a great disappointment because of his uneven style and extreme vagueness. Three notebooks were fifty bucks. Looking over my shoulder, Peter read the title of the first notebook in my hands and said: “You have that at my place.”

On the shelves next to the cashier were crystal balls of assorted sizes, tarot cards, and sticks of dry yarrow with manuals for I Ching. It was a well-supplied bookstore, where you could find anything you wanted in one place. But I didn’t experience the shivering which used to engulf me when I was looking at occult books. I stood in front of them as if seeing withered loves which were now only memories. In a sad moment, I wondered what had happened to the young, voracious reader whose eyes had widened before every new title, who now felt curiosity mixed with satisfaction that the time had come for immediate experiences and confrontation with the true challenges. The game with books was over. I didn’t feel sorry when we left the bookstore and walked to Peter’s home.

“Peter, who is the owner of Osiris? The red-haired girl?”

“Dorothy? No, she only works there. The bookstore was recently bought by a Polish guy – Kopetsky. Dorothy’s the daughter of a Moon.”

“You mean a witch?”

“Aha, and a real one too. There’s a lot of fire in her. She was born in Aries and her ascendant is in Saturn. We have known each other for quite some time. Her group has been active in Chicago for over thirty years. Dorothy is a fine girl. Are you interested?”

“She is nicely built but she has bewitching eyes.”

“What kind of a witch would she be without the bewitching eyes? For a while she was my favorite Shakti. We performed exciting sexual operations. That was in the past, when I hadn’t been in touch with Aiwaz yet. Now I don’t need a Shakti. For you, the ninth level is okay. After the initiation, you’ll get in contact with him mainly through Shakti. Don’t forget that you have Venus in Scorpio. Classical astrology considers it a bad position for Venus, but in the New Eon that’s the best position for sexual magic.”

I was about to ask how I could get in touch with her but he said: “Are you hungry? It’s lunchtime.”

We walked to a Mexican restaurant, “Amelia”, toward the end of Delaware Avenue. Addressing the waiter like an old acquaintance, Peter ordered burritos with cabbage salad and a small bottle of red wine. I had a coke. I wanted to continue the conversation we had started. After a few bites, I asked him: “In sexual magic, everything is narrowed down to the use of strong emotional energy, right?”

“Not only that”, said Peter, chewing with his mouth full, “Dynamic psychology – they probably taught you that at the university – uses many metaphors to explain the functions of the human spirit. For example, when some contents are suppressed, they will still find ways to come to the surface of consciousness. It tells us we’ll get better if we release the suppressed. That is a classic, often quoted approach. Which is the strongest form of energy in human beings? Sexual, of course. What’s fascinating is the encounter of the ancient tradition of tantra yoga and quantum mechanics. You said you were fascinated by quantum mechanics? No wonder, it aims at the very heart of things.” He was slowly chewing, with his eyes half-closed; it wasn’t possible to determine if he was judging the taste of the food or carefully choosing which thoughts to express. “I don’t want to bother you with theories, although they are fascinating to me, but....you should know that the bases of everything is Heisenberg’s assertion that atoms were not things, that is material objects.”

He finished his glass of wine and signalled to the waiter to bring him another bottle. “What are the main characteristics of quantum physics which are scaring off so many people? Coincidence, superfluosness, and inter-connection. Coincidence on a human level is spontaneity. Coincidence or spontaneity of an event is the core of every romance. Superfluosness is an even healthier approach to humans. Treating humans like a web of potential possibilities and not like fixed structures is a very healthy approach.”

“One member of the Odin Brotherhood in Stockholm told us similar things. He was fascinated by the similarity of quantum mechanics to mysticism.”

“He wasn’t naïve,” said Peter. He talked between bites, slowly, as if he was equally enjoying both the taste of the food and the sound of his own voice. “Interconnectedness, which John Bell called nonlocality, is the core feature of quantum mechanics. It is fascinating that the Hindus pointed that out three or four thousand years ago.... after them the qabbalists as well. However, their approach was quite abstract, like other serious philosophical disciplines. Quantum mechanics is all-inclusive. In every appearance, in every smile of a beautiful woman, in the smallest particle of her body, the entire universe is embodied. Every fool understands that the ocean contains unlimited number of water drops, but only sages know that every drop contains the entire ocean. Blake perceived that with prophetic intuitiveness a hundred years before Heisenberg and Bell and expressed it with a magnificent verse – to see eternity on the palm of your hand and the entire cosmos in a grain of sand.”

“I don’t see any relation to sex in that.”

“It exists. Quantum physics, tantra, and thelema all have close contact with sex and at the same time with religion. Every religion has symbolism, right? Christianity has the cross, Islam the half-moon, pagans the pentagram, Buddhists a wheel and so on.” He laughed deeply from his body: “Crowley would turn over in his grave if he heard that, but that’s the way it is.” He took his fork, stained with tomato ketchup, and lifted it to the height of his eyes and stared at it. “The fork is indicating to us a world of possibilities”, he continued. “In a particular situation only one thing can happen. Tantra, like quantum mechanics, sees the future like a web of open possibilities, like the teeth on this fork.”

I was slowly guessing at what he was aiming at. “Borders are not clearly defined?”

“Right,” he said, blinking, satisfied. “Possibilities are defined only by intentions, the way you define one moment in time. Those are much wider possibilities than when you roll a dice – then you have only six probable outcomes.”

“That has nothing to do with sexual energy.”

“Yes it does, and a quite bit as well! It is the most powerful tool for transforming potential into actual manifestation. In quantum mechanics, it is called a collapse of the infinite wave into a particle or limited manifestation. If more energy is entered in that process, the manifestation is more obvious and more stable, although sooner or later it must break into a wave again. In the *'Book of Law'* it is a contraction of Nuit, the goddess of infinite space, into the

individual being or Hadit. You are one and the other, infinite and limited, masculine and feminine.”

“The transformation of potential into manifestation: Theoretically, I understood that in Stockholm, but there isn’t much of it in practice. Crowley died in an old people’s home in spite of his many magical operations. Why didn’t he collapse the infinite wave of possibilities into a decent living in his old age?”

“Crowley? He misunderstood many things and paid a price for it. He didn’t succeed in discovering the secret meaning of the 'Book of Law'. Egomania seized him; he believed that he was a logos of the new eon while he was just an ordinary scribe, although a scribe with quite a bit of knowledge. After all, his destiny was prophesied in the "Book of Law". Tragically ends a rooster who believed he was an eagle.”

“In Stockholm, a woman initiated me into thelemic magic, but I was disappointed. It was not nearly effective as everyone talks about.”

He finished the wine in his glass. “Yes, there is a lot of exaggeration, but isn’t it everywhere? Look at psychoanalysis. Four years you have to spend on a couch and pay a great deal of money to find out why you’re lacking an erection? Priests widely preach that God is good and you should pray to him to realize some wish: a child’s health, spiritual peace at difficult moments, even rent money. However, true believers still die in car crashes, although they believe that God is good and pray to him, priests and saints die of cancer, although they are presumably closer to God than others. Napoleon knew how the grace of Providence was manifested. God is on the side of the one who has the strongest battalion, he said.”

“Are you trying to say that everything is craziness? Then what’s the use of all these....occult systems, the magic and rituals...forty years of meditation in a cave?”

“It depends on the level where you want the achievement. On an above-physical level of existence, the intention is achieved very quickly. For the physical level, it takes time. Naive practitioners want to realize material achievement very quickly but it happens very slowly and the realization never corresponds to the idea in full. Crowley drove thousands of naïve people crazy by his definition of magic as the ability to attain changes in accordance with our own will. Dion Fortune is closer to the truth. You know her definition – magic is the ability to cause changes in consciousness. Do you understand? IN CONSCIOUSNESS! Our ego knows there is a great difference. It wants

accomplishment in both material and social reality. While man is functioning on the ego level, he cannot understand that.”

“Then, there is no difference between a madman and an enlightened man? In the consciousness of a madman, anything is possible.” My voice became irritated again.

“Of course there is. An enlightened man is capable of functioning on both levels and knows which level he is on.”

“In my consciousness, I am completely happy, satisfied, and perfect. But I’d like to be like that on an earthly level.” I began to speak English fast, swallowing sounds. Bending his head to one side, he was following me with difficulty.

“That’s a mistake. Where do you think your dissatisfaction comes from, if not from consciousness? Moreover, you would realize every intention very quickly if your consciousness was clear. The lack of realization means only one thing – you have counterintentions in your consciousness, totally unconscious, which are askance with what you’re trying to achieve on an ego level.”

“What should I do?”

“You should clear yourself of opposite intentions and then you’ll have mainly harmony between what you want and what you can achieve. Don’t feel hurt by what I am going to say. You are not a layperson but you have some lay notions of what you should be like when you get enlightened some day. The sooner you get rid of those ideas, the better.”

“Aren’t we all gravitating toward spiritual development and higher levels of consciousness?”

“Yes, but to that development people attach many illusory expectations which originate from the ego. You have probably noticed that the people who are gathering around us have certain unrealistic expectations: they are surprised when we are nervous or afraid, when we raise our voices or have an argument, if we to light up a cigarette or drink a glass of hard liquor. Not to mention if we are attracted to beautiful women or God forbid, young men. Before they reach a certain level, people have an idealized image of a mystic, magician or occultist as a being entirely free from negative feelings, who in all phenomena of life sees only God’s mercy and infinite love for everything He created. Naïve people believe that God’s divine spirit resides in us and from it we spontaneously and unflinchingly radiate happiness, joy and tranquillity in every situation. Who wouldn’t want that? However, during spiritual development, we all discover in

ourselves a black shadow which is agitating, shivering from positive and negative feelings, longing for love and often fearing the loss of someone close or our own death. Isn't that right? We despise this shadow and search for books, systems, and teachers who will show us how to control it, not realizing that such a desire is yet another ambition of the same shadow. At the deepest level, it is the same as the transcendental state toward which we gravitate throughout life."

"Then, there is no difference between a spiritually developed person and the rest?"

"Of course there is. Such a person lives in harmony with himself and the rest of the world. Harmony is simply the non-existence of contradiction in his consciousness. Remember that, because it is the key quality of enlightened people. Such a man has no contradictions in his consciousness! Seeing one in the foundation of all things, there is no contradiction. That's why duality is the symbol of evil." With his index and middle fingers he drew the letter "v": "Those are the horns of the devil, I and non-I, good and evil, spirit and matter... Those messages are everywhere, it's hard to avoid them, yet people interpret them erroneously until they open wide their spiritual eyes. In the Bible, Adam and Eve were thrown out of paradise when Adam tasted a fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. You remember that, right? It was, actually, the tree of opposites and of course he became aware that there is good and evil, beautiful and ugly, pleasure and pain. In other words, from a state of oneness he stepped into this dual universe built on polarities and contradictions. Are you following me?"

"I never thought of it so explicitly, but I agree."

He nodded, satisfied: "The usual way in which a man tries to solve his problems is - elimination of the contradiction, the one he estimates as negative. Man's rigid belief is that the life would be perfect if he could remove all negative and unwanted polarities. Life would be paradise on earth if man could eliminate illness, pain, suffering, death, so that everything would burst from health, happiness, eternal life. World religions promise exactly that - but of course in another world. Paradise is interpreted not as a place where the pairs of contradictions are overcome, but as a place where the positive halves of pairs are stocked; hell is a place where the negative halves are banished. The cause of all our troubles is a tendency to experience the polarities of this world as separate and irreconcilable. That's why I gave you this lecture on quantum physics."

I wanted to say that I didn't see the connection between physics and the duality of the universe but I gave up. I closed my mouth and eyes tightly, waiting for him to go on.

“You see, in short, modern physics irrefutably proves that reality, scientifically and truthfully understood, is nothing more than the unity of opposites. What lay people believe they acquired through experience and what religions teach are not irreconcilable opposites; they are complementary aspects of the same reality. The reality of a sea wave cannot be found in its peak nor at its bottom but in the unity of both extremes. Without one the other doesn't exist.”

He nodded like he understood my unspoken confusion and then continued: “For the majority, it's hard to believe that all opposites in this life - for example, subject and object, happiness and suffering, life and death - are inseparably connected one to another. Why? Because during life, we invest enormous energy in maintaining their separation and that energy, like an iron wall, keeps them polarized. What is important for us as seekers of truth, is to recognize that the division exists only in our consciousness. But through consciousness it is also possible to supersede it. Our inability to perceive that the opposites are only two names of the same process allows religion to easily convince us that there are always two processes which work against each other. For that reason, as a famous physicist affirmed, the immature person is unable to comprehend his own error and subsequently he is sentenced to spend life in a lunatic shifting of duality: subject-object, spirit-matter, space-time, life-death...”

He finished his drink smiled with satisfaction, and continued: “The good news is that in our consciousness there are both limitations and the keys to freedom. That is why in the occult traditions of the East the man who sees through illusion is called a liberated man. He is free, free from illusions about the pairs of opposites. In his search for the truth he doesn't incline toward one opposition, opposing the other, but he supersedes both of them. He's not in one or the other, but in the center of his consciousness, which transcends both.” He kept quiet for some time, like he was weighing the effect of his words and added: “That is the true meaning of the religious expression “heaven's kingdom on earth”, but preachers have forgotten it long ago.”

I couldn't think of anything sensible to say. His presentation was persuasive yet it disqualified many of the beliefs I'd held for years: controlling the unsettled spirit, conquering weaknesses, developing a common “I” into a being gifted with occult abilities, knowledge, expanded consciousness...What's the use of spending long years meditating in Himalayan caves and novice's cells, renouncing the world, sexual abstinence, scorning material goods? And the assertions he made in his letters that I would be Aiwaz's messenger for Slavic nations and that he would, through secret rituals, turn me into a cosmic Ipsi-simus...That I was a partner of Blavatska in the past, that I will discover the essence of my being as endless cosmos...There was no end to the promises which his unrestrained imagination produced, inflaming my feelings.

“I don’t know what to think...Your letters created totally different expectations in me.”

“Didn’t you have those expectations before my letters?”

I was about to say “no” but a number of images from the past appeared, which stated the contrary. Every new book, new teaching or teacher stirred my hopes about the existence of miracles on the “other” side. Even slightly stimulated, my expectations rose to the sky like the flames of fire. However, I have never achieved a more powerful eruption of hope than when I’d read his letters, holding them with shaky hands.

“Not to that extent.”

He was gently stroking his beard with his right hand. My disappointment didn’t move him; he reminded me of a well fed-cat who was contentedly licking his fur. “Wait for the results of initiations, and then make your conclusions. Maybe you came here to get rid of your unrealistic expectations.”

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The touch of a hand woke me up. Peter was standing next to my bed. “It’s time to get ready. Take a shower first.”

I was standing sleepily the shower and the warm water didn’t wake me up. I turned on the cold water and it covered my body with goose bumps while it ran down my back. I couldn’t bear it for very long but my head cleared and my thoughts were sharpened. I rubbed myself with a big cotton towel that warmed my skin. I put on white cotton underwear. Peter was waiting for me, wearing a ritual dress of gold brocade with red and black ornamentation. He had a high tiara on his head and a censer in his hand, which he was swaying left and right. The thick smoke of frankincense filled the room.

“Let’s go” he said and walked toward the ritual room. I walked behind him carefully so as not to bump any of the chests in the hallway. The room was faintly lit with two candles burning on the floor. The half-darkness and strong scent of frankincense reminded me of a graveyard. Peter approached the magic mirror in front of me, and with one move of his hand he removed the silk cover. The mirror was square and framed in very smooth acrylic. It was black like freshly made asphalt. I saw my reflection.

“Take off your undershirt and remain in your underwear”. I heard the flickering of burning frankincense in the censer. I remembered my first initiation into the Odin Brotherhood. My eyes were covered then. Now I could see so I wasn’t disoriented in space; nevertheless, I was equally tense. I stood in front of the mirror and my skin was covered with goose bumps from cold coming from within.

Walking around me with the censer, Peter began to sing. On his feet, he wore soft slippers of red silk in which he soundlessly moved his heavy body like he was gliding. His voice, deep and resonant, emerged from his wide, bulging chest as if coming from a deep cave. He sang in Hebrew mixed with English and some parts of the evocation were in the Enohian language. He was calling on archangels, winds from four sides of the world, the divinities of vanished people, and finally Aiwaz. He stopped in front of me, concealing the mirror with his, murmuring unintelligibly part of the evocation. It was a confidential invoke, but very penetrating because his whispering didn’t originate on his lips but deep inside his chest, from the diaphragm. It echoed like the whispering of an actor on stage, which the whole audience could hear.

He sprinkled me with salt and holy water three times. Drops glided across my face, slowly rolling over my lips and chin to my neck. With his right index finger he put some oil on my forehead, solar plexus, and shoulders. “Kneel” he said in a ceremonial voice. I lowered myself on my right knee. He put the censer on the floor, took my face with both hands and, with intense concentration, blew his breath three times over me. Deeply and soundly he took a breath, so that his chest lifted up and expanded like a blacksmith’s bellow: “Have mercy, Aiwaz!” His voice was now even stronger and it hummed like the sound of a contrabass. “Have mercy, Aiwaz! Have mercy, Aiwaz!” His head was close to mine but I couldn’t encompass it clearly. His eyes were glassy and wide-open. I felt feeble and then a much stronger feeling of fear. He was in a trance.

“Raise, Zivo!” he commanded and his trembling voice now had a sharp metallic note. While I was getting up, he stood on my left side, begging for Aiwaz’s mercy incessantly. My knees felt weak. I remembered people who had fainted during rituals and I tightened the muscles in my thighs and stiffened my knees. Calling Aiwaz, Peter came up behind me. His voice was growing stronger and stronger. I wondered what people in neighbouring apartments thought, because this must have been heard far away. My leg muscles strained against my will and now even my back and neck felt as stiff as wood, while the tiny muscle fibers in my eyelids were rapidly trembling. I wanted to tell Peter what was happening with me, but no sound came out from my throat. Forcing my will, I tried to shout - I couldn’t inhale, my chest had turned into inflexible armour.

I was overwhelmed with fear. Did he know the state I was in? His trance could last for hours. From a spasm of my chest muscles, I began to choke. In the mirror before me, I saw the movement of shadows like barely visible clouds moving in the night sky. Suddenly, my tension diminished, and my breath came out from my lungs in a noisy exhale like air from a balloon. I saw myself far away at Grandma's estate. I was running across the meadow holding a clay figure in my hand. With beaming face, I was choking from feelings of happiness, my heart was heard beating in my chest. The meadow was covered with flowers; the sun was shining softly like it was lifting up from the horizon and my leaps over flowers and grass were becoming longer and longer. The meadow turned into a sea, the green waves with white foam on top were hitting the shore, and tiny water drops cooled my body with their freshness. The last leap turned into flying. I left the earth far below, seagulls with black eyes and dazzling white feathers screamed around me. I wanted to stroke their feathers but I heard Roshi from Stockholm call out from a great distance: "It's always different!" He had Haling's image, with smiling eyes, his chest arteries clearly visible through a transparent body illuminated with inner light.

I was in front of a huge snake which encircled the planet like a ring. Its tail turned into feathery clouds and disappeared in the distance. I wanted to see how far it spread in that heavenly blueness so I immersed myself in its two shiny eyes, like two sparks. A knife with silver handle was pressing into my palm when I struck. The blood gushed from the swan's chest, striking its white body and marble altar. I knew now that I could write a poem which the world has never heard. The essence of the poem would be the indifference of a creator toward its creation. But I heard a sound which made my whole body tremble. Aaaaaaa-iiiiiii-vvvvvv---aaaaa---zzzzzz. With pain in my eyes I saw the distinct contours of Peter's face. AAAA-iiii---vvvv--aaaaa-zzzzzz, he wailed with his powerful voice. The sound disappeared in the room, trembling in a hesitant departure.

Peter was looking at me fixedly.. There was too much frankincense in the air and I breathed heavily. "Are you able to walk? Now, get dressed." His voice was deep and sound but without its former tension, like the sound of an instrument with loosened strings. My hands were totally weak, I couldn't make a fist.

"How do you feel?" There was slight worry in his voice.

"I am completely worn out."

"You should have a good night's rest. Drink this." He handed me a glass. I swallowed a few sips. It was hot lemonade sweetened with honey. I took a deep breath and finished the lemonade. "I am going to lie down," I said. He nodded.

With stiff, frozen fingers, I put my undershirt on and slipped under the covers. I rolled my knees up almost to my chin, put my hands around them, and closed my eyes. I heard Peter moving behind the curtain. What's next? Through the window I saw the pink night sky over Chicago. I heard the sound of a police siren from afar. Someone was dying at this moment, someone was being born; people somewhere experiencing happiness, misery, passion, and suffering. Everything was the way it has been forever. Could I become someone else or something I was not now? What happened to me in the ritual? Were those mystical visions or hallucinations? Will I really turn into Ipsisimus, some cosmic being, strange and unknown to me who will proclaim new truths? I needed a good night's sleep now and a chance to forget what had happened. It was like part of my life had been abandoned on the other side of a bottomless abyss. Softly but powerfully, I was overwhelmed with sorrow.

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I came back from Chicago with my tail between my legs and I crawled into my room to lick my wounds like a wounded wolf. Since my return, very little remained in my memory: faded black-and-white images of sitting with Peter in a waiting room at O'Hare airport, silent, everyone in their own thoughts. The questioning looks of Mladen's and brother when they came for me at the airport. If those two had any hopes when they saw me off for Chicago, they were now gone. My appearance said quite a bit, I didn't have to explain anything. My encounters with Nenad and Lydia, drinking morning coffee in the kitchen, and Nenad's hasty rummaging through my bags and inspection of the gifts I'd brought him, couldn't move me from the spiritual lethargy I fell into.

A difficult period began for me. Like being squeezed by invisible pliers I was overwhelmed with the feeling that my efforts of many years were wasted; that none of my previous experiences had been worthwhile and the worst of all, was that there was nothing I could direct myself into. While I walked the streets of Belgrade with my head bent, I was aware of talking to myself, as if I was severing my life so far with a sharp knife: I was a lost man. That was the simple and rough truth. There was no reason for joy, nothing worth wishing for, nothing I could fight for. Moreover, I couldn't completely experience my misery. Most of the time, I was in a state of numb hopelessness.

Mystics call this mental state the dark night of the soul. Many times I have said to people around me that it was darkest before dawn – however, it was of no

help when you are stuck in mud, with no exit in sight and no end to misery. I wasn't consoled by the notion that Peter was foolish too and that sooner or later he was going to sober up painfully, as well.

Old Lon Hibner called this state the end of the game. You played a big game and when it ended, you remained empty, without a goal to strive for. All you could do was to find a new goal and start a new game.

To find a new goal? I knew I had to find something worth fighting for, but my fate, that old whore, was that I didn't have enough strength to even think about something new. I leafed through books, I'd read a long time ago and new ones which I'd brought from Chicago. I didn't have to read them beyond the second or third page, I knew what was written.

Sex was uneventful. Lydia was like my sister, I didn't find her desirable. She had been tolerant of me for many years but now she was noticeably different. Whenever she mentioned my stay in Chicago her face turned into a grimace of suspicion as if she had a sour taste in her mouth.

Young men and women started to group around me, bursting with the desire to experience what Crowley, Steiner, Yoga teachers, and new occultists wrote about. They listened to my words with wide-eyed interest, believing it was a privilege to be close to me and ask me questions. My hesitation to answer questions asked too many times, they interpreted as the thoughtful reservation of an expert in occult wisdom. However, I didn't feel any satisfaction in that notion, just boredom and resignation.

I wasn't in the mood to start a guru-game, although the conditions for it had started to form. One time, during conversation and tea, the Alchemist explained a guru formula in a dozen sentences, about which a whole book could be written. His explanation that a man needs to be his own teacher I experienced as a game to tempt and test me. However, he stood behind his words. When I indirectly suggested to him that he be my spiritual teacher, he looked at me with his small eyes for a while, and then gave a lesson which was hard to forget.

"Do you know what that means? That means that I have to take responsibility for your entire life, your flaws, and vices...troubles which will happen to you and your family. I have played out that game until the end. The lemon has been squeezed, not a drop is left." He looked at the engraving on the wall showing Paracelsus, as if he was consulting with him, and then added: "I am in spiritual retirement and believe me, I honestly earned it." He smiled, which wasn't customary for him. "I'll tell you something which might surprise you. Taking over the role of teacher is just another game, although it often has tragic

consequences for the player. Do you wish to become the Great Teacher, the man people look at with open mouths, who is asked for advice and consolation; around whom circulate a torrent of diligent scholars and attractive female students?"

I lowered my gaze. He had touched an invisible nerve hidden deep inside me. I wanted to say that attractive female students wouldn't be my main motive, but he went on: "To become a Teacher is easier than you think. The high level of consciousness is not indispensable nor is the perfection. What's needed is that you fill up some time with a certain attitude. Before you answer a question from someone in your proximity, it is necessary to keep quiet for some time, looking him straight in the eyes and then slowly nodding your head. You should allow rumors about your powers to circulate whereas you shouldn't ever say anything clear or unambiguous. When strange coincidences happen, put on a serious face, refuse to comment on them, and soon enough you'll gain a reputation as a miracle worker."

He smiled, but not at me. It seemed he was smiling at his younger days and the multi-layered experiences which reflected in that smile. "Later on, some miracles really will happen, and because people believe in you, they will interpret them as a consequence of your invisible intervention. And when miracles don't happen, in spite of your followers' expectations, you should, with a sad face, complain about their lack of faith or explain to them that the axes of evil of this universe never rest.....Your successes will be remembered, your failures will be forgotten, and you will end up with an ego as tall as a memorial."

That wasn't the game for me, by any means. However, there was no other game. Actually there was and it was by far the worst game of all, the game of painfulness and despair with no way out in sight. For things to hit bottom, I had to find out that the strategies which I once successfully used to solve to my problems no longer worked. More precisely, I didn't have the slightest desire to apply them. My condition was so desperate that every thought of doing something to change it I experienced like sliding over polished glass. I was lonely, apathetic, hopeless, and aimless. There was a feeling of despair in everything I did. Isolation, which I used to like from time to time, was now hard to bear. I was in a no-way-out situation like in the twenty-nine hexagram of I Ching, The Abyss. You can't go forward, can't retreat, and it was unbearable to stay in one place. All you have left is to endure. The hexagram explained my condition precisely, but how to endure? I felt lonely all the time, with everyone I was with, immobility, aimlessness, and infinite hopelessness.

I sent Peter a letter describing my plight. I didn't want to blame him but nevertheless my description of the horrible state I was in sounded like an accusation. Fourteen days later, I got his answer.

Dear Zivo,

I am glad that your trip back home was safe. Allow me to say that your wife's expectations for some physical changes and cheap parapsychological abilities to emerge are hard to understand. I have no doubt that during your stay here what happened was supposed to happen, since on higher levels there are no signs which speak against it. You reached the Messianic level of consciousness, and it is a cause for many negative things which happened to you, including the one you mentioned in your letter. It is simply a psychological reaction to a significant change and such a reaction is always proportional to the amount of change. Negative forces are resisting you more powerfully now, using elements which are dearest to you, in regard to which you are the weakest, for example your spouse, possible divorce, the question how your son will endure it, and similar issues.

Now that you have achieved a spiritual transformation but you're still residing in a human body, you have to understand the cosmic responsibility you assumed over. You'll suffer more but there will be more energy in your experiences because you will live the reality more deeply and profoundly.

In regard to your critical point of view of Crowley, I can tell you the following. He was a perverse person, obsessed with sex, but he was a man of great knowledge. If that wasn't true he wouldn't have the reputation he has in occult circles.

All I can tell you is the following: get back to your work. In the past you had received powers which were outside of you, now; you have to take them from outside of you. However, be assured that I don't mind the criticism which you're expressing toward me. The Teacher must die in a student so that he becomes an active factor in the transformation of collective consciousness.

Brotherly regard, Peter

His answer didn't calm me. Words and signs which once put me into an elevated state of mind now sounded like empty clichés and sugar sweet messages of the New Age mediums, spiritualists, and theosophists.

People close to me tried in their own way to redirect the water I was drowning in. My uncle was a distinguished professor at the university, and for him, everything outside a university career was a futile waste of time. I had to

laugh, in spite of my troubles, at his advise on how to get back on track. He called me on the phone and in an enthusiastic voice he announced that significant opportunity had come up: "The Fourth High School has an opening for a psychologist... since your colleague took off on maternity leave. It is for half of the total number of classes and the pay is only half...but it's a start....I could say a word so you can get that job."

"I don't need a job. I need something else."

"Eh, Bogy, Bogy", he said disappointedly, "you should ask yourself how old are you? How long will you drive yourself crazy with things which bright people stay away from?"

Stojan Filipovich also tried to bring the prodigal son back on the right track. I knew I shouldn't speak to him about myself in such a state, but the need to unburden myself was stronger. He listened impatiently to my complaints, waiting for me to pause so he could offer his solution: "Listen," he said, leaning over to me significantly, "what happened, happened. It's not too late even now to focus on real things. Go to the University Library and look through magazines printed in the last couple of years. Magazines, magazines, magazines - that is living science. That is what's up-to-date. Pick a topic and get to work. I am certain you could publish something serious."

Seeing the expression on my face, he added: "OK, you could continue with those books for your own needs, no one would object to it, although you understand that you are in this state because of **those matters**, but serious science is serious science, you'll agree with me."

I didn't have the strength to argue with him, to debate, to convince him that I would be unhappy even if I published an article in scientific magazines, which the majority of my colleagues wouldn't understand, and no one would read anyway. It was no use, for him there was no other world outside of Plato, artefacts, digs, and tombstones two thousand years old, and he was genuinely unhappy when you took him, even for a short while, outside that world. "Stojan," I said, with defeat in my voice, "Should I spend half the year writing an article such as *'The influence of collateral sensory observations on the self- perception of middle school students?'*"

Insulted, he pulled back as if confronting drug addict who wasn't reacting to competent therapy. "As you wish, but I can see the state you brought yourself into, because you didn't deal with those topics. What you are talking about, to find out who you are and so on...well, the greatest brains in the history of civilization didn't succeed in solving that. Besides, you are looking for answers,

surely in the wrong place – among lost people, neurotics who are escaping from real life...Forgive me, but I must tell you about Schopenhauer's experience, something I read a few days ago...OK?"

I shrugged my shoulders indifferently: "If there's nothing else you should be doing with your time..."

"Schopenhauer - a great philosopher, you'll agree with me – was once walking in the park deeply engrossed in his thoughts. Absent-mindedly he walked off the trail and stepped on a manicured lawn. The park attendant, as serious about his job as any German, ran over to him and screamed at him: "Man, you're walking on the grass. Who do you think you are?" Schopenhauer, roused from his thoughts, sadly said: "If only I knew." Stojan looked at me meaningfully and concluded: "Schopenhauer didn't know, and you thought you could find that out all these years among failed people."

"They thought your Socrates to be an idle man and a corrupter of young people. Now you are teaching your students that he was a brilliant mind. And he was the first to say: man, know yourself."

"My dear friend. To compare Socrates to your idle losers...No use talking to you about that. I will tell you for the last time – get on to serious work. Look at the magazines and psychological annals, find a topic, and make yourself do serious work."

I'd had enough of his advices and approach to life where one reads a hundred books and then writes a hundred and one; in which everything about life is already known except life, and you never find out who you are. "Stojan," I said, trying to sound cynical "maybe annals are right for you, so stick to them. I prefer orals."

He knew how to control himself. He stepped back from my words like he was dodging spit and, after thinking for a while, he said conciliatorily: "You are oversensitive now, and apparently I didn't use the right approach. I'd like to help you. I am not a psychoanalysis specialist, but there are so many serious works on the psychology of personality. They certainly describe the state you are in."

I felt sorry because of what I had said. He really was trying to help me. "Thank you for your tolerance, old chap. But those books contain less speculation over the essence of my problem than I have. Those ossified disciplines which you call real science will do anything to escape the truth. At the university I studied about the experiences of other people from people whose experiences were reduced to just retelling the experiences of other people, and even those were chattered over too many times."

“You’re wrong, my friend! That’s how science is developing - we are climbing on each other’s shoulders. What has greater value?”

This was a conversation between two deaf men. I felt in the deepest nucleus of my being...no, I didn’t feel - I knew - that everyone who didn’t experience enlightenment, no matter how much literary knowledge they collected or the status or titles they acquired, I knew they were living in the land of ignorance. I was dying in despair, but I wouldn’t give away any of my spiritual experiences for the lofty titles people decorate themselves with all their lives. I tried to contain myself so I wouldn’t insult him, but unsuccessfully:

“Greater value? As a psychologist, if I wanted to compare values, I am certain that the time I spent peeling potatoes and washing dishes in Stockholm, although I didn’t discover who I was, was worth more than four years of studying psychology. The moment of enlightenment of any man is worth more than all the books of the great philosophers. Actually, that moment is worth more than all the books ever written. When I say this I am not forgetting Homer, Shakespeare and Dostoevsky.”

I felt drained and empty, but I was an empty man who spoke the truth about himself, not an empty man who lied, and there was some consolation in that. I took a deep breath, once, twice, like I was lacking air: “In that lifeless and innumerable multitude of written papers, which you call scientific psychology, there is nothing unattainable, there’s neither real drama, nor the clash of freedom and imprisonment, not the slightest indication about the way to final liberation. And, that’s what I need.”

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The question - who am I? - was pointless to discuss; it had to be experienced directly through the Intensive of Illumination. This was written in the magazine “*Human Potential Resources*” which I received four times a year. A copy of the magazine sat on my bookshelf for days, unread. I drank my coffee, turned the television on and off, shaved, and sharpened several. I got the magazine and went through it. It had articles on Tai Chi Chuan, Hata Yoga, meditation courses in London, how to see aura....

My gaze stopped at the framed announcement. I read it slowly two more times. It was written as an informative article and in the end there was an invitation for a 3-day Intensive of Illumination course. Bjorn Haling headed it. A

faint interest numb in me for a long time, stirred inside me. It could hardly be anyone else but good old Haling. Slowly, a familiar sensation was growing inside me: the expectation of excitement, a new adventure, an encounter with myself and yet, like a shadow, the thought that I was wasting my time again.

There was a contact telephone for Maurin Peton. Only 55 English pounds, the course lasted three days, during which time you could find out Who You Are. I played with the thought for several minutes whether I should go or not, but that game quickly made me tired. I left the magazine on the table, and ate two plates of warm sarmas. I hardly got up from the table anymore - I had begun gaining weight, I ate several times a day, and fat was gradually piling up around my waistline and chest, but I didn't care.

I believed that nothing could move me. I had seen, heard and experienced everything. But I was wrong. Fate always has a stronger card up its sleeve and reveals it when we least expect it. Haling was an expert; my thoughts grew into conviction - he would never get into some obscure business. If I could believe someone, it was him. I remembered the rituals of initiation he headed in Stockholm, after which we were all shaking from charged energy. What had happened to him in the years since then? Would he open up some new world for me again?

I rented a room in a small, cheap hotel in Earl's Court in London. Among young people that part of the city was known as the Kangaroo Valley because the staff was mainly from Australia and New Zealand. While I was unpacking, and placing my bag in a shabby armoire, I felt like ants were crawling in my stomach. That sensation wasn't in itself enjoyable but I accepted it with pleasure this time. After so many months of dull emptiness and aimlessness, I felt like I was living again and that something was waiting for me which I had to confront. I knew why I had come and what I had to do now. I took a bag with things I needed for the Intensive and a sleeping bag and walked out to face the enemy.

The Intensive of Illumination was taking place at the East-West Center, close to a underground on station Finchley Road. The underground was almost empty when I came out. A simple map was drawn on the backside of the invitation for the Intensive and I walked down the street looking at house numbers. Across the street, two men walked parallel to me, one fair-haired and middle-aged, with thick glasses, the other younger with long hair receding in front. They both carried backpacks with attached sleeping bags. They must be going to the same place, I thought. The man with glasses, like he was reading my thoughts, waved to me to cross to their side of the street. "Intensive, ah?" he said, giving me his hand. "I am Jeff Chandler." The young man mumbled that his name was Dave. "Is this your first Intensive?", Jeff asked.

“Yeah, but I have gone through many similar things.”

“This is different from anything else you’ve experienced. Intensive of Illumination is exceptionally difficult but the reward is ample. I am a psychiatrist but I can tell you that they don’t teach these things at the university.”

We entered an old building with a dark brick façade. A bookstore, now closed, occupied the ground floor, while a macrobiotic restaurant was on the first. The Intensive was taking place in the attic. The floor of a huge room was covered with a cotton cover and big yantras in vivid colours, used by followers of the Arika system of Oscar Ichazo, hung on the walls. A group of about twenty people was already there, dressed in sporty gear and old clothes and with sleeping bags. From their conversation, it was obvious that many of them knew each other from before. Haling wasn’t there. I was right, the Intensive participants were no different from the people who gathered at AST, Arika, Sciology and around the spiritual gurus newly arrived from the East.

Experience from previous courses taught me to position myself in the corner of the room, hoping that no one who snored would get next to me. I wasn’t surprised that it was cold in the room; I had brought along thick undershirts, long johns, and a sweater. A tall, slim woman in her forties, with prominent incisors like a rabbit, asked us to pay for the Intensive. “I am Maurin, from Canada,” she said with a lisp, “I am the organizer of this Intensive.”

We sat on the floor, gathered around an armchair which was elevated on a plank platform, where the Master would address us. There was tension in the air, most people were silent, deep in their thoughts, and those who talked did it in a whisper.

Haling entered with light, steady steps, swinging slightly in his walk like he was examining the firmness of the floor with the tips of his feet. He sat in the armchair, bending his legs under himself, and looked around the room. He hadn’t changed much. He was few pounds heavier and his once blond hair was now greyish, ash-coloured, while the wrinkles on his face were more prominent. For some time he silently surveyed the gathering, and when he spoke, his voice was less resonant than I remembered and deeper, while his speech was slower.

“My name is Bjorn Haling. I will be your Master at this Intensive of Illumination. Your only goal at this Intensive is gnosis or illumination which is, by its essence,” he leaned forward in his chair, accenting every word, “the direct experience of truth.” The people who were sitting next to me leaned over, as they were trying to meet Haling half-way. “There are no guarantees that you’ll experience illumination”, he continued. “Sometimes everyone at the Intensive

experiences it, sometimes no one...The creator of the Intensive of Illumination, Charles Pegden, better known by the name Yogendra, recognized that usually about one-third of the participants experience that state of consciousness. I agree with him, but it is unnecessary to burden ourselves with percentages. The advantage of Yogendra's system is that you don't have to believe in anything new. Moreover, every belief that you now have presents a barrier which separates you from the direct experience of the truth. There is no need to change anything in your life; one should only be open to anything that comes into your consciousness" – he opened his hands with palms up – "then your prospects for the direct experience are the greatest."

Some of the participants looked disappointed after hearing that illumination wasn't guaranteed. In the invitation for the Intensive and the announcement in the newspaper, that outcome wasn't stated; however, Haling spoke of it as a possible result.

"Mystics, saints, and gnostics experienced the divine light of the soul," Haling continued. "The objective of schools of mystery in Ancient Greece was to awaken the memory of that inner light which is the essence of the human being. Direct experience of the light was called gnosis, liberating knowledge. That is the initiation of the truth itself. Experiencing a fundamental shift in consciousness, the neophyte steps into the temple of light, changed forever." He stretched out his arms again, and with his eyes closed, and an expression of assumption on his face, he simply said: "Illumination, gnosis, a direct experience of truth is our invisible church. The door to truth opens by itself to open hearts." He pronounced the words like he was following his own reflective thought, without conscious direction, and shifted effortlessly from one sentence to another as if stepping on stones in a stream.

He took a few gulps of water from his glass, placed it on a small table next to him, and continued: "Those among you who are at the Intensive for the first time, or have been here before but didn't have a direct experience of truth, will work on the first koan: Who am I? That question went untouched through whirlpools of human history. With us in the West, from Socrates to the modern times, it is the basic question of the human being. Others can work on the koans: What am I, What is Life, and What is Another."

I couldn't sleep until morning. I fell into numbness. Images whirled before my eyes. I re-evaluated my motivation for coming to the Intensive and estimated my prospects of success, but I did all that like I was crawling through a fog. I went to pee two times, drank some water and had coughing fits. I couldn't find a comfortable position and tossed from one side to another, on my back and

stomach, but no position allowed me to fall sleep. I had an unpleasant emptiness in my stomach, my palms were sweating, and I had gooseflesh over my body.

At six in the morning, when we were expected to begin our work, Haling gave another speech. He pointed out how illumination was different from apparently similar but fundamentally less valuable experiences such as insights, euphoric states, and occult phenomena. “Some of those experiences could follow the illumination, but it could be experienced without them, peacefully and imperceptibly, so that sometimes people don’t even know that they were enlightened.”

That part of his presentation sounded illogical. How was it possible for the enlightened man not to know he was enlightened? As if he was replying to my criticism, he said: “People often think that it is impossible or that such less valuable illumination is experienced only at our Intensive while in oriental systems genuine enlightenment is only experienced where there is no doubt about what we experienced ...It’s not so. Have you heard of the experience of the already renowned Sixth Patriarch of Zen? At one time he was permanently enlightened but he wasn’t aware of it. We believe that we would always recognize a deeply enlightened person. Sometimes it is possible, but not always. The sixth Patriarch went to a Zen temple and none of the hundred monks recognized his state of consciousness. It was discovered by his predecessor, the Fifth Patriarch, when he gave him a problem to solve...but, this is all known from the literature and stories told to this day.”

He explained the technique in detail again, stressing that it was impossible to say precisely how it should be done, but that every one of us would discover it individually. “Simply, have the intention to directly experience your object – yourself, life or another being. How to do it no one can tell you, because the word 'how' marks the process, and in the direct experience of truth, there is no process.” To help us accept that strange direction, he used metaphors and anecdotes from Zen and Sufism.

He mentioned the barriers we had to go through before we experience illumination. “If you tend to get headaches, you will get one now. Whoever has inclinations toward diarrhea or constipation will undoubtedly experience it in a very unpleasant way. If you are prone to fears, you will experience here a genuine fear. It is important for you to understand that barriers are not outside of you, something separated from you, which prevents you from reaching the truth. They are part of you, those are states which appear because you are trying to access the truth. If you left the Intensive, the moment you walked over the threshold, they would disappear.” He surveyed the whole group. He seemed relaxed but serious. He slowly nodded several times and then, as if he had

remembered something very important, he said: “In the fight for truth at the Intensive of Illumination you must go through crisis. There are two simple axioms in reference to that. Remember them well! What turns on the crisis, also turns it off. That means: you did the technique and you fell into crisis. If you keep on doing it, you’ll get out of crisis. The second axiom is even simpler: The way out of crisis leads through crisis! Simple, isn’t it?”

Those were Lon Hibner’s axioms. Haling drank from many sources, but it didn’t matter.

“Do you have any questions in regard to what I have told you?”

“You said that sometimes a man doesn’t know that he is enlightened. I want to know when I achieve enlightenment. Is there a way to do that, or not?” asked a young skinny woman with small eyes and pointed nose.

“Sometimes it’s obvious and sometimes it isn’t. But in the second case, you shouldn’t worry. That’s my job.”

A powerfully built young man in a Norwegian wool sweater, raised two fingers as if he was in a classroom and when Haling nodded in his direction, he said: “As I understood it, during our work we’ll experience a headache as a barrier, if we are prone to it. I’m not, but I had a headache last night before the Intensive began and I still have it.”

Haling continued to nod. “Those things happen. For some people Intensive begins significantly earlier, when they make a decision to take part in it. Rest assured, you’ll get out of that state sooner or later. Any other questions?”

I raised my hand. “I have one. You mentioned the axioms of the Intensive of Illumination....But those are the axioms of Lon Hibner, the creator of Sciolargy.”

He didn’t show in any way that he recognized me. “That is quite possible”, he said accepting my words without resistance. “Before he created the Intensive of Illumination, Yogendra was one of the leading sciolargs in the United States for fourteen years. Maybe he took those axioms from Hibner. The important thing is that they are exceptionally applicable in the Intensive. That’s why I mentioned them....Any more questions?”

No more questions. Haling’s gaze slowly hovered over the participants for a while, like he was counting us, then he loudly exhaled through his nose and his voice filled the room: “I’d like to tell you one more thing....To achieve illumination isn’t easy, but the Intensive was created for people, not for super-

people. Thousands have gone through the Intensive of Illumination and hundreds have experienced that state of consciousness. **This thing works.** The state of consciousness, direct experience of the truth about who you are, what you are, what life is and what another human being is, may last only a few seconds, but it radically changes a person. After that experience, you won't be the same. **Your life will be different!**"

He spoke in a deep voice, but considerably faster than I expected. I remembered him from Stockholm – during conversations and rituals he spoke steadily, with controlled peacefulness, and his body was immovable except when he performed ritual gestures. Now, he was accenting his words with his entire body and his facial expressions changed quickly. That didn't belittle his persuasiveness. He spoke from within, enthralled, and he succeeded in communicating his beliefs about the values of illumination to us.

"Forget all the problems you have at home", he went on." Focus on only one thing – illumination, and nothing else!" He stared somewhere in the distance and, as if was remembering something important, he added: "I'll tell you a story which illustrates the kind of attitude you should have during the Intensive... One time in India, some robbers caught a rich merchant. They wanted to make him tell them where he hid the money, so they tortured him. They tied him onto poles driven into the earth, so he couldn't move, and they put burning coal on his chest... Then, the sound of a trumpet was heard... they were the soldiers who had been chasing the same robbers for quite some time. When they heard the sound of the trumpet the robbers ran away and the soldiers continued to chase them. The merchant remained tied up with the burning coal on his bare chest, ... What was he thinking at that moment?" Haling wrinkled his forehead. "Was he thinking about his business, friends, family, and problems of everyday life? No, he was thinking about only thing – how to cast off the coal from himself!" Narrowing his eyes like he was squinting from strong light, Haling leaned forward in his chair, and emphasized: "Think about one thing only – how to cast off the lies which are burning your soul! How to experience gnosis or the direct experience of the truth! **How to become enlightened.**" And then in a peaceful voice he concluded: "Let's begin. Find a partner for the first exercise."

Exercises or dyads lasted 40 minutes and in every one we had a new partner. We were to sit on the floor facing each other. One partner was active, trying with simple intention to achieve direct experience and all contents that appeared in his consciousness he announced aloud to his partner. The other, passive, gave a command, and then kept his full attention on the active partner trying to understand him the best he could.

Already after breakfast I felt pains in my butt from sitting on a hard floor covered only with a thin rug; also pain in my back and nausea. I became critical of the room, other participants, Haling, and his assistants. There were three of them, two long-haired young men and a girl with a pimpled face. They had no place there. They hardly differentiated the illumination from a coca-cola advertisement.

The majority of the participants were below my level. They hadn't come for answers to koans - Who am I, What am I, What is Life, and What is another human being; they had come to make confessions. The passive partner had to listen carefully to all that the active one was saying, and many abused that role. Confessions sometimes sounded like those typically made at a bar. People rarely took responsibility for unpleasant experiences which happened to them – always someone else was guilty: parents, brother or sister, unfaithful partner, government, life, fate...As time went by, more and more criticism was directed at Haling. Some participants knew quite a bit about his private life. I heard that he banged almost every female student of his, that he was a bisexual so that he couldn't leave his male students alone either, that his wife found consolation with other men, and that his son was a junkie. While I was following those statements, I was looking furtively in his direction. He sat immovable, with his attention concentrated on the participants.

During the entire first day, I felt awful. I waited for mealtime like it was salvation, although the macrobiotic food was tasteless. We got thin soups in which a few beans were floating and a thin leaf of cabbage. The cooked turnip, without any fat or condiments, which we got for lunch, I left uneaten after the first bite. I was nauseous, salty liquid poured from my mouth, which usually happened before vomiting. I stood for some time in the dirty bathroom, leaned over the toilet while saliva poured down my mouth, but I didn't have anything to vomit.

Late at night I was awestruck by the desire to sleep. The pains in my back grew much stronger, my neck was stiff and above my right eye I felt a pain as if a nail was wedged into my forehead. My consciousness was divided: I wanted to go back to the hotel, eat dinner and plunge into bed, to leave behind this room with sweaty, unwashed people whose mouths were lined with white scum, out of which came laments, moans and heavy stench; at the same time I knew that my shrewd mind repeats the same game with boring persistence on every such occasion. I was no longer a man who started many things only to leave them behind convinced of their worthlessness. I had learned to experience things until the end, because the end was the right moment to assess the value of any system.

Before midnight the gong announced that the day was over. Like a dizzy boxer I went to my corner to sleep. Without taking off my sweats, I crawled into the sleeping bag like a baby to his mother's lap. A part of the sleeping bag, which has a hood, I put over my head. My nostrils were filled with the stench of my own sweat, which was coming through my clothes, but I didn't mind it, it created in me a faint sense of security. The last thing I heard were Haling's words: "Stay with your question!" I drifted to sleep, slowly sailing away from the shore into a feathery fog.

"Stay with your question!" With those words Haling woke us up at six in the morning. It was still dark; people were dressing in the darkness, coughing from the cold and sighing. The bathrooms looked like the army's; there were several faucets above the long, narrow metal sink. Who am I? Cold water got into my nose, waking me up. I gargled it and spit, scraping with my toothbrush the thick layer of greyish stratum from my tongue, which had collected overnight. Next to me my last partner from the night before, a long-haired young man with a pale face, noisily blew his nose, alternatively closing one nostril. "Terrible night," he told me softly, looking at me askance, "I didn't sleep a wink." I wanted to tell him that I had slept like the dead, but I swallowed my words. He might think that I was bragging because our efforts from the day before hadn't bothered me. Silent, I only nodded.

In the cold room, some people were already sitting in pairs, ready for the beginning of the first dyad. Their eyes were swollen; faces exhausted and pale, looks directed at the ground or eyes closed. Haling, freshly shaven, sat in his armchair and addressed us in an enthusiastic voice:

"We're continuing with our work. In the beginning of the exercise, communicate what you experienced last night and then continue to do the technique of the Intensive. Remain conscious of your goal – illumination or the direct experience of truth, which alters life. All other contents are only tricks of your mind, to avert you from the basic goal. Don't give in! In this life we all have an exactly defined time before we leave it. Today is the first day of the remaining part of your life. Use it wisely!"

In the first two dyads I had trouble pronouncing the words, as if they were glued to my mouth, but breakfast woke me up completely. I felt really good then, for the first time. I begin to distinguish how to do the technique, contents which were coming I announced unpolished, freed from the desire to leave a good impression on my partner. On the previous day I was overwhelmed several times with the desire to present my experiences as especially dramatic and important. When you hear that everyone is doing it you lose interest in that kind of game. The first day was shallow torture in which nothing really happened – we tried

only to survive before going to bed. Now many things were happening, causing fear in the majority. A German or Austrian, hard to tell what he was, who was sitting to my right, talked gibberish all the time. He was were obviously experiencing hallucinations. A psychiatrist would without hesitation make a diagnosis of schizophrenia. In slippers lined with fur, Haling slowly and silently walked among us, without looking at the German directly, but I got the impression that askance he kept close attention on him.

My partner was a young Englishman with a skinny body and sparse beard and moustache, who spoke critically about himself: “Last night I couldn’t fall asleep for a long time. My valet was in the bag next to my feet. All the time I was afraid that someone would steal it from me in the dark. I have such thoughts all the time...” He was looking through me with hazy, goggle-eyes. “That’s who I am... my miserable property...not real money... just a couple of pounds and some change... I must face it – that’s who I am and that’s who I have always been.”

In the next dyad, my partner was the young man in a sweater of grey Norwegian wool, who I’d noticed the morning of our first day. His short hair was combed downward to the middle of his forehead and his teeth were sparkling white like some healthy animal. He paused briefly between every couple of words, and he clenched his teeth so that his jaw muscles tightened, giving his face a resolute, square shape. He had a strong voice and spoke like someone who was feeling good because of his ability to communicate honestly: “The moment I sat next to my partner I felt the desire to say something clever or acceptable...” He was silent for a while as if he was judging the accuracy of his words. “That need to be accepted or to please others makes me feel pissed off. I shouldn’t care about what others think! They won’t solve my problems. Fuck them! Fuck the whole world that pretends! Fuck a man like me for not being I really am in every second.” He went on to criticize his attitude, talking faster so that he was frenzied before his five minutes were up.

His words moved me. It was hard for me not to say and feel something similar. My thoughts were interrupted when someone behind me began to vomit loudly. “In a bag, in a bag”, I heard the assistants telling him. Haling got up from his chair and began to walk away with a disinterested look on his face. “Goodness,” my partner said through clenched teeth, although during my last five minutes he was supposed to keep quiet, “I find it repulsive when someone vomits.” At that moment, on the other side of the room, some woman began to scream. Her screaming was piercing, cutting the room in half. By the expression on my partner’s face, it was clear that he was wondering what people in the neighbourhood thought since this could probably be heard far away.

I felt good because something was happening. It wasn't only the fight with sleep, tiredness and pains in my back; new contents were coming which I wasn't aware of before, nor had I experienced them at any prior processes. It became clearer to me that my body was only a shell much larger than me and that I was sitting inside of it and through my eyes, under the forehead, I observed the partners I worked with, Haling, his assistants, and the events in the room.

On the first day we mainly produced superficial content and confessions. Now the effort was more obviously directed toward one right and deepest answer, which would represent a solution to the basic question of life. People became more engrossed in their thoughts; meditation lasted longer while the communication was shortened to just a few words, like squeezed out from us. My partner Eva, a young woman with a rough complexion and light green eyes, said she wanted to rip from herself one answer for all times. After some short-lived satisfaction, she again declared her doubts, displeasure and complaints and started a new search for a more truthful answer.

My next partner, a middle-aged Englishman, spoke with a heavy cockney accent so I had difficulty following him. He was still buried in the first phase of the Intensive, complaining about his family and society. "All officers swore in the canteen, and it was very unpleasant to me in the beginning. I noticed that they avoided me, as if my place wasn't among them. Then, I also began to swear...they avoided me even more...I felt miserable, I was a non-commissioned officer. I asked one of them, some Robert Blay – once we got drunk together and I confided in him – why when everyone swore, nothing happened...but when I swore, their faces clenched? He said something I couldn't forget all these years: Bred, it's not whether you swear but how you do it."

My attention drifted against my will to the left, at a man with a rosy face who spoke English with a German accent. "I am light", he said, with his eyes closed and a heavenly expression on his face. "Wherever I look, I see light, and that's me. That I have been forever." In the second row, a red-haired girl was sobbing, covering her eyes with her hands. "I'll die, I'll die, I'll die! I know that death is coming!"

During break and before the beginning of the next dyad, Haling addressed us in a faintly sympathetic voice: "Some of you entered into the phase of phenomenon. Others will get there soon. Those are different occult phenomena and visions, fear of death or madness, and strong attacks of laughter. Don't be afraid. Those too are tricks of your ego, your old enemy, to take you away from the truth. Just communicate the content of the phenomenon and keep going. Don't buy those lies."

I wondered if I was getting engulfed by this wave, since everything was becoming funny to me: people paid money for two days of torture, to get into a state which they could experience after a few glasses of hard liquor: intellectuals tried to leave a positive impression on their partners with long, twisted theories about life and the place of man in the universe; excited young men, stuffed with books on yoga and Buddhism, talked about themselves as atmans, authentic beings, eternal sparks and similar stale assertions.

I was even funny to myself. In spite of my efforts to immerse myself completely in this process, I remained coupled as both a participant and observer, and then I noticed that there were subdivisions as well. There was an honest observer, dedicated to what he saw, trying to understand it; a cynic who forms a judgment about everything from games learned long ago, a hesitant witness afraid that he might lose his grip and go mad himself; an observer who follows events from a great distance. The perception was that I had a group of subtenants in my head. When I tried to direct my attention to one who was in the middle of the event, then over to myself who sees and harmonizes it all, I turned into a dog running in a circle, trying to bite his own tail. When I asked myself "Who am I?", I got the answer "I am the one who's wondering." And immediately, I entered into another point of view and it is completely clear to me "I am the one who's aware that he is wondering". It doesn't end there. A thought comes into my consciousness "I am aware of being aware that I am wondering" and then a feeling that my "I" is widely spread and that it encompasses all those smaller "I's", and that there is the I who is aware of it all...and...there is no end to it.

"I am a dog chasing his own tail", I said to my red-haired partner. She squinted her eyes, trying to understand my words. But there was no other way to express it, that is winding of the eternal ball and irritated I tell her again, as if it was her fault that she witnessed my weakness "Yes, I am a dog who wants to bite his own tail".

After a short time, my irritation melted away and I entered a state of calmness, feeling like I was at the right place and that I would become enlightened for sure. I was surprised as well. In life, far away from this room where sweaty people are screaming, suffering and laughing, emotions last much longer. We are depressed for a day or two and then we have a feeling that life is what it should be, it stays with us for a while and then it turns into a state of indifferent reconciliation with people and circumstances. Here, emotions change with great speed. I am miserable, I didn't achieve anything valuable in life, no one ever loved me, I hate myself because I am worthless, and I am completely certain that these feelings will last forever. After a few minutes, they become a distant dream. Everything is good and always has been, negative thoughts are

part of the life game so as to avoid boredom. Experiences are accelerated and enlarged contradictory thoughts excluded.

My feelings of tranquillity are expanding, I stretch into infinity and everywhere I direct myself, with my eyes closed, I see parts of myself. Then I am playing some a game with a group of men and women who are dressed as Indians from the Andes. Men are on one side, women on the other. We dance to the sound of drums and simple string instruments and those sounds strike me directly in the heart. Some sing with high-pitched guttural voices, in accordance with the music, and those sounds echo against the high cliffs nearby, as if the mountains were yodelling. A powerful nostalgia overwhelms me for that life, and through squeezed eyelids, tears begin to roll slowly down my face, because that life, is already past and I am moving further away from it. I look over my shoulder at the group of dancers and one of them seems somehow familiar; then, the images fade away and disappear into the valley.

I dive into the dense greenery among long leaves of ferns, flowers of different colours, and densely-waved creepers, warm from the sun, richly soaked in rainwater, which have recently fallen. I see strange swarms of beings who live in that green sea and I can understand their inarticulate language. They are tiny fairies with foggy reasoning which somehow didn't affect their ability to completely immerse themselves in with what they are feeling.

Among the fairies one being stands out, thin, male, but with the softness of a woman in his moves and in the way he is looking at me with his slanted green eyes. His skin is shiny, a pale green colour with yellow glitters; I feel it is soft, moist and elastic although I am not touching him. I am open like the enormous pink flowers I see around me, I don't have to hide anything and mentally I ask him who he is? The being slowly turns his head but still keeps his green eyes fixed on me, so that now, he's looking at me askance like some seductive woman, slowly pointing at me with the long index finger of his soft hand. There is a secret in that gesture, but the answer is hidden, and yet another concentration of consciousness is needed so that the riddle opens in front of me like a legible book. "And who am I?" I hear myself speaking from a distance. The green fairy, who I learned to love so quickly, is becoming smaller and smaller, disappearing in the blueness of the sky and I hear my weak voice resonating, disappearing, Who am I-I-I....Who am I-I-I-I-I?

The blueness turns into the dark blue sky covered with sparkling stars. I raise my hand and it immediately melts in the depths of the cosmos. I move my head to encompass everything with my gaze and that move initiates a spiral movement of a new galaxy, which is born from a primordial emptiness. Processes are noiseless; explosions of faraway stars inaudible, as if the entire

cosmos was drowned in the dark, blue liquid, which muffles sounds. I see strange sights, unknown planets, crystal cities, and beings made of pure energy. Many symbols appear in front of me from alchemy, qabala and magic. They emerge as if from a fog, achieving sharp edges and then disappearing. I hear indistinct words, but I don't try to understand them. A forceful jolt at my shoulders takes me away from this world. "It's over....it's over! It's time for working meditation."

With difficulty, I opened my eyes. Standing above me, looking directly at me was Bentley, Haling's assistant, with his blemished face, pushing me with his hand, repeating, "It's over. The exercise is over. It's time for working meditation". Haling was sitting in his armchair with his face motionless. His blue eyes were fixed on the assistant and me. "I'd like to stay to meditate," I said to Bentley in a sleepy voice. I wanted even deeper experiences. Finally I have found the way to do it. With short-lived confusion on his face, he looked from me to Haling and finally said: "There are good reasons for working meditation", and then he added in a meaningful tone which was supposed to explain everything: "The structure of the Intensives mustn't be changed".

Meals and break times after exercises now seemed too long and unnecessary. I wished the entire time were filled with meditation; it was the key to inner worlds and its indefinite union with the cosmos. The last gong that evening caused great dissatisfaction in me. I slithered into my sleeping bag, put the hood over my head, and resolutely continued to meditate. But, without a partner, without his commands and concentrated attention, my impressions faded and dispersed. Haling's last words: "Stay with your koan!" created in me a definite idea that the Intensive should be set up differently.

On the third day the time became dense and exercises lined up much faster. Like an individual being the Intensive hurried to its end. Feelings of closeness among the participants became deeper and many expressed them openly. Persons who on a first day gave the impression of being banal, uneducated, and boring were now radiating with tangible love. At such seminars, customarily, women were unattractive. At this point, their swollen eyes and dishevelled hair, pasted to sweaty faces without make-up, looked natural and beautiful. The young man with a German accent, Siegfried, declared stridently that we were all rowing in the same boat toward the same goal. My partner interrupted her meditation for a moment, opened her eyes and nodded, agreeing with him.

Around noon, the participants for whom this wasn't the first Intensive were urging the Master to push them toward the direct experience of the truth, to give them new motivation, since without it, they wouldn't be able to become

enlightened. Yet again, at the brink of my conscience, critical thoughts of the Intensive, participants, and the Master were sneaking in, not powerful enough to develop into an open intolerance, since somewhere in the middle of my chest, I was overwhelmed with a brand-new tolerance. Based on the koans the participants had worked on, I could determine who had reached enlightenment in the previous Intensives. Those people didn't work on the question Who am I, but on the remaining three questions. The attitude of those people made me doubtful. Quietly and carefully I reported that to my partner, who was also working on Who am I. "If someone is enlightened that must be evident in their behaviour." She kept steady attention on me, but I sensed that she agreed with me. "I feel no desire for the Master to push me toward enlightenment," I said, "I came here on my own free will exactly for that. Wretched are people who need someone to push them, like cattle to a watering place."

I noticed that my attention often drifted toward Haling, who sat sombrely in his armchair, pressing his chin with his clenched fist as if he was locking himself up. "The Master said that the illumination can happen at any moment of the intensive," my partner said "and so far no one has gotten enlightened." She was looking at her lap, as if she was calculating the likelihood of that brief experience happening to someone, and then she added: "There are only three more dyads left. The Master should do something."

I remembered Haling's smiling face during the ritual in Stockholm, the serenity he radiated around him and the security he inspired in everyone. Those things were gone now. I was becoming more certain that he was desperate and that his feelings were slowly permeating the group, since some participants were becoming hysterical. I felt empathy for him and strong anxiety at how he would seem when the last gong struck and no one became enlightened. That moment was coming soon.

During the short break between two exercises, Haling said in a hoarse voice: "I need to say a few words about the situation we are all in." He looked at the floor in front of him; it seemed he didn't have the strength to confront our expectant gazes directly. Everything came to a complete standstill. He went on: "Many times during our lifetime humans are at a crossroad, but there are particularly significant moments in which life takes a turn in one way or the another. This is such a moment." He raised his head, but closed his eyes and kept them closed for a while.

"Some of you are wondering, why haven't you become enlightened? At the beginning of the Intensive I mentioned some barriers which separate you from the direct experience of the truth....but, I didn't tell you all of them. There is a spiteful barrier which people face over and over again, whenever they want

to experience the truth. That is...that is....the feeling of guilt. All of us committed some bad acts in life and deep inside we feel that we're not good...that we don't deserve such a valuable thing as enlightenment. We can do the technique for days in the best possible way, but if we are burdened with guilt we will not become enlightened."

He put the palm of his hand in the middle of his chest. The sentiment he conveyed was that he was one of us and that he was tormented by the same trouble. He opened his eyes, surveyed us with his befogged eyes, and continued: "How to overcome that barrier and become enlightened...There is a simple way. We can't do it for ourselves, but we can do it for others. Become enlightened for some other being, for someone who's suffering at this moment, for some unhappy child...Know that someone at this moment is crying out for you to become enlightened for him..." He paused, something had interrupted him and it could be felt how deep inside of him he was wavering on a thin line between opening and closing, surrender and retreat.

It seemed that his body was slowly rocking in accordance with his thoughts and feelings, which were crucifying him. Time was at a standstill; everyone in the room sat immovable, hardly breathing. At that moment, the chains which bound him broke and he said: "The master's chair can be both heaven and hell. It depends only on you. Until someone becomes enlightened, I am like Jesus on the cross! Take me off the cross, become enlightened for my love!"

Painful convulsions appeared on his face and two tears rolled over his round cheeks. He swallowed once, then a second time, and finally, exhaling soundly, he said: "I grew to like you very much. If I expressed all the love that I feel toward you, I couldn't survive!" He sobbed soundly, without restraint.

I was moved and enchanted. He spoke spontaneously, slowly and without hesitation, as if his words were sprouting directly from the ground. They had the incredible force and penetration of a stonemason's chisel. His transformation surprised everyone, myself probably the most, because I had seen him in different situations and was convinced that he kept his emotions under perfect control. It seemed that he was speechless because he silently showed us with his hand to begin with the next dyad.

That was the exercise before the last. At the very beginning a man with a round face and glasses with yellow metal frames, who was sitting to the left of me, hysterically screamed: "I want to experience hell! I paid good money for this Intensive and I want hell."

I worked with David, an Englishman with a sweaty unshaven face, whose receding hair was pasted to his forehead, his eyes red from crying and his lips trembling. He spoke about his grandfather's death, the only member of his family who he'd truly loved. His voice was hoarse and his fists clenched, while he spoke. "When my partner spoke of the women to whom he couldn't express his emotions, I felt a deep sorrow. How much effort do we put into withdrawing from other human beings and hiding when we feel something beautiful and deep toward them? It is easier for us to express our hatred, scorn and apathy...I have an image of my dead grandfather...lying on a table in his old suit. An odour spread from him...not the scent of a dead body, but the scent of an old man who I loved...I feel it even now. Family vultures hurried to bury him so they could take hold of the little he had, while I longed to stay alone with my dead grandfather to tell him how much I loved him...I had suppressed that desire on many occasions before his death ... Did my grandfather have to die so I would learn that because of my hesitation I shouldn't miss the most valuable lesson that life offers, the opportunity to tell the person dearest to us that we love them."

He sobbed powerfully like an animal being branded with a burning iron. A red haired woman with a freckled face, dressed in the orange cotton robe of the Bagvan Sri Rajneesh followers, who was sitting on the floor right next to him, was looking at him askance with tears in her eyes. She held her stomach with one hand and her throat with the other and began to vomit. "Breathe through your nose! Breathe through your nose!" Bentley was loudly telling her, lifting her forehead upward with his left hand. With his right he placed a plastic bag over her mouth but she had already vomited on her feet and the little rug in front of her.

Then it happened. David howled, hitting the floor with his fist below my knees. He was cursing himself, his mother, the girl who left him: "Drop dead all of you! Decay in torment...murderers, carcasses, rubble!" He was hitting the floor forcefully like he was nailing a wedge into the ground and in one moment he stopped in the middle of his movement. He was kneeling on the floor; with his right fist in the air, his eyes wide-open and shiny when suddenly it came out of him: "My God, that is me!" The red haired Bagvan follower broke off with a sigh of relief: "Here he goes!"

That's it!" Several participants laughed nervously at the same time. David inhaled, his raised fist loosely fell in his lap and he stretched back, to lean against the wall. I couldn't take my eyes off him. He was sitting with his head thrown backward, eyes closed, with a heavenly expression on his face and although he filled the entire room with his presence, for the most part he seemed to be in some other world. For those couple of moments his appearance completely changed. His face, wet from sweat, was shining; his receding hair

gave him a look of wisdom and his unshaven face appeared manly. He breathed deeply and evenly with flared nostrils and his breathing permeated the room. I had no doubt – that man had become enlightened in front of my eyes. Everyone present knew that. There was no need to say, explain or prove anything.

The gong was heard but David didn't move, as if he wasn't affected by anything in the room. The relief which I felt for a brief moment and the hope that it was possible to become enlightened was slowly turning into a wave of envy. It grew from my stomach and rose over my face so that my lips unwillingly became distorted. My new partner, a man with a grey wrinkled face, told me as soon as the exercise began: "I feel good. My ulcer's not bothering me anymore, a strange warmth has come over me, I feel love toward all people."

It seemed he was speaking sincerely, but it didn't help me. I was feeling much worse with every second, my stomach was permeated with powerful heat, which made me curl up and bend forward. While I was trying to follow his words, I was holding my hands over my stomach as if I was disintegrating or giving birth. At that moment, a red-haired girl with large extremities and a rosy face, shouted as if someone had twisted her arm. There was something in her shout that caught my attention, although I was trying to concentrate on the grey face of my partner. She was biting her lower lip and, although her eyes were filled with tears, she was laughing. I knew that enlightenment had happened again. She got up from her seat and approached the girl assistant. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She whispered something to her and the two of them embraced with eyes closed. That was the touch of the truth, I knew without a speck of doubt.

I had difficulty following my partner's words, nausea was getting a hold of me more powerfully. I felt envious many times, toward the achievements of my friends and relatives, that was the familiar feeling. I was always envious of the spiritual achievements of others. The novelty this time was its force – burning heat from the center of my body which turned my lips into a convulsion and my hands into trembling clenched fists. A powerful wave of energy coming from within overwhelmed me and, from a kneeling position it knocked me to the floor. I began to scream through, my constricted throat as if I was being skinned alive. I saw a blurry image of a dark cellar and someone closing the door, leaving me alone in the dark, and I heard my hoarse voice: "Mommy, don't leave me! Mommy, don't leave m-e-e-e-e!" While I was cramping on the floor, someone's hands held me tight, lifting me into an upright position. I heard Haling's voice talking to me calmly: "Straighten your spine! Just keep your spine straight and everything will be OK."

Heat was still burning my insides, choking me, I was able to take just a quick breath and then in a split second I saw my partner's wide-open eyes and mouth and the thought went through my mind "This one got really scared."

"Breathe deeply! Keep your spine straight and breathe deeply. Don't suppress your feelings, let them out," Haling was telling me. "Pigs, dirty pigs!" My screams were directed at the beings that had caused this state, indistinct shadows that had played some demonic game with me. The heat was subsiding, and I could take a deep breath with full lungs. Sadness and self-pity took hold of me like a good friend who naively opens himself to evil - like a curious little animal in a laboratory who doesn't suspect that it will be exposed to horrific experiments. Those were less strong feelings, the worst was over and a new thought flew through my foggy consciousness like an electrical spark across the dark sky. "I survived. I got myself out again." I groaned softly and in the room where all communication had ceased, the murmur was heard again. "That was powerful", someone said. The comment referred to my catharsis and for a moment I felt like an actor who got praised for a role well-performed.

I endured the last dyad with difficulty. My throat was coarse as if it had been scratched with a metal brush, my mouth was dry, my face and body loose. With difficulty I followed the delighted communication of a crossed-eyed girl with a round face. She intensely gesticulated with her short, fat hands, hesitating somewhat to openly express her joy because the Intensive was such a wonderful experience for her. She felt great love toward all people like never before, people were good, she had been hiding it from herself, withdrawn from life....Now she realized that those were mistakes. She continued to speak, looking at me askance, judging how much of her good emotions I could bear.

The last gong struck. Some couples embraced, others silently turned to Haling, who was sitting in his chair with folded legs. A warm smile spread over his face, filling the room with light. "Look over here, I want to tell you a few words in the end." Slowly he surveyed the entire group, nodded in his usual way and continued: "We've reached the end of our Intensive. First, let me give you some technical information...Tonight you will have difficulty falling asleep because your energy level is very high but still, try to sleep at least two, three hours. If you discover that you're emotionally unstable, take large doses of vitamin B and calcium...Don't do the technique on your own. You will not experience the illumination in that way and you can get yourself in big trouble."

The smile on his face became even warmer: "Some of you experienced illumination, gnosis, direct experience of the truth...whatever we call it, it will stay with you forever. Even those who didn't reach illumination accomplished a lot...They discharged a lot of spiritual masses and fake identifications, they

removed many resistances and became closer to themselves and to other human beings...Those who didn't achieve illumination should stay open after the Intensive, the best way they can. I don't want to console you...but sometimes that experience is achieved after the Intensive, the next day...a few days later. There are many people who have experienced that."

Haling paused even longer, searching for the right words: "I feel a need to thank my assistants: Bentley, Maurin, and Robert". He looked at them and smiled. "And to thank all of you who participated in this Intensive of Illumination. I owe you a lot. Same as you, I faced my weaknesses and had to overcome them." He swallowed hard as if he was pushing a ball through his throat, and went on: "Maybe it wasn't evident, but I sympathized with you. Your sufferings were my sufferings, your joys were my joys."

The invisible hand, my old torturer, violently grabbed me by my throat again. Behind me, a woman sobbed loudly. "We feel that, Master," the Austrian said, "and we are grateful to you for these three difficult and wonderful days." He didn't achieve enlightenment but his words sounded simple and sincere. I tried to open my mouth and say words of gratitude, but I couldn't. It seemed that God wanted us to meet the wrong people before we met the right ones and when we finally met them, we would know how grateful we should be for that gift. There was too much bitterness in me to say anything good to any man but overall I still felt a wave of sympathy for Halting besiege me. I wanted to separate myself from people, to crawl into my sleeping bag and have a good cry until the last tear was shed for all the hopes I'd missed. I didn't hide it from myself – this unusual Intensive had the power to encompass all the hopes and disappointments in our life so far. I had to be alone, alone, alone...to sail onto the vast high sea of solitude until my wounds healed. I didn't have a place among these smiling people who radiated love and goodness.

"It's time for a small celebration," said Halting.

While the room resonated with giggles, I collected my things, folded my sleeping bag with which I'd created an intimate relationship in the last three days-like with a living being-and walked toward the door. With lowered head I passed the group of people who were laughing and talking. The man I met at the beginning of the Intensive, Jeff Chandler, put his hand on my shoulder. "May I hug you?" I silently nodded; I didn't feel like hugging but he was a decent man and a good partner at the Intensive. He grasped me sideways over the shoulders with both hands and swayed his body left and right so that he moved me too. "You know," he said, separating from me so he could look me in the face, "I was very moved by your catharsis. I felt your pain like mine. Here we learn that there are other people who suffer the same way we do."

“I know. Thank you, Jeff.”

He sadly shook his head and said: “It’s not easy to get to the truth. It’s hardest to climb the straight tree. You are not staying for the celebration?”

“I can’t. I want to be alone.”

There was the usual crowd in the subway. On the street outside Earls Court Station, loud Pakistanis and Arabs fought in front of small oriental restaurants open all night. I felt I was really alone only in my hotel room. I stood in front of the mirror for a long time. My image looked strange: as if I was seeing myself for the first time. Was I sliding into madness? I rejected that thought immediately; I only wanted to give some significance to my otherwise miserable condition. My eyelids were swollen, eyes red from crying, and cheeks unshaven and dirty. I shook my head while looking at my image. If it was the easiest thing in the world to find who you are, how come I wasn’t able to do it? Before my eyes I recalled the image of the red-haired woman who had achieved enlightenment quietly and then embraced with Maurin. She did it secretly, hiding like a thief. If I had achieved enlightenment, everyone would know, it wouldn’t be like a whore, under the table. Unfortunately there was no consolation in comparison. The Intensive participants were now cheerfully laughing in the same room where my destiny was altered in the three most important days of my life so far. They had forgotten me already.

I threw myself on the bed, over the covers, with my clothes on. I had to sleep and gain my strength. When I closed my eyes I felt a vibration in my solar plexus, mouth and tongue, on the tips of my fingers and nose. Who am I? Certainly not this being reclined on a bed, shaking, in such a miserable state. This would be a long and repulsive night.

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At the Belgrade airport Muci waited for me with his mouth agape. He was a slim young man with a sparse beard, whom, I believe, I haven’t mentioned so far, although he has been in my proximity for some time. His insistence on taking every opportunity to be near me began to bother me, and his high-pitched stammer truly irritated me. It was hard to get rid of him because he was always on disposition. He came to pick me up with his car and, straining to stay decent, he was hiding his curiosity with difficulty. “At home...they are waiting for you...parents, uncle, brother, and friends”.

My stay in London had stirred the waters. I acted indifferent: “Anything new?”

“We are all waiting to...to...hear from you.”

“Oh, I see.”

Sitting in the living room were Mladen, my brother who had suddenly had enough of struggle for the career and became interested in “other things”, Lydia, Nenad, Mother, and Maxim Draganic. In a corner, leaned against the tile stove, my father was sitting with a confused expression on his face. The table bent under the weight of food: a huge bowl of Russian salad, Lydia’s cheese pie, mother’s cherry pie sprinkled with confectioner’s sugar, and rum cake.

“How was your trip?” Mother asked, pushing a plate of food in front of me.

For a moment I hoped to avoid answering. “Exceptional. In fact, it is hard to find the right words to describe the Intensive of Illumination and what a man can live through in three days.”

“Did you find what you’re looking for?” Uncle asked me. Although the room was filled with people, he smoked. He was holding a cigarette butt between the tips of his tobacco-stained fingers and sizing me up with squinted eyes. His eyes were red and shiny and his speech was slow. He had in him several glasses of brandy. He had visibly aged in the last couple of years and now he constantly drank hard liquor. “Mladen wants to know if you have become enlightened”, my brother added.

With the crisis behind me, I felt good. After Haling’s Intensive, I stayed in London for four more days. I visited the bookstore “Foyle” and “Atlantis”, ate the best shish-kebab at the Greek restaurant “Dionysus’s” in Tottenham Court Road, like in good old times when I was on processing in Sciolargic Church. Two times I dined in “La Cucaracha”, a Mexican restaurant in Soho and my butt got properly sweaty from the hot food. In Oxford street stores, invaded by Arabs and Hindus, I bought jeans for Nenad and Stevica. Whatever I was doing, the question who am I, came back to me. Depression and desperation evaporated imperceptibly and I had a new goal in front of me, worth fighting for, enormous like a crystal castle in a fairy tale. It wasn’t quite clear to me what had happened during those three days and nights at Haling’s Intensive, but I knew that it was the turning point in my life. A powerful decision ripened in me, almost against my will, that it was what I’ll devote myself to from now on.

Looking back at the Intensive, aside from its flaming atmosphere, it was possible to clearly and completely understand its segments. Separate elements came to me, like they were offering themselves to me to be understood. Like a powerful whirlpool, the Intensive of Illumination has a great power of absorption; during the course the division between dream and reality disappears. The Master, assistants, and participants forget that another world outside of the Intensive exists, so that a person is disconnected from states, events and visions of everyday life. The axis of all images and thoughts was the question who am I, which came back after the Intensive, in spite of my efforts to suppress it. As if the technique of the Intensive, which I needed the entire first day to master, now worked on its own and I wasn't able to disconnect it at all. In front of my eyes I saw the faces of the participants of the Intensive, their words, crying, cursing and fits of laughter, the eyes of the enlightened and images of that basement from some past life where I was left as a child. I couldn't determine when I gained the insight into the inner structure of the Intensive, but at one moment, it achieved the transparency of a clean glass.

Intensive technique, which some participants weren't able to master even by the end of the third day, didn't have illumination for a goal. It served to empty consciousness and at one moment of such emptiness man would unite with his object – himself, another human being, or life. The difference between an object and subject would disappear in consciousness-they would become one. As Peter Perriot explained to me concisely in Chicago, the main cause for man's problems - experiencing the world as a battlefield where polarities clash, was solved at the Intensive not by yearning for one of them, but by overcoming their separation.

The contacts between two people in a dyad made possible what Lon said so many years ago: When two consciousnesses oppose one unconsciousness, the break-through into the essence of a being becomes possible. In the Intensive, the goal is to balance between the individual and the group and the Master's task is to make the participants to harmonize in order to achieve it. Also needed is the unified effect of two basic processes which empty the consciousness - meditation and communication. Through meditation a man rushes into digging and reviving the unknown while communication provides the expression of the unspoken, suppressed, and forbidden.

It seemed to me that one thing had escaped all the participants except me – the key role of the Master. Like a spider, he stays focused on the sensitive web of the Intensive and reacts to its tiny trembles, invisible to the participants immersed in their world of sticky experiences. Every word of the Master, his every act, physical or emotional, leaves visible consequences on the fluid tissue of the Intensive of Illumination. He is the beginning and the end of the Intensive. Without doubts Haling was a genuine Master. He affected me with a rarely seen

unity of intuitiveness and inquiry, because in his middle age he had acquired the wisdom of an old man but had kept the eyes of a child for seeing this world and the human beings in it.

The crucial moment at the Intensive was the emotional opening of the Master, which happened by the end of the third day. Haling would have missed it if he'd tried to convince us rationally in the values of the illumination, no such reasons would have helped. Straining to open the participants, he had to find a path to the nucleus of our beings, and that path, through his personal example, leads into the archetype, visionary and infantile, which most simple expressions are fairy tales, cries and tears, since they are concentrated at indications, alternative reality and inexpressible.

Immersed in the essence of the Intensive, I reached the answer to a question, which had darted in my head for a long time: why does Avatar, who is the embodiment of God, come down to Earth and appear through a human being? Because mankind has a need for the universal divine example, all-human and all-cosmic Teacher, Buddha or Christ whose function is, at some critical moment, to speed up the movement of the human race toward the absolute Truth. On a smaller scale, it happened at the Intensive's opening.

Haling's words in the end were true, that the Intensive was an extraordinary opportunity for the Master to face himself, to get to know himself on a deeper level and to penetrate into his own roots. Among all of us at the Intensive he gained the most. All that had become clear to me during my four-day stay, while I wandered around London, but clearest of all was my fate on the Path, as if it was carved with a sharp knife in the bark of the oak tree.

"I didn't get enlightened", I replied to Mladen, roused from my visions, "but I found a Path I had been looking for forever. Nothing could compare to the Intensive Illumination's force. I'll do anything to bring it here to our country!"

"You'll bring that Haling person here?"

"No", I said, as if I was announcing an oath, "I am going for Master's training in California and then I'll lead the Intensive."

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Haling held Intensives once a year. No one who had been touched by the Truth in the heart could wait that long. Before the Intensive began, Bentley handed us business cards with Haling's address saying that we could write to him after the Intensive if we felt the need to do so. I sent him a letter on the first day after my arrival in Belgrade. It was short, but I told him everything: that I understood the Intensive from within; that I knew what kind of tortures he had gone through; and that I was thankful for his openness. I told him I couldn't wait for a year for his next Intensive and asked him to send me the address of Yogendra's ashram in Santa Barbara.

His reply troubled me for a moment and awoke emotions I had at the end of the intensive.

Dear Bogy,

I am glad that you want to continue with the Intensive of Illumination. It is, after Vichara, taught by Sri Ramana Maharishi, the only direct Path of the Truth. If I allow myself to tell you anything, you have made the right decision. At the same time, I am sorry that you didn't stay for the celebration at the end of the Intensive. I saw the state you were in when you left, and although my opinion is completely subjective, I think that the wall which separated you from the direct experience of the truth wasn't thicker than a single hair from your head. Three people, who were in the same state as you, experienced Illumination during the celebration. If you had stayed, maybe there would have been four...?"

Haling included the address and the telephone number of Yogendra's ashram in California, his telephone number and asked if I knew people in Yugoslavia who wanted to fight against building nuclear power stations. He now directed his efforts and time mainly in that direction.

The fact that Yogendra was a former sciolarg was proven by the speed with which I received an answer to my letter, and the promotional materials of his organization, Anubava. Everything smelled of old Lon except the Indian names of Yogendra's associates who headed the Intensive: Kali Shakti Ma, Ava Shakti Ma, Tara Devi, and Arjuna. The three-day Intensive of illumination was organized once a month in the ashram, and every three months some of the

experienced Masters headed the fourteen-day Intensive. Photographs showed groups of happy people at the end of the Intensives, and “stories of success”. For all further information I had to contact Arjuna, Yogendra’s main assistant.

His words sounded familiar over the phone: “Bogdan, we are so happy that you want to come to us. Do you have a nickname, what should I call you more intimately? Okay, Bogy, come here as soon as possible. It will be the turning point of your life! During your stay you can go through a three-day intensive and a Master training course. One more thing Bogy...” he paused to give his words more significance, “keep in mind that YOGENDRA is here! A man can’t understand what his presence means until he experiences it personally.”

This was the school of old Lon Hibner, no doubt about it. Arjuna’s tone of voice when he pronounced YO-GEN-DRA-A-A-A, suggested that I would yet again meet a being upon whose self-sacrifice and wisdom depends the salvation of mankind. That was the reason to keep on guard, but the possibility of coming back from California as a Master, made me stiff. I had to earn money for the plane ticket to Santa Barbara, courses and room and board in the ashram and get over with that work. There was no hesitation about whether I would become enlightened - I knew that positively.

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In the small airport in Santa Barbara, aside from a group of loud Mexicans, a wiry girl with freckles and flat chest was waiting for me, holding a piece of paper with my name on it. She shook my hand and stared at me with a confrontational look, which I remembered so well from the Church of Sciology, and then addressed me in a piercing voice: “Bogy, I am so glad...We don’t have a guest from Yugoslavia every day. I am Tara Shakti-Ma. My car is outside.”

While she spoke I noticed the wire braces in her mouth. She wore a long black dress of thin cotton and platform sandals with straps of soft rope, and around her neck and hands swung strands of pearls on coloured strings and thin copper bracelets. On a thin black strap around her neck was a medallion with Yogendra’s photograph in a small, round frame.

She drove resolutely with fast, yet soft motions, and spoke about her infinite love for Yogendra.

“Is Yogendra in the ashram?”

“Of course. He’s always there. But one can talk to him only during satsang. Other times visitors are not allowed to approach him.”

“I have no intention of bothering him. I only wanted to know if I could see the man who created the Intensive of Illumination.”

“I understand...Many people want to see him. He emanates so much love toward humans...toward all of mankind. He has changed the lives of all of us who are fortunate to be in his presence. We call him Bapuji. That word is like love itself.”

I didn’t speak. I had heard these stories so many times; there was no need to start the discussion. I looked around at the scenery. Santa Barbara was a nice town built in the style of Mexican architecture. Buildings were low, with white walls, and red roof tiles and lots of greenery around. We passed by a small harbour with lots of sailboats, motorboats, and yachts.

“This is the main street”, Tara said to me, turning off the semi-circular road which ran around the harbour. “I believe there are about a hundred different religious communities in Santa Barbara. The bulk of the temples are on the main street. Further up the hill, not far from our ashram, is a Zen temple and immediately behind it, a temple of the late Swami Yogananda. Have you read his books?”

“Just his autobiography. Did Yogendra write anything?”

“No, his teachings are on audiotapes. Actually, fifteen years ago he wrote *“A Guide to the After Death States of Consciousness”*. That is a modern version of the Tibetan book of the dead. It is a fifty page booklet with enormous value. He cleared up everything that was not comprehensible in the original version...Here we are in our ashram. Isn’t it beautiful?”

There were buildings on both sides of the road; parking was in the center, just a few cars and some vans. To the left, I saw a basketball court and a large swimming pool next to it. A fairly large building, made of planks, with a sign “Reception Office” and under it “Library”, was located close to the pool. Tara pointed at several small huts of dark wood to the right of the road and said: “Those are our dormitories and working rooms.” When she stopped her car in front of the reception office, several young men and women came out to greet us as if they were expecting us. “They are curious. They always like to see new people who come to ashram. Take your things and wait for Arjuna at the reception office. He’ll speak to you.”

In the reception office a young, petite woman with a shaved head, silently nodded and gestured with her hand at the wicker chair. In the middle of the wall above her head was a big photograph of smiling Yogendra. He had a long, thick beard and long hair. On the glass-covered stand were promotional materials about the Intensive of Illumination and smaller photographs of Yogendra with prices attached. In the corner, two young men, dressed in black cotton robes similar to priest's mantles, were arranging card catalogues. A large ceiling fan was slowly turning, making the room pleasantly cool, as it was getting warm outside. A tall man of about thirty-five walked in with quick steps. He had a small head, with very scarce, thin hair, small facial features, and a pointed nose. He would have been ugly if not for his clear blue eyes and a piercing look. He approached me, stretching his hand toward me: "Welcome, Bogy. We've been waiting for you. How was your trip?"

"Fine. I am little tired, I'd like to get some sleep."

"Yes, of course. I'll show you the dormitory. Come with me."

He took one of my bags and walked with fast steps. In the communal dormitory with ten beds, a few were already occupied. Arjuna put my bag on a bed in a corner, far from the window and entrance door. "Let me tell you a few things," he said, sitting on my bed. "Accommodation is cheap here; room and board is one dollar a day. You can pay later in the reception office for as many days as you want to stay. Because you are a resident, you have a twenty five percent discount on all courses and Intensives in the ashram. If I am correct, you wanted a three-day Intensive, fourteen-day Intensive and a Master course? To get through all the important work at the same time?"

"Correct."

"There is a slight problem. There has been a change in the course schedule. The Master course and three-day Intensive start tomorrow... we arranged it so that the participants of the Master course could follow the Intensive and gain some experience. I advise you to sign up for the Master's course. Grab that chance; it takes place only once a year."

"No, I want to achieve enlightenment first and then do the rest."

"I understand. But let me tell you something." He looked at me with his penetrating blue eyes: "As a Master, you do a lot of good for people. There isn't anything greater than leading people to the direct experience of the truth. The truth has no price."

“I agree. I have known that since the moment I saw the first man become enlightened in front of my eyes. But I have to have that experience myself so I can have the right to tell others how valuable it is.”

“That could be arranged. Immediately after Masters, starts the fourteen-day Intensive. Most likely, you’ll experience enlightenment there. You’ll return to Yugoslavia as the enlightened Master.”

I was thinking for a while. “Do you guarantee that I will become enlightened at the fourteen-day course?”

Arjuna quickly blinked several times. “Frankly speaking, no one can give you such a guarantee. Experience of the truth is in the hands of Providence, but your chances are much greater at the longer Intensive of Illumination.

“Then, I don’t want it, Arjuna.”

A shadow of disappointment crossed his face. He had been certain he would talk me into it. The three-day Intensive of Illumination was 100 dollars and the Master’s was 500, but it seemed that money wasn’t his main motive. He wanted another Master in Europe to expand Yogendra’s system. Haling was the only one in that part of the world and he led Intensives once a year.

“Okay, I understand. I’d like you to know, that deep down in my heart I appreciate your choice because it’s honest, although I think you’re making a mistake. Promise me one thing. When you get rested, listen to some tapes from the Master’s course. They were recorded live last year at the course held here last year. You’ll hear Yogendra’s voice, participant’s questions, and his answers. You’ll feel his authentic being in those words. Promise?”

“I’ll listen to his tapes but I am not going to the Master’s course until I find who I am!”

Arjuna nodded and smiled. We shook hands and he said: “Call me when you finish listening to a few tapes. I believe you’ll sing a different song then.”

I tried for over two hours to fall asleep. On the windows, wicker blinds let in lots of light. People walked in and out from the dormitory. I heard voices from outside, splashing of water in the pool, and cheerful giggling. This was a combination of a spiritual ashram and Western life style. There was no iron discipline, dead serious faces or stories of Armageddon’s battle between the forces of lightness and darkness. I was exhausted but I couldn’t fall asleep. I could have used this time more efficiently. There was just a little time left before the Intensive.

The wooden desk for tape listening was in the corner of the library. The walls were covered with books and the room was peaceful and shadowy. A tiny woman with a shaved head brought me the collection of tapes in a narrow plastic box and, stressing her words, she said: “Please, handle them with care.” I read the label on the first tape, “*How to be a Master*”, put the headphones on, and turned on the tape recorder.

The tape was of poor quality, Yogendra’s voice was muffled, but he spoke English better and more intelligibly than most of the people I had a chance to listen to; he sounded more like an Englishman than an American. The rustle of leafs of his notes was heard which he was turning while speaking, coughing of the audience and sound of his deep breathing.

“How to be a Master is the question which many of you are asking yourselves. I am afraid some of you will be surprised already at the beginning. The reason is that you are transferring your life’s habits and points of view from everyday life into a world of spiritual milieu – like the Intensive of Illumination, which is a completely different world. Different laws and different rules of the game apply...” There was a longer pause during which the audience could be heard fidgeting, and Yogendra’s breathing. “In everyday life you study at the University to become a doctor. You get your diploma and after that you consider yourself a doctor...that’s how people around see you too. They address you as ‘doctor’. In other areas it is the same, people expect someone above them to give them permission or transfer authority on them, so they can perform some function...Things are the opposite in the spiritual world. To a question how to be a Master, there is only one answer – **be the Master!** Simply, be the Master and all things will fall in place.

I should have been surprised by those words, but I wasn’t. They entered me without any resistance, like a hand that slips easily into a custom made glove.

“Imagine a photographer who identifies himself with his job”, Yogendra went on in his well-articulated voice. “Imagine that on a trip, he loses his camera, films, photographs...everything he carried along. Would he stop considering himself a photographer? Of course he wouldn’t! And all the people who know him will still regard him as a photographer. Another man, who isn’t a real photographer but is trying to become one, when he loses his things, he will think that everything is ruined and he won’t feel like a photographer...Does a beard, a corduroy trousers, hands smudged with paint, and an atelier make a painter? No, what makes him a painter is his feeling that he is a painter and even if everything of his burns in flames, he will still be a painter.”

An even longer pause followed, which almost made you think that the words were erased from the tape in that part, but then, Yogendra went on: “At the course, I will teach you technical matters: what types of speeches you should give; how to select the assistants; the tools which will help you attract participants to your Intensive; why is it very important to give large doses of vitamins to the participants; are the most common mistakes that Masters make and how to avoid them; how to teach the participants the techniques of the Intensive of Illumination and the most common errors that the participants make...but...but”. Yogendra paused in his speech again. Obviously he was a wizard of the dramatic situation; he knew how to create tension by making pauses in his speech. He began to talk in a high-pitched, resonant voice as if drawing conclusions of critical importance to the fate of the audience: “If you are not a Master, no one in the world can make you a Master. Some of you may never become Masters...**Some of you are already Masters!**”

My breathing accelerated and the energy ran from my hands into my head. There was no need to continue listening to his words I knew it all. He continued to speak in a weaker voice and I heard his words as if they were coming from a distant hill. There was no need to hear what he said on the other tapes. I had only to finish listening to this tape until the end, because the matter was clear and in front of my eyes I had visions from the faraway past. I saw a group of men and women in white clothes, sitting in pairs, and I knew that it was some kind of Intensive. I didn't see myself among them but I felt that I was sitting on something which resembled the Master's chair. Yes, that was it! Yogendra hadn't created the Intensive, he had remembered it and transferred it to our time, and his words awakened my memory. In the same way a candle is lit upon another candle. I put the tape back its place, turned off the tape recorder, and handed the box of tapes to the woman with the shaved head. She looked at me with surprise but didn't say anything. I had an urge to take a walk or swim in the pool, to do something with my body because I had begun to float.

In front of the reception office, Arjuna was talking to a slim blonde girl, whose eyes seemed to be staring at him, although her voice sounded calm and her speech unhurried. Arjuna waved to me to approach him and said: “This is Kali Shakti-Ma. She will be the Master at your three day intensive.” I stretched out my hand, but she smiled, folding her hands on her chest like in prayer and said to me in an apologetic tone: “I mustn't touch a man. I made an oath.”

Arjuna was looking at me fixedly. “Did you start listening to Yogendra's tapes?”

“I have finished with them.” He furrowed his forehead and blinked several times. “I heard the first tape and there is no need to listen to the rest of them. I

am the Master!” Arjuna shifted his perplexed look from me to the young woman and she said: “I have to go”, and added, turning to me: “I’ll see you tomorrow night at the Intensive. Rest well, it will be strenuous.” Arjuna had certainly told her about our conversation and she knew that I wasn’t signing up for the Master’s course.

Arjuna showed me to a wooden bench under a big tree with wide drooping branches, which looked like a weeping willow. “Let’s sit down. I’d like to say a few words.” He surveyed the ashram. Several young men and women were splashing water at each other in the pool. A young man in a black robe and long beard was sitting on a flat stone next to the sulphur spring with his eyes closed as if he was meditating. From the hill, the screaming of birds was heard.

“It’s not my right to invalidate your opinion....do you know what that expression means?”

“Invalidation? Of course. I spent several months with sciolarags. Yogendra drank from the same cup as well.”

“Is that so? You know, everyone has the right to an opinion whatever it may be. It’s your right to believe that it was enough to listen to only one of Yogendra’s tapes, to think that you understood everything, and that you are a Master. I don’t want to discourage you, but it’s my duty to warn you: I have seen many people who believed the same thing you do, that they were Masters without specialized training. However, later on they had some very hard moments. To be very honest, you are the first who reached that conclusion after listening to the introductory tape only.”

“People are different.”

“Maybe you’ll change your mind after the fourteen-day intensive.” That wasn’t a question but a statement.

“I won’t. I gave up from the second Intensive. After the three-day Intensive, I am going home to lead my own Intensive.”

He blinked. “I think that it would be a huge mistake. The fourteen-day Intensive is the most powerful spiritual technique on the planet. You will destroy many spiritual masses and impurities. Believe me, I have tried many things and I know what I am talking about. The long intensive changed my life in its core.”

“I understand what you’re saying, Arjuna, but I don’t want to wait. I’ll stay for it only if I don’t achieve enlightenment on the three-day. If I get

enlightened, I'll go home straight away. People are pleasant here, I like the atmosphere, but...I'll come again some other time."

"Maybe you'll change your mind at the three-day. Be open to that possibility."

"Sure. I am open to everything." I felt light and self-confident like never before; I was sailing at full speed: "I know I am the Master and that I have been one forever. Just a few words from Yogendra were enough for me to realize that, and m grateful to him for that. Anyway, that matter is over now. If I tried to explain what I am now feeling, Arjuna, I would put my hand over my heart and say, as an Indian chief once said: Brother, my heart is singing."

The sound of a horn roused me from half-sleep. The young man with the shaved head, who was reading on a bed next to mine, got up quickly and while he was putting on his apostolic sandals, he casually said: "It's time for dinner."

Dining room was a long wooden house with bare tables and benches made of rough planks. At one end of the room was a table of dark carved wood, covered with a white linen tablecloth. On a piece of cardboard was written: *Reserved for Guru and his family.*

I got a full plate of oatmeal and a banana. The oatmeal tasted better than it looked. Due to my exhaustion, I ate slowly, not feeling hunger. It was difficult to keep my eyes open. There were about thirty mainly young people at the table, who were eating in silence. A tall young man standing by the door announced in a deep, strong voice: Sad-Guru has arrived! Sad-Guru has arrived. Sad-Guru has arrived! Everyone, get up!"

Yogendra was a short and delicately built man. His face was framed by a long beard with occasional greys and his hair came over his shoulders. He had on a saffron sanyasin robe and Japanese straw sandals. He looked around the room, silently nodded and gestured with his hand for us to sit down. Two contradictory impressions intertwined in me. He was unexpectedly small and somehow nondescript, yet I wasn't surprised by his appearance. After seeing the photographs in the reception room, you would expect to see a giant; however, only his clear blue eyes, were faithfully represented.

So this was the man, who created the Intensive of Illumination, the system that had no equal on the planet. Watching him woke me up fully and the food acquired a more pleasant taste. Sitting next to him was a tall girl of seventeen or eighteen with a rosy face.

“Yogendra’s daughter?” I asked an older man with an ascetic face and body, who was eating next to me.

He nodded and smiled: “He has four. Strangely, none of them is interested in the Intensive. Many people would give anything in the world to be in their place. I don’t know about the other three, but Sharlin – he nodded toward Yogendra’s table – is crazy about computers. That’s life.”

“Are you participating in the Intensive?”

“The one tomorrow? No, I lead them from time to time. You are new here?”

“I arrived today.”

“Satsang starts in half an hour. Make sure you don’t miss it. I am Galusha, Mike Galusha. And you?”

“My friends call me Bogy. Tell me, how long have you been leading the Intensives?”

“For a while. I was the first Master of the Intensive after Yogendra...We were together at the Sciolargy for thirteen or fourteen years.”

“That long? I left after six months.”

“In our time, the process of decay had only begun. Now all of them have stepped into deep dirt.”

“You found a good expression. Did you know Lon Hibner?”

“Much too well. What I am trying to say is that he robbed me as he did so many other people.”

I looked at him inquisitively and he went on: “He robbed Yogendra, Jack Horner, John McAllister...it would take me a while to list them all. You saw the comment in his books not to continue to read the text further if you didn’t understand some word? That is a great formula for pedagogy and psychology but in his organization they don’t admit that Yogendra discovered the significance the misunderstood word, while Lon Hibner shamefully usurped it.”

“However, his life story is an incredible. He established Sciolargy when he was forty, as an unsuccessful writer of cheap novels, and he created an authentic kingdom based on his methods for spiritual development.”

“You’re right. He is a genius, not only for stealing.”

I hesitated to ask how Old Lon had swindled him, because our conversation began to sound like gossip, but I couldn’t restrain myself: “What happened to you?”

Mike smiled conciliatorily: “Well, that’s a long story. You know my wife Millie and I were among Lon’s oldest associates. In the beginning of Sciolargy, he claimed he was the incarnation of Gautama Buddha, which was, of course, hilarious. But that’s the way he acted. One day he called Millie to process him. She had great stage fright; Lon sensed it and he began to abuse her from the beginning of the session. He told her that she was stupid, that she could only clean his shoes, that she was incapable of processing him and similar insults. An hour or two later, after further humiliation, she began to cry and stopped the session. She came to me and complained. What could I say?... How much do you know about the processor’s code in Sciolargy? A Processor is required to process a Client regardless of his irrational behaviours since they are expressions of his reactive mind. I told her that. She went to a session the next day and he continued to behave in the same way.

Well, Millie learned her lesson and she didn’t let him make her relinquish her identity as a Processor. Lon kept on insulting her in all imaginable ways and in a moment of inspiration, she asked him a question: 'How can I help you?' He continued with insults but she kept repeating her question, and slowly she drew him into a process. After half an hour of asking the same question, Lon had the greatest insight of in his life. He embraced and kissed her. Millie came home thrilled.”

“The next day we went to the Sciolargic center in Baltimore. There was a carnival atmosphere. People were hugging each other, singing, opening bottles of champagne. What happened, I asked? Don’t you know, they said. Old Lon has created a new processing procedure, a Helping Procedure. The method is as powerful, yet so simple. It consists of the repetition of the Processor’s question - how can I help you?”

Mike chuckled softly but without bitterness. It was an expression of feelings of a man who had seen a lot and knew all too well what life was. “We should be going, we’ll be late for the satsang”, he added.

The floor of an enormous room was covered with a hand-spun cotton rug. There were no chairs and people sat on the floor. Women were on one side, men on the other. Mike sat on the floor and easily crossed his thin legs into the lotus position while I silently lowered myself next to him. A refreshing, cool breeze

was coming from the hill, mixing with the smoke of sandalwood incense stuck in sand in ceramic dishes. Three men and a woman played oriental instruments which I wasn't familiar with. The music was subdued and melancholy, with drawling tones, and the sounds trembled in the room for a long time forerunning each other, uniting and separating, awaking memories of a faraway past, brief encounters, and the sorrows of departure.

“Let's sing”, Arjuna said. Everyone in the room except me knew the words to the song and sang it harmoniously. The song was long and the refrain was repeated many times, while the words were in Sanskrit. I felt sorry I didn't have a paper and pencil to write down the lyrics. A young woman with a freckled face and neck, green eyes, and long, dark-reddish hair, led the choir in a strong voice, while the others followed quietly. She didn't have a refined voice, she was singing spontaneously from her heart, but there was a true, powerful beauty in her singing. Her voice was piercing but feminine in which intertwined love call for a hitherto unknown lover, wailing for a lost child, broken and hoarse, torn between infinite desperation and longing for a faraway truth, or at least I felt that, since I began to open spontaneously before the forthcoming Intensive and impressions were powerfully imprinting in me.

When the last vibration of the song faded away, the red haired woman rose to her feet and said: “Let's get up. Sad-Guru has arrived.”

Yogendra was standing at the entrance surrounded by three young people. He didn't enter the room earlier so he wouldn't interrupt the song. He slowly walked toward the small wooden podium, with a wicker chair and two bouquets of flowers. Young men from his entourage threw handfuls of rice over him singing softly in monotonous voices: “Sad-Guru has arrived, Sad-Guru has arrived, Sad-Guru has arrived.”

Yogendra looked at the people in the room, keeping his gaze on me for a second longer, nodding in a friendly manner.

“Blessed be all of you”, he said, in a surprisingly deep voice for his tiny body. “What questions do you have for tonight?”

A woman in her forties, with a thin silk scarf over her shaven head, raised her hand and when Yogendra nodded in her direction, she said: “I had a dream which I thought was important not only for myself. In my dream, I heard a voice saying: In the base of a skull is green energy...I meditated today for a long time on that statement but I wasn't able to grasp its meaning. Please, what is your comment.”

There were many questions, about the most useful rhythm of breathing, chakras, astral projection, relations between mental and causal bodies...The pleasant impression which the song created in the beginning was slowly diminishing. The answers to most questions could easily be found in numerous books or the questioners were so childish, as if they had asked the wise father what should they do with their lives. Yogendra's answers disappointed me as well. To all those questions, there was only one answer – decide yourself what you should do – but such an answer never rolled over his lips. It seemed that Yogendra's students were struggling to come up with any question so that the satsang would make sense.

“Any more questions?” Yogendra asked as if he was ready to draw the curtain over a performance, which had lasted too long. There were no questions for ten, fifteen seconds. I raised my hand. Yogendra didn't look surprised. He nodded in my direction.

“I have a problem which has followed me throughout my life, since early youth”, I said, searching for the right words.

“All serious problems follow us from an early age.”

“It is my approach to sex.” I had thought for some time about which words to use and how much openness was permitted at such a satsang. “I don't know how to express myself...”

Yogendra interrupted me kindly but firmly: “Express yourself in the simplest possible way.”

“Okay. I have a good wife and two children and the potential for a happy family. However, I am not capable of controlling my sexual drive. Many times I have been unfaithful to my wife, making promises that it was the last time, but after a while, the same thing would happen to me...That humiliates me, such an attitude doesn't go hand in hand with spiritual development. But...it's stronger than me.”

The silence lasted quite a while. I heard only the barking of a dog far away in the hills. Had I asked an inappropriate question at such a place, and how would it reflect on my participation in the Intensive? Yogendra's answer took away my edginess and at the same time confused me: “You should become the best deer hunter in the whole world.”

I blinked quickly and several people smiled knowingly. They recognized what Yogendra wanted to say.

“You don’t know the story about the best deer hunter?”

“No”, I said.

“I am afraid that some of you here have already heard the story several times. However, there are many people who have the same problem that you do. Continue with your development and at the same time, do the best you can to restrain yourself. After some time, the problem will go away by itself, spiritual development and such an attitude can’t exist simultaneously. Working on one’s spiritual goal is like a powerful river which slowly but inexorably sucks in all other attitudes until in the end everything becomes subordinated to the same goal... Well, here’s that edifying story. The supreme God Brahma once walked on earth, disguised as a traveller, observing what people were doing. In a clearing, he saw a man practicing archery. The man was practicing very persistently for the entire day, and Brahma finally approached him, and asked: ‘Tell me, good man, why are you practicing so persistently?’ The man told him that he was the best deer hunter in the world and that he had only one goal in his life – not to be exceeded in it by anyone. “How do you know that you’re the best,” asked Brahma. “No doubt about it,” said the man. “I am the only man in the world who has killed three deer with the same arrow. I waited for them to stand in line, and then I released the arrow. It pierced two deer and stopped in the third. No one but me had ever done that.”

Yogendra was slowly nodding, as if he identified with Brahma in searching for the best answer for the great hunter. “You are not the best,” Brahma said. “To be the best in the world, you have to kill the whole herd of deer with only one arrow.” “That is impossible,” the man complained. “It absolutely is possible. I am Brahma and I can teach how you to achieve it.”

Yogendra had a good stage performance and he switched from one person’s identity to another with ease. As the hunter, his voice sounded youthful and naïve. As Brahma, he spoke from the depths of his chest; his voice had more strength and penetration, as if it was coming from afar, but filling the entire space. After a short break, he continued.

Brahma took off his travelling clothes and showed the hunter in the illuminating glow of his divine nature. “Teach me,” said the man. “I’ll do anything to become the best hunter in the world. Anything!” “To achieve this you don’t need to practice archery,” Brahma said, you need to meditate. Go into a cave - local peasants will leave you food and water in front of it - and meditate, during the entire time you’re awake. After a while, you really will become the best deer hunter in the world. With one arrow you could kill a whole herd of deer.”

“Without hesitating for a moment, the deer hunter entered the cave and began to meditate. Brahma forgot about him – you know, gods are sometimes forgetful; and thirty years later, when he was passing through that area, he remembered what he had asked of the deer hunter. He returned to the entrance of the cave and in the half-darkness he saw the man meditating with closed eyes. “Hello, wake up, wake up,” said Brahma. “You have been meditating for thirty years. Here’s your bow and arrow, go hunt, you are the greatest deer hunter in the world. There isn’t anyone who’s equal to you in the world.” A soft murmur came from inside. “What bow? What arrow? What deer hunter? I want only the truth.” Yogendra was silent for some time and said: “Instructive story, isn’t it, and for many of us, comforting. If we give our entire selves to a higher cause, everything else will come to its place in time.”

I couldn’t fall asleep for a long time. Lying in bed, I wondered how I had missed that story before. I knew hundreds of stories - occult, mystic, Sufi, Zen, and Chan, and yet this one calmed me down in such a simple way. It’s odd how the simplest means, such as stories, legends and myths influence the child in us, and push us toward realizing our goals with much greater force than long, elaborately worded discussions, logical proofs, and quotations. That’s why experts have used them - from Buddha and Christ to contemporary teachers.

Lying in the darkness, I thought that for the first time ever, I was able to understand the mechanism of the traditional story. Undoubtedly, stories are stimulating metaphors. The narrator begins with the situation in which the listener finds himself – always some kind of crisis or situation filled with emotional charge. The story portrays the crisis faithfully. When he brings the crisis to culmination, the narrator provokes a sudden turn in the story, which suggests the solution. The narrator doesn’t work on a conscious level of a listener, that level influenced by numerous books and encyclopedias; he works on the subconscious, which is a tomb of time in which infinite generations of experiences, archetypes, and restricted energies are buried. They rest there frozen, until the seeker, following his Path, steps on them and resurrects time. Then, amazing treasures open, buried experiences raise their heads, archetypes revive, and suppressed energies rush to the surface and we become a big child who cries to return to his spiritual homeland, which is at the same time, mother’s warm lap and the protective hand of a father. Falling into sleep, I realized that I was beginning to philosophize, that tomorrow I would have to live that philosophy at the Intensive.

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Kali entered the room for the Intensive, walking the same way Haling did. She introduced her two assistants: Sadi, a skinny African-American woman in her forties, who looked like a withered spinster, and Suchi, an Englishman of about thirty, with a mischievous expression on his face, with an earring in his left ear. The introductory speech was almost exactly like Haling's; she gave the same examples and paused in her speech as if she was his twin sister, and in the same way surveyed the participants.

Several times consecutively Kali explained the Intensive technique, approaching it from various points of view, and she made an extra effort to convince us that we could experience illumination in three days if we devoted ourselves entirely to the Intensive. "It can be done", she said, resolutely affirming those words with her whole body. "Thousands of people have succeeded in it, everyone here can do it." While she spoke, in the important moments she squeezed her right hand into a fist in front of her chest, like she was getting ready to hit an invisible enemy. "I am not asking the impossible of you. Just use this time in the best possible way....Any questions?"

During the first dyads in the morning I had difficulty keeping my eyes open and when I closed them, during my five minutes of meditation, I sank into foggy sleepiness. I regretted that I hadn't arrived several days earlier to adjust to the time zone difference. It was too late for regrets; I just had to endure. I've made great efforts, rarely before have I been more concentrated on what I was doing. I was the only one in that group who worked the techniques of illuminations unerringly as if I wasn't the participant but the Master demonstrating it to others. I could clearly see my partners' mistakes in the application of the technique, and was surprised that Kali and her assistants weren't correcting them. They mostly corrected the physical posture of the participants, making them keep their backs straight and not allowing them to shift their attention from their partner while he was meditating or communicating.

I worked on the technique as long as I could: I made an effort to experience myself directly, I was open for contents which appeared in consciousness and reported them by categories – thoughts, psychical images, feelings and psychical sensations. Some partners looked at me with surprise; I

wasn't part of their philosophizing, beautiful thoughts, cleverness, and self-criticism.

On the first day I had fewer crises to report and went through them without wasting time on confessions to partners. By the middle of the second day I was gradually overwhelmed with apathy. I was ashamed of my bragging to Arjuna and it was becoming much clearer to me that I would need to stay for the fourteen days Intensive because I wouldn't achieve enlightenment at this one. The bastard knew that very well when he so delicately warned me. As the dyads changed I felt worse and worse and in the afternoon my indifference turned into swooning. Innumerable times I have sneered at people who called upon saints or prayed to God in difficult moments. Now I was doing the same. Through squeezed eyelids, I directed my gaze upwards and cried out: God, have mercy! Creative powers of the cosmos help me! Aiwaz, alleviate my torment! In a tiny part of my consciousness, a slight sneer at my own weakness flickered. Misery filled my consciousness again. Then it seemed that in the dark and orange stains far behind my closed eyelids the head of Lam appeared. He gazed at me with monstrous coldness. His lips were so tightly squeezed shut that they were almost invisible, and around the small slits of his eyes, tiny wrinkles formed, suggesting an inhuman smile - as if in his icy solitude my begging amused him. The impression lasted for a short time and then disappeared.

"What a fool I am." I said to my partner. "The moment I feel better I begin to brag. Like I am so psychologically mature that only one of Yogendra's tapes is needed to hear and find out that I am a Master. Like, I am hurrying home to lead my Intensive. I was always disgusted by people who brag and I am the worst of that kind!"

My partner was looking at me with a lot of understanding. From his communication I learned that he was Jewish, that he always wanted to experience true love, and that he wanted to change his name. "I wanted to take the name Lovejoy. That was hard on my parents, who are Orthodox Jews. I made them genuinely unhappy. I contemplated suicide...I even got a gun, but I didn't have the strength to do it. I concluded that I was good for nothing not even for such a simple matter like pulling the trigger. So many people do that every day, but I can't. You have to have guts to do that." He was about thirty-five; with a dark complexion and shiny black hair. With his symmetrical facial features, he looked more like a handsome Italian than a Jew.

"The woman I live with wants to get married, but I don't love her. I want to experience love with a beautiful girl, and she is....she is not so ugly as she is unexciting. She is nice, I admit, she has a good soul, but she's not what my heart

desires...How do I tell her that I don't love her? I have already caused so much pain to other people."

The notion of how much pain I have caused to others flew through my consciousness. The unhappiness of those people was somehow concentrated in it. Then something ripped wide open in me, making a cavernous opening through which fretfulness poured, which made me howl with helplessness. Tears blurred my vision so that I lost the image of my partner. Suchi grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me powerfully, trying to make me open my eyes, while Kali was shrieking in my ear: "Keep your attention on your partner. It is his time now. Keep your attention on him, do you hear!"

It was useless. I lost myself utterly in the powerful emotions which swept me. I was not crying, but wailing. The gong was heard. People were slowly getting up for dinner. I stayed in the room with my grief and feelings of chill from tears drying on my cheeks.

There was no hope for anything. Everything vanished and what remained was only I, helpless in my misery. I focused my attention on myself, unhappy with the way I was and then, a miracle happened. My head slowly raised up and bent backwards and my hands with palms up lifted involuntarily, stretching open, offering a precious gift to someone above and in front of me. As if I saw myself from the inside, through some inner eye which I opened, for the first time, in a soft light which illuminated me from every direction. I slithered into myself as softly as the breath of a sleeping child, into my torso, head, and extremities although I was already there. Somehow I united with myself again; it is hard to describe because I was never actually separated. A thought gently passed through my consciousness – that's it! I was always one with myself, only I didn't know it. I became aware of it now and at the same time I realized that all my life, all those years, I lived only for this moment. Everything was in it, all my experiences, past memories and presentiments of the future, the beginning and end. Slowly, I opened my eyes.

There was no one else in the room except Sati, who was sitting three steps away from me to the left, staring at me intently. She no longer looked like a shrivelled spinster - she was now a charming woman anyone could love. She smiled tenderly and happily as if she understood the state I was in and said: "It is time for dinner, you should eat something." I could eat or I could pass, there was not much difference. Other matters were more important. "Thank you Sati", I said, feeling gratitude toward the entire world from where I existed at that brief moment. All the events of my life and all people, moreover all beings, were linked in this experience, which scrubbed me so that I've never been cleaner. There was nothing else except myself the way I have always been since ever,

nothing in excess and nothing that I lacked. Only ME, and it encompassed everything.

My experience was a generous prize for many long years of suffering and torment, doubt, sneers and scorning of my surroundings; painful self-examinations and disastrous conclusions about my own prodigy. Moreover, I was over-rewarded; illuminated by the light and happiness which I didn't deserve. That feeling of ascent of my own worth was impersonal – melted away in space and time. I knew it couldn't be lost, although it contained childlike wondering, how did I deserve such grace? The only answer, which imposed at that moment was, that in that moment, with tremendous force the fate said it loved me.

I stepped outside the hut. The participants of the Intensive were sitting around, on the grass. Some were chewing their food absent-mindedly; others stared into worlds which only they could see. The handsome Jew kept his eyes closed with an enthralled look on his face. One of my partners, a New York girl with a face full of acne scars, looked at me suspiciously, and Suchi smiled knowingly. He knew. I smiled back at him with gratitude and nodded. It was a quiet talk, the talk of the truth. There was no need for impressive words – a look, gesture, and smile - everything was obvious. I remembered a metaphor from Zen: A thief doesn't have to tell the other thief that he is a thief, they recognize each other. It is strange how this deep truth was explained in such a simple and humorous way.

I took my bowl of food but I couldn't sit down. I ate standing, barefooted, focused on myself like never before. The touch of my bare feet on the grass permeated my body from below and it seemed that the ground radiated the warmth of the sun. The same gentle warmth radiated from every bite of food in my mouth. That food loved me and it assimilated with me, surrendering to me with love. I was firmly connected with it and the ground; it was love's union of mutual surrender. My God, I had been naïve, enlightenment was the easiest thing in the world. Who am I, the solution to that riddle I searched for in everything I have ever done – in books, hermetic sayings and Zen stories, in the rituals of the Odin sword and the initiation in Chicago, with old Lon Hibner, in every woman I united with during this lifetime, in the shiny eyes of girls who passed by me in a split second and in short embraces with old friends. Whenever I spread my arms open to hug someone, I was hugging myself. The one who is searching is the same as what he is searching for, I realized, and laughed out loud.

I looked at the people sitting on the a grass and wanted to tell them: "Hello, there is nothing you need to search for; everything has been found before you even thought to begin your search. It is a joke, which sometimes sounds cruel, but when you get it, it becomes a superb comic story. I played hide-and-

seek all my life, while the one who was hiding and the one who was seeking were the same. Throughout all those eons I had my eyes closed, pretending I didn't know that.

I wondered who should I should offer myself to first, the way I was now, and immediately I knew – to my children, Nenad and Stevica. But then the word “my” evaporated like warm breath on a cool morning, because deep inside me, there was the realization that the children were not mine, that they were divine beings committed to my care for a short time.

Slowly I remembered words, which I once had heard or read, which contained a clear message of who I was. How was I able for such a long time to constantly and persistently avert my look in another direction, pretending I didn't understand their meaning? In this questioning there was no criticism or conviction, but only tranquil acceptance of the rules of that strange game.

Placing my bowl next to me, I leaned back against the hut's wooden wall, and as a passive, slightly interested witness, I surrendered to a lengthy procession of experiences from a long time ago. They all had the same topic, a miraculous game of hide and seek with myself. The memory of questions I was asked during the initiation ritual into the Odin Order struck me; I clearly heard Haling's voice interlaced with mine.

“Listen to me! You began the only worthwhile game in this world - the game of hide-and-seek with the Truth. But what you're looking for is much too open to be hidden, to be discovered, to be lost. What you're looking for cannot be taken, seen nor understood. But you can...become it!”

How? I heard my voice saturated with confusion and pleading. I begged someone to tell me: how, when, and where could I find it? Jesus, Haling had answered my question in advance. Before I began to walk toward my goal I was already there. To my ritual questions he gave obvious answers which I was too blind to understand then: Hundreds of fish began to search for the fish called the hundredth fish! Three snakes crawled the world looking for three-snake... What you were extracted from remained whole. Now it sounded like a naïve riddle, which could be answered in only one way, and I had found thousands of others. I heard Haling's question - Who are you like placing a mirror in front of me, and my empty answer, I am I. I remembered Haling's words, like the support a teacher gives a first grade student whose answers are inaccurate. In his voice, desperation resonated because his favorite student wasn't accepting his prompts in his last effort to help him. A soul must illuminate itself and everything else is darkness.

Mother dear, so many years ago I claimed – I am I, and I kept searching for myself. Of course, that's why Haling abandoned ritual magic, giving himself to the Intensive of Illumination, an obvious education for the rather stupid, deaf and blind students in the invisible church of the Truth.

Those memories, followed by insights, cleared my consciousness, and for a while it existed like an empty mirror; later a the feather cloud of memories appeared, slowly covering it. The evening with my Grandma in Vilin Do, her story about a boy stolen by the travelling Gypsies and the sound of a bell which brought him back in his old age, to his homeland. From that soft memory, Grandma's words when she spoke in a little boy's voice, struck me: My whole life I have looked for my real home and now that I've found it, I see that I had never left it.

I saw myself early the next day, in front of our house; the walls became transparent and I could see Grandma and my brother in their beds in deep sleep. I was strangely slow as if more mature or much older. Songs of birds reverberate in the orchard. The sun hadn't come up yet, but meek warmth drifted above the ground and no morning dew appeared to wet the feet. I slowly walked on a path through the middle of the orchard. I saw a forgotten old rug on the stump of a linden tree. I folded it, spread it with my hands on the grass and sat on it, leaning on a tree stump.

The water in the fishpond was smooth and transparent, and I saw a school of fish with red fins soundlessly swimming in it. My thoughts calmed down, my breathing became slower, and I couldn't feel my body. Gradually images from Grandma's story came to me. I was that boy in her story and the sound of a bell awoke a strong nostalgia in me again. The first ray of sun came through the dense crown of an old apple tree and fell on my face. I slowly closed my eyes, enjoying its gentle warmth. The field of vision under my closed eyelids was red, spotted with yellow dots turning orange. The dots were moving slowly, like fish with red fins in the clear water of the fishpond. From that multi coloured field, a light blue dot emerged. It gently trembled for some time, as if hesitating, but then it widened and from its center the indistinct image of Spirilen emerged. He smiled, and his smile made my heart tremble as if anticipating great happiness. I opened my eyes and for a moment was taken aback by the beauty of the scenery. It was a moment at the crack of dawn when everything comes to a standstill: birds stopped singing, fish quieted, there was no breeze so that the surface of the water in cleared part of the fishpond was still like a forgotten mirror. Clouds stopped moving and all sounds disappeared in the distance.

I looked at my palms resting on my thighs. I stared at them, enchanted because I actually saw them for the first time. Those were my palms! Their

beauty astounded me, overflowing my eyes. I averted my look from the palms of my hands to the crowns of the apple and oak trees on the other side of the fishpond. They also looked strange; the novelty of that unfamiliar sensual feeling was making me drunk. My body was becoming heavier like a thick tree trunk powerfully rooted in the depth of the ground, immovable, motionless.

I wished never again to move my body or change anything, so I wouldn't disturb such beauty. No other state - the state of power, abundance, fame or worlds from fairy tales - could compare with the tranquillity I was in at that moment. There was peace – a deep indescribable peace like an ocean of melted gold.

It seemed I had come to the end of a long and difficult journey and had seen a miraculous sight. It was a beautiful spot where I could rest forever, which I reached after so many years of strain and concern, because at that moment, I was no longer a ten-year-old boy. I felt older and wiser than all adults, which I had left in the other world. Words were inadequate when trying to describe such beauty, such completeness and achievement, such all-inclusive unity.

I was strongly aware of my body; however, I felt lifted into unearthly heights. Everything inside of me felt like it was trembling with a golden light, yet everything inside was eternally immovable. The whole world, everything unchanged, without beginning, was in me at that moment interwoven with eternity. My experience was above our senses and power of thought, out of the reach of words, yet real like a knife blade under a finger. Everything was one, and one was all.

I don't know how long I remained in a state of animated vigilance. Gradually, the world around me narrowed and formed again. At first, I had a faint feeling that my body and surroundings had come back to me, then the realization of where I was and the time of day, followed by the sensation of my personality, aims, responsibilities toward adults, and all those strata of consciousness which form our experience of real life. I had a refreshing feeling that I had drunk the clean water of all-knowledge from a far and timeless spring of existence. My entire being was overwhelmed with a wave of blissfully warm delight.

In a strange way, the memories of my boyhood experience in Vilin Do blended with my present state as if I was leaning against the wooden hut in the ashram and against the tree trunk in Vilin Do, experiencing both at the same time. Yes, that was it. And then I became enlightened. How many times had I been blind, overlooking the obvious truth? There were no regrets or disputes which would accompany that insight. It was simply the Truth and me in

inseparable unity. Games of building the experience with other insignificant participants both attractive and ugly or terrifying toys, existed only because the perfection of Unity was followed by a shadow of the divine boredom. When I ran into any of those games, attracted by the drama they offered, I would identify with them for several years, lives or eons, and when I would play it till the end, I would endure the divine boredom for a while and then I would search for some new game of hiding.

Now a game on a higher level was beginning and when I thought of it I didn't feel anxious. I knew I was pretending again that I didn't know something that I would later discover and that the attraction of game consisted of pretending, searching, and recognizing. There were other human beings, an infinitely wide world, what was happening between me and them, what we call life, and the Great Creator of the game who made that infinitely large playground so that I could have some fun. The wounds I suffered at it and sometimes the desire to die right there in agony when I didn't know the answer to a riddle, all were just part of the infinite game. I was so open that I could accept what I have refused so many times – that between the Great Creator of the game and myself, existed some mysterious bond and when I figure it out, the game would finally be over.

I will go home immediately after I have said good-bye to Yogendra and Arjuna. I have never been so right in my life than when I told him that I was the Master. Never! I shouldn't have just told him - I should have screamed it out so loudly that the whole ashram would resound. A Master, that was the center of my being in this period of the life game. How could I have doubted my mission even for a moment, because of those insignificant pains, which I felt around the middle of the second day, which now seemed like insignificant details from the remote past? But immediately I had another thought - that game wouldn't have been so interesting without pretending that I had suffered. That was its charm. I am going home, to that shady part of the world, to light it up, like a fresh blush which is dawning, like an enlightened player who will make the all of Europe sizzle: Here's the right man, here's the Great Master! Peter Perriot in Chicago was right when he suggested that my enlightenment would light up many new lights. The darkness was receding and the dawn was beginning.

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Muci was waiting for me again this time. I was filled with love for the whole world but in it, like a black dot, I had the feeling that it was hard to love people like him. His shrieking voice, stammering, and thin, scarce beard, which looked as if he didn't have it at all. It was hard to avoid him because he expressed a strong desire and great persistence, to attach himself to the person who he considered stronger than him. In this period, he chose me. While we were driving in his car toward Belgrade, he repeated that my articles in magazines had changed his life. In high school, we called such people the crawlers, although reluctantly I had to admit that he was exceptionally hard-working and that he finished tasks without making any mistakes. From time to time he looked at me askance, expecting to see how does an enlightened man looks. "Everything is ready for your first Intensive", he said in the voice of a corporal reporting to a higher ranking officer. "I couldn't find anything better than a one-bedroom apartment. I tried to rent a hall in a cultural center or school, but at such places they always ask for papers that we were an official organization. It was hard to find assistants; everyone wanted to participate.

"If there are no assistants, I'll work without them."

He looked at me with admiration and said: "There will be about twenty people. I don't know how we are going to sleep in that space?"

"Where are you taking me?"

"To your home. You have a welcoming board, this time with even more reasons to be happy for you."

"No. First I want to see the apartment where I'll lead the Intensive."

It was an empty apartment near Kalemegdan, in which our steps and voices echoed. Large living room, kitchen and anteroom, and a bathroom. "Everyone should bring a sleeping bag or a couple of blankets. We'll use the anteroom as well."

“I understand. I’ll write that in the invitation. You should take a look at the invitation once I write it. Surely there are a lot of things which need to be done. Just tell me - I’m here.”

“We have to inform people about the place and have the Intensive. Everything about the truth is simple. People complicate things and circumstances to avoid it.”

“Could I ask you something?” His pale eyes squinted with curiosity.

“Yeah, just make it short.”

“Does a person get mystical experiences at the Intensive? I mean really mystical?”

“A long story devaluates its value. You’ll find that out at the end of the Intensive. Personal experience is the only criteria.”

The time before the Intensive went by quickly. My mood changed often. Several times I wanted to cancel it, but my courage came back by itself. I didn’t do anything to win it back, it came back stronger than the one before, filling me with energy, which made me tremble like a spiritual fever. I knew the people who signed up had confidence in me, but they often called me on the phone asking for more detailed explanations - what should they expect, would they be normal after the Intensive, what if they discovered that deep down in their souls they were homosexuals?...I demonstrated patience I didn’t know I had, and I quickly succeeded in convincing them that they were at the turning point of their lives. “Dad, I have never heard you be so convincing”, Nenad said to me one time when I finished a conversation over the phone. “You could sell refrigerators to Eskimos.”

I didn’t have an assistant who would prepare food for the participants, so I bought baby food to mix with milk, yogurt, apples, rye bread, which stayed fresh for a while, and roasted peanuts. I prepared large doses of vitamins, bought candles in case the electricity went out, and recorded a tape with the sound of a gong five minutes apart. The Intensive was scheduled to last from Thursday evening through Sunday night. On Thursday, my energy was boiling; everything was ready for the first spark to ignite in this part of the world. In the afternoon, while I was packing my good old sleeping bag with which I had quite a history, Lydia stood at the door of the room: “I want to talk.”

“Let’s do it after the Intensive,” I said quickly, turning around in the room. In serious moments, often I forget something and later I become upset about it.

“No, I’ve delayed it too many times. I can’t wait a second longer,” she said, and went into the kitchen.

Our relationship had grown colder in recent months. She was critical of me and she refused to participate in the Intensive. She was sitting at the kitchen table, with furrowed forehead and tightened lips. I pulled the chair closer to the table. “So, tell me, what is it so important that it can’t wait until Sunday evening?”

“I want a divorce.”

It wasn’t the first time I’d heard that statement, in our arguments we’d divorced several times. That request was the introduction to something else, like opening with a king’s pawn in a Spanish chess game. There was cold resolution in her voice and facial expression. I restrained myself with effort and said in a shaking voice: “Don’t start now. You know what is ahead of me. That Intensive is the most important thing in my life. Let’s have this conversation in a couple of days; then we’ll talk calmly.”

“I know that the Intensive is the most important to you....unfortunately. But it means nothing to me and I have had enough of your most important things.”

“I don’t want to fight. We’ll talk some other time.” I got up and took a metal bowl from the kitchen cabinet and a spoon from a drawer. I didn’t need a fork and knife for such food. On the kitchen table I placed in front of me a toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, the tape with the sound of the gong, three pens, a notebook, the address book with important numbers and a book of Zen stories. I put them slowly in my bag, one by one trying to remember what else I needed.

“There is no need to have a fight. I think you should know that I want a divorce.” She didn’t move from the table. She was silent for a couple of seconds, looking at her folded hands on her lap, and then she raised her eyes and said: “I don’t love you.”

The tightness in my solar plexus lifted, turning into a lump in my throat: “You really found a great moment to tell me that. Thank you...”

“I postponed it for many months. You don’t mean anything to me any more...I want to live my life. I have nothing against you, simply...our relationship has thinned out completely and nothing binds me to you. As a matter of fact, I can hardly bear you...it’s hard to look at someone day and night when he is a total stranger to you.”

I sat by the table and put my head between my hands. I should calmly examine the situation but I was breathing faster. I didn't know what had happened with Lydia, but I knew why. She played her life game completely honestly while for me, it was a barrier, which I had to go through by leading my first Intensive, no doubt about it. I knew that I would face some kind of a barrier before the Intensive, I was getting ready for it, but I was surprised by the direction the strike had come from. It was good that Lydia was silent, I could gather my thoughts and slowly the assurance came to me that I was ready to pay any price. I got up hastily, put the remaining things from the table in my bag, and said to her:

“You know what? Do what you want, I am off to lead the Intensive. Everything else, marriage, divorce, I don't love you any more...I always loved you, the man of my life... the only woman who understood me...those are trifles and nonsense. I don't give a fuck for the whole world, the truth is most important to me. If you can't bear that, leave and don't worry about it!”

Lydia shrugged her shoulders and said conciliatorily: “We need to talk about some things - our child, the apartment...I don't want to list.”

“Well, that has to wait until the end of my Intensive.”

I left the house earlier than I had planned. I had time so I decided to walk over to the apartment where my fate had scheduled the date with me. When I left, I remembered I hadn't said good-bye to Nenad but I couldn't go back. I become superstitious in such situations. I was tightly holding the handle of my bag, walking faster and faster. Had I just passed the worst or was something else waiting for me during the Intensive? Let it be, whatever it will be and rather sooner.

The door of the apartment was unlocked. As we agreed, Muci was supposed to be there to meet the participants. Six people were sitting on their sleeping bags on the floor, looking at me with questioning looks, as if they expected to become enlightened the moment I entered the room. I took a deep breath, filling my lungs with air, and walked over the threshold, as the Master forged from one piece, no part of me remained someplace else. I didn't have a wife who wanted a divorce because she didn't love me anymore, or sons, past nor future. Everything disappeared in a faraway mist. In front of me were only the faces of people who wanted the truth.

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An expression of questioning mixed with fear was on all seventeen faces of the participants, who were sitting on the floor waiting for me when I entered the room. I'd spent about forty minutes alone in the kitchen to gather my thoughts and re-stimulate people. I heard their nervous giggling. Some were walking about the room; others were sitting immovable and silent next to the wall. "It's a real cookout", I heard someone say and it was a good expression for the state they were in. That's why I let them wait - to let the tension become unbearable. The longer the meat is cooked the softer it is.

I sat on a chair, the only in the room. To the right of the chair, Muci had placed a small table with a jar of water and several glasses, a tape recorder with the gong tape and a list of participants. I took the glass and drank a big gulp of cold water with dry lips, and slowly looked at the participants.

"Finally, here's our Intensive. Masters usually introduce themselves, but we know each other so there's no need for that. Right at the beginning I have to tell you some important things." I looked at them one after the other until inside I counted to twenty. Then, I went on: "The goal of the Intensive of Illumination is illumination – that's why it's called that. Illumination is gnosis, the enlightenment and in essence, it is the direct experience of the truth... That expression best describes that state, which runs away from every description. As one Sufi poet said, measuring a thousand liters of wine wouldn't get you drunk until you drank."

They listened to me intently and silently; only my deep breathing was heard. "Ahead of us are three difficult days during which we'll fight for that experience. It's not easy to achieve. Why? All your life you have had only indirect experiences. They are characterized by the duality of object and subject. Between a subject who lives through experiences and the object, which he experiences, there's always some process which mediates it. Do you understand? That's why it is indirect experience. For example, I am talking to you now (I pointed at myself quickly with my index finger), and you're trying to understand what I am saying (I pointed at them). Between you as a subject and what I am presenting you, as an object, a mediating process of listening, hearing...and understanding is happening. You could remember similar things, which you

heard of or read about, so you have a process of comparison and process of memorization, because you are pulling out from your memory some informationOr, another example – when I look at this wall, between me as a subject and the wall as an object, mediates the process of seeing.” With open hand, which I held before my eyes, I made several quick gestures back and forth toward the wall. “Sometimes you can perceive some person telepathically, but even telepathy is a process! It happens sometimes that your intuition whispers what someone thinks about you. Regardless of how sophisticated a process it is, intuition is also a process. Are you following me?”

I paused and then continued, stressing my words: “In the direct experience of the truth or illumination, there is no process, because there is no difference between the subject and object! They merge and become one.”

It was time to move on to the most difficult part, to try to explain to them the technique of the Intensive of illumination. There wasn't much to explain. Yogendra had created a practical system, which gives results in a short time, but in the beginning, with participants, it creates stress, anger and aggression toward the Master, oneself, anything and everything to which the attention gets tied to.

“When you receive a command from your partner 'Tell me who you are', it doesn't mean that you should tell him who you are. You have been doing that all your life while talking to people, and you haven't experienced illumination. On the contrary, you should direct yourself to experience yourself directly, without any processes, to unite with your object - which is you - at that moment. How can you do that?” I furrowed my forehead to indicate the weight of that undertaking. “That's where you'll have the most difficulties, because no one can tell you that. The word 'how' always means some process, and in the technique of the Intensive, there is no process. You simply need to willingly orient yourself to directly experience yourself and to do it the best way you know, as 'how' doesn't exist.... That's one of the wickedest things about the Intensive – there are others, too – but it's worth the trouble. The reward you'll get has no price...Are there any questions?”

“If I understood well, you are asking of us to work during three days on something we don't know how to do and that you can't explain to us?” Milunka asked. She was the oldest in the group, a middle-school teacher, with grey hair and glasses on the tip of her nose. She expected a reasonable explanation and she got Yogendra's technique.

“Exactly that Lunka. I said, that is the part which you'll have the greatest difficulty accepting. It will seem that you will never master the technique, but if you do it the best you could, in whichever way, in the second part of the

Intensive the technique will somehow work for you and then you'll know how to do it in the correct way, although, you couldn't explain anyone how you were doing it, as I can't explain it to you now."

"Frankly speaking, I have never come across anything like that in my life."

"Of course. That's why you have never experienced enlightenment, because you only spoke about it."

"I expected that based on our reason..."

"Leave the reason for after the Intensive! May be you should think about Albert Einstein's words: Reason is our faithful slave and the truth about us is the gift of Providence. We created the society which celebrates the slave forgetting about the holy gift."

After this no one wanted to ask a question. I softened my tone: "You have fifteen minutes to get ready for sleeping. There are too many people here for such a small apartment. When you go to the bathroom tonight, don't turn on the lights. Be careful not to step on someone." I'd put my sleeping bag at the place everyone avoided, under the window through which cold air was coming, pouring all the way to the floor. Muci took his sleeping bag from the corner where he had already accommodated himself, came to the window as if he was interested in seeing what was going in the lighted street, and then placed himself to sleep next to me.

"Let me ask you something," he murmured between his teeth, so that people immediately next to us heard him. He was trying to make others believe that there was some closer connection between the two of us. The skill of attaching to one stronger than himself he had developed to the highest level and in other circumstances that could pass unnoticed, but this was the Intensive, when I sharply noticed everything. It was time to show him that I was the Master who saw people clearly in the Intensive. "You could have asked me like everyone else, during our conversation. You didn't do it so now get down and be quiet." It took more than thirty minutes for everyone to quieted down. I addressed them the last time that day with the words: "Stay with your question!", and then turned the light off.

During the morning lecture, I repeated the technique using different words. "The technique of the Intensive of Illumination doesn't give direct experiences, it only empties our consciousness. At one moment, spiritual masses desert the field of consciousness and then it is possible to experience the direct experience. In the state of empty consciousness, illumination will happen or not – there are no guarantees." They looked at me crossly under swollen, half-closed eyelids. It was

six o'clock in the morning on a dark December day and not much remained of their excitement from last night. Now they were thinking how nice it would be to wiggle in a warm bed, turn over on the other side, and continue to sleep. "I know it's hard for you", I said, "you are sleepy now, wondering what the heck are you doing here? But be persistent! Do the best you can in this moment, no matter how little it is. I told you, a way out of a crisis is to go through crisis. This is the first one and there'll be many more. If you get sleepy, go to the bathroom and splash cold water on your face, and then continue. Persist, **persist**, PERSIST!!"

The main problem I saw was on the other side. Events in the room reflected in me like in a mirror, and not much was going on. It was like a lukewarm, sleepy puddle trying to generate a storm and spill over the edges. The love for people I felt earlier, especially the night before, had evaporated. I suppressed the feeling, which was emerging in my consciousness like a rat from a dark hole, of intolerance toward these ill-humored people...no, hate is the right word. They had tricked me into this muddy, shallow water with their prattle about illumination which they have waited for since they were aware of themselves, the truth, sacrifice for others and other empty stories... Now, among these swollen creatures there wasn't a single genuine man who would do what he swore, to move the group and to stir me to move. I remembered Yogendra's words from the first tape that it was impossible to enlighten people unless you felt love for them, but that the Master shouldn't lose hope if he doesn't find love in him at the beginning. "Do the best you can and love will come by itself. The Intensive isn't love at first sight. Love will appear as we are walking toward its end." But what could you do when you knew that you could never love these frogs with swollen eyes?

The animalistic base of a human being is easily noticeable. After the first sleepy dyad, I gave them some baby food for breakfast of groats mixed with yogurt and a thin slice of dark bread. They ate fast with downcast eyes. In the next dyad they came to life, voices became louder, occasional laughter was heard and swollen faces became deflated. At the Intensive, on the first day, a war is waged with the body, on the second day the greatest enemy is the human mind, and on the third day everything evolves around questions – whether a man will have the direct experience. At quarter to midnight, I told them to get ready for sleep since the lights would go off exactly at midnight. I breathed a sigh of relief. The worst was over, the first eighteen hours, which were now at midnight compressed into several images.

The participants started the second day fresh and rested. Energy was bursting in the room. It was too hot so I had to open the window quite often. Some participants became aggressive and started to criticize me and the Intensive's structure. I was surprised how much they knew about my life, my

relationship with Lydia, and my problems so far. I heard things I didn't know: that I had three children out of a wedlock, that one of them was half-witted and stashed away at some center for handicapped children, that Lydia was cheating on me with whoever she got a chance, that I was doing the same and that condoms were falling out of my pockets all the time...

I was ready for such rumors but they hurt me more than I expected. I was in that stuffy room because of them, breathing their densely compressed body odour, listening to stale complaints and senseless reasons for their weaknesses and no one had shown me any gratitude with a single word. At one moment, Marianne, a tiny girl with short hair, said: "I feel some sadness for Bogdan. He's sitting there in his chair while all of us are playing a game of spitting at a target. He can't defend himself...it's horrible. He doesn't deserve that." She had the slanted eyes of a Japanese person, small hands and tiny feet, and I'd liked her since the beginning. Her support came at the right moment, but it was short-lived, since she continued: "Well, why should I feel sorry for him? He deserves it. He bragged so much, and now he's huddled up, nowhere to be seen. No one pushed him to lead the Intensive."

There was a deep, primordial justice in her words. True, I voluntarily stepped into that meat-grinding machine. I promised them too much and now I wasn't able to keep up the race with myself. I had to survive somehow until the end, and then...I knew that never again would I get into something like that. But the end was far away.

We were approaching the middle part of the second day, when, by schedule, I was supposed to deliver a speech. I felt that at that moment I had to push them toward illumination, for which all the previous activity was a preparation. I had to open myself emotionally, to bare myself in order to open them up and to have the right to ask them to make the next crucial step. I had the strength to do it, but there was that omnipresent disgusting shadow - my double consciousness. I knew what I had to do, and for some time I saw myself as an actor getting ready to go on stage, do his part for which he'd prepared himself for days, and change over the mood of a depressive audience who had already begun to leave the theatre, and extract applause from them like a wisdom tooth from a swollen jaw. It would be easy to execute the opening if the consciousness narrowed down only to what needed to be said, but I was conflicted and I saw myself clearly.

The Intensive is a hellish thing; it is a magnifying glass of our intentions, actions and worse of all - our weaknesses. Thoughts hidden long ago jumped into the light, screaming and stinging our eyes. I have realized everything, I knew everything but I couldn't make myself move. I thought of stopping the Intensive

and telling them why I was doing it, because they have been working uncaringly and they didn't deserve the direct experience of the truth. I quickly pushed away that thought – they would know that it wasn't reasonable approximation talking from me, but my weakness. What was waiting for the whole group had to be done. The way out of crisis leads through crisis. I told them that at the beginning of the Intensive and now I had to prove through my work that I was standing behind my words. I decided to call them individually for a short consultation and thus establish deeper contact with them, since the possibility that they could spit on me after my speech became more probable.

I called Muci first. He kneeled on a blanket in front of my chair and with desperation, looked up at me.

“How's it going?”

“Badly. I am doing everything you said, the best I can, but it's no use. I must admit to myself that this is not for me. I'll never achieve enlightenment.”

I leaned over him and placed my hands on his shoulders: “Listen to me carefully! That is a trick of your mind. How many times has it deceived you so far? It's doing the same thing again. Don't let yourself go. Persist.”

“I think it's not meant for me to become enlightened. Everyone has a different fate.”

There was a delicate spark of hope in his voice and a silent request for me to ignite it. “Again, that is a trick of your mind. It pulls tricks, one by one, from its bag, like an evil sorcerer. Don't fall for it! It's up to you to do the best you can, and let fate take care of the rest. Do you understand? Now go to your place, continue to work and don't let go until the end.” He nodded. He was a different man now, his hopes were renewed, and he was ready to fight for the next couple of hours.

I wanted to call the little Japanese, Marianne, but Peter Korcnoy was already approaching me. He was a man in his forties, with a strong body beginning to soften, red hair, freckled face, and widely-spaced teeth. He created pottery and people said he was a talented artist who drained his ambitions in alcohol. While he kneeled before me, his sweaty body emitted some indistinct odour, which reminded me of empty brandy barrels. His seven-year-old daughter was seriously ill and he fought for illumination fervently, as if his direct experience of the truth would save her life. He looked at me with wide-open eyes, covered with thin red veins, and with feeble, hesitation he said: “I think, I think... that I have become enlightened.” That was a simple statement, but there

was haziness in his eyes, conflicting feelings were mixing, catching each other. He analyzed his experience, made comparisons, and brought down the account.

“What happened?”

“Well, many things.”

“What made you think that you’ve become enlightened?”

“Well, all the time I had thoughts of who I am. There were many doubts and none was the right one. Then suddenly my head cleared... Like after it rains when the air gets clean. And then...” his face took on a numb expression and his eyes directed through me into the distance – “...then slowly in front of me emerged an incredibly simple Chinese drawing. It represented perfection of lines, form, and content. I’ve never seen anything like that; it was indescribable. And then, I understood that it was I.”

“So you think that you are the Chinese drawing?”

“I don’t think, I know it.”

It was a great temptation. If he had reached enlightenment, he would inspire the whole group and I wouldn’t have to deliver that difficult speech, to reveal myself and play that disagreeable game before him and myself. It would be a nice beginning of a denouement, it would be easy on everyone and the incurable sickness of his daughter would seem less terrible. But I knew that I couldn’t affirm a lie. The master’s acceptance of some indirect experience of illumination, no matter how dramatic that experience may be, Yogendra said, is the crime of a lie. It was where weak Masters went in moments of crisis, when they believed they couldn’t enlighten their people, so they took shortcuts, validating insights, catharsis, and occult experiences as enlightenment. A lump was beginning to harden in my throat and my lips began to curl. I was so close to embracing him, sobbing over him and admitting how desperate I was. Nothing like that happened. I looked at him with my face motionless and only my lips moved when I said: “Peter, I’d like more than anything in the world for you to have become enlightened. Your experience is valuable, you feel that yourself...but I must tell you – that isn’t a direct experience of the truth! Keep on working, you are on the right track.”

He lowered his eyes with a painful expression on his face. In his desperation, he had reached for that experience like a drowning person for a piece of wood, and with just a few words, I had broken it.

Jovan was a thirty-year-old locksmith from some village near Belgrade and in the beginning I thought that he was among us by mistake. Nevertheless, he worked well and was more open than the majority. In the beginning of the Intensive sexual contents poured out of him. He was calmer now; recognition of the dark contents which came to the surface had resulted in some submissive acceptance of himself. He shook his head slowly while talking to me: "What kind of man am I? I would kill my best friend for a stinking cunt of some woman. That's the way I am, I can't lie to myself any more."

I held his neck with my hands so that my fingers met behind the back of his head: "Listen to me carefully! That's a content of your consciousness, which doesn't have permanent value. In an hour or two you'll think that you're the best person in the world. That content has no permanent value either. All you need is to communicate all of it, so you can empty your consciousness." I paused and said, accenting every word: "Then you'll find out who you are! **The direct experience will alter your life!**"

I invited them one after the other, and when I finished with the last person, they were different people. A different man sat in my chair, ready to throw himself bare into the pins and needles - if that was the award for only one man to become enlightened. I felt the Intensive from within and I knew I was doing the most valuable thing. The right words came out of me, which had alchemical influence on all of them. It was a simple matter: If the Master maintains complete focus on the participant as a conscious being, he will, during short consultation, be able to see through him and say exactly what is needed. The unmistakable index forced on me in that process. When I said the last word to the participants, with which I would push them toward illumination, at that moment I felt the stab of a thin, hot needle. It was the same feeling I had in my youth when on the street I accidentally met a girl who I was in love with. I felt a short and sharp pain, not unpleasant because in a strong way I felt that I had accomplished the real thing.

After that exercise, I gave them a short break and then, I placed a glass of water next to me and said; "It's time we talked. I need to tell you some things which will help you get enlightened."

They turned to me, with sweaty faces, tired but ready for the next effort. I could feel tension mounting in the room and sparks of energy in the stuffy air. I knew exactly what I had to do - to bring them gradually to the turning point and then thrust them in the heart with all mighty force. I began to speak slowly. I told them that the majority had the technique in their consciousness and that they were doing it quite well. I reminded them of tricks of ego, the great master of illusion, which will until the very end try to deceive them and pull them away from the truth. I stressed that they had to endure until the last strike of the gong. I

had to make the situation real for them, tie my words with something tangible so they would gain in persuasiveness, and I did that by telling them what they were already feeling:

“While you are sitting and listening to my words, you feel that the pressure of your body becomes deeper and deeper...Blood is pulsating in your hands and with every beat, the remaining time of your life elapses. But with every beat, you are getting closer to the truth of who you actually are, which will change you forever.”

The eyes of the majority widened as if I had said something deep, until then hidden words of wisdom. I drank several gulps of water, put the glass on the table next to me and took a deep breath. The nausea in my stomach became stronger and my legs began to shake.

“I have to tell you one more thing. It may be the most important thing at the Intensive of Illumination. You have been working for a long time and no one has become enlightened. Some people could work on the technique for thirty days without achieving enlightenment. Why!?! Human nature is such that many people cannot get enlightened for themselves. You feel deep down in your soul that you are not worth it, that you don't deserve it and that's why you're stopping yourself. You created that barrier in your consciousness yourself, no one else did. Your mind is a cunning trap because the door of freedom is locked from inside.”

I slowly drank some more water and looked above their heads through the window into the dark, grey sky. It was December and already getting dark outside. I wanted to give them some time to at least partially accept responsibility for the state they were in. I looked over all the participants, making sure I didn't miss someone's eyes. And then I said:

“What can you do to become enlightened? There is a way, so simple and so effective...” I paused, counted silently until ten and then began talking more loudly: “Do it not for yourself, but for someone else!” The passion from inside overwhelmed me more strongly when I continued: “Do it for someone you love! Do it for some unfortunate being, for a child without parents, for someone who is crying for love. You can do it because the world is full of unhappy people.”

They were surprised. They had fought for a day and half without thinking of anyone else, believing that illumination was the greatest gift which they could give themselves and now they're told that they should do it for another human being!?

I took a deep breath and paused. What was coming I had to roll over my lips: “If you can't find anyone to get enlightened for at this moment, you

shouldn't be looking very far...Do it for a man who lives for that moment of your truth, for whom your enlightenment is a precious gift...DO IT FOR ME! DO IT FOR MY LOVE!" I spoke powerfully but hastily; emotions were suffocating me and tears filled my eyes: "No matter what you thought or said about me, you are the best people in the world for me. You are sitting here in this stuffy room, sweaty, hungry, tormented, desperately trying to step out from the world of lies and reach the truth...for the first time in your life." I felt pain in my diaphragm and stomach. "I need your enlightenment. I live for this moment of your truth! I need your love, I need all of you! No matter that you were spitting on me and saying all kinds of hurtful things, I need you...not in the far future when you become perfect, light and clean beings in some cosmic blueness, but now, the way you are...Do it for my love, ENLIGHTEN YOURSELVES."

I kept silent for a few minutes and at that moment I saw Haling's image, with tears rolling down his cheeks. I raised my head, looked at them with blurry eyes and gave them the simple truth: "I love you all. It seems I have never loved anyone so much in my life. If I let out all the love I feel inside of me, I would split in half!" I cried, but crying like a Master before them wasn't important. I knew that I had reached a turning point in my life which I had avoided many times before and that I had taken a step in the right direction. I became the road I travelled on, both mission and its fulfilment. In the next dyad, Orion became enlightened.

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Orion painted aquarelles and over time his paintings faithfully depicted the spiritual changes he went through. His aquarelles had transparency and depth; you could assume that there were many hidden things on his paintings which only you could see, as if between the painter and you there was a hidden conspiracy. His family on his father's side was originally from Montenegro and he inherited a typical Montenegrin last name – Vujovic, but he had adopted the name Orion which sounded somehow as smooth as an aquarelle and vaguely suggested cosmic distances, past lives where human pettiness disappeared. A short time before the Intensive he decided to marry a freckled girl with a small body; he was getting ready to go to Holland, and this Intensive was the only chance for him for a long time to become enlightened. He expected a lot from the direct experience – to become clear to himself, and begin to paint from within, not through imposed identities from the past.

The fate of his family was known only to a small number of people. His grandfather and father had come out of the war as communists; his grandfather as a commissar of the battalion and his father as a young member of a communist organization, who pledged himself to the party like one would to a beloved girl. When in 1948 arrests of the members of the Informbiro began, denunciation and all kinds of repulsiveness, typical for such states, his eighteen-year old father declared at the family lunch that it was shameful that so many of his comrades, loyal communists, were arrested and shamed publicly. While he was talking, the grandfather-commissar was sombrely silent and then he said: “You are against the party! Do you know, you miserable creature, what it means?”

“I am not against the party, I am always ready to die for it, but I am against such methods. Something stinks there. We didn’t fight so that honest people would be denounced, arrested and ashamed.”

“You are my only son, but if you say another word, I’ll disown you.”

“Just go ahead. You can even go to the committee and denounce me. The truth is more important to me than anything else. I joined the party because of it.”

Orion’s grandfather then spoke the words which caused the family tragedy. “I’ll do it. I swear on my honour! I’ll go to the committee tomorrow to denounce such a bastard that I made.”

Orion’s grandmother listened silently to this conversation in which great trouble lowered over the head of her only son. That night she killed her husband with an axe while he was sleeping and then hanged herself.

Images I created based on that event from Orion’s story went through my consciousness for a second, while I watched him meditate with his eyes closed. I couldn’t take my eyes off him for several minutes. That was a strange phenomenon – when something significant was happening with the participant, the Master’s attention unwillingly focuses on him. I wondered what was happening with him? At that moment he got up, walked past the sitting couples, and approached me. He kneeled on the little rug and raising his eyes to look at me, like he was remembering an old dream, he gently said: “A strange thing is happening...There’s nothing in me. Just infinite emptiness...like a light that spreads everywhere. There is nothing left.”

“How long have you been in that state?” My face was immovable but I was overwhelmed with excitement, the same as I felt when Stevica told me he waited for me knowing I would come for him someday.

Orion was looking at me with glassy eyes as if he was reading the truth inside of himself engraved in a stone: “Since last night.”

“Since last night?” I was silent for a moment and then, like a hen pecking at an egg shell to help a troubled chicken emerge, I asked: “Now tell me...WHO ARE YOU?”

He opened his mouth halfway, spreading his hands with palms turned upward. “Well...I.” At that moment he understood the joke from time immemorial. He touched his forehead with his right hand: “Oh, my....that’s it!” From a kneeling position he lowered himself onto the floor still holding his head, and sobbing like a small child who had finally found his mother, he admitted what he had suppressed for such a long time.

Since then many people had become enlightened in front of me. I have forgotten the names of some of them and words which preceded their enlightenment. But Orion’s direct experience of the truth has remained intact in my memory, his facial expression, the way he held his head, his eyes directed at eternity, his understanding of a cruel joke which the creator had played on him for so long, his tears and the illuminated expression on his face with which he returned to his partner in the dyad. I realized a strange thing then – how powerfully connected we are to other human beings. My enlightenment with Kali in Santa Barbara was until that moment my most precious experience. But, when Orion said those two words “Well...I”, his illumination overpowered mine in significance. When I compared those two experiences, his was more valuable to me. As if at that moment I doubled myself and the better part of me was kneeling in front of the Master’s chair, illuminated by the truth.

Orion’s illumination disturbed others. His partner, a fat girl with thick black hair and the strange name of Milada, stared at him with wide-open black eyes, which became shiny as she observed every word he said. Orion loudly talked of his experience so that the whole room resonated, and the other participants, stretching their necks, looked askance at him so they could hear him better. By regulations which Yogendra established, I was supposed to warn them to continue to meditate on their koan, but it was better let them be influenced and permeated with Orion’s emotions. It was obvious how powerful was the fragrance of the Truth. Their worries, the aches in their bodies and heads, nausea, feelings of helplessness, surrender, and despair – all disappeared suddenly and the desire to experience the truth obviously got aroused again.

My attention was drawn more and more by Milada’s appearance. Bending forward, she stared fixedly at Orion, absorbing everything that was coming from him. Her face was covered with redness descending to her neck while her lower

jaw was loose. She looked as if she was muted by the miracle. When the gong announced the change of roles, she closed her eyes and focused on herself, enthralled. It was a deep immersion, from which powerful energy was emitting. I tried to pay attention to other participants as well, but I couldn't take my eyes off of her face and chest, which was rapidly moving up and down. The nostrils of her wide nose were open and her breathing turned into wheezing. Then she covered her face with her hands, her shoulders shook, and a piercing cry came out of her body, becoming higher and higher, suspended with short moans. Fear appeared on the participants' faces and they looked at me with the expectation that I'd do something. Only Orion was shining with happiness; his experience was doubling and enhancing. Milada's screaming suddenly subsided. She was silent for a few moments with her head bent over her lap, hands still over her face, but when she raised her head we witnessed the metamorphosis of a fat worm into an enthralling butterfly. When looking at her shiny eyes, you didn't see her fat body, short column-like legs, and black curly hair like fur. Beauty radiated from her, which annulled her bodily flaws as the whiteness of a lotus flower makes you blind to the mud it grows from.

She spoke through sobs: "I am happy for the first time ...to be alive."

Relief spread through the room and generated a new hope that it was possible to experience the truth here and now. People became like a herd of hunting dogs rushing after a rabbit. Nothing remained of the previous confusion, doubt and hesitation. The truth was in front of them like a sunbathed golden mountain, the solution to all their torments, fears, and humiliations and the remedy for all the sickness of this unattractive world.

I had to avert my attention from Milada since Mihailo Pantic, called Mik, was approaching me. He was a mathematician and computer expert, and that's exactly how he looked. He had an egg-shaped head, glasses with thick frames, behind which he squinted with tiny eyes, a high forehead and a brain which sucked information in like a sponge. Now that sponge of his was rapidly vibrating, trying to find a reason for the obvious injustice where two people, a painter who lives in fantasies and fat Milada, had reached the finishing line, while he hopelessly fell behind in the group of losers. Spiritual envy like an acid bit through the surface of his unshaven face. He was sweaty and in corners of his mouth he had traces of dried spit, which turned to foam, and his eyes, reduced by his thick glasses, gave him the look of an insect unable to find the exit from a trap he had fallen into.

"I want to know one thing," he said, with a note of desperation. "Is it possible to check...I mean...to know for certain whether the person became enlightened or not?"

“Don’t worry about that, Mik. There is no certain equation; this is not mathematics. You should use the state you’re in. Turn the question on yourself. Who wants to know if it is possible to be certain in the estimate? Who is desperate now? Who’s looking at me?”

“But I can’t work any longer, if I don’t know what I’m getting myself into!”

“Of course you can! You have worked well so far; you saw what happened. Deep down in your soul you know what those two enlightened ones have experienced. Now your ego, your old enemy, is trying to prevent you from experiencing the truth, since it will die then for a moment. It’s giving you a bone to chew on until the end of the Intensive – what is the possibility? Can it be done or not...and similar bullshit. Those are old, dirty tricks. Go back to your place and keep on working! Turn everything you’re doing on yourself and you will become enlightened!”

Orion and Milada’s illumination set in motion deep processes in many of the other participants. Communications filled up with emotions, people stopped pretending, and previously hidden filth slowly emerged to the surface. The group was an assembly of exposed beings with only one goal – to experience the truth. The states they were in changed quickly. After desperate cries and revulsion over their own acts, there developed a belief that everything was the way it should be and that our unethical behaviours were created for the awakening game.

Energy filled the room; it was closed to midnight, but no one was sleepy. I heard someone say that we were in a cosmic ship and had left ordinary life far behind. The participants were enchanted by the game of self-discovery; the truth took them under its wing and now there was no return from that path. When I announced before midnight that the second day was over, indistinct protest roamed the room.

I dreamed of Vilin Do, my brother, and Grandma, who was telling us a story. She put her warm palm on my cheek and said: “You’ll never forget that.” Then I realized I was in the orchard, next to the fishing pole. I had caught a beautiful white dove, with smooth and shiny feathers, which was glistening in the sun. I held it in my hands, feeling his warmth, the same as my Grandma’s palms felt on my cheek. Then, the soft sound of the alarm clock, next to me in my bag, woke me up, and at first, I didn’t know where I was. The white dove was a sign of enlightenment, and I knew everything would be all right.

I began the third day with a short speech: “You have an ideal situation. There is a lot of positive energy in the group; the majority is doing the technique

well and now comes the time to achieve the goal you came here for. Be open to contents of your consciousness. Be careful not to overlook the obvious thing!” My words caused confusion on some faces, hesitation and resistance. As if they wanted to say, which obvious thing, I am not blind. To sharpen them at the only thing they had to experience, I used moving metaphors of Sufis and practical Zen minds who were using them for centuries. I included in my words everything valuable I had heard, seen and learned from others, but not for a second did I devalue someone else’s ideas; but as a narrator adding to those ideas. “All such riddles, puzzles and short stories have only one goal – to move you toward the truth.” I paused for some time as if waiting for their answers, and then I went on, remembering with excitement my past initiation into the Odin Order: “Three snakes roamed the world to find a three-snake snake...Who is that?” I had a quizzical look on my face, as if I was trying with them, to find an answer to a riddle.

“Do you know what the poet, Vesna Krmpotic, said about a sphinx? A sphinx is a place from which you can see a sphinx; and it is the only place in the world from which you can see a sphinx.”

Some raised their eyes, some lowered them, and some looked through me into the distance. I had moved them, no doubt about it, although they weren’t aware of it. Deep inside, these metaphors will move around fulfilling the task because sages created them. I don’t miss anything. Everyone noticed Muci’s egoism. He skilfully tripped his partners. When he was passive, he didn’t keep his attention on the active partner, which was his responsibility, but under half-closed eyelids, he dozed off or daydreamed or looked around, worried that someone else might get enlightened while he remained cocooned in his selfishness. He tried to buy my grace by saying aloud that the Master’s words had helped him greatly; that my every word was worth of gold; it was hard for him because he wasn’t attentive enough, he felt enormous love toward people; and if he had to choose between his partner’s and his own enlightenment, he would always choose his partner’s. As the Intensive progressed, his ears became harder and his tongue longer. I had to keep an eye on him, since people like him, like rodents, chip away at the groundwork of the Intensive.

During a break between two dyads, I addressed the participants with the words: “Some people, when they are passive, are not following the communication of their partners. In the Intensive, selfishness and love are easily noticed. Don’t forget that a good passive partner is the first to become enlightened, because love breaks the shield of ego. When ego disappears, a person achieves illumination.”

I had to move Orion and Milada again. They were empty from the night before, already experiencing “the end of the game”. When a game was played till the end, its focus and structure disintegrated. There is no tension remaining to push one toward a goal, because the goal disappeared when it was achieved. I had to prompt them to set a new goal and create a new goal tension. The only resource was love, they were still radiating it, weaker than last night but it was in the background of their thoughts, words, and gestures.

“Those who have already achieved illumination should use the remaining time to practice even deeper experience, to change the question and do everything to achieve enlightenment to the koans “What is Life’, ‘What am I’, or ‘What is another human being?’ If you feel saturated, think of the people next to you. You achieved illumination thanks to them, express your gratitude and love and help them get enlightened.”

Time until lunch was just marking time. Then, several individuals, one after another, entered the state of strong catharsis. I was no longer afraid longer that no one else would get enlightened; I was more afraid that their piercing cries would make the neighbours call the police. To muffle their voices, I give them huge feather pillows to keep over their mouths while they screamed. It is strange how a man in some situations which seem to be completely out of a control, can do everything he is asked to do. “Keep a pillow over your mouth, scream in the pillow!” I said to Mik and he does it with no objections.

At one moment, karate master Stojan Drenjanin, the man I knew the least in the group, entered the catharsis state, as well as the Japanese girl and Olga, a literature student with a long neck and blue veins, which became swollen when she screamed into a pillow in a hoarse voice. During the next ten minutes I couldn’t keep my attention on the rest of the group and when I returned to my chair to get a better look, Peter Korcnoy approached me: “Bogy, I can’t work on my question any longer.”

His technique had broken, the smell of Zen was coming from him. He stayed in the emptiness. That was obvious illumination, and the experience had to be extracted from him with just a few words, to prevent him from philosophizing and looking elsewhere for elevated experiences. I leaned over and looked him in the face. His breath was like the breath of a hungry dog but it wasn’t important to him or to me.

“Why can’t you work on that question, Peter?”

Slowly, like he was awakening, he said: “Because it no longer makes any sense.”

A pure being was standing there, without identification, layers or lies. A chick's head protruded through a crack in an eggshell. "And why doesn't it make any sense?"

He squinted his eyes and, shaking his head, said: "Because I know....who I am." He put his head on my lap and sobbed. His hopes that illumination would make his daughter's leukemia disappear, his alcoholism vanish, his relationship with failed women next to the wife who he loved, hope that the exhibition he had been postponing for 15 years would open in front of him, everything disappeared. He was here, the way he was and the way he has always been, the man whose daughter will die soon from leukemia.

I embraced his wide shoulders and kissed the sweaty back of his head. "It happens, Peter", I said in a shaky voice. "The truth is what it is, it's not what we want it to be. Painful at first, it is for eternity. Remember the words of Zen: Now when I am enlightened, I am miserable like I was before...Communicate all of it to your partner, don't suppress anything: your expectations, disappointments, feelings that you have been deceived, everything, all of it...illumination is followed by a feeling of total fulfilment, and it will come to you sooner or later."

He raised his head from my lap with a resolute, manly gesture, wiped his tears with the back of his hand and said: "I will. I imagined it differently, but thank you. Thanks from the bottom of my heart."

The end of the Intensive was approaching, the time had expired. A small group of participants were feverishly trying to achieve illumination while the other group was immersed in increasing euphoria, followed by hysterical laughter. Jovan, who had dropped sexual subjects on the second day, was flooded with them again. Before he began his communications, euphoric participants suddenly became quiet to hear what he was going to say and every word he said was accompanied with an outburst of laughter. "I have a semi-automatic cock", I heard him say, "I get it up by with hand and it drops down by itself." I rubbed my chin with my hand to hide my laughter but I couldn't. In the middle of his statements, which made people around him laugh, anxiety came to surface:

"I am a spineless person with women, I feel guilt all the time, I am always guilty...When women accuse me, you are this and that, I immediately accept it, yeah, I'm like that, I am tough, a pig, tricky, all of that... I should be a man and raise my voice like a man. I need to tell them – shut up! You are all whores, from the first to the last, fucking unfaithful bitches!"

His words revealed the miserable hurt he felt, but it just roused a new wave of laughter. He knew he was the center of the attention and it wasn't hard

for him to stay there. He spoke of his wife as if talking of two different people. One was a girl he dated in his youth, and he had many words of praise for her. Her transformation during the marriage into an unpleasant bitch who talked behind people's backs, walked around the house with messy hair scratching her butt, couldn't alter the initial image. When he talked about the time when they loved each other, his face acquired a compassionate expression: "She was really cute, you know...a real chick. She had a great pair of legs, boobies and a nice ass, it was great to look at her." He meditated for a short time, opened his eyes, and then his current wife became the center of his observation: "That poisonous snake talks around the neighbourhood that she will deny me as a husband in the newspaper and she won't accept my debts." He looked around the room, searching for listeners, and screamed loudly: "Hey, people, I'll help her: I will deny myself and I won't accept my debts!"

His partner Maxim Draganic, nodded, confirming the statement. During the past three days, Maxim lamented several times about whether he was homosexual or straight. It seemed that Jovan's openness had stimulated him and he suddenly spoke, although his role was to be a passive partner who had to be quiet: "I am done with rotten compromises. If you are a man, you can't sit on two chairs. You can't have a prick in your ass and your soul in paradise!"

Next to him was Daniela, a slim girl with a long neck and hair tied in a bun, dressed in blue velvet sweats. She had been reading occult literature for years and was generously drawing from her knowledge. From her communications, delivered in well chosen words, a person could distinguish which of the authorities was embracing her mind at the moment. One after the other came Blavatska and Ramacharaka, Gurgieff and Crowley, Meher Baba and Maharishi. She finished with Telhard de Sharden. She threw a superior look at Jovan and Maxim and announced, louder than usual: "We are not humans who try to become divine. We are gods who try to become humans."

Jovan stopped in the middle of his speech, as if he was weighing her words, and then said: "If I am God, you are all in a big shit!"

The last dyad began, all active partners spoke at the same time, laughter spread throughout the crowded room, the odour of sweat and bad breath bothered no one. "I wonder how it must be at the 14-day Intensive", the Japanese girl asked the entire group, almost screaming with her ear-piercing voice, looking at me. I wished I could abandon the role of a Master and show her, with my fist in the air, that it was surely the most powerful thing on the planet, but my attention drifted to Vica, Olga's brother, a peaceful island of seriousness in an agitated lake of laughter. With a questioning look, he was inspecting one and then the other side of his palms, as if he was seeing them for the first time in his life.

Then, he touched his face with both hands. With my hand I indicated him to come over, but he didn't see me. I knew what had happened – a Narcissus had seen his image and feelings of surprise and love embraced him. I approached him from the back and, tapping him on his shoulder, I said: "Come over." He walked behind me to my chair and kneeled on a little rug, but his attention was forged on the inside. The one who searched and the one that was searched married in unity. He needed to be slapped a little harder so he could shift his gaze from the marriage with himself to other people.

"Tell me what is happening."

"Nothing."

"I understand. Tell me what is in your consciousness."

"Nothing. Just relief. I felt like I was a bag of peas which shifted constantly. Someone cut the bag and all the peas spilled. Just an empty bag was left."

"Who feels that relief?" I asked. When he opened his mouth to answer me, I looked away pretending to be listening to what was happening on the other side of the room.

"I do," he said, enthralled.

I brought my gaze back to him: "I didn't hear what you said. Who feels the relief?" Again, while he opened his mouth I shifted my look away.

"I do," he said, with irritation in his voice.

I looked at him again as if I'd missed his words and said: "I didn't hear you well. Say it louder – who feels relief?"

"I do, I, I, I!" he shouted and the rest of people in the room heard him, "Who else?" At that moment he got it. His face and eyes squinted and he moaned: "That's not IT, Bogy. That's not IT!"

I smiled and several people followed, bursting into laughter. It was no use denying, the game of denial was over, a game of truth had started for him. "You think that is not IT?"

His upper body swayed from left to right, like he was weighing his words: "Goodness. And I expected..."

"What did you expect?"

He raised his head toward the ceiling and then lowered it, looking at his hands. "I was sure that when I got enlightened, I would discover some mystic bond between every atom of my body and the whole cosmos. What a fool I was!"

I kissed him on his sweaty forehead: "Go to your place and communicate everything to your partner!" There was no need to say anything else; my job with him was done for now.

The Intensive was rushing toward its end and I let it take me. I had grown in the master's chair; exhausted and complete, I looked for comparisons with similar situations in my life. Only a few brief moments in my past could be compared with this feeling: When Stevica told me in the home of his foster parent: "Daddy I've waited for you, I knew you would come some day", and the one which happened the afternoon after my return from Chicago. I had been thinking about life's nonsense, contemplating suicide – and Nenad came to me, embraced me with his thin hands, and gently asked: "Daddy dearest, why are you so sad?" Only those two experiences in my life had the power of this moment.

The last gong sounded. Partners hugged each other, crying from happiness, giggling and shouting all at the same time. They came over to me and touched my face with their faces wet with tears, and the odour of sweat of people who had fought for three days and nights for the truth of their beings. "Master", shouted Milos Drenjanin, "you are the best master of all, there aren't any others like you! Let me kiss you; we should all be kissing your ass!" The little Japanese got on her tiptoes and kissed my cheeks: "When will we have a fourteen day?" "Soon, soon", I said, looking for Peter Korcnoy in the crowd. He was standing to the side, leaning on the wall. Down his manly face overgrown with reddish beard, tears were rolling. "Come Peter, let me hug you," I was trying to overpower the voices in the room. He came to me slowly. Vica moved to the side to let him through. There was some nobility in Peter's misfortune which required an honorary place. He embraced my neck with his right hand, and pulling me next to him he simply said: "I am happy that I can call myself your friend."

Still hugging him, I saw Muci, with an expression of unhappy loneliness on his face. What a strange experience. I had hated him for most of the Intensive, wishing that people like him would disappear from the face of the earth and now, I loved him also. Love was spilling everywhere like from a holy grail. I beckoned to him with my hand and before I kissed him on his forehead, he began to cry. His words were simple now; he didn't try to please me or to shut others out: "You know what this means to me!" Olga was kissing me on my cheeks and, holding my head, she pushed me away a bit as if she wanted to see me better. "I have never felt so much love."

I had to leave. I would go to pieces if I stayed any longer in that hot boiling magma of feelings, hearing cries coming from deep inside. I couldn't wait for the elevator; I walked downstairs still hearing laughter from the room where I left people who I loved more than anyone had ever loved them. It wasn't an ordinary love. It was a recognition of identical conscious beings in which every one saw the most valuable part in the other. A strange word resonated in my head which I had never heard before or if I had, it was long, long ago... It sounded softly, it is a memory of some fairy land – Arelena. I have never heard such a simple and beautiful word and now it filled me, it twirled inside me like a tune which didn't want to leave consciousness. And I didn't want it to leave and while I was walking, I loudly, rhythmically pronounced: Arelena, A-re-le-na, are-le-na! I heard yodelling echoing from the invisible, faraway cliffs which lasted long time. Without a speck of doubt, I knew what that love meant: Love Forever. The Path of Truth is the Path of Love. I had found my Path in California and now I was walking on it. That's Arelena, Arelena, Arelena...

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The telephone rang early in the morning and didn't stop for several days. Intensive's participants called to describe their experiences. They spoke fast, as if they were afraid that I would hang up on them before they said the most important thing. They showered me with praise and declarations of love. Everyone asked about the next seminar. When will it take place? The same question was asked by friends of the participants and people I knew who'd missed the first Intensive. They apologized transferring the responsibility for not coming on family members, pressing business which made them miss the golden opportunity.

I couldn't get the same apartment for the next Intensive and for some time it seemed that I would have to cancel it. Then near the Russian Embassy, Muci found a ruin of a building called Teachers' Home. No teachers there; it was an overnight place for construction workers with harsh unshaven faces, wearing rough, heavy clothing and rubber peasant shoes. Muci rented the largest room in the house for working and three additional sleeping rooms. The glass on some windows was broken and dirty water in the toilet was mixed with urine. The sleeping rooms were heated by coal and wood stoves which released dark smoke. But I was satisfied; the rent was three times cheaper than at other places and no one asked us who we were or what we were going to do.

After the Intensive, I had a negative emotional reaction. For several days I felt apathetic and empty, but I could partially distance myself from my emotions and perceive them both as a player and objective judge who knew what was going on and could contribute to its undisturbed continuation. The expected clash with Lydia didn't happen. After the Intensive I found her parents in a visit. My mother and uncle were there too. There was no need for them to say that they were waiting to find out what new material I'd invented this time. Lydia looked at me in a friendly way and simply asked: "Do you want some dinner? I made some pancakes."

The euphoria I felt at the end of the Intensive didn't last long. My hands were shaking for several days and I often spilled coffee and dropped utensils. When I closed my eyes in bed, my body trembled and seemed like it was levitating. On the third day after the Intensive I went to the sauna. I needed a massage badly to bring me back into my body because I felt out of it all this time. Vukasin, a physiotherapist at the sauna, was the right man for that. Wiry, with extraordinarily strong fingers, he was able to massage muscles for hours without any signs of fatigue. When I took off my bathrobe, he quickly measured me from head to toe and said: "You have really melted Mr. Zivotic. What did you do?"

After the massage, I walked over an hour to my home. When I crashed on my bed, feeling a pleasant tiredness, I felt grounded. I had entered a serious game, it was clear, and there was no going back, since it was the most interesting game on the planet. To be a spiritual Teacher to a group of people for three days and nights, was like taking over Christ's sacrifice in miniature and feelings of such great love – there was no price I wouldn't pay for such an experience. I knew we would find a place for the next Intensive and when Muci came hastily to tell me that everything was settled, I wasn't surprised.

What surprised me was what Milada told me over the phone. I expected another expression of gratitude because she began her communication in the same way the others did: "I need to tell you something but I feel uncomfortable. A few times I wanted to call you but I gave up..."

"Come on. Let's have it."

"Well, I don't know how to begin...I had a feeling at the Intensive that I knew several people from a long time ago. I wouldn't like to get into some ego trips...maybe they were fantasies but they were coming on their own...There was no way I could avoid those images and thoughts. I had to tell someone...I feel better now." The sound of her deep breathing was heard over the phone.

"Okay, make it short."

“Well it’s about Orion. Since the Intensive, I have been convinced that he was a brother to me. Yesterday we met in the city, a couple of us. He told me confidently that he felt that in some previous life I was his sister. I was amazed.”

“Those things often happen during and after the Intensive. I told you to be open to many possibilities. You have endless lives behind you and some people were certainly your parents, brothers and sisters, partners.... some of the people you met. You opened up at the Intensive, so you recognized some of them. It is possible you were wrong.”

“Thank you. I feel better now. And one more thing...” She hesitated for a while and then slowly said: “Some strange words came to me.... it seemed it was the language we once spoke....Some word or tune is still lingering in my head, torturing me. I was irritated for hours and days and only when I understood the meaning of it, did I feel relief. As if a cocoon had burst, releasing some dense energy which weighed me down.”

I squeezed the telephone in my hand a little harder: “Tell me which words came to you.”

“Oh, there were several. I couldn’t find the meaning for some and I am still suffering. The guy who has a sick child, Peter, I believe his name once was Otar which means sculptor.....it seems.... ‘Lexa’ means fire, ‘me’ means I, ‘ota via’ means ‘let it be’. At the Intensive I understood that there is a true love which is not limited by time, as it is for all times...still I am not quite sure which word that is: ‘amarena’ or ‘varlebena’....something like that. I really would like to know which word it is.”

“Arelena?”

There was silence; I thought the connection was gone. “Milada?”

“That’s it. How did you know?”

“Some realizations happen to several people at the same time.”

“Goodness Gracious, Bogy. That’s it, no doubt! I suffered so much. I should have asked you right after the Intensive. Of course, Arelena...My God, that’s the word!”

“What man gets through his own efforts has greater value than when someone tells him about it. You were close – Arelena means love forever. Love between two ingenuous beings, there is no place for ego there. Listen carefully,

Milada: write down all those words and talk to others about them. It is possible that they are still in the sphere of those vibrations.”

“I will. I feel relieved; I thought you would laugh at me. There is something else. I think that we lived as a community on some white planet. It was called Shona which means white. Some people from there were not at the Intensive, but they’ll show up soon and we will recognize them.”

“Very good, Milada. Once at the Intensive, I had a vision of a group of people who were close, they danced a ritual dance all dressed in white...the white colour dominated at that planet.”

“Hey, Bogy, we all want very much to see you. Who knows what others have in their heads? When we all open up we’ll have a wonderful experience.”

The Master in me raised his head. “You have to control that urge. You shouldn’t run away from your everyday obligations into visions. That’s what happens in many cults and sects. We have two legs. With one we can test how deep the water is - new dimensions and unknown worlds with the other you must stand firmly on the ground. What’s with your exams?”

The delight in her voice disappeared: “I have to go to the university one of these days. I haven’t been there in a while.”

“You have to do it right away and leave those other matters for the Intensive. You can communicate them there. We are having a new Intensive in twenty days.”

The list of participants was filling up very quickly and I worried we would not have enough space for all of them because I wanted to include as many people as possible. Pavle Isakovic, called Isa, also called. He graduated from the Military Academy and immediately after left the army. He worked as a truck driver in some village near Pancevo, and he wanted to talk about only two things – the history of war and spiritual evolution. He claimed that in a former incarnation he was Zivojin Misic, a commander-in- chief. The walls of his room were covered with his photographs; in one corner he kept a rifle from the Balkan wars and on the shelves he kept hand grenades with the explosive charge removed and three officer’s hats. The ashtray on a table was carved from a brass cannon cartridge. He was tall, strongly built, with somewhat thin hair and wide, healthy teeth.

“Allow me to the Intensive, Bogy. You won’t regret it. You know that I am a true worrier for the truth and justice.”

“Isa, this is a far larger game than the one we’ve played so far. The old rules don’t apply here, but I believe that your place is at the Intensive.”

When I hung up the receiver, I saw Nenad looking at me inquisitively: “I’d like to ask you something.”

“Go ahead.”

“Would you do it for me? Promise you will, so I’ll tell you.”

“There, I promise.”

He smiled contentedly like he had successfully made a good deal: “Let me come to the Intensive.”

I contemplated for days how to gradually bring him to the Path. I wanted to avoid the mistake of parents who were wholeheartedly dedicated to their professions. They put pressure on their children to love the same thing, except they did it in a wrong way, causing the opposite reaction – their kids hated what their parents loved dearly. I need 3 to 4 years to introduce him to the Intensive’s atmosphere, and he was begging me now to let him come. His plea surprised me and I felt a weak anxiety. Would he be able to endure three days and nights of stress which makes some adults give up? His ego could fall apart; would he be a normal boy afterwards, capable of playing with his peers, reading comics and daydreaming about some girl from school? I yearned for some irresistible mystic whirlpool to take me in and drive away my doubts and give me only one goal in life. I didn’t want the same thing to happen to Nenad, who was only thirteen years old.

“Okay, I won’t deny my promise”, I said, with hesitation, “but if it becomes necessary, I’ll take you out of the Intensive. Agreed?”

“Yes,” he said simply, looking at me with eyes which had acquired a new glare, “I am certain that I will endure it.”

Lydia came back from work in the afternoon, and she was present during my conversations with the participants and telephone communications. She heard Muci’s continuous questions and my replies. She didn’t show in any way that she paid attention to it. There was a slight hope that she might participate in the Intensive, but she quickly dispersed all hopes. “I am not interested in it”, she said one evening. “I don’t want to insult you and I don’t have anything against Nenad’s coming with you. You are his father and you know if that’s good for him. The whole thing seems somehow false to me, as if people are trying to force something which will happen by itself.”

“If you are waiting for it to happen spontaneously, you’ll wait for a long, long time. The approach of the Intensive of Illumination is nothing new. Swami Vivekananda, I am sure you have heard of him, said that yoga is nothing more than amplification of efforts to fulfil a spiritual evolution in one life, from which many new lives will generate.”

She nodded conciliatorily. “I’ve heard of Vivekananda many times from you, but there are other ways.” She directed her enchanted look through the window at the grey December sky and, as if talking to herself, she said: “I have been reading Jung these days...What clarity and depth of thought. Goodness!”

I became nervous. All kinds of flattering comments could be said about Jung’s writings but that he wrote clearly wasn’t one of them. I gave up any further explanations of my point of view. None of my arguments had an impact on her. Jung wrote in his memoirs that there is no woman in the world who considers her husband an important person. How could she? Other people are always more important and exceptional. They are distant, clean, and their stained underwear a wife doesn’t see when she sorts the laundry. I remembered the words of Oke Wilkinson one evening at Astrid Monty’s home in Stockholm. “To be considered an expert, a man must be at least a hundred miles away from his home. Sages and spiritual teachers, even further.”

“Maybe Jung is the right thing for you at the moment. Someday, perhaps...? You’ve heard of the saying that a book is a best friend until you step on a Path.”

Indirectly, I also tried to make my uncle come to the Intensive. It was a chance for him at his age to comprehend who he was. His failures would have been settled and his life’s debts paid for in some timeless moment. His time was up, that was obvious. He laughed and shook his head: “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks. If I was only ten years younger...? The way I am now – my place is not there. But I’d like to talk to you like in the good old days. I believe there’s one more thing which you can learn from me.”

“I wish we would talked. There aren’t many people I can talk with so openly, like with you.”

The next person I wanted to bring to the Intensive was Zoran, my childhood friend. He was tall, had symmetrical facial features, light blue eyes, and elastic eyebrows which moved like signal flags when he commented on the conversation. I invited him for a cup of coffee at the cafe “Boka”, our old hang-out. At the beginning of our conversation, I was careful about what I said. I pointed out the value of direct contact with the truth and the changed lives of

those who achieve it, and that three days of hard work wasn't too high of an investment compared to the spiritual gain which one will have for eternity. Silent, he creased his forehead. Looking for stronger arguments, I made a mistake. I described Yogendra as an exceptionally wise man and at the same time a modest human being. I moved on to the great yoga teachers, masters from the Himalayas, Blavatska, teachings about chakras and the awakening of Kundalini. My speech lasted for over fifteen minutes. Toward the end I spoke so enthusiastically, that I swallowed vowels and sometimes entire words in an urgent desire to point out the value of illumination. I became aware of his facial expression. He squinted his eyes and raised his eyebrows high: "And you said, Bogy, that your great masters are all vegetarians, grazing grass and eating flowers...no sex...no meat...nothing of our everyday pleasures?"

"Exactly," I said, deflated, aware that I had lost him.

"I'll tell you something as an old friend...If you put that Yogendra person next to a good barbeque, so the smell of it tingles his nostrils, hamburgers, pork chops, kidneys, thymus and all of that, he would immediately begin to preach grill master virtues."

The approach of the Intensive ignited a strong fire in me. Nothing was too hard for me in an attempt to attract people who I sensed as being mature. I took a bus to Jagodina to fetch George Arbaba. Originally he was from Lika, tall, bony, in his forties, with a thick beard and light grey eyes. He worked with clay, befriended for years by the local potters who sold their casseroles and bowls at the village fairs. He had invited me many times to come and witness the old-fashioned process of baking process pottery. "It must be something truly valuable if you took the time to come all the way here", he said, holding my hand at the bus stop. In an old mud house with thick walls, which smelled of quinces, his wife Simonida prepared lunch for us. She was a quiet woman, convinced that she was married to a yet unrecognized, great artist.

We ate sarmas from clay dishes of bright colours, that George made in his workshop, using wooden spoons which he carved from beech trees instead of bread, we had thin cornbread with well-baked crusts which crunched under our teeth.

"If you had let me know earlier that you were coming, Simonida would have made us some soup, using my recipe. My father was a butcher and I learned from him the best recipe in the world for soup. You take a pot of five liters, put in two kilos of the best young beef and two kilos of the best greens and some water. You cook it all night and there you go – a butcher's soup. Father worked from the crack of dawn until dusk, and during the night he made children. He

made six of us. He got strength from the butcher's soup which he ate every day. He could knock down a bull with his fist."

I changed my tactics with George. He was convinced that life was simple and that simplicity concealed an unreachable secret which wasn't worth talking about. "What do you experience then?" he asked me when I briefly explained the core of the Intensive.

"You experience who you really are and it is so simple, that you just become astonished with the simplicity of that experience."

"But what do you exactly experience?" He looked at me with his wide open grey eyes full of confidence and hope. Aside from the erogenous, a man has psychogenous zones and at that moment I knew where to touch him.

"It's no use saying anything. Words are unnecessary. What you experience is impossible to explain or understand. I could talk for three days, yet you wouldn't be closer to the simplicity of that experience. Everything stays the way it was, nevertheless everything becomes indescribably different. The truth of who you are is the simplest thing in the world."

He took a deep puff from his cigarette, made of tobacco smuggled from Hercegovina. "I am going to that Intensive, Bogdan. I could never resist such experiences. Highly educated stuff is stupid; the essence of life is in simplicity. What you just said...when I am hungry I eat, when I am thirsty I drink." He took another puff and said: "When I feel like going to the Intensive, I go to the Intensive."

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Mladens' apartment had remained the same all these years, but somehow it looked smaller. Right at the door I smelled the odour of tobacco, cologne, and burned coal from the tile stove. The paint on the wooden window frames was cracked and the had become tarnished. I went to the window expecting to see the sight which was imprinted in my memory from long time ago: family homes with wooden fences and plum and apricot trees in the middle of the yard. In the summer, I recalled the smell of lilac permeating the air and the dazzling whiteness of locust bushes. There were concrete buildings now and many cars parked one next to the other on the pavement.

“I have some orange juice for you” he said, sitting at the table. In front of him was a half empty bottle of plum brandy. Seeing my look, he smiled: “The plum juice is for me as always.”

“What interesting news do you have to tell me?” I wasn’t pretending. Mladen aged and drank every day, but it was never boring with him even for a moment. He was capable of talking concisely and cleverly about things he taught himself. With a gift of the divining rod he could feel a premonition of hidden things. Many adepts of the Odin Brotherhood should be pleased if he allowed them to clean his worn-out shoes.

“Have you read this book?” On the table between us, he put a paperback book a drawing of a labyrinth on the covers. It was “*The Hero With a Thousand Faces*” by Joseph Cambel. The book was often mentioned at our gatherings in Stockholm. The title sounded like some sociological study written by university professors who rarely leave the library.

“I have only heard of it.”

“It would be useful for you to read it”, he said, taking a deep puff from his cigarette, made of poor quality tobacco. “It would be interesting. It’s your biography. No one will ever write a better one.”

I waited for him to clarify his words. He squinted his eyes as if measuring whether I was ready to accept his explanation. “Many of us knew what awaited the seekers of truth on their long journey, but it’s fascinating how this man discovered the exact model of how they live through their experiences. This was a Pythagorean theorem of spiritual development. Cambel discovered the laws in the progress of spiritual development. I am telling you it’s your biography, and the biography of hundred people similar to you.”

He stared at me and for a moment he looked like he was a man who spoke through his eyes. The good old feeling I had before I reached for a valuable book or heard a man clear his throat before speaking, stirred in my solar plexus. I shifted in my chair and leaned toward Mladen. He smiled, happy that he had captured my interest in the subject in such a short time. “In the beginning, a typical characteristic of a hero or a seeker, whatever you may call him, is his unrest. He feels like a foreigner in his surroundings and a constant unease eats at him, making him wonder about the purpose of existence. That inner crucifixion, lonely attitude, refusals and disobedience is the first indication that archetypical fate is awaiting for the potential hero.

“I’ll become conceited”, I said like I was complaining but inside, I became very sharp.

“Yes”, Mladen said simply, “that could be expected in a positive phase. But everything in this universe has two sides, you and all your brothers in soul, cried many times. The first phase, Cambel called the call of the adventure. The main character feels out of place in his surroundings and when someone feels like that, it’s time for him to leave. In the everyday life of a hero, a guide appears who marks the turning point. It could be an old friend, accidental conversationalist or even a book which turns the hero’s world upside down. No matter which form the guide has, he represents a symbol of the unconscious spirit. The main character doesn’t recognize him as such and he often causes fear in the hero.”

He slowly drank from his glass and squinted his eyes, looking over my head through the window. The conversation was beginning to sound like the one which we had before my departure for Stockholm. Many years had passed since that time, but his words, gestures, and facial expressions stayed alive in my memory. That conversation was being duplicated now.

As if speaking for himself, Mladen continued: “That is human nature, to feel fear before the unknown...After the first appearance of a guide, the hero usually steps back and for a while he returns to the well known circumstances in his life, but soon enough, he experience them as drained and hostile. He leaves the security of the known world like a snake sheds its old skin, and steps into an abyss, into the land of the unknown, in search of a precious stone which was lost a long time ago and which must be found. That is a dangerous adventure from which many step back, because a seeker must abandon a small secure puddle and sail into the open seas.”

Mladen’s words sounded as if he had rolled them around in his head for some time, polishing them to a sharp simplicity which resembled a well written essay.

“The value of the hero’s adventure lies in investigation of many unknown and wrong roads, until he finally achieves spiritual enlightenment. The discovery of deeper forces within him happens when life’s situations seem burdened with dangers. Actually, the problems, tortures and dangers of the outside world are only projections of his internal weaknesses. To him, it seems he is conquering forces outside of himself, while he is actually conquering weaknesses within him. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I’ve always felt that way. I couldn’t express myself so clearly, but simply said, yeah, that’s it.”

“Still, that’s not the end. In every phase of his journey there is a crossroad where he must decide either to continue along the Path of truth or to remain in

his small warm puddle. Many of us made mistakes in life at the very beginning.” He smiled in his melancholy way, which could make me cry. He wanted to say that he was one of those losers.

“When he experiences enlightenment, the hero accomplishes the task of his fate. He then needs to decide what to do with the knowledge which changed his life. It is necessary to begin the process of returning the grace which was given to him. It is also a call of fate which the hero often refuses to listen to. If he doesn’t do it, he obviously won’t complete the full circle of the heroic path, which is connecting the world of higher spiritual recognition with the world of everyday life, the same way that he combines in himself passing time and eternity.”

His words dried my mouth. This wasn’t a pleasant chat with a man who I loved more than anyone in my family, it was a fatefully serious conversation. Mladen didn’t notice what was happening to me or maybe he was only pretending not to notice. While he spoke, tobacco smoke came out of his mouth along with his words. “There is a right moment for everything. At one such moment, the hero understands that isolation, without giving himself to others, presents a negation of everything he has created. It was the same in his previous existence in a well-known and secure world.” With sudden resolution, he shook his head. “That’s why he decides to become an instructor in the hands of fate, to lead others through the path he walked. Since he made a full circle in his search, he is finally coming back to people. Ivo Andric had a similar presentiment because he wrote somewhere that on such a journey, the return rewards were the best.”

At that moment, it seemed that the wall which separated Mladen from the Intensive was no thicker than a cobweb. I couldn’t miss the chance.

“Mladen, come to the Intensive!”

He smiled again. There was sad wisdom in that smile, of knowing himself well and feeling that a long time ago he had missed his last chance: “I am grateful that you worry, but my mission is something else. To help you become conscious of what is happening to you.” He paused several moments, and added: “I am doing it right now.”

“But how can you do it, Mladen, when you didn’t live through these things yourself?” My voice rose and sounded nervous and tense because he wasn’t accepting the obvious.

“Well, I can do it, somehow”, he said conciliatorily. With bent head he looked through the window. High above tall buildings, a flock of pigeons was

flying. Once, this was the pigeon breeding neighbourhood. Many courtyards had cages with purebred birds whose owners spent hours sitting on the grass, drinking plum brandy and following their flocks flying. At the beginning of the summer some of them had half-baked faces from the sun, the half which they lifted toward the sky when they observed their birds flying. As if birds on a grey sky stirred something in his memory, he said: “You see those pigeons? Late uncle Manojlo didn’t have a flock but he was great expert. When the first pigeon was high in the sky, he was able to unmistakably say if it was a real flyer or a reject. It’s hard to explain in words...During a conversation with a man who sailed into our waters, I became a sharp hunter of his contents, watching for each inner tremble. Maybe I am doing you a disservice when I say this – but I have never made a mistake so far.”

He was convincing and probably right. Mladen had missed opportunities in his own life but he had a true inner force to push others toward the fulfilment of whatever they were looking for. He smiled suddenly, not in his customary sad way, but looking boyishly innocent. At that moment he looked thirty years younger: “My dearest Bogy, when you were born you cried and everyone around you was smiling. Just follow your mission in life and when it ends you can peacefully close your eyes smiling, and everyone around you will cry.”

“Mladen, thanks from the bottom of my heart”, I said, getting up from the table. “Do I have to read it?” I pointed at Cambel’s book.

He waved his head. “No need to, you are writing it right now.”

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I was carefully packing my things: white sweats, three undershirts, and three pairs of socks. I needed them because there’s no washing at the Intensive, and during spiritual efforts, I sweat like a shore worker carrying sacks. I collected my notebook with the names of the participants, two pens, two tapes with gong sounds, and two tape recorders. I dreaded the possibility that some of these gadgets would break so I brought two of everything.

That morning Muci and two other participants brought the food to the house. Several times I checked the things on the list and they were all there: stories from many books which I had selected - one to open the Intensive, the book of short Zen stories and a collection of Sufi wisdoms, which had to inspire participants during the short breaks between dyads. Nenad roamed around the

room like he was expecting me to tell him something significant. He was overwhelmed by an unpleasant flickering in his stomach and hands, which caused sudden outbursts of hysterical laughter or intolerant reactions. The doorbell rang and Lydia appeared a moment later. “Your friend is here.”

It was Muci. “I came to take you and Nenad.”

“I told you there was no need to. We’ll take a cab.”

“But it’s on my way. Why take a taxi?”

Like a blowfly, that man flew around me and waving my hand was useless to drive him away. I suspected that he would create problems at the Intensive again: invalidating partners and the surrounding participants, wailing when someone achieved enlightenment, and trying in every possible way to attract my attention and pity. After the first Intensive he really surprised me: “Bogy, I’d like more than anything in the world to become a Master and lead the Intensives. I realized that was my mission in life. I beg you to train me”. Good God, such man to be a Master!? I wouldn’t let him guard two sheep drawn on a piece of paper. I suppressed the words which were boiling inside me. “Let’s have some coffee,” I said. I wanted to appear at the house at the last moment when people were already cooked to the bone.

I carefully observed the moment when I entered the working room. I sent Nenad with Muci while I paid at the reception area for our three-day stay. People were sitting on beds and chairs; some were on the floor. There were twenty four participants but it seemed there were more. The entire room was filled with pale faces focused on me. More than half of the people were ones who had come to the first Intensive, but they weren’t any less anxious than the beginners. I sat in my chair, took a sip of water, and said: “Let’s start.”

I briefly explained the rules of the Intensive, went into detail about the technique and the barriers which were waiting for them on the road to illumination. When I began to speak about the direct experience of the truth, my voice trembled, and people from the first Intensive had tears in their eyes. I felt powerful excitement, which had followed me since my stay at Yogendra’s ashram in Santa Barbara, a conviction that the truth is the most valuable matter and, at that moment, I didn’t have an equal on the planet.

At the end of my speech, I paused for a long time. I burned with desire to talk but I restrained myself, silently looking at the participants, one by one. Nenad stared at me with a seriousness which I haven’t noticed in him, as if he had aged in the last thirty minutes. Finally I said: “Don’t forget. Our destiny set a

date with us here, tonight. Use this opportunity. Fall asleep with your koan in mind!”

During the first day, I noticed again the phenomenon of parallel mirrors. What was happening inside of me was reflecting on the group, replaced with a process in which their thoughts and feelings worked on me. It disappeared after the third dyad. The conversations of many participants were dominated by the conviction, permeated with strong feeling, that they had made a mistake by coming here. People who were at the first Intensive talked about that. They compared this one with the first Intensive and everything was in favour of the first one. I tried to define the reason for such comparison. They were comparing two different periods: current, during which they struggled like worms under nails, and the end of the first Intensive, when everything was beautiful and eminent, energy was at its peak, and love for everyone was bursting.

It was hard to believe that during the Intensive I would learn to love these people. I felt intolerance and a desire to be alone, far away from that room which was already beginning to smell of sweat and stench from dry spit lining their mouths. It was a smell characteristic of people in the center of spiritual crisis, patients suffering from depression, and people with exhausted nervous tolerance. That odour reminded me of rotten apples. I was surprised with myself – where did I get the stability, the perseverance of a mule which I lacked in all other aspects of life? It wasn't worthwhile to think about the end of the Intensive, when shining faces and love would be spilling everywhere. That was the essence of the game of truth. While you're in crisis, it doesn't help to think about its impermanence and unreality. At the end of the Intensive, prior suffering looks like the transparent illusion of some amateur magician. I knew I would suffer until the moment I opened the Intensive and from that moment until the end I would ride on a winged horse above the earth. I knew that in the end, I would embrace myself and the rest of the world, and hug and kiss them from the best part of my being. There is no greater happiness than the sight of a man who has disconnected from a web of lies and assimilates with the truth. One such Illumination was a greater prize for a Master than an entire life filled with wonder and doubt. However, that notion wasn't working at the moment – I could hardly bear myself or them.

I felt the strongest intolerance toward Muci. He constantly pulled the legs of his partners. As an active partner he babbled, fidgeted, and looked around with wide-open eyes. The moment he took the role of a passive partner, he closed his eyes during his partner's communication and dozed off. I had warned him already, clenching my teeth, but that creature needed some stronger remedy. I stood behind him for a while, warning him every two seconds: “Keep you eyes

open! Do you hear, keep your eyes open and listen to what your partner is saying.”

The desire to hit him was steadily rising in me. He complained loudly, saying that he felt miserable since he wanted more than anything for his partners to get enlightened but bloody sleepiness wouldn't let him be the partner he wanted to be. He glanced to the side to see if I was standing next to him, listening. He kept playing that game and my nerves began to tremble at the dangerous line where my hand was ready to unleash itself. A pair of someone's pants with a thick leather belt were left on a cotton bag next to a bed. I took the belt from the pants, folded it in two to make it short and stood behind Muci on one side to see if he closed his eyes. He did it as soon as his partner began to meditate. I drew back the belt wide so that I wouldn't hurt George Arbaba, sitting next to him, and hit him on the back as hard as I could. He threw his head back like a whipped horse, and the explosive sound of the belt spread around the room, waking several other people from sleepiness. “Want to sleep some more?” I said loudly. “Either you do it as a man or get out of the Intensive!”

The silence was disturbed by Muci's sobbing. People were quiet and sat with their heads down. I heard George's voice. “This is awful. It would have been easier if it had happened to me than to watch someone else's humiliation.”

For a second I thought that I had overdone it and may have ruined the Intensive on the first day, but Eva Kis dispersed my doubts. Accenting the first syllables the way Hungarians do, she said: “Bogdan is right. If he is going to invalidate others with his attitude, what's he doing at the Intensive?! When I was active he slept the whole time. When his five minutes came you couldn't survive his babbling. Zen Masters are right when they beat people with bamboo sticks.”

Her words moved me. From a table by my chair I took a jar of water and filled my glass. Holding it in one hand, I stood next to Muci. He kept his eyes open with difficulty while his partner meditated. When she opened her eyes and began to communicate, his eyelids dropped. I poured water over him but he surprised me. With great speed he moved away so the water just caught his shoulder. Most of it landed on Jovan's chest. It was the move of a boxer who observed my actions askance, getting ready to avoid the hit. Someone to the left laughed. “Now you're not sleeping,” I said, hiding my anger. I went back to the table and took the whole jar with water and came behind Muci. All communications came to a standstill; people were looking in our direction. Holding Muci by his hair so he couldn't move, I emptied the whole jar of water on his neck and back. It mostly ran down his back. He raised himself and took a deep sound breath like stepping under an icy cold shower. “Sleep now. If necessary I'll refresh you again. Do you hear?”

I paced between the rows of people with an uninterested look on my face, looking at everyone without keeping my gaze on anyone, just noticing their reactions. For the first time they were aware of what they had got themselves into, and that this game, aside from great happiness, can create painful humiliation. Nenad looked at me quickly. His eyes were wide open and the colour vanished from his cheeks and forehead. An expression of worry and desperate sympathy was on the Japanese girl's face. Milada had her eyes firmly closed but without enthrallment which followed meditation. It was an escape from her psychological field where tension had exceeded her tolerance. I heard Jovan murmur with his head forward and eyes closed: "Fuck it, something like this...?! Something like this!"

I had humiliated all those people because of that stammering ass-crawler. For a moment I thought – do I have the right?...but before the thought got defined, a reply came from my entire being – yes, I do! There was merciless coldness in that reply, sharpened to some unbelievable edge where every doubt disappears, that you cannot get to truth through lies, through pretending, friendly inclinations, and compromises. It was inexorable, unknown to me until then, curled up at the bottom of some endless hole, like a gigantic cold snake aimed only at One.

Then, I clearly noticed that I was outside my body. I'd had that thought several times but I had tried to suppress it, thinking that it was my ego raising its head whenever it got a chance. So now I was exterior?! But it was obvious. I was...it was hard to say where, but approximately, I was just a little behind my body and around it. As if I could discern the back of my head and neck and at the same time sharply notice everything that was happening, through my eyes. I tried to trick that inhuman coldness by thinking about the opening of the Intensive like a torrent of love toward everything, but it didn't help me this time. Something else had to be done.

I invited the participants for a consultation. You couldn't remain passive, you have to keep your attention focused on every word which a person says and to react to it immediately. The participants kneeled before me and followed my words with concentration. Milada was in crisis. I noticed that while she was sitting in her place. Meditation was hard, she uttered her words with difficulty and the contents of her consciousness consisted of complaints and the delayed decision never to come to the Intensive again. She kneeled in front of me with glazed eyes.

"How's it going?"

“Bad. My contents are no good, I can’t pull out anything worthy. I thought that the Intensive was the most valuable thing in the world, and now I think that I am mistaken.”

“Listen Milada, the technique doesn’t require that you have valuable contents. The contents of consciousness, beautiful or ugly, have exactly the same value. What you have to do is to communicate them, to completely empty your consciousness. Do you understand?” She nodded silently. “The intensive is the most valuable thing in the world, but you are in crisis now and that’s why you think that it isn’t. We can’t get to the truth easily; we have to go through crisis. We said – a road that takes us outside of crisis leads through crisis. Do you understand?!”

“I know it is like that, but I have lost all motivation. I don’t want the direct experience of truth. I have no desire, no wishes, everything is nonsense.”

I leaned over and held her face in my hands. “Listen to me carefully. That is a dirty trick of your mind! How many times has it tricked you in life? Remember the desires you had to study medicine, and then you lost your motivation and ditched it. You enrolled in physiotherapy because you wanted to work with blind children. Your mind tricked you had again – you thought you lost your desire, that is what your mind did for you. Do you recognize the trick? It throws you a bone to chew on again. Don’t let it do it to you. Persevere! I am not asking you to put forth inhuman efforts, just work the best you can no matter how little that is. Deep down you should know that the truth doesn’t have a price. PERSEVERE!”

The expression on her face changed. She nodded, smiling and blinking her eyes several times, and she said: “I will”. I knew the job was well done. She returned to her seat and I heard her say to the Japanese girl: “See what a good word means! When you hear it, you are a different person.”

I kept a disinterested look on my face but I observed the reactions of people who were sitting next to her on two opposite beds. They livened up and I knew they would start coming to me, one after the other. I wondered – where did I get the ability to convince people at the Intensive, quickly and effectively, while in regular life I didn’t have that skill at all? In checking the technique I always found the right words. In brief communications, I tried to show them that I understood what they were talking about – complaints, suffering, moral offences they’d committed in life. I would push them back on track to keep doing the technique. At the Intensive, other stories have no value. The Master’s message must contain power in condensed form. He can’t stop to think of what to say, it has to come automatically.

I remembered the way Kali did it in Santa Barbara and now I know that she had made a mistake. She talked for several minutes with the participant, giving herself as an example, while the participant wanted to talk to his Master only about his own suffering. She was looking everywhere except in the participant's eyes, as if searching for help. Unwillingly, I had to admit that Haling had the same attitude. He listened to problems absent-mindedly and he mainly told the participants to go on with the technique, although many were not able to do so because they didn't quite understand how the techniques worked. I was a better Master than them.

I remembered Yogendra's words on how he succeeded in finding the right answers to questions at the Intensive. "I concentrate only on the person I am talking to and I am totally open. I say the first thing that comes to my mind and it's always the right word." Ken Hamilton told me that Crowley did a similar thing. He didn't give the same answers to everyone. When Ken pointed that out, Crowley said: "How come you don't understand that it's not the same man. I have to give him an answer which corresponds to his level of understanding."

Peter Perriot didn't explain that ability although he possessed it. I witnessed several conversations that he had with visitors who asked him questions in an area where he had limited knowledge. Absentmindedly, like a medium in a light trance, he looked through the person, made several general statements and suddenly gave the answer to the question. That answer was always a bit crazy, but for the person asking the question it had the effect of a right answer. They left filled with emotion that they had heard from an expert what they were supposed to hear.

I knew I was doing the same and in that realization there was no surprise, only acceptance. I wasn't able, like those other three people, to be completely open in everyday life, but during the Intensive, I opened up completely. My openness was such that I drew the participant in it like in a vacuum and my concentration for the man kneeling before me reached extraordinary sharpness. I saw through him, and not a thought in his head or even a tiny grimace of his mouth did I miss. People didn't return to their seats in the same state they were before they came to see me. Unmistakably, I thrust my hand into their souls, touching the right string which resonated for a long time in the right way. It was the sound of the bell on the village church from the story my grandmother told me in my childhood, the story about the boy taken by gypsies, and the sound by which he, as an old man, found the right path to his village.

"I'd like to experience another human being, but I'm confused because I don't know how to combine it with the technique. When I learned the technique at the first Intensive, I thought I would know it forever. And now again, I don't

know what to do,” said Bane, a musician with a thin beard which he stroked with the long fingers of a guitarist, while staring at me.

“I understand that you are confused. Your wishes won’t help you there. All your life you wanted to understand what another human being was and what if you had succeeded in finding that out? Well, you didn’t! You have to find an object first, **what really is a human being for you at the moment?** Then focus on him with the intention of experiencing him directly. Intention is not desire, it is an effort of will where you make a **transition to an act**. Do you understand?”

“I see?! I thought that there was a primary wish.”

“I know, many people think that. But there’s a major difference. I would like to drink cool juice in a restaurant right now. But I am not getting up from my chair and going to the restaurant. But my desire remains. And now, I want to have a glass of water,” I pointed at the table next to me – “here”, I stretched out my hand, took the glass and drank. “Do you understand the difference?”

“Yes,” he nodded, that’s it.”

“Exactly that, Bane. The difference is in wanting, which needs to transfer into action. That’s it!”

Olja Risakovic, a potter with long dark hair and light grey eyes, came to the Intensive at the suggestion of the Potter. Like a noble Peruvian lama, she was tall and slim, with a long neck and narrow face, fine hands with long fingers. She had the sneering expression on her face of an intellectual who understood everything before everyone else, but her life was passing by her. Such people Lon Hibner defined as those who were not in a condition to face life, so of course, they became intellectuals. Since the beginning of the Intensive, she had watched people and her own reactions, analyzed everything aloud, and drew conclusions using different words: we were not doing the illumination, but due to moments of exhaustion, hallucinations occur, and Master interprets them as enlightening experiences. She kneeled on the rug under my feet and in a whining voice she said: “I think it is hopeless.”

“I understand. Tell me, how are you doing the technique? Describe the treatment. When a partner gives you a command, you close your eyes and...?”

“Then I wait for anything that comes in my consciousness, look at it from every angle and if it has any value, I communicate it to my partner.”

“Listen, Olja. The technique doesn’t say that you should wait for something to appear in your consciousness. The technique says that you should

find an object – **who you are at the moment** – and focus directly on experiencing yourself through a wilful act. The technique doesn't say that you should inspect it from every angle to judge if it has value. Simply communicate everything that comes to you without making estimates and analysis."

"But my entire life has been built on the sensible judgment of values."

"Of course, and that's why you **have never achieved enlightenment** in your life! Leave intellectual analysis for after the Intensive. While you're here, stick to simplicity. There are three days ahead of us and the illumination won't miss you. There is a saying at the Intensive: While the wise are wisecracking, the crazy get enlightened. Get back to your place and do the technique!"

While I spoke I was completely focused on her but I noticed something strange – I was also conscious of what was going on with the whole group. An invisible web of concentrated consciousness was everywhere in the room; it trembled whenever someone touched it. With a part of my consciousness, I followed what Isa was saying and with the other, I looked in corners of the room. So far Isa had been settling the accounts of his life, and he looked pretty bad. "I've come to this Intensive to feel better in life. Fuck it, I feel worse than ever. I don't have a dime in my pocket, I am going bald...I have bad breath, my feet stink...I am fucked..!"

Milka Trbojevic was fidgeting in her chair, getting ready to come to me. Her husband was a wealthy jeweller and that was obvious. Her fingers were covered with gold rings and on one finger she wore a large ruby. During communication she waved her hands in front of her partner's face: "I have had enough of my husband. He's chasing other women all the time. Whenever I catch him, he gives me jewellery." She stretched her fingers toward her partner: "All these are from my husband's sex adventures. I've had enough of that relationship!" She wore dark blue velvet sweats and moccasins of soft, yellow-brown leather. She approached me, swaying her large breasts, kneeled in front of my feet and placed her hands over her heart so that I could see her rings.

"What's going on?"

"Not what you promised. You and I shouldn't be wasting our time with such people," she said through her teeth, throwing quick glances around the room.

"I understand. Now tell me what is going on with you? What is in your consciousness?"

“Love for only one person and thoughts that you and I have no place here.”

“I understand. Love is a wonderful feeling, if it is directed properly. I want to check how you’re doing the technique: describe in short the whole process.”

This was her first Intensive, but she did the technique flawlessly and there was nothing for me to correct. “You’re doing the technique very well. Keep on and you’ll experience the truth about yourself. Then you’ll feel love not only for one person, but for the entire world.”

“I don’t want that. That love is cheap. I have been suppressing what I’ll tell you now for a long time..” She paused, looking at the ground, then slowly she lifted her head and said: “I love you.” She was looking at me like at an icon.

“I understand. You feel love. Listen to me carefully! If you really love me, get enlightened for my love’s sake. Achieve enlightenment and I’ll be eternally grateful to you!”

She lowered her eyes, looking left and right at the ground. She hadn’t expected such a request; she was playing a different kind of game. Still, she was touched and moved. She nodded and affirmed in a significant way: “I’ll do anything to get enlightened and then I’ll see if you were worth it.”

“Thank you. That is the right way to check the value of your emotions.”

At the end of the Intensive, people forget about their expression of eternal love to the Master. They are simply grateful to him because he pushed them to illumination. The intelligent people understand the mechanism used by the Master, and they feel gratitude as well, especially if they achieve enlightenment. Those people could become Masters someday if they listened to the call of their fate.

The middle of the second day was approaching, opening of the Intensive waited for me, my tension grew stronger but I felt more attached to those sweaty people with red, swollen faces who were swinging their states from hysteria to depressive passivity. Nenad held himself better than I’d expected. The night before when everyone could barely keep their eyes opened, I offered him to go to sleep but he refused without hesitation. He asked me shyly to call Lydia on the phone and ask her to wait for us on Sunday night with some lasagne.

Muci stopped sleeping but he was still invalidating his partners now in a more subtle way. In everyday life it might pass unnoticed but at the Intensive everything was visible like a crow on a snow-covered meadow. When his partner

opened his eyes after meditation, getting ready to say something, Muci looked the other way. He didn't move his head but he looked askance at him. In his active phase, I heard him talk about coming to my house often and what we talked about during his visits. He talked in a confidential tone, creating an impression of our closeness so people hesitated to complain about his attitude. It was no use to remind, beat or pour water over him. I decided never to have him back at the Intensive. He was quite a crafty rodent. With tiny tricks he pulled the legs of people; what was dangerous was their indifference and his ability to always find new ways for his game.

Then I experienced something which I was anxious of about the first Intensive, but at this one, I had completely forgotten about it. One person left the Intensive.

Josip Banac was a psychiatrist from Pula. I had great hopes in him, believing that when he become convinced of the power of the Intensive, he would bring his colleagues. That would give a legitimacy to the Intensive and create respect for my work. He was the only one who should be interested in therapy effects of the Intensive and powerful influence on psychological maturity and self-realization. He had read all my articles published in various magazines and we met at the Intensive for the first time. He seemed disappointed in my appearance and the people who came to the Intensive. He told Mihailo, the assistant, of his decision to leave and after that, he went to the toilet where dirty water, coming from some broken pipe, had flooded the cement floor. When I entered he was washing his face over the sink. He had small yellow eyes, a foxy expression, a scarce beard, and ash grey hair. I didn't like him at the beginning but he acted in a typical way, sat in the corners of the room, and I called him only once for a consultation of his working technique.

“My assistant told me you are leaving.”

“Yes. Please don't take it personally but this is not something I want to spend another day and a half doing.”

“You will be making a big mistake if you leave the Intensive. This decision is a trick of your mind, to take you away from the direct experience of the truth.”

“It would be a mistake if I stayed. Please, let's not talk each other into it. I had a gall bladder operation recently and I've got diarrhea; I need to go.”

“I understand, but you should know the following: less than ten minutes after you leave, your diarrhea will go away and you'll know that you made a mistake.”

“All right, so let me decide for myself, even if I am making a mistake. Thanks for all your efforts but this isn’t for me.”

“I understand. I wish you a good trip.” I stepped out from the toilet and didn’t think of him any longer. I had more important matters to think over - what to say to the group since it was somehow obvious that ugly story was not over yet. Maybe someone else will also leave, they talked about it all the time, and when one pulls the leg... Entering the room, I decided to open the Intensive earlier because they’ll notice that one person was missing. When there’s an odd number of participants at the Intensive one person works solo meditation. I approached Desko, called Vlah, who was the doctor’s partner. He looked at me with a questioning look and I simply said to him: “Go on alone. Do the technique the way you learned, except there won’t be the second, communication phase.”

He shrugged his shoulders and closed his eyes. I gave the key to the room where Banac had slept to Mihailo and told him quietly: “Let him take his stuff, walk him to the door but do not speak to him.”

“Should I try to make him stay?”

“No, he doesn’t exist for me any longer. Just take him to the door.”

“I think we are responsible for his leaving.... we should try everything...”

“Did you hear what I said?” Several participants looked in our direction. Mihailo lowered his head and left the room.

I was sitting with my mouth dry, thinking about how to begin my speech. It was no use theorizing, it was a simple matter. Either my participants will leave and I will never again let myself get involved in a similar bloody activity or I’ll stay and go on with my mission. A thought of what Yogendra would think when he found out that the Intensive fell apart because of some so-called psychiatrist filled me with desperation, the same kind which I felt during sciologargic processes when I faced the engram and horrible scenes of what I did to people in my previous lives, came to me. I saw Lydia in my vision, telling me that reading Jung’s book was superior to what I was doing. The Potter was sitting somewhere in the room but I didn’t dare look in his direction. What will that man think of me; and how skilfully I persuaded him to come to the Intensive? And Nenad! He was in a dyad with little Olja, a short-sighted girl with a tiny face who was a good partner for him. I heard her giggle while she followed his communication. I knew that Muci, in the darkness of his soul of a rodent, silently cheered. He knew that he had contributed in some part to the disintegration of the Intensive. Such turnover will surely be disastrous for people who were at my first Intensive. I bet they wouldn’t be thinking for a long time about spiritual development and

personal truth. They will probably spit at my story about the greatest value in life.

The five minute break was over. I drank some water and said: "It's time for us to talk. I have to tell you some things, one of which is quite unpleasant." They only stretched their necks without a word so that we could all hear the conversation of two women on the street.

"I should begin this speech by giving you technical information, correcting the technique, pointing out your mistakes, and directing you toward the goal which is why you came here in the first place. However, I must tell you something else....One person decided not to be with us any longer...He left the Intensive. I feel responsible for him because that means, that so far, I haven't led the Intensive well. If I had, he wouldn't have left."

I paused, looking at the ground. I drank some more water and went on: "If anyone wants to leave, do it, I won't mind. However, that person needs to know that he is making a mistake which will influence his entire life and take it in a different direction. The Intensive is a valuable substance. In my life, I learned about many systems, met many teachers and tried many things; I don't know of anything that is more valuable than the Intensive. If there was, I'd be doing that, not the Intensive." My mouth was drying fast as if a jet of hot air was deep in my throat. I drank half of the glass of water, and putting the glass clumsily back on the table, I knocked it over and the rest of the water spilled. I felt too nauseous and weak to go on, so I kept silent for some time, looking above their heads. I thought of Kali and Haling and remembered my conclusion that I was a better Master than them. A moan rumbled deep inside me. I talked like I had a wool ball in my mouth: "I have to say what you are evidently feeling. I am desperate because of the man who left! I have had many hard moments in life but this one is the worst." I heard Nenad sobbing and people's faces were becoming hazy and distorted.

"You should work the best work you know how. Put all your effort into it so that you get enlightened. Do it for someone you love! If anyone wants to leave, do it now, I have no objections. However, I'll stay here and go on with the Intensive even if only two people stay in the room. The master's chair can be both tortuous or divine...What else can I tell you? If anyone gets enlightened, I will experience an unearthly happiness. That's all I have to say. When words and everything man wants are wasted, there is only one thing left to say – **I love you all...much more than myself!**" I can't remember this moment clearly. I remember Nenad's loud crying, Potter's masculine face in a fit, shaking shoulders, the screams of the Japanese girl and Milada...the sight of my

assistant Mihailo's back while he was banging his head against the wall, chewing on his fingers like a child.

No one left. The desertion of that one person bound them and powerfully pushed them in the direction of a common goal. I was aware that destiny had kissed me once again and my mission was continuing. I wished Yogendra could see the outcome. He would be surprised. In my mind, I saw these people as future Masters and Intensives multiplying like swarms of bees. The wave had already begun and nothing could stop it now.

They worked without any reservations and I felt a dense energy begin to permeate me. While I walked between couples, my lips, hands and plexus were trembling. When I sat on the chair, my whole body was shaking. The pressure of condensed energy became stronger; someone had to become enlightened to give us all a break. Two more exercises remained until the end when Nenad approached me: "Could I work solo?" I thought for a moment. I couldn't think of a reason to deny his request; nevertheless, I felt my stomach tighten. Perhaps I was afraid that he would immerse himself too deeply and go to pieces in front of my eyes.

"All right, do the technique, but if you feel you need help, come to me immediately."

The dyad before the last one began. Nenad was sitting in the corner of the room leaning against the wall. His face had a stressed expression as if he was trying to see through closed eyes. He did it several times and then, he began to cry. His crying alternated from soft moans to loud weeping. I couldn't bear it, I walked between couples and finally found some clear space next to the entrance door, where it was possible to take three steps in one direction. I paced back and forth with my head bent, as if I was absorbed in my thoughts. I was outside my body and I had double consciousness. One part was my horrified being filled with such thoughts as: "my child was going mad", "what have I done", and "now I'll start to scream". Those thoughts flew through my head like scared birds, disappearing and reappearing. The other side was a consciousness which came from inside. It was higher and much wider, spreading far into the depth of the cosmos yet still connected to me. With an icy smile, it observed both the events in the room and my personal feelings, somewhat disinterested because everything had already been experienced. This was the repetition of the same game invented for the pleasure of higher beings. I jumped between those two points like an electrical spark, but I remained longer in this widened consciousness of the cosmically smiling machine. As if powerful fear transferred consciousness from a scared human being into an inhuman being who pretended it was suffering although it knew it wasn't.

The voices in the room quieted; people communicated in apprehensive whispers. I heard Potter say to Eva: "I'll get up and hit him. I can't bear to listen this child's whining anymore...Does he know what he's doing?"

When I walked by her, Olja Risakovic lowered her voice to a whisper but I was able to hear what she said to her partner. "The worst is when a child is suffering like that. There is something inhuman in what we're doing." Feverishly, I leafed through my past, looking for points in the base of my foundation to hold onto: my relationship with Spirilen, opposing Lon Hibner in front of his surprised Guardians, Peter Perrier's words that it was my mission to lead people to the truth in this part of the world...Mladen's belief that I was a real seeker walking on the known path...Nothing helped. The flaming mass in my stomach was spreading throughout as if I was in front of difficult engram. Then I called my Higher I for help: Enforce my faith in you! Enforce my faith in you! Suddenly a thought ran through my terrified consciousness – Who were you calling? Yourself?

That realization changed me into a tiny scared being, who walked a stone faced among people who were expecting leadership which would guide them to enlightenment. How easy was it to rush into ego games? Was I that mighty powerful Higher I who permeated the entire cosmos? I saw my part of the world where a group of miniature copies of his were forcing themselves to remember their source. I looked above the heads of those people through the windows, covered with torn curtains. At that moment, I entered an emptiness with nothing in it, but consciousness about consciousness. That state lasted until, in the distance, a space opened and filled with soft light. From that light the shape of a giant child emerged, big as a mountain. His facial features slowly became sharper as if the light itself was getting condensed. The innocent smile on his face emitted love and warmth. One eye widened, urging me inside while everything else disappeared except the eye. It was hard to tell how long it lasted. When I found my body again in a chair, my right hand was feverishly writing words in my notebook. I looked at the written words. It was my writing all right, but the words were not mine. It began with "Aiwaz", and while I slowly recognized that word, a hot electric shock ran from the back of my head to the end of my spine.

"Aiwaz, You, who are forever! Aiwaz, You who the blind do not know and those who are able to see recognize You in the depth of their beings and in the vastness of the cosmos; I call You in this hard hour.

The fear is overburdening my strength, what caused my suffering overpowers my wisdom, shadows overshadow my light. Disperse darkness with your light! Bedew me with the dew of your grace!

Aiwaz esta Alpha!

Aiwaz esta Piora!

Aiwaz esta Arelena!

Aiwaz, You who came from the uterus of Meon to lead Atmans to Freedom, Love, and Truth. You are the goal and the Path! A labor of birth and a cry of Meon made your beautiful image seen by the wise, because you are the sun behind the sun. Protect me – because I am in You. Be by my side when my strength deserts me! Wipe tears from my face when sorrow overwhelms me! Lift me up when they knock me down! Love me when they hate me! Embrace me powerfully when they abandon me!

Melt the ice which armoured my soul with lies, with your divine breath. Let it be Light! Let it be Love! Let it be Truth!

Recognize Yourself in me, Aiwaz, and I will be the Truth forever, because you're the beginning and the end!"

Letters written in indistinct shapes quivered in front of my eyes, and my words echoed in me before I saw them written on the paper. I knew that Alpha meant light, and Piora meant truth. I remembered that Peter Perriot had used those words. Meon signified nothingness or the infinite emptiness which was the source of the expressed universe. I tried to remember the cosmic baby through which Aiwaz revealed himself but I suddenly focused on Nenad's image. I shook my head as if I'd been hit on the chin. Nenad was kneeling in front of me telling me something.

"I can't hear you."

"I was telling you that I feel horrible. I wanted to get enlightened for you - to help you. I see how hard this is on you, but I can't work the technique any longer. It broke."

His words aroused my attention and I focused on his eyes. "When did the technique break?"

"I am not sure....during solo meditation. I can't make an effort. When I'm concentrating it's like I am sliding in one place and can't move forward...I can't do it any longer..."

I wanted to let out a sigh of relief but my lips trembled and feelings of sweet sorrow overwhelmed me: "Why do you say I?"

He bent his head backwards and his eyes widened. His eyes became glassy, not directed at me but somehow everywhere, as if he saw through everything. With boyish innocence, like he was much younger than his age, he said: "That's me! And I thought that I would..."

"That you would what...? I knew that everyone was looking at us but I couldn't resist. I embraced him, holding him close to me. I felt his wet cheek from the tears he shed and his sweet scent of a boy who wasn't a man yet. I heard some people next to us sobbing loudly but it didn't bother me. I moved my head away from his to better see his eyes. "What did you think will happen?"

Nenad was slowly shaking his head with his eyes still wide open, as if he was looking at the images of his expectations. "I don't know. I believed everything would be different yet everything remained the same. I am I and I have always been myself...But somehow, I don't know how to say it...I don't feel tormented any longer. I feel that love toward you is overwhelming me, and I see that I love myself too and that it isn't selfishness...it's real love. Everything comes from it."

"Thank you, my loving happiness. You don't know how much your experience means to me. You are the best thing that has happened to me in my entire life."

"Thank **you**. Before this I was ashamed to tell someone I loved him, like I was bragging and all that...and now I can scream it aloud so the whole world hears."

Enlightenment is a contagious experience. In the last dyad that evening, four participants got enlightened.

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Silence is one of the four hermetic virtues and some say, the most important. This time I couldn't keep silent. The evening when Nenad and I came back home, I wrote a long letter to Peter. I described in detail what had happened at the Intensive and it seemed that my excitement transmitted onto paper. I admitted that after my return from Chicago I accused him unjustifiably of making mistakes in his teaching, in my initiation, and in his visions. I expected his reply to express a patronizing attitude toward the prodigal son who had

bowed to him and admitted his mistake. However, his letter had not even the slightest indication of his intuitiveness or the superior boldness of his judgment.

Dear Zivo,

The news that you entered into the identity of Aiwaz, even for a short moment, filled me with great pleasure.

Ever since our first contact, I knew that you would discover his identity in yourself and that in such discovery you would express genuine Aiwaz-nature. Your hesitation to accept yourself the way you are was merely a reflection of hesitation common before the great responsibility which such consciousness carries – responsibility for others who will fly to you like night butterflies to light. To experience genuine enlightenment it was necessary for you to face the Truth about Who you are and What you are.

I agree with your thought that the Experience of Gnosis at the Intensive was a true initiation. That is the highest Path on which you will lead people into deeper levels of Truth.

Alas, I wouldn't hide that extremely difficult temptations will wait for you. You will feel like Christ crucified on the cross. But don't forget what Christ teaches us through his example – after the crucifixion comes resurrection! I have distinct premonitions from the higher level of consciousness that soon you will undertake a new, even more challenging mission.

Brotherly yours,

Peter

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Peter was right. I took that next step. The fourteen-day Intensive of illumination was called by the Masters of Yogendra's school the meat grinding machine. When they lead it, they swear that they will never again take part in such an adventure. After they recuperate, they think fearfully about what they have been through and the thought which lingers for a long time is – this time I stayed alive and in one piece. As time goes by, and the spiritual itch becomes stronger, they begin to play with the idea of another fourteen-day Intensive and finally they enter again into the merciless millstone.

Tomiki Kenji, from Okayama, who I met at Yogendra's ashram in Santa Barbara, was one of the rare people I confided in about my decision to lead the fourteen-day Intensive and the anxieties which followed that decision. In his response, he praised my courage, but he warned me: "*Yogendra's Intensive of Illumination is almost a carbon copy of the seshin of Harada Zen school. I realized that recently. You will have many hard moments. The Roshi in seshin has untouchable status and there isn't the slightest possibility for criticism. In Yogendra's Intensive the participants have the liberty to criticize the Master. You can hardly imagine how this criticism will reflect on you. Be sure that you'll have some horrific moments.*"

I felt that, but still I sent the invitations for the fourteen day Intensive.

I rented a huge empty stable in the village of Zova near Vilin Do. A few years ago, a commune of seven to eight members lived there, mainly sociologists and philosophy students. The commune broke apart after a year because they mingled like snakes; they exchanged partners and when all combinations were exhausted, they split. Only a married couple, Remac, the owners of the estate, continued to live there. They rented me the stable for a small fee.

During the Intensive many of Yogendra's assertions which made me nervous in the beginning proved to be incorrect. There was no rebellion among the participants, no one physically attacked me, nor did I suffer from hallucinations. I did tremble the entire time; vibrations spread from my stomach to my arms, legs and lips. Sometimes I had difficulty talking because my lips were so stiff. Although participants' aggressiveness and rage wasn't directed toward me, as Yogendra claimed it would be, it was expressed in common intolerance. People who had accepted and loved each other now had boiling outbursts of common hatred. Although they used the diplomatic language, everyone in the room knew exactly who all the nastiness spilling around was intended for.

It was possible to notice regression in people's behaviour. In my evening speech at the beginning of the Intensive, I anticipated what would happen. The expressions on their faces suggested that they had made a decision not to surrender and not to allow significant changes to happen to them. As the Intensive progressed, the decisions they'd made melted like ice on a hot stove and they began to project their problems onto others. Their requests were not to be in a group for meditation with this or that person. "I have nothing against him, but I don't want to work with him." Then, "I CANNOT be next to him, his attitude is such...I don't want to be responsible for my actions, just separate me from him!" Finally it became hard to gather a group because the few people couldn't work with any of the remaining participants.

My difficulties were on the other end. The Intensive wasn't progressing, so to move them forward I had to find the strength to tell them simply that I loved them, but those three words, I love you, I couldn't extract from myself. That was the only solution so the Intensive would move on. I was totally paralyzed even by the thought that with those words I was trying to buy them cheaply. Salvation came from a source I didn't expect. I remembered an event from my childhood which I had completely forgotten about. It came back clearly, in bright colours and with the feelings I'd felt then, reflecting in me with the same intensity. Educated people say that angels do not exist and I believed that was true. Since that memory resurrected, I wasn't sure of that statement any longer. Once, when I was a little boy, I met a man who had the quality of an angel, and that encounter utterly changed my life.

When my father was sentenced to three years in prison after a colleague from work denounced him as a Stalinist adherent, we began our fight for meagre survival. Mother worked at the post office; malicious neighbours said that she was paid to lick stamps. She earned a miserable wage and we were dressed in rags, often hungry. Bitterness against my jailed father and miserable looking mother in worn out clothes, toward people in general and myself, collected in me, forming into hate. Because of my father, the neighbourhood kids called me Bogy the Prison. I did many things to earn that nickname. I molested kids younger than myself, broke electrical bells at entrance doors and overall gained a reputation as a dangerous kid. Those weaker than me wanted my companionship only when I was needed to beat someone up who they had a problem with. I didn't enjoy doing it since I noticed that they called me only to fight someone, but they never invited me to birthday parties where only decent children came. Irretrievably, the gate to a decent life in a warm room, with coffee and fresh donuts for breakfast on Sunday morning and hope for better tomorrow closed before me. I was bitter and revolted because of that notion, and anger and hate toward people permeated my soul. I knew I had to humiliate them if I didn't want them to do the same to me. I became a bad little boy.

Something happened then which I couldn't understand until many years later. It had already been some time since I'd realized that people looked at me differently. One day, a neighbour who lived on our street stopped to ask me how I was doing in school. She stroked my head. "You have become a very good boy", she said, giving me a candy. I should have been surprised by her words, but I wasn't. That feeling of goodness gently spilled onto other people. I walked down the street, passed the gate to our yard, and continued to the park where I spent most of my time. The park was almost empty; a few young mothers with children in strollers walked along the pebbled path. I sat on a bench under the massive wild chestnut tree and thought for a long time about the words of that

woman. The part where she said “you became a good boy” was particularly puzzling to me, suggesting that I hadn’t been that way before. Her words were a riddle, but a recognition of something incomprehensible and dark in me. I was good boy now, everyone knew that, and I was accepted as such. However, there was a blurred memory that it hadn’t been like that forever. I couldn’t forget my nickname the Prison. Sometimes, a friend I hadn’t seen for a while addressed me by that nickname. What had changed and how had that strange change happened? I concluded that I probably become “more serious” as I grew more mature. With that impression in mind, I left the park thinking that it was some kind of a compromise in my search for explanations and that I was still looking for answers in the dark.

Later in life, when I stepped on my Path, that blurred period of my life remained mysterious and I was unable to live through it in any technique. When I was in Sciolargy, I was able to re-stimulate and live through many former incarnations which revealed many details from my past, but that period remained dark. My desire to make it clear grew stronger when I was able to look through many different periods in my life, and I found myself to be an evil person then, filled with hatred and desire to violently force people to fit into my image of the world. Those two opposite periods of my life faced each other – the period when I was evil and the time when I experienced myself as good. In both periods, with their acts, people confirmed that I was right.

At the end of the Intensive, while other participants squirmed in the cauldron of envy, intolerance, and hatred and when the possibility that any one will get enlightened was almost unreal, suddenly a memory which altered my life came back to me. I saw it closely like on the palm of my hand, I saw people who were part of that event, brightly illuminated, with clear facial expressions, emotions which I unmistakably recognized, and my own transformation which was the centre of that alchemical event. The incident from my past, evolving into a complete picture, came back to me now, in the middle of my life game, when, though armed with cynicism, I had to admit that angels did exist. Yes, angels, and I am not ashamed to say that. With a faint touch of a hand, an angel brought me from darkness to the light side of life.

I was nine or ten then, I don’t remember exactly. I was in elementary school, which at that time had four grades. It was the beginning of December, and Mother got her salary and went to a lumberyard at the end of our street, to pay for coal and wood for heating. We were freezing for days, in the evening mother burned some old newspapers to slightly warm the kitchen where we spent most of our time. She asked me to come along and help in case she needed anything.

Snow was lightly falling. In front of the lumberyard, there were many carriage drivers who transported fuel and a group of Albanians hired to cut lumber and shovel coal into basements. I saw Mother from a distance and a man encircled by a group of Albanians and coachmen. His clothes and appearance were different from everyone else's. He wore a nicely pressed grey suit, a tie, and leather shoes with rubber galoshes over them. He was in his forties, closely shaved, with receding hair. In that group of people he looked like a real gentleman. The collar of his jacket was lifted up behind his neck, to protect him from the wet snow. For a short moment, when I looked at him standing in the middle of a group of rough people, I felt as if he didn't belong there. I saw my mother standing on the other side of the lumberyard. The entrance ground was muddy, with puddles full of dirty water and horse droppings. Mother was crying. Her face was blue from the cold, she tucked her hands into the sleeves of her old coat, her lips were twisted and it was obvious that she was missing some teeth in the upper jaw. She looked miserable. She wore a faded woollen scarf around her head, to protect her ears from the cold. If she hadn't been crying, I would have been ashamed of her appearance, but her miserable face made me come to her quickly. "What happened?"

Her face twisted even more painfully, her eyes squinted, and fresh tears rolled down her blue cheeks. "It's nothing, son."

"Tell me what it is."

"Nothing, don't worry."

I felt a presentiment of great trouble, of something dark and dangerous, because Mother was a talkative person and in difficult moments she couldn't wait to talk to someone and get rid of her troubles.

My fear turned into desperation: "In the name of God, please tell me what happened."

An expression of helpless resignation covered her face: "You see that man over there?" She pointed toward the group of people on the other side and without hesitation I knew she was talking about the gentleman I had seen. "When I paid for the fuel, I gave him 500 dinars then I should had. The moment I stepped outside I realized I'd made a mistake. I asked him to give me my money back but he didn't want to. He saw how wretched I was and he took our 500 dinars." She was silent for a while and then she added, as if making peace with fate: "This is the way people treat a woman who has no protection."

That was a great misfortune. To take one-fifth of Mother's salary meant that we would be without food, but even worse was the thought of the injustice

done to us. Anger exploded in me. Clenching my teeth, I made an oath to wait for that man in the dark and to break his head with a muddy brick. I could almost see his bloody face in a puddle. Then I was overcome by feelings of frailty. I was aware that it exceeded my powers; it wasn't the same as beating up a peer on the street. Only when Mother wiped my face with a wet handkerchief, did I realize I was crying. The man was still talking to people and occasionally looking at us. He must have seen that Mother was wiping my tears, although it was a dark winter afternoon. Mother took me by the hand and said: "Don't cry, son. It's already hard for me."

Suddenly, indifferent to muddy puddles and horseshit, the man came over to us and simply handed a 500 dinars note to Mother. "Madam", he said in a deep, noble voice, "You have made a mistake, believe me. But here's the money. You should know that I have a child at home as well."

In the wet snow, mud, cold, and sharp odour of horse urine, the sun came down on me. However, mother struck back in an unexpected way. She quickly took the money, put it in the pocket of her coat, and in a triumphant voice, she said: "Aha, is that so! You had a bad conscience since you took that money away from my children so you repented. Shame on you."

I was about to tell Mother to keep quiet because the man could take that money back, but he was faster. With a sad expression on his face, he said: "Madam, you made a mistake." He turned and walked away over puddles and without stopping, entered the hut where people were paying for fuel.

Mother took me home, keeping my hand in her pocket to warm me up. It was a couple of hundred meters to our house and she talked the whole time: "There, you saw the way people are. Remember this, son. Sometimes their conscience talks to them....sometimes they are ashamed.."

I was happy, we had avoided disaster, it would be warm in the house, and we wouldn't starve. To celebrate the happy outcome, mother lit the kitchen stove with some firewood she had saved and soon the pleasant warmth and the nice smell brought tranquillity. Mother sat at the table and began to calculate the expenses for that month in an old notebook. She didn't sigh as usual; she was relaxed because of the happy ending. I took my buttons and played a game of soccer on the kitchen floor. The evening was coming to a happy end. Suddenly mother shrieked. It was a sound of surprise she typically made when she broke a glass or a plate. She said, choking: "Woe is me! I accused an innocent man!" I looked at her with a questioning look and she said: "It is true, son, I made a mistake. That man didn't take our money. Here's our 500 dinars. Where will my soul go after this?"

If someone else had given money to my mother, I would be happy to have it and wouldn't think about it any more. I remembered the expression on the man's face when mother told him, shame on you! I knew that Mother would give back his money. She said: "Son, take this 500 dinars to that man at the lumberyard. He works there. Tell him, my mother apologizes, she made a mistake."

Her request was unjust. I would rather go to the graveyard at midnight than face him. "Why should I go, Mother, shouldn't you go and apologize to him yourself?"

Shortly and simply as if she was tearing off a slice of her soul, she said: "I can't, son. I can't look him in the eyes. Please go, I beg of you."

I have never walked more slowly in my entire life. I hoped I would get there after he'd already left. I have never felt such discomfort in my life. It wasn't the shame of that man that troubled me and the words Mother had scolded him with. It was the resistance against the truth that someone was that good. The evil which had accumulated in me for years was coming alive, biting back, and refusing to accept the fact that there was someone in the world who was that good. I shivered from an effort to get rid of such kindness of one human being. In my order of things, people were on the other side. In order to have it good I had to do evil to someone; my laughter required someone's tears, to be warm someone should shiver from cold, to cry to feel miserable. I choked, stopping often. My world was collapsing.

Something burst inside me at that moment, so loud that I actually heard it. It was like the sound of glass breaking when you pour hot liquid in it. A desperate cry gushed out of me. I walked, staggering, hardly able to see the lumberyard at the end of the street. When I reached the mud at the entrance, no one was there. The snow was falling much harder now, melting the moment it reached the wet ground. There was a light on in the hut. I didn't have to look; I knew that he was inside alone. Through eyes blurred with tears, I saw him sitting by the small desk leaning over his papers. I stepped inside without cleaning my shoes. He slowly raised his head and looked at me: "What's wrong now?", he asked with surprise.

I was standing by the door with my lips twisted like my mother's when she cried. My mouth was frozen; I had a lump in my throat and couldn't say a single word. I approached him, dragging my feet over the floor, and dropped the wrinkled bill on the desk in front of him. He understood everything in a second. Smiling gently, he nodded and said: "Don't cry son. Everything is all right."

My tension immediately loosened and a torrent came out of me. I wept so loudly that probably everyone could hear me; fortunately, no one was in front of the hut. I wanted to tell him that my mother wasn't able to apologize to him, that I was ashamed, that I had never believed in such goodness, that some day I would repay someone the same way...But I only wept and wept.

He slowly walked around the desk, hugged me and put my head on his chest. I could smell the scent of his cologne mixed with tobacco, warmth, security, goodness, everything at that moment. He stroked my cheek and head with his warm, dry palm and said: "You are a very good boy. God, so much goodness in such a little man!?"

I cracked completely, split into pieces, and from inside of me came a hollow groan and long solitary crying for this moment.

I don't know when I went outside. I walked as if in a trance down the street covered with snow. I moaned all the time and my crying was only interrupted by a cry of abandonment which came from the depths of a dark, endless well. I stopped by a wet gutter and leaned on it, grieving. People gathered around me asking me something I couldn't understand. The image of that man was in front of my eyes. I stood there a long time, an hour or two, I don't know. At one moment, I calmed down. People were gone and there was no one around. I wiped my eyes with my hand and looked deep into myself – my desperation was gone. I was empty with grief and at the same time filled with warmth as if some liquid light had spilled everywhere inside my body. My face was burning and my hands without gloves and my feet in worn shoes were permeated with strong warmth as if I was still holding on to the warm hand of my benefactor. I knew that man had changed me with the touch of his hand. I became good.

That experience came back to me. I knew now what had happened then. I didn't know why I'd suppressed that incident for such a long time, but it was important now. I felt an urge to tell the participants about it and I knew that many would become enlightened after they heard it.

The dyad was over and it was the time for dinner and the evening walk. I watched the participants without saying a word. No one spoke or asked anything. They looked at me with motionless faces and bodies. The song of crickets was heard from outside and the hardly audible mooing of a cow from afar. "I have to tell you something," I said slowly, feeling my damp shirt on my chest. "You know, everything that is happening to you reflects in me and in my assistants. We are in the same boat. Your suffering is my suffering, your joys are my joys. While you were doing this exercise, I remembered a forgotten experience which has great value for me and I want to share that experience with you."

I told them the story slowly, totally immersed in my words. I was at the lumberyard, mother cried, an angel appeared and touched me with his warm hand. While I spoke I looked each person in the eyes and I saw the face of that man in their faces. For a moment, I couldn't see their faces clearly because of my tears, but I felt and shared their emotions. Some people were quietly crying, some sobbing loudly. My story, succinct and polished, rolled toward them like a pearl. I knew I had opened them up at that moment and that many would become enlightened, because my angel appeared in this moment to award some of them with the gift of enlightenment. Shaking like an arrow which had hit the center of a target, I said:

“That man put in me so much goodness, that even if people began to shower me only with evil, there would still be enough love in me to last a lifetime...Everyone of you could find in his or her past such a being who radiated goodness and love. Do it now and pay him back by becoming enlightened for him. Those beings deserve that.”

Two more exercises remained until the end of the day. In the previous twelve days no one had become enlightened. During the final two short exercises, more than half of the participants got enlightened. My life had meaning again.

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The end of the Intensive marks the end of a book you became close to. There is a sense of relief, sorrow that the game is over, and emptiness because there is no goal to strive for. I know that I had to set a new goal for myself, but I didn't have the strength to do it. The only thing I could think of was a clean bed with crisp bedding, the sounds that announce a new day, the smell of hot coffee in the kitchen, Nenad's questioning look, and the sound of the tramway which runs along our street. I saw Stevica's image and thought about how I'd neglected him since I began doing the Intensives.

The participants, blinded with happiness because they had endured until the end, didn't know what was going on inside of me. I heard the little Japanese say: “No one is happier now than Bogy...he brought the Intensive to the end...and in what way? I'd like to be in his place.”

Muci shouted from across the room: “And who wouldn't?”

My face was motionless and my look unfocused. I could hear my pulse beat in my ears. I had prepared the final speech, but now there was no need for words so I simplified and shortened it as much as possible. I said that they had completed a significant job and that they should continue with it because man is always at the beginning once he steps onto the Path of truth. I told them to be tolerant of one another for the next couple of days because they were oversensitive, and they should try to avoid reactions to the Intensive which could be very painful. I concluded my speech with a serious warning to be ready for deep changes in their lives which weren't always pleasant, but which were in accordance with the truth. "The truth is what it is, not what we'd like it to be," I told them in a serious voice, knowing that what they wanted now was different from what was waiting for them. "I am thanking everyone for coming to this Intensive because it means a great deal to me. You helped me to face my own weaknesses and to go through them, you helped me remember people who I owe a great deal to and who I had forgotten over the years. Finally, you helped me to feel love and gratitude, which are hard to experience in life outside the Intensive. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

People were hugging, thanking one another, and lighting cigarettes after fourteen days of abstinence. I looked at them as if looking through a thick glass; I felt alienated. If embraced them, it would be like I was embracing trees. My feeling of separation was not surprising – it was my reaction to human ingratitude – no one thanked me for all the anguish I had gone through. Everyone was drunk with themselves like after drinking a strong wine; they didn't have room for anyone else, except in the supporting roles of their personal dramas with a happy ending.

I closed my eyes and put my head in my hands. I looked inside of me and I could see only gray and lifeless emptiness. Sometimes that emptiness is tense, filled with a productive charge which permeates consciousness like a rising river when its banks become too narrow. It was drained and infertile now and there was nothing in it except a faint protest against human ingratitude and the idiocy of everything I had done so far. I knew that a flood of warm emotions would overwhelm me if only one of those sweaty and loud people came to me and said a few words – that he owed me everything, that he loved me, and that he would remember me forever...any of those empty words people shower on one another would do. No matter how much we despise those praises, we have an unquenchable desire to hear them all over again. However, I didn't get any of it. I didn't have the strength to hold that against them. They were completely immersed in the game of recognition, discovering themselves amidst their sweltering worlds, meagre and limited until then and now filled with a blazing fire of emotions, love for oneself and dignified goals which now seemed

approachable. There was no place for a drooping Master crying out for someone to remember him.

I had to go home as soon as possible to see Nenad and Stevica and to tell Lydia that I had missed her all the time more than I believed was possible. A decision ripened in me to tell her that I loved her and to admit that I had been unfair to her many times. The long Intensive causes a lot of changes in the Master, often painful. Like in some cruel cosmic calculation the deep all-inclusive change about to happen to me was equal to the total changes in all the participants. I didn't know that while I was sitting lonely and abandoned in the Master's chair.

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When I got home after midnight, Lydia wasn't there. I found a piece of paper on the kitchen table, written in blue pen "Call Father immediately". The word 'immediately' was underlined two times. I knew that something terrible must have happened while I was gone. I ran to Nenad's room and opened the door. He was breathing deeply, sound asleep. I wondered whether to call Father that late. I dialled his number and after two rings my brother picked up the phone.

"This is Bogy. What happened?"

"I have to tell you something very painful..." There was a pause and then he spoke in a voice which contained reproach: "Our mother died. We couldn't let you know...because no one knew where you were. We buried her three days ago... Bogy, you should have been at Mother's funeral." I was silent, wondering for a moment if I would have stopped the Intensive to come to mother's funeral. I knew I wouldn't have. Relatives could think whatever they wanted, but I would have stayed with my people. Because of such circumstances I hadn't told anyone where we were going. If I had gotten the news that someone's mother had died, I would have told him so only in the end. I did my mother a favour by immersing myself completely into the truth. She must have felt it while she was leaving her body. With decisiveness in my voice, I said: "I did the best possible thing for my mother. It was better for her that I was at the Intensive than at the graveyard....Put Lydia on the phone!"

He didn't say anything for a second. "Lydia is not here. Do you want Father?"

“No, I’ll talk to him later when I pull myself together.” Father would spill all his fury on me. Stories which I’d heard many times supported by examples from his ethical way of life, names of people who respected him greatly, detailed descriptions of his farewells to deceased parents and relatives, all of which deserved respect. Being so open and vulnerable, I wouldn’t be able to tolerate him without using harsh words. Lydia wasn’t there and she wasn’t at home. Where could she be?

She didn’t come home until afternoon of the next day. My desire to tell her how much I’d missed her during the past fourteen days evaporated in those long hours of solitude. At first I worried because she was gone, then I was angry and finally I felt numb. I fell asleep completely dressed around noon. My sleep, weighted down by worry, lasted only a short time and didn’t bring the desired rest. I woke up when I heard the key in the entrance door. Lydia came to the door of the room which I shared with Nenad, stopped for a moment, and said: “We need to talk. I have something to say to you. Please behave nicely.”

She was tense, the skin on her face was tight and pale, and her lips were squeezed together tightly. I sat on the edge of a bed, rubbing my eyes: “So, say what you have to say.”

“Let’s go to my room”, she said and walked away. It was then that I saw Sinisa Popovic behind her. He was looking at things around the room as if he didn’t see me. It was all clear to me in a flash; I knew it all. We sat by her desk, she leaning toward Sinisa. He looked stiff, with shallow breathing and squinted eyes.

“In short”, Lydia said simply, “I want a divorce. I’d like to marry Sinisa...We have to talk about details and guardianship of Nenad.” While she was saying those words, she was excited but firm. Women like Lydia express such firmness only when the welfare of their child is concerned and when they are building a new marriage nest. It was obvious now where her self-confidence had come from in the brief conversations we’d had in the last couple of months. She was dressing up carefully, going to a hairdresser frequently, throwing back her head when she spoke to add significance to her words, doing morning exercises again after many years, and brushing her teeth frequently. She delayed telling me what was going on for a long time; the death of my mother simplified the situation. She could hardly confess in front of my mother that she was leaving me and Nenad so she could live with another man.

“Please, no scandals, fights, and rough words. I’d like us to have a peaceful and civilized divorce.”

“You could have told me yourself; you didn’t have to come to our house with backup. What did you expect from me, to break everything around the house out of desperation?”

“I don’t want to discuss that. Let’s talk about other matters. I am leaving you the apartment, but I think it is better for Nenad to live with me. You are often absent...”

“No way! When I am away he can stay with you. I want him to decide for himself where to live. Anyhow, the time has come so I can take him along whenever it is possible. His desire is to become the Master of the Intensive one day and I will support him”. I was calm. It was a poor and cynical calmness followed by tremors in the corners of my mouth and the awareness of those two people.

Lydia lowered her gaze as if she was looking at the surface of the table to find a solution to her problem. She knew that Nenad loved me more than her and there was no chance of her getting him if we let him decide where he would live. She had to try to win him, since her idea of future happiness included our son. Sinisa’s tension loosened. I read through him like an open book. It was going better than he expected. With his own two children, he wouldn’t also have to look after someone else’s. Once they were alone, he would reassure her that they had tried everything, but unfortunately they would have to accept life without Nenad, although it was a hard thing to do.

“Well, all right, if that is the way it must be,” said Lydia, with resignation. Behind the superficial optimism she had begun this conversation with, deep down she knew how the matter with Nenad would end, but her vision of a new life and mutual understanding with her new husband didn’t allow for any significant defeat. “I am leaving you the apartment. I’ll just take some of my things.” She turned to Sinisa as if she wanted to tell him something and then in a slow and attentive gesture, she removed a hair from his lapel. For me, it was the hardest moment in our conversation. When a woman expresses concern for a man by removing crumbs from his clothes, fixing his tie, and extracting his blackheads, it means that they were deeply intimate. Their relationship had been going on for a very long time already. For a second I wondered where they met and what they talked about. Did she complain about her life with me? Then, I slipped into numbness.

When I was alone, I remembered that Lydia hadn’t told me if Nenad knew about her decision to leave. He left for school while I was sleeping. I should have told him that she had left me for another man. He would definitely suffer over it.

It was early afternoon when I arrived at the family grave at Novo Groblje graveyard. Father was proud to own a family grave there because it was a symbol of family status. A wooden cross, made for mother's funeral, was covered with withered flowers and wreaths with the names of the people who brought them. The cross had Mother's name in metal letters and her years of birth and death. I sat on a small bench made of rough boards faded from the sun and rain, with moss covering it from below and on both sides, and closed my eyes. I didn't feel sadness because of my mother's death. I tried to remember which day of the Intensive she had died and if I had dreamed anything the previous night. She'd had a decent life if we excluded Father, who she had to share her life with. She had children, lived to see her grandchildren, had a daughter-in-law who she loved more than me or my brother. She didn't suffer. Brother told me that her heart failed during lunch time. She poured some soup in Father's bowl and dropped dead.

I felt sorry that I'd never see her alive again. I remembered a blanket of Scottish wool with harmoniously composed shades of red and green colours, which she wanted for so long. I wanted to buy it for her but I delayed it so many times. It was too late forever now. I tried to remember her in my previous lives which I had revived at Sciology, but the images were faded as if the mothers in all my previous incarnations were insignificant. I could accept that every significant spiritual breakthrough was followed by an unpleasant emotional reaction, but for my mother to die – that was somehow cruelly disproportionate. Lydia's departure with another man, the suffering which Nenad had to go through...The same feeling from the end of the Intensive came back to me while, forgotten by everyone, I sat in my chair.

I didn't pay much attention that people, who were my relatives against my will, gave themselves the right to judge me, but I should have been at my mother's funeral. She loved me in a way which only mothers from Southern Europe are capable of, with a readiness to sacrifice for their children without thinking, to forgive them everything and to take the worst on themselves. She would do anything so I could finish school, she used to say. That meant getting a diploma which I could sometimes use to rub noses of people who didn't have it. She wasn't very clever, her intelligence was emotional, she felt people well and the culmination of practical wisdom had to do with what our ancestors did, because they knew the best. For her my frequent trips abroad were a waste of time and money which could have been used more wisely for furniture, carpets, china for festive occasions....What kind of a man was I, I thought, she got the worse from me. Those things which are valuable in me were inaccessible to her.

I was convinced many times that spiritual achievements besides awards bring a corresponding negative reaction, but I wasn't prepared to accept the

negative quake of such magnitude. I left the graveyard wondering where I had gone wrong. There was no sorrow in me, only the feeling similar to one I had toward the end of the Intensive. No matter how much I searched in the dark area of my consciousness, where I could during the time of the Intensives succeed in getting out contents which were not straight away visible, I couldn't find great sorrow for my mother. The result of the search was only lonely emptiness with trembling feeling that I was abandoned by everyone, that people should feel sorry for me and that I needed more attention.

I was thinking whether I should casually tell Stevica that my mother had died, hoping deep down that the young man's sympathy could for a moment fill in the emptiness which weighed on me. On the telephone, the voice of the old attorney, Stevica's step-father, sounded hoarse as if his throat was swollen. He introduced himself, stating his full name as if he was in his office, and then added: "Yes, please."

"This is Stevica's father," I said, "I'd like to speak to him, please."

"Oh, it's you", the old man said, with hesitation in his voice. He paused and then continued: "...Stevica is not here any longer. Irena took him somewhere."

"What do you mean? When will they come back?" My voice sounded like his.

"It seems that you are the only one who doesn't know. Irena left me and I don't know where she went; somewhere abroad...people say she is in South Africa. It seems she's not coming back."

I was silent, breathing with difficulty. He added: "Try through your mutual friends to find out where they are. They didn't want to tell me."

Misfortune never comes alone, and it was impossible not to wonder – is there an end to it? What karmic lesson should I learn from this series of troubles? I kept telling young people, who considered me their Teacher, that karma puts us in unpleasant situations not in order to break us, but to make us stronger. What was I learning from this? Perhaps that all beings which meant something to me had to leave me? That I should become barren like a dry ravine to find out who I was? I lost so many old friends in the last couple of years which I experienced as rapid spiritual development. Not everyone was walking toward the same elevated path. What existed in the beginning as a small crack later became an insurmountable gorge and old friends were gone. My thoughts swarmed like anxious hornets; should I angrily hit my head against the wall, break the window glass and cut my hands, call Father and accuse him of stupidities which had

ruined Mother's life... admit to everyone I knew that my life was a total failure, scream to them that they should run away from me like from a plague... There was nothing to learn, no trace of fate's valuable lessons other than that I'd made terrible mistakes many times.

I didn't have to explain anything to Nenad. When I came back to the apartment, I understood by the way he looked that he knew about Lydia.

That brought me some relief.

"How was it at the Intensive?"

"It would have been nice if there weren't things which followed it."

"I missed you very much", he said, embracing me. I felt the scent of his hair that I loved so much. "I wanted to come with you to the Intensive," he whispered in my ear, softly, like he was telling me a secret.

"Often we can't do what we want. That's life."

"You know Dad, I dreamed about you every night. I had wonderful dreams, even when Grandmother died. You always wore white and there were people around you...I didn't know some of them. I heard nice music from a far away cosmos...Beautiful transparent blue images, like precious stones of incredible beauty. I cried out of happiness once in my dream. I wanted to ask you...where is Grandmother now? You know, it's useless to ask Mom or Grandfather."

What should I tell him? Nenad, like other naïve young people, believed that I had answers to all the questions. I looked outside the window above his head. There was a pink candle on the armoire. When we were together, Lydia used to light that candle. We ate by candlelight when Nenad was asleep. "Grandmother," I said in a weak voice, "is now in Meon, in nothingness, where candlelight goes when a candle burns out."

I warmed some zucchini moussaka for him which Lydia had left in the refrigerator. I tried to drink milk but I had difficulty swallowing so I played with the glass in my hand. While he was talking, Nenad looked at me intently. He didn't mention Lydia. "Are you OK?"

I smiled. "I'll be fine, Nenad, I'll recuperate in a day or two."

"I know, Dad. It will pass. We'll live nicely. We get along so well."

"It's not hard to get along with you, Nenad."

I laid on Lydia's bed for a long time looking at the ceiling. Nenad was reading in his room and when he moved around he did it so softly I could barely hear him through the open door. I saw images of my childhood in front of my eyes, mixed with communications from the Intensive, faces of participants, and memories of my enlightenments after difficult moments. Those images were repeatedly coming back to me with slight differences in details. They flowed persistently like they wanted to pass on some message, and every new appearance compressed even stronger the charge in my body. Only a completely dry emptiness could create such torment, I thought. People get drunk, gamble, hate or get revenge to make something happen because the pressure of emptiness is unbearable. It was no use to look for Stojan to bring some relief me. He was a true friend but, like a compass, he was oriented in only one direction. He would continue from where he stopped the last time – you were going too far along a bare road and those were the consequences of making such mistakes. I warned you, I could hear him say, one could have foreseen such developments. It was never too late to do the right things get down to science, magazines, periodicals....

Unwillingly, I had to admit that his way of life brought him fulfilment. His life's road was like a series of sketches: the best student, assistant professor, then a professor...He was looking at membership in the Academy of Science and the thought of being selected made him fidget nervously in his chair. People praised him highly although not many loved him the way I did in spite of his honesty, balanced attitude, and tact in his relationships with others. When he completed his doctorate or when he achieved something, he wasn't left alone in his chair to contemplate human ingratitude.

The thought calling Mladen disappeared immediately. It wasn't possible to find support from him now; he probably wouldn't sober up for days. He felt that he had played some part in this unfortunate event. He probably needed empathy more that I did.

Peter Perriot was in his fantasy world where he communicated with cosmic Intelligences. For him, this was yet another experience which I had to go through during my maturity process. He didn't have a wife and children. Everyone else who I considered a Teacher or an expert was spared from such experiences. At the end of AST, three hundred people pushed forward to shake Ackerman's hand. People were either envious or full of appreciation toward the Alchemist; Yogendra's students shed tears when his name was mentioned, for all that he had done for them....Where could I find support? My life was formed by stories, not real events. All significant experiences I've had wept through like some hysterical woman. Mother, who showered me with love and care, had died. The only woman I ever loved, devotedly takes hair off another man's suit. I saw

Lydia's hand reaching toward Sinisa's lapel and a hot needle pierced my chest again. One day was enough to fall in love, I thought, but I'll need the rest of my life to forget her. Maybe I would live long enough to erase her from my memory. It's most likely that I'll die trying. Such thoughts and images were coming to me in procession and I couldn't see the end of it.

I had to go outside. I closed the door behind me and gently turned the key in the lock. I wanted to walk fast and long so I'd get tired, but I wasn't able to. After a few steps I slowed down, hardly able to lift my feet from the ground. Thoughts and images were still coming steadily but at a much slower speed. I could follow their creation and development, the hesitation over which direction to turn, and finally their vanishing. While emptiness burdened my consciousness and separate thoughts formed, I felt strong warmth in my body, which crawled along my back toward my head. When I reached the Sava Bridge, leading to New Belgrade, it began to rain. Here, finally something was happening to me - the rain was falling on me, making me wet. Now I had a reason to think, to get away or to continue to walk. To the west toward Zemun, lightning and powerful thunder could be heard. I crossed the bridge and walked slowly by the Sava river until reached its estuary into the Danube. Along the river banks, plastic bags, old newspapers and tree branches were moving in the water. Across the river, under Kalemegdan's crest, I vaguely saw ramparts of dilapidated, wet bricks. That's where I was sitting on the day I decided to tell Stevica that I wasn't his father. Thirteen or fourteen years had passed since then, yet it felt like it was only yesterday. I was smothering in depression then, but it seemed like a childish game compared to what I felt now. Powerful thunder was heard. A thunderstorm was one of the few things which made me nervous but now, I didn't care. Lightning, thunderbolts, someone dying, someone being born, an infinite merry-go-round which waits only a second for a man to get off and another one to get on. While I walked sluggishly, I slowly started to separate from my body, but the phenomenon appeared insignificant at the moment. I saw my body from an angle, from above. It seemed like a dummy without consciousness. Fate had drained it, it was empty, a shipwreck abandoned by the crew.

At that moment, above the river's estuary, the sky parted and a golden light fell on War Island, although it was still raining where I stood. In the crevice, between the dark clouds, I saw fluffy layers of white clouds and above them a pale blue sky. In that mixture of colours and the mass of clouds which swayed under the wind's fury, an image of an old man with white hair and rosy cheeks appeared. He was smiling and looking directly at me. I raised my head with difficulty to see the strange image which changed its expressions with the cloud movements. That must be Spirilen, for sure. He looked the same as he did back at the meadow in Vilin Do and later in Grandmother's stable. What is happening to

me, I thought; these were hallucinations and I was going mad, what else? The image was very real to me and I turned back to see if there was anyone else nearby who had noticed the unusual shape of the clouds as well. Under the pouring rain, there was no one else but me.

The appearance of Spirilen's face didn't bring me the relief which I'd briefly hoped for. I didn't see any significance in his image now. Moreover, I thought that perhaps I didn't understand his indications properly so perhaps I had wasted my life. I looked the other way. Should I walk over there where I'd fallen asleep on the day when I went to see Stevica? While the water slapped in my shoes, the feeling that I would feel better in that spot disappeared.

There is no point in visiting places that were once important. That happens only in stories, and this was a harsh, empty life. I walked slowly and it rained harder and harder. I thought of sickness and death. I saw images of my own funeral: the crying faces of the Intensive participants gathered around my freshly dug grave, my family members, friends. Mother was there too, alive, with teary eyes and shaky legs, leaning on Lydia and Father, all with expressions of suffering and desperation on their faces. It was hopeless. Visions which once provoked sadness, in which I could immerse myself for hours, no longer reverberated in me.

Where should I go and what should I hope for? I wasn't able to find any sense in writing books full of footnotes that nobody read – what my well-intended friends advised me to do. Social life was a wheel in which two-legged rats ran, because somewhere in front of them flickered the ideas of achievement and justice. There was no difference between revolution or counter revolution, ideology, artistic movement or philosophy, fight for women's rights, homosexuals or national minorities. Those were simply endless turns of the wheel in which the primary goals were either abandoned or perverted. Not a single grand idea which enchanted people endured in time. What could I possibly do on this planet covered with deserted land and prickly groves of hopelessness? Not in a single Christian document did Christ laugh or smile. He knew that this world was a battlefield of darkness, bitterness, and cosmic abortion.

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I entered the apartment quietly, took off my wet shoes and put them under the coat rack which didn't have Lydia's things anymore. I walked in my socks,

leaving traces of wet footprints on the parquet and carpet. I took off my wet clothes and threw them on the floor. From a closet which smelled of lavender I took a clean towel of thick cotton and began to wipe my wet body loosely, without putting any strength in my movements. I sat at the edge of the bed. I had to do something with myself, find a new goal, focus on it and start a new game. My head was heavy, my thoughts incoherent, and images before my eyes changed in slow motion. Present, all the time, was the same bare emptiness. The only philosophical question was whether to kill oneself or not? Albert Camus, Kierkegaard...whoever said that must have been in the same condition. I put on clean underwear and the scent of lavender filled me with sadness for simple family life. There would be no mornings in a warm kitchen, sitting at the table next to the window while it snows outside and Nenad asks endless questions while Lydia is telling me her worries from work.

I had put my undershirt on inside out but I didn't have the energy to take it off, turn it inside out, and put it on again. My stories of the greatest importance of spiritual development, Grand Teachers, Path I was walking on regardless of painful karma's lessons.....was all nonsense I made people around me crazy. I didn't attend the funeral of my own mother! One must be an immeasurable fool to act like that. How many times had I impatiently interrupted her when she tried to say something which was important to her? Now her body was decaying, swollen and formless, and she was someplace else, waking up from a confused dream trying to realize her path. Did she remember when I talked about bardo state in conversations with friends and Lydia? If I had been there when she'd died, I would have read "*Tibetan Book of the Dead*" to her, led her through bardo and protected her from fears and feelings of being lost. There she was frightened child who cried for protection. At the same time, I was showing off in the Master's chair in front of those naïve people. They believed they were looking at the man who had overcome human suffering and who was looking at death with a superior smile.

"Dad, are you okay?" Nenad was standing at the door looking at me with his head bent to one side. His eyes were wide open like he was trying to see in the dark. I silently nodded. He softly came to me and said: "Daddy dearest, I can see that you are so unhappy."

"It is stronger than me. I'd rather you didn't see me like this, but it seems that's the way it has to be."

He stepped toward me and with pleading in his voice he said: "Don't. Because of me. It's hard for me when you suffer; I get scared. Do it for my love. You know how much I love you."

I choked. The murderous hand of a strangler pulled me powerfully by the throat. Hot steam in my stomach compressed in a bubble...the membrane around the bubble burst and the heat spread throughout my body, taking my breath away. I squeezed my eyes tightly to avoid seeing the face of the little man filled with unfortunate love. I couldn't bear those few simple words that he'd said. I wanted to tell him to leave me alone but only sobs came from my twisted mouth. A strange thought flashed through my consciousness - that it was harder to endure great love than great hate.

A strong vibration ran through my spinal cord and cold sweat drenched my face, neck, and back. Things around me began to fade away and the contours of objects crumbled, disappearing. My eyes crossed inward, trying to see one another, my eye muscles became painfully stiff while my eyelids trembled from great strain. I tried to relax but my body wouldn't listen. The skin on my forehead tightened to the point of bursting. Then my eyes saw one another and I saw both of my eyes as one. My pupils opened wide over the entire iris and their familiar little spots disappeared. Through my pupils, I saw the dark, glassy bodies of my own eyeballs, warm and trembling. While I strained to see the bottom of my eyeballs, small sparks of light appeared from their depths. The light was coming faster and faster toward me, growing and widening, flickering more powerfully, and while I was contemplating its origin, the light's intensity blinded me, followed by a sudden feeling of happiness. At that moment, I was in the middle of hundreds of bright suns. They arrived in bunches, multiplying and assimilating into an endless ocean of light.

I was light and the Earth remained under my feet not larger than a child's fist. With demonic power, I felt the birth of my desire to expand, to penetrate the cosmos, permeate all existing worlds, to become formless and eternal. I expanded further and further...There was no end to it and it was pointless to wonder where and why. My eyesight sharpened to an extraordinary penetration. While I was noticing the circling of planets around every one of many suns, I was inundated with an extraordinary power of discernment. I knew that the past wasn't over and that it lasted eternally, that all past experiences and future events were forever condensed in me. The first tear that dropped from my eyes was still rolling down my twisted cheek; the first man who died was still dying while at the same moment his death rattle was merging with the cry he had released as a newborn. The sun was in permanent sunset, zenith, and dawn. I could go wherever I wanted; light up the depths of any of the parallel worlds, and as soon as I wanted it, truth was in front of me. I was overwhelmed with unearthly thrill.

There was only one secret. It existed outside the past and the future; it existed only in the moment when the two merged. Fearful, I felt that the moment to break its seal had arrived. My horror increased so powerfully that in the course

of spreading myself, I hesitated for a moment and the light flickered, almost starting to extinguish - only for a moment and then I continued into vastness. The moment had arrived for the veil to be taken off. I could lift it anywhere since the secret didn't have a hiding place, wherever I went I would come across it. Then I played a little since, aside from my anxiety, I enjoyed a short-lived omnipotence of choice. I chose one tiny planet in a hidden corner of the universe and at the same moment it appeared before me in all its beauty. It was a planet of golden people, burning and glittering in a colour of pure gold. I knew everything about it. The rivers in rainbow colours circled eternally, flowing into their sources, time began its end, and thoughts incarnated at the moment they were formed. People had golden skin and hair and their voices were pleasant. They existed eternally in this moment.

Then something flickered in me. Among the many golden people I saw a Being from behind, which tried to remember me forever. It was a man, woman and child in one. I directed my powers of discernment on him but I didn't find out anything. While I was concentrating on him, the Being didn't become transparent and familiar as I expected. It filled me with fear, which made the golden planet tremble.

I wanted to see his face with all my might, but the Being didn't move. Floating, I started to approach him from behind, as if, bursting with the desire to penetrate him, I could hover my way into his body. I came so close to him that I could touch the back of his head or the tightened skin over his back. Without breathing, immovable from fear, I looked at him carefully. His hair was filled with shiny golden light which blinded me. Under the smooth, tight skin I distinguished the spindle-shaped muscles of his neck and back. He stood immovable, throughout eternity, trying harder and harder to remember me. Suddenly there was stillness; the voices of the joyful golden children silenced and the rainbow-coloured rivers stopped flowing. A new recognition came to me – I knew that IT would happen now. I felt petrified before the approaching secret. There was no need to move my finger, or lips or to alter my thoughts. Everything had been decided from time immemorial. I had known the golden-skinned forever. His golden hair and neck, his back, ears positioned tightly on his head, the thought which was sharpening in his mind, I have known all that for eternity and loved him like myself. I let myself go, existing without resistance. The gold-skinned tried harder and harder to pull me out of oblivion. I felt myself appear, grow, and spread in his consciousness. Slowly, very slowly, he turned back.

There was nothing before me now, only infinite emptiness.

