

**NATALYA
ANDREEVA**

ISLANDERS

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Islanders

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Natalya Andreeva

Islanders

"The Bay of Pleasure"

The house was near the forest. When the sun slowly set over the horizon in a clear weather over the lilac pine-trees in twilight it seemed that the very top of the seventeen-storied building wore a gold crown. The red-bricked building was made of two close to each other like the twins. One entrance faced to the forest and led to the parking line the other – to the road crossing the blocks of houses. Windows like the sewing sticks glued the parts of the twins. A thick wall separated one section of windows from another. Each floor had four apartments: two one-roomed and two two-roomed.

The house was strange with the sharp corners and among surrounding five-storied buildings it looked like a tower spike. Inhabitants of "the red dwarfs" struggled against the long construction which broke ecology but they lost the fight and when the house had been built frankly hated it. They called it the Tower. It attracted the eye but not the soul. To live in that house for some reason would not be desirable. Apartments in the Tower cost fabulous and in fact there was a suburb of Moscow! A place was not overcrowded far from the center and the underground

was not under the windows but investors did not reduce the price and waited for "the right client". There were a few clients for a year that the most part of the windows remained empty.

For that time the local businessman whose name was known very well rented the ground floor for a casino which he loudly called "the Bay of Pleasure". In the evenings under the neon signboard of "Casino" shone the other one "Billiard Club". Below it was "Bar" and to the left "Slot Machines". "Crazy Cash" was written by huge red letters. Inhabitants of the five-storied buildings were frightened by "Crazy Cash". It also frightened off the possible buyers of the apartments in the Tower. They were not "crazy" to wait until somebody breaks "cash" and arrange shooting under their windows.

The profitable businessman had managed to find the sanction which forces of hired workers to build a brick separate entrance to a casino for the convenience of clients. So near the Tower which became ugly was the third entrance to "Crazy Cash". Behind one of the windows of casino there was a huge palm tree in an oak tub. It was proudly looked at pine-trees from its exclusive position. Unlike the pine-trees it's always bright and warm. But it wasn't important for the wild-growing plants which didn't want to entertain clients sitting in a tub. On the glass window there was an image of the same palm tree which contour from the neon fires began to shine brightly in the darkness. So the entrance was full of lights, the bar attracted, the billiard club promised, the hall of slot machines encouraged and the crazy

cash drove mad. Casino didn't like the Tower either. As nobody came there Casino was afraid to lose money but the stubborn businessman as well as his investors was waiting for the clients.

Clients were not in a hurry...

...That year the winter didn't come for a long time. More over it was much snow which wasn't going to melt, frosts at the end of March were like in January and people were sad. It was Monday. Even lights in "the Bay of Pleasure" appeared not so bright and the palm tree was bored. Yes, it was the usual Monday. The beginning of the working week and the beginning of cold boring March. The combination on the green cloth of the casino's table meant despair.

His new black "BMW" of the fifth model had stopped near "the Bay of Pleasure" in the center of the parking line. He had looked at the shining palm tree in the window and thought: "Crazy Cash. It is so primitive."

That irritated him. Everything irritated him last time: the weather, the late spring, clients, colleagues, employers. He left the car loudly shutting the door. And he again looked at windows of casino: "Don't wait!" They had some minutes to think: "The client arrived. The rich car, the excellent suit, the black cashmere coat, expensive boots..." "Don't even dream! Go to hell!"

Well, it's not eight but the street was quiet. At eight in the evening the entertaining program would begin and music would be loud. To attract clients the crazy owner of casino sent through powerful columns signals to everything, to everyone who was

passing by. Inhabitants didn't complain. Probably, that wasn't the time for the battle. The army hadn't gathered yet under the banners. But that was only a matter of time.

"No, I am not your client." he thought and looked again at the windows.

It was the reception room. There on the tenth floor was dark. "It means I am the first." and he went to the entrance watching the time. A quarter to eight. He didn't like to be late. They had fifteen minutes to gather. Otherwise...

Otherwise what? It's not his time he would follow the game. He became irritated. Why was HE always in time? He always had a schedule. He knew time was money! Not everyone who should come here today was so rich and so demanded. Why? Really if the person was more significant the more he would appreciate time of the others. His time he should spend on himself. It's time to communicate. That's his main problem – communication. He created the Tower for himself.

He had typed a code and entered the house loudly shutting the entrance door. The house was elite but there wasn't a guide inside. Few apartments had been sold and not everything was ready. When could he call? Could he rise on the tenth floor first? It's a quarter to eight. No, thirteen minutes to eight.

In the lift he took out the mobile phone from the pocket of the coat.

At that time one more car came to the entrance. "BMW" of the third model the same black color but not so new and a back

bumper damaged. A respectful man went out of the car in the same cashmere coat. He had the same tie and the same expensive boots. He was the copy of the previous man but a little smaller and not so wide in shoulders and the face expression was simple. In general he was just the advanced copy of the man who had arrived three minutes later. His car had stopped twelve minutes to eight.

"I am not going to play, don't wait for!" he looked at windows of the casino.

Then a man looked at dark windows on the tenth floor. He thought: "Aha, it means I am the first!"

But in a second the light had flashed in two windows. He signed in disappointment and went to the house.

He repeated to himself: "My time is money and they can't be late!" then added: "Why did I agree on this adventure?" He didn't choose the Tower. But the Tower had chosen him. He nervously pressed the buttons opening the entrance door. He had forgotten a code. But then he said: "Well! Come on! Nothing serious happens!"

He had already entered the house and another car appeared near the Bay of Pleasure an old model.

A driver parked very carefully straight to the white lines. Finally, a woman of thirty years old, modestly dressed in a dark thick long coat, boots on a platform, a turtle neck sweater went out. The man turned back and nodded her. The woman wanted to come but at that time she saw the other car. The man who had

arrived on "BMW" of the third model went in she stopped.

It was a dark green "Volkswagen". A man in a bright jacket went out and also nodded her asking with a smile: "Have they already gathered?"

"I have seen only one." answered the woman.

"What's the time?"

"Ten to eight." she added looking at the watch. "It's nine already. He likes accuracy."

"It's so dark here." the man looked around. "As for me I like the other entrance close to the road."

"But it's better for walking." said the woman in disagreement. "Just go out and you are in the park."

"Walk, breath, look at pine-trees."

"When I were old my tastes will probably change." the man laughed. "Now I like to jump out of the house straight to the underground."

"You are a typical product of a civilization. The child of a metropolis."

"You are right. I haven't got a summer house. What for? On holidays I go abroad, week-ends spend with friends. Better rest is outside the city instead of work. In a metropolis we work. And how many should we be here do you know?"

"Seven. Except the owner."

"Well, that ..."

The man had locked a door of the car, put it on the signal and turned to the woman:

"Let's go."

Then they went to the entrance door. He pushed the buttons of the code. The woman stood close shivering from cold. The wind was very cold. But she had decided to be patient whatever happened. The man agreed with her. The Tower was new for them. And both the man and the woman were full of expectations.

"Well, that's terrible weather today, isn't it?" asked the man holding a heavy iron entrance door.

"Yes. It's very cold." she nodded and came in. And the second lift began to move up.

Soon near the entrance appeared a girl in skinny jeans and a fashionable short jacket with a hood from which you could see some locks of her hair. At first glance she was about twenty. The girl was nervous pushing her hair in the hood of the jacket but they did not obey. The girl hurried up and her steps were fast. She typed a code impatiently, her fingers trembled and she tried to be calm.

"It's bad to be late." she repeated to herself pressing the button to call the lift. "It is the law of life: who lives close late more often."

The girl was mistaken. First she had come in time. Secondly she was only the fifth. And at last the most beautiful woman came. Oh, who doubted.

The sixth woman was simply perfect. She looked relaxed. Her chubby short fingers were blue from cold as she had to go from

the underground ten minutes on foot in a penetrating wind.

But nothing to do: she hadn't got the car. She could not at once push the necessary buttons by the frozen fingers and the first combination of numbers had appeared wrong. The door had not opened.

The woman nervously began to search for the mobile phone then she made two steps back and looked at windows of the tenth floor. "Oh, God! I am late!" she signed and began to hurry. She didn't want to disturb anybody asking a code of the lock and tried once more. Her fingers again ran by buttons. That time the code had been typed correctly and the heavy door opened, the woman flew in and rushed to lifts.

Suddenly the music burst. The entertaining program began. In a lift the woman looked at the watch.

"They would forgive me a minute."

"It is not necessary to be so nervous." she told herself. "It doesn't mean anything to me. It's not important".

But she didn't want to be late. Easy come – easy go. She wanted it to be over earlier. Likely it was her last visit to the Tower.

And at last time had come. Under sounds of a cheerful song at the beginning of nine "Mazda" a car of the red color drove and a magnificent platinum blonde went out. She was one more hope of "The Bay of Pleasure". However the blonde looked at the casino with interest. She would rather go to the casino. Music, champagne, a flying roulette ball, she liked all that.

The woman shut the door of the car and shook her curls. Then impatiently she went on high heels to the Tower. "Am I late? Well, I think, they will wait! "The Bay of Pleasure still looked at her with hope and the palm tree cheered her up." Bye, so long!" she waved to casino with her hand tightened in a glove and the sound of her high heels was close to the entrance door. She wore the white leather service jacket, the slacks of red color and the high boots decorated with colorful stones. It was hard to know her age, especially in the darkness. She was from twenty five up to forty. She used a lot of make-up. There was a suspicion that unlike the girl who had come there about ten minutes ago that blonde was not natural and her small height was compensated by the height of heels. Her heels were four inches for sure! But what effect!

Without taking off the red gloves, the woman pushed buttons and at first typed the right code. Her mobile phone rang. She entered the house and only then not worrying at all without vanity had got from a handbag a mobile phone which was calling loudly.

"Inhabitants"

The lift took her on the tenth floor. Doors were closed and the woman looked round. The blonde had the poor sight but she did not like glasses. She was sure they would ruin her image. Glasses were in the handbag, just in case. She didn't get them out.

The light on a staircase usually was very bright. And everyone could guess the woman was over thirty. May be she was close to forty. But she spent much time caring about herself: massage cabinets, the hairdresser, cosmeticians. Yes, she smoked. For a long time and a lot, a pack a day, that's why she was so pale. And the color of her skin seemed ashy because of a tone-cream she had used a lot.

On the one hand near a window there was a door behind which – a ladder. The door was massive, iron and locked from within. Not to break a rule of fire-prevention safety, the key was into the lock, the door was slightly opened.

In case of a fire or earthquake it's free for the evacuation. But that fact didn't trouble the blonde. She was almost disappointed to be there. That was Monday.

She could use it for entertainments. And there ...

She came to the door separating a section with four apartments, she was late. She looked to the left. There was one more window. And the way came to a balcony. She thought it was the best place to smoke. Well. They would not force her

to stay for three hours in a reception and to listen to someone's nonsense!

She didn't promise to stay for a long time! They should let her out!

While the blonde was thinking about it, the door opened. The man behind it tried to be kind.

“Hi.” he said. “We are waiting for you.”

“I have already said: I am rising.” the blonde answered. She wanted to smoke. She expected to make it in the street before entering the house but she was late for a meeting and she was in a hurry. Now she felt irritation. “No, that's not good!”

The blonde looked at the man who had opened the door for her. He was tall, thin, with a strange sharp sight. His sight was as sharp as the Tower with its sharp corners.

The blonde felt nervous. The man didn't seem pleasant.

“I want to smoke.” she said.

“Will you come in first?” he offered politely.

“Is there a place to smoke? Can I smoke there?” the blonde didn't stop speaking.

“We shall solve it.” promised the man. “Have you come to do that?”

“Well, in general.”

She came in and her platinum hair moved after her like a cloud. Suddenly she stopped.

The corridor with four doors was deep and dark. The lamps didn't lighten it well. It smelt the fresh paint. It was a mess

everywhere around as the repairing works were not over.

The blonde looked at wooden ladders, a basket of paint, brushes and on a floor there were tools and another basket full of paint. One wall was half painted. There and then, at the door laid bricks in a pile.

“What is it?” the blonde asked blinking. She was afraid of dust.

“Repairing works.” indifferently said the man. “Have you ever seen it before?”

“I saw, but ...”

“Something confuses you?”

“No. Absolutely not! May I smoke here?”

“Later. Please, wait. First I should introduce you to our guests. Perhaps, they will not be against if you smoke in a reception. We should ask about it. I know, not only you smoke.”

“I hope you haven't got more bad habits.” the blonde smiled.

“That's another question.” and the man widely opened the door before the last guest. “Please, come in.”

She had come frightening. But then she cheered up. The corridor shone and seemed different. Repairing had been finished recently and all around, walls and the floor and furniture were neat and pleased an eye.

The blonde looked around. The hall was decorated with taste. Re-planning was available. Initially it was the two-roomed apartment but the wall was removed and she stood in the middle of the huge hall. Near the entrance door there was a leather sofa,

deep armchairs and a coffee table. The conditioning was unusual.

At the window there was a desk with a computer on it, two phones and a fax. The chair had been moved up closely, the monitor was off, as the phones. It was the beginning to nine.

The working day of the secretary was over.

The woman had taken off a service jacket and stayed in a snow-white sweater. The man helped her to put her service jacket between the man's cashmere coats, one was more dark, another brighter, the female leather jacket which had been shabby enough was somewhere between. The girl's short jacket was lonely hanging closer to an entrance door. Her bag was there too.

“Don't take off the shoes.” said the man.

“But I think you will give us special slippers as at the hospital.” said the platinum blonde sarcastically.

“That's not a hospital.” the man softly noticed.

“And what is it? A clinic?” the woman did not stop asking.

“Does it look like?” he smiled.

“No, but ...”

The woman had shaken curls. Eventually, she had already come. That's why to turn and leave would be silly. There were two doors before her. The glass one was on the right and the big, massive, red door – on the left. That door had been opened.

“And where should I go?” she asked.

“To the left.”

“Well, of course! To the left!” the blonde burst out laughing.
“I like to go to the left! “

The joke was stupid but the man didn't respond it. When the woman was ready to come he firmly stopped her:

“One moment.”

“What is it?” she looked back.

“Do you know the rules? Were you warned?”

“The rules? What rules?”

“Of course, that's not a hospital. But we have got rules. During the session all mobile phones must be off.”

“Yes, yes, I understand.” the woman nodded and looked into her handbag.

“It is for your convenience.” the man said. “It is impossible to concentrate when in a pocket there is a mobile phone. It's a temptation, do you agree?”

“A temptation?” the blonde wondered playing with a tiny mobile phone. “I don't understand.”

“You will contact somebody and interrupt us. It means that the confidential atmosphere created with such work will be destroyed.”

“What do you offer?” the woman asked impatiently.

“Put your phone here and shut it off.” and the man added her mobile to six other phones in a box of the desk. He closed the box and said.

“Now you are welcome. “

She opened a massive door and entered.

“Here she is – the last!” exclaimed the man with delight. His sight was condemning.

“Excuse me.” the woman murmured.

The others kept silent. The pretty girl nervously wound a twisted lock on her finger, the man sitting next to her turned away to the window.

“Well? Shall we begin?” asked the man who after the platinum blonde entered the room.

It was a big area in twenty and a half square meters, spacious, not full of furniture. At a window – dense heavy curtain, light not bright. That room was in the dark colors. Everyone felt a light grief of withering and tranquility there.

The low armchairs’ color was hardly dark than the color of the wall-papers. They were transformers. It was possible to change easily a position of an armrest, lower it or, on the contrary making them comfortable. Thus they were not heavy and it was easy to move them without an effort more close to the window or in the center. The blonde had counted eight armchairs. Two were empty. The woman understood that one of the armchairs was hers.

“Here we spend our sessions.” said the man. And he had noticed that the blonde uncertainly looked back, came to her and softly touched her hand. “As you are here for the first time, I would like to introduce you to people.”

He looked at the impatient man and said:

“This is Sergey. Here we avoid surnames and age. We try not to mention an occupation. This theme is forbidden. Your address, the name of the street you live in, the number of your house –

all these are not important. Well.”

The man nodded and rose from an armchair saying.

“I am Sergey.”

“Close to him is – Vsevolod.”

The man who had arrived by "BMW" of the third model and who looked like Sergey stood up and said.

“You may call me Seva.”

He had dark sad eyes, very beautiful, big with long eyelashes but the face features were small and his hair rose up in the ridiculous hedgehog even after the skilful hairdresser.

"How old is each?" thought the blonde. She watched them sitting next to.

"May be they are the same age. Both are a little over forty. And they are well familiar with each other".

The man indifferently looking out of the window turned back and with a wide smile said.

“I am Arthur.”

“Glad to meet you.” the platinum blonde smiled in the answer. Among all men in the room, including the owner, he was the youngest and the most handsome. Very handsome! Everybody paid attention to that fact.

“Close to Arthur, on the right – Zhanna.”

The girl nodded. The platinum blonde looked at her with dignity. She was very pretty. The figure was slim, the waist was thin, the legs were long and probably she did not keep on any diets!

How lucky she was! Someone got everything from birth and for someone it was a hard work! To break legs wearing very high heels to seem taller! The blonde felt as her legs began to hurt. She wanted to sit down and smoke.

“And this is Lida.” the owner introduced the nice woman, a bit plump with smoothly combed chestnut hair. She was simple and lovely. Her name was Lydia but shortly Lida.

“No need to be afraid of her.” thought the platinum blonde. She was that type of women who always and everywhere fought for the attention of men.

“Close to her – Vera.”

The woman who had arrived by the old car and parked slowly, stood up and nodded. She was the other type of women: the business woman. Not a business-lady or an owner of a company of underwear with her name as a title but the simple worker, who worked all night long so hard that almost hadn't time for the private life. Not the secretary, a rank above. The average rank.

Her clothes were simple but comfortable. Her eyes were red like with the person who a lot of time spent at a computer. As most people she had contact lenses. But eyes looked tired because of them. The platinum blonde noticed everything and greeted her unwillingly. Well, that happened. May be she would look better dressed- up with the make-up ...

“Well.” the man looked round. And then addressed to the woman standing at a loss.

“I think you should introduce yourself, shouldn't you?”

“Okay.” she shook her curls and said proudly.

“I am Angelica.”

“Wonderful!” Arthur shouted. “What a nice name! “

“It suits you.” said the kind woman Lida by name.

“Thanks, I want to ask.” the blonde had hushed up. “Are the names real here? I am not sure ...”

And she stopped.

“Not necessarily.” the man calmed her. “Here, as at a confession: the main thing is your soul and for God all people are without names. When God gives you life he isn't caring about the name. The man is important. The man who needs help.”

“So, Angelica is with us today. Well, you are welcome, sit down.”

The platinum blonde sat in an armchair and stretched her legs in narrow, sharp-pointed boots, modern but not comfortable. She asked the owner.

“And what is your name? You have got the name, haven't you? How could we all name you?”

“Yes, I have got.” he smiled. “I am Ivan.”

Vera and Arthur looked at each other. “They knew each other.” noticed Angelica.

She became quiet and relaxed.

That was not dangerous. All seemed so ... normal.

Sergey and Seva looked respectable, Zhanna was naive, Lida was nice and Vera with Arthur looked like businessmen. What problems could these people have? Anyway, there was no danger

about them. All of them wanted to speak, communicate.

Ivan sitting in the armchair close to the door addressed to the newcomer.

“Angelica, do you want to ask anything before we shall begin?”

“Yes. Can I smoke here?”

“Can she smoke here?” Ivan looked at the others. “Sergey, I know that you smoke.”

“So.”

“Does it mean that you are not against?”

“I am not.”

“I agree.” responded Seva. It seemed he would agree with everything Sergey said. “I don't mind.”

“But I do.” exclaimed Lida. “I do not smoke myself and I do not like when somebody smokes close.”

“I do not smoke either.” Zhanna disagreed. “But I have got used. I do not approve but also I do not object.”

“I smoke.” Vera complained about herself. “I try to give up. But I can't.”

“And I even do not try.” Arthur smiled cheerfully. “I do not smoke. But for me it doesn't matter whether you smoke or not.”

“So, we shall sum up.” said Ivan. “Angelica, Sergey and Vera smoke. Zhanna, Seva and Arthur do not smoke but do not object. Lida does not smoke and objects. But you, Lida, in this case in minority.”

“And you?” she looked straight at him.

“I am neutral. I am always neutral. You should obey.”

“Well.” Lida nodded. “Smoke.”

“It is necessary to finish with the Tower.” she thought. “This time I shall come into trouble, no need to appear here anymore. It is too hard.”

“I shall give you ashtrays.” Sergey rose. The conditioning is good here but we shall not smoke much. Relax.”

He came to the wall and took from a shelf of the unit a pair of the light silver ashtrays. He said smiling:

“I will take this.” he weighed the third ashtray in the hand. It was massive, made of dark glass and obviously did not match on style to other things in the room.

“Well, the best – for the ladies, the rest – for the men.”

He gave Angelica and Vera the ashtrays, then returned to his armchair and got out a pack of cigarettes. Ivan watched everybody smoking. The pause lasted for about a minute then he said.

“So, today we have got the next session of psychotherapy. Shall we begin?”

Nobody was against. And he added.

“Who wants to speak?”

“Robinson's Solo”

The pause was long. Ivan kept silent. Angelica smoked with pleasure, Vera persistently looked in an ashtray which was on the armrest of her armchair, Seva looked at Sergey, Arthur – in window... Then people in armchairs began to exchange glances.

“Well, be brave.” Ivan said. “I remind you: everything that happens here won't be open for public. The newcomer?”

“I don't want to be the first.” Angelica protested.

“I see: you should look around. Who wishes to tell us about the problems? I shall open you my small secret: I have got an interesting solution. With it I shall help you to get rid of the fears. In the next room, behind the door which is at my back, there is a surprise.

“What surprise?” Lida asked curiously. “We did not agree!”

“Do not worry.” Ivan smiled. “It is not painful. Sessions of psychotherapy are absolutely not painful. It's better to say they are pleasant. About money we are not going to speak now but I am sure time comes. And time is paid by you. So ...”

“I am ready to speak.” and Sergey stopped to smoke.

Lida and Vera looked at him with surprise. Sergey had caught these sights and said.

“I know it surprises you. I seemed shy. Well ...I had just listened. But sooner or later there comes the moment when you are ready. Now I am ready to speak.”

“Nobody objects.” Seva muttered.

“So, Sergey wants to speak.” Ivan looked around. “Please. We listen to you attentively.”

Sergey nervously took one more cigarette from the pack and began to smoke. Lida was not glad about it but kept silent. After a little pause Sergey at last said.

“How to begin? That is the question. As a rule it is better from the beginning. Excuse me, I am nervous. I repeat. Everything around ... weather, yes. Today the weather is disgusting.”

That was a long pause.

“Yes, March in this year is surprisingly cold.” Vera supported him.

“It seems that the spring will never come.” Lida added quietly. All men and Zhanna were silent. Angelica smoked.

“Weather is disgusting.” Sergey summed up. “So, we have talked about the weather, what else? I cannot concentrate. Excuse me, I must be more talkative. Let’s begin. I was born forty two years ago in the city of Moscow, in the street ... Yes, I remember the rules... This street is in the City centre. My mum ... I think that won't be any secret if I shall tell you that my mum has worked all her life as the teacher at school without specification of a subject which she taught. We lived in a municipal apartment. To be sure, in a two-roomed apartment. One room was bigger and the kitchen was neither large nor small. Two tables and two cupboards and a stove were there. The relatives bought the refrigerator for the kitchen. It was so long ago. That was my

childhood. We with mum lived in the big room and in the small one lived the aunt ... Without names, I remember.”

He continued to smoke. Ivan didn't say anything but his sight became suddenly so sharp as if he wanted to pin Sergey to a back of an armchair. Meanwhile Sergey continued.

“As for the metric area, it's okay. We did not apply for expansion. Our room was very big. Why are you looking at me? Yes, there are such big rooms in the center in the old apartments. Of course, we with mum would like to live in a separate apartment. But I forgot to say the aunt was ten years elder than my mum and she had a diabetes. It is a shame to speak about it but we thought she would die earlier than ... in general you have understood me. And such apartment in the center you know how much it costs. Mum who was born in an old city doesn't want to move.

And the aunt ... the aunt was ill, never married, had neither the husband nor children. The lonely, sick woman... We signed the contract about trusteeship. Without any details, such contract as we look after her and her room after her death comes to us. It is disgusting!” he said suddenly. “It is disgusting to be interested in someone's death! This woman became to me a close relative! Mum worked all day long earning money alone and it was hard. She wanted to give me a good education. But the aunt ... While mum went on private lessons, the aunt warmed up meal for me, met me from school and then from the institute, mended my socks, ironed shirts. And after that I wished her death! It is

disgusting!" he repeated again and got one more cigarette from the pack.

"But that's not your fault." Lida said suddenly. "That's life which puts us in ... such ..." and she hushed up "circumstances."

"Yes, but we should stay people under any circumstances." Sergey answered smoking. "Excuse me, I am nervous." and then he added. "She died one day after mum."

"Who died? " Arthur didn't understand him.

"The aunt who had diabetes died one day after the woman who considered herself absolutely healthy and did not go to doctors up to the last moment. I mean my mum. When at last she visited the doctors it was already late. "We couldn't do anything." doctors told her. Last two years of my life were awful. I had already understood that it was necessary to earn money and to buy at last a separate apartment not waiting while the small room of the aunt will be ours. I had understood it. And I started to work. I earned money. I bought a car. At first one, then another, more expensive, then ..." he stopped for a moment. "When I had money, both of them were sick. They were so ill that I ask somebody to stay with them. There were people near them all the time: nurses, doctors, friends. The aunt was very sociable. The old women from the next houses came to her. I tried to spend at home less time. Left early came late. Justified myself that I was earning money."

"And why didn't you move?" Seva asked. "They had got nurses, hadn't they?"

"Feeling of a duty. I was brought up that way. I could not leave

them. They wanted me to stay and though it had not been said aloud I understood it in their eyes. Both of them wanted me to prolong their lives, do you understand? I was always near and it seemed to them as soon as I disappear it will be the end. I was close up to the end. The funeral was the same day. After that I felt loneliness. I hated the old people and all their illnesses. I could not communicate with them. And ... I had sold that apartment in the Center. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, of course." Vera answered.

"And you?" Sergey looked at Lida then at Arthur sitting to the right. Lida was silent as usual. Arthur bent lips trying to smile.

"Why are you so sad, Sergey?" Ivan asked.

"Sad?" Sergey smoked a cigarette. "I don't know such a feeling that I am the old man myself. For these forty years in that apartment close to a sick woman I felt old myself. It is a shame but when they died I didn't feel grief. I didn't want to cry. I felt nothing. The soul was empty. I wanted to stay alone."

He stopped speaking. The others were silent too. Nobody was going to interrupt him and Sergey continued.

"Well, I want to tell you more about my private life."

"Are you sure? It is not necessary." Lida said.

"Why? It is interesting! Or maybe you thought that I had no private life at all? Well, of course, I had! When I was twenty six," Sergey began to remember. "I met the girl who was younger than me ... Five years younger. Yes, only five. I had met girls at the institute and ... However, unimportant. But that was the

special one whom I wanted to marry. The problem was she had no separate apartments. She lived with parents in a very small apartment. We fell in love and began to date. We loved each other ...”

With these words Angelica began to giggle.

“Is it funny? By the way, it was not funny at all. We met waiting while her parents left or my mum went away but behind a wall there was a sick woman who knew everything, more than everything. She was curious, very curious. When the baby was born.”

“What baby?” Vera asked with a surprise.

“Why is it so surprising? You don't know how the babies are born, do you?”

“I do but ...”

“You don't think that I could have a baby? But I have a daughter.” Sergey was angry.

“She is almost an adult and very independent. Sure, we wanted to get married with her mother. But we could not live together. We tried. But I didn't feel comfortable in their apartment and it was far from my work. She lived in the suburbs. And I had to work a lot to earn money and to solve our problems. She could not live with me. We had no separate room and put a screen. That was fifteen years ago. Long fifteen years ago... I asked her to rent a separate apartment she refused.”

“Why?” Zhanna asked. “She could live there with ... with the girl.”

“Women are strange.” Sergey smiled. “When I had nothing, she loved me. And when I became rich, she left me. We had never lived together. She said that for those years I had changed greatly. She spoke about the Robinson complex in me. “

“What complex?” Angelica was wondered.

“It’s loneliness. You don't need people around. I became strange. But I want to ask you if it was strange or not? Why did she refuse to live together?”

“Who thinks Sergey is strange?” Ivan asked.

“Absolutely not!” Angelica said. “He is normal!”

“Thanks.” Sergey grinned.

“Do you want me to marry you?” she could not stop speaking.

“Thanks again. But I want my family.”

“Seva?” Ivan asked.

“I?” he was frightened. “ We are all very strange. I, for example, too ...”

“We will speak about you later. Vera?”

“I didn't find anything strange. Don't find.”

“Arthur?”

“Is he strange?” Arthur wondered. “I think she is strange. The woman who as you said left you.”

“You are from the category of men who always accuse women of everything.” Lida attacked him. “As for me I don't want to comment the situation.”

“Well. Zhanna?” and Ivan looked at the pretty blonde.

“I am only twenty five. I am younger than all of you. I can't

judge the feelings of people. But I think if she had stopped loving him that's right that why she left.”

“I did not say: she stopped loving me.” Sergey noticed. “I think not.”

“Life is so difficult.” Seva tried to express himself. “Today she leaves, tomorrow she will return.”

“But I would like to be sure!”

“I think, you do not tell us everything.” Ivan said. “What is it, Sergey? Is there anything else?”

“Probably.”

“It is important to know everything.”

“Well. I met the other woman.” Sergey said unwillingly.

“Aha!” Angelica threatened him by her finger. “Here we are! You got confused in your mistresses ...sorry, women. That's it.”

“I didn't.” Sergey said angrily. “I am sure with whom I want to stay.”

“And with whom?” Vera asked very quiet.

“Let's stop speaking about the family problems.” Arthur stopped them. “We are lucky that Sergey has only two women. If I shall start to tell you about mine whom I want or don't want it will take me a week.”

“Oh! We would like to listen to you with pleasure!” Angelica began to clap her hands.

“I am not going to listen to it.” Lida was against. “Let's stop it.”

“Wow!” Angelica was wondered. “Are you a virgin?”

“I am not!”

“By the way...” Angelica looked at everybody in the room. “Have we got here virgins? I don't want to confuse them. Sometimes I am so shocking!”

“We are all truthful enough here.” Ivan responded to her.

“Well, thanks God!”

“But it does not mean it is necessary to be rude.” again very quietly but firmly said Lida.

“It's nine.” Ivan looked at the watch. “It's time for a surprise.”

“What surprise?” greedy asked Angelica.

“I found a way how to help you to overcome your own fears. Sergey said he had the Robinson's complex. Actually he likes people and he wants to communicate. Robinson many years lived on an island searching for a way to get out and finally he met Friday. Communication is important for Sergey as well as for the others to get rid of fears. So, cross the past and think about it as you will never return back. It is necessary to move further. The others will speak later. And now I shall bring something.”

“What is it?” Angelica asked impatiently.

“Wait a minute.”

Ivan got up and left the room. Angelica took from the pack one more cigarette.

“You are smoking too much, aren't you?” asked Lida.

“And what?”

“Nothing. But you don't think about people around. Men do not smoke so much as you! “

“As for the other people ...” Angelica enjoyed smoking.”

I think you are always right. But it's boring. Have you got a husband?"

"That's not your business."

"I think you aren't married. And that is your problem!"

Totem

Lida became red and wanted to answer but at that moment Ivan came into the reception room. He carried something like a box for voting. Only the smaller size and was made from the other material not wood because it was light. Ivan came to a low little table with a transparent cover from the thick glass and put his box on it.

“What is it?” Lida asked with interest.

“By the way, are you afraid of anything?” Angelica laughed. “Are you sick? I bet you that it not a bomb!”

“Sure.” Ivan nodded. “It is our protective totem.”

“What is it?” Vera hesitated.

“Can you see that crack above?”

“Well, of course.” Arthur said.

“I guess Sergey's story had left nobody indifferent.”

“Why have you decided that?” Lida tried to put her hair in order nervously.

“I see it on your faces. You are thinking about something. You, Lida. You don't tell me anything.” Ivan said softly. “I suggest you to overcome the fears. When I suffer from something, I act as follows myself. I write the fear on a paper and I burn it. Let's burn the fears.”

“Burn fears?” Zhanna wondered. “How?”

“I shall carry the box in the next room. Put it on the table.

There you can find clean white envelopes, pens and paper. Write your fear, put it in the envelope and throw it in the box. You will come in by turns, I understand that you hesitate. It is better to write it in loneliness ...”

“And mind printed letters.” Arthur added.

“Why?” Vera asked again.

“Who knows what happens. I prefer anonymity.”

“Then we shall burn the sealed envelopes.” Ivan promised.

“But you can really write printed letters. Or by the left hand.”

“Change the handwriting.” Arthur added smiling.

“Arthur is an optimist.” Ivan noticed. “He is always in a good mood. “

“I don’t understand why has he come here in general?”

Angelica watched him expressively.

“Why? Oh, I’ve got the reason to come.” Arthur answered.”

But I like the idea with the envelopes. To say truthfully I have also got my fear. And I dream to burn it.”

“I shall join this game with pleasure.” Angelica began to clap her hands.

“You are forty years old and you behave yourself as the little girl.” Lida revenged her.” It looks ridiculous.”

“Why do you think that I am forty?!”

“Ladies, calm down.” Ivan tried to stop them. “Lida, you quarrel with Angelica as she smokes towards you. Angelica, you know it and directly smoke to her side. Lida, it is evident. For Angelica you now the weakest person and that’s why she attacks

you. That's your irritation, your anger. It is a weakness. Actually you are a kind woman, Lida. Why did you remind Angelica of her age knowing it will be so painful to her?"

"And she did the same. Well, that's bad. You are right. I apologize."

"Thanks." Angelica answered. "I also apologize. But I am here the newcomer."

"You are deep inside yourself." Ivan smiled. "That's right."

"Are you going to comment all the situations?" Angelica asked.

"Some of them. My aim is to teach you to avoid conflicts. To be self-controlled means to own a situation. So have you got anything against it?"

"Do you mean against burning our fears?" Zhanna asked.

"Yes."

"I am not against." Sergey shrugged his shoulders.

"I agree." Seva added.

"I have already showed my opinion." Angelica noticed.

"Agree." Arthur said at the same time.

"I support all of us." Zhanna dropped quietly.

"And I do." Vera said briefly.

"So, we have again the majority." Lida signed. "I am not lucky today."

"Well, let's begin."

Ivan left the room for a minute carrying the box in the next one. Seva sitting in an armchair said.

“In a circle, let’s begin with Sergey. Please.”

Sergey rose and slowly went to the door. Seva was to the left of him and took the pose as in a sport’s game preparing. As soon as Sergey had left he ran to the door.

“You are quick.” Vera noticed.

“Too quick.” Arthur added.

Seva stayed in the room only for a moment. He ran back and fell in his armchair. As if he did the duty, unpleasantly but fortunately as he had already done it. Zhanna rose from her armchair. While she went to a door Angelica looked at her figure. As she had noticed before, the girl was tall. Magnificent light hair shone on her shoulders, jeans fitted her very well.

“She could become a model.” Lida said suddenly catching that sight.

“It is not enough for a model.” Angelica answered.

“Not enough of what?”

“Everything!”

“Tell better that you envy her.”

“Ivan is looking at us. Do you want to become an object of his psychoanalysis again? I don’t.”

Zhanna returned quickly and Arthur was going to hide his fear in an envelope. Vera’s turn was after him. They were there equal quantity of time as if they had agreed. Lida stayed there the longest. And when she returned, Angelica asked her suspiciously:

“Have you read everything written by the others?”

Lida became red and Ivan noticed.

"It is impossible. Only I know how to open the box."

"I was thinking!" Lida answered her angrily.

"Don't think much!"

And Angelica jumped out of her armchair and slowly went out showing off her figure. Really she returned quickly. Angelica was the last, Ivan said.

"It is my turn. I shall bring the totem back."

In a minute he returned with "the box" and put it on the low little table.

"Here there are your fears. We have almost got rid of them. We must burn them now."

"And how shall we do it?" Zhanna asked.

"There is a metal tray in the kitchen. I shall open the box we take out envelopes on a tray and burn them."

"And nobody knows what is written inside." Arthur noticed smiling.

Sergey looked at his watch and offered.

"Perhaps, shall we have a break? One and a half hour has passed as we here. I suggest to make a break and then to continue. Then we will burn our fears."

"I support!" Seva supported him with joy.

"I don't mind to go out on a balcony to breath fresh air." Angelica said dreaming.

"I also want the break." said Lida. "I'll go to the bathroom."

And she touched her hair which was really in a disorder.

"At last you are in the majority." Vera noticed. "I personally

don't need the break but if everybody insists so much ...”

“So, by the majority of voices it is solved.” Ivan summed up. “We do a ten-minute break. We may breath in the balcony or smoke in the corridor or whatever.”

“I can make coffee.” Zhanna suggested.

“Perfect!” Arthur said with enthusiasm. “Zhanna, you are the best!”

“And I want coffee too.” Vera signed.

“Coffee and cigarettes.” Lida condemned them. “At night!”

“What's wrong, darling?” Angelica asked. “If you don't want, don't drink! And I do with pleasure! And by the way you are alone again!”

“Does anybody else want coffee?” Ivan looked at them. They all kept silence. “It means seven cups of coffee. Zhanna, can I help you?”

“No, I shall try.” and the girl rose from the armchair.

“So, let's have the break.”

Ivan also rose and said.

“I will go out for ten minutes to the cabinet as you are not against.”

And he went out the same time as Zhanna who moved to the kitchen. Angelica followed them then Vera and Lida, Sergey was with Arthur. Seva stayed alone.

Alone at the coast: Sergey

In his childhood he needed love greatly. He was small, proud and lonely. He wanted to be hugged but he jumped aside from everybody who tried to do it. It seemed to him that all these people faked. So he grew up thinking that nobody loved him. And when he became an adult he began to feel absence of love in himself. Still proud and lonely, he avoided hugs as well as kisses and any open emotions. In childhood he had learned to laugh at everybody who kissed in public. He was shy about the aunt, she seemed old and very ugly and mum had been almost always busy, worked a lot with her private lessons and got tired much earlier than there came time of love. He was lack of the fairy tales at night, a parent kiss in a cheek and tender words "good night, dear". He was dreaming about it lying in bed with the open eyes waiting for his mother. He was thinking.

And finally he had had an idea that the most sensitive people were idlers. They had no problems at all. He understood that himself when he started to work all night long. In the underground watching people passing by with the indifferent faces he thought that people had blamed the century of cruelty in vain and soon it would be worse. People were stressful from unemployment. No free time and no will to earn money. They used the feelings of the others. The TV, show business, the Internet ... All these were developing so quickly and at the same

time the feelings were gone. They had no time for growing. His own feelings were as green as the wild apples. They had grown on a tree which was not taken care of well and that's why their taste was bitter.

In the childhood he wanted the creature so much, small creature to take care of and love. He thought as he was not loved, he would love himself. He wanted it greatly. It would be good to have the younger brother or the little sister but he could only dream about it. He wanted a cat or a dog. He was shy to feel the desire to patronize, protect and once asked.

“Mum, let's have a dog.”

Mother refused. And she was right. The dog was a problem, very noisy. You needed to feed it, to walk with. “Let's buy you small fishes, Sergey.” she offered and put her arm on his shoulder.

He didn't want fishes. They were cold and silly. They looked very silly. But he agreed because they were alive. And they could somehow color his loneliness. He couldn't like them but he felt it won't be boring to have them. He could sit near the aquarium for hours watching fishes and trying to understand where they were swimming in the clear water. The water in the aquarium always was clear as he took care of that. And he was glad.

Then it began to seem that he had known everything about these fishes. Where they were swimming in pair seconds as well as they quickly rushed in and in some time fell asleep caught by his attentive sight. He liked himself to be the small Lord of the

World who had created an inhabitancy of these creatures and supported their lives comfortable. Only on him they depended when they would be fed in the water and how they would be warmed by the light. Finally he could fry all of them. And stop their stupid fish existence.

Once mum was worried by his motionless sitting at the aquarium and asked.

“Sergey, is everything all right with you?”

“Yes, absolutely.”

“Is it really interested you to sit always close? Watching?”

“Yes. ”

“You are a strange child.”

“What is strange that I study fishes?”

“To study means to read about them. I have not seen on your table any books about them. Do you know what exactly they are from? What kind are they? Why have they got such color?”

“I know what they think. It does not depend on color and where they are from. They think about food.”

“Sergey! These are only fishes! They can't think! They only swim!”

“All of them are swimming to that part where there can be food. Look at that little one. I bought him as he was the smallest. The rest I do not want to know. That is a pretty fish, Mum! Look, Mum! He is waiting when I shall throw food in water! Because his food is over! And he is still hungry! How beautiful he is but he is not quick. It seems he could not survive.”

“You will help him, won’t you?”

“Shall I put him in a separate aquarium? May be ... But it is boring. I will think whether it’s worth or not.” he said it absolutely as an adult.

“You are a strange child.” repeated his Mum. “But you study well and I haven’t got any problems with you. Teachers praise you, they do not complain about. I think you are all right. What do you think?”

She looked at him attentively. He nodded.

“Yes. I feel well. I am healthy.”

“Okay.” Mum smiled. “Very soon you will become an adult and you will be excited by something else. Girls, for example. And you will forget about your fishes.”

She was not right. He of course was excited about girls. But they were not so much different from fishes. He almost always guessed their thoughts. They were attractive. He got them as the best fishes, the girl-friends and the rest he didn’t want to know. The one who feeds and changes water in an aquarium was special. Finally he could just fry them all. If he boiled the water all of them would be dead. Or he can block oxygen there and to watch them dying. It was amusing.

“Oh, Mum, Mum! You would better to buy me a dog!” he thought looking at people sitting in armchairs. All of them were fishes. They were floating where he wanted. They did not guess at all what will happen to them. And they believed in his "confession".”

If you wanted people believe you it would be better to tell the truth. But truth was like an iceberg the most dangerous part of which always stayed under water as well as your secret dreams. On a surface there stayed only one part. THEY were guilty. Their truth was hidden under water. He didn't want to risk, to sympathize, to give an advice. In fact you couldn't realize the sizes of the iceberg under the water.

They thought he was truthful. They knew nothing about the iceberg ...

Storm

Angelica was waiting for Sergey and Arthur in the dark corridor.

“Don’t you mind to join my company?” she asked looking straight to Arthur. “Let’s go to the balcony.”

“But you know I do not smoke.” he smiled.

“Will you breathe fresh air with me?”

“I want to look at the wall-papers in the next apartment and the ceiling. I began to repair my own flat I had from the grandmother in an old house but I had some problems. There is such a big choice of the wall-papers I can’t imagine what to choose. It’s expensive. And the owner boasted that he had found wonderful wall-papers. The ceiling the masters had made excellent. It was cheap because everything they brought from work. I have to look at. And the door is open. I shall go.”

“Why is it open?” Angelica was surprised.

“You may don’t know.” Arthur looked at Sergey. He made a sign and Arthur said. “The owner bought all the apartments at the floor. Four apartments are in this section. There is no need to lock them. What for? “

“Great! “ Angelica whistled. “The whole floor! I think it’s a big deal. Is he crazy?”

“May be he loves loneliness.” Sergey shrugged his shoulders.

“Or he is going to marry.” Arthur grinned. “And have a lot of

kids.” “Are we alone here?” Angelica asked.

“Absolutely!”

“Wow, let’s go to smoke.” the woman shook her platinum curls. And with an obvious hint she said. “I know that you smoke, Sergey.”

“Yes, I smoke. “

“Will you join us?”

“In five minutes. I want to speak. ”

“What about? Are you good friends?” the woman asked suspiciously. And she looked at them firmly.

“We have got the same business.”

“To say truthfully we work together.” Arthur added.

“Aha, here you are! “ Angelica connected them by her sight. “It seems very interesting! Open your cards. The comedy is over. I also want to speak to Sergey. That is a good time.”

“I don’t understand.” Arthur was surprised.

“What don’t you understand? Not only you have secrets. That’s my turn.”

“Well.” Sergey answered. “I shall be in two minutes. “

“I am waiting for you.” Angelica sang like an actress and opened the door close to the lifts.

When she disappeared Arthur asked seriously.

“What have you got with such a woman?”

“Nothing.” Sergey answered.

“But you have invited her here! Am I right?”

“I repeat nothing.”

“Nothing serious?” Arthur asked with irony. “Will you explain then?”

“Later. That’s not the time. Okay, what do you think about all these?” Sergey asked after a small pause. “Have you got any thoughts about it?”

“No, nothing. Only guesses.”

“I think you’re clever! Well, watch, think. And ...” Sergey again made a small pause. “Take on a note. It can be useful to you. “

“Do you want to add it to my debt?”

“Let’s not speak about it.”

“No, wait. I want to know what to wait?”

“Later.”

“Today, Sergey. Now.”

“Do you really want to look at the repairing works?” Sergey changed the theme.

“Why not? I told the truth about my apartment. I repair it really.”

“I believe you, one drop of the truth!” Sergey burst out laughing.” I have already got confused!”

“You may go to watch.” and Arthur nodded to the door behind which Angelica disappeared.

“I repeat for the third time that’s not you think about.”

“Then what is it?”

“I shall tell. Later.”

“All right. I shall wait. How much?”

“About three hours.” Sergey said indifferently. And he opened the door to go out to the staircase. He hesitated. Then he turned back.

Arthur went to the door to the next apartment. He also turned and they changed the glances ...

... The break came to an end when from the corridor they heard the female shout. The woman shouted so desperately that even Angelica who was at the balcony that moment heard it and rushed back. Very strange that she was the first to react to these shouts. She ran into the corridor and saw the body on the floor. She stupidly looked at it and asked.

“What happens?”

“And you ... you ... don’t you see?” said Vera stopped shouting. “He is dead! Sergey! Sergey is dead!”

Angelica bent and stared at the body on the floor.

“And really ... he did not move. May be, the heart?”

“What?!” Vera cried. “That’s the murder! Blood! The blood is on the floor!”

“Why are you so nervous? Why are you shouting so loudly?”

“And you ... you ... aren’t you afraid of?”

“I have seen a lot.”

And Angelica removed her boot from a pool of blood. Then she complained.

“It is so dark here!”

At that moment the door of the next apartment opened and Arthur came in asking.

“What happens? Who shouted?”

“Sergey ... He is dead!”

“What?” then he added. “I can’t believe.”

“Are you both mad? He is dead!” Vera shouted.

“Why could I feel sorry?” Angelica said.”I have not even known him!”

“Stop lying.” Arthur said angrily. “Have ever known!”

At that time Zhanna and Lida came from the other room. Lida began to cry. Zhanna tried to calm her. Seva came to them and finally Ivan went out from the room where he put the box with the letters.

“What’s the matter?” Ivan asked watching people around the body as he could not see it.

They moved back and Seva said.

“Well. That’s...”

“May be, he is alive!” Lida fell down on her knees and tried to find Sergey’s pulse.

“Stop!” Ivan stopped her. “I shall do. I am the doctor. Step apart.”

Vera moved strangely to close the body but then stood up. Ivan came close and bent down above Sergey. After the pause Ivan said.

“Sorry. He is dead.”

“Oh, my God!” Lida signed.

“But ... how did it happen? “Angelica asked.

“He is wounded in the back from the left side. Wait ... it is

dark here. There are two wounds. One above another. By a sharp object. Murder was about five minutes ago, blood still goes. Who has found the body?"

"I did." said Vera. "Why are you looking at me so strange?"

"Call the police." Zhanna said suddenly. "I am curious how he was killed."

"There. Have a look." and Ivan pointed to a basket with an oil paint with the chisel sticking out. "Somebody hit him in the back twice. And the instrument of murder that chisel the murderer had thrown in the basket with paint. Watch: only the edge sticks out. It's dark here but I am sure there is blood on it."

"Yes, blood." Lida whispered. "I see. But why is it in paint?"

"It means that all prints of fingers are destroyed." Ivan explained. "Great trick! To hide it in the basket with an oil paint! It's impossible to identify them!"

"You must call the police." Seva said. "They will decide."

"Yes." Ivan agreed. "I think our session is over. On the background of this murder everything else is not important."

"Wow!" Arthur said suddenly. "We both left for the corridor! Now you can say that I killed him!"

"The best defense is the attack, isn't it?" Angelica blinked her eyes. "And in fact you are right! I have left you together and went to the balcony to smoke. I think it is clear."

"But you invited him there." Arthur answered angrily. "Do you remember?"

"By the way, I was waiting him in vain."

“Who will prove it?”

“I shall go to call the police.” Zhanna said. “Don’t touch anything here and better to dismiss.”

“Dismiss?” Lida screamed. “But one of us is the murderer!”

“She is nervous.” Ivan said. “Not to dismiss but to go away from here.”

Meantime Zhanna went to the door. Nobody stopped her.

“As for the murderer.” Arthur crookedly grinned. “He is among us. I am sure it will be better to call the police.”

“Yes!” Angelica exclaimed. “I need the protection! I won’t stay alone now!”

“Let’s call immediately.” Vera said. “I am ...” she added. “I feel terrible.”

“We should wait for them here.” Lida sobbed. “Close to the body! Oh, I am afraid!”

“I also feel bad.” complained Seva.

“I don’t know what to say about myself.” Ivan reminded. “My private practice will be closed then. Could you imagine – the murder happens during the session of psychotherapy! That’s a scandal!”

“Nobody will go to your sessions.” Angelica said. “Never!”

“I should say.” Ivan looked at her and continued. “One of us is the remarkable actor. Nobody protested against a call to the police. Not a single person. All were for the call but in fact someone plays! Lies! What do you think, who?”

“You are the psychologist and you will find who.” Angelica

said suddenly. “What about acting ...”

At that moment Zhanna who recently had disappeared behind the door rushed into the room and cried.

“Could you imagine? The telephone socket is broken! The wires are cut off! We have no phones!”

“We haven’t got phones, have we?” Vera asked.

“No phones?” Lida echoed her.

“Be quiet.” Ivan said. “We all have mobile phones. Don’t begin to panic.”

“Oh, my God!” Zhanna shouted. “How stupid I am! Well, of course! The mobile phones!”

And she rushed back in the room. Everybody followed her.

Cut off from the Continent

“Be careful!” said Vera to Zhanna when she last slipped in a hall and was ready to fall. She picked her up by the elbow.

“Thanks.” Zhanna murmured and released her elbow rushing to the small table of the red color.

“Why is it water on the floor?” Seva asked in wonder.

“Oh, my God!” Zhanna shouted. And everybody forgot about the pools on the floor. “Where are our mobiles!”

“What?” Ivan asked tensely.

“They are gone! I can’t see them!”

“Where are they?” Arthur was surprised. Lida turned pale.

“Have a look!”

And Zhanna moved forward that box where they had put the mobile phones. She moved it up to the end.

Vera came the first to watch as she was standing close to and began checking by her hand on a bottom of the box hoping to find a hiding place in which mobile phones were. Then she said helplessly.

“They are gone.”

“Do you want to say that ...” Lida put her hand on the chest. “Can we call the police? Oh!”

“We should go downwards and try to call.” Ivan said.

“Or ask the neighbors.” Arthur noticed.

“The neighbors?” Ivan thought. “As I know not a single

apartment on that floor is sold yet. On the ninth floor there is a repair. Builders work there till six pm. The eleventh floor is empty too. Half of apartments are sold but there still nobody was there. I know that windows are light up on the fifth floor in the evenings. May be on the seventeenth floor.”

“How could you live there?” Arthur grinned.

“The apartments are expensive here.” Ivan justified. “I don’t know exactly on which floor people live. But if you want we can try to go down.”

“To my mind it’s easy to go down on the ground floor then to the street and ask somebody for the mobile.” Vera said and moved Ivan from her way. “I shall go.”

“A very self-confident woman.” Angelica noticed. “She had found the body! And she said that I am weak!”

“She is strong.” Arthur noticed coming out from the apartment.

“It is better for us to keep together.” Lida said seriously and followed him.

In the corridor where Sergey's body was she screamed and began to shiver.

“Well, well, calm down.” Ivan came after and hugged her. “Do not look there, Lida.”

“What happens here?” suddenly they heard the woman’s shout again from the elevator’s platform. Ivan with Lida then Seva and Zhanna rushed there. Angelica was the last to leave the apartment.

On a platform they saw Vera pulling the handle of the door to the stairs.

“Don’t do it so hard.” Arthur told her. “It’s locked from within.”

“It can’t be locked! “ Angelica said. “I have come here the last and saw that the door was opened and the key was in the lock!”

“Ah, you’re the last!” Lida looked at her. “That means you have locked the door and took the key!”

“Arthur, I can’t.” Vera turned back to him. “You’re the man, say something!”

He tried to open the door.

“It’s such a heavy door!”

“Yes, it’s iron.” Ivan sighed. “It’s like in the bank. An absolute safe guarantee.”

“And they say the advertising lies!” Zhanna complained.

“We see. That’s not right. Have a look.” Arthur said again still breathing hard. “Well made!”

“Wait.” Ivan said suddenly. “Why are we going to break the door? I think it is better to use the elevator!”

“Let’s try.” Vera said angrily.

Angelica had already unsuccessfully pressed on the button of the elevator. She turned back and asked.

“Why isn’t it working?”

“Darling, it does not work.” Vera noticed.

“What’s the matter? Why?”

And they all looked at Ivan. He shrugged shoulders.

“I don’t remember it had happened before! It worked!”

“Perhaps, it was made by the murderer?” Lida blinked.

”How?” Arthur asked. “Cut the wires? If you know the technology then you will understand that it is impossible. The elevator’s board is below. Nobody from us went down.”

“But what happened then?” Lida asked. “It couldn’t be the fate. The door on a staircase is locked and the lift does not work. The phone is off and mobiles phones are gone. What is it?”

“We still have the balcony.” Ivan reminded. “Angelica, what is there on the balcony?”

“A handrail.” she was surprised.

“The real woman...” Arthur hemmed.

“As far as I know there is a hatch there.” Ivan said slowly. “And a fire ladder in case of the evacuation. It is possible to go down to the next floor below. There the door on a staircase is open.”

“Well, thanks God!” Zhanna signed. “That’s the way out!”

Ivan was the first to go. The others followed him. Two men Ivan and Arthur went to the balcony. The last bent down over the hatch and tried to open it. It was as heavy as the door. In a minute Arthur said hardly breathing.

“It is closed from outside!”

“From outside?” Angelica echoed him.

“Yes. Someone blocked the hatch from the other side. That we could not go down through it.”

“May be, it was made by tenants?” asked Lida.

“I have already said that the ninth floor is empty!” Ivan was irritated. “Nobody lives there.”

“Then who closed the hatch? The murderer?” Lida was afraid.

“Angelica, was it made by you?” Arthur addressed to her.

“How could I do that?” Angelica asked.

“You went down on the ninth floor and blocked the hatch.”

“With such high heels?” Angelica screamed. “It’s impossible!”

“If you’re a good climber.” Zhanna said.

“Yes!” Vera added. “The mountain climber!”

“Tell me that I am a man.”

“May be.” Seva shrugged shoulders.

“What nonsense! Shall I take my clothes off?!”

“No need to do it.” Ivan was tired. “Let’s return to the reception and think about it.”

“It’s cold there too!” Angelica reminded.

“I did not go down! I am not mad!”

“Why did you come here if you do not suffer a neurosis?”

“A neurosis! Such people could kill!” and she suddenly looked at Lida.

“I?” Lida was frightened. “How do you think I was able to do it?”

“We shall see!” Arthur was excited.

“Wait...” Vera looked up. “There is the hatch in the ceiling! Perhaps, it is opened.”

“It’s hardly ever.” Arthur shook the head. “I have checked. It is also closed from the other side. But if you want I shall check

up again.”

He went to a fire ladder and climbed upwards. Then with an effort he pressed on the hatch trying to lift it. After some attempts Arthur jumped off from the ladder and said cleaning his hands.

“It is useless. I think it’s something on the hatch. I do not know who did it, the murderer or builders but we shall not get out this way. It is useless.” he repeated.

“It is better if we all shall return to the reception.” Ivan reminded. “And we shall discuss a situation. The main thing is to keep together. Nobody knows about the plans of the murderer.”

“Plans?” Zhanna asked. “Do you want to say that ... By the way, why was Sergey killed?”

“That should be find out.” Ivan summed up.

He left the balcony the last following Arthur and accurately closed the door.

“So, we shall return to an initial point.” Arthur gloomy joked. “Let’s go back to the reception.”

Angelica headed the procession. She was mad because of her accusation. Her stiletto heels were clicking down the floor.

The Poisonous Arrows

So, people cut off from the continent on the tenth floor had nothing to do than to return to the reception room to discuss a current situation. Seva passing through the hall murmured.

“And nevertheless: why is the water here?”

The others were too nervous to react to any pools with water in the hall.

“Please.” Arthur had gallantly passed forward Zhanna was going after Angelica. Zhanna looked at him suspiciously. “Are you afraid to turn to me?” Arthur grinned. “Don't be afraid. If I am the murderer, the maniac that's not time to kill you.”

“It seems not the right time for jokes, isn't it?” Zhanna asked.

“Will you order to begin sobbing?”

Without answering she went in the reception room. The other islanders followed her.

“Look! That's his ashtray!” Lida exclaimed. “It is here and he... is dead.”

“Well, cry over stubs.” Arthur was laughing. Lida looked at him angrily but did not answer she put the massive ashtray from dark glass on the table where the totem was.

“I am sure I will find the decision.” Ivan addressed to everybody falling to the armchair. “That's not time to panic.”

“Agree.” Arthur was calm. “It is necessary to search for variants. The lift will be not eternally off!

“And if for that time while it is off, the murderer will kill us?” Zhanna asked.

“We are all together.” Ivan reminded. “And I do not see aggression in anybody.”

“Wow, you're the psychologist!” Angelica sniffed flopping herself in the armchair. “I am sure your science is a fiction. And you are kidding us!”

“Sergey is killed!” Vera reminded falling into the armchair. “Whether is it an aggression sign?”

“But the murderer won't show off.” Ivan answered. “So, he is an excellent actor. That's so smart to hide the chisel in the basket of paint after the murder.”

“By the way, why did he kill?” Zhanna asked.

“It's easy to find out.” Ivan answered.

“And how?” Angelica asked with astonishment. Everybody were sitting and waiting for the explanations from Ivan. He looked at "the totem" which was in the centre of the table and said.

“What was the reason? That's Sergey's story. I saw that it was hurtful to everybody. Without an exception, no need to say anything. But it touched everyone. After that we had gone to write notes. By the way, how could I forget!”

Suddenly he slapped himself on the forehead and jumped.

“What is the matter?” the islanders started to exchange glances.

“I have a mobile phone! And I did not put it in the box! It is

in the room!”

“Well, thanks God.” Lida exclaimed.

“Too early to joke.” Angelica grinned looking as Ivan was running for the phone.

And she was right. A minute later he returned and said.

“My phone disappeared. From my table.”

“And what did you expect?” asked Angelica.” If the murderer climbed down through the hatch he would forget about your mobile phone... Do not make me laugh!”

“But I do remember.” rubbing his forehead Ivan said. “When I brought the totem box in the room I put the phone on the table.”

“And I do remember.” Seva supported Ivan. “I have paid attention because I thought to buy the same model. It is the new one with a lot of functions.”

“But I remember nothing.” Arthur declared. “I haven't seen any phones. Seva, were you the last to see the phone?”

“What do you mean?” worried Seva.

“I did not pay attention.” Zhanna complained. “If there was phone on the table or not.”

“I didn't either.” Vera nodded.

“We are like all women absent-minded.” Angelica complained pulling out from the pack a cigarette.

“And I say that there was the phone!” Vera declared. “I wrote my fear on a sheet of paper the same time!”

“You are telling that because of Angelica, aren't you?” Ivan said softly.

“On the contrary!”

“We won't find the ends.” Vera began to smoke. “It's easy to open the totem box and...”

She was afraid of her words.

“What is it, darling?” Angelica asked. “Are you afraid? What have you written?”

“I am against opening the box.” Zhanna said. “We didn't agree to do that!”

“Wow ...” Arthur was astonished. “I would never think you said it!”

“So, as far as I understood you are for the reading of the contents, aren't you?” Vera asked looking straight to him.

“And who is against?”

“I am.” Seva answered. “Handwriting is different, of course, but ...”

“But suddenly the others will know the truth, won't they?” Arthur asked. “Will then the note with the obvious motive of Sergey's murder appears yours? By the exception principle. And despite the changed handwriting the unattractive truth will appear. Do not worry: judging by a look of our beauty.” and he nodded towards Zhanna.” Angelica was offended – such note will be not the single one. Open the box!”

“And why are you telling for the rest?” Vera protested. “I for example can see that Lida is against.”

“I?” Lida was frightened a little and became red. “In general, I am again in minority ...”

“We haven't got the other variants.” Ivan summed up. “We should know who had made it. Or the murderer himself stands up?”

Death silence was the answer.

“I am going to open the box.” Ivan said taking the box.

Then he pressed on a tiny latch and "the totem" bottom leant back. The white envelopes fell down on the table. All of them have not been sealed.

“Oh! What a surprise!” Arthur moved forward.

“Look!” Lida opened her mouth.

“There are eight ...” counted Vera.

“Well and what's from that?” Angelica was calm.

“You are bad at mathematics, darling.” Lida told her. “We are seven.”

“Then has anybody thrown two envelopes?” Zhanna asked. “But why?”

“To be sure.” with a smile Arthur said. “Well? Shall we read them?”

Ivan took the first envelope. Everybody looked at him. The first note dropped out. The letters seemed small. Ivan took the note in his hands and read.

«I love Sergey».

“Oh!” Arthur was surprised. “That's the brave woman!”

“And why do you think that it was written by the woman?” Ivan looked at him.

“But who else?”

“It could write the man, too.”

“Do you want to tell that I or Seva ... Or someone from us can be the gay? The gay? Do not make me laugh!”

“It can be.” Lida said. “I am not the gay!” Arthur shouted.

“We do not need proofs.” Ivan noticed. “But it could write both the man and the woman.”

“I am not the gay! Did you hear?” Arthur did not stop.

“And why are you shouting?” Seva noticed.

“Who could think ...” Angelica said sarcastically. “Such a pleasant young man ... Though ...”

“Are you deaf? I am not the gay!”

“Okay, calm down already.” Lida became angry. “You’re not the gay... Well.”

“Stop talking about that!” Arthur returned back to his arm chair. At that time Ivan unpacked the other envelope and read.

“«I envy Sergey». Will you say again that it was written by the woman, Arthur?”

“Why? It was just written by the man.”

“And why cannot the woman envy Sergey?” Zhanna asked.

“Well.”

“May be she envies his professional career. May be, his money at last.”

“I accept.” Ivan agreed. “As well as it can be the motive for the murder. It’s a strong feeling.”

“I doubt.” Seva said.

“Was it written by you?” Arthur looked at him. “Am I right?”

“If you wrote the first note...”

“I am not the gay!”

“Silence!”

“Shut up!”

Ivan opened the third envelope and the absolutely clean paper dropped out. Everybody looked at it with astonishment.

“Did someone fake?” Zhanna asked. “And forgot to write the fear?”

“I will confess.” Ivan signed. “I did it. I put the clean envelope in the box.”

“But why?” they looked at him with the surprise.

“I would like to take part in the game too. But I am neutral. That's why I sealed the clean paper. I have already burnt all my fears.”

“At least, one problem is gone.” Arthur shrugged his shoulders.

“Let's continue.” Vera nodded.

And Ivan opened the next envelope.

«I want Sergey» he read.

“Wow! You are very brave!” Angelica burst out laughing.

“It's not.” Lida frowned.

“Darling, have you written it?”

“What?”

“You are not married. And you want the big strong man ...”

“Are you mad? I could not write it.” Lida became red.

“Among us there is the loving woman.” Arthur said watching

the women sitting in armchairs. "It is interesting, who is she?"

"That's another question." Zhanna said angrily. "If the woman constantly wants sex she is ill. And what about the man?"

"He is always the man." Arthur said. "That's his natural state."

"And if he is the gay." Zhanna asked innocently looking at him.

"Why are you looking at me?!"

"Zhanna wants to say that the note was written by the man or by the woman." Ivan interfered.

"It's a madhouse any way!" Arthur complained.

"Do not forget that among us there is the murderer." Vera reminded. "And it is not simply a madhouse. It is the madhouse where one of the patients is the most dangerous. By the way, it is the reason to write «I want Sergey». The murder was jealous."

At that time Ivan opened the next envelope and said.

"Have a look!"

Through the paper by huge letters was written: «I AM GOD».

"It was written by the madman." Zhanna said in a low voice.

"It's an addiction." Vera added.

"Sure. The maniac." Arthur nodded.

"Comments do not require." and Ivan put the note aside.

"Unless the woman would not write «I am Goddess»?" asked Angelica.

"You – I do not doubt." Arthur grinned.

"Silence. Next." Ivan stopped them. And he opened the next envelope. His face became strange. Then Ivan read. «I will kill

Sergey today».”

There was a long pause. After it Arthur asked.

“That’s the worse than «I AM GOD», isn’t it?”

“This note is about the murder.” Zhanna said slowly.

“It is necessary to find the one who wrote it.” Vera said firmly.

“Is it a joke?” asked Angelica.

“You have got strange jokes!” Arthur answered.

“But this note is direct.” summed up Ivan.

“And no need to open the other envelopes.” said Vera.

“Oh, no!” Seva protested. “Let’s do it!”

“And who argues?” Arthur was not against. “Finally, we will open all the envelopes!”

“I agree there won't be worse.” Vera was pale.

“Who knows?” Zhanna asked slowly.

Ivan opened the following envelope and read.

«I hate Sergey». Not by the printing letters but it seemed by the left hand. An inclination of letters showed it.

“That's the same as «I will kill Sergey today»” Zhanna noticed.

“Nothing similar!” Arthur said sharply. “In my opinion «I AM GOD» is the most important!”

“Well, let's open the last envelope.” Ivan reminded. “I am curious what is there.”

“Yes.” Angelica said firmly.

And the last note had fallen on the table. Ivan took it and read like an actor.

«I am with Sergey in sex relations».

“Will you insist that it was written by the man?” Arthur was indignant.

“I do not say that all three notes «I love Sergey», «I want Sergey» and «I am with Sergey in sex relations» are written by the man.” Ivan answered. “But only one is. Is it important?”

“So who among us is the gay: me or Seva?” Arthur asked.

“I would think that you are, darling.” Angelica sang.

“Is it because I guessed that you went down in the hatch and closed the door?” Arthur asked angrily.

“Come on, darling.”

“By the way, you insulted me!”

“By the way, you are talking too much and Seva is silent.”

“That doesn't prove anything!”

“Calm down.” Ivan again stopped them. “Let's sum up.”

And he accurately put all eight notes on the table. The clean one was above and then he read.

«I love Sergey»

«I envy Sergey»

«I want Sergey»

«I AM GOD»

«I will kill Sergey today»

«I hate Sergey»

«I am with Sergey in sex relations»

“So.” Ivan said. “Except me, does anybody wish to make a confession?”

“We have forgotten one thing.” Vera said slowly.

“What is it?” everybody turned to her.

“What has Sergey himself written?”

“You're right!” Arthur cheered her. “Absolutely right!”

“In all the notes the name Sergey is mentioned.” said Lida.

“He could not write about himself, could he?”

“You're right.” Arthur praised her. “But one moment: the name isn't everywhere. How do you find the note «I AM GOD»?”

“He was the madman, wasn't he?” Zhanna asked.

“Anyway there is only one note where there is no name Sergey.” Ivan noticed. “I had the idea that Sergey had written it. Though there are maybe variants.”

“It's interesting, what variants?” Seva looked at him.

“For example: «I will kill Sergey today». What if he decided to commit suicide?”

“Fine!” Angelica supported Ivan. “He is right as the psychotherapist!”

“And why isn't he writing that he'll kill himself?” Arthur objected. «I will kill myself today».

“Don't turn it upside down.” Vera said. “You may say “I am with Sergey in sex relations.” as making sex with himself.”

“Vera!” Lida was embarrassed.

“What is it? We are adults. And these are not toys any more. And you, Lida, suffer by yourself.”

“She is old-fashioned!” Angelica sniffed. “By the way why the

dead could not write, for example «I love Sergey»? That's not strange that he loved himself. We all love ourselves.”

“I personally come to the idea that Sergey wrote «I AM GOD».” Seva signed.

“Did you know him so well?” Vera looked mad.

“He didn't seem to me so mad.” Angelica shrugged her shoulders.” Anyway we never know what exactly he had written.” Zhanna said. “Because ... because he ... he died. And he wouldn't tell anybody anything.”

“We do not know if only the others do not say what each had written.” Ivan noticed. “Then by an exception we'll find Sergey's note. We should confess.”

“But at first we should find a way to get out from here.” Seva said. “I would prefer to call the police.”

“I thought you're bad, Vsevolod,” Arthur said.”I even guessed that you're the gay. I was mistaken in you!”

“Personally I find some aggression in him.” sang Angelica. “If to speak by Hippocrates language...”

“Where did you find these words, darling?” said Lida. “It seems you even haven't got the diploma, have you?”

“She is the different one.” Arthur noticed.

“What do you want to say?” Ivan moved forward.

“When we left in a corridor, she told Sergey she would wait for him on the balcony. They wanted to talk. And I understood they had known each other.”

“Lovers?” Vera moved.

“Nothing similar!” Angelica was indignant.

“What were you going to tell him?” Lida asked.

“That's my business!”

“But we want to know.” Ivan reminded. “I start to believe that you went down through the hatch on the ninth floor and closed it. And then rose by the lift and locked the door. As well as Arthur said.”

“Yes, I was on the balcony but it doesn't mean anything! And where, by the way, were all of you?”

And Angelica looked around. They didn't move and she said.

The Meeting

There was a long pause in the reception room. The islanders tried not to look at each other. Zhanna again nervously wound a light lock of hair on the finger, Arthur indifferently looked out of the window, Lida bit her lips, Vera and Angelica smoked.

“I shall begin probably.” Ivan said. “Angelica is right. We should find out where each of us was while Sergey was murdered. Personally I went out to the other room.”

“What for?” Vera asked. And then she complained. “I have never smoked so much.”

“Not to disturb you. I wanted to think. I prefer to do it in loneliness.”

“But the entrance door of the apartment comes to the corridor.” Zhanna noticed. “You could go through it and kill Sergey.”

“Why could I do that?” Ivan asked. “I said I didn’t write it. With Sergey we were connected only by relations the doctor – the patient. There is no motive or reason to kill him. The murder was made by the person with mental problems. I think it is necessary to search among patients. How about you Zhanna? You went to the kitchen to make coffee. Were you alone there?”

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