

Butterfly with soaked wings

A Novel

By
Dragica Najcheska

**(Translated from Macedonian to English and
edited by Risto Stefov)**

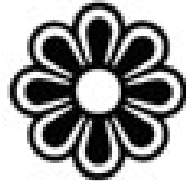
Butterfly with soaked wings

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A Novel

Risto Stefov



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September 28, 2023

A SEVEN DECADE STEP THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF LITERARY CREATION

The end of last year was the 50th year since Dragica Najcheska wrote her first novel *Butterfly with soaked wings*, published by “Misla”. The novel was reviewed by academic Blazhe Koneski who suggested that it be published. It wasn’t only Dragica Najcheska’s first novel but also the first novel published in the Macedonian language by a female writer.

This is the novel’s third edition. The second edition was included in the six-volume edition of Najcheska’s Selected Works. It was edited by Vele Smilevski, a famous Macedonian writer, and published by “Dialog”. Her five novels, two collections of poetry, short stories and unpublished short stories, as well as short stories for children, were also included in her Selected Works.

Blazhe Koneski’s handwritten review has been added to the jubilee edition of *Butterfly with soaked wings*. (See Macedonian version *Пеперуга со натопени крилја*)

When she was an assistant at the Faculty of Economics in Skopje, working at the Department of Political Economy, Dragica Najcheska was sent to Belgrade to complete her postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Law. This was from 1962 to 1965. At that time she had already published several short stories and poems in newspapers and magazines all over Yugoslavia.

Some of them were included in the Macedonian and Serbian Anthologies.

While pursuing her studies in political science at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade, Najcheska devoted a large part of her time to getting to know the works of the top writers of world literature. At the same time, she had the opportunity to attend many events in the field of art and culture and socialize with some of the cultural elite. During her stay in Belgrade, she quickly expanded her acquaintance with important Serbian writers, including Mihailo Lalich, Stevo Raickovich, Skender Kulenovich, Dusan Kostich, Branko Kiopich...

All this contributed to Najcheska writing her first novel in 1965. She immediately translated the novel herself from Macedonian to Serbian and, towards the end of her postgraduate studies, sent it to Dushan Kostich and Branko Kiopich before she left for Skopje.

Among other things, this is what was said in a letter of reply dated February 22, 1965:

Dear friend Dragice,

*Here is a brief summary of what we think about your novel, this is my opinion and that of Branka Topiņa, who I also let read the novel, he also likes your novel, it is interesting and honestly written, contemporary, has warm lyrical passages and it gets out of hand...
...Most of the novel is strong in terms of confessions of today's young man...*

...The novel... deserves to be published...

...If you agree about "Bagdalu" - no problem...

A friendly greeting

Dushan Kostich ħ Otkako

Encouraged about the values of her novel, after receiving such a positive response from Kostich and Kopich, on February 22, 1965 Najcheska, without a moment's hesitation, decided that her first novel should be published in the Macedonian language. Soon she proposed that "Misla" in Skopje do the publishing.

After some ups and downs that lasted several years, the novel was finally published. In his review, Blazhe Koneski said that the novel fell among the significant works for the development of Macedonian fiction, as an addition to the psychology of women, highlighting its pedagogical value, especially for the young generations. In his review, Professor Koneski, highlighting the artistic values of the novel, concluded that it deserved to be published and proposed that it be done.

In addition to this novel, Najcheska also wrote and published some of her most famous poems in Belgrade described as "anthology"

from which her poetry collection “Nespokoj” emerged, which was reviewed by Mihail Rendzov, a famous Macedonian poet.

Little is known about the fact that, together with twenty-two of the most famous poets from all the Yugoslav republics, Najcheska was invited and participated in the World International Congress of Women Writers from all over the world, in Paris, as well as in Nice a few years later. This trip encouraged her even more to create poetry because her poems left a great impression on famous poets like Desanka Maksimovich, Mira Alechkovich, Vesna Parun, Florika Shtefan..., who during the trip tried to recite them several times.

Supported by the DPM, on Najcheska’s initiative, some time later the Yugoslav poetry elite visited Macedonia and held a number of poetry performances.

As a result, after the novel *Butterfly with soaked wings* was published, the door for new literary achievements was opened for Dragica Najcheska. The series of novels she wrote after that included the titles *Another Mother*, *Crossroads*, *Deep Hatred*, *Lifelong Noose* and *House on the Lake*. Also published were a collection of *Short stories* and poetry published in the collections *Restlessness*, *Give me back my sleep*, *And blood and death and hope* and *Crucifixion of souls*.

Like Najcheska said she “is not entirely indebted to her short stories”. With them she continued her journey through the labyrinth of literary creation but she began with the publication of her first short story in the magazine *Idnina*, edited by Atso Shopov in 1950 when she was only seventeen. Nowadays Najcheska is preparing another collection of short stories for publication entitled *Search for the Hidden*.

Prof. Dr. Georgi Stalev
Skopje, 18 February 2020

When he opened the door, I only heard her very soft, stretched out voice. I recognized her. I recognized her immediately... perhaps by the colour of her voice, which I had only heard once before and perhaps by instinctively sensing some danger that was hidden in it. I heard her enter quietly, slowly, as I became fully aware of her presence and perhaps a silent hug and kiss between the two of them. I had already entered the room and closed the door, so I couldn't see what was happening.

And what had happened before that, before the doorbell? What had happened before his sharp jump at the ring of the doorbell and my flight into the room?

...The music played softly. We were snuggled up in the half-dark hall on the couch... We hugged each other gently, intimately... we caressed. Then, tired, we debated as usual whether we would spend the afternoon rest together or separately.

He kept forcing me to go to the room and sleep there because he said couldn't sleep next to me. My presence, my breathing excited him and woke him up every hour, as if being afraid that maybe with some situation in his dream he would prevent me from sleeping normally or that by moving he would wake me up and he wouldn't sleep because he would be worried...

He said that to me even now and I continued to cling to him, feeling that his hands, although he was saying the opposite, were drawing me closer, so masculine and beautiful, and with such warmth and love that no woman would want to leave his embrace, that incomparable feeling of being together.

At one point I wanted to overcome my desire for him and exit his embrace just for his sake, so that he could sleep, rest and then work. But then he shifted himself and almost wrapped his arms around my waist, like the branches of a tree, telling me all the time that I should go. This was quite impossible to do, so I clung to him even more and dozed off like a satisfied cat in a warm corner.

Then somehow, half asleep, I allowed him to turn his back to me so that he could fall asleep, but even in that position he was still

touching my hand, as if to make sure that I was still there, that I existed, and that I wasn't part of a dream.

We were sleeping. Only the soft music which was playing slowly was awake.

Maybe that's why the sound of the doorbell seemed so rude to me. Like someone had suddenly hit it so hard.

After finding out that she had arrived and that she was in the house, I couldn't help but feel helpless and in despair.

Then, half asleep, I heard her ask about me.

"She is in the room," he said.

I felt like a frightened, wild animal and looked for an opportunity to escape, if only there was a secret exit from the house, and then I would immediately disappear. Helplessness overwhelmed me even more because of that... There was no other way out. I had to look her straight in the face, eye to eye. That was the reality. That and despair...

Then I was startled by her voice. She called me by my name.

I answered but it was like with someone else's voice:

"I'm coming," I said.

Then I went into the bathroom, like some wound up doll, washed myself, went to the room, got ready and left. They were both there. Before I left I heard myself say politely:

"Oh, it's you! You haven't been here for a long time! As far as I remember, you only came here once, no more!

God, only I and no one else could have such a hearty and cheerful expression on my face at a moment like this. She looked at me smiling sincerely. It was obvious that I had won her over; that she believed me and that I had lied to her. She was younger than me, she

had lived less than me. Then we talked like we were friends. I even felt her humour was working on me at that moment.

I didn't look at him. I couldn't. I could see that he was completely confused by everything that was happening at the moment, maybe mostly because of my composure, my beautiful artistic game.

It seems that I really played my part too convincingly, even for him, so that at one point he was so free that he hugged *her*, rather timidly.

I know that at that moment I wanted my eyelids to be closed. I'm not sure if I did that but I felt like I had been blindsided.

Soon after that I left the apartment. I said I had to visit a friend. Of course, with that I wanted to show her that he was free, as far as I was concerned, and that I would leave them alone... together. And him too.

Why did I do that? Was it a game, a sacrifice for him...? No... I was no longer able to bear that mask of kindness on my face, that fierce role which was exhausting me... I looked miserable to myself and yet helpless like a child.

Let everything be... Let them be together... Everywhere in the apartment where he and I had been had our touches and caresses together...

I wanted to shout, cry hysterically, or laugh cynically, recklessly tell the truth, openly to her face, and to his...

I knew I wouldn't do any of that. I knew I would remain calm, serene, with a smiling self-loathing face which, I hope, I would be able to keep until the exit door. The door which she'd entered a little while ago, like a monster unaware that was going to destroy everything that was so beautiful... everything that was our dream.

She was a decent, good and carefree girl but couldn't even guess what was happening between the two of us. She was far from that happiness and love herself and as she entered the green hall with her uncertain step, just a moment ago, she destroyed it.

As I was going down the street, leaving the scene, it felt like my face, eyes and body were about to give up on me... I felt like I should immediately sit down on the walkway or the street. My lips were salty. I knew why. Maybe I would have run down the street if those people weren't there, I should have run, but from whom - from those people, from him, from myself...

I had to win for myself. The most important thing was not to think about both of them. No, I mustn't let the idea come into my mind that they would now caress, make love, perhaps in the same way, perhaps in the same places in the house... No, no, that's not right! I will go back immediately, I won't allow it, I will stop them... It's too wild, I won't allow them to be anywhere where we had been, those are sacred places, no one dares touch them and no one dares go there. I will immediately say that no one, least of all *her*, dares to spoil our place, defile it, at least what happened, what was born there and rose to perfection... I will stop them in that... That place, that apartment is sacred to me...

He loved me. If she was here now, why would she be reaching out for what there had been for her before? I'll go there right now...

I knew I wouldn't go, that would once again allow helplessness and despair to overcome me. The only thing I would do was stay on my feet, I wouldn't fall, certainly because of that small presence of awareness where I was and the superhuman will in me would keep me on my feet.

...Why did I run into the room? Why didn't I just stay on that couch of ours... without hiding my love... Who lied to me and told me that love must be allowed, defined by some law, between the one with right and the one without right, moral and immoral. At that moment I was ashamed of the part of morality which I had played before that woman, like before a portion of public opinion, which my sacred sense would have called by the most derogatory vulgarities, to hypocritically conceal the true opinion of life and love.

Even from her, from that child, I had to hide my sad truth, just because I had a man with whom I lived legally... And that this love

of mine, if revealed, like this... could cloud the “purity” of that so-called morality! Really?!

Despair overwhelmed me more and more. It was as if I was sinking into some kind of lifelessness. Mostly because I couldn't run back into that room and, in front of that child, in front of her, jump into the arms of my beloved man, selfishly, defiantly, not allow her to enter his life, much less remain unconcerned, not knowing that with every glance fixed on him she pierced my heart, tore apart the brightest corners of my soul.

However, I never once hated her. She lived in a carefree world with her feelings for him not yet fully formed. And even if she had any doubts about us, she couldn't allow herself to believe in such things that were beyond her reach. What's more, she had been separated from him for months because she lived in another city. And she had never become a part of him, so that with the intuition of her being she could feel what was happening in that other, not your, but her part...

Her existence in his life, even before our life bond, seemed to me to be harmless so I just forgot about it.

I had only seen her once before, for a short time. She had left quickly. Now her presence was real and impossibly fierce. It simply threw me out of my place. It felt like my veins had been cut, I had no blood left. I had no strength anymore. What was going on...? Where was I now...?

No... that's impossible. Who could take away anything from love... and those arms around the waist... and the warmest hug that would never let you go... the touch of lips, the only touch, only the lips that loved each other... Maybe most of all because of that I wanted to cry... maybe that's why I cried...

I wouldn't have been so sad if I'd had to give my love away to a stranger, maybe I would have given it away... No, I shouldn't have left home... I should have been defiant and stayed... if only I had defended my love!

Now everything was done. I wouldn't be going back there. It was almost nightfall. I was going to sleep at a friend's house. I couldn't stay and sleep there, in that apartment, next to the two of them, in the other room. I couldn't.

I realized that I was wandering the streets aimlessly and should immediately go to that friend of mine, and... everything would be fine.

It would have been best if my aunt hadn't gone to the baths and my husband hadn't traveled with the children to his mother's place; he would have had to ask my aunt if he could keep her there for the night. Well, even if she stayed, she wouldn't have been allowed to sleep in his room.

But everything was different now. There was no one to help me... He was there with her.

I would be back though. It was my apartment, my aunt's apartment and that meant mine, even more so since I'd lived in it for so long.

Why had I done that, convince my aunt to accept him to live in our apartment? I don't lie! I was lying to myself. I could never abandon that most beautiful, like a dream, part of my life. That would be like agreeing to have part of my body cut off. An even more, stronger, part of being... I don't want it, I can't do it... Even at the cost of everything that happened today... what is happening... Nothing would defile the purity of my feelings, my being with him, least of all her.

I'd go there right now. I'd return. My place was there. I would hide all the pain and horror... I would overlook things. I would still feel his presence, existence, even in her embrace, which I wouldn't see consciously, deliberately...

Running away from the house was a sign of a weakling, a cowardly surrender to the fight. I would go back so that I could remain dignified, true to myself, to my feelings...

For the first time this afternoon and this evening I felt like I was walking with a firmer step, directed, with a purpose. I was going there, and that meant to him, to our dear spot, where everyone in the house for us was like that. I remembered how once, when I was away for a long time, he said: “Don’t ever leave this house again. It’s empty when you’re not here.”

I had to go there now. And she? And if she was there...? So what if she was there! I would go into my house proudly, defiantly.

I became frightened when I realized that I was really in front of the house. But then I felt very happy. They weren’t there. The lights were off everywhere. But at the same time the most bitter thought pierced me, “They were making love in the dark.”

I just ran into the house, trying to escape from myself but where? There, from where the danger came, in the wake of it.

I quickly unlocked the door and tried to sneak a glance inside his room. His door was closed, which was unusual. I figured they were there.

Perhaps the loudest screams are in the soul and without sound. I was suffocating... My love... Was it possible, that you... Then I went out into the hall and with my hands, like I was blind, kept touching the green cover of the couch... caressing it...

My love, well... just a moment ago... We dreamed the most beautiful dream here... You and I, just the two of us, in this house of love... He carried me in his arms like a child around this room, he fed me there in the kitchen with his hands, caressed me, put me to sleep.

Oh people, whoever invented hugs and feelings, you invented them for yourselves... otherwise at this moment I would have yelled at that girl – who was she, what was she looking for here, I would have told her – this is my love, and you will confirm that won’t you dear...

It was all in vain. I couldn't even cry. All parts of my nervous system were working so intensely that it seemed like they would tear me apart, blow me up.

The only thing I was able to do was play music, from the same radio, in the same hall, where we'd had our last dream.

At that moment I heard the lock of the outer front door and, as I understood it, someone was unlocking the door. They both came in cheerfully. They had been out watching a movie. So they weren't here, in his room!

I immediately pulled myself together and made a kind of clownish face.

She immediately came to my room and started telling me her impressions of the movie. As usual he followed her. The three of us sat down and naturally had a simple conversation.

Once in a while *She* made small gestures of tenderness towards him and he towards her.

There was a small break in the conversation. Not believing what I had done, somehow, patronizingly, mothering I said to her:

“Do you want to sleep with me in the room?”

I listened to my heartbeat as I waited for her answer.

What made her agree - I don't know. Maybe she wanted to call attention to her chastity. I was afraid to look at him! He fell silent.

I hastily prepared the beds, rushing at every moment, as if somewhere deep inside I was subconsciously afraid that they might change their minds. It was getting close to midnight.

Was it because of all the tension or because of something sadder, that he was constantly making jokes? This way I felt that this was a good way to get him to relax.

We went to bed. *Her* and I in the same room.

He stood at the half-open door and I heard him say:

“You know what? I sometimes walk around the house like a sleepwalker, so don’t be surprised if I come into your room.”

Even though I knew he was joking, the very idea was terrifying: for him to come into the room where she was next to me.

I don’t know how long after he’d made that joke and yet cynical statement, that I got up and quickly turned the key in the door of the room.

Relieved I took her to my room, thus isolating him from both myself and her. Perhaps he would never have dared to come to her in my presence, nor would *she* have gone out to him in my presence, but I did this to avoid even the slightest possibility of him committing the most despicable act.

Then, probably as a kind of self-defense, I tried to put him out of my mind. I focused on her indulging in a superficial display on a variety of topics.

Neither one of us was aware that the display in the dark and that sleeplessness brought us closer. We found a common female vocabulary, perhaps – human.

Only occasionally I strained to hear the noises coming from his room and it seemed to me that he was restless and not sleeping either.

At the same time, I felt good about putting him in that situation, I felt like I’d punished him, made it impossible, and maybe even helped him.

We both fell asleep talking and thinking about the movie.

The next day passed in the same way as the previous, starting for me with a terrible moment. He came over to her bed (I was still in mine) and with a vigorous movement of his hand he ruffled her hair.

I lowered my eyelids and then daringly sought his gaze. He left.

I quickly got up and went to the kitchen.

I sensed him more than I saw his presence in the kitchen. *She* was still in my room. He gently reached out to me and with his hand tried to give me one his imitate hugs.

I said, “No!” and left in disgust. “Don’t you dare to do that! After going to her in the room you now come here to appease me. I don’t live on scraps!”

He tried to somehow explain the whole situation, provide another non-existent solution, a way out, after *she* had come suddenly, uninvited... He wanted to justify himself... I wanted him to shut his mouth, not to speak, to be quiet because the situation was already quite disgusting and painful.

She went into the kitchen. I felt that somehow the day would be easier for me if I was close to her, maybe because she’d confided in me the night before. I was gradually realizing that *she* wasn’t to blame for unknowingly defiling my love and neither was I for stealing hers.

We had coffee. Then we had breakfast, the three of us. Then in a kind of naive voice *she* said to him:

“Come here, sit next to me,” He was sitting on the sofa in the kitchen next to the window.

He sat down beside her. In the same voice *she* then said:

“Put your head here,” and pointed at her lap.

I didn’t see him but in a muffled helpless voice I heard him ask illogically:

“Where?” even though it was quite clear to where she had pointed.

I fought terribly with myself deciding whether to leave the kitchen or not. Overcoming my impulse I decided to stay. It was my invisible fight for him, for my love.

I had the feeling that we were both, he and I, stretched to the limit of our possibilities. And only *she* was spared in all this.

What made us preserve, fence off everything that had happened and was still happening to us? Did her chastity and guiltlessness force us to create barriers?

She stayed a while longer before leaving. She got ready quickly and left to catch the train to go back to where she was living.

I couldn't even put my finger on how she was feeling before she left.

It was as if I was burned out, understanding the unavoidability of everything that had happened and that might continue to happen. Recognizing how small my or rather our chances of stopping her made me feel empty inside.

Then something happened that became an undeniable fact, and yet also illogical. I felt her hand being extended to greet me and she kissed me.

I was completely confused, lost. Her heart was truly young and pure. Was there some sense of kinship between the two of us, choosing the same man to love? I was mortified and she was still uncertain... In any case, the moment I felt her almost shy lips on my cheek, I felt like hugging her, crying and, now like a woman to a woman, telling her all my sorrow. I smiled, hugged her lightly and wished her a safe journey.

“Come again,” I heard myself say and at the same time I noticed his appearance looking like a lost, completely unhappy man. Standing in the hallway he was probably feeling that way because of the

incomprehensible nature of what had just happened. He looked like he didn't know what to do with his hands, with his eyes and with his lips. He took an unsteady step to accompany her to the train station.

Suddenly I realized that the most terrible thing to come was the moment when he and I would be alone again, the two of us in this apartment face to face.

Where should I run, what should I do? No, I didn't believe he would come back from the station straight here. Certainly not immediately! He might come later, tonight, after midnight.

I didn't hate him. But I was horrified by the thought that he would approach me with the same hands with which he'd hugged her at the train station just a little while ago, with those same lips he'd kissed her. I would hate for that to happen, I would be disgusted. No, that must not happen. Maybe it would be best for me to leave the house after all.

No, I would stay; I would endure until the end.

In no time at all I heard fast moving but indecisive footsteps in the hallway. It was him.

It appeared that he had decided not to run away from the truth, to stand up to it; immediately and without delay. I was surprised to see that he stayed in the hallway listening to the music on the radio.

His presence filled the house. I felt better that he'd come back... as soon as he came back. He sat motionless in his armchair smoking. The music flowed calmly and it was the only sound in the house. I felt like everything had died... including us.

The door to my room was half open. I was overcome by a kind of numbness... I couldn't move. It was as if I was afraid that, with the slightest noise, I would spoil the silence, this silence, which was only possible after everything that had happened.

I was subconsciously listening to the words of the song that a duet was singing on the radio. I was amazed... Were those the actual

words of that song or were they just forming in my head? Had I made them up?

Every word of the song matched everything that had played out in these last twenty-four hours between him and me. I stood up as if lifted by something stronger than myself in the wake of those words, or running away from them I just came closer to him, to see if he was listening to the song.

Even before I took the first step forward, his face was already turned towards me before I stood in the doorway.

His face trembled... He had the pitiful helpless look of a child who had sinned.

I was sobbing... I was sobbing. It seemed to me that at any moment now he would grasp and desperately press me against his chest.

He turned his face towards the wall. He couldn't find enough courage to face me maybe because of my harsh words in the kitchen this morning, when he tried to hug me. And at that moment, this morning, I believed something terribly strong had drawn him to me. I knew it wasn't a comforting gesture. On the other hand, I didn't understand the logic of maintaining a relationship with her. Perhaps that logic was not unlike the one that sustained my marriage, although it was worlds apart...

A beautifully harmonized duet sang at the end of the song.

I didn't stop sobbing. My entire body was shaking. At that moment I felt like someone had pulled out my soul and placed it in lyrics, that song and the tune from the radio were composing themselves. My head was spinning. For the first time in my life I found justification for people dying on purpose in moments of despair.

I took slow steps back into my room. I was expecting him to call me at any moment and come after me.

He didn't! He didn't even move.

We'd missed the chance to reconnect in this amazing match of the song's words to our sad truth.

The end of the song "never again mine, never again", which at first seemed to me like it was a possible, fair, punishment for him, lost its content and didn't find a place in my heart.

Gradually I became aware that love was again present in this house. That it came out again from every corner. It was like it was hidden only temporarily, for a little while.

His whole motionless presence in the hallway spoke that our love had withstood a great test. Through some invisible thread that came from him to me, I felt that he still loved me, perhaps more than ever... He was mine...

I stretched out my body on my bed in my room like a motionless statue. Voiceless. The slightest movement he made startled me.

Moments later I heard him lie down quietly almost silently on the green couch, appearing like he had lost all his strength.

Some time later two women inside of me began to fight... One was hurt, humiliated, thrown away and the other, the stronger one, was the one who loved him... their fight appeared to be irreconcilable. They showed each other their teeth, shouted, growled.

"You are the most ordinary coward, without dignity, without pride, you are nobody. After all he's done to you, you should despise him, reject him, forget he exists", shouted the first woman.

The other woman had only one single argument, but a powerful and undeniable one. That was love; the love that engulfed her entire being and drew her towards him. It was unstoppable like fate. She longed for his every slightest touch, for the whisper of his beloved lips, for the trembling of his excited body, for the silent and clear conversation of his beloved eyes.

The first woman looked at her with contempt and, unable to bear her, left the dispute with dignity.

The second woman quietly enjoyed her happiness and didn't betray her love...

...For the first time in the last two days he stood before me with an open face and a clear view. I didn't hear when he came in. Maybe that's why I felt his presence as some kind of apparition, so loved, so loving.

I accepted his hands extended to me and his lips, which had no trace of the kiss on the lips of that other woman. It was just our kiss, just our lips and only our love.

Our lips and faces were moist and there was more than tears in our eyes.

I said, "I love you," with a whisper which, according to our old custom, only he could hear, or rather sense.

"I love you, I love you very much, the most", he pressed me to his chest, whispering words with his lips that he could barely form between kisses.

I knew that only apparitions had the power to utter these words like he did... to whisper of love like this.

Even now I'm not aware of what it was that made me utter the following words, as if in some way I was seeking assurance that my existence in his heart hadn't ceased even for a moment. I said:

"And yesterday, right, and today, dear?"

No one could describe the expression on his face, nor the voice by which he said:

"Even more yesterday, darling, even more today..."

There was something terrible and wonderful in that voice, infinitely terrible and wonderful.

The woman in me who loved, defending his behaviour, said to the other woman, “Don’t listen, not to the words themselves, listen to what is contained in the voice... Words can lie but not the hands, nor the lips, nor the whisper of spiritual beings.”

Every quiver of his body belonged to me again. We hugged each other; we loved each other until oblivion like apparitions, until exhaustion, until complete exhaustion...

He only held the little finger of my hand, like a child, as if to make sure we wouldn’t be separated, as if just enough to convince himself that I was there, that I existed, that I wasn’t torn away from his strong embrace even by the painful things that had happened to us.

Darkness reigned over the house and love floated everywhere in the apartment.

My eyes became blurry again... Why again now...?

I felt that I’d forgiven him and that’s why I cried with happiness.

* * *

The night was quiet, mild, with a shining, full moon. The street lamps quivered in the dark.

I was standing on the balcony, as usual, waiting for my man, who regularly came late. I was lonely and feeling empty. Then I stretched out on the old but comfortable armchair. Sitting in it was a real pleasure.

The moon sank between the black silhouettes behind the poplars, awakening some longing, nostalgia, some immense desire for beauty.

In moments like this I was pleased that my husband wasn’t here, that he was late. I had pretty much stopped being tied to him long ago.

My old aunt was dozing on the bleached hemp in her room. I could barely see her silhouette in the darkness through the open window,

like a picture from a fantasy movie. For years she didn't go to bed before my husband arrived. She always waited for him. Then, after he'd come, she would get up and wander about the room sleepily, displeased, muttering words criticizing his coming late.

The house was located in the suburbs, so there were various smells coming from the surrounding gardens, the chirping of crickets cheering up the nocturnal setting.

All that was around me dragged me back to my past, to those restless carefree maiden days, filled with restlessness and dreams, full of beliefs about the wonderful things in life that were yet to come.

Maybe there was a need to go back because right now I didn't know how to dissect events in my life, for or against what was and how it might have been.

A long time ago, my parents were left without their little girl, as my father liked to say. Children gradually, imperceptibly break away from those who created and raised them, and began to live their own lives...

I was alone, without brothers and sisters, and perhaps that's why my mother and father took care of me with extra tenderness and care.

My father was a good man, a rare intellectual, with a great wealth of spirit and persistent optimism.

My mother was calm and gentle, unable to anger or offend anyone, excessively patient.

My first impressions of life were tied to books of various colors and titles, arranged with dignity in a huge library, which reached almost to the ceiling of the living room in our apartment. I had learned to read before I started school.

I was constantly surrounded by a large number and variety of toys, picture books and books.

My first contact with friends at school and going to their houses began to reveal something else to me, a world that wasn't always and was almost never the same as the world that I carried in my soul as my own, as the world of my family.

I remember how scared I was when, while doing a school assignment with a friend at her house, I heard her father calling her mother in a harsh, for me, terribly harsh voice. I was even more surprised that she, my friend, paid no attention to it. I realized that her parents behaving in this way was something ordinary for her. Then, I don't know why, I always dragged her to come to my house to do our assignments.

Another example, which saddened me a lot and remained in my indelible memory for the rest of my life, was when I ran into a drunk. We were walking down the street, when a friend of mine and I suddenly ran into an unshaven man wearing an untidy, dirty shirt and half-fallen pants, whom we hadn't noticed before. He quickly grabbed my friend by her arm and forced her to go with him. She just looked at me with sad eyes and left. I wanted to cry, to shout for people to take her away from him. I wanted to run after her but was afraid to meet the sight of his bloodshot eyes. He was almost dragging her. But at that moment my friend yelled:

“He's my father!”

I felt like someone had hit me hard on the head. I quickly ran home. I ran to hide there, in what was our sanctuary, where, at that time, it seemed to me, I could be safe.

For a long time my mother tried to understand what was wrong with me, what had happened to me. But I remained silent like I had sworn, like I had been entrusted with some hideous secret, which I couldn't divulge. This, of course, was my school friend's secret, which I would have never known if I hadn't happened to go back with her that fateful day.

I never did tell my mother and father what I'd experienced that day; it was like I was afraid that they wouldn't allow me to go out again in order to keep me in the harmony and kindness of their quiet

happiness. That evening, lying in the dark, I felt a deep gratitude to my parents for creating the loving atmosphere in that world of ours in our home, a world of deep warmth, care and carelessness, a world of humanity.

After several years of school, the books drew me irresistibly, so that I devoted myself to them for days and nights, tirelessly seeking the truth and answers to all the questions that tormented me. They became my second close and loved world.

Sitting in the house in the evening together with my father and mother I often told them everything that interested me. I occasionally even found myself resisting the defined, established truths which they sometimes advocated.

That resistance was often expressed in small things like, let's say, not wanting to wear a black apron to school, solely because the principal had issued the order.

In that regard, my father would have made a complete analysis of the necessity and logic the school used to make such a request. If the director of the school, understandably, on behalf of the college, made a decision that students should wear black aprons, then my father would have thoroughly considered the reasons and would say "there was nothing to think about. You will wear it."

Or, let's say if there was a rule that "a student must not walk alone on the street after eight o'clock in the evening," which also meant that students couldn't go to the theater without their parents. To that my father would say, "That's not allowed."

One evening I said to my father, coolly and even a bit provocatively, "Father, tonight I'm going to the theater with a few friends."

After a short silence he said:

"You know that's not allowed."

"But why father, it's a theater, it isn't a place where the student's authority is violated."

To that he said:

“I know but you know very well that, according to the school’s regulations, it’s not allowed. If you wanted to see this show you should have told me earlier, I would have accompanied you and I believe your mother would have too.”

I knew that he would do that for me but the performance itself wasn’t important, but rather a kind of defiance which in those years I loved to exercise against something that was prescribed, established, or ordered.

Of course I went to the theater that night, with my class group anyway.

My father didn’t even try to talk about it the next day. Only my mother reprimanded me slightly but more because of my attitude towards my father, which in that case looked like disrespect to her.

No mother, it wasn’t disrespect, in the least. Maybe young people wanted to live with less restrictions and rigidity, and more so with flexibility. The older we got the more restless we became...

I was restless and impatient... But when I was sitting in the theater I was really surprised by the extraordinary acting abilities of the actors and actresses. I imagined myself being a great, famous actress, an actress with a reputation worldwide, all in flowers, bouquets, masses of fans, strong applause... After the performance when I got home, I stood in front of the mirror for a long time and, in the semi-dark, studied the features of my face and imitated the facial expressions the actors had made in the tragic roles...

Watching the graceful actions of the ballerinas, I didn’t consider it impossible to learn even the most difficult moves and make the most delicate hand movements...

I danced secretly in my room. The young lady in me did the dancing.

I watched many movies. I read more and more of the most beautiful world literature and no one could dissuade me from believing that only the good and beautiful won everywhere in the world.

However, my happiest moments were at my desk in our classroom. I liked to hang out almost equally with both girls and boys, if they were good friends.

But at the same time, I also sank into that boil of students with worries and unrest almost every day. There were all kinds; from too withdrawn, good-natured, to too bold, even impudent. However, all of these problems were somehow similar, even the same, not because of the black colour of the aprons and blouses, but because of the fact that we carried them inside of us every day when we came to class and again we carried them inside of us when we went home.

What happened that day I couldn't even attempt to explain...I didn't understand it then... He looked at me with his clear blue eyes, straight into my eyes and then was embarrassed. I don't know why but I too was embarrassed... Actually, our embarrassment was caused by something that we felt independently, somewhere deep in our consciousness. It felt like we were independently startled by something unknown to us.

Then we avoided looking at each other; afraid of running into that thing again. But somehow, indirectly, I had the feeling that we wanted to do that again; to look into each other's eyes. Even though we avoided looking at each other we stole moments when we did look when the other wasn't looking. That was the start of the game.

It seemed to me that everyone in the class already knew what we were doing. Even though we both barely knew what it was. In any case, it was some kind of special relationship we had, the both of us and it was ours... That realization excited me and confused me terribly, so that in his presence I behaved awkwardly, sometimes even funny. He did the same.

Although I absently followed what the professor was teaching during class, I felt that I was completely transported to the boy,

burning with impatience - what would happen next. At the same time, I dreaded the school bell going off.

From time to time I instinctively felt his eyes looking at my hair, and there was nothing in the world that would have dared me to turn and meet his gaze. And even if I had turned, he would have immediately turned away to avoid my gaze.

The following days were filled with new and miraculous previously unknown excitement, restlessness, weakening our resistance more and more and raising the restlessness to the ultimate limit.

We wanted to be alone but we were afraid.

He did things for me in an indirect way; he would hand me a ruler, even though I hadn't asked for one, or he would sharpen my pencil, he would protect me when I was teased by my friends, or when we played volleyball in the yard, he would ask me if I'd thought about it before answering a question in class, he would also remind me to pay attention in class. I was happy with all that, it filled me with warmth; and again with a kind of peaceful silence. At the same time I let him know that I knew he cared about me and even more... I let him know that it wasn't just an ordinary care, not the everyday kind of care.

Then something insignificant happened which somehow separated us. It was insignificant indeed but a big deal for me in those first daring flights.

During the break between the two hours of class time, one of the boys in my class put his hand inside the boy's bag, pulled out a picture and raised it up high while running around between the desks. After seeing that, the boy ran after him and with his utmost effort tried to bend his arm and take the picture from him.

At first I didn't pay any attention to it but I felt that the loud class laughter had something to do with me, that it was about him and me. Then I realized that there was no one else in the picture but me. I couldn't believe it. Where had he gotten my picture?

I was embarrassed because of how my class reacted not only towards him but also towards me... How had he allowed that, and even if he had managed to get my picture somehow (of course he'd stolen it from one of my friends) he shouldn't have taken it to class in his bag, much less let anyone see it.

I was furious. There was no point in telling my friends that I hadn't given him that picture, that he hadn't taken it from me, it had nothing to do with what they thought. I felt it wasn't possible to change their impression. I felt like something perfectly pure, his and my secret, had been made public in a careless way, where its purity and tenderness couldn't survive.

He was all confused and helpless. In fact, he was troubled because he'd done this to me for whom he would have done anything to please. But he'd ruined it with his carelessness, and perhaps also because of his friend's mischievousness.

Days passed. Even though I felt that it wasn't possible for something so insignificant to interrupt the beginning of a perfect friendship. But I was afraid it had. I was really dreading our breakup. Even still deep inside of me I felt it was necessary for us to find each other again. Then one day our eyes met again when I felt that he was looking for my gaze, to cry out to me, to express how difficult it was for him without even my silent presence, to beg me to forgive him.

Going to the cinema to watch a movie alone was a great pleasure for me. I felt comfortable in the dark where I was free to shed tears or laugh, to look at what was shown on the screen or to freely follow my thoughts.

I was in a good mood the next time I went to watch a movie alone. I wanted to be alone.

I was startled when I saw him with one of our classmates at the counter buying movie tickets so I decided to give him my money for him to buy the tickets, it was only logical. I didn't hesitate to go with them and watch the movie together. This was a big event for me and for him. It seemed that one bold, decisive step on my part pulled us together again.

His clear blue eyes didn't hide his boundless excitement and joy at that chance of us meeting. Even in silence we managed to cross the space that kept us at a great distance.

We sat in the big dark theater trembling with excitement. It was the first time we'd sat so close, next to each other.

We loved the film but feared even the most accidental touch in the dark. We didn't speak. I felt our faces were red, burning in that world that we were powerless to master, where we had to learn the game.

I don't remember the title of the movie, just the picture. This was the first step in our lives, in our youth that we took to allow our hands to touch in the semi-darkness. We were both trembling with tenderness, with restlessness while secretly holding hands.

No one was allowed to know about this... not even his friend who sat next to him. Everything had to remain a secret, and why? Neither he nor I knew, maybe that's why, so as not to disturb that perfect miracle of ours.

We slowly walked home. At first we felt uncomfortable from the bright light that greeted us outside the cinema... Then we were afraid to look into each other's eyes. Man is freer in darkness, is it because of the self-deception in which he hides?

The other boy, feeling like he was a third wheel, apologized and walked away with quick steps, leaving us alone.

I wanted to hold him, to grab him, but I didn't. That other thing in me was stopping me.

We walked side by side through the alleys of the half-dark park, anxiously expecting something unusual to happen. The mournful willows with drooping sentimental branches suppressed our last resistance.

At one point I felt heat on my lips. It was his lips on my lips. It seemed like everything had turned red, the leaves, the trees, the sky and the night. Red like joy, like happiness...

I will never forget the unmatched tenderness of those inexperienced hands holding me in an embrace, the first and only, and the night that helped keep the inaccessibility of those moments in our eyes.

No, we didn't have the courage to repeat that touch of lips, we just held each other's trembling hands, gently crying from happiness, from beauty, not knowing why...

When I ran home I felt like a criminal who must not show himself in front of anyone.

I went into my room quickly, silently, like a breeze, without turning on the light... I danced in the dark like a fictional creature from that wonderful feeling that had taken me over which, even in my thoughts, I was afraid to call love. I lay motionless with my face turned to the ceiling and everywhere in the darkness floated the purest blue of his warm eyes and his mouth, glowing like the most beautiful poppies.

I would give anything to stay alone in that room, in that darkness. Not to go to dinner, not to have to turn away even for a moment from the beauty of that new feeling that ruled me. What's more, I was convinced that I wouldn't be able to hide what had happened to me from my mother and father, even with the most skillful acting. My mother's keen eyes would pick up on the slightest flicker of my face.

For a long time no one called me. They didn't know I was home of course, so I was grateful to be able to enjoy the things that I carried in my soul that night.

The next day I found out that I'd fallen asleep and that my mother didn't want to wake me up. Now, however, it was easier for me to keep my composure and find an explanation for my absence. I quickly ate, grabbed my school bag and ran out into the street.

The most important thing for us now was to find enough strength to cross the threshold of our classroom. We solved that problem by avoiding looking at each other. This was the first time since I'd begun to attend school that I was unable to follow a single word the teacher said after teaching for several hours. I felt my soul was already full of everything I needed and everything else was superfluous, something that would somehow reduce my joy.

Fortunately, that didn't last too long because we were almost at the end of the school year. Every class, however, was important and decisive for my final success.

After that everything that happened between us was wonderful. We did everything together; studying, walking and enjoying life. We even agreed to wear similar coloured clothing.

It seemed to me that everyone was happy for us when they saw us together, probably because of my own sense of happiness related to our love. This went on for months and months.

I believed in the goodness of love the way it was portrayed in the movies and books I'd read... In that ecstasy I expected miracles and great feats to take place. It seemed to me that in the future I too would be creating grandiose works...

Eventually the end of the school year arrived.

We struggled for a long time between the desire to stay together through the summer, not to be separated, and the feeling that we needed to go to summer camp after school ended.

He stood pale-faced next to the train that was supposed to take the girls of my class to summer camp. This would be the first time, even for a short time, that he would be without me since our relationship began. At that moment something was squeezing my soul, my heart. However, I was aware that it was my duty to do this. I had to make the sacrifice, I couldn't separate myself from what the majority of our class wanted.

I wasn't going to allow myself to cry, no, because of my mother who was standing by him, maybe not even thinking that he was there for me, just because of me, her "little" daughter.

We weren't allowed to be together because my brigade was an all women's brigade. He and his brigade would go to another camp in two days. That's how things were organized.

The train moved slowly, almost with uncertainty. I smiled at my mother and immediately at him, at his... eyes, lips, unique hands...

That last moment, as I boarded the train car, he looked at me like he was going to lose me forever.

The first days at camp passed very slowly. There was no mail for me for several days...

I didn't reveal the pain I was feeling to anyone. I pretended it didn't exist. I don't know why, whether it was egoism, a desire to preserve everything that was beautiful or what. I quickly became distrustful of my friends. But they knew me very well and knew what made me keep quiet.

I ran from the camp to the shed to get my towel and go wash up. I was hungry and wanted to get to the dining room as soon as possible. At the same time my friends surrounded me and, in one voice, informed me that a letter had arrived for me. A blue envelope had been placed under my pillow. They'd put it there. I stood there motionless afraid to open it and was unwilling to do it in front of them. I wanted to hide somewhere all alone with his letter.

My eyes quickly went over the lines, swallowing down every word to the smallest comma. It seemed to me that no other lover had ever written such beautiful words to his beloved. I kissed, hugged and caressed the letter and jumped for joy.

It was clear to everyone, the trees, the leaves and the birds... I was happy and in love. I almost cried out loud... I love you.

Then I wrote him a letter and again impatiently waited with much anticipation. And every day stretched into infinity – until his new letter arrived.

The camp was boiling like a hive. New acquaintances were made and lives were connected. It was all passing by me so fast. The only way to pass the day quickly was to become involved in my work, of which I wasn't afraid. Perform a kind of mechanical movement and at the same time think about what made me happy, what was close to me and of when my new life had begun, when I'd met and gotten to know my first love.

My thoughts were closed off to everything outside of that. I was re-experiencing everything that was going on between the two of us, and I was happy. That was all.

I didn't know what to do with my joy after reading the letter that separated us for only a few days before our reunion. He had written the exact day, hour and place where we were going to see each other again. It was a beautiful place in the great City Park, which we had found before. That place was ours alone, and whenever we found another young couple in that bush-enclosed place, we regarded them as uninvited guests. However, we had to be patient until they left willingly before we would go to our beloved corner.

It was a real joy for me to see one of his best friends, who had just come from my friend's camp. I loved to listen to him telling me stories in which my friend was involved, telling me details about the conditions at that other campsite, how he, my friend always talked about me until late at night, dreaming about us being together and about our reunion...

This friend of his, an art student, went to the camp to draw sketches of objects present at the campsite where my friend was.

I believed that I had already bored him with questions, although he convinced me otherwise, as if he himself wanted to show me, and again confirmed the details to me, and I listened, silent, happy, transported to his camp, to the shed where he would sleep that night.

It was evening. We sat by the campfire, which lit up our faces with a blush and gave the whole region a kind of fantastic appearance, power, defiance, brilliance. Behind it was impenetrable darkness. There was a merry dance and then a dance.

Even the stars had given way before that gleam of the beautified youth and, with a drowsy twinkling, had retreated into their dreams.

I was sitting on a stone, hunched over and overcome with warm sadness. It seemed that only the fire with its flash could penetrate the dreams hidden in my eyes, and the happiness for what would be tomorrow during the reunion.

It seemed that his friend, that little artist, fantasist, had been calling me for a long time without getting an answer, so he was forced to pull me by my hand.

I laughed. He asked me to dance. I don't know why but even that slightest expression of fun without him, my boy, seemed beyond my wishes and feelings. I didn't get up to dance. Everything that wasn't him, my love, was too much for me... in some sense it didn't exist.

* * *

Even now I don't know how long I managed to say hello to my mother and father, but I know that an hour earlier I was at the meeting place.

I didn't wait long. He came towards me through a long alley lined with dead yellow leaves. I was trembling. I ran with the lightness and speed of a doe and crawled into the bushes, not to deceive the hunter, but to attract him to me.

As far as I could see moving at that speed, he was wearing the soft burgundy blouse that I loved so much. His blond strands of curly hair fell over his eyebrows accentuating the blue of his eyes, even more pronounced against that chocolate colour of his tanned face.

My heart was beating so hard that it seemed like the loud beats would reveal my position and any moment now I expected him to grab me, hug me and carry me in his arms.

Because of my excitement I didn't even have the courage to raise my head and look at him.

Suddenly, more subconsciously, I felt that he had passed by the bush where I was hiding with a calm, measured, even slow step which was getting further and further away.

At first I thought he was only pretending not to see me, and I expected that any second now he would laugh out loud, roaring with that unconquerable laugh, the kind only he could laugh, and run back to spread the bushes and discover me.

When I got to my feet his silhouette was barely visible at the end of the alley. I couldn't believe what had happened. He probably didn't notice me, but why was he going there when our meeting place was actually here.

I ran and soon caught up with him. When he turned, I saw that it wasn't my beloved. It really wasn't him and I couldn't understand how such a close resemblance was possible.

It all seemed so unreal that, to this day, I sometimes think it was just a hallucination.

After some time, with a sad face and barely audible steps, I walked on the dead, yellow leaves agitated because of what had just happened. I had a bad feeling that something had gone wrong. I didn't even know how much time had passed or how long I'd stayed there... in our place... He still didn't show up, even later in the evening when I was returning home, alone, without hope, like those fallen yellow leaves.

I lay on my bed in my room in the dark with bitter tears of despair in my eyes feeling sad. What could have happened...? Was there something that had prevented him from coming to see me...?

Then I suddenly jumped up filled with energy and hope. I had a thought, it was a positive thought – perhaps his brigade hadn't arrived yet. His friend, the “artist”, would know that.

I was already on the street. I rushed down the road hoping in my heart filled with fear that his brigade hadn't arrived yet. That's what must have happened?! The first thing that petrified me after I'd found his friend was something I couldn't understand at the time, he avoided looking at my face.

I made him swear to tell me what had happened, thinking the worst, even an accident.

He was silent for a long time. I became aware that I was pulling him by the hand. I was rough, even violent with him. I had a single desire; for him to tell me something immediately, anything... to just speak to me.

The first thing he said was that my boy had come back with his brigade and that nothing had happened to him. This blocked my brain. From what the “artist” said I interpreted it to mean that my friend was angry with me about something, that he had probably heard from someone, something to do with infidelity, and that he couldn't get over it. In that confusion, if I understood correctly, it was about my loyalty to him.

I couldn't believe it. Anything but that...! How dare they tell him that?! I wouldn't allow it! The flow of tears prevented me from walking. I dragged myself like a wounded animal, like someone had taken my heart out mercilessly and I was living my last moments. There was no longer a sign of the restless doe that was hiding in the bushes moments earlier.

The “artist” started to worry about me and ran after me. I ran away from him in all directions. I couldn't, in all my being, accept that terrible and unjust accusation. Everything was turning inside of me. The arrow that shot me was too saturated with poison.

I kept repeating to myself, a hundred times over, “how is it possible for him to think such a thing, to believe such a thing...?” At the

same time I kept shouting at everyone “this is impossible...!” Not him... I will open my chest and show them all – I love him; I love him more than anything, more than myself, more than life! No, don’t take him from me, and in such a low and sneaky way... Who was it that defiled me, defiled my infinitely pure, perfectly crystalline feelings for him? I beg you, I humble myself before you, be generous, spare me... just leave him to me, leave that which so recently, not so long ago, was born in me, something irreplaceable... Give me back my love. Don’t you realize that you are raising a hand against me, against my very young life? Don’t destroy me...

His “artist” friend kept pulling me, shouting, begging me to go with him, “we will go and see him, I will get him for you” he kept saying. “We will talk... Let’s talk...” Those words kept piercing my brain.

“The conversation isn’t over... There is still plenty to talk,” he added. “But he condemned me... he only heard one side and condemned me. In his eyes, I wasn’t even worthy of a conversation, an explanation. Why should I go to him then? He closed his heart to me...” I replied.

Still, I went with the “artist” being pulled subconsciously by that little thread of light, that little hope. I became completely hopeless; I had lost even the smallest possibility of resistance because of this stupidity of this absurdly untrue accusation, and of course because of that, a great absurdity, I had to prove, to refute that untruth. Most of all, the bitter realization that he, my dear, believed a lie... A terrible lie!

“Where was I, my character, your feeling for me to prevent you from accepting as truth that blind lie?” I felt like saying to him. It was an undeniable fact that no matter what I felt and thought all of this was the way it was. I felt that it was useless me going to see him... something in my subconscious told me not to do it, not to go to him, it kept me back... But still I went...

“What should I say to you if you come out? How do I dissuade you... me, so powerless, with my small words. Maybe you will read the truth in my eyes... you used to always look for it in them...” I thought I would say.

In the few moments, until the “artist” went inside the house where my boyfriend lived, to ask him to come out, I didn’t feel my existence. It felt like every part of my body was going to explode.

I literally froze when I saw the “artist” coming out alone. I get it... he doesn’t want to come out. I wasn’t sure if I’d heard the last part of what the “artist” said, but I ran so hard down the street that it was impossible for him to catch up to me.

Why do I still exist... why don’t I disappear... Life continues to lose meaning for me... I dreamed... of being together... for my whole life... I don’t want to live my life without him...

Where do I go? Home? Like this? I couldn’t, I shouldn’t... however home was the only place where I was protected from all the looks and noises... It seemed like this was the end... I felt cheated, robbed... they’d taken the most sacred thing from my life. “Did you believe them when they slandered me, darling? Were you fooled so easily? You don’t know, and maybe you will never know, how bitterly you have been lied to...” I felt like saying to his face.

“Did you fight, my love? Did you try to preserve anything of what you and I experienced, that carried us on wings...?”

“Did you yell at them, tell them that it was impossible, that you, you knew me very well... and I would do no such thing... You remember how you met me in the beautiful silence, trembling while holding hands, being in the warmest and most innocent embrace, in shy love... No, my dear, you allowed them to deceive you... you had no strong arguments... You allowed them to lie to you... You allowed them to erase our beautiful love... They trampled on our love and defiled it... before your eyes, and you allowed them to do that. Why weren’t you strong enough to protect it...?” I needed to say to him.

I went in the house unnoticed. I went straight into my room. The darkness helped me hide my face... this time too, but not to run away from the terrible truth.

My mother came to see me much later, surprised why I had gone to bed so early.

“Mother, I wanted to jump up and hug you, tell you everything, prove to you that I am pure, that I haven’t sinned, not even with a small part of my thoughts, let alone physically. Shall I betray him...? That term was familiar to me but only from the shallow stories my friends had told me, which I didn’t like much. What is it... what does that word mean when you are in love... how it is possible... when he, only he and no one else, entered my soul and became my life. Right, mother, you believed me that only he lives in my heart... and no one else.

I didn’t say anything to you, mother. I thought, somewhat subconsciously, that it had been a long time since you could have experienced things like this, or something similar, and that you had moved away from all this a long time ago. I know you would understand, or maybe you would regret it if I told you that your little daughter was so unhappy... I wanted to save you from that trouble.

Mother... would it be so terrible if I died... No mother, I won’t kill myself, but if it was by accident... in an accident...” I thought to myself.

The dark hid my sobs and my pillow, which I kept putting over my mouth, stifled my gasps and yelps... I didn’t understand why this was happening to me...? What had happened in these last few days since his last letter?

That question rang in the air, everywhere in the darkness around me, transforming into various forms of apparitions, haunting me, driving me into frenzy.

“Why am I doomed, darling...?” I whispered endlessly, helplessly in the dark, running away, trying to get rid of the most beautiful memories of him, almost all of which suddenly came to me, as if to defy me because they became only memories, and not part of something that was built, that we lived.

I was going mad with the turmoil that was boiling in my head. I thought of getting up, going out into the street, wandering endlessly without stopping, walking like a crazy person. No, I couldn't go anywhere; I couldn't possibly escape from that closed circle of my terrible despair.

I felt stressed again, I was tormented by the fact... that he hadn't even bothered to ask me if what he'd been told was true... that he hadn't come out and talked to me when I went to see him... to tell me what his problem was... He just simply dismissed me like I was a disgraced person. He'd done that to me, the only love of my life. He, whose being I carried both by day and in my sleep, every smallest part of him, everything related to him...

I felt like shouting out loud, furiously rebelling because I knew with my whole being that I didn't deserve this which, even unconsciously, he'd inflicted on me.

However, not once did I find harsh words in my heart to condemn him, believing that he was a slave to a delusion, which he would quickly find out for himself and ask for my forgiveness. There was a small possibility of me surviving... without having to defend myself. I was prepared to spare him the hardship that I'd endured had he come to his senses...

That would be my sacrifice for my great love.

Somewhere deep in my heart, I always hoped that it wouldn't stay like that, and that things would change. The truth, the only truth I carried in my soul must conquer all lies.

Young people and all their naivety helped me believe that.

* * *

On the first day of school suddenly everyone, I don't even know how, understood, knew there was a problem between us... Maybe because they missed our ringing laughter in class and all the riots of the eighth graders... maybe because of his important, dignified look, which escaped me, which seemed to contain an understatement.

The entire time I felt the urge to leave the class, to run away. How would I live in this same environment where the most beautiful thing associated with my youth began, at least the first step of it. Even the desks, windows, blackboard... the entire classroom was part of something warm and human that bonded us... It was an integral part of our love.

I was afraid that he might bring the person who'd slandered me to testify against me in class. ...The person who'd slandered my purity, the impeccability of my feelings for him, the person who'd told that shameful lie. That would be too cruel. After that everyone would know the so-called "truth" of why we were separated and it would be a lie. How could I defend myself against that? By crying? Where could I hide after such an accusation which didn't have a single iota of truth in it...? Where could I hide except in my own grief? I told only two of my best friends about my grief, about my revolt and undiminished love for him.

And why that again... Because it was just mine and his alone, no one had the right to judge it. I was very bitter that he'd allowed others to have fun with our sad experience.

I didn't have the courage to look my teacher straight in the eye. It was like I was starting to look guilty of something... or maybe I was simply afraid of sharing the great disappointment in my heart.

Then my story soon became an ordinary everyday story; for everyone except me.

I went everywhere he went for months, or where I could sense he was going, perhaps just to grieve in his presence. I followed him into the theater where we practiced student drama performances, in the literary society meetings, in the reading rooms.... In all the places where he was, showing his defiance and where our sad love continued to die.

Suffering silently, I couldn't find a single negative word for him. I couldn't find fault for the terrible way he made me feel, and for not

understanding the serious consequence of my devastation. I felt my whole being change in a negative way.

My friends, and even some of my teachers, treated me with care, like a person who was recovering from a serious illness but wasn't yet sufficiently healthy. That kind of treatment hurt me even more.

Even my mother and father's attitude towards me had changed. Poor them... I had no idea how difficult it was for them to experience all the changes they read on my face and in my behaviour. The reasons for this new state of mine didn't remain a secret for them. However, they avoided talking about it; as usual one didn't talk to a sick person about their illness, especially if it was something serious.

I was very sensitive so paying too much attention to me annoyed me... I felt like I was making myself miserable. Because of that, I consciously and persistently began to hide everything that was bothering me deep in my soul. I even gradually returned to the normal flow of school life.

I was very careful not to look at him even when we were in class. I falsely pretended to be defiant. Then I would look for him again. I even looked for him from afar.

I was sitting with my best friend in the gymnasium one day. It was during a dance but I didn't want to dance because I had always danced with him, even though another girl was in his arms... and I followed his every move with my infinitely sad eyes and with them I caressed his hands, so familiar to me...

The greatest mastery was not to betray myself during those moments... not to allow my tears to cross the permissible limit of my eyelids and spill over onto my face, even when my eyes were illuminated by the blueness of my loved one's eyes...and now in some way they weren't my eyes, not even when I sensed the silent reproach of my beloved's lips.

Suddenly the lights went out in the gym. I strained my eyes in the dark and continued to follow that tenderness, that pain and

bitterness. He quietly turned around, holding the body of my classmate in his arms.

At one point I felt my friend's long fingers, wipe away the tears on my face, which were probably glistening in the dark.

I walked everywhere in the park where we'd made our best memories... "Our bench" sat there empty and in silence seemingly asking me why I was there alone... and where he was... This was "our place", surrounded by lush bushes... it has been empty for a long time... It seemed like the bench, the herbs and the petals in that place condemned me... they looked for faults in me... so sometimes I would cry bitterly, at least letting them know how unfair and painful things were for me... Well, he was mine... he gave me life... people, why did you have to take him from me...?

I didn't return my love to him... Perhaps our love was nipped in the bud too early, interrupted in its first opening of those beautiful but tender petals.

I was too young, filled with innocent feelings, and without the experience of life and was unable to fight for my love.

Coming home one day I found a letter on the table in my room. I was really surprised when I saw the name on the envelope. It was from the "artist". At first I was trembling all over, I was very excited, hoping that maybe it was some kind of explanation for everything that had happened, or maybe, although I couldn't believe it, even a plea for forgiveness from my boyfriend who didn't have the courage to do it personally, so he tried to do it through his friend.

Unfortunately I lied to myself bitterly. The content of that letter completely threw me off... I was unable to accept it as the truth. Well, it was true alright! He, the "artist", my boyfriend's best friend, in a desperate way said to me that he was hopelessly in love with me, which he had been hiding for a long time and now it seemed he'd found the courage to tell me, to write me about it; not having the courage to do it in person, he did it with this letter...

No mention of my love for my boyfriend anywhere.

It was too much... it made me sick, somehow it seemed like a bitter irony, a mockery of my feelings that he, maybe only he, knew very well how it felt.

I felt completely disgusted by him. I despised him...

Wasn't he, exactly he, an eyewitness, a witness to that immense love of mine for his friend, a witness to that boundless despair and suffering? How could he do that to his best friend! He shouldn't, he shouldn't have, it was wrong!

I tried to understand him and to find reasons for his actions. It was true that this could happen to anyone. Someone could fall in love with someone else but according to all human rules, like in our case for example, he should have remained mute, profoundly silent...

I didn't tell anyone about this, it seemed so drastic to me, and hid the other two letters that followed. And maybe I would never tell anyone, ever.

A few years later an intimate friend of my boyfriend's, from our school, dug into our past wanting to find out what had really happened to that perfect flight of ours which suddenly, fatally and sadly crashed... Even today I still don't know what motivated him to do that; to return to our mutual life and examine what had happened. Was it just curiosity or did he want find out what exactly went wrong with either me or my boyfriend.

If I understood him correctly, the secret, the key to the whole case was hidden in a well-composed letter from the same "artist", which he'd sent to my boyfriend in the last two days from our campsite... It was maybe a naive letter but in it he accused me of things I hadn't done, placing doubt on my chastity and my love for him.

I guess the unfortunate "artist," who had fallen in love with me, wanted to destroy me, ruin me, so he wrote that fateful letter falsely and hypocritically telling my boyfriend to leave me because my behaviour in the camp was too free and prone to cheating...! He even accused me of cheating! He wrote the letter with the sole

purpose of keeping me “free”, hoping that maybe I’d fall in love with him and love him just as much!

Had he no shame? Was he not ashamed and horrified at what he’d done to me when he took me to see my boyfriend. Couldn’t he see how helpless I was? The boundless pain and despair I was feeling trying to prove my innocence? Oh, how he lied and bitterly deceived me...? Unaware I prayed to him for help while he was digging my grave trying to bury me.

Even then he didn’t have the decency to go any further... to stop and, if it was still possible, fix things... This was supposed to be for love? What kind of freakish, deformed and distorted feelings did he have for me? What he did was hideous and raised him to the extreme limits of egoism...

This is why my dear boy rejected me; trampling the most beautiful bloom of my feelings when the whirlwind of happiness was bestowed upon me and my youth...

Why did you blindly believe him my dear, without wavering even for a moment? Was I that far away from you that you couldn’t even check with me? Again I found and still find justification in your youth, inexperience, in the first steps of a more serious life. Of course, the devotion of your friend and the trust in that friendship didn’t allow you to think more deeply about many things at that moment. You simply accepted what you were told as the undeniable truth.

Perhaps even without the letter, something would have happened to us later in life which would have destroyed that beautiful glow of our most beautiful first feelings, as I later found out. The purest and true kind of happiness somehow seems to be condemned in advance and only lasts a short while. However, I couldn’t reconcile what had happened to us in such a callous way. The most terrible thing for me, as unimportant and naive as it might be, was that it undermined the entire course of my life, and perhaps his too.

Learning the truth of what had happened from his fellow student, which brought me back several years, I blamed myself for not

having overcome my feelings and gone to him, begging him very much to explain to me what had come between us, after loving each other so immensely. Maybe I would have freed him from suspicion; maybe I would have told him the truth with my eyes, with everything I had, if he didn't believe my words...

It was too late for all that now. I no longer hated the girl that took my place in his heart. But I loved him and still love everything that was beautiful for him, was his happiness from which I was thrown out mercilessly because of the still completely unformed egoism of the other boy, the "artist", whose victim I had become... And not just me but also the boy I loved and loved me, as well as our love.

We were too young to resist and protect our love...

I could never tell my parents, who cared about me so much, much less confide in them about what I had experienced. Somehow I managed it all on my own and kept it where no one could enter or help. In any case, they were trying to indirectly let me know that these are ordinary things in life, which shouldn't be taken too seriously. In reality, however, they had no idea but rather assumed, what was happening deep down in my soul.

I was grateful to my parents for being concerned, but somewhere deep in my heart I knew that these things that had happened to me were no ordinary things.

Eventually I stopped looking for him and following him everywhere in the city because I realized that she, his new girl, had completely replaced me in his heart. Looking for him, I always found them together, often so cheerful. So it became clear to me that my presence had no place with them.

There was a joyless, almost dull period in my life. The only world that filled the void in my soul was the world of novels, theater and movies. I wandered everywhere where I could experience something beautiful and then kept to myself for long periods of time walking the streets, deep in my own thoughts.

The first thing that came to my mind was to enroll in college and I did, but I was completely indifferent to the distant prospects in my life.

I attended classes at the university but rarely made new acquaintances. I was much too restrained.

One day while aimlessly walking the streets I met a group of friends from my school. We stopped and talked about our studies. Among the people in the group were also Dutse, Bedo and Miki who chummed together, they were close... They went by their nicknames, which someone invented for them or they invented themselves. At that moment a new life began and I was in it... the joy over the five and the crying over the two. All that was a small, tiny part compared to what was to come... fights and harmony, friendship and still young naive hostility. That was my first collision with what life is and beyond that, what class is... I loved that meeting so much. All of them, these boys of ours, were something that tied me to the most beautiful part of my life.

Probably losing patience with our long conversation, a boy whom I'd just seen, approached us and extended his hand to me to introduce himself. One of the others explained to me that he was also in their company and that he had waited on the side for them to finish talking. We met. He was a few years older than me and had an insistent, even slightly impudent look in his black eyes.

Not wanting me to part so quickly, one of my friends held me back leaving me with a happy feeling that somehow I was now part of a company again.

Mechanically answering my new acquaintance's questions, I spontaneously slipped into a conversation with him. I became interested in learning more from him about how he dealt with the loneliness and boredom of every day life. This is what I was interested in.

He was much older than me and it wasn't difficult for him to impress me, even to deceive me with some of his knowledge.

He was studying and nearing the end of his studies. Less than a year from now he would be a doctor. And that certainly impressed me. Not the profession itself but the fact that it was, so to speak, before becoming a graduate specialist.

I started to get used to going out for long monotonous walks with him. We argued about anything and everything, sometimes for a long time, as if wanting to verify our own thoughts in a mutual exchange.

I noticed that he insisted too much on accuracy, only on his knowledge, with a certain initially discreet arrogance. That didn't sit well with me but I thought it might have to do with his self-confidence and even his character.

From an early age I had learned to have my own opinion on almost everything and express it freely.

I don't know why, but even during my first conversations with that man, I didn't dare insist that my views were correct and allowed him to think that he was right. Maybe I needed that, for the sake of creating some kind of authority, his over me. I knew that the moment I underestimated him, his presence would become overwhelming.

Our walks became more frequent. Either he would call me whistling from the street, or he would wait for me in some designated place. He started suggesting how I should dress and what hairstyle to wear. I wasn't aware of why I did all that for him, maybe because of the need to be with someone, a stronger person, a man of course.

I have long since forgotten where and how he hugged and kissed me for the first time. I only remember that I didn't resist, I did not resist. Perhaps we even walked the same sad paths where my first love had carried me on his beautiful wings.

This was a pale shadow of the past, a kind of imitation.

Why wasn't I resisting, but surrendering to these new touches?

I was in ruins, and when in ruins it is neither difficult to enter nor to leave because there is no door and no windows...

My past love, my only great love, with an even greater illusion of a little girl – the love of a lifetime, was no longer there. So whatever came next... let it come...!

Habits were gradually acquired. First of his growing arrogance and then his nervousness, which at first I ignored by studying harder.

I used to go with him to the cinema, to the theater, with his friends and with my friends.

I was invited to his home to visit his parents. He should come to mine.

I began to accept his habit of rudeness, which kept surfacing and resurfacing more and more.

All that was somehow becoming my way of life, from which it would be difficult to escape...

I was closed in a circle, which he had been building around me for months in order to achieve the culmination of his influence over me by completely isolating me from any outside influences. I was never, not even today, aware of how I gradually lost all will to resist and completely fell under his obsession.

Soon I resembled a minor under his tutelage. I wasn't even allowed to greet old acquaintances, which in some sense meant "staying within the bounds of morality" for him. He even reminded me with irony that I hadn't spoken to "my own parents" knowing very well that I hadn't only because he wouldn't allow it. In the same way he forbade me to have contact with my acquaintances, even school friends, because he believed they were possibly my ex-lovers, which was too paradoxical for me to feel the need to respond.

A practicing behaviour like this had long since acquired citizenship in our relationship. Every time we met and after we scheduled our next meeting, which was unusually the next day, we parted politely,

cheerfully and in good spirits. We were away from one another no more than one night and some hours during the day. Coming to see me I would watch him from afar. He would look angry and have an evil look in his eyes. He usually met me without saying a word. We would leave in silence and I would have no idea where we were going.

I begged him, sometimes for a long time, to tell me what had happened to him and why he was so angry. He refused to tell me, preferring to stay silent. We often walked for a long, long time in silence and, sometimes, when I lost my patience because of the long silence, I cried. He would still be silent. Then he would suddenly turn and walk away, leaving me completely in suspense as to what was wrong.

I would immediately, or the next day, go to his house in hopes of finding out how I'd wronged him or what sin I had committed against him to make him so angry. I even spent many hours searching my own mind, considering all the things I had done, words I had spoken and even thoughts I'd had, what would have made him angry.

But then, as usual, when I stopped inquiring his demeanor would change and his mood would return to normal as if nothing else had happened in the meantime.

I couldn't figure out if this was some sort of game or if he wanted to further subjugate me or even reduce my value...? I felt I was still too young and inexperienced to figure out what was really happening. In any case, I eventually accepted my new situation and stopped asking him to explain himself. I figured this way there would be less tension, less uncertainty and less silence between us.

Every day I became more and more aware that there was something not good in our relationship. It was not a healthy relationship. So I gave considerable thought as to how I could get out of it. This relationship had already lasted quite a long time. It had become part of my life so it was difficult to change. But at the same time it was difficult to keep the way it was.

When we had a crisis and were on the verge of separation, he would always find some reason to keep us going. Even though he was overbearing and infallible he would find something to tell me, to convince me, to continue our relationship. He would tell me that he loved me even more than before, to a point of torture and at the same time complain that I didn't love him enough and with that he would try to explain his whole attitude towards me, sometimes even rudely.

When he was like that he also experienced internal struggles between his opinion of himself and his terrible desire to remain in the same kind of relationship with me. I didn't believe, even for a single moment that he considered himself unworthy of my great love, which I should have in my heart for him.

The crisis usually lasted a long time but when it was over and we stopped fighting he would suddenly come up with something negative implying that it was pointlessness for me to attend college classes, and indirectly criticized the courses I was taking, implying that I wasn't a good enough student and wouldn't be able to finish my studies. But even though he didn't say these things plainly and directly to me, they were hurtful. He would often talk to me, sometimes for a long time, about his ideal of how a housewife should be. That she should be intelligent, well-read but completely devoted to her family, family happiness and children. A woman in a working relationship, with a profession of her own, according to his ideas, was only a burden on a happy married life.

We argued for a long time about what a female spouse - intellectual, mother and so on should be. I didn't agree with his opinions and wondered if it was another kind of game he was playing, dictated by his arrogance. However, I naively believed that I could convince him to change his opinion of what a wife should be and many of his other negative opinions about me. I figured I could do it not with just words but by showing him examples. Some things seemed to me were irrefutable truths about me and my life and I believed that, whether he wanted to or not, he had to acknowledge them.

Of all the things that pulled us apart, I still believed that there might be something, something that I didn't completely understand, that

pulled me towards him, that wanted me to remain with him. It became my obsession.

Why was he seizing me so unavoidably? Why didn't I find enough strength in me to fight back, to find a way out, an opening in that closed circle that kept squeezing me more and more? Was it my dullness that had overtaken me after everything that happened to me during my first steps in life and immediately after that great disappointment? In any case, I became aware that I was getting weaker and weaker in my search for a way out... maybe it was because of the too well-calculated and constructed system he was using on me...

Again there was a period when he was good to me during which he gave me some attention. He even came with me to the hairdresser to watch me get a haircut the way he liked it and to the clothing store to watch me model dresses. He would often surprise me with a gift. It was usually a book which he knew I wanted to read. I once again began to indulge in a mood which restored my hope that maybe we could find some kind of compromise in our relationship.

I was with him at his parents' place almost every day. His mother kept inviting me for lunch.

We often went out together.

My parents didn't know a single thing about all this. Deep down, subconsciously, I began to realize that I was undertaking big responsibilities on my own without consulting them and without seeking their consent. Later, as more things happened, I would realize that I had even less courage. Something was pulling me away and I couldn't find the strength to resist it.

After going to his house every day and staying there for several hours, my visits became something completely ordinary.

One day when I went to his house to see him, I was surprised to find him in his pajamas still in bed. In a weak voice he immediately told me that he was sick and seemed a little angry as to why I had been gone for so long. I apologized and explained that I didn't know he

was sick and, after taking my shoes off, sat down on the bed next to him. There was no one else in the house, which was rare because his mother was always at home.

Seeing him sick made me feel a bit more sentimental and, perhaps, for the first time since we'd been together I became more yielding to his caresses. Probably my age also made me more sensitive and ready to forgive him, quickly forgetting the rougher things in our relationship, even the insults, or maybe I was just suppressing them somewhere deep inside me. Then I would let my delusional self believe that all this, even the most drastic rudeness, was just a result of his love for me and his impatience to have me for life.

In any case, at some point in time I realized that something more was going on than was usual in our relationship. I knew that I should resist, that I mustn't allow it, that it was a line that we must not cross, at least not yet until we were sure, absolutely sure that we would live our lives together. But despite that, I surrendered to everything that was happening, like a drowning man who no longer had the strength or desire to fight, surrendering to the merciless waves...

Even after it had already happened, I didn't know it was "it", I wasn't sure that it was like that because until then it had only existed in my imagination. My mother had never talked to me about it. She probably thought a conversation like that with her little girl would be too serious.

At that moment, after what had happened, I became unsure about my future life. I became full of dullness and maybe disappointment. I didn't know it would happen now. Everything that had happened was far from the dreams I had imagined, the perfection from the union with a loved one.

I wanted to leave right after. I was burdened by what had happened. I don't know if I blamed him for that, or if he felt my disappointment but I remember very well what he said. He said:

"It only seems to you like it was nothing..."

At first I thought he was talking like that to comfort me and I was grateful for that, even though I knew he wasn't telling the truth. I almost wanted to cry, and I certainly would have cried if I hadn't been afraid of his mockery.

Then he tried hard to convince me that what I thought had happened hadn't actually happened. Whether it was because of the tone of his voice, or because of the expression on his face, a terrible thought arose from my subconscious: "He deliberately wanted, just in case, to distance himself... Certainly for the sake of getting rid of some kind of guilt, or any sense of obligation."

I was becoming disgusted. Maybe I would have dismissed that thought had he remained silent, or had he smiled and gently hugged me. No, he continued to insist, trying to convince me that I had imagined it all, even though I knew it had happened. And what was even more terrifying was that he knew, he knew that it had happened more surely than I did, as an undeniable fact, and he consciously tried to obscure it. Maybe even more than that, more horrible was the fact that he tried to cover it up like it had never happened.

I was more and more repulsed by him. It was a kind of internal resistance. I got the feeling that I would never forget or forgive his miserable behaviour towards me, especially at this very sensitive moment in my life, and in every girl's life. Sitting there he looked like a total coward. At the same time, I felt like I had no desire to argue and defend the truth. I was even becoming indifferent to the reason for his hiding behind the false screen.

Full of bitterness and with some revolt I walked back to my house. I was disgusted by his attempts to cheer me up, to cover up everything that couldn't be changed, not then, not now, not for the rest of my life. I knew that I had left all of him there, in that bed, in his house. I hadn't taken, even the smallest part of him with me.

I was completely freed from the prejudices in terms of my womanhood. What had happened, at least for the moment, didn't burden me nor did it bind me to him. Even more, the incident became an unpleasant act in my life... I didn't find it in myself and didn't have the slightest desire to go and look for him. He wasn't

looking for me either. I assumed that he thought I would go looking for him, after what had happened. While under normal circumstances I wouldn't have lasted two or three days without going back to his house but not now. Now I left my house, went to school, walked the streets just so that my parents wouldn't notice that I was without him.

One day I heard him whistle. I quickly got ready and went out. He was furious. I wanted to tell him - by what logic should I be looking for him, and not him for me but I was afraid of a big fight. I didn't invite him into the house because I knew he wouldn't come. He hadn't come to my house for several weeks, that is, after one of our conversations in which I naively told him that my mother and father didn't like him and that they were against our relationship. And that was true.

From the mean expression on his face I knew he'd been insulted when I said that. He could hardly refrain from saying something harsh, insulting to my parents, and it was better that he didn't. In any case, he stopped coming to our house and my parents knew why but did nothing to change the situation. I had the impression that it was more pleasant for them if he didn't come because they really didn't like him.

At the same time they were very careful not to impose their opinion on me, probably assuming that I had found something in that man that suited me. However, they didn't hide their attitude towards him.

On the other hand it affected him terribly, especially his arrogance. He couldn't understand how he, the doctor of tomorrow, with an attractive external appearance, with such high intelligence, at least that's what he thought of himself, which he always emphasized, couldn't become an object of admiration for the parents of a girl whose husband he might become. He believed that there could be no parents who wouldn't want him as their son-in-law. That's why he sought to find some reason, perhaps even a little thing, to belittle my parents and reduce their value.

I always tried to stop him from doing that because they really were parents who deserved to be respected and loved.

Their attitude towards him was a normal reaction; they wanted something more, something better from him for me. They were able to look at him and his actions more realistically than me. They wanted him to be mature and, in a certain sense, not so distant from me who was now caught in that vortex.

Whenever I explained to my father the problems, clashes and fights I'd had with him, in which he always found me in the wrong, my father always suggested that I immediately break off the relationship and leave him.

I would often even fall asleep with a firm resolve to do it, impatiently waiting for the next day. I once told everyone and myself that I had the will and was going to do it. And then when I found him and was preparing to do it, he somehow managed to squeeze the weapon out of my hands and beat me with it.

Constantly, in all our disputes, collisions, I, my life, my understandings, my habits, my upbringing, even my family were the object of his analysis, criticism and insults. He always managed to get out of the ring and, being too young and inexperienced, I was unable to drag him back. The very fact that I had to constantly defend all that myself, seemed to really call into question the quality of all those components from which I was made. As a result he made it impossible for me, even for a moment, to enter into what he himself was. Of course because of that I felt worthless and beaten.

This time, after I heard him whistle from the street I went out. I saw the rage on his face. I caught myself wanting to immediately start making excuses for not going to him because I'd expected him to come to me. I didn't yell at him or cut him off like I'd planned or clearly tell him that it was only logical for him to come looking for me, especially right after what had happened. Moreover, not because of the "thing" itself but because of what he'd said about it, because of his attitude towards it. Then our fight would have been inevitable, harsher and more insulting words would have been said, and perhaps for some time he would have been tensely silent. Then he would still have to go through all that and go back to the old... giving kisses and caresses. I couldn't bear this anymore and, in order to avoid the

whole thing, I was inclined to make even more sacrifices just like before. Even sometimes with a loss of dignity. Of course, that's why I gave in, even this time. But he didn't. His evil eyes avoided looking at me.

"You don't deserve to be with me!" he said.

"You didn't care if you saw me or not for three days. Is that how much you love me?"

"It doesn't matter to me. But not because of love."

"That's not true," I said. "The same could be said about you, why didn't you come looking for me?"

"I was sick. You know that very well!" he replied in an even harsher tone of voice.

Sick? It sounded funny to me. At that moment a thought crossed my mind, "Had he been play acting the other day?"

I was silent.

"Well, that's why I'm going home now," he said sharply, turned and began to leave.

"Don't you dare leave, you'll regret it," I wanted to yell at him. I stood there, with tears in my eyes. He didn't care. I didn't want him to leave like this. I wanted to run after him, touch him, maybe I would have done that had I not been afraid that he wouldn't understand and that he would interpret my action as fear and feel I was becoming dependent on him. With bitterness I figured he would think that without hesitation.

I took slow aimless steps. Maybe this was another of his performances to show me his superiority in the new situation. But he'd lied bitterly to himself. In no way was he superior... I couldn't see any. What happened from my point of view was of little importance to me, it didn't change anything of how I felt about the

value of myself. If he thought differently it was only because of his delusion.

...Despite everything, I still went looking for him, defending my action to myself with the reason - that he, well, had still come to see me and thus had taken the first step. I felt that I should be taking the next step... And secondly, I felt guilty for not going to visit him again, especially since I knew he was sick. Consciously, I didn't know why I'd done what I'd done but I did neglect the real reason that prevented me from going to see him in the first place, and that was his attitude towards me, in connection with the last "thing" that had happened.

When I caught up to him at his house, he had a different demeanor. He had a cheerful expression on his face, like we had parted in good company a while ago and that had left him in a good mood.

I, on the other hand, accepted the new variant and everything was fine. After asking me a few conventional questions, his mother left us alone.

As the days went by our relationship continued to be strained. I didn't know that a close and intimate relationship with a man could be such a big burden for a young woman, or rather a girl. I encountered some strange resistance in my organism and a desire to stop it all... Unfortunately I didn't. I allowed it to become what it had become and I let it stay that way. I would have done anything if I could have avoided his touches, which became foreign to my whole being... However, like everything else that was dragged by that vortex, I surrendered myself unaware of why, whether it was for his sake because of all that had lasted for months... I didn't know. In no other situation in my life had I ever experienced such feelings for myself as I did then - I felt like I was an object, some separate mechanism that functioned outside of my being.

I avoided contact whenever possible, which in a way distanced him even more from me. He certainly felt it. Perhaps that was why in our future encounters he didn't hesitate to emphasize my dependence on him, as something completely logical. He often boasted of his

dominance over me, implying that, according to his logic, men have been dominant over women from time immemorial.

I always had a hidden sneer for all that and a bitter realization that he hadn't been sufficiently emancipated. Maybe it wasn't even that, but an attempt to stabilize his place in our relationship and, to a great extent, he was relying on outdated ideas.

Aware that all this was insufficient and looking for new ways to achieve his goal, one day quite coolly, like talking about buying socks, he said:

“You think I'm so stupid, so you're going to lie to me that I was the first, that day... that I was with you. You'd done “that” much earlier! The only thing left is to tell me with whom...!”

I struggled with the thought for a short while that he might be joking, though neither the object nor the tone of his words gave any indication that it was a joke. We were sitting on a bench in the park and I was afraid that he might repeat the words because, unfortunately, I realized that he meant them.

I desperately wanted to hit him, no, even more than that, to run away from him, as far as possible, like he was some terrible danger to me, to my life.

The thought was so devastating that I immediately became aware as to why he now felt the need to reveal the fact that “it” had happened, and not to deny it as usual.

It was another well thought out move in his game.

Everything seemed even more miserable because of my very natural attitude towards all those aspects of life... “So what? Even if I had done it before, with another man...” I wanted to yell at him even though it wasn't true.

What hurt me more than anything was the accusations... the accusation of being dishonest when I wasn't... Of lying when I wasn't... It was too much... stepping on my chastity hurt...

The only thing I could do now was leave... I considered him unworthy and I had nothing to say to him... Not even insult him...

Realizing that he had crossed another line, behind which lay the danger of a breaking point, the very next day he took a big step and came over my house and rang the doorbell. In other words he broke his word that he would never again set foot in my parents' house because they had insulted him.

I hesitated for a long time deciding whether to open the door or not. I still felt he was unworthy and I shouldn't let him in. I then heard my mother open the door and him greeting her loudly and cheerfully.

Why had he come...? Why did he expect we would get back together when there were so many insurmountable things that keep us apart? And most importantly, he and I were aware of that. These were truly insurmountable obstacles. I couldn't find the strength to go back to it all again. Why had he come...?

He came into my room. My mother didn't, either because she was busy with her own stuff or she wanted to show him that her attitude towards him still remained the same.

We were silent. We were unable to form the words needed to speak.

He came closer to me and, without saying a word, began to stroke and kiss my hair. I was furious and wanted to shout at him. Why was he doing this, it made no sense, not after everything that had happened yesterday and before...? I sat motionless like I was sinking into another world and leaving this one. It was all happening automatically independent of me. I felt completely disconnected from him and his movements had nothing to do with me.

I couldn't find the strength to reject his hand, to make it impossible for him to caress me. How dare he do this to me after he had insulted me yesterday so badly? I was also furious with myself, mostly because I was a coward... But at the same time I knew with

my whole being that I didn't want him to touch me even once, not even a little bit.

Everything about him was disgusting to me. It seemed like I had landed on a torrent, a dirty torrent, a powerful torrent. It was powerful and dirty perhaps because of the stones and various debris rolling with it... I was a delicate butterfly, whose wings were soaked with water, unable to fly, unable to escape the vortex.

I didn't know how my mother and father would have felt if they knew what was happening to me lately. But because I continued to allow him into my life they probably figured we were close but couldn't understand why. But they had accepted that if he was good enough for me he was good enough for them, even though they weren't satisfied with him. They took this path because they truly loved me and respected my wishes. But I kept my affairs to myself in an attempt to spare them from what they didn't know.

Our relationship kept dragging on and on. If only someone, other than me, could end all the bullying I would be free of the strong torrent that dragged me and pressed on my soul. But, of course, since I was completely under his spell I was out there with him the very moment he called on me. I walked out like I was completely under his power, a slave, with absolutely no will of my own. I resembled a dog that wouldn't for a moment resist its master; not even when he abused it, perhaps it believed there would be times in the future when its master would be more generous.

We were sinking deeper and deeper. The days were filled sometimes with sadness, and sometimes with the occasional enlightenment.

Leaving the office of the famous gynecologist, I couldn't sort out the jumble of thoughts circulating my head. However, the truth was, as I found out a while ago, I would be a mother. That was clear deep down in my consciousness.

I wish I hadn't gone to see him at our usual meeting place, where he was waiting impatiently for me to tell him what the doctor had said. I wanted to lie to him, mostly because of everything that had happened between us in these last few months. I knew I wouldn't be

able to lie to him that's why I immediately told him what the doctor had said as soon as I saw him. He frowned but the expression on his face didn't truly reveal how he felt about the new situation. Or maybe I was unable to read it from him.

I wanted to tell him, yell at him, that all this didn't oblige him for anything, it didn't mean that he should, that he must marry me and that I wasn't afraid of anything that was to come...

After he went home, I walked down the street with my head down. My new situation completely threw me off. It found me too young and unprepared. I felt no joy; it was all bitterness... which I couldn't share with anyone, not even with him, which would have been helpful for me especially during these difficult moments.

A few days later when we were out in the park for a walk, he began his game again; a continuation of the last part of his plan.

“Don't you think I know why you broke off relations with me? By God you just don't like me. Even the stupidest person could understand that... and I hope I'm not that stupid. The only reason for doing this is because your parents wanted you to tear yourself away from me, like the person you chose didn't give you anything. Strange, and you say you love me so much. You're a child!” he said looking at me with pity.

“Tear myself away from him?” That wasn't possible! He sounded absurd and on top of that he'd brought my parents into all of this, my loving parents. How could I explain this to him when he'd never belonged to such a wonderful world, which existed for the three of us – father, mother and I... Obviously, I understood that all this was foreign to him, like his parents were foreign to me. Even his remarks about my parents were foreign.

Was he talking about giving me material things? Did he think I thought he didn't give me things? That was another stab that reached deep down in my consciousness. Did he really think that his interest in material things would make me a happy wife? Or did he want to marry me to gain material things? What was I, an object? That thought terrified me. After I thought that I wanted to end our

relationship, trample on it and erase everything that was between us... from the first moment we'd met.

“How do I make you understand that I am their only girl, the meaning of their life, and they only want the best for me...?” I replied.

“I just want to open your eyes. You are still too young and naive and don't understand life. They are deceiving you...” he said.

No, I don't want to accept that as a possibility... Say, I beg you to say, that it's not true, that it isn't so... I can't live with a picture like that in my head... it's unbearable...

It would have been a thousand times better if he'd had kept his mouth shut rather than say what he said.

“Stop it, stop it! What are you talking about, who are you talking about? Have you something mixed up in your head?! I don't want you to say another word,” I cried.

The most terrible thing of all this was his ironic laugh. The tone of his laugh had the sound of a slave master.

“No! Stop lying to yourself! I could get over everything, everything, except this material thing, which you think is an integral part of me which has value that you can take. Are you sure this is the right moment to put this into practice?!” I added.

I was prepared to say to him that I was ready to reject him because he was miserable, I was disgusted with him and that I was ready to run away... But where could I run to, especially with the other thing that had happened...? To whom could I run? Was I going to run to my dear parents in this sorry state? Would this be the reward for everything they had done for me?

Another thought that ran through my mind was my unborn child. What should I do about that? Should I condemn that child, my child, which I'd bring into the world, to a joyless life...?

“You have no right,” I said very calmly. “My parents will never give me less than what they can. That’s what they have always done. But I think that that, that side, shouldn’t be at all important in our relationship.

“I’m not saying that it is that important,” he said, as always, with a ready answer, “but, my dear, you know that you cant live without it, without the material goods, they are an integral and necessary part of life.”

I went home hastily, consciously ending this bitter conversation...

Having sensed what was happening to me in those few days, my mother and father spoke to me several times, trying once again to make me aware of my delusion regarding the choice of my companion.

How could I now tell my mother and father the real reason why I had to maintain my relationship with him and, unfortunately, for the rest of my life?

However, the day would come when I would have to tell them everything, all the things about which I’d kept silent all this time; about the difficult days that had passed.

One day he and I started a nice conversation about our future plans in the garden of my parents’ house, which led to mention of specific things.

“Since all this will take place soon,” he said in a soft voice, “it’s high time to ask the question in front of our parents, that is, we will have to tell them our plans. My position and that of my mother is well known and clear. She doesn’t mind.”

“My parents too won’t mind,” I said decisively, “if I tell them it was my decision...”

However, I didn’t say it convincingly.

“It’s not about that,” he said a bit sharply, “they will have to agree.”

He then said, “I figure they will have to agree given the situation... They will have to accept my proposal on account of that other situation, with which they will be faced, about which they will have no choice.”

All this time I kept quiet.

“And another thing, it’s high time I knew what I was up against. Will your father be a little more generous?” he asked with a sarcastic tone of voice, with an evil tone of voice.

This was too much even for me. I realized he had gone too far. I suddenly erupted and everything that had been accumulating for more than a year was about to spill out... Without knowing where my strength and willpower had come from, I slowly, clearly and determinedly told him everything I thought of him, of his character, his understanding, his attitude towards me and our relationship.

I felt extraordinarily relieved. I was finally able to shed the entire hideous burden that I’d been carrying with me for those long months. I was finally ready to bear the consequences of this final breakup.

After I went inside my house and took off my shoes, suddenly before I had a chance to lock the door, I heard the outer door swing open violently and saw him stomp in all flabbergasted, furious and wide-eyed. He walked right past me into the house like his storming in had nothing to do with me. His rage and the cynical expression on his face shocked my mother and father.

After a few moments of silence, he assumed an imposing posture and threw back his head. While looking at my father, I heard him say:

“I came to tell you that until now you didn’t approve of your daughter’s relationship with me or the idea of us getting married. But now I (underlining the word “I”) don’t care for that. She is pregnant, I won’t deny it, it is my child.”

I looked at him with startled eyes. I couldn't believe that he'd actually said all that to my parents. I couldn't believe that he'd told them in such a terrible, terrible and evil way!

The words "He doesn't want me, now he doesn't want me and is leaving me in this state" kept ringing loudly in my ears... I heard them loud and clear how he said them and the way he said them.

And yes, I was looking... I was looking at that big ashtray on the table and, with a convulsive move of my hand, I reached for it. My father saw me and instinctively knew what I was going to do, so he grabbed it, tightly clamping his hand over it.

Then, with his fantastic coldness, he calmly said:

"Thank you very much for the information. The only thing I want to tell you is that I won't be giving you my daughter, to live with you, not even if she gives birth to five children!"

"How wonderful, father, you, only you could have said this so elegantly in this fateful hour! Father, how I would love to hug and kiss you. Only you could..." I said when I was rudely interrupted by him.

"Good. So be it!" he said in his usual cynical tone of voice and left our house, just as furiously as he'd come in.

He only awkwardly turned twice to see if my father was still firmly holding on to the ashtray.

After the door slammed shut we were all relieved. It was like we had cleared up a tangled matter and now we were at peace. As for me, the only thing I needed do now was go to my room and avoid my father and mother's gaze.

Almost two weeks later I went to the local university and canceled my courses. My parents had convinced me to go to the state capital to continue my studies. This way I would be far away from here... far away from my bitter memories...

I stood in the line for quite a long time. There were many students waiting in front of me. The queue was long because students were registering for their exams.

Suddenly I sensed but didn't see him. He was standing close behind me. I tried to distract myself so that I could avoid him.

I told the clerk loudly, even with some defiance, that I was canceling my courses and moving to another school... I said where I was moving and to which faculty, I even mentioned which city... As I headed towards the counter to pick up my documents, I suddenly heard someone pass out and collapse next to me. It was him.

Students ran from all sides.

A thousand contradicting thoughts went through my mind, all forcing me to do something; remain proud and indifferent because of what he'd done to me, or do something else? What should I do...?

Where would I find the justification to push that mass of students away and lightly slap him on his terribly pale face while calling him by his name and waiting fearfully for him to regain consciousness...?

The eyes, his eyes – when they looked at me they seemed to be hiding regret... and even somewhere in their depth they hid something more, something beautiful.

Maybe it was just a figment of my imagination because I felt sorry for him passing out.

“I couldn't stand it,” he whispered while trying to stand up, “even more so when I found out that you were really leaving... I can't live without you... My mother has been crying constantly since this happened between us...”

I was so young, I still had romantic notions about life, about people, and was unable to separate the lies from the truth that were hidden deep somewhere inside a person.

Was this his last step in the fight, the fight he needed to win in his game...?

We walked slowly down the street. I was carrying my documents in my hands. He looked pathetic, lost and miserable which made me pity him.

“I don’t know why I treated you like that, I tortured you...” he said in a crying tone of voice. “It’s because I love you too much and I’m afraid of losing you.”

There was a paradox in his words which made them sound illogical, but at the very moment I had no desire and this wasn’t an opportune time to tell him what I thought and how I really felt.

For some reason I was always inclined to blur the truth and only attach importance to that which would keep the normal flow of movement, but this time I blurred everything except for the words “I love you”. I needed that so much now, it was necessary to heal my wounds, caused by what he’d done to me in the past.

“I have to go away,” I said in a quiet voice. “My father will accompany me. Everything has been arranged...”

Like he didn’t hear a thing I said, he continued:

“Perhaps the reason why I was so hostile to you was because your parents didn’t like me.”

“You are to blame for that; they were never unrealistic or unfair...” I wanted to say that to him but instead I said nothing. Instead I remembered how, again and again, he insulted and humiliated me and how much I’d cried because of that. I was even close to developing an inferiority complex because of his systematic humiliation and ridicule... And then... there was that terrible episode when he came over to my parent’s house for the last time...

“No, I have to go,” I said again in a loud harsh tone of voice, which startled and even intimidated me calling on that other weak, sentimental woman in me...

When I looked at him again he had an expression in his eyes that revealed that he was losing the game but wasn't ready to surrender.

"You have to go, I understand," he said. "I will somehow survive here... all alone, it doesn't matter what happens to me..."

Then he was silent for a moment. After that, with a sickly, crying and strangled sounding voice, he said:

"You... you look after the child... our child, take care of it, I really don't know what will happen to me..."

I felt like I could hardly hold back the tears in my eyes, then I felt them sliding down my face.

I was slowly being enveloped by darkness. Everything around me was getting snuffed out. I felt a great sadness come over me.

Walking almost mechanically we went inside a cafe, where we used to go often.

I sipped on a disgusting thick green liquor. He drank rakia, a lot more than usual. Maybe on purpose... Then he began to cry out loud... this was because of me... because of the child...

I was getting sick of it all, I felt terrible. I looked for a way out, to escape.

I didn't want to be the object of attention for the other patrons in the bar so I grabbed his arm and pulled him outside.

We were on the street again. In the darkness which magically and insidiously concealed things.

I hated him and couldn't stand him, even more so after he'd drunk all that rakia. I dragged him towards his house moving as quickly as possible. I was frantic and unable to endure the disgust I had for him because of the things he'd done to me. He'd persecuted and rejected

me and on top of that he'd gotten me pregnant. And now all this was somehow about him...

When we went inside his house his mother was sleeping.

I didn't go back home to my house. I hoped my parents would understand and forgive me. That was the only thing I could do under the circumstances...

Before going to register I dropped by my parents. I was alone. I didn't go there to invite them to participate... This was now something they couldn't participate in... This was exclusively my problem.

My father had gone to work, which made things easier for me to deal only with one person.

My mother gave me a hug and, with a sad face and tears in her eyes, escorted me to the exit door. All that, with tears in her eyes and with what I was carrying in my soul, resembled a joyful wedding... However, I hoped, although it was hardly certain, that this joint step of ours would calm him down and, above all, help him fix his internal problems. And one more hope, regarding the child, which might contribute to a greater rapprochement between us...

He was graduating soon. We were both satisfied. I believed it would be a big turning point in his life. He would engage in serious responsibilities. His profession was filled with great responsibility.

A son was born to us. It was a kind of out of this world formal obligation.

We were sitting alone listening to the radio. Soft music was playing.

Our son was sleeping. Everything seemed calm and peaceful.

His mother wasn't there, like many times over the past two months, she had gone to see an older man, whom she wanted to marry. She had divorced her husband, his father, several years ago.

The apartment we lived in, together with his mother, was small but had two rooms. If she chose to marry the old man there was a chance that we would be left without an apartment. If she brought that man to live with her, like she had mentioned before, we would be forced to move into my aunt's apartment, which she was currently renting. Her tenants, however, were building their own apartment and were going to vacate hers. My aunt loved me very much and, since she had been lonely for many years after my uncle died, she would be really happy to have me by her side.

Perhaps my mother and father would agree to have us move in with them but I knew that it would be beyond their means to seek and find a common language with my husband. Not to mention him.

I moved away when I heard the so familiar coldness in his voice, which undeniably reflected the content of what he was saying:

“Everyone is wondering why I married you. Maybe I really should have thought about it some more... And that I could have done...”

The chill that emanated from his words pierced me all over. He was still the same person, the same one... not a bit had changed in him...

I kept my mouth shut. I couldn't prevent what he'd already said and I didn't want to give him a reason to say something more, more bitter, deeper, more calculated...

Despite my silence he continued:

“As you can see education wise you finished nothing and you never will, you will be the most ordinary housewife, a maid. I could have married a woman with an intellect equal to mine...”

Why did I keep silent? ...Perhaps because there was really no point in entering into a dispute with someone who spoke such cheap, calculated words and evil thoughts.

“I was hoping that by marrying you I would achieve some kind of material well-being. Not even that... your father is a big miser, he didn't give you much, not even as much as a poor parent would have

given... I told you that before... my dear... But who can prove anything to you. You always thought you were the smartest..."

I sat in the room in near darkness, lit only by a night lamp, and quietly cried. I didn't want him to know that I was crying. I didn't say a word because I knew if I did it would provoke more and even fiercer insults from him and I didn't want that. And now that he was a doctor he believed that he was a "great man".

Unfortunately my silence provoked him even more than if I'd said something. He was infuriated...

"So now you're silent. That's the only thing left for you to do. What could you possibly say about things that are indisputable truths? And still... you enrolled in college and took courses; with good intentions of course." He said and laughed out loud with his ironic laugh.

I wanted to yell at him and tell him that it was his fault that I didn't make much progress in college. Me, who never had problems learning, mastered even the most difficult subjects. I didn't study because of all that torture he 'd been inflicting on me for more than two years. Our child too had tied me to the house. I also had to cater to his mother after we moved in with her. She insisted, believing I was obligated, that I do everything for her. I wanted to say all these things to him but instead I kept silent. This was what he wanted and I was a perfect fit for him. As time passed I began to fear him.

I even feared his furious footsteps on the stairs, when they clattered on the concrete, and his loud banging of the doors. Every time he came into the house he immediately looked for a reason to fight. And if he found nothing else, he would drag his finger along the furniture, hoping to find traces of dust on it, so that he could then shove it under my nose, or a book that was out of place so that he could throw it out the window.

To whom should I have gone to complain, to cry? My son was too small to protect me... Should I have gone to my sad mother...? To make her suffer even more like I was suffering in those bitter days of my life...? Or... should I have gone to my father, who would have

been more than happy to see his little girl find enough strength and determination to break with all those fake, petty-bourgeois things that blinded her to him, that made her stay in this terrible situation which she chose for herself... Father, I know that only in this way would I be worthy of you. I know your little daughter let you down. Perhaps, father, you would forgive me when you realize that I am making these sacrifices for my child, like you always did for me, even more, and most of all on that terrible day when you came to my rescue, when... you remember, when he came to see you, you remember during that cynical visit of his when you victoriously uttered those wonderful strong words, standing up to him... Yes, father, when you showed me that you were more than a father, that you were my father... my great father!

Swimming in this murky vortex was difficult for me but I hung on, I didn't relax, not even for a moment, because I knew very well that if I did I would drown.

We moved and lived at my aunt's place. His mother got married, sold the apartment and went to live with her new husband in a smaller town, renting a separate small ground floor house with a large garden. We maintained relations with her, although rare. Sometimes she came to visit us at our place, just to see the children, or to take them and look after them for a few days.

Our relationship had not changed in any way. He didn't mind insulting me even in front of my aunt, making fun of me, and even more so when she went to sleep.

If he didn't find a specific reason, he would go back far into the past, dig something out and torment me with it... He did this most often when he wasn't on duty at the hospital, usually at night, when the children were asleep.

One night he did everything possible. It was like he intended to reach a peak in our already quite long, turbulent relationship.

My upbringing, the upbringing my parents had given me, was again on the agenda. In his interpretation, it was a bourgeois and spineless

upbringing mostly because they allegedly forced me to live in some kind of fictional world, and didn't teach me what real life was like.

Was he talking about my "real life or his...?" What was his real life like? He learned what life was like from his parents before they divorced. Unfortunately they did divorce. So, what was his real life like after that? I remembered what "real life" was for my school friends a long time ago...

The real beautiful life, the one that was filled with beautiful colour tones and with joy, love, tenderness and humanity, was actually unknown to him. It was inaccessible to him, but I recognized it wasn't entirely his fault. Unfortunately this kind of life was completely unknown to him. They took that wonderful world away from him during his childhood and made it impossible for him to know any better... They punished him terribly, perhaps even unaware that they were doing so...!

Then, that same evening, he started talking about my past. He used big words with offensive meanings. He wanted to distort things, to dirty things... He was talking about my past... a girl's past... It was funny that he was unaware that he was taking a path strewn with crystals... stars... What was impure in him were the tears that rolled down his cheeks for a girl who he allegedly loved?

And again he wanted to go further and further, to defile me again so he again mentioned "that thing" like it wasn't the first time, and not with him... and that it had happened before him... before him...

He shouldn't have touched that... it was insulting... Why was he going there, at least that was where he belonged? Even more so because he came later and clouded it all, he tainted it. Everything... everything would be much better if there weren't people like him...

I heard myself say:

"You should be ashamed of yourself for meddling in such things. You know very well how things were!"

“I don’t know, I will never know... And actually... I don’t care,” he laughed ironically.

Then I spoke a few sharp words in revolt, defending that purity and chastity of the girl before his touch... defending the blue and red poppies.

Losing control over himself he continued to insult me with his insolent words. He increasingly provoked me to tell him some truth that he wanted to hear. He wanted me to tell him how unworthy I was and that I’d done nothing in my life. But instead I told him that he’d robbed me of my happiness... he had lied to me... and that there was no love in my life... No tenderness... and then I yelled out loud “Where are you love...?”

I shouted it all with fanatical determination, demanding that he be what he had never been, and what he could not be... he could not be...

In a terrible fury he started coming towards me to strike me... but he immediately moved away and, opening the outer door, quickly went out.

In a sort of calmness of body and spirit, it became undeniably clear to me that these were really large spaces that separated us, tearing apart our worlds, mine and his, like two terribly different essences...

I wanted to leave and go to my parents immediately... I was sure they would take me in. But at this time of night...?! No... I wouldn’t go...! I wanted to be that your daughter of theirs again and be happy. But now? All I did now was inflict more pain on them.

I would look for and perhaps find a better way for me and my children to live. Going to my parents like this would be too much for them to handle...

I heard his footsteps. I knew he would be back soon. He was coming. I had tried leaving before and as I knew from experience, I was incapable of leaving him or going anywhere.

I decided to go and see if my son and daughter were sleeping. They were sleeping peacefully so I decided to lie down next to them.

The only thing that could have helped keep us together was my complete withdrawal into myself, into my world, and his more and more frequent escapes to the hospital, in general, and for him to stay out of our house... Maybe that was the only possibility for us to stay together...

...God, it was dawn! I was stiff from sitting in my armchair. This armchair was one of my white knights, upon which I used to sit and read or rummage through my books like an old man... He hadn't come back home. Maybe he was on duty at the hospital. He didn't even find it necessary to tell me that he was going to spend the night away from home. When I got up, I noticed that my aunt was sleeping in her armchair... as was her habit when he didn't come home.

* * *

Why was I startled by the sight of those green eyes, on the balcony of the new building nearby, across the street, which was being populated with tenants in those few days? I would have turned away if in them, in those eyes, there wasn't something long forgotten, innocent... pure blue.

Then I noticed that I was blushing, although I knew that no one but me and him could notice this meeting of our eyes. I tried not to look at him... I was even mad at myself for not closing my eyes... But, as it turned out, his eyes didn't want to leave mine and mine didn't want to leave his.

However, I did find the strength to look away and get inside the house but soon realized that this was only temporary. I knew I would be back outside sooner than I thought. I was anxious to see him again. My superficial reason for going outside would be to do some job like sweep the balcony or water the flowers, etc.

I went outside and began to look for him... for those bright eyes.

Much later, on the second or perhaps on the third day, I noticed that he was a large, tall man with black hair and with perfectly matched locks that fell down to one side, almost down to his wide, black eyebrows.

I found out that I couldn't resist looking at him. He was right there in arm's reach but I had no idea who he was. He was close... I couldn't resist the bluish glow in his eyes, those twinkling and unattainable caressing eyes... eyes that are sought and found to fall in love... that would surely fall in love.

I couldn't control myself. Everything in me was buzzing... At first I discovered and was surprised by how much I'd neglected my whole appearance, how my hair looked and how I was dressed.

I walked briskly around the house. Nothing was difficult for me anymore. I was excited by the knowledge that at any moment, just when I raised my hand and stepped over to the balcony, or just to the window, I would see him... Him... he would see me. Immediately, even before I showed myself, he would know that I was there... And at the same moment his face would break into a beautiful quiet smile, just for me... Me. There would be a magical gleam in his eyes... because of me.

I didn't know what expression I had on my face when I looked at him but I felt a perfect trembling which, I was convinced, had never been more pleasant.

The feeling, the knowledge that someone had noticed me, separated me from others, that it made him happy to see me, and that he was able to stay on the balcony for hours and hours, just to see me... just for a moment, gave me wings... It was returning me to life.

I had a feeling that everything was returning to me again, my self worth, my qualities... of course. He was indirectly reflecting them to me through him.

Because he had singled me out, he appropriated me as some kind of special value. The following days he kept up the usual expression on his face, so as not to betray his feelings for me. It seemed to me that

my joy, my happiness too, despite all my efforts to hide them, burst forth from every part of my being. It was a salutary circumstance that my husband was absent from the house almost around the clock, and even the little time he stayed home he didn't devote to me.

I found myself becoming passive to everything my husband said; insulted me... ridiculed me, belittled me.

Could that be important now, when warmth slowly but surely penetrated into my life, which really came to me from far away, but so close, so mine?

The best times were our "dates" during the nights when my husband was on duty at the hospital.

When the moon traveled behind the poplars, according to its old habits, passing first by one then by another, with a trembling glow as it passed by the branches.

He, the man I didn't know, would turn off the lights in his apartment and stand on the balcony in the moonlight, tall, beautiful, like he was sculpted in a dream... unattainable... With his face turned towards me, with a wondrous gleam in his eyes, I felt he belonged to me. I sensed it in his silence, in his stillness due to my presence. It was like he was afraid to disturb something in such a fantastic unreal dream world.

That night, that glow... that moon between the tall dark poplars... there was only he and I, in that silent silence and the endless eloquent beauty.

This went on for hours and hours... until it reached exhaustion...

Then I would go inside the house, with a definite decision not to go out again, to lie down, to sleep... But then I would again go out... to see if he was still there. And when he really was, with that expression on his face, which only I and he understood, I would want to tell him, I would want to ask him to go to sleep.

Then, in my room, for a long time in the darkness, I would imagine the expression on his face, remember his eyes, lips... his stature, appearance... so close to me.

This went on for quite a long time.

Sometimes I would be startled when my husband randomly and inquisitively looked at me. When he did that I would immediately make myself look busy doing something to avoid him. As soon as he left the house, I would feel free like a bird and would fly quickly to look for his gaze, which in some sense became a necessary thing for me, an integral part of my life. In those moments I would feel like I was alive again.

Everyone was sleeping again. Again, my husband was on duty all night at the hospital. My aunt was asleep long ago. The night was so quiet that indeed everyone was content, both the moon and the stars... and the crickets and the flowers in the field...

I felt something special in our eyes meeting that evening... Some invisible force pulled us inexorably towards each other. The muscles of my face trembled... all of me trembled... I knew, and him, and all of him.

I stopped thinking about the things that worried me; that someone might notice us looking at each other, perhaps one of our neighbours. I felt like the earth and this beautiful night existed only for the two of us, because of the beauty that came from heart to heart... along with some invisible threads, incomprehensible even to us.

Suddenly he decisively and quickly went back into his apartment. Immediately I knew that he would be heading down the stairs, down the street towards my house, towards me...

I was convinced that that was exactly what he was going to do. I couldn't wait. I even felt my hands extending to him in anticipation, as well as my lips... and all of me.

I was trembling terribly... uncontrollably... what was happening felt unreal like it was taking place in a fictional world, it was inevitable... fate...

I had unlocked the door and heard his quick steps, like the beats of my heart... I didn't even remember who opened the door, me or him. I remembered every detail after that... the beauty of his determined strong and loving arms. They were extended towards me and ready for a long, tender and warm hug. Then I began to doubt if this was even possible or real.

I wasn't standing on my own two feet. He'd carried me away... I was carried away by the warmth and wonderful thrill of his kiss. I had forgotten that the touch of lips, loving lips, could be so beautiful.

We looked like a couple of love-crazed apparitions, lost in a tender, barely real embrace.

I don't know how he'd found the strength to tell me.

"I couldn't wait any longer..." he whispered, and I, not listening to the meaning of his words, enjoyed the tone, the color of his voice, sounding like someone whom I'd known so long ago, who was very dear to me. What would this bring into my life next?

What was it that made me trust this man so quickly, to feel him being so close to me? Well, I almost didn't know it! But it was his eyes... the expression in them... his facial expression. All these things interested me and mine interested him. Because of some unprecedented intuition, subconscious for me and probably for him too, some invisible flow of kinship from one to the other... the sameness attracted me to him and him to me.

This unattainably pure first touch didn't push me away but fatally possessed me, forever.

He told me his first and last name and what he did for a living and where to find him, and then he left... For an instant I had the feeling that he would disappear.

And then I cried and laughed with joy, with foolishness, with happiness, with beauty.

It was like I was coming back to life again. And I don't think it was because of the possibility that I was going to date him. But because I knew he existed, that he loved me, that I loved him and that was enough to help me overcome everything else.

I didn't hear his steps when he left. I didn't see him passing in front of my house. I lay in the dark with his embrace on my body, the warmth of the kiss on our lips. He existed, he was real, he wasn't a dream!

I was amazed that I didn't feel guilty, not even for a single moment. Like it was something that was expected to happen and that it was completely natural, and that it couldn't be any different; I couldn't act any differently.

That night I wanted to wake up my aunt, or find someone to whom I could tell how it was... how much... everything. I wanted to talk out loud to someone, even to myself, or at least to the darkness... which was the only witness to this spark in our eyes.

During our next meeting he told me that he was an engineer working on a hydroelectric plant project. With what enthusiasm, love, he spoke to me about his work! Every word of his radiated something human, something warm, something rich, which made you want to be better than you've ever been. There was something Slavic, broad and joyful in him. All that, and much more, we discovered in each other every time we met. It made my life completely different, something very different from what it had been before, full, meaningful.

Then began our struggle with the real cold world and its public morality and the only way to avoid its sharp teeth was to hide.

That didn't weigh too much on me. I might have been in a constantly tense state but I wasn't afraid of anything.

Our bond encompassed us more and more. We were in love. We began to realize that our worlds, our lives were coming together and growing. That is, it wasn't a merger but a perfect identity.

One time when we met he asked me about my studies and scolded me for not pursuing them, for having stopped taking exams, for having given up on finishing college. After that conversation I was worried and at the same time was happy - he believed in me, in my abilities, possibilities! And even more than that – he soon asked me to take courses and set deadlines for me to finish my assignments! Would I be able to do it now, after so many years...?

My husband was very surprised when he noticed that I was studying almost every day and, even more, that I was taking college classes. Would I be nervous when I took my first exam? Would I pass, for his sake, for the sake of my beloved, for my own sake, and also to prove to my husband, who for so many years persistently and cynically made fun of me, that I was capable?

My first success set me free, it pulled me forward and I no longer felt anxious in connection with my learning. My husband had no idea that I was doing this, not for me, not for him but for the man I loved. I was now able to completely ignore my husband and not feel his existence in my life, even though he was there right next to me, like some kind of mechanical inevitable presence, determined by law.

While talking to my beloved about theater, opera and the arts, I discovered, with bitterness, that I was completely out of touch with that world, which once was my way of life. Also, I hadn't read any of the new books because I was so immersed in that narrow, too narrow world, that he, my husband, had built for me.

My loved one often spoke about the plays he'd seen, about the operas he'd heard both here in our city and in other larger cities where he went on business. He also told me about the various wonderful films he'd seen and the feelings they unleashed in him, both joyful and sad, which I had once loved so much. And each time we met I admired him even more, with my eyes and heart, and he

began to take the shape of the image of the ideal man I had created in my soul.

He wasn't just telling me his stories and expecting me to passively listen to them like an immature person. He always pulled me into the conversation and asked me for my opinion. He sought confirmation and verification of his understanding of things from me. He was often delighted with my reasoning... he would excitedly draw me near him, the real me, and I knew that we were together as one...

I was also proud of him, especially when he spoke about the people at work, about himself, about his place in that busy world of his. I dreamed, no, I longed for such a place, working on my own, outside these four walls, and for which I'd already fought by taking exams at the college.

I felt like I had been raised from the dead.

However, with each passing day it became clearer to me that I had really made a fatal mistake in my choice to marry and condemn myself to an imitation of life, and not to real living. Maybe because of that, my attraction to this man I love and my connection to him was the result of my bitter realization that it wouldn't be easy for me to change things; because of that fact I would only occasionally rise above the torrent, to which I had surrendered myself, but I would never completely free myself from it.

The more serious and deeper our love became, the more we feared for it, we protected it from even the smallest dangers.

Seeing each other from a distance was still necessary for us because we didn't have favourable conditions for close contact. Although I knew that he often stayed away from me out of caution it was still difficult for me if I didn't see him for a long time. I would often wonder where he was, and why he was gone! I was afraid even of the slightest possibility that he'd met, found another girl, younger and unattached, without any annoying problems like mine, and had fallen in love with her... Well, he wasn't married after all... He had the right to do that...

He had mentioned to me once that he'd had some kind of relationship from before, with a student, but that it was something that wasn't based on feelings... love... Because I had never seen that girl, nor did he go anywhere after he came back from work, I had almost forgotten what he'd told me. Now he belonged to me both day and night ... With his whole being. He was always there for me and me for him.

Our greatest mastery was our ability to avoid the curious looks of our neighbours, to deceive them. But many times we didn't exercise maximum caution.

The hardest times for both of us were when my husband was at home. Sometimes, but not too often, I would sneak up to the balcony or to the window to look for him, risking being found out by my husband. My God, I would make up any excuse to go to the balcony or I would simply open the window to let fresh air into the room and stand there so he could see me and I could get a quick glance of him. My husband always had a sarcastic remark looking at me hanging by the window in my pajamas where our neighbours could see me. But I expected that from him. I didn't allow his frequent mockery to affect me.

My husband and I rarely went out together. Maybe he was doing it on purpose to tell me that he didn't think I was not good enough for him, or maybe because he was too busy at work. I don't even know if he had any company, except for his godfathers and a doctor with whom he'd studied together.

One evening, however, looking like he was honouring me, he took me to our godfather's son's party.

I dressed nicely and so much wanted my lover to see me when I was leaving the house. I believed that he'd already seen me through our open living room window and based on how fast I was rushing, he expected me to be outside soon.

We went out. I let my husband take a step in front of me so I could raise my head and look up at him. He stood discreetly at the window. He looked sad. I had never seen him so sad before.

I didn't have the courage to turn around but I was aware that he was looking at my half-turned face and knew that it was turned towards him and him alone.

It was a pleasant birthday party. A lot of people had come to our godparents' place and I got a chance to talk with many of them. And because I didn't want people to pry into my life I tried to be well groomed and to give the impression that I was a completely satisfied woman.

We were returning home. He was silent. I always considered his silence a consequence of something he'd noticed in me, or invented to have noticed.

I looked at his balcony from afar hoping to see him even though I knew it was too late in the night and he would have gone to sleep long ago. He was probably tired of waiting for the many hours I was away. But I was sure he waited a long time.

Then I noticed his silhouette on the balcony in semi-darkness but I thought I was really seeing things, precisely because many times I had seen him waiting for me, longing for me, when he wasn't there.

But this time he really was there and I made sure to let him know that I'd seen him. I raised my face up to the light and made a facial expression and a small movement, the kind that he would immediately recognize. I saw him react... and I knew that he was happy because of that. Infinitely happy, as if we were on a date... in love... well, it was our biggest date.

...How could I not go out on the balcony, or peek out of the window, after my husband and I returned, entered the house and turned on the light, when I knew that he'd been waiting for me for so long, so much just to see me pass by the house, though together with my husband.

I wanted to go out on the balcony, even though it was so late in the night and my husband might make some sharp remark, or something more, suspect me of being up to something.

However, after getting dressed in a hurry, I took my husband's suit and a brush and quickly went out onto the balcony to brush it so that I could immediately put it away.

"Was that necessary now?" I heard his impatient voice coming from our room.

I didn't care what he said because I wanted to see my man, the one I loved, he was the only one who mattered to me. I wanted to let him know... Well, I couldn't possibly fall asleep without telling him that I was there... at his place... with him...

After hearing my husband's remark, like I'd heard it in a dream, I thoughtfully replied:

"Okay, if you don't mind, I'll do it tomorrow, I thought I'd put it away now." I went in and closed the door. My husband was pleased.

Days and nights followed, more beautiful and more painful.

I will never forget that one terribly tense and risky night. It was similar to every other night, yet maybe not quite...

That night I ran over everything that was considered to be the established order of life... Everything that was "moral", and even determined by the right written in the laws.

I was alone in the house. Their grandmother had taken the children to her place. My aunt was long asleep. And my husband called and told us that he would stay in the hospital until the morning.

With a few words, I told my beloved about all that when I briefly met him on his way home from work.

I watched the lights squint away across the city for a long time.

I stood hidden behind our bedroom window curtain, and he on the other side, lonely and attracted to me more than ever.

He was calling me with his whole being, with everything that only we two understood... everything was pulling me to him... I was floating in that space between him and me, so close, yet so far...

I was in tears because I wanted to run to him but felt I shouldn't. I had to restrain myself. Doing that would be terribly dangerous... And what if something changed and my husband came home?

It was getting close to midnight. My brain was boiling...

I suddenly realized... My common sense was being defeated... My emotions were stronger and winning. I loved him... him... was there a greater imperative in life, a stronger truth – I loved him... I couldn't think of anything but that.

I waited for the lights in all the neighbouring windows to go out. I had to go there... I could feel him calling me... love was calling me...

I walked very quietly, first down our stairs to the street and then like a ballerina tiptoeing and disembodied, barely touching the ground, truly floating like a ghost, I quickly ran across the space that connected my building to his.

My beloved carried me into his house with his strong but gentle arms. I could feel the thousand tones of different vibrations in his touch. These were tremors known only to love. Every part of my body existed only for his trembling hands and quivering lips. He could express his love only with them and with his infinitely deep, tender and warm eyes... My soul couldn't ask for a greater means than his eyes to express his feelings.

His face overflowed with infinite gentleness, his eyes turned bluish... completely blue and his lips were filled with infinite desire...

There were no real touches... they were my love breathing on me, through his lips in my hair, on my face, eyes, lips...

Then he asked me to put my hand under his head and hold him like a child, a big child and stroke his hair to put him to sleep... and slowly

go away, so that he didn't hear, didn't see me leaving. This way I left him with the impression that I was always there with him... and that I was his...

When I left to go home it was already deep into the night but I wasn't in a hurry. I felt dull and indifferent. I wasn't worried at all about what might happen if my husband had come home

There are those moments in life which are so infinitely perfect and so full of meaning that you want to stay in them, to continue to experience them, without any care as to what would happen next, it didn't matter at all what the consequences were, you just didn't want them to disappear.

I opened the door quietly so as not to wake my aunt. I saw that he, my husband wasn't there. Maybe it would have been better if he had been there. Then I would have told him once and for all that I couldn't live like this anymore... living a fake life... and that I'd had enough of his imposition and bullying. I would have told him the truth that I was in love with another man, which at this moment I really couldn't hide. I would have said for once, let's look at things realistically, without this established, long-standing hypocrisy.

Maybe my husband was gone for good. It might be better for the sake of the children... I would never disturb their carefree childhood, perhaps mostly because of my own beautiful childhood, which I carried in my soul.

I slept in a kind of stupor that night, half asleep.

My aunt had planned to rent out the one room, which had a separate entrance, because it really wasn't used. We placed an advertisement in the newspaper.

The idea of my boyfriend coming to live in our apartment, in my aunt's apartment, scared me. He was a tenant where he lived.

How could I resist, but also how could I agree? Such a decision entailed great responsibility for both him and me. And how could I

miss the only opportunity to be by him, side by side every day... to rejoice and suffer endlessly.

One day, holding a newspaper clipping in his hand, he rang our doorbell.

I went out to open it. My husband was sitting in the hall reading a newspaper.

“Please forgive me,” he said, “I’m looking for the lady of the house...” and named her by first and last name. It was my aunt. He then said, “I’m here in connection with the advertisement for an apartment.”

“Come in,” I said, fearing even the slightest tremor in my voice, and led him into my aunt’s room.

I closed the door and, struggling to remain perfectly calm, entered the children’s room. I found them dragging the kitten on the floor, one by the ear, the other by the leg. I scolded them both.

They both looked at me with a serious look and immediately let the kitten go. Then I listened intently to hear when he was leaving.

My heart was pounding when I heard my aunt introduce him to my husband in the hall and said:

“This gentleman here will be moving in with us, in the apartment. I’m renting him the empty room.”

My husband dryly told him our last name and gave him a conventional “welcome”. I also knew that my husband would never bother to talk to him and would expect him to address him as “Sir” when he spoke. My husband took special pleasure in keeping people at a distance, certainly to emphasize his special value.

That was the least of my worries at this point. So, an even more beautiful and even more difficult part of my life would begin when he moved in. I had the feeling that we were like bullfighters entering the arena aware of the possibility of being gored to death, yet not

retreating because of the perfect attraction we had in the game of life and death.

Life, why do you torment me so much...? Do you have to, so mercilessly, show me the clearly different nature of these two lives of mine, impossibly different, yet both necessary and both existing?

I knew that for me, and even more so for my beloved, that all this would be just one great daily torment. We'd taken serious steps and put our lives in jeopardy.

It would be a conventional good morning... or good morning my... dear, and everything in it, and tenderness and warmth – these were the two possibilities from today on for both of us depending on the situation.

A quick silent hug, full of risk and danger... or a long caress... short-lived and endless...

Music was playing in the hallway, the kind he wanted to hear and he was listening to it through the half-open door, knowing I had picked it out for him... I wore a dress that he liked... The flowers in his room... red flowers... were just for him...

* * *

...I saw *her* for the first time here, in this apartment, shortly after he moved in. The first time she came to visit him she was quite reserved and serious. She greeted everyone timidly. Then she quickly left.

I asked him, "What's with you and *her*? Is there room for her here, between you and me?"

"She doesn't have a place to stay," he replied. "Look at it like this... it's something completely insignificant."

And so I did...

And then I wondered why I'd said that to him? Why had I allowed myself to do that...?

...At the same time I questioned myself and wondered how bitter he must have felt sleeping next door to me and my husband sleeping together... And yet he loved me endlessly... Not once did he show resentment... Why did I object to that, almost innocent visit, which for him, as far as I could understand, was some kind of obligation from before.

But no... I couldn't bring myself together... he wasn't tied to her like I was tied to him... However, was engagement something that was established by right?...

The next time she came over to see him she stayed overnight and slept here. I slept in the same room as her, at my request, so that she wouldn't sleep in his room. I barely got over that. But even then, right after he left, I didn't love him any less. When he returned he was mine again, the very moment he held out his hands to me, after he took her to the train station. After that life returned to normal once again... How could I possibly continue to exist without his hands, lips, eyes...?

* * *

We were sitting in the hallway, me, him and my aunt. He treated us with chocolates because he'd won a prize in a library project competition. I knew all the details of the project, both when he'd started working on it and when he'd finished it. The two of us were eagerly waiting for the result of the competition. I was very happy that he'd won.

Someone rang the doorbell. My aunt and I were having a conversation. He went to open it.

She came in slowly and quietly. She greeted us kindly and immediately headed for his room. He obediently followed her, quite confused.

It was evening. My aunt stayed with me a bit longer and then went to her room. Where was I going to go?

My dear, maybe it wouldn't be so terrible if the door to your room wasn't left half open and I wasn't sitting in the hallway next to the radio playing sad music.

First, my dear, you know, I was only happy to watch your reflection on it, on the glass of the radio with the names of the capitals written on it. I watched you on it... I knew you were there somewhere, beside me, even though *she* was with you... I was happy to watch you! I witnessed the moment when *she* held out her hands to you gently, eager for you. First *she* caressed your hair, your face then *she* drew you to her. You stood motionless for a while, seeming like you were struggling with yourself. Then you kissed her, stroked her hair...

I watched you both in that, to me, horrible, caressing. I followed every little change in your facial expression, the movement of your hands, your lips...

Why didn't I get out of there right away, dear, why didn't I get up and leave... run away...

No... I couldn't, I couldn't, dear. I stayed, knowingly, deliberately running into the knives that were thrusting deep into my heart... and I went and went at them more and more, deeper and deeper, until I completely bled out...