Dragi Trajkov

The Baron's Pledge

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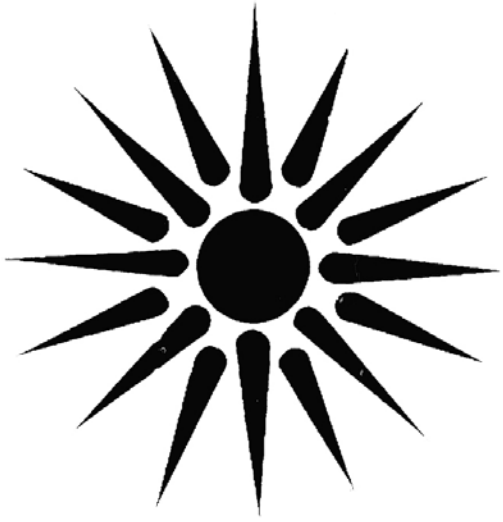

By

Dragi Trajkov

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

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Published by:

Risto Stefov Publications
rstefov@hotmail.com

Toronto, Canada

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e-book edition

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February 22, 2021

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Chapter I

Morning broke over the slope of a village near the southwestern corner of Macedonia. Beams of radiant light poured over the houses on the east side above those on the lower west side. Fog still covered the nearby valley. Whitened by the limestone it carries, the waters of Belitsa (from 1926 to 1941, with a series of laws, the Kingdom of Greece changed thousands of Macedonian toponyms in Aegean Macedonia; the river Belitsa became, Aliakmonas Potamos) bubble in the middle of the valley. Belitsa flows down the great mountain "Gramushcha" (Kostur dialect for Gramos) rushing to spill its water into the White Sea (Mediterranean) at the flat shores on the opposite side of Solun.

The first hours of the morning passed with some commotion disturbing the troubled peace. The surrounding hills, covered with trees, cracked rocks and bare ground carved by the creator when the world was formed, were all silent. The crooked valley seemed to be mute. The old men in the village were the first to be worried. All tense, they glanced around with their experienced eyes implanted in their wrinkled and tormented faces. It seemed like something was crawling in the south, along the ridge of "Skala". And in the west, with a mountain verse, something was waiting for a signal from "Veterniko". Everything was over in an instant when the dogs began to bark when a cry came from down the valley calling: "Run people, run! …The Arnauts (Albanians), the Arnauts are coming, the Arnauts!"

An eerie pale look instantly covered their faces as they found themselves on the anvil of life and death. A battle with time had begun. Even from a distance they could hear the thunder of fast moving horses approaching. The robbers were coming. A short time under that rush, Belitsa growled like a wounded lion while protecting its pack. It frothed under the roar of rage and evil that shouted, drew swords and fired rifles. Silhouettes of turbans, arms

and protruding weapons flowed by... No sooner had they invaded "Dolno Maalo" than they started to persecute and slaughter the Christians. The screams and cries were mixed with gunfire, whip thrashing and the groans of livestock. A tragic shadow of Hades (mythological god of the underworld) haunted the village.

Dimitri's house was at the fringe on the top side. He was tormented by a bad dream during the night so at dawn he got up and went out into the yard in hopes of working out his unrest. It was still dark and only his light hair betrayed him in the dim light. Like his father Giorgia who lived in the old house in "Dolno Maalo" with his brother Jovan, Dimitri also had a light complexion. His hair was more white than blond, so to distinguish him from others, everyone called him "Belio" (not Beliot. In the Kostur dialect of the Macedonian language the "t" is lost as it is in the Prespa and Prilep-Bitola dialects.) The census takers registered him with this alias as his surname. Dimitri didn't mind because his name connected him with the river Belitsa with whose waters he had been since he was a child. The river too got its name from its white water. But, at the moment, he was bothered by the bad dream he'd had which pointed to signs of malice.

"Prepare the children and some necessities; we're going to my uncle's at Blatsa!" yelled Dimitri at his wife the moment she was up. (Blatsa now called "Vlatsi" located near Oksia in Greece. It should not be confused with "Vlasti" (Vlashka Blatsa which is far to the south) like some Greek and Bulgarian sources call it).

"What's come over you?" asked Despina. But seeing how determined her husband was, by the sound of his voice, she began to prepare.

"I don't know, I'm disturbed... by a bad dream!"

"Bad dream?"

"Yes, bad dream in which St. George appeared to me without his armour, tunic, cloak, or spear. He stood there in front of our yard as a dragon slithered down the road... Whichever house the dragon passed, the house became covered in fog. The dragon brought

desolation and when it slithered behind the saint, I felt great fear in my heart and soul!"

"God forbid!" said Despina and set off to prepare for the road to Vicho Mountain. Eleven-year-old Maria, who in the past had a good time with her cousins in Blatsa, was happy to help her mother prepare. Ten-year-old Giorgi and eight-year-old Stefan were with their father and the cargo. Three-year-old Konstantin was in his crib.

Dimitri was not at peace. He trembled at the thought of this vivid dream. For a while he suppressed his fear but as the morning progressed the fear kept growing. His high forehead, under his hair combed backwards, was all wrinkled. His swollen eyelids and eyebrows over his light brown eyes simply kept drooping from insomnia. He constantly bit his lip nervously. Only his straight, long nose and wide jaw, under his short blond beard growing over them on his wrinkled face, seemed to be without consequences. Despina too became restless. Puttering in the backyard she too felt they should be going away for a day or so. Unlike Dimitri, Despina had a long face with a slightly dark complexion, a short nose, full lips and a small chin. Her dark green eyes shone under her eyebrows and her black hair could only be seen from the sides of her wrinkled kerchief.

"Giorgi, go to your grandfather's place and tell him we are going to Blatsa for three or four days and ask him to look after the livestock... And don't let him keep you there. Be sure to be back immediately and wait for us up the hill at the intersection of the road!" said Dimitri to his son who then left immediately. Sometime later Dimitri inspected the load; he hung the bag of oats, loaded the saddle-bags, tightened the ropes and placed his youngest son on top for a comfortable ride. Then, with a slight thud he closed the wooden gate behind him and proceeded to go up the path that led to the grove. He walked over the hill and reached the intersection at Omotsko just before the grove. Here one branch of the road led to the lower part of the village. This is where Giorgi was supposed to wait for him but he wasn't there. Dimitri became worried and had a bad feeling about this. And exactly at that moment he was confronted by screams from the village. Infested by Arnauts, the village was in the grips of

malice and cries. Stunned by this cruelty, Dimitri and Despina turned for a moment and looked down.

“Continue on this road, I’m going back to get Giorgi!” yelled Dimitri to his wife, choking from the pain he was feeling in his throat. She, in turn, froze in shock.

“Move woman!” shouted Dimitri pointing to the children. Startled, Despina whipped the livestock to get moving.

“Oh father, father did you keep him there?” Dimitri asked himself as he ran down the road in a frenzy thinking of his father and the fondness he had for his grandson who bore his name. He must have kept him there unaware of the attack. As he continued running it occurred to him that he might not find Giorgi. He wasn’t in sight anywhere. The robbers had already invaded “Dolno Malo” and were now in front of it. With irritated nostrils and eyes, gritting his teeth Dimitri held his cry from spilling out. Helpless and fearing being caught by the robbers, Dimitri hesitantly stopped. It was clear to him that he had to turn back and set off on a new battle with time to save his family. He hadn’t run like this since he was a child. He ran through the grove loudly crushing and scattering leaves, brushing twigs and hopping over stones that were in his way. Looking for his loved ones, he panted and ran at a slow pace with his face drenched in sweat. Dimitri listened and was certain his family was nearby. “There they are!” he said and with his heavy and burning legs that could barely hold him, tired from running, he went towards them. Despina heard a noise and turned back to look. Her eyes became filled with horror when she searched but couldn’t see Giorgi with him.

“Perhaps he escaped with the others, before the dogs arrived!” said Dimitri throwing a spark of hope. But that’s not what Despina heard. As a mother she heard something evil. She bitterly wept as she walked in silence, weaving and layering great pains of sorrow inside her, whose thick thorny fringes irritated her womb and tore at her soul. Dimitri sped up the livestock. In the rush a distant cry was heard. The livestock heard it too and perked up their ears.

“Did any of them survive?” Dimitri asked himself while trying to guess where the echo came from. Unfortunately his wish lasted only for a short time, as he was overpowered by the thought that the yelling could have come from the robbers. He stopped and listened and looked intensely. Dimitri knew every path through the mountains. He turned off and took the road to Omotsko, ending up on an impassable path thinking that the pursuers would take a safer path. By doing so he put his cargo at risk. His livestock carrying the load now had to travel over rocks and roots sticking out of the ground and then pass through a rocky slope over an abyss. After emerging from this difficult path they ended up on the slope of a long hill. After they climbed in front of the ridge they could see their village in the distance. A group of robbers was sitting in a small meadow on the side of the village. Many of the houses in the village were engulfed in flames. Very few villagers would have survived. With clarity and sharpness Dimitri was struck by his worst cold fears which he had suppressed until now. Heavy thoughts began to invade all the corners of his mind which irritated his nerves, veins and muscles.

“Giorgi is now a captive or a victim, only because of me; I damned him by sending him over there! ...My relatives were at the bottom of the village and they too are probably all gone; no one was safe!” stammered Dimitri with self-inflicted pain in his voice. A silent cry rose from his chest to his throat. His lips toughened and he couldn’t control the hardened muscles on his face. Despina started pulling the hair from her skull. Maria curled up next to her. Unaware of how long the agony had lasted, Dimitri instantly wiped his wet eyes with his hands. Dimitri’s look frightened Stefan who now was crying. Konstantin, on the other hand, kept stirring with his eyes, under which were his reddened cheeks tormented by his swaying between the loads. Dimitri didn’t want to be discovered by the dogs, so they left.

“What’s happening to us?” Dimitri asked himself as he thought of his world changing before his eyes. His thoughts turned to his closest family, neighbours and fellow villagers who now were no longer there. As he continued to walk, his mind suddenly turned to the dream he’d had during the night and the events that followed: “Here is the dream! Like St. George without armour, a tunic, cloak

and spear, my two Giorgis; my father and my son, also appeared defenseless... And the dragon which circled around from house to house leaving the houses covered in fog… well; there it was down there still furious." They walked for more than an hour and were tired. Their horses, drenched in sweat, trembled for a moment. They could again see the village from the crest before crossing the ridge.

"Those who fled didn't get far from those who were grabbed. The savages caught them… Linotopi is a wealthy village," concluded Dimitri straining his eyes to see more. (Linotopi was destroyed at the end of the 18th century, now the locality Agios Zaharias (St. Zaharia) or Zagari, repopulated in the beginning of the 20th century.)

Lawlessness and oppression had gripped the Ottoman Empire in the six-year war against the Russian Empire in which the Ottomans were badly beaten. The villages located north of Epirus near to where the Arnaut gangs lived were devastated during the second summer of the war. The Arnauts killed the wealthy and razed the city Moscopole to the ground. These furious hordes then struck deeper into the east making their way into Kostur Region in Macedonia. The last summer after the war ended the people naively thought that the evil was gone. They thought the sultan would have more free soldiers to restore order. Their hopes unfortunately were dashed as the oppressors not only didn't cease their activities but intensified them. Linotopi, which for centuries guarded the gates of Gramuscha, fell and only a few today find salvation there.

"The church too?" Dimitri said to himself while still looking down at the village. Thick black smoke rose from below and looked grayish from above. It was different from the huge cloud of smoke that rose from the burning houses. Linotopi was not the same any more, even the church which bore the voice of its glory wasn't immune. Not too long ago this was where the most skillful painting guilds in the country started out. Generations of artists painted church and monastery walls and arches. From the old people Dimitri had heard names like Mihail and his sons Konstantin and Nikola, then Nikola and his son Dimitri. He had heard of Teodor who created fancy ornamentations in icons, Jovan, Dimo, Marko, Martin, Kostadin... They painted in Macedonia for nearly two centuries from Kostur to Seres, Lerin and Prespa, then to Pelagonia and from there

along Vardar to Shtip and Bregalnitsa. They said they also painted temples of God in other distant places. They gave souls to the frescoes and spread support and admiration for the Christian faith. They even broke the whip of Istanbul. The church below was one of those churches. Now it's in the midst of flames and embers. Will this place die? A village without a church is like a man without a soul. This is its Judgment Day. This 1775th summer of the Lord has been one of the worst summers of all time, so far.

The sorrow, the despair, the insanity of the misfortune that befell them, broke the family; they simply stood there with irritated eyes looking at what was becoming of their village. And then Dimitri, Despina and the children just fell silent. Their tears dried up and their thoughts and disbelief took them over. The silence was so great that they could hear their own hearts beating, turning their blood through their veins without stopping. Aside from that, the only other sounds they heard was the hoarseness of their livestock plucking and chewing grass, and the occasional whistling of the mountain wind that whirled their hair. The nausea they felt grew with their awareness that the "here and now" was over. This would be the last picture of their homeland they'd see. And after they crossed the ridge they would move on to a different life. Quietly, with barely contained mental anguish, Dimitri began to say goodbye:

"I will now take you to Blatsa and tomorrow morning I will quickly return and go down there. I want to find my dead relatives and take their bodies to the cemetery, dig a place for them to rest and make their eternal bed for them, for their bones to rest. And then, as it should be, I will place a cross on top of the soil covering them; so that God can see them from heaven, gather their gentle souls into his kingdom and let them walk along the path of the most fragrant fruit, the meadow with gentle horses and rams; and in the forest full of nests of doves, swallows and various other birds... I know I shouldn't be taking them from the village alone, without a priest to read from the Gospel and to wave a lamp with burning incense. It doesn't seem right to be taking them alone, without a procession of people with hats off to follow them out of the village and with church bells not ringing... It doesn't seem right but there is no priest to find, no people and no church with a bell. There is no rooster left to crow or dog to bark to warn of a stranger approaching. Tomorrow

I will be there alone, the Lord spared me to be exasperated every day and every summer until my turn comes to face his judgment, when I again will be with my relatives so that we can again be like we were yesterday when we were sitting in harmony and with God... Well, that's all that remains now, to carry out that order and then do something else afterwards. Only God knows where we will go and what will happen to us."

Silently facing Linotopi they all said goodbye to those remaining behind. They dragged themselves across the ridge looking back as if wanting to see their village one last time. Down in the distance, where their eyes caught a glimpse, they saw a century of life come to an end. Houses were burning and crumbling into piles of charred logs and stones. Once built firm from solid stone and covered by a roof made of long-lasting wood, they now crumpled and rolled over the blackened earth down the slope. Look at them. They look like burned candles that have come to their end. Linotopi is melting in lines and flowing down towards the valley. It has reached its final hour, releasing its final smoke. It's releasing its suffering soul. For there, not a single house is left whole and no one can build it again; neither a threshing floor nor an earthen vessel remained unbroken. There are no livestock on the threshing floor or roaring with a distant echo. There is no space where life exists. There is only grey smoke that still rises into the grey sky. The final embers have not yet burned and the fire has not taken its last breath. After that weather and time will do their thing. They will chew this place like other deserted places that have been chewed. Armies, rulers and events will pass. They will come and go just like they came and went this time. The ice, rain, and sun will finish what is left of the once thick walls and smoky cupboards. Moss and weeds will appear and grass will grow everywhere. Trees will also rise and the grassy bareness will remain all around them. Everything will remain silent except for Belitsa's murmur. It will be so quiet it will seem like people never lived there... That's the way it will be until some distant and poignant times when generations from the outcasts will raise it again, settle it and revive it.

Chapter II

That day, Constantinople, Tsari Grad or Istanbul, as they call the Ottoman Empire's capital, was boiling with people. It seems like the entire world had flooded the streets and alleys, the taverns, the baths and the inns. Located between "Halich" ("Golden Horn". Peninsula and Bay, known as Haliç in Turkish) and the "Bosphorus", Istanbul pulsated with life at every corner. Apart from Turks, there are others: Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Jews, Latins and Christians from Rumeli (Turkish Rumeli – The Ottoman province on the Balkan Peninsula, included in which are: Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Walachia, Greece, Serbia, Moldavia, Macedonia and Montenegro; closest being: Thrace, Macedonia and Anatolia). There was a river of people there whose course rippled with horsemen, camel riders and coach drivers. There was a variety of gowns, scarves, shawls, fezzes, turbans and all kinds of other headgear available for sale.

A whirlpool of people and everything that was grounded, entrenched, or rooted; from house to tower, from lawn to tree and from spring to river was surrounded by Roman style hedges from antiquity. They had the city wrapped in a long, triangular contour which looked like a necklace, and those double towers erected every fifty metres or so were like ornaments on it. There were many roads including those from Edirne which led inside the city through the six city gates. The gates were surrounded by a strong fence made with wedges and heavy planks. There was a road coming out from the northernmost gate near Halich, known as "Egri Kapia", extending to the centre of the "Aivan Sarai" neighbourhood, and branching south into the "Balat" and "Fener" neighbourhoods. These three neighborhoods encompassed a third of the Halich coast, in which Christians and Jews were squeezed together living in wooden huts that hung over alleys, lanes and pathways. Pedestrians and horses walked along one of those streets in Balat which gently bent towards the ports. This is where Dimitri was leading the first horse and

Despina and Stefan the second. Next to the third horse was Father Daniel Zihnenski, Despina's brother. Father Daniel and Stefan were going to Varna. After that they planned to go to Bucharest by coach. A short walk later they arrived at the bazaar near the port.

"Bozaa, bujrum bozaa!" yelled one street vendor just like the others who were carrying well-balanced yokes over their shoulders, balanced with their bodies. Tied to each end of the yoke were ropes on which hung a barrel, a copper vessel shaped like a jug used for carrying and pouring liquids and a small metal drinking vessel in the shape of a cup. The vendors routinely served the public from the youngest, with moss under their noses, to the oldest with hunched shoulders. The vendors easily moved on the cobblestones wearing their sturdy but comfortable shoes. Other street vendors used planks with belts tied at each end, placed over the back of their necks. The planks hung in front of them and on them were placed simits, zelniks with toppings, and pastries whose aromas spread all around. There were piles of watermelons and pumpkins resting next to the shops as well as sacks full of grain. Hanging on hooks on the walls were bunches of herbs and other goods. Dimitri had gotten used to the chatter after living here for five summers. In addition to the celebratory fanfare that existed here there were also quarrels, robberies and sadness. As a result people tended to stay on their own streets. The Christians and the Jews didn't stray too far from their neighbourhoods which they occupied according to their countries of origin and the places from which they had come.

"Who cares about time!" said Father Daniel, looking at Stefan who was shopping with his father. "When I started out it was for six or seven months and now it's been twelve or thirteen summers."

"You left without telling anyone!" rebuked Despina.

"I was young and hot-headed; I had faith that we would preserve the autocephaly in Ohrid which had existed for centuries. Unfortunately Samuel Handzherli's cunning did us in. Using corruption and slander, he abolished the Serbian Church in Pech and then, in the summer of 1767, he abolished our Church in Ohrid from which Arch Bishop Arsenei, a Macedonian by birth, left. Two Slavonic churches were shut down by non-believers, and Orthodoxy in

Europe fell to its knees," said Father Daniel and pointed to the Patriarchate palace on the hill located in the east part of Balat. That "palace" became the Turkish "Balat" because the palace existed before the Turks took it over. Now it has become the Greek "Phanar" (the followers of this church policy are called "Phanariots").

"They imposed Greek service, duties which were worse than the Turkish ones and our priests were left unprotected," replied Despina.

"That's very true, sister. Since we couldn't reconcile our differences with the 'Phanariot' government, we took other measures to save our heads. By God's providence, I crossed over the Danube and arrived in Bucharest at the 'Koltea' Monastery (which existed from the early 18th century to the end of the 19th century when a large part of it was demolished. It was later completely destroyed by earthquakes and bombings). The 'Phanariots' thought it was a good idea that we left. Those who remained behind were always sent to desolate and remote places away from their homeland. It was okay with the Phanariots if we carried on with dignity in the Christ-loving countries where we were, as long as we stayed away from our patriotism. Their aim was to uproot us from the love for our own churches and countries."

And indeed, with humility, devotion and honesty, Father Daniel became the church warden of proceeds and then abbot of the "Koltea" Monastery. There he brought chandeliers, an ark, some holy books and various other necessities from Istanbul and now he came back to take his nephew Stefan so that he could study religion. Dimitri and Stefan arrived here and then they all left.

"You say it's better over there?" asked Despina.

"There is no such thing as "Sharia" (a right with which a Muslim is always right in a court of law) because Istanbul is afraid of the nearby Christian kingdoms led by women – the forty year-old Maria Theresa of Austria and the nearly twenty year-old Catherine the Great of the Russian kingdom. Both women possessed Walachia; the Russians until five summers ago."

“The Russians seem to be making more of an effort!” noted Dimitri.

“Yes, because they have Suvorov, an invincible, dry and cruel warrior, as well as someone named Potemkin who moved Russians into the conquered lands. It was with people like these that the Russian queen defeated the sultan. Ships are now sailing through there... The guardian of Walachia is also interfering in the legal affairs of the ‘Porte’ (the word ‘High Porte’ referring to the Ottoman government comes from the gate in front of the Vizier’s palace where the ‘Davin’ and his assistants sat to conduct state policy)... Istanbul’s first fear surfaced seventy years ago when Tsar Peter the Great made his way to Moldavia and Walachia and abolished their rule. They were afraid that the local people might elect their own government and with Christian help, might take Moldavia and Walachia They turned to their trusted in the ‘Fanar’ with properties and people who lived there. But confirmation for the chair cost bags full of gold,” said Father Daniel.

“We know,” said Dimitri, “here, they will do anything to celebrate the chair. The week we arrived in Istanbul, they were appointing the current prince of Walachia.”

“Did you see the procession?”

“I had to. The Patriarchate and the Porte are the authority - the former spiritual, the latter corporeal. The new ruler was sitting on the chair in the middle of the procession and everyone was walking around him; from janissaries to cooks. They moved along riding their horses covered with beautiful rugs. The saddles too were made of rugs tied with threads of gold and cords. Above the new ruler were two white sheets and below him were long sticks carried by servants. He wore a hat, with markings of the country he was going to rule, and expensive clothing. The procession lasted hours,” said Dimitri and walked out in the open where there was a nice view of the buildings on the hill; mosques with pointed minarets, Amams, sarais, ...harems.

“Sultans, viziers and pashas endeared their Allah with their highness when they were advanced! ...But for the glory of their own names they named buildings after themselves,” remarked Father Daniel.

But then they looked at the smoke-filled walls of a building without a roof. He continued: “There were mosques and churches that were destroyed by fire so that smaller buildings could be raised.”

“This was St. George,” said Dimitri pointing to the ruins of a church with a large courtyard located near where they walked. It was fenced by its fallen walls and the green growth that grew all around it. “This is how it has been for the last forty summers when it was under the Patriarchy.”

Dimitri and Despina knew this place well. They often came here to light candles and grieve. They walked along the path to the entrance and entered the crumbled building over the fallen walls. Inside they stood in front of the smoky fresco of “St. George” and prayed. They found the need to remember the two Giorgis, Despina’s first born son and her father in law. They prayed for them and for all their neighbours who had suffered five summers ago. And outside, in this once beautiful church garden, were sprouted trees and roots and decaying stumps. Among the stumps and bushes rose and spread a web of wild blackberry vines. The cinder on the beams, reminiscent of the ruined church in their own village, the overgrowth and noise from Halich, brought Dimitri and Despina back to their mountainous hometown near the river Belitsa. They plucked from the distaff of their memories, threaded threads and slowly wrapped them on the spindles of their subconscious; for this, they were told, was the healer of consciousness.

“Of course fire turns to ashes in so much water!” said Father Daniel breaking the silence on the shore, greeted by sea air. “It’s nice here where vapours from the sea mix with the breeze. I was suffocating from the smell of goods and spices in the bazaar.”

They were truly calming, the sea and the air... Ships with magnificent sails on masts sailed across the bay. Commercial and military, galleys and boats came and went. Those anchored, on the other hand, were waiting for cargo to be loaded or unloaded or to have repairs done. Father Daniel and the others approached the port of Balat, which was connected to the port of Fener at the bend of Pomal at Halich Bay. There, towards Balat maala, just before entering Fener maala, was the oldest part of the city where Jews

came over to meet them. It has been said that the first Jews in Istanbul came from Macedonia, from Ohrid to be exact, during the second summer when Tsar John Paleologos was on the Roman throne. They built the "Ohrid Synagogue" at the incline in Balat. A quarter of a century later, during the summer when Mehmed conquered Istanbul, more Jews came from Macedonia. Some came from Kostur and built the "Kostur Synagogue" on one of the streets in Balat towards "Edirne Kapia". The Spanish Jews and Jews from other countries began to arrive forty summers later and, because they were culturally different and had different habits, often quarreled. The Jews of Kostur and Ohrid were closer to the Macedonians than they were to the other Jews. (The Ohrid Synagogue was called "Ahrida Sinagogu" in Turkish and was the largest synagogue in Istanbul. It was built in l427 with a capacity for 500 people. The "Kostur Synagogue", called "Kasturya Sinagogu" in Turkish, was built in 1453 with a capacity for 150 people. Only the Ohrid Synagogue survived to this day.)

"Are you leaving Dimitri?" asked Isaiah, a wrinkled old man who ran into them.

"No, I'm sending Stefan with his uncle to learn a craft."

"That's good. I saw the priest and your cargo all alone so I thought something bad had happened to you. I'm glad you're all okay. Gook luck to you and have a safe trip."

"Thank you Uncle Isaiah. Thank you."

When the old Jew understood that all was well he smiled and continued on his way home. Isaiah lived on the same street just below Dimitri. His son Moses was a rabbi and was familiar with the Talmud (the Jewish holy book). He was also experienced in interpreting law. The other two sons, Abraham and Elijah lived separately but on the same street. Shortly after Isaiah left, a small group of passengers arrived near the port of Fener where many people including porters, port workers and sailors were waiting. They were waiting to go on the ship to load the trunks, barrels, sacks and baggage made of leather and linen. After a while they loaded Father Daniel's baggage. At the same time passengers getting on the

ship were saying goodbye to their loved ones standing on the shore. Dimitri and Despina hugged their son with trembling hands and hearts, repeating the advice they gave him as they said goodbye. When he finally left, they stood in disbelief - their child was leaving them. His frightened eyes reminded them of that difficult truth...

Yes, this was the real world of the living driven by the need or compulsion to say goodbye and travel. Dimitri and Despina were overwhelmed by feelings that brought to mind memories of the many experiences they had had with Stefan since he began to crawl and walk growing up... until this moment. But, hope was smouldering inside them because Stefan was the kind of boy who had youthful vigour and was prepared for almost everything. Young people didn't usually torment their brains with things, especially with details and time; they just burrowed through and went straight. Stefan and Father Daniel walked over the planks from the platform, supported by wooden green pillars beneath the sea, to the moored ship. A man with a yellowed moustache sat on the ship's deck and made notes of the passengers. They gave him their names and he entered them in his book. The ropes then came loose and the heavy chain began to knock, raising the great anchor out of the water. A short time later the ship began to detach itself from shore and slipped away into the water. Tears began to slide down Despina's face as the ship moved away. Many others who were sending their loved ones away also cried. Their tears detached from their eyelids as they stood on the long platform watching the ship move.

"Our fate… Five summers ago they took our firstborn; now we are sending away our second. What will this 1780th summer bring?" asked Dimitri with a worried look. He had regrets about losing Giorgi. He felt he'd made the wrong decision in sending him alone. The only thing that put him at ease was teaching his other children to be cautious and take care of themselves.

About a month after arriving in Blatsa their relatives were able to help them minimize the wounds to their souls, after the death of family members and neighbours, whose bodies Dimitri found the morning after the attack. Like he said, Dimitri went back to his village as soon as he'd left his wife and children in Blatsa. When he arrived he found his poor mother, father and brother Jovan dead.

They were killed in the yard of their neighbour Marko who lived two houses away from them. They either went there to hide from the attackers or they were gathered there to be slaughtered. But, as Dimitri discovered, two bodies were missing; that of his son Giorgi and his daughter-in-law Ilina, wife of his younger brother Jovan. When he discovered that Giorgi and Ilina might still be alive Dimitri was compelled to look for them. He began to loudly call their names all through the ruins. He yelled as loud as he could but it was all in vain. The last part of the candle of hope that was burning in him was extinguished; he became aware that something terrible might have happened to them. The Arnaut robbers targeted young women and children especially in order to sell them as slaves or to change their religion. When he thought that this might have happened to Ilina and Giorgi, Dimitri started having bad feelings. He was confronted with the difficult question of which was worse, to find them dead, or alive with their lives spent in slavery. They could have been taken anywhere from Egypt, Arabia, Moldova to Bosnia or even somewhere else. Drowning in tears Dimitri gathered the dead bodies he found and, using his livestock, took them to the cemetery and buried them. From that day on, the dream he had the night before the attack, became his nightmare. It followed him like a shadow wherever he went. And so he searched for them for three whole summers. During that time he looked everywhere, asking everyone he met but found nothing. He even looked for people that had survived the massacre in Linotopi, people who weren't in the village the day of the attack. All had heard about the slaughter but all they could tell Dimitri was what he already knew; that some were taken to harems and others sold as slaves. No one could tell him what had happened to his son Giorgi.

And here is Dimitri now worrying about his son Stefan. His eyes were glued on the ship moving away and shrinking as it gained distance while Stefan's eyes were glued to the shore. And as the ship floated away and reached the middle of the bay, the buildings on the opposite side, along the shore of Halich, became clearer. Stefan turned to look because he knew he might not have another opportunity to see them. As the ship approached he focused on the "Galata Tower" as it rose from afar. It was colossal with its layered roof looking very impressive. It looked the same even when they turned into the Bosphorus flow. For a moment it looked like it was

piercing the sky. But as the ship made its way away from it, its greatness and that of Istanbul began to diminish in Stefan's eyes. And after a while the big city too was gone. It hid behind the bluish hills that followed one after another; and then they too disappeared into the blue of the sea and sky. As the hills faded away it was difficult to recognize them in the fog. Eventually they slowly disappeared. Now there was only endless blue water rustling as the ship rhythmically flowed through it.

Chapter III

The thunderous and persistent ringing of the bells mounted on the tallest bell tower in Bucharest woke Stefan. The first ones to ring were the large, loud bells with harmonized rhythm. After each ring the smaller bells, with muffled irritating sounds, swung through the air. Daylight had already penetrated the window of his room surrounded by a thick wall. Lying in bed in the simple monastery room, Stefan's sleepy eyes wandered aimlessly over the white-washed walls and plain ceiling, but his mind couldn't stand the idleness. He got up and went to the window. His room was located on the highest floor of the building and had a beautiful view of the entire monastery complex, surrounded by walls that made up a large square. In the middle of it was the church of "Sveta Petka", consisting of three chapels symmetrically arranged with Saint Basil (Sveti Vasilei) to the east, Saint Gregory (Sveti Grigorei) to the north and Saint John (Sveti Jovan) to the south. The almost fifty metre tall tower at the monastery entrance housed the bells that woke Stefan. This was the most impressive building in the city. From his window Stefan spotted the coach in which he had arrived here over the Danube two summers ago. It was parked near the shed with the collapsed roof and a monk and a novice were getting it ready for travel.

"Oh, today is the day," said Stefan to himself remembering that today he was going to Kraiova. He felt excited about going on a trip. The road he had come on from Istanbul was still carved in his mind. His youthful brain absorbed everything it saw and heard during the long trip from the village huts to the city houses and inns. He remembered everything that he'd experienced from his arrival in Varna by boat and the long journey by coach that took him through Bulgaria, Shumen, Razgrad and Rushchuk. Razgrad, the smallest of the three cities, which consisted of about two thousand five hundred

houses, had the most antiquities. Only one third of the houses belonged to Christians.

“Razgrad – razuran grad (ruined city) hence its name,” said Stefan making the connection. There were many stones, support poles and statues in the ruins. The only other place that contained so much debris was the port of Istanbul… Stefan remembered from when he’d boarded the boat that brought him here. After leaving Razgrad Stefan remembered stopping at Pisnitsa for a short while then traveling for five hours before reaching Rushchuk, the final city before the Danube. They spent the night there before sailing to Duvan the next morning. They arrived in Giurgievo, the first city in Walachia located on the opposite side of Rushchuk. (Giurgievo or Giurgiu in Romanian; Rushchuk or Ruse in Bulgarian.) The coast of this city was full of islands and canals. There were long walls on the largest island guarded by soldiers. Then they sailed along the canal in front of Giurgievo where they were greeted by a wide wall.

“This wall was built by the Romans and fortified over time to prevent attacks beyond the Danube. The Russians built the tower behind the wall eight years ago,” explained his uncle, the abbot.

Father Daniel had made all the arrangements for this trip just like he had the last time when they were welcomed by the monks in Giurgievo. It was a long way to Kraiova. They would have to travel for days through all kinds of landscapes and situations. During this trip, just after they left Giurgievo for Bucharest, a sandstorm struck which made it difficult for them to see and breathe. Nothing could have been worse, as the abbot explained at the time:

“It’s okay now but when it rains hard and the snow melts fast, the Danube floods and carries torrents of mud and debris, dragging trees, roots and dead livestock. The river carries so much debris it becomes impossible to cross.”

And it’s true; the road from the Danube to Bucharest goes through a plain traversing many rivers, pastures and swamps which flood during the wet season. One could see the snow-capped mountain peaks in the distance in Transylvania on the way to Bucharest.

“Are you ready?” asked Father Daniel, startling Stefan.

“I am Father; I was distracted thinking about the trip.”

“Let’s go and have a quick breakfast. It’s going to be a long trip.”

After he washed and got ready, Stefan went to eat breakfast. There were tables covered with thin tablecloths set under the long porch and carpets lay on the benches. The monks and nuns sat in wait as the abbot delivered the breakfast prayer. They were having cold, sour corn porridge.

“This is it! Eating with the monks and nuns here isn’t like eating back home (in Macedonia). With the firefighting measures imposed by Karadzha, the new master, the kitchen is far and the food is cold,” said Father Daniel justifying himself to Stefan.

“The food is fine! I’m satisfied with it, with the bread, the plums and other fruits we eat,” said Stefan calmly, trying not to worry his uncle about the food. Stefan remembered his mother telling him not to worry his uncle too much. So he did as his mother had told him. To change the subject he asked his uncle:

“How will they prevent fires, Father, when fires always existed?”

“Well, they made sure kitchens and chimneys are away from flammable materials. The authorities go to kitchens and inns where there are dry leaves, dry brush and dry grass and make sure they’re cleared. The government makes sure the chimneys are cleaned because the soot is fine and can catch fire. They make sure that the entire city doesn’t suffer from one unattended chimney,” concluded Father Daniel and dismissed Stefan so that he could go and get ready. When he went back to his room, Stefan thought about what his uncle had said about the fires. He then remembered what his uncle had said when he first arrived here:

“The monastery was built by Mihail Kantakuzin about seventy years ago, on top of an old church, and was repaired after a fire took place about forty years ago when hundreds of houses, shops and churches burned down in the city.”

“Was the tower damaged?” Stefan asked his uncle.

“Partly, but it was repaired the same summer. It was weird that the tallest building in Bucharest would catch fire!”

“It’s different somehow! There are many towers in Istanbul. This one is similar in size to the Galata Tower, but different from all the others!”

“You have a sharp eye! It wasn’t built by local people or by anyone under Ottoman rule. It wasn’t built by the Russians, Hungarians, or Austrians. It was built by people from the northernmost part of Europe. It was built by King Carlo of Sweden’s soldiers. When King Carlo was defeated by Tsar Peter at Poltava (a river in Ukraine, the site of the historic battle of 1709 between Tsar Peter the Great of Russia and Charles XII of Sweden), the then Sultan gave King Carlo’s soldiers refuge here. A symbol was placed at the entrance above the small room in the attic and two guards stood above the gates.”

“They are waiting for you at the hospital for the medicine,” said Deacon Kozma from behind the door, disrupting Stefan’s thoughts.

“Let me finish here first!” replied Stefan from the room. Then, after packing and loading, he went to the hospital.

The monastery hospital was the oldest hospital in Bucharest. It was opened during the summer before the fire. It was later rebuilt based on the Venetian hospitals which had a doctor, a barber and orderlies. The pharmacy was full of medicinal herbs, ointments and balms. There were many medical books brought from everywhere that dealt with diagnosing and monitoring the sick and various other therapies to use. Stefan learned the Church Slavonic and Greek scripts and kept the monastery books. He also mastered the Latin language which allowed him to study the medical books. The hospital had twelve beds for men and women and was supported by the monastery.

“The booklets have all kinds of information on when and how much medication to prescribe, God forbid if it’s needed,” said the doctor before saying goodbye to Stefan. Stefan wasn’t happy about the doctor leaving. He wasn’t happy listening to his uncle giving him a lecture:

“By entering here, you have entered a godly court. You have left human nature and entered the care of Christ’s grace. But when you go there you will be tested whether you will take the right or wrong path. You are a quick learner son, but you need to have a little humility. You need to be thoughtful and patient so that you don’t have regrets. There you will be in the midst of laymen with envy, malice and greed. Don’t let their pride and titles fool you, even if they are worshipers. They could have gained their titles with bribes and by crooked means, like the patriarchs. For example a sultan from a different (non-Christian) religion appointed patriarchs; the man who offered him the highest bribe. Those men were loyal to the sultan. People like that are unworthy; stay away from them.”

His uncle paused for a moment and continued:

“Those patriarchs are also enemies of the Greeks, their own kind. They condemn Christian revolts about which the Greeks are most bitter. Their sons are in their trusted service, from dragomans (high-ranking interpreters and diplomats in Ottoman negotiations with other countries) to royalty. Sixteen summers ago Mavrogeni was the prince of Walachia, and six more summers of Moldavia. He fought against the Russians during the Russian-Ottoman war during which he was captured and imprisoned for thirteen years before his death. He died loyal to the sultan. According to the fatal man’s name, he was one of us. Patriarch Samuel Handzherli was a “handzher”, meaning he was well connected with the Ottoman hierarchy. Apparently one of his grandfathers had saved a sultan. Handzherli and Ioaniki Karadzha were Ohrid’s greatest opponents. Why am I telling you this about them? ...Let this be your first lesson, if patriarchs could harm Christians for the sake of other religions imagine what kind of harm laymen can do to you. If they managed to plant our people in the Archbishop’s yard, to sell him and their own families, imagine what an outsider or a villain could do to deceive the most faithful, and the kind of harm they could do to you.

And just like our Archbishop Arsenei who offered his resignation and ended up on 'Mount Athos' in a cell, with devalued royal decrees and letters, you could end up just like him. So be careful what you write and do, so that you don't end up in a worse cell. Justice comes after the bad, because 'if someone does bad, bad will come back to haunt them'. But by then it will be too late. Handzherli expelled Arsenei in the summer and he ended up in a cell. What happened after everything from Ohrid left us? The evil which deceived eventually took the deceivers, temporarily punishing them and then throwing them into new sins to be revealed just like the fornications between Roxana Karadzha and Samuel Handzherli. False dignity has an unworthy end. Why do I say this to you? ...This is another lesson for you. You need to keep your eyes open and mind sharp. You have an important job to do in Kraiova where you will be keeping the books for the tailor Ion. The old economist will introduce you and then leave you to be with his son. You will meet all kinds of people there. This is how you will learn the craft, but you must keep your eyes open!" concluded his uncle.

"Of course, father, I will be careful. If you don't wear spiritual clothes you become prey for the cunning one. Only a spiritualist knows the right way. Philosophers speak of wisdom but have no solutions to problems. Forgive me if I'm wrong!"

"You are forgiven Stefan by me and by God. I will continue with the lessons. It's the duty of the older people to teach the younger lessons. You are at your most vulnerable summers, when anger, impatience and energy get in the way of wisdom, patience and humility which hold your salvation," said Father Daniel, extending his right hand to Stefan, who accepted it and kissed it gently over his fingers.

Father Daniel continued:

"May your path, home and work be blessed; May the providence of God guide you, and may God always be with you through the Holy Spirit, to protect you from temptation with which the ever-cunning one will attack, Amen!" concluded Father Daniel, making a cross in the air with his right hand folded over Stefan's slightly bowing head, similar to when clergy read the Gospel or perform rites.

“Never start doing work without a blessing,” said his uncle, the abbot, as he hugged Stefan and escorted him to the coach.

Deacon Kosma and a novice accompanied Stefan on the long journey. The moment they were settled the coach started to roll and they went through the small tunnel under the tower. As they passed through the gates, Stefan was becoming aware that he was leaving this sacred place and going to a strange and unknown place. He was overwhelmed by sorrow that weighed on him.

As he left the monastery he remembered how diverse the world beyond this great tower was before he arrived here. It seemed as if, from this outer and distant side, everything was different. It’s true, for Stefan the world was different even before; when he used to return from the city with provisions, from visits to other places or from other needs, but this time it wasn’t the same. In those days he rejoiced seeing the tall tower from afar, which seemed like a raised hand waving at him to welcome him in the warm embrace of the monastery. And now it seemed like he was saying goodbye to all that forever. But, as the coach wheels continued to bounce over the cobbled stones on the street and amidst the clacking rhythm of horse hooves hitting the stone slabs, Stefan’s thoughts turned to Kraiova. Uncertainty worried him so much so that he didn’t notice the bright sky and the clear glow of the day. Deacon Kozma, who was aware of Stefan’s problem, began to talk to him in an attempt to console him.

“How are you feeling? Are you anxious about how it’s going to be…? Don’t worry; everything will be okay for you. You are going to be with a respectable man in Kraiova. He is a friend of the abbot. You will be well looked after!”

“It’s okay, but I don’t know anyone there! I came to the monastery with my uncle and he was by my side until I got into things. Who will help me there…? Who do I have?”

“You are right about that…! I will help you with some things. Time will help you with the rest! It will take time before things settle down. It will take some time to make new friends. Soon you will be

able to visit places, meet new people and make friends. And when you're among new friends you will not be alone."

They passed by the two fountains and a small pond in the middle of a park. These were built by Master Ypsilanti three summers ago. Stefan remembered seeing them before. Every time he passed by there he used to stop and enjoy the tranquility and their beauty. But now it seemed like they didn't exist. Stefan was so preoccupied in his own thoughts that he left them behind without looking at them. It got worse on the streets. He refused to look at the houses they were passing by. No one spoke. The only sounds heard were the squeaking of the coach, the noises the horses made and the barking of the dogs in the distance.

Stefan was physically in the coach but his disembodied being was somewhere far away. It was further away from the monastery and from this world. He visited every corner of his past journeys. He even returned to Istanbul to visit his relatives and then went back to his native village Linotopi. When he got there his strength was shaken by deep feelings that led to a quiet cry. There he was with the closest people in his family - his father Dimitria, his mother Despina, his sister Maria and his brother Konstantin. And when he remembered the victims of Linotopi, tears welled up in his eyes. He was especially sad about his older brother Giorgi who was presumed to be dead. Stefan remembered the long dusty road that extended to infinity. He remembered the view of Linotopi and little Giorgi starting out in the yard and going down the road towards "Dolno Maalo". He remembered the poor boy happily rushing down the road with the privilege of being the eldest son who had fulfilled his father's wishes. He remembered the warmth of his grandparents waiting for Giorgi. Stefan also remembered that there was some childish jealousy in him because of that. He remembered angrily looking at his brother as he disappeared down the hill. Unfortunately Giorgi disappeared forever, leaving his family behind. Stefan's memory of his native home in the south, while the coach traveled westward, caused him pain. Being well aware of this, Deacon Kozma silently tried to help Stefan ease his anxiety and loneliness. After they had left the city and were far beyond it, they could still see the monastery tower that dominated Bucharest, looking smaller and smaller as they made their way along the dusty road. Both the

bell tower and the huge German clock, whose hour and minute hands were now blurred by distance, were procured in Vienna. As the coach traveled further and further, the bell tower, left behind, was disappearing into the horizon until finally it was no longer visible. Only the road leading them west was now clear. But that too seemed to disappear somewhere beyond the vast plains and hills in the distance ahead of them.

Chapter IV

Leaning against an old wall being rebuilt on this side of the street in the Kraiova neighborhood, Stefan, while waiting, watched the scattered builders and stonemasons doing repair work on the church. Strong scaffolding made of pine pillars with interlocking beams and planks was firmly planted in the ground all around the walls. There was intensified rhythmic banging from hammers and adzes, saws cutting and workers shouting. The old churches were made of wood, only their foundations and the walls just above them were made of stone, so when they were repaired or demolished they were rebuilt with stones and baked bricks. They were then plastered with a façade decor and a new roof was added, which looked amazing to the people. Bridges, fountains, parks and houses were also renovated; and all this in the last four or five summers as a result of Oltania's increase in trade and economic strength. Kraiova was known as the "the city of money" and its palace as "the house of money", which belonged to the early Kraiova boyars. About fifteen years ago, when the Russians occupied Bucharest, it became a capital and the master fled here.

- More money, more churches. This is how it was with the Kraiova boyars who, two or three centuries ago, accumulated a lot of money, built hundreds of villages for themselves and founded the monasteries and churches. They did this to create titles for themselves such as viceroy, duke, prince and whatnot! – This is what Stefan had heard about the building in front of him. But he didn't think so. Eighteen-year-old Stefan was getting involved with a family which had inherited property from the great Matei Besarab, a viceroy from those boyars. Stefan was falling in love with Elena Balachesku, a nobleman's only daughter. The Balachesku family had a long history which went back two centuries to a rear master called Konstantin Brankoveni, born in Wallachia. With the great amounts of money he was given in Istanbul he brought peace,

prosperity and fame to the region. He brought so much gold that they began to call him “Altan Bey” (Altan Bey (Tur. Altin bey) - Gold Prince). On the other hand, he, along with his four sons and councilor Vakaresku, was executed in Istanbul in the summer of 1714, at the behest of the Phanariots of Kantakuzin. Since then, the Phanariots have ascended to the throne of Wallachia and are still holding it. The second youngest of Brankoveni’s seven daughters was Balacha, Elena’s grandmother. A family with such roots wouldn’t easily reconcile with the knowledge that Elena was with a “commoner” like Stefan, and a foreigner at that! In the higher social classes love between young people was meaningless to the parents. It didn’t exist and everything was calculated. Agreements could be reached if parents decided… without taking into consideration the feelings of the young. As for the poor people love was free, feelings were taken into consideration without the prejudices and whims of ambitious parents. The poor lived in rural settings or modestly in poor urban neighbourhoods.

Elena falling in love with someone from a lower class was taboo news. It would have been impossible had she not had her father’s favour. She was naughty and sweet to him since she was a child and she was still the same at age sixteen, losing her head to Stefan. She had caught Stefan’s eye from the first moment she saw him and heard his voice. She was captivated by his poise, good looks, always tidy blonde hair, being comfortable around him and his cleverness in conversation. Even his foreign accent and his miraculous smile were cute to her. His large and penetrating green eyes dazzled her. They mesmerized her to a point where she felt she couldn’t think or sleep soundly. When she was prohibited from seeing him she was eaten with sorrow. And the more they tried to separate them, the more she suffered, the more fiercely she loved him. In spite of all odds, they still managed to see each other. Stefan came to her home secretly at night by the fence. From her darkened window Elena made liniment for her love wounds from her restless beating heart. Starting from the middle of her chest, that liniment poured in gentle words from her smiling lips, playfully landing on his senses, and his whole enchanted being. At times her mother stepped in to check on her. She often noticed Stefan’s silhouette outside – the moonlight bouncing off him in the dark.

“What’s the most beautiful ballerina’s name?” asked Stefan gallantly, his question echoing in the halls where they had met for the first time after a ballet group performance in the theatre. He found a way to run into her in the hallway as she was returning from behind the scenes. Courage in flattery brought close encounters. The envious didn’t understand that, so they hurried to inform her father. And there were many of them. So, who could resist the surge of pleasant warmth in their hearts seeing such a beautiful, slender full-bodied, well-dressed and graceful young woman passing them by in the bazaar? To make matters worse, Stefan by-passed them all. Their first secret messages led to night meetings at her house and in the park. From their shy conversations and holding hands, they progressed to their first kisses, and then they became more and more passionate, so that in the end, in their firm hugs, they could hear their heartbeats.

They didn’t think of the consequences but encountered restrictions and all the panic that their love raised.

“She must come... now that her father has left for Severin,” said Stefan while waiting for her anxiously. The victim of their love was their prohibition; not being able to see one another. He was angry because they had to pay for the minutes stretched out to eternity as a result of someone’s prejudices, envy and malice.

“Elena my love!” said Stefan excitedly when she arrived by the hidden part of the old wall, and then hugged her tightly. Intoxicated with her, he kissed her sporadically like he needed those kisses to make himself happier, and Elena reacted with passion. The only thing that separated them from the street was a small wall; a place that couldn’t hold Stefan. He led her to the corner behind the park. They left behind Elena’s street with the lavish houses of famous craftsmen, tailors, furriers, halva makers, bakers, butchers, but also old nobles.

“My dear morning and evening star, there isn’t a day or night that goes by in which you aren’t in my mind and heart. Did you ask your father!” said Stefan in a single breath as soon as they arrived in the park.

“My sweet, before I told him that you would come to look for me, I said that my desire for you won’t stop until I am with you. My father was furious and yelled a lot; about circumstances, his work, his reputation and honour on which I trampled, and just about... practically everything!” said Elena, sitting on a flat and low cut, thick tree stump with exposed roots sticking out of the ground. This was their place, well-hidden in the tall bushes and trees of the park. Still excited Elena continued talking:

“I then said ‘Behold, the bride of Stefan Belio, a monk from a distant monastery wearing a mourning monastic dress or a heavenly dress, because for me there is no life without him!’…”

“Oh my unsurpassed beauty, you embarrass me! ...I have been waiting here like a worthless quitter and you are leading our battle alone!” yelled Stefan in a voice full of helplessness.

“Wait for the most important part! Then my father started yelling your name: ‘Belio, Belio…! What word is that? It means nothing in our language, nor in the Greek or in any other noble language, except for the people from whom it originated, from his Macedonia! ...Maybe in Russian, but the Russian nobility don’t speak and write in their simple language, but in French! And what will the words Elena Belio mean? With no origin…, and worst of all, the name of a foreigner? The closest thing to our language is Belu, and that’s another thing.’…” said Elena with a radiant face.

“Insults, your father didn’t say anything new. What is so important?” replied Stefan.

“The importance is in that ‘Belu’. I’m the only child my father has and I long for you. I know that my father will agree to our marriage if you change your last name that way! ...It matters to him because of other people…” said Elena.

“My beloved, I’m ready to do everything for you, but your father wants me to renounce myself and my family; a discourteous act for me... And how will my identity be moral for me if I change two letters? Exactly those two letters which bring me honour and

existence! What will my family say? In my country Belu doesn't mean anything!" replied Stefan.

"I don't understand men's vanity. I stand against mine because my identity isn't more important to me than you!" said Elena.

"Oh, my sweet Elena, you embarrass me again," said Stefan bluntly, "we men carry a burden with our vanity and honour."

They were silent, swimming in their thoughts for a while. Elena leaned on him with her worried forehead, from which her beautiful reddish-brown hair flowed over and ran down her neck. There was a rose with small petals on the side sticking out. Her hair flowed down in pleasant curls around her neck. Stefan could see his reflection and the reflection of the tree canopy around them in her very bright eyes under her thin eyebrows. And while they sat there, a gentle breeze blew bringing fresher air from the forest in the park, mixed with the aroma of fresh lilac blooming in the surrounding bushes. The sharpness of the intoxicating scent seemed to relax them. Elena leaned her head lightly on his lap so that her face came opposite his while he was bent forward above her. They relaxed and forgot about their worries, hugging with greater passion. Intoxicated by her fresh and soft skin, Stefan continued to gently kiss her on the neck, face, lips and hands. Elena responded with sighs while running her fingers through his hair. Unaware of time and space, they wanted their moment together to last. In their tight embrace they managed to squeeze reality out of their minds and everything across the park at the luxurious houses, seemed distant to them. Whatever their love affair was, from time to time they remembered the slow steps they took to reach the threshold of consciousness. She was prohibited from seeing him but she kept going back to him.

"My dear, I can't do this anymore. As soon as my father returns you will have to talk to him. Let him get to know you as soon as possible, let him see for himself what kind of person you are and not the kind he thinks you are," said Elena firmly.

"How will he change his mind about me with a single conversation?" replied Stefan.

“My father has been asking about you, he talked to Jon the tailor and the other tradesmen. They all praised your work with the orderly keeping of the books. This has already helped to somewhat change his opinion of you,” said Elena.

“He inquired about me and my job?” asked Stefan.

“Yes, he also knows about your uncle who is well-respected in Bucharest and that he has become a bishop. I heard him talking about it with my mother. He may not change his mind right away after you meet him but with more meetings, I believe he will. You behave and express yourself like an educated person who is devoted to seeking fairness,” replied Elena.

“Dear Elena, what are you trying to tell me? ...To have chats with your father, through many meetings?” asked Stefan.

“I know my dear, it sounds unattainable but don’t worry, that’s my concern. All you need to do is one thing; consent to change your name Belio to Belu. Everything else depends on that,” said Elena.

“My dear Elena, don’t pressure me. This is like being sold in the market… I will have to put a price on myself; the price that was decided by my buyer! It’s very unworthy!” replied Stefan.

“Yes, it looks that way, but then you will have a pile of dignity, and others will be in front of you with miserable prices, believe me. They go to my father every day and they are important people!” said Elena.

Stefan was confused. He had been placed in a very difficult situation. He remembered what his uncle the priest had told him about temptations and dignity. But he was able to calm his conscience because of Balachesku’s dignity, which was centuries old and earned by the extreme suffering of Konstantin Brankoveni and his four sons in Istanbul. Stefan thought: “If their dignity survived for this long – it survived for a reason!”

“You know my dear that nothing is more important to me than our love. So, if this is the only solution to preserve it, then so be it!” said Stefan calmly.

“That’s wonderful my dearest! Don’t feel bad, be happy!” yelled Elena and threw herself on him.

Her naughtiness, new energy and joy slowly overtook Stefan. And in return he loosened up in order to briefly subdue his love ascension, tasting the juicy elixir of her lips, cheeks, throat and visible shoulders under her luxurious green velvet dress. Their excitement carried them away. The rhythm of Elena’s breath grew stronger and deeper coming in waves from the rising and falling of her chest. Stefan, intoxicated by the sweetness of the divine taste, slowly extinguished his passion as if wanting the magic of the moment to last. Their bodies intertwined in her velvet green dress merging with the soft grass carpet on which they made love. And the following days passed in the same manner of passion.

As soon as her father returned from Severin, Elena went to work to create the seemingly anticipated events. However, her father too was a man of many feelings and knew what Stefan was going through because he too was broken in by lady Balacha to accept a noble name in order to marry her daughter. But, unlike Stefan, he didn’t have a low status. Unfortunately his family was so impoverished that nothing was left of their status and he accepted the offer without much hesitation. As a son-in-law Elena’s father felt uncomfortable in the household where Balacha dominated. He often traveled and took on jobs to fill the open abyss and to prove that he could work and earn his own money. His dedication paid off, especially in the summer after the grandmother moved to Gorna Zemia. He was able to expand his properties and fill the coffers of his treasury with money, but all that came at a price. In his absence Balachesku was left by himself with only a single child, Elena, who became his most precious thing. And here was Stefan with an even greater pain. His status was established by his uncle the bishop, and by his work at the guilds, but his foreign surname was still an obstacle. Just as Elena made the announcement, she disappeared.

“Yes, that’s really something... Daughter, what can I tell you, let him come tomorrow and we’ll see,” said Balachesku to his happy daughter who threw herself into his arms, hugging him like she had in the past while his heart trembled with joy. He didn’t want to disturb the newly established closeness between them, so immediately, in the days that followed, he began to see Stefan. Their first meeting was the hardest. The two weren’t comfortable around each other, but with each meeting the ice began to melt. The nobleman found Stefan interesting. For a young man he had a wide perspective on various subjects. Stefan even produced proof of his knowledge by showing him some of his work including transcripts with legal advice. But, as time progressed, the topics they discussed became less and less important and so did Stefan’s rivals who slowly began to disappear as they reconciled with reality. The surname Belio also disappeared. This subject dragged on until the day came when Stefan went to a judge and gave a statement initialed with his new surname - Belu. Balachesku also kept his word, the day after Mitrovden in the summer of 1785 Stefan would marry the most beautiful girl in town.

There was no end to the immense joy and happiness. Guests filled not only the yard but also the street beyond the house fence. This was the same fence which Stefan was sneaking through, breaking the shackles of their then forbidden and now celebrated and publicized love. The bride radiated with happiness and no less the groom who escorted her out on the veranda in front of everyone. Many people came to see them, even more to dance to the music and to their happiness. More and more guests joined the dance floor hopping and moving to the beat of the loud music played by the musicians hired by Balachesku. And not just the guests, not to be outdone Ion the tailor also participated, spending his money with joy. He pulled out money from his belt and handed it to the musicians. He acted like this was his own son’s wedding. Those who meant something to Stefan as well as those associated with him, like the merchants and the scholars from the guilds of the bazaar, were also there. Stefan hadn’t found anyone with that kind of ingenuity in books; the bazaar loved the energy and enthusiasm. The guests kept tipping the musicians, who played non-stop raising their spirits even more. The dance floor kept growing and it seemed like no one was getting tired of dancing. And so the dancing went on

without stopping. That's how it was… the drums rumbled on, the clarinets thundered, the trumpets trumpeted and the flutes squeaked, sending their sounds all over Kraiova. It was a great celebration, like never before seen here. And there was no one, long after that, who didn't talk about Elena and Stefan Belu's wedding.

Chapter V

On the third summer after he arrived, Konstantin decided to go and see his brother Stefan. But it was during bad times. Before that he spent the first summer in the monastery with his uncle, and the next summers at the Bucharest Academy. The academy was built almost a century ago and was mostly attended by the children of nobles and to a lesser extent by the children of traders, craftsmen and the smartest children of foreigners. They studied mathematics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, history, religion and Latin. In Walachia children studied in the Greek language and in Transylvania they studied in the German and Latin languages. Konstantin studied mathematics and read advanced history books which he then exchanged for other books from the monastery.

Socializing with these children Konstantin developed a special attitude; something he learned by observation. He felt it was necessary for him to use this in his relations with this kind of people. For the most part, he clearly observed that they respected him when he didn't pay much attention to them, or when he pretended not to be aware of their presence. When he did this they wanted to talk and listen to him even more. By nature he was quiet and rarely spoke but his thoughts were always clear. He had a strong intellect which he developed from the many books he constantly read until late night and sometimes until dawn. With his neat look and his especially neat reddish-brown and slightly curly hair, Konstantin attracted respect. He had his mother Despina's face and a similar complexion, reddish-brown hair and big dark green eyes. He inherited his father's strong jaw tied with a firm beard, straight nose and high forehead.

"My brother is closer now but I wonder how he is coping?" said Konstantin to himself while making his bed. Three summers ago Stefan was appointed judge in Kraiova. Soon after that his wife Elena gave birth to a son whom they named Konstantin after his brother, but they called him Kocho. Unfortunately, after everything

was going so well, last summer war broke out between the Austrians and the Turks. Balachesku, Stefan's father-in-law, had lived in Kraiova for generations and didn't want to leave his home hoping that no evil would touch him. Stefan however didn't stay. He set off for Bucharest with Elena pregnant and his two-year-old son the moment he heard the cannons roar and before the fighting and suffering reached Kraiova. The arrival of groups of wounded and maimed soldiers became more frequent. Stefan pleaded with Balachesku to go with him but he refused to leave. He believed the bad days would quickly pass but as a precaution he gave Stefan his coffer with his money and valuables to take away for safety. The guards quickly released the family at military checkpoints along the way because of Elena's condition and complaints from her midwife. The bribes Stefan offered also helped. Stefan's decision to take Elena in her condition that long distance unfortunately had consequences. The unborn baby's life, who they named Dimitri, born after that journey, was placed in danger. Regrettably Balachesku didn't survive to see the city liberated. Turkish deserters plundered his property and tortured him to death. Balachesku and his servants were all killed.

Field Marshal Paul Cray and the Austrian armies eventually defeated the Turks and liberated Balachesku's hometown. But unfortunately he failed to save his fellow citizens. The Austrians fought until December of last year liberating cities along the Danube, among which the largest were Belgrade, Orshava, Severin and going as far as Bucharest. In July 1790 Cray was appointed baron as a reward for his victories. In the meantime General Alexander Suvorov and the Russian army attacked the Ottomans from the east. In September of last year Suvorov demolished an Ottoman army of one hundred thousand soldiers near Ramnik, with a force five times smaller. Suvorov was twice appointed count, once by Tsarina Catherine and a second time by Emperor Joseph II. And had Prussia and Britain not intervened, being angry at the Russian and Austrian expansion, the whole of Rumeli would have been without Ottomans. After Emperor Joseph II fell ill he withdrew from the war and before he died he gave the countries he had liberated back to the Ottomans. His brother Leopold II became the next Emperor. And while the war was still taking place around the Danube and in Rumeli, the bourgeoisie started a revolution in

France. It seemed like a plague had attacked the nobility. They were seized by unprecedented fear.

“What are you thinking about?” asked the bishop, interrupting his nephew’s thoughts.

“Forgive me Your Beatitude, I was wondering how my brother found himself in this place called Urlati, near Ploeshti?”

“It was important for him to save his family and there is no one more resourceful than him!”

It’s true Your Beatitude. The first thing we think about during severe danger is our salvation; my father saved us in the last moment! Young Kocho, who has the same name as me, went on a similar journey as me at almost the same age. Even our grandfathers suffered in a similar way from thieves at their hearths; his in Kraiova and mine in Linotopi. My mother lost a son named after his grandfather, and here his mother is afraid of the worst for her other son - seven-month-old Dimitri, named after his grandfather!”

“Little Dimitri will survive… he will survive. His father Stefan has hired a good doctor. By God’s will he will be saved.”

“Everything is in God’s hands… I do want the little one to recover. Our strange destinies gave me the wrong impression,” explained Konstantin.

“There are good things and bad things in life. They used to call Kraiova the “city of money”, but war broke and wiped things out. Then the spring earthquake turned everything to ruin.”

“Are you still angry at my brother for changing his name?”

“Anger, rage and resentment are part of the passions that lead to decline. When they enter a person’s mind and heart, even a little, they can destroy a person because they have the power to poison. Our minds and hearts should be our gardens that we nourish with love, humility and patience; and if we nourish them with anger, rage and resentment what fruits will they bear?”

“It seems that I didn’t express myself clearly Your Beatitude. I thought you might be angry at him because you spoke negatively in some of your lessons about my brother taking a foreign name.”

“It’s different when it comes to lessons. Stefan absorbed my teachings and advice well, but after he left he sought to absorb the conveniences Balachesku enjoyed, so he changed his name without considering the transience of it. What did he really gain and lose by doing that?”

“Your Beatitude, my brother did that out of great love. Isn’t love a powerful feeling that makes one give up things?”

“You can talk about love for days; its power is without equal. Love for God or for a human being – it moves you, but only when it’s sincere, non-hypocritical and unconditional. Stefan was hypocritically provisioned with the holiest of sacrifices – he gave up his name! ...Now listen to me and hear me well. When we arrived here we had nothing except our name. Everything can be taken away from a person by force - land, peace, family, health and life, but not the name with which they were baptized. When I started out twenty-three years ago, I took my secular name Daniel with me and became a monk in the Zihna diocese. Now I’m a Bishop here but I’m also Daniel Zihnenski. I kept my name in memory of Zihna - a city built by Philip II, Alexander the Great’s father. Even the Ottomans didn’t demolish it after they captured our vilayet. The village Ziliahovo is now in its place. The first bishop who went there called himself Jakim Zihnenski. He was the founder of “St. John the Forbearer” (Sveti Jovan Pretecha” monastery located near Seres...) There you will find Slavonic books and icons hanging on the walls of saints with tormented faces and meek penetrating eyes. All these icons were painted by artists from your village Linotopi in 1630 - the summer of our Lord. There are also beautiful walnut carvings of grapes, birds, animals and people. The walls are sturdy, made of earth and stone. They say things were the heaviest where they lay but were not so heavy when they were moved to other places. Our names were sculpted from those frescoes, carvings, Slavonic words, stones, earth and wood. And if you change your name then you’re not the same. It’s like changing your faith!”

“Your Beatitude, your name too comes from your faith.”

“Yes, about that, I will tell you a sad story of an incident that took place in Meglen in the 1759th summer of our Lord, which involved Bishop Hilarion. Patriarch Seraphim did everything in his power to abolish the Archbishopric in Ohrid but the people of Ohrid, led by their bishops, did everything in their power to resist it. (Seraphim II of Tsarigrad was a Patriarch from 1757 – 1761. He was a supporter of Greek domination over the Orthodox Church and the Greek state. He exploited the Russo-Turkish war, Russian interests and weapons for the Greek uprising in 1769. He later fled to the Ukraine.) Seraphim had received a letter from the Bishop of Meglen, and presented it to the Porte (Ottoman government) as a plot to overthrow the Ottoman government and establish Macedonia, a Slavonic state. As a result the Sultan ordered a severe attack against the people of Ohrid Region involving the Ottoman army and bands of Bashibozuks. The bishop of Meglen said that he had found out about this on the first day of the Easter holidays before the attacks had taken place. To save the thirty villages from slaughter, the bishop gathered his clergymen, informed them of the situation and went to church to conduct liturgy. After he was done delivering his last part of the liturgy, he began to weep and informed the people of the following:

‘My dear bothers and sisters, my spiritual children, great evil is approaching us with aims to destroy you and our church of Christ. The bloodiest soldiers and Bashibozuks have been dispatched here to deliver a slow painful death. And, as long as the eyes can see, they will commit the most ungodly suffering. They want to destroy all that is dearest to us, especially our helpless children, without whom we will be uprooted. That… should not be allowed to be done. We need to do everything possible to preserve our nation, which is the least we can do. Therefore I ask you and advise you brothers and sisters to convert to Islam en masse. I am forced to ask you to do this so that we will be spared from the imminent slaughter. But before I take off my bishop’s robe, I will swear to you that Patriarch Seraphim, who carries Jesus Christ on his tongue and not in his heart, is responsible for this great evil aimed at harming the church of Christ. I will swear that it is Patriarch Seraphim who

stands before God but cares not for the happiness of evangelical truth, but pursues the policies of the Greek tribe, to the detriment of other Christian peoples. And now I greet you with the blessed joyful of all greetings - Christ has risen, and under the weight of everything I also greet you with the words - Bairam bairolsun!'

This unexpected alienation was a shock to the people; it dismayed, saddened and brought them to tears. With hardened hearts, following the advice given to them by the Bishop of Meglen to convert to Islam, a select number of them went to complain to the Metropolitan. The conversion, as they explained was to consist of all the people in the thirty villages of the Meglen Diocese, including several Vlach villages. Unfortunately neither Seraphim nor Hilarion stepped in to save them. As a result we lost our spiritual and blood brothers. In time the souls that accepted Islam melted away and became permanent Muslims. The moral of this story, a lesson for you, is to never renounce your faith or your name or allow anyone else to do it for you. Such an act would be permanent as was the case with the people of Meglen who converted to Islam. It is true, and the church celebrates those martyrs who, above all, choose cruel death over converting to another faith, but after those martyrs are gone their children and future children will still remain faithful to the same religion. That's not the case with the people from Meglen who changed their religion. Their children and all future children will be faithful to their new religion, even though the new religion was accepted under the influence of horror. And what horror did Stefan face when he changed his name? That's why my lessons are often about faith."

"That was truly a sad event, Your Beatitude. I will remember it well..."

"Sometimes we don't learn our lessons from our own suffering, let alone from someone else's!"

Soon they arrived at their first destination. The coach pulled into a yard and his uncle's entourage, that included two novices, unloaded some cargo from the harnessed coach and took it away. Konstantin got off the coach, said goodbye to his uncle and got back on again.

When it left the yard the coach took the road leading to the northeast part of the city.

Rolling down the dusty road, the coach sped across the picturesque plains. It only stopped at villages that had wells or watering troughs for livestock. These were oases for the relaxation of body and mind. The watering troughs were made from deeply carved tree trunks fed by rushing water from springs that soaked the ground and formed puddles, wetlands and ponds. Drenched in sweat, the horses drank from the troughs quenching their thirst while swatting the swarms of flies that kept landing on the sensitive parts of their bodies. The village wells were dug deep with low protective walls built around them. Village women and travelers hung around them waiting to fill their buckets and earthenware water jugs. Konstantin and his companions didn't go to springs or wells. When they needed to rest, eat or drink they went to roadside inns. They did their best to avoid being ambushed by marauders escaping the recent fighting. There was also the great aqueduct. Master Nikola Mavrogeni started building it four summers ago but it was damaged by cannon fire.

As they traveled through the countryside they encountered desolation and wasteland and on occasion they ran into hills that rose from the ground like bubbles. Sometime in the afternoon they reached Ploeshti. From the distance they could see the rear of the city. This was one in a string of cities in the lowlands. Ploeshti connected Targovishte and Pitesti to the west, with Buzau and Braila to the east, and Campina and Kronshtad (modern-day Brasov) to the north in Transylvania. The back of Ploeshti was decorated with massive wreaths extending from the Carpathians. The travelers stopped at an inn to rest while Konstantin went out to shop in the bazaar. There was a mobilized army and checkpoints in the city which made everyone nervous. The soldiers were overly aggressive and mistreated people. After the travelers left the inn they continued traveling east, crossing the bridge over a nearby river and passing the last checkpoint. Two hours later, they arrived behind Urlati on his brother's property. The property was spread over a secluded forested hill and on it was a spacious thick-walled house located at the bottom of the hill. The bottom part of the house served as a winter storehouse and above it were porches on all sides except on the north. As they traveled through the property and after they

passed by a number of plum trees tangled in a fence, they arrived in front of the house and stopped.

“You’re late, we were worried about you... these are bad times!” said Stefan and, without waiting for an answer, hugged Konstantin as soon as he got off the coach.

“It’s important that we arrived. And even though we are religious people from a monastery they still held us at the checkpoints the same length as they did all others.”

“You’re lucky. No one is sure of anything these days, even Master Mavrogeni. You know that even though he was faithful to Istanbul, the Ottomans took him to Bulgaria and killed him at Ruschuk... But, enough talk out here, let’s go inside and get reacquainted.”

While Stefan led his guests inside his servants unloaded the coach and unhitched the horses from the harness. Elena greeted them at the porch with a pleasant expression on her face. She greeted Konstantin with a sad face after he asked her how little Dimitri was feeling. Shyly peeking from behind his mother’s wide dress was three-year-old Konstantin.

“Hi Kocho, please come over here. Look what I brought you!” Konstantin told his nephew while opening a box of candies, which he’d bought in Ploeshti. The child’s eyes immediately lit up but he still hesitated. Little Kocho then looked at his parents as if asking for their approval.

“Take them,” said his father, “Konstantin is your uncle. He has the same name as you!” Kocho took the candy to the delight of everyone watching. The guests then went to another room and washed their hands with water that was poured from engraved Ottoman copper and silver containers made in Sarajevo, a famous city with the most skillful masters in the region. Walachia imported quality products from there for those who could afford them. After they washed their hands, Stefan’s guests went into a room with a long table and sat down. The table was set with plates and utensils covered by thin serviettes. As soon as lunch was over the two brothers left the table and went for a walk around the property. The

greatness and everything else about the property was an indication of the immune condition of its owner. The money from Balachesku went to good use, but only in small part. Stefan bought the property cheaply from a bankrupted Boyar who had left for Russia.

“This place is great but why is it so far away from the road and the city? You aren’t someone who needs to be isolated from services and other things,” said Konstantin.

“Look around. See how calm it is? You won’t find this kind of tranquility in the cities. I hid here so as not to make the same mistake Balackesku made in Kraiova. Yes, his money came in handy, it improved our lives, but when you have money and live near or in a city, you’re more likely to be assaulted and robbed. There are greedy people out there as well as thugs. You become a target for them, so it’s best to stay away from crowded places. It wouldn’t be so dangerous if the authorities took more care to curb the assaults and robberies. The Master has taken some measures to remove crime carried out on the roads as well as some of the government officials who looked the other way but it’s not enough. Besides I’m comfortable here and my servants are trustworthy and faithful,” explained Stefan.

It’s true, the property was well positioned in this location and Stefan’s security concerns were well justified. With much admiration Stefan wanted to talk about every little thing about his property; the new wall, the trench and everything else they came across. At one point they came to a building, not as high as it was wide, made of solid stone. On top of it, on the third floor, was a spacious porch. The porch was supported by five round pillars with a roof on top, and there was a wooden terrace on the south side along its entire length. Shortly afterwards they arrived at a crest in the property from where they had a wide view of the plains to the southwest. They were silent as they kept looking into the distance. It seemed like they were conquered by the vastness of the panorama of endless fields, pastures and meadows in a mix of colours from last summer and from the most recent autumn. Konstantin tried to look beyond the extreme edge of the plains but he couldn’t. In the far distance everything merged into everything else. It seemed like the

sky had merged with the meadows and pastures, and the sun with the yellowish harvested fields.

Chapter VI

They say Vienna was most beautiful in May. That was also Konstantin's impression the first time he visited here. That's when nature is at its best and the buildings of the "old city" stand out. Besides its old part, Vienna also has suburbs which are part of the new city. Inside the old city are the double ramparts on which, seven summers ago, Emperor Joseph II arranged the "Bashtain" gardens with promenades. (Bashtain from "bastion", semicircular parts of the fortress, rearranged by Joseph II into flower gardens.) At their foot is "Gletsis" - a circular space over a kilometre wide. This space is covered by grass and flowers with rows of trees, lanterns and paths leading to the new city, which was as large as a dozen "old cities".

Inside, behind the ramparts, are the marvelous palaces "Teutonic Knights", "Archbishopric", "Lobkovits", "Frizova", and the winter "Schwarzenberg" and "Liechtenstein". On the east side is the city Presburg which at that time was called Bratislava, until ten years ago it was the seat of the Hungarian kingdom. Presburg and Vienna are connected through a plain which extends to the south. To the southwest are hills with dilapidated houses, to the west are elevations and behind them are large massifs. To the northwest flows the mighty Danube River in which there are islands and small lakes.

Konstantin was dazzled by the grandeur of the palaces which he very much admired. But as the days went by and he became familiar with the old city, his admiration began to wane. The streets were intertwined and full of coachs, porters and passers-by. They added more congestion to the already congested streets of pedestrians traveling to their destination. The old ramparts simply didn't have the space to accommodate all that traffic. The upgrades to the city made things worse as they took more space from the streets making them narrower. There was also a heavy mix of all kinds of

suffocating smells that made breathing hard especially on the lower floors. Apart from the houses, there were also inns, warehouses, pharmacies, cafeterias, butchers, stables and so on. On those pre-holiday days when livestock was slaughtered, unwashed skins were scattered on the walls, smelly meat was hung on hooks and blood and waste was dumped into the stagnating, open sewers. This made basements, rooms below street level and the first floor of buildings unattractive for residence. On top of that there was dust on the streets, not to mention the endless noises made by people loudly chattering, the rolling of coachs, the trotting of horses, as well as the knocking of hammers on anvils. The most expensive places to rent were the second floor apartments. It was true that the higher floors were cooler and less noisy but were harder to supply with firewood, furniture, water and food. As a result they were cheaper to rent. There were also apartments called royal property which was given to officials as part of their salary.

The biggest whirlpool in the old city was central "Graben" square. In the middle of it was a large base under a small fountain with sculptures sitting on it. Today that fountain was visited by Konstantin and the merchant Adam Four who stopped for a look.

"I didn't tell you about Holy Trinity (Sveta Troitsa) with the runners for your book," said the merchant.

"It was beautifully made, what else can be said?"

"It's like a person from birth to old age. Leopold I built the "Holy Trinity" church a century ago to honour the people of Vienna who kept dying of a plague for weeks. After the emperor decided to build the church the plague subsided so at the end of the summer he stopped its construction. Then a new plague was brought in by the army returning from Rumely; from down south.

"Did the army bring the plague from our country?"

"Yes, it did when Duke Holstein and General Piccolomini drove the Turks out of Rumeli. Leopold summoned all the Christian people under Istanbul (Ottoman rule) to rise up against the Ottomans. Led by a certain Petar Karposh, the Macedonian people joined the

insurrection. The insurgents took up positions along the Vardar and Bregalnitsa Rivers while Karposh established his headquarters in Kumanovo. Leopold recognized Karposh as king and was blessed by the bishop of Bitola. Unfortunately that didn't sit well with the Ottomans who had brought the plague from Egypt in clothes with aims at devastating the rebels. The Ottomans also brought elite Tatar fighters from Bulgaria to suppress the uprising. After the Tatars captured Karposh they killed him in Skopje. The city was later recaptured by Piccolomini who, because of the plague, set fire to all the soldiers who had contracted it. On his way back, Piccolomini also died from the plague. Vienna was spared because the authorities didn't allow any sick soldiers to enter it. In other words, the plague didn't infect the people in Vienna. Reminded of the previous plague, the emperor decided to fulfill his earlier pledge and finished building the 'Holy Trinity' Church. And there it was a testament to a time when it was the only hope against the plague."

"I passed by it unaware that even a stone had a story to tell."

"Haven't you been in other cities of this kingdom? From that time on, the 'Holy Trinity' Church was raised by other cities to protect them from the plague coming back."

Konstantin waved his hand slightly seeming like he saw something and wanted to ask a question but he didn't. They took a passageway from the street that led from Graben through a bend to the northeast, and further towards the Danube. There were many people there. According to the city government, two summers ago Vienna had more than two hundred thousand inhabitants. It's 1792 now and who knows how much more it has grown. More and more immigrants came here every year. The suburbs were full, and the old town was like a dream for them. The local artisans who worked in the suburbs couldn't wait to open up their shops in the old city. They would consider themselves successful if they could work in the old town for even a summer. Immigrants who succeeded in opening their first shop in the suburbs always looked forward to moving to the old city. As a result the old city was in need of servants, cooks, horsemen, street vendors… All these services came from the suburbs. Unfortunately not everyone in the old city was successful. The road that Konstantine and Adam took leading from Beckershtrasse Street

to the Church of the Holy Trinity, close to the Danube River, brought them to a neighbourhood where successful Orthodox Serbs, Greeks, Vlachs, Bulgarians and Macedonians lived. But their sense of nationality was intertwined with their faith since Pech and Ohrid had been without an autocephaly. Many referred to themselves as "Greeks" even though they belonged to other nations.

"Ah you're here... Have you brought the text?" Adam's brother Dimitri asked Konstanin as soon as they entered his shop. Dimitri was sitting comfortably behind the big table and, with some difficulty, stood up to shake hands.

"Here it is, ready to be published Uncle Dimitri," said Konstantine, handing him a bundle of papers at which Dimitri looked at intently. The title "Robinson the Younger" was written at the top, a topic well-known to him in its original meaning, but he also knew that this was a reworked version written by another author before him. With help from his brothers the 20-year-old Konstatin published his novel entitled "Robinson the Younger". Konstantin was inspired by the works of German author Joachim Kempe who had written a book with a similar title. Ever since Kostantin read it, he felt no peace until he could write his own version. Now the moment had come for him to publish it. Kempe too had reworked the novel "Robinson Crusoe" written by the Englishman Daniel Defoe, released seventy years ago. Kempe changed it so that everyone could read it. The younger people were especially impressed. Konstantin, on the other hand, was well aware that this new kind of thinking would destroy the rooted and heartless writings. Educated and well versed in languages as well as having access to high circles, he devised a plan. He figured its publication would bring him gains especially in the countries where the book was not available. Up to now the book had not been published in other languages except in English and German. He figured he'd not only make money from its sales but also gain fame and make connections.

"Sit down, let's see what you have done and let's have a conversation in our language (Macedonian)... I ordered coffee for myself, should I order some for you?" asked Dimitri cordially, offering Konstantin a chair to sit at the table while Adam sat on another chair.

“Yes, thank you,” said Konstantin and sat down.

Dimitri yelled at the man in the back of the store and ordered coffee. He then began to flip through the loose pages of the book. He liked what he read. Kostantin was a sweet talker and used that kind of language even when he wasn’t selling something. The young man was also a compatriot. Dimitri liked to listen to him speak in their native language like they had in their vilayet. Dimitri and Adam were from Sachistsa, a village located somewhat southeast of Kostur Region, and more in Kozhani Region.

The brothers had come to Vienna a long time ago and managed to start up a business in trade. Dimitri joined the “Holy Trinity” Church board of directors and made regular contributions for six or seven summers. He and Adam subscribed to all church publications and various scholastic books. Dimitri was also up to date on guild regulations. When the city services dragged their feet five summers ago on issuing some permits, Dimitri and twenty other traders wrote to the emperor and complained. Dimitri brought his son Jovan into his business and took him to trade throughout the kingdom. Dimitri pursued the large trade by outwitting powerful buyers, and his brother Adam looked after the smaller things and everyday customers. Their nickname “Four”, which became their last name, they got from their father Konstantin who, with the rare will of God, was born a twin in a family that had two sets of twins.

“You should publish it in our language with our Slavonic alphabet!” said Adam anxiously.

“Those were my first thoughts too. But, unfortunately, the Slavonic alphabet is rarely used now. The Greek alphabet and language were introduced thirty summers ago when the Phanar began to rule our church. The Greek alphabet and language are now rooted throughout the whole of Rumeli including Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova and Walachia. I had to write my book in a language that is read.”

“Forget the written language, we still speak our language!”

“Yes, our people and others who speak the Slavonic languages could buy a book but could they read it? That’s another story. The Russians are another people who could understand Slavonic but they are ashamed of it, of the letters and the language. Their nobles, who would buy such works, read, write and speak French. They are educated in the French language. It’s true, the Russian church is not under Phanariot rule and uses the Slavonic alphabet and language for its services, but it doesn’t tolerate or publish books that contradict its dogma. I have thought of everything, and it led me to this conclusion.”

“You’re right. Why take unnecessary risks? In trade profit comes first,” said Dimitri, who until then was immersed in the pages of the text.

“We are giving up our birthright for profit!” grumbled Adam.

“Our birthright can only be protected from a higher position. Those at the bottom are invisible, let alone influential. Were it not for my uncle’s positions, would my brother and I have come here? Would we have attended school? Would he have become a judge and everything else…? How would I have reached my position? These positions required sacrifices to power which doesn’t matter how it came to be. Both my uncle and my brother sacrificed something, now I too have to do it with my text. But on the cover I have put my native Linotopi and our Macedonia. Help me finish this and I assure you, I will get to the point where I will not only raise our birthright out of the darkness but Vienna and the emperor will be humbled!” concluded Konstantin looking inflamed.

Adam and Dimitri were shocked. Everything was going well, but the things the young man said were contrary to common sense! His arrogance surpassed the emperors and the city from which he expected to be worshiped?

“You haven’t yet felt the power of this kingdom. We have been here a long time and have seen many things. We have even moved up in society. You are here for the first time and you say the power will bow to you?! ... That takes the cake!” said Dimitri with a worried look because of Konstantine’s youthful recklessness. On the other

hand the young man had determination and there would be no limits for him. Dimitri continued:

“It’s true, you have been educated by good teachers and you have hung around noble children at the Academy and so you’ve gained self-confidence. Your uncle the Bishop opened the way for you and you have progressed further than all foreigners in knowing languages! We have barely mastered German. You, on the other hand, speak and write in Latin and Greek. This leads upwards but you need to be careful because it’s no good saying things like that elsewhere.”

“The refugees’ journey, moving to a new city and country, sharpened their urge to adapt. It opened their mind to foreign languages, habits and stretched out hands. We are hardworking and patient refugees. The people here, on the other hand, are enslaved by a nobility that has centuries of idleness and clumsiness and has become stupid. They will fall and humble themselves to someone else’s mind and money.”

“They will fall? ...And whose mind will they humble themselves to? Ours?”

“Didn’t your hard work and minds elevate you to traders and others to goldsmiths and manufacturers?! ...You are now a new layer of bourgeoisie like the one in power in France. The useless nobility there failed even though it didn’t pay any taxes. Yes, with arms, but here it will fall without any weapons.

Both brothers fell silent. Adam, who first started this controversial conversation, didn’t say anything more but was very interested in what he heard. Also, it became clear to Dimitri that Konstantin and his brother were doing something new. In Walachia Stefan had gained a lot of wealth within nineteen summers and became a judge in the twentieth! Dimitri and Adam, on the other hand, were old-fashioned settlers who cared for every grosh (penny), miserably trying to do better so that they could accumulate some money for their retirement when the fiftieth summer of their lives approached. They spent many years living in small quarters with their countrymen cooking, sewing, washing their clothes, cutting their

hair and looking after one another to save money. It took the brothers a long time to save enough to go out on their own, barely daring to move to the old city. They felt like intruders for a long time. Every time they encountered a stranger they looked into his eyes and in their eyes they read undesirability. When they started earning more money they went to concerts and other entertaining events which they began to embrace. That was many summers after they got here. But this young man (Konstantin) was immediately accepted right before their eyes, and this was his first time here. At twenty years old he acted and looked like a baron's son, moving forward, living his life and climbing to the top. He had mastered everything he needed. He conducted himself like the local nobles, officials and merchants. He went to a special barber, rented a tidy room, ate in an inn and paid a special service to wash and iron his clothes. He had polished himself to perfection which seemed like he was born that way. His hair and skin were spotless, his face and hands smooth, and he had the elegance of an emperor. When he walked the streets with the brothers they could see that he commanded much more respect than them in the eyes of the same people. The way he walked on the cobblestones with equal steps in line with his raised head avoiding looking at people passing him by, made the passer's by stare or bow to him like he had some special status. Not only was he not moving away from those going the other way but it seemed like he wasn't even aware of their existence. The striking and beautiful clothes he wore confirmed the saying 'beautiful clothes impress'. Even when he walked on the street he caught everyone's eye. And no matter how much you stared at him, you would never admit that he was a foreigner. Even the brothers sometimes thought he was a local nobleman. They realized that they needed to support this young man; he was going to be very influential and wouldn't only help them but also all the other compatriots. At the same time he needed to be made beware of his insolence, so Dimitri started with a lesson:

"There was once a young man in the city with a beautiful and talented mind. He had a good attitude and education just like you. Not only did the emperor and all of Vienna worship him but who knows how many kings and cities wanted him! The world bowed down to him - Paris, London, Munich, The Hague, Prague, Zurich... They greeted him with money and made him a noble by name. I

remember he was with the “Knight of the Golden Spider”, as well as with the Masons. But he died last December, not even half a summer ago. He was thrown into a grave like a vagrant with twenty beggars, murderers and prostitutes, next to the western wall of the “St. Marx” cemetery. Barely ten people attended his funeral at the “Stubentor” wall where he was buried. Snow, hail and cold weather prevented them from going. The coach drivers carried his coffin to the grave because there were no pallbearers. He wasn’t even buried with the poor, and this was because he had only eight gold coins of which three were used to pay for the coach. He left a twenty-eight-year-old woman with two children penniless and in misery.

“You’re talking about the great maestro Mozart, right?”

“Yes, I’m talking about him. He was so ‘great’ that Vienna and his nation did nothing for him. They didn’t even give him a worthy funeral; which made me very sad. He lived nearby. People spotted him go in and out of the “St. Stephen” Cathedral. You could even meet him on the streets. I went to his concerts and found out that he was mute. Two months before his death he performed ‘The Wonder Flute’. He took to the stage with the theater orchestra in a red tailcoat, black silk trousers, long white socks and shoes with silver buttons. He looked pale and weathered. He started to play casually from the second act bringing the audience to euphoria. He ended the performance to applause and shouts of admiration. The next day all of Vienna was talking about him and sang verses from his works in the inns... All this ended when he died.”

Dimitri paused for a moment. It felt like he was going to continue with another lesson, which came to him a short time later:

“Why am I telling you all this? Because you touched our hearts! We’re thrilled to see one of us publish works in these summers. We are ecstatic about your confidence and not being afraid of anything. You will go far and you can count on us to support you when you need it. But as an elder I need to tell you to be careful. To ‘Watch out’! Today you’re at the bottom and you’re a little reckless. Let Mozart’s fate be your best lesson.

“I will watch out and I am grateful for the lessons. You need not worry about me. Mozart had recklessness and weaknesses that brought him to the bottom. I guard myself against that. The weakest thing about him was working with money which is my strongest point. And because I know how to work with money I will become a banker. I know that when you do things right, even though people may not know it right away, in time they will come around. They say that Mozart became even more famous posthumously because people continued to honour him.”

And as the three continued with their long conversation, fog began to descend over Vienna and the Danube River, enveloping everything. The weather was cloudy, a sign of spring rain to come. Over time the fog thickened and became one with the clouds, so that everything was thick with water vapour. Then came the cold air followed by light rain. After that came waves of torrential rain which laid siege to the great city on the Danube, so that nothing could be seen through the mist, the dark clouds and the torrential rain; nothing, except for the spikes on top of the cathedral which were illuminated by lightning coming down from the sky. This continued for a long time…

Chapter VII

On the seventh day, while Konstantin traveled through the Hungarian forest, the outline of Budim began to appear in the distance. The first buildings to appear were the tallest, such as the church towers with huge bells which required at least three pair of oxen to hoist up. Most impressive were the royal palaces on the plateau lined with ramparts and long stone steps. As the coach moved along Jacob, the economist, yelled for the coach driver to stop the coach on the road close to a mound. They all descended from the coach and a moment later stood on top of the mound from which they could see the hilly west side of Budim as well as the low eastern part of the Danube River, opposite of which stood the pontoons and Pesht.

"All the streets in Budim go down towards the Danube!" remarked Konstantin while looking at the city's panorama.

"They all merge down there," said Jacob the economist and continued. "The northernmost settlement of Budim, across the two islands, is 'Obuda'. It's followed by 'Yj Varosh' and 'Vizi Zerosh' with bazaars and city services. The southernmost settlement is 'Taban'. This one is full of newcomers from Rumeli. On the other side of the Danube, the first by the bridge, in Pesht is 'Bel Varosh' and the one on the left is 'Leopold Varosh'. The southernmost is 'Forents Varosh'."

Yes, I see them, as well as the places inside the two cities."

"The interior is developed by the people whom you will meet. They own and move a lot of things on the streets!"

"I will meet with many and all kinds of them and I know what they are all driven by – money… whose worshipers they have become."

“Is that all you have to say, you, the banker, whose only concern is money?”

“Yes, I say that with certainty… Money is the most deceitful deity.”

“How are you different, and why do you serve the same lie?”

“I am different, I was born into slavery.”

“You’re the same; money is now your deceitful deity too.”

“It is! Look, initially money may have trapped me, but in time I saw its trap. Look at my brother, malice has seized him and he is willing to sell his own brothers into slavery for money! I didn’t have the strength to escape it, but I have been thinking about it a lot. My uncle too has helped me see the truth. He opened my mind and helped me understand the thinking process, the habits and the predatory greed of aristocrats.”

“Wait, you’re telling me that aristocrats are the same as robbers?”

“Aristocrats too serve money, taking lives to the altar. The wealthy old native people seem to respect their own aristocrats even when they commit evil deeds but, as an immigrant, they won’t respect me even if I’ve lived the most sinless life! Born rich, aristocrats surrender to the monetary lie and spend excessively. They willingly allow their legacies to melt away and their greed to grow. They have one palace and they want another with eighty rooms, most of which they never enter. But prestige makes them like spoiled women and children! What do idiots do when they run out of money? They run to the bankers and borrow… They live to spend because that’s the only thing that makes sense to them.”

“If it wasn’t for them, you wouldn’t be earning much… So, why don’t you care about them?”

“I care about them as much as they care about me. It will be their own destinies, their worship of money, that will destroy them. Worship of money enslaves people... It will enslave them! I, the

banker on the other hand, will be waiting for them to imprison themselves by their weakness."

"You'll be waiting for them, and you are convinced that they will come?"

"The greedy are hungrier than the hungry. Give a little to the hungry and they will be satisfied - not the greedy ones! No matter how much you give them, they will still be 'hungry'. That's why they will keep coming back to me forever."

"You scare me! I'm concerned about Kir (Mr.) Dimitri. I know you two are close!"

"He's not one of them. He went through the Golgotha (great suffering). He started from the bottom and hasn't forgotten that. Besides, we support the same cause... Enough talk, let's get moving!"

Six summers ago, Konstantin published his book "Robinson the Younger" and set out on his journey. He received orders and made a lot of profit. He then went to a number of German cities to study banking. It's true that he worked for the banker Hadzhi Mosku in Walachia before that, but he quickly got bored with the small account volumes and with the uniformity. He wanted to learn the great German banking secrets and innovations, especially currency exchanges in export trade, movement of international loans and currency differences, and general lending. This type of banking was most developed in the German lands such as Hesse, the Duchy of Holstein, Hanover and Frankfurt. Konstantin also perfected the language of travel, even though the German lands were divided into over three hundred duchies, kingdoms and places which had different dialects. The first time he encountered the German language he found it difficult but in time he figured out its peculiarities. First he learned easy words, then more difficult ones, and when he heard them repeated he connected them in sentences. He made use of them by creating short and long phrases. Later he learned the alphabet but it wasn't easy because the spoken and written language didn't easily bind in his mind. The Gothic letters weren't easy. But deep inside, he knew that the written language

would be more important to him than the spoken language. He thought that by reading German he would be able to better learn than just by listening to it being spoken. He was determined to do it and he did. When he traveled through German cities he looked around for inscriptions on plaques, shops, newspapers, cathedrals and monuments erected by Austrian emperors, dignitaries and nobles at the time when they ruled those lands. He wrote down the texts he found and then asked the teachers in the academy and a few of his friends, who entered the labyrinths of the German language, to translate for him. On top of that he used Gothic books from the monastery library where his uncle worked, and the ones he received through book exchanges, and studied the phrases and texts for hours, days and sometimes longer. He loved to write, read and speak perfectly, to a point where his speech had no accent. He had conversations with Germans more and more easily, and the curtain behind which the German soul hid was pushed to the end, revealing a great, deep and colourful scene behind it. Five or six months later he realized that he spoke better German than his countrymen who had lived on those lands for a long time. But, at the same time, he knew that his success was due to his strong will. After he traveled through German lands and perfected his language skills, the great banking secrets he sought began to reveal themselves to him. With a mathematical and clear mind he saw opportunities. He studied the differences in prices, courses of action, custom's duties and bribes that weren't entered in the books, but lurked somewhere in the final account. He started a trade which he grew with profit.

Konstantin thrived as a banker, working with money exchanges, loans and disposals, while following demands and developments. His brother Stefan also widely expanded his ownership of properties in Walachia. Three summers ago, together with a certain Stefan Kuiundzhiev, a compatriot from Bitola, otherwise a goldsmith in Bucharest, they invested in a proposal from Konstantin and made a lot of profit. Konstantin was turning into a money magician with hungry accounts that grew by the day, especially after the war ended. This was the war between the Ottoman Empire on one side and Austria and Russia on the other. In those days everything was for sale and Konstantin was buying goods for practically nothing and selling them for a lot of money. And as the whirlwind of war impoverished some and enriched others, Konstantin was there to

buy and sell everything while building his wealth and raising his status. Three summers ago inflation hit, which is still destroying Habsburg. The loans he made couldn't be repaid by the bankrupted nobles, so Konstantin confiscated their lands, divided them into smaller pieces and sold them... he made a lot of money this way. Konstantin also bought himself fashionable clothes and shoes from the latest fashion and lacquer finished coachs so that he could go wherever he wanted. At first everything enchanted the young banker. As boys, Konstantin and Stefan believed in God. Here they were sinners, tempted by money, about which the Bishop had warned them. The words the Bishop spoke to him were now louder because Konstantin had been warned about the sins of money… Yet he kept sinning again and again. At some point in time he changed direction. He continued to earn money but money was no longer his first goal in life. He turned to a higher source for direction. This didn't happen immediately but matured through contact with refugees from his homeland whom he considered important. With the national ideas that originated in France, people began to awaken nationally. He saw his compatriots as subjects without a sense of national identity. They simply saw themselves as people. This bothered Konstantin who didn't feel the same! He covered himself in expensive clothes to assure himself that the reflection on the mirror was his; the infant from Kostur Region, from Macedonia, a land of suffering, a land that was in need of rising and joining the other kingdoms in gaining its national identity and independence.

Konstantin's coach arrived at the Budim outskirts and was about to roll down the street. His passenger Jacob the economist was with him. Jacob was responsible for looking after Dimitri Anastasiev - "Sabov's" properties. Kir (Mr.) Dimitri was the wealthy man Konstantin had visited a few days ago. Kir Dimitri, as he was respectfully called, arrived in Karlovtsi as a child with his uncle and other compatriots from the town Negush in Macedonia. As a boy he worked as a tailor. Because of his craft he was nicknamed "Sabov". Over time he expanded his business to include shops, stores and trading posts in many cities and across borders. He invested seventy-two summers of his life in his work. Unfortunately now he couldn't work like he used to, but still had the power of his mind. After a fire that devastated the city ten years ago, Dimitri helped to rebuild it. One of the things he did was build a high school for which he

donated twenty thousand forints of gold. All the Slavonic speaking children went there but only to learn Hungarian, German and Greek. The teachers were Slovaks but understood the language of the local inhabitants. Food for the students and other necessities that were required at the time were supplied through the state services. Maybe that's why the high school was called "Alma mater" (mother that nourishes).

From his meeting with Dimitri, Konstantin got a good impression about him, especially about his ideas of donating money to the kingdom. As mentioned, most recently he donated money to build the high school. During the war against the Ottomans he donated thirty thousand forints in gold to Emperor Joseph II. Dimitri showed great courage when it came to helping the city and the emperor, but he couldn't help himself. His wife Sara gave him several children but, one by one, they died from scarlet fever - the worst childhood disease of the century. Now Dimitri lived with his sister Jana. He had brought her from Macedonia a long time ago but she too was left alone and getting older. As a result of his and his sister's losses, Dimitri turned to religion and became a founder of the metropolis which was in alliance with Vienna because the emperor influenced who would be bishop. And there was the eternal trinity of businessmen, clergy and kings.

Three days ago, Konstantin and businessman Dimitri had a conversation. It had just begun to get dark outside signaling a clear night. By this time of year the summer had spread over Srem and it was warm outside. (Srem is a region in the Pannonian Plain located between the Danube (north and east) and the Sava (south) Rivers, just before the Sava-Danube confluence.) They sat in the yard talking for a long time and trying to determine at what hour day became night. There was a gentle breeze blowing around the flowers spreading their pleasant scents. Vine shoots were crawling up the terrace roof weaving a cover to shade the terrace from the hot sun during the summer days. A comfortable breeze blew on their faces and drove the mosquitoes away, which were plentiful during this time of year. Dimitri had a firm build. He looked even more impressive with the richly embroidered Dzhamadan (kind of vest with decorative embroidery and rich decorations) he was wearing, decorated with silver and silk and a thick row of iliki (holes sewn for

buttoning) through which decorative loops were passed; except for the top two or three which were unbuttoned to allow air to flow. He had a high forehead with sparse but straight white hair which became thicker towards the back ending in curls bent at the end and above his neck. To Konstantin he looked like his father - the same big eyes, long straight nose and strong jaw. Dimitri began the conversation first. He said:

“In the summer of 1781, Emperor Joseph proclaimed the ‘Patent for Tolerance’, with which he granted the Orthodox people rights to their religion, education and civil services. As a result people who came from Rumeli were no longer required to learn German, Hungarian and Greek. Many Macedonians and Serbs had been here since the uprising was carried out by Karposh a century ago. Among them were others, newcomers who chose not to learn German, Hungarian and Greek. Included among these newcomers were Vlachs, Shops, Bulgarians and Arnauts. And because all these people were of the Orthodox fate they had been led as ‘unified inhabitants of the Greek rite’?”

“Eight nations, five religions, nine official languages, thirty nationalities, seventeen crowns and ten assemblies… Vienna was damaging itself by granting more rights.”

“Even though the Greeks were few in number, Vienna gave them their rights while subduing the rights of others from Rumeli who weren’t Greeks!”

“Yes it did that by granting the Phanariots rule over all the Christians from Rumeli.”

“Well, a summer later, with the introduction of the ‘Consistory system’, Emperor Joseph ordered the church courts to grant the bishops the right to protect their language and script!”

“Yes, and then the emperor appointed the bishop of Vienna!”

“Like the sultan appointed the patriarch in Istanbul, to help him rule!”

“After the assembly took place in Timishvar in the summer of 1790, Stefan Stratimirovich was appointed Bishop of Vienna and the surrounding area. Stratimirovich belonged to a prominent family, ennobled by Maria Theresa... The summer after, I decided to donate money to assist in the eradication of scarlet fever. For that I went to see Dr. Jovan. He didn’t know what to do so he told the Bishop about it. The Bishop then came to see me on Ilinden so that we could have a talk about building a high school! In other words, I was to donate money not to eradicate scarlet fever but to build a school for Slavonic languages; so that children from Rumeli wouldn’t have to learn foreign languages! ...I was convinced that learning and education had the potential to defeat diseases. So, I agreed to finance the building of a high school. After that the Bishop kept coming back and asked me to continue to donate more money for theological and public schools because he said they were needed. But unfortunately, they kept failing mainly because the church didn’t want to teach, and the Slavonic speakers from Rumeli still had to learn to speak foreign languages. I then realized that the Bishop was under the auspices of Vienna and Budim and, as the saying goes, ‘The fish stinks from the head,’ that’s why there was no progress in the schools…”

Immediately after Kir Dimitri spoke his last words, Konstantin turned and, with his big, dark green eyes, looked at him. He paused for a short moment in an attempt to find the right words to respond to him. He felt that now was the right moment, when Dimitri expressed disappointment with the leadership, which instead of focusing on educating the flock, only cared about its own privileges from Vienna or Budim. Konstantin chose his words carefully and said:

“Uncle Dimitri you mentioned the leadership! Here we are… We have our compatriots without the right to leadership. It seems like something always interfered with our thoughts, like your most human desire which hasn’t seen the light of day; your experience with the bishop for example. Isn’t it time that we realized that we need to unite in a secret organization and adopt principles that we must adhere to? We need to join an organization and take an oath to abide by our own laws so that we can eliminate the problems that plague us.”

“Are you talking of the Masons? Because they’ve already approached me…”

“They approached me too, but this is something different. It must be based on a nationality and care for our people.”

“Okay! ...How do we do this? What’s needed?”

“Well, most of our people are involved in all sorts of guilds - winemakers, booksellers, manufacturers, bankers, officials... We need to get them all together in one place. And when we do that, during our first gathering, we all need to stand in a circle. This is the most inspirational way to do this. It’s like preparing to take part in an all male dance in a great hall. We must then take the oath with a single voice; all shouting the oath in a single breath of tribal monotony. It must spread through the hall like the aroma of a bunch of basil sprinkled with tiny drops of holy water. Our yells must bounce off the walls and echo over the heads of those yelling. The feeling we get from doing this will lead us all forward. Our strength will quickly diminish the power of the kingdoms that diminish us and that power will be lost in the same corridors in which our prayers and intentions used to be lost. We need to strengthen, widen and support our organization and it needs to support us. We need to feel as one and no one needs to be humbled or exalted because of age, education, statues… Everyone needs to become a leader after half a summer and no temptations must be allowed for self-love, like these other people... If this is close to what you want, Uncle Dimitri, then you’re welcome to join us.”

“Well, you have the right idea, so make it happen. In my time, we had no educated people and no awareness of nationality. The past summers I lived hadn’t allowed me to travel but gave me the opportunity to help in other ways… making donations and supporting all kinds of services, for example. I’m with you.”

“The younger people can do the running around. The older people can contribute their experience and wisdom... How are our people doing here in Hungary?”

“You know how they are doing. They are working hard and they are thrifty and meek. They quickly adapt to the environment and to the people. They live all over Budim and Pesht as well as all over Bechkerek, Seged, Komlosh, Mohach, Modosh (today known as the village Jasha Tomich located in Vojvodina, near Zrenjanin), and in other, smaller places.”

“I need to meet with those who have influence and are able to talk about our problems and needs here. I also need to make contact with the trades and guilds so that we can take care of the poor and help them stand on their own two feet. How can I do that?”

“I will write you introduction letters for some and you’ll have to convince others by talking to them. In Budim your will find Dimo Apostolov from Solun. He has stores, shops, vineyards and properties. There you will also find Atanatsko Jankov, Jovan Filipov and Gigo the merchant who own a winery. In the old stores you will find Pejo Stojanov-Kolarot from Mariovo, Volche-Bozadzija from Prilep Region, Orestie Radev-Abadzijata and others. The most wealthy are the brothers Christopher and Kiril Nakov from Poljan ((From Poljanin) - today’s Dojran in the Republic of Macedonia), who now spend most of their time in Vienna. They became wealthy by draining swamps in Tisa and Seged and turning them into productive agricultural lands. They built schools for agriculture. They also became barons after they gave the emperor the treasure from Attila that they found in the middle of the swamps they drained.”

“They are with us in Vienna and they are helping... It’s also important for me to know if there are any troublemakers (enforcers) among our people here.”

“Well, there are. You can find them in Mishko Velchev’s tavern. They were haiduks back home (Macedonia), killing Turks and Arnauts. They were wanted men so they ran off and came here to avoid the noose. Some of them had grandfathers who were haiduks. Included among them are Tesho Sekulov and the Barjaktarski brothers Guro and Pavle from Malesh. Why is this important for you to know?”

“Everyone is important Uncle Dimitri. In times of trouble they are also crucial. Truth needs humility, meekness and mind, but let it be known that we also have strength... how are things in Pesht on the other side of Budim?”

“You will find our people (Macedonians) in ‘Leopold Varosh’. Included among them are Giorgi Masev from Bitola who inherited his trade business from his father and expanded it to include many more stores. The brothers Dimitri and Konstantin Moskov are also from Bitola. Masev and the Moskov brothers donated oil for the church that was built eight summers ago. Unfortunately the people from Rumeli are now divided. The Macedonians, Serbs and Bulgarians attend the “Illyrian Church”, as the episcopate calls it. The Greek, Vlach and Arnaut Christians want a separate church. Even some of the wealthier Macedonian merchants are with them. They had no common ground with the Serbs and Bulgarians. Also they spoke the Greek language which is the language of trade, so they felt they would have more privileges if they went with the Greeks. But even there they are divided. The Vlachs took the Greeks to court because they wanted their liturgy in the Vlach language... Look, everyone is quarreling, in times like these, they are looking for their birthright, something they barely thought about before!” concluded Dimitri.

All the things he’d heard about in his conversation with Dimitri were now in Konstantin’s mind. He was concerned about the division among the Macedonians; divisions that had always torn them apart. Traveling down the cobblestone road, the coach approached the wide paved Danube quay that could be seen from afar. The bright sun became obscured by the eaves of the stores and other buildings in the circular core of the bazaar. The street was busy with passersby, horsemen and coachs that made a lot of noise. Even Konstantin’s coach squeaked as it traveled over the cobblestones. The place was full of idle melancholy, young people shouting and laughing. Down the road were a couple of overdressed men discussing things over coffee. The coach stopped just before the turn at the tavern which had a striking façade and an advertisement for bedrooms upstairs. After he got off the coach Konstantin carefully walked towards the tavern. His attention was drawn to a display in a row of adjoining shop windows. It reminded him of

Istanbul with things being displayed behind glass such as engraved kettles, pots, pans, spoons and plates, tastefully arranged to deceive passersby. Jacob arranged the accommodation and the porters unloaded their coach and placed their luggage in the tavern. Seemingly fascinated by the displays, Konstantin stood in front of the window for a long time. Besides thinking of Istanbul, Konstantin also thought of his father, mother, sister and other relatives who still lived there. His brother Stefan wanted to bring them here but there was always something in the way; from wars to bad storms to ruined roads. Overwhelmed by his thoughts and tired from his long trip, Konstantin, with difficulty, climbed up the wooden stairs to the rented room. He then took a shower, tidied himself up and lay down and slept on the comfortable bed which seemed a lot more comfortable than he'd expected.

Chapter VIII

“Trieste, June 14, 1804

Dear brother,

I spent three days in the warehouses and paid fair prices for the goods, so, relieved of worries, I am writing to you before my departure tomorrow. I hadn’t been in the sea for a long time so I felt good. It reminded me of Istanbul except that Trieste is smaller, quieter and out of the way. Its harbour is an endless forest of masts, sails, ropes and ship’s beaks. This place satisfies Vienna’s needs. The days of purchasing coffee, sugar and fruit are growing, which will yield good profit. The cost of a lemon in the market four summers ago was three cruisers and now it is thirty-three. Vienna, however, fears that it might lose Trieste because Napoleon has his sights on it. He took Paris on the third Sunday of March. He then took the Pope’s crown and placed it on his own head; this is who the world is dealing with now. It appears that Suvorov won’t help like he did five summers ago when he defeated the three strongest generals and with three battles he drove the French out of Italy just like Hannibal did when he crossed the Alps and defeated them in Switzerland. Now there is only one Lord!

There are all kinds of guilds and crafts here - traders, bankers, officials, ship-owners, fishermen, winemakers… Even Masonic tribes made their way here three summers ago. Trieste has close to thirty thousand people living in it. Among them are a great number of Slavonic speakers; Slovenes and Croats, and others who came from Rumeli such as Serbs, Bulgarians and Macedonians.

There are also Greeks, Vlachs, Arnauts and others who bring news of Kara Giorgia’s rebellion in Serbia. (Karagiorge Petrovich’s uprising of 1804.) He fought many battles, caused much destruction and has gained some freedom. Many people are now fleeing from

there and coming here and from here they go to America. The ships are filled with people heading for America; local people wiped out by inflation, interest and multiple lotteries.

Crossing the Alps was an adventure, and so was the path I took from Klagenfurt - Vilach - Wolch and Goritz to Trieste. I was accustomed to traveling on flat roads in Walachia and Hungary but here I traveled over huge ridges, gorges and waters. In some places the sun was obstructed by the abundance of cherry trees, and in others the sky was wide open. After descending to the valley I rested at an inn in the village Volch, next to the turquoise River Isonzo (today's River Socha in the Republic of Slovenia). On the other side of the river is Tulmino, with its houses resting on the flat side of a hill above which is a fortress. The river air combined with that of the surrounding forests and meadows, the houses with wooden fences and the playful children - were all in harmony. The culmination of all that, together with the cheerful sound of a violin and clarinet, coming from behind a church, was a recipe for happiness; for old and young alike to dance in ecstasy. I have never seen that kind of relaxation before. This kind of relaxation in our enslaved country would be unthinkable. I won't be going there tomorrow. I will go through Alben-Leibach-Tseli-Grats and Vienna with my cargo.

That's all from here. I hope you are all doing well. After I stayed with you, I was convinced that our mother and father would get used to living there... Tell me about Kocho. He is seventeen years old now. What does he think? Is Dimitri studying? Three summers from now we will have to think about him like we were thinking about his brother.

Alexander is still young, only eight summers old, but it's important that he take the right path. Write to me about my nieces. Maria is now eleven. Is she obedient? How are Ekaterina and Elena? Our father doesn't like being idle, maybe you should prepare a little woodshop for him. He can make all sorts of things from all kinds of wood. He feels like he is in his own world when he works with wood and will work for hours without getting tired. As for our mother Despina, I find it difficult to accept that our dearest and most gracious person is not here with me. She looked after me well when I was a child. She calmed me down just by being near me. She

would stay with me until I closed my eyes and fell asleep happily. She also came to see me in the morning and I would wake up looking at her face looking over me. Now that our mother and father are with you, it's easier for me to see them, I will come and visit first opportunity I get. Here things are getting worse as we're headed for war. Maybe I will come back and we will all be together again. Until then, stay healthy and well.

Greetings to all of you, your Konstantin."

Everyone had moist eyes and sighed while the letter was read. Despina cried all the time. A mother's tears could not be held back. Kostantin was good at putting events, characters and feelings in order. It was strange how all these things could fit on that little piece of paper! Their son had the gift of putting his thoughts into vivid pictures, making them feel like they were there with him in all those places. And about the people he wrote, it seemed like he'd known them from time immemorial. After the letter was read Dimitri, his father, said:

"He should come back! Why does he need a war to start to come back?"

"Father, he needs to work! It's his job!" replied Stefan justifying his brother's actions.

"Does he care about anything other than his work...? What about starting a family?"

Everyone was silent. They all knew that Dimitri was angry because his son didn't have time for a family. Konstantin had spent thirty-two summers and still hadn't found what he was looking for. Not because he had no opportunities, but from something else. He had a problem. When he was fifteen or sixteen years old Kostantin had contracted the mumps (a viral infection of the parotid salivary glands). He survived the infection with medical help and with assistance from his uncle the bishop. From reading books and from what he'd heard and from how he was treated after intimate friendships with girls, he realized that his illness had ruined him. He wouldn't be able to have children! And because of that the subject

of marriage wasn't on his mind. His restraint however required patience and strength.

Later on in a different room Despina said to Dimitri, "Kostantin has a fortune of money but none for a gierdeka?" (Turkish Gerdek – a marriage bed.) "Elena, with so many children is embroidering and knitting a new Giergief." (Turkish gergef – a stretched canvas in an embroidery frame.)

"He needs a wife not only for children but also to have a home with his own family. No one knows where his bed is or where he sent the letter from."

"Stefan said that five or six summers ago, when he was finishing in Hungary, he fell in love with someone."

"If they loved one another and if he finished why didn't they get married?"

"How am I supposed to know? He never mentioned this to us!"

Even his closest family members were unaware of Kostantin's love affair… Did it take place or not? It did! It thundered, shed tears and broke hearts. It was like a strong summer thunderstorm with torrents of rain and floods tearing the ground apart and uprooting trees. It started the day after St. George's Day five summers ago when Kostantin arrived in Veliki Bechkerek (modern-day Zrenjanin in Vojvodina, Republic of Serbia), the capital of Torontal County. Thirty summers earlier Empress Maria Theresa granted trade privileges to this city and it became a market for merchants from everywhere. When Emperor Joseph II ruled, he made new plans for this city which attracted new businesses and more people. There were all kinds of people living there including Serbs, Macedonians, Germans, Hungarians, Vlachs and Shops (a south Slavic subgroup of people that spread between Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria which spoke a special dialect. During the middle of the 19th century the Shops began to be assimilated with the populations in Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria). There Kostantin met Zlata, daughter of merchant Kiril Dimitriev. Kiril invited Konstantin to his home after he bought some goods from him. Kiril's property was located

between the “Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God” Church, whose bell tower rose in the north, and the Bega (Berei) River (Vega in Hungarian) whose waters flowed southwards. They sat at a table in the yard were they were accompanied by Kiril’s wife and Nestor, Kiril’s sixteen-year-old son. Kiril was brought here from Prilep, Macedonia by his father when Kiril was a child, so he was happy to have a conversation with a compatriot. There were other compatriots here like the Stojanovs, Trajkovs, Popovs and others but he wanted to meet with a compatriot who was successful; to learn something new from him.

At the end of their conversation Zlata suddenly appeared at the yard gate. As she approached, a wave of pleasant stimuli poured over Kostantin. Her black hair, parted in the middle, hung to the left and right, hiding half her ears on whose soft fringes shone her earrings, bouncing playfully as she took each step. Her white tunic shyly followed the shape of her chest, abdomen and torso. Her short sleeved dress emphasized her gentle arms and hands. The lace above her chest, hemmed around her collar, expressed the soft skin of her throat and neck. There was a perfectly curved line showing her body below her waist which became more pronounced as she walked.

“I’m Zlata Dimitrieva, daughter of the host,” she politely introduced herself with a smile on her face and extended her right hand. Konstantin stood up and said:

“Konstantin Belio, merchant and banker,” he then reached out, shook her hand and said, “I’m pleased to meet you, Miss Dimitrieva!”

“I’m pleased to meet you too, Mr. Belio.”

“Daughter, where have you been? Kostantin here is a bachelor and doesn’t run around as much as you do. It’s not lady like for you to run around like that, is it?”

“Father, you are embarrassing me! ...I didn’t run around, I was with Milena!”

“You’re embarrassing me. Your brother had to do all the serving here.”

Zlata didn’t say anything. She smiled lovingly like a daughter who knew how to smile when she wanted to be indulged. She then, as if accidentally, gave Konstantin a shy trembling look with curious restraint. Konstantin not only caught her isharet (Turkish Işaret - sign, gesture, signal) but retaliated with a penetrating look through her shining pupils and deep into her eyes. Zlata’s guard collapsed and her cheeks flushed red with betrayal. She was in her twentieth summer and behind her stood many youthful letters and declared loves, to a point of being pampered. Older guys like this one aroused passion in her, and this one was well-groomed, confident and with an attitude that left no room for the games she played with the others. His eyes were clean and his look irritating. Zlata felt a strange fear, overwhelmed by something more powerful. She lost her train of thought and stood there stiff without knowing what to do or say. She may have been proud and carefree to walk around the city but here, in her yard, she was powerless. Even though she stood there for a short time, for her it was an eternity; a swarm of words swirled in her brain but her mouth was voiceless.

“Don’t stand there, daughter, clear the table!” said her father.

“Yes, father..., right away!” replied Zlata seeming like she was lost for words, as if she was guilty of something, and as if not knowing how to gathered the empty kettle, the empty cups of coffee, the dishes and the towels. She then walked down the cobblestone path along the green and flowery courtyard and went inside the house. Even though Zlata’s unexpected meeting with Konstantin ended, the consequences of it kept growing. She couldn’t sleep that night, especially after what she found out about him from her father. Konstantin couldn’t sleep either thinking of her. Zlata’s father became so enamoured with Konstantine that during dinner he spoke to Nestor, his son, at length about Konstantin’s success as a banker and merchant, expecting him to follow his path. Zlata’s mother, whose care for her unmarried daughter was already tight, saw an opportunity. For the first time she could see a change in her daughter’s eyes, voice and attitude. She seemed to care for the young banker. There were very few women who were unmarried at

twenty years of age, but Zlata was too egoistical to get married. It was good that Kostantin was going to be in the city for two or three more days. The city wasn't big, so wherever you turned you met someone you knew. And, as it happened, they met the next day. Looking for some small items in the bazaar, Zlata saw Konstantin approaching from the other end of the street. With each step their excitement grew.

When they met they stopped walking. They were both elegantly dressed which captured the hidden admiration and jealousy of those who sat there or passed by them. Would "their" Zlata fall for this one was the question on her mother's mind… No, it must be a family trait that she didn't allow anyone to get close to her for long! But the two stood there looking at each other with excitement, waiting… Wondering who was going to speak first, suffocating by the quiet tide of excitement gripping them from within. Similar in nature and mind they kept reading one another. With neither willing to start speaking, they had to communicate with their thoughts. More and more eyes kept looking at them. Konstantin spoke first.

"Miss Dimitrieva, are you going to this store?"

"No, Mr. Belio, I'm going to another store."

"Will you give me the honour of speaking with you at that table?"

"Chatting at a table with someone educated and well-known would be interesting but not appropriate. You may be accustomed to sitting at a table with a girl in the big cities but its different here."

"True, but the girls in the big cities are not as special as you. I don't sit with just anyone!"

"Oh, thank you... for thinking of me as someone special! But Mr. Belio, you dragged me into a conversation and here we are, in plain sight… Let's sit down like you suggested."

They sat down and waited for the waiter to order something. Zlata continued:

“About those girls... Look, everyone here knows everyone. They also know that you’re sitting with someone. See the couple sitting at the last table? They plan to be engaged this Sunday. See the other two couples; they plan to be engaged soon. Do you realize what I look like to them, sitting here with you?”

“We’ve met and you know me well enough to call me by my name, and I to call you by your golden name. And about the other, I will try to understand my dearest Zlata... don’t worry!”

“Okay then, out here I will address you by your name…! So, my dear Konstantin, do you know how many idiots there are here? They are already looking at me like I’m some kind of trouble maker!”

“Ah, you have a soft heart…! I’m all yours my dear Zlata, right?”

“Are you even listening to me...? They will be gossiping about me!”

“I am listening to you and here is what I say: ‘It doesn’t matter what they say, but what you say, what makes you happy and comfortable. If you give up on that and do exactly what others expect you to do, will they be grateful to you? No! They will still gossip about you even without me here!’…”

“Yes, they will gossip about me... but that’s different!”

“And I Zlata, love you endlessly, and if you feel about me the way I feel about you, you won’t worry so much about them… you’ll give me your full attention.”

“You’re embarrassing me…! And who knows what your intentions are towards me?”

“I am inexperienced in these matters but what I tell you, I’m telling you freely. You’re like me, you do and say as you like and, as such, you can easily overcome the fear of the gossipers. You’re special and your beautiful face left me sleepless last night!”

“Okay then. You have assured me that you have no bad intentions towards me…! You’re a banker and a merchant, you read thoughts

well and I can't seem to hide mine... I too didn't sleep last night because of the restlessness in my heart."

"In that case I will hire a coach and take you to the biggest city where your mind can be at ease!"

This is what Kostantin and Zlata said to each other when that day started. Then they got up and left like floating shadows on the street and got lost in the park. They spent the following days enjoying their love affair. Kostantin eased his way into Zlata's world of body and being; so feminine and without a sign of weakness, softness or heaviness. But that love affair was about to come to a sudden end. It was terrible for Kostantin because, in fact, he wasn't aware of "the bad" when it began. Now in their growing passion, he was about to stumble into it. It was over for them even before Zlata had a chance to be happy. The spark was lit, followed by a quarrel - and the end. This took place the next day as they sat on a large tree trunk at the entrance of the park near a man, a woman and two girls. The younger of the two girls walked away from her parents and came towards the place where Kostantin and Zlata were sitting. Smiling shyly and swaying left and right, she kept looking at them.

"What is your name?" asked Zlata.

"Giurgia!"

"Were you named after your grandmother?"

"Yes, after my grandmother, her name was Giurgia."

The little girl kept looking at them gently with her wide, dark, clear and innocent eyes partly covered by the locks of her hair which Zlata couldn't resist to stroke. She trembled and indulged the little girl, speaking sweet words to her in a gentle high tone of voice as if talking to a childhood friend. Yes, Zlata may be an arrogant person but she had strong feelings for children. This brought an almost forgotten memory into Konstantin's mind. He thought less of the little girl and more of himself and his own childhood. Konstantin was haunted by his own childhood which left him impotent, without the possibility of ever having offspring. The thought of this choked

him. Zlata sent the little girl back to her parents who were cheerful watching her. Overwhelmed with her own feelings, Zlata turned to Konstantin and said:

“I want to have many children, my dearest.”

“Well, yes... that will be nice, yes.”

“What is it? You don’t want children?”

“I do my dear, how could I not? But children are children, one or many, yours or adopted. It’s the same when they are in your home.”

“What are you talking about? Yours or adopted...? What’s the matter with you?”

“Nothing, what should be the matter my dearest?”

“You’re hiding something! Ever since the girl came over something changed in you! Are you secretly married? Why are you dragging your feet? Why haven’t you asked my parents for my hand in marriage? No, it must be something worse! You have a child from a secret relationship, eh…? Tell me, speak up!”

No, no and no! It has nothing to do with what you said!”

“Is it something else, some kind of twisted thing?”

“Please stop, I will tell you but I don’t know if that will change anything for you. I’m not married, nor do I have a child somewhere... because I can’t have children!”

“What…? How do you know? Have you lived with other women?”

“I have been with girls but I haven’t lived with anyone. The doctors discovered this when I was in the hospital for something else. They also confirmed it in a hospital in Vienna. As a child I suffered from the mumps. I swelled up and the swelling lasted for days. And here are the consequences.”

This new information shocked Zlata. She was stunned. Her head was buzzing with disbelief, questions and thoughts. She said:

“When were you planning to tell me all this?”

“I was looking for a way to tell you and told myself all children are the same…! The world is full of adopted children. Their adoptive parents take good care of them. Most children are better looked after by adoptive parents then by birth parents. It’s all up to how they are brought up and educated!”

From looking into Zlata’s eyes Kostantin came to the realization that everything was in vain. She no longer trusted him. Her mind worked quickly. This is what she thought:

“He confessed to me that he had been with other women. Of course he has been with other women… I suppose high class call girls… All alone all these summers and with all his money…? People like him do go to houses like that with easy and expensive women... He must have contracted a disease from one of them which made him infertile and now he feels ashamed so he had to make up this story about allegedly having the mumps? What was he thinking? No, its over with him, I’m ending it!”

Life for Zlata had to begin and end with love, trust, marriage, struggle for a better life and family; life was also passion, birth, growth and old age. The love that ignited in her, ended with Kostantin. Her life just began to look grey and hard. Suddenly, as if he was someone else, Konstantin sat there in silence looking straight ahead. He soon became insensitive like he didn’t care about anything or anyone. He may or may not have been guilty of what Zlata thought he had done. But, even if he told the truth, everything had fallen apart for Zlata. Her feelings were dulled and she lost her devotion and trust. He dragged her into this deep love affair in front of the entire world without warning; so that she could decide for herself what to do. Her ego awakened from her feelings of being exploited. Zlata got up and left with a muffled cry, she even ran. He didn’t even move at all. He didn’t know if it was worth it. So, the love affair was over. Kostantin left the city without seeing her again. Since then he threw himself even more fanatically into his work,

banking and trading, directing all his energy and mind into it. Since then he hasn't fallen in love with anyone. He never again loved anyone like he loved Zlata Dimitrieva.

Chapter IX

Soon after he got out of his room in the great inn near Vidin, Stefan went down to the waiting room. People kept coming in while he waited. The place was coming alive. In order to accommodate more guests the innkeeper had narrowed the rooms but that caused congestion. The place was noisy and loud. The creaking of wooden doors, floors and stairs, loud human chatter, trotting of horse hooves outside, all added to the general noise. Many of the guests came from Hungary, Transylvania and Walachia. Some were local Ottoman Beys, raft builders and coach drivers. Some were here on business and others to idle their time. Spaso, a merchant by trade, came into the waiting room and, after greeting Stefan, the two left and boarded a coach parked in front of the inn. Then they drove off. With wheels squealing and hooves knocking on the stone slabs, they made their way up towards the city. They stopped in front of a big building.

"Why are we stopping?" asked Stefan.

"Soldiers are coming out of the 'Cross-Barracks,' replied Spaso.

"Cross-barracks?"

"It took the Neimars from Poland three summers to construct this building for Osman Pazvantoglu. He later remembered that it was like a great cross. In no faith was it evil what he'd done from Vidin to Varna, and from Bucharest to Kraiova. One hundred thousand soldiers went into jihad against him, but Osman won and became pasha."

"And the mess was gone. As a pasha he no longer had to plunder because money came from taxes, teskerinia (written permission, identification papers, documents, etc.) and everything else. He brought order and got even closer to the Christians, they say!"

“He got that from the French who came here. He treated Christians and Mohammedans as equals. He halved their taxes and abolished taxing the poor. He helped Kara Giorgia in a war with the Dahis whom he didn’t want near. (The Dahis were led by four outcast janissary squires, who ruled the Belgrade pashalak from 1801-1804. Lacking the power to defeat them, the Sultan recognized their pashalak.) But when the local Shops (Shopi) allied themselves with the Serbs, Osman was shocked that they were preparing a rebellion against him. After Vasilitsa (New Years by the old calendar) two summers ago, Osman gathered the leaders of the rebellion and Bishop Kalinik and massacred them inside a church. The summer after the massacre, Osman fell ill. He died last year after Atanas Day. Now Idriz Mola is pasha.”

“Mola…? Should I be seeing him?”

“Yes, he knows about you and you will both benefit from such a visit.”

After the soldiers passed by, the coachman prompted the horses to get moving and they soon arrived at the bazaar; amid roasting skewers, heavy smells of frying oils, smells of burned sugar and various other spices. There were veiled women, bald men and boys who served food and drinks. Spaso and his guest Stefan got of the coach and went towards the stores because Stefan knew what to give a Turkish official. He selected some good gifts and asked for the prices of other goods.

“You’ll see, we will make a deal during our first visit with the pasha,” said Spaso.

“I will bring a small quantity of goods along the Danube. The pasha too will gain something from them. Should I still think about the teskere (invitation)?

A little later the coach started moving and made its way to the pasha’s inn. Stefan was always confident, but approaching the inn he began to feel a strange restlessness.

He knew practically nothing about this Mola, and wondered if he was somewhat strange in nature, so he asked Spaso:

“What else do you know about the pasha, except that he is good with numbers? Is he evil, weak, strong, what family is he from?”

“Has he gained the respect of the elders? He has. Was he taught by tyrants? He was. Some janissaries left the sultan and became sandzhaks (merchants), using Istanbul’s wars in Egypt or along the Danube for their own benefit. They rose and fell in glory and ruin. This is how Mola appeared on the scene and here he is… a pasha.”

“Does he keep his word…? What’s he like when trading with Christians?”

“He is good with the Christians and his trade with them is first class. Pazvantoglu’s trade laws were good because Mola drafted them. Traders like the Shishmanovs are very happy with them. Goods were traded with “pazvant” money (Pazvantoglu’s currency)... I have some here with French letters written on them that say ‘There is only one god’ on one side and ‘Freedom’ on the other. They were close to Napoleon. That’s where they got the idea of freedom, equality and brotherhood.”

“Did they also think about how to lead the Freemasons?”

“It seemed like they were in a brotherhood in Vienna, but who knows?”

“How much is Idriz Pasha mixed up in everything else?”

“Look, not even Osman rose like that. His father Omer Aga left him a thousand books and he obtained another two thousand. He was well read and surrounded himself with bright people like Idriz whom he hired in his service twelve or thirteen years ago. At that time, the sultan sent an army to Vidin from Istanbul and Trsteniklioglu from Ruschuk. They clashed with Osman’s army, somewhere near Pleven but Osman defeated them because Napoleon was helping him. He took captives and among them was Idriz Mola, then a janissary lieutenant from Ruschuk. But because he had been

wronged before, Idriz promised to serve Osman. As it turned out, the next summer Idriz broke the new siege of Vidin and took the head of Hapti Pasha. After that Osman put Idriz next to him and when he found out Idriz was good with numbers, he put him in charge of his treasury. Idriz Mola was loyal and kept his word to the end."

"Well, that's good to know... and we have arrived."

The horses stopped in front of the entrance to the inn. Although the inn was a dominating structure, it was wrapped in by the surrounding deciduous trees. Of the three floors it had, the lower was the widest and with many rooms, the second floor had half the number of rooms and the third had only one room raised above everything. The pasha chose a place with the best view of the city and the Danube where the river wind blew and mixed with the clean air coming from the shadows of the tree canopy.

A guard went inside to announce their arrival. He came back with a courtier dressed in a stately robe. He seemed to be the pasha's secretary. He led the businessmen inside in a ceremonial way that seemed to follow European protocols. From this it was evident that the French had much influence here. Finally, they were ushered into the pasha's lounge. The pasha sat on a convenient, slightly elevated chair covered with velvet, silver and pearls on the sides. The lounge shone in the splendor of beautiful carpets and sofas, and a certain sparkle radiated from the patterns of the woodwork, from the metal of the decorative weapons and from all those places lined with mother-of-pearl. Stefan and Spaso sat on the guest sofas on the side after the pasha invited them to sit with a gesture from his slightly raised hand. The Pasha was a mature man in his prime somewhere in his forties but his duty and the attacks from his enemies made him look older. In general his senses were sharp and he continuously scanned his guests reading their body language. Stefan surmised that "if the pasha wanted an impression from Stefan he would have asked Spaso about him. It would have been smart of Spaso to say that Stefan was like a Muslim judge who judged for an hour be it this hour or be it another. This is what we would have expected from the pasha too. He had us both in his service!"

When the pasha and Stefan finished with the greetings, they continued to scan each other's glances like they were looking for something. Spaso in the meantime laid in wait thinking that everyone in this business hunted everyone else. At one point, it seemed to Stefan that he saw a faint gleam in the pasha's eyes, a ray of hope that foretold they would be doing business with him. That feeling strengthened Stefan. He even got the feeling that he knew the pasha from somewhere. The pasha too had similar thoughts. Stefan figured that he'd known Idriz from the time he and the bishop were moving goods from Bucharest all over Walachia, or from his brother the banker. After the ice was broken they continued their discussion but with caution. Idriz continued questioning Stefan about his plans as well as the volume of goods he carried, the timing, his intentions and so on. About some things the pasha also questioned Spaso to make sure of the answers and to easier knit a web of calculations. Stefan was careful, as much as he could be and so was Spaso!

"Vidin is interesting but it's more important for a trader to know where the conditions are best," said Stefan at one point.

"Do you think there are more secure places? Napoleon has trampled Europe, the Russians have trampled Walachia and there are ongoing revolts in Serbia and battles in Istanbul. Vidin is much better in comparison… and besides, it has low taxes. And the only thing your goods have to cross is the Danube River."

"Dear Pasha, when a bear plays in your neighbourhood it's bound to come to your door. Perhaps it would be better if I didn't do business at all!"

"The Russians came to Vidin and were defeated. Sultan Selim gave me three horsetails (symbolic title for pasha) because I stopped them from crossing the Danube.

"Mahmud is now sultan and Alemdar Mustafa Vizier with whom you had unfinished business in Ruschuk. They are preparing to attack you with a large army. Under those conditions it won't be…"

“Enough…! What kind of pezevenk (hooligan) are you? I treat you like a prince, and you… you line up my enemies and those who are sowing malice against me! What kind of mother and father in a pasha’s yard taught you to speak like this, huh?!”

“You’re right Pasha; you did treat me like a prince. And if you want to know, my mother’s name is Despina and my father’s is Dimitri. My parents have never seen a Pasha’s yard, never mind teaching me in one...”

“Despina…? Dimitri…? You must be Stefan! Is your younger brother Konstantin? Are you from Linotopi, under Gramushcha?”

“Yes, that’s us... But how do you know that, Pasha?”

After the pasha had calmed down and his swollen veins bursting with rage turned back to normal, his anger subsided and his gloomy face became slightly brighter as if a gentle hand had stroked it. His whole body relaxed and, full of sad thoughts, full of sorrow, and with wet eyes and barely visible tears, he turned and looked at Stefan. Stefan started to feel cold all over as he wondered how the pasha knew all this…! He now knows everything about me, thought Stefan to himself, and is circling around me with vague intentions to trade… At the same time it appeared to Stefan like the pasha was in shock. The pasha had stopped talking; it seemed like he had lost his voice... but not for long. After the torturous silence, words started coming out of him. With a crackling voice, barely enough to break the silence, the pasha said:

“On the day of judgment, my father sent me to my grandfather Giorgia in ‘Dolno Maalo’! My younger brother looked at me with envy because our father trusted me... But life is full of lies. When you think you have gained something you soon realize you have lost even more. I separated myself from my brother and ran downhill as our father had instructed... and time swallowed me. I wandered in the fog a long time, and only when I sat down did my brother arrive.”

“Giorgi!” Stefan cried. Stefan lost his strength and his entire body began to shake, suffering under the force of the currents that

dragged joy, sorrow, dizziness and thoughts through his veins and nerves... He got up and ran towards Idriz who was already standing. They hugged and a moment later they both had wet eyes looking at each other… They were looking for signs of recognition, something from their past that they could recognize hidden in their faces. They could feel each other's pain as tears of sadness and joy flowed down their faces without end. Even Spaso's face was moistened with tears, and no matter how much he wiped them with his sharbet (handkerchief) they continued to flow from his eyelids. He kept staring at them, the two who had just discovered that they were brothers. He felt privileged to be a witness to such a moment. And as they say, the stronger the pain, the further back it goes. With their fraternal hug, they opened and closed doors through the corridors of their minds, searching for common things that had survived in their memories. At one moment they remembered running near the frothing Belitsa River, at another they remembered being in their grandfather's yard and then in the barn in Blatsa with their cousins... Their childhood memories took them to who knows where, in which they were both together.

"You can leave now Spaso, my brother and I have a lot to discuss," said Idriz when the two brothers were done reminiscing.

After the brothers were reacquainted, the spacious cold lounge they were in seemed to shrink and warm up. It began to look like a cozy little room with the brothers sitting down for a nice chat. During their conversation Stefan informed Idriz of how their father, mother, brother, sister and all the others were doing. Idriz expressed joy when he heard the name of every niece and nephew. Idriz told Stefan about his own family and took him to meet his wife and daughters. Initially they were a bit confused about his new and distant family but in time Idriz figured they would get used to it. After that the brothers went back to the lounge and Idriz began to tell Stefan what had happened to him that dreadful day when they were separated.

"I didn't do exactly as our father asked me to do the day I was sent to see our grandfather. He trusted me to do what he asked and told me to come back immediately. Why didn't I do what I was told…? Why didn't I run when I saw the slaughtered people in the yard?

Why did I allow myself to be captured? They were all dead and the rest of us were neither alive nor dead. They herded us like a flock of screaming animals and made us walk on foot over hills, ridges and valleys with our fate sealed. I was alive with my throat caught between the jaws of the beast... I was alive like our grandfather's half month old calf that was taken by a wolf one night. The wolf grabbed it by the throat with its jaws and led it away. The wolf wasn't strong enough to carry it dead so it left the calf alive. It dragged it along and made it walk for hours using its own legs and strength... When the wolf brought the calf into its den it left it alive for a few days to teach its young pups how to kill. It only bit its legs to make sure it couldn't run away... My experience was similar to that of the calf. Not even one summer had passed between the calf's fate and mine. When they found the wolf's den the only thing that was left of our calf was the rope and the wedge on which it was tied. That's how they knew it was our calf. I would have never guessed that I would share my fate with the calf… except my wolf's den was the village Molai where we arrived after crossing the mountains. That village was in front of a long plain at the end of which was the town Goritsa (today's Korcha in the Republic of Albania). The spoils from the plunder were divided there among the thieves. I saw our aunt Ilina there for the last time. They took her away along with the other women and girls. The torment they experienced was unspeakable. They had big plans for us boys from eight to twelve summers old. They fed us well to strengthen us for what was coming but first we had to give up our Christian faith. They forced us to accept a new faith and adorned us with Islam, then circumcision and celebration. I had to say two holy words in front of a hodzha and a mufti to renounce my name. So from Giorgi I became Idriz... Ten days later Hadzhi Hasan Alemdar arrived at the market. He was a janissary and served as a bairaktar (standard bearer). He traded in cattle and sometimes in people. Later I found out that he was born in a local village called Goshkove. The village Molai was located at the end of the plain but a little higher… Hadzhi Hasan Alemdar was attached to his family there by trade. Then, when we arrived near the Danube River, he introduced me to the janissaries as Idriz from Molai. But, either the scribe heard him wrong and wrote the name in the register wrong or because of the Turkish word for Molai, the people began to call me Idriz Mola, so Mola became my last name."

“Oh my poor brother, you’ve suffered a lot... We too suffered a lot… We didn’t have a single good day that summer or the summers that followed… For as long as we lived there that land seemed to be cursed... We used to have some good days in the past but all was lost after that day… Speaking of Alemdar you mentioned… Is he related to Vizier Mustafa Alemdar?”

“Yes, Mustafa is his father. When Mustafa was a young man he and his friends left their service and went looting along the Danube River. He later tied himself with Ayan Trstenikliogluwho gave him shelter in Ruschuk. I served there as a lieutenant and had a misunderstanding with Mustafa. After the battle for Pleven, I joined Pazvantoglu’s service; I couldn’t go back. And it was a good thing too because as soon as Trstenikliogluwho died, Mustafa became an official in Ruschuk and two or three months ago he became vizier.”

“Your situation is bad when the vizier is your enemy!”

“His situation is even worse because he has stronger enemies. The new sultan doesn’t like him. He will hold him there until he uses up his strength and gains access to his seat. He will then take it from him. I got a secret message from the sultan’s people to attack Ruschuk and strike Alemdar’s stronghold in October 1808 and they will attack him in Istanbul.”

“Be careful they don’t play you after they use you?”

“They will need me as long as the war with the Russians lasts, and it will last a long time. When it ends anything is possible. But whatever happens, I’m prepared.”

Stefan knew his brother was calculating. He was a step ahead of the others no matter what they did. While there was chaos everywhere there was order in Vidin because his brother was in favour of supporting trade... Now that Idriz had found his brother and shared his feelings of sadness and joy with him, he turned to lighter topics. He said:

“Don’t worry about me brother. First, I would like to invite everyone in our family, our father, our mother, your family, our

brother and sister… to come here. I want to also send gifts to everyone... And then we brothers - merchants, pashas, judges, bankers and whatever will pursue what we know best - economy and trade. From the Ottoman side I will send and arrange whatever the markets demand. You from Walachia, Transylvania, Moldova and Russia, and our brother from Hungary, Austria, Italy and Bavaria will do the same. We'll become well-known in all of Europe."

"Of course brother, of course... Konstantin will not be able to come right away. He was in Budim, and he would have already left for Vienna, but I will give him the happy news. But until he arrives, I will visit father, mother and my family and give them the good news... We will somehow find a way to contact our sister in Istanbul... Then we will all gather together like you asked and pursue our business in trade, economy, holdings… and everything will be in order."

Chapter X

It was late autumn and the roads were ruined. Konstantin stared powerlessly from behind his window at the greyness over Vienna and at the freezing rain sprinkling outside. Overwhelmed by the power of temptation and loneliness, he remembered that at this very moment two years ago, he had left Istanbul for Bucharest with Jovan Karadzha the new ruler of Walachia. The weather was like today, raining and freezing. The cold seemed to seep into his skin through his clothes. He was on his way to invest in Karadzha, from whom Istanbul demanded eight thousand bags of gold for the Walachian throne. Konstantin lent it to him. Karadzha bought the throne and became prince of Walachia and its ruler. Karadzha paid Konstantin back by allowing him to trade in his kingdom and hired his brother Stefan to manage his treasury. Stefan became the lead treasurer of the treasury and Konstantin got his loan repaid. All this was done under the terms of the loan. With permission from the government the brothers then made everything possible. Stefan acquired some property from the village Alunisu and built a church for the inhabitants.

Ever since the summer of 1812, Europe has not been the same. At the end of May the Russian Tsar and the Turkish Sultan ended a six-year war in Bucharest. Tsar Alexander ended the war so that he could start another war against Napoleon which was to begin on "Vrtolum" Day ("St. Apostles Bartholomew and Barnabas Day" which in the Orthodox religion is always fixed on June 24). Free from the war with Russia, Sultan Mahmud declared war on Kara Giorgi and the outlawed pashas. Under the pretence of caring for the Serbs and for Kara Giorgi, Russia now left them at the mercy of Istanbul, but gained Bessarabia, part of Moldova and the Caucasus. Russia always did this in Rumelia. It raised its voice for the rights of Orthodoxy and for its Slavonic brothers, setting them on fire and then offering them limited help. Then, when Russia got what it wanted, it abandoned them. Liberated from the war with Russia, the

Sultan now attacked the renegade pashas, including Idriz in Vidin. When Stefan and Konstantin found out about this, they did everything in their power to rescue their brother, including offering bribes, and they succeeded. But, instead of letting him go, the Ottoman government arranged for him to move to Istanbul, and he did. In the four summers he worked with his brothers he made reasonable profits from moving goods by caravan. The brothers were able to move a lot of goods everywhere. From Macedonia they moved Vardar tobacco to Austria, Seres cotton to the fabric makers of Saxony, and Shtip cauldrons to Hungary. They brought back glass and porcelain from Austria, mirrors and books from Italy, and sugar and coffee from the Netherlands. But the wars were always in the way and devoured a lot. More than three hundred thousand horses were killed in Russia alone. Besides the horses more than a million soldiers lost their lives in that war alone with more in other wars. Without livestock to work them, the fields were deserted. The war also brought plagues, famine and diseases including the black plague in Istanbul. At the end of 1813, Konstantin and Idriz became ill. Idriz and his family contracted the plague and they all died. When Konstantin received the bad news he was with his nephews Kocho and Dimitri. They all mourned their deaths together. Idriz was supposedly forgiven by Istanbul for being a renegade in Vidin, but the same Istanbul government was now suing him. Kocho and Dimitri had been staying in Vienna since the spring, when Kocho became ambassador in Walachia. Good thing that they remained there because the plague crossed the Danube River in late 1814. Seventy thousand people died in Walachia from February to May. That's half of Bucharest.

And now Konstantin is standing behind the window looking at the passing grey clouds with thoughts of his past, especially the death of his brother and his family. After they found Idriz the family tried to relive all the time that misfortune had taken away from them. True, his brother had a different name and faith, but blood and origin don't change. Idriz, formerly known as Giorgi was like his brother Konstantin and shared his intelligence, insight and expertise in books and money. From the days when he was an officer he was well disciplined and capable of doing many things. He paid attention to details and was persistent in running things. Without a doubt,

Idriz was the third leg of the Belio trivet, which supported even heavier cauldrons.

“Uncle, are you here?” yelled Kocho as he entered the room.

“Yes, I’m here... I was distracted… come on in!” said Konstantin as he left the window and slowly turned to meet Kocho.

“I came early. I wanted to tell you that Prince Metternich blocked congress. (Clemens Wenzel von Metternich (1773-1859), Austrian statesman and most important diplomat of the time) (The Vienna Congress (0l.X.1814 - 09.VI 1815), for redrawing Europe’s borders after the Napoleonic conquests) They postponed the redrawing again,” said Kocho while they shook hands and then, a moment later, he continued with emphasis, “He blocked congress because the Russian tsar, supported by the Prussians, wants Poland!”

“Even during the most difficult times the Prussians were with the Russians. Many, like that Clausewitz, fought with Kutuzov near Borodino. Why shouldn’t they now support each other?!” replied Konstantin.

“Well, that’s how it is, Uncle, but there is reckoning there. The Russians in return, promised to support them in taking Saxony…! But in the end, I think General Radetski will mediate between the Tsar and Metternich,” said Kocho returning the conversation to the beginning, with a kind of courage and diplomatic sense that would impress… “Since March when they arrived in Paris with the tsar, until they arrived here, they were often together, especially during feasts and drinking bouts. The Russian Tsar follows him in that. That’s why he is close to him, and that’s why Radetski wants his company.”

“It’s more than just that. The tsar appreciates warriors like Radetski who is also of Slavonic origin from Bohemia. His wife too, Countess Francesca is Slovenian from Neumarkt (today’s Trzhich in the Republic of Slovenia),” replied Konstantin, as if seeking other circumstances.

“They influence each other! A handful of kings, dukes, and counts, flirting...” said Kocho, looked outside and added. “The rain has stopped, we should get going, we can continue out conversation in the cafeteria. What do you say, should we get going?”

“Yes, I could really use a coffee!” replied Konstantin, seeming like his nephew had found the thought he was looking for.

One time before leaving Istanbul, Konstantin had bought a hand-held manual coffee grinder. When he worked on his books at home he usually took out about sixty roasted coffee beans, ground them and made his own coffee. But his nephew’s invitation to go out sounded tempting and, despite the cold weather and dim daylight, he went out. But neither that nor the cold bothered a young street vendor, who they met on the way, all hunched up carrying a pile of wood over her head and shoulders. She held the wood with a long strap of canvas tied from her forehead and shoulders over the bundle and down around her belly. The girl nodded at them as they passed by. Kocho, who passed in front of her, saw pain in her eyes. He figured she was suffering because she had to sell wood in this kind of weather. Kocho also noticed something in her hidden face which seemed familiar to him. Pulling back the curtain of memories in his mind, he stopped for a moment! Yes, he recognized the girl. She was Katerina his former girlfriend, the same Katerina whom he knew twelve years ago from school in Bucharest. He assumed she had died in the tragic earthquake of 1804, during the Great Mother of God holiday. That morning, the ground shook and houses collapsed. A fire started from “Selary” Street at eight o’clock and enveloped the entire city. It raged until midnight when it started to rain hard. There were aftershocks; the ground shook until September 8. The school was completely destroyed. Rescuers looked for victims for days. Also among the victims was Katerina. She was sleeping in the dormitory with her sister when the earthquake hit. They both fell into a gap that opened up in the middle of their room. They were both asleep at the time. Kocho grieved for her a long time. Their relationship was disrupted the moment the earthquake hit. He remembered her well. Katerina wasn’t the kind of woman who would hide her feelings. Kocho never met another woman like her. She was his soul mate. She had a kind face, was spontaneous and sometimes naive. She didn’t have the artificiality of other

women. After he lost her, and over time, his youthful love and passion for her diminished. He spent the next summers studying. Seven summers later, Kocho married Elena Mavrokordati from a noble family which, at the time, had financial problems. This was a good opportunity for Kocho; her father and her uncles at the time were widening their caravan markets.

He saw Katerina again but only by accident. Seeing her took him a long way back… He was glad they had left on foot. But not for long, now they had to watch out from being splashed by passing coaches and horses stepping in puddles left behind by the falling rain. They were happy to have arrived at the cafeteria around the corner. But this wasn't any ordinary coffee shop; it was a place where the elite from the city hung out. But, even though Konstantin was influential here, he didn't want to spend much time with people he considered untrustworthy. He was here more for Karadzha than for himself. Karadzha was Walachia's ruler and wanted to make connections with these people. Konstantin owed him for hiring his brother Stefan. He owed him even more when he made Kocho ambassador. Konstantin had a weakness when it came to his nephews. When Karadzha found this out he did him even more favours, including helping his nephews change their last names back to Belio. Unfortunately those in Vienna weren't too happy. Dimitri, the younger nephew, on the other hand, had worries of his own. His wife Despina gave birth prematurely because the child was ill. They took him to hospitals, witch doctors and monasteries. They used potions, icons, talismans and garlic wood, but it was all in vain. As a diversion and to avoid worrying, Dimitri spent most of his time working. He hadn't been back from the road that's why Kocho and his uncle had to go to the cafeteria alone- one of hundreds of coffee shops in Vienna. They say that the first cafeteria in Europe was opened a century and a half ago in Vienna. Since then things had changed a lot. Besides coffee the cafeterias now also served hot chocolate, lemonade, almond milk, liqueur, tea, pudding, ice cream... When they went inside, Kocho and his uncle were greeted by chatter and cigarette smoke. Some patrons stared at their newspapers, others stood around the billiards tables clapping and shouting each time a ball was knocked into a pocket, others were playing cards and muttering, and the rest were sitting at their tables talking.

“Mr. Belio! Welcome,” said Count Alexander Nako loudly from a nearby table. Alexander had a pleasant expression on his smooth cheekboned face, from which a thin moustache protruded. Count Nako greeted them warmly and so did Mr. Kiro Nikolich, a prominent banker and manufacturer who was sitting at the same table. Mr. Nikolich was born in Poljan, the same city in Macedonia where Count Nako’s father Christopher (Krsto) was from. Count Nako was born two summers before Kocho and, although he looked older, his face radiated vitality. Six summers ago Count Nako married Countess Teresa, daughter of Count Ignatie Festetich, a Croat from Turopol, and Countess Francesca Bitiani. They were prominent Hungarian nobles. The Nakovs were very wealthy but their power came from the properties they owned in Hungary.

“Thank you for the honour, kind Lord,” replied Konstantin with a slight bow. Then, after their greetings were done, the four sat down at the same table.

“Gentlemen, we just ordered, would you like to order something for yourselves so that we can start our conversation?” said Count Nako, and as soon as they did, he asked Kocho a question:

“Ambassador, how is the congress going?”

“Unfortunately with a lot of quarreling and interruptions, kind Lord.

“Of course, they are dividing the spoils! Who is causing the biggest dispute?”

“Tsar Alexander and Prince Metternich,” replied Kocho and, to leave a mark on his diplomatic and political achievements, he continued with emphasis, “Yes, kind Lord, it’s all about spoils - Poland and Saxony, but there is also something else! Prince Metternich is worried about Russia’s deep entry into Europe. That’s why he sent General Radetski to Paris; to be the Russian tsar’s shadow. If the tsar puts a puppet on the throne there, everything will go to hell! Russia will be in the east and in the west; Russia will be in Europe, Asia, and even America... After Alaska, he will settle

California. That would disturb the balance which worries the prince."

"The tsar has a large delegation, are they all in agreement?" asked the Count with interest.

"Yes. Included in his delegation are Prince Tsartoriski and Prince Razumovski as well as Counts Capodistria, Stackelberg and Nesselderode and Generals Chernyshev and Volkonski. Everyone is in agreement with the tsar!"

"Prince Razumovski was ambassador here for five summers. He built the "Razumovski Palace", he then built a bridge over the Danube River and a gallery; he ordered works by Haydn and Beethoven. He is an Austrian son-in-law and, like a local, can be influenced, right?" asked the Count looking for weaknesses in the Russian "wall".

"Forgive me Count, After the New Year's fire, during which the palace burned, Razumovski was not the same anymore!" intervened Konstantin following his interest. "When the stove exploded the fire burned down valuable paintings and sculptures. They didn't find Razumovski until dawn and when they did he was all sooty and had lost his voice."

"Dear Belio, Razumovski recovered. His tsar promised him help because the palace was also the Russian embassy…! Prince Metternich will exert influence wherever he can", said Kiro the banker calmly, after which everyone went silent.

The mention of Prince Andrej Kirilovich Razumovski's accident got them all thinking, especially Count Nako. He had the same passion for art as the prince. His puffy black eyes, now frozen in thought, were swelling even more. Count Nako was a painter himself and often painted during his free time because, he said, it eased his soul. He also bought other people's works that caught his eye and captivated his mind. He bought art because he believed in its value and not because it was fashionable or because he had achieved a high place in society. Unlike many people who bought art or painted without knowing or understanding what art was, Prince Razumovski

was an artistic soul with his entire being. He loved art, not only the kind that caught his eye but also the kind that brought him joy like paintings, sculptures, antiquities as well as musical instruments. He was fascinated by various melodies and everyone knew how gifted a violinist he was. His friends used to ask him to play for them and, as a virtuoso, he brought them joy and they admired him for it. Razumovski and the Count were close because of the pain they felt when they lost the artistic collection created by very talented people. Razumovski was also well aware of the collection's monetary value but people who love art never put their money ahead of their admiration for it. In such a situation money loses its meaning; a man will give up his last bit of money for what fulfills him and for what brings pleasure to his senses and soul. But, let us not underestimate the power of money either because if it weren't for money the collection would not have been possible. At the same time there are things that are more powerful than money; the power of love… the power of a fire or of nature. A momentary fire caused irreparable damage which affected the future… Count Nako was now confused. He was born a rich heir, and since his childhood he was surrounded by the power of money. Everything that he and his father acquired from the buildings and properties was no secret to anyone. In fact their wealth was open and even crucial for the people and for the environment. Now people were talking about Razumovski's deeds just like they were talking about the deeds of powerful people who they considered their friends. But, no matter how much the power of money provided people with objects and other things in form and importance, it had its own life and permanence. Some things survived after its founders and owners had died, and some things lasted only several days; being taken away by war, fire or some other whirlwind event. Nako was thinking about that now and feeling sorry for Razumovski. His memories of him were full of sorrow. Nako hoped for better health for the unfortunate Razumovski. Even though Nikolich said that the Prince had recovered from that tragic event, Nako knew very well that there was no recovery from that kind of blow. Taking away a man's love that had turned into his passion was like taking away part of his soul; the man wouldn't be the same again. The silence persisted. Realizing the destructive power of the fire and to end the silence, Kocho decided to talk. He said:

“Lord Stewart of the British delegation reported a recent accident taking place at a large beer oven in London. Employees and passers-by were killed, many were burned and the beer that flowed through the streets caused more damage.”

“Vienna now has a construction plan, it’s not like London with stoves and boilers in the most crowded neighborhoods, and still it’s not at ease. The “Debreziner” soda factory owned by Jovan Manuel from Melnik burned down and he went bankrupt,” said Nikolich the banker.

“Yes, he was removed from the owner’s books but before he became a Catholic, when his last name was Manush, and not Manuel, he joined the guild, so we help him. You Brother Kiro even gave him a house at Jagerzeile,” said Konstantin.

“He had good business sense and he was known everywhere. When he married Clara, all the people high up in the organization were there. Nikola Smolenich, with his yarn spinners in Pesht, Trnava, Novi Jichi, Vienna, and his managers from the soda plant “Gumperdorfer” were all there. Nikola Smolenich was his witness... Unfortunately his furnace destroyed Jovan…! But, my bank will help him and he will be back in business soon,” said Kiro Nikolich.

“Help him! The economy is working and the emperor got his lands back!” said Count Nako unexpectedly considering how he felt about Razumovski’s accident, and continued in a warmer tone of voice. “Uncle Giorgi Karajanov died on June 3rd last year... Did you know that he and my father brought cotton seeds from the old country and planted them here; my father in Hungary and my uncle in Saxony? My uncle started a yarn spinning business in Chemnitz and Emperor Friedrich made him a baron; so from Karajanov he became von Karajan (Giorgi von Karajan - great-grandfather to the conductor Herbert von Karajan (1908-1989).) Uncle Giorgi worked for seventy years and helped many people, like you’re doing now Mr. Nikolich. He and my father donated two thousand forints to go towards building an Orthodox school here. My uncle also set aside five percent of the mortgages to go to the administrators of the school and the church “Holy Trinity” and five hundred forints to go to the churches “St. Trinity” and “St. George”... He helped hospitals and

charities in Vienna. He left two thousand forints for the poor in his native Kozhani in Macedonia!" Count Nako then sighed and looked at everyone as if looking for more attention, and continued. "The old country was always in the back of my father's mind until he died in 1800. He wanted to build a school in his native Poljan so he found two trustworthy locals and gave them a special fund to be distributed to the top twelve students from Poljan. He also awarded scholarships to the Agricultural School that he had set up twenty years ago in Senmiklosh. He helped the church in Poljan, distributed food to the poor and gave a dowry of 100 forints to the twenty-four poorest girls from Poljan... And I can tell you there is no one else like my father and my uncle. They were persistent, hardworking and generous."

"My dear Count, Uncle Krsto and Uncle Giorgi mourned for their homeland. It was their birthplace. It was where they took their first breath of air and rocked in a cradle... But I am more impressed with the generosity of the countries that made them wealthy," said Nikolich.

"Yes, even in these countries they thought about their compatriots who were here. My father left a fund for twenty-four poor Hungarian people from our properties, but also a fund for the 'Illyrian' school and for the bishopric in Karlovtsi. He donated five hundred forints to the hospital in Pesht. And for the day of his own funeral he ordered one hundred services from Macedonians in addition to the twenty-four from Hungarians.

He also donated fifty forints to be given to poor Hungarians, and one hundred forints to be given to the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Churches closest to Senmiklosh... In addition to what he donated for the Orthodox school, he also donated another thousand forints to the 'Alms Institute' and 'Moral School'. My father treated people equally and his compatriots were always in his heart!" explained Count Nako.

"My dear Count, did you contribute to the high school here?" asked Konstantin.

"Yes, my dear Belio... During the times that God cared for us and saved us, we experienced everything; wars, betrayals, false news,

mass exodus, diseases and the plague. Napoleon's cannons hit Vienna in May five years ago. There was much death and destruction and the money was worthless," said Nako with difficulty and paused for a moment. "This is how Konstantin's brother died two summers ago when he was looking to support education and the purchase of books. He donated sixteen thousand forints for all the schools, from the St. Anne's German school to the Orthodox schools... At that time I too decided to make a donation. When His Majesty Franz requested from high society to help with the recovery from the war, I too made an offer to assist by paying for higher education. He liked my proposal and pointed me in that direction. I arranged for scholarships, housing and food for sixty-two students... I'm still supporting that project."

The other three sitting around the table praised the Count's gesture. By now it was already noon, which they had failed to notice given their intense discussion. It was easy to lose track of time when you discussed subjects of interest. The chairs at the adjacent tables kept moving. Patrons were coming and going but also standing up to stretch their legs. They took out their wallets, paid for the service and left. With time those departures became more frequent. Now it was time for these four to part company.

Chapter XI

There, on the horizon in front of which the road and the coach seemed to speed along the endless plain, was the first mound in the start of the journey from Amsterdam. The drive through the idyllic green and blooming Dutch fields befit a melodious symphony guided by the highest point of the coach. The coach driver sitting at the top and, with the skill of a famous conductor, was dictating the pace of the horse trot, which spun the coach wheels an hour more moderately or an hour faster. The rhythmic shaking, creaking and squeaking, mixed with the wind whistling and the horse snorting, created harmonious sounds that intertwined and slowly wove into a symphony. Here, on the road in the middle of the greenery, the coach driver's gift had a special echo. Konstantin, hunting with his eyes through the windows from the inside, was looking at the beautiful landscape. Amsterdam, the place where he was returning from, was in the southern corner of the charming and flat Soyder Bay Valley. The waters there were collecting into so many canals that it seemed like the entire city was separated by them. There were many bridges that connected the streets and they looked the same. Most striking was the large harbour from which cargo ships set sail for the North Sea and for the Atlantic, and even more arrived from there. Konstantin and two of his associates from the bank were trading and also helping an important customer in bidding on goods that were arriving by sea.

It was May 13, 1818 and spring was already in full swing. The green grass was growing, the flowers bloomed, the trees and groves were green and water was plentiful in puddles, lakes and canals. Spring was also visible in the windmills shaped like huge mushrooms, with their powerful blades sitting idle along their axis at the top of the cap. Arranged in rows along the roadside and looking like humble giants, they dominated the scenery. Two centuries ago they numbered in the tens of thousands and were used for all kinds of purposes; to dry flooded land, to grind grain, extract mustard,

squeeze oil and process paint. Now their numbers had been reduced but Holland still made use of wind power through them. South Flanders was different from central Holland which, along with Friesland to the north, was grassy. Here, when a person relaxed from seeing the sights they get intoxicated by the fresh vapours of the ocean waters and aromas from the flowers, grasses and canopy greens.

Konstantin cherished that feeling for a long time, as long as it took the coach to pass through the country. After that, his obsession with this magic seemed to diminish being replaced with different thoughts as indicated by the wrinkles on his forehead. It seemed to him that the roads he traveled on and the lands he passed through were intertwined with meetings, encounters and events, but also with worries, troubles, desires and other feelings. They all started with that first barely visible wrinkle that appeared on his forehead. It was more like an expression than a thought that came to his mind that instant: “Today, exactly one summer ago”!

Yes, on this very day last year, 1817, Konstantin received a certificate from Emperor Franz I, who recognized his noble status. That day Konstantin became Baron Konstantin von Belio. His ceremony, full of splendor and rituals, had been held earlier, on February 24, 1817. That’s when he joined the council of barons and a glorious and noble life, which was not easy to achieve because glory and ruin were separated by a thin line. He, who had not tasted fame, didn’t know the alternative or the price of progress. You’re required to raise an altar and offer innumerable sacrifices so that people could worship and respect you because you had now become master of their destinies. But Belio had learned to think about people differently long before he became a baron. He wasn’t like the masters who were guided by the thought that people were born to serve them. People like that didn’t deserve to be nobles, even though they were counted among the nobles. They simply followed the salon logic: “If there are no people - there are no masters. If there are no people - there is no God, because who is He for, if not for the people?! People live thanks to God in the heavens and to the lords on earth!” Blinded by that thought, they also referred to the Holy Scriptures, interpreting them in their own way. After He first created everything for them, God created people on the sixth day out of

great love. He created them in his image out of that love and gave them an opportunity on Earth. He created them as equals but in time differences appeared in them from other deeds and acts... The bitter truth didn't touch those masters. Their servants and serfs could survive without them, but the masters without the servants and serfs would certainly perish.

Despite his icy looks, Baron Belio was not one of them. He was a good man. He was compassionate and cared for people, especially for the helpless and poor. He was also recognized for his nobility and for performing noble acts in helping society. He and his brother Stefan sent aid to the victims in Banat and Hungary. They sent caravan loads of clothes, fruit and other foods to the people hit by the floods. Disaster struck at the end of 1816, when the waters in the plain rose, especially around the mighty Muresh. Rain and torrential downpours swept through it, from the eastern Carpathians to Transylvania, and headed downhill. When Muresh reached the bottom of the Pannonian Plain, its waters poured out destroying and demolishing houses and other buildings. It destroyed all the fields. It dragged trees, roots, sand and silt. On top of the Belio brothers helping in general they also helped many of their compatriots who had settled there. Some of the villages and properties belonged to Count Nako, like those at Rudna, Nakovo, Senmilotosh, Komlosh and others. Nako was also one of the people who had influenced the emperor to make Konstantin a Baron. The emperor recognized Konstantin but not only because of Nako's influence. He recognized him for his other good deeds too. Whatever it was, the inscription on his certificate said: "…For his care and love of Austria and its people" which sufficiently confirmed and acknowledged him.

Well, that too was in the past. Now Belio was on his long journey throughout Europe. While riding in the coach with his two passengers, Konstantin occasionally talked about various topics outside of banking, but every conversation had to end. At that point Konstantin's thoughts took him back to his own world. He was now worried about his brother Stefan. Everything Stefan did was fast and without measure. He was seduced by a comfortable life and had indulged in lust and greed. He had deceived and possessed widows taking their material goods and money. It seemed like he wanted to possess all of Walachia because there wasn't any place where he

didn't own property. He had been most active the last two summers. He'd built a palace, a big church and other buildings in the village Gostinu, near the river Ardzhes. He transferred all the lands in Pistsania and was transferring properties in Negreni, Tamasheshti and some other villages. Initially, when he started the transfers, the people rebelled. Who was this freeloading stranger from nowhere that had become their owner? But they had no one to complain to. He was now the "logothet" for justice. (Chancellor (for justice), a high office in the Ottoman Empire) The transfers of property were made by his trusted bookkeepers Mihail Popov and Jovan Sokolov from Pitesti. They were careful because nothing escaped Stefan. He himself was experienced in bookkeeping and when he was younger he kept books for some businessmen in Kraiova. Stefan was also determined to implement ideas that the environment didn't understand or agree that they were good. This was how Stefan acquired the village Peretum two summers ago. To get hold of the village lands he decided to move the people from the hill to a valley. Stefan hired the famous Austrian engineer Otto von Moritz, who was in Bucharest at that time, to draw up a plan for him. After the engineer drew up the plans Stefan began to build the new village but with solid houses; not like the one on the hill. Austrian systematic precision was built into everything, from access, streets, sidewalks, waste, etc... This was the first such village in Walachia. Stefan cut down the forest around the hill and sold the trees so that he could finish everything faster. He also used the building of the church to appease people. Unfortunately the villagers were not content and they complained to Karadzha, but their complaints were in vain. Karadzha was worse than Stefan when it came to greed and pillaging. As a freeloader himself, Karadzha knew that he was there temporarily and didn't care about these kinds of complaints. If he lost his power, even for a short time, due to suspicion or from being slandered, he could be punished - persecution or beheading. That wouldn't be the first time. That kind of punishment was handed down to Hangerli in February 1799, after only a summer on the throne. They slandered him for Osman Pazvantoglu Vidinski defeating the Sultan Selim. Many had suffered from defamation. Many were accused of having ties with Russia; that was the safest card to use to remove a rival from power. Defamation was most useful and worked fast in the Orthodox countries; especially if their rulers were aligned with Slavs.

Now Walachia was boiling and as soon as Baron Belio arrived in Vienna he would have to journey to Bucharest. Karadzha needed his help to untangle himself from the knots he had created, supposedly due to Stefan's escapades. And how had this come about? Well, Karadzha was cunning and held the throne in Bucharest for the sixth summer, but he'd been followed by misfortune. A fire broke out in the city during the summer of l817 which burned many storehouses filled with harvest. Many were left destitute and hungry. People began to believe that the fire was just another of Karadzha's evils. And it was true, ever since Karadzha had taken the throne the people experienced nothing but misfortune. The moment he settled himself in the palace a fire broke out and consumed it and half the city. The plague, which brought death to the city, was blamed on him. They called it the "Karadza plague". Then an earthquake struck and here again the fire it caused left people dead, destitute and hungry. It was God's will but also man's will. It was people who started the riots in Ploiesti in 1813, and in Bucharest in 1816, when the leaders of the Divan (Turkish term for Council or Government), along with some prominent boyars, rose up, cut off heads and seized properties. As if that wasn't enough, Karadzha introduced new taxes for the villagers and guilds, and also sold boyar titles, mines and other properties. His income rose and so did the complaints to Istanbul. Those whom he could bribe were not poor and miserable but nobles. What spilled his cup, on the other hand, were the blows to his honour for his vile adulterous acts and blackmail of the nobles. If he happened to like a certain woman he would take her away from her lover, husband, family… and send them to distant duties or imprison them under false accusations. He did this through cunning gossip, with blackmail, and cunning lies. He led women to such despair that they often asked him to intervene and save their loved ones. They said his son followed in his path. Ironically, perversion was a crime under the strictest moral laws passed by Karadzha himself; with heavy fines and penalties for disrespect. That was a cruel policy designed to fill his coffers from fines and from bribes. Now, something was being plotted in Istanbul against him. He had been in enough trouble to make him distrustful of people and recently he'd started watching over everyone. Evil roared in him and there was no one to confide in. He was seeking salvation from the outside, like he was doing now from Austria. He also reached out to Prince Metternich, who

had an account with him. He appointed Baron Belio as mediator in the negotiations, accompanied by his nephew Kocho, ambassador to Vienna, and his brother who was in the Walachian Divan.

The coach was nearing the inn where they were going to take their rest. Baron Belio was still thinking about the insatiable Karadzha and the sticky problems he was getting him into. He pictured him from a meeting he'd had with him, bent over in his ruler's chair, looking like a hyena staring at him. Karadzha murmured slowly and quietly when he addressed people and seldom smiled, and when he did smile he somehow looked warm to those who didn't know him. He rarely smiled because he knew people couldn't read his cold and gloomy face when he was not smiling. Mistress Karadzha, on the other hand, did the same with her servants and her daughters. All of them were typical phanariots and the one thing they had on their minds all the time was money…! They had respect only for those who had money, or for those who could bring them money. This is why Karadzha was considerate to the baron and the baron knew it. Konstantin remembered how Karadzha had acted when he was a contender for the throne; that's why he set conditions for him before lending him the money to purchase it. Among the conditions he set was to appoint his brother Stefan to the highest positions available, to grant Konstantin trade privileges and to pay back the loan with interest. And, as the saying goes, "The greater the greed the more the gains when the risks are high!" And "Ask for a lot from the powerful because a lot or a little, the opportunity will pass. Look for a lot one time so that you won't be asking for a little many times!" Outside of Karadzha the worst Phanariots were Hangerli and Patriarch Arsenja, who decided the fate of the Ohrid Church Throne. Baron Belio always had that in mind and wisely chose to play with them Byzantine style. He pretended to respect them and used their authority to its limit. They in turn took their authority from Istanbul by playing worse games. The difference was that he didn't crawl before them like they crawled before Istanbul.

"Dear Baron, what can you tell us about the new bank in Vienna belonging the Kamondo brothers?" asked one of his companions, which took Belio out of his thoughts and back to the banking business.

“Isaac and Avram Kamondo from Constantinople started a banking business in Vienna late. Vienna by then had many banks and with the wars the risks had increased... They could have been more successful elsewhere.

“Avram Kamondo was in London and Paris, looking to do the same!”

“Look, the Ottomans are locked in the old monetary system. They don’t know and don’t follow the news with regards to securities and interest. Besides, for them everything is out of the way of money... The Kamondos, being Ottoman subjects with the greatest banking sense, can be their bank representatives in Vienna, Paris and London only if they get permission from the Ottoman government, and then they can be successful!”

“Others have opened banks in London and Paris. The Rothschilds opened banks there,” interrupted the second passenger.

“Yes, the Rothschilds!” replied Belio stretching out the name as if starting a difficult subject, only to say, “London and Paris have chosen them because they are with many colonies from Africa to Asia and America. Fresh money is needed to get goods from there faster.”

“Dear Baron, these are risky investments owing to revolutions and secession…! There we have slaves creating a state on the island that Paris lost (meaning Haiti in Central America).”

“Fresh money is needed!” replied Baron Belio again becoming aware that this subject required clarification. He continued, “Money is needed for both; an old country like France and a new country like that of the slaves! In these kinds of troubles both countries lose but not the Rothschilds. Other people’s troubles are opportunities for them, according to their motto ‘Buy where blood is shed!’ In situations like these they buy low-priced properties from the impoverished saibs ((Turkish sahip) - owners, masters of property) who want to run away only to save their heads. As soon as the war is over, the Rothschilds are there handing out securities to old and new states, which didn’t cost them anything, nor are they valued by real

value; and with interest. When the economy starts up the needs after the war are big especially with the reconstruction. At such times everything the Rothschilds took for practically nothing, from properties to mines, they rent out or sell for a lot of money... They invested in Napoleon and also in his opponents; after the stock market released falls news about Waterloo and Napoleon having Britannia." (Waterloo is a city in Belgium where Napoleon's last battle was fought, with his new army in 1815 which he raised in February after escaping from exile.)

As they listened to the baron talk, his two companions only slightly nodded their heads. They kept quiet as, through his words, the world began to change before their eyes, being transformed through great games of speculation in which new states sprouted and old ones fell apart. The old nobility was deserted and a new one was created and no noble blood of inheritance was needed. It appeared that money made blood noble where it never existed before. Money paid the popes and patriarchs to seek and affirm kinship with old noble tribes. Yes, there was a process of complete realignment everywhere causing burning chaos with revolutions starting from Napoleon's in France to the colonial ones, all operating under the humane motto of brotherhood, freedom and independence. But it appeared like they all fell under the same shadow that was cast over them, that of Rothschilds in particular. This has been ongoing ever since Mayer Rothschild, father of the five brothers, circulated in Frankfurt among state leaders. Old and especially new states returned or gained power with concessions. Just like Karadzha who paid Baron Belio for the service he provided, giving him the money to purchase the Walachian throne. Nathan, the most skilled Rothschild, established a bank in London in 1805. Six years ago, Prime Minister Percival died during an assassination attempt. Old King George III was blind for years and was unaware that he was ruling. But those things didn't stop the Rothschild plan. Nothing was left to chance; the Rothschilds had eyes and ears everywhere. Last summer Belio met one of them, Solomon Rothschild. The meeting appeared to be coincidental but Belio figured they were interested in Vienna. Solomon inquisitively asked him about his health, how he'd become baron, but also about Vienna seen through the eyes of a banker. Solomon's trip to Vienna confirmed Belio's suspicions that the Rothschilds were interested in Vienna. When Belio was trading

jewels in Amsterdam he learned of Solomon's intention to settle in Vienna. Belio figured they were preparing to take this European capital and turn it into their base. Belio knew how they were going to do it too; they would go through Metternich. He had the power of decision. They were not going to waste their time with others. If he wasn't with the Rothschilds before, he would be if he rose together with Napoleon.

Just like the many who aspired to take over interests in the Austrian Kingdom the bankers too were facing a struggle for supremacy by old and new groups. Also among them were the Macedonians. Besides Kiril Nikolich, Simon Sina and Baron Belio there were other bankers like Dimitri Kazanov, Stamat Radokonachiev, brothers Anastas and Naum Lazarev and some more recent arrivals. The most prominent of them was Simon Sina, whose father was Giorgi. Giorgi left Solun and went to Sarajevo and from there to Vienna. Two summers before 1800, they set up the company "Simon Sina and Partners". First they traded in Hungarian grain, wool, wood, coal, cotton and linen, and started up a paper mill in Lower Austria and later they started a bank. By 1810 Simon had become the richest banker in Hungary. He bought the Hodosh and Kizdia properties in Timis County. In April this year, Emperor Franz made sixty-five-year-old Simon and his sons Giorgi and Jovan barons because the Sina family hadassisted in the wars against Napoleon; especially with military transport.

So, here we have Baron Sina, Baron Belio, Nikolich, Kazanov, the Lazarevs, Radokonachiev and the bankers from Rumelia who had arrived in Vienna a long time ago, along with the Rothschilds and other new bankers, waiting for a conflict to start so that they could get into some new agreements and interests. And, because new wars were on the horizon, no one knew how economies were going to fare and what the borders would eventually look like. Not to mention the disasters, plagues and other evils these wars would bring.

Chapter XII

Bent forward, powerless, and besieged with tears, Stefan stood over his youngest child's dead body. His daughter Elena lay in a coffin placed on a stone slab in the middle of the oldest church in Koltea monastery. She was named after her mother and managed to live twenty-three summers but with a serious illness during the last two, which she contracted from her no-good husband Jordan Paduroi. No one knew how he'd gotten it. He was a drunkard and a gambler, spending his father's and Stephen's money. He didn't stop his drinking or gambling even after Elena fell ill and was bedridden. They separated over the disease but Jordan kept pushing her to get him more money. It was suspected that he ended her life in a rage but it was difficult to prove and for what? Stefan had done everything to convince her to leave him and remarry, but she refused.

Stefan had seen many things in his fifty-nine years of life until his last days in October 1826. He had seen everything but never thought that life would weigh on him so much. His half-open hazy eyes were sunken in tears from the pain he was feeling. His thoughts fervently carried him to his past, searching his memories. But, no matter how they came and went, they always stopped at two incidents. The first was from when he was a boy without sin and arrived at this monastery. The second was when he was a sinful man and committed a grave sin. Because of his greed and callousness he drove a woman off her property and sent her to a monastery. His rise and fall began with those two incidents. Those two incidents seemed to mix in his mind causing him a lot of pain. But the second incident, perhaps because it resembled the malice of his son-in-law, dug deeper into his consciousness. Was this his punishment for what he had done? And if this was his sin then why was he still alive? Why did his daughter have to die?

Stefan's gravest sin began eleven years ago in Nobleman Hrizea Balcheanu's estate courtyard in Teleorman County, located between Ardzhes County in the north and the Danube River that bordered Bulgaria in the south. Hrizea owned a magnificent house in one of the villages called Tatarasti. In Bucharest he owned an office for writing complaints and requests and to helping the illiterate. Some time back, when Hrizea's first wife Anka died, he married sixteen-year-old Zuitsa who was twenty years younger than him. Her parents married her to him to gain "opportunities". Afterwards she gave birth to two daughters and, no sooner had they grown up, on the fifth summer of their marriage Hrizea contracted pneumonia and died shortly thereafter. Eventually Zuitsa inherited the properties and became a target of interest. One year later she married Angel Amiras with whom they lived in Tatarasti. Unfortunately tragedy struck again two summers later. In 1798 Amiras suffered some kind of misfortune at the entrance of Bucharest and died. One year later matchmakers began to come with propositions but the resistant widow refused to remarry until the summer of 1815. That's when intrigues by the greedy began to surface. Many refused to pay her for the summer crops and livestock products she delivered to them, making excuses and finding flaws in the goods. Facing debt and collapse, Zuitsa appealed to the first man of justice - Stefan Belu. She looked good and was well dressed, but not aggressive, when she entered his office. She was about forty years old then, with a baby face, smooth cheeks and a shapely figure. When she spoke about her problems she spoke, it seemed to Stefan, in a soft voice that came from somewhere deep in her chest. Stefan, on the other hand, kept mostly quiet, asking questions only for clarification but gave her his full attention. Clearly he was well aware of her position and what she was going through, as well as her naivety. He was going to save her from her attackers whose greed was nowhere near his! He began to use impeccably sweet words and the power of his important position when he spoke. He was a decade older than Zuitsa, mature and with a neat appearance. He exuded confidence with his words. He also wrote letters and sent them to her attackers. His big green eyes gleamed when he looked at her. His lips, bordered by a combed moustache and thick but well-groomed beard, poured words that made her feel calm.

“Mrs. Amiras, consider the problem solved. I am grateful that you opened my eyes because our office would have been ridiculed had you not come to me... I am also immensely sorry that you didn’t come to me right away and that you had to suffer so much. And only after you faced bankruptcy that you came to me! Should you face any other kind of trouble, please don’t hesitate to come to me, my door is always open!” said Stefan politely.

When one of the accused arrived at Stefan’s office the next day, he threatened to torture and imprison him if he didn’t pay Zuitsa all he owed her. He also told the greedy man he didn’t want to hear any more complaints from her about him or any of the others. Of course the man paid Zuitsa what he owed her but at the same time he noticed the woman had caught Stefan’s interests. It didn’t matter who, how, or how long things lasted, the man figured he had to be careful from now on. He also warned the others and they all began to be careful. Suddenly, all of Zuitsa’s troubles disappeared like magic. It was clear to her who the magician was. Stefan stayed away from her for a while. He left her alone until things settled down. He didn’t want to be a target of slander. He wanted to be seen as a respectable chancellor. He waited and waited until one day Zuitsa came back to him. She didn’t exactly know why she’d come back but maybe because of the serenity she felt for the first time after a dozen or so summers of torment.

Her property was doing well which, Stefan figured, made her feel radiant when she entered the office. But when she spoke she revealed something else; feelings of gratitude and warmth. Stefan hadn’t seen this during the first visit but smiled pleasantly with full understanding and courtesy. He surmised that her visit wasn’t because of a problem but was an occasion to maintain contact with an old acquaintance. They both had expectations. She was under a strange trembling spell and he caressed her with his looks.

Zuitsa spent many sleepless nights full of excitement because she felt Stefan had sent her clear signs that he was interested in her. She also didn’t want to live alone, caught in a cycle of adventurism and low regard. Being married to a woman of nobility Stefan didn’t want to get into a risky affair. Zuitsa, on the other hand, wanted him. Her memories of having a man next to her were fading but her feelings

of being with one were rising and bringing back distant memories. They were taking her back to pleasant times when she was a girl in love, who didn't experience love because she was married to a much older man. She lived through two short marriages without love and through many summers of torment and intrigue. Of course, she was attracted to Stefan and showed it with every gesture she made. Her looks, her smile, the way she spoke, the way she waved her arms… weren't just gestures of politeness, they were beyond what politeness allowed. She was also aware of her lasting beauty. Her body was firm and her skin clean and tight. She showed no signs of decline for her age like other women did. She worked hard and kept her body in shape and her vitality high. She figured Stefan hadn't failed to notice all those things and wondered if his admiration for her was simply male instinct or love… Whatever it was it couldn't be because of her wealth. He had who knows how many properties and treasures all over Walachia and beyond. It couldn't be for his lustful urges either; he could satisfy those with younger women. The poor woman simply believed that Stefan had found a soul mate in her!

Zuitsa thought to herself, "His wife is from a family of old nobles and they are the worst kind. They were spoiled since they were children and they tormented their loved ones with whims and idleness all their lives. He had to endure her but now he was powerful so he no longer had to!"

She indulged herself in those thoughts and deeds. At the next meeting, which Stefan scheduled for ten days later, giving himself enough time to solve her new problem, Zuitsa, found herself in his arms without being aware of it. Not only for solving her problem but maybe because Stefan made her feel good with every word he said and compliment he made, answering her questions in a relaxed and cheerful manner. His looked straight into her eyes and didn't leave her with any doubt of his intentions. He even evaded assumptions about the bad relationship he had with his wife. His words that day were simply full of hidden desires, which caressed Zuitsa, igniting a kind of love she had never experienced. Her eyes shone with purity, as if the sky had opened them and made them smile. They became tame and smiled under Stefan's unmistakable flattering attacks. This was how it all started, and in the months that followed their love and

passion grew and shrunk. They had to hide it until Stefan resolved his divorce. This was how they spent their time in 1817. Then, during one of those rare days in February when they were in their love nest, Stefan showed Zuitsa his divorce papers. He also showed her his fear that he might be left with nothing once the divorce was finalized.

“I’m afraid I will become a target for the boyars too. They will attack me, she has Brankoveni roots and I am a foreigner! The properties are in her name because of my position in the Divan, and without property there is no future for us,” said Stefan looking worried.

“Don’t worry, I have properties… but what good are they without a husband to manage them. Besides, I would have lost them all if you hadn’t saved me from those devils. You have knowledge, people and positions and I have properties and myself. You will rise again with me on your side,” replied Zuitsa happily for finding salvation for everything.

“It’s not necessary! I have some money set aside, which isn’t enough to purchase a better property but I will try and borrow some from my brother. When I told him about the divorce he got a little angry... You know, he’s very much attached to my children and Elena.”

“Don’t go into debt for property. The money you have set aside will be used for our new life. You can have these properties. I will go to Bucharest tomorrow and transfer them into your name, you finalize the divorce!”

This was how the misery started. What she promised she did, she signed over the entire Balacheanu property to Stefan, a property which had once belonged to the powerful Balacheanu family and had lands and buildings all over the county. Stefan told her that he had started the divorce. But he lied. He dragged it on for weeks with excuses and obstacles, increasingly avoiding Zuitsa. Eventually she realized that not only would Stefan not divorce his wife, but he had never intended to divorce her. This was a big shock to Zuitsa who isolated herself in a room on the ground floor of a home in Tatarasti,

where she lay in despair. The room was a cold storage made with thick stone walls half buried underground. No light could get inside. There were little windows with heavy shutters but they were all closed. Zuitsa locked herself in this dark, cold and silent room full of wooden crates filled with rubies, shelves with pitchers and a linen closet full of old carpets. She didn't want to see anyone and cursed her gullibility and the day she'd met him. She especially cursed Stefan. Sometimes, when she recovered from her stupor, she made attempts to get her property back but it was in vain. Sometime later she was asked to leave the home because it was no longer hers. Having no choice she left, rejected all worldly possessions and became a nun. In her ninth summer she became known as "Mother Zosima".

And now, while standing over his dead daughter's body, Stefan was reminded of the grave sin he himself had committed against Zuitsa, which was awfully similar to the sin his son-in-law had committed against his daughter. She too was seduced, robbed and rejected by his son-in-law. But if this was the punishment for his sin, because it was committed against a close and most innocent person, then why wasn't he dead…? Why the disproportion? Zuitsa was now in her fifties and Elena was only twenty three and deceased…! Even with his distracted consciousness Stefan still remembered what his uncle, Father Daniel, had taught him when, as a boy, he was in this monastery. He remembered his uncle telling him: "A planned sin is more serious than an accidental sin! A sin may not weigh as much on a lay person as it does on a man of God. A lay person may know very little to nothing about these things but in the case of a novice, a monk, a priest, or a bishop, the weight of sin and punishment increases with their growth of knowledge. This is because they knew committing a sin was wrong and yet they did it anyway. It other words, they consciously committed the sin and with intent!"

Stefan lived a monastic life and received knowledge with prudence. He was expected to walk on a path full of humility. But, even though he was aware of the harms of temptation, he gave in to the lures of earthly afflictions and lust. As soon as he tasted them, they dragged him deeper and deeper into the abyss. And when he was most exalted, the cunning forces set out to reclaim the properties and treasures he had gained through intrigue. But those losses were one

thing and this one with his daughter was another. Of his ten children born, six survived and grew up, but the death of his youngest tore him apart. No evil had even brought him so much worry, sorrow and pain like this. Not even when he barely escaped from Brashov, when his home in Bucharest was destroyed by the armies that were raised to quell Tudor Vladimiresku's uprising in the summer of 1821. Everything on his properties was looted, including his cellars and furniture. All those lost earthly possessions, however, didn't affect him like the loss of his daughter Elena. That's because they robbed him of the things he himself had robbed from others when he was in power. In the past, he was no different than the other crooks. This is what Tudor Vladimireski wrote about him:

"This gentleman, the former Great chancellor Stefan Belu, without doing anything good in the service of the country, was there only for its sale and brought it to the level of stupidity, robbing it ruthlessly and cunningly, in addition, the ruthless man took property by violence and, for the example of others, the court must investigate the above matters. It needs to provide an opinion by what means he worked with the shops, so we have a situation in which he was involved in everything, and turned the country into a wasteland; he took the position of a boyar (chancellor), which instead of being fully in service and for the good of the country and bringing progress, he created the conditions for its defeat."

It's true, Tudor Vladimiresku had big plans for Stefan but his government lasted only two or three months. Stefan, in the meantime escaped. More precisely, Stefan was rescued by his Macedonian compatriots who were the most numerous among the mounted insurgents. Their leader was Lieutenant Dimitria Makedonski who, after all, took his surname from his native country. Dimitria received recognition for his military skills from Russia after its clashes with the Ottomans in the summer of 1806. After moving to Walachia with his brother Pavle, they found themselves in Chancellor Stefan's hands because they were leading a tax revolt. They acquired their innate skill to lead from their father Stoian Minchev who was a leader in the resistance in the old country in Krchovsko and Mavrovo. There were also other insurgents who proved themselves in battle, like the Tsepenkov brothers from Prilep, for example. Stefan may have been greedy but he was always

respectful of his compatriots. He was especially mindful when dealing with the likes of Dimitria and Pavle who had seen everything and belonged to a kind of breed that could be useful when you needed them. So, five years before the uprising, while Stefan was in authority, he helped them with their tax problems. He secretly waived their taxes, and for the others he delayed and extended their pay periods. After that Stefan helped Dimitria and Pavle with their business dealings and became close to them. Now that Dimitria Makedonski was an insurgent leader, he returned Stefan's favours by arranging to smuggle him out of Bucharest. He also gave orders not to loot Stefan's estates even if the courts found him guilty of the charges leveled against him. But before Stefan could be tried, Dimitria overthrew Tudor from the leadership after a quarrel, which saved Stefan, his property and his children. The looting of his properties took place later, when the Ottoman army was quelling the uprising. One of Stefan's magnificent properties was turned into an Ottoman command post from where the killings in the streets of Bucharest were coordinated. Before Stefan acquired that property, that house had belonged to banker Hadzhi Mosku. Stefan bought it from his widow Katerina and then renovated it in the summer of l818.

In time everything passed, including the days of the insurgency. Stefan was able to return home but unfortunately his misfortunes continued to follow him... First he fell seriously ill. This was at the end of 1822. He was saved only by the skill of Dr. Grunau, a German doctor who had been working in Bucharest for ten summers. After Dr. Grunau saved Stefan, his brother Konstantin, on November 1, made a big donation on his behalf. But unfortunately for Stefan, his shadow of misfortune continued to follow him. He lost his daughter Elena and even though his daughters Maria and Ekaterina were married and lived well, they were still childless in their thirties. He also worried about his sons. Dimitri still had no children and Kocho had a son and daughter but they were both sick.

Only Alexander, his youngest son, seemed to be doing well. Unfortunately, Alexander, like Stefan during his younger days, was rushing forward full of greed which disturbed Stefan. Alexander didn't listen or look where he was going. He plodded forward blinded by earthly lures. He joined the Divan in 1822, as a great

falconer and protector of the crown. Two years later he married Barbu Vakaresku's daughter Irina. Barbu Vakaresku was the Great Ban of Kraiova. And how did he do that? Alexander blackmailed the Ban to allow him to marry his daughter "tied with honour"; that was because two months before the marriage, Irina had given birth to a son who they named Stefan, after the child's grandfather. Alexander was twenty-eight years old and Irena only eighteen when he seduced her into entering into an intimate relationship and consciously got her pregnant. He knew that the Ban wouldn't allow this marriage in any other way, but, given the circumstances, he accepted Alexander as his son-in-law. Ordinarily only a prince, king or emperor could marry his daughter. Irina's mother was Zoia, a noblewoman belonging to the old Palaeologan royal lineage which lasted until Istanbul fell to the Ottomans. Irina's sister, Princess Elizabeth, was wife to Prince Matei Chika of Walachia. The Ban belonged to an old noble family. He was Vakaresku's grandson. This was the same Vakaresku who, together with Brankoveni and his four sons, was executed in Istanbul. The Ban's brother, meanwhile, married his daughter to Prince Bagration of the Georgian royal family. And now we had unworthy Alexander whose father was the infamous thieving and lustful Stefan, on top of that being a foreigner, marrying into a "blue blood" family. But Alexander turned out to be very clever and, with the step he took, he became brother-in-law to the prince of Walachia. Father and son followed the same path; they both married a noble woman from Kraiova.

But all was not well. Rumours began to surface that endangered Chika's honour. It was alleged that his brother-in-law Alexander had had an affair with an unmarried and honourable woman before getting married, which was the ultimate immorality! So, in order to quench the rumours Prince Chika removed Alexander from the Divan. The Chika family was well experienced and had managed to hold onto the throne for the last two centuries. This was started by Giorgi Chika who moved to Moldovia from his native Kupurli (today's Veles in the Republic of Macedonia) in Macedonia. Giorgi Chika was in the trade business and prospered so much that he became close to the Grand Vizier who appointed him Lord of Walachia. His descendants were also rulers of Walachia and Moldavia. But even with all the tradition of ruling and dealing with intrigue, the prince and the Ban had no solution for what to do about

Alexander so they gave in to every step he took. One year after they were married, Irina gave birth to a second son whom they named Barbu after his other grandfather. Alexander did this to tighten the knot even tighter. Every summer after that Irina gave birth. This summer Irina gave birth to a third son whom they name Konstantin after Alexander's uncle, Baron Konstantin of Vienna.

While Stefan was facing his destiny, Alexander and his sons were yet to face theirs. At this very moment Stefan stood before all these people who had filled the church, feeling his heart weakening and his strength and mind giving up. It was clear to everyone that the old man standing before them was helpless. This man was not going to see his sixtieth summer. There was no trace in him of the powerful Stefan, who spread fear throughout Walachia, Transylvania and beyond. And as his lips moved, it seemed like he was whispering his last prayer before his death. He had no strength to stop Alexander from making the same mistakes he had made. And, while feeling sorrow for his sister, tomorrow Alexander would embark on that eternal race for earthly glory and dignity; blinded by its temporary and false glow.

Chapter XIII

Baron Belio was in his office at 753 “Bekerstrase” Street. He was sitting on a chair with his body at its most comfortable position looking at the newspaper spread over his working desk. This was his twenty-fourth summer in Vienna maybe because his job meant everything to him or maybe because he was at the end of the third floor with a nice view of the outdoors. From there he could see the entire street and everything that went on outside. But because the eye was the first to steal a glance or a flash, it’s also first to admire the bell towers, the statues, the ornaments, the golden letters, the balconies and the windows with wrought iron bars. The air there was cooler and the scenery brighter... All this gave him pleasure.

Bekerstrase Street was located in the narrowest first circle of Vienna. It was surrounded by decor of baroque and Renaissance facades with four-storey buildings tied in rows and facing each other so close that they seemed to whisper to one another. To the north the street started at “Lugek-Plats”, a long-standing market, and led southeast to “Stubentor”. In the middle it had a small extension to the east where it met with “Dr. Ignats Seipel-plats”. That, in turn, was located between the former University and the Jesuit church. Light radiated from there and freshness flowed towards Belio’s office. Located in the small divide were “Upper Bekerstrase” and “Lower Bekerstrase” streets. Belio had become accustomed to the street sounds made by the passing crowds of people and coaches. In the mix he could also hear and distinguish the sounds coming from the shops located at street numbers 758 and 759. These sounds were made by the customers who went to these shops to purchase cloth and confections. Located one floor higher was the tailor shop belonging to the company “Dies”. In addition to the businesses and factories there were also houses on this street that belonged to influential and esteemed people. Here, a banker like Belio was like a fisherman shooting fish in a barrel. He worked a lot with Mr. Weber from the office next door to him, at number 752. Above the door

was an inscription from the Vienna directory which read: “Weber - a company with all kinds of Macedonian and Indian opium, and a tobacco factory.” Yes, tobacco and opium were in high demand; tobacco for the smokers and opium for everyone. It was available in every home as a cure for gout and other ailments. Macedonian opium was the most popular and most sought after.

Today the newspapers were full, from interesting news and advertisements to horoscopes and other information. Belio was familiar with the value of news and read every bit of it very carefully. There was news from London, Dresden, Paris, Madrid, Rome, Constantinople, etc... His name was sometimes in the news. Sometimes there was news about Macedonia, about the company at the same address as his office, about the brothers Anastas and Naum Adamov, and so on. Today there was news about the company “Dumba”. This was a company that sold mineral water. It belonged to the Dumbalov brothers who were born in Blatsa, the same village as his uncle Alexa. Recently there was news about the companies belonging to the Lazarev brothers from Shtip and to the Ikonomovs from Bitola... As for bankers, there was always news about them because there were so many in Vienna, especially powerful bankers from the vilayet, as well as the Rothschilds, the Kamondos and others, so they needed to be especially careful. This was the seventh summer of Baron Gorgi Sina, Simon’s son, who had been elected Director of the National Bank at the proposal of the ten largest banks. As first man of the bankers, Sina was an envoy to the emperor. He owned a number of wholesale stores and lived at 511 “Markte” Street. Solomon Rothschild became the first Jewish baron in the summer of 1822. His bank had been established two years earlier and was responsible for financing the construction of the first railway lines. The other bankers helped him to become a baron. In those days they didn’t fight one another. They invested in real wars from which they all profited, especially from the rise and fall of countries and changing prices of commodities. The bankers insisted that new laws be passed and new authorities be appointed through which they could easily influence events and people. The latest wars not only reshaped the Ottoman Empire but also introduced local governments in Serbia, Walachia and Greece.

Baron Belio too became an influencer from the banking side. He set out for Athens in April 1832, to assist in making Athens Greece's capital. There were rumours that Corinth, Megara, and Nafplion had been set aside to be the capital. Currently Nafplion was the capital but Belio wanted Athens. As an experienced investor, Belio knew that the properties in Athens were worthless at the time, so he bought two plots of land with vineyards and a house for practically nothing. Everything was worthless at the time when the Greeks were fighting against the Ottomans and each other. Behind the clashes between the various Greek factions hid the Great Powers. Half a year had passed since the assassination of Greek President Kapodistria, which was a blow to Russian interests. Kapodistria was a former Russian count and a minister. He was trusted by the Russian tsar who took him to the Congress of Vienna when the borders of Europe were being drawn. His death sparked a war between a pro-Russian, pro-British, pro-French, and what not, party. The most experienced leaders, who survived the Ottoman bullet, were now locked in a struggle for supremacy over the un-liberated country. Two and a half summers ago before Kapodistria, the first leader of the uprising was Alexander Ypsilanti. He was a former Russian major general and commander of the First Hussar Division. He had participated in many battles against Napoleon and was a personal aide to Tsar Alexander I. He also died during the Greek struggle.

Belio arrived in Athens in the middle of a new escalation of assassinations and persecutions. Athens at the time was a larger village of four to five thousand mostly Arnaut (Albanian) inhabitants. It is true, according to the ruins found there, this was a city in ancient times but it wasn't viewed as a city today. It had no prospects of becoming a city let alone a capital city. It had no more than four hundred houses, was without drinking water from springs, had no night lighting, no roads, no food and the streets were muddy. The shops were dirty and had a bad smell. There were no visible workers anywhere, not even village fairs, let alone people of Belio's rank. In his notebook, full of all kinds of information, Belio wrote:

"There are no houses in the world that are similar to those in Athens. The people of Athens live like those in primitive times. They live in white-washed shacks made of wooden stakes and rods, covered with

mud along the walls. The walls are rough and only up to five fingers thick. On top of that the inhabitants don't want to maintain them. I don't know what to think, except to marvel at their backwardness."

After gathering everything he needed in Athens, Belio left for Nafplion where more comfortable conditions awaited for him, but also more difficult negotiations. While leaving Athens he ran into a German architect named Eduard Schauber, near a water spring. He and his colleague were surveying the land and making records of it. They had been doing this since November 1831, but didn't say much.

"Dear Baron, other places may have better chances but we have orders to make this the capital. We also have colleagues working in other places. But, lately, it was considered and decided that this place would be the capital," said Schauber.

This, for the experienced banker, was more evidence that Athens would be the location for the Greek capital. He also knew how much King Ludwig was carried away by the ancient days of Athens - the centre of ancient Greece, which never before existed as a country. King Ludwig introduced the ancient Greek language into the schools in Bavaria and built a building like the Parthenon in Munich, which became a centre for Hellenism. Many were outraged. Even the most prestigious historian Fallmerayer became involved in the outrage, proving in deeds that the present day Greeks had nothing to do with the ancient Greeks. At least three major historical breaks had occurred since then, he explained. But, given the euphoria that was started, no one was willing to listen. Written on Fallmerayer's epithet were the words "Greece's biggest enemy". That's why Belio wasn't given details by the architects in Athens. King Ludwig didn't want any more problems...

The strangest of all was the role of the Ottomans in all this. Athens was guarded by Ottoman guards even though the Great Powers had taken these lands away from them. The Great Powers had created this little state and each wanted it as their own protectorate in order to have a watchtower in the sea to watch over Europe, Asia and Africa, especially Britain and the smaller but not less influential Bavaria. Resisting them were Russia and France.

Baron Belio didn't go to Greece just to be a speculator. He also had a political aim; to take care of the unfortunate Macedonians who lived there. About ten summers ago the Negush Uprising took place in Macedonia. As a result many people fled. Around 1829 five hundred and forty-five families, totaling two and a half thousand people, were displaced from the affected areas and resettled near Atalanti, in Lokrida. In March last year one hundred and fifty haiduks, their leaders and comrades descended from Mariovo and Bitola to Solun. The Ottomans then drove them down to Atalanti. These illegal armed formations roaming in Macedonia weighed heavily on the Ottomans so they drove them down to Greece. They were hoping the haiduks would become involved in the Greek rival war and stay away from causing problems in Macedonia. Kapodistria received them at the request of the Russians who could trust them because they were Slavs and might be useful in the future. Unfortunately the Macedonian refugees didn't fair well in Greece and word got out that they were struggling to survive. As a result many wealthy Macedonians in Vienna became concerned and established a fund to purchase food, medicine, construction materials for building houses, churches and everything else that was needed. Belio was their envoy in charge of negotiating the help with the government in Nafplion. These rich Macedonians were thinking of purchasing lands in Atalanti, where a city could be built for the homeless Macedonians. Belio was even more passionate than King Ludwig about antiquity. But, unlike Ludwig, Belio was thinking of the glorious days of his native Macedonians. That is why he was interested in Ludwig's plan for Athens, only the city that Belio was going to build would be called Nova Pella; named after King Philip of Macedonia and his son Alexander's capital city. Atalanti was the closest place to Macedonia and it was free from the Ottomans. Belio even started a fund to hire a commission to get permission and prepare the groundwork to settle and accommodate the current and future refugees from Macedonia. Belio and the other rich Macedonians truly cared about the unfortunate Macedonians back home. These rich people incited an uprising in Negush in March 1821, by sending the insurgents weapons and other necessities. But after the uprising was put down the consequences fell upon those on the ground who had no political power. In other words, they instigated the Macedonian liberation and supported it as much as

they could but only with material help. The Greek uprising, on the other hand, was supported by great forces and interests. The Macedonians unfortunately also made mistakes. The insurgent leadership consisted mainly of inexperienced fighters who fought in large formations and regions. Yes, the Greeks had the same problem but they were supported by Great Power fleets, international volunteers and emissaries from Europe like Lord Byron of Britain, about whom the barons Belio and Sina had talked before Belio left for Greece.

"I know you once negotiated for Metternich, but be careful in Greece. Don't get involved in their varying interests like everyone else who went there. Every political faction tried to recruit Lord Byron the moment he arrived in Kefalonia. He had no peace after he became associated with Mavrocordato. The Suliots demanded more and more money from him. If he didn't give them more money they threatened to go to the Ottoman side!" (The Sulios were Orthodox Albanians from Epirus. They were named after their village Suli, which was central to the sixty other villages. The Suliots were more like a tribal clan than a nation).

"The first time he gave them six thousand pounds to pay for government salaries. He gave the money to Mavrocordato and we know what an idiot he was when he fled here with his uncle Karadzha in 1818. Byron grew up giving away money. Before he died he wrote about the vain sacrifices he made there."

"Yes, but it was rumoured that with his investment he was hoping to become king of Greece. He was a nobleman, the sixth lord in the line of his ancestors!"

"Titles, money and property didn't matter to Byron; he was an idealist and adventurer. The Abbot of London refused to bury him for two days because he'd led an 'immoral' life!"

"Titles didn't mean anything to him because he was born with them! The churches too were against him and against revolutions. Patriarch Gregory from the Phanar cursed him and the uprisings in Walachia, Macedonia and Greece. Patriarch Gregory prohibited the

burial of revolutionaries, just like the abbot of London in defense of the lord."

"But the Fanar was not beyond avoiding evil. And, as the saying goes, 'Do unto others as you have them do unto you!' The patriarchs in the Fanar and the Ottomans committed real evil, not just by cursing. Some time ago they punished Archbishop Arsenia Ohridski and Bishop Ilarion Meglenski. So, the evil they committed came back to bite them. As soon as Sultan Mahmud figured out that the Phanar's influence on the Christians was weak, he struck at them…! He struck at them because they were at his mercy. The Ottomans were losing lands and Mohammedans were suffering, so the sultan took revenge on the Phanar…" said Belio with some difficulty. He paused for a moment and continued:

"Sixty years earlier the Phanar committed the same evil against Bishop Hilarion, bishop of Meglen Region, with trumped up charges. On the first day of Easter, in 1759, the bishop gave the last liturgy in tears when soldiers and bashibozuks came to put the entire population in Meglen Region under the knife... However, they didn't kill anyone because the bishop took this flock away from Christ and surrendered it to Mohamed... Then, in 1821, when Patriarch Gregory gave the last liturgy, he too wept when the bashibozuks arrived at the church of 'St. George' in the Phanar. They were enraged and showed no mercy, taking revenge on the Phanar for the attacks on the Ottomans in the Peloponnesus. Gregory was hung at the church gate and left there for days. The Christians at the Phanar also suffered immensely. This cruelty committed during Easter enraged Europe, which began to call for revenge."

"Yes, revenge without end! The Ottomans lit up because their people were beaten so they beat the Christians. The Greeks then beat thousands of Ottomans in Chios. Then, for the slaughter in Phanar, Europe lit up with new volunteers from everywhere."

"But they quickly saw the hatred and murders among the Christians. Scott Finley who arrived at the same time as Lord Byron wrote about those bloodthirsty people."

“Habits are difficult to break. The new Greek government desperately wanted to adopt the absolute Ottoman rule but those who went there from various different countries brought their own interests with them, causing more tribal divisions.”

Yes, it was difficult to create one nation from so many different people. The Arnauts (Albanians) were the most numerous, and Arvanitika (Albanian) was the most common language in Greece. The new nation began to coalesce but only a little and only after Bavaria forced it to adopt the Greek language. And this was only because the numerous Arnaut Christians boasted of being bigger Greeks than everyone else. When it came to looting or self interests, their differences spilled over into conflicts. The Vlachs too melted into the new nation. They were numerous too and covered entire regions. For more than a century Thessaly was called “Great Walachia”, and Aetolia “Little Walachia”. There were also Macedonians mixing in behind the scenes but they weren’t like the first two nations. The Macedonians were involved because they had been driven down from the north by Ottoman oppression. They allied themselves with their Christian counterparts in the south and assisted them during the Peloponnesian uprising, with hopes that they would help the Macedonians when they raised their uprising. Unfortunately that help never materialized. These people simply followed their own selfish interests which, in turn, resulted in perpetual conflicts. Even the outsiders and volunteers who fought for the Greeks were divided. The Greek Mohammedans had one interest, the Ionians another and the Moreans a third. Even their first constitution, drafted by the three in June 1827 was vague. The borders of the country, their identity, character and future of all those people were unknown. Article four of their constitution said: “The Greek provinces will be those that will be taken away from the Ottomans by force of arms”, and the Greeks will be “all those who inhabited the new state and who believed in Christ. Those who have arrived or will be arriving from all sides of the Ottoman Empire will also be Greeks!”

The first president of Greece was Georgios Kondouriotis. He held office for three summers, until 1826, and thought of himself as Greek. He was an Orthodox Albanian from the Zervas family! Baron Belio clearly saw a shift from one national consciousness to

another and to a third taking place in those few months that he was there. Belios's extended stay in Greece came from requests made by the various party leaders. When these party leaders found out more about Belio when he was in Corinth and Nafplion, they set out to win him over to their cause. Belio, however, was careful not to get involved with anyone because his only concern was the Macedonians. He especially stayed away from Coletis, leader of the Rumeliots. He was a cunning man who was trying to form a government by using "Divide and rule" tactics. It was rumoured that he was behind the death of Odysseus Androusis and the quarrels between Prince Ypsilanti and Mavrocordato. Coletis had studied medicine in Italy and, having experience on how to deal with various people, knew how to negotiate but also how to plot. Before returning to Vienna, Baron Belio wrote him a letter. But neither that letter nor all the conversations he had with the various leaders could bridge the divisions between them. Belio had no confidence in achieving the things he set out to do.

And now, when he was back in his office in Vienna going through the newspapers, Belio noticed that things were starting to happen with all that unrest, not only in Greece but all over Europe. The past two summers had been marked by poor harvests, cholera and famine, creating a rise in riots, revolutions and new states. The first revolutions, which didn't succeed, took place in Italy and Poland. Those in France and Belgium, however, were successful. In July 1830, the French Revolution overthrew the Bourbons and King Charles X after he passed a series of absolutist acts, like dissolving the National Guard, Parliament, etc., issuing the "July Decrees" and censoring the press. After three days of street fighting in late July, the people of Paris persecuted him all over the country. Then, in August of the same year, the people in Brussels rose up and started a revolution in the south part of Holland which gave birth to Belgium, a new kingdom. The Great Powers resisted the revolts but didn't help Holland. They themselves were facing similar riots and threats. The revolution in Belgium was aided by the new French revolutionary government. This was the year when King Leopold became king of Belgium. Leopold was the prince of Saxe Coburg and Gotha. He was first offered the title of King of Greece but refused it, playing it safe with Belgium.

But even with all those revolutions and plagues going on, there was some economic movement with the growth of the railroad which shortened distances and travel times. Baron Belio was now preparing to go on a bank trip to Cologne, in the Rhineland. Since Saxony had been defeated during the war, according to the Vienna Congress, it now belonged to Protestant Prussia whose rule the people couldn't tolerate. Cologne, being the most powerful city in the region, began to lead the entire region forward, linking trade, transport and economy, especially trade with Holland and northern Germany. Cologne had been the centre of sugar trade since 1821, with over fifteen large companies whose number kept growing. Cologne had also developed into a strong centre for lending, insurance and mortgaging. In 1825 a fire insurance company first appeared in Germany. Yes, this was where Baron Belio would make his new money. Belio best suppressed his worries only when he played big money games.

Chapter XIV

Vienna greeted him with snow one December morning. Movement in the streets was difficult. The tree branches in the parks, the Danube River and its islands were covered in snow. But as the hours passed, by noon it had eased up and pedestrians and coaches had resumed their movements trampling on the snow. The cold too eased up a lot after the winter sun appeared in the celestial whiteness. More people emerged on the streets talking loudly and their chatter merged with the creaking of coaches and the trotting, neighing and snorting of horses.

A church bell started ringing exactly at noon. The sound came from the direction of "St. Trinity" and "St. George" Orthodox churches. It was a quiet, monotonous and spiritless sound; as if summoning a departed soul. This happened when a person was separated from our sad world. The yard of the "Holy Trinity" was packed with mourners. There was a line of wagons pulled by horses waiting on the side. When the memorial service for the departed ended all those inside the church came out and mingled with those outside. When the coffin was loaded onto a wagon, a long procession was started. A long black line of people followed the lead wagon, meandering crookedly over the endless snow. It seemed like God's black pen was sliding over a white page. It seemed like the Creator from above was recording the name of the person He was about to receive. Today, that person was Konstantin Belio the "Macedonian", he was the deceased.

It was December 12, 1838, according to the Orthodox calendar, and December 26, 1838 according to the papal calendar. (The Catholic Church adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1582 and the Orthodox Church continued to use the older Julian calendar.) It was a sad day when he appeared before God. His older brother, by five years, Stefan had passed away at age sixty and Konstantin passed away at age sixty-six. The procession continued to move in perfect order for

him, marching on the snow with a muffled rhythmic sound, followed by the occasional cough from the mourners and snort from the horses. Leading the procession was a priest, a confessor and a deacon from the church “Holy Trinity”. All the others walked behind them. The Orthodox community in Vienna had two churches and there seemed to be a division between them. The Serbians, Macedonians and Bulgarians went to the “Holy Trinity” church and the Greeks, Vlachs and Orthodox Albanians went to the “St. George” church. The Belio, Karajanov, Nakov, Nikolich, Dumbalov, Shekierev, Popovich and other families regularly attended the “Holy Trinity” church. At the same time they also supported “St. George” church because they had relatives going there. And on days like today, when a nobleman was sent away, both churches performed services because the entire community was in mourning. When the procession finally arrived in front of St. Marx’s Cemetery, a sight of greatness set in. A baron was being sent away with an old ritual taking place on the stone bridge over the Danube River. The wagon carrying the casket stopped in the middle of the bridge displaying the black canvases on which, embroidered with silver thread, was the “Belio” coat of arms and above it was a baron’s crown. The wagon was pulled by four horses and led by two horsemen. The body was accompanied by thirteen soldiers. Only they wore white uniforms but with black hats and black stripes on their sleeves. The leading soldier stood in front and wore a wide black stripe across his chest. In front of them stood the black barons; sixteen in number and all dressed in mourning clothes; from hats, gloves and boots, to overcoats, coats and trousers. That blackness marched in unison with a single step, making an impression on the observers. The last two led a dark horse with a dark fabric on top of it.

The rest of the people followed behind the funeral wagon. The first were the baron’s nephews Dimitri and Konstantin - “Kocho” Belio with their wives. Behind them were the counts Nako, Sina Karajan and Nikolich followed by the barons Ikonomov, Dumbalov, Kazanov, Lazarev, Shekerov and Radokonachiev. Also in attendance were local businessmen, bankers, dignitaries, etc., that the deceased was close to and had worked with. When they reached the tomb, they first took down the coffin and the priest recited a

prayer. Then, after the coffin was placed in the tomb, the priest began to recite the farewell sermon:

"The late servant of God, Konstantin, from the first day he arrived until the sad day yesterday, was one of us. With a sharp spirit he understood circumstance and always worked hard and had his people in his mind and his heart. In times of war, plagues and calamities he helped the helpless and distressed. And with those and other good deeds, he became prominent; like he did with his learning, dedication and work. Konstantin was rich in Christ's humility and his successes didn't make him arrogant, nor did his defeats push him into unworthiness. He didn't deceive or persuade another, nor exalt himself with an undeserved gift or another's decoration, because that would have been a disgrace to him. And for the things he deserved to get, he said he was unworthy because they came from God, who made him this way in his far away native Macedonia.

Konstantin left his native Macedonia, his first mother country, when he was a child. He left, because even though it was sunny there, the sun didn't shine on his people because of slavery. He arrived to a second mother (Walachia) country that raised and educated him. And now he left her too and came here to his third mother country (Austria), the land under the snow, but also a ray of freedom. He loved all three mothers. He especially loved his first mother, his real mother, despite the slavery he suffered there. He did his best to help her because every person is obliged to help his mother country. Wherever he went he carried her with him, in every part of his body and everything he tasted there first; her waters, grains and her sun. That's why he took the name Konstantin Belio - the Macedonian. He cared for his country and for his compatriots until the last moment of his life. It has been said that 'in order to be able to love other people, you must first love your own'. It is said that all people are the same in death. Unfortunately, the living tend to divide themselves over material goods. It is true that the All Mighty also divides the dead, but who goes where is decided on how well people did in life. The late Konstantin did a lot of good things about which we learned from others, he himself didn't want to tell us because he didn't want to boast. We pray that he will be closer to God and to God's will. His noble soul will land on Upper Earth and his body to

Lower Earth. People are born from earth and will return to earth. We, who are in the middle will visit, respect and mention the deceased for the good he has done while he was with us. Let him enter heaven… He is the last of the Belio siblings. Let him be with his father, mother, brothers and sister; they are all waiting for him. May he rest in peace. Amen."

The priest took three handfuls of soil from the dug soil next to the grave and threw them on top of the coffin resting inside the tomb. After that the other people did the same. They all whispered the words "rest in peace" (Lesna ti zamja). When they were done, the grave diggers threw shovels full of soil from the same pile on top of the coffin. While that was going on, Konstantin, the baron's nephew, silently watched them and the small chapel with a recessed altar sitting over his uncle's grave. He was reminded of the day two summers ago when his adopted son Jovan was buried under a similar chapel. Like his uncle Konstantin he was unlucky with children, so he adopted two, Sophia and Jovan, whom he brought home from the plains of Walachia; from a suffering family in Bachalbasha. Even though Konstantin and Elena did their best to make them happy, the poor boy was sad and painfully sick. He couldn't adapt to the climate and slowly faded away and became weaker and weaker. They moved his bed close to the window to get more sun and fresh air but that didn't help much. They prayed and had doctors examine and care for him but that too didn't help. His dewy and warm forehead got worse and worse. Then, one gloomy morning in May, 1836, Jovan didn't wake up. His little soul said goodbye to this world and went to heaven. About an hour or two later it started raining and rained for a long time. It seemed like the sky was crying for him. Pushed by the wind, raindrops kept rolling down the misty windows as tears rolled down Elena and Konstantin's cheeks. The next day, after the memorial service held at the "Holy Trinity" church, they buried him. Later they raised a small chapel which they visited regularly. Now, the baron was there too, next to little Jovan, and the need for Konstantin the "Younger" to keep coming here became even greater. Little Jovan was Kostantin's adopted son, just like Konstantin was the Baron's adopted son.

The chapel was separated from the baron by another tomb, with a pedestal, an elevated marble slab and ornaments recognizable from under the melted snow. Between them stood a figure of a woman looking like she was in rapturous mourning. She was well covered which made her face barely visible. There was a name on the plate, Dimitar Jovanov. He was the son of a Macedonian goldsmith. He was one of the best in the guild. He had died last November and was sent away on a sad day like today. This place was full of memories like that.

Looking at the mound of moist soil over the Baron's grave Konstantin was reminded of Baron Belio telling him, "We have been seeded all over the world." His thoughts took him back to the moment when the baron was still alive and Konstantin was trying to save him after suffering a severe stroke. It would appear that the baron was weakened by many things; his long journeys, his worries and his exhausting negotiations. Twenty days ago the unthinkable happened. The baron felt an icy shadow standing over him. He had just returned from the cafeteria when he felt light-headed, dizzy and had blurred vision. Then he noticed his left hand rise up in front of his eyes, without him having control over it; he just simply didn't recognize it as his own. He started talking incoherently to convince himself that he was still okay... But who knows!? He reached for the bed and fell onto it. Five of six minutes later his nephew Konstantin appeared at the door. He had come to visit him and noticed that he was lying there helpless and convulsing. Konstantin grabbed a jug of water, ran to the bed and started spraying it on his neck and face, telling him to relax, while he himself was panicking. After the Baron took a sip of the water Konstantin put a pillow under his head and began to massage him. When he was convinced that the baron was seriously ill he ran to get the doctor next door. The doctor examined him and gave him medicine. The following days the baron seemed to have recovered but he knew he wouldn't last long. And he was right, the life into which he had been born and the life he lived came to an end; god Chronos was never defeated by anyone. While he rested, his adopted nephews Dimitri and Konstantin were always there with him. He, in the meantime, busied himself walking, writing things down and verifying them. He arranged everything because he didn't want to leave a mess or burden to anyone. He supplemented the wills with items even for things he hadn't

considered, such as possible additional expenses if the day of his funeral was stormy; and this December it was stormy every day. His nephews begged him not to talk about dying and that he would be able to recover and work again. But he wasn't wrong. On the ninth of December, the baron finished writing his "Bequest", and below it he wrote something for his compatriots under the title "Appeal to my Macedonian compatriots", after which he rested. But, yesterday, after the twentieth day of the first light stroke, came the fatal one. It began like the first with a blurred consciousness, and with an interrupted but clearer speech. He called his nephew to come over.

"Son, son, forgive me... if I have wronged you... if I have said something wrong... or if I am angry with you... You are a good son…! You forgive me... right?" said the baron with difficulty as soon as his nephew came over.

"Yes, yes... everything is forgiven... father…! But please don't talk like that."

"Remember... The Will!" whispered the baron in a barely audible voice which didn't break.

The next blow that followed was stronger. The baron plunged into a dying spasm, with bloodshot eyes and flickering eyelids, and, while looking at the ceiling, he lasted another minute or two. And in that time he quickly passed in and out of consciousness. It seemed like an eternity because time has no limit; only people try to limit it. He first visited the place where he'd sat on a rocking saddle of a horse, like it was when he was three years old, when he was taken away from Linotopi. It wasn't a full memory, only a trace of it. It was more like a dream, but very realistic. It was one of those events that had no significance or a need to remember. It seemed strange how he could even remember such a thing from such a young age… It was more like an effect of something "already seen"... or who knows what? But it appeared to him in those last moments of his life, no matter how meaningless it was. The second thing that happened to him were short moments like a scratch on a book, leaving a harmonious embroidery of rows of letters - births written by the baron's pen with black ink from his engraved, thick glass inkwell. It was a text from an older introductory paragraph from

which the “Appeal” arose. He thought it was an urgent call that should be shared with the Macedonians:

“This call is about our struggling and suffering country. Of everything that needs to be done, the noblest mission of our youth is to end the suffering. At the same time, I call on all of you, my compatriots, with a strong voice, to embrace unity among you. If you want to see lasting peace, don’t punish one another, embrace unity. The Macedonians too have the right to a bright future as they have the right to their own history. I am ready to help, and I will contribute in a brotherly way in any way that I can, my dear compatriots.”

These last lines were his final thoughts written down while a trace of bodily consciousness still existed in him, just before his spirit left him to ascend through a whirlpool tunnel, at the end of which waited the Archangel and the Almighty. Before leaving for heaven he made sure all his earthly possessions were well distributed. Apart from his closest ones, he also considered those who had suffered the most in the three mother countries; the poor, the sick and the unhappy. In Vienna and in this country where his life ended, he made donations as follows:

- To the general hospital he donated four thousand forints for the treatment of poor Orthodox people, and another two thousand forints for the treatment of those of the order of the “Brothers of St. John the Baptist”;

- To the Catholic churches he donated one hundred forints for “St. Peter”, and two hundred for “St. Stefan”;

- To the poor Austrians he donated three hundred forints. To two poor people - Austrian and Orthodox - in the police service he donated a thousand forints for a dowry;

- To the “Home for the Disabled” from “Landshtrasse” he donated two hundred forints;

- To the “Home for children without parents” he donated two hundred forints;

- To the “Institute for the Blind” he donated one hundred forints;

- To the Orthodox churches “Holy Trinity” and “St. George” he donated two and a half thousand forints for commemorations. To “Holy Trinity” he donated another five hundred forints for the confessor to whom he confessed, one hundred and fifty for the priest, fifty for the deacon and the attendant, and thirty forints for the manager. To “St. George” he donated three hundred forints for the priest and fifty forints for the church singer and attendant;

- For his funeral expenses, for mercy, for the poor and for memorial services in the first three years after his death, he set aside another three thousand forints to be given to the two churches. In case there was a storm during the funeral, he set aside three hundred forints.

The baron also considered the country where he grew up, where he was educated and where his parents, brother and other close ones ended up:

- To the hospital in Bucharest he donated two thousand forints for the treatment of the poor;

- To the “Radovoda” monastery where his father Dimitri and his brother Stefan were buried he donated two hundred forints;

- To the poorest woman in the village Peretu in the Teleorman vicinity he donated one hundred and ninety forints, and fifty ducats each for four poor people there.

The part of the property that Baron Belio purchased in Athens five or six summers ago, for almost nothing, which had a house, a garden and two plots with vineyards, he donated to Greece’s Archaeological Museum. Finally, to his native Macedonia and to the Macedonians, Baron Belio made donations as follows:

- He donated thirty thousand forints in convertible currency for scholarships for two young Macedonians. They were to be the “adopted sons of Mr. Belio” and to spend six summers at the Lyceum in Munich; they, in turn, would be obliged to “love and

respect our dear, once glorious homeland Macedonia". (After Baron Belio died the fund was transferred from Munich to Athens with Philhellene King Ludwig's help along with the purchase of 85 National Bank shares. After 1850, the commission used this money to provide scholarships for more than two scholarship holders. By 1908, the number of scholarship holders had grown to 354).

- He donated sixteen thousand and three hundred forints in convertible currency to fund a library worth one thousand eight hundred and eighty-six titles. Initially this was to serve the Macedonian people in Nova Pella, and "when Macedonia reached the level of development to have its own schools, the municipal council of Nova Pella would be obliged to hand over the books to the public in Macedonia".

- For the treatment of Macedonians in the hospital "Hope", built in 1837 from funds obtained from the sales of the remainder of Belio's properties in Athens, he left two thousand and six hundred piastres. But there was a condition to this. He added clauses in the Agreement with the City Council which, under "Y", strictly stated:

"Always and on every occasion, Macedonians have the right to be the most privileged for hospitalization in these beds. If a poor and helpless Macedonian patient comes, he should be immediately accepted in one of the beds donated by his compatriot and benefactor. In case there were no poor Macedonian patients, then Greek and non-Macedonian patients should not be hospitalized, without exception."

Yes, insisting on a clause of exclusion may not have seemed good, but the baron was embittered by his experience with the Greek government, and with the city council of Athens. Athens officially became Greece's capital in 1834. While Greek officials easily accepted bribes and construction money for themselves, they showed no obligation to others. They tried to twist everything to fit their own interests. They abused beds, inventory, medicines and other things in the hospital. They even took the library books, which Belio brought from Vienna for his Macedonians, and placed them in the new library in Athens with the excuse that Nova Pella still had no proper storage facilities for them!

These inconsistencies would be the basis for future events in the legacy, intentions and wishes of Baron Konstantin Belio - the Macedonian, but, unfortunately, they would not be carried out as the Baron really wanted.

Chapter XV

The meeting of the new newspaper editorial board ended three hours before the end of the third day after Christmas, in 1892. Seven Macedonian emigrants decided what the final version of the first issue would be like. Kliment Karagjulev from Ohrid, a highschool student, was one of them. The article Kliment had researched for the past two or three years was finally going to be published as an introduction to the newspaper. It was going to be seen and read by many people. Kliment felt exhausted, not from physical fatigue but from mental fatigue from searching, taking notes and from insomnia. He spontaneously raised his hands and rubbed his eyes, forehead and hair with his palms. Leaning with his elbows on the table, relaxed and lost in thought, he stared at the opposite side of the room between the floor and the beginning of the wall.

Kliment's article was prefaced with Baron Konstantin Belio's "Appeal to my Macedonian compatriots". Young people who admired Kliment and respected his perseverance and hard work were eager to read it. Some years before the newspaper was published, thirty-three students at the Solun Men's Exarchate Highschool started a revolt. They then took the revolt to the Belgrade Highschool, and from there they brought it back here. Some of those students that revolted then were now teachers. Among them were Damian Gruev and Dimitar Mirchev. All of them became the soul of important events. Having no Macedonian schools, being unable to teach in their own Macedonian language in their enslaved Macedonia, they drifted around being targets for foreign interests. They were also targeted because they had rebelled when they were students. They witnessed evil appetites grow, not only for them, but also for the Macedonian people and for Macedonia. In November 1890, they founded the "Young Macedonian Literary Society". That word "literary" was a mask for their first goal - struggle for the Macedonian people's freedom. They

drafted a Rulebook, a Constitution and collected articles and subscriptions for a newspaper.

And, finally here it was. A Macedonian newspaper prefaced with Belio's appeal to his Macedonian compatriots. Even though Belio had died over half a century ago the words he wrote then were still valid to this day; and beyond. This was because what Belio said wasn't achieved in the past and was still valid in the present and would be in the future. But, hopefully, the article would remind people of what was important and to have faith in themselves and in their abilities. You're not lost if you have strong faith, even in the midst of desolation and darkness. Faith might be born through thought, but it's fed and defended with the heart; and a thought that is bound to the heart is stronger than anything. Kliment Karagjulev tied himself to this part like Belio had some time ago, and what he learned about him, plunged him into the distance, but closer to his world. From what he read, or more precisely from what he learned from Baron Belio, something not well-known, something strongly expressed, was to have pure and sublime feelings for his country and people. This was at a time when even larger nations were not aware of themselves. This was made possible in the high world of Vienna, where Belio devoted himself entirely to his people. And how did Kliment Karagjulev find out about Belio and his deeds?

Well, many students at the Solun Highschool, including Kliment Karagjulev, were inspired by the lectures given by their teacher Grigor Prlichev, a native of Ohrid. Prlichev instilled much knowledge in his students which made him different from other teachers. He spoke and wrote in several languages, and with that he left his mark on the world. His high forehead spoke of a great mind, and his blurred eyes of knowledge and devotion to books. His dry face with a silver beard and a thick moustache left the impression of a sage or venerable father, of whom Ohrid had many. Prlichev taught at the Solun Gymnasium until the Exarchate found out that he had much influence over the Macedonian students. The Exarchate also found out that Prlichev was involved in the student rebellion. So, not to make him a martyr by liquidating him, the Exarchate quietly retired him. In August 1849, when Grigor Prlichev was a student, he applied for a scholarship to Baron Konstantin Belio's fund. Here is what he told Kliment:

"I made the request for nothing! In place of the fund being for Macedonians, it was turned into a fund for foreigners. About a decade after the man died, the cunning ones took it away from him and from us."

"He was a smart man and a banker, but did he take precautionary measures to protect the fund?"

"Yes he did, but they did too…! When a fort is attacked the attackers look for weak spots. If there are none outside, they look for them inside."

"Are you saying the fund was taken over through treason?"

"During the first years, sometime before and sometime after his death, everything was spelled out in his Will; the scholarship was for Macedonians only. But without patronage, when the will was translated, the 'Philhellene' Ludwig in Munich replaced the word 'Macedonians' with the word 'Hellenes'…"

Unlike in Istanbul where Christian children were forcibly grabbed and turned into Muslims and janissaries, those in Munich became 'Hellenes' voluntarily. Did the scholarship administrators decide the fate of generations?"

"All I can tell you is that my request was rejected by Minister Paikos, a former administrator from the Macedonian Paikov family! You see, the Greek language was the only language that was valued at the time. I was caught up in that Greek-ness too. But in March 1860, when I was awarded first prize for the 'Serdar' in Athens, they gave me a silver wreath instead of a gold wreath, and not in public. I noticed that. Later, before they gave me my award, they had found out that I wasn't Greek."

"Both Paikov and the others weren't Greek either, but as you can see they accepted them!"

"You see, the Greeks had a goal in mind. The goal was to use Macedonians to take away the fund from those it was intended for.

Like I said earlier, if you can't penetrate a fort from the outside you have to find a way to penetrate it from the inside. This wasn't the only time this had happened to us. The fate of our chair in our Church of Ohrid was also decided this way. You are from Ohrid so you must have heard of the song '1762' sung by the old people. That song was about the fall of our Macedonian Church. I wrote it down and used it in my lectures, so that our future generations wouldn't forget what happened. That church fortress was taken over by the Greeks with the help of four Macedonian furriers working in Istanbul. They were paid by the Fanar to do this. After they returned to Ohrid, they secretly buried fake money in Archbishop Arsenija's yard. They then complained to the Ottoman authorities that fake money had been used to purchase goods in their shops. They even told the authorities where to look for the fake money under the guise that someone had seen where it came from. After the authorities found the fake money suspicions began to grow around the archbishop. The four furriers then carried out the next deceit ordered by the cunning Fanar. This time they were asked to create conditions to destabilize the local people. No authority is immune from the people's will, especially foreign or vassal governments! At that time Selim Pasha was governor of the city. He wasn't popular with the people so the cunning ones concocted a petition written in Turkish with all kinds of accusations, including Selim wanting to take Istanbul for himself. They then asked the people to sign the petition. Everyone in Ohrid signed the petition unaware that the complaint was not against Selim but against Arsenija. After that, authorities from Istanbul came to Ohrid and abolished our church. Ironically they did it at the request of the people from Ohrid who had signed the petition. And thus in 1767 our Macedonian centuries-old ecclesiastical authority ended. This is what happened. Our people did this to themselves… In suicide there is no murderer, and no one will be looking for a murderer... You also need to know this: When Arsenija found out about the evil the four had committed against our church, he cursed them in front of a large weeping crowd. And soon enough all four died. First they fell into decline and then, one by one, malice beat them down until no one was left. Cobwebs filled their rooms, dark moss grew on their roofs and weeds, grass and shrubs grew all around their houses. Their homes became mute. Ominous dogs and screeching owls paralyzed the silence in the night by barking and hooting. The curse left no peace in those

houses. They remained empty because no one wanted them, not the Macedonians and not the Ottomans, not even for free. This is how those who betrayed the people's religious fortress ended up. And now we have Macedonians handing over the fund to foreigners, our new fortress for our education and for young people like you. And if we ever build another fortress, it too will be destroyed with more betrayals from our apostates."

This is what Grigor Prlichev, his teacher, told Kliment Karagjulev. After that he translated some of the baron's correspondence. Kliment's compatriots, who studied abroad in Europe, translated more newspaper articles written about the count. But what impressed Kliment the most was the "Appeal" the count had written just before he died. And here it was written in the first issue of the new newspaper.

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The first issue of the new newspaper was published on February 18, 1892. In no time at all a large circulation was raised among the Macedonian immigrants. Following the cover page with the headlines was the preface, which read as follows:

"… 'Worthless is he who has a better friend than his own homeland…,' Sophocles.

Vienna, 1838

Appeal to my Macedonian compatriots

It is indeed honourable, the feeling of loving your homeland. This is inevitable for every noble person and necessary for all those who have preserved the elements of honour and who want to live eternally in the words of their descendants, instead of dying altogether the moment they breathe out the atmospheric air, like the animals, and thus become erased from the list of the living, to become forever a burden of the soil. How bright is this truth indeed, yet it isn't fulfilled by all and therefore it doesn't impact the feelings in all of us.

We, the rich, because of all that which we have earned in our endeavours, occupying our thoughts with our personal material wealth, we are only striving to multiply our wishes rolling in an eternal illusion and pride, where the endless fantasy had once separated us from moderation wants to delude us in useless and fantastic fortunes, which we have never been able to successfully discover, so we stay behind without being able to taste the moral and constant pleasure of having aided those who are close to us and to our homeland.

In the final minutes of our lives, terrified by our consciousness, we are dying very saddened and our homeland, our sweet mother homeland, is not going to wear black for our death, nor will we be sent off by the prayers of our brothers; our homeland removes us as the progeny that was unfit for its love; we are cast out as foreigners and degenerates with the words: be rid of me, degenerate! And our descendants will judge our ambivalence with the plain words: 'He was useless while he was alive and stands for judgment in his death too.' Sad voice! Sad voice! The homeland denounces its children, its brothers, its prayers and the relatives and all capable of speech will give up on uttering any praise…

Baron Konstantin Belio – The Macedonian"

"Fifty four years have passed since the late Baron Kostandin Belio – the Macedonian sent the appeal from Vienna addressed to "My Macedonian compatriots", in which he spilled his entire soul, heart and thoughts. It is indeed sad that his patriotic advice grounded on eternal principles of truth wasn't been heard by those who were meant to hear it. Written in the Greek language, only the Greeks could make use of it. But, no one should blame the late Baron for this. In his time our homeland was covered in thick darkness, our people's language was suffocated and the Greek language was taught in our schools and churches.

Our compatriot reminded us of one of the most sacred duties. And it's true. What is nobler than to serve your homeland? What is more deserving than to work for your national good on which your personal happiness depends? People are unhappy outside of their homeland because they will remain foreigners even if they are

clothed in gold. People alone without a homeland, without their own people, are nothing… The words of our compatriot are proof of that. Even though he was loaded with treasures and tributes that earned him honours and a barony in the throne of Austria, it was still insufficient for our compatriot who felt unfulfilled; he was missing something else… But, even above that insufficiency, he didn't yell like Solomon: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!' He yelled 'Homeland people!'

That person needed his homeland and his people, and they too needed him; and now our homeland needs us all. All it takes is one look to see how desperately our homeland needs us. Thanks to the latest political events on the peninsula, and Macedonia's geographical position, all possible foreign elements have gathered there, which delight in their blows to our plans, interests and future, freely and feverishly reinforcing their rivalry that already existed in our country. Only with strong resistance on our part can we be saved from their predatory attacks. But in today's world, we can do no more; forces are needed, and ours are shattered and crushed. We need to unite and to unite our forces into one general powerful force - a people's force, if we want to save the future of our homeland. That should be a constant aspiration of every concerned Macedonian, wherever he or she may be. The young Macedonian literary society has that goal in mind. It is obvious that what is proposed is ambitious, and it's true that ambition surpasses the forces that are now available to our Organization. But at the same time, the Organization believes that it will not be isolated from its patriots for long. To achieve that goal, the Organization has issued Loza."

This is how the magazine's foreword ended. Unfortunately this article and others that followed in the coming months infuriated the Bulgarian authorities enough to issue orders to fiercely arrest, torture and kill these Macedonians. The press also hit them hard with repressive measures. Kliment's brother, Aleksandar Karadjulev, who was editor of "Makedonski Glas" for years, struggling for freedom for the Macedonian people, called the Macedonians to arms with his article "Listen patriots". He was thrown into a dungeon, tortured and eventually hanged. Many

Macedonians were turned into martyrs in vain just like Aleksandar Karadjulev.

Theodosius Gologanov, the Metropolitan of Skopje, on the other hand, set out to renew the Ohrid Archbishopric. Within a week he received two hundred letters and was visited by several consuls. In June 1891, Gologanov wrote a letter to Archimandrite Dionysius, a compatriot from Strumitsa. This is what he said:

"Our Holy Exarchate, and the Blessed Exarch Joseph, is doing everything possible to convince the poor Macedonian people that he and the exarchate are on their side and that they care for them and their future. They say they want to bring them out of ignorance and from national darkness and to create saintly Bulgarians out of them. My dear brother in Christ let me say that the Holy Exarchate with its churches and schools in Macedonia is doing a miserable disservice to the Macedonian people. The exarchate is erasing everything Macedonian and turning it into Bulgarian. It is taking away our birthright including our Macedonian origin and Macedonian language and turning it into Bulgarian, so that the Bulgarian government can expand its influence and business opportunities into our country which is foreign to them. And what would you call this, dear brother, if not a new slavery - more terrible than the Ottomans... I'll be honest with you my dear brother in Christ, we Macedonians didn't have as much trouble with the Ottomans as we do with the Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbians, who, like vultures circling over a carcass, have set out to plunder our tormented country which has already suffered so much. And I hope you will understand me as I tell you all this; I am going to renew the Ohrid Archbishopric and there is no turning back."

But when Gologanov was also attacked by the Russian Church for trying to bring back the Ohrid Archbishopric, he turned to Pope Leo XIII. He contacted Augusto Bonetti, head of the Lazarist Mission in Constantinople, who on December 4, 1891 sent a letter of conditions to Rome informing the pope that the Ohrid Archbishopric wanted to enter into a Union with Rome. He also wrote Rome what the Austrian consul had told him that the governments in Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia were against Gologanov; and so were the two churches - the Exarchate and the Patriarchate.

“I believe Your Headship that our esteemed friend, the Honorable Consul, is familiar with the conditions of my expressed desire to ask that I and my entire flock in Macedonia be protected by His Holiness the Pope, for the restoration of our Ohrid Archbishopric, which was illegally abolished nearly 120 years ago. My people want to get rid of the spiritual authority of the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Patriarchate in Constantinople over us, and to have our own church,” said Gologanov to Bonetti at the time.

“Forgive me my Beatitude but His Holiness will decide that.”

“Of course, but first let me repeat the conditions for our Union with the Roman Catholic Church,” said Gologanov and began to read from a piece of paper. “The clergy at all levels that will be involved in the renewal of the Ohrid Archbishopric must be Macedonians and appointed by me. The borders of the Archdiocese must coincide with the borders of Macedonia. The Catholic missionaries in Macedonia must not interfere in the established order of the Archdiocese. Worship rituals, clothing and other similar matters must also not change.”

“I don’t see what the Archbishopric’s obligations will be to His Holiness the Pope? What will happen to the Uniat Episcopate in Macedonia, to our educational and charitable institutions, as well as to other similar issues?!”

“Yes, my friend Bonetti, I didn’t say anything about that. You are more qualified to spell out your interests, just like I spelled out ours, so that we can enter into a proper agreement,” said Gologanov and then wrote something more for the Pope as an attachment.

Bonetti realized that Theodosius was approaching the issue with all his heart and suggested to Cardinal Ramponi to speed things up because any delay might be fatal to Gologanov. It was also important to keep an eye on the forces that were attacking him. Bonetti emphasized that Gologanov was well supported by his flock. On February 24, 1892, Cardinal Ramponi replied as follows:

“Due to the complexity of the issue, the Cardinal Collegium has decided to further study more thoroughly Gologanov’s request to unite the Macedonian flock with us. Until then, we advise that you don’t meet with Gologanov and leave things alone.”

Until now, the Exarchate was careful with how it treated Gologanov because he had the support of his flock in the negotiations with the pope, but when the Exarchate was convinced that Rome wasn’t going to get involved, it attacked Gologanov and his followers. The Exarchate fired Gologanov in March and removed him from his flock. It also dismissed his followers and attacked Cardinal Ramponi placing him on “ad acta”.

In the meantime a fiercer enlightenment battle began in Kostur Region, in Baron Belio’s homeland, which turned into a new hotbed for the Macedonian struggle. On August 20, 1892, the Serbian consul in Bitola wrote the following to his minister:

“There has been an intellectual movement among local teachers recently in the city Kostur which seeks to reject Greek and Bulgarian propaganda, and to introduce the Macedonian dialect as a language of instruction in schools.”

The consul proposed that Serbian propaganda make use of the opportunity and as the folk saying went, “when two quarrel - the third makes use of the opening”. In one of his future letters, dated September 1, 1892, the consul wrote the following:

“The commission responsible for preparing the literary Macedonian language, which would be taught in the school in the city Kostur, has extensive material on the Macedonian grammar and Macedonian vocabulary...”

This set off alarm bells in the Bulgarian Exarchate and Principality. They acted quickly with the authorities in Kostur and Skopje to stifle these aspirations; and in Sofia with the Macedonian emigration. The Greek kingdom, with help from the Ottoman authorities and its agencies, also attacked southern Macedonia and these movements. Then, as the year passed, another Macedonian Organization, called “Vardar”, appeared in Belgrade. But as the

attacks became fiercer on the neighbouring propaganda, so did the resistance. At the end of October 1893, a secret Macedonian revolutionary organization was created in Solun. Nothing was the same after that. Events began to take a different direction. People began to prepare for an insurgency and an armed uprising. Thoughts and deeds spread far and wide; freedom for Macedonia and for the Macedonian people.

But for all that, and plenty before that – and followed afterwards. With everything else that happened to the Belio family, to the first at the beginning of the century, and to their descendants at the end of the century.... an old tradition still remained true:

“There is the providence of God, which watches over the earth and over all human destinies. It lowers its eyelids approximately every one hundred years; but only to rest for a moment and to give to all people from that century a place in accordance with their merits and deeds.”

THE BARON'S PLEDGE

Translated from Macedonian to English by Risto Stefov from the paperback novel "БАРОНОВИОТ ЗАВЕТ" (Baronoviot Zavet).

Author: DragiTrajkov

Title: БАРОНОВИОТ ЗАВЕТ (THE BARON'S PLEDGE)

Publisher: Dragi TRAJKOV

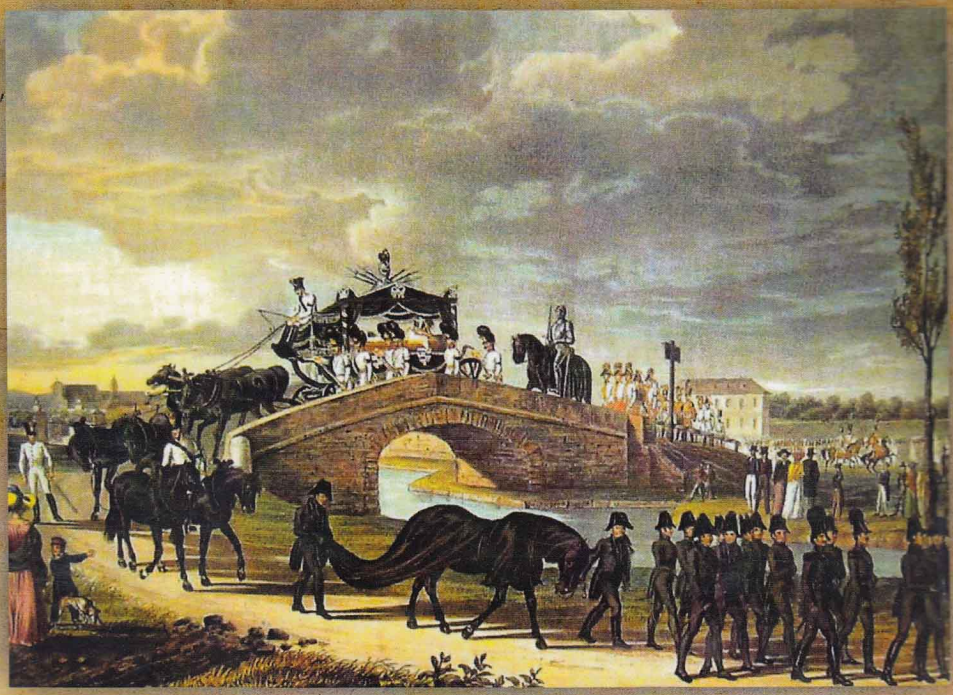
Lector: Violeta Krsteska

Printer: DOOEL STOBI TRADE

Circulation: 300 Copies

The Macedonian paperback version can be purchased at:

Бароновиот завет - Д. 1 - kupikniga.mk



ISBN 978-608-66455-0-2

978-608-66455-0-2