

# **DREAM TAMER**

**By Vladan Čukvas**

...is a story with three endings  
the first one is written for the impatient reader  
in the middle of the book,  
the second one for the patient reader  
at the end of the book,  
and  
the third one is endlessness  
in which the book is written...

## First part

### I

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A greenish blush spread along the winding mountain top, then turned softly upwards to the sky like the scent of poppy. Birds started to pick at the solemn silence, while the wind tore it apart and spread its remnants down the steep mountain slopes. At last, night flew over to the other side, dragging its long tail through the narrow ravine. A lone cloud stood still for a moment, just under the rocky mountain-top but it, too, slipped quickly away. A dazzling circle of light surfaced, as unstoppable as a tide, and quite soon it stood high above, bending over the mountain. The northern side, at the bottom of two small hills, remained in shadow, so it seemed that the mountain was frowning at this joyful morning.

Morizok lifted his head lazily and, without opening his eyes, placed his hands on his hips. The sharp morning air was dragging itself along the low ground and Morizok felt its freshness fill his nostrils. For some time, he remained lying still under the big oak tree. Drops of morning dew began to glide down his hair and face, then a single shaft of light, shimmering like a Syrian sable, slashed through the treetop and stopped boldly on Morizok's face. Bathed in the dew and the first rays of the morning light, he opened his eyes and saw a winding mountain top. One step ahead of him, a bug with golden wings was trying to climb a tiny blade of grass but began to sway, throwing light from one wing to the other.

Morizok blinked and bent his head away from the morning light, which was as sharp as a blade. The treetop began to rustle above him and he noticed that it was already pierced everywhere by the rays of the eastern sun.

'There is no place here for dreaming', he thought, and stood up, shaking the remains of the morning dew from his hair.

He walked uphill for a long time, following no road, yet he knew he was walking towards water. There was no road for him to follow - Happy Valley was too big for roads and signs - so his footsteps did not follow each other in a blind or unerring way. He might have looked as if he was merely wandering but in fact he was following the sound of rippling water, which would disappear from time to time then make itself heard again, albeit as a more distant and vague sound.

He walked in irregular circles, now smaller, now bigger, to deceive the light. He did not know how he had found out how to do this (it seemed as if he had always known it) but he had been performing this morning dance for a long time now. Turning around with his head crooked slightly to the side, it seemed to him that he could make it all spin - the meadow, the woods, the flowers, the mountain that bent over the valley nestling below - and it seemed to him that he could see all of it in a single turn of the head, in a single stroke of light broken into a wonderful jumble of colours.

Once, he had been a butterfly. He had had black, fanlike wings, white around the edges, with yellow spots. He had flown with those wings all day long, around the wasteland under the silverfish woods. He had flown hither and thither as if in a kind of delirium, freely and flutteringly, paying no attention to the time. He had even dared to fly over the gorge, which was coloured with a gray darkness, but that flight had worn him out and shuddering flames of fear had reached up from the darkness of the gorge below him. Then he had seen a garden of flowers with a multitude of different petals on which all of the allure of Happy Valley was dancing. A mild tiredness had landed Morizok's wings on a rather large tulip and he had supped from it to regain his strength. The flower juices had made him feel so drunk that, in the end, he had plunged down under the shadow of a nearby pine tree, and there, in an oak apple, he had fallen asleep. The same sable light and winding mountaintop had woken him the next morning.

He remembered this as he wandered enthusiastically around the green-eyed landscape. He was overwhelmed by laughter. He always laughed at the memory, happily and heartily with the same joy, untroubled and honest.

The wind gently swayed a branch of a nearby oak tree and its flickering leaves twinkled, forming white slices of light on the dewy grass. He knew that the forest, too, was laughing at this memory of his, but he did not care. Sometimes it troubled him that he would never be a butterfly again, and at those times he would sigh with yearning. But he was not troubled by it now, so he moved on towards the rippling water.

At the bottom of the hillside, where the slope ended, stood the birch, winking in the distance. Morizok waved his hand carelessly, though a little timidly, as he bent his gaze to the right over the sycamore treetops. A nightingale's gentle melody had been following him since early morning but he only noticed it now. He trod on a dry twig, which broke with a tingling noise, and the melody disappeared for

a moment. At that instant, he remembered that he knew the language of the forest and the animals that lived in it. The wind and the silence were the language of the forest and the only way that Morizok could reply was with his gaze.

Once, he had tried to name everything he could see. He had sat at the top of the highest cypress and begun to sort colours and reflections, shadows and faces, the visible and the hidden. At the twentieth name, he had paused. It seemed to him as if there was a lot more of what is hidden and in shadow, and it was as if this was pouring from every named thing and, as he named each one, he became acquainted with it. He was running out of names. He had decided to make it all simpler by using larger words so that he could cover as much as possible of all he saw, and to squeeze and lock into everyday words all those vague and unclear things which boldly imposed themselves.

He had thrown words into words, names into names, and had fit words into words, names into names, creating new, larger and larger words, and yet the world had somehow got ahead of him and was wandering about, silently observing Morizok and his colossal words and the way they were swaying at the top of the cypress, not touching anything around them. Morizok had been obsessed with this hard work for a long time. The names had become so large that they obscured his view and he could see even less than before, so he had thought it would be much better if he climbed the stony shoulder of the mountain to perceive the world from above. Winter had come, and a snowflake as big as a haystack had carelessly landed on the very top of the mountain and remained there for quite a long time, not caring about Morizok's hard work.

The names had become so numerous and clumsy that in the end he could neither pronounce them nor remember what he had put into them. One day, they fell to the earth from high above and scattered all over the soft fur of the mountain. Petrified, Morizok had watched his large words roll down the steep hillsides and disappear among the thick ferns. For a moment, a feeling of sadness had come over him while he stood still, gazing into the distance.

It had taken him a long time to see all the joy and beauty of Happy Valley again, which proudly spread itself in front of him like a peacock's tail. Then he had laughed with the twittering of the swallow, and gone on making irregular circles. That had been before he had been a butterfly.

The sun was dispersing heat in glowing rings and Morizok felt his skin becoming tighter. Somewhere in the middle of the day he felt hungry, and stopped under a black locust tree which stood apart from a nearby grove. He leaned against the soft bark and bit into a quince. He ate voraciously. A tiny ray of light split the

shade in two and, within it, a bug with silky wings was throwing light from one wing to the other.

Morizok finished the quince and ran to the grove. He squeezed through thick hazel bushes, tearing spiders' webs on the way, and climbed a small, stooped tree, where he drank honey. When he returned, the bug and the light traces in the grass were gone. He took a chestnut and entangled it in his hair.

'In case I get hungry later', he thought.

Under the black locust tree, the rippling sound of water was fading away, nearly vanishing, so Morizok decided to move on.

One night, the moon drew Morizok's face on the quiet water of the lake. For a long time, Morizok looked wondering at the image, as if he was looking at a puzzle.

'What kind of face is this?', he asked himself.

The face possessed an impenetrable and serene tranquility.

'Stone face', he thought.

The moon jumped quietly to the other side of the forest and turned its moonlight to the north. Now it was stuck on the top of the juniper tree, laughing its heart out, shaking off golden dust. This made Morizok mad, and he waved his fist as if to threaten it. The moon laughed for some time longer and then it left.

Now the night took on the appearance of the stars. Morizok laid himself on the grass besides the lake and stared at the sky, trying to recognise his face in the shy twinkling of the stars. He was hindered in doing this by the dream, in a sleep as sound as a nut.

Once, he had been slapped by thirst, as angrily as a nettle and, since then, he often heard the same rippling sound of water. He was bothered by this thirst, persistent and merciless. He never forgot its blow. It dragged him along the steep hillsides and the surrounding craggy lands with a vengeance. An evil thirst, it was. He knew from the start, though, that they would not part, thirst and he. It was strange and incomprehensible. He felt a presentiment that he would have to walk the valley much longer before he would be able to quench this thirst at a spring of some sort.

While he rested, hidden in wild flowers, he allowed a snail to crawl over his leg. He looked at his leg and the glittering track of mucus on it, and wondered whether this snail felt the same thirst and whether it could also hear the distant rippling of water. Morizok could walk a thousand snail lives in a day, although he did not know whether he was happy because of that.

He turned the chestnut in his hand, straining his ears to hear the muffled and hardly discernable rippling sound. It was difficult to locate its direction. The wind knew where the sound came from but, hardly touching him, it passed silently. Thinking that the forest might help, he ran deep into it and whispered his troubles to the oldest trees. He spent the whole night there waiting for a reply, but in vain. This thirst was his alone.

Clouds marched in clusters, following the scent of the meadow. Morizok watched their flying shadows. The mountain was far behind him and a hilly landscape, decorated with white rocks and moss, now lay in front of him. The forest changed its voice. This new voice was rustling and wrinkled. Somehow raucous. Red oak branches folded around the silence and spilled their reddish leaves. On the other side, a group of black locusts shone with a yellow colour so the whole picture took on the scent of autumn. Morizok loved that scent. Moist and melancholy. Two drops cracked the quiet surface of the lake, and a third pounded directly under Morizok's chin.

In the corner of the lake, in the part of it that remained undisturbed, he could see a large black cloud rolling by like a drunkard, dropping rain. Two oval stones that were his only company remained seated on the edge of the lake. In an ill-humour, Morizok moved towards the forest, looking behind him as if his glance was jammed between those two stones.

He lay curled under a pile of acorns, pretending to be asleep. Rain was falling relentlessly and Morizok wished he could tear apart the leash that bound time. He frowned, and a raindrop slid down his forehead. Because of the hard rain he could not hear the rippling sound and, just then, while he lay cramped under the pile of acorns, he felt the thirst. He decided to go on. At first he walked along the edge of the grove, then he turned onto a dried-out riverbed. He noticed how the rain made the riverbed happy but then, to Morizok's satisfaction, the rain stopped. The air cleared and the scattered white rocks shone even brighter.

All afternoon, he was followed by a leaf. Yellow, and brown at the edges. Part of it had been broken off and Morizok thought the large raindrops must have done that. The leaf, which was from an oak or chestnut tree, had become friends with the wind. The lukewarm breeze that blew from the south carried the leaf like a kind of treasure. It showed it proudly to the wild plants that choked under their own thickness, pressing against each other. Morizok saw them as he climbed the hillside,

wrinkled by the water. He walked in solitude and he was glad of the company of the breeze and the leaf.

Occasionally, the breeze would hug him round the waist and off they would go, all three of them, barely touching the grass.

Night hastily broke off a good part of the darkness and fastened it to the sky with nails as large as stars. The moon was a golden eyelash, standing low as if ashamed. Covered by a leaden tiredness, Morizok stamped on the high grass and lay down. For some time, he listened to the clanging of the kingdom of the night. The breeze and the leaf left and, because of the loneliness, his sadness tormented him like smoke that bites the eyes. He did not want to cry in case the night thought he was afraid of it. Soon he had new company, cheerful and entertaining: two fireflies flew above the bushes, making irregular circles. That reminded him of his morning dance. He laughed.

His laughter stumbled clumsily over the remains of his sadness, then poured out as sweetly as honey and at last collided with a sleep that was as sound as a nut. He slept peacefully while the fireflies played above the bushes, mingling occasionally with the stars.

The next day, he came across the tracks of desire. He did not recognise her at first, but when he looked at her in the distance he realised that it was she. She was his, Morizok's desire. From the distance, she reminded him of his thirst, because only one side of her was visible, but when he drew closer, at sunset, Morizok also noticed the tracks of indifference following her, and he thought that they must have been chasing each other and driving each other out.

There were days when he desired, although he did not know exactly what he desired, and somehow those days boiled especially with strength and were long with light. This feeling usually overcame him in the morning hours, so it seemed to him that he desired the day that was about to emerge and, because of that, indifference towards a never-coming day came over him; so he decided to give the day to desire and the night to indifference.

He lay on his back with his head resting on a large white stone. Four crows in gray coats flew by at a low height, debating something bitterly. The desire from that morning was still with him. As thick as fog, it pressed his chest from inside and took the sleep away from his eyes.

He knew that indifference was to blame because it demanded submissiveness and reconciliation, but Morizok would not yield so easily.



A coal darkness moved over the sky in the blink of an eye. Night slept on a hill, while Morizok measured the space between the stars with his pointed finger. He did not sleep. A kind of restlessness moved in his legs, so he got up onto his knees. Water had gathered in a large oval leaf that stood beside him. Morizok bent over it and saw a face older than the one he had seen in the lake. He stared at the line under its left eye. Desire had passed along that line yesterday.

Black moustaches of clouds suddenly appeared in the sky and the image in the water vanished. Morizok threw out his chest angrily. The restlessness started moving around his legs, becoming even more intense, and a shooting star bravely hammered its stinger into a black cloud then faded away. The cloud remained, quietly curling the tips of its moustaches.

Morizok thought that his desire, too, might fade away in the blackness of indifference. He shuddered at the thought, but suddenly the mistral blew and shaved the sky. Morizok liked the mistral. It had a salty taste and it sang with a deep voice.

He went on, with footsteps as large as the steps of an ostrich. After four hills he began to walk more tiredly and after the sixth, he rested. He was sitting with his fingers woven like a girl's pigtail when suddenly restlessness appeared again and started moving around his legs.

For the past few nights, when he had lain down to sleep, the same restlessness had turned into a bed of thorns, and during the day it hurried his footsteps as if it was rushing somewhere.

Morizok's thirst and desire met once, while he was asleep. They acknowledged to each other that they were afraid of indifference and they agreed to call upon anger. Morizok woke in the morning with a new glow in his eyes. He could now cut through fog with his gaze, and that made him glad. He could cross nine hills without rest. He jumped over gorges and he walked the fields. His own shadow could hardly keep up with him. It sat on a tree stump, breathless and tired, and called after him:

'Hey, you fool! Anger is leading you from one circle to another and making you wander aimlessly, just passing time. Turn around among the treasures of the world, bow in submission and get to know your first truth. Thirst chases you as truly as life itself', said the shadow, very quickly. It continued:

'If you quench your thirst, will your life be saved or will you quench them both?'

Morizok shook a lock of his hair as if he hadn't heard the last words, and placed an arrogant smile at the corner of his mouth. He wandered on, but now deeply absorbed in thought.

The day dragged as slowly as a turtle. Morizok rushed over the field that was rounded at the corners. Convinced that he had left his shadow far behind him, he sat down under a flowering pine tree. Something rustled in the bushes behind him. He turned round and saw the words that the shadow had spoken. They were following him, persistently and inexorably. Morizok was discouraged by their steadiness. When they came closer, they lined up into that same question: 'If you quench your thirst, will your life be saved or will you quench them both?'

'Thirst, as real as life itself', he thought, and blew through his nose. Morizok's forehead looked like a small stone hill. He got up. He wandered about for the rest of the day, searching for words that could be composed into an answer. Occasionally, he would lift his gaze and measure up the sun properly. He did so nervously, almost deliriously. He had sent thoughts in all directions to find those words, but they kept coming back empty-handed. He was overcome by a quiet despair. He stood faced with his own weakness and, behind its left shoulder, indifference was getting up on its tiptoes, sticking its neck out as if waiting its turn. Morizok saw it and felt something breaking under his ribs. In an instant, despair was replaced with anger.

He became angry at this futile afternoon and at his mad searching. At first, he angered childishly, capriciously, but by sunset his anger had grown into a resoluteness interwoven with granite. He seized the question and threw it onto the burning anger, then stretched out in the young moonlight. He heard his shadow come and sit beside him. He winked at it rejoicingly, and said:

'I did not find the answer to your question today, and I may not even find it tomorrow. You, shadow, you follow me faithfully, tormenting me with your questions, but I leave your questions and their answers to you. I leave them to you, the shadow', he paused there and made a movement as though he had said something important and then he continued:

'This thirst is all I have and all I know about. Every morning, she wakes up and puts on the same dress. She says that she lives at the spring of wisdom, and that's where I'm going now. I shall drink from the spring of wisdom and then I will know the real sweetness of life', and he added:

'Thirst whispered to me once, when it was passing by, that wisdom's dearest garment is eternity and that it will sew such a garment for me if I come with her.'

The shadow opened its mouth to say something but Morizok went on talking, with his mother-of-pearl gaze. Resoluteness, and a courage that was ready for anything, were

blended together in that gaze. He believed firmly that sweetness and wisdom of life existed and that they were always together.

That night, he slept more peacefully than ever before. He hadn't yet tried the taste of wisdom but he already believed that it had the taste of honey, or at least the taste of flower nectar. Morning light crawled from the grass and made a circle around Morizok. He wiped the dream off his face and sang like a cricket. The rest of the crickets heard him and joined in. Soon, the singing resounded all along the hillside. Morizok stamped as hard as a drum through the singing. The singing finely chopped the heat, and it cut through the skin like pine-tree needles.

He was carried by a footstep, braided into wild rose hair. The valley in front of him narrowed, and now it squeezed like a serpent between gloomy cliffs. At the end of the road, water blocked the way and it roared two times in a deep bass. A willow was bent over the moody water but did not dare to step into it, instead only dipping the tips of its branches. Morizok picked some fern, tore off a lock of hair and made a raft with it.

The water was turbulent. He steered skillfully among the waves that jumped over each other, shouting something he did not understand. When he finally docked, the step braided into wild rose hair waited for him at the shore, and carried him on.

Morizok's footsteps were breaking off even larger pieces of the meadow. He noticed this for the first time at moonlight, and then again at sunset the following day. He had been waking at dawn, with blue blades of grass braided into his hair, all the while becoming more and more mature. Increasingly, he was overcome by uneasiness and haste. He rushed over the meadow, leaving his tracks behind him in swathes. Sometimes, he thought that he could compress the whole world into a footstep or two.

It seemed to Morizok that he had travelled quite a distance since that morning under the winding top of the mountain. Whenever he turned around, he would see it disappear in a cold sea of indifference. Oblivion was his ally, but it kept its fingers crossed when it gave its promises. Morizok dispersed his memories like pollen. He waited for new mornings, filled with desire and, freed from the burden of the mornings that had passed, he felt that he walked much more easily and freely. This was the lightness of a man who walks ahead of himself. The searching man.

‘How sweet is the light that winds around my gaze. How challengingly infinite is the field of life?’ he thought, turning the words around like chestnuts. These thoughts came to him silently, through a drowsiness, and when he woke up he could not remember them. He thought that they, too, might have dispersed in the air like pollen, but fortunately he found them in a snail shell. The snail kindly returned the words, making a face as if he did not understand them.

A high spruce broke off from a group of trees with which the woods began, and offered him some fresh shade. Morizok leaned his sweaty shoulders on the rough bark and noticed that the spruce was really quite tall. He sat like that for some time, gathering his strength. The spruce noticed this and asked in a friendly tone of voice:

‘Is it large, the desire that draws your strength?’

‘Yes, it is large’, said Morizok, readily acknowledging it. ‘But actually, I call it thirst. You know, it once slapped me so...’

Briefly, Morizok explained all his troubles. He told how he had been wandering around Happy Valley for quite a long time and how he had been hearing the rippling sound in the distance, and that it was the rippling of the spring of wisdom, and how the thirst dragged him selfishly towards that rippling. He told the spruce about his conversation with the shadow and, when he came to the part about his decision, he remembered that the spruce, just like the woods, could only understand him when he spoke with the gaze. Morizok jumped to his feet and gazed at the top of the tree. His gaze told her about his decision, but the spruce was much more amazed by the resolute glow in Morizok’s eyes. A firm faith emerged from under Morizok’s clumsily hidden delight, and stood up straight. The spruce stood across from it, almost a head lower than it, and was somehow ashamed because of that. She felt all the strength of life that was boiling over in Morizok and that made her glad. She just couldn’t understand what the wisdom was that he persistently searched for.

When he was about to leave, she gave him a branch from a silver pine tree to be his light.

‘I leave you here, and I go on through life’, he called out to a small group of lilies.

His words fell all over them like dew. Morizok repeated them a little later, when he passed the rounded part of the plain, and then the words remained hanging in the air like a swarm of bees. He pronounced them again when he waded through the green creek water, and this time they fell in the water like dry leaves and floated off. In the early evening he stopped by an ants’ nest and looked at the ground. The ants marched

in a line bearing his words, which were broken into syllables. Two crows wrapped in gray feathers watched the scene from above, trying to read the broken words. After they'd read them they burst out laughing, cawing and clapping their wings. Happy Valley echoed with their feathery laughter. Morizok looked over his shoulder and saw a pretty large piece of that laughter rolling down the valley. He thought it was about time to leave Happy Valley and its inhabitants. They did not understand his thirst, and nor did they know what the wisdom he searched for was. They only knew how to laugh at his crazy wandering. Then he realised that he was different from them precisely because of this faith of his, his faith that he would find hidden wisdom, tear off all its masks and be able to see its face; and in spite of all that, he thought about all the sweetness with which he would then walk through life. His face cheered up, and the distance in front of him, gloomy and unclear, pulled him by his hand. Morizok decided to quicken his pace. Increasingly, his careless wandering was turning into a searching. As he walked he rarely turned around, and he paid even less attention to the giggling around him. He walked ahead of himself, holding life tightly by its neck, and spoke through clenched teeth:

‘Oh, life! I have grabbed hold of you and now you are mine. There is no place for you to go to from my hands, and the distance is calling us, so shall we go?’

In a half-circle made by the green river water lay a hill covered in the scent of reddish pitch. In the middle of it, Morizok was covering memories with stones which he was bringing from the water. These memories were all the things that he did not want to have with him on this trip. Memories that would be too heavy, and which were unnecessary to a life that only looks ahead, a life Morizok had become acquainted with when he was slapped by the thirst. When he placed the last stone on the pile, which reached up to his waist, a kind of silence that he had never heard before appeared. It was a formal, cold silence. It had a body made of wax and in a minute it filled the space surrounding Morizok. At first, he felt uneasy and started to strain his ears. A kind of weak sound was trying to cut through its thick walls. Morizok pricked up his ears and recognised the rippling. He went on, happy about it.

The sky blushed at its edges and said something that sounded like ‘morning’. Morizok sat with his back turned to Happy Valley and his past life, while he watched the birth of a new day. He thought that some wisdom might be hidden in that birth. He watched silently, carefully measuring every move of the sun, which began to dance far away on the horizon. The nearby grove that had grown into hard, brown bark was silent, and Morizok felt that silence. The birds were silent too, and so

were the green leaves of the elm tree, the rain and the moss. Happy Valley's laughter had almost completely disappeared. The silence had followed him since the day he had buried his memories at the river shore.

'Maybe this silence hides some kind of wisdom', he thought, and blew a lock of hair off his face.

'Even if the silence did hide some kind of wisdom, that wisdom might be unspeakable. It may not be able to be expressed in words.'

This thought made him sad for a moment. He realised that he had been searching for the words in which wisdom was hidden. Words that appeared to be completely ordinary, and yet which were woven together to fit true wisdom. He imagined those words to be like rays of sunlight that slid through the darkness and tore it apart, and poured light into the inner darkness of life. He imagined himself walking boldly through that darkness, holding wise words like torches in his hands.

'Brave searcher in the womb of truth', he whispered, and his face lit up with joy.

His thoughts were disturbed by the intoxicating scent of the dream, which threatened to overcome him completely. He raised himself and stretched. The morning blush on the horizon disappeared and some white cotton flowers passed by in the sky. He went on.

Silence followed him. It appeared to Morizok that he heard words of warning in that silence and he stopped to listen more carefully, but he could not hear anything.

A fragrant and swaying breeze entangled itself in Morizok's hair. He walked in a hurry, jumping over a rotten tree trunk that lay in the high grass. The trunk reminded him of the silence, which still was not loosening its grip. He walked on, the plain ruffling and turning into a hill. Along the south side of the hill, the clouds' shadows were travelling towards each other. They crashed together like two bulls, with a clap of thunder. The silence broke like glass and Morizok grabbed a piece of it. He turned it towards the light and in it he recognised his own face. His face looked different, as if it had aged, and was covered with the silence of his bold searching. He saw two lines emerging from the corners of his eyes and disappearing into the thick locks of his hair. The lines bound his gaze to the distance. They did it mercilessly, almost by habit. He winked at the face and it answered, with satisfaction stretched over its mouth.

The tips of the high grass were yellowish, like the sun at noon. Mischievous whirls of wind dispersed the wild flower petals and blended the scent of

the meadow with the scent of sresla\*<sup>I</sup>. A small group of birches at the edge of the meadow was making the light quiver, while it gently swayed as if in a fervour. Some wild bees with yellow collars repeated in chorus the names of different flowers, but the repetition blended with the heat so it seemed as if they were humming. Under the old oak's roots, snowdrops gathered. Hardly audible, they played a sweet melody. Two squirrels walked up to them. They stood there briefly, then jumped off and disappeared up into the treetop. A rustling sounded, as if someone was coming. At the other end of the meadow, an unclear silhouette appeared. It kept disappearing in the flickering of the hot air, and it was hard to determine whether it was going somewhere or whether it was just wandering around. A whisper, as silent as the finest feathers, spread through the meadow.

'Morizok', whispered the yellow primroses, as if they were warning the other plants and the woods.

'Morizok is coming', croaked the frog, and crossed the meadow in three jumps.

'There he comes', said the snowdrops, and dropped their heads down. The wild bees with yellow collars shouted the same thing but because of the heat it still sounded as though they only were humming. Morizok continued resolutely ahead. The lines at the edges of his eyes were clearly visible. They bound his gaze to the gloomy contours of the general, not caring about the details of the images of the world. He walked in the middle of the meadow, paying no attention to the life which passed him by. Now he handled resoluteness as well as a sword. He felt the premonition of a wild strength hidden within him and he let that strength reshape the world.

When he reached the other side of the meadow he felt rather fatigued, and lay down to rest. Behind a nearby bush, which had branches woven into a bun, the dream was sneaking up, and when Morizok laid his head on the grass, it fell over him. He slept covered tightly with silence. The tips of the high grass, which were as yellow as the sun at noon, caressed his face compassionately.

When he awoke, his hair was as sharp as resina<sup>II</sup> and, when he rubbed it, a unicorn bumblebee flew out of it. Morizok stretched in the grass and made a sound like a little owl. Out of habit, he listened to see if he could hear the rippling and when he heard it again, he walked on.

He had not been walking for long when he came across a well. The well was built from stone which was green with moss. One stone, which stuck out from the others, had a hollow carving through the middle. The water ran through it and dropped in a

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<sup>I</sup> Type of parasite leaves found on cherry-trees

<sup>II</sup> Type of small bush growing in Mediterranean

stream as fragile as an icicle, into a waterhole. The water in the waterhole was transparently clear. The place where the tiny stream hit the water hole foamed, reminding Morizok of the rippling he had heard. Morizok bent over it and, as he was about to touch the cold water with his lips, he heard a voice:

‘Drink freely! This water is refreshing, and you have travelled for a long time to find such water.’

Morizok looked around but there was no one there. The upper side of the well was overgrown with heather and blackberry. The blackberry was coloured dark green and on top of it sat flowers with gentle white petals. Around one of the flowers, the unicorn bumblebee flew cautiously. Suspicious of it, Morizok stood watching its flight for a moment. He noticed that the blackberry looked like a wreath and the purple heather was angry because it was completely in its shadow. The unicorn bumblebee flew away and the humming of its wings disappeared. Again, Morizok bent over the waterhole and, as he was about to bite into the tin stream the voice spoke again:

‘Go ahead, don’t be afraid! You have been searching for me and my water for a long time; and don’t let my voice confuse you. It has been a long time since anyone came this way, and I have been silent for all that time.’

Morizok stepped backwards. He moved a step away from the stony well. The voice seemed to be coming from somewhere in its depths. He stared at the green stones and he discerned a face in them. Two of the topmost stones were not completely covered with moss and, beneath them, two sunflowers appeared out of the hole. They reminded him of the eyes of a doe. The holed stone out of which the water poured looked like a nose, the crack beneath it like a mouth and the lowest part was overgrown with grass. Together, they made him think of the bearded face of an old man. The sunflowers turned lightly towards Morizok and he felt that they observed him with a gaze filled with curiosity and good heartedness. He felt hot gooseflesh down his back. He stood silent and motionless, his gaze pinned to the crack from which the voice was coming. The sunflowers turned round a bit further, as if they could not quite see him. Morizok was half immersed in the shadow of the blackcurrant.

‘Hee, hee!’ sounded laughter.

‘Aren’t you thirsty anymore?’ the voice asked.

Morizok remained motionless and it seemed as if he wasn’t breathing at all. He heard a humming, and turned his gaze towards it. The white flowers of the blackcurrant sat in a circle, and the unicorn bumblebee sat on one of the flowers and observed the whole scene. Morizok swallowed, and began rolling his tongue as if he was trying to find words that were hiding.

‘Yes...’ he stuttered, and rolled his tongue again, licking his dry lips.



‘You must be very thirsty to have come all this way to see me’, the voice continued. ‘Others rarely come by’, it added, sadly.

This time, Morizok listened to the voice carefully. At first, it was hoarse and mixed with sand, but it soon turned into something that sounded like rippling.

‘And who are you?’ spoke Morizok, finally.

‘Me!?’ shouted the voice. ‘I am the spring of wisdom you have been searching for. I am a talking spring. I refresh searchers, I quench thirsts like the one you have.’

The well said this very quickly, as a verse, and grinned. Hearing the words, Morizok first felt an easiness, which slowly turned into an excitement that shone in his eyes. He squeezed his lips together and folded them over each other. A strange blend of satisfaction, excitement and doubt swirled within him. He wanted to say something, but only a stretched out, insecure ‘ye-es’ flew out of him.

‘The spring of wisdom’, he mumbled quietly, and then much louder.

‘You went through Happy Valley as powerfully as the wind. I can see that strength matured in you, and you look like a man who is ashamed to talk to himself. Talk to me. Speak cheerful and crazy words. I hope you saved some happiness for later’, the well gurgled as if it was laughing.

Morizok stood where he was, confused. The words fell over the thick and fragrant grass and shimmered like grains of rice.

‘Visitors are a rarity here, and I have become used to silence. I call out by rippling and by offering my clear water, but people built roads far away from me. Only those that wander away from the smooth paths come here. They come in anguish and say that they are tormented by thirst, a big thirst that can’t be quenched, but a well-intentioned thirst. That is their trouble.’

Morizok was still standing confused, and the grains of rice in the thick grass shone even more.

‘Sometimes, you can still hear the cheerful laughter of Happy Valley, but it gets choked by the quicksand of oblivion. You have lost your first sanctuary in the lap of happiness and now you wander the plains of life with a footstep as heavy as iron, which leaves blisters on stone. That is how your resoluteness signs its name. You do not look back on the day that has past because, somewhere on the horizon, time cashes in a new morning for a night of old puzzles.

Morizok was completely confused now, and he wondered how the well knew all this. The question jumped restlessly and the well saw it, but said nothing. The large sunflowers turned and the well gazed over the hill. In that gaze Morizok saw desire, which looked like the desire that overcame him from time to time, and he felt a kinship with the stony face of the spring. He wished to confess to it.

‘Once, I was slapped so hard by thirst...’ Morizok began to tell his troubles to the well. He told him of his wandering around Happy Valley, his awakening and his restlessness. The jumble of colours that enchanted the view, light and unbridled. The refined superficiality that cheered the eye. The woods that spoke with silence. He also told the well about the time he had been a butterfly, and of the malicious laugh, and of blushing mornings that changed shifts like guards.

‘For a long time I have been gazing at the distance, but somehow it was always moving away. The horizons of this new world are blurred’, Morizok continued. ‘Anger would sometimes come over me like a fever. I searched for the words hidden like water in a desert, but one man’s words are like a dandelion clock. Mostly, I walk alone and silence wipes my tracks away. Occasionally, I listen to the past, but it points with a finger to the waste space ahead of me. Once, in a dream, I saw a drop into which the sea poured. I wish I knew a word which was like that drop. A wondrous word that contains everything. The word of truth.’

He stopped, and made himself more comfortable in the blackcurrant’s lap.

‘I seem to hear that word sometimes, blurred like a whisper, and heat fills my chest, but then the word disappears and silence interposes. I imagine how it dances and how it smiles seductively. The queen of words, with a body made of wind. Untouchable and innocent. Not to be caught in a web of simple thoughts. I imagine how it shows the nakedness of this world and dresses itself in eternity. I imagine it as the truth.’

‘You are in love with that word’, said the well.

‘If I have been thirsty until now, then from now on will I be in love.’

Morizok hit his breast with his fist, boldly, yet at the same time a bit timidly.

‘The love of wisdom can be a wicked thing.’

Morizok didn’t say anything. The well coughed in a intermittent murmur and then went on:

‘Once, my rippling brought a man who was a lot like you, and that man sat besides this same blackcurrant and confessed. He said that he was tormented by doubt and that he sought the essence of everything because it was a remedy for doubt. I asked him what this essence was and how he would recognise it if they ever met, and he answered that it usually hid away and that it was invisible to an eye which had been dulled by joy, but that he would recognise it when he had peeled off its entire false and fickle shell. To show me how he would do that, he ran to a nearby poplar tree and began breaking off branches. First he broke off the highest branches, then the largest, and in the end he split the tree in half. When he had finished, he looked at the tree stump. He wasn’t satisfied so he went on cutting the next tree, but neither this nor the third or fourth trees drove doubt away. Under every bark that he peeled off, a new one would appear, and it looked as though the essence was jumping from one tree into another tree. He only stopped when he had cut the whole forest down. Ever

since then he has lived in solitude, and doubt has turned into a snake and nestled beside his heart like anguish.'

Morizok was shaken by this story. He was silent for some time and stared at the clear water. 'Could love be wicked?' he thought, worried. The thought became entangled in the blackcurrant and Morizok began to try to disentangle it. The well saw this and, to comfort him, added:

'Wicked because of blindness, not because of its nature.'

'You already have desperate thirst, first love and one life, and now you are searching for truth. The wondrous letter of wisdom. Would you hear it if someone whispered it or called it out as a curse while passing?' asked the well.

Morizok said nothing, only picked a couple of dried blades of grass and threw them into the waterhole. The grass fell silently, drawing Morizok's face on the still water, and the well saw the lines of desire under his eyes.

'That word of yours is expensive, and you're only paying with prayer. You will also need hope and faith. Comfort you can take for free. Words of comfort don't last long. They are as corrupt as words of deceit.'

Morizok then spoke with his dogwood gaze, and with it he squeezed the sun around its waist so that the sun shone brighter. The well said:

'You fear indifference. It always threatens like a flood in which even the strongest wisdom staggers powerlessly, like prey in a spider's web. The walls of anger are guarding you against indifference's force. That word of yours is dangerous. It grabbed you in its claws and took you to the eagle's heights, as if you were searching for salvation in the heavens.'

Morizok lifted his head, and his face lit up. The sky wore a collar made of a fox's tail, and the clouds stood like white buttons. Morizok made a movement as if to tear one off.

A fresh breeze climbed the hill on which Morizok and the well stood. The breeze was breathless and it bore with it the speech of the woods, but Morizok didn't want to listen. The well saw that and said:

'Your happiness and your joy are holding hands and babbling happily, and yet you turn a deaf ear to that and listen carefully to silence with the other ear. Crazy!' the well shouted, and then continued:

'You search tirelessly for the words with which titans speak. Be careful not to be buried by them. Listen carefully. Can't they just be the silence?'

The night rolled through the thick grass, stopping in front of Morizok's feet and swallowing the blackcurrant's shadow. Coldness followed it, and the stars shivered from the cold. The sunflowers closed and the image of the old man disappeared. Morizok shivered too, wrapped in a squirrel's tail. The moon bent over the waterhole in front of the well. It was dressed in a butterfly tie and it looked festive. Just before dawn it cracked its knuckles and went on its way, singing some song. Where it had stood in the night, the sun now stood, and Morizok awoke to a new day. He took a deep breath of satisfaction, which painted the air around him.

'One night wiser', he mumbled in a half-aloud voice. 'I cross this day off and I count down the days, but I'm not counting them. I will close my eyes once more to the beauty which teases the senses and I'll replace it with the sweetness of the wise word.'

Morizok said this as a prayer, just as the well woke up and twinkled with the sunflowers' yellow petals. Morizok was impatient and ready to learn the greatest word amongst words. He knelt in the soft fur beside the waterhole and waited, but that morning the well was particularly silent. The unicorn bumblebee appeared from somewhere and again flew around the white flowers as if it was courting them. Its humming cut through air that was dry and filled with expectation. Morizok couldn't hold out any longer, so he begged:

'If you are the spring of wisdom, tell me the secret of life. Tell me its name.'

The well was silent for some time, and then it spoke:

'If you respect great words, then you will need people, people with a lot of small words. Babblers and charlatans. Ignorant and empty-headed persons. Shouters from the mob. Noisemakers. Their small words fly out from the highest bell tower and they reach everywhere. Like snow, they cover everything. Learn from them, but don't do as they would. Learn the power of each of the words before you squeeze them into one or two. Words are like footsteps, and a long road is made of many steps.'

The well coughed a bit at this point, but then continued in a fluent voice:

'Words are sometimes wicked, but they are mostly too narrow to embrace all that you have to give. You dreamed of a wonderful word of wisdom, so let it be. I dreamed once, too. What a captivating dream. I wanted to fall asleep and wake up in that dream the way I wake up to a new day, and to call that dreaming awareness. Those dreams then turned into wild horses, which rushed off into the waste space. Powerful and mighty, they stamped everything on their way. The most passionate among them went furthest. With the tracks they left behind, they drew the faces of unknown landscapes and unreachable depths. They crossed a world a hundred times larger than the world that could fit into an eye or a fist. They crossed a world so large that it only could fit into a poem. Eh, crazy dreams. They rushed off in all directions and I waited a long time for them to come back, but in vain. Distance and wastelands

are their home. Words were standing all around me. As tiny as grains of sand, they shyly averted their eyes in the face of the power of the wild horses. The infinity of the land that the wild horses crossed frightened them.'

The well paused, and looked at Morizok. Morizok sat in the grass, swallowing every word the well said.

'And you search for a word mightier than your dreams, or at least a word equal to them. A wild and unbridled word, a word as mischievous as a butterfly and as loud as the thud of the horses' hooves that echo infinity. Eh, my water does not house that kind of word. Go on! You will have to build it yourself, out of grains of sand and drops of rain. Make a poem out of it and out of the poem, you can make bridles. Only with a poem can you tame dreams.'

The well stopped talking and for some time only the rippling of the clear water could be heard. Morizok bent over the waterhole and saw how the last of the words spoken by the well had fallen into it and turned into fish with yellow scales. Morizok picked a water lily and made a feedbag out of it. With his hands, he grabbed a few fish and put them inside the leaf, which he tied with a branch of blackcurrant. He came down the hill, carefully gripping the bundle of his first wisdom. That was the only luggage he had.

'I shall take these words with me, with which to drive away the silence at night, and during the day they will be my road signs' he thought, as he cheerfully jumped down the green hillside.

## II

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The landscape that stretched ahead of Morizok began with a grove, which looked like a peacock's tail in the late autumn. It was an olive grove, into which figs had moved without asking for permission. The figs bore branches woven into knots, and that made the olive trees, which got extremely sweaty because of those knots, angry. Besides that, the figs were somewhat taller so they cast shadows, which resembled fishing nets, onto the olive trees. Because of that, the olive trees and the figs often spent the sunny days fighting and quarrelling.

The day Morizok came across them, their quarrel was especially lively, and it overpowered the shrill of the gray-green birds that flew around the grove. When they saw Morizok they became mute for a moment then the shrilling from above overpowered the air again and the space above the treetops assumed a purple colour.

Since the day he had parted from the well, Morizok had been peeking into the feedbag constantly, admiring his wise words and their power. They were heavy at first and he had difficulty carrying them. The feedbag looked as if it was going to burst at any moment, so he bore it pressed against his chest. The words had to be heavy, otherwise how would they reach the depths that were hidden from the eyes of shallow and merely curious people, thought Morizok. He had been trying to take them out and line them up to make some recognisable form, but he soon realised that they almost couldn't be caught. Slippery and mischievous, they would slip through his fingers, and when he tried to hold them tighter and weave them into a wreath, they would run away in all directions and he would hardly be able to put them back into the feedbag. It was a tiring game, but he was particularly glad to play it. He didn't lack determination and he wasn't discouraged, even though his own clumsiness was making fun of him. He played the game over and over again, each time more passionately, with a flame in his eyes that would sometimes dazzle the morning sun.

The shadows of tiny, round clouds flew in flocks over the meadow, around the groves, and then a blue, clean and tidily tightened sky appeared. Under that sky, the days rolled as silently as balls of wool, but Morizok didn't count them, nor did he pay attention to them. He was completely immersed in his wise words that looked like fish with yellow scales. After a while, he managed some of those words.

He now knew how to take them out of the feedbag without them slipping away, and he knew how to tie them to other words without them running away. He found out that only some of them could be tied to some of the others and that, in that way, they could form a new word, a word that was even more difficult and incomprehensible. He learned how to make a wreath out of the words and how to interweave them without them touching each other and, when he had become skilled at doing that, he threw the feedbag away and wore the words around his head, woven together and tied like a tuft of feathers. He let the shiniest of the words fall over his forehead and cut through darkness with their golden-yellow fins. He stepped out, satisfied and bold, with his forehead lifted a little because the ends of the fins fell over his eyes. He stepped a little insecurely, like a tightrope walker, jumping to the left and then to the right. He never took the wreath off his head, not even when he was lying very tired in the thick grass, and he would jealously chase away the butterflies that wanted to land on it.

Once, while he was chasing a butterfly away, his hand had accidentally brushed against his own happiness, which had fallen and broke into hundreds of tiny pieces and the butterfly had flown away, giggling and joyfully clapping his wings.

The day he stopped in front of the grove, which in late autumn looked like a peacock's tail, Morizok noticed how the quarrelling of the olives and the figs stopped and was overpowered by the shrilling of the gray-green birds. The olives and figs that stood in the front row looked on curiously and then started whispering to each other. The whispers disappeared into the depths of the forest, from which swarmed beech and oak and other trees. All the plants were now standing at the edge of the hill, pressed into a crowd. The oaks, which were tallest, bent over all the other trees and with their branches they painted the space above the forest pink. Morizok watched the colourful audience silently and he noticed their curious looks at his wreath. Pride did not leave him; on the contrary, he was glad that they were watching his wreath like that. It seemed to him that he saw admiration in those looks, maybe even envy. He honestly hoped that they could see, woven into the wreath, a hidden wisdom whose master he was slowly becoming, and the secretive speech of the well in which he had washed his dry face and quenched his thirst as large as a drought. He stood like that for a moment, immersed in that thought, as if waiting for cheers and a sigh of silent admiration, but only the shrilling from above could be heard. That discouraged him, but he decided to try to conjure up all the greatness and grandiosity of his decoration. Then he remembered that he spoke the language of the forest, and he started to speak with the mother-of-pearl gaze. The trees were surprised, especially

the tall oaks. When Morizok finished there was a short silence, and then an old beech spoke:

‘Strange indeed. The man wears on his head some kind of holy wisdom as a crown, and that crown, forged in silver light, shines like a star and dazzles him. He is proud because he is blind, but he is sad too, because he jealously guards his blindness.’

The beech said this as if it was explaining to the other trees what was in that mother-of-pearl gaze and when they heard that, the trees nodded approvingly with their highest branches.

‘I’m sad because I accidentally broke my happiness, argued Morizok. The trees then came closer as if by command, and they saw that he was carrying under his left arm the leftovers of the happiness he had broken. He had managed to gather up the pieces and lime them together using pitch, but the ugly creation didn’t resemble happiness, at least, not a complete and untroubled happiness.

‘The splendour of my crown will drive the sadness away’, said Morizok with determination. ‘I know thousands of words by which I can call happiness.’

‘Your words have sunk into a sea of silence, which surrounds you’, the same beech called out. ‘You still speak only with your gaze, and for that you don’t need words. That stump of happiness you’re carrying with you is not enough. Happiness lives in a bottomless depth, on the road of countless shelters, but you broke off a piece that fits your own greatness and squeezed it into a word. You can’t give us an armful of words. We are just trees. When you break silence, and when you knock its firm walls to the ground, then you will feel joy of words. Go from here! Let the roads take you amongst people. They await your wise words the way they wait for the first morning light. There you shall find the remains of your happiness.’

Morizok turned away from the grove. The grass was high and reached his knees. He seemed to be about to leave, but still stood there indecisively. He watched the grove over his shoulder, looking a bit confused. With his right hand he fixed the wreath on his head, while spasmodically pressing the sticky stump of happiness under his left arm. A wind came from somewhere, walked around the grove then burst with all its strength into the olives which stood in the first row. The olives waved their branches and whipped the figs, which began to push them angrily with their knots and the quarrel, which Morizok’s arrival had disrupted, continued again. Morizok opened his mouth to say something but could not overpower the racket and crackle of their branches. He shrugged, pulled his look under the wreath, and took a sluggish step. He shook his head in disbelief and quiet disappointment. He had been determined to share his riches with them and let them scoop with the biggest spoon from the well full of fresh joy, but they did not care, and nor they were interested in



his offer. He sighed sadly and walked on. Then suddenly he heard again the old beech, which was the only tree that had spoken to him. Its voice was mixed in with the quarrelling and murmuring, but he could still make out what it was saying:

‘Loneliness has a comrade in you. A friend as loyal as a servant. She wants you all for herself and she likes neither your words nor your wreath. At night, when you are asleep, she secretly pours silence into them and your words then become as mute as a stone.’

The voice disappeared for a moment into the murmuring, which wasn’t letting up, but it soon returned.

‘Leave it! Find yourself better company. Try people who abhor darkness. There is enough light on your head for you to wrap the entire night in it and hide it, and they love that. Their joy will eat your sadness away and your words will turn into the ringing of a bell.’

Morizok listened to what the old beech was saying until its voice again disappeared into the squeaking and impudent shouting. He listened carefully for some time, hoping to hear even more of what the beech wanted to say but, apart from the quarrelling which turned the many voices into a rustling whirl, nothing could be heard. Then he thought that he had heard enough and that the old beech was right.

‘I must find people, and share this wreath of happiness with them’, he said to himself, then realised that he did not know where to look for them or where to go. He pottered around for some time, then he suddenly sensed the scent of lavender. The scent squeezed through the grove, leaving a fragrant track behind it, which turned into a small path. He hesitated at first, but nevertheless walked along the small path, which wound between giant trees and thick ferns. He let his excited footsteps lead him along the narrow path, which would occasionally disappear but which he would then find again by following its scent. At the evening of that day, the path brought him to the end of the forest and Morizok sang in delight like a green woodpecker. The night spilled in front of him and he stepped into it as if through shallow water. He heard a rippling and that reminded him of the rippling he had followed for a long time, and he wondered if he had again come across the well.

All of a sudden, a fog appeared and he could walk no further. He decided to wait for morning. He cut off a piece of fog, folded it up and sat on it, and he sang again like a green woodpecker.

The night flew around Morizok as he slept soundly on his carpet of fog. It had a fluttery voice and huge wings. At dawn, one of its giant wings broke off and fell to the ground, where it turned into a mountain. A little bit of sleepy morning tried to straddle the winged mountain, but it stumbled and hit with all its force the water of

a river, whose rippling Morizok had heard. Hundreds of water drops fell over his face and roused him from sleep. He gaped around as if he was looking for a culprit, but actually he was trying to spot the wild horses. Since the day he had met the well, they had come while he was dreaming. He would hear the thud of their hooves from afar, at first quiet and muffled, then stronger and stronger. He was certain that the horses were splashing him, but after a good look around, he saw that it was only morning, basking in the clean water of the river. He stood up and stretched. The river turned at the spot where he spent the night and the narrow path along which he had walked was gone. He stood where he was, confused. He couldn't smell the scent of lavender and he didn't know where to go. He thought the river might have taken the path, and he went downstream to look for it.

The river wound, for no particular reason, becoming now narrower and now wider. Morizok waded along the edge of the river, his legs wet all the way up to the knees. From time to time, he fixed the wreath on his head and tried to see his reflection in the water, but the river inexorably flowed, taking his wrinkled image away. He wanted to see whether those lines of desire were still carved on his face. He felt that they would never leave him and that they would forever be part of his face. He wore them with the same pride with which he wore the wreath on his head. It seemed to him that his face was becoming more defined and recognisable because of those lines. At sunset, he would place tranquility and calmness over the lines and then his face would become a stone, but only for a while. He was still searching. He searched for unreachable depths as much as for pilgrims of wisdom who knew the value of the true word and who listened to the whispering of eternal life.

‘With them shall I share the dining table’, he thought. ‘Oh, what an unseen feast shall that be’, he thought again.

### III

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Infinity had its beginning somewhere in the middle of the road, and Morizok was vainly trying to gauge with his gaze the borders that he wanted to cross. Sometimes, he thought that infinity was like a circle and that he could draw it with persistent footsteps, but it seemed to him that it was in fact the very same distance which was pulling him crudely by his arms. Uncatchable and unclear, but real. It seemed to him that it was also a labyrinth through which he roamed, not knowing whether he walked towards or away from himself. The infinity was his task, his deed or his destiny and, because of it, he wore the wreath of entangled subtlety on his head. Through the infinity the wild horses rushed, and they were the only ones that knew its hidden image. He chased the wild horses, which were stubbornly getting ahead of him. Morning was giving a rosiness to the opaque horizon which only Morizok's great desire could reach.

As he walked along the river, Morizok thought that the river had no end either, and that it would take him through enchanted regions that were separate from the world of unhealthy faintheartedness. He also thought that, perhaps, it flowed into the heart of the world, which wouldn't be cocooned in a simple and crippled vision. The world which demanded a flaming life, completely committed to the passion of living. He cast his eyes down the foamy stream and listened to the beating of that big heart. He recognised a call in that beating, then, as he did thirst, and grace came over him.

At the place where the river flowed uphill, Morizok became tired. He sat on a round stone and gathered his breath for a hard effort.

Morizok's rests were becoming shorter and shorter, and he would awake covered in the warmth of sundown. He tied two wishes to his legs and let them lead him through the infinity into which he dared to go. He wanted to give people the treasure he had, and to weave from it a cloak of happiness as large as the sky, and use it to cover souls frozen with anguish. He wore the cloak covered in the wreath of wise words and he searched for the unhappy people. The thoughts that played under the wreath were becoming more and more his own. After all this time he felt them like his own breath and he would sometimes let them play on his lips as a smile. On one occasion, while he was sitting at the river shore, he coughed, and thoughts fell from his lips into the mud. He burrowed with his hand through the river mud until he found all of them and took them out. They were dirty, and Morizok patiently started assembling them into a wreath. He glued muddy pieces onto each other and soon he had made a lump as large as a human head out of them. The sun peeped behind the ruffled clouds and quickly dried the mud head, whose surface began to crack, and

those cracks drew Morizok's face. The lines of desire were clearly visible, and he was very glad of that. That is how life wrote its signature on the face of the searcher. He took off the wreath and decorated the statue with it. He looked at his head with satisfaction while it stood mute in front of him, but its silence, the silence, of clay head, was echoing as a warning, and he felt vaguely that something was missing. Suddenly, he realised where the other half of the happiness was. The fish with yellow scales were helplessly wriggling and gasping, as if they were trying to say something. Morizok watched their mouths and was suddenly struck by their dumbness and their inability to become spoken words. He hopped up as if spurred by that knowledge, which was as sharp as a cactus, and shouted so loudly that he overpowered the rippling of the river:

‘Oh my foolishness, was I a better host to you than to other men's wisdom? You came as a beggar, and I offered you my home. You sucked the life out of my knowledge and you laid a film over the glittering of my treasure, and I embraced you as a sister. I search for an equal, if not better than myself, to bring my words to life.’

Morizok shouted so loudly that the river stopped flowing for a moment, and then he saw the fragrant lavender path winding on the other side. That made him happy, and he followed it.

The path climbed a steep hillside and the horizon slanted because of it. Morizok felt the hillside slowing his pace, but he didn't give up. On the other side of the river, he came across desire sitting crunching some twigs and when he came closer to her, he saw that it was the same desire whose mark he wore under his eyes. She waved to him and went on crunching the twigs. He felt her greetings like a tap on his shoulder, and he passed by without stopping. He felt her force running through his veins, pulling him up the hill. When he was beneath the top of the hill, he stood and looked back. Desire had lit a fire and its flames caught her body so that desire and the fire became one. He felt a heat and fury which drove the tiredness away, and he continued his climb. At the very top of the hill, under the elm tree, anger was having a nap; or maybe it was only pretending. He wore a mace attached to his belt and in his hand he wore a shield, which protected Morizok from indifference. Indifference was nowhere in sight and Morizok decided to pass by anger quietly, so as not to wake him up.

The narrow winding path was losing the scent of lavender, but Morizok saw that it was now covered with dahlias holding hands. He walked cautiously, trying not to step on them. Holding hands like that, they reminded him of the wreath which he wore on his head. At dusk, he sat himself down, turned to the south and stared at

his palms. In them, he carried patience and he saw that a great deal of it was still there, but at the same time he felt that he would soon find a man, and then he thought about all the abundance he had to offer. He wanted to be prepared, and to dress himself up in the best wisdom he carried with him. He carefully pulled it out of the wreath and started sewing a suit out of it. He finished just before dawn, and it appeared to him that it suited him. He wanted to look at himself in the dewdrops which were gliding down the dahlias' petals but the dewdrops hid in the thick grass and Morizok remembered that he needed a smooth surface of water for that. He turned around and saw a sparkling in the distance. He went on, dressed happily in the best wisdom.

The morning mist wrapped the hill, behind which Morizok spotted a lake, and the mist made it look even further away. He could not see clearly and he oriented himself by touching the tops of the dahlias. He thought how the mist remained behind the sleepy morning like the remnants of dreams and then he remembered his favourite dream, which he dreamed even when he was awake. He dreamed of wild horses galloping and whipping the stirred air with their tails, their hooves plunging into the soft ground, leaving tracks which only the bravest would follow, the hands of courage reaching after them, convulsively gripping their manes, and Morizok had such hands. He would wake up with hair between his fingers and then he knew that they were slipping away from him. Far away on the horizon, after they were gone, he could only touch them by his wish and he carried that wish in his chest as if in a birdcage. Sometimes he was discouraged and sometimes he was desperate and at those times he would grab resoluteness, which he wore attached to his belt, and he would swing it as threateningly as a sword, and the dream would then turn into a neighing mixed with a reality created by words. A reality that was created like that wore an unfulfilled promise of the land of infinity and, roughly, it changed tameness into wildness. Morizok felt, somewhere deep inside, that he belonged to the immense waste space, but he could not break up the wreath of happiness with which he wrapped his head, and he could not cover his own tracks with haughty silence. He felt that he had to pile joy upon joy and to raise a hill from which he would look at his achievement with satisfaction.

Those thoughts pottered around his head while he walked towards the hill which was wrapped in the morning mist.

A warm breeze came from the south and in its pockets it brought the laughter of Happy Valley. It was actually a smile, crouching in two eyes and painted in nostalgia.

Morizok watched those eyes, trying at first to remember where he had seen them, and then he recognised in them the past, which still smelled of the freshness of mountain water. He turned and waved to it with rapture, and he wanted to run towards it, but he remembered that he was actually looking for its twin sister which time was hiding in the trunk of the future, so he went on. He stepped up his pace because he thought he heard moans in the distance.

The top of the hill was covered with grayish pebbles, which were being gently pounded by the water of the lake. A large group of reeds stood still in the water and it seemed to Morizok, as he gazed over the brown peaks, that on the other side he saw sadness sitting motionless and staring at the water. 'I shall chase it away and make this water happy', he thought boldly.

He rushed along the shore, which wound into a great arch, while grayish pebbles gushed under his feet. When he approached the sadness, he saw that it was a man wrapped in a worn-out gray raincoat. He stopped a few steps from the man, confused, but the man lazily turned and examined him disinterestedly with half an eye, hiding the other side of his look under his hood. Morizok raised his hand in greeting and touched the yellow wreath slightly, which shone even more. He rolled his tongue, not knowing where to start.

'I have been carrying this greeting for a long time, but there was no one to deliver it to. I keep it in my heart as honesty, so that it does not get spoiled', he said, his lips trembling.

The man in the worn-out gray raincoat did not say anything, but just sat motionless. Morizok hesitated for a moment and then continued:

'I am carrying joy, bathed in the spring of wisdom and woven into this wreath. This joy I am offering you is pure. It is as tangled as only wisdom can be, but do not worry because I know the way to its heart. I will take you to it, if you wish. Out of night it will make a day and, out of a day, eternity. Try it, it is as fresh and sweet as honey and sometimes it can fit into just a few words.'

The man in the worn-out gray raincoat did not say anything. He just sat motionless.

'I have crossed the waste space, searching for the water that quenches the thirst of the titans. A well gave it to me, and I forgot to thank it. I collected a bunch of words, and from them I shall make a flame poem which melts icy despair. Let us sing together!'

The man in the worn-out gray raincoat did not say anything. He just sat motionless.

The moon wandered along the surface of the lake, pulling a cloak made of wrinkled moonlight, and when it saw Morizok and the man in the raincoat it became

afraid, jumped high up to the middle of the sky and stayed there. Morizok was still waiting a couple of steps from the man. The man did not turn around and the fragment of a look which he had given Morizok when they met was all Morizok knew of him. He wondered in confusion whether this was really a man or just a worn-out raincoat. He seated himself on the pebbles behind him and unhappily looked at the clumsily glued piece of happiness. He sat like that for some time, thinking that they were both strangers, and that they were not even akin in terms of happiness, although he had thought that all people were akin in terms of happiness. Morizok wished he could see the stranger's face, but it remained hidden under his hood. The stranger stretched his neck to the side, but not even the tip of his nose came into view.

Then, suddenly, the moon stopped upon them and illuminated the man in the raincoat. His face was mirrored on the quiet surface of the water, and Morizok anxiously looked at it. This was a face he had never seen before. It was the face of suffering and exhaustion. A face indifferent to its own pain and its own happiness. A face like the sadness when Morizok had first seen it from the other side of the lake. A face with a look as dark as a hole through which hope and dignity were falling. A face deformed by hunger. A face without eyebrows and without teeth, separated from its body by a load of temptation. The face under the hood of the gray worn-out raincoat hid its disbelief in the existence of the waste space which Morizok had crossed. The face was without faith in the light beyond human boundaries, bound with iron bands that chained him mercilessly to the emptiness of cowardice. A face without dreams.

Startled, Morizok sat back on the pebbles. He became sad and waved to the moon to go away, which the moon, visibly offended, did. Dark shadows were now playing on the quiet surface of the water and they were trying to pull something out of the stranger's hands. They were attacking as violently as wild animals and growling silently. Morizok could not see what it was, but he noticed how the stranger pressed and gripped the thing convulsively to his chest.

Morizok bent forward again and he saw that the thing was life. The stranger in the raincoat was struggling, and then he moaned. Morizok rushed to help him but the shadows ran off, leaving stirred circles on the surface of the lake. Relieved, Morizok patted the stranger on the shoulder as if he was encouraging him, but even then the stranger did not look at Morizok. He remained seated on his spot, motionless and silent. He breathed asthmatically and with difficulty. He gripped the life, which reminded Morizok of the broken stump of happiness which he had salvaged. He thought that they were, after all, akin in some way and he said, in a silent, solemn voice:

‘I saw your face, stranger, and it told me of the horror of your life and the hopelessness of your existence. Under that raincoat, all the beauty of this world becomes rotten and turns into black powder. You are not giving in to the shadows that play around you at night and awaken you. Watch over that stump of life you have left. There was once a seed of the warrior in you, and you growl with broken teeth. You have taught me about the holiness of life once more.’

‘Look at my suit’, said Morizok, when it was dawn, and he rose up. ‘It is sewn out of my best wisdom and I wear it with a pride that makes my chest expand like a bubble. Take it! It will protect you from the cold which comes from inside. It is sewn to fit any man.’

Morizok started taking his suit off and soon he sensed the fresh air cutting through his skin.

‘I am going on. My treasure is enormous and I will give it away like the sky gives us rain. In that treasure there is no pity and I leave it beside the quiet water of the lake, untroubled and sure of the magical force of life. The smile does not come to you. It is a prisoner of sadness. If I meet it I will cast off its iron shackles and then you will hear the echo of joy. My words remain silent, and I will have to give them life in some other place.’

While Morizok was speaking, with a visible melancholy which quivered in the air around them, the stranger turned around and looked at him. That startled Morizok and he saw an unhidden curiosity in that look. The stranger measured him, moving his eyes slowly, while Morizok trembled, struggling with the morning freshness.

‘And what’s that you’re wearing on your head?’ he spoke, finally. Morizok grabbed the wreath woven out of pure wisdom, which shone at the edges, and tore it off his head.

‘My treasure’, he said. ‘Actually, the key that guards it.’ The stranger did not say anything while he looked, now at Morizok and now at the wreath.

‘Treasure, you say?’

‘Yes, treasure transformed into words and words woven into providence. In them sleeps a song that has not yet been sung.’

‘Hm’, the stranger breathed out. ‘Those words look like fish to me.’ Morizok smiled. There was an unhidden condescension in that smile.

‘Yes, they do look like fish because the well gave them to me, the spring of wisdom.’

‘So let us try that wisdom of yours’, suggested the stranger. Morizok full-heartedly agreed to this, and handed him the wreath. The stranger grabbed it, turned it around twice, folded it and swallowed it in two bites. When he



had chewed it thoroughly, he spat out the fish heads and tails and slipped his hood over his head.

Morizok stood as if turned to stone, not believing his own eyes at first. The wreath and the fish were gone. The wisdom had been chewed up and torn apart by the teeth of a stranger who had not heard in it that which Morizok treasured as being of the greatest value.

‘This wisdom of yours isn’t that bad’, the stranger laughed maliciously. ‘Fresh’, he added, and placed himself on the spot on which Morizok had first seen him. He sat satisfied, in his gray worn-out raincoat, as motionless and silent as the lake.

A flock of wild ducks flew very low above the lake and then turned in a curve towards the east. Morizok looked after them and saw how the sky shyly blushed. A new day stepped resolutely towards them. It wore a gray suit and it reminded Morizok of the stranger’s worn-out raincoat. In the distance, it already looked somehow somber and depressed to him, and he wished it would pass as quickly as possible, but the gray day dragged itself along sluggishly, not caring much about its looks. The stranger took off his hood for a moment and Morizok could see two powerful sinews vibrating under the cracked red skin on the back of his neck, while he washed his face with lake-water.

‘Wash your face!’ he told Morizok. ‘This water is my treasure.’ Morizok did not say anything. He was standing bareheaded and exasperated. He swallowed saliva which was as bitter as gall and stuck to his throat like pitch. The stranger finished his morning wash and sat back down on his old spot. He shook drops from his bony fists, which creaked, and then he hid them under the raincoat.

‘Is that the anger of the naïve heart that sparks and flashes like lightning?’ he asked quietly. ‘I know that I am an unthankful thief - that is why I sit alone - but I also know that you are a fool. You have no pity for me, but you asked for compassion. You said that you were carrying joy in that wreath for me. Well, rest assured that I am joyful. And above all, I am full. I guess that is why I am joyful. On my face you saw no dreams, and I saw disgust on yours. What kind of wisdom is that, when you have no room for courage in it? My face frightens you, I know, it frightens others too. I scared the fish away from this lake a long time ago, and only the hunger is unafraid of me. It stops at nothing. It bothers you that your words have been silent, but you see, I think that they have been fleshy and tasty. Give thanks to that well in my name.’

There he made a short pause, letting his look glide over the lake like a wave.

‘Don’t be upset and sad by my deafness for your song. If there has been pleasure and grace in it, then you shall sing it again in some other ear. Once, the lake told me that beauty neither gets old nor vanishes, but only hides from sadness. So let

it be, I said, when I became sad. And you, foolish friend, go on and don't extinguish the fire that smoulders in you, and don't reproach the fainthearted and tired me, who kicks like a lizard's tail. Your words are bigger than this lake and no thief can steal them. Make a new song and let the birds take it on their wings.'

Morizok listened carefully to the stranger's every word. He felt a hidden excuse in those words, but it was the argument of a man who could not repent honestly. He thought that an enormous calamity had eaten him and that the few words the man had spoken were a mere consideration but, at the same time, Morizok felt eased. The stranger's words had a gray colour and became mixed with the pebbles on the shore. Morizok stood still, taking care not to tread on them. Nevertheless, he felt they carried with them something worth listening to, and he thought this was because of his fish which the stranger had swallowed voraciously. He especially liked the last ones, about the greatness of his words and about the song borne on the wings. He remembered then the wild ducks which had flown east that morning. The gloomy day was still standing beside them, being sluggish and somber, but it slowly crossed to the other side of the lake and left. Morizok watched it go, ready to move on, when he suddenly wished to forgive the stranger.

'My home is always somewhere ahead of me, in scarcely visible landscapes which call out for my footsteps. When I leave, my past will come along the same road by the lake and you will know that it is mine by the sharpness and cruel coldness of its look, with which it will stab you. Here is my forgiveness, as honest as the greeting which I brought you. Let it guard you against wicked and evil memories. Let it watch over your peace and over you.

Morizok laid his hand on the stranger's shoulder and stood like that for a moment, as if he wanted to give some special importance to that act. The stranger shrank even further under his raincoat and gave a scarcely noticeable tremble. Morizok arose, picked up his stump of happiness and shook off some tiny stones which had stuck to the pitch. He looked once more at the gloomy day which staggered down the hill. He turned around and went in the opposite direction.

Under the hill, a green meadow was shining like sesame oil. From afar, Morizok could already see how the winds without homelands glided over it and left tracks which smelled of thyme. As he passed the canes, which were standing still in the lake, he picked one of them and made a shepherd's flute, and now he was blowing through its tiny opening. His cheeks became red, he was trying so hard. He tried to blow a melody out of it, but the melody stubbornly refused to come out, so the shepherd's flute remained silent, like the wisdom he had carried. He thought of the stranger once more and he sighed longingly. Then suddenly, he heard a gushing behind his back. He turned around and saw that the words which the stranger had

spoken had followed him. They were mixed up with the shore pebbles, and their grey colour gave them away. Morizok stopped to let them catch up with him. It seemed to him that they had been following him for some time. When they came close to him, one of them said:

‘A sweet melody is hiding shyly in your shepherd’s flute but it won’t come out until you give it words to lead it. You are blowing in vain, with your flushed cheeks. Take us, and we will bring it out.’

Morizok watched the words suspiciously at first, but in the end he listened to them. He picked up a couple of the closest of them and pressed them carefully into the shepherd’s flute. He brought it closer to his mouth and blew easily. The shepherd’s flute sang. The melody rose like the mist of daybreak and began to make swaying rings like smoke. It barely touched his ears and he felt thrilled by the charm of its tones. He stood mesmerized, waving his head slowly as an eagle sways its wings. He felt as if he was hovering, and as if the height was conquering him inch by inch. A weak scream slipped out of his mouth, then slid down the smooth grass and vanished at the other end of the meadow. After that, another one slipped out, and after that poured the laughter of unrestrained satisfaction.

Morizok had been standing like that for a long time, as if hanged by the branch of pleasure, when at sunset the sweet melody turned into a moth and flew away. Morizok was startled, as if he had suddenly awoken from a trance, and he could not at first remember where he was. The night took advantage of that and covered him with a darkness as thick as a quilt. He lay down on the soft grass and felt the stones gushing under his head. He remembered the words that had followed him and he found them by groping about in the dark. The words said to him:

‘This melody is the stranger’s gift to you. He is not a real thief, but he is a wretch who abhors life. Your fish-words made him full and your forgiveness made him happy. Let the melody follow you. Goodbye, you fool.’

The pebbled words gushed again and disappeared in the darkness. Morizok wanted to ask them something else but they had slipped quickly away. As he lay on the grass, he felt the dream lying in ambush for him and he laughed. He waved to it to come closer, and positioned himself more comfortably. He slept with a pearly satisfaction on his lips.

Heavy drops fell over Morizok’s face and washed off the refreshing dream. He blinked and jumped up. With his hand he removed the rain, which was getting thicker and thicker, and he noticed the shepherd’s flute lying at his feet. It played, and the melody got underneath his thick hair. He thought it might be afraid of the rain. The melody saw the thought curling like a lock of hair and it whispered in his ears:

‘Let us go from this rain. Let the rain dampen our tracks. Like you, I am looking for people to hear me and to cheer their souls, and there ahead of us, over those statuesque mountains, I hear agitations and cries. The silence is bent over the people like a black cloud and it threatens to take their sky away from them. They have forgotten how to listen and they cannot hear. Your words and I will bring them salvation as a present.’

Morizok was encouraged by the whispering of the melody so together they went along the wet meadow. He walked cheerfully, with a footstep that cleared the sky, and the rain soon stopped.

## IV

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The mountains hid black thoughts under their shady sides, and scared travellers off with their narrow, winding paths. At night, they roared with a muffled voice that came from the deep and during the day they would strut impudently and arrogantly. On their peaks, under a white shawl, they hid a cold which broke tree bones. Morizok wasn't afraid. He walked boldly, leaving winding tracks behind him. He counted the jagged tops which stabbed the sky and it appeared to him that there were too many of them. He climbed to the top, from which he could reach the clouds that were passing silently, and he mounted one which looked like a white stallion. The cloud carried him over the mountains and he played the magic melody to it in return. When stirrings and murmurs could be heard below, the cloud laid him down on a smaller peak, and there they parted as friends. Morizok waved to the cloud and the cloud strewed snowflakes along the path that led to the foothills of the mountain. Morizok went down the snowy path which wound abruptly between juniper trees and jumped over tracks left by chamois.

At sunset, Morizok stopped to listen to the stirring and murmuring. Only the buzzing of night bumblebees could be heard. The ground became softer, and it bent under the heavy tiredness which had attached itself to his legs like a burdock. He noticed how the sun quickly went down behind the hilly area with its form drawn in the gentle contours and he thought that this day was very impatient. He climbed into a bush and waited for the darkness of the night to spill over the mountain and over the sky. He listened to his heart and he heard joy and singing. He heard, too, when the heavy door slammed and the singing thundered even stronger and the joy became greater. A weak light and music were coming from behind the door. Morizok felt a warmth around his heart and an unrestrained liveliness in his limbs. He lay stretched out with his fingers woven into his thick hair and he enjoyed the song of his heart. He fell asleep with the dream carved in white marble. He dreamed again of the wild horses, and the dream shone and flew around the bush like a firefly all night. He heard the neighing but it, too, became entangled with the music and joy that were coming from his heart. The strange mixture played like a magic spell on the silky thread.

At sunrise, the dream merged with the first rays of sun and turned into a white hornbeam. When Morizok opened his eyes, the white hornbeam greeted him with a smile and bowed gently. Morizok became a little bewildered and replied to its greeting, turning his look to the side in confusion. He got up and felt the same

warmth and unrestrained liveliness from the day before. He grabbed his shepherd's flute, which had lain all night in the lap of the violets, and moved on.

The day had broken in two when Morizok stopped, breathless, on the top of the hill. The whiteness of the path was long gone and Morizok tried to orient himself with the tips of his eyelashes. He blinked as if in twilight when suddenly the melody, which he carried in the shepherd's' flute, spoke.

'I saw your dream last night and I listened to the joy of your heart.' It said that while it was playing to him.

Morizok realised that the melody had been gone all morning.

'Hm...', he blew through his nose.

'Are you angry with me?' the melody asked, timidly.

'No.'

'I just wanted to take a little walk, when suddenly a northern wind came, grabbed me and took me to the top of the mountain. I begged it to let me go, but it wouldn't. It thought that I was a nymph. When we came beneath the top of the mountain it got tired and I managed to slip away. I wandered alone and frightened. The night was as dark as a well. I didn't know how to get back. Then I heard from somewhere the thud of horse hooves and I saw a herd of horses rushing down the mountain. Their mightiness frightened me. They ripped the soil and crushed the stones with their hooves. They shone like torches. One of them galloped right beside me and I got entangled in its mane. It pulled me mightily and unstoppably. I tried to catch sight of where it was taking me, but because of its speed I couldn't see anything. All of a sudden, they stopped in front of a thick door and one of them smashed the door with its legs so that it burst open. We entered a room that looked like a walnut shell, and then joy and music started and I played better than I had ever done before. They liked my playing. Just before dawn they suddenly disappeared and the tracks they left in the soft ground turned into flowers. Then I fell asleep and much later the branches of the white hornbeam woke me up.'

Morizok gazed silently at the distance. He felt the melody curling around his neck like a thread of cobweb.

'When I meet sadness, which is dressed in human clothes, I will tell it about the pureness of your heart and about the joy that blazes within it', it whispered to him.

'No!' it almost shouted, 'I will sing to it about the goodness of one heart. And you, what will you tell it?' the melody asked him, and looked into his eyes.

It quivered in front of him and became foggy in Morizok's wet breath. Morizok was quiet. He was surprised by this question. Since the day the stranger on the shore of the lake had swallowed his wreath, he had felt helpless and robbed. He had been a poor man without gifts, and yet he had had so much to say; a handful of bright words, a braid of yellow scales. Now he carried muteness in his mouth like dry dirt. He vaguely sensed a roaring in his chest. The muffled roaring of the lost river which rinses the insides of the earth and which, unexpected and unannounced, emerges to the surface, clear and fresh. He felt that river flowing in his depths, hidden to the ear, and he trembled hardly noticeably, as if he agonised.

'The song?' he said.

'The song? the melody repeated after him, as if it didn't believe its own ears.

'Yes, the song. My song, and you will carry it' Morizok repeated to himself. 'I will speak by myself, I'll tell my dreams, yes dreams, the same dreams that carried you last night. I'll create my own letters out of rain, out of crumbs, out of morning, precisely as the well told me, and I will let its words remain with the stranger and the lake.

His face brightened and his eyes glowed. He realised that he had always been able to speak with words, which bore his own birthmark.

'...and I hardly searched for them in the wastelands, abroad' - he tapped his head as if he was trying to bring himself back to consciousness. He remembered the stranger and he was grateful to him now, yet at the same time he felt guilt pricking his heart like a sting, because he had hesitated too long before forgiving him.

'Wrap them with your lovable body, double the joy and triple the happiness. Be the greatest among songs!' shouted Morizok, and got up onto his knees.

He went on. He walked swiftly, catching up with the light of the coming day and soon he overtook it and found himself in the day, which impatiently glided down the hill with hair of golden corn.

'Golden hill!' shouted Morizok with all his strength. 'How many days have you seen off down your golden mane? One after another, they dragged themselves tirelessly, holding each other's hands. Some of them as rough as highlanders and some rainy and dejected. Oh, those days, a silent procession down your slopes. And I watched them for a long time and I counted their blinks and every time I got tired, hill. There were too many of them. And the one we call "today" found me in your hair of golden corn, and I speak to myself the best I can, the way I used to, against the silence. The truth of a single dream has nested in my heart and I want to make many more such nests, and to conquer the unpleasant silence of anguish

and turn infinity into a homeland. That will be a mighty day. It shall be celebrated with cheers and tears. I wait for that day, and I count; perhaps it is this one? Or maybe it has passed me by? Tell me, hill, did you see off the day I'm looking for, and where did it go? Did the day that stubbornly waits for me slide down your hair?'

The hill did not say anything. Its golden hair was bending, leaving passages like furrows. Morizok walked along one furrow and noticed that the hair reached up to his eyes. He walked, nearly blindly, until he emerged on the plain at the foot of the hill. He turned around and watched. The passage down which he had come had disappeared. On the top of the hill he could vaguely see another day preparing to slide down the golden hair. He waved to it to hurry up and sat himself down in the thick soft grass. The melody got into the shepherd's flute made of cane and said nothing. Morizok stared at his palms and saw that the patience had turned into sand and was disappearing between his fingers and spilling over the grass. He cast his eyes once more towards the coming day, which still hesitated timidly at the top of the hill as if afraid of the steep slope. The sky became wrapped in darkness, and Morizok fell asleep. He slept peacefully and as motionlessly as a stone mark in the thick grass.



Grass covered the paths and Morizok was standing still, confused. He turned the shepherd's flute in his hand as he looked about. Wastelands were all around. The echoing and humming of wild flowers filled the air, which was slowly becoming warm. Morizok headed for a grove which was crouched in a gap between two small hills, remembering how the old beech had once showed him the way and thinking he could ask the grove for directions. He had been walking for a long time, while the sun mercilessly burned and stirred the quivering air. He paced resolutely across the naked meadow, thinking how long and hot this day was. As he neared the grove he felt a freshness, so he hurried, chased by the heat of the sun. He sat down under a maple tree with twisted branches at the edge of the grove, and voraciously inhaled the freshness. He stared at his palms and realised there was much less patience there than there had been last night, even though he had slept with his fists tightly clenched.

'Patience is time', said the maple tree.

Morizok jumped as if the voice had woken him from a nap.

'And you squeezed patience into two fists and now it's leaking through your fingers like grains of sand in an egg-timer', the maple tree continued. 'Is all the time you have contained in those two fists?'

Morizok bowed his head shyly and stared at the thick wrinkled roots which were sticking out of the ground.

'I carry a bud inside here' - Morizok pointed to his chest - 'and it withers, and craves to blossom. Its craving is great. I named it "desire" and "thirst" and I let it carry me along, the way the river carries its waters. Mightily and unstoppably. Infinity is the homeland of both me and that bud, the same infinity which is hidden by the haziness of a sad eye. Only in the land of infinity will we find sanctuary. And the wild horses are already there, they were the first ones to arrive there, and they come to me at night in dreams, which they tear apart and upset with their neighing. That is where the water is which can quench this thirst that has gathered inside of me. In the land of infinity I will destroy time and I will tear apart the boundaries which hold me like iron chains. The day of my eternal birth is there, it sits somewhere in the shade, as I do now, and it waits.'

'Hmh.' The maple tree with twisted branches became absorbed in thought, and it squeaked quietly. It was silent for a while and then it spoke:

'If that is so, then go, but you should know that the road to your land through this land goes.'

Morizok's eyes lit up. He felt that the old maple tree understood him and he hoped happily that perhaps it knew the road that led there. He asked it if it had seen the tracks of wild horses.

'No', replied the maple tree. 'I haven't seen such tracks and even if I had, I wouldn't recognise them. Hardly anyone comes by this forest. Only some winds and the scent that follows them, and they don't leave any tracks. Go on! I can't help you in your quest.'

'Look at these thick roots', the maple tree waved with its lowest branches towards the thickened roots sticking out of the grass. 'They have grown too deep into this ground of mine and into my peace. In my forest there is a lake, a small forest lake. Go to it and ask it for help! They say it is magical and knows all the secrets of this world. Maybe it has heard of your land too.'

Morizok jumped to his feet happily, excitement boiling in his veins. This was the same feeling that had filled him when he had come across the spring of wisdom.

'Rest in peace, and let it be undisturbed and eternal!' Morizok shouted, and disappeared in the forest.

Thick treetops hid the sun and Morizok could only see twinkling leaves with bent edges colouring the thick and humid breath of the forest. The highest leaves were playing, and dazzling light would shine through the narrow gaps then jump over to the next gap. Morizok thought that this forest had a roof that sparkled and flickered like the sky covered with stars. The heavy air he was breathing was pierced with thin beams of light, in which the stirrings of many small bugs could be seen. Morizok walked round the light beams so as not to disturb the bugs. The forest became thicker and darker and the air heavier and more humid. Morizok felt his footsteps becoming leaden and he thought he might be near the forest lake. He jumped over a fallen tree covered with moss, and saw the lake. Its surface was smooth and shiny, and striped with the shadows of trees which stuck out of the water, half eaten and ghostly. The branches of the trees were naked and broken. Morizok looked towards the sky but the sparkling roof was gone. A gray cloud of fog, thick as a mush, hovered above the lake, pressing with the greyish-blue gloom of its belly. Uneasiness and a weak chill streamed through Morizok's limbs. He thought that the secrets hidden by this lake must be dreadful and sullen. He stood at the edge, uncertain whether or not to ask. He inhaled the thickened air twice and said:

'I have been walking the wasteland which has been mastered by silence, and loneliness never leaves me. It's as faithful as a shadow. My tracks have been covered for a long time and eaten away by the monotony of the life which I abandoned. I wander alone and sometimes a dear melody follows me. The old maple

tree with twisted branches, which motionlessly keeps vigil at the edge of the forest, sent me to you. Show me the way to the land of infinity.'

Morizok said all of this in a single breath and now stood quietly, as silent as the water which spread in front of him. Who knows how long he waited. He gently touched the surface of the lake, trying not to stir it. He felt that long hours of waiting were ahead of him, and bit his lip. He listened, but could only hear the hollow echo of silence. He suddenly remembered that he had never spoken to the lake before, and became worried whether he would be able to understand the language of water. He became restless. He looked around the forest, pricking his ears up. He noticed that an owl perched in the fork of a tree was looking at him. When he wanted to wave to it, he suddenly heard a gurgle coming from the depths of the water. He saw big black bubbles emerge on the surface and spread an unbearable stench. As the water stirred, Morizok put his hands over his face. The gurgling became louder and the stench even more unbearable. The shadows of the deformed branches that peaked out of the water as if they were about to drown played violently, and the surface of the lake turned into a strange swirl of living pictures. The pictures cut through each other sharply and swiftly, and mixed together with each other, creating vivid images which would stay for a moment then disappear in the stirring water. Morizok stared carefully into that mysterious play and looked for an answer to his searching. He tried hard not to miss any of the fleeting images but they changed too quickly, and that made him angry with himself.

He saw a crowd of people. They were sitting peacefully, then an ominous hand of despair was covering them with black dirt, and the people were drowning under black piles while they tried in desperation to crush the lumps of black earth with their teeth. Morizok shivered and the image disappeared and, for a moment, another image took over. Now he saw fear whipping the people like a horsewhip, cruelly and mercilessly, and the people hiding behind each other and crying. They whined and choked in their own cries, that emerged from the mud like a bad stench. The whipping stopped and the people were singing, glorifying its cruelty and their own obedience. One man stood up and shouted, 'Courage!' as if he was gripping it in his embrace. Suddenly, serenity poured over Morizok like rain. The image blurred a little, disappearing almost completely for an instant, then it calmed and Morizok saw the same man again. He was standing covered with flowers in the jumble of a garden of magical colours, but he was standing astoundingly still. The other people grabbed him and, while he was shouting his name, they strangled him. They decapitated him and made a grave in the wet earth, and on it they placed a grotesque gravestone to the fearless one. The people were crying again. They were mourning the only hero among them. Again they sang the elegiac song and celebrated their fear. They bowed to the cliffs and shivered. The many people that Morizok watched on the stormy surface of the water, which constantly spat out smelly bubbles from somewhere in its depths, hid in holes, in covered valleys and on hills with hedges.

Now they were sitting on the edges of their holes, peacefully at first glance, but when the night came they started slipping fire into each other's holes. Their night trembled and echoed with cries and pleas that were never answered. Afterwards the morning came, bloody and pierced with hatred. They shouted, 'Truth!' to that bloody morning, as if truth had gone in the night. They shouted it in harmony, as a dirge, and they were crying again, and swearing and celebrating their own fear and glorifying their misfortune. There were more and more of these people.

Morizok shivered and looked away. The stench was now unbearable and he felt the urge to leave. He took off, tripping and stumbling through the gray-blue darkness of the forest. Nausea was tearing his insides apart. When he was quite a distance from the stale air and unbearable stench which tore his nostrils apart and choked his breath, he sat down on a tree stump. The forest ceiling became glittery again and that cheered him up. He felt someone's eyes watching him. Foreboding and bewitching eyes. He turned around and soon saw them, in the fork of a bloody tree. It was the owl he had seen by the lake.

'You have started off on a road of thorns. It will lead you through mouths of horror and over ravaged and naked crags. It will take you into the depths of this world and through mud and dregs to its very bottom. Will you be able to get back to the surface again?'

Morizok looked palely at the owl. He had been swallowing bitter saliva as the images passed in front of his eyes. He felt a disgust from which his insides cramped. It was a disgust soaked with the rotting dirt and soured air of the forest. He sat bent over and restless. He wondered whether these were the valleys he would have to cross on the way he had appointed for himself. Sticky sweat glided down his limp limbs and he felt a cry coming, like a giant wave that closed in on him ominously. The cry reverberated, still not vocalised, somehow muffled and foreboding. It echoed hard in his chest like iron footsteps in dark halls and it threatened to crush him like a mallet. He shivered. He stood up and started to run. Now he cracked the beams of light which stretched over the entire height of the forest, not caring about the tiny bugs which swarmed in them. He ran for some time, tripping over knotty trees and bushes, then he stopped again. He breathed deeply and with difficulty, tired of this foolish running. Then he felt the same look on the back of his head again. He turned round and looked at the treetops surrounding him, and in one of them he spotted the owl. It stood still, its large red eyes only blinking now and then.

'Your legs are already covered in blood and your heart is flustered', the owl said.

'Until recently you were a searcher and all of a sudden you are a fugitive. You say you carry in your chest the truth of a single dream, that your heart is pure and good, that you know of the land of infinity and that desire draws you towards that land like a sea current. Words as dark as crows fly in the sky and their shadows will follow you, perfidiously and secretively. They'll caw and they'll slap you with their

wings. Take care of that bud in your chest and feed it with courage, wild and unstoppable. The whirls of the quiet water are the most dangerous, and they'll pull you to the bottom. You may find your kin in the mud. Don't let their ghostly dead faces, eaten by enormous pain, frighten you. Stony are the roads of your journey. They have torn tougher skin than yours. Will you be able to walk upright?'

When it had finished its speech, the owl blinked and settled itself more comfortably in the tree fork. It stared at Morizok without blinking and he swallowed its words with great difficulty, as if swallowing rancid fat. The question swayed in the air like the bugs in the bands of light, challenging him arrogantly.

From somewhere at the other end of the forest, freshness was getting through, and Morizok felt it streaming over his sweaty back. Fear overcame him and his entire body trembled. A current of fresh air hit the owl and ripped one of its feathers off, a greyish feather with dark-brown spots, which spun and fell silently at Morizok's feet. He picked it up, turned it around for a few moments, then suddenly dipped the tip of the feather in a beam of light which had sneaked through the crack of an old tree, and started to write an answer on a piece of night darkness which slept in a hollow tree trunk. When he had finished, he threw the piece of darkness back into the hollowed tree trunk and left. A bit further on, a cheerful and enthusiastic footstep like a footstep of spring caught up with him, and carried him away.

The day was already at its end when Morizok realised that he had left his shepherd's flute by the old maple tree at the edge of the forest. He followed the swaying circles of light which were fading away on the cracked hard bark and soon saw the old maple tree basking in the evening colours. Motley clouds obscured the sinking sun and it burst into a wonderful jumble of colours. The dying light cut through it as if through a glass showcase, and gently caressed the twisted branches of the maple tree. Morizok noticed a company gathered around the maple tree and when he drew closer, he recognised resoluteness and desire. Resoluteness was leaning against the tree with her blade stuck into the ground and she caught the last ray of light and blinked with it to Morizok, causing his eyes to blink from the reflection. Desire was sitting in the tree fork, chatting to the melody which had stepped out of the shepherd's flute to greet the guests. As he came closer, Morizok clearly saw an unspoken question in the eyes that stared at him.

'What did you write with the feather?' asked the melody, when it spotted him. Morizok smiled and he thought to himself that the melody's patience was like his own. The old maple tree read his thoughts and smiled gently with its yellow-red leaves.

‘I wrote your names, friends of life. Those were the only things I knew. I wrote the names which drive me into troubled waters and which give me the strength to await another day in the fields of bitter sage. You preserved my heart, uninfected with the anguish of worthless slavery. And that’s what I saw in the stirred water of the lake’, said Morizok, and he climbed into the fork of the old maple tree. He settled himself comfortably there, took the shepherd’s flute and played the tunes of the soft dream.

‘Goodbye, old maple tree’ was written on the piece of mother of pearl which Morizok cracked off and threw away as he stood at the other end of the meadow, from where the maple tree’s grove was barely visible as a tiny green thread. The mother of pearl shone in the bright morning sun and lit up Morizok’s tracks in the wild grass. It followed the tracks swiftly and Morizok watched sadly as his ‘goodbye’ travelled across the naked meadow. He turned and continued his journey. The melody was having a nap in the shepherd’s flute made of cane, and Morizok didn’t want to wake it up. A furrow cut the sky in two and he decided to take the right side of the sky. He walked on silently, absorbed in thought. Thoughts played around him like a swarm of wild bees and from time to time he would slip one ‘hmh’ out. The images revealed by the forest lake worried him and occasionally he would feel the nausea which made his insides spasm. The heat was becoming as unbearable as the stench. From time to time, it seemed to him that he heard cries and screams. He became tired, and lay in the grass. He stared at the sky and the sky turned into a swirl. He stood up and moved on. The wild thoughts were buzzing, and their buzzing muffled the chirping of rare birds. The owl’s red eyes flashed in front of him and disappeared in a twinkling of hot air. Large grains of sweat rolled down Morizok’s face and he felt them run down some new lines which had become carved into his sunburned skin. He wished he could see his face.

The sun slid silently over the sky and now stood opposite him. It slowly faded away and, in the evening, touched the top of the hill which Morizok was approaching. The heat loosened and now he breathed again. The swarm of wild thoughts which had followed him all day long was trailing behind. At sunset he sat on the ground, which was still warm, and breathed even more easily. The hard inner struggle was over. He sat, tormented and exhausted but undefeated. And he was satisfied with that.

A fluffy sound cut through the first darkness and he soon spotted a peculiar bird flying towards him. He strained his eyes in the darkness, which was becoming thicker, to discern the image of the peculiar bird. When it came close to him, he saw desire and resoluteness sitting on it, tied on with an iron clamp of will, and waving at him. He cheered up and waved back. As they flew over him they threw something into the thick soft grass, then, in the blink of an eye, disappeared into the dark. The

fluffy sound became quieter then vanished completely. Morizok sat up and began to crawl through the grass, groping around for whatever they had thrown down. He didn't have to look for long before he found it. It was his happiness, the same happiness he had once smashed, jealously driving curious intruders away from the wreath of wisdom. He became mightily glad, and pressed his happiness against his chest. He carefully removed the withered blades of grass and dust which had become stuck to the pitch, and he stroked it. He laughed out loud. His laughter poured across the meadow and caused the dark curtain of night to become wrinkled. The melody, which had slept through the whole day in the shepherd's flute, hiding from the heat, peeped out and tried to discern in the darkness what Morizok was gripping in his hands. Seeing it, Morizok shouted:

‘See, it has found me again. My happiness. The friends of life and the iron clamp of will that tied them returned it to me.’

Still sleepy, the melody looked confused. It came closer to Morizok and circled twice around the sticky stump, gently touching it with its silky body.

‘Well, if that's so, let us dance’, it said, and started twisting sweetly and seductively. Morizok shrilled with joy, shaking his head as if he was driving away flies.

Some time later, the moon came down to the meadow, broke off a piece of moonlight and wrapped them in it. It had just been passing by; anyway, it stopped and joined the party. It bounced and bounded around, crumbling up gold dust and scattering it all over the meadow, delirious and more and more cheerful. Before dawn, Morizok fell into the grass and went to sleep. The moon hurried to catch up with the night, which was now leaving it behind, and it shyly noticed that it was as thin as a sickle.

At morning, which wore a purple robe, the sun became as yellow as a pumpkin. A shredding song of crickets echoed across the meadow, announcing the heat. Morizok sat up, still dazed by the previous night's party. He picked up his luggage and went on. The meadow wound like troubled waters and, in some places, oases of wild flowers dappled. In the distance a height, which was supported by steep cliffs, was just coming into sight and Morizok headed towards it. The height was quite far off, and Morizok thought about persistence. He thought about how resoluteness was a rock and desire a force which moves it, and about how rock piles on rock and out of that a statuesque mountain grows. He thought of how the mountain cuts through the skies and lets the winds rush down its steep slopes, and how water springs from within it, cold and clear, flowing down the plains, watering the lifeless ground with the strength of steadfast life.

‘Flow through my veins, clear water, and flood disgraceful hopelessness and faintheartedness’, he said, half aloud.

‘Neigh, you wild horses! Neigh, wildly and powerfully! Be chased by my crazy desire, which abandoned reason long ago, and find a wasteland big enough for your eternal movement! Here I come, unfettered by thought, too fast for the eye to follow. I searched tirelessly for a word, but the best of them stand as mute as road signs. Everywhere, I find circles I can’t break out of. I want to talk to someone, I want to take them with me, but there isn’t anyone. Where are the people hiding, wind? You have travelled their lands and caressed their faces. Will they believe my words the way they believe their fear, wind? Do great sorrows make them hide under the black earth, or have they perhaps found joy in the dream in which they live? Here I come.



## VI

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Morizok went on, jumping from one rock to another, feeling the sharp edges of the warm stone plunging into his feet. Tiny clouds dragged themselves lazily over the sky like a defeated army, while their shadows headed towards the north. Morizok climbed a big rock from which he could see a region striped with dark-green tree columns climbing the slopes of the heights which screened the valleys from the light. Morizok decided to follow them. He walked swiftly and enthusiastically, ripping off an invisible path. When he reached the slope he continued at the same pace, and soon he had left the mute tree columns behind him. He climbed the slope which had been shaped by torrents tearing off the loose soil. Rest, the cold and the dream waited for him at the top.

The top was flattened and covered with a reddish-grey grass which shivered under the blows of the sharp wind. Morizok felt a different breath from the one in the valley and he measured the area before him. He took up the shepherd's flute and played. The melody came out unwillingly at first, then poured out sadly and quietly. Morizok knew that this was because of the cold, so he soon gave up.

'Oh you huge heights, which break the views and bring unrest to deceitful hope! What was hiding behind your giant shoulders if not my naïve and reckless curiosity? And what did you give me but barren terrain, the desert and the cold which is their master? My persistence is as cruel to me as your icy breath surmounts you. Now I laugh at myself and pity you because you are cruel to yourself the way I am to myself. You elevated yourself high into loneliness, the loneliness of silent defiance, and you threaten those lower than yourself with the unreachable and your icy whiteness. How horrible are those rocks on the ridge, how cold and gloomy! I won't disturb you, giant heights, but my road leads through here and I will tread the reddish-grey grass quietly and silently, so as not to disturb your peace. I will carry this piece of happiness over to the other side, to those who abhor your heights. Morizok took the shepherd's flute, which he warmed with his hot breath, and he played again. Two wind tails which had been chasing each other over the frozen plain stopped their game and whistled as ominously as wolves.

The night arrived behind Morizok, and climbed the reddish-grey plateau agilely. It was breathless and stormy and it coughed deeply. Woken by the cough, bats started to fly around, slicing through the frozen darkness, and Morizok squatted, wrapped in the flame of the past day.

‘How merciless are the freezing nights which visit these unattainable heights’, he thought.

He lay silently but defiant. He looked up at the sky and the sky was still and clear. He thought that the stars were also frozen in the cold. He thought an armful of night thoughts too, but bats began to fly closer and closer and they soon chased those thoughts off. Morizok remained motionless and peaceful. The cold was tearing the air apart as heavily as an axe, and Morizok would occasionally feel its blade swaying close to his head. Suddenly he heard a neigh and he felt under him a thud like a weak shiver. Horses emerged from the darkness and the silver light of the dream poured out. The bats retreated, frightened by the light of the sparks beneath the horse’s hooves. The wild horses galloped across the plain, not bothered by the darkness. Morizok’s heart beat faster and, as they passed him, part of the light broke off and fell over his face like a smile. He remained lying there, quiet yet defiant, while the thudding died down, mixed with the gasping of stirred air. He fell asleep.

The morning dawned grey, the sky tucked into the fleece of thick clouds. The sun barely came into sight, like a pale round flicker, and Morizok decided not to wait for it. He got up swiftly and went on. He slit the plain in front of him with slanting moves and soon landscapes, coloured by the whiteness of the winter, emerged in front of him. Snow squeaked under his feet and woke the melody up. It peeped cautiously out of the narrow opening of the shepherd’s flute, and shivered. Morizok put the shepherd’s flute to his mouth and warmed it with his hot breath. The melody still shivered and Morizok began to comfort it and cheer it up.

‘Don’t be afraid of the winter’s white fangs which threaten and growl. Gray wolves are its kin. It hungers after the heat that is inside you, defying it arrogantly. Look at the way it whimpers powerlessly, sharp and ghastly. Fires frighten it and it is afraid of the deepness out of which the heat sprouts. The heat of virtue that married life. The winter circles and threatens with its gruesome look but it doesn’t come near. It lies in ambush and waits for the dream to let you go and forget you, and I had a dream again last night. Don’t worry, favourite of the cheerful ear.’ Morizok encouraged the melody but still it didn’t dare get out of the shepherd’s flute that morning. He went further, leaving behind him the narrow path torn in pieces.

A snowy whiteness rose abruptly and Morizok felt his footsteps became heavier. He found himself sinking up to his knees into snow and he wrestled with the slope, whose white edge was just coming into sight. The northern side was becoming dark and he saw the shadows of the night trotting as silently as ghosts. Mischievous

winds from the heights started playing with their tails and in the distance Morizok saw snowy dust swaying and disappearing in the air. Beneath it, a grove appeared and he moved towards it. When he came close to it, joy overcame him.

‘You are hiding your weakness in your chest, cold’, whispered Morizok as if he was mocking it.

He sat under a large pine tree and settled himself comfortably.

‘Short are the days and long are the rests in your kingdom, cold, but you’re not winning. You remain outside, alone and haughty, punished and frozen by your own breath’, whispered Morizok, as if he pitied it.

‘You hide the paths, snow, the way indifference hides flaming wishes’, said Morizok when he raised himself and emerged from under the branches which bent to the earth under the weight of the snow. The snow said nothing but only squeaked, and gripped his frozen ankles more firmly.

‘You hide beauty too, but I have found it in the heart of this mountain and now I know its secret. Your hard work is in vain, snow. The force has caused a shoot to sprout and it does not wither in your grip.’

Morizok’s words glared in the pale morning and he hung them on the bent branches of the pine trees when he left. When he reached the ridge where the slope broke he didn’t look back to see whether the grove was decorated. The clouds moved apart and the sky became blue. It was as clean and tidy as tulle. Morizok could now discern the contours of the pointed peaks which peeped down on each other. There were many of them, and he thought that the temptation of the icy expanse was the only way to the land of infinity.

‘Let it be so’, he spoke through his teeth, and continued his descent.

Occasionally, he measured the distance to the beginning of the next slope and on the way he looked for groves and rare vegetation under the white cover. The day trailed behind him and it barely managed to climb the ridge. Morizok looked at it and saw that it was growing dim and fading away, not moving over to the other side. He stepped up his pace. At the end of the slope he spotted a large ball of frozen snow. The night came quickly on the mountain and soon it began to pour darkness the colour of ink into the deep tracks which Morizok had left behind. Morizok hurried towards the ball of snow and, when he reached it, looked curiously at the huge mass of snow, on the side of which was a hole big enough for a man. He scratched the surface with his fingers and, under the fluffy snow, frost appeared, firm and barbed like a hedgehog. Morizok scraped this off too and a wall made of blue stone emerged.

Feverishly, Morizok broke off pieces of frost while his fingers froze and became stiff. The wall of blue stone, built by a patient hand, was becoming clearer. Morizok squeezed through the opening in its side and found himself in a narrow room. The blue of the wall was darker inside. Morizok cheered up, thinking that he had found shelter from the wild winds. He decided to spend the night there, and knocked on the wall with satisfaction as if to test the firmness of the little snowy castle. He took out the shepherd's flute and played, and the melody was mightily glad when it saw the shelter.

That night was particularly sweet and lovable and they played cheerfully, bouncing between the walls.

The night roared ominously and the winds mercilessly whipped the fort built of blue stone. The fort stood still, a little bit bent, but it didn't tremble. Morizok slept soundly, worn out by his long walk through the wastelands of icy whiteness. The sky was frozen, with icicles hanging down from sharp star legs and a weak twinkling light dropped from those icicles right onto Morizok's face. That morning, the sun peeped from behind the peak of sharp cracked edges and began to roll across the sky. When it was above Morizok's snow fort, the sun cut through the dilapidated ceiling with its sharp rays and Morizok woke, walled up within the blue stone. He cheerfully jumped up and went outside. The sharp, biting freshness of the air stiffened him, but he sighed cheerfully, blowing hot air through his nostrils. He ran round the fort and looked around it, wondering how long it had been there and who had built it. He ran around it several times, but did not find the answer. The fort stood silent and frozen but defiant, the way Morizok had been that first night he'd spent on the cold heights. It seemed to be very old, like the ruins of a kingdom blown to oblivion by the winds from the heights.

'You are the secret of some song,' Morizok told it.

'You are silent; your speech has hardened because of the cold and it has turned into blue stone. You are made of that very stone. Whose hand raised you in this wasteland, without face or back? Was it a traveller with no motive but with an overwhelming longing to travel?'

The white fort still stood peacefully, not saying a word.

'I've learned to listen to silence, and your silence is defiant and bold. Are you angry because you have been abandoned? Or has the cold hardened your speech?'

He received no answer. Wet, heavy snowflakes landed on his question and the question merged with the impersonal whiteness.

Morizok looked at the sky, and the sky suddenly became dark. He saw black clouds stormily stirring and rushing about like raging bulls. One of them, which had a large belly and jaws like beasts, swallowed the sun. The sun was muffled now, wriggling in the black cloud's belly, and it soon disappeared completely. The storm was preparing itself and dusty whirls of snow could already be seen coming down the shadowy slopes. Frantic winds dispersed heavy snowflakes, which stormed towards Morizok and his fort. Morizok turned around, looking for firewood. A bit further off he saw a fallen tree, and he broke a few branches off it. He got into his fort and bricked up the opening in its side with pieces of frozen snow. He now sat carelessly, cracking frozen branches while the melody swayed around him, waiting impatiently for him to light the fire. It was visibly restless, and Morizok told it that made it look frightened, and it admitted it. It shivered as fearfully as a sparrow and lost the sweet lovability it had had the night before. Morizok was troubled by the frozen branches, which would not burn. The storm came down from the mountain peaks and the small fort now stood in the snowstorm's strong embrace. The snowstorm plunged its claws into the blue walls and shook them madly, as if it was trying to tear it out of the ground and crush it, but the fort stood still and defiant. It hissed and whistled like a serpent, this snowstorm, but it did not get inside. Morizok became impatient and fiercely fixed his look on the branches. His eyes sparkled, one of the sparkles nailed itself to a branch and the branch caught fire. At first it was hardly noticeable, but then the branch burst into flames. The melody was mightily glad and became sweet and lovable again. It played cheerfully around the fire, and the light in the fort became hopping and light blue. The cramped space became filled with a sparkling smoke that burned the eyes and Morizok drove it away by shaking his head, as if he was trying to shake away the locks of hair that were falling over his eyes. He sat in a corner of the room with sharp edges and, through a crack in the smoke, he saw the stump of happiness cheerfully bouncing against the blue wall. He smiled with his mouth closed. The storm was getting stronger and could be heard through the thick walls, tearing away pieces of frost with its mad whip and ripping apart the stirred air with a roar. Morizok leaned against the wall as if giving himself up to an embrace. The wall embraced him round his shoulders and, soon after, he fell into a half-dream which was the colour of blue because of that embrace.

With one end, the sea splashed the time that was woven into the red hair of the south winds; with the other, it caressed a tiny limestone island which, from time to time, peeped up between the waves like a drowning person. Morizok's half-dream turned into a cradling wave which now carried him towards the limestone island. Occasionally, fish jumped out of the water around him, cutting through the foamy wave crests with their sharp fins. Morizok felt an indescribable satisfaction,

lying like that, tucked into the wave, and he didn't feel like opening his eyes. Because of this, he did not see the disheveled and unbridled time passing him by. He dreamed with his thoughts turned underneath him, as if he was watching the moody depths of the water. Those thoughts mingled with flocks of small fish and they reminded him of the words he had carried on his head, woven into a wreath. A smile landed on his face, stayed there for a while then slid into the water. He lazily waved to it with his hand as if chasing off a fly that has already flown away. A sea stream seized the wave on which Morizok was loafing as if in a hammock, and directed it towards the island. On the island, birds with long necks and bent beaks stood conversing with lively pecking words, swinging them like pieces of meat. They pushed each other around and bent their necks and, when the wave washed Morizok onto the slippery shore, they hopped into the stormy water and the commotion disappeared.

The wave-half-dream dispersed into thousands of drops and Morizok woke up in the rounded fort with the blue walls. The branch he had lit was burning out, and circles of smoke were getting into the cracks in the wall so it seemed as if the wall was breathing with a bluish breath. The shepherd's flute lay on the ground and the melody slept softly inside it, exhausted by playing. Morizok rubbed his eyes and listened. The snowstorm still raged outside and he could hear it scratching the outside of the walls with its claws. He blew onto a red-hot firebrand and it glowed and lit the thought that filled the rounded room. Morizok became immersed in that thought and he saw that the ropes which tied time were broken, and that time stood at the front of his dream and could not be caught and measured with footsteps or with sand which drizzled through the tiny openings of impatience.

'The snowstorm is my loneliness', he said, and waved to time which, hearing this, transformed into high seas and scattered as far as the eye could see.

'Eah, that is much better, you nameless world', he added. 'Infinity is the side of your face, which you hide between hope and yearning, and I have learned to survey three worlds in one blink of the eye.'

The storm was dying out and was now gasping as if struggling with its own anger. It dragged itself along sluggishly, covering its tracks and leaving high snowdrifts behind it. Small flocks of snowflakes flew from the snowdrifts and lingered for a long time on in the icy air, as if they were seeing the angry snowstorm off. The snowstorm growled quietly and soon it had completely died out. Now it was taking a nap, squeezed somewhere between the cliffs, and waiting in ambush. Morizok tried to count how many nights the snowstorm had tied together on the heights, whose appearance had now been changed by the high snowdrifts. He looked through the dilapidated ceiling, waiting for the first light to ripen, but only snowflakes flew in and sat on the branch, one end of which was still smouldering.

Some of the flakes turned immediately into dewdrops, while the rest remained seated on the charred end, speaking quietly with crystal whispers. Morizok coughed, to emphasise his presence, but the snowflakes didn't notice him. They sat tranquilly and whispered to each other in the same language with which the snowstorm spoke. One little flame got angry and moved towards the snowflakes. It flickered, almost died out, vanished, then broke out again, stumbling clumsily. When the flame got close to the snowflakes it stopped, then licked the ones sitting closest to it and they sizzled quietly and turned to vapour, so it looked to Morizok as if the firebrand breathed. The rest of the snowflakes jumped up and, as if on command, sat on the place where the little flame stood. The little flame disappeared into the burned branch, which glowed brightly. It appeared on the other side, wound round the branch and licked the snowflakes again. The branch puffed out another breath and the snowflakes jumped up together and choked the little flame. Through the cracks in the roof, another flock of snowflakes flew in and lunged at the scorched branch. In a blink of an eye, the branch became white and smoked at its ends with swaying smoke. A piece of ember broke off and fell into the ashes in the middle of the room.

Morizok had been watching this fight the whole time and had seen the little flame break out from the broken off ember and rise threateningly towards the snowflakes. The cracks in the roof widened and more snowflakes flew in. They pressed against the thought into which Morizok had sunk and which was still filling the room. They brought with them the freshness which remained after the snowstorm, and Morizok wanted to get out into it. The morning light, which grinned with a smile made of ivory, swarmed into the room, following the snowflakes, and Morizok hopped up as if spurred on. He grabbed the shepherd's flute and the happiness and left, but when he was outside he remembered the little flame and he went back in. He burrowed in the ashes and found the ember in which fire was still smouldering, put it in his pocket and went out. The morning waited impatiently for him and it took him right towards the pointed peaks which propped up the light-blue sky.

The snowstorm had put a yoke on four long nights, but now it was just as far away itself. Those nights dragged it across expanses untouched by the cruel cold and they coloured the fields, covered with peony, in white. Morizok moved swiftly, leaving tracks drawn with the blade of the sword in the snow. He walked along the very top of the mountain, which was flattened and reached almost to the sky and, because of this, he walked as bent as a linden flower. Sometimes an isolated cloud brushed against him, making the road along which he walked wind, but Morizok wasn't giving up. At the very top it was even colder, so he started a fire from the ember and covered himself with a blaze. He walked like that for a long time, lit with

a fiery cloak under the sky, like a shooting star, while behind him sparks played like fireflies.

Morning transformed into day, and out of the day the silence ran down into valleys which could hardly be seen. The thought which Morizok had left in the snowy fort caught up with him, and they walked together. It was the thought about timelessness and he threw a few words before it like crumbs. The thought turned into a bird and began pecking voraciously at the dispersed words, and he went on, not turning back.

The top of the mountain became slanted and now Morizok walked down the slope, throwing snow before him. He noticed that the snow was becoming less fluffy and dry than it had been on the other side of the flattened heights. From time to time, he would look to see whether the day was still following him and whether the shadows of the evening were gathering somewhere on the horizon.

‘Like mountains crowned with deaf whiteness, the winding horizons went one after the other and they called for you to bring them a tomorrow, but you search for that same tomorrow passing through time, tied into day and night, and you call for courage to take you along the road no one has yet trodden. Have you forgotten the intoxicating scent of the land of infinity or do you still search for eternity in that yesterday which has slipped away with the bitter taste of yearning?’ The thought echoed like twitterings, and blocked his way.

Morizok remembered the words which he had thrown before that hungry thought about timelessness. Those words were now flying around him as a warning, shearing with their beaks and cutting through thin air with reproachful glances.

The reflection of daybreak struck the sharp mountain grass and soon cockchafers sang all around the field. Morizok rushed on swiftly, running from the shadow of his own worry. The flattened peak was bending over him and it shouted something to him, but he didn't listen. Oval bowls made of stone were filled with snow, and that reminded him of the mother of pearl gaze with which he talked to trees. The morning wasn't yet completely awake and it squinted from afar with bloodshot eyes. In that look, Morizok recognised the red eyes of the owl from the maple tree forest and he felt cold gooseflesh on the back of his head. This was the look of suspicion and disbelief, which demanded submission and anguish. That look bit through the armour of courage like an oak borer beetle and Morizok felt the weight of suspicion falling over him. He felt as if he was walking along an unbroken thread through the expanse which was coloured by the threat of indifferent silence, and he defied them with the untamed dream which grew in his heart like a wild service tree, but now he could catch sight of the emptiness left by unanswered temptation. It seemed to him as if he sank into this void as if into quicksand and he



hurried down the slope towards the day which carried salvation with it, but the day was moving away from him. Morizok thought that day was like the wild horses which rushed through his favourite dream and he wished he could reach into that dream with his hand and bridge the gaps created by suspicion. His wish caught and carried him, and suddenly he was standing stretched out, holding a mane with one hand and the crispy freshness of the mountain morning with the other. A sonar sneer resounded from high above, and Morizok recognised in it a mocking scorn. The sneer was catching up with him and it threatened to bury him like an avalanche. When it came closer it turned into thunder and the mountain roared loudly. Morizok shivered, but he didn't let the shiny mane of the wild horses slip and he fought feverishly not to fall into the dark ravines of heartlessness. That went on for some time, while the sleepy morning was still squinting secretly under the clouds.

Lightning tore at the mountain air, leaving black circles of scorched grass behind it and Morizok swayed with his sword and struggled bravely. He gasped heavily, and then he felt the rage of the warrior. The blood boiled in his veins and he cut off the heads of the lightning. Suddenly, everything went silent. The morning crawled under the veil of mist and the silence sparkled like dew on the slopes. Only Morizok's heavy breathing could be heard. He sat and looked with satisfaction at the steel of resoluteness out of which his sword was cast. In his other hand he was turning the mane of the wild dream which he had pulled out in the zeal of the fight. He made a plait out of it and braided it into his messed hair. He walked heavily, his fatigue shortening his footsteps, and in the evening he crashed beside a bush and fell asleep.

The night stole its image from the sea and rolled over the dark-blue deepness of the sky. Gloomy shadows sneaked around like velvet waves, and stars twinkled in the spaces between them. Morizok was asleep and memories were coming through his dream, one after the other. They were coming from everywhere. The memories wore robes made of *calmouc* and had the intoxicating smell of mastic. They were nudging each other, and Morizok kissed them and caressed them with his hand. He enjoyed watching them like glittering medals in this strange passion called life. Those memories brought with them the taste which he was beginning to forget by now. He sometimes feared the colour of oblivion, which threatened to colour the past entirely in grey and wipe it out, the way morning wipes out moon steps, and he stood happily before the parade of memories in that dreaming. Obviously, he knew that desire turned its head away from them, but sometimes he enjoyed the nostalgia of times that had passed and he would let the feeling overcome him like the stroking of a warm breeze. He hung those memories over himself like fringes and wove a thread from them with which he would decorate the time in the entrance hole of eternity.

Before morning, he inhaled them, together with the light, and woke up thirstier than ever before.

‘Take me with you, you crazy heart!’, shouted Morizok.

A flock of birds flew swiftly over the sky, as if dispersed by that shout.

‘We’ve been friends with solitude for a long time and we have remained faithful to one another’s hearts. We spanned those wishes together, like a net, and no heart was caught in it.’

Morizok grabbed a fistful of dust and threw it in the air.

‘Let the whisper be carried with the winds and let the waters stand still so that I can listen to the trembling of the road which will lead me.’

The flocks of birds screened a piece of the sky which was squeezed between the slopes of the wooded hills, and from there a grainy light came. The light grabbed the dust and carried it off down the slope. Morizok ran after it and stopped when he reached some steep cliffs. He peeped over the edge, trying to follow with his eyes the stirred dust which glittered like pearls and was carried with the wind like dry leaves. A hill, grown with dry grass, began under the cliff on which Morizok was standing and it softly descended down a longish hollow, part of which was blocked by the forest. The glittering dust landed in the hollow and covered it like dew. The grainy light became full again, before disappearing. Through the middle of the hollow a winding path had appeared which, from the cliff on which Morizok stood, looked like a golden ringlet.

The day was silent, and it lazily twined around the hill, which wore at its crest a coniferous forest. At sunset, it dressed itself in a robe of bronze and stepped on the golden ringlet, following Morizok. The pearly dust of the path stuck to his feet and Morizok thought that he now looked like the wild horses which carried dreams away through the door of the land of infinity. When darkness poured into the narrow hollow, Morizok decided to get some rest, and he lay down beside the path. The day passed him silently and in the morning it waited for him on the hill where the path broke, winding down to the valley.

### Third Part

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The old bus panted, struggling with the steep rise and the softened muddy macadam road. The rain was pouring unstopably and, from time to time, water could be heard splashing against the worn-out bottom of the bus when it hit a water hole, and along the way there were many water holes as long as the bus itself. The road was curving and at some places so dug up that the bus barely managed to pull itself out of the ruts which had been left by other vehicles. It was night-time, and the lights in the bus were off. Raindrops ran down the big windows, pushing against each other and merging into small drips. Sometimes the glaring light of lightning would quiver over the forest trees through which the road was cut, and then the light would quickly disappear into the branches. Some of the light got into the cabin, which was filled with moist and sleepy passengers.

Damjan Lopur was sitting in the back seat and in front of him he could see people's heads jerking and jumping in time with the bus. They looked somehow slack and half dead. Some were tied in kerchiefs and some wore creased caps. Some were egg-shaped and some scarcely peeped over the worn-out seats, and they all rolled lifelessly from one end of the back of the seats to the other. Everyone slept tightly, as if dazed by the irregular groan of the engine. Occasionally, the groan would become silent and it would seem as if the old engine was catching its breath on the rare parts of the road that were flat, and then it would continue. Damjan pulled his fists into his sleeves and crossed his arms over his chest. He looked through the semi-darkness of the cabin and secretly enjoyed the silence of the sleeping passengers.

'You do not sleep and, if I guess rightly, you don't worry the worries you have already worried. Half-thoughts and abandoned thoughts do not pursue you on this muddy road, or perhaps I'm wrong.'

Damjan was startled by the passenger across the aisle from him, bending towards him and trying to speak quietly. He could not discern the passenger's face clearly, but he could see that it was dark with huge black eyes and rather big, pointed ears. A strange smell was coming from the passenger's seat, like the smell of a stable and Damjan recalled that he had already sensed that smell earlier that evening when he had got on the bus. The passenger had completely slipped his attention while he had been secretly enjoying the silence, convinced that everybody else was asleep.

'I hope I'm not bothering you, but I could see that you'd been awake since we started off. I, too, can't fall asleep, even though this night is filled with dreams which you just have to grab the way you grab a bucketful of water from the well. And that is because of the rain, you know; for many people it works like the whisper of a lullaby. That whispering of countless drops of rain dazes and mesmerizes them so that, later on, they won't even hear the thunder that announces

the rain. But I, you see, I can't hear that whispering and I stay awake for a long time, as if I'm watching over the sleep of others.'

After the passenger had said this he leaned back and sank even further into the shadows. Damjan turned towards him and tried to discern his face, but he could only just see a silhouette with narrow shoulders and rather a large head. The passenger was sitting on his own with his legs stretched over two other seats, and the leg space before him was filled with packets and sacks. Later, Damjan noticed that between the packets was stuck a branch which blocked a large part of the window, and that the passenger occasionally picked leaves from it and chewed them for a long time.

Damjan did not say anything at first. He was surprised by the sudden address from the passenger, whom he had not noticed for all that time despite the fact that he was sitting just across from him. He was a bit confused by his question, his speech and his unhidden, almost intrusive frankness. He had been very considerate towards the other passengers and had therefore spoken quietly, almost with a whisper that mixed with and disappeared into the sound of the drumming of the rain against the tin roof.

The passenger emerged from the shade and leaned towards Damjan again. He paused before he spoke, as if trying to choose his words carefully, and Damjan had the feeling that he had been preparing that address for some time and had been waiting for all the other passengers to fall asleep. The passenger spoke somewhat incoherently, jumping from one thing to another as if he was jumping across a creek from stone to stone. Damjan listened to him in a similar way, occasionally losing attention completely and then the passenger's talking would seem like the monotonous groaning of the engine. Damjan answered the passenger's rare questions briefly, sometimes merely with a 'no' or 'yes' or with a blow through his nose, almost unwillingly, as he wanted to avoid a serious, deep conversation. This sometimes made him look a bit comical and Damjan was angry with himself because of that. The passenger talked without stopping, with ever more visible excitement, as if convinced that he had found a conversant and a listener in Damjan. He talked about his family; actually he talked about a certain uncle whom he sometimes called a 'master' and sometimes an 'uncle'. He said both good and bad things about him, but somehow always with nostalgia and Damjan concluded that this uncle or master was a very important person in the passenger's life. Damjan also learned that he came from a small village which one could reach in one day's walk in good weather but which one could leave quicker, even in bad weather, and that if he could, the passenger would most of all have liked to stay in that village, which consisted of few houses, if they had asked him to. He now spoke with that same nostalgia in his voice, which in moments threatened to grow into sadness, about how he had then begun his wandering around the world, at first and for a long time with this uncle-master and later with others. The passenger told how one day, the uncle had left him at with some people lived in a village. At first, they would let him spend the night in front of their house and, after some time, they had built him a little house with a thatched roof

just beside their own house, with a roof made of stone plaits, and in front of which a yellowish dog always lay. The people hired him to carry water in large woven baskets and he did this for a long time. In return, he would receive food and occasionally a fistful of salt from them. He would carry the water over steep hills to a nearby town, which was a hundred times larger than the village he was living in, and on his way back he would carry stones in the baskets. Those stones were all around - the entire landscape actually consisted of stone and poor vegetation in which snakes hid - but anyway, he had to carry those stones all the way back, as if the stones from the town had some extraordinary value.

‘They spoke as if they were joking or half-asleep, or as if they were in a kind of strange delirium that the world was built of stones from this town, the world which was thirsty for water that didn’t spring in the town itself. And once, while he was loading me up, one of the townspeople said that those stones were actually some preacher’s rosary and that thoughts, which looked like walls, were built out of them and that they spoke about how every thought separates the world like a wall and that is how one can know which part of the world belongs to which word.’

Damjan positioned himself more comfortably and glanced through the window. Lightning flashed outside and he saw that they were now passing through a bare landscape and that the rain was still pouring with an unchecked fury. The bus hit a hole in the road and jerked sharply. The passengers’ heads bounced, but none of them woke up. Damjan was glad of that and he turned again towards the passenger, who continued his tale.

‘And one day, when I was in that town to which I carried water, some people who were all dressed in the same clothes and had the same haircuts as each other, surrounded me and took me away with them. They didn’t ask me anything, nor did they speak to me. When these people went to sleep they would tie me up and they would only give me food, but not a fistful of salt. They had come from a long way away and we walked for a long time to reach their land. Their houses were small and wooden, and they were on wheels. Together with some others, I had the task of towing these houses. By that time, I had already grown strong and it wasn’t so hard to tow and drag those tiny houses except when it rained, because when it rains, you know, wheels sink into mud and then it’s much harder. Roads, if you travel the roads at all, become muddy and soaked, just as the one we’re travelling on now. Somehow, since then, I haven’t been able to sleep when it rains, because during that time I had it worst on rainy days. But I’m not complaining.’

He added that ‘I’m not complaining’ especially quietly somehow, almost timidly. Damjan didn’t fail to notice it, however, and he wondered what it was that the passenger, who was so vividly telling his life story to him, a complete stranger and an accidental travelling companion, didn’t complain about.

‘And I remember that these people drank all the water I had brought to town on the day they took me with them. They sang on the way, hitting me over my back with a willow stick, and they shouted the names of the towns they had to go to in their small wooden square houses. That was the only time I saw them cheerful and singing. Most of the time they were somehow sad and unhappy. ‘

The bus made a sudden turn, and slanted. The heads rolled to one side as if by command and remained like that until the bus hit the straight. The driver cursed quietly through his moustache and one of the passengers coughed in his sleep. Damjan almost fell out of his seat. The stench of the stable, which had moved to the opposite side of the bus as it slanted, pushed him back in his seat. The passenger stopped his tale and bit a leaf from the branch which was stuck between the sacks and boxes. A muffled slurp came from the passenger’s seat and Damjan felt a curiosity come over him like hunger. He wished he could taste those leaves, and the passenger found his wish by groping in the semidarkness of the cabin, and offered Damjan a few of them.

‘These are the leaves of the white hornbeam. I eat them at night, and in the daytime I eat the leaves of black hornbeam. The leaves of white hornbeam taste at night like the leaves of black hornbeams do at day, so I eat both of them and the taste remains the same. It is like some kind of petty deceit, like when you sleep through the day in order to catch up with the night sooner, and then you think you have taken a shortcut through time.’

Damjan grinned and chewed the leaves. They were tough, and had the sweet taste of almond. He chewed them patiently, just like the passenger next to him, and they both sank into a silence mixed with slurping and the thrumming of the engine. A few seats ahead, someone was snoring heavily as if he was choking. The road became less winding and Damjan heard the bus’s wheels grinding the washed gravel. They descended the steep hillside and in the weak light of the headlights they could see heavy raindrops bouncing off the road so it seemed as though the rain was pouring from both the earth and the sky.

From time to time, Damjan tried to watch the sky but they soon drove into a narrow canyon and he could only see pieces of dark-blue sky squeezed into the upper part of the window. The road had been sinking deeper and deeper into the narrow ravine, and it soon became as dark as a tunnel. The talkative passenger in the seat across from him completely disappeared into the shadows and became somehow secretive. He continued his tale in the same careful and quiet manner, almost whispering, and his words emerged from the darkness and stuck to the windowpane like raindrops. Damjan could now read a great deal of what he was telling him on the wet glass, and he watched the words which ran down the window, making small drips of speech. The passenger talked about long winter nights which were borne by the whistling of the northern wind and about the snow which covered the small square houses on wheels and the people who lived in them. He told of how he wandered

around, chased by those same icy nights, asking around about his little village that no one had ever heard of. Since then he had begun, as he put it himself, to recognise in his memories the time that had passed and that had now been removed from the roads he travelled.

‘So I stopped to wait for time and I began to imagine it as a wheel of those small wooden houses. The time I once knew could not come back, and nor could it catch up with me, but it only trailed behind me, leaving shallow scars in the soft soil and, wherever I went, the time I didn’t yet know waited for me, dressed in the morning.’

Somewhere high above them the sky ignited, and sharp splinters of light fell down into the canyon. Part of the light slapped Damjan’s travelling companion on the face, so that he blinked and bent his head down. It lasted only a short time, then the canyon was again swallowed by soaked darkness. Damjan closed his eyes for a moment, too, so the light stopped and, pierced by the tips of his eyelashes, it broke and went off. Then they both opened their eyes, which adjusted to the darkness. The passenger hesitated, as if he expected Damjan to say something, but Damjan took his own speech and tied the silence with it, making dead ends. The muffled thrum of the engine, mixed with coughing and snoring, filled the cabin. Silence stood like a curtain between Damjan and his nameless neighbour. Damjan began to feel some uneasiness because of this, but he didn’t know what to say. He fidgeted in his seat, trying to figure out how to pull that curtain down, and he reproached himself for his inability to take part in a simple conversation. Then he thought that the conversation hadn’t been a real conversation, but rather a confession which had waited for a long time, perhaps too long, to be poured out onto an accidental passer-by. And so it happened that he had to be that accidental passer-by, or more correctly a travelling companion, in that rainy night squeezed between the cliffs of the gorge. He thought about what he could say; perhaps something important or something which would leave a strong impression. Some skilful, juggling move with the thoughts which would make them unintelligible and hard to grasp (he had learned a lot of moves like that by reading books), or perhaps a puzzle, but he couldn’t come up with anything. He was angry with himself because of this, and because he felt he was becoming a debtor with nothing to give in return. He fought these feelings, which were pouring out in disorder, jumping over each other. He was overcome by both sadness and anger, now in turns and now together, and those feelings mixed in his mouth like tar and goat suet and because of that flavour he remained mute, and frowned for some time. When he finally decided to say something, he stretched his neck, bent over the armrest, took a breath and remained like that for a moment, but then he just blew through his nose, nodded as if he approved of something, and leaned back. Silence completely filled the space between them, becoming even heavier due to the sour breath which the sleepy passengers were giving off. Damjan swallowed his spittle with disgust, and thought how this night was especially long. He looked through the

window, but his look bounced off the opaque darkness which stood with its face pressed against the window, then bent and fell over the talkative passenger who had just emerged from the shadow. That same quiet voice slashed through the silence and it seemed to Damjan it was even softer and gentler, with no scars left by those moments of silence.

‘Silence, oh yes!’ sighed the passenger ‘I’ve been friends with it too. Sometimes I doubted it but now I’m completely sure that it has never betrayed me.’

Those words flashed in the half-darkness like sparks and the fact that the stranger was about to start his tale there, where Damjan had left an untied thought, felt like a slap in Damjan’s face.

‘I can see you’re asking yourself the same thing I ask myself’, the passenger continued. ‘Forgive me for talking constantly about myself, but that’s precisely because of that silence. It has become heavier and more solid with time. I know its tart taste and I can recognise its cruel coldness. I have been sleeping in its embrace since the day I realised I could speak animal language and that my own words were fading away like an echo of silence. That is silence, actually, and you understand that, don’t you?’

He paused, and even though he could not see the face hidden under the shadow as if under a veil, Damjan recognised a pleading tone in the words ‘don’t you?’.

‘Yes, of course, I understand. I’m afraid I understand you too well’, Damjan answered, trying to speak quietly himself.

‘I’m glad, you know, but not because of you. Don’t misunderstand me - I’m not happy about your loneliness, nor somebody else’s calamity’, the passenger apologised, explaining his excitement, which was unconcealed.

‘I’m a loner by destiny, some would say, and I don’t know about you. Perhaps you’re a loner by choice, by your will, like some of them, you know, those who believe that the best way to hide their treasure is by loneliness, and you must admit that loneliness manages to hide and remove a lot from curious eyes. When you meet someone who has trodden barefoot over stubble fields and who knows how your roads pinch, then you become overcome by the feeling that “someone” has taken over half your trouble and then you are happy. Two loners do not make loneliness bigger, but they halve it, don’t they?’

Damjan said nothing. The ‘don’t they?’ swayed between the seats, unconfirmed and unanswered, but the passenger continued with visible excitement, not waiting for approval.

‘I have been silent for a long time and because of that silence the things I knew became secrets and again, this was destiny. I didn’t want that to happen, but the force which spins destinies on a spinning wheel did it. And I’ll tell you a secret. It has been bothering me for some time that I have been carrying it hidden like that and I often think that this is actually which keeps me imprisoned. Wandering around the



world, aimlessly and without destination and avoiding trouble, I've learned to stay awake when everyone else is asleep. My loneliness gave that to me, I suppose. So, when I was awake like that, I started meeting other people's dreams. It happened only rarely at first and when I would meet them they would swiftly slip away like frightened roe deer. But later, much later, I learned how to observe them and listen to them, how to sneak up on them silently and walk through them without being seen by those who dreamed them. That is my secret. Now you know about it, it is not a secret any more, at least not the way it was before. Do you envy me? Believe me, I'd be glad to exchange this skill of mine for a day of friendship with a stranger. It isn't worth as much as it might seem. Some people would consider it to be a damnation. Believe me, I have often thought that myself, about this skill of mine. That's why I say that I'm secretive by destiny, and lonesome too. Condemned and banished to loneliness.'

The talkative passenger held Damjan's attention completely. The old worn-out engine was thrumming and panting with unchecked fury, but now it sounded like the engine of a car which was moving away. The noise was disappearing from their conversation and Damjan was overcome by the feeling that it was they who were moving away from the bus and from the sleepers, who breathed heavily, drooped on their seats, sitting in pairs, with heavy, tired heads. It seemed to him as if they were moving further and further away from the bus like the whirls of stirred air in which thick strings of rain got entangled. They sat opposite each other, firmly nailed to the conversation, which was becoming more intense.

'And I've seen all kinds of dreams, short and long, foggy and opaque, unripe and overripe, unsaid and dead ones.'

'Dead ones', repeated Damjan in disbelief.

'Yes, dead ones. I've seen dead dreams more often than any other kind. I don't know what makes them dead, but they are dead. These dreams I encounter are not the dreams of sleepers, as people usually think, because I've learned something else too, as you surely know yourself - that many people dream when they are awake. Dreams can't tell the difference between reality and sleep, the same way that stupidity can't tell the difference between knowledge and ignorance. One can equally know or not know stupidity; one can know stupid things or, equally, one can be ignorant. So the dreams, too, jump from reality into sleep and from sleep back into reality, so people forget when they are asleep and when they are awake, and the border between these two worlds is a swaying ring of vanishing smoke. This game of theirs, this jumping, is tangled. It is confusing, but dreams love it. Believe me, I have been watching them for such a long time and I speak from my own experience. They love that game. Only dead dreams do not play it. They wear funeral robes during the day and lie still and silent, transparent and quiet, and at night they sound like dormice. Dead dreams belong to the dead people and the other way around, that's the way I like to put it.'

The passenger was becoming more passionate in his telling and would sometimes raise his voice then turn it down immediately, almost whispering, as though he was frightened by the strength of his own voice. Damjan sat motionless, absorbing every word. He was no longer trying to discern the passenger's face in the darkness, and nor was he looking through the window. The rain poured with unchecked fury and its drumming on the tin roof became heavier.

‘And I’ll tell you something else, and I hope you won’t get angry with me, at least no more than I’m angry with myself because of it. I met Morizok. There at the bus stop, while you were waiting to board the bus, I couldn’t resist taking a stroll through your dream. You are an artist, I know that too. I can see that from the way you enthusiastically wave your gaze.

Damjan unconsciously touched the bag in which he carried wrapped canvas and paintbrushes, and he sank even deeper into the passenger’s tale. He felt a closeness to this strange travelling companion which he could almost touch.

‘And your dream was already visible from the distance, like an aureole’, the velvety voice continued, ‘and unusually alive. It was simply offering itself up, imposing itself, and now I wonder whether I saw you or your dream first. I have to admit that I haven’t met a dream like yours for quite a long time. Dreams have their heroes and Morizok is one such hero, but most of the dreams I meet are too easy for my curiosity to digest. The best of them has lasted as long as the full moon. So that Morizok of yours has particularly occupied my attention.’

At these words, Damjan got a feeling of hunger in his stomach like the feeling that a smouldering fire has when it stands before a green forest. He felt an irresistible urge to bite into the passenger’s tale like a slice of watermelon.

‘You almost guessed right about the painting. I am an artist, or more correctly, I have been painting for a long time and one picture has particularly occupied my attention. You say that you know about dreams, I mean, you can somehow read them or simply see them like some kind of scene. I’ll be honest; I do actually envy you for that, because, you see, I have been trying for a long time now to paint a picture of Morizok, that dream of mine, as you say, but I have never managed to see it all as you claim you can. I have been painting scenes which charmingly and seductively offer themselves to the eye for such a long time now, but they were scenes of stiff, almost frozen reality, which had somehow had the strength torn away from them and the liveliness washed from them. I have painted fields and clouds and people and houses, sadness and happiness and worry and rage, but they have always somehow been cut off and separated by the blinking of the modest eye. These pictures of mine were poor, ugly. One day they turned into shadows and they put a screen across that in which the eye used to find pleasure, and forced me into movement.’

Damjan leaned closer to the passenger and sank deeper into the stable stench coming from the passenger's seat.

'It is like a vision you're obsessed with', Damjan went on. 'The insatiable urge to blow strength into the footstep that will carry you through the wasteland, without asking what that wasteland, on which none has ever walked, is hiding. Morizok is the one who has such a footstep, the one who makes his own paths, bold and courageous. The footstep of life carries him on these paths, the movement which haughtily waves farewell to those broken scenes of the world, which are blended with colour and captured in dead moments of time. Those moments occasionally become artificially reanimated in the pale remembrances of people whose lives ran away long ago, or they completely disappear in oblivion. And Morizok doesn't care about them at all. He is the spirit which passes through all these moments and connects them with his movement, like the invisible silky thread of a pearl necklace which squeezes itself through tiny holes and makes various earthly ornaments. Those moments don't interest him, he is always somewhere ahead of himself, in the footstep which creates new moments, and he gets away to each of them simultaneously, so in that way he becomes the creator and master of his own time.'

'Interesting, really interesting', the passenger interrupted him, not hiding his excitement. 'That is actually what I liked best about your character, to be honest. I, who have seen plenty of dreams, couldn't survey yours in its totality precisely because of that motion and the waste space into which your hero has dared to set off. The land of infinity, if I'm right? It sounds nice, bold. The land that stays behind that kind of movement, which feeds on the strength that springs from within. He really can't be bridled and fettered into pieces of the world broken into past and future. Just like a water-flow, unstoppable in his mightiness and mighty in his tranquility. As soon as you as you think you've got your hands on him and firmly tied a piece of his reality to some silly name, he is already somewhere else, nameless and defiantly free. Yes, that's how I saw your dream and your attempt to paint the invisible onto a piece of canvas.'

'That's right, you said that very well', said Damjan. 'Exactly that, to paint the invisible. To portray that which constantly changes its appearance and which remains hidden from the eye. That is my hardship and difficulty as a painter. I have been carrying this canvas for so long, and I still haven't succeeded in covering it entirely with colour and creating a limit to the land of infinity. Don't think that I'm suffering because of that - on the contrary, my hardship has a sweet taste and I find delight in it as if it was pear compote. I, too, know something about dreams. Not as much as you do, but I know that dreams are born where tired thought dies, where words are empty shells. I also know that you can entrust yourself to dreams as much as you believe in them and that you can become a hero of your own dream as much as you can identify yourself with it. The heroes of dreams are the first to step in, carried by divine, superhuman courage, and your courage is your daring to follow

their paths. Their breath is soaked with untamed wildness and that's why they dare to travel to distant places which the bravest thought can't reach. They penetrate a reality you can't even imagine while you stand fainthearted, hiding behind the palisades of your own weakness and cowardice. Cheerful and smiling with a gentleness which lures you irresistibly and draws you into its kingdom, that is the face of the reality which remains unreachable to dead dreams surrounded with hedges and weeds. That's how much I know about dreams, but I'm afraid I know even less about painting.

'You say you met my dream. So if you know as much of it as I do, then you will certainly have thought that that kind of painter's work and effort is in vain. I think that myself, believe me, and again I get carried away by the idea, just like Morizok, that with a few magical strokes of the brush you could portray and form a land of infinity and the spirits of freedom that live in it. I get the thought that colours have power, like a magic spell, and I try to catch them, but the job remains unfinished.'

After he had said these last words, Damjan leaned back into his seat and remained like that, but suddenly fell silent as if longing had started to play in front of him, and he breathed in heavily. He watched through the window as if he was now hunting uncaught magical colours out there, and the window was painted in black.

'I'm afraid I don't understand you very well', said the passenger. 'You say you want to draw, with colours, limits in a land which has no limits. Is that some kind of a joke that you artists like? I'll admit something to you, your dream confuses me, and it seems to me that Morizok is little bit confused too. If I saw it correctly, he searches for a word which with its magic looks like your colours and lines, and those peculiar strokes of the brush, and it is precisely those I can't find and pronounce.'

Damjan breathed in heavily once more, as if emerging from the depths of the reflection into which he had sunk completely for a moment. With his question, which didn't hide its honest confusion, the passenger had pulled him to the surface, but somehow painfully, as if he was dragging and pulling him by his hair. A weak light, which was lost in the canyon, twinkled between them and the passenger saw numerous scratches and scars on Damjan's face. These were the traces of some severe inner struggle which Damjan fought with, his own thoughts and the questions which poured out of those thoughts with the same boldness with which he stepped on them and tore them apart, and which now suddenly stood before him, threatening and challenging him. Then, suddenly, he turned towards the passenger and stared directly into his large black eyes. He looked like a man who could squeeze through bramble and blackberry bushes with a winner's smile on his face, and who stood up straight, rejoicing at having finished off the nightmare as if rejoicing at a hunting trophy.

‘You may be right; perhaps we artists really have a strange, incomprehensible sense of humour. But don’t look at that as if it only concerns us artists, or only painters. You said you read dreams, that you see them and that you meet characters and heroes in them. That is a skill which requires special attention and special understanding and perhaps some uncommon sense of humour which I can’t comprehend at all. You’ll have to forgive me for that.’

Damjan settled himself more comfortably in his seat and continued in a somewhat quieter voice, not taking his eyes from the passenger’s eyes and face, whose contours he could hardly see in the darkness.

‘I will be honest; for a long time, I haven’t been an artist. At least, I haven’t felt like one since the day I started this painting. Early in life I acquired something artistic, something which people recognised in me and my paintings as aesthetic and inspiring in the sense they themselves had found and determined, and I stood behind all that, untouchable and insensitive to the intimacy of their experience and their lives through those works of art. I painted ghosts and dragons which horrified them, and I myself wasn’t afraid of them; I inspired their loves and jealousies, passions and yearnings without feeling or enjoying myself. I stoked through their deepest and strongest emotions like a poker through a fireplace, stirring them up, but I didn’t feel any warmth. I was like an innkeeper who serves cheerful and satisfied guests but himself remains invisible, a phantom that wanders between tables and sees his full guests off, without ever taking anything from the dining table at which they ate with such large appetites.

That separateness from my own creations was my artistic talent. To possess the ability to play with the lives of other people, and especially to play with those things that fulfil them to bursting point, to see triviality in any human sacredness while at the same time finding nothing holy in your own world except your own vanity, to commit sacrilege in the moments of lucidity and persistently pass yourself by, rewarded with freedom in which you are freed of your own life. All of that makes an artist. The greater an artist you are at imitating life, the greater and more famous an artist you become. The more you are separated from raw passion and the more you are deprived of emotion, the easier it becomes for you to imitate it in a moment - sounds, colours and a word. Loneliness and isolation is the space in which an artist orients himself best. That contains the essence of that ingeniousness. Spice all that with submissiveness, which self-love demands, and you will get a man to whom art is both destiny and damnation. The artist I talk about is an expert in artificial life. And there are many different arts. You’ll admit that the art connected with the word is the oldest. The art of telling, smooth-speaking, eloquence, philosopherising, scholarship. Those artists are armed with powers like few others are. Almost magical occult powers. They say so much about life, with such refinement, style, nuance and subtlety, which seduce the lover of sweet words and drive him crazy. And the depth of the abyss and the nothingness of senselessness with which they frightened the

credulous, castrating their urges to dare to go to the other side and taste the passion of honest life and the strength of their own will. Try to remember what kind of emotions their strict game had engendered, the game which these institutions had so mercilessly imposed on the people, provoking their feelings and choking their freedoms. And what did they give in return, to the frightened flock that looked up to them pleadingly? They gave a consolation which had to be earned by servile submission. They gave sublime names to their skill. The search for reason, revelation, truth, divine miracles and every newly pronounced word had to be of that kind. The art above other arts, they would say, and I wonder, thinking about that particular artistic ingeniousness, did any of those artists ever live and feel all the passion of life and truly see the greatness of the force which creates and nourishes life?

‘And now’, Damjan continued without pausing, ‘now it is different. This dream of mine isn’t a play of light and shade on the canvas. You were talking a moment ago about dead dreams and dead people and how they belong to each other. Simple minds admire dead-dreamers because life is hard and to act it, to draw it, to tell it is anything but to live through it, and the art of the artist is exactly that, to step aside, to run from it, to evade its moods and crudeness and its bad jokes, its greatness and its pettiness. To remain untouched, to be separated like the young from their mother, alone on the stage, deluding yourself, walled up in the emptiness of existence which falsely poses itself as the power over life. Almost everybody fears life and flees it, but they do so awkwardly and clumsily, and artists are skilful cowards who have fled from their own faintheartedness into solitude, divided from themselves by the fear of becoming their own life. One of these days, when it is least expected, that knowledge will come to the man and from that day on he will start to take off his old skin like a snake and to search, awaken and sober up as he never has done before. What he searches for, he won’t know yet. Far from his old audience, this time in the loneliness which echoes with silence all around, he feels passion. Reborn, with a thousand lives squeezed into the power of a single footstep, he wanders around and pretends to search, because that which he searches for is already found.’

‘Isn’t it like going back to what was before, then ? I mean the “pretending” - wasn’t it the essence of the old game?’, the passenger, who was listening carefully to Damjan interrupted, feeling his stiffened look like a pointing rifle barrel.

‘Perhaps it is. Only someone like Morizok can answer that, if something like that can be put into words at all. Once you zealously and completely give yourself over to the dreams, when you let them lead you, brighten your nights and clear your troubled horizons, then speed, unreal and untouchable by words, will overcome you. The best speech will then remain scattered like pollen in the air and the most beautiful names will stand ashamed before the luxury of the land of infinity. Don’t allow yourself to be fooled and seduced by the melodiousness of the great artists’ and orators’ words. Those great players divide the world into the real and the

unreal, and between these two worlds stand words, thoughts and various sophistries which they have planted like poles in the ground. They need a border because their movement is short-lived. The real exists wherever your dreams dare to go, and where you dare to go as well. In one grain of courage there is more reality than in the sea of boiling words and thoughts. Let me read you a poem.'

Damjan took out the canvas and unwrapped it in his lap. In one corner was a bush painted in green, whose tiny leaves were the words of a poem which he read in a quiet voice.

Thought,  
became my lover  
of a dear sweetness mistress  
Made my loneliness out of me  
my golden cage

Thou thought!  
Have you ever been unfaithful to me?  
Have you ever cheated me with loneliness of others?  
I and my thought  
walk along the shore of stormy world  
and she holds my hand tightly like a mother  
selfishly  
devotedly.

I planted a thought once  
in moist soil, in fertile soil  
on the shore.  
She was stillborn beside the water of the stormy world  
Dry leaf  
trampled by those who walk  
betrayed by their own thoughts

I watched once  
through an iron grid  
through an old thought  
waters of the stormy world  
We stay alone and die together  
me and my thought  
on the shore of the stormy world

‘Have you ever thought about fish, about those mute water creatures?’ Damjan asked, when he finished reading the poem. ‘Fish only know about the sea they live in and it is hard for them to comprehend the depth and width of the heavenly expanse. For them, that dimension is unreal and non-existent but in that dimension, which does not exist for them, birds exist, which feed on fish from the sea and are their reality.

Be cautious when you hear a cracking of words which sounds like the gnashing of the cogwheels in which an entire reality crushes and disappears. That crushing often sounds pleasant and solemn, elevating and magnificent, but it is actually a hymn of stupidity.

Beware of a world whose borders can be drawn by thoughts and which can be girded with words. There is too little air in it and choking is the most common way of dying. I know what confuses you. You want to be able to tell the spoiled egg from the unspoiled one, judging by the shell. To be able to tell the master of artificial life from a warrior of life. They are both inside the same shell and appear alike, inseparable. I believe, you see, that one of them is imprisoned inside that shell, unable to break out, while the other one will most certainly take it off one day like an old worn-out habit and put on a new one. Which one will be which is something only you can know, in your own case. Any other case is mere guessing, precisely because of the magic power of the word to entangle and fog and turn the fake into truth.’

Damjan leaned back and became silent. He carefully wrapped up the canvas and laid it on the empty seat next to him. He stretched his neck to the side and blinked, and his look rolled between the seats, stopping at the windshield. The windshield wipers tirelessly rubbed the huge glass, removing the water, and the road could barely be seen, seeming even more winding due to the waving of the windshield wipers. Damjan tried to follow the contours of the canyon which would at moments appear in the headlights. The passenger across from him was silent too. He was chewing the leaves from the branch and Damjan thought that he was actually chewing his confusion. As if part of that confusion leapt into him as well, Damjan began to wonder whether he was satisfied with his own answer. He thought about his unfinished picture, and dissatisfaction flew over his face like a shiver.

‘Doubt is a special illness of the soul, isn’t it?’, the passenger broke the silence like a cobweb. ‘I think I’m beginning to understand your dream, and Morizok. Colours became more vivid and clearer in your picture. This might only be my imagination, but it seems to me that you are building yourself and your wishes into that picture. How much of Damjan there is in Morizok? Is this question born out of doubt?’



‘I’ll tell you something about doubt. The “illness of the soul”, you call it. You have given it an interesting definition. I think about it too, when I think about the soul, because where else can you find it except in the soul? Think about truth. Truth can change her clothes, she can be hidden and can be covered up. She is subjugated to word, to fear and to blindness; she is covered with an outer skin, sometimes erected motionlessly, like a monument. You can enslave her, tie her up and throw her into dark casemates. Most truths are made of clay, shaped by hand, cooked and decorated with patterns. The prettiest of them are lovers of the lord of words. And honesty. It is deeper and stronger. Always raw, unhidden and plain. Where you are, it is too. Inexorable. Truth can drive anyone crazy and it can be trimmed to fit if an excess is interfering with it, but honesty is another story. Man can’t run away from it. Its weapon is doubt, and doubt eats you up from inside, like rust under the surface. Doubt isn’t a sickness of the soul, but its guard. A man can’t know that he is healthy if he doesn’t doubt. He can’t know that he is alive if he doesn’t doubt, and to doubt the self is the only honest thing he can do. Honesty and doubt are the guards that guard over the health of the soul. Doubt keeps you awake and guards your honesty toward yourself.

Think of a lie. The lie isn’t made of untruth, but of insincerity. Man first deceived himself by being insincere to himself, and afterwards he learned the game of truth. Through that same honesty, he met truth for the first time, and not just any truth but his own truth, his own truthfulness. Later, much later, he learned to shape truth with words, to cheat, to deceive and to seduce. And not just that, he also discovered her irresistible charm because, you know, truth is charming. The coldest reason is passionately in love with its sweet whisper. Doubt is bitterness because of that. Doubt is the weapon of honesty which truth fears most of all. Only doubt dares to laugh in her face, to spit in front of her and push her away. You ask me if doubt has given birth to that question. Yes. It has and it gives birth to it continuously and every time, with the same tough cruelty, it returns me back to myself.”

‘I’m afraid you’re right concerning doubt, and not only doubt, but the power of the word too. Great power lies in words and the pleasure of their caress is irresistible, especially those sweet words that know how to please you and seduce you, that flatter and elevate you and which can carry a man as fervidly as a dry leaf. I also believe in the existence of personal truths, as you call them, the truths of the private character, so to say, and that honesty is older than truth and that honesty, besides all, is the first touch of one’s own being. How could we know what we are, and whether we are, if we didn’t have truth built out of honesty to ourselves, and if we hadn’t had that doubt which won’t let you call truth what you would imagine, according to your own wish and taste and to baptize it with truth in the end?

Forgive my confusion, which irresistibly urges me to question you about that painting of yours. There are many details in there, which I can’t catch in the web with which I’ve caught so many dreams. Your hero has experienced so much. You speak about

him and about the painting with a special excitement, inspiration and enthusiasm; anyway, it seems to me that there is lot of sadness in his solitary wandering. It could be that only I experience it that way. It could be that I'm unable not to see sadness in solitude. I think that Morizok wouldn't be my hero, or he wouldn't be the hero of the world I belong to and which I do dare to step into. I know a lot about loneliness, but I have never met anyone who has so readily accepted solitude with so much courage and enthusiasm. One part of a man is solitude, I can admit that much, and that part is not small. We are made with that inner realm into which no one can enter but ourselves, with a part of reality which can't be truer, and which at the same time appears unreal, just because it has the property of being unreachable. That loneliness is a gift, and a condition of life, but Morizok chooses to reduce the entire world to just that part of him which remains eternally captivated in his inner realm of life and which is concentrated on him. When I walked in your dream, I saw him searching for people he wishes to take to the land of infinity. He searches for them and for the words of a song that can open the entrance gates to the land without beginning and without end. It is the only land where life manages to evolve to a dimension which is eternity itself. But he stays alone, with a piece of happiness and his magical melody with which he wants to cover the words of the song. And I ask myself, watching that picture, is that the price he is willing to pay?'

Damjan listened carefully, hanging on the stranger's every word and piling up those words somewhere in the middle of his thinking, which was pressured harder and harder by those same thoughts. The passenger continued, his tone of voice unchanging and completely undisturbed by the thrumming of the engine, which became louder as they drove up a hill again.

'And look at those sleeping passengers. Those people are not in your picture. Morizok does not encounter them. They dream too. Their dreams are not always so visible to a sleepless walker like me, but don't you think that they contain as much reality as there is in Morizok? To them, solitude is given as a condition they are often not aware of and which, like a present which they hide in a cellar, is thrown away as a disgrace. A lot of them do not dare to step into this realm of their own in which Morizok lives. They dream quietly, furtively like thieves, most often at night. Like scared children, they peep through the openings in the gate of the land of infinity, but they do not dare to open it. They remain on this side and they exchange their loneliness for the tenderness of consolation and the mercy of destiny. They renounce themselves and, holding hands, they step together into the loneliness of the one they believe in. Faith in something outside themselves is the necessity of their life, faith in something endlessly greater in which all of them can be together while they feverishly hold hands. And in his movement, Morizok constantly passes by them and their reality so it appears that these two realities actually pass by each other. The

reality of the inner existence which longs to be filled and the reality which looks like it is going around the inner realm. Escape into solitude and escape from it.'

'Why do you think that there is something sad in it?' Damjan interrupted, impatiently.

'In loneliness, you mean...' the passenger got confused, not finishing his question.

'Yes, you said that the picture looked sad and that you see sadness in the loneliness which Morizok is condemned to.'

'Well, yes', the passenger admitted, hesitating a little. 'Don't you think that loneliness, no matter what it is like, carries sadness with it?'

'No, there is no place for sorrow in the land of infinity or the inner realm, as you call it', Damjan cut sharply as if with a razor. 'Resoluteness, courage, unquenchable will and ardour, passion and devotion, wild desire and the untamable strength of existence. These are the goddesses who dare to go into that realm and you won't find sadness in their company. The gates to it are forever closed and locked by the faintheartedness of cowards who grieve and find pleasure in their own weakness and betrayal. The one who ventures to go into the land of infinity does not hide his tracks, nor does he pretend he is going somewhere, but he wanders proudly around with his head raised, and readily, without retreat, he awaits storms and earthquakes and he isn't ashamed of his face, covered with the scars of overcome temptation. To be elevated in one's own solitude, what is sad about it?'

'I can't help noticing how you constantly glorify those virtues like courage, persistence, resoluteness and firmness of will, and how you skillfully classify them under the wing of strength, awesomeness of life, how your heroes possess heroism as their inner determination above any other, and I notice how you talk about them in a smooth-spoken manner and with fervour. Your heroes remind me of gaudily dressed wedding horses. I feel that you despise those who are armed with other virtues, just because they do not possess yours. Do you really not believe that another's virtues, however different they might be from yours, still demand strength, human strength, which is worth no less or is no less real? Don't you think that compassion, self-denial, moderation and modesty demand strength?'

'Perhaps, and don't you think that honesty and doubt, which always go together, reveal the truth of such strength and the own truth of those who say they possess it? Doesn't it seem to you that strength possessed by such heroes actually reflects weakness and the lack of bravery? To tame and bridle yourself is much easier than daring to follow the paths that are trodden with wild dreams. There is too much faintheartedness and too little sincerity in such virtues and the strength that nourishes them. Such virtuous heroes remain forever captured in their hope for some better time, some kinder destiny and some other life, because they do not dare to live the life they were given. Believe me, there exists a world of humanlike gods. Ask your fear if it would let you go there. Executioners of lust and killers of dreams, that's

what I call your heroes. They close their eyes when they look, they let themselves be led by thoughts which pretend they would dare to go into the unknown, and in reality they only hide themselves behind corners.

Those heroes are afraid of death, they are terribly afraid of it, and with what kind of virtue they face death and their fear of it but that ridiculous game of mutual deception which they call 'faith in the almighty'. They would rather believe in anything else except themselves.

They pretend to be dead, hoping that death will pass by them. That is their great trick and subtlety. Stuck in their own deadness, they secretly hope that they are not even worthy of dying and all the comfort and sweetness of deception have withered in that hoping. Compassion is their virtue and they are compassionate because they seek compassion and mercy in destiny. They do not have the courage to find the hero in themselves or in others - and you ask me if that is strength. No, it isn't, nor has it ever been; it is weakness and reconciliation.

Resignation is submission to one's own weakness and powerlessness, and that is one of their virtues. Frightened and squeezed into their own powerlessness, they fear the act of heroism, and they banish the true heroes from their hearts into fairytales and myths.

And they are afraid of life, too,' Damjan continued, without letting the passenger stop his tirade, 'those heroes of yours are afraid of that most. They are creators and venerators of tragedy. And do you know the greatest nonsense in which such heroes believe? That life is righteous and unrighteous. They don't know how to talk about the just and the unjust without that - to them - characteristic elegy. In the unpredictability of life they see tragedy and they condemn the injustice of such life, and tragedy, I insist, lies exactly in their incapability to seize the challenge of life. And you ask me whether strength isn't needed for that. No, and I repeat, no! At least, I do not see the strength and the mightiness in those virtues. Escape into emptiness requires reconciliation and meekness.'

'And your hero Morizok, isn't he meek?' asked the passenger in disbelief.

'No, don't let the ambiguity of the words mislead you.' I'll tell you something else about Morizok', Damjan said somewhat solemnly and he stopped, as if searching for special words for what he was about to say.

'It is said that wisdom and truth are closest to each other. To be wise is the same as knowing the truth, and truth is a unity. Truth is one. She is eternal and unchangeable, untouchable and she can't be caught so no one can actually know her, all we can do is get close to her. Those that are enchanted by her beauty search for her; those are the self-named knights who do not dare to look into her eyes and dance with her. They claim they know her tracks and the way she moves and where she went by. They follow the way of her revelation. Their ways are reliable and unmistakable and that makes them knights of a special kind. They say about themselves that they would faithfully follow her wherever she goes. Their boldness and arrogance consist in their

following her tracks wherever she goes, and her tracks always lead into the unknown. They leave road signs on the way for others who believe that they, too, have enough faith for such a quest.

What do those knights of knowledge bring from their long journeys? Surely not truth? They know that they aren't worthy of her and that she wouldn't come with them. She is too holy for their worthless existence, too nice for such plain company. Their trouble is that they renounced truth before they even started off to find her. They proclaimed her unanimously to be no one's and superhuman and they were left with the game, that silly search.

And how do these knights speak about her? They save the best words for her. They hang the brightest ornaments and the shiniest medals on her. They cover and wall her up in their smooth-speaking words, wishing deep in their hearts for her to wriggle and slip away from their loving arrows, so they push her even further away with that wishing.

Strange is the game of knights. They search for her tirelessly, following the tracks of her pleasant fragrance. They desire her, and at the same time they want her to remain untouched and uncorrupted by their smallness, pure and innocent. Truth, oh, they went out to get her, hoping not to find her. If it seemed to them that they saw her contours in the distance, they would cover their eyes. If she moved towards them, they would run away.

Do those knights fight for her hand? They fight, they really do fight. They fight a ferocious fight. Each of them wants her for himself, but if one of them won her, the others would deny her. The beautiful princess would turn into a whore, promiscuous and low. Impure. Plain untruth. That is the knights' game of truth. Their truth exists only in fairytales in which credulous people believe, like they believe in the stories about knights. And that is the only power the knights have. Power over the credulous. They tell legends about themselves, and the credulous and the naïve become enchanted and crazed by such stories. The astonished mob cries out for the sweet lies, and the knights know it and they also know that the naïve remain amazed by their courageous and self-sacrificing efforts. However, truth remains, among all those names they have given her. They knightly hushed up their oddities and they took truth out onto the balcony. They walked her down the streets wrapped up in words, which they proclaimed to be sacred. They built a world of tidily arranged thoughts and they placed the truth in it like a strictly kept secret.

Beauty under the veil, they called her. They've fitted truth to their hungry audience. Their knightly truth wasn't bigger than those names in which they wrapped her. They spoke about how her paths are hidden, how they lead to unknown places, but they would always arrive where their wish would secretly take them. And they were left with that doing, which passed on to them. Over time, they forgot their knightly search and the only truth they were left with was exactly the artificial one, decorated and cut after the latest fashion. There lies their miserable glory.

Forgive me for beating around the bush so much', Damjan said, feeling the passenger's impatience like a hedgehog's spines, 'but I'm trying to answer your question about tameness. Don't get angry with me because I get so carried away sometimes, but I want to tell you something important about Morizok. His first love was truth. That same truth that no one ever has caught, the truth whose body is made of wind. He was a knight too, enthralled by her beauty, driven crazy by her voice. But he saw through the knights' game. He saw through, and despised, the hypocrisy and insincerity of his own striving. At first, he was fettered by the limitations of the thoughts of others, then by the limitation of his own thoughts, so in the end he decided to follow dreams. The honesty in him has gained the upper hand. The honesty towards himself. Self-deceit has a short life, if you're honest to yourself. Morizok learned that long ago. And the dreams imposed themselves with unbridled wildness. Morizok learned then, or he acknowledged it to himself, that dreams can reach much further than thoughts, that they are much more real than thoughts. Then he started calling them the wild horses, and he dared to follow them.

Does he tame them with his searching like the knights have tamed truth with tame thoughts? Frightened by truth's wildness, the knights didn't dare to follow her, to catch up with her and conquer her. And Morizok hunts his wild dreams with bridles made of a poem, believing that to be the only way for him to catch up with them and bridle them without depriving them of their mightiness, without locking them into a world made of tight, too narrow and symmetrically arranged thoughts. He's the lord of the wild dreams, tamed but not tame. That is so with Morizok.'

The bus made a sudden turn and Damjan fell back into his seat. He had almost completely stepped out of his seat while he had been talking to the passenger about his painting, for a long time and without a break. He remained seated like that for some time. The passenger across from him sank, and almost entirely disappeared, into the shade. It seemed as if the rear of the bus, where these two were seated, was darker than the rest of it. The window couldn't be opened and the air was becoming heavier and thicker. Damjan heard someone a few seats ahead of him breathing asthmatically, as if he was choking. They were driving uphill and the road was getting steeper. They would come across short, sudden slopes beyond which a straight section of the road would follow, so the old bus reminded him of a small boat fighting the stormy sea. He thought that they would soon leave the canyon and reach the hill and that the air in the bus would become thinner and fresher. He tried to guess what time it was. There was no moonlight and his look was reflected in the black windows and captured inside the cabin. That captivity bothered him. He could judge, by the thick and opaque darkness, that it was still night. He looked over to the seat where the talkative passenger, the sleepless walker who sneaked through dreams, was seated. He thought about him, and the passenger was quiet and absorbed in his

thoughts, as if he had lost something of the talkativeness which had at first seemed inappropriate to Damjan at that time of night. He thought about him, thinking at the same time about their conversation. Those thoughts, awakened and restless, became stirred and somewhere among them he could discern the tender contours of the passenger's long face and his huge, coal-black eyes. Those contours were disappearing, changing their shape, and it seemed to him that the passenger's face was cast in tin. It seemed to him that he could see many other things in his face, but it remained mysterious and invisible in the night which travelled with them in the bus cabin. He waited for the day to come so he could clearly see the passenger's face. He wasn't sleepy and, as far he could see, the passenger across from him wasn't sleeping either, even though he was mute for some time, like a stone. Damjan thought that he might be sneaking through someone's dream and he wanted to ask him whether he ever met Morizok in the dreams of other people.

'No', the passenger answered quickly, not waiting for Damjan to ask. 'I didn't meet anyone like Morizok. Your hero is the hero of solitude. Like a manlike god that searches in vain for his followers, he wanders over infinity, which he has found in himself. Deserted are the islands where such heroes dwell, like shipwreck victims who survive storms, rescued in the wasteland into which storms wouldn't dare to go either. When I look at your painting I think that Morizok has made his own island far away from others, out of the reach of the dreams of others. That island emerged, somehow defiantly, from the stormy sea. It lures with its charm, colourful like jasper and fragrant like potpourri. That island is a sharp sea cliff, unreachable to drowning people and attainable only to those who carry resoluteness sheathed. Heroes of a different kind win in the dreams that I encounter. Those heroes are disgusted with Morizok. And do you know why? For them, your Morizok does not possess the strength which creates the virtue whose reflection colours the sky over their land. His personality doesn't have that desired and recognisable solidity. He doesn't follow tamely smoothed paths and he elevates his capriciousness up to the heights where only haughtiness and arrogance dare to go. He is a megalomaniac, heightened above the morality and unleashed from the goodness which they have intertwined with compassion and gentleness.'

'Unleashed from goodness?!' shouted Damjan, rudely interrupting his fellow traveller. 'Do not usurp the goodness as easily and selfishly as your heroes do. The good and the bad belong to none. They have the faces that you inscribe into them. They suffer from the same weakness as truth. Those three are orphans and it is exactly the mercy of your heroes, which claims them in order to extol them.'

The traveller ignored Damjan's bold attack and went on, not changing the gentleness of his voice.

‘Please, allow me, they fear Morizok. His cruelty towards himself frightens them, and his unrestrained ways. They spit out the name of his virtue with disgust, like coffee grounds which have got deep into the throat. His virtue is snake venom which causes their insides to cramp and their bodies to tremble. He is a pagan priest and they are horrified by even the thought of his disciples. They are offended by his swiftness and awesomeness and by his disgust for the poisonous horned pondweed into which he swept all their virtues as if they were scraps of wormy apples. Because of all that, he is alone. Those others you ask about do not let him into their dreams. That is why I have walked through your dream for so long and looked at it as if I was in some miracle. That Morizok is the standard-bearer. I must admit I admire him for that. And I wonder how much you dare to follow your dream. How much do you, Damjan, live in that truthfulness you talk so subtly about? How honest are you to yourself? Is all this just a stillborn dream, a figment of your imagination as a painter?’

These questions rang within Damjan like church bells and he felt excitement like a weak chill because of that ringing.

‘You walk through my dream and ask me the same questions my doubt asks me. You are putting my honesty to the test. And now, above all that, you want me to answer the questions which are not to be answered, at least not like that, pouring words like wine into a chalice. If you indeed wish to be my doubt, then I’m sure that we will meet again. This is my honesty speaking. And go on, walk through other dreams too! I’ll tell you something. The spirit is like the rose of Jericho. Bathe it once in the clear water of bravery and it will blossom again, no matter how long it has slept. I believe that you will meet Morizok again as you met him in my dream. If not in my dream, then in some other.’

As he was saying these last words, Damjan noticed that the morning had come somewhat earlier than usual, almost by surprise. The sun stood on the hill, peeping down the end of the canyon out of which the old bus emerged. The rain had stopped and the first morning light was squeezing into the cabin, slowly pushing darkness out and pressing it to the rear part of the car where Damjan and his travelling companion sat. The night was trailing behind, sinking deeper into the tracks left by the wheels in the muddy road. Damjan cheered up at this sudden sunrise and he stared at the seat where passenger was sitting, looking for the face that remained hidden in the piece of darkness which was squeezed at the very end. He couldn’t see it but, through the back window, he could see a large tail with an ornate crest sticking out of the bus. He laughed. He thought that the bus was looking forward to the morning and waving its tail like a dog. He laughed louder and, through his laughter, explained his thought to the passenger. The bus reached the top of the hill and light completely filled the space. The sun cut sharply through the wet windows and almost blinded Damjan. He



put his hand over his eyes, turning towards the seat where the passenger sat. The contours of the face were different now, but he still couldn't see him clearly because of the glare of light which was breaking his gaze. He continued to laugh, repeating what he had said about the tail sticking out of the bus. From the passenger's seat he could hear something that sounded like speech, which was becoming more silent, almost like whispering. Suddenly, Damjan was startled by a voice and murmurs coming from the front of the bus. He turned and looked down the bus. Passengers were already awake and peeping behind their seats, looking at Damjan. They were stretching their necks and peering past each other. They looked threatening. Damjan saw in their eyes unhidden feelings of revulsion, as if they were looking at a monster. Somebody shouted: 'Madman! Throw him out! Out with him!'

The others shouted it too. Damjan looked at them, confused and astonished. He felt uneasy. He recognised a threat in the looks springing from beneath their frowning eyebrows.

'He abuses a poor animal, shame on him!' shouted someone from the front seats, as if he was telling this to those sitting furthest away, who could not see Damjan.

An old woman with her face wrapped in a black kerchief spat three times in Damjan's direction and she crossed herself with a spasmodic movement of her withered hand. A broad-shouldered, bearded man sitting in the seat in front of Damjan looked him in the face and swayed his hand as if he was going to slap him. Damjan lifted his own hand to shield his face and shouted in confusion:

'What's wrong with you?'

'What's wrong with us, ah?' the broad-shouldered man growled angrily. 'You queer bum, you found that poor animal to molest.'

He slapped him once, and then again. Damjan felt the metallic taste of blood in his mouth. Someone else grabbed him by the hair and pulled him violently. Damjan tried to defend himself but the slaps and fists were pouring all over him while that invisible hand dragged him by his hair through the bus. Through the multitude of voices he heard someone shouting to the driver to stop the bus and open the door.

'Get out of here!' a deep, manly voice shouted after him as he hit the waterhole beside the road. His bag and canvas flew out of the bus after him. The engine revved up and the bus started off again. The multitude of heads that were stuck to the bus windows watched him and his dirtied suit with disgust and curiosity. He tried once again to see the passenger's face, but the broad-shouldered man who had grabbed him first was completely blocking his view of his seat. The bus wound off and disappeared behind the bushes that grew by the road. He could only see that the tail with its ornate crest, which was sticking out of the butterfly window, was waving, and he continued to laugh as he sat in the waterhole, wiping blood from his nose.

## Second part

Morning, white like a swan plume, landed softly on the end of the path beside which Morizok had been sleeping. He was startled, and began to rub the whiteness into his eyes like salt. He stretched and stood up, fresh and rested. He turned and looked at the landscape around him, trying to recognise some of what he had seen the night before. It appeared different, changed. He thought he must have walked in his sleep with his eyes closed and that was why he couldn't recognise the area he had gone through before falling asleep beside the path covered with fine dust. Only the winding path was the same, unchanged by the night which alters the face of the landscape. He took his shepherd's flute and left, following the swan plume.

By the middle of the day, he had reached the hill from which the path dropped down into the valley, hemmed with young ash wood, and he stopped to listen to a twittering. The twittering carried a feeling of providence, which flew around the path, leaving shadows on the southern hillsides. From afar, those shadows looked like torn thoughts which had become lost, and Morizok thought they must belong to someone who roamed the valley, forgotten by his own past. He decided to follow these shadows, and went south. Soon, he came across the path and noticed that it, too, secretly followed those thought-wanderers.

The night came suddenly in the valley and spilt itself like soot. Morizok began shaking it off his hair and shoulders, but soon gave up. He lay in the grass, making sure he was turned towards the south. He took out the shepherd's flute and played. The melody played cautiously, as if touching the night, and then it flew high up and sat in the star-carriage which was dragging itself slowly over the sky. Morizok winked to it and carried on playing for some time before he fell asleep. A light breeze was gliding over the valley, stroking the tops of the wild marjoram, and when it passed by Morizok it saw the shepherd's flute lying in the grass and began to squeeze through the narrow round openings, playing its own melody, which reminded Morizok in his sleep of the laughter of Happy Valley.

In the morning, Morizok jumped up and began groping around in the flattened grass, looking for the shepherd's flute, but it was gone. Instead of the flute, he felt only the southern side of a little hill. He saw the thought-wanderers flying around the breeze which was playing his shepherd's flute, and heard their cheerful giggles. Becoming angry, he went after them.....