

# The UnSimple<sup>1</sup>

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## THE THIRD OLD PHOTOGRAPH—MAYBE FOR LAROUSSE

1. This photo—were someone to ask him unexpectedly—Sebastian would be totally unable to describe exactly and in detail, although he had seen it many times and there was nothing at all complicated shown in it.

It's possible that the very laws of reduction, memorizing and forgetting, which so fascinated Franzysk were at work to the full in Sebastian's relationship with this photograph.

Faces are the best plots, said Franzysk.

Franzysk said, "Plots do not end and do not disappear. They can from time to time be forgotten."

Sebastian recalled the plot of Franz's face differently throughout his life, but never as it was in that photograph.

2. It was taken at Franzysk's funeral in May 1915.

Franzysk lay on a bench covered with a woolen rug next to a hole in the graveyard outside Ialivets. It had been taken in such a way as to show only Franz, and not the funeral. Franz, dressed in an embroidered shirt, wide leather belt, and red trousers, lay with his arms folded on his chest, holding a cross made of two pencils tied together with a wisp of upland grass (this was Loci's idea). The ring with the river stones in it, which Franzysk had made for himself, worn for years without removing, and then taken off but not thrown away, yet refused to put back on, stuck out from between the pencils. The opening for the head and neck in the shirt was covered with a silk cloth.

The head itself lies—more precisely, stands—apart, a little further along the bench. The black beard and long gray hair are combed in such a way that, apart from the eyes and nose, the face is almost hidden from view.

3. Sebastian wasn't at the funeral; he didn't see this. The little girl—Anna's daughter and his daughter, Franz's granddaughter, whom the latter had not lived to find out about—was brought the day before. Franz had had his head cut off two days before. Sebastian was there. Afterwards he waited until the blood drained, washed Franzysk, combed his hair, and dressed him in the shirt and trousers. He laid the head in a basket, covering it with ferns. The next day the courier brought the infant from dead Anna.

The whole day, while Franzysk was being given a ceremonial burial in Ialivets, Sebastian did not leave his granddaughter, who cried constantly, likely on account of an upset stomach.

Sebastian could never memorize the photograph, maybe because he couldn't imagine how things had been at the funeral, but knew only too well what had happened before it.

4. In the spring of 1914 Anna could shoot better than Sebastian. Now he was again spending more time with Franzysk, because Anna would take her rifle and go for several days into the mountains. There she tracked animals, watched them, and discovered things about being a sniper that Sebastian could not know—what a sniper looks like from the opposite end of the rifle. She killed no one, other than the gadflies that tried to land on the udders of the mountain sheep.

“I want you so much,” said Anna, “that I don’t know if I could fall asleep at all, if I didn’t want so much to sleep next to you.” And she would fall asleep, needing Sebastian’s hand to be under her head. “I want to be your daughter, and for you to be my father. A father is for being dreamed about later.”

5. Spring did not begin until April. During the winter an immeasurable amount of snow had gathered, and it all started to melt at once, no matter whether it was on the northern or southern slope or how high it was above sea level.

Somewhere down in the lowlands ran dirty, overflowing rivers, causing floods in various cities, but no one there knew how the snow was melting in the mountains.

Ialivets was also flowing. Every building was washed away a little that spring. All because of the thickness of the winter ice.

On every street in town blazed bonfires, in which they burned the leaves and branches that had shot up from under the snow. The burning of spring smelled different than that of autumn: pruned stems of grapevines already flowing with juices found their way into the fire.

6. All spring Sebastian waited in fear for the attack of his allergy, as in previous years. But there was no allergy attack. This place accepted him without resistance.

On the other hand, he noticed while waiting that the trees opened up in the morning, just as night ended.

Everyone in Ialivets knew about Sebastian already. Often, having gone into some bar with Franz, he would have to tell various groups of people about Africa. The same story, but longer every time. He was even invited to be the survival instructor at a mountain lodge, but he turned it down for lack of time.

7. Because just then Sebastian had a dream.

He and Anna were in town walking along a street, one which did not actually exist in Ialivets. The street was formed by two rows of buildings standing on a bare slope. Behind the buildings there was nothing but alpine

meadows and animal tracks. The street led sharply upwards. The ground floors of the buildings all housed different bars. There were also tables in the interior courtyards, behind closed gates.

They went into each bar in turn, walked up to the counters, which were distinctive in every bar, and knocked back a glass of white wine in a single gulp, memorizing the taste of different years and different vineyards. Dozens of acquaintances sitting in every bar told them something trivial but very interesting. Finally they hooked up with some acquaintances, also a man and a woman, for longer. The women talked about something, and the man invited Sebastian to go for a swim.

They left the bar and went along the street, further up the slope. The street ended suddenly at the snow-covered summit of the mountain. They walked across it to the opposite slope. They came upon a large open-air swimming pool there. Sebastian went into it first. He dived in and swam under the water, feeling that there was a current in the pool, for he was being pulled a little to the side. He surfaced and, treading water, realized that in this position it pulled him even more. The same was happening to his friend.

They drifted towards the side of the swimming pool, which ended not in a wall but in a rope stretched across the surface of the water. The nearer they got to the edge, the stronger the current became, as though all the water wanted to pour out beyond the rope. When they reached the brink, they barely managed to grab hold of the rope. Their legs were carried forward and they lay on their backs, hanging on to the rope. Little white turtles, dredged up from all sides, were disappearing past the rope. Sebastian held on for several minutes. His hands hurt as never before, and he decided to let go and plunge after the turtles. But first he raised his head and looked beyond the rope. There the water became an almighty waterfall, creating a smooth, towering, and seemingly immovable wall. At the very bottom of the falls Sebastian saw everything that could possibly exist in the world. Suddenly, the current completely stopped and then immediately carried him in the opposite direction, finally expelling him painfully at the place where they had entered the water. Sebastian's whole body recalled the short swim with a strange sense of sorrow.

They got dressed and quickly returned the same way they had come to the bar, noticing that balconies that hadn't been there before had appeared on the buildings. The bar was empty, except for two old women playing chess at a table, which rocked every time one of them moved a figure on the chessboard. In the numerous bottles on the shelves behind the counter there was not a single drop of liquid. They had already decided to leave when the old women left their game and approached them. They then realized that these old women were their wives—Sebastian barely recognized Anna—who had been waiting for their husbands, without leaving the bar, for forty years.

8. Sebastian was so struck that the next night he tried to return into a continuation of the dream. But instead he merely dreamed that he was tea with milk, mixed in the proportions that yield the best color.

9. Anna calmly listened to this story and said that it could be that way, but mostly things are completely different, because real pleasure resides not in the vestibular apparatus but somewhere deep in the lungs—something about breathing, filling, emptying, air pressure. A long time ago Franz had said the same to her.

10. In the evening Anna took the shirt off Sebastian and put it on her own naked body. She seated him on the Biedermeier chair, chosen from among all the chairs in the house, found an opened pack of Gitanes Caporal in the cupboard, and put it in his hands. She tore four small strips off the vereta rug, grabbed a bottle of “Pelikan” ink and sat down at the table. Sebastian lit up a Caporal and Anna dipped her finger in the ink and sketched primitive and crude drawings on the strips of cloth—a sun (a circle with a few large rays on all sides), a fir tree (a vertical line in the middle, with short, symmetrical, downward-pointing sticks on both sides), a person (a stick split in two at the top and the bottom, with a small circle between the upraised arms, a stroke pointing towards the earth between the legs), a flower (a large circle, tightly surrounded by smaller semi-circles).

From between the pages of Larousse Anna took a dried flower of good-quality hemp and packed it into a narrow glass tube, while quietly reading some entries from the encyclopedia. Having finished, she pulled the belt out of Sebastian’s trousers and tied his hands behind the back of the chair so tightly that his chest muscles became absolutely flat. With her neckerchief she bound his eyes just as tightly. She pulled out a razor from her pocket, opened it immediately with one hand, and without hesitation lightly cut Sebastian three times: on the shoulder, between the ribs and across his stomach. The cuts for a moment remained narrow lines, then their edges came apart, the wounds opened, and the blood ran.

Anna took the stub of the Gitanes from Sebastian’s lips and used it to light the flower in the tube. She took a few slow draws, holding in the smoke for a long time after each. Finally she took the tube in her mouth by the end where the hemp was smoldering, and with one breath released some smoke onto each wound. Then she inhaled all that was left, brought her mouth against Sebastian’s, and released everything she had. From the surprise Sebastian began to cough and lick his lips—the Gitanes Caporal had left a different taste on his lips.

Only then did Anna seal up the wounds with the painted strips of the vereta. And untie Sebastian, who decided not to ask any questions.

**11.** That night Sebastian dreamed that he and Anna were walking along a street which led out of Ialivets. Only instead of junipers and mountain pines there were two rows of enormous flowering lime trees, which they knew were about to start speaking, and that then they would have to either say nothing other than a greeting or answer very accurately. The trees were to evaluate something according to criteria known to them. From the sides and from above, through every gap in the treetops, shone an unavoidable sun—like sea water leaking through the holes in a ship, spreading inside it, filling every nook, and drawing it down to the bottom.

He walked along that corridor so purposefully, as though something were pushing against the nape of his neck. Alongside him walked many strangers, but if a photograph were taken of the street with the whole crowd, it would be understood, nonetheless, that the photograph was of him.

Sebastian could see a little way up ahead—underneath the trees lay piles of swept-up leaves, and he saw that the first smoke was already rising from them.

He knew that he would always walk this tunnel, gradually losing himself from rubbing against the light, until he finally passed into eternity, having finally become light.

**12.** Anna was a grateful student and taught Sebastian to assign and bestow thematic dreams, using the greatest force in the world—vibration. To achieve such pleasure all one needs is a little imagination, to learn for oneself to sense the vibrations in that which you can't even imagine that you should know.

**13.** Throughout the early summer Anna and Sebastian entertained themselves by pretending that Anna was pregnant.

They began to make love gently. They slept long and did not get up for a long time, caressing once again. They would stroll leisurely out to the meadow to get milk. They would come back past the felled trees, picking the berries nearest them, and making love one last time at the place where the brambles ended. Along the way they recalled their first days together, always finding some details they hadn't noticed before. They always had lunch together on the veranda, just the two of them, and went out somewhere for supper, but always ordering the healthiest food and arranging the table as exquisite still-lives. They went to shops and tried on dresses for pregnant women. They rearranged the things in their room and planned how they would accommodate the child. They bought children's books for several years ahead in the bookshop, and Sebastian read them to Anna before bedtime. Sebastian washed Anna in the bath, dried her and rubbed her with scented oils. Before bedtime they wandered through the

most beautiful parts of Ialivets, poured heated rain water on the watermelons they were raising on the balcony in a large pan filled with holes, and drank tea made from medicinal herbs. In bed, Sebastian would stroke Anna's stomach under the soft blanket to get her to sleep, so that he could go out onto the balcony for one last cigarette.

In the middle of the night Anna would wake him, and for a long time they would not sleep.

**14.** On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June Anna decided she wanted to spend the whole day on her own. She had to finish a letter to the Unsimple and send it with old Beda, who had come to Ialivets for only a few days because of the needs of the Unsimple, who had come up with some great plan. Sebastian didn't leave Franz's side. They conversed, traversing Ialivets, one on foot and one swimming in the canals. Then the survival instructor took their photograph and hung around with them until morning, first at Beda's place, and later God knows where, drinking wine, gin and predicting terrible dangers for the careless Sebastian.

**15.** At the end of September Anna went to Mezõterebes and signed up as a volunteer with the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen.

The day before, the Unsimple had finally arrived in the town. Anna met with them at the French engineer's place, she lay down to sleep with Sebastian on the gallery, and in the morning she was already gone. There was also no trace in Ialivets of the Unsimple. Franzysk was sure that she had either gone with them, or that they had taken her with them. Sebastian wanted to go somewhere, ask around, at least do something that seemed useful (half a year later he would be thankful to dead Anna for sending him the infant at the very moment when Franz was no longer with him and he had to do something so as not to go mad from loneliness).

Incidentally, running around haphazardly looking for a lost person, asking everyone you meet, is not so completely senseless. For in our mountains, where the waters gather everything and themselves gather in three places, finding a missing person is very easy—as long as they aren't lying under the snow or under a rock. And even then the not-knowing will last no longer than a couple of years.

But Franzysk laughed at Sebastian's impatience and ordered him to sit still as a rock and wait. Because waiting is sometimes the most radical thing one can do. And sure enough, three weeks later the Unsimple came again and began to demand that Franzysk let them see Anna. For the first time Sebastian felt relief.

**16.** In October a wounded Bosnian captain arrived in Ialivets from the front. Both of his legs had been crushed during the destruction of the Buchach

citadel. They had been amputated, but the phantom legs hurt so much that the captain was advised to come to Ialivets for treatment. Later the hopes of the doctors would prove justified: the captain would stop howling and even write the first volume of a short memoir about the start of the war. Gin really is an effective analgesic.

In the meantime, back in October, when the captain had only just been brought to Ialivets on a stretcher, he told everyone about his operation, which took place in Horonda. The surgeon spent all his spare time at the famous Horonda inn with the commanders of the Sich Riflemen. There he had met the most beautiful woman he had ever seen—Anna from Ialivets in the Carpathians. She had been the favorite sniper of Second Lieutenant Pelensky, Didushko Company. She had advised the surgeon to send the Bosnian to Ialivets (very soon afterwards the company left Horonda for Nyzhni Verechky). This was not only the second relief for Sebastian but also the ultimate one for Franzysk. Anna was free. She wasn't with the Unsimple. There are things more important than fate.

War, it turns out, and that means death, too.

**17.** The third relief for Sebastian could have come when they brought the child, but he didn't allow himself this luxury and lived with that heaviness to the end of his life, perhaps sharing only crumbs of it, passing them on from Anna to Anna.

**18.** How Franzysk lived out the final months of his life, Sebastian did not know exactly, because he saw Franz only from afar. In the simplest sense of that word. And only from below.

At the beginning of that very warm winter, Franzysk moved for good out onto the balcony, isolating himself there without any contact with anyone. Sebastian met him only once a week in a bar, where he would go to collect a full gourd of gin. Their meetings were sometimes measured by glasses of juniper vodka with guelder rose syrup. Franz was touchingly friendly, but about family matters he spoke not a word. Sebastian listened, and Franz told him stories of the latest movements of the World War so vividly, as though it wasn't he but Sebastian who sat shut up on the balcony (or as though he had a pair of binoculars that could see for hundreds of kilometers in every direction and even look behind every tree). Sebastian didn't understand how Franz could find out the military secrets of both military blocks, because he couldn't know how Franz lived on the balcony—vines, ivy, and the tops of young cedars all obstructed his view.

**19.** Back in Africa Sebastian had noticed something interesting: people are very willing to examine things when they have to lower their gaze, and they are terribly inattentive when it comes to looking up.



In summer he and Anna had spent a great deal of time on the balcony to which Franz had moved—they had grown watermelons, smoked, spent the whole day drinking cold mate that had been steeped in a silver jug of hot water the night before. They saw everything that happened on the street. They could even guess at the content of conversations from gestures and lip movements. On the other hand, nobody ever—Sebastian was sure of it, because he never missed a single glance aimed at him—saw what they were doing on the balcony, that they were on the balcony. Because one would have to raise one's eyes ("This, obviously, has something to do with anatomy," thought Sebastian).

Now, looking at Franz's balcony, Sebastian cursed himself for never having taught Anna the first rule of sniping in a city: above all—balconies.

(Much later General Tarnavsky recounted to Sebastian someone else's recollections of the lost street battle in Lviv in November 1918, and Sebastian again thought about snipers and the balconies on which those snipers probably lived before the war.)

**20.** The last leaves on the vines fell off one night, and Sebastian was able to discern something through the ivy and the cedars. He saw a thin line tied to the balcony, stretching straight upwards towards the clouds. And nothing else in particular. But during their next meeting he warned Franz that the line could be noticed, it was visible.

Franz explained nothing, and Sebastian was left with nothing but to believe his own theory, which was, it seemed, most logical. The line from the balcony leads to a high-flying kite—the kite is fitted with a bird-catching net—the net catches birds—the birds are escaping from their nests at the front—an ornithologist lives beyond Chornohora—the ornithologist puts rings on the birds—the birds are ringed—they fly across Chornohora—they get caught in the net—Franz examines the rings—Franz knows the ornithologist—Franz understands his ring codes—the rings identify nesting places—the birds are escaping from their nests—that means the front has reached those places. Franz lets the birds go and raises the kite again.

**21.** In April 1915 the battle at Gorlice began (Franz had named the exact location of the offensive in advance).

In May groups of strangers began to pass through Ialivets: the Mazepists were returning to Galicia, the Galicians had been released from Thalerhof and Gmind, the Moscophiles were catching up to the Russians, deportees were fleeing from Russia, Russian spies were infiltrating Hungary, the Hungarians were weeding out spies and hanging Hutsuls, the Hutsuls were wading over to Romania for some cornmeal porridge, Romanian bandits were hunting Hutsul girls, deserters and marauders were trying to avoid one another.

Most of the vagrants avoided Ialivets, but those who appeared in town generally wore arms. In Ialivets there was only Sebastian's African rifle.

**22.** With Franzysk everything happened very quickly.

So quickly that it seemed to everyone that the head simply fell off in mid-sentence, the way a pipe can fall out of your mouth—if you pick it up quickly you can keep smoking. It would have been nice to do the same thing with the head, before the body collapsed. So that the end of the word wouldn't disappear in the momentary pause.

They were finishing their gin with syrup when the bandits from Maramureș walked into the bar. They paid for their gin with boots gnawed by wolves on the bootlegs. They sat down behind Sebastian, Franz looked at them from time to time, for he was on his guard. He placed his machete on the table, the one he used when he visited Lukach the Serb to hack his way through the dwarf mountain pine that grew incessantly around the forest hut.

The front was retreating, but the birds were not yet returning. Franz had nothing to say and was telling Sebastian about the Unsimple—how when somewhere someone is born they sit right under the windows and make up his story, like earthly gods. And how because they couldn't think up a different one each time they'd dreamt up this war. He was about to finally tell Sebastian what the *baimaker* had thought up for Anna (it was very significant that she was not Anna then) and where he had hidden the film with something the Unsimple were looking for.

Suddenly, one of the bandits came up to their table and said he'd buy the machete. You won't buy it, said Franz. Then I'll take it. You won't take it. Why? Because I need it. And if you won't need it? Then you'll come to me. "I'm already here," said the bandit, "and I want to take it." "If you can hold it," and he looked not at the Romanian's hand, but into his eyes. The bandit turned his eyes away, reached out his hand, looked back, took his hand away. "I can cut your head off," he said in Ukrainian. "If you can, then do so, if not, perhaps you'd better say good..." And that was how their chat ended, because the bandit grabbed the machete and without taking a swing, purely with the weight of the knife, sliced off Franzysk's head. Sebastian heard the rip of the severing tendons. Franz's body sat. The head fell onto the floor and did not roll. Like a clay pipe from a mouth. If only you could put it back in its place quickly to hear that "...bye." The second bandit put a bomb down in front of Sebastian and both of them, with the machete, left the bar. Sebastian didn't know what to grab first—the bomb or the head. In the end he took the grenade and threw it into the open stove. At least the explosion went up the chimney—the bats took flight in broad daylight; the body fell onto the floor, knocking the head under the table.

**23.** The next day the courier brought the infant girl from Anna. Sebastian understood why Franz had died—he had reckoned that he was immeasurably stronger, because there was no other woman in the world whom he would be able to love. Not suspecting that he had a granddaughter. At that moment Anna’s daughter was only a day’s travel away from Ialivets.

## WARS OF THE IMAGINATION—BRIEFLY

**1.** Why always war? This is what little Anna, daughter of Sebastian, asked when she began to understand more complicated stories. Sebastian was horrorstruck—he really had told the little one about nothing but war, everything about war, although it was already 1921; for two years now he really had taught her nothing but what might be useful in a war, and had been bringing her up like a soldier.

Why is there always war. She turned her head towards him and managed to articulate the question in the time it took the horse to leap over a dogrose bush. The horse's forelegs stretch down to the ground. Sebastian leans back sharply against the fall to avoid striking the child in the face with his chin. Anna turns her head and looks forward again. They speed across the hills. She doesn't wait for an answer too long—she's becoming like Anna, her mother.

Along the road Anna is to remember everything she sees. Then recount it as exactly as possible. And in addition—identify the positions she would choose for shooting, and the points that could serve as hiding places for the enemy. Just a children's game, a first schooling.

**2.** That evening tired Sebastian took some paper and sat down by a candle in order to sum up the material traces of war (this is how Sebastian illustrated various lessons for Anna—in the form of geometrical problems and formulas).

The war had taken: Franzysk, the machete, Anna.

The war had given: the strange sea buckthorn forests around Ialivets, Anna, a few Russian cartridges, the funeral photograph of Franzysk, and one drawing by Perfetsky.

Things he had done that can only be done in a war: one time he went on reconnaissance, one day he dug trenches, one time he blew up a bridge.

Not much trace at all. The war had, in truth, passed them by. So why always war?

**3.** Back in autumn 1914 the Ialivtsians decided that this war was not for them. They were Central Europe, and could not have any larger interests. But when the South is fighting against the North, and the East against the West, they fight mainly in Central Europe, where the Carpathians and their rivers are. And the worst thing possible in such times is to play the role of the peaceful population of the Carpathians or a strategically important point on a 1:50,000 topographic map.

For this reason Lukach decided—Ialivets had to disappear. And all around it he planted sea buckthorn bushes, which after a few weeks had grown so

high (for this to happen everyone had to take part in digging a real defense system with several rows of different trenches with passageways between them—it was as though the whole town was playing the old Boiko children’s game of moles; but only in this way, assured Lukach, would the sea buckthorn grow fast, high, and thick, hiding the secret paths with its needles) that the city was not visible from any mountain. Only the viaduct, where the Unsimple had once lived, stood out. They gathered all the gunpowder horns they could find. They laid them on the bridge. They opened the windows in all the buildings, and Sebastian fired an incendiary bullet at the powder.

The bridge shuddered, jumped up in the air, the blocks tumbled together and disintegrated into dust, and nothing but sand fell on the town—all this happened at once.

(The few Russian cartridges—sharp bullets with a Cyrillic letter on the shell—had been left with Sebastian by some Lemko deserters, in return for a little ether.)

4. Everything in the world is connected by no more than four steps. So said Franzysk.

Everyone in the world knows each other through no more than four people. Sebastian knew Anna, Sebastian knew Loci. Loci knew Anna, Loci knew Sebastian. Loci knew Perfetsky. The artist Leonid Perfetsky knew Anna. Perfetsky drew Anna in the legion of Sich Rifleman. Loci met with Perfetsky in January 1919 in Stanislav, the temporary capital of the Western Ukrainian National Republic. Perfetsky showed Loci the drawings, and Loci recognized Anna. He told Perfetsky about the woman in the picture, and Perfetsky—as formerly in Franzysk’s films—told what had happened before the drawing.

5. Anna was a born spy. She was able to get through anywhere, see everything, memorize everything, and, what was most rare, she could describe it in exact detail. She often disguised herself in different outfits and crossed the front line. That’s how it was at Bolekhiv. Once she went behind the front as the Russians were beginning a counterattack. The Austrian units fell back, leaving our riflemen exposed. Three Finnish regiments came at us from three sides. Hand to hand combat began. Many of ours fell; taken prisoner were Captain Bukshovany, Ensign Stepanivna, Ensign Svidersky, Second-Lieutenant Kravs, and Corporal Frei. The rest held firm and fought off the Russians. And suddenly, in the forest on the other side, Anna appeared. She was dressed as a ragged old man, leaning on a long stick. She went straight through them. It wasn’t carelessness. Something was guiding her, something no one could guess at. She was chased by three soldiers. Anna took her staff in both hands. It had been honed and was sharp as a

bayonet. And she made a stand against the three of them. She used it like a real rifle without bullets—as though using bayonet and butt. She pierced the throat of one, smashed the head of the second above the ear, and from the third took a bayonet in the chest. The soldier couldn't pull the bayonet out from between her ribs, and Anna seemed to help him, grasping the blade in her fingers. The Russian became frightened and let go of the rifle, which fell and hit the earth butt-first. Anna began to fall forwards but the rifle held her up. By then the bayonet had come out right through her back. In one hand Anna still held her staff. She barely managed to lift it and strike at the rifle that wouldn't let her lie down. The butt slid forward and Anna fell, also forward, with the bayonet in her chest twisting inside her. Some other soldiers ran up and stabbed her as she lay on the earth, as they were taught in training.

6. Perfetsky gave the drawing to Loci. Loci brought it to Sebastian, asking him, "Open the envelope only after I've gone."

In the drawing Anna didn't look dead.

Her head lay on a small mound, her face bright, her lips not tense, her legs slightly bent upwards at the knees; one hand lay languidly by her side, the other was thrown back at the elbow toward her head. There were no features typical of a corpse—no hardness, no withering, no inflammation, no swelling, not even any sharp stiff angles. But for the clothes, it would have looked like a classic nude in an art academy.

7. He couldn't accept that this Anna was his own. Sebastian generally didn't believe in any existence of Anna's that he hadn't seen himself—an aptitude she'd also had during her lifetime.

But, looking at the picture, he felt the same as he had on St George's day in 1914.

On the market square twelve Gypsy trumpeters from Subotica played long into the evening. Gin poured from the fire hydrants. Drunken Lukach planted some shoots in the ground that grew so fast the eye could see it. In the canals there was swimming and dancing. They were swinging on all the swings and trapezes. When everyone had fallen asleep in the street, Lukach took the Gypsies, Sebastian, and Anna back to his place. The Gypsies could barely manage to drink any more. Sebastian didn't manage to get his arms around Anna, and she sat in the embraces of the Gypsies. Then the trumpets fell silent and the singing began. They all sang as though facing the gallows. Until suddenly they all sobered up, remembered everything they knew, and got drunk again—this time for the duration. Sebastian and Anna wanted to make love somewhere in a corner, but it didn't work out because she kept approaching the table as each new song began.

At dawn they made their way home and had nothing to say. Behind them

the nightingales were still singing and before them the larks were awakening. They thought they would lie until daylight with their eyes open but they fell asleep as soon as they lay down in one another's arms. The last thing that went through Sebastian's head was that tomorrow a new life would begin.

He woke up two hours later wanting water. He ran to Lukach's hut. The Gypsies had already risen and were making kasha on the fire. They barely even greeted him. Sebastian couldn't understand what he had felt so close to in the night. And the whole day he waited for night.

**8.** Looking at the drawing, Sebastian began to think about how a bayonet enters the body.

From that time on he constantly felt something like this. He is being stabbed. He is stabbing. A saber slices skin. The wound heals. He walks the field among the still living but already killed. He slowly dies from a bullet in the stomach. Mud under his boots. Marching in columns. Crossings through cold waters. Purulent wounds cleaned with dirty fingers. Ragged fighters. Rainwater and quagmires in trenches. The wheels of the cart have to be dragged out. Trees are cut down for the road. Explosions nearby. Must stay down. Trees shatter. Columns of deserters. Hangings in orchards. Crawling in the snow. Black figures returning across white hills. Burnt fields. Inflamed eyes. Muscles hurt from sleeping in the cold. Frostbitten hands. Pain, sleeplessness, cold. The constant effort and strain, without which even finding food becomes uninteresting. All this Anna felt too. For the first time in the world—two feel exactly the same thing.

**9.** In 1921 Sebastian stopped talking about the war, although his imagination was there always. Thinking about something, he always thought about something different than what he was thinking.

But he began to tell the child about animals.

He began to miss Franzysk most of all.

**10.** That same year the French engineer died. Just as he had expected—from smoking.

It was already quite cold, so all the windows were shut. The shutters on the chimneys were also kept closed. The French engineer finished his last cigarette already in bed, but he didn't put out the stub in the ashtray and instead got up and without putting on his long-johns walked across the room and threw the butt into the stove. He then took a drink of water straight from the bucket. And only then did he lie down to sleep in peace. But the stove was full of waste paper—mainly old rough drafts and notes on completely banal stories (strange, but after the war there were more of these, and he had to throw them out—and this on top of the fact that people began to come to

the notary office of the French engineer much less often: some stories were unspeakable, and others begged to be told both one on one and to whole gatherings). The paper caught fire from the cigarette butt and burned quickly in the closed chimney. The French engineer died sweetly from the toxic fumes.



## THE UNSIMPLE

1. They said the Unsimple would come to the funeral. Why they hadn't appeared for all those years, when they had been truly needed, nobody knew. Apparently, it wasn't something they needed. It meant that the death of the French engineer interested them more than Ialivets during the war. Or perhaps the real war, outside Ialivets, was more interesting to them. Here, after all, nothing happened that the French engineer couldn't keep an eye on. If they really are still tied to Ialivets, then they will come in order to do two things: first, to collect something the French engineer had left behind, and second, to leave somebody in his place. Franzysk had said that they were interested in certain people. Sebastian vividly recalled how Franzysk had shielded Anna from them, how he had spoken of the persecution of their family by the Unsimple. The fear that someone might take his daughter (and his Anna's daughter) from him came—at least for a few seconds—every hour. Now it had become all-consuming and pushed Sebastian to his limits. They had to escape somewhere.

Anna slept, and Sebastian grated potatoes and fried some pancakes, so as to have something substantial to take on the journey.

He grated, fried, and thought about something completely different.

2. the unsimple are earthly gods. people, who with the help of inborn or acquired knowledge, are able to do good or harm to others. that point is important—inborn or acquired. they know something. at the same time this can also be learned. acquired. in this way it's possible to become unsimple by learning something.

and the inborn. they were interested in Anna's dreams. was this inborn or acquired. it came from the morphine—acquired. but it came only to Anna. the morphine uncovered something. which meant—inborn. Anna explained some things to me, I learned some things—acquired. Anna said that not everyone could master her teachings. there have to be some features. features are the principal plots. they're intonations. intonations make a voice. something innate and unchanging—it can at most be imitated. to imitate, one must know. imitation is knowledge, because knowledge is imitation. they were interested because Anna knew something they had not learned. which means their knowledge is not limitless. they have to acquire it. add it to features. the unsimple are different. it's impossible for one of them alone to acquire all knowledge. but each one for whatever reason chooses certain branches of knowledge. depending on features. they are of all kinds—cowlike, horselike, catlike, doglike, chickenlike, gooselike, froglike, fishlike, mouselike. like all creatures that from other creatures take nourishment. there is also the snakecharmer, the werewolf, the

stormbreaker, the clouddriver, the peakwalker. there is also the seer and the seeress. but the most important is the *baimaker*, the spellcaster. the most powerful is the spell—speaking, *bai*. *bai*—is not a word. *bai*—is many ordered words. a *bai*—is already a story. for different causes there are different *bais*. *bais* are plots. a *bai* is a narrative, telling a story, a plot. causes must also be plots. and in order to find a *bai* for them, they must be told. in this case narrative influences the choice of narrative and then the chosen narrative is narrated. the *bai* is narrated, the *bai* which influences, acts on, the previous narrative-cause and matches the direction in which it is going after the narrative-*bai* towards the narrative-effect. which means that there are only narratives. narrative is all actions, and all actions are narratives. among the unsimple the *baimaker* is number one. his inborn knowledge-features—how to narrate (hearing, articulation, voice, intonation, rhythm, and pace)—are strung together with acquired ones—what to narrate. unsimple must know what to narrate. they need people’s narrations—Anna’s, the French engineer’s, Beda’s, the deputy Stefanyk’s, General Tarnavsky’s. what they know they tell someone else. but whom. to Franzysk, Anna, Loci. afterwards Franzysk makes such films, Anna builds such buildings, that then *bai* something to someone else. and these someones have something they have to *rebai* to someone else. they have to. the unsimple do what they want. wanting also has to be known from somewhere. to know is to hear a narrative. wanting is narrative, *bai*. wanting is had. the unsimple want to have. the best way to have is to be able to narrate, to make narrations. whosoever narrates has everything. narration, therefore, is not only the greatest act, but also the greatest thing, the greatest number. the greatest feature and trait. the unsimple have the most, do the most, signify the most, because they narrate. the mystery turned out very simple. knowing criminals A, crime B is dreamt up for them. the unsimple rule the world. the unsimple come when someone is born, or something is born, and think up his life. they narrate a plot. the narrative becomes the cause, life—the effect of the narrative. and the cause of a new narrative, which can be heard and retold. there is no life without narrative. because narrative is life. plots do not end, said Franzysk. plots hide and emerge. stories, like infections, cause fever, are carried, are passed on, hide, come out and cause fever. they merge, separate, mix together, grow together, break in different places, overturn, crumble, are reborn. to gather plots. to combine plots (analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, mythologization, de-mythologization, analogy, hyperbole, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, accent, timbre, articulation, transfer, cohesion, instillation, elimination, tonality, speed, rhythm, chronotope, personification, allegory, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, construction and deconstruction, comparative linguistics). to give away plots, according to place and time. such is the method of the unsimple. and this method is a

result. for it is as it is said, ordered, related, refused, retold, forbidden, indicated, suggested. what is it for. in order to say.

*bai* is invisible medicine.

the essence of all form.

the form of essence itself.

that which can be taken into the next world. that which is necessary in the next world. for there there is nothing but voices, eternity and delight. your own eternity with your own voice your own *bai* about your own delight.

no work, no treasure, no strength, no body, no emotions, not far, not near, not much, not little, not sometime, not now, not sometime. your own eternity with your own voice your own delight—your *bai*.

3. Sebastian gave Anna all the pancakes for breakfast, because they had nowhere to go, because there was nowhere to escape to. The main thing is to fear nothing.

Sebastian went to the deceased, prayed (dear God, don't allow me to harm Thee!) for the narrative of the soul of the French engineer and waited until the Unsimple arrived. They asked him not to get in their way and to wait two days, although this family had first sought them out, and not the other way round. Sebastian promised not to take up much time and did not step aside. He told the *baimaker* that he wanted to be a *baimaker*. And he asked to work as a barman in the bar that belonged to the Unsimple.

At that time in Ialivets the bar "What's There Is There" had become the most fashionable post-war locale in a fashionable pre-war Central European resort. After the war the address changed a little, though some basic errors couldn't be avoided. Despite everything, Ialivets was still situated in the Ukrainian Carpathians, and not simply in the Czechoslovak Republic. But Stanislav, Lviv, and Arzheliudzha were beyond the forbidden line through Chornohora. Now people came for Ialivets's gin mainly from Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Košice, Karlovy Vary, and Uzhhorod. And also from Podebrady and Nusli, from Německý Jablonec, Liberec, and Jozefov. With the foreigners it was easier to communicate in Ukrainian than in German.

The Unsimple without hesitation agreed, but they had one condition. As it happened, Sebastian also had only one condition. Both conditions turned out to be the same: Anna was to be in the bar, beside Sebastian.

## TO SAY OR TO STOP

1. Something had to be changed in the bar. Sebastian described to Anna several interiors that he thought he had dreamed of his whole life.

Anna agreed that it was easiest to remember beauty through things. Things endure, they go from story to story. But truly the initial beauty lies in flowers, plants, and that from which they grow and that into which they grow: water, open air, light, and a little warmth and a little cool.

They did whatever the girl wanted.

2. After ending six years of military training, Sebastian always did whatever Anna wanted. He didn't see this as spoiling her. He just didn't know what little girls need (with a boy it would have been different—Sebastian could remember well how he had felt at different times in his childhood; but then it may have been worse, because who knows whether his son would feel things in the same way), and he believed that small people know very well when it's good and when it's bad. The most telling way of summing up childhood is as the correlation between laughter and tears. Some of the lalivets women tried to help in Anna's upbringing, but Sebastian simply didn't allow them access to the child, and ignored their advice. Although the renovation of the pub left very little free time, Sebastian managed to tell his daughter every day about all the things he had learned from the lives of animals.

3. The pub was transformed into a bar that was open in several places, more like a garden. As for the things in the bar (other than tables and benches)—everything was made of transparent glass.

Mainly it held cut flowers.

4. In the meantime Anna spent more and more time with animals. She especially loved snails. Sebastian liked snails, because they seemed well mannered. Their reserve and lack of emotion demanded more attentive consideration of their snail needs, sympathies, wishes, and intentions. Completely different manners of behavior, self-expression and communication give a generous space for mutual understanding. Anna felt happy when she put a snail on herself in a place from which it didn't immediately want to crawl away. It thanked Anna by slowly and gently sliding across selected areas of her skin.

It was possibly because of this preference that all her life Anna was best able to imitate snails. When they began to make love she became a snail most often and most enthusiastically. Sebastian suspected that in this way she was trying to show him how he was to behave with her. She never dared

to say this to her father in words. Sebastian was surprised—how was it possible to know the secrets of animals so well. “I just didn’t have anything to read,” his daughter laughed.

5. And really, this Anna didn’t even read Larousse, because: Sebastian didn’t know French (his fighting had not been in French Africa—Central Europe means the possibility to communicate with neighbors in one’s native tongue), in the early years Anna had constantly been becoming a soldier, then they almost never left the bar, going home only to bathe in winter, and in addition, Anna heard so many stories in the bar that the eternal and timeless Larousse would have seemed like yesterday’s news to her, and finally, they fell in love in such a way that no encyclopedia could ever contain entries of any use to them.

Next after snails were lynxes and wagtails. Among the insects—crickets.

6. At that time Anna was between ten and twelve years old. Once they were bathing in several streams during a short, sunny September day and followed the Kevelev right to the Tysa. They decided not to return to the mountains until it got dark. They knew that there wouldn’t be any more river that year, and walking in complete darkness was actually easier—the soles of the feet themselves found the way.

Sebastian looked at Anna as she jumped into the river and crawled out onto the rocks. He had never seen such women before. And he didn’t know if he ever would—Anna would soon grow up, he could already see in her a hint of his first Anna. He felt guilty for not memorizing that beauty. He couldn’t remember the Anna from last year, when she was three. It was always today’s that moved in his imagination.

“I don’t have to remember this,” said Sebastian to himself. Remembering childhood is a child’s business. I want only one thing—to see the day when there’ll be no need to remember her as she once was, when she’ll be everyday Anna every day. I want to live only with her. I’m her father and an adult man, I know what I’m saying about my little girl. I don’t have to memorize this—after all, she’ll also have to have something to tell when she becomes a woman.

(Anna lay in the whirlpools between the rocks.)

All the same he tried to remember things. She was like a slender twig on a branch, whitened and honed, bent and dried by the river water. Dried by the river.

He had to plunge his face into the Chorna Tysa.

7. During the night, as they crossed the Dzhordzhova Pass and could no longer make out one another’s features, Anna stopped him by taking his hand and said that a poem had come into her head. It was, probably, very clumsy, but:

how sad oh anno  
 oh how sad oh  
 for in anno domini one hundred hundred  
 it's not just your height I want  
 just like a clay bowl  
 fears the growth  
 of the supple pine  
 which will carry her efforts  
 in those places it seems  
 the wind will release too much  
 very fine sand  
 from those rounded hills nearby  
 for eyes filled with stinging tears  
 when you touch your cheek  
 to the palm  
 which I press  
 fine hairs rise on your skin  
 I don't know the *bai*  
 for this sand  
 how sad oh  
 little girl  
 in a black beret  
 in thick boots  
 with a blade of grass  
 in your wide mouth

She gave the poem to her father Sebastian.

**8.** Through all these years they worked in the bar, which really did very quickly become the most fashionable in Central Europe.

As Franzysk had once invited Sebastian, Sebastian invited columnists from several major newspapers to try living in Ialivets for a while, (“And anyway,” he wrote on the postcards, “There’s never anything really important in the newspapers, there’s only what causes most of today’s problems—an excess of information, which is impossible to retell... it’s understood that a certain convention exists that forbids philosophers from looking around and describing certain things...”), to drink gin together and talk as people should talk in Central Europe—to ascertain common places and common people, in this way exposing several parallel webs in which everyone finds themselves.

Ialivets became a paradise for writers, journalists, essayists, columnists, and reporters.

They came for the gin, they came for Sebastian. Some he listened to, some he told stories to. He tried to avoid stories more distant than across four steps.

**9.** And every day he and little Anna worked night and day, mainly together, sometimes—sleeping in turns. The child grew up in the bar, washing glasses, wiping the tables and the floor. Cutting flowers for all the glass. Sometimes they spoke, but somehow differently. Now they were concerned only with what they thought about whatever they had just seen.

**10.** Anna liked to have her photo taken, and even those who had never taken photographs liked to photograph her. Only Sebastian didn't like this. For this reason only three photographs, taken and given to them, apparently, by visitors, survived. In one of them Anna is almost ten years old. This photograph is the most interesting.

Sebastian's figure is somewhat blurred. It's no wonder, because at that moment he is spinning around on his axis. In both hands—knives. You can see that he has already started to throw one—he is just letting it out of his hand. Anna grips Sebastian round the waist with her legs, her back touching his knees and her hair touching the ground. In her raised hands are a bottle of gin and a glass. Her smile is distorted by the rush of blood to her face and the centrifugal (centripetal) force (in such situations it's very hard to close an open mouth).

This was a trick they had for their clientele. They would go out into the middle of the bar and, without music, dance a complex tango. At the end Anna would leap up onto Sebastian, they would spin round, Sebastian would throw knives at a target (throwing knives at a target was the most popular form of entertainment at the bar), and Anna would grab a bottle and glass from a table, pour out some gin, and place the glass on the table in such a way that it would slide right up to one of the customers. She never spilled a drop.

**11.** After Anna's death Sebastian tried to collect at least some of her photographs. He recalled guests who might have photographed Anna, found their addresses, and sent them letters with a single request. But for some reason nothing came of this. No one wanted to give away their photographs, not even those who could fathom Sebastian's suffering.

## THIRTY YEARS OF THE FAMILY S.

1. In 1921, when Sebastian went of his own accord to the Unsimple, he chose a strange form of freedom—persistently to tell the Unsimple about the life of his family. To make surveillance by normal methods impossible. In this way he turned himself and his family into a sort of research plantation for the Unsimple.

“To live in such a way,” said Franz, “as not to have secrets.”

This suited the Unsimple completely and they stopped interfering in their life—they were convinced that Sebastian’s experiments with his own life were more inventive and more merciless than anything any of them could come up with.

2. Sebastian sent his observations to the Unsimple on ordinary postcards.

Their code could be called unprose.

The messages did not take the form of normal sentences but contained abbreviated records made according to a certain system of definitions, which he used to give names to things he experienced—actions, impressions, days, people, stories, emotions, ideas, whole microperiods. The Unsimple decoded the unprose and were able to imagine even more (though sometimes something entirely different) than what Sebastian knew.

He would leave the postcards under a stone beside the road leading out of Ialivets. Old Beda, passing through from time to time in his armored car, would collect them and then himself address them to the Unsimple—he always knew where they were wandering, and the mail would be waiting for them at the places where they were to spend the night.

3. Thus passed almost thirty years. In all that time the Unsimple only came to Ialivets a few times. Then they spoke at length with Sebastian and collected any unmailed postcards themselves.

Chronology did not interest them, and for Sebastian it had never even existed.

4. There was only one period when he wrote nothing—in 1934, when the third Anna—his daughter and granddaughter—was born, and Anna, his daughter and wife, died.

5. In 1938, when Carpatho-Ukraine was created, the Unsimple did as Sebastian suggested—they bought a big bus, turned it into a bar, and Sebastian and little Anna set off in it for the capital, Khust. During this time he put together several dozen pages of descriptions of the mountain regions for the government of Avgustyn Voloshyn, and during an hour-long



meeting with Colonel Kolodzinsky, head of staff of the Carpathian Sich, he put forth a detailed plan for the defense of the country by two hundred well-placed snipers, having personally selected every indicated position.

Sebastian continued traveling around in the bar, like a wandering circus, even after the occupation of Carpatho-Ukraine—right up until 1944, when instead of the Hungarians came the Russians. With them around, you couldn't wander for long.

Sebastian barely made it in time to register himself in Deutsch-Mokra, near Königsfeld, moving into the home of a Tyrolian deported by the Hungarians. (The bus-bar he left by the side of the road in Krasnishora, and he heard that a whole squad of Soviet spies had gotten drunk in it for several days and then had drowned in the Teresva, as soon as they started up the bus and began moving.)

6. Sebastian and Anna lived a most primitive life in Mokra. They ate cornmeal porridge three times a day; Anna would be asked to graft the apple trees (she had such a good touch), Sebastian would cure people of their fears. And at night he played a complicated radio game, imitating on the air the activities of several radio stations of a non-existent partisan group called "The Earthspirits."

7. In 1949 Anna was poisoned by rye ergot and began seeing the Middle Ages.

The Unsimple said she had to be with them as soon as she became a woman. Precisely for this reason Sebastian didn't take Anna to see their family places when she turned fifteen.

It was only in late autumn of 1951 that they left for Ialivets.

The NKVD had burned the Unsimple in the spring.

And Anna became a woman in June.

She and Sebastian spent the whole summer and autumn in uninterrupted love-making.

## UNPROSE

**1. not to talk to w. the same way**

(w.—women—Anna is still little, and he thinks up affectionate names for her—he notices that the little girl becomes moody when he uses the same words he used at one time for her mother—even if very effectively—in the narrations he used to narrate to his Anna at least a few words have to be changed before they can please his daughter, even if they are only simple stories from Brehm—and the most important thing is not to speak the same way about making love—it’s not only individual words and phrases but also repeating descriptions of emotions—Sebastian crafts a whole erotic lexicon, making love to three generations of his women)

**2. tattoo on palm**

(Sebastian entertains little Anna by drawing kittens, small fish, fir trees, rabbits, and birds on his hands—Anna watches for hours as the drawings change when he moves his palm in different ways—once in the bar a frog trainer performs—his frogs are tiny, like brambleberries, and of different colors—most of them, though, are white—the trainer has a tattoo—a huge multicolored iris between his shoulder-blades, its long stem wrapped around his whole body—Anna wants a tattoo of her own—they take a long time to choose, looking through a Carpathian plants guidebook—Anna remembers the drawings from her childhood—but she asks for at least a little frog, like the performer’s—on her palm—quite a painful place, but Anna is persevering—tattooing Anna, Sebastian thinks about the line of fate—but there are things more important than that—a tattoo on the palm won’t be seen by many people—now Anna greets people by raising her hand—they make love, Anna looks at her palm and doubles herself up like a frog—afterwards she exhales all the air out of herself, which in this case enters her together with Sebastian—several hours after Anna’s death the frog loses its color and becomes white)

**3. fear—the greatest temptation**

(Sebastian to Anna—“You are, and the world is together with you, and only fear tears away parts of you and makes another world next to you without you—it’s tempting to be afraid”)

**4. to squeeze an orange out into the mouth**

lemon dries white

(one of the bar tricks they invented—cut an orange in half and pour a shot of gin—the customer drinks the gin and immediately throws his head back, opening his mouth—the barman squeezes the orange juice not into the glass

but straight into his mouth)

(Anna is very tired—Sebastian squeezes some lemon juice onto her skin behind her elbows, above her collarbone, on her stomach, between the tendons on her wrists, under her throat—the juice soaks in and relaxes the skin—streams flow out from the lemon lakelets and dry up, leaving thick white trails—in the same way that your fingers go white if you peel a lot of lemons)

**5. w. b.; a completely different self**

(w. b.—without biography—in Ialivets everybody knows everybody—and all biographies are known—on their free days Sebastian and Anna travel to resorts in the Prut valley—where there are lots of strangers, where nobody knows them—to Tatariv, Dora, Deliatyn and Luga, Mykulychyn, Iamna—they stay in randomly chosen lodges for a few hours—simply to make love—they tell invented stories about themselves in trains and hotels—they behave differently every time—according to chosen roles—Sebastian sometimes feels as though he has just met this woman—just as with apartments—often after working at night they spend the whole day in the empty apartments of friends—they try themselves out among other people's things, in other people's habits, look at albums of other people's photographs—or languages—they go to shepherds' flocks on the mountainsides—speak Hutsul—ask for milk, *zhentytsia*, *huslianka*, *vurda*, *budz*—they listen to how the Hutsuls try to understand them, to what they say among themselves about them)

**6. seventeen stones ahead**

(a long time ago, when Sebastian was training his daughter like a soldier, there was this exercise—cross a river without stopping for an instant, jumping from stone to stone, having glanced at the route from the bank for only three seconds; they tried again when the second Anna was pregnant—she saw and calculated seventeen steps in advance)

**7. understanding—is the business of whoever must understand**

(this is a fragment from a discussion that lasted many years between Sebastian and the Unsimple—they believe that the problem of understanding should be solved by the one who has a need to be understood—Sebastian held the opposite—because what is vital here is the a priori impossibility of identical understanding—and he holds to his point of view in practice—he always narrates as he wants to, though answering fully any questions that arise—he says that he prefers spare rhetoric to excessive rhetoric—more meanings than words, and not the opposite)

**8. epos of family places**

(Sebastian, following Franzysk, considers the foundation of every private epos to be the enumeration of imagined conceptions about places in which the family history has taken place—a sort of family geography of plants—in the case of the last Anna the main junctions of the epos must be Mokra, Ialivets, Chornohora, Stanislav, Prague, Africa, Lviv, Trieste, Borzhava, Sharish, Bolekhiv, Petros, Chorna Tysa)

**9. child—killer**

(spring 1944—the last spring of the bus-bar—columns of trucks on the mountain roads—some vehicles stand for weeks—helplessness of the commanders—the only idea—Westward—soldiers live in the trunks of their vehicles, during the day they await the possibility of mobilization, at night they wander in the surrounding area—a few Hungarian corporals drink all night at the bar—Sebastian recognizes among them the two Romanian bandits who twenty years ago cut Franz's head off—he points them out surreptitiously to Anna, as a fragment of the family epos—no way of knowing whether the bandit-corporals might remember Sebastian, but no one says a word to anyone—in the morning the Hungarians go to sleep in the truck, and Sebastian and Anna drive on a little—Anna asks him to tell in great detail what happened to grandpa Franz—during the day the bar is closed—Sebastian puts the child to sleep and falls asleep himself—he wakes up from the feeling that someone is moving his pistol in his belt—he checks, the pistol is in place, and Anna is sitting beside him looking at the clouds—so transparent that you can see what's inside them—tiny bubbles of dampness, like caviar on seaweed, vibrate on narrow strips of dense plumes of steam, everything the same color as gleaming flint—a few days later someone says that two Hungarians, who were, in fact, Romanians, shot themselves in broad daylight right in the vehicle where the corporals slept—Sebastian notices that two bullets are missing from his pistol, Anna is washing glasses—to kill the killers, thinks Sebastian, she would have had to go back ten kilometers by herself)

**10. diffusion, to absorb one another, to be absorbed by one another**

(a theory of reverse absorption reveals itself to Sebastian—he experiments with roots—applies the findings to people—proves that a man, when he is inside a woman, not only releases fluid that is absorbed by the woman but himself absorbs some of the woman's moisture—according to the laws of empty capillaries and connected vessels—Sebastian believes that in this way a transference of substances takes place world-wide, and this seems extremely important to him—in any case, he wishes to absorb the maximal amount of this extract)

**11.** cognac with onion soup; juice from the grapevine; porter with wild honey; gin with red ants;

(an Arab back in Africa told Sebastian—first of all teach your sons to make food, they will be wise and joyful—Sebastian doesn't have any sons, but he has a daughter Anna—he teaches her to make food: tells her she shouldn't be afraid to invent, it's the finest of adventures—making food for someone is always sensual, like bringing up a child or looking after plants—tasks that return us to the spontaneity of animals and birds, when questions of what to do and why do not arise—curiosity that can be given—the opposition of different forces and essences that can be taught to live together—the beginning of all tastes is in plants—because there is no end to them, there is no end to the making of food—Anna started from the bar—she boiled porter together with honeycomb from wild bees—she served hot onion soup right after cognac, and then you take another drink of cognac for your scalded palate—into a glass of gin she threw a few dozen red winged ants (believing that to kill for food is not a sin), whose acid gave the spirits a burning quality—in the hungry spring she cut grapes from the overgrown balconies and gathered the juice of the vine, in order to mix it afterwards with juniper vodka in a proportion of one to one-half—and the same with everything)

**12.** a rainy lodge

(during one of their trips to the Prut valley Sebastian and Anna stop at a small villa built in the Zakopane style—while they make love it starts to rain—when rains like that begin in the Carpathians they last for whole weeks of summer—why do I want you so much today—asks Anna—when she asks Sebastian something, she always does it in a childish way—like a daughter, and not like a wife—Sebastian also forgets that Anna is not a child—he answers simply, genuinely, carefully, vividly, and wisely—so that she will understand for the rest of her life—for the friction and pressure of human surfaces are extremely necessary to a human being—the amount of this is set in advance, like the number of beats of a heart—and we're not for so long—Anna presents various parts of her body—the body—the gate of the soul—the gate is open—the soul is revived by touch—observe the changes in the strength of the downpour beyond the open window—otherwise you may not return from flight—they come out of the lodge—come out of the forest—unexpectedly the rain stops—they walk along the mountainside—Anna wants more—they make love in the warm grass under the rarefied air, which barely restrains the sunlight—Anna feels so good that the surfaces are changing, in such a way that they will want to talk about this tomorrow—if there is a tomorrow, if there is talk, if there are surfaces—because she is absent time and again even here and now—she takes Sebastian with her—he is so far inside her that they think he is no longer visible—birds land on the ground and watch from up close—they

look without shame at the birds and see the openness of the huge Anna, who barely fits in their field of vision—they can no longer give themselves to the sun, but they want to go still deeper—they head for (now Anna becomes a naked little girl with a wide mouth) where it might be wet—they run into a forest villa—maybe we should move somehow, but let us lie still, because my head is spinning—outside the window it is raining—I can give a lot of wetness—they lie still and hold one another—Sebastian imagines Anna feeding just such a little girl for the first time—Anna dreams of seeing just such a little boy for the first time —it's not you that feels good, not I, not we, but the world—you made me like this)

### 13. story of a view along a cheek

a tale of lips

a whole essay in a matchbox

(the last Anna is a few years old—these are the worst days of 1938—everything that Sebastian tells the little one at bedtime either ends badly or loses sense, because he eliminates non- children's places from the narratives—children have to be read to out loud, Sebastian is convinced—children must look at the book, at daddy with the book, at letters, at the paper with letters—children must want to come to understand the book themselves—because they tell: because that's what is written—to perceive many older voices, in order to better distinguish your own—our Larousses ran out already a long time ago—Sebastian makes weird books—he cuts up postcards and binds the fragments, puts the little scraps of paper together in little numbered bundles in matchboxes, writes all over the walls, the table, the bed, the doors—he himself writes the written—writes in different voices—in the evening he lies down beside Anna and reads aloud the story of the view along her cheek, a tale of her lips, an essay in a matchbox, a chronicle of the lack of a chronicler, an epos of railway stations, fairytales of food for birds, a philosophical tract of ivy—Anna listens to the different voices and tries to hear her own—and indeed, something moved)

### 14. to kiss often

a kiss through a sweater

(throughout the day dozens of times Sebastian firmly presses his open lips against the clothed Anna and breathes out long and hard all the air in his lungs—through the sweater comes warmth, and somewhere in the middle of the breath the skin at the place of this kiss becomes hot—if this is done often, then using one's own warmth one can perceptibly keep the kissed one warm even in severe cold—the sensation is strengthened by the magical significance of giving from inside yourself into the body of another something which is life itself)

**15.** this inaccessible structure—like a brain, like a nut, like a closed hand, like a seed

(one time Sebastian feels a certain psychosis developing inside him—between the Annas he doesn't have and doesn't want to have any other women—but during one of these times he understands that the sense of the erotic is not the object but the path—the interrelation of bodily landscapes—entering, penetrating, staying, returning—the wonder of any journey—the path that leads itself—all-encompassing uniformity—a place where one can meet the universe—his psychosis is based on a nostalgia exaggerated by inaccessibility—even neutral situations he sees as being either in or outside—sometimes he even feels that he performs his wanderings along this path at his full height—sliding along, squeezing through, pausing, ceasing, collapsing, gliding, falling—only because the wanderings are imaginary does he think he is not living right, godlessly wasting the gift of life)

**16.** to see the Middle Ages

(1949—in the mountains there is great hunger—Anna is eating grains of raw rye infected with ergot—she sees the Middle Ages, in which things from the present take place—severed heads, torture, columns of refugees, the arrival of strangers, ruined faces, wide belts, grammar lessons, bestiaries, musicians at feasts, scarcity of food, decimated forests, polluted rivers, mixing of languages, dried fruit, ulcerous diseases, insane exhibitions, lost chronicles, manuscript apocrypha, stinking clothes, dirty dishes, broken arms, crushed legs, stretched tendons)

**17.** six

(the last Anna is six years old—Sebastian is bathing her—he notices that four spots slightly darker than her skin, under her ribs and on her stomach, are in fact underdeveloped nipples—he recalls Franzysk's greatest dream—would he have dared even to suppose—his great-granddaughter with three pairs of breasts)

**18.** (For some reason old Beda didn't take one of the bundles of cards from under the stone. They weren't found until the end of the '50s, during the dismantling of Austrian military roads in the Carpathian sub-alpine. Every single one was a photograph from the famous (in the '30s) Chornohora series. The Soviets didn't yet have any printed views of the Carpathians of their own, and these, taken with a fish-eye lens, were taken to the local museum in Vorokhta. The penciled inscriptions on the back were hard to understand.)

feeling of discomfort—this is the traces of a previous taste on the salivary glands that forces you to seek the next one

every period brings new slang; like a new way of life; languages pass more slowly than periods. They accumulate, take up more and more territory, squeezing out the canonical language—they mean more to us. Soon Anna and I will get to the point where we can converse purely in our own phrases  
summer of white wine; get used to Austrian green wine  
met with the Colonel and Iaryi  
all periods pass (I see that already in my second child and third wife)  
it's good to know that you are, that always, somewhere, you are  
faith in that which was in childhood  
to think about how a leg gets caught between legs and gets scraped  
she fell asleep by the stove with atlases of plants on her lap  
when you pee on moss you flatten moths that sit there pretending to be unfurled leaves  
now I shall never envy anyone, for I have seen tears of kindness  
she could have done more than (why are some women allowed to do everything, maybe because they are able do everything)  
trench diggers eating with their hands  
animation on the sun, on the clouds, on the moon  
deformation by twisting  
such a fullness of being that one could dissolve inside  
(If it were possible to know what these un-decoded messages meant—what they mean (my Annas were not, won't be, but are, always are—so good to know that always, somewhere, they just are). If we knew more human fates, said Sebastian. Often in this lies the main therapy of *bai*.)  
Now a selection of the postcards of Chornohora is kept at the museum of the Carpathian national nature reserve in Iaremche.



THE MOST BEAUTIFUL *BAI* (FOR EXAMPLE)

1. Sebastian told only of how things could be, and therefore things were as Sebastian told.

All the years before starting to speak Sebastian actually did just one thing—he looked and thought about how to tell stories.

2. Sebastian told how he could tell people about their lives in such a way that they would want to live forever, without changing anything. And people really did want to live forever and changed nothing.

Sebastian told how even under interrogation he wouldn't tell everything about his love, his loves with the Annas. And true enough—under interrogation Sebastian did not tell everything, because he overcame himself and spoke not at all as he would have wanted to, as he had never once allowed himself to speak in his whole life.

3. Afterwards he told how he had never heard anything so strange.

He was taken right off the street in Königsfeld.

They were already living in Mokra. Sebastian was walking home, returning from a forester's hut near Tempa. There one forester had been crushed by a falling spruce. It didn't kill him immediately, but he had stopped living—he just lay, neither here nor there. The forester was not a local—he came from somewhere near Bereziv—and so there was nowhere to take him. To bury someone like that would have been a sin, so they came to fetch Sebastian on horseback, with neither saddle nor bridle. He examined the wounded man and saw that he had forgotten how to breathe. He sat next to him and told the necessary *bai*. The Berezivian remembered everything, got up, and invited Sebastian to come and visit him in Bereziv. He had to thank Sebastian somehow, but he was foresting now, so he decided to give Sebastian the only thing he had—a lump of *budz* cheese.

4. Sebastian stayed in the hut a little longer, because he had to hear something about Bereziv—he had never been there, although he knew many Berezivians.

Sebastian said that what was most interesting for him was to listen to someone telling about a place he didn't know. Then he would ask that it be described as though you were walking around, looking, and relating what you see. Then—as though you were riding a bicycle or horse (a little higher, which dramatically changes what you see), and then—as though you had climbed up to the top of a tree. And he would always pull out a map of the place and ask that everything that was marked there be described in words.

Sebastian perceived even wars, camps and all kinds of cataclysms primarily

from this point of view—you meet so many people, who come from and are coming from different places, who have grown up and spent time in different places. Great movements mix people together, and comparative geography becomes the foundation for speaking and ways of thinking.

5. Sebastian carried a lump of cheese to Anna for supper and breakfast. In Königsfeld, by the tailor's door, as always, a table had been carried out into the street, and several men were playing cards. The rest looked on. Sebastian had learned still back in Africa to see the road he walked every day in comparison with the one he had walked the day before. Yesterday (and the day before yesterday and the day before that) three of today's spectators had not been present. When he saw how they were looking at him, he understood that they were there for him.

6. Sebastian could still escape—turn off between the colorful small wooden buildings, run through the gardens to the bank, and swim with the logs down the Brusturianska to the Teresva; the Teresva would carry him down to the Tysa, and then after a few days along the Tysa he could reach the Danube, and then turn either towards Vienna or towards the delta—both this way and the other there are countless places to hide for a lifetime. After all, he knew that it is rivers that bind an entire continent best, because all places on the continent are connected by no more than four rivers.

7. Back in Africa Sebastian had on more than one occasion been obliged to cover great distances by means of rivers, not coming out of the water for days at a time. He just took everything that could get wet out of his pockets and placed it inside an aluminum canteen engraved with his name and regiment number and swam in his clothes with the current, pushing ahead of him a few light sticks that he had tied together to hold up his rifle.

Surroundings seen from the level of the water's surface—when your view glides along on a tangent—are no less interesting than those seen from a bird's-eye view. And the sculpture of the riverbed is sometimes even richer. To say nothing of the fact that all the most interesting things in the life of human beings happen on the banks, by the waters of rivers.

The last time he had swum into a strange network of canals with water that was almost hot and had an unearthly abundance of plant life on the bottom, and further on—to the ruins of a submerged fort.

For some reason it was precisely this that he dreamed of most often over the course of his life. Such was his nostalgic Africa. And also—transparent bays, and a lot of turtles swimming.

But at that moment he couldn't swim off anywhere—Anna was waiting for her daddy.

8. In Königsfeld Sebastian could only have tried shooting—if he did it first, he could have hit all three, one after the other, so that they would have fallen together. That was how he'd once shot a blind assassin and his child.

9. Those were the times when a great many armed people could be seen wandering around Ialivets, for they had moved their hunt of one another up into the mountains. It often happened that shots were fired first, and only later was the body turned over to see who had been shot. Sebastian had had to keep his pistol ready and near at hand—under the counter, next to the grapefruits, the frosted-glass jar of cinnamon and the large glass of nut vodka he kept for himself.

10. When the blind man entered the bar with his toddler sitting on his shoulders, no one even suspected that they might be dangerous. Sebastian was brewing coffee with hashish for four Rastafarians, who were playing word games with Anna—Anna named the same item in Ukrainian, Hutsul, Polish, German, Slovakian, Czech, Romanian, Hungarian, and they tried to guess what meant what.

11. Sebastian had begun to think up such linguistic games for Anna after he noticed how easily she understood not only the pictures and habits of animals but also their languages. Her fantastic ear heard in the language of animals more subtleties than there are words in everyday human speech. There had been a time when Anna had gone over almost entirely to non-human language, and Sebastian answered her in kind. But after a time he came to his senses—a little longer and they would no longer have been able to speak to each other. And he had invented so many games that now they spoke about linguistics—often in very complicated speculations—as though about something quite ordinary.

Their word play climaxed with a game in which for every word Anna would have to think up a beautiful sentence in different languages, and from those sentences form a meaningful paragraph. The subject of the paragraph was mainly formed by the temperament and mechanics, the way of thinking of the languages used, or, more rarely, was based on articulation—so that it would be pleasant or sad or funny or scary or however else to recite the paragraph.

12. The Rastafarians were hired killers. But no one was afraid of them, because that was well known. The first hired killers in Ialivets after Shtefan. The Rastafarians had come from Budapest and, on the orders of Nanashka from Szeged, were tracking down and wiping out all the merchants in the mountains—Jews, Czechs, and Ukrainians from the *Maslosoiuz Dairy Cooperative*—who were trying to arrange the purchase and export of cheese horses.

After arriving in Ialivets the Rastafarians entered “What’s There Is There” and stayed for a few months, partly Latin-Americanizing the Carpathian town—they introduced Ialivets to mate, loose, colorful men’s shirts worn over the belt, sung sambas, big knitted berets, and the habits of sleeping in hammocks, putting houseplants out on the front steps in summer, and eating supper on balconies.

They figured they could forego chasing around the mountains after the merchants and instead sit in one place and wait for them all to come of their own accord.

**13.** Sebastian liked best how they could live for days at a time on the bank of the river—they lay about, bathed, gazed at the water and the clouds, smoked, slept, said nothing, ate a string of cheese horses each, drew something with stone on stone, did handstands. Or just drank gin. Like true predators, they soaked up the sun and moved sparingly. Sometimes they took Anna along.

The girl wasn’t bored with them.

**14.** For some reason Sebastian was absolutely unconcerned when Anna went with the Rastafarians. This was so even though normally he tried to shield his daughter from any customers at the bar who paid her any attention. Especially later, when the second one became a teenager and he himself knew several serious people who came to Ialivets to sit in the bar and watch Anna’s hands or lips.

**15.** One of them was an anonymous sculptor.

Fascinated by the art of medieval sculptural ensembles, primitive folk figures, and ancient African statuettes, he made copies of wooden sculptures and sold the forgeries to collectors, sincerely believing that he was fulfilling a sort of mission, that a sufficient number of these figures could change the world for the better. In the Hutsul villages he was not liked, because he tried to buy up all the figures in the churches and cemeteries for huge sums of money. In refusing him the community was fearful that someday he would return and either steal something or burn the whole lot down in despair.

They weren’t far from the truth. In Prague the sculptor had recently been taken to court and given a huge fine for deliberate acts of arson on several small shops selling paper flowers. That was his way of defending true beauty.

Sebastian understood him completely.

The sculptor had already visited several times since the first time he saw Anna. He sat by the bar, drank wine with water, and sketched Anna’s every move. He wanted to publish his own artist’s guide to anatomy, which would differ from all contemporary notions of the structure of the human body.

He said that Anna was a perfect model for the medieval Queens of Sheba, rural tombstone pietas (Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary—mother of Jacob the younger, Joseph, and Salome) and naked Negro queens (but those from Central Africa—slim, tall, with elongated heads, and very supple), all at the same time. For her appearance, her suppleness, her firmness.

**16.** At the same time Anna had a strange sense of faithfulness and devotion and an uncommon ability to dictate her own personal distance, which only she had the power to regulate. It was easy to make friends with her, but to seduce her—impossible.

And so Sebastian didn't even hint that she should be careful with the sculptor or the Rastafarians.

**17.** Incidentally, it was only after Sebastian himself had gone after the night shift to the river with the Rastafarians several times that he became fully aware of how profoundly and sweetly one can do nothing.

**18.** Very soon another of the Rastafarians' amusements that Sebastian was particularly fond of gripped the whole town.

As they crossed the Ialivets market square, the Rastafarians would gather whole pocketfuls of the chestnuts that had fallen in great piles under the trees. And throughout the day they did various pleasant and complicated things with them—threw them onto the roofs (and the chestnuts rolled down the tiles, falling onto the pavement as though from a springboard), tossed them into the drainpipes, juggled with them, rolled them across a table, trying to pass a chestnut to each other between bottles, threw them up as high as the birds, threw them to one another, held a few in each hand and dropped them to float in the canals, put them in the bottom of glasses and then poured gin over them, gave them to strangers and friends, left them behind on the bank of the river, on city benches and swings, on the billiard table.

**19.** During their first week in Ialivets the Rastafarians actually lived on that table. It so happened that in the whole town not a single free room could be found for them. And sleeping somewhere in some corner was not for them.

The Rastafarians paid Sebastian for an hour of billiards but didn't bother to take cues or balls and took off their boots and lay down to rest. One asked if this was okay. Sebastian decided that it was, because they met the two conditions for billiards at the bar—it was paid for and nobody was ruining anything. After the first hour the Rastafarians paid for another two, then for a day, and, finally, for one week in advance.

**20.** They appeared right in the middle of the grass season, and there was a sea of grass all around. The Rastafarians themselves smoked one joint after

another, and also gave them out to all the guests. Some holiday-makers had already become Rastafarians, and the journalists listened for hours to stories about Jamaica. The bar was so smoky that, like it or not even those who didn't smoke had to breathe in the burning hemp and sooner or later got high.

**21.** When Sebastian washed his and Anna's work clothes the water that came out was not dirty but yellow from the cannabinoil sediment that washed out from between the threads.

**22.** Little Anna was also constantly stoned.

(Sebastian recalled this in 1947 when the Chuhaistyr detachment stopped to spend the night at a house near Huta. After supper, thirty partisans started smoking the same cheap tobacco, and in the middle of the night it was discovered that a baby who had been sleeping in the house behind a curtain had died from the smoke.)

At first she was a little afraid—she felt so good that it really seemed as though things would stay that way forever.

**23.** Later Anna smoked often but only in the presence of her father—he didn't want their hemp experiences to be too different.

Once, after smoking hashish, she felt how God stretched out his finger between the clouds; and she raised her own towards the sky, and thus they spent a few silent minutes in infinity, touching the tips of each other's fingers.

However, after a time the times changed and the time of hashish passed.

It's curious, this was much later, when she had grown up and Sebastian would tell her what he felt as he made love to her, Anna would always recall her hemp-filtered perceptions of the whole world.

**24.** When the blind man with the child came into the bar, she wasn't smoking, only playing word games with the Rastafarians and playing reggae on the Jew's harp.

The blind man was dressed in a typical European suit—only Sebastian subconsciously noted several oddly colored patches in various places on his jacket—and sitting on his shoulders was a young child in a stained sweater. The blind man had no eyes, and about the child it was impossible to say whether it was a boy or a girl. They made for the bar, the little one somehow steering the man with its hands. It had to bend down low towards the blind man's head three times before they reached the counter. It bowed down in order to avoid the backs of the chairs that were screwed on to the ceiling by the legs—Sebastian had made things so that all the furniture in the bar, was replicated on the ceiling, exactly as if in a mirror.

25. Not long before it had been different: the whole ceiling had been studded with many different knives—blades pointing downwards and producing strange reflections, shadows, the blade forest created a unique acoustic and added a pleasant feeling of uneasiness. Sebastian took the knives down after a few Boikos who were stealing horses on the Transcarpathian slopes to take to Galicia got drunk, began to argue, and, grabbing one of their colleague by the arms and legs, gave him a swing, and flung him up to the ceiling.

26. The blind man placed his hands on the counter and ordered strong tea with vanilla, spirits, and a few red berries of whatever sort. The child looked round the bar. Sebastian was measuring out the spirits when he suddenly had the feeling something was wrong. Seeing the man's hands and a sort of elusive gesture made by the child for some reason reminded him of one of his games with Anna

27. They started playing it after they'd thought up a new strategy for themselves—more theatricality in their behavior (then they allowed themselves a kind of mimicry that surpassed even a harlequin's). He would stand by the counter; he would put his hands behind his back and push his shoulder blades together so far that from the front only his shoulders could be seen. Anna stood behind him—she couldn't be seen at all—and put her hands out in front of Sebastian; it looked as though a large man had a small child's arms, so well did they synchronize Anna's manipulations and gestures with Sebastian's facial expressions and intonations. The game was called "Two barmen—two hands." It was this very allusion—two people but two hands—that put Sebastian on his guard. The man's hands still lay on the counter.

28. Sebastian turned away and took a couple of steps towards the sideboard to take some cherries from a dish. On the way he even managed to take a sip of the tea (he always tried complicated drinks once they were ready, before giving the glass to the customer), and it tasted good. Suddenly he was seized by the feeling he always had when someone unexpectedly, quickly, and quietly ran up behind him. He really hated this, and at such moments he was at his most dangerous.

Sebastian dropped the tea, turned around, grabbed his pistol (the child's hand was under its sweater) and shot twice. So quickly that the child didn't fall from the man's shoulders but they fell together—just as they'd stood, overturning several baskets of large summer apples and various dried fruits that decorated the bar. Sebastian jumped over the counter and bent down to the child, pulling its hand out from under its sweater (only now did he

realize that the stains were made by fine painter's dyes and fit together in an interesting abstract composition). The little hand gripped the butt of a large pistol.

**29.** From that time on everything that the Rastafarians did was dedicated to Sebastian. They drank only to his health, played with Anna, taught her to lie for long periods of time on the riverbed, looking up through the water (someone even took a photograph of this; when Anna died and Sebastian was searching for her photographs he was sorry that the Rastafarians had not photographed Anna—they definitely would have sent him everything they had), and in every joint they left a few draws.

**30.** As a sign of gratitude, Nanashka from Szeged sent Sebastian a whole menagerie made of cheese. A horse, a ram, a deer, a billy-goat, an ox, an aurochs, and a unicorn, all life-size, were delivered by some rosy-cheeked, big-boned bruisers, glistening with sweat and somewhat on the plump side, who worked for Nanashka as thugs, intimidators, henchmen, and hitmen, and whose job it was to sample every day all the cheeses and bryndzas at the local markets.

Especially for Anna, Nanashka also sent a necklace made of hardened cheese and a few of Franz's sketches, in which you could see how he had tried to master the symbolism of cheese horses.

**31.** When skiers began to disappear and the visiting police commission took an interest in Sebastian (too often the missing skiers were last seen at "What's There is There"), the Rastafarians took it on themselves to track down a band of robbers who had been throwing skiers into a ravine, taking their expensive skis, boots, watches, and cameras, and selling them in tourist trains at stations on the Polish side.

**32.** That day the Rastafarians threw a party especially for Sebastian, Anna, and a few of their friends, renting the whole bar for the entire evening.

One of them performed barman's duties, another cooked a delicious supper, putting a different type of hashish into every dish (sugared hemp flowers and salted seeds were served for desert—that is how Sebastian learned to live on seeds and not necessarily just hemp; he simply collected the seeds of various plants, carried them in the pockets of his leather belt, and nibbled on them on hungry days). Two others led a hired Hutsul band, which was made to play reggae (one day I'll take you to this music, thought Anna about her dad).

At the end the Rastafarians wanted to exchange earrings with Sebastian—and since Sebastian didn't have any earrings, then at least with Anna. For this they had to pierce Anna's ears twice with an arrow from a cross-bow (the Rastafarians didn't sanction the use of fire-arms in their work), and



each of Anna's earrings was divided between two Rastafarians.

**33.** Somehow everybody forgot that the arrow had been smeared with a substance that prevents the blood from clotting. Her earlobes bled and bled. Neither herbs nor *bais* helped. Anna even lost consciousness from the blood loss (later she told them that suddenly all colors began to flash and change—but only the colors of objects, which did not spill out beyond the shapes of the objects themselves, and that this weakness was more pleasant than any strength), until the effects of the substance passed. Sebastian took an interest in the liquid and the Rastafarians gave him a whole bottle of it.

**34.** Sebastian passed the liquid on to the Unsimple for analysis. They may well have used it for other purposes.

An ethnographer from Warsaw was staying in Vorokhta, and having almost solved the mystery of the Unsimple, he was planning to write an article about how these illiterate Hutsul pseudo-sorcerer-charlatans were manipulating Europe and the world through the use of plots. And just then he died in the finest hotel restaurant in Vorokhta, where at one time the young Franzysk, after entire nights spent drawing, used to go for his morning coffee with egg liqueur (the liqueur was in fact alcoholic gogol-mogol, but you could choose the eggs for it yourself: they lay in a large box—different sizes and colors, spotted, monotone, and almost transparent—eggs of all types of mountain birds, gathered among the dwarf mountain pine), which was sometimes finished off late in the evening with mushroom soup, roasted corn on the cob with trout pâté, broad beans in blackthorn sauce, frozen fillet of smooth snake with cranberry paste, and blue ginger vodka—two or three quarts of blue ginger vodka.

**35.** The ethnographer was dining in the company of the stationmaster, a Roman Catholic priest, the manager of a sawmill, and a doctor from the sanatorium. Suddenly he began to sweat. Very soon, instead of sweat drops of blood appeared on his skin. Blood clouded his eyes. He tried to wipe it off with his hand, but merely smudged the neat, red spots. The blood seeped incessantly. Red stains appeared on his spotless white clothes and quickly got bigger, spread towards each other, and merged into one wet redness. No one knew how to help. There was not a single wound on his body, but blood flowed from every pore.

**36.** When the party with the Rastafarians was almost over, Sebastian thought about the infinity of wondrous knick-knacks, objects, music, methods, spices, wines and films which—as you are sharply aware—will never, in your lifetime, situated as it is somewhere between the extremes of cold and heat, become a normal part of everyday life.

**37.** The Rastafarians gave them a very beautiful specimen of an Indian hemp plant in a stone pot, and spent a long time telling them how joyous it would be to live with Anna and start a little plantation from this plant on deserted meadows and mountainsides with maximal exposure to the sun. Because every plant is planted first and foremost for the joy of planting plants.

The next morning Sebastian reminded himself not to forget to ask the Rastafarians how to look after the hemp plant, but it turned out that they'd finally left Ialivets.

**38.** The blind assassin proved useful once again in 1938.

Sebastian didn't know how to take two pistols into Carpatho-Ukraine. He thought for a long time, until he remembered the blind man's child. He took four-year-old Anna (not the same one who'd been in the bar then) up onto his shoulders, hid the pistols on her, and headed for the checkpoint. He was afraid only that the little one, gripped by a childish desire to shoot everything, might pull the gun out from its hiding place.

**39.** For some reason Sebastian believed passionately in the triumph of Carpatho-Ukraine, because the plot seemed to be such a good one.

It was of crucial importance to him that the Ukrainian cause begin in Central Europe itself. Although it's well known how a representative of the field reconnaissance unit of the headquarters of the Carpathian Sich, a pure nationalist who at that time was traveling around Transcarpathia in the bus-bar, reported to Commander Klympush his belief that Sebastian was guided more by the idea of landscapes than the idea of nation.

And maybe that was true, for Sebastian's enthusiasm cooled somewhat when he learned of the government's forestry policy plans and saw how the citizens were making use of autonomy mainly to destroy forests, waterways, and stone formations.

After all, the issues of forest and wood have always been critical in these lands.

**40.** Despite a certain disillusionment (after all, his main quality was contemplativeness—to see everything and know what you see—which leads not to indifference but to the acceptance of everything that occurs), Sebastian hurried to complete the mapping out of all sniper positions necessary to turn the mountains into one enormous fortress.

**41.** At one of these positions—an incredible metal construction somewhat similar to the Eiffel Tower, with a hole-ridden wooden platform at the top and broken stairs and narrow hatches between the different levels—

Sebastian found a bottle of plum brandy, which he drank on the spot. Only after finishing it did he see the barely visible signs that a Hungarian-Polish diversionary group, the sort of which at that time there were many all over Carpatho-Ukraine, must have stopped there before him. The home brew turned out to have been poisoned (Sebastian's consciousness was not yet ready for quite such a trick).

It got worse and worse. That is, Sebastian felt good—he liked fevers—but the strength of his juices had disappeared somewhere, his lungs barely managed to take in and release air, which was of no help. For some reason his arms began to feel as though they had been burned, and they would have hurt dreadfully if not for the fever. He had to replace quickly all the water in his body.

**42.** He made his way further up into the mountains—he didn't want to come home and die in front of the child. And he didn't want to go to hospital. Some time before he had made up his mind—if something happened to him, he wasn't going to call doctors and he wasn't going to lie helplessly at home; instead, like an animal hiding its own death, he would make for the mountains. The mountains would either cure him or quietly swallow him.

**43.** He had already been in hospital once. It was a long time ago, in winter, when he had just begun to make love with the second Anna, back in Ialivets. He had contracted a strange infection after eating part of an apricot left by a guest, a cavalry officer from a foreign legion—an unimaginably stupid coincidence.

He was arrested, so as not to spread the disease, and taken to a closed mountain hospital in salt caves. Oversized white wards, underground and doorless, led into one another via short corridors that were a little lower but just as wide as the rooms. In every ward patients wrapped in some unknown leaves lay directly on top of piles of salt. Treatment consisted of periodic rubbing with extra-thick oil. Moans of pain reverberated (there seemed to be more individual voices than there really were) and echoed through the underground chambers, the extent of which could only be guessed at.

This hospital was one of the innovations of the Czechoslovak ministry of health, aimed at the elimination of Carpathian syphilis and the destruction of other viruses. The patients were held in prison-like isolation, sometimes for as long as they managed to say alive.

**44.** Sebastian could no longer imagine what winter on earth looked like, and the salt stalactite next to him had almost touched the stalagmite, when one day Anna appeared in the ward.

This could mean only one thing—she had also been arrested; yet it meant something different. Loyal Anna, unable to get through to her father

(normally such prohibitions did not affect her, and the guards themselves would show her the way along forbidden paths), had come up with the idea of working in the hospital as a nurse—there was always a lack of people willing to work there.

Every day she came to rub him with oil (“You are my finest cream,” said Sebastian, “It’s you who is mine, and you know why”), and every night—to make love. (“I want to have the same microbes as you do,” Anna insisted, “Anyway, it’s actually a good thing, because we won’t get sick a second time.”) By God’s grace, she didn’t fall ill at all. Soon afterwards Sebastian was let out, and they returned home together.

Winter had not yet passed.

Sebastian didn’t dare tell Anna that there was no such thing as immunity against that disease. But apparently it is dangerous only for those who have been in Africa.

**45.** As a young man in Africa, Sebastian had almost died from the very same illness.

But then it had been even worse—because of the African climate, exotic fungi grew in his lacerations. Nobody knew whether they were the result of airborne spores or whether they were a product of the infected body, but the fungi hurt so badly that Sebastian preferred to cut them off together with patches of skin.

Then he had also been at a sniper’s post. It was a large African city made of clay. He could make just one shot, and he was waiting for his chance in a hot attic where there was only room enough to lie down and cut off more and more rotten skin.

Sebastian kept his eye glued to the optical sight. He saw exactly the same thing that was portrayed on that country’s most expensive postage stamp—countless white cubes of buildings, a few spindle-like spires, gardens and overgrown orchards on the city’s hills, the red clay of the narrow street, coffee brewers on the doorstep of a blue restaurant. His view differed from the philatelic one only due to the presence of flies on his eyes and on both lenses of the sight.

Alongside him lay his beloved African girl. From time to time Sebastian wiped down her sweating body with a wet cloth, and she applied aloe juice to his wounds six times a day.

From then on Sebastian’s only erotic fantasy was love-making soaked in aloe. In Ialivets, however, not a sprig of it was to be found.

**46.** The Annas were never ill.

Once, when they were already in Mokra, the last Anna had wind sickness, if wind sickness can really be called a sickness.

Anna climbed up onto a mountain at the wrong place and didn’t manage to

duck to avoid a bad wind. The wind got into her head and blew out all smells.

Sebastian knew only one cure for such an ailment. He led Anna along a narrow path between two mountains and waited for the draft there to blow the wind out of her head. This is just what happened, but then the draft stayed in Anna and softened her head—so that the shape of her skull could be molded with the hands. “Make it like yours,” Anna said. “I really love your beautiful head.”

Sebastian decided that there was no longer any point in driving out wind with wind—you just end up endlessly exchanging one wind for another (at best you could stop with the one you feel most comfortable with). However, wind can also be frozen out.

On the feast of Jordan they bathed together in the Mokrianka, holding their heads underwater for as long as possible. A Soviet militiaman arrested Sebastian, and naked Anna ran home through the whole village. The militiaman wanted to hold Sebastian for at least a few days for performing pagan rituals during religious holidays, but in the end he gave him a bottle of arnica in alcohol and sent him away to rub it on his daughter. “I have children too,” the militiaman said.

47. Poisoned by the diversionists’ home brew, Sebastian didn’t go to Anna but crawled higher into the mountains.

He knew of a spring where he could replenish all the water in his body. He stopped often to tighten the bandages on his burned hands, which kept slipping off as he crawled. Even more often he passed out for several minutes. Then he had the worst hallucinations possible—that he was stuck in a narrow crevice and couldn’t pull himself through to Anna, who was balancing on a ladder flung across a chasm.

When he reached the spring it was already nighttime. He took a drink, wet his hands, and dozed off. After a while he awoke and once again put his hands into the stream, but he couldn’t feel the water. Yet someone gave a deathly cry. Sebastian realized he wasn’t washing himself but the burnt hands of a woman who had crawled to the spring too and slept alongside him in the dark (something similar, though not very, had happened to him already: He and Anna, when spending the night amongst other people, would resort to an inconspicuous method—under the duvet he would put his finger into Anna. Once they had been sleeping in such cramped conditions that waking up in the middle of the night Sebastian had pulled his finger out not from Anna but from a Hutsul woman who lay on his left. And Anna was sleeping soundly, lying with her back to him, to his right—Sebastian had not noticed when they’d fallen asleep, Anna had turned away, and he had unwittingly placed his released finger somewhere else).

**48.** By March 1939 his hands had still not healed completely yet every second day Sebastian sent a telegram to Klympush's headquarters, urging that troops be sent to the sniper stronghold he prepared.

Nobody listened to him, and all was lost (almost the same as happened in Lviv because of the balconies).

The Carpathian Sich faced open battle.

This was the unnoticed first act of the Second World War.

But four thousand versus forty. Blood flooded the Tysa.

(A fraction of the Sich fighters got out to Romania, but before long the Romanians gave them all up to the Hungarians, and the Hungarians gave the Galicians to the Poles.)

Sebastian understood that this time someone had thought up a plot that was better than his.

**49.** But Sebastian believed firmly in the force of his own presence. He knew that there could be nothing bad wherever he might be, because he felt good everywhere.

You have to love places genuinely, so that they will love you.

For this reason, after the massacre at Krasne Pole, he took his rifle and settled down in a comfortable position near Trebusha. One exceptional marksman can change several plots, especially if that marksman is the last one.

**50.** He waited, crouched behind a small rampart near Trebusha, and waited for the enemy troops (Franzysk had been right: the most radical thing is to wait).

That's the way things happen, thought Sebastian. I wanted to be the most outstanding. Franz also tried to be the most outstanding, and what came of it—he stopped making films (because he was always aiming to make the film of films) and let them chop off his head. Franz really could have been outstanding. But if you're outstanding in everything but not in some one thing you're not—then you're already not the most outstanding. And anyway, for everyone who is most outstanding there will always be someone even more outstanding. That's what happened with Franzysk, that's what happened with Nanashka from Szegeed, that's what happened to Klympush. And that's what could happen to him.

**51.** When the nearly hundred-year reign of Nanashka collapsed, the bar was often broken into by the new boss's bruisers, who stomped around the mountains covered in rifles and powder-horns, imposing their own order.

These were times when Sebastian found himself amazed every night by some new madness, although the previous night he'd always been sure that nothing could surprise him anymore.

Sometimes the thugs would cause him problems, but what could he do, since he called himself the bar-keeper.

Then in his mind he recalled all his boyhood heroisms.

**52.** He didn't doubt that in their boyhood men do their finest deeds. It's just a shame that afterwards nobody knows about them; it's a shame that boyhood feats don't count.

Sebastian, for example, was the best at jumping off roofs onto the tops of trees—he would fly straight into the leaves without looking. His own body would tear a passage through the leaves and then, already in the midst of the thick foliage, he would grab an oncoming branch and instantly swing himself up onto the next one.

**53.** True, there were some childhood adventures that were similar to those involving the bruisers.

After such incidents he would replay hundreds of times in his own mind his own, invented, successful version of the events, until he made himself believe that it really could have happened only like that way.

Such stories were created literally once and for all. Apparently, a variant of a *bai*.

**54.** Crouching in the trench near Trebusha, Sebastian imagined how fine things could be in this little Carpathia, which he, making use of universal chaos, would be able to defend by himself.

He dreamed up a beautiful land around Ialivets, in which there would be no rubbish, everybody would know everyone else's language, and the supreme institution would be the bureau of scripts, where everyone would be able to submit something genuinely interesting, and the government would act on the basis of these plots.

Everything is ruined by would.

**55.** In March it gets dark early.

Lost in thought, Sebastian barely noticed the detachment of riders in strange uniforms, armed with long rifles. They were headed for Trebusha.

He took off his gloves, laid out a row of bullets by his hand, and pressed his eye to the sight. The riders were speaking to one another (judging by their lips—in Hungarian), and looking at a map (the gothic script looked as though the First World War had never happened). On their uniforms one could make out the badge of the forest guard.

Sebastian took his rifle between his legs, covered it over with a rag, put the bullets into one pocket, his gloves into the other and crawled along the trench on his knees until he reached a large pile of stones. Then he ran

through the forest to the road and ran for four hours without stopping until he reached old Beda's armored car, hidden away in a ravine.

**56.** The armored car nearly hung over a steep drop, secured by a cable to a thick beech tree. The top hatch was open, and warm air coming from inside vibrated above the opening.

Inside the vehicle it really was warm. Old Beda was making wine and telling little Anna about Francis of Assisi and Franzysk Petrosky. Anna brightened her stay in the car with large paintings on the white walls (Sebastian had once drawn something similar on her mother's hands) and unremitting misuse of the verb "is."

Wasting no time, Sebastian and Beda drank some wine and drove all the way to Kvasy, where the bus-bar was.

Sebastian admitted defeat in his imaginary war.

**57.** They could hear the bus-bar before they saw it. And then they saw, fairly high up in the sky, a secret sign—six bank swallows, four golden orioles, and one kingfisher. All the birds were flying backwards—forwards one past another but without flying beyond the bounds of a certain hemisphere, like the beams of many searchlights pointed at the cloudy sky above a darkened city. They were held by strong lines that converged somewhere behind a tall hayrick, in which there was almost no hay left after the winter.

Six four one, said Sebastian.

Beda opened a thick notebook and read out—six four one. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it happens; in it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value; if there is any value, it must lie outside of all that happens and exists. For all that happens and exists is accidental. This meant that everything was okay, and they could safely approach the bus, which stood in a hiding place behind the almost empty hayrick, in the very place where the lines attached to the birds converged. And they were attached to the handle of the bus's front door.

**58.** The all-clear signal had been given by the ornithologist who had once ringed birds in Chornohora, Hryniava, and on the edge of the Hutsul world—in the Tsibo mountains—and who had known Franzysk.

Ornithology had slowly transformed into ornithophilia—he had learned to make love with all birds that laid at least slightly larger eggs. They made love on the highest peaks, where the sky itself spins all around and the entire earth is reduced to an immovable base for feet. The birds gave themselves to him silently, only throwing their heads back and opening their beaks wide, struggling to keep quiet, lest their males should hear them. The latter hated the ornithologist that loved birds—the ornithologist was always



surrounded by an agitated flock of male birds screeching in inhuman voices. The lovers of my lovers, the ornithologist called them ironically. Later ornithophilia faded, and philosophy took its place. To be more precise—one tract by Wittgenstein. The one-time ornithologist knew it by heart and would always ponder which proposition it was appropriate to quote in a given situation.

**59.** Therefore, when the ornithologist was being asked to watch the bar while Sebastian fought against the occupying forces, he warned him that on his return the necessary signals would be given via the birds and Wittgenstein. To ensure the signals could be decoded, he gave old Beda a notebook with a handwritten transcription of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. For example, the sentence “Each item can be the case or not the case while everything else remains the same” would be conveyed by one bird of one type, two of another, and one of yet another (one two one). What such a sentence was supposed to signify was up to Sebastian to decide. In any case, Sebastian’s conclusion that six four one meant everything was okay turned out to be correct.

**60.** The ornithophile was probably the most loyal customer at Sebastian’s bar. Though over the five years of the war the bus had seen thousands of the most diverse clients. Among them were a few hundred regulars. The bar functioned very simply. Sebastian drove the bus until someone stopped him. The customer stepped into the bar and they drove on. If the customer didn’t want to go anywhere, Sebastian pulled over to the side of the road and for a while the bar operated in one place. Some clients could travel for weeks in the bar without any aim whatsoever. Some went too far, and Sebastian would have to turn back. Sometimes the bar would stop for a long time in some village or other. Occasionally they would have to pack up unexpectedly and hurry off somewhere. One could request the bar arrive at a certain time. And so on, and so on.

**61.** Sebastian managed to drive the bus, serve his customers, and bring up Anna. Before each town he would stop and walk to it by himself, so as to—an old sniper’s habit—scout out the terrain in advance. On top of that he had to listen to various stories, in order somewhere to tell somebody something from someone. This oral postal service tired Sebastian out so much that he could no longer remember what had happened where, when, and with whom. He was traveling in an epos that had nothing to do with him.

**62.** The only conversations he took part in with his customers in full consciousness were mutual confessions of a certain sort, devoid of refined stylistics but extraordinarily rich in plot—who loves or doesn't love what, what someone likes or doesn't like, what someone finds tasty or not. Sebastian considered such conversations the basic catechism, the compulsory first level, of any coexistence. And so, on meeting any of his guests a second time, he knew just what the guest was accustomed to and what to suggest he try.

**63.** The bar was most popular in the distant villages where few people lived and very little happened. In such villages each inhabitant had at his disposal only a few stories of his own. He retold each of them countless times to everybody he knew, just as they related their own few stories. Thus there were only a couple of plots that were hard to distinguish between experienced or heard. The arrival of the bus with its strangers presented an opportunity to connect with something different. And to tell anew your own, which, wrenched from the enchanted circle of listeners, again gathered weight.

**64.** Sometimes interesting things happened when friends got together with their friends and talked about friends and told stories about friends of friends heard from friends. It frequently happened that someone would hear a bizarre story from a stranger that turned out to be about him. Or: at one table the conversation would often be about someone who, unbeknownst to the speakers, was sitting at the next.

**65.** At one time this was constantly the case with Severyn. Everyone talked about how he had taken some foreign tourists into the mountains to some weird mushrooms, how the tourists had gone crazy and Severyn had gone blind but had nevertheless led the tourists back to safety. This story was retold again and again in various forms. Nobody knew that Severyn was living with Sebastian then and spent the whole time in the bus. A good thing he couldn't hear all these fables, since he had stopped up his ears and nose with cotton wool soaked in gin to finally dissolve the tumor in his brain that he had refused to allow the younger Mlynarsky to cut out. Many legends of all sorts about himself were also heard by the ornithologist, who was considered in the bar to be a wandering philosopher—and with time he, retelling the tractatus over and over, stopped mentioning Wittgenstein.

66. Even odder than the ornithophile was, perhaps, the Pope's daughter. Nobody could know if that was true or not but she certainly said it was true. And, in any case, nobody had any intention of contradicting her—everyone was glad to see the impossible.

The Pope's daughter wrote drunken plays. At least, that's what she called her method of writing.

Somehow she got fed up with coming to terms with the fact that the most interesting things happened when she was drunk—the most important stories, the wittiest jokes, the most aphoristic thoughts, the most original ideas, the most paradoxical solutions to the most painful problems. And the tragic thing was—she felt—that a moment later you can't remember a thing. So the Pope's daughter started getting drunk with a pencil in her hand, and writing down every word she said and heard. The dynamics of her plays depended largely on what she drank. Sometimes near the end the actors spoke completely incomprehensible things. And not just that—the Pope's daughter tried yet another experiment: her stage directions indicated exactly the quantity and kind of drink involved, and the author insisted that the actors drink this on stage during the course of the play. It's no wonder this led to some interesting improvisations that took the action to unexpected lengths. Sebastian's bus was for several years her creative laboratory, study, studio, and home.

67. In 1942 the Pope's daughter decided to write a play about Gypsy children who ran away from a camp, and the Hungarian gendarmes who were trying to find them. The gendarmes come to the conclusion that the children can best be tracked down by a child, who can imagine how the children think and behave, and they call on the help of a girl-detective. The little girl finds the Gypsy children, but with some difficulty—at issue is the otherness of different cultures and civilizations (in reality the children were met by old Beda, who ferried them around in his armored car until the end of the war).

Eight-year-old Anna was required in order to study the language of children. The Pope's daughter gave her deceptively sweet young wine to drink.

When Anna had slept it off and sobered up, she told her father about the grafting of apple trees, pears, peaches, and cherries in such a way that Sebastian became convinced she had been inside the trees and had swum in the sap in their tubules.

68. From that time on the Unsimple occasionally gave Sebastian cigarettes that couldn't be smoked down.

On the inside of the cigarette paper the Unsimple drew plans that Anna was to use to find one or another tree and graft certain cuttings onto them.

They drove to the indicated places in the bar.

**69.** In general, traveling by bus was very pleasant. It allowed for good drinking and pleasant talking, there was a great view, and somehow you avoided all perils—either you got there early or were fortuitously late.

It wasn't much of a problem that they often didn't have enough food, that in winter they got stuck in snowdrifts, their hands became raw from washing dishes in icy water, and they had to pee straight into the snow outside the door, and that in summer it got so hot that they had to keep wetting their clothes in a tub of rain water and that at night, when it got cooler, it seemed that it was constantly raining outside because of the swarms of insects on the windows and that they had to serve free drinks to the police and officers.

**70.** In the autumn of 1944 the bus had to be abandoned in Krasnisora. That very day Sebastian and Anna hitched a ride to Königsfeld—villagers who went to Teresva to get bicycles left there by the Germans took them on the handlebars

**71.** Sebastian could easily have beaten up those three who were in front of the cobbler's workshop in Königsfeld even without a weapon. Without even a stick (and he could easily have come by a stick, because the trees were saturated with water and had become soft—it was a time when water and greenery had triumphed everywhere). Back in the army Sebastian had learned to maim an opponent with his bare hands. And in Africa he had taken part in some pretty theatrical contests—fighting with warriors armed with knives, awls, razors, or knuckledusters (“It’s a good thing I have had Africa,” thought Sebastian. “It’s always possible to explain the origins of many personal characteristics”).

**72.** He approached the three and could vividly see the throat cartilages of the first crushed by a short, straight blow from his straightened fingers, the blood vessels on the temple of the second shattered by an open-handed blow from the left, and the knee and jaw of the third dislocated by his right heel and his right elbow, respectively.

But he had no right to fight.

**73.** To fight meant to kill; to kill means to run away and spend your whole life hiding. At home Anna was waiting.

Sebastian approached them first, remembering that first and foremost he must always remember to protect life, and he just managed to greet them before they jumped him (presenting their throats, cheekbones, knees, jaws, and solar plexuses in a most inviting way), tied him up, threw him into the trunk of a Studebaker, and drove off in the direction from which Sebastian had just come.

**74. What could they beat out of him under interrogation?**

At interrogations they ask about secrets, not guilt.

Guilt (husband of a Sich riflewoman, sergeant in a foreign legion, participation in colonial wars, brother-in-law of a famous decadent, Greek-Catholic, Ukrainian, contact with nationalists, Zionists, anti-Semites, white and black racists, anarchists, Trotskyites, monarchists, foreign journalists, boy scouts, monks, officers, government ministers, members of parliament, diplomats, ornithophiles, drug-addicts, relatives of highly placed Vatican officials, hired killers, the murder of three hired killers (one juvenile), sniper, unregistered firearms, banned books, hashish, daughter as second wife, pedophilia, petty entrepreneurship, private property, illegal crossing of borders, witchcraft, local inhabitant, presence in occupied territory, participation in the events in Transcarpathia in 1938–1938, espionage, sabotage, passport violations, supporting the nationalist underground, living in a border zone, unlicensed psychotherapy, Freudianism, Morganism-Weissmanism, Nietzscheanism, Wittgensteinization, departure from the principles of socialist realism in narrative, fault-finding, sympathies with the West, pacifism, half-Lemko, resisting representatives of authority, non-participation in elections to the Supreme Soviet, avoidance of the all-Union census, deliberate unemployment, common drunkenness, illegal income, harboring criminals, observes poorly, listens carefully, remembers a lot, talks too much) doesn't interest them, because it's not a secret.

Live without secrets, said Franzysk.

He doesn't know any secrets.

What does he know?

He knows thousands of places and words.

What does he remember?

He remembers thousands of places and words.

What does he forget?

He forgets thousands of places and words.

What does he recall?

He recalls thousands of places and words.

What does he make up?

He makes up thousands of places and words.

What does he speak of?

He speaks of thousands of places and words.

What does he learn?

He learns thousands of places and words.

What does he love?

He loves thousands of places and words.

What does he choose?

He chooses thousands of places and words.

What does he not choose?

He doesn't choose thousands of places and words.

What can he do?

He can see, know, love, remember, forget, recall, make up, tell, choose, not choose thousands of places and words.

What does he do?

Loves, sees, learns, knows, remembers, tells, forgets, recalls, chooses, makes up, doesn't choose thousands of places and words.

What does he want?

To see, to learn, to know, to love, to remember, to forget, to tell, to recall, to do, to make up, to choose, to not choose thousands of places and words.

What might he do?

See, learn, love, know, make up, not choose, forget, recall, choose, remember, tell, do, want thousands of places and words.

What then is the secret?

How and for what he sees, loves, remembers, tells, knows, wants, might do, can do, does do, forgets, doesn't choose, recalls, makes up, chooses thousands of places and words.

How and for what are there thousands of places and words that are seen, learned, known, remembered, forgotten, recalled, chosen, loved, wanted, might be done, can be done, not chosen.

And that's already not his secret.

He can go to the interrogation confidently. Although, if you don't know at least one secret, pain can't be avoided; but there's no need to bear it—somehow it will pass on its own.

**75.** On the way Sebastian pressed his neck arteries in order to sleep a little before the interrogation. To sleep is to prolong time by half a lifetime. They barely managed to wake him for the interrogation.

**76.** First they offered him a cigarette. He took three or four cigarettes from a full pack of lend-lease Camels.

You have to think of the cigarettes you'll need later even when they've appeared at the present moment only by some miracle; cigarettes are the best proof that everything is coming to an end (Sebastian knew one staunch fascist who had handed himself over to the Americans because in their camps they gave out cigarettes every day).

**77.** Then they introduced themselves, called themselves folklorists, told Sebastian to prepare himself for a lengthy talk, and appealed to him to be honest.

Sebastian decided not to mention a word about how he had been hurrying to Anna. That might make them want to hold him for as long as possible.

And as for honesty, he knew one pretty good tactic. In *bai* just as in love-making, everything depends on rhythm. If you set a false rhythm, what kind of honesty can there be. Well-composed sentences will lead to nothing. He decided to try the following pattern—six short, one long, one very short going from the bottom upwards, one very long turning into a spiral, and two short unfinished to the right.

Sebastian was so focused in his mind that he heard his own voice before he even started to speak. And he liked that voice.

After all, it had yet to happen that he didn't get the better of someone in a discussion.

**78.** For some reason Sebastian recalled a story one of the Rastafarians had told, about how Szeged Nanashka had kept a private little prison in Szeged, where chance passers-by were imprisoned in order to tell Nanashka all kinds of stories.

**79.** When Sebastian was released after a couple of hours and he was once again on his way to Mokra via Königsfeld, hurrying to Anna, he couldn't at all understand why everything had gone so easily and painlessly. Was it because he'd told the folklorists straight away where to look for Dovbush's treasure ("Where valuables are involved, it's better to come clean before the torture starts," he had taught Anna), or because he had been right that endeavoring to reach understanding in different languages is in fact the peak of existence. Although it could have been even simpler: either these people really were folklorists, or the false rhythm had helped. Both were possible.

**80.** He didn't reach home until the next morning.

Anna slept late into the day, as she'd fallen asleep just before he'd arrived home. Sebastian didn't even take her boots off, so as not to wake her; he sat beside her and waited as she slept so beautifully.

The cheese had begun to stink so he fried it with caraway seeds while she heated yesterday's soup on some soft wet branches: soak bread, onion, wood sorrel, and tree-dried cherries in plum brandy, boil in water with sour cream, add oil, salt, and paprika, serve in bowls—to each portion add a spoonful of vodka and eat while still very hot (on top of all the necessary ingredients Anna dunked all of the fried cheese into the soup).

Then Sebastian said how he had never heard of anything so strange.

## IF ACCORDING TO THE MAP (LEGEND)

The brilliant historical essay written in Paris in 1976 by Anna Sebastiani about the psychology of Christian martyrdom, “Irrational coherence is total,” has the following lyrical epigraph: “That the saints went through this you will know after a century has passed. Todiaska, 1951.”

In all likelihood this phrase is autobiographical and relates to Anna’s meeting with the future martyrs of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic underground church on Todiaska mountain. Judging by time and place, that happened during Anna and Sebastian’s journey from Mokra to Ialivets.

If this is really the case, then their journey most likely followed the route: Deutsche Mokra — Ruska Mokra — Königsfeld — Svydova — Berliaska — Pidpula — Todiaska — Blyznytsia (the last five are mountains of the Svydovets ridge) — Kvasy — Menchil — Sheshul — Ialivets.



## SEVEN

1. It was so cold you couldn't even take off your sheepskin.
2. Sitting on the stone floor of the empty room, they made love so simply that Anna felt as though she'd disintegrated into many parts, each of which was making love to Sebastian.
3. And he felt that he'd learnt to fly, although he understood that this was because he was in Ialivets.
4. The cold could not penetrate into the open gaps in their clothing, because it was met by a surging heat with the distinctive flavor of scent-hallucination.
5. The main thing is not to be in a hurry to leave when nothing is holding you and there is time to talk.
6. If so, you are so big and yet really so small.
7. There's so much and so little of you.
8. That's good for the world, and the world also is good.
9. Although inside you the world is better than outside you.
10. The thing I want most is to touch my pregnant stomach together with you.
11. If you ever have another man, he will die because he has too beautiful a woman.
12. Don't talk to me in such intonations—that's how they talk when the way is closed, when you can't get what you want.
13. I'm beautiful when you tell me about it.
14. Anna dozed off, sitting on Sebastian and resting her forehead on his shoulder, and he had to keep sitting like that even though he dearly wanted to stretch out and lie down.
15. Just as with the previous Annas so with this one it was always like the first time in the world.

**16.** Later old Beda came for Anna. Nothing had happened to the Unsimple. Plots cannot end. They had decided to go somewhere far, far away, and were waiting for her in the armored car. Anna became terribly sad. Sebastian said he wouldn't give her away to anyone. She drank a lot of gin and began to cry. Beda came back again. Sebastian chased him away and threw a grenade through the window. Anna got drunk and began to think aloud about their family. Sebastian understood for the first time that she saw everything differently than he did. She cried and tried to kiss his hands. He wouldn't let her, she stopped crying and calmly asked permission to kiss each hand once. Sebastian allowed it, and she did what she wanted. The second she kissed for a very long time. He had to take his hand away to throw another grenade. Anna said he was doing too much for her. And went to the door. Sebastian couldn't understand this. Remember, we talked about this? She turned round, but didn't stop—and went out backwards. Sebastian made such a gesture that Anna, when she was already by the armored car, couldn't resist and tried to do the same herself, as though she'd become Sebastian's biographer. What could her father be doing at this moment? Searching for interesting things is the most human of all traits, her father had said. Thus Sebastian had said what Franz said.

**17.** Sebastian could neither sit nor walk nor stand nor lie down.

**18.** The depths of his lungs were empty.

**19.** Three thousand times he thought the word Anna.

**20.** Not until evening was he able to do anything. And it was four things at once.

**21.** He pissed in the snow.

**22.** He examined a tree in which there were some birds that looked, like overripe fruit.

**23.** He explored the roof of his mouth with the tip of his tongue, and it felt strange from the cold.

**24.** And he prayed for the souls of the dead for whom nobody else could pray—for Franz, Lukach, old Beda, the French engineer, Loci, the Rastafarians, the blind assassin, his child, the ornithologist, Shtefan, Nanashka, deputy Stefanyk, deputy Lahodynsky, the painter Trush, the painter Perfetsky, the survival instructor, the Bosnian captain, Second-

Lieutenant Pelensky, Captain Didushko, Captain Bukshovany, Colonel Kolodzynsky, General Tarnavsky, his African women, Severyn, the younger Mlynarsky, the Pope's daughter, Brehm, Wittgenstein, the Gypsy trumpeters, Anna, Anna, and Anna.

25. On the apple trees in the old city gardens were a great many apples. Nobody had gathered them and nobody would. From his pocket he pulled out an apple he had picked the day before. He took a bite and found one of Anna's long hairs in his mouth.

26. I love her, and not myself, and she is, always is somewhere, just as beautiful. It's good to have somebody at least somewhere. If only to have somebody to whom to tell the story of the day, which is worth living through for this very reason.

27. In the next world those who feel most at home are not soldiers or doctors, not builders or gardeners, but tellers of stories, *baimakers*.

28. From the highest of the trees that Sebastian had planted in 1914 the magpies took flight and flew into the shadows of Petros.

29. Sebastian counted—seven.

30. In the ornithologist's notebook, seven—Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

31. Of all the proofs of God's existence, this can be considered the best.

*Translated by Uilleam Blacker*

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