

Heiress of the Elder Zosima

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and with his commentary**

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*When one who always knew
the Will of God leaves this world —
what remains after?
Who inherits his Wisdom and Love?
Who takes upon himself the work of
serving God and people?
Are there any heirs?*

From the journal of fr. Alexander

Here is the story of the life of Zosia, a disciple of the elder Zosima, told by the Divine Teacher Ngomo. The story is filled with the knowledge that was received from the elder Zosima by Zosia herself and the novice Nicholas, who later, as a monk, was called fr. Alexander.

Included in this narration are excerpts from journal entries of fr. Alexander, conversations of Zosia with Zosima, and notes from the elder's notebook, which was presented by fr. Alexander to Zosia before leaving for the capital to study medicine.

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Departure to the Capital

The ringing of the bell informed the believers that the service had begun. Reverberations of beautiful sounds poured over the river and over a small district town and dissolved somewhere in the distant sky... But the *toll* did not subside...

Even when the sound of the bell melted away in the silence, the *good news* that there is God, that He is here now, and that His Love calls upon every person on the Earth to love — continued and continues to sound!

Only not everyone hears...

Zosia stood on a high hill above the river and listened to the *song* of the bell. She habitually plunged into the silence: into that cordial silence and warmth that connect the human world and the Peace of God.

The elder Zosima had managed to teach her a lot...

She recently decided to go to the capital to apply to an institute there in order to learn to become a doctor of medicine. Recently in St. Petersburg, the Women's Medical Institute was opened and this gave an opportunity for women to get a doctor of medicine diploma.

This decision was not easy for her. A year ago, her father died. He was *Dr. Fyodor*, as all the inhabitants of the town, without exception, called him. And there was no one who had not heard about him, the

amazing doctor who for many years ran a free hospital.

Her mother, Nadezhda, had difficulty, agreeing with her daughter's decision, but, in the end, she decided to release her beloved Zosia, though Nadezhda couldn't imagine how she could live without every day seeing her daughter's face, shining with affection and joy. She agreed despite the fact that now all the difficulties in organizing the work of the hospital fell on her fragile shoulders.

* * *

Zosia went to the monastery, to fr. Alexander, to inform him of her decision and to say goodbye. Fr. Alexander, who was formerly called Nicholas in the world, was a disciple of the elder Zosima.

The service in the temple ended and the people began to disperse.

Zosia watched the faces of the people with interest.

Here — a man shines with joy, his eyes shine, his heart is full — that means the touch of the Lord to the soul has happened!

Here — some talkers go, preoccupied, first of all, about the subjects of food and clothes. It is evident that the empty thoughts, which have accumulated and overwhelmed their minds, were restrained only slightly during the service.

Here — officials in uniforms and prosperous townspeople in black frock coats walk, talking about politics.

Here — beggars near the temple count the pennies donated to them...

Many people greeted Zosia. She used to be a frequent guest in the cell of the elder Zosima, and later she often visited fr. Alexander as well. And many people communicated with her in the hospital where Zosia spent most of her time working.

“Health to you, Zosia! And may your mother also be healthy!” — greetings sounded. Zosia answered, trying to bestow warmth and attention to everyone. She had already become accustomed to such respectful treatment from her days of working in the hospital.

The temple was empty. Zosia stood alone for a long time asking God to bless her decision and also asking Him to support her mother. She was waiting to feel the answer of God with her heart, trying to determine: does He approve this?...

She then entered the small cell where the elder Zosima once lived and received visitors and where fr. Alexander now worked the same way, by the grace of God.

This disciple of the elder Zosima was not yet old: gray hair had just slightly silvered his temples, and gray hair was also visible in his neatly trimmed beard. He was taut, broad-shouldered, and his appearance was very surprising for visitors who came to him for advice and healing. His eyes and smile over the past years had become quite the same as elder Zosima’s: especially deep, transparent to the Light of God, and infinitely kind.

Fr. Alexander met Zosia with the words:

“Well, Zosia, have you decided to go to learn?”

“Yes, I have decided!”

“You made the right choice! Do not be afraid: you will succeed!”

“Yes, I’m only slightly afraid for my mother: it’s hard for her without my father, and there’s a lot to do in the hospital...”

“Such tasks will help her not to grieve over the sorrows of the earth! Let her come to me more often, I will be glad to help!”

... Zosia and fr. Alexander talked about many things. Ever since childhood, he was her friend and spiritual mentor.

“I don’t know how I will cope without your advice...”

“With God’s help!” — fr. Alexander answered.

Then, smiling mysteriously, he handed Zosia two notebooks. One of them was thin with a heavily worn cover. Zosia knew that these were the journal entries of the elder Zosima. And she saw a second, very solid little notebook for the first time.

“This is my journal entries, Zosia. Everything that I remembered about Zosima, I wrote here. Some thoughts about the Path to the Lord were also recorded. I would like you to hold on to them. And I will start a new notebook.”

“Or maybe we should publish all this as a book? During my space time, I will sit down and type it on a typewriter. And, afterwards, maybe I can take it to a publishing house in the capital?”

“Typing it would be beneficial! However, maybe not everything should be published. It would be best to choose the main things that people need to know. Zosima has not yet blessed us to publish a book, but he said that such a time would come. And he did, in fact, bless me to give you these diaries!

“The elder Zosima once asked me if I would like to live in the world like how a monk lives before God,

thereby giving an example of a pure life to all worldly people?

“Back then, I answered that I wanted to stay in the monastery. I didn’t even think, didn’t imagine that such a life was possible in the world! But now, I know that this is possible! And, moreover, it is very necessary for people to have such examples next to themselves in everyday life. But for this one needs to be able:

- to love people, but without clinging to them,
- to not force people to kindness, but to teach this by one’s own example, by one’s love, by one’s whole life,
- to speak the Word of God in time, while allowing each person to make his or her own choice,
- to not drag people along, and to not force them to be righteous, but to deeply understand everyone and explain things to him or her in ways that are in accordance with that person’s mind. Then it will become clear how to help the person whom God has put for a long time in your life next to you — or whom He has allowed to be together with you for a short meeting.

“You, Zosia, are now able to realize this dream of Zosima: to live in the world — but being with God in every moment!”

Zosia raised her eyes to fr. Alexander.

He rejoiced at her clear, clean gaze and the radiant and warm light in her spiritual heart. It is rare to see a soul that shines with such sincerity and purity! Even in one’s gaze such qualities are reflected!

Zosia said:

“You say: ‘to be with God in every moment!’ But it still does not work out for me... Is it possible?

“Nevertheless, I will try not to lose the warmth of the heart!”

*** * ***

The wheels of the train gently tapped along, taking Zosia to the capital.

She sat for a long time at the window, behind which, alternating pictures of the awakening spring beauty floated.

The remaining seats in the compartment were free, Zosia was riding alone. Apparently, there would be more passengers later.

Zosia carefully took out the notebooks which had been presented to her. She opened the journal entries of fr. Alexander, which had never been read by her.

From the Journal of fr. Alexander:

I am starting these writings, apparently, too late...

A year has already passed since the day when the elder Zosima left his body...

And now, I realize that if I do not write down the elder's words, then they will be lost. I refer to the invaluable knowledge that he told me and to what I had seen and heard during the seven years of training by him, and what I can testify to...

Over the years that I was a disciple of the elder Zosima, I saw many miraculous healings, but the transfiguration of human souls was even more miraculous. Each of his conversations healed, first of

all, the souls. And it gave hope for further life, and the fear of the death of the body was cast out...

But how to put all this into words?...

I now cannot write down everything in the exact sequence of those many days that I spent next to the elder Zosima. Therefore, I will begin to write down that which is vividly recalled at this moment. I will begin to spell out his words about love for God, because they live in me — as an unshakable support:

“Let God be all that you have! Do not desire anything but the closeness of God!

“Happiness will not be taken away from you when you are cognizing with your love — the Love of God!

“Do not wish to be praised for your zeal, do not wish for thanks from those whom you helped!

“Rejoice in God! Rejoice every day, every hour, every moment!”

“But how can I learn to live in this joy? Sometimes, this joy is with me; and other times, it is not... What should I do?”

“All this is simple! Look for it in the spiritual heart! This joy appears in your heart when you invite God there and let Him be there!

“Your body is like a vessel for the life of God! God has breathed this Life-Giving Radiance into you and others!

“If a person does not know about it, then he or she neglects the purity of the soul! And such a person’s thoughts will be gloomy, self-derogatory, or self-praising! And, because of this, a person’s life can become unrighteous.

“But by attention and respect for the purity of the soul — this Light of God, like in a lamp, can be maintained.

“There are a lot of written tips on how to ignite this Light and keep it... But, until you yourself start your vigil, all of such words will be empty!

“It took me many years to make Unity in the Spirit permanent.

“One’s body may be busy with various tasks, or the small mind of man can be loaded with labor — but, nevertheless, let the heart continue to soar in the Divine Light, like a bird!

“And then the soul becomes inseparable from God!

“And — like sunshine — God’s Love pours, no matter what the body does!

“How then, you ask, to cognize this Grace of God in the heart and not to lose it?

“The first concern should be to always try to feel the Response of God.

“To your love which is turned to God, to your thoughts which are directed towards Him — God’s Answers come! But man will notice these Responses only when — in the stillness of the heart — the attention of the soul is directed only to God.

“From this, begins the experience of understanding the reality of the existence of Living God. And the sensation of the Presence of God comes!

“Even just believing in God is good... But the experience of Contact of the soul with God — reveals to man the Life-Giving Light, Which will nourish the soul!

“For some, this can happen during Communion... For some — in different ways...

“Before — a person was as if in a dream, and his or her faith was not alive, but existed only “by the rules” ...

“But when the Response of God is known, then the soul comes to real life! God touched the soul with His Breath — and the human soul awoke! And then a person saw that God is the Living God!

“The soul resurrects due to the Contact with the Spirit of God!

“If the delight of Touching Living God suddenly seems commonplace to you, fear then the cooling down of your heart love!

“The happiness from the Touch of God to the soul is always new! This is the Great Miracle! It is as if a door to Heavenly Life is opened for a while for the soul!

“If you suddenly get bored, it means that the main thing that makes you — as a soul — alive, has been lost! And then such a state of yours will not elevate you to Oneness with the Holy Spirit and with the Heavenly Father!

“And the second concern should be to learn how to maintain this awareness of life in the Holy Spirit.

“Yes, it is possible to make the Flame of Love unquenchable in the spiritual heart!

“This is easy when you shine for others, and when — through you — God gives His Helping Hand! It is joyful!

“But this is not achievable in one day...

“A person who has mastered this step of growth and is growing up in the Holy Spirit will cognize the Great Happiness!

“No matter what happens to a person from outside, no matter how much people of hell persecute or reproach him or her, no matter how much the devotees are tormented by worldly hardships of the outside world — for such persons God’s Love is like an Unstoppable Flow, shining in the souls and pouring out to help others!

“No matter how the mind tries to deviate, the heart that loves the Lord is on guard!

“And it is impossible to turn such a devotee away from the True Path, the Path of becoming closer and closer to God! Because a spiritual heart that is filled with the Endless Love of God already has an inextricable connection!

“And after — the third concern for the devotee comes, which has no end. This is the complete immersion of the soul in the Life of God!

“Personal love, mind, and power are then replaced by God’s Love, God’s Wisdom, and God’s Power! I will not talk about this. This should be cognized by everyone, by giving oneself entirely to the Heavenly Father!”

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Zosia closed the notebook. The soft light of the setting sun outside the window merged with the Light that filled the compartment of the car. It seemed to Zosia that she saw in this Light the appearance of the elder Zosima. He smiled affectionately, then said: “If you want, I will always be next to you, I will help you!”

... In childhood, Zosia often saw the elder in her dreams, like now — in the Radiant Light... And she

could often hear his words. But then this happened less and less often...

And now Zosia again felt like a little girl. And her doubts — yes! — disappeared!

“I can see and hear the elder Zosima!” — she thought. Tears of joy even came to her eyes!

She looked at the setting sun and recalled the elder’s words that were once addressed to her — a little girl during a winter evening:

“It only seems to us that the sun is not there, because we cannot see it beyond the horizon! But it is there! And it is shining! It always shines!

“And God is always with us! Never be afraid of anything, Zosia: for God is with you, next to you, and in your heart! His Love never stops! Accept It!”

Exam

The capital met Zosia with a cool drizzle. Soon, however, the rain ended. The clouds in the sky and the damp gray streets contrasted with the expanses of forests and fields, in which spring had long since passed, giving way to a gentle summer.

Zosia took out a piece of paper upon which was written an address that was given to her by one of the young doctors from the hospital who had recently studied there. He said that it would be possible to cheaply rent a good room at that place.

A cabman brought her to a multistory apartment building.

Having walked up to the fifth floor, Zosia called out for a nice woman who came out to meet her. She

laughed, recalling her former guest student, and said that there were no free rooms now. However, she recommended one of her acquaintances, who lived nearby and also rented furnished rooms.

Zosia had few things: only a small suitcase. So, she went on foot.

The mistress, a woman in her forties, met her sternly and unfriendly:

“Yes, there is a room, but no partying is allowed! And money must be paid two weeks in advance!”

“You will not need to worry about that, ma’am: I have come here to study! I will enter the institute!”

“I’ve known many people like you! You come here to learn and go to the institute!... But then you drink booze with the guys, trying to get married! And then you get pregnant and your belly begins to grow. And you run out money... And you begin trying to not pay your rent by trying to make me feel sorry for you! But I will not tolerate any of such things! I will kick you out! I don’t wish to see any gentlemen here! Order must be maintained!”

“Good,” — said Zosia, trying to understand why she had already managed to cause this woman to dislike her so much.

She examined the room and, despite the unfriendly hostess, agreed to rent for the first time. She did not want to have to search for housing in an unfamiliar city for a long time. The room was clean, bright, and had only a few furnishings: a table, a wardrobe, and a bed... What more could a person want?

The entrance exams were to be started the day after tomorrow. The institute was nearby, and she could easily and comfortably walk there on foot.

When Zosia paid for the room, the hostess noticeably became kinder...

* * *

This year, the enrollment of new students at the Women's Medical Institute was announced unusually early, right after the preparatory school exams. Because last year many more applicants enrolled than were accepted, the entrance tests were introduced. Those who could not pass them and who were therefore not accepted, had the opportunity to try to enter other educational institutions afterwards.

... In the spacious beautiful hall of the newly constructed Institute building, there were a lot of girls. When Zosia's turn came, she entered the office and handed in her papers.

The worker, who was accepting the applications, looked at Zosia's documents.

"This is not enough. Take the trouble to bring a certificate from your preparatory school and, once you have that, it is then very desirable to also get a certificate from courses as a physicians' assistant.

"But in our town, there is no full preparatory school, only four classes. I specifically went to another location to take the needed exams. Here is the paper..."

"Dear, it isn't enough! In such a case, you will have to take the Latin exam here. Based on the results of the exam and of the interview, a decision will be made. Come back tomorrow at 10 o'clock."

... The next day, there were already fewer applicants remaining.

* * *

The events of the exam happened as follows:

At the beginning, a strict looking gray-haired professor, who was running the exam, dissatisfying said:

“You, ma’am, are only 19 years old, and we are accepting only those who are 20 and older.”

“I will soon meet that requirement! In the fall, I will turn 20!”

“And this — what kind of piece of paper is this?”

“These are my grades for the preparatory school course. In our town, the preparatory school is incomplete, so I had to take the classes externally. They said that this paper would work...”

“They said... It doesn’t matter what they said ... How then were you able to also study Latin externally?”

“You can ask me any questions related to Latin literature or to anatomy! I know everything!”

“Is that so? Well then, maybe you don’t need to study from us, because you already know everything?”

“Please quiz me! I really need to become a doctor! A real doctor!”

The professor looked at Zosia with surprise: this provincial girl with a clear and open gaze as if did not notice his sarcasm and discontent.

He raised his glasses, carefully examining Zosia. Then he lowered his glasses back and took

out an anatomical atlas from the table of the department:

“And will you be able to name all the organs in this atlas in Latin, with explanations?”

... Zosia answered confidently and without hesitation. The professor started getting rather heated, complicating the questions with each next page of the atlas, as if he was examining a student who had been studying for a long time. His surprise grew rapidly.

“How can this be? Without courses, how can you already know everything?”

“I helped my father in the hospital, and I remember a lot from my childhood. I was pretty much already practicing there as a paramedic; the only thing that I was lacking was a piece of paper officializing this...”

“So, your father taught you Latin too? Is he a doctor?”

“Yes, a surgeon.”

“And what is your father’s name?”

“Fyodor Berezin.”

The professor raised his head and looked carefully at Zosia:

“I had a student in Moscow twenty-five years ago, his name was Fyodor Berezin. He defended his dissertation to me. It should be noted that that young man was a very talented and promising student! I had very, very high expectations for him! Then he began to practice independently in Moscow. A story happened in a clinic there: a person died during an operation. It seemed that everything was clean, the commission decided so, but then he disappeared.

“So, it turns out that you are his daughter?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t he send me a letter? How is he? Is he still working?”

“He managed a free hospital in our town, treating and operating on people there... He died a year ago. Therefore, I am here. I didn’t know that my father was your student!”

“Yes... The ways of the Lord are truly mysterious! Do not worry, be sure that you are accepted!”

*** * ***

Zosia left the office, smiling joyfully.

She heard two girls mockingly discussing her unfashionable dress.

“How many provincial girls have come! They should be ashamed to come to exams dressed like that!”

... Zosia looked in surprise at her dress. It was clean and tidy. Zosia’s mother had sewn it. And Zosia cherished it and put it on only on special occasions.

Zosia stepped aside and stood at the window. She decided to wait until the end of the exams to see the list of all those who were accepted.

The mockers continued to discuss her appearance and manner in a particularly loud way so that she could hear.

These girls were heard by several young men who were wearing medical academy uniforms. They assisted professors with the examinations.

The girls obviously wanted to attract their attention, but the opposite happened.

The young men approached Zosia:

“Well, what’s worse: Latin, professors, or future classmates?” — a very handsome and tall dark-haired student asked.

“But Latin is not scary at all!” — she replied.

... Then the young man switched to Latin, intending to continue the trials and embarrass the girl. But Zosia calmly answered him in Latin too.

The student, to his surprise, realized that this “simpleton” was completely fluent in this language.

“Are you really not afraid of Latin? Who taught you this?”

“My confessor, fr. Alexander.”

“Are you not mistaken? This is not a seminary! Here you have to study skeletons and dissect corpses!”

“I am not mistaken: I worked in the hospital for a long time!” — Zosia said, laughing easily and joyfully.

“I’m Victor,” — the student said, introducing himself with a small and comical theater-like bow.

They extended their hands for shaking, saying:

“I’m Semyon.”

“And I’m Denis.”

“I’m Sophia. But all the people close to me call me Zosia.” — Zosia said, introducing herself in a non-embarrassed and non-flirtatious way.

... Later, the admission lists were posted. After examining the list, upon which the name Sophia Berezina was listed at the top with the highest examination score, Zosia, feeling happy, left the institute.

Suddenly, Victor caught up to her:

“If you wait about fifteen minutes while we take care of the audience after the exams, I will show you the city. Will you wait? This, of course, is not right for

the girl to wait, but, perhaps, another time I will wait for you!”

... Zosia agreed.

* * *

They walked holding hands like old friends.

Victor asked about everything, and sometimes tried to slightly make fun of Zosia, but affectionately, not offensively.

“So, why are you called Zosia and not Sophy?”

“It happened... It happened because of the elder Zosima.”

“So, it turns out, your nickname *Zosia* happened because of this elder?”

“Yes. It is as if I was born under his protection. And in our family, everyone always remembered this... Do you understand? This elder — he really could work miracles! And it happened often. And I witnessed this many times.”

“It’s as if you’re from the previous century! Elder Zosima, fr. Alexander!... You want to become a doctor, but you yourself are like a child! You believe in God...

“In our preparatory school, for example, none of us could stand going to the ‘Scripture lessons’!”

“I did not study God’s Law in a preparatory school, but in life, that is, really from God.

“Sometimes I feel God like how I feel you now, I can take Him by the Hand, and feel His touches... And then, He Himself takes my hand and leads me, telling me how to live and how to act. It’s doesn’t always happen to me, but when it does, then everything around me becomes special and beautiful, like now!”

... Zosia touched Victor's hand with her hand and gently squeezed his fingers.

He silently looked in surprise at the tender face of this girl, at her light ash-brown braided hair, at her modest dress... And he could not understand why such strength and confidence came from her hands, from her fragile slim figure, and from her very unexpected words. Naive, pure... and so beautiful!... Victor wanted to protect her from this unjust and cruel world...

And Zosia did not feel at all that she needed protection. She calmly continued:

"Why do you think that doctors should not believe in God? After all, there are some things that do not depend on human will at all, but which, nevertheless, happen to people. And in medicine, this is so clearly visible!"

"You really are strange, Zosia! But also — wonderful!

"I can be with you more easily and more naturally than I have even been with anyone else! We only met today — and it's as if I have known you for many years, as if we were friends since childhood! And anything that I think of, I can say! Even those things that you completely disagree with! And everything is so simple! And such joy is around!"

... It was beautiful and quiet everywhere during that white night of summer...

... They walked along the embankments for a long time and met the early dawn. Zosia liked the city that Victor showed her. It was not as strict and gray as it had first seemed.

The Neva River calmly carried its waters along the granite shores. The sun was about to rise, and

the blue-green-orange sky was reflected in the fluid, shining surface of the river, which looked like iridescent silk, hiding its power and strength from view.

The expanse above the river was beautiful, it was fascinating!

And everywhere — there was God! Zosia now felt this very vividly. She firmly knew that everything happens on time, everything moves as it should! And even such a self-confident like Victor, a 3rd year student, was right here, next to her! And he so easily offered his friendship! And on the exam, everything worked out! I was accepted!

... When they said goodbye, Zosia pronounced:

“I would invite you to drink some herbal tea, but you can’t come to me. The landlady said that she would drive me out of the room and wouldn’t return the money, if I started bringing guys...”

“It won’t work for me either...” — Victor hesitated and paused. — I have been in a quarrel with my father for a long time. I now live in a hostel. Girls are not allowed there either. My father, by the way, is a doctor, a professor... We have a ‘family passion’ for medicine. It is probably ‘hereditary’!... The confrontation between us happened a long time ago, because of my mother. She died. And he is now married to another woman. We don’t communicate... I see him only at lectures.”

“You need to make peace, I’m sure of this!”

“Yes? But how? He is proud! And I am even more stubborn! It seems like the initial resentment is gone, but we now live our lives apart...”

“Are you going to teach me *Christian humility*?”

“I will not teach you anything, but I can help you to make peace with him! If you want, of course...”

“I will not ask him for forgiveness. So, know that!”

“Well then, do not ask... He, nevertheless, will forgive you. Are you ready?”

“Well then... — shall we meet on Sunday? And you can demonstrate your spell then,” — Victor joked. — “On the Trinity bridge, at noon, in our place, Okay?”

“Agreed!”

*** * ***

In her room, before going to sleep, Zosia opened the notebook of the elder Zosima at random, as she occasionally did so that Zosima could “say something” through the lines that she read.

The words seemed to embrace her with warmth and joy:

“Love and peace, and benevolence towards every being — gradually but surely lead a person to wisdom, to cognition of the Holy Spirit.

“And any hostility, defense — lead to a loss of the Holy Spirit’s Light in the spiritual heart.

“Love is the best defense against evil!

“But people do not at all understand this! They answer evil with evil, are annoyed, offended, take revenge, and blame others for all their own troubles! And they don’t know how to forgive!...

“It happens that because of trifles, people live apart, separate. And this happens in families! And in whole nations, it happens! And it happens even between countries, leading to disasters and wars!

“But how simple it is to live in emotions of kindness and peace for one another!

“Without God’s Will — even a hair from your head will not fall! So, if there is something that offends you or which you consider unjust, know then that this offense or injustice is in an admonishment from God for you! And when you understand this admonition — thank the Lord! Evil then will not only not enter the soul, but it will also bypass your life! For one who lives in God’s Love is always happy!”

Zosia froze in a special silence. The understanding came that reconciling Victor with his father was good, right, and necessary! And that it certainly must happen!

Then she picked up the still unfinished notebook of fr. Alexander and began reading.

Zosia got the feeling that God was talking to her through these lines:

“Once, I asked the elder Zosima about how to share with people the love that inflames the spiritual heart like a sun. I also asked: why do not many people feel it, even if they are nearby? And if they do feel it, why do they feel only so little of it?”

“And the elder answered me:

‘Share It generously! It is unthinkable to keep this Light within yourself! For It comes from the inexhaustible River of Love!

‘Share It! And don’t worry about who will accept It and who will not accept It!

‘Shine! And the rest is not only your concern! God has His plans!

‘The sun shines onto all the flowers in a meadow! Some of them open up immediately. And others need to ripen as buds for some more time. Each flower has its own appointed time: to bloom and disperse its seeds! And, even more so, the souls of men

have their own terms for both growth and understanding! Let God's Light flow freely, and then everything according to His Will will come true!"

Zosia was overwhelmed with happiness from the very clearly felt Presence of God, Who not only did not leave her upon arrival in the capital, but became brighter, and more and more distinct!

She fell asleep, continuing to whisper words of Gratitude to God for such amazing Care of His!

Reconciliation of Victor with His Family

On Sunday, Victor and Zosia met as agreed.

Zosia asked:

"Does your father love sweets?"

"Very much! But how did you know?"

"I didn't, but now I know! Let's buy some tea cakes and go to visit him!"

"You're bold! But okay, let's go! It's not like it would make matters worse!"

* * *

They stood in front of the solid carved door of the apartment in which Professor Danilevsky, Victor's father, lived.

"Well, ring the doorbell, if you say that you have the 'magic touch'," — Victor joked, visibly worried. He, as usual, tried to hide his emotions behind jokes.

A pretty, middle-aged woman, wearing a fluffy knitted shawl on her shoulders, opened the door.

Victor greeted her, saying:

“Hello, Natalya! Is father home?”

“He’s home, he’s home! Peter, Peter! Victor’s here and he’s with a girl!”

... Her voice trembled with joyful excitement.

Victor’s father, too, was clearly delighted, and with great difficulty hid the emotions that were overwhelming him.

He introduced himself, saying:

“I’m Peter! And what is the name of this beautiful young lady?”

“This is Zosia! And these are tea cakes! Shall we drink some tea?” — Victor, without any ceremony, said.

When the initial excitement subsided and everyone was sitting at the table, some tension started to be felt. Therefore, Victor’s father decided to transfer the conversation to Zosia.

“Tell us, please, my dear, how did you manage to get acquainted with this rebel and joker?”

“At the exam. I entered the Women’s Medical Institute, and Victor and his friends were helping to organize everything there.”

“And were you able to successfully get in?”

“Yes, they accepted me!”

“You must, I suppose, also be a rebel and a revolutionary, like my Victor? Now all the youth seems to be plagued by these ideas about freedom and equality!”

... Victor intervened, saying:

“You didn’t guess correctly, papa! Zosia does not share my ideas at all, but we, nevertheless, have never quarreled!”

“Wonders!”

“Exactly! Zosia is some kind of important specialist in miracles! Imagine, she says that she knew a ‘real saint’ — the elder Zosima. She will now crush our medical atheism, and Natalya will find full support in her views and in matters of faith.”

“That’s great! This means that there will be balance in the religious life of our family, which means that there will then be peace and harmony in everything else!

“And tell us, Zosia, something about this elder. I promise not to mock, honestly! I really would be interested to hear about this from the lips of a future doctor. So, are there miracles that cannot be explained with materialistic science? And what of such miracles have you, yourself, seen? And which ones of those among them could convince scientists-materialists?”

“Of course, such miracles do exist! However, people understand miracles differently. Turning water into wine or walking on the surface of the water — these are miracles that the elder Zosima never performed. He, nevertheless, healed many!

“But his wisdom was expressed in a different way. The help that he provided transformed souls, turning them to the path of kindness and love! Helping a person to become calmer and wiser, or to straighten his or her life into the light, can also be considered a miracle! And inspiring people to do good deeds when one previously didn’t want to do them at all — is this not also a real miracle?”

“Well, my dear, then, it turns out, that I also perform miracles: I test vaccines against diseases and I create medicines.”

“Yes! But, in these deeds, you do not think that it is God Who helps people through you, helping them to develop common understanding and wisdom.”

“So, it turns out, you believe, my dear, that common understanding and science do not in any way contradict faith in God?”

“Of course, they do not! The deeper scientists study everything in this world, the more clear the Great Power will become for them, Which always governs everything in the universe. This is as the elder Zosima said. I’m just now reading one of his student’s notes about him.”

“And what, were you a witness of such events that took place beyond the scope of understanding of materialistic science, such as, medicine, for example?”

“Yes!”

*** * ***

What Zosia told after that, came as a complete surprise to everyone.

“I will talk about the most important event in my life.

“I was fourteen then. At that time, my faith in God waned. There was a time back then when I seemed to feel offended at God, because He did not fulfill my prayers and healing requests for some patients. The elder Zosima had already been gone for 6 years, and an admonition from his disciple, fr. Alexander, only slightly convinced me.

“It so happened that my father became infected when he went to a remote village to fight the sudden outbreak of a plague that was brought there by visi-

tors from Transbaikalia. There were only a few cases of the disease, and my father managed to stop its spread.

“But when he returned, he realized that he himself had, nevertheless, become infected. Then he locked himself in his office, and did not let anyone in: neither my mother, nor me, nor other doctors. He did not allow anyone to intervene. He had medicine, but he was dying.

“When I saw through the door window that he had lost consciousness and had fallen to the floor, I could not stand it and began to try to open the office door.

“At that moment, I was alone and no one could stop me.

“I don’t remember now how I managed to open the lock! This was the first miracle, because it turned out that I was able to select the right key almost immediately.

“Although, of course, we can assume that there are such coincidences...

“I locked the door again from the inside and stayed with papa. For two days, I looked after him.

“And then he died...

“That he really died was not my imagination. Of course, I was still a child then, but a child who grew up in a hospital. And I could not be mistaken!

“During those days, there was no limit to my despair! I prayed, believed, and hoped — I went through all this. But he... died!

“And then I saw the elder Zosima: his intangible appearance appeared next to me, coming out from the Light. It was not a dream, not nonsense. I was in clear state of mind.

“I asked:

‘Give dad back! I will believe, I will live the way you teach! I will agree to everything! I’m ready to do anything, just return dad! Ask God! I know you can!’

“Death is just the other side of life...” — was his answer.

“I seemed to cry then through tears:

‘Do something! All my life I will live only for God, I will be obedient! Just bring him back!’

“And then, in that Light, I saw my dad, hugged him, and did not let go... Then I fainted.

“When I woke up, papa was breathing...

“I did not know how much time had passed, apparently not much, but anyway, this usually doesn’t happen!

“Dad — he was alive!

“He was recovering very quickly, and I didn’t get sick!

“It was then that I was ‘cured’ of life without God... I’m sure that it is forever! I then understood a lot about life, about death, about faith, and about trials. I won’t talk about it now. In that moment, I felt and deeply realized that each of us has not only our own earthly father, but also the Heavenly Father!

“I was given another five years of life with my dad. He died last year; no one could have cancelled it.

“And now, I want to become a doctor who can treat patients together with God! This does not mean that all patients will recover miraculously. That is another matter. But I know for sure that so much more can be done to help people!

“And I must keep my promise to Him!”

* * *

Natalya wiped her tears with a handkerchief.

Victor looked at Zosia and realized that he had not just fallen in love, but that an unusual girl had come into his life, who, with her simple words and similarly simple deeds, changes the circumstances around him!

In this particular case, she reconciled him with his father. And right now, she was changing his whole life! And to not love her would be impossible!

Peter said:

“You are so amazing, Zosia! And I’m so glad that my son met you! Truly, I am very happy! Although, I admit, I do not know how to give compliments: sentimentality is completely alien to me.

“By the way, I am often in correspondence with Dr. Vladimir Khavkin from the University of Lausanne, a student of Mechnikov, who recently created a cholera vaccine and is now working on a vaccine against the plague. He is an incredible person! By the way, he is also a very deep believer, but his religion is Judaism. If you are interested, Zosia, my new book includes a chapter on these studies of his and on the need to introduce their results in Russia.

“And by the way, my dear, I have already finished the book. I would need to find a reliable person who could type the text on a typewriter. Do you, Victor, have a friend, who is not an underachiever and who would like to earn some extra money? I found one typist, but so many mistakes in medical terms were made by her that all her work was wasted...”

Zosia suggested:

“Can I try to do this job? You can show me the manuscript. And if I can easily understand the hand-

writing, I'll quickly do it. I had to type a lot for my father and for the hospital.

"Only, I have no typewriter.

"And I do not want to do it for the money...

"I only ask that I may be allowed to type the text from a notebook about the elder Zosima, if possible?"

Victor's father and Zosia went to the office to look at the manuscript.

Natalya said:

"Thank you, Victor, for forgiving me and your father! Thank you for coming! If you only knew how worried he was!..."

"It's all thanks to Zosia. If things will continue as they are, I might even start believing in miracles myself," — Victor answered, smiling calmly.

He understood that the resentment against his father and the hostility to his father's new wife had now disappeared without a trace, as if it were swept away by the purity of that state of love that was now awakening in the soul.

On the Seashore

Initially, Peter suggested that Zosia come to his house and work on typing his book several hours a day.

"In this way, it will be more convenient for us. The office is free during the day since I am in the clinic."

"But I, nevertheless, will probably interfere. Will I be an inconvenience?"

“No, you will not, Zosia. Natalya and I are always glad to see you!”

... And after some time, Peter invited everyone to go on a vacation together outside the city, saying:

“My friends, my vacation is starting, and for this month, I rented a cottage on the shores of the Gulf of Finland. The house is spacious, not far from the shore, and everyone will have their own rooms. It seems to me that if you, Victor and Zosia, stay with us, then the work with my book will go faster, and you will also be able to have a good rest. Your studies do not begin until September. And it will be good for all of us to breathe in the sea air, and it will be nice to be together!”

*** * ***

It was an amazing time!

The house was spacious, two-storied, surprisingly beautiful, with wooden carvings, and with a terrace on which they could drink tea. It was located not far from the coast, surrounded by tall slender pines.

A vast sandy beach and the sea!

Zosia had never been at the sea before.

Victor, chuckling, said that the Gulf of Finland is not a real sea at all, and that it is more like a shallow “sea puddle”. He dreamed that someday he would show Zosia the coast of the Black Sea.

But Zosia was charmed by these places! The natural harmony was amazing, especially in calm weather.

She and Victor often walked for a long time along the shore early in the mornings or in the evenings during the sunset.

The sunset always happened above the sea, and it was possible to observe how the sun seemed to fall below the horizon.

When there was no wind and the surface of the sea became like a mirror — the beauty was indescribable!

In the afternoons, Zosia typed on a typewriter. The work progressed well. Peter was very pleased.

And when everyone gathered together in the living room or on the terrace at the table, much was discussed in the conversations.

Victor sometimes, however, went to the city for a day or more. He did not tell either Zosia or his father about the kinds of activities that he did there, but Peter suggested that Victor went to student groups there that were “politically colored”. His father did not approve of these ideas of his son and was very worried about his safety, but did not try to forbid him from going — so as not to quarrel again.

Everyone tried not to let such talks about the state of affairs in the country, about the need for change, and about the terrible situation of the poorest classes, turn into heated debates.

Peter himself sometimes also complained about the government. Sometimes, he was indignant at the fact that the “authorities” did not presently allow scientists to introduce new medical discoveries into the real life of the population:

“Here is Vladimir Khavkin in India, in Bombay, and right now he is creating unique vaccines, the British government is financing it, and the results are amazing! And in our country, his studies cannot be applied, because he, you see, is a political emigrant! But, mind you, Victor: he, as a result, chose science,

not politics! And he really helps thousands of people in need of help! And you want to jeopardize your future in medicine by getting into all sorts of illegal organizations!”

“Father, you just don’t know the reality! You do not see what is happening in the country! If we do not change our very system of government, then nothing will change!”

“It is possible, but, my dear, I have always been horrified when such ideas like the concept of “freedom” becomes equated with the right of “revolutionaries” to cut off the heads of rulers!”

“We are not like them, father!” — Victor said indignantly, but then immediately fell silent, restraining himself.

* * *

Zosia rarely expressed her opinions in such common conversations.

However, alone with Victor, she was usually a little more frank.

“It seems to me that any violence generates reciprocal violence, and hatred — reciprocal hatred. And this is like a vicious circle! And breaking such a series of wars between countries, as well as the bloody riots within countries — can only happen through the help of spiritual knowledge, which transforms the people themselves.”

“You argue like the Tolstoyans! Advocating non-violence and humility... But this passivity is used by those who act according to the power of their whims and for the sake of their own profit!”

Zosia said nothing.

... There was a storm over the sea that day. High gray waves rolled through the shallow water and crashed over the shore, reaching coastal bushes and pines.

Victor admired the strength and beauty of the elements. He spoke enthusiastically about how the “storm of people’s anger” will sweep away all the remnants of the past — and then justice will triumph!

Zosia, with some pain inside, understood how different from Victor she was!...

She carefully said:

“Long ago, fr. Alexander was very passionate about the ideas of the revolutionary transformations of people’s lives. But then his former friends wanted to organize a group where they planned to murder and make explosions...

“He was so horrified at the crazy cruelty into which the ideas of protecting freedom and helping the oppressed and poor were turned, that he moved to the monastery to live.

“But in those years, just like now, — all those riots did not bring the freedom to people that the initiators dreamt of.”

“Zosia, I agree that such terror is horrible! But that is no longer a part of the revolutionary movement! However, to sit idly by, hide in burrows, and pretend that there is not all this horror in the country, is also impossible! We need to do something! And we will do it!”

... Zosia did not argue...

She reflected on many things during those days: about what is fair and unfair in life, about when one needs to rush into the battle for truth with cour-

age, and when to endure and humble oneself and be silent...

Sometimes, something inside her trembled with fear for Victor, for the fact that she would not be able to prevent trouble and save him... However, she consoled herself by remembering that Victor was not like the other revolutionaries! And that there was a lot of truth in what he said...

... In the evenings, Zosia opened the notebook of the elder Zosima, and read and typed his wondrous words — and, on such occasions, peace then filled the soul:

“There is a fear in a person for his or her life, there is a fear of bodily pain, and there is a fear for one’s beloveds...

“Overcoming these fears with God is very important!

“And these fears are strong. But overcoming them strengthens the power of the soul, and reminds one of Eternal Life! And an understanding comes concerning the perishability of life; it allows one to feel the temporality of this bodily life!

“But there are also other fears that sometimes come to us.

“For example, fear to cause harm, fear of making a wrong decision, fear of succumbing to temptations without noticing that we were tempted...

“And such fears sometimes prevent one from feeling God’s Will in one’s heart!

“Fear always constrains and limits the soul!

“We must remember that everything that comes to our lives can be used with benefit. And any fear needs to be put at the service of our advancement to the Lord: so that pride cools down in us, self-

confidence is humbled, and the way to the Lord's Will is opened to us!

"In this way, understanding gradually comes from the Lord, and the temptations of a small mind are avoided — through the wisdom of a loving heart.

"Thus, genuine fearlessness in union with the Will of God is gained!

"An immature mind is inclined to fear, to pride, and to a sense of its own self-righteousness. An immature mind easily gives in to temptations! And such a mind cannot withstand difficulties...

"In the spiritual heart, the wisdom of a loving soul grows! We need to learn to constantly listen to God in our hearts! In this way, we learn to understand the Lord!

"When the Love of God is in the spiritual heart, then everything else in life falls into place! We no longer want anything for ourselves from anyone, and even the thirst for the most pleasant things disappears for us, such as: the desire for human love, or approval for our words and deeds... And we no longer feel afraid of the censure of people! Nor do we feel afraid of being misunderstood!

"And the quiet Love of God in our hearts — does not allow us to show power out of place, or to say words clumsily.

"It is as if we, as souls, plunge into Eternity!

"And in this Silence, there is always time for understanding.

"It is a good idea to stand on the threshold of this Silence of God every time when we want to make an important decision with God.

"Silence is the gateway to this timeless eternal extension of the life of the Spirit.

“The Wisdom of God enters the soul when there is no mental fuss in it.

“Only a spiritual heart, firmly connected with God, can open the mind to complete understanding! We then as if see everything from all sides at the same time!

“It is as if the veil is opened and our vision becomes complete and comprehensive, allowing us to perceive the answers to our questions to God! Then a clear answer from God comes to us about our particular problem or situation!”

*** * ***

In those days, when Victor was leaving for the city, Zosia got up very early and went to the sea alone.

During those hours of solitude, something special happened to her. The silence, broken only sometimes by the cries of seagulls soaring above the sea, seemed to fill the whole space around.

The expanse above the sea was so enormous that it seemed to Zosia that she, as a spiritual heart, was dissolving in this immense transparency and beauty!

The Inner Silence of the heart was then filled with the Divine Presence.

God was with her and in her and in everything around!

He was in the soft, light glide of the slightly noticeable waves on the sandbanks, in the mirror reflection on the calm surface of the water which reflected the entire infinity of the sky and the clouds that were as light as white wings, and He was in every blade of grass, and in every grain of sand under her feet.

Zosia got used to being in this bottomless and all-encompassing Silence for a long time, merging with it, and becoming it...

She wanted to learn what the elder Zosima wrote about, specifically: to be able to enter into this timeless Silence at any decisive moment in her life and to clearly understand God's Council and His Will!

The world of Divine Light and Love opened its entrances for Zosia and let her into the Infinity of another — Divine — Reality, in contrast to the fussy material world.

Divine Love surrounded Zosia from all sides. Living Divine Silence was both inside and outside her. Silence filled Zosia with inexpressible words of happiness!

... On several occasions, Zosia tried to tell Victor about this, but so far it didn't work out: there were no words that could possibly describe all of this to him...

Words of the Elder Zosima About the Art of Healing

The next morning, they were scheduled to return to the city.

Zosia was a little sad to part with the house and the beach, where they were all so happy during the past days.

... The day before, she and Victor had a small misunderstanding. They did not argue with each other, but... it was as if a small rift began to form between them...

She and Victor still had not managed to fully understand one another. And such an understanding is needed for souls to transform simple mutual attraction into a sufficiently strong love.

On that day, Zosia as if ran into a wall of misunderstanding...

In the past, this self-confidence had made Victor tough, as if making it possible for him to make cruel decisions and perform cruel deeds. Now, however, this self-confidence only applied to his judgments and reasoning about what is true, what is not true, and how one should live rightly...

However, due to his words and this inability to understand one another, a pain remained inside Zosia.

There was a feeling that, apparently, she and Victor were not meant to be together for a long time or to walk alongside one another through life. And she so wanted love to melt that wall of misunderstanding!

Zosia tried to drive away the sad memories of yesterday's conversation with Victor.

But she didn't succeed right away. She again and again wondered why, after the conversation, she let him read those few sheets that she had typed about Zosima?

"I should not have done that! It was the wrong time!" — she said to herself.

Now, it seemed to her that it was such a silly and naive hope to believe that by just reading about the elder, he would immediately feel the Love of God... She herself had thought that it was impossible not to understand, not to feel it...

But things did not turn out as she had expected!

“I acted too soon!... As if I didn’t want to see that Victor was still ‘closed’, as fr. Alexander had described this state of a person.”

... Yesterday, she and Victor talked about medicine and about new scientific achievements and their implementation — and everything was great and inspired! But then they turned to questions of faith...

Victor seemed to attack:

“Understand: the path of faith is the path of the weak, Zosia!

“Look at the example of medicine:

“You believe that a person will recover, and when he or she really does recover — that means that it happened ‘according to God’s Will’. And if a person dies or remains crippled, then, in this case, it is “God’s Will” too! So, it turns out that nothing depends on you! Is that not true? Faith is self-deception, a drug like morphine, which removes pain, but does not remove the cause of the pain!”

... Zosia tried with difficulty to select the right words to explain her understanding:

“I was thinking, namely, about the causes of illnesses. And I think that there are more reasons for this than just the damage to some organ. After all, there must be some reason why such damage happened in the first place. In trying to answer this, I have had many thoughts about the fate of man.

“In any treatment, much depends on the patient himself or herself and on the doctor; but even more depends on God. After all, through the doctor, the Will of God is manifested!

“The understanding that comes from God can be a great help! This is not some kind of silly faith; it is knowledge!

“It is difficult to explain this clearly, but we should understand that on the spiritual plane, work is also carried out. So far, I know very little about it. But I think that *there*, that world also has its own rules, its own laws... However, we still know very little about those laws. But they can be studied!

“Humanity, for example, once knew very little about the laws of practical medicine, and much was considered impossible and forbidden! But now, there are so many new achievements! And there will be even more new discoveries! It is the same case with spiritual healing: there are certain rules, and there is more to it than just reading prayers. Only, this has not yet been investigated earnestly.”

“Your church has always been against any study, against all science! Let me remind you how many doctors were burned alive in bonfires just because they wanted to understand the causes of a disease through autopsy! Was it not?”

“It was... But I’m not against science, quite the opposite!

“I want to tell you something more: that it is possible to combine material science and spiritual science.

“As an example, the elder Zosima and my dad, a physician, worked together to heal many patients! I personally witnessed how help to the soul and help to the body could be combined with great success...”

... Zosia fell silent, feeling that Victor had stopped listening to her, considering her words to be nonsense...

... Then, in the evening, she decided to let Victor read the pages that she had typed from the notebook of fr. Alexander, with which she was most amazed.

There, fr. Alexander asked the elder Zosima about how he began to learn to understand God, and about how he discovered that he could heal. Those pages contained a story from the elder about how, gradually, knowledge from God began to come to him, about the principles of helping people, and about how this understanding was not easily given to him:

“Zosima, you never told me about how you learned to heal people by uniting with God’s Power. Tell me! For me, it is very important to hear this!”

“Yes, but what is there to talk about?... It was difficult, and countless mistakes were made!...

“The roots of that understanding began at my first monastery.

“The first such Providence of God happened when the sight returned to a blind man. I didn’t even think about the fact that such assistance could have happened through me. It did not cross my mind that the Power of God could have healed that man by pouring out through my body.

“And then, different rumors started spreading. Not only the monks, but also the parishioners began to talk about this with added exaggerations and fantasies...

“Crowds of people then started coming to receive ‘miraculous deliverances from any ailment’...

“And I myself was like a ‘blind kitten’ back then, I prayed passionately, sometimes even losing consciousness, and sometimes I saw the Light of God... I could not understand why sometimes the healing happened and other times it did not. And I did not think at all about that. I only tried to put all the strength of the soul into the prayers. And I didn’t refuse anyone.

“Six months passed.

“Then I started to get sick very often. The number of people who were successfully healed became fewer and fewer, and those asking for healing became more and more.

“At first, our abbot rejoiced; he wanted to declare me a saint, thereby bringing glory to the monastery.

“And, after difficulties in pursuing such a ‘canonization’, he, on the contrary, received an official answer saying that there was no credible sanctity and certainty in those cases of recovery, and that therefore it turns out that all this is ‘the machinations of evil spirits’...

“And they drove me out of the monastery.

“They also didn’t accept me in other monasteries: they were afraid... Our country has always been ‘famous’ for rumors and ‘secret directions from above’...

“But I still did not understand almost anything about the Power of God.

“I walked the earth like a wanderer with a backpack. I didn’t ask for alms. When there was no food and I was starving, I considered it as a fasting for myself. When I met someone who had a disease, I always tried to help, and for this I was presented with food and shelter.

“At that time, I almost always began to take diseases upon myself... One time, I healed a lame little boy, and afterwards I could barely walk for a week, my leg was so badly hurt... And the same sort of things happened in all the other cases too...

“And, without thinking, I considered it a great blessing: to accept the suffering of others onto my-

self... I thought that it was possible and right to atone for someone else's sin with my own pain...

"I almost died then.

"One day, when I was lying unconscious by a river, a widowed woman found me and picked me up. She took me to her home out of mercy.

"I was sick for a long time at her house.

"When I recovered a little, I began to help her with the housework.

"That time of my life was special and bright. It was as if I was born again! Strength slowly returned to my body. And any activities in the yard, in the garden, or in the household, brought simple happiness!

"Maybe, it was because I never had my own land or my own home. And here, even though it was not my own, it, nevertheless, felt like a house where I was needed and a land that asked for my care... Or maybe it was good because my every simple deed brought joy to that woman!...

"To this day, I remember the good that I received from her! I'm indebted to her!...

"Aglaya — that was her name...

"She loved me with that kind of selfless love of which women are often capable... It seems to be that in such love like that, they do not directly think about God, but, nevertheless, God Himself is present and shows Himself in that love with Clarity and great Power!

"In her simple deeds and words, there was so much spiritual achievement, simple wisdom, and unselfish love — that, even now, I still remember and learn from this how it is possible to help people without desiring anything in return!

“She had a son named Egor, who was thirteen years old. He had been paralyzed for three years already: working in the tree felling area, he was hit hard by a fallen tree. His father was killed, and Egor’s legs became paralyzed.

“He could not walk or stand at all, he could only sit. At home, he carved and painted spoons and weaved baskets...

“He was a good kid: kind and smart! I then began to teach him to read and write, so that he could also earn a little bit of money to help his mother.

“I decided to stay with Aglaya until Egor was able to stand again on his feet. I believed that God would help...

“But, no matter how hard I tried, I could not heal him! God did not allow this to be done until He instructed me about many things, such as: how — through illness — learning is given to both the healer and the patient, though which great help for souls is gained! Also, about how every event that occurs, not only affects a person, but also spreads knowledge to many others.

“A turning point for me happened when I gradually began to hear the Voice of God and to receive clarifications. Starting as if from childhood, I then revised my whole life according to the understanding that God taught and was now teaching me through Mergence with Him in the Fire of my heart.

“When God had finished instructing me about His Power, about the purpose of bodily healings, and about spiritual transformations, which should go hand in hand with the healing of an ailment, — then the ability of passing the Holy Spirit through my body returned.

“I began to see how, by connecting with that Light, it became possible to expel a disease. I began to understand: when it was possible or impossible to heal, and whether or not there was permission for this from God.

“Then it became possible to heal Egor. It did not happen all at once, but little by little. I had to restore the little streams of Light that flow through one’s body and make them alive. I then learned — in this Light of the Holy Spirit — to see the body of a patient. And with the hands of the soul, I learned to act. These hands — they became as if only partially mine, and partially God’s. And the Power for healing in them exists only when the soul abides in Oneness with the Light of God.

“I then also began to learn much more about various auxiliary methods that can be used if it is impossible to remove an illness immediately and miraculously. For example, how it’s possible to fill water or herbal brews with God’s Light-Bearing Force and to carry it to a patient. And how, with the help of such infusions, you can repair a lot in the body. I also began to learn how a person’s faith in healing can affect recovery. I began to understand how the correction of vices of a soul allows a person to change his or her fate.

“In this way, I almost became a village healer!

“Aglaya very much wanted me to stay with her, as a layman, and, little by little, to become an addition to their small and happy family!

“I had a choice then, but I didn’t see that. I wanted only the monastic life.

“Egor’s healing was all that I could thank her with. And for her, that miracle was great!

“She let me — at my request — to continue on a monastic path through life.

“From that point on, I, no longer blindly, but by the Will of God, began to learn to do everything. I wandered quite a bit, being taught by God every day!

“And, in this way, I am still continuing to learn!

“Then, I came to this monastery. Ignatius was already the abbot, and he accepted me due to the previous friendship that we had formed long ago at the seminary.

“That is the story...”

*** * ***

In the morning, Victor gave back the sheets of paper to Zosia.

He gave them to her calmly, and said:

“Later, we can talk, if you want. The cab will be arriving soon, and it will be necessary to load our things. Are you ready? I can help.”

... Zosia put the sheets in a pile and closed her suitcase.

“You can take this. And this — I’ll carry myself,” — Zosia said, pointing to a small bag. Physicians usually take such bags with them on calls. They contain much that is needed for first aid.

“You didn’t have this before. Where did it come from?” — Victor asked.

“I had it. But, Natalya gave me a dress, and so, now it no longer fits in my suitcase.”

“So, this bag can be carried separately. Are there, as expected, medical instruments in it?”

“Yes. This is from my dad. He always took it with him, even when he wasn’t on calls, but just in case suddenly someone needed medical help.”

“And could you use them yourself? Could you decide to carry out an emergency operation?”

“I don’t know... I myself have never operated on anyone, and I am not allowed to do this yet... But there are sometimes hopeless cases in which one might need to help someone urgently. And, if needed, I could certainly at least use the medicines, bandages, or the syringe.”

... They went downstairs.

Peter asked:

“Have you changed your minds about leaving this place? If so, would you like me to speak with the owner about renting for another month? Without me, you could continue resting!”

“No! — Victor answered for everyone. — It would be better for me to use this time practicing in your clinic this month since it will be my senior year. In this way, I will also be able to earn a little money.”

Even during the time that Victor had a falling out with his father, he refused to accept money from him for the necessities of life. Now, despite the reconciliation, he did not change his position and still tried to earn money to pay for all his needs himself.

Peter liked the idea that Victor would be there, under supervision, and that in the clinic, he would be able to gain work experience.

Zosia hesitated in choosing whether to stay or to work this month in the clinic together with Victor.

“Peter, can I work as a nurse? I would love to! I’m not used to living without a hospital! Can I, at least, do just cleaning and nursing?”

“After all, I still have no medical education certificate...”

“I’ll try to arrange it under my responsibility,” — the professor looked at her fondly. He already mentally saw Zosia as Victor’s future wife and longed for such an outcome of events.

Clinic Practice

The work in the clinic was familiar and joyful for Zosia.

It was also very nice that Peter allowed her — along with other students — to attend his daily rounds of all the patients and listen to the diagnosis and treatments.

And yet, after the time spent in the expanses of the sea, Zosia had a strange feeling that almost all the people around her lived in some kind of self-isolation from God. And it is they who close themselves off from the perception of that world of Light and Love, where life with God is a reality every day.

Most of the people with whom Zosia communicated — patients, physicians, and students — were believers, but they did not feel God in their “ritualistic” faith. Many of them read prayers every day, many regularly visited temples, but this did not make them better and did not bring them closer to the cognition of God.

Previously, everything around Zosia was the same: people were the same and their prayers were too... But this, for some reason, did not surprise her back then.

Now, however, the world of Light and life with God, which so brightly opened, seemed to have divided life into two different realities. Moreover, the everyday reality, in which all the “earthly” events took place, contrasted very strongly with the world where Living God was!

Zosia tried to at least slightly “open the doors” between these worlds — to help people to at least somewhat enter into the life of that Light and Joy, which is always nearby! But people usually don’t feel it...

Peter was surprised to see how quickly the attitudes towards Zosia were changing in the clinic. In just one week, she transformed from the “girlfriend of the professor’s son” into an irreplaceable assistant and friend of a majority of the patients and the hospital staff.

... One day, Peter heard her talking to a dying man.

Zosia spoke about death and about God so calmly and joyfully, that it was as if she had dispersed the clouds of fear and made it possible for this man to accept the inevitability of this in deep peace. Dramatic changes occurred in that sick man! And he passed away without the convulsive and desperate fear that had shook him for the entire previous month.

Peter understood that Zosia had already done so in her former provincial hospital. They had talked about this over the past few days more than once. But now, he saw this with his own eyes.

And almost all the patients in the clinic were now waiting for Zosia to come to clean their room, feed the bedridden, and talk with them...

* * *

An event, which was important for everyone, happened one day in the clinic.

That day, early in the morning, Victor brought a child in his arms to the hospital — it was a girl. She was about six or seven years old, in appearance. She had a very strong fever. The clothes on the child were dirty and beggarly, and because of this, serious problems arose.

Peter came to them, having been called to the situation by a medical orderly. And Victor almost shouted:

“Father, this is what I have been arguing with you about! Where is all our compassion and support for people?!”

“I was driven out of the emergency room! The girl might die right now! And they told me to go to the Mariinsky hospital, where there is a ward for the poor, or to the Alexandrovsky barracks outpatient clinic. And they said that in our clinic there is no place for ‘dirty beggars’, and that we do not need ‘infections and quarantines’! Father, I examined her, and I think that this is pneumonia. I am ready to pay for her treatment myself!”

“Do not be angry! I’ll give the orders right now! Does the child have parents?”

“Yes, there is widowed mother but she still has a baby, and she did not come with me...”

“Go to the medical room. I’ll send your Zosia to come and do everything for the hygienic treatment, and then I’ll come to see the girl.”

“Thank you, dad!”

“You, too, please, take measures so as not to catch any infection!”

... Then Victor told Zosia about this girl:

“One of my friends asked me to help the child, knowing that I was studying as a physician.

“The name of the girl is Nadia.

“I brought her here from a homeless shelter.

“You should see what’s going on there! It’s just awful! Those who say that hell awaits people after death have not seen hell in reality! And it is right there, next to us!

“Can you imagine? — her mother also has a baby infant!... The worst thing is that all that illness, dirt, crime, and death there — is the norm, is routine. Most cannot even remember another way of life: for them, it all happened too long ago!

“And the mother of this girl, it seems, had only recently joined the shelter. Apparently, by the will of some tragic incident, she is now completely broken by this hell, and has already stopped fighting for the life of her children...”

... Zosia listened without interrupting, then said:

“I will stay all night on duty around the girl, if Peter allows this. Her state is very serious.”

* * *

Zosia stayed the night in the hospital and was on duty at Nadia’s bed. She hardly slept. Sometimes she was replaced by Victor. The fate of this girl stirred up something deep inside him, as if it was his little sister or daughter.

Finally, the girl became a little better.

Victor told Zosia:

“You need to go home today and have a good rest.

“I will accompany you, otherwise you might pass out on your way home... Should we take a cab?”

“No, let’s walk on foot, so that we can get some fresh air...”

They walked during the warm summer twilit evening and continued to talk. Victor could not restrain himself:

“Why does your God allow children to die? How could a child even deserve this? For what sins? Is this fair?”

“What happens in life does not depend on the various religious patterns established by people. I myself don’t know much about it, rather, I feel it... There is a Justice and Love Which goes deeper than what we see in this material world! Behind everything that happens here — there is God: His Love and Wisdom!

“I sometimes feel that world of God. It exists! God is more real than everything that we see here! If we stay there and touch that Love — then everything here seems to be like a dull dream...”

“Then, when we again return to this ‘dream’, we get used to it once again. I wash the floors, help sick people to change their clothes, and speak with them... But when you know that God truly exists, then it’s not scary to live!

“Although, difficulties, of course, happen...”

“And you believe that if Nadia is an innocent child, then she will end up in paradise, right? Then, probably, it would be fortunate for her not to return to the hell in which she found herself with her mother!

“But now, we are fighting with all our might to ensure that she lives in this world! We want this! Is it not?”

“It is...

“Life is an opportunity to learn a lot, and to become better... But only God decides who must leave and when it is time to leave here! We are only tools in His Hands to bring help and good!”

“I wish you could be put in control of this world!” — Victor joked.

“I remember how fr. Alexander once told me a lot about other branches of religion; and, in all of such religions, human life in a body is seen only as a short fragment of a much larger whole.

“There are such branches of religion, as, for example, Buddhism or Hinduism, where it is claimed that people are born many times on the Earth in new bodies, as if changing clothes. It is as if another ‘day’ is awaiting everyone, and, on that ‘day’, the soul is born again and takes on a new body and a new destiny.

“And, if the people were sinners, criminals, then their fate in new lives is difficult, full of suffering.

“And if they were good, then their fate is safe and happy.”

“And do you believe that?”

“I don’t know... Sometimes I think that this could be true. It seems to me that it would be fair to be embodied many times in order to be given a chance to correct errors.

“But, if there are no such repeated chances as, for example, new lives in new bodies, — then how we live our lives is even more important!

“The elder Zosima told me that God — for all peoples and for all religious branches — is one and only one! But in every nation, people call Him by different names.

“The prophets and messengers of God for each nation were different. There were a lot of them. And the legends about them are different. Due to this, many branches of religion happened. But this does not change the essence! Every human soul must strive for God! It is for this approach to God, namely, that these lives are given to us! This is the most important thing that a person must understand and implement while living on the Earth!

“And this is precisely what could help people in the first place!

“All other benefits like money, other values, and even health — all this is secondary!”

... Zosia fell silent... Despite her inspiring topic, she did not have the strength to speak further.

Victor looked at her anxiously, and said:

“Forgive me for starting these topics again! Do you want me to carry you in my arms?”

“No, thank you! I can handle it! We have already almost arrived!”

But Victor, nevertheless, picked up Zosia in his arms. She hugged him and laid her head on his shoulder.

And it was so good to feel his strong hands!...

*** * ***

In the morning, Nadia became much worse.

After examining her, Peter said to Victor and Zosia:

“This is the end! We are powerless...

“Zosia, you can stay with Nadia for now. You are free from other duties today. I know that you know how to do something very important for those who are dying, a special something that cannot be explained in words...”

... Zosia thought a lot about death. She saw a lot of deaths in the hospital. She read many of the elder Zosima’s words about how to accept this transition of the soul into another world, and she helped many people to calm down before approaching the inevitable end of life in a body...

And yet, every time when a child died, a pain rose in Zosia and a desire grew to definitively take it away, to change it.

She remembered about Zosima, thinking: “If the elder were here, he could tell if this girl could be helped. And, if so, how?”

... Nadia was dying, but was still conscious.

Zosia finished telling her a fairy tale, and, in order to restrain her tears, she went out into the courtyard of the hospital. It had just rained, and the sun, peeking out from behind the clouds, shone incredibly brightly, sparkling in every drop of water on the tree branches in the hospital garden.

Zosia felt the Presence of God, full of Endless Love, as if she were being hugged by the soft and warm Embrace of a Familiar and Dear Friend.

Zosia clearly and acutely felt Boundless Love, embracing her from all sides and consoling her... It was if the whole sky, all the transparent thickness of the air, became His Embrace.

And in this Presence of God, there were Joyful Caresses and Care! An understanding came that eve-

rything happens according to His Will. Everything is right and good! And it could not be otherwise!

This Joy pervaded the space!

Each droplet shone like a little sun! On the leaves of the trees, on the tips of the blades of grass, on the hospital fence, on the benches in every corner of the garden — tiny “suns” shone in countless numbers! Rays of Divine Light poured in streams. In every smallest particle of space, Zosia sensed the Presence of the Great Divine Love and Power.

... Zosia returned to the ward.

The dying girl opened her eyes and looked a little surprised, as if she had also seen this Great Light.

“Thy Will be done!” — these words sounded in space. It was the “soundless sound” that only souls hear.

Zosia could barely see the objects in the room; only transparent contours, like soap bubbles, could be seen. But the Light of God — Living, giving life to everything — was everywhere!

Zosia focused on the girl. In the child’s body, spring-like Streams of Light, which at first were weak, began to flow more and more powerfully. The entire body of the girl was cleansed of gray sticky energies... And became filled with the Primordial Light!

Zosia saw this and passed out...

* * *

Peter and Victor entered the chamber of the dying girl. Zosia was lying unconscious on the floor. A braid of her hair fell out from under her kerchief, on which a red cross was embroidered.

And Nadia, who was sitting on the bed, called for help.

Victor grabbed Zosia in his arms and carried her to the ward room.

“What’s the matter? What happened?”

“This faintness of mine will pass...”

“Nadia will be healthy! It happened! Do you understand?! Everything happened as the elder Zosima told! God can reveal Himself ever so clearly!” — Zosia whispered softly, regaining consciousness.

... While Peter was examining Nadia the next day, she said:

“Zosia’s fairy tale was real! Everything was true! I am now healthy! God came to me and cured me!”

... The doctors could only shrug their arms and talk about the miraculous recovery.

Only Peter and Victor guessed that this miracle could be connected with Zosia.

But they were not yet ready to seriously evaluate this.

Responsibility to God

Of course, Victor asked Zosia about the healing of the girl.

“Do you think that namely you healed Nadia? Is it possible? And how?”

“No, of course, it wasn’t me! It was God!”

... Zosia told a little about what she saw that day in the hospital garden, and about what she felt...

This time, Victor listened seriously and did not object.

He tried — with his research logic — to evaluate what had happened. But his logic... could not cope...

... And Zosia was so gentle and beautiful! And a special confidence came from her, which was transparent and invisible, but, at the same time, filled with power.

Zosia continued:

“I used to think that in order to heal someone, I needed to really want this, and ask God for it.

“But with Nadia — everything was different... I did not ask. I even agreed then that she should leave right now...

“And then the Joy of God eclipsed everything! And all this wonderful transforming Power of His passed through me!... I saw all this, I was a witness and, at the same time, I was as if a Part of this Power.

“I cannot repeat it myself. This was God’s Will so manifested!

“And what happened is not only for Nadia’s need. This is important both for me, and for you, and for your dad, and for the mother of Nadia, and for her brother!

“This event can make a spiritual change in many people. But whether those changes will happen or not will be a personal choice for everyone.

“And I also realized that if we can continue to bring to the world that Light, Which has descended, and if we will be able to continue to show that Power of God to people, — then it will be good. And, we ourselves will learn a lot!

“It is very important that we take responsibility now for Nadia, for her future. We also must help Na-

dia's mother! Although this, of course, will not be easy...

"But, if Nadia returns to that hell that you talked about, to her mother, who is in despair and on the verge of suicide, — then the girl's recovery will be of little use."

"My father has already helped a little: he gave me money in order to rent to her a room, and provide her with housekeeping for the first time. I didn't mind, I took it, I was delighted even, and already did what was necessary! So, the girl now has a place to call home."

"Yes, that is very good, but all that is temporary.

"After all, many beggars are given alms, but this is a weak form of help: from this, only the number of beggars increases!

"It is necessary to cure something in the person himself or herself, in the soul, so that the person ceases to feel unhappy, beggarly, or hopelessly desperate. It is necessary that they become able to take care of themselves and of others!

"Today, let's go visit some foster homes, shelters, and almshouses. Maybe somewhere they will agree to hire Nadia's mother for childcare or to help the elderly..."

"It is unlikely because she has two children...

"Yes, it might not happen... But, if we can find a children's shelter where they will allow her to work and bring her children, — then this will be a fairly reliable solution for the current time... Let's try! Nadia told me that her mother read books to her and taught her the alphabet. So, maybe it will work out..."

That day, they visited many charitable institutions for widows, for the disabled, and for orphans. But it was impossible to find anywhere that agreed to their plan.

Orphans could be taken to shelters, but it turned out that no one needed a mother with children.

Victor was indignant:

“All this charity is just a ‘drop in the bucket’, a farce! There are so many miserable people around! And here, only a couple dozen people have benefited, and the rest are not being cared for!

“After all, all these shelters, work houses, and almshouses are such a small part of what should be done! A few rich people donate crumbs from their income and help only a few — out of thousands!

“All these good deeds are ostentatious, it’s like how many people ‘put candles’ in churches just so that their sins can be forgiven!”

“I think it’s better to save at least a few people than not try to help anyone. After all, you and I, also, have only taken care of one person, in this case, Nadia, and we have not taken care of everyone whom you saw in that rooming house.”

“This is — only now! But someday I will definitely do all that I can to help change the lives of all those unfortunate people who are ‘at the bottom of society’! It is my goal!”

“Yes, that is good...”

“But right now, we need to come up with a solution for Nadia’s mother. It is important that she stands on her own feet, and, after that, we can try to help her find some education for her children. Maybe

there is something else she can do, like sewing, embroidering, or so on... — so that she can work from home?”

“I don’t know. Tomorrow, Nadia is being discharged. Let’s go, take her home and see everything on the spot, and talk. It will be best if you speak with her mother: with you — all people open up and speak sincerely!”

* * *

They arrived.

Nadia — in a new dress and shoes — felt not only healthy, but also completely happy! Her joy spread around!

After a long hug with her mother, Nadia began to tell:

“Mom, mommy! I have seen God! He cured me! And now, everything will be fine! I will help you with Ivan! Now, I will be like Zosia: hardworking and kind! Mom, this is Zosia! Get to know her! She treated me and told me fairy tales!”

Nadia pulled Zosia’s hand to her mother.

“I’m Irina,” — the woman said, introducing herself in a low voice.

... Nadia's mother was very thin and pale, tears glistened in her eyes because of the excitement...

Nadia went to show Victor her little brother Ivan.

Zosia invited them to take a walk with the baby, and she and Irina were left alone to talk.

“Thank you, Zosia! May I call you that?”

“I do not know how to thank you for all your compassion!”

Nadia's mother, with tears in her eyes, rushed to kiss Zosia's hands...

"Do not mention it, Irina!" — Zosia hugged her and kept her alone for some time in her heartfelt love: in a certain space, which was always invisible, but felt around Zosia.

Then, there was a frank conversation. Irina said:

"I don't know how to live further, how to raise my children... The worst thing is that I alone am to blame for this... Both for our poverty and for Nadia's illness... Everything has burned out inside me!... Nadia's father left me long ago. But back then, I kept going somehow: I gave music and drawing lessons, I taught children to read and write. Not in rich houses, but still...

"And the youngest one — I was raped... because of my stupidity...

"I understand that the child is not guilty, but inside me — everything is empty... And Nadia, probably because of this, became ill, as if feeling that I had already become dead. I have forgotten how to believe and love!... I myself asked God to take us all away from here!... After all, when Ivan was born, they refused to help me everywhere, including in work... This must be how the Lord is punishing me for my sins..."

"Do not blame yourself, Irina! Now, everything will be different!"

... Then they discussed what Irina knew and could do...

So, Zosia succeeded to calm Nadia's mother and give her hope. Now it was necessary to help realize this hope.

* * *

The next day, Zosia and Victor continued their search for work for Nadia's mother.

Their practice in the clinic had already ended, and there were only two days until the start of the training sessions.

But so far there had not been a single place where they were successful.

... Victor and Zosia heard yet another polite refusal. There were now only two places on the list to check.

When they were already descending the stairs to the exit, an exquisitely dressed young and beautiful woman rose to meet them.

Zosia suddenly recognized her. Zosia had briefly met her on her first day when she entered the institute. At the time, they only said a few words to one another. Zosia had asked her about the procedure for filing documents, the girl answered her, introduced herself, and wished Zosia success in the exam. That was the extent of their acquaintance...

The beautiful woman walked confidently. Two workers of the shelter bowed to her with great reverence as they passed by carrying stacks of bed linen.

Zosia decided to greet her:

"Olga? Is that you? Hello!"

... Realizing that Olga did not remember her, Zosia said:

"You probably don't remember me, together we submitted medical documents to the institute."

Olga really didn't remember, but smiled warmly and benevolently:

"Did you come here to visit one of the children?"

“No, we wanted to get a woman and her children admitted here to work, but it didn’t work: they refused...”

“And what kind of woman? Is she your relative?”

Victor guessed that this noble and beautiful woman was most likely from the board of trustees of the philanthropists of this shelter, and he decided to use the chance:

“No, she had a daughter who was treated in my father’s clinic. So, we are trying to help. She could be more than just a nanny here, she could even be a teacher for the younger children...”

“Come on, let’s try to arrange it all. I have some influence in this institution.”

... The result exceeded all their expectations! The shelter was largely supported by funds donated by this young and rich beautiful woman. Therefore, of course, everything was quickly settled.

Victor and Zosia thanked Olga from the bottom of their hearts. They warmly said goodbye.

“Soon the classes will begin, see you then! And you, Victor, I will be pleased to meet you again someday!”

*** * ***

When they parted with Olga, Victor hugged Zosia, lifted and spun her, not embarrassed that people walking along the street turned around and smiled.

“Are you crazy? Please, let me go! You scared the passerby!”

“Let everyone watch! Let everyone see what an extraordinary and beautiful woman is here with me!”

Victor lowered the laughing Zosia to the ground and said:

“You are an enchantress, my Zosia! How do you do it? Will you say again that it is God Who does it?”

“Firstly, it’s not *me*, but *we* who have succeeded!

“And about God... You yourself can already feel that if you do something good and right for people, then you do it for God!

“And then, it’s as if a special Power gently carries and guides you! You can even learn to perceive how you are being directed: for example, where you need to go, or when it is time to do something. It has happened like this many times in my life — when I felt this Help clearly. It’s as if by themselves the right words come that are needed to be said, or an understanding comes of how to best help someone.

“And sometimes you feel, on the contrary, that something should not be said or done at all.

“All this is called *intuition*...

“And if you do not obey these internal understandings, these ‘hunches’, — then everything goes badly. It sometimes happened to me. In such cases, it was enough to reason just with my mind, — and then everything turned out badly in the end...

“The elder Zosima said that this is how the Holy Spirit teaches us to understand the Will of God!

“And this understanding easily comes when the soul is full of love, when we want to share the warmth and light that are inside us — with others!

“And if a person is either afraid, or calculates one’s own benefit like, for example: how to occupy a higher social position, how to push an opponent out,

or something else that comes from the *self*, then this deep and caring understanding will not come!

“Then, on the contrary, conniving and nasty thoughts come — about how to benefit oneself, to the detriment of others. And such dirty thoughts, if they suddenly come, must be driven away. Such thoughts may be generated by fear, or may come from the *self*.

“When I was little, the elder Zosima taught me that *fear* and the *self* are like two evil beasts that attack the conscience from opposite sides. If you obey *fear* or the *self*, then one’s conscience... will hide. But if you look decisively at these vices and do not succumb to them, then help comes from God to overcome them.

“But often people do not pay attention to the voice of their conscience, which is inside them. And these people do not compare this reasoning, which is built in their minds, with their heart love. From this, people have many misconceptions about what is good and what is bad, what is true and what is untrue...”

“What a philosopher you are!”

“And what’s wrong with that? Love for wisdom is good!

“And wisdom without love is impossible!

“If theories about transformations in society are built only by logic, then they can also contain dangerous errors.

“Victor, this is very important: we are responsible for those whom we help, we are responsible for what we want to bring into this world, we are responsible even for how we think! We are responsible for all this — before God!

“And we are also responsible for how we live, for what purpose, and which things we choose in this life...

“If this choice is made before God, then it is easier to choose.

“And if you think that there is no God, then, as Dostoevsky put it, ‘everything is permitted!’...

“We bear responsibility for our lives, whether we understand this or not... And it would be better to understand!”

“Well, now you have decided to attack my beliefs! You will ‘repay’ me for such reasoning: I will bring you books of my favorite philosophers to read — and then you will tell me all their mistakes!” — Victor joked.

Olga

Classes at the institute began.

Zosia liked to study. Studies now began to occupy most of her time.

And Olga appeared in Zosia’s life — the same girl who helped them in the orphanage. Over time, they became close friends.

Olga was from a noble and wealthy family. For several years now, she had been living separately from her parents.

Olga stood out among other students with the bright external beauty of her entire appearance, which was emphasized by her ability to dress elegantly and, at the same time, simply. She shone with wide knowledge in many areas of life and with the

flexibility of her mind, which allowed her to always be one of the top students. She was talented in many ways: she painted beautifully, composed verses and prose, and knew a lot about literature and art.

Olga usually found herself in the center of attention in any company: she always knew how to interest listeners with her statements, and she herself was also able to listen to others sincerely and with attention.

At first, Zosia did not assume that she might be at least somewhat interesting to Olga and did not expect to become her friend at all.

Students of the institute were fond of not only the news of medical science. They often discussed many topics that worried the intelligentsia of the capital.

One day after classes, several ladies gathered around Olga, discussing the possibility and necessity of widely introducing into the people not only medical knowledge, but also art. Then their conversation turned to a partnership of traveling artists, which had been created not too long ago specifically for the purpose of preaching art. Olga expressed her conviction that after the death of Kramskoy, the ideas of that movement were now quickly fading away, and that only the great artist Repin remained there. The ladies continued to talk about the significance of individual works of art and their impact on people's minds.

The conversation turned to Kramskoy's painting "Christ in the Desert". Zosia was very interested in what students thought about Jesus and His Mission on the Earth. She carefully listened to the views of

her classmates, but she did not give any of her own opinions.

She suddenly felt like an uneducated provincial, because she had never seen this painting.

After the conversation, the girls said goodbye until tomorrow.

Olga for some time continued to walk next to Zosia. When they were left alone, she suddenly asked:

“Why were you silent today, Zosia? That was ‘your theme’! And why are you sad?”

Zosia answered:

“I have not seen this painting of Kramskoy...”

“Well, ma’am, that’s not something to be sad about!

“After all, not knowing something is not at all embarrassing! What truly is sad is to not want to know!

“Let’s go to Moscow on one of our days off from school and go to the Tretyakov’s Gallery! I will buy tickets for all students who want to go.”

“That is so expensive!... Each time, I think about how many people could be helped with that money... even at least in your orphanage, and I’m ashamed to spend it on myself...”

“Well, after all, man must live not by bread alone! Pictures and books are created namely for this purpose, so that for the souls, too, there is food!

“Well, if we must postpone Moscow for now, then let’s go to my house: I will show you a photograph of this picture.”

... They arrived at Olga’s home.

Zosia looked at the painted photographic reproduction of Kramskoy’s painting for a long time. One

could not look at the face of Jesus here without experiencing emotion.

“Yes, in that painting, it was as if all thoughts about that moment in time had found an expression... Such power and tragedy!

“Yes, the painting was wonderful! By looking at it, many people can think about their life path, about their choice of why and how to live... Do they want and are they ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of other people? Are spiritual feats capable for them?”

... Then they drank tea. Olga showed some magazines about contemporary art.

They talked a lot.

Olga said that she herself took painting lessons and was fond of drawing.

Then she even showed her pictures.

Zosia really liked them:

“You draw so nicely! You could have become an artist!”

“Yes, I am still interested in drawing and writing... But when I thought about where I could bring more benefit to people, I chose medicine. After all, in art or literature, it seems that only real geniuses can bring true benefit to society, but in medicine even being just a nurse can be a life dedicated to good! Is it not so?”

“It is so.”

... Then Olga talked a little about her passion for “Tolstoyism” and about her attempts to follow this teaching in life.

“Under the influence of Leo Tolstoy, I tried to improve the situation of peasants. But I did not have much success. This kind of work wasn’t for me.

“One can probably *force* oneself to do something that does not bring one satisfaction — simply because it’s good and right... But I couldn’t. Life in the village became boring to me. I hope that my efforts there brought at least some lasting benefit to people... The school for the children is still working. Although, there are only twelve students there of different ages. No one needed anymore. And the teacher who teaches there is hopelessly in love with me. That is why all this has not yet collapsed.

“When I left the village, I began to take painting lessons. I really liked to paint. And even now I still like this.”

“I know little about art. My father was a doctor, and a whole hospital was under his leadership. Due to this, I grew up in this hospital.

“And in our monastery, there was an elder named Zosima.”

“Like Zosima of Dostoevsky’s novel?”

“Yes, there are some similarities.

Probably, when genius people describe or portray something, then God helps them gradually to see all the shades of the Truth.

“And then, I was taught a lot by the elder’s disciple fr. Alexander. He is an educated man and he ordered many books for the monastery library. He let me read what he considered important for me. And also, he wrote down some stories about the elder Zosima... He gave me these notebooks. This summer, I typed them. If you ever want to, I’ll bring you them to read. Perhaps, you will also write a book, like Tolstoy or Dostoevsky?”

“No, I won’t even try... One must be a genius to write books! And I am not a genius. Nevertheless, at least, I am not quite a mediocrity!”

*** * ***

Now, Olga and Zosia spent a lot of time together.

Olga told Zosia about interesting artists and writers and about new trends in art. She let Zosia read books and magazines from her library.

For Zosia, another bright side of the world was revealed, in which God’s Light was refracted in a special way, as if a ray of sunlight highlighted something important for people for a while.

But not all famous paintings made a good impression on Zosia. She, not being embarrassed, sincerely told Olga her understanding of the essence of what she saw.

Olga liked this directness and honesty in Zosia’s judgments. After all, most of the people around just followed fashion trends gleaned from magazines and conversations...

Sometimes Zosia, in conversations with Olga, carefully touched on the most sacred topics: about God and the Power of the Holy Spirit. She found an attentive listener in Olga.

Olga was not deeply religious, but she was interested.

She thought about the meaning of human life and tried to look for this meaning.

Conversations with Zosia about this were important to her also because of the opportunity to express their thoughts aloud:

“Why is everything happening here with us? What is our whole life for? Why are there joys and sorrows, ups and downs? And what is creativity, for example, for?”

“At one time, it seemed that for me art was a way out, it was a salvation from the nonsense of life!

“But then, I realized that no one needs such self-expression of a not-too-talented girl of twenty-five years old. And all the enthusiasm and compliments from most of my male fans were given to me only because they wanted to marry me.

“Secular evenings, balls, then family, and children... Should we, women, find the meaning of life only in motherhood?”

“But I have not yet met a man with whom I would like to live my whole life and raise children...

“And what if I never meet such a man?”

“But there is medicine... It seemed to me that the life of a physician gives a chance to bring real benefits to people!”

“It seems to me,” — Zosia continued the conversation, — “that cognizing God and mutual love with Him represent the meaning of human life. It’s hard for me to express it in words... But when you are in an embrace with God, then clarity comes and it becomes clear: what makes sense to do, that is, from which deeds there is a benefit to Him and people, and from which — only evil... Maybe it is presumptuous to think this way: that it is possible to understand the Will of God... But, when it is not just personal thinking, but when God is in the heart, then an understanding of everything comes — an understanding that is so pure and dear!

“And even if in one’s actions there is no great role for all of mankind, but only modest work for the benefit of people, then this can fill every day with happiness!

“This is because God fills us with happiness when His Love and our love for Him are united! Then, great happiness comes!

“When a soul is in embraces with God, an incredible happiness happens, even if the events in material life are not too good...

“And if the feeling of the Presence of God is gone, even if everything in life seems to be good, — then inside there is emptiness and such unnecessary in everything! People often try to fill this void with all sorts of stupid pleasures...”

“You talk about God, as about a beloved one who is always here and loves you...

“It’s impossible for me to perceive God so. I know that God exists. I believe, I pray... But all this remains separate from the rest of my life! We are here, and God is far away... And it is as if He does not care about the troubles and sufferings of people, and He does not care about how they reason about Him, or how people interpret His Truth...

“For example, now some preachers, such as George Gapon, are calling upon factory workers to bring about, in the name of God, revolutionary transformations, — while others are cursing any progressive ideas and want to turn all people towards a fanatical and stupid medieval belief.

“Here — Leo Tolstoy was publicly excommunicated from the church... And even in such things as this, there are those who are for and those who are against it!

“And it turns out that every person believes in his or her own mind. And there are some preachers who carry whole crowds behind them — and these crowds are ready to throw themselves at each other in a struggle ‘for the true faith’...”

*** * ***

Zosia, in those days, thought a lot about why she could not convey her understanding and sensation of God to Victor, Olga, and other people. She also thought about whether it was possible to give them that happiness of life with God, with Whom she herself so often came into contact.

“And is it necessary to strive for this without fail?” — she wondered.

“And do I have the right to teach someone?

“And how to teach to another what is so obvious to me, when he or she does not see or understand at all?”

Zosia again and again read the words of the elder Zosima:

“There is much that we must understand about the Response of God and about the Help from God!

“When does God help? And when does He not intervene in human affairs?

“After all, God does not always respond to a person with the waves of His Love and Bliss! He answers so only to those who truly aspire precisely to Him!

“... There is an intimate communion between the soul and the Creator.

“At first, it can be a brief insight, a piercing sensation and understanding of the reality of the Power and Love of God!

“This is created by the Light, and It indicates the direction that one should go in both earthly life and spiritual life.

“It is important to help a person to feel the Presence of God and God’s Response, even for just a short time! When a soul has learned to cognize God, even in such an initial measure, then a true spiritual life can begin!

“This surge of love for God and the Response of His Love are very important! Due to this, a person can start to crave for God and really rush to cognition of Him! And it’s easy for God to help such a soul!

“But it also happens that such a person feels this, and then forgets... It is as if he or she has hidden a priceless treasure in the background and has lost his or her memory about it. That innermost memory then lies there without benefit... And that person lives as before, as if God does not exist...

“And another thing can happen. Sometimes, it seems that a person outwardly lives for God, but in reality, this person seeks just the respect from people for how he or she performs rituals, or holds a fast... — and so one’s *self* is fed.

“And instead of love, a *self* imperceptibly develops in such a person. It seems that the person becomes satisfied with himself or herself, and others praise and honor this person... But there is no place for Living God in such a person’s life. That is sad... It seems that such a person wants to please God, and thinks that he or she has risen above others in spiritual life... But that person does not live with God at all!

“Without love, everything is dead and false... In the Gospels, such people were called Pharisees. And even now the situation is the same...

“Many would now need to hear such words. But for some reason, they do not listen, and, even more, they do not understand the essence of such words...

“Some do not accept the Teachings of God because they consider their simple visits to temples on holidays as sufficient for them to call themselves Christians, and they firmly believe in their own coming ‘salvation’.

“And now, there are others who have completely rejected faith in the existence of God — along with rituals — because of the unreasonableness of faith in rituals and because of the self-serving thoughts of some church servants... And there are more and more of such non-believers!

“How many saints and prophets spoke the words that I am saying now!

“Maybe everyone, who understands God and the Unity of Life in the Heavenly Kingdom, comes to this understanding a little differently, and their words may vary slightly. But the meaning, which is deep down behind those words, is one!

“Until the Truth enters into understanding, into awareness of the soul, — there will not be much benefit from spiritual efforts... Wise words remain — like grains that you hold in your hands, but they have not yet been entered into the soil of the soul and have not sprouted, have not taken root...

“There are words that are correct — but living according to those words does not always work out...

“Those words must penetrate inside, only then does the true understanding come. And then — even more so — the experience of the soul becomes built! This is because you then have actual spiritual knowledge, which no one can take from you, and which no one can shake!

“Great happiness encompasses you when God gives you an understanding of the Truth! And it seems that I already understood everything to the very depths!

“But living according to this understanding does not always work out...

“Between understanding and the ability to live in Oneness — there is still a whole chasm! And a lot of work needs to be done in order to build one’s own bridge across that abyss, so that from the side, where the devotee receives understanding from God, one can go to the other side, where all life is lived with God in Oneness!

“A devotee builds his or her way across that abyss by forming his or her life experience. And only on one’s own can such a bridge of spiritual experience be built, and can one go to the side where life with God in Unity exists, and where everything is according to His Will, and everything is in Harmony with Him!

“Then, both Strength and Love are manifested by God through such a devotee. But this takes place only when He needs it.

“And when God does not intervene, His Great Power dwells in peace.”

Four Friends

Zosia, of course, told Victor about Olga:

“I made friends with Olga from our course. Do you remember? — we met her at the shelter. She’s an amazing person! Let’s all walk together this Sunday!”

“Is that the beautiful girl from the board of trustees? And aren’t you afraid that I might fall in love with her? Okay, I’m joking! Let me invite Denis, my friend at the Academy, do you remember him? Let’s go for a walk together!”

“Agreed!”

... Denis was from a family with a tradition of becoming sailors. His father died during the Russo-Turkish war, when Denis was not even a year old. His brother, Sergey, was much older and had served in the Navy for a long time. Denis was not permitted to join the Naval Cadet Corps because of health reasons. This all became an impulse for him to choose medicine as a profession. He decided that he would certainly find a way to serve at sea, even if it meant doing so as a physician!

The general conversation of such a diverse (in their opinions) group of young people that day was centered around the future of Russia, and about how to improve people’s lives.

Olga asked:

“Victor, how do you imagine the future after your revolution?”

“Our aim is to give freedom to the oppressed classes. And afterwards, the people themselves will decide how to arrange their lives! And I’m confident that they’ll solve it well!”

“The people is just a word... It is composed of individuals! These people are all so different! And it’s so hard to find agreement even among those who want to give freedom and rights to all citizens of the country!

“Even among us, our understandings of what is good for people are different!

“When I used to read Leo Tolstoy often and enthusiastically, I decided to help the peasants: I tried to organize a school for children and tried to change many things... In the end, I understood that I was trying to improve the lives of people about whom I knew almost nothing! I didn’t know their desires, their aspirations, or traditions... I realized that I was trying to change something that I didn’t really know anything about!

“Out of all those attempts of mine, only the school remains. And currently, only ten children and two adults go there. No one else needed this school! True, it is still working...”

... Olga laughed with sadness and then continued:

“A strongly inspired young man was hired there, to whom I pay a salary. And even if I stop paying, he would rather die of hunger than stop teaching the children! Perhaps, of all people, this school has benefited mainly him!

“You and Zosia saw the children’s shelter. Young ladies work there from the female courses... This gives them some emancipation in life... Yes! But the benefits are much less than planned! And if it were not for the large amount of money that I pay them, then none of it would have happened!”

“That’s the problem: all such things are handouts from the rich to the poor! But when all citizens are equal, then everything will be different!” — Victor said.

“And what? Will there no longer be smart and stupid, kind and greedy, or hardworking and lazy people?

“And it’s not only revolutionaries who think about how people can be benefited! For example, I now believe that through medicine I myself will begin to bring benefit to people; though not great, but real. Everything is clear here: from physicians — there is definitely a benefit!”

... Victor smiled:

“You and Zosia should talk and talk with each other about this subject! She thinks that helping the body without helping the soul is of little use at all! And, that the most important thing in life is the transformation of that invisible soul itself!”

“Well, Victor, you should know that I agree with Zosia about this!

I’m very lucky in life to have met Zosia! Now I understand a lot about faith in the existence of God, about humility, and about myself!

“In Zosia, there is that purity and simplicity towards which we should grow and grow! Or maybe ‘grow’ is the wrong word here. Possibly, we should purify and expose the true qualities of the soul, which we often hide from others in shame!”

... Zosia wanted to stop Olga’s praise, but Olga continued:

“It’s okay, Zosia: I’m telling the truth! When else will I have a chance to say all this?!”

“All my erudition and intelligence are nothing compared to such a purity as hers! This is like in Tolstoy’s parable about the three hermits. A so-called smart aleck of a church visited the hermits on their island and proudly tried to teach them how to pray properly. When that man left on a boat, the three hermits, having forgotten his instructions, walked on the water of the sea, holding hands, in order to catch up with him and relearn his ‘teachings’... Like this — Zosia lives! She is as if transparent before God!

“Therefore, I think that it is very useful for all of us to be with her, to hold her hand, and all hold hands together! Maybe then, we will not fall, we will not stumble in this life, we will find the right path, and we will learn what God reveals only for pure hearts!

“For example, next to Zosia, I understand a lot about myself: about my pride, about my desires...

“Even from childhood, there has always been a desire in me ‘to be good’, and not just good, but to be ‘better than everyone else’! And I did this so that everyone could love me and admire me!...

“Previously, I only occasionally noticed this in myself. And even when I noticed it, I then just tried to hide it from others.

“It’s right to do good deeds not ‘for show’, but to do it in secret and not boast about what was done!

“But, anyway, inside, I always wanted everyone to admire my deeds!

“Of course, the joy, when it helped someone, was, and is always, very big! This joy is real and right!

“But inside me, pride also remains. So, I live, knowing about myself that which is not always visible to others...

But one cannot hide the truth from oneself!

“It turns out that I get more satisfaction from the gratitude of people or from their admiration, than from God’s Joy for the good deeds that I try to do...

“And I first noticed this after having been next to Zosia! And this is very important to me! And it is also important that now I can tell you about this! Previously, I would have been ashamed even to admit something like this to myself!

“I now understand that the reason I did not want to become an artist or writer, was not only because of my passion for medicine, but also because of this pride: in art, I could not become the best among people!”

... Zosia could not stand it any longer:

“Well, you completely overpraised me, Olga!

“However, friends, what Olga understood and said aloud about herself turned out to be similar to the group confessions of the very first Christians! Nowadays, only very few people want and can act so. They are those who already have no false self-justifying in themselves!”

... On this day, only Denis remained silent. It was not difficult to guess that he was fascinated by Olga. This nascent falling-in-love deprived him of any desire to talk about transformations in society or about purifying the soul! Olga “enchanted” him with her beauty, intelligence, and openness, and her courage in speeches!

... In the future, the four friends gathered together more than once.

The talks were about the future of Russia, about how to make smart, kind, and talented people — to be those who direct the development of society, how

to make education and the culture accessible to all people, how to overcome social inequality, powerlessness, and lack of freedom in the state system. They also talked about medicine. They talked about faith in the existence of God, and whether people need religion. They did not quarrel and did not argue, but expressed their opinions in order to unite the best ideas and create — at least in their thoughts — the project of a society in which there would be harmony and justice.

Winter flew by quickly. Spring, the warmth of May, and the sun beckoned them to spend their free time from classes — in nature.

One day, Olga suggested:

“Next time, let’s go to the park on Yelagin Island! There are boats, and we can take a ride along the canals and ponds. It is very beautiful there!”

Then suddenly Denis suggested:

“Let’s instead go to my family’s cottage on Krestovsky Island! It is very close to there! And the beauty will be similar! Our house, however, is not big, it’s quite modest, and not a manor. But we have our own nice boat there! We can ride using oars, or we can attach a sail to it and even go out into the bay! In childhood, my brother taught me a lot about sailing. Only, we need to ask for his permission and get the keys.”

... Zosia was very happy about this prospect! She had remembered the summer days spent by the sea, and that especially vivid closeness with God that she had cognized then.

She thought a lot about how to give her friends such touches to the reality of the Divine World. She

sometimes tried to talk about it, but so far — it did not work out.

Often, Zosia returned to the notebooks and re-read the words of Zosima:

“The love that we give to others must be attentive, careful, and active!

“Love without attention and care for those, whom we love, will manifest only as what we *ourselves* think is good for them. But when we are really sensitive and attentive to our neighbors, then we provide the help that they *actually* need.

“Love, which is not manifested in deeds, is only the embryo of genuine, effective love.

“But material acts are not the only manifestations of active love. Love can also be in inaction, in silence, when it is needed.

“Love is active in not only accepting God’s Will, but also in realizing it in life!

“Do not be ashamed of the delight in your heart before the immensity of the Love of God!

“Do not hide your faith before others who do not believe!

“And do not show yourself off as a believer — to shame or humiliate someone!

“May your love for God be natural and unending, like breathing that cannot be stopped without ending bodily life!

“And protect yourself from inclinations towards despondency!

“Learn to maintain a never-ending merriment in your heart: a quiet joy!

“This joy has one reason — God!

“This feeling of a living connection with God is a way not to fall into sorrow and to keep joy in the heart!

“The world needs love: a steady and unconditional love! The more we bring it to the world, the more beautiful life becomes!

“There is already anxiety and contention here in excess! But there is not enough love and peace! If we ourselves live in love, then this alone makes this world a little better. This, by itself, can be counted as a way of serving God!

“Even if at least half of the people could be in peace and love all the time, it would be wonderful to live in such a world!

“God does not exist in mere theories of transforming the world...

“External freedom — that is, to do whatever you want — is impossible in society! And the desire for such freedom can even be dangerous!

“But internal freedom — let it be achieved!

“Such freedom is a property of One, Who knows the Highest. Nothing earthly can bind such a free Soul. Whoever has not experienced this is still wandering in the darkness of suffering. And whoever knows, he or she lives in the Light of Love and Wisdom!

“God is Everything! He is everywhere!

“God lives in everything: both here in the mundane, and beyond the bounds of earthly life!

“God surpasses everything with His Infinity!

“For a soul — in the Light of the Holy Spirit — this becomes clear without any words! And an understanding comes that we are particles of the Divine Life! There, we learn that we are not separate grains,

but parts of the Divine Whole, Which can be manifested in each of us!

“And *There* the life is joyful, full of Love, and Eternal!

“And in the world of matter, we need only purify and transform ourselves as souls in order to learn the selflessness of love, which is real and emanates from God! And then, Light, Joy, and Beauty become an intimate part of our lives!”

... Zosia closed the notebook of the elder Zosima and mentally addressed him:

“How can we help those who have not yet felt the Love of God? How to help those who believe only out of habit from their upbringings, or those who want to love and live honestly without God?”

... The space around Zosia suddenly became special, as if every drop of Love suddenly began to radiate Light. And then Zosia saw the face of the elder Zosima. The face was not clearly visible, but was more like an appearance of Transparency and a slightly wavering Light. And the elder’s look was lively, and Zosima’s eyes looked affectionately right into the soul. And then his words began to come. They were as if being born inside her:

“Silence! Silence must be taught! Do you remember how I taught you to listen to the silence? And after that — to always find peace in the heart, and live in it!

“Without this — no matter how many words you say — it will all be of little use!

“The silence which is complete and deep, in which the mind plunges into Love and falls silent — that’s what you must show to these people!

“And whether or not they really want to know God in this silence, is a choice which each of them must make on their own. This choice is free for every person, and no one has the right to take it away.

“God gives every person a chance to approach Himself!

“When learning this, you can feel the Love of God, the Silence of God — like a breath. Inhale Silence — and exhale Silence, as if It is transparent air!

“It is both inside and outside, in every cell of the body, and in everything around the entire spaciousness of the Divine World, to which there are no boundaries!

“In every being: both in you, and in the trees, and in the birds, and in the flowers, and in the blades of grass — there is God’s Power, Which makes everything alive!

“Remember how the body, which is dead and lifeless, is different from a living body, which is sleeping, for example... And there is no device that can measure this!

“Only a soul — purified and developed — is able to see God’s Life in everything.

“Seeing so — is real!”

Silence

The friends gathered at the cottage in the evening so that they could wake up before dawn and meet the sunrise.

Sergey, Denis’s brother, was already waiting for them at the cottage.

His marine uniform looked very nice on him. He was tall, well-built and broad-shouldered, handsome, and surprisingly pleasant — with his whole appearance and soul. The latter was much more important than the outer beauty. It was as if he embraced with both his attention and care all those people with whom he was close.

Sergey, in many ways, was like a father for Denis.

He gave Denis the keys and said that he checked the boat and that everything was in order and that it did not leak. Then he very strictly asked Denis to make a promise that they would not go to the bay alone, without him.

He looked around at the group once more and, speaking to Olga and Zosia, said:

“On you, ma’ams, I put all my hope! Keep these youths from doing anything rash and do not let them drown you all!”

Olga pretended to salute him, and said:

“I obey, Your High Honor!”

Everyone laughed.

“Are you having dinner with us, Sergey?”

“No, please, forgive me, I’m in a hurry: duty calls!

“But, when you all pass the exams this year, we can go sailing together to celebrate this event somewhere on the shores of the Gulf of Finland.”

Olga watched Sergey with an enchanted look.

After he left, they settled in a simply furnished living room by the fireplace.

Denis, as if making excuses, said that Sergey, who was twelve years older, had been like a father for him for his whole life, and that this was why he, out

of habit, was so protective and concerned about security.

They began to drink tea and dine on the stuffed buns that they had brought with them.

Victor joked a little about the fact that the buns were once again filled with cabbage and apples!

This was because even though Olga had already departed from activity in the Tolstoyan Movement, she followed in life many of those ideas, including the rules of “killing-free” nutrition, as Leo Tolstoy called it.

Not long after their first meeting, Olga told her friends about this, about how she herself came to understand the need to switch to vegetarianism.

Olga always spoke simply and, at the same time, with a deep and confident voice. She did not try to offend those who disagreed with her. She did not argue with anyone. She simply stated — with her striking example — that vegetarianism is good!

She said that not killing and not eating the bodies of animals which feel pain and suffer — is so right and wise!

Before, Zosia knew that the elder Zosima, for example, had never eaten meat. He was very strict in his diet. Although, of course, Zosima ate more than just goutweed and apples from the monastery garden.

He also — in quantity — rarely allowed himself to eat beyond the body’s necessity for life, except for those occasions when not doing so could offend someone who brought gifts.

Zosima never specifically called upon anyone to such a strict fasting life. But he said that it is good for a person to first feed the soul, and only after, —

the body. And if a person's main concern is to eat and drink, and only after this to recall about God, then God is not close to him or her. "This always happens in life," — he said: — "that what a person holds as most important in his or her thoughts and deeds becomes that which is next to him or her".

Zosia herself, from childhood, could not eat meat: her body simply did not accept it — and that was that! Her parents were worried about her health, but the elder Zosima reassured them: "Don't worry: her health is fine! Through this, God has ruled in favor of her health! Accept it — and do not force her!"

... So, now, united, Olga and Zosia made it a rule in their joint walks to take with them only food that was pleasant for everyone. They had buns filled with mushrooms, cabbage, apples, and cherries. There were also cheesecakes, cheese and eggs, and fresh bread with butter.

The young men were indignant at this diet only as a joke, since everything was very tasty and quite satisfying!

They also did not drink wine. Tea and berry fruit drinks suited everyone! The friends talked a lot about the dangers or benefits of wine, about vodka and moonshine, and about drunkenness, as a disaster for the entire Russian people. They decided for themselves that they should not drink alcohol at all — in order to be a good example for others.

* * *

They did not have conversations that evening, and went to bed shortly after supper.

They got up before dawn, which in May in the northern part of the country was very early.

At the mouth of the Neva River, the ramifying branches of the river and canals formed many cozy places.

It was a foggy morning. Before that, there had been several days with an almost summer-like heat, and the nights were cool.

... In calmness, the fog made everything magically fascinating!

The natural beauty began to awake amidst the gentle morning! Newborn green leaves, young blades of grass, and flowers along the banks were all happy! All this was reflected in the mirror surface of the water, which doubled this beauty!

The birdsongs emphasized the amazing silence!

Now, almost all people were still sleeping, and they did not disturb the harmony of nature with their noise.

... The boat glided along the water. Only the quiet taps of the oars were audible...

Olga admired enthusiastically, and said:

“What fabulous beauty! Thank you, Denis!”

Victor was also inspired:

“Yes, it rarely can be seen! We are lucky today with the weather!”

Zosia whispered:

“And such silence! Let’s try to listen to it!...

“And we can even breathe this silence! It is as if is dissolving us in itself! And then these trees, flowers, blades of grass, birds, and all of us — are just tiny particles of this beauty and silence!”

The young men stopped rowing.

The silence enveloped everyone and plunged them into the wonderful world of unlimited peace...

Zosia felt that she herself became this enormous transparent silence in which everything abides... And now, she could hold on her palms of the soul — with God — the shore with the singing birds, with the trees, with the flowers, and also the mist-covered surface of the water... And she could gently caress them like small children!...

... The sun gradually warmed the space. The fog was dissipated by the rising breeze.

They landed on a coast, where there were no cottages, and took out their picnic baskets. They had a snack.

Olga shared her impressions:

“Words cannot describe how great this beauty and silence is today!

“All my abilities for delight come from my youth, when I admired beauty and imagined how it could be depicted in a picture, or when I considered what words could be found to describe it.

“And today it was as if I myself became like a tree with bursting buds and erupting green leaves!

“In this silence — I myself as if sprouted!

“Or, conversely, silence penetrated me to the very depths...

“All my thoughts even stopped!

“And my life existed only here, along with all other creatures on equal terms!”

... Zosia continued the topic, quietly and slowly saying the words:

“This state is also called hesychia. This is when inner silence comes and the soul, before God, dissolves in this silence of the heart. In this silence, you can feel and understand God, what God wants from

us, people: from each of us individually, and from all of humanity.

“And how absurd and unnatural in such silence are anger, violence, and wars between people!

“Silence can serve as a purifier for our thoughts.

“And, in such silence, it’s as if you see everything as it really is, and you understand: what is good and what is bad.”

After a short pause, Zosia continued:

“We look at the cells in a microscope, and study them.

“But do the cells of the body themselves know why they live, why they divide, multiply, and why they die in their hour?

“But in human life, they play their necessary role.

“It seems to me that all people in the universe are just like those cells, they have their own purposes and their own tasks.

“And, if a droplet understands that it is a particle of the ocean, then everything becomes different for it!

“This is what Jesus explained about when He said, ‘I and My Father are One!’

“And all of us are commanded to strive for this!

“And now, if we learn to look at everything with God, then a common, holistic understanding will come. The meaning of everything that happens becomes clearer then! And it will be easier to bring help to people — reasonable help!

“After all, in order to even understand another person, you need to be able to put yourself in his or

her place, to feel what he or she thinks, how he or she sees this world.

“To love your neighbor as yourself or even more than yourself, you must be able to understand him or her to the depths! Otherwise, it’s just not possible!...

“It is like this with God as well. Indeed, in order to live according to God’s Will, one must learn to understand how exactly He sees each specific situation, and how He plans each person’s fate. And all that is connected with that person, you need to try to feel. And this — at the beginning — is not easy!

“You can try to look through the Eyes of God — at yourself, and at other people, and at the whole world.

“As a child, I often imagined that God was looking at me...

“Sometimes, I even played like this: I imagined that opposite me, for example, Jesus Himself was sitting. And I spoke with Him and asked Him questions. And then, I tried to imagine what He answered me, I tried to look at myself through the Eyes of Jesus. This was how the elder Zosima taught me to do confession. And after learning this, I began to do so often. Sometimes it even seemed to me that Jesus, imagined by me, came to life... It was so wonderful! Happiness enveloped me!...

“I guess I’m explaining confusingly. I have not yet learned to talk about such things!”

“Everything is working out for you, Zosia! When you speak, it’s as if the Divine World is opening up! And an understanding comes! What you are talking about, becomes visible and felt!

“But this is your world... We ourselves cannot yet enter this World. Apparently, we are not allowed

in yet! This is like a glass wall!” — Olga thoughtfully said.

“And what about those who have no souls? How can we, unhappy people, admire beauty, listen to silence, and help others?” — Victor tried to joke.

But his joke did not seem appropriate to his friends.

That special state of infinite silence and peace, beauty and blissful spring bliss — still did not let go and did not allow them to return completely to the world of everyday life. Everything was too beautiful!

And God, pervading His Creation with Himself, embraced by His invisible Presence and Love both those who could feel Him and those who had not yet seen or heard Him.

Dark Shadow

Soon, the course exams were to begin, and Zosia was seriously preparing for them. She reviewed everything that was done at the institute that year. However, since it was just the first year, the students had been taught only theories. Sometimes, Zosia even thought that she had forgotten what she had been able to do in practical medicine before.

She had already firmly decided that she would go home for the summer and work in “her own” hospital. She was looking forward to how happy her mother would be and to the many things that she would be able to tell fr. Alexander. Zosia, of course, regularly sent them detailed letters about her life, but it was not possible to tell everything!

Zosia also dreamed of inviting Victor, Olga, and Denis to her home, introducing them to fr. Alexander. She had already spoken about this to her friends, but so far, they were still thinking about their own individual plans.

Zosia wanted to practically master what she had read from the elder Zosima. In a separate notebook, she even wrote to herself all the recommendations that, she thought, could help her to treat patients in the future. She thought about how the clairvoyant ability to see the organs inside a patient's body could be developed for diagnosis and treatment purposes. She also thought a lot about how not to harm a soul when healing a person's body.

In particular, the elder's explanations to fr. Alexander about clairvoyance always inspired her, because they pointed to the huge opportunities that she so dreamed of developing:

"Bring your gaze into the hands of the soul — and look from there! This allows you to see a lot!

"You can, among other things, carefully examine something between your palms, this allows you to zoom in on what you want to see in the body of a patient.

"Everything can be observed in detail: how and what is arranged in a person's body, how it works, and where and what suddenly stopped working.

"And if you look at someone from a distance — together with God, connecting with His Eye, — then it happens that the person's past becomes clear, and a possible future is revealed.

"The future is usually presented as many different paths and trails. If a person makes a good choice after a conversation and healing, then a straight path

of fate becomes possible. But if one does bad things, if one forgets those lessons that one has accepted through illness or other sufferings, and again allows oneself to sin more and more, then one's fate becomes like a crooked path leading away from the Light of God. At first, pits and various obstacles appear in one's path, prompting one to change one's mind and return to the right path.

“But after that — it could be different...

“For example, feeling persistent sorrows or anger, a person could get bogged down in such emotions, or some other bitter thing could happen...

“Or, one might even suddenly start feeling that evil deeds bring one success, and that one benefits from unclean intentions. And such a misguided one becomes satisfied with oneself and one's life!... This sad thing happens when God backs away — for a while — from someone, who persists in sins, allowing that person to make his or her own wrong choice. Such a one stands on the dark side and allows the evil in oneself to triumph! It is not easy to stop such people. They have already stopped hearing the voice of their conscience, and they are not afraid of God's punishment anymore, and they don't even think of God's Joy about them... And the saddest thing is when they believe in their 'rightness' and gain confidence in their false choice, and call upon others to do the same!

“When someone, for example, plans the sin of murder, one is scared, and one's conscience shouts with a cry, — no matter how hard one tries not to hear the voice of one's conscience. But if a lot of people come together and 'for a just cause', 'for faith', or at the direction of a leader, whom they

revered, plan a killing, then it no longer feels scary for them. Neither do they feel ashamed to God, nor do their consciences torment them: after all, they are the same as others are, and that gives them false confidence...

“It would be nice to have time to warn such a person before he or she embarks on the path of evil... It is very difficult to stop those who are already rooted in evil!

“It would seem how all this relates to treatment? Why is such a reasoning? But here — the most direct relation is: that is, an understanding the fate of a one, which is depending on one’s decisions!

“And if we do not help to free the soul from evil, then the treatment is not good, even if the body was able to be corrected.

“And we must remember that people are interconnected by fate, and many — very strongly so! And an event that happens to one person can also affect many others.

“You heal, for example, the body of one person, but it brings much greater benefits to other people than to that person. For example — to that person’s relatives or to those people who are close to him or her, or even to strangers who see this.

“And sometimes, it happens that there is very little awareness in a person. His or her understanding of God and of goodness is very weak, and his or her choices in life are as if random. It is similar to how a blind person looks for his or her path using touch: it hurts, it doesn’t hurt, it’s nice, it’s hard here, it’s calm, it’s scary... Such a person is not ready to accept the purification of the soul.

“In such cases, when the understanding in the soul is still in its infancy, it is necessary to give very simple parting words on how to behave well. It is necessary to explain in detail how and because of what something will be bad! And it must be said with such confidence that the person remembers this for a long time! Then there is a hope that such a person will beware of evil, and that he or she will try to strive for righteousness. And, if possible, the faith and love of such a person should be directed towards a good path. Then the body can be easily treated.

“You should also understand that water and infusions are among the simplest means of influencing the body. It is especially convenient to use such remedies for people of little faith, who need to get something necessarily material, to feel satisfied. For example, a potion or powder.

“Both water and liquid oils can easily transfer part of the healing power in the body to diseased organs and tissues.

“The faith of the patient is important. When the faith is weak, then you need to select the words and actions that will strengthen his or her faith, add understanding, and redirect them to recovery and away from the fear of death.

“These words should be simple and clear. They should be spoken confidently and calmly. In this way, calm is transmitted to the patient.”

... Zosia tried to learn to look with the soul. But she did not succeed in being able to see everything inside a patient’s body in detail, as the elder Zosima had explained. And the fate of people also was not revealed to her.

Sometimes, however, everything inside her seemed to shrink, when beloved ones were about to do wrong.

So far, there had only been the amazing case with the girl Nadia, but, during that event, Zosia herself did nothing on purpose. God showed and accomplished everything, and Zosia only watched as the Power of God poured through her.

For healing practice, Zosia so far had had very few opportunities. She sometimes tried to train to let God's Light pass through her bodily arms. And it seemed to her, when the Light flowed through her hands, that, through this, any pain, any disease could be removed from another person.

She tried several times to treat the headaches of some classmates. And the results were successful...

But Zosia was not satisfied with her attempts: "To relieve a headache is a trifle!..."

"And now an entire year has passed, and so little has been learned!..."

* * *

One day, Zosia had a wonderful dream:

Many Holy Spirits, consisting of the Living Light, gathered around a large table and prepared a dough. They were going to bake bread so that all people could partake of the Holy Bread: that is, so that all people could be involved in the Divine Life.

And Zosia also wanted to take part in this, to help them in their work. But she was still too small, and she could not reach the table. She even tried to stand on tiptoe, but still could not reach it!...

Then, those Holy Spirits in shining white robes surrounded Zosia on all sides. And she saw herself with Their Eyes from all sides at the same time. And

it became so interesting, as if she had disappeared in the center of the circle, and it was possible to look only from all sides towards the place where she had been before.

And then, everything became clear to her: on that table, and in that room, and beyond... And the transparent space made it possible to be everywhere and see everything, and understand everything together with the Holy Spirits Who taught her...

Then, those Holy Spirits said to her affectionately: "Take your time: everything is good, everything is right, your turn will come, daughter!"

And then that blissful picture disappeared, the light in the dream suddenly became cold and dim. And the table was no longer for bread, but was the table of... an operating room, and on it — there was a bloody body...

* * *

A sharp doorbell in the middle of the night woke Zosia.

She opened the door.

Victor stood on the threshold. He was pale and excited. He was dressed in some ridiculous jacket that must have belonged to someone else. There was blood on the sleeve.

"May I come in?"

"Of course! What happened? Are you hurt?"

Zosia almost pushed Viktor into the hallway and closed the door behind him.

"It's not I who is injured... I'm sorry to get you involved! I really need your help: your tools for the operation! My friend is seriously injured. We need to act urgently! They are looking for him, so we cannot go to the hospital..."

“And your father?”

“He — will probably call the police and say that there are doctors in prison...”

“Do you want to operate yourself?”

“Yes. No choice. He will simply die if we do not use the chance now to save his life!”

Zosia got ready in a couple of minutes: dressed and with a bag in her hand.

“I will go with you, I will assist you!”

“You cannot! They might arrest us!”

“So — let them arrest us!...”

“Then you must say that I forced you! Do you promise this?”

“No. I do not know how to lie! Go! Here, put on this jacket: that jacket is covered in blood!”

... They took a cab.

They got off in the working quarter and passed through several passage yards.

In the room where the wounded man lay, there were still a tearful woman and two men. It was dark and stuffy. The wounded man was unconscious.

Zosia began to prepare everything for the operation. She calmly and clearly gave instructions on how to make the light brighter and where to put the patient. She asked them to bring clean boiled water to wash hands.

Victor was very nervous. He had never operated before and only in practice in the clinic had he several times assisted in operations.

Zosia took his hands in hers for a few seconds, as if pouring out confidence and strength:

“Everything will be fine! You can do it!”

She mentally called for the help of the elder Zosima. The response from the World of Light came

immediately. It became quiet and calm inside, as if time began to flow at a different speed.

Several times, when Victor was in indecision and did not know how to proceed further, Zosia told him how and what to do next. She was now seeing exactly as how Zosima had explained. She could see such things as where the bullet was, and what muscles and vessels were damaged...

The bullet was removed. The wound was not very dangerous. Important vital organs were not affected. Everything went well.

Zosia approached a woman who was probably the wife of the wounded man. Zosia said that now everything would be fine, and began to explain in detail how to continue to care for the patient, and how and when to change the bandages...

The woman thanked her through tears and said that God Himself had sent help.

She was interrupted by one of the men, the brother of the wounded man:

“Stop saying nonsense! What did God have to do with it? It was due entirely to these comrades-students performing the operation well!”

Zosia very carefully looked into his eyes, as if looking deep down into the soul, and said:

“She’s right: God has now saved the life of this man. We just removed the bullet. And it was God Who extended his life! And now, it is important how your friend will continue to live, *for which aim* he will recover.”

A second man came up and touched her shoulder:

“You have to leave: it’s dangerous here!”

He gave Victor a gun. Victor took it into his palm with a habitual movement.

Zosia said:

“Victor, please, return the weapon! You are a doctor!”

“And if the police are armed? So, it is necessary for your safety!” — Victor’s comrade said.

“No, don’t! Victor, if you’re afraid, then I’ll go home alone!”

Zosia took her bag and went to the door.

Victor put the gun back into the man’s hand and went with Zosia.

They walked silently for a long time through the night streets.

This situation with the gun seemed to put a strain in their relationship...

Victor made an effort and broke the silence:

“Thank you! I couldn’t have done it alone!... Sorry to have dragged you into this! This will not happen again!...”

Zosia nodded, then asked:

“Could you shoot a policeman if you were being chased? Have you killed people already?”

“No, how could you say that, Zosia?! A weapon is just in case!”

“For what case? When an acting policeman tells you: ‘Freeze! You’re under arrest!’? And what if he has a wife, or little children? It’s not his fault! Do you understand this?...”

“You just don’t know, you don’t understand... There is no other way to make a revolution! This is for the good of all the people, for all the people of our country!...”

“You used to say: ‘We are not terrorists-killers’...”

“Yes, and I say so now as well!...”

Zosia did not reply...

Victor was silent too.

It was as if a dark shadow suddenly fell... And it was not possible to drive it away...

Bay Trip

Zosia had not seen Victor since that night and she did not know how to continue to communicate with him:

Would it be best to pretend that nothing had happened? Should she try to dissuade him from participating in future gatherings with his comrades, who were “paving the way for the revolution”? And could it even be possible? After all, he so sincerely believed in the righteousness and justice of everything that they conceived!

But one cannot put one’s understanding into someone else’s head!

The exams were completed and very successfully passed by the friends. Denis invited them to go to celebrate this event on the shore of the Gulf of Finland. His brother Sergey, as promised, was ready to sail with them. Everyone agreed and set a date.

*** * ***

The weather was sunny and warm, and the wind was fair and not strong. Sergey was sitting at the

helm and watched with approval as Denis steered the sail.

When they entered the bay, the wind became a little stronger. The boat glided easily and confidently along the small waves.

... It was an early morning. There was a feeling of freedom from being on the open sea that stretched on before their eyes! It was as if the wings of them, as souls, spread open, allowing everyone to soar as souls, like the white-winged gulls that accompanied the boat.

They passed some coastal settlements, on which there were wooden cottages.

Olga asked Sergey:

"Tell us about yourself! Denis has said told us almost nothing about you. Whereas, the rest of us already know almost everything about each other."

"What can I say about me? My life is a life of service on the sea. Ever since childhood, I have dreamed about the sea, of sails, and I have wanted, like our great sailors, to travel around the Earth on a sailing vessel and see the whole world...

"But circumnavigation has not yet taken place in my life.

"In practice, we sailed for three months along the Baltic Sea. It was great!... And now, for the third year, I have been commanding a battleship.

"Service, maneuvers... My ship has become 'close to my heart'. My ship, my crew — I feel as if we are all one family!... I live like that...

"And Denis told me a lot about all of you. So, it seems to me that I already know each of you well!"

... They moored at the mouth of a small stream flowing into the bay.

The sandy beach was small and was covered with stones on both sides. Walking over the stones was very inconvenient, but the huge granite boulders towering above the water and the pine trees on the shore harmonized so beautifully!

The pines were tall and strong, having withstood many severe storms from the sea.

The travelers arranged a camp: they laid flat stones and wide planks upon them, which had more than once been washed ashore by the waves, thereby creating some comfortable benches.

The wind almost completely died down, as if it, after doing its due, chose only slightly to rustle the leaves of small aspen trees and sway the branches of mighty pines.

Olga and Sergey went along the coast to collect dry firewood for the campfire. They went very far, talking among themselves.

When they returned, Olga shone with happiness! She ran to one of the tall pines standing separately on the shore, and wrapped her arms around it.

“Look: what a beauty! It was already growing here before any of us were even in this world! And perhaps, when we are not here, it will still be standing here and admiring the sea!”

... Olga hugged the trunk and pressed it gently against her cheek. Then she stood still for a long time, feeling how, high in the branches, a subtle gentle breeze was stroking the needles and cones.

Zosia came up, stood next to her, and stroked the golden trunk of the pine tree with her palms.

The three of them stood for a long time, hugging each other — the two girls and the pine...

Olga thoughtfully said:

“This is just like your hesychia! Trees — they know the deep inner silence! They keep it, and they can teach people a lot!...”

... Denis was a little worried, watching Olga, who could hardly take her eyes off Sergey. Denis tried to pretend that he did not care. But he did not succeed.

... They made a small campfire and brewed tea in a pot. They also snacked on some of the supplies that they had brought with them.

They decided that they would spend the night by the fire and return to the city the next day.

Victor was silent, casting an occasional furtive glance at Zosia, trying to understand how they should now be together. He thought that he definitely needed to talk with her...

He suggested:

“Zosia, let’s go for a walk, and, at the same time, we can gather some firewood: we will need to keep a fire burning all night.”

“Yes, let’s go...”

... For a while they walked in silence.

Then, Victor said:

“My father has long wanted us to get married, he dreams about this.

“You know that I love you... Until now, I have been silent about this — only because I worry about involving you in all the prospects that come with being a wife of a revolutionary. If they arrest me, they might not let you become a doctor.

“I really want you to be happy, I do want to hurt you in any way... But it turns out that being near me is becoming dangerous... And yet, I really would like us to be together!

“But, just as you will never give up your God, I cannot give up my ideas, my dreams of goodness for all people. This is — a part of me!

“Will you agree to love me as I am and agree to be with me? Do you want to be my wife?”

“Victor, you are saying everything correctly... Everything is complicated! I love you... But we are too different. And our lives seem to be flowing now in different directions. It’s not about the danger: I’m not afraid... But I cannot become your wife! In any case, now it’s impossible!...

“And one more thing: do you remember that I invited everyone to my parents’ home for the summer? Have you decided yet? Will you go?”

“Yes, I have decided. I cannot go.”

... Victor was gloomy. All the points in their relationship were now placed.

They returned to the fire with armfuls of dry branches.

... The sunset over the sea was surprisingly beautiful!

Everyone admired the play of colors in the evening sky for a long time.

They prepared a convenient place in the boat so that if anyone got tired and wanted to take a nap, then it would be possible to lie down. Blankets were brought to the fire for added warmth.

... With the sunset, it became cool.

And the campfire was cozy and calm.

The night seemed to dissolve all the daytime difficulties of life. There was only the campfire in the transparent twilight of the northern summer night. Sparks soared and then went out in the heights.

Olga thoughtfully said:

“So we, like these sparks, flash only for a second in the transparent calm of the eternity of the universe — and then fade away... And what will happen after the death of our bodies? Paradise? But no one really knows the truth! Here — we loved, burned with ideas, strove for something, tried to accomplish something in these lives. What will happen to us after all this?

“And what is really ‘on the other side’?”

... Victor said seriously:

“It’s best to ask Zosia about this; she tried to look there.

“Sometimes, she even at present can talk with her departed elder Zosima.”

... Sergey was surprised:

“What? Like spiritualistic sessions? Now it has become fashionable. They gather at a table and summon spirits.”

... Zosia answered:

“No. I have not heard much about spiritualistic sessions. I would not want to participate in such actions. After all, spirits can differ. There are also unclean ones...

“And if, for example, Jesus begins to speak with a person, then no one will call this a ‘spiritualistic session’.”

... Sergey was surprised:

“And what, do you think, Zosia, that a person can have a conversation with Jesus Himself?”

“Yes, I think that it’s possible, if one — with all one’s heart — wants it! The elder Zosima often spoke with Jesus. And fr. Alexander, his disciple, also saw Jesus and heard Him...”

“And you?”

“So far, this has not happened; at least not in a way in which I can be certain that I am actually seeing and hearing Him. But I firmly know that it is possible! I feel His Presence when I speak to Him about important things. I have not received immediate answers from Jesus, in a way in which His voice is both pronounced and heard. But after some time, an understanding comes: an answer is as if born within, pertaining precisely to the question...

“And I firmly know that there, on the other side of bodily death, there is a life! There, life continues! Souls are alive there without bodies! We can talk with them and see them.

“I don’t know much about it yet. The elder Zosima only recently has given me some very important advice and words of wisdom, on a few occasions.

“In those moments, I saw the appearance of Zosima — formed from the Light. He explained to me a little about healing. And he also answered some questions about a few other topics.”

... Sergey listened to Zosia carefully and seriously, without scepticism.

Victor expressed his opinion:

“Zosia does not invent all this. For example, I myself saw how she cured a dying girl: she, herself, even lost consciousness, and the child was miraculously healed! I’m talking about that girl for whose mother we arranged a living situation in your, Olga, children’s shelter. Of course, Zosia will now say that it was God Who healed the girl... But I do not believe in Heavenly Forces or all that church nonsense about a ‘good god’! But I can say that Zosia can interact with the worlds that are intangible and invisible. I have seen this more than once! This is a reality!

“And spiritualistic sessions are fraudulent performances for the public!”

... Olga continued the topic of conversation:

“Maybe they are not always just performances... Once, my friends lured me to such a session. There were candles, special music, and the table was shaking. The female medium fell into a trance and became just like a crazy person. She broadcasted some words from some kind of spirits. She predicted the fates of all those present. Also, she predicted a war in the Far East in the near future. There was an unpleasant feeling during all this, but something was really happening. I would not want to go there again.”

... Sergey said a little sadly:

“In order to predict the war, you do not need to be a broadcaster from the other world. It is clear that everything is moving towards this... Sadly!... Stupidly!...”

... Victor was inspired:

“Yes, it is very bad that, due to the decisions of individual rulers, entire countries, many nations start bloody wars. Many people go to kill and die — for the sake of the possibility of their rulers to influence the lives of other countries and their peoples!

“And ordinary people do not need all these wars at all! They want to work in factories or plow the land, and live with their families. But they are sent for murder and death!

“And all this madness is called ‘patriotism’! And then, they say such things as ‘Long live Russia!’, or ‘For the Tsar and for the Fatherland!’...”

“It should not be like this! This must be changed in the management of all states!

“We need a world revolution, democracy, and a reasonable government!”

... Denis said:

“Sergey, I told you that Victor is a passionate fan of revolutionary ideas...”

“But are there fair wars too? And what? Will the army or navy in your new state not be needed?” — Sergey asked.

“Justice is a very relative concept... But the army and navy, of course, will be needed in the beginning, until democracy is established in all countries. And then, there will no longer be need for them!”

... For a long time, the conversations passed from topic to topic. Sergey told stories from his maritime life...

Sometimes, everyone fell silent for a long time and admired the fire.

Olga admired and was fascinated with Sergey. She had fallen in love with him, but tried not to give free rein to her emotions or to show all this outwardly, seeing the state of the younger brother.

... In the east, the sky began to turn a bright pink color.

In the bushes or on the tops of trees, the songs of blackbirds, robins, and nightingales were heard more loudly and became more fervent... More and more new birds joined in the polyphonic bird choir.

The sun began to rise slowly. A new day had come.

*** * ***

Olga went to the water to wash herself and slipped on a wet stone. She fell, twisting her leg strongly, and cried out in pain.

Everyone rushed to her.

“Does it hurt badly? Where? The ankle?” — Denis asked in alarm.

Olga nodded silently.

Zosia, having passed her palms several times over Olga’s leg, confidently said:

“There is no fracture, only the ligaments have torn a bit. Nothing terrible!”

... She unlaced and carefully removed Olga’s elegant boot, trying not to hurt her. She asked Victor:

“Please, bring my bag from the boat!”

... Denis, in excitement, asked again:

“How do you know, Zosia, that there is no fracture? You might be mistaken... We should get some ice so that the leg doesn’t swell so much. A bandage needs to be applied!”

... Victor, meanwhile, had already brought Zosia’s bag and opened it:

“It’s your turn, Zosia, to be the chief doctor in the field!”

... Zosia confidently put on a tight bandage.

She said:

“Olga, be patient a little longer! Now, I will try to reduce the pain.”

... Everyone was surprised to see Zosia, who froze, and placed her palms over Olga’s sore foot.

After a while, Olga said in surprise:

“But I didn’t believe you that this could be done in reality!... The pain has completely passed!”

... Sergey, in deep appreciation, kissed Zosia’s hands, which could relieve pain in such an amazing way.

Olga began to apologize:

“Forgive me! I have caused such a fuss for all of you!

“It doesn’t hurt at all! I probably can even walk on it now.”

... Zosia did not agree:

“No, Olga, there’s no reason to try to stand on it right now! It needs rest. And here, we have so many strong men! They will help you!”

... Sergey picked Olga up in his arms and carried her to the boat. She gently wrapped her arms around his neck.

Denis walked nearby, carrying her boot in his hands.

Zosia and Victor quickly collected all their belongings that were laid out around the fire and loaded them into the boat.

They returned back against the tide, using the oars.

They docked at a pier on the Fontanka river, near Olga’s house.

Victor stayed with the boat.

Sergey carried Olga. Denis and Zosia discussed whether to go to the hospital right now. They decided that it would be better to call Victor’s father and take Olga to the Academy clinic a little later, so as not to make a fuss now, but, nevertheless, to be sure that there was no fracture. There was even an experimental x-ray machine at the medical Academy, which would make it possible to take a photo.

... Sergey carefully laid Olga on the bed.

Zosia helped to arrange a comfort for the sore foot.

Denis said that he would get Victor’s father to agree and would soon pick up Olga, hiring a cab:

"I'll be back soon!"

... Olga looked at his face, which had turned pale from the excitement.

"Denis, no clinics are needed, everything has almost passed!"

... Then she looked at Sergey:

"Sergey, stay with me, please! If you want, of course..."

... These words sounded like a direct and open declaration of love. And, through those words, everything immediately became clear to the older and younger brothers.

Sergey met his brother's eyes. It was a silent dialogue in which there was everything: a request for forgiveness, a willingness to give up one's own feelings for the sake of the other and for the girl with whom both of them had already fallen in love.

Sergey stayed.

Zosia asked:

"Do you need something else to help?"

... Olga shook her head:

"Thanks, but no."

... Denis, still visibly pale, said:

"Olga, you still need to visit the clinic. Sergey will take you. I'll call you when I get Victor's father to agree."