

## Entangled spaces

By tradition the cages were put in the streets, in fact in the main streets. The cages with fish. They stretched ropes between piles, made especially for the purpose, and laid out the cages on them. It was a fishing town and most of the men made their living by fishery. Once in a fortnight people from the bigger towns came to buy up the catch and then to sell it at ten times the purchasing price. But, in fact, almost no one cared about such economic details. So... about the tradition with the cages. That was something like... let's say... bullfight? The expectation and the influence on people were probably comparable to those of a bullfight. Fish in cages is quite a senseless combination, and how it had become a tradition is totally inexplicable. What was the next thing to come to their minds? To cram the fish into the sea? The madness had reached such proportions that each year, on May 16, they organized a photographic exhibition – of fishermen and their cages... and their fish. Of the fishermen – in front of the cages – with the fish. All the photos were alike. There was one photographer, not a very talented one, and that was why every year the photos were alike. But the fishermen looked so proud that, if someone lived in the town for a while, they got used to the scene and even started to respect the tradition.

However, there was a person who could not get accustomed to it, although she had been living in the town since she was born. She was 25 and every time she passed by the boats, she got sick. The men were taking the nets out of the boats and throwing them on the shore. Most of the fish were already still but in case some of them jumped off, there was always someone to grab it and knock its head on a stone. The eyes of the fish froze and its head got completely crushed. The scene disgusted her when she was 5, when she was 10, and when she got 20, too. It disgusted her now as well. She could not stand the smell that was creeping all over. She liked fish but she never cooked fish herself. She could not stand the sight of cleaning it and she had never touched raw fish. There was a month left till the tradition now. She was heading to a recess on the beach where she liked spending hours after sunset. She sat down and the swash from the waves blew softly into her face. She folded her knees into her arms and fixed eyes in the horizon. She felt the warmth of the day sinking together with the sun and the cold particles of sea dispersing in the air. In a while, when her eyes got tired from the blue distance, she turned her head towards the villa. The villa was on the opposite hill and only part of it could be seen from the beach. The curtains over the large windows were flapping and looked like tied butterflies. She thought she saw the shadows of the two brothers but that was impossible from such a distance. She lay back, dug her hands into the sand and closed her eyes.

So... these. Here! They started fighting. These quarrels, ending with heavy or light injuries, became more frequent as May 16 approached (the day of the exhibition and the tradition). The fishermen became nervous to the utmost limit and more often than not they were not satisfied with simple swearing. These two were not an exception. One could not say whether they were drunk but they were quite fiery. Usually, the quarrels were about which fish in which cage to be put. Everyone wanted their fish to be put in the central cages, not in the end ones. The town administration solved the problem by imposing the lot principle – a democratic decision, unfortunately to little purpose. So... these two middle-aged men clutched each other and started hitting so hard that the situation went out of control. A man from the crowd around tried to interfere but received a hard thrashing for his good intentions. No one saw how a metal object flashed in the hand of one of the fishermen and ... then... silence. Blood was leaking from the sleeve of his rival and dripping on his shoes. He stood as astounded as all the others. The one with the knife was petrified. Everything reminded of a movie frame. The silence lasted for several seconds and then burst into an incomprehensible medley of clamorous voices.

“What are you doing?”

“Are you insane?... You haven’t caught the fish yet... Crazy people!”

“Don’t call them crazy... who lost his hair last year, who?... you were trailing your coat too... you too! And what are you faking now?”

“Damn it, damn it...”, kept repeating the man with the knife. Floods of tears were running from his eyes. Little by little the look of his eyes was going mad.

Suddenly the one with the stabbed arm rushed at him “Take it easy, buddy! Just take it easy! See, I am all right, OK!” He was waving arms in front of his face and the blood kept on leaking from his sleeve.

Both of them were arrested.

Till the beginning of the tradition there were going to be a few more fights, plenty of quarrels and wrangles, and three murders, a bit apart from the fishing passions.

It was quiet and calm at the villa that night. Salerno, leaning against the terrace parapet, was looking at the town outlines and thinking about the forthcoming tradition with slight unwillingness. There was something in it that made his heart sink whenever he passed by the cages.

“You know”, he turned to his brother, “I would rather go somewhere until that stupid fish thing is over.”

“Aha...”

“This annoys you, doesn’t it?”

“Aha... See, you are taking it to heart too much. It is really unpleasant. There is nothing funny about it. But still something holds you up here, right?” He grinned in the dark.

Salerno's back tightened up a little. He shrugged his shoulders defensively, but said nothing. He leaned at the parapet again. There was something around him... something in the air, in his body and soul. His brother had this thing too. Girls fell in love with them and men did not like them very much, but always invited them for a drink because they were pleasant company. When they bought the villa and settled in the town, they prompted many gossips and got the role of Don Juans. So... in that quiet and calm evening, Salerno's silhouette was delineated against the terrace background as some beautiful and fabulous presence that had taken physical form. His brother, Nurmeo, lying on the lounge, was looking at him teasingly and thus trying to disguise his own sensibility. He had been sleeping with her for a long time. He knew she was in love with Salerno; he sensed that his brother was attracted by her, too; he spent hours with her with great pleasure, knowing that she would never undertake anything as far as Salerno was concerned. This gave him the freedom to cause ecstasy, and pain, and tears, and laughter; to love her, and to hate her! And this was enough for her – just because he was his brother. As in a cheap soap opera; as in an inferior movie; as reality itself! In fact neither of them had ever put any emotions and feelings in their relationships with women; they never went into small details; they never went too far into infatuations – just because they had never really fallen in love. Nurmeo was not in love now either, but all of a sudden his brother got tired and would, sooner or later, start dreaming of an unreal model he had made up and had decided he saw in her. Nurmeo adored his brother but felt some unexplainable satisfaction to tease him when he sensed that feelings took over his mind. They were both good lovers but Salerno always put something into it that he knew women liked. However, this thing brought a lot of trouble – the girls' torments that vented in front of him in torrents of tears. He managed to end up his love affairs considerately, while his brother usually became irritable by direct explanations and put an end at once.

“Do you sleep with her?”

“What?” Nurmeo gaped at his brother. He did not expect such a frank question.

“Don't be ridiculous, brother!”

In fact all the three of them knew. They knew the game they were going to play. They knew the answers before they asked the questions. They knew who whose death was going to cause even before they attempted their lives.

When Talia felt the cold from the sand crawling over her body, she stood up and dusted off her hands and clothes. She cast a glance at the villa and then turned her back to it. She had a date in the pub at the quay and she did not want to be late. Her acquaintances were a group of 5-6 people. No one left that fishing place; no one complained or exalted about anything; no one had any claim on anything or anybody. They were funny, irritable, kind, bad, vicious and boring. From time to time she found them touchingly impersonal. When she arrived,

they had already gathered and were outshouting each other in some passionate argument.

She took a seat next to a handsome, cheerful boy who put his arm over her shoulders, “Talia, darling, what are you going to have? You are the only one that knows about good food.”

“It’s just that they don’t serve such food here.”

“Darling, they offer the greatest variety of fish specialties here.”

“Don’t go too far with the meaning of “specialty”!” She smiled at him. “A salad and beer, please!”

It was close upon 11. Nothing could be seen through the windows because of the darkness outside and the smoke inside. The company had become cheerful. Smiling faces with a bit empty looks were showing up in front of Talia’s eyes.

Her thoughts floated towards the villa when something passed in front of her face. She could not understand what was happening but the coldness of slithery bodies filled the pub. Pieces of fish flesh were slapping on the people’s faces. It was most painful for those who were hit by tails. Talia raised her hand in order to protect her face but nothing flew towards it. The more drunk visitors decided that it was some kind of joke and kept on laughing, and the less drunk ones analyzed the situation for less than a minute and then forgot all about it. Talia felt that fish rose from the sea and flew to the town on the wings of their embitterment. Everything subsided in a while. Simultaneously, the same thing happened at some other places. The people did not pay any attention.

“What the hell was that?” She tried to outvoice the racket on the table.

“What, darling?” The handsome boy, with already flushing cheeks, tried to look serious but burst into laughter.

“It’s not funny at all!”

“Come on. Someone made a joke, nothing more. Just a little joke before...”

“Before the big event!”

“Before the fish fest!”

“This is not a fest, but a stupid tradition! Do you know what a fest is at all?! This is not a fest at all...”, but nobody was listening to her any more, “Hey, one more beer!”

While she was calling for the waiter, she saw Nurmeo coming in. He leaned at the door, slowly took out his cigarettes and lit up one. He stood like that for a couple of minutes looking round. Then he went straight to the bar and ordered double vodka. He leaned at the wall again and started examining the faces at the tables.

The handsome boy turned to Talia, “Shall we invite him to join us?”

“Whatever”, she tried to be indifferent when answering, “It’s all the same!”

She could not look at him without thinking of his brother, without feeling pain. She had made a step that dragged her into a situation that satisfied her and at the same time made her suffer.

“Nurmeo, join us”, called out one of the boys on the table.

“I’m coming in a minute; I’m just waiting for my brother. He’s coming right now.”

In fact, Salerno might not come. He was still in the villa hesitating whether to have some drinks in the pub at the quay or alone on the terrace. Nurmeo would get angry if he let him wait. One way or another he did not like going there. Still... He would go. Just to get dressed. And he might see her there. He started hesitating. Not that he was looking for her, but always, when he found her, he could not get her out of his mind and that distracted him for days. She would be there for sure. He knew that. And in spite of his hesitation, he got dressed and went out. In order to get to the road, he had to go down some stone steps, surrounded by grass and bushes. Watching at his feet and minding his steps in the dark, he saw a fish shadow crawling on the stone. He followed it as far as he could and saw it heading towards the sea. He was so amazed that he literally ran to the pub. They saw him coming through the door breathless. He looked around for his brother and saw him sitting at Talia’s table. He sat at their table and tried to tell him everything he had seen. His brother laughed and then retold everything to the rest. Salerno went mad. If he had wanted to tell something to everybody, he would have done so himself. Then he went even madder because the others started laughing too and the table took grotesquely hysterical outlines. “Someone is making jokes, definitely. Here there was a fish incident as well. Good joke!”

“What are you trying to unravel now? Someone decided to have fun, that’s all.” The table was rumbling and the whole pub was echoing with silly conversations, empty laughter and jingling of glasses. She was the only one to see him in the shadow of the fish and did not laugh at him. And he saw she did not laugh. The evening went on in the spirit of noisy entertainment. It was awfully difficult to listen – they were interrupting each other all the time. Everyone was shouting. A pretentious girl sat next to Salerno and called into play fearlessly. Nurmeo’s attention was distracted among the conversations and he was staring aimlessly all over the place. It was hard for her with both of them there. When she was with one of them at a time it was not so confusing. She knew that nothing would happen between her and Salerno, but it was enough for her to see him. However, when he was in a company, she understood clearly that he existed beyond her time as well; that he was liked and loved; that he laughed and had fun somewhere else too, and that brought her only the disappointment of reality. And reality included the presence of his brother, which violated her thoughts, controlled her body, but did not pervade her dreams. They happened to meet in the pub at the quay often. They examined each other’s faces and remained silent.

The morning was cool and calm. Fishermen took their boats out at sea, the shops opened and nobody mentioned the incident with the fish.

Talia got out of her bed unwillingly; Nurmeo was already drinking coffee and Salerno was still sleeping. They had some business in the near towns which they had been running before they came to the villa. They had enough free time which allowed them, of course, to hang about all day. Nurmeo had bought a boat a week ago and it should be delivered around noon. He was just lighting a cigarette, when his brother showed up on the terrace and sat down on the other lounge, yawning.

Nurmeo looked at him “Today they are delivering the boat. The weather is fine, so we can go out at sea in the afternoon.”

Salerno felt that it was one of those days when the anger took over him and it would be better to keep silent. Anger at her; at the town; at everything and everyone; at himself alone. At the fact that he said nothing when he wanted to speak and that he spoke when it was better to let the anger go. The day was going to be nice indeed – a new boat and fine weather! But behind the gloomy face Salerno disguised the disappointment of the fact that again he was not with her; that again he had not told her. He was hiding the suspicion that his brother was sleeping with her, as well as his resentment to the fish tradition.

Nurmeo knew him well enough to feel how the day could be ruined. “Don’t do it, brother. I am serious. Don’t get sour because of her. You know that no one deserves to be thought about all the time. And she will get out of your mind sooner or later. Either tell her or stop with your “noble” masochism. You are getting ridiculous.”

He knew his brother was right and that drove him crazy. “Is there more coffee?” “Yes, brother”, Nurmeo reached for the jug and poured him some. “Something else?” He winked at him and smiled.

This was more than enough for Salerno to start answering with the intentional aggressiveness of an insulted person.

“Just kidding, brother! Cigarette?”

Salerno took the packet and pulled out a cigarette. A horn sounded down the road.

“Come on! It’s here.”

Nurmeo stood up and looked to the direction of the sound. The car had stopped down the road. The boat was hung on it and Nurmeo’s face glowed.

“You have picked out a real beauty, sir!” The driver got out of the car and held out his hand.

Nurmeo took his hand and started examining his “beauty”. “You are a beauty indeed. You are gorgeous.”

“Come on. Drive to the quay!” And he got in the car next to the driver.

Salerno took a slow sip of his coffee. He looked at some bottles drawn up in the cupboard, contemplated for a minute and then stood up and took a cognac. Although it was pretty early, he poured himself a substantial amount of it. The telephone rang. He did not feel like standing up or talking to anyone. The ringing, however, irritated him and he eventually picked up the receiver. It was

an acquaintance of his. Such type of acquaintance you date at first, then you sleep with from time to time, and finally you find her presence unbearable.

“It’s me!”

*“Who are you? ‘It’s me!’ Each person has a name, for God’s sake! She never tells hers as if I am supposed to guess that it’s her. And I guess, of course.”*

“I’m sorry but I can’t hear you very well!” He tried to sneak out.

“Hallo! Salerno, it’s me!”

*“Say your name, damn it!”*

“Hello, Tia!” He gave up.

“What are you doing?”

*“Vapid talk and early in the morning at that!”*

“In fact... well, the truth is I am drinking coffee with a lot of cognac. My brother is waiting for me at the quay because we have a new boat and we are going out at sea. The weather is wonderful, my spirits are low. Would you like to come with us?”

“Of course I would.”

“I’ll wait for you here” and he hanged up.

The sun was already hot. The waft of the sea was drifting to the villa blending with the smoke of the cigarette, and the scent of the cognac made the air sweet. He was already sorry for inviting her. *“Oh, what the hell...?”* He filled out his glass and drained it. He heard heels knocking on the stairs. *“I hate women on high heels. She will climb stairs on heels; she will walk on the beach on heels; she will always wear high heels. She knows what the road is like up here, and still she always comes with such shoes. She thinks I like them...”* He heard her climb the stairs, then the grass muted her footsteps and she was on the terrace in a minute.

“It’s me!”

“It’s you! And you are wearing high heels”, he laughed.

“Why are you laughing?” She came near and kissed him.

“How are you, Tia?”

“OK.”

“Something to drink?”

“The same as yours.”

In fact, Tia was an attractive girl with a nice body, pleasant features and lovely hair. Salerno really liked her hair.

He filled the glasses.

“Cheers!”

“May I sit?”

“Of course!” And he pointed to the lounge.

Affectation and nice legs in a woman always fascinate men. Salerno passed his eyes over her smooth skin. He had slept with her many times. But she could not get into his thoughts even for a minute when they were not together. The pain for Talia took over him completely after the next glass. He came near Tia and

took off her dress. All the thoughts vanished from his mind. Tears were welling up from his eyes – for something lost before it was won. And the pleasure possessed his body.

Tia did not ask any unnecessary questions; she did not cry and did not make plans for the future – she was comfortable!

*“She is driving me crazy with these heels...”* He stroked her hair. He felt a malicious joy seeing her suffer in the boat with them. Of course she would take them off! But she would still be carrying them in hand. But she would go to the quay with them! Then she would wonder where to put them...

*“Come with us... The weather is wonderful, just for sailing.”*

Tia was a nice girl, doltish, yet kind, and more often than not she became a victim of his bad mood without getting it. Doltish!

*“Well, all right...”*, and she put on her shoes.

Talia and Nurmeo were waiting at the boat. They had met an hour before and now they were both standing and watching the “beauty”. The heels were knocking on the pavement and Talia heard that. She turned around. And she knew she was going to hate this afternoon for the rest of her life. This afternoon she was going to hate anyone who stood in her way. She was going to hate Nurmeo! And the boat! And everything! She was going to hate herself, because she could not stop thinking about Salerno. His face did not leave her alone – while making herself coffee; while dreaming; while walking; while running. She had met the person she loved and she was now feeling like crying in the middle of the quay. As Salerno was approaching, she wished to begin hating him too. She wished he were a man she could not stand, or to be indifferent to him; or he were just somebody; or nobody!

*“Hi, Talia”*, he did not reach out his hand this time, *“I didn’t know you were coming.”*

*“I didn’t know that our beloved Tia was going to pay a visit either”*, cheered up, Nurmeo was watching his brother. *“Look how we gathered, right?”* The irony virtually swallowed his words. *“What do you think of our new acquisition, Tia?”* And he pointed his head to the boat.

He said it deliberately. If there is a girl, the appearance of another always strains the atmosphere. Usual civilities are said with effort; gestures are either too many or too thrifty; one girl’s perfume is always better than the other’s ... Nurmeo was very well aware of these particularities and by asking for Tia’s opinion with such a harmless question he managed to intensify Talia’s hate even more. But she neither did nor said anything and the answer was heard *“I’m so glad to come with you.”*

In the long run, they both had been invited in the same way.

*“Come on!”* Nurmeo helped the girls to get on board. His impatience to sail in the “beauty” was so big that he did not intend to lose any time in senseless conversations.



Talia got on and, against her will, felt that she became an observer. She was one of the participants but she decided to stay out of the main act. The tension she felt being around Salerno built a boundary for her feelings.

The water was glassy and the whole surface was glowing. She stared at her reflection and her face started moving in the water. The space became unreal. The words coming to her ears were unreal. The bodies in the boat were unreal. The fish that showed up were unreal. This was the loneliest day in her life. She was neither on the one side, nor on the other – she was in the middle, and the middle was not exactly the middle: it was something in the middle of the superfluous and the inexistent. She was a quickly faded memory, remembered by nobody's consciousness; she suffered a pain caused by herself alone and sensed by nobody else – she was there and unnoticed! She just wasn't! Out of nothing!

And suddenly that creature – Tia, turned to her with the intention to talk. And they talked. An empty conversation that irritated Salerno. Nurmeo was so overexcited by the “beauty” that he paid attention to nothing else. Talia looked back and saw the coast shrink. Splashes from the waves made her face wet and awoke the hatred towards the two brothers. She knew that Salerno always had his knife when he went at sea. It was a gift from his brother. A beautiful knife with a heavy handle and a short edge. She looked through his trousers and saw it coming out of his side pocket. She stood up and approached him. She kissed him ardently and he kissed her back. He slid a hand over her blouse and felt the blade in his ribs. He smiled to her gently. A large pool of blood covered the boat and everyone's feet drowned in the red.

Splashes from the waves made her face wet. Tia lured her again in some conversation.

The four of them were sailing – each in their own selfishness!!! The unhappiest four! And all they had to do is switch places! It was so simple!

Her eyes followed the knife tumbling down the boards and shoving against Nurmeo's foot. And he kept on jabbering about the boat; he did not even take breath and did not shut up for even a second. Talia, like some kind of animal, slid to him – rose up the knife and without any hesitation passed the blade across his back. Blood was leaking out of Nurmeo's shirt as if he were some slaughtered animal and the boat filled with red.

Splashes from the waves made her face wet. Nurmeo got entranced by his “beauty” more and more.

The knife was still sticking out of his back. She could not pull it out the first time. “Damn it” she said, pulled a little harder and managed to. She thought for a second over Tia's face but... in the end... she shouldn't have got on board. Her face was slashed from top to bottom and then the blade stabbed her in the throat. Everything was stained with blood.

Splashes from the waves made her face wet. Tia kept on talking.

When were they going to find them? The police in the town was going to have work and entertainment for a long time. Investigation of serious crimes was a rare thing. The bodies of the two brothers; and a girl! Was there a witness? Somebody must have seen them – four in a boat. And the weapon was one and the same! And the murders were cruel!

She wanted to go back to the coast.

The bottom of the boat was red. She was looking at the faces of the three... and ... felt nothing. Nothing! Neither love, nor hatred, nor desire, nor she felt like crying. Nothing!

Were the residents going to give up the tradition because of the murders? Still there were three bodies – brutally stabbed with a knife at that!

“How is the sailing, girls?” Nurmeo smiled at them happily.

“Hey... terrific, terrific...” Tia was now hugging Salerno, now grabbing his hand.

Nurmeo was really having fun.

A fish ripped up the air in front of their eyes. A tension was felt for a moment and then everyone stood silent.

“Did you see that?” Salerno stood upright.

“What?” Tia was looking around.

“I saw it!” said Talia.

“What? What?”

“Oh, people, why don’t you look only at the sea and the boat, and have fun as we should?” Fierce sparks sneaked in Nurmeo’s eyes, which meant he was getting nervous. “There we have a terrific boat and terrific weather for sailing! So, cheer up, or you will be all off board! Got it?”

Everybody laughed.

“I am serious!”

“You know, in fact you’re right! There is nothing funny and you are serious.” Talia stood up. She was beautiful and the air surrounded her with bluish transparency. She had always feared vast spaces. She jumped! She had left three bodies in the boat and at that very moment her fear from the deep paled. Oh! It was beautiful – blue and airy! – and there was still a way down. She was falling but she could still hear the steps of the policemen; their dull theories and stupid reasoning. They were going to prolong the investigation for months. She screamed out of the water “I did it – hey! And this is just a mawkish story – hey! There is nothing more! Just a love story!” And she screamed so loudly that the fish yielded her the sea.

“Hey, why so silent?” Nurmeo sat next to her.

“When are we going back?”

“Well, I turned the boat already. It’s almost dark.”

As they approached the coast, the town lights were getting larger and one could tell which was coming from where – from a window; from a lamp post; from a pub; from a car. The town was standing bigger and bigger and she had to get back in it.

“Great sailing! Just great!” Nurmeo was frantic with delight.

“What? Are we getting off?” Tia turned to Salerno.

Nurmeo could not help laughing “No, you can stay! By yourselves! The boat is a great place for such things. Ha-ha! Talia and I are going to the pub.”

“I am coming too” Salerno tried to get off but Tia grabbed him by the sleeve, “Let’s stay!”

“No.”

“Come on!”

“Of course, you stay!” Nurmeo pushed him back in the boat.

While they were talking, Talia was far enough. The only thing she could hear was Nurmeo’s laughter and nothing, nothing else. On her way she saw policemen and tried not to look at them. She saw many people crowding in a place and there was a big uproar. “*There is a fight again.*” Two policemen passed her running. Then some more. “... *Or they have found them. Have they found them? So quickly?*”

Someone pulled her by the shoulder. “Where are you going? Let’s go to the pub!” Nurmeo caught up with her. “Those two are going to have a lot of fun”, he added deliberately.

“OK”, and they set off to have a drink.

They went to the pub at the quay.

“What are you doing on May 16<sup>th</sup>?” He looked her in the eye with his ironic smile. “Are you going to the exhibition? Or to see the cages, or...”-

“Don’t nag at me! Yet, they can cancel that nonsense.”

“And how is this going to happen?”

“I don’t know. For instance, something more important will happen.”

“There is nothing more important to these people and this town”

“You’ve got this really fast. What are you and your brother dealing with exactly?”

“You don’t really think I’m going to answer that question, do you?”

“Why not? It’s not something...”

“Listen, Talia, don’t ruin my mood and don’t try to ask my brother. He is so stupid that he can tell you, and then I’ll have to kill him, you know”, he shrugged his shoulders and giggled, “I’m kidding.”

“Aha, but it’ll be a little difficult.”

“Why do you think so?” He kept on laughing.

“Well, let’s say I get ahead of you. And I’m not kidding.”

“You wouldn’t do it – you will lose me as a lover.”

“You’re right! I didn’t think about that. Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

“I’m sick of this town. And its people. And the fish smell.”

“Well, then leave!”

“Why did you come here?”

“I like it. A lot”, he thought for a second and said, “Yes, I definitely like it.”

“I know why.”

“Really? Why?”

“Because you will get out of here. You will leave the same way you’ve come. Because you don’t live here.”

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing. I just wonder whether I haven’t made a mistake.”

“What mistake?”

“While we were in the boat.”

“You didn’t do anything while we were in the boat.”

This time she smiled at him. “Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

“Let’s go!” offered Salerno.

“Where?”

“They are waiting for us at the pub.”

“I don’t think so.”

“But I do”, and he jumped off the boat, “Come on!”

“Since when has your brother been with that girl?”

“He is not with her.”

“Bite me! Come on, tell me!”

“He is not with her.”

Tia shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

They went to the pub.

It was almost lunchtime when Talia woke up. The day promised to be warm and sunny. She got up and looked through the window. Same town, same people, same fish smell. Nurmeo called her “Talia, did you hear the news?”

“What?”

“They have found three bodies. They won’t tell who they are. They were stabbed with a knife – brutally stabbed. The town has gone mad. All the policemen are working on the case.” Nurmeo was quite excited. “Let’s go and see.”

“Where did they find them?”

“On the beach. Let’s go! What, are you afraid?”

“No, but you won’t like the view.”

“Of course – this is a murder. But when are you going to see such a thing again?”

“As you wish.”

The whole town was on the beach. Nurmeo pushed the people aside and got on the front row. Obviously the three bodies were thrown out of the water and were covered with sand all over. Eyesore! There was a huge red stain under them and the water could not wash it. Policemen were running up and down. The crowd was surging and shoving.

“Who are these people?”, and while Nurmeo was asking the question, he saw the faces on the sand. He looked at Talia. “Damn it! You have done it!”

He gripped her by the arm and dragged her to the villa. There were no questions to ask. From the moment she got off the boat, she was trying to restore her own feelings but she couldn't. She couldn't do it now either. She could feel the pain from the fingers digging in her arm, and nothing more! She could hear people on the beach rumbling.

Nurmeo was literally dragging her through the streets. She could see the cages set up and feel the tradition coming.

The absurd swept over the town.

They were climbing the hill. A bush tore her leg.

“*We are approaching their villa*”, came to her mind. “Nurmeo...”

“Shut up, damn it! Shut up! What have you done? He really loved you, damn it!”

She was about to answer.

“Shut up! Hear me? Shut up!”

They had reached the villa. He pushed the door open and entered. His look petrified. Everything was splashed with fish slime and stank terribly. Fish bodies were dashing against the walls and falling on the floor. They trampled on squash of bones and scales.

“Salerno! Salerno!” cried Nurmeo.

Salerno came near with a glass of cognac in his hand. “Would you like a drink?” He seemed perfectly calm. He indicated with a glance around “It's like that all around the town. Fish have virtually gone mad.”

Nurmeo came near him, yelling “Do you know what she did? Do you?” He was pointing at Talia, beside himself with fury.

It was already dark outside. It was as if that day had only morning and evening, and the afternoon had slipped away in the nowhere.

“Stop yelling! I know what she did. Let her go!”

“What? Are you out of your mind? She is going nowhere!”

“Let her go!”

And Nurmeo released her. Talia went away. She went to the beach – where she loved spending hours in a row after sunset. She sat down. There was only the lapping of the waves and the screaming of the fish. She turned her head to the

villa. The curtains over the large windows were flapping and looked like tied butterflies. She lay back, dug her hands into the sand and closed her eyes.

Boriana Doncheva  
November 2004  
December 23, 2005