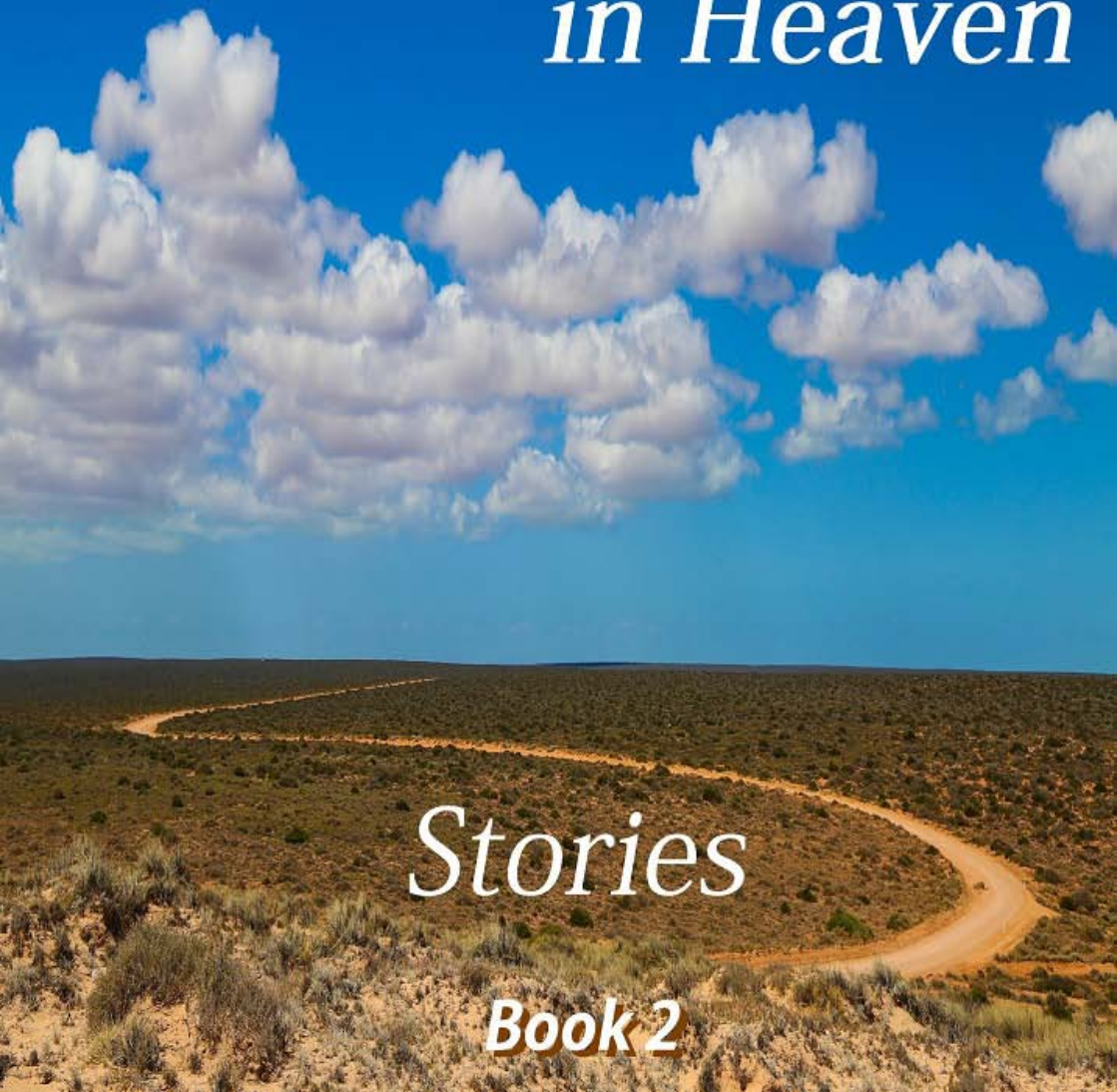


**Igor Bondar**

*Once upon  
a time  
in Heaven*

*Stories*

*Book 2*



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in Heaven*  
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“Zolotoye sechenie”

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Another book from the “Once Upon a Time in Heaven” series, consisting of several stories. Using the fantasy genre, the author tries to look at some earthly events not just from the standpoint of the inhabitants of the earth, but from a slightly broader perspective.

“Zolotoye sechenie“ private publisher.

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## The Bunker

Robert Wilson screwed in the last light bulb on the wall and proudly looked around the room. His personal concrete bunker, located at a depth of twenty meters below the ground, was perfectly ready for use. Thanks to the state-of-the-art life support systems and the stored food supply, Robert and his wife, Dorothy, could hide in this safe shelter for about a year.

Of course, such a construction cost a pretty penny for their family. But now they had a completely secure place, where they could wait out various cataclysms that could occur on Earth. Needless to say, the Wilson spouses were now much less worried about the possible nuclear conflicts, killer comets, various tsunamis and other dangers.

With a satisfied smile, Robert went to the spiral staircase and began to climb up to the surface, while closing the armored doors on the landings from time to time. He did not install an elevator in the bunker because he reasonably believed that he should not rely on electricity when it comes to an emergency. Mr. Wilson had always preferred reliability to comfort in his life.

\* \* \*

With his chin resting on his hand, the angel Anil was looking thoughtfully at his ward who was cheerfully climbing up the stairs

at that moment. Unlike the happy Robert, there was no sign of great joy on the angel's face. There was a reason for that.

In fact, it all started when his Robert Wilson made his career choice and decided to be a meteorologist. For years afterwards, he made weather forecasts for people. Those who understand the specific nature of this work can say that the life of a weather forecaster is very similar to walking through a minefield. He had to walk through it every day because people always need the latest forecasts. At the same time, it is very important for a true weather forecaster not to "be blown up" by inaccurate forecasts, otherwise people would just stop reading them.

Unlike his ward, the angel knew exactly how the weather on earth was actually formed and often cheerfully smiled at some of Robert's amusing maneuvers on this "minefield". Nevertheless, he always helped him to make accurate forecasts, as Robert was a good, kind fellow.

As a result of this help, for many years Robert has successfully handled a difficult task of making accurate forecasts. A few years ago, by the discretion of the management, he even led one of the divisions of the company.

However, a constant over-cautiousness at work produced a side effect: Robert's excessive caution gradually became his second nature. That was why building an underground bunker became the next logical step in his life, given all the global horror stories, which the forecaster constantly heard on the news.

'Hello, my friend,' a familiar voice behind Anil interrupted his thoughts.

The angel turned around. His friends, angels Blowie and Leno, stood next to him and smiled warmly.

'Hello!' Anil smiled back.

'You don't look happy at all today, mate,' Leno said, as he looked closely at the angel. 'Why?'

'How could I be happy?' Anil sighed. 'My ward has just finished building his underground bunker. Look how happy he is. Protected himself from everything...'

'Yeah, the people's faith is 'great' nowadays,' the angel Blowie shook his head. 'Back in the day, they hoped for God at least sometimes, but now, they seem to believe just in concrete and iron...'

His friends smiled with a sorrowful mien at that sad joke.

'Yes, such times now,' angel Anil said. 'Actually, my Robert isn't a bad man. He's kind and honest. But, he's afraid of everything in this world and has no faith in God. How can I ever wean him away from being afraid or at least smoke him out of this bunker? If this continues, he will soon stop leaving his new shelter at all.'

His two friends sat down side by side with their chins resting on their hands.

'Maybe we can just flood his bunker or damage it severely?', said angel Leno five minutes later, looking up at his friends.

'It's not an option,' Anil shook his head. 'My forecaster insured it well. He'll just start build a new one.'

The angels were silent for another ten minutes.

'All right friends, let's ask Father for help. It's not a simple problem, we're talking about a whole underground bunker!' Angel Blowie finally said. 'Our Father always comes up with some interesting solutions in these cases.'

The other two angels looked at each other and nodded in agreement. After that, they all looked up with great enthusiasm.

'Hello, hello, my dear ones,' they heard a familiar and warm voice from above. 'What happened there?'

'You see, Father,' the angel Anil said, 'my Robert has built an underground bunker for himself. Me and my friends have already racked our brains trying to figure out how to get him out. Well, and how to lead him in the right direction...'

'The bunker, you say? Yes, my dear angels, every year our tasks become more and more complicated,' the Father sighed. 'I am giving people new technologies for their convenience and they immediately switch to them, but completely forget about some really important things from their past.'

The three angels nodded their heads with understanding.

'Well, my darlings, I'll try to think of something for you,' the Father said. 'This Robert is a good fellow.'

The angels - Anil, Blowie and Leno - smiled happily.

'Thank you, Father!' Anil said.

'No problem,' they heard an answer. 'But from now on you should be alert and ready to come to his rescue at the right moment.'

'We will, Father!' angel Anil exclaimed with joy.

'Good luck, my dear ones!' they heard a receding voice from above.

\* \* \*

The next day, Robert went down to his bunker in fine spirits. He was whistling a cheerful tune and carried a couple of bags with the things that could be quite useful for a long stay underground. Inside these bags, one could find half a dozen board games, several thick crossword books and even Chinese and Russian learning self-study guides.

The meteorologist walked into the bunker, turned on the light and... all of a sudden, dropped the bags on the floor. In his favorite rocking chair sat some gray-brown shaggy creature with horns and a tail. It was slowly rocking and whistling a tune, which was very, very nasty.

'W-who... Who are you?!' Robert finally said, beside himself with fear and surprise.

'What do you mean "who"? I'm a demon.' the creature replied and kept on rocking.

'W-what demon?' the forecaster stammered.



'What? Just an ordinary underground demon. Man, I've lived here for a thousand years and I've never heard such a silly question before.'

'For a thousand years...' Robert echoed.

'Yes, I've lived here for a thousand years,' the demon repeated, sighed sadly and looked at the forecaster with some sort of trust. 'But to be honest, what kind of life is this? It's always dirty, damp and cold. Ugh! I'm glad that civilization has finally reached me. What an awesome bunker you built for me! What have you brought, by the way? Some fun stuff?'

'An awesome bunker for you?!' Robert popped his eyes. 'I didn't build anything for you. This bunker is mine!'

'Your bunker on my land? Without asking permission, without any payment and without any land lease agreement? Such a gross violation definitely gives me the right to confiscate your bunker.' The demon raised his crooked hairy finger for emphasis.

'What do you mean, c-confiscate?' Robert stammered. 'I'm calling the police, they'll throw you out of here!'

The demon roared with laughter.

'Go ahead. I won't be here when they come. You can call them three times to evict the demon, but on the fourth time, they'll find you another bunker in a mental hospital. Well, so that you don't bother them with some demons...'

'How dare you!' Robert started coughing with anger. 'This bunker is mine!'

Never before had the meteorologist dealt with such insolence. Without knowing what to do, he picked up a large stick from the floor and was ready to attack the demon. As if nothing happened, he kept on rocking in the chair and whistling a tune. The man came up to the demon, took a swing and struck the demon with all his might. But for some reason, the stick went through the demon and knocked out a lath from the back of the chair. Robert stared at what had happened.

'Foolish man... I'm a ghost! You can't hurt me. I've lived here for a thousand years, and this is the first time I've seen such an idiot. Even your grandfathers knew a hundred times more about us,' the demon turned around and looked at the back of the chair. 'Madman, why did you ever need to break my good chair...'

\* \* \*

Robert slowly walked up the stairs, came into the house, and fell down on a chair in the living room. He was too confused and powerless to think of anything.

His wife Dorothy who came in at the same time, stared at him in surprise. She had never seen Robert like that before.

'Darling, is something wrong?' she asked with concern. 'You look like you've just seen an alien.'

The meteorologist slowly raised his head and thoughtfully looked at his wife. He understood that he could not succeed in hiding this problem anyway.

'Yes, dear, I have seen someone. However, it wasn't an alien, but a demon,' he said. 'I know that it sounds ridiculous, but our bunker is now occupied by a shaggy and arrogant demon.'

Dorothy froze for a second, and then looked around for an empty bottle. She had only heard him say weird things twice in her life, and the reason for it was always the same. However, there was no bottle and Robert looked completely sober. The forecaster sighed, while understanding her natural thought process.

'Darling, instead of wasting my time on fantasy stories, I'd rather ask you to go down to the bunker and see what's going on.'

Dorothy wanted to fully clear up this matter as soon as possible, so she nodded and went to the spiral staircase. Ten minutes later, she came back and looked exactly as her husband did. The woman slowly walked across the room and fell down in a chair next to her husband.

'Is he still there?' Robert quietly asked her after a while.

Dorothy nodded, without a word.

'Is he sitting in a rocking chair and whistling a nasty tune?'

His wife nodded again.

'So, what are we going to do?' Robert asked his third question a few minutes later.

Dorothy's head did not move.

\* \* \*

The angel Anil smiled as broad as he could. The angels Blowie and Leno, who were sitting next to their happy friend, also smiled happily.

'Yup, my friends, the Father's plan was brilliant as always,' Leno said. 'Just one cheeky demon and such a stunning effect!'

'That's true, my friend!' Anil nodded happily. 'From now on, my Robert will no longer be in a hurry to go down to his bunker.'

'And we also made him think about the creatures from the other world. Well, if he believes in demons now, over time he will inevitably begin to believe in us,' the angel Blowie added.

'Yeah, I couldn't have asked for more,' Anil nodded. 'It's not that difficult to plan the rest.'

'Exactly!' Angel Leno agreed with enthusiasm. 'Now we have several scenarios, and all of them will eventually help the weather forecaster to make the right choice.'

Angel Anil stood up.

'Well friends, let's not waste time,' he said. 'I need to push my Robert further. Will you help me and Dorothy's angel?'

'Of course friend, we will be glad to,' the angels Blowie and Leno nodded.

After that, the three angels went to Earth.

\* \* \*

'So, Robby, what are we going to do?' Dorothy asked quietly after a long pause.

'I don't know,' he replied. 'There's one thing I can tell you for sure: we don't need to call the police in this case. Not only it is a real chance to get to psychiatrists, but I can lose my job as well.'

His wife nodded sadly.

'It seems so. But who will help us? Who even on earth knows what to do with demons?'

'I don't know, Dot,' Robert shrugged. 'Christians, I guess... Who else? We have to look it up on the Internet.'

The couple turned on the computer and sat in front of the screen. In two hours, they knew much more about exorcism, demons and other evil spirits. Of course, the Internet was full of nonsense on this matter, but there were also some worthwhile information.

For example, one very serious company was selling the latest models of flamethrowers to fight zombies and other imps, and one big esoteric shop that offered their customers astral axes to fight evil spirits. As it turned out, Christians also had a wide range of special tools for exorcism. And, they did not change much over the centuries.

Until recently, the Wilsons would have laughed at all this information, but now they had to take it very seriously.

'Where do we start?' Dorothy asked her husband.

'I don't know, dear. Christianity has existed for centuries. I think we can trust them. But on the other hand, science does not stand still,' the meteorologist thought out loud. 'This flamethrower is made by a high-tech company and thousands of people have already bought it. I checked out the reviews – nobody seems to be complaining.'

'Maybe it's because they haven't met any demons or zombies yet...' his wife said doubtfully.

'Maybe, but I think it's worth a try,' Robert said. 'Let's first buy modern things, and if it doesn't work, we'll go to plan B.'

'All right, Robby,' his wife agreed and they went shopping together.

\* \* \*

The next day around noon, the Wilsons went down to the bunker decisively. The weather forecaster was proudly carrying a brand new flamethrower and his wife was carrying an astral ax.

Fifteen minutes later, they were 'snailing' back up the stairs. Both looked very sad. They were followed by loud and ornate cursing from the demon. The meaning of this cursing could be summed up to a serious concern of the demon in regard to his burnt chair, as well as an overall assessment of the intelligence of his visitors.

'Okay, that didn't work,' Robert said slowly after they had returned to their living room.

'Indeed,' his wife nodded, 'we didn't even set his hair on fire...'

'Well, it means that we should use plan B,' the weather forecaster said. 'Let's look and decide what we need for this.'

The Wilsons went back to their computer. For the next hour they studied Christian methods of dealing with various demons in detail. It mostly required a cross and a prayer but sometimes icons and holy water were also used. According to the reviews of some eyewitnesses, these tools were very effective against demons. Robert and Dorothy switched off the computer and sat in their chairs.

'What do you think, Robby? Should we try this method?'

'What other options do we have? We just don't have a choice, Dot,' the forecaster shrugged.

'I agree,' Dorothy nodded, 'but where can we get a cross, an icon and everything else? We don't have anything like that around here.'

Robert scratched his head and suddenly had a revelation.

'Honey, after my grandpa died some of his things were left in our house,' he said. 'As I remember from my childhood, he was definitely a religious man. Maybe we'll find something useful here?'

'Great idea,' his wife said enthusiastically. 'By the way, if you remember, this demon told us that our ancestors knew a hundred times more about them than we do. Maybe it's a sign... But, where are your grandfather's things?'

'As far as I remember, there's a boarded-up box and a big old chest in the far corner of our attic. Maybe it's them?' Robert suggested.

'Well then, let's go and check it out right now,' Dorothy said and got up from her chair.

The couple went up the stairs to the attic. In a few hours, Robert and his wife solemnly went down into the bunker again. This time, Robert was holding an old cross in one hand and a large red book called "The Gospel" in the other hand. Dorothy was very seriously carrying some large icon. They found it all in the old chest belonging to Robert's grandfather.

The procession slowly made its way down the staircase and ceremoniously stepped into the bunker. The chair with the demon, which had been rocking in the middle of the room suddenly stopped. The Wilsons moved toward him, while carrying everything they had found in the attic.

'What do you have there?' the demon asked loudly, and the homeowners could hear a clear concern in his voice.

Without answering the question, the couple kept going. The demon quickly jumped out of the chair and began to slowly step backwards into a corner of the bunker. There was obvious fear in his eyes. Robert and Dorothy, delighted with the success, as if on cue, began to say a prayer, which they had found on the Internet for that occasion. The demon shivered and shrank into a corner.

'Guys, I know that I said some things I shouldn't have,' he muttered, 'I hope that you don't hold a grudge...'



The Wilsons' procession was inexorably drawing near. When they were just a couple of meters away, the demon suddenly screamed and disappeared into the concrete.

'Wow, it worked!' Robert could not believe his eyes.

'Yeah, Robby, it seems to,' Dorothy sighed in relief. 'Your grandfather really helped us! I'm so grateful to him!'

'All right, Dot. Let's leave the cross, the red book and the icon in our bunker, just in case,' the meteorologist suggested.

'Great idea,' his wife agreed.

Robert took out the tools from the drawer and quickly attached the cross to one wall and the icon to another. They put "The Gospel" on the shelf, on top of the crossword books and Chinese and Russian learning self-study guides.

After that, the Wilsons happily returned to their home. Having thought a little, they hung another cross from their grandfather's chest in their living room. Just in case...

\* \* \*

There was a feast in Heaven. The angel Anil and his friends could not stop looking at the new design of the underground bunker. At the same time, they listened with interest to Robert's profound conversations with his wife on wonderful topics. The breakthrough in changing the minds of the weatherman and Dorothy was really impressive.

In just a few days, the Father managed to turn the situation with the underground bunker from a serious ‘minus sign’ to a big ‘plus sign’. The angels rejoiced wholeheartedly and thanked Him. However, the best gratitude for the Father was the Wilsons who began thinking about very important subjects.

## **Low Tide**

There is some infinite magic of nature in the tides.

Just a few hours ago, there was a completely different world on this spot – the ocean world. There were colorful fish swimming, crabs running and little sea animals crawling. But time passed and the world of water gave way to the world of land. And now, the inhabitants of this new world are various birds and tourists who like to walk along the water's edge.

However, the ocean gave up its territory only for a while. In just a few hours, the land should anew vacate this place. And then, the fabulous water world will come into its own again.

So day after day, year after year, millennium after millennium, water and land share many places on our planet.

\* \* \*

Arthur McKenzie was fifty-three years old and had lived alone on a small island in the ocean for almost twelve years. Arthur was once a very successful businessman but a couple of some serious financial crises that happened in the world almost destroyed his company. Arthur once believed in a great and high love. However, on this path too he met just disappointments. That was why Arthur who loved the sea since his childhood decided one day to retire from all the matters.

He had enough money left to rent a small island for fifty years that was cut off from any civilization. From his point of view that was a reasonable rental period as he did not expect to live more than that. He had built a fairly comfortable house on the island and began to live there.

Solar panels served as a source of electricity which was quite enough to fill his needs. A small boat from the nearest town delivered the necessary supplies and some things once a month. At that time, Arthur made the next order with the boatman, since there was no phone and no Internet on the island.

In general, the man provided food for himself. He had a small rowing boat, so he could go fishing, set crab traps and pick oysters in the rocky part of the island. Besides that, Arthur had a small vegetable plantation near the house where he grew the vegetables he needed. A dozen fruit trees that the man had once planted on the island also diversified his menu.

Arthur was completely fine with plain food, so he usually ordered just bread, salt, coffee and some other basic products from the mainland. Sometimes, he also ordered some home appliances which were breaking down from time to time. Of

course, once in a while he needed new clothes. Also, Arthur was not interested in any news from the mainland. Always positive news from nature was quite enough for him.

At the beginning of his life on the island Arthur tried to keep a diary where he wrote down various interesting events that happened to him or thoughts that he cared about. In the first couple of years, he filled up three notebooks but then he stopped. The man did not show them to anyone and he was not going to publish them. All this was exclusively for himself – the notebook for him was a kind of a close companion with whom he could share his thoughts in the first stage of loneliness.

Occasional tourists who sometimes sailed their yachts past the island docked to the shore from time to time. Arthur had always been very polite to them but he had never offered them to stay on his island. He got too accustomed to his solitary way of life, so he was afraid that other people could easily disrupt it.

At the very beginning of his life on the island Arthur tried to live there with a girl whom he had met just before the move. However, she only had the patience for a couple of months and then she went back to the mainland. Island solitude, as it turned out, was definitely not for her.

Since then, the man had lived there all alone the whole time and only five years ago he got a dog – a good-natured Labrador Othello. That was the creature that was absolutely excited about living on the island! Well, among other things, the ever-intelligent eyes of his new silent four-legged friend fit perfectly into the Arthur's island way of life.

\* \* \*

The angel Els looked at his earthly ward and involuntarily yawned. Actually, angels in heaven yawn quite rarely. Perhaps because they have few wards like Arthur who secluded themselves from the world. Every day of the earthly life of this island hermit was almost an exact copy of his previous day. The weather was the only thing that was different in his life - the man had to somehow take it into account.

The angel had long lost any interest in Arthur's thoughts. It seemed that this man created his own, very simple view of the world and learned to live with it. However, Els strongly disagreed with the conclusions of his ward. The angel looked anew at the man, who was sitting near the house with his dog and yawned again.

'Well, my dear, I see that you're really bored with your Arthur, aren't you?' he suddenly heard the Father's warm voice beside him.

The angel covered his mouth with his hand and stood up happily.

'Hello, Father,' he said, smiling broadly. 'Yeah, a little bit. The thoughts of my ward are becoming more and more simple every year.'

At this moment, the angel shrugged with some surprise.

'It seems that in five years, I won't be able to see the difference between the thoughts of Arthur and his dog.'

'Oh, dear...' the Father sighed. 'Looks like I should step in a little. All right, my good angel, I'll push your ward.'

'Really? Thank You!' the angel exclaimed with joy and looked at Him with interest. 'What are You going to do?'

'You'll see, my dear, you'll see,' the Father laughed. 'There's a lot of delicate work to be done. You know, these hermits can be quite complicated...'

'I know,' the angel smiled.

'Well then, just watch and wait,' said a warm voice.

\* \* \*

The next day Arthur was gathering oysters in the rocky part of the island. There was a very low tide and the man walked between the rocks on the sand where not long ago was the seabed. He found oysters attached to stones, used a large screwdriver to pick them off and put the oysters in his bag.

The man almost finished gathering food for that day when he suddenly noticed a small dark cavity in between two large stones. It was located at the very bottom of the steep slope of the island. Arthur drew closer and examined it. It was a small tunnel a little more than a meter in diameter that went deep inward to somewhere.

'It's strange that I haven't seen it before,' the man muttered, a little surprised.

He got down on his knees and looked inside. From the outside he could see that the tunnel was getting wider and higher. Arthur crawled into the passage and soon he could stand inside the cave, while bending down a little. The man wanted to move further but it was so dark just a few steps away from the entrance that he could barely see anything.

As he got out of the cave, Arthur went to the house to get his flashlight that was charging from a solar panel and came back. There was still some time left until a high tide. The man climbed back into the cave and turned on his flashlight. It became clear that the tunnel went further under the island and it did not get any smaller. Arthur cautiously moved on, illuminating the walls.

Twenty meters later, he suddenly found himself in an underground grotto. The man pointed the flashlight to the sides and looked around. It looked like a big room almost circular in shape, about eight meters in diameter. The distance to the ceiling was almost four meters.

'Wow!' Arthur said. 'It turns out I had my own grotto on this island all this time.'

The man turned off the flashlight for a few seconds and suddenly saw a small beam of light breaking in from the very top of the vault.

'It seems that there's an exit hole,' Arthur thought and climbed up the rocks to look into it.

It was not very difficult for him to reach that opening and to examine it. Its diameter was not big, slightly smaller than the size of his head. Arthur looked into it, while expecting to see outside

some familiar spot on the island. However, the things that he saw stunned him.

The landscape outside was nothing like the island. There was a beautiful green meadow between two picturesque hills. The grass was perfectly smooth and vividly green, and the whole place sparkled in an unusual and beautiful way. He also saw three big snow-white birds flying in the sky. One of these birds landed in the meadow next to him and then... stood up and walked like a human. Arthur almost fell off the stone on which he was standing.

'What is that?' he murmured, a little bit lost.

Meanwhile, "the bird" walked on the grass, as if nothing had happened and Arthur realized that it was a beautiful snow-white person with large wings on his back.

'It's an angel...' the hermit whispered quietly and slid off the stone to the bottom of the grotto.

There, Arthur stood in silence for a few minutes and then he noticed that he was already knee-deep in the water. The high tide was coming in.

He sadly looked at the opening above him and headed to the exit. The tides on his island were very high and Arthur did not want to remain in the dangerous trap.

'What unusual news I have today...,' he mused as he walked. 'Okay, I will definitely come back and sort it all out.'

\* \* \*



Angel Els did not yawn at all that evening. He watched his ward's thoughts with interest and could not stop feeling surprised. It seemed that in those few hours Arthur had been thinking much more than for the whole past year. Even his dog Othello laid separately that day and looked at his owner with surprise.

'Well, my dear angel,' Els heard his Father's warm voice beside him, 'Did we manage to work up our hermit a little? What do you think?'

'Hello, Father!' the angel stood up happily. 'Thank you so much, it turned out great! My Arthur thought no less than a real professor today. But, what should I do with him next?'

'I have a plan, my dear. Listen...!' the Father said with a mysterious smile.

\* \* \*

The next day, Arthur came to the cave just before the low tide. That day he wanted to spend more time inside, so he climbed into the tunnel against the flow of water that was still coming out. The man was carrying a bag with some tools: the day before, Arthur realized that he should try to widen the passage to that unknown place and get out from it to the outside.

The man climbed up the rocks and sat down near a small hole in the wall as before. Outside landscape was the same but there were no unusual white birds flying in the sky that day. Arthur pulled out a big hammer with a sharp edge on the back and began to hit the stone on the left side of the opening. However, in a few

minutes he had to admit that the stone was too hard. After that, the man tried to break the stone on the top of the hole but it was another failure. It seemed that the wall did not want to let the hermit go to the green meadow.

Arthur sighed, put the tool back in the bag, leaned against the hole and just looked outside. His expectations were met: soon, two large white birds appeared in the sky above the meadow. After circling several times, they landed on the clearing. This time, Arthur was not surprised much when he saw them getting on their feet and folding their wings behind their backs. He stared at the unbelievable scene, trying to make sense of it.

One of the angels - Arthur was now sure that they were indeed angels - was moving across the meadow in his direction. Soon, he was walking near the opening.

'Excuse me!' Arthur suddenly shouted. 'Can you talk to me, please?'

It seemed that the angel did not hear him and walked past. However, a few seconds later a slightly surprised face suddenly appeared in front of Arthur from the outside.

'Hello! Who are you?' asked the resident of the green meadow.

'Arthur,' the surprised man answered with one word. He could not take his round eyes off the unusual creature.

The bird-man had a light face, light curly hair and it seemed that he somehow glowed from the inside.

'Nice to meet you, Arthur. My name is Els,' the winged man replied with a smile. 'Are you just sitting here and looking out the window, huh?'

'Well, yes,' the hermit stammered a little. 'Sitting here, looking at things...'

'That's great! And I'm just flying here...' the angel said. 'All right, Arthur, have a nice day!'

After that, the light face disappeared from the opening.

'Y-you too...' the man muttered with a goofy smile.

After that, he sat by the opening lost in thought for another twenty minutes, until the water began to flow inside the grotto again. However, he did not see anyone outside pass by during that time anymore. Finally, with a sad sight the hermit got down and moved to the exit.

\* \* \*

Late in the evening, Arthur was lying on the roof of his house and looking up at the stars. Sometimes, he liked to look at the sparkling bottomless sky and think. Most frequently, he did this when he had just moved to the island.

Angels. In fact, Arthur had heard quite a lot about angels as a child, thanks to his grandmother. She liked to tell him different stories about angels, life in heaven. Everything in her stories was beautiful, they were full of kindness and justice. Arthur had

always liked the stories of his grandmother and listened to them with pleasure.

The world where Arthur had to live as an adult, was very different from the world that his grandmother had told him about. Perhaps, it was one of the reasons why he decided to retire and move to the island. He did not like many ugly things in the earthly world and the only solution he could think of was to step aside from them.

In the last couple of days, Arthur had seen something on this island which was very difficult to believe. So, he could believe only thanks to the children's stories of his grandmother.

The man sighed. Once, he had no doubt that the world of angels exists. Then he stopped thinking it and finally completely forgot about it. And now, it seemed like he got a second chance.

\* \* \*

The next day, Arthur arrived at the cave even earlier - one hour and fifteen minutes before the low tide. He reasoned that this time was already quite suitable to get into the grotto and spend more than two hours there until the next high tide. The hermit was not sure whether he could see the angels again or not, so he wanted to have some extra time.

He took a few bananas that grew on a couple of trees on his island, reached the grotto, knee-deep in the water, and sat down on the old place on near the opening. That day, he had to wait for

more than an hour, and then he saw three large white birds above the green meadow again. Two of them landed close to him.

As the angels stood up and began to walk on the grass, Arthur could see the features of their faces. They were clearly slightly different from each other.

'So, angels can be different in appearance, too,' he said out aloud.

As he took a closer look, he realized that one of the angels who flew to the meadow, had talked to him the day before. It was Els. After a while, this angel again began to walk quite close to the hole, where Arthur was sitting.

'Excuse me, Els. Can I talk to you again, please?' the man shouted loudly through the opening.

A few seconds later, he saw the familiar bright face on the other side.

'Hello, Arthur. Glad to see you!' the angel said cordially. 'I see you're sitting and watching here again.'

'W-well, that's right,' Arthur muttered. 'Yesterday I tried to climb to the other side of the wall, but it didn't work out.'

'It didn't work out?' the angel asked and then, passed through the stone wall as if it was some light mist, he appeared inside the grotto.

Arthur's eyes flew out of his sockets. He stared in amazement at the snow-white guest. Meanwhile, the angel first carefully

examined the opening, gave Arthur an appraising look and then said judiciously:

'Arthur, you had no chance to get to the other side. You're much bigger than this opening.'

'Indeed,' was the only thing Arthur could say.

After that, he looked at the angel with great curiosity.

'Then, how did you get here?'

'Me?' Els raised his eyebrows. 'Well, I'm made of a different material, so I can walk through solid objects. Well, like birds that can fly through clouds. Something like that. Do you understand?'

'Y-yes-s, I think so...' the first signs of a thought process began to return to the man.

'By the way, Arthur, it's time for you to go home,' the angel said and pointed to the rising water at the bottom of the grotto. 'All of this is going to be flooded soon, and you need air to breathe.'

'Thank you,' was the only thing the man could say and then he obediently began to climb down from the stones.

When he went down, he looked back.

'Els, won't you come over tomorrow at low tide for a little chat?' he asked hopefully.

'All right, I'll come,' the angel simply said with a smile.

Then, he waved at Arthur and walked through the wall. Arthur joyfully moved to the exit of the grotto.

\* \* \*

That night, Arthur had an unusual dream. It was as if he was sitting next to his grandmother again as a little boy, listening to her story with his eyes wide open. This dream was so bright that the man woke up from it.

Perhaps to someone else, such a dream may not seem very strange, but Arthur saw his grandmother in a dream for the first time in his life. Considering that it had been almost forty years since her death, the dream was clearly unusual for him.

Arthur got out of bed and went out to the porch of the house. That night the moon was shining brightly. The sea was completely calm and the lunar path was going into the sea from the shore.

'It's showing me the way to my grandmother,' Arthur thought warmly and smiled.

He stood there for a little while, admiring the beautiful night landscape and then went back to bed.

\* \* \*

The low and high tides on the island shifted by about forty minutes each day. So, when Arthur went into the grotto at low tide again, it was late in the afternoon. He thought that he had to wait a long time for the angel but Els walked through the stone wall just a couple of minutes after he arrived. They said hello and Arthur could not hide his admiration again.

'Wow, walking through the walls looks so unusual to me!' he clicked his tongue. 'Els, what's the difference between your body and mine?'

'Actually, they're completely different. The human body is temporary, it's intended just for a few decades of life on Earth. There is no greater meaning in it - if a person wants to understand something really important in his life, there's more than enough time for that. And then, he will have exactly the same body as all the residents of heaven do,' the angel looked at Arthur. 'In fact, the aging process of human bodies and the approaching end of their lives even help people in some way. This motivates them to seek the secret of eternal life, and it's only one. As for our bodies - the bodies of the residents of the Heavenly world are completely different: they're thinner, made mostly from energy and live forever.'

'Forever?' Arthur was genuinely surprised.

'Don't you remember what your grandmother told you?' Els smiled. 'Actually, her words were quite realistic.'

'I thought so when I was a child,' the man said, laughing heartily. 'Are you saying that all this is true?'

'Arthur, who would want to make up all these stories about God, what do you think?' the angel answered the question with a question. 'Do you think that someone could ever send twenty-five prophets and his son to Earth, give people the commandments, perform hundreds of miracles just for the fun of it? Actually, it's a lot of work, man. Why would God do that, unless to help people?'



'Yeah, indeed...' Arthur thought and suddenly raised his eyes. 'By the way, how's my grandmother doing? Is she in heaven? I dreamt of her today...'

'Yes, she's there. She loves you and still cares about you,' Els nodded.

The man smiled warmly.

'Tell her that I remember her and that I love her very much as well.'

'She can hear you, Arthur, she always listens to you.'

'I often thought so too, for some reason,' the hermit smiled. 'Els, it turns out that anyone on earth can come to Heaven?'

The angel nodded silently.

'What does he have to do?' the man asked.

'Read the Commandments, Arthur. They remain unchanged,' the angel shrugged. 'That's why they were given to people. Be kind, honest, moral and everything will be good.'

'And what does it look like, Els, when a man from earth turns into a man in heaven? If it's not a secret, of course' Arthur suddenly looked at the angel with interest. 'Does it happen already during the earthly life or after?'

The angel smiled broadly.

'That is not the easiest question. I'll try to answer in a language that you understand. You often go fishing, right?'

The man nodded.

'A fish breathes invisible oxygen dissolved in water. It's like a person living on earth without any knowledge of God and our world. In this case, his interests are limited to the earthly things that surround him, the things that he can see. And he thinks that he breathes them, but in fact a man created by God can breathe differently. Do you get this logic?' Els looked at the man.

'It's not that easy, but I do,' Arthur nodded.

'However, if God comes into a person's life, it significantly widens his horizons. Such a person begins to think and sometimes even feel that there's something much bigger and more important beyond the earthly world. He realizes that he can live forever. It's called faith,' the angel Els looked closely at Arthur. 'A person who believes in God is already becomes like other inhabitants of the sea – those who live in the water but breathe air from another world. Like dolphins or whales, for example.'

'I'm beginning to understand your comparison,' the man smiled, 'and I like it. It turns out that a person who has discovered heaven begins to change?'

'Yes. But faith is just the first step on the way to our world. His next steps - only his good deeds and right views,' the angel replied. 'People call it high morals. And if a person begins to live in accordance with the commandments of the Lord, then he like gradually moves to another type of breathing - breathing the heavenly oxygen. And this oxygen changes him and gradually fills him with the knowledge of our world.'

'And what does this person do with this knowledge?' Arthur asked with interest.

'Nothing special, he just lives on,' the angel smiled. 'However, he lives a happy life, with meaning and joy. Such a person doesn't need to change his life but can keep living the way he's been living. But his heart and thoughts will now always be in a different place.'

'So he can safely keep living among people?' Arthur asked in surprise.

'Yes, he can, and Heavenly Father will be just happy about this,' Els said. 'The world needs people like that. They help others to get better. Actually, the Father created the earthly world to raise spiritually beautiful people. And any help from His kind children will always please the Father.'

'Hmm... I didn't think so before,' Arthur scratched his head. 'Els, isn't the fact that I detached myself from all earthly things to live on the island prove that I'm not interested in various earthly values at all?'

The man looked at the angel with unhidden interest.

'No, Arthur, you just swam from the big sea into your own little puddle, where no one can bother you, irritate you or make you sad. But, you're still just an ordinary fish,' the angel shrugged with regret. 'I'm sorry, but you just hid from a prickly world. You didn't rely on the Father's commandments and didn't move on.'

'Well, that's news to me,' Arthur put his head down, upset. 'It looks like I made the wrong choice once.'

'Unfortunately, it's true. It's much easier to hide from injustice than to live honestly and right next to injustice every day.'

\* \* \*

A week later, the boat was carrying Arthur from the island to the mainland. Several bags of simple things laid on the back seat, and the former island hermit sat on the bow of the boat, hugging his dog, and silently looking into the distance.

The man turned around to look at the island for the last time, where he had spent a big part of his life. A large poster with the words "Island to let for no less than 5 years", which he had been making the whole day, was now on the main beach. For some reason, Arthur had no doubt that the Father and angels would bring another man to this island who would also need to understand some important things in life.

He turned away from the island and looked in the direction of the mainland again. Now, the man knew what he had to do.

Arthur really wanted to get out of the water and start breathing the heavenly oxygen. He had a dream to be near his wonderful grandmother, the good angel Els and the Father one day. And he was ready to fight hard for it. Needless to say that his grandmother, the angel and the Father in Heaven also wanted it very, very much.

# The Year 2060

## *Mini Fairy Tale*

Once upon a time, there was a planet in the universe. And ten billion people lived on it. All these people were great photographers and videographers. They had beautiful smartphones-cameras with smart photo editors and quadcopters that could fly anywhere to shoot anything their owners wanted.

There were eleven billion bloggers on this planet (well, some people had two blogs). All of them had subscribers, and bloggers told them some stories, taught them, shared their impressions, lifestyle, views and so on. In return, they wanted to get attention and, preferably, to become famous and to get as many fans as possible. Of course, they also wanted to get money for their labor.

The locals did not like to study the history of their planet. In their opinion, the story began with the first smartphone and continued here and now, mostly in the virtual world. Before that, their planet was pretty boring. Well, that was what some top bloggers said.

The inhabitants of this planet barely heard of different philosophers and sages of the past. And this was more than logical for them – what smart things could they ever learn from an ancient man who had never seen a simple computer?

These people did not believe in God. Of course, they suspected that he was the first and very cool blogger on their planet. But the inhabitants did not understand why he brought so many strange restrictions to people? Well, he was a bit weird, that's for sure...

In general, that generation did nothing *so* wrong. They just wanted to live by their own rules, speak about themselves, earn money for themselves in some way and make their dreams come true.

\* \* \*

And the previous generation on this planet was already gone. These people did not have any bloggers and those who broadcasted about something to other people, learnt to do it for many years. To do this, they read hundreds of different books by their wise predecessors and gained knowledge and wisdom from them. And only then the most talented and bright people could begin to broadcast to others.

Not all of them were great photographers and videographers. And those who actually were, spent a decent part of their lives mastering this profession. In order to show others some beautiful photos and videos, these people often moved far away from home and traveled to the farthest corners of the Earth. They looked for interesting places and situations, carried heavy equipment and often lived in quite uncomfortable conditions.

That generation had their own heroes, philosophers, sages. Those of their predecessors who have done a great deal for other people on the planet... And, as a rule, their deeds were completely selfless. In schools, where the inhabitants of that time were educated, from an early age they were taught to admire those people instead of themselves.

A significant part of this generation believed in God. As in some higher meaning of human existence. Those people valued kindness, modesty, honesty, morality and condemned selfishness, coldness, lies and immorality.

However, that generation was gone.

\* \* \*

And there was also God on Earth and above it, the One, who had once created that planet. And He could do anything, but it did not mean that much to Him.

The only thing that was important to Him were His real children – people who were spiritually close to Him, people with big and warm hearts. And apart from kind and sincere hearts, God had little interest in anything on that planet. Some of His real children had come to His house a long time ago, when there were few people on the planet who could simply read and write. But it did not really matter to God.

So now, God was looking at His planet, which once looked like a big interesting book. Before, He had always found something to ‘read’ there. However, today, that planet looked more like a book cover – bright, beautiful, sparkling, but just a cover. There were no interesting pages within it anymore. And now, for some reason, God increasingly looked at the large switch in the corner. The switch that turns the planets off...

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Igor N. **Bondar**

*Once upon a time in Heaven*

# Stories

*Book 2*

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