

Igor Bondar

*Once upon a time
in Heaven*

Return

Fictional story

Eternity cannot be seen by the eye. But with the heart, one can. Why is this so? It is simple. Our eyes, as well as the whole body, is the product of the world we live in. However, our heart, or our soul in other words, is the creation of another world, the creation of Eternity. Therefore, the soul can see its Home. But only when it is pure, high and wants it very much...

Tangalooma

The wind was filling the sails of *Dolce Dive* catamaran and cheerfully drove it further away from any civilization. At its helm stood Josh, an Australian. His friends: Mike from America, Yegor, a diver from Russia and Bob, Josh's nephew who was wearing his old-fashioned tricorn hat, were all sitting not far from him, looking at the blue ocean with joy.

After a year of living on land, they missed the vast ocean a lot. So now, they were literally absorbing the sea air, the sun and the magnificent atmosphere of forthcoming adventures. The catamaran swayed slightly on the waves and the entire crew felt as if they were riding a big swing. Earlier in the morning, they departed from the port of Gold Coast, heading towards Moreton Bay, and planned to reach Moreton Island before dark.

The captain pressed a couple of buttons on the display and then lowered the lever near the helm. After that, he changed his skipper's chair to the seat next to his friends. They were amazed

to see that the helm was rotating by itself to keep the catamaran on the right course.

‘Wow!’ Yegor exclaimed cheerily. ‘I see you haven’t wasted your time, my friend. What’s this technological wonder called?’

‘Autopilot,’ Josh replied, smiling. ‘I’ve also installed the radar on it: if any ship approaches us within the distance of fifteen miles away, we’ll instantly hear a signal.’

‘Very convenient,’ Mike nodded.

‘What else have you added to the ship, uncle?’ the nephew, who loved all kinds of electronics, asked Josh.

‘Unlimited Internet, of course,’ Josh replied glancing joyfully. Seeing the guy’s wide eyes, he laughed loudly. ‘Joking, Bobby. It’s better not to let the civilization into some places yet. So, I only installed the autopilot and the radar. Everything else was already good.’

‘Yes, my friends,’ Yegor said and in a few moments he thoughtfully added: ‘I still can't believe that we all wanted to return to Swain Reefs specifically. Because there are so many other fascinating places in the world!’

‘Surely there’re,’ Mike smiled. ‘But all of them are more or less explored. But Swain for me is like a fairy tale that came true: kind, happy and incredible...’

‘And very unpredictable,’ Josh continued after his friend. ‘It was only at the Swain, where the most unbelievable things happened to us. I don’t have the slightest doubt that we were being led somewhere then. To some important place, it seems.’

That's why the thing I want most in the world is to come back there and continue. Compared to this, everything else is much more boring.'

'This story at Swain Reefs resembles me of a fairy tale too,' Bob said seriously. 'I do love fairy tales. I read a lot of them during my childhood.'

At that moment, the three older friends looked cheerfully at young Bob and tactfully covered their smiles with their hands.

'But, when Kathy started coming to my place, the first thing she did was to move them to the balcony,' Bob sighed. 'She says I should be masculine and cool, whereas fairy tales are written for children. But in fact, I think she understands nothing in it.'

Everyone shook with laughter.

'Relax, my nephew, you're among those who also love fairy tales,' Josh replied. 'Even though, we're much older than you are. See, how we've voted for a new fairy tale in Swain? All as one!'

'It's cool!' Bob smiled happily.

* * *

Smiling warmly, the Father and Angels were looking at their romantics returning to the Swain. It was very good that this time, they were going there not for treasures or hoards - the Father could see their hearts well. This time, something completely different was beckoning His children, something much greater.

They could not explain what it was, but the taste of what they had felt on Swain on their last journey, apparently, did not let them forget about it.

So now, His children were returning to Him without being aware of it themselves. They were sailing forward, following only their hearts. But in fact, these feelings were the most reliable compass on Earth.

The Father was looking at them with love. Well, it will be hard for Him to refuse such kind and persistent children. ‘Sail, sail on, my dears. I will prepare a very beautiful fairy tale for you,’ He said. Having heard this, the Angels glanced at each other and smiled merrily.

* * *

‘So, friends’ - Josh told his companions as the day was ending. ‘In half an hour, we’ll be passing a place called Tangalooma. However, we have enough time before dark, so we might try reaching to the end of Moreton Island today. What do you say?’

‘Whoever understands life doesn’t hurry more,’ Yegor pronounced with emotion. ‘I don’t remember where I heard this saying, but I like it very much. I am definitely for Tangalooma. The end of the island is uninhabited, whereas Tangalooma is a hotel with a good meat restaurant. On its tables lie long-long menus with various yummy dishes and magnificent desserts... Will we sail past all these?’

Bob, sitting next to Yegor, gulped excitedly.

‘I’m for Tangalooma too,’ he cast his vote.

‘You don’t have to ask me,’ Mike joined the conversation. ‘We finished our previous journey on this island, so it’d be quite symbolic to start a new from here.’

‘I’m happy that after a year, we are all thinking alike, friends,’ Josh laughed and turned the ship’s helm. ‘It’s decided! We will sail to Tangalooma.’

The island began to quickly increase in size and soon the *Dolce Dive* catamaran dropped anchor at a beautiful and windless place.

When the solar disk touched the horizon, friends had already gotten to the island by zodiac and settled at a table with a magnificent panorama of the bay.

‘Well, my dears!’ Josh said solemnly after everyone placed their orders, ‘We began our previous trip by making a plan. Back then, we looked for a sunken ship. But now, we are looking for something entirely different. I don’t even dare to formulate it into words. Nevertheless, we still need some kind of plan. So, who has any suggestions in this regards?’

After some time, Yegor broke the prolonged silence.

‘It looks like there are no good ideas yet, friend. But on the other hand, there’s an idea on how to facilitate the thinking process a little,’ he said and called a waiter.

Soon, a bottle of nice Australian wine appeared on the table. Having instantly filled all the glasses, Yegor proposed drinking to new ideas. After the friends drank and ate a little, Mike began speaking.

‘Last time, we indeed looked for a sunken ship, so we had a clear logic. We chose the spots between the Swain’s reefs that were difficult for old sailing ships to pass through in bad weather, right?’

Everyone nodded in agreement.

‘However, this time, we’re looking for something completely different.’

‘That’s correct,’ Yegor said. ‘Previously, we searched for sunken ships, but now we’re after something abstract which we gave a general name *Avos*.’

‘Well said!’ Mike smiled. ‘We’re really sailing for all that unusual which happened to us on our first journey to continue.’

‘Although, we might actually come across another sunken ship,’ Josh spoke his thoughts.

‘Anything can happen in Swain,’ Yegor shrugged with his shoulders. ‘Last time, we saw that even our thoughts sometimes came true there. So, let it all follow the same scenario. The main thing is that it’s all incredibly interesting and so unusual that it takes your breath away.’

‘That’s right. But what will we start with?’ Mike asked. ‘On our previous trip, we simply pinpointed the spots on the map and risked to have trusted Yegor’s new word *Avos*.’

‘So let’s rely on it once more,’ Bob entered the conversation, ‘and put the dots on the map again.’

Everyone fell silent and thoughtful.

‘Ah, Bob’s right,’ Yegor said a moment later. ‘Why change something that worked well?’

‘Good thinking,’ Josh agreed. ‘We’ll head where our dots coincide most.’

‘Hm, yeah, right,’ Mike smiled broadly. ‘Whether we’ll find there: corals, another sunken ship or unidentified underwater object, is no longer up to us.’

‘Wow!’ Bob’s eyes shone. ‘I’ve heard about an unidentified flying object, but as for the unidentified underwater one...’

‘Well, it seems a lot is possible with the *Avos*’ plan,’ Yegor replied. ‘It’s exactly why we are all coming back to the Swain after a year with such interest.’

Then, the Russian diver filled the glasses with wine again.

‘So, friends,’ he said, ‘let’s drink to the continuation of our fairytale in Swain!’

‘To the incredible plan *Avos*!’ Josh smiled and raised his wine glass.

‘And to the most interesting thing I’ve ever had,’ Bob added.

‘To *Avos*!’ Mike summarized and the friends clinked the glasses.

It was not in vain that Yegor had been teaching them this old Russian tradition for so long.

* * *

After a couple of days, catamaran *Dolce Dive* was passing by a place called Inskip. A little canal divided a large Fraser island and the mainland in that spot. Sometimes, it was very difficult for ships to sail here. Especially in low tide with big waves. However, that day the ocean was calm and, besides, it was also high tide time.

Our friends rapidly passed the difficult section and after that calmly sailed along the inner water area of the bay. Another forty minutes later, they were already anchored in a suitable lagoon located a couple of miles away from the town called Rainbow Beach.

‘Josh,’ Yegor turned his friend, ‘do you know why this place is called Rainbow Beach?’

‘Can I try to answer this question?’ Instead of the Australian, Mike responded with a mysterious smile.

‘Sure,’ Yegor nodded and looked at him with interest.

‘Maybe it got its name because of the local sky,’ Mike laughed and pointed at a couple of big clouds with his hand.

Yegor looked in that direction and smiled as well. Between these clouds, a bright piece of the rainbow was clearly visible.

‘It seems there is some true in your version,’ he nodded in agreement.

‘Look! There is another rainbow over there!’ Bob joined the conversation and pointed in a slightly different direction.

‘Okay, friends, I have no more doubts left,’ Yegor gave a satisfied chuckle, ‘everything is clear with the name of this city.’

‘I like your version,’ Josh smiled, ‘but in fact on the local beach just a lot of colorful sand.’

Everybody laughed cheerfully.

‘Yeah, there are interesting places here’, Mike said, ‘perhaps, we should take a walk around the town in the evening.’

‘With pleasure,’ Josh agreed, ‘but only after we complete our plan.’

‘We need to place the points on the map?’ the nephew asked him, guessing.

‘Exactly, Bobby,’ his uncle nodded, ‘in a day or two, we will already be in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef. And it is better for us to know the direction beforehand.’

‘In addition to all this, we will probably have something to discuss after that at the local café,’ Mike smiled broadly.

‘And if we are very lucky, we will have something to celebrate at once.’ Yegor smiled broader than the American

Everybody burst out laughing.

‘Ok, guys, let’s get down to our work. Do you remember well how we did it last time?’ Josh asked.

The team nodded simultaneously.

‘Then, let’s start in the same order. The detailed maps of Swain are waiting for us on the computer. Place ten dots on them just like the last time. Then, I will sum up the results.’

* * *

Four Angels: Asli, Few, Nias and Sain, were sitting on the rail of the catamaran looking at their earthly wards.

‘Guys, does anyone already know what our Father has prepared for them this time?’ Angel Few asked his friends.

The other Angels exchanged glances and shook their heads negatively.

‘So, what are we going to do? Wait for the results or should we ask our Father right now?’ inquiring Few asked again with a smile.

However, in that moment, a warm answer came by itself into their hearts. For a second, the Angels exchanged surprised glances and burst out laughing.

‘You have come up with such a wonderful idea, Father!’ said Angel Asli. ‘It seems that the result will be unexpected for our guys.’

‘The more interesting it will be for us to see their reaction,’ said Nias, ‘and to observe how they will solve the problem as well.’

‘For some reason, I think they will easily cope with this,’ the Father said cheerfully.

‘I think so as well,’ said Angel Sain, ‘and if they have any questions, Yegor will find them help quickly.’

All the Angels laughed loudly again.

* * *

In the evening of the same day, the four friends were sitting at a table in a cozy cafe located near the seashore. They all got there by taxi which they ordered over the phone. The distance from the lagoon to this town was quite long.

Despite the presence of the delicious dishes on the table, the faces of our friends this evening looked a bit thoughtful. It was clear that the result they had received after checking all the dots surprised them a lot.

‘Yeah, friends, this time everything looks absolutely different,’ the American diver said thoughtfully, ‘I wonder, what it means?’

‘You are right, Mike,’ Yegor nodded, ‘last time we had three places where dots matched and they stood very close to each other. But this time, we don’t have a single coincidence’.

‘Furthermore,’ Josh shrugged his shoulders, ‘even the shortest distance between the closest dots in our case is more than a couple of kilometers. That’s a lot. So, there can be no question about any coincidence.’

‘Well, if only we don’t talk about the version of vice versa coincidence,’ Yegor murmured, reflecting.

‘How is that?’ his friends asked almost simultaneously.

Yegor looked at them and suddenly coughed in a very demonstrative way.

‘Guys, am I the only one who has a scratchy throat or someone has it too?’ he asked with the most harmless voice.

Everyone around him started to laugh. Soon, a bottle of good Australian wine and a can of beer for Bob appeared on the table.

‘So, what did you mean, Yegor?’ asked Josh after they took a sip of their drinks.

‘I think, I also guessed. Yegor, may I try to answer?’ Mike, who was sitting and looking thoughtfully in the direction of the ocean, suddenly responded instead of the Russian diver.

‘Come on, mate!’ Yegor smiled.

‘Extremes, my friends. It is all about extremes,’ the American started to talk slowly, but when he saw uncomprehending eyes of Josh and Bob, he explained: ‘You see, the complete coincidence of all the dots - is one extreme, and the complete mismatch of the dots is also an extreme, but a different one. Is it clear?’

‘Well, to some extent,’ Josh said thoughtfully, ‘but what follows from that?’

‘Extremes always say more than a dull middle,’ Mike continued. ‘Our extreme is also not accidental and must mean something’.

‘Yes,’ Yegor nodded slyly, ‘is it clearer now?’

Josh and Bob nodded more confidently.

‘Well, it makes sense,’ Bob said slowly. ‘However, the match of all dots means that there is something in that place. But, what does the absence of coincidences mean?’

‘Complete and indisputable absence,’ clarified Josh, while thinking.

‘Exactly, a complete absence of coincidences, friends. I would even say that this is a kind of demonstrative absence,’ Yegor said with a mysterious smile and poured wine into his friends’ glasses, ‘so, friends, let’s drink to our unusual plan “*Avos*”?’

Everybody clinked their glasses and were about to take a sip when, at the last minute, Josh suddenly hit his forehead with a palm.

‘*Avos!*’ he exclaimed joyfully, ‘that is where the answer is hidden, my friends. Our result is *Avos!*’

‘How is that?’ the friends asked together.

‘*Avos* is a chance, an uncertainty, a hope. Did I understand the meaning of this word correctly, Yegor?’ the Australian looked at the Russian diver.

Yegor nodded cheerfully in confirmation.

‘Well, there can be a chance anywhere and anytime. It does not need a special place!’ Josh continued.

Everyone tried to understand his statement and suddenly one after the other started to smile too.

‘You want to say...’ Mike began to speak.

‘Yes, friend,’ Yegor grasped his thought, ‘Josh is absolutely right! *Avos* has to be nowhere and everywhere. It is like an inevitable surprise.’

‘Wherever we are, *Avos* can be there with us,’ Bob suddenly started to talk.

‘Great, nephew!’ the uncle slapped him on the shoulder, ‘well done!’

‘Well, friends,’ Yegor smiled broadly, ‘in my opinion, getting such a result means that the *Avos* plan has brought us to the second level of the game. The unusual, most interesting game called Swain.’

‘Does this game have a third level? And how many levels are there at all in it? And what is the prize awaits in the end?’ Bob, who played all these games since his childhood and was computerized by them, started to gibber rapidly.

Everyone laughed.

The invisible angels laughed, sitting nearby at the empty table, and the Father looked at all His children from Heaven with a cheerful smile.

* * *

The next day, the catamaran sailed happily through the calm waters of the canals towards Hervey Bay. This time Yegor was at the helm, whereas Josh, Mike and Bob settled down at the table on the rear deck. They chatted at ease and interrupted only when a pod of dolphins passed by. In this case, the friends with interest always followed them with their eyes and then returned to the conversation.

‘It is quite interesting and even a little unusual this time to sail to Swain reefs without a plan,’ said Josh.

‘Why without a plan?’ said Mike, ‘beautiful diving is a good plan by itself.’

‘Especially since Swain is a whole country for divers with the size of fifty by eighty kilometers,’ said Yegor, who sometimes participated in the conversation from the Captain’s seat, ‘and moreover, this country is almost unknown.’

‘Is it not a great plan,’ asked Mike, ‘to dive in beautiful new places, and enjoy the underwater world? Well, and to wait for the unusual plan *Avos* to bring us something.’

‘As for me, it is a very good plan,’ Bob, who was sitting at the table in a tricorn hat, reasonably agreed with his friends.

‘Yes, I absolutely agree, friends!’ Josh raised both hands, ‘I also like this plan. I did not say that it was bad, just unusual.’

‘Then, get used to it, friend,’ Mike smiled, ‘after a couple of dives in the beautiful places we will quickly get used to everything.’

The divers smiled, having good feelings about the forthcoming trip.

‘By the way, Bobby,’ Yegor suddenly changed the topic of the conversation, ‘how did Kathy let you go on a trip this time? Was she calm or not?’

‘You know, much better than the last time,’ the guy said seriously. ‘Last time, she did not believe we actually found the underwater treasures for a long time after the trip. Well, until I bought a flat, a car and our little yacht.’

‘And she believed then?’ Josh smiled.

‘What choice did she have?’ Bob laughed, ‘what’s more, she let me hang my tricorne hat near the door, despite the fact that she hates it very much.’

Everyone burst out laughing.

‘That is what treasures do to women,’ Yegor summed up.

‘Definitely,’ the guy nodded and suddenly looked at his friends. ‘This time, for some reason, she said that she’s always wanted to live in a house by the ocean. What do you think? Did she say that without any hint?’

His older friends exchanged glances and smiled slyly.

‘Well, how do I tell you, Bobby,’ Yegor said finally, ‘actually, this process can indeed develop progressively. To broaden your horizon in that area I would suggest you to read the famous fairy tale of Pushkin “The golden fish”. It should be on the Internet with English translation.’

‘Really?’ the guy asked with interest. ‘What is this fairy tale about?’

‘Well, an old man gave his old wife a new washtub as a gift. Then, she wanted a house, then a bigger one and so on.’

‘Just like in real life,’ Bob replied with greater interest.

‘Well, yes. There was a magic fish that fulfilled all the wishes of an old man.’

‘Really? How did it end?’

‘Well, when his wife desired to eventually become the ruler of all the seas, then all her houses disappeared and she was left with

an old broken washtub,' Josh answered instead of Yegor, as he also read this fairy tale.

'Ohh,' said Bob with a feeling and added after a while, 'I need to give this book to Kathy'.

The older friends burst out laughing.

'But be very careful, Bobby, a real washtub may be thrown at you.'

Without dots

By the end of the day, the travellers reached the port of Urangan which was familiar to them. After staying there for the night, they refueled the catamaran's tanks the next morning and replenished their food supplies from a local supermarket.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, when they finally sailed into Harvey bay and slowly headed towards the Great Barrier Reef.

By the end of the day, the divers managed to arrive at the southernmost end of Fraser Island. Here, protected from waves, they decided to stay overnight. Meanwhile, the friends checked the weather forecast once again. For the coming week, the wind was expected to be between light and moderate which was quite acceptable for the crew.

On the next day before sunrise, *Dolce Dive* catamaran raised its anchor and sailed into the Coral Sea. As the distance to the

Swain reefs was rather long – nearly two hundred and seventy kilometers – the divers decided not to make haste but make an intermediate stop on the islands called the Bunker Group.

That day, there was a fresh side wind, so the team did not turn on the engines. When the guys had set all the sails, the *Dolce Dive* gained the speed between seven and eight knots per hour. The friends on board were quite satisfied with this, so they switched on the autopilot and comfortably settled on the rear deck.

It was very quiet on the ship while going under the sails without the engines.

‘Bobby, what are you hearing now?’ Yegor asked the guy, using an old sea trick.

‘Well, nothing,’ the young man shrugged his shoulders, ‘it is quiet now.’

‘It’s because you’re young,’ a smiling Josh interfered, catching on to his friend’s joke. ‘But we hear is our fuel money being saved thanks to this wonderful wind.’

Everyone burst into laughter.

‘I have to get Kathie to listen to it somehow. She will surely like this sound,’ the guy smiled back, catching his breath.

About eleven o'clock, Lady Elliot Island drifted past them far from the ship. Three hours later, they sailed to Lady Musgrave Island.

‘Well, my friends, will we stop for lunch somewhere here or continue sailing until sunset?’ Josh asked everyone.

‘I prefer to stop here for a bite, friend. We aren’t in a hurry,’ Yegor said thoughtfully. ‘By the way, the underwater world is very nice here. It’s only two o’clock. We can also dive under the ship until the sunset.’

‘Why not? It’s a wonderful idea! I really want to visit the local underwater kingdom myself. I completely support the stop!’ Mike said with a smile and raised both of his hands.

Bobby waved his tricorne hat in agreement.

‘Well, it is decided then,’ Josh nodded, switched off the autopilot and turned the helm.

* * *

After they had enough of swimming under the ship amid beautiful corals and coloured schools of fish, our friends settled on the catamaran’s rear deck in the evening and were prepared to meet the sunset.

‘Wow! What a joy it was!’ Mike reflected. ‘Although we humans are dry land creatures, for some reason, the underwater world is far from alien to me.’

‘I agree with every word,’ Yegor nodded.

Bobby, who dived with his uncle, smiled happily.

‘Right, it was great indeed’, Josh said, and then added, ‘but tomorrow, a quite long passage to the Swain lies ahead. Nearly one hundred and sixty kilometers to the reef. Therefore,

friends, we'll turn the engines on for some time to increase our travel speed. By doing this, we'll surely get to the site before sunset.'

'And we need to sail off as early as possible,' Yegor added.

Everyone nodded in agreement.

'Well then, let's sit for another couple of hours and go to sleep,' Mike summed up.

At that moment, the sun's disc touched the line of the ocean. The friends silently watched the day give way to the night.

'What point are we sailing to this time?' the nephew asked his uncle.

'Last time, we started from the Twins reef, Bobby. However, this time, I want to begin our trip on the Swain from the Howard Patch reef. It is a bit closer to us and much bigger, by the way. We'll be safe from high waves, anchored behind it.'

'After that, we'll decide on the spot,' Mike added. '*Avos*' plan doesn't presuppose any long-term predictions in principle.'

* * *

Well before the sunrise, the crew weighted anchor and having made a curve around Musgrave Island, the *Dolce Dive* catamaran set its course for the Swain reefs. The wind's direction was the same, so the friends set all the sails again. After that, the

catamaran's speed reached seven knots per hour. Josh started the engines and the speed increased by five knots more.

'That's good,' the captain said satisfied. 'We'll sail for about three hours with the engines on, then we'll turn them off. Further ahead, we'll have enough time to get to the site under the sails.'

Josh remained at the helm, meanwhile the rest of the crew moved to the bow. There was almost no noise from the engines at the bow. The waves were smooth and rolling that day, so the sea splashes did not hinder the friends from having a relaxed talk.

'I'm still thinking,' Bob began to say, 'what may we come across at Swain?'

'The youth is characterized by curiosity,' Mike pronounced with a wise look.

'That's right,' Yegor nodded and added, 'Well, no worries, it will pass. Say, in about twenty years, he will come to realize that expecting something good is often better than the good itself.'

The older divers began to smile.

'What are you talking about?' the young man asked with confusion.

'Well, Yegor meant that we're excited about what awaits us there, in Swain,' Mike explained, 'he simply spoke in a high-flown manner.'

'Ah! I see-e,' Bob nodded respectfully.

The Russian diver instantly turned away, so that his broad smile could not be seen.

‘Perhaps, it is quite boring to live without any interests, Yegor. At least some kind of interest is still required,’ Mike said. ‘But in Swain’s case, we’re entering completely unknown and unstudied territory. That’s what even more interesting.’

‘What do you mean?’ the Russian diver asked him with interest.

‘Well, for instance, when you go fishing, you can catch a fish of different sorts. But it will always only be fish,’ Mike began illustrating. ‘And when you go to hunting, you can shoot a game, for example. However, your trophy will only be of such kind.’

‘It’s also advised to watch out for other hunters around there...’ Bob added, making everyone laugh.

‘I agree,’ Mike nodded. ‘But as for the Swain, we begin such *fishing* that no one will tell when and what we’ll catch. That’s the most interesting thing.’

‘You mean, we’re going to have *superfishing*?’ Bob quickly found the definition.

‘Right!’ Mike burst into a cheerful laughter.

‘That’s how the youth can give the right definitions,’ Yegor smiled.

‘Seriously,’ Mike continued, ‘last time, we had chess, a chest, the sunken ship ‘Avos’, an antique bottle and much more.’

‘What may there be this time?’ Bob asked.

‘I can’t tell,’ Mike shrugged his shoulders, ‘and I don’t want to know until the time comes, frankly speaking.’

‘I think we’ll find some prompts,’ Yegor said.

‘Prompts?’ Bob wondered.

Mike leaned his head closer.

‘I’m sure there will be something like this,’ the Russian diver replied. ‘For some reason, it seems to me that the consequence of all this should be our understanding of something. Otherwise, why all this? In any case, it means some great meaning stands behind all these events.’

‘The meaning of what?’ Mike asked.

‘I don’t know, yet,’ Yegor replied honestly, ‘but something important for sure. Decorations around us were very large, they could not have appeared without important reasons. So, there must be some serious meaning in this all.’

‘I mostly agree,’ Mike nodded.

‘It’s pretty unreasonable to make any further assumptions today,’ Yegor shrugged his shoulders. ‘Why look into the end of the fairy tale? It must be read from the beginning to the end to enjoy every page of its contents.’

Everyone smiled at such a beautiful comparison.

‘Hey, friends, won’t you have a look at the dolphins?’ they heard the captain’s voice and looked at where he was pointing to.

A big pod of dolphins was swimming along their ship, some of which would jump out high from the water and cheerily dive back in. The dolphins slowly overtook the catamaran and moved on.

For a long time afterwards, the enchanted divers stood and watched them swim away.

The Swain reefs

The next day, the travellers woke up late. They had nowhere to hurry to: two weeks of amusing diving in various parts of the Swain reefs laid ahead. In addition, they did not have any specific goal.

After a good breakfast at ten o'clock, they sat on the rear deck to make their plans for the day. After a short discussion, they decided to first dive in the outer side of the reef where they were at the moment. Then, they drew lots in order to decide who the first would be to go underwater.

Fortune smiled on Mike and Josh. Bob was to accompany them on an inflatable boat. Yegor was to stay on the catamaran and then go and dive with Bob. Josh and Mike checked their equipment without haste, then put it on and embarked on the boat. Bob joined them, switched the engine on and then they slowly sailed towards the outer part of the reef.

Yegor waved them good-bye and left, taking his thermos full of coffee, to the ship's bow. There, he sat down and began to watch the colourful fish that swam in the shallow water under the catamaran. He watched for about fifteen minutes and during this time he emptied a couple of cups with the fragrant drink.

Everything was going remarkably well when Yegor suddenly felt the need to look along the board to the catamaran's rear. What he saw was so unusual that the thermos fell out from his hand. On the edge of the rear platform, a mermaid was sitting. Her sparkling scaled tail was hanging beautifully down to the water. She was combing her white hair with some kind of comb, looking at the Russian diver with a smile.

Yegor smiled back by the force of habit. And it was the silliest smile of his life. Realising in his heart that what he was seeing now cannot be real at all, the Russian diver closed his eyes. Then, he rubbed them profoundly with his fists and shook his head just in case. At last, he cautiously opened his eyes and looked at the mermaid again. There was no sign of her on the catamaran's rear deck.

The diver sighed with relief. He thought it over for a while and looked suspiciously at the thermos with coffee.

'Did someone poured something in it for fun?' the thought crossed his mind.

But then, he threw this thought aside: no one would have done it among his friends. The Russian diver himself had never experienced any hallucinations before, so the incident seemed more than unusual to him.

Immersed in his thoughts, he slowly rose to his feet and went to the rear part of the catamaran to check if everything was in its place there. After coming to the platform, he saw that it was wet. However, it could have been wet for a number of reasons. Perhaps, one of his friends rinsed their equipment before diving.

The diver came closer and suddenly froze: in the corner, under the step, there was a quite big scale. Yegor hiccupped and carefully picked it up. They had not fished on this trip yet, so there was no reason for the scale to be there.

‘It is possible that all of this was not a hallucination,’ the stunned diver thought.

Yegor sat down on a step. He devoted the following ten minutes to thinking about whether he should tell his friends about this or not. His innate honesty was voting for telling them everything, while the reputation of an idiot, which could stick to him after telling such a story, was against it. Yegor postponed such an uneasy vote until later and went to the ship’s bow to finish his coffee.

* * *

The underwater world met Mike and Josh solemnly: just a minute after they had dived, a huge, gracious manta swam right below them. Our friends watched her glide away for a long time and then, they swam along the magnificent corals of the reef.

That day, sea inhabitants pleased the divers with its abundance. Sea turtles, reef sharks, groupers, octopuses and shoals of colourful fish would come one after another. The friends were constantly turning their heads around, enjoying the beauty of the untouched underwater nature.

Almost certainly not a single fin of a diver had ever swum there before them. An exciting feeling of exploration added

colours to the friends' mood. On their way, they swam into a couple of small caves which were beautifully overgrown with blue-white corals on the inside. Josh turned on his torch and the friends inspected them for some time.

On the sandy bottom of one cave, there lay a big ray, nearly one and a half meters in diameter. In another cave, lived a big school of beautiful striped fish. While swimming out of the second cave, Mike stopped to examine something on its bottom. Then, he took out a diver's knife and began to scrape it. Josh, who observed all this with curiosity, swam up closer. Mike's efforts produced a small item, which was apparently of earthly origin.

The friends looked at the object intently and amusedly. Having scraped it some more with the knife, they finally realised that it was a metallic belt buckle with a prominent relief image on it. Mike looked at it thoughtfully for a few seconds and then put it inside his vest's pocket. After that, they continued their underwater trip.

The air in their tanks was gradually running out and soon the underwater computers advised them to rise slightly higher. Without arguing with them, Mike and Josh swam up to the peak of the coral reef. Having ascended to a depth of five-meters, they found a beautifully overgrown coral slope and swam around there until the decompression stop time was over. After that, Josh released a red buoy to the surface for Bobby to see, and the friends began to rise to the water surface.

* * *

In the evening after dinner, friends settled on the catamaran's rear deck. Josh and Bobby were smiling with relaxation while digesting the feelings they received from the brilliant dive. Yegor was in deep thought and Mike also bore a shadow of thoughtfulness. For a while, Mike was holding the belt buckle in his hands which he found on the seafloor. The American diver cleaned it well, so the letter *N* could be clearly visible. This letter was done in an unusual style.

‘What are you thinking about, Mike?’ Josh asked his friend. ‘If it's because of the buckle, you don't have to bother: some fisherman had dropped it into the sea occasionally. Fishermen are not uncommon in these parts, unlike divers.’

Mike smiled.

‘Well, I don't worry about it much,’ he shrugged his shoulders, ‘simply, there's one thing that seems a bit strange to me.’

‘What's that?’ Yegor was sincerely interested.

‘This letter *N* on the buckle,’ he replied, ‘it was made in a very unusual style.’

‘Maybe,’ Josh reacted and, taken the buckle from Mike, examined it for a few minutes. ‘Well, yes, there's something in it. An unusual letter style. However, now all manufacturers are striving to make something original.’

‘Exactly,’ young Bob caught the thought. ‘There're hundreds of brands and logos with one, two and three letters.’

‘You're right, friends,’ Mike smiled, ‘but I've already seen this exact style many-many years ago. I never seen it since.’

Everyone looked at the American diver with interest.

‘So, where have you seen such style of the letter *N*?’ Yegor enquired quietly.

‘In one book which I really liked reading in my childhood,’ the American replied cheerfully. ‘Written by Jules Verne, *Twenty thousand leagues under the sea*. Of course, you’ve heard about captain *Nemo* and his submarine *Nautilus*. It is from there. Also, there were many pictures in that book. It’s where I seen this symbol for the first time. It served as *Nautilus*’s emblem.’

Everyone stared at Mike in silence.

‘It’s just a coincidence, I suppose,’ Bob put forward his version at last.

‘A story from your childhood? Namely the one you really loved? And now, it suddenly emerges on our first day at the Swain,’ thoughtful Yegor spoke in a low voice. ‘As for me, I used to love reading fairy tales about mermaids when I was a boy...’

‘Mermaids?’ Bob asked, looking confused. ‘What the mermaids have to do with it?’

Mike and Josh looked at the Russian diver with interest.

‘Oh! Come what may!’ he sighed. ‘All right, I’ll tell you everything. After that, I will look like an idiot, of course. This is why I did not want to talk about it at first. But in addition to Mike's story, my case begins to have, in my opinion, an important meaning.’

‘Case..., an idiot... Yegor, what’re you talking about?’ Josh asked his friend with a confused voice.

‘Well, that’s nothing, not to bother, friend. It’s just that today, I saw a mermaid on our catamaran’s rear deck. Well, she was combing her hair there, see?’ Yegor looked at his friends, sitting with big round eyes, then he sighed and continued his story.

* * *

‘Well, now everything is as it was before,’ angel Few smiled, having inserted a new scale into the mermaid’s tail.

‘It looks good indeed,’ she smiled in reply. ‘Thank you!’

‘It is you we should be thanking for helping us today on earth,’ angel Nias said.

‘Well, I’ve had plenty of fun too,’ the mermaid laughed again. ‘You should have seen how round the eyes of the diver were! Well, until he began rubbing them with his fists.’

All the angels shook with laughter.

‘We saw it,’ angel Asli said, ‘and laughed heartily too.’

‘It was the first time for me on the earth, generally,’ the mermaid replied. ‘Well, nothing, I liked it there. The sea is somewhat similar to ours.’

‘There is some resemblance in it,’ angel Sain agreed.

‘Call me, if you need me again,’ the mermaid smiled, waved at the angels and jumped into the waters of Paradise Sea.

There, she immediately swam into the blue. The angels waved after her from the shore.

‘So, friends, do you think our divers will be able to properly comprehend the meaning of all that?’ angel Few asked his friends.

A complete silence was there for a while.

‘I think they have a good chance,’ angel Nias finally smiled. ‘However, the challenge is slightly more complex this time. What did Yegor say about them getting to the second level?’

All the angels laughed merrily again.

‘Well, it is their second arrival to the Swain, therefore the level should be the second.’

‘Alright, friends, let us fly to them and hear everything ourselves on the spot. What’s the point of guessing if it will all be clear in half an hour?’ angel Sain suggested.

The friends nodded and cheerfully clapped with their wings.

* * *

‘Well, that’s the whole story,’ Yegor drew the conclusion, ‘all that I found it the place where the mermaid was, is this scale.’

The Russian diver put a typical silver ten cent-sized scale on the table. Total silence fell on the catamaran.

‘A scale, you say?’ Josh pronounced very calmly. ‘From that mermaid’s tail probably...’

‘It resembles one of a mirror carp scale, a bit,’ Mike noted, examining the find.

‘Maybe mirror carps and mermaids are relatives?’ Bob asked his question.

‘Well, well,’ Yegor sighed, ‘that’s why I didn’t want to tell you about it. I knew you wouldn’t believe it. I wouldn’t believe myself either if I heard something like that.’

Josh gave his friend a questioning look.

‘You know, Yegor, we’ve known each other for fifteen years now. Certainly, you like a good laugh and jokes, but never to the point of looking like an idiot,’ the Australian smiled. ‘Therefore, I do believe you. Although, this story does sound incredible.’

‘And I believe,’ Bob said, ‘simply because it happened on our first day in the Swain.’

‘I believe you too, Yegor,’ Mike added, thoughtfully turning the buckle in his hands. ‘Then, all of this should have some meaning. Let’s consider what it could mean.’

‘Stories from childhood, various dreams of youth ...,’ Josh began thinking out loud.

‘Oh no-no!’ Yegor objected, raising both his hands. ‘What you’re saying is correct, but it is far too dry.’

Then, the Russian diver coughed politely and looked at the cupboard emotionally. Mike caught his eyes and smiled.

‘I agree with Yegor: it sounds a bit dry,’ he said.

Josh laughed out, understanding his friends’ thoughts, and went to the cupboard to get a bottle of wine.

‘Alright, following our good old tradition, we’ll try to wet this conversation a little,’ the Australian pulled out the cork and filled glasses. ‘Well, my friends, let’s drink to new and amazing riddles of the Swain!’

* * *

‘So, friends, we’ve got some news after our first day in the Swain,’ Josh said twenty minutes later. ‘Who’s want anything to say in regards to this?’

At that moment, the sun disc touched the horizon and the wind was calm. Only small waves that were hitting the ship’s board disturbed the fallen silence from time to time.

‘This time, it seems to me,’ Mike began slowly, ‘the *Avos*’ plan is trying to draw us to some thoughts.’

‘What kind of thoughts?’ Bob asked with interest.

‘Let’s think it over together,’ Yegor said and leaned back on the chair, relaxed. ‘Well, firstly, it all happened during the first day in the Swain. So, it means someone doesn’t want us to waste any time here.’

‘It seems so,’ Josh nodded, ‘what else?’

‘Then, there comes the buckle and the mermaid,’ Mike started to talk. ‘The only thing that connects both of these is that Yegor and I were passionate about these things in our childhood.’

‘Perhaps, the intention is to return us to childhood?’ Bob said with a shine in his eyes. ‘But why should we return there?’

The three of his older friends almost fell off their seats from laughing.

‘Not you, Bobby, us,’ his uncle could hardly say, finally catching his breath, ‘because you haven't really left your childhood yet.’

Bob frowned, thinking, and then looked cheerfully at his companions.

‘Alright, I’ll put it another way. What is it that I still have, but you haven’t...?’

A new wave of laughter followed in response.

‘Good, boy,’ Josh said, admiring his nephew. ‘You’ve managed to defend yourself beautifully now.’

‘I had a bit of practice with Kathie,’ the guy dropped his eyes modestly.

Everyone smiled.

‘So, let’s continue,’ Yegor said, ‘children... what particular qualities do they possess? Well, certainly, they’re more open.’

‘Back then, you and I simply believed in the fairy tales, Yegor. We were much more trusting,’ Mike told him.

‘That’s it! Exactly!’ Yegor raised his hand. ‘Trustfulness...’

‘Right, I also think that the answer lies here,’ Josh joyfully caught this thought. ‘It means we all should become more trusting

with everything we see in the Swain. For it is only people who trust that are capable of believing in something truly.'

'And I read the Gospel last year. Well, I got interested after our last trip,' Bob suddenly began. 'I recall one thought from there: *become as little children*. I think it has some relation to the topic of our discussion.'

The adult divers looked at the boy in surprise.

'Bobby, from where did you get the wisdom?' Yegor asked, whistling with respect.

'Well guys, it looks like we've already figured out something about kids,' the guy smiled modestly.

Then, he put on his hat contentedly and went to the cook-room to eat a deserved, sweet bun. This way followed by the cheerful laughter of his friends, of course.

At that moment, the four angels were laughing nearby. Today, their wards have solved everything excellently.

The Wall

The next morning, the friends raised the anchor and headed further into the Swain reefs. However, this time, it only took them a couple of hours to reach the next stop: they had nowhere to hurry, riddles would find them themselves and the underwater world was amazing everywhere in these places. Josh chose a

suitable lagoon on the atoll and dropped the anchor in its sandy part.

An hour later, Yegor and Josh went diving. Bob took them on the zodiac to the site and Mike promised to cook something tasty for their return.

The reef where the divers were indenting to dive was not at the outer side of the atoll, therefore water currents should not have been strong there. Soon, Josh and Yegor, counting to three, rolled from the zodiac, their backs forward; during the flight, the Russian diver managed to wave with his hand to Bob.

The silent and wet world let the divers into its kingdom and instantly pleased them with good visibility. The depth under them was more than twenty meters, but groups of corals were clearly visible on the bottom. Josh and Egor slowly descended to them, looked around and then swam along the base of the reef.

Life on the sea bottom was slightly different from the reef. Here, there was a greater number of various rays and coloured fish which like to dig themselves into the sand. At times, the heads of Moray eels and mustaches of lobsters were sticking out from the corals. One time, a quite big triangle-headed seafloor shark swam past them, for some reason it was called guitar-shark.

Our divers remembered yesterday's discussion very well and were mentally prepared for any unexpected findings or events. However, time passed but nothing unusual happened. After fully observing the seafloor's beauty for twenty minutes, the friends swam up the slope of the reef. In addition, their diving computers began to hint that it was time to rise from the depths. The divers

did not usually argue with smart gadgets. Soon, their depth gauge showed 15 meters.

Josh and Yegor decided to swim around for ten minutes, maintaining the depth and then rise for a decompression stop. The divers swam along the slope of the reef where they saw a drastically different world. Here, they came across shoals of colourful fish, sea turtles and groupers. There was also an abundance of marine plants in that area. They often came across big fan corals and plants resembling underwater bushes. Most of the bushes had huge black blossoms.

Everything was going smoothly when Josh suddenly stopped and caught his friend's attention with a gesture. In a few moments Yegor was next to him. The reason for the Australian's stop was an entrance to some sort of a big underwater tunnel. One look at it was enough to realize that it was not a tiny grotto: daylight penetrated about eight meters into the cave, but its end was not visible.

The friends took out torches from the side pockets of their vests and switched them on. Then, they slowly swam inside. The width of the tunnel allowed them to swim side by side. The divers turned their heads, following the spotlights and examining the walls. The cave was covered inside with beautiful light-blue and rose-coloured soft corals. Soon, the tunnel slightly turned to the right and then to the left. And suddenly the divers ran into a flat wall.

Its appearance made our divers stop in surprise. The wall in front of them was not natural, but artificial, hand-made. About five meters wide and four meters high, it was made of a silver-

like matte metal, with a big door in the centre. The fact that it was a door was indicated by its shape as well as the two hinges on one side. There was nothing else on it: no handle, no eyehole, not even a doorbell.

Josh and Yegor just stood there blinking with their eyes through the diving masks for several minutes, looking at each other from time to time. The latter was needed to make sure that they had not lost touch with reality and that it was not a hallucination. Finally, the eyes of the friends became more conscious. Gradually, they began to accept the idea that doors could be underwater. By the end of their adaptation, the divers swim closer to the wall and began to examine it.

Yegor knocked on the door three times as he would do at home. However, nothing happened: it was as if the door did not notice this action. Then, Josh took out a small camera from his pocket and made several shots. He then glanced slyly at Yegor, pulled out a knife and knocked louder on the door with its handle. It was some kind of Spanish rhythm, with which the Australian was probably knocking on some door on land. But the outcome was the same.

At that moment, Yegor's diver computer began to beep. Josh's computer joined a few seconds later. Friends glanced at each other. They shrugged with their shoulders and slowly moved towards the exit from the cave. After they swam out, Josh immediately took out a buoy from his pocket which could be sealed airtight. Then, he inflated it, tied a rope, and let it escape to the water surface. After that, he tied another end of the rope to a stone near the entrance to the cave. Next, the friends began preparations for surfacing.

* * *

An hour later, four friends were sitting at a table with a delicious lunch on it, cooked and served by Mike. However, they were eating just like the cows eat hay: slowly, dull and without any thinking process involved. All of their emotions and thoughts were distant from any sensation of taste. At times, they would take Josh's camera and look at pictures on its small screen in turns. Finally, the first questions began to appear.

‘Did you knock loud enough on the door?’ Bob asked.

Yegor shrugged his shoulders in uncertainty.

‘Well, same as I always knock at home,’ he replied. ‘Josh knocked with his knife's handle and it was definitely louder.’

‘Maybe there was just no one at home?’ Mike suggested. ‘Well, maybe they went somewhere on business. And now they are back home...’

All the divers smiled somewhat weirdly.

‘Well, you and Bob will check it out when you get there,’ Josh replied. ‘Perhaps, you'll think of something there or find a hidden doorbell.’

‘Maybe we should try something new there?’ said the young man.

‘Of course, try. We had very little time and we found nothing: no eye hole, no doorbell, not even a spot for a chip unlock. Just a smooth door and a smooth wall. It all may be located somewhere nearby, to the side of it.’

‘All doors are supposed to open,’ Mike stated philosophically.

‘Without a doubt, mate!’ Josh smiled. ‘So, let’s consider how exactly...’

The friends sat in silence for some time.

‘Alright, Bob and I will have a look on the spot,’ the American diver said and they both went to prepare their equipment.

* * *

Bob and Mike came down the rope from the buoy and instantly found themselves in front of the cave’s entrance. During the past year, Bob greatly improved his diving skills - he completed the *cave diver* and *wreck diver* courses. So now the American was absolutely confident in his partner.

The divers took out the torches from their pockets, switched them on and then swam inside the cave. After they passed both turns, they came up to the wall with the door. Even though Mike and Bob were prepared for this encounter, the spectacle still impressed them: they just looked at the wonder for a couple of minutes.

Finally, they regained the ability to act. According to the plan, the divers began the inspection of all the corals next to the wall. They were checking whether any of them were a secret door opener. However, it was all in vain and after twenty minutes of tedious work, Mike and Bob gathered in the middle of the cave to look at the door and think again.

A couple minutes later, Mike took out a knife from his pocket and loudly knocked on the door. His idea of hosts not being home the last time was not confirmed. No one opened the door this time as well. Several minutes later, Bob came up with another idea. He swam up to the door and drew a circle, then a square, and then a triangle with his hand. He came across similar 'keys' in computer games before. However, the door remained still.

Mike, who was carefully watching the Bob's drawing on the door, suddenly approached to the wall and wrote the word *Avos* with his hand. However, even such an original attempt had no effect.

Soon, the divers' computers began to remind the owners that it was desirable for them to rise to the surface of the water. Mike and Bob hung by the door for some time, then they turned around and slowly swam back to the exit.

* * *

In the evening of the same day, all four friends sat thoughtfully at the table on the catamaran's rear deck. Josh and Yegor finished listening to Mike and Bob's diving story. The American diver's idea of writing *Avos* caused a broad smile and respect.

'Right, friends, it seems that this time the task turned out to be a little more difficult,' Josh slowly said. 'Perhaps, we should think everything through before going underwater again.'

Everyone nodded in agreement.

‘So, let’s try to look at this issue a little more broadly. Anyone have any ideas?’

A complete silence fell on the ship for the next ten minutes. In the end, all six of the divers’ eyes were looking at the cupboard with pity.

‘Alright, got it,’ Josh felt the general mood and went for a bottle of wine.

Twenty minutes later, the discussion continued more cheerily.

‘Well, first of all, let’s start from the main point,’ Yegor said. ‘There can’t be any walls with a door underwater. Moreover, without any meaning and on such distant and unexplored reefs as Swain.’

‘Hundred percent, agree’ Mike nodded. ‘Only the *Avos*’ plan could create a task like this for us.’

The other divers nodded their heads as one.

‘However, the existence of a mystery means that it is within our abilities to find a solution for it,’ Yegor finished his thought.

‘Guys, is it possible that we can't find a solution?’ Bob asked his friends somewhat quietly.

‘With such an attitude, it is possible...,’ his uncle replied, copying his timid manner.

Then, the first gales of friends’ laughter rolled over the ship.

‘So, we know that all of it is the *Avos* plan and that God is behind it. Does anyone have any doubts in this regard?’ Mike said.

‘What doubts can there be?’ Josh shrugged. ‘We remember our previous expedition, remember after what the chest moved, we remember how the mast in the shape of a cross glowed on the ship, we remember...’

‘Mmm,’ Yegor moaned and slapped himself on his forehead. ‘Why did I not think of it earlier!?’

Everyone got quiet and impatiently looked at the Russian diver, waiting for continuation. He raised his cheerful eyes with a smile.

‘The cross! Our key is the cross! The previous time we dived, we began by tying a descending rope to the mast in shape of cross and when we were leaving, the cross glowed, remember?’

Mike scratched his head with a smile of agreement.

‘Of course, the cross, Yegor! I’ve written the word ‘*Avos*’ on the door intuitively today. I wasn’t far from the correct solution: I should’ve simply drawn a cross.’

‘Exactly!’ Yegor smiled.

‘For some reason, I also think it is the right key,’ Josh smiled. ‘We’ll check it tomorrow morning.’

‘By the way, who is diving next?’ Bob asked suddenly.

Everyone thought in silence.

‘Well, this is a really serious occasion, my friends. Maybe we should draw lots to make it fair?’ Josh said.

After considering it for a while, the other divers nodded. Bob quickly tore out four pieces of paper while only putting crosses

on the two pieces and a triangle on the third one. Then, he threw them into his tricorne hat and shook it.

Mike picked the piece of paper with the first cross, Yegor picked the second, and Bob got the one with the triangle which meant that he had to accompany the divers on the zodiac.

* * *

The next morning, Mike and Yegor swam up to the familiar wall as if they were to pass an exam. Of course, they had the solution, but whether it was correct or not, only the door could decide. For a second they froze a meter away from their target, then Mike gave way to Yegor with a gesture, as it was originally his idea.

He made a short flap with his flippers and touched the door. Then, he moved his hand from top to bottom and from side to side. After that, the Russian diver took his hand away and moved a little to the side.

Nothing happened for three seconds and the friends managed to exchange glances. Suddenly, they heard a click. Mike and Yegor kept their eyes on the door, which released several bubbles of air and began to slowly open. The divers' heartbeats rose from happiness - their solution turned out to be correct.

A minute later, the door opened completely, touching the wall. The divers stared inside the doorway with their eyes wide open. It was more than unusual: on their side the water was normal, whereas inside it was like they had never seen before.

It was as if it consisted of tiny particles that were shining on their own. These shining dots were moving and the water seemed to be alive.

Mike stretched his arm forward so that it could reach the other side of the doorway. The moment he did it, the skin on his hand began to shine and sparkle. The American diver pulled his hand back from surprise, but a few seconds later he put it forward again. Yegor joined him with pleasure, so some time later, there were two hands sparkling on the other side of the doorway.

Having done that, the divers looked at each other questioningly. As if understanding each other's intentions, they nodded in agreement and swam through the doorway: first Yegor, then Mike.

It was quite bright on the other side. The divers could clearly see the beautiful walls with an even surface and steps of a ladder leading upwards. They both raised their heads and and instantly looked at each other. Water surface was just a meter above them. Apparently, the sea level on this side of the door was completely different. The divers looked at each other once again and moved up the stairs.

* * *

After an hour and ten minutes, Bob's zodiac touched the board of the catamaran. Josh looked at his nephew with some thrill and hope.

'They did not return, did they?'

‘No!’ the guy responded with happiness and excitement. ‘That means they were able to enter, uncle! We agreed that they won’t stay underwater for more than an hour.’

‘They are definitely there - I feel it,’ Josh nodded, smiling. ‘The key was correct.’

He gave his hand to Bob as he was boarding the rear deck.

‘Sit down, nephew. Let’s wait for them and watch the buoy through binoculars.’

Josh set down in an armchair and put his hands behind his head.

‘Don’t worry, Bobby,’ he said. ‘Nothing can happen to them, if the cross was the key to the door.’

‘I’m sure of it too,’ his nephew replied. ‘Although, I’m dying to know about what’s happening to them now.’

* * *

‘So, my friends, our romantics have finally solved the task,’ angel Asli said.

‘They have,’ angel Sain smiled, ‘although, at some point, I thought that we’d have to give them a hint.’

‘I was sure from the start that they would solve it on their own,’ an optimist Few said.

‘Well, friends, now we must lead them forward,’ angel Nias continued. ‘We have a very delicate work ahead of us.’

‘What’s more, our wards will be visiting us here soon!’ Few smiled broadly. ‘Ah, we should have met them well here. It is a pity that we don’t have a cupboard here...’

All of the angels burst into laughter.

‘Don’t worry, we’ll find something much more interesting for them. There are many things here that are surprising for them,’ angel Sain said, laughing.

‘So, friends, let’s go see them entering our world.’

‘Let’s go,’ angel Few replied. ‘The first events were already prepared for them, of course, by the Father. So, it will be very interesting to have a look at this!’

* * *

Mike and Yegor swam to a wide step, stood on it and rose out of the water. For several minutes they looked around in surprise. Everything around them was unusual and beautiful. The light walls and ceiling of the room where they stood were sparkling with different tones as well. Even the air around them emanated a soft light. Therefore, everything was well lit.

There was no one else in the room. An arch-shaped exit could be seen at its end. The divers, who were still breathing the air from their tanks, looked at each other questioningly. Then, Yegor took out his regulator for a second, made a single breath and put it back. Mike gave him a questioning look. Yegor smiled back and

signaled that everything looks fine. A minute later, he took out the regulator again and inhaled several times.

‘I think the air is breathable here my friend,’ he said. ‘But don’t do it yet, watch me.’

Yegor continued to inhale and exhale.

‘Listen, it smells good! Like a flower fragrance.’

Mike watched his friend for another two minutes and then removed the regulator from his mouth with confidence.

‘Well, if something was wrong, I would already feel it,’ he said and inhaled the air through his nose. ‘Ah, it smells so nice indeed!!’

“Reminds me of lilac,” Yegor thought.

‘What’s lilac?’ his friend asked.

The Russian diver stood stunned.

‘Mike, I didn’t say anything about the lilac out loud, I’ve only thought of it,’ he whispered.

Mike froze.

‘Oops!’ he finally reacted in surprise. ‘Where are we, buddy?’

‘I’m afraid to even assume,’ Yegor shrugged. ‘But I like it here and it smells good. It’s not so bad to be able to hear someone’s thoughts, probably. I wouldn’t mind using this opportunity, for example, in some important business negotiations.’

Both divers widely smiled.

‘Yegor, let’s check it again: what am I thinking about now?’

‘Pork ribs, Mike. The restaurant near your home. Are you hungry?’

‘Oh boy, this is unbelievable!’ the American diver raised his eyebrows in surprize. ‘I wish I could listen to my wife someday...’

‘It’s not worth it, friend’, Yegor replied doubtfully, ‘there may be unpredictable consequences...’

The divers laughed cheerfully.

‘I’ve never thought there could be such fragrance in tunnels. Even my mood is improving by breathing this air,’ the Russian diver said. ‘Well, Mike, let's move on?’

‘Sure!’ the other diver replied. ‘If it’s so exciting here, then what will happen next?’

‘I don’t even know,’ Yegor smiled and sighed happily. ‘I never thought I would visit a place, where apparently no one had been before.’

Mike nodded and started to remove his fins. Yegor quickly removed his fins too. Then, they climbed the steps to a flat place. There, they decided to leave their equipment and continue their trip wearing only diver’s boots and short-sleeve suits. They also carried small underwater cameras in their hands.

‘Our friends won't worry about us?’ Yegor asked.

‘They’ll probably kill us, if they find out we didn’t go further,’ Mike replied reasonably. ‘Don't worry, Josh is experienced, he will understand everything. Who knows what will come next?’

Therefore, it is very important to see as much as possible while we have the opportunity.'

'I agree', the Russian diver nodded, 'let's go, mate.'

Another World

The divers walked along the water's edge towards the arch.

'Yegor, look at that huge turtle,' Mike suddenly said and pointed to the water with his hand.

Indeed, a large turtle was swimming just below the surface of the water. Like everything else around there, it was shining from within, although the divers were already a little accustomed to this glow. They watched the local inhabitant for a few seconds and turned towards the arch to continue their journey.

'Have a good trip, guys!' they suddenly heard a voice behind them.

The divers turned around from surprise and saw the turtle's head above the water, watching them leave. Yegor coughed and Mike shook his head.

'Did you hear that?' the Russian diver asked.

Mike nodded.

'Do you think it was that turtle?' the American asked with a smile, still looking at the turtle, so as not to seem impolite.

‘Are you talking about me?’ a slightly creaky voice was heard again. ‘Well yes, it was me who wished you a good trip. Is being polite a bad thing?’

The friends watched the turtle’s beak move synchronously with its voice.

‘N-no... being polite is good,’ Mike mumbled.

‘It’s very good, in fact,’ Yegor added. ‘We like to do the same. The only thing is, turtles never wished us a good trip before.’

‘Is that so!?’ the turtle sincerely wondered. ‘Oh! I am so ashamed for my kin...’

After that, the turtle’s head disappeared under the water.

‘It ashamed, Yegor...,’ Mike pronounced slowly. ‘Hey, where are we?’

‘I’ve no idea,’ his friend replied. ‘However, everyone is polite here. It’s not the worst thing I’ve come across in my life.’

‘Here I completely agree. Alright, let’s walk through this arch already,’ the American said.

‘And let’s remember about our good manners on the way,’ Yegor smiled, going by his side. ‘It looks like we’ll need them here.’

The archway turned out to be rather short - after a few steps, the friends were already in the open air. Mike and Egor walked a little more and soon reached a large cliff. They looked around.

The view that opened up before them was unbelievably beautiful. Far below them, green and blossoming trees could be

seen and colorful clouds were drifting high in the sky with beautiful birds flying under them. Sparkling with all the colors, was the sky ahead. Even though the sun was absent, it was extremely beautiful, as everything was glowing on its own. Next to the divers, there was a small waterfall running down the mountain.

Look how beautiful it is!' Yegor finally said.

'That's true,' Mike agreed. 'I was in a place like this once when I was a kid.'

'Probably not,' the Russian diver expressed his doubts. 'It's just that the stories from our childhood always seem very bright.'

'Perhaps,' Mike smiled. 'However, to be certain about it, we would need to come back to our childhood and compare.'

As soon as he said that, the landscape in front of them suddenly began to change. The mountains and the forest disappeared and instead a street of a small suburban town with a house on it appeared. From the surprise, friends just stood there without even knowing what to think. Yegor looked at Mike.

'Where are we?'

'This is the house where I grew up,' the American answered slowly.

'Really?' Yegor was surprised. How did we get here and what will we do?'

'I don't know,' Mike shrugged. 'I often wanted to go back to my childhood and it seems that it finally worked. Shall we go to the house?'

Yegor nodded and they slowly moved along the sidewalk. A minute later, the friends reached the porch. At that moment, the door suddenly opened and an old man appeared on the doorstep.

'Grandpa Tony!' Mike exclaimed with surprise and then explained it to his friend. 'This is my grandpa who died long ago.'

The old man looked at them with a smile and spoke in a cheerful voice.

'Glad to see you again, grandson, and your friend, too,' he walked down the stairs and hugged Mike. 'I never thought that we would ever meet again, and under such circumstances.'

'What circumstances, grandpa?' the American said in surprise.

'It's a long story, grandson, and there is no need to explain it in detail now. You'll find out everything in due time. In short, there is the earthly world, and there is also the world of God beyond it. We've met on the border of these two worlds.'

'Why did we meet?' asked Mike, unable to take the eyes off his grandfather.

'Everything has a meaning, Mikey. Look for it,' the old man said with a smile.

Suddenly, everything began to vanish. After a few seconds, the friends once again stood on the edge of a beautiful cliff. Mike was silent and Yegor was sighing next to him.

'It must be nice to see your grandpa after all these years. I would love to see my grandma, too.'

At this moment, they suddenly saw a huge transparent ball descending to them from above. It looked like a soap bubble made

by kids but much bigger. The diameter of the ball was about three meters. Inside the ball was a pretty girl. She placed her palms on the inner side of the ball and looked at the friends with a smile. The bubble slowly approached them and then touched the ground where they were standing. Immediately it burst, turning into splashes.

'Hello there, my dear grandson!' the pretty girl said.

'Who are you?' Yegor asked in surprise.

'I'm your grandmother whom you wanted to see. Remember how I loved to tell you fairy tales? Your favorite was about the Grey Wolf. I also baked delicious pancakes for you, and we often walked in the park near the house.'

'Grandma?' Yegor still couldn't believe. 'But you look much younger than me.'

'You are now in the place where any reality is born. And it can look very different at various times,' the girl smiled. 'All right, so you're used to this appearance?'

The young girl appearance began to change quickly and in a few seconds she looked fifty years older.

'Grandma!' Yegor shouted happily and rushed to her.

'There you go, you finally recognized me,' she replied with a smile and gave him a warm hug. 'Well, hello grandson, nice to see you again.'

After that, the grandmother slowly began to vanish into thin air.

'Best of luck with figuring everything out, guys and finding the right path in life,' the divers heard her distant cheerful voice.

There was complete silence for a few minutes.

It's a pity that we don't have the cupboard here,' Yegor finally said quietly.

'It would be great,' Mike agreed.

At this moment, a cupboard, the same as on a catamaran, and a small table with two glasses and a fruit platter on it suddenly appeared.

'It's crazy,' Yegor could barely utter.

'So we are standing on the edge of the abyss of desires?' Mike suggested his version.

Yegor opened the cupboard, took out a bottle of wine and filled the glasses. The friends had a drink without saying a word. Right after that, two chairs appeared near the table.

'Actually, I've just thought about them,' Yegor admitted.

'It turned out well,' Mike nodded and they sat down. 'But let's be more careful with our desires here, mate.'

'I agree,' Yegor said. 'Who knows what may appear...'

'We'd better think about what's going on here,' Mike said after a while. 'So, it's quite obvious that all our wishes come true here.'

'Looks like it. And I think that we should not waste them on minor things. Let's try to find the answer to something really important,' Yegor suggested.

'I totally agree,' the American nodded. 'So, what's important to us?'

After a moment of silence, the friends reached for their glasses again.

'Well, for example, to figure out what the meaning of life is. Your grandpa and my grandma hinted at it,' Yegor finally came up with a fresh idea. 'Shall we ask?'

'Okay!' the American agreed and they both stared at the sky.

At this moment, they saw a large heart in the sky gleaming with all shades of red. It seemed powerful and alive.

'It's a heart, Yegor...' Mike muttered.

'Beautiful,' the Russian diver added, 'it means that love and kindness are most important of all.'

The friends fell silent again. In a minute, the American suddenly stood up.

'Listen, let's go back to our friends. I think we've got a lot to talk about. Preferably in the place where our dreams don't come true right away,' Mike said.

'I had the same thought,' Yegor replied. 'The question is too serious to rush. So first we need to discuss it with Josh and Bob.'

'That's right, friend, let's go back to the cave.'

The Russian diver got up from his chair, which then vanished into thin air along with the table and cupboard. Mike and Yegor looked at the wonderful abyss for a few more seconds and then went back to the arch.

* * *

'Bobby, Bobby, look! I can see the guys' buoy on the water,' Josh said.

'Great!' Bob said and looked at his watch. 'It's only been an hour and fifteen minutes.'

He walked up to the zodiac and untied it. Then, he started the engine and sailed to pick up the divers. Josh went to the bow of the catamaran with binoculars. After minutes, Mike and Yegor were boarding to the aft deck.

'Well, friends, were you able to go further?' Josh asked.

'Of course,' Mike said mysteriously. 'We did it. We were on the other side for about three hours.'

Bob and Josh looked at each other in confusion.

'Guys, you've been underwater for just one hour and fifteen minutes,' the guy said.

'Oh, these time tricks are nothing,' Yegor waved away. 'You should hear the story about the places we've been to! You won't believe what we've seen. It's unbelievable! But allow us to change our clothes first, and then we'll tell you everything from the beginning.'

Mike and Yegor's story took a couple of hours. At first, Bob and Josh listened to them with great mistrust. Even with all of the previous experience in the Swain reefs, they could not believe in what happened to their friends. However, Mike and Yegor were

telling their story in vivid details, complemented each other's words and above all, were just as surprised as their friends. So, eventually Josh and Bob believed them.

'Yeah, friends,' the older Australian finally said, 'I couldn't even think that I would ever hear things like that on Earth.'

'All the stories that I've read before, uncle, are nothing compared to the story of Mike and Yegor,' Bob said.

The divers smiled at the guy's words.

'No doubt, you've touched the very ground of something really important. Perhaps, the most important. There's a reason Yegor's grandmother said these interesting words about the other reality,' Josh continued.

'Well, yes,' the Russian diver nodded, 'after everything that happened, I have no doubt that there was a true source of reality in that place.'

'A kind reality,' Mike added. 'It's important. The huge heart in the sky demonstrated it to us.'

'Actually, the cupboard showed that too,' Yegor coughed. 'Someone really loved us in that place, that's for sure.'

Everyone burst out laughing.

'Mike, Yegor,' Bob asked with blazing eyes, 'and what if you wanted to see, for example, a dinosaur? Would it appear?'

Yegor choked up, and Mike's eyes just popped wide open.

'Josh,' the American said quietly, 'are you sure you wanna take this kiddo with you?'

The Australian looked at his nephew with some doubt.

'Bobby! Do you promise not to do or wish anything without my permission there?'

Mike and Yegor looked at the guy with attention as well.

'Okay, okay, why do you ever worry about that...' Bob looked confused, 'I was just asking. Why do I need dinosaurs? I need to get back to Katie in perfect health.'

The guy's eyes suddenly lit up with fun.

'Friends, can I at least see Katie in a bubble? Just one wish, huh?' asked Bob.

The adult divers smiled cheerfully and looked at Josh.

'Okay, Bobby, but just one,' the Australian smiled too. 'To be honest, I wouldn't mind seeing it myself.'

The divers burst out laughing.

'All right, friends, jokes aside, let's think about serious questions,' Mike said.

* * *

The text below is being corrected.

Improved version coming soon.

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