



BLACK SEED

Tashko Georgievski

BLACK SEED

Tashko Georgievski

POLLITECON PUBLICATIONS
P0 Box 324
Five Dock NSW 2046
Australia

ISBN 0 95867890 1

Copyright 1996

Front cover photograph by Jim Shavkulovich

Black Seed is one of the great political novels of modern literature.

Doni, an ethnic Macedonian of northern Greece, is conscripted into the Greek army. But the time is the 1940s and Greece's monarcho-fascists and Communists are fighting for control of the country. Doni is accused of being a Communist. He and other political prisoners are taken to a concentration camp on an Aegean island and systematically tortured until they confess and pledge allegiance to Greece. But Doni is not a Communist. His crime is simply to be a Macedonian. He refuses to sign, while around him Macedonians, Greeks and others, including his friends, succumb to torture, pain and death.

Black Seed is a moving story of endurance, courage and truth against a shocking drama of state-sponsored political persecution. Its direct, succinct and engaging style bring this prize-winning novel alive for all readers.

Table of Contents

Translator's Introduction	iv
Black Seed	
Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	4
Chapter 3	8
Chapter 4	18
Chapter 5	25
Chapter 6	30
Chapter 7	32
Chapter 8	36
Chapter 9	41
Chapter 10	45
Chapter 11	51
Chapter 12	55
Chapter 13	60
Chapter 14	66
Chapter 15	71
Essay: Tashko Georgievski's Return	79
Tashko Georgievski: Biography and Bibliography	85

Translator's Introduction

The action in this novel is based on the tumultuous events in the history of the Macedonian people, especially those from Aegean Macedonia (northern Greece), which intensified after the partition in 1913 and continue today. The background is worth mentioning for those who may not be familiar with the setting of the novel.

In 1913, pursuant to the Treaty of Bucharest, Macedonia was partitioned between Greece, Bulgaria, and the then Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and the Slovenes. The novel focuses on the Macedonians who found themselves under the rule of the Greek government. While there were promises exacted from the Greek government that education in their own language would be available to minorities that came within its territory, minority languages were never taught.

In addition, following the taking of power by the Greek dictator Metaxas in 1936, many laws were introduced which denied Macedonians (and other minorities in Greece) their basic human rights - property rights were extinguished; the Macedonian language was outlawed with persons, including children, physically punished if they used the language; and place names and people's surnames were Hellenised (this explains why some of the Macedonian characters of this novel, Andonis Sovichanis and Christos Saglamis, for example, have Greek sounding surnames). While the official names of towns, villages, rivers and so on were changed, the people still recall and privately use the Macedonian names for them. Further, all of the people who became subject to Greek rule had to learn Greek, which is not a negative thing in itself but becomes a harsh measure when the Greek language is used to replace a person's own mother tongue.

During the late 1930s, not only minorities were persecuted. Ethnic Greeks who belonged to or were sympathetic toward the Communist Party were also persecuted; there was no scope for tolerance of diverse languages, cultures or politics.

In 1936 there was a mass strike of workers for better conditions in Solun (Salonica) where many workers were killed and the incident is referred to as the "bloody Solun week" for the reason of so much blood having been spilled.

Shortly after 1936, although conscripted to military service, Macedonians and supposed Communist Party members were imprisoned on desert islands of the Aegean where they were tormented until they were broken and “resigned” from the Communist Party. Such activities are little known outside of Greece or even outside the cruel and ruthless prison camps themselves. This treatment of citizens of Greece forms the basic plot in this book.

Also mentioned in the book is the Varkiza agreement in 1945, which the leadership of the National Liberation Front, one of the left wing factions, signed with the Greek government.

It is well known that the left wing forces lost the Greek Civil War, which raged between the years 1946 and 1949. The Macedonian struggle within the Greek Civil War is also known as the Macedonian-Greek Border War. The Macedonian people had aligned themselves with the Communists because, no doubt among other reasons, the Communist Party of Greece promised that if they won there would be Macedonian schools and the Macedonian language and culture could be freely enjoyed. (In fact there were a large number of schools in the Macedonian language established during the Civil War.) Many Macedonians fought alongside the Greek Communist forces but not all Macedonians were Communists; many were persecuted just for being Macedonian.

That is the situation in which the main character, Doni, finds himself and the situation, which introduces the tension into this tightly constructed novel: he is conscripted to serve the Greek King but he is taken to a desert island and tormented to “resign” from the Communist Party, a party he has never been a member of. He can sign a page to say he has resigned, thereby “admitting” that he had been a member and implicating others from his village in some way; or he can refuse to sign by repeating the truth that he has never been a Communist and continue to be beaten and tortured.

Glossary and other points

The author uses a small number of Greek words and phrases in the text, spoken by the Greek guards and in keeping with that the Greek words are used in the translation. To assist the reader, I set out below a glossary of those words and their meanings.

Used in Text

pedimu / pedja
tiles
endopi! endopin

madzhiri / madzhir

English translation

my boy! boys
what are you saying?
indigenous people! indigenous
person; used by the Greeks to refer
to the indigenous Macedonians
immigrants settled into Aegean
Macedonia from Asia Minor during
the 1920s following Greece’s defeat

sopa bre gajdouri
tipota
ela edo

in war by Turkey in the Asia Minor
adventure! A single immigrant
shut up, you ass
nothing
come here

The place names in the novel are given in their Macedonian original names; for assistance I supply below the Hellenised version:

<i>Macedonian name</i>	<i>Greek version</i>
Ber	Veroia
Seres	Serrai
Solun	Thessaloniki
Goumenitsa (adj. Gumendzhiski)	Goumenissa
Konomladi	Makrohori
Negush	Naousa
Lerin	Florina
Voden	Edessa

Some other terms, which may not be known, are explained below:

<i>Term</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
UNRRA	United Nations Refugee Relief Association
Ohrana	Tsarist State Security Force
ELAS	National Popular Liberation Army (Communist resistance army)
Varkiza	Conference in Varkiza in 1945 between the Communists and the Greek government.

A character's direct thoughts, when presented without explanation, are given in single quotation marks.

Finally, thanks and acknowledgement for suggestions and help to Aleksandar Kolupacev, Ratka Kolupacev, Malcolm Stewart, Jim Shavkulovich, Maryanne McCarthy, Paul Knight, Andrew Buist, Mark Burnside and Dr. Ilija Chashule,

Elizabeth Kolujiev Stewart

BLACK SEED

Tashko Georgievski

1

Doni met his fate in an army vehicle, under a stiff and heavy tarpaulin of no particular colour. His soul and body were stuffed into a khaki uniform, a large khaki uniform, and his body and soul moved around in it loosely. There was not a single hair on his head or his face, so his cap with a large royal crown on it sat somehow lopsided and funny on his head. He was clutching his army pack to his knees. He did not believe that he was a soldier only because he did not have a gun. And because none of the others have guns; those who are clutching their army packs to their knees and their thoughts to themselves. They are clutching their thoughts to themselves because of the two men with semi-automatic guns who are sitting in the back corners.

A siren somewhere beneath them is tearing out its throat.

Who should he ask about where they are taking them? All of them hide their eyes and their thoughts, while the stiff tarpaulin hides them from the world, from the sky. While he was keeping quiet and clutching the army pack to his knees, Lieutenant Stavros pushed into his thoughts and said to him:

“Andonis Sovichanis!”

“Yes, Lieutenant, sir!”

Doni answered and wanted to jump up and stand to attention, but he recalled at once that the man was not in front of him, but rather, was in his thoughts, so he remained still when he continued:

“Andonis Sovichanis, hand in your weapon and prepare yourself for a trip - you are going to work in the canteen.” He noted a sneer from the corner of his eye and he wanted to say:

“Sir, I’m illiterate; I can’t work in a canteen. I have no education.” He kept it to himself now as he had then.

While the siren screamed beneath them like somebody being strangled Doni thought about Ber. It was there that they had accused him of writing slogans and appeals to people to desert and join the partisans;

they said to him, "Write!" But his hand had trembled as he had done the letters, one after the other, and after the third letter they had said to him, "Ha, there you are!" And for those three letters that looked as if they had been written by three different people, they completed all of the necessary documents to court martial him. That was when he should have met his fate for the first time, but it was hiding amongst the other soldiers and it didn't reach him until Negush through the mouth of Stavros who was continuing, "Andonis Sovichanis, you must be a mighty little man - if they're after you to work in the canteen!"

The thing that did not happen to him in Ber happened to him now. But what? All of them were tense, as if they wanted to lose themselves inside the beautiful English uniforms, to stuff themselves right inside so that should the commander call out an order, the empty uniforms would stand up with the cap with the royal crown, but they would not be there. Not even Marko Kizovski tried to say a word, even though he did not usually shut his mouth. "You, Marko, you're married," and Marko nodded with his head, mostly from habit, "and you have children," continued Doni. "Four children."

Marko nodded again, but it struck him as funny - 'why ask when he knows that I am married and have children?'

"Now, see," continued Doni, "I am married too even though God has not given me a single hair on my head. You know Angelina, the daughter of the fortune teller, Tina. The most beautiful woman in the village! Who knows? You may have sometimes had sinful thoughts for her!" But his words dried up, not because he was afraid that Marko would misunderstand him, but rather because all of the others around were quiet, no one cast a glance, no mouth was smiling, all of them were enduring, they were clutching their army packs to their knees and their thoughts in their heads. The soldiers carrying semi-automatic guns and sitting in the back corners looked at each other from time to time, but neither one nor the other shouted at Doni. Anyway, Doni went quiet by himself. The semi-automatic guns, which could just be seen in the poor light that filtered through the tarpaulin, took away his courage and he went quiet.

It was difficult for him to part from Angelina. He wanted to keep her seated on his knees for a while longer. As he had already overcome his shame and had brought her into the thoughts of all these men, why shouldn't he be able to keep her for himself a little while longer; he has the right, being her husband.

His heart tightened.

'Why did I need to bring her under this thick tarpaulin?'

How could he chase her out of the thoughts of these hungry men who, even though they have other worries, will not be parted from her just like that. Out of sorrow and spite he spoke once again.

"Marko," he said, "you have a beautiful wife, too! Doesn't she go through your thoughts?"

Marko jabbed him in the side with his elbow and the two guards almost saw, those two escorts who threateningly cradled semi-automatic guns with death in their black mouths, but something happened on the

road and the driver braked hard. Doni's army pack shifted from his knees. And the army packs of the other soldiers shifted from their knees. Doni sighed with relief when he saw Angelina above the army pack when he put it back on his knees. Certainly the other soldiers had chased her away from their thoughts. It would not be nice if one of them pulled her down next to him tonight and tried to sleep with her.

When there was no light of any kind filtering through the tarpaulin, when darkness smeared all the mouths absorbed in thought, Marko again poked him with his elbow and whispered:

"What's got into you Doni, what wind blew through you that made you mention my wife?"

Doni did not answer him.

2

The vehicle stopped. First of all, one of the two men with the semi-automatic guns jumped down and called to them to get out. They got out into the night. The lieutenant, who, for the whole time had been riding in the cabin with the driver, called for them to line up and then led them away into long and narrow rooms and left them there, but locked the door behind himself with a key. There was not much room. They dozed sitting up and they heard someone's steps behind the door. Eventually they all enticed a dream onto their eyelashes. A dirty and ugly dream. Something evil, like an evil wind, got into their dream. Fortunately, the night was quickly over.

The day was brought by small windows which had been left just under the ceiling itself. They were crossed with thick steel rods and the day entered through the heavy bars like something that can no longer be seen but is longed for in thoughts. And it seemed to all of them that the day was entering into the narrow room chopped up into square pieces and that those matrices of light were not enough for everyone, and it set it into their minds that they were prisoners.

With the arrival of the day, the door made a sound and a fat round little man wearing an officer's uniform positioned himself in the doorway, but his epaulettes were pulled back and they could not be identified. A familiar command but called out extremely harshly, as a shriek, raised them to their feet and they saw that the fat little man was wearing Captain's stripes. The Captain said nothing, he just looked at them with eyes which were pressed into lard and he walked out backwards, as though frightened by the shining looks that were sparking with fire in the darkness. They heard him order that they be led to the yard.

Doni looked for Marko and whispered into his ear:

"Take care that we are not separated, Marko," and he did not recognize the voice, his own voice, it sounded as though it was coming out through a throat in which there were three hundred splinters.

Outside, first of all, they saw lots of soldiers darting to and fro, here and there; then, barbed wire which separated the green grass and the trees from, on this side, the trampled earth of a deathly sallow colour. Doni stood in line and he was trying to straighten up all his bones, straight as a rod, so that nobody would notice anything about him. Passing in front of the line was not the familiar Lieutenant Stavros who had brought them here and who, even though sometimes he came out with malicious words, did not swagger like this one did; this one who was standing astride in front of them, wanting to make out he was more important, more of a man, but with nothing to measure up to Stavros, not with rank and not with stature. Just that he had a voice which sounded as if it was being sent through a rusty flute. In his eyes he hid not just a sneer, but also malice, which his clenched jaws reinforced. Doni was sad for Stavros.

The new one, who had a Second Lieutenant's rank, stood in front of Doni, raised his cap and shrieked:

"Where is your hair?"

Doni stammered:

"God did not want me to have hair, Lieutenant, sir!" but too late, this one had already whacked him with the rubber truncheon and shouted at him:

"Quiet, you!"

Just then the army trumpet sounded, but with a different sound, with a different call. The screech of the trumpet was getting in under their clothes and making their skin bristle. It had a superior sound and did not permit itself to be joked with. The soldiers, who had been walking to and fro on the trampled earth started running, they made a small jumble, but just for a moment, and while Doni was thinking that the jumble would never order itself into lines, the soldiers were already lined up, as though against a string. After that they took them away to the cauldrons.

Their Second Lieutenant did not take them to the cauldrons. He led them in front of one of the group of houses on the other side of the clearing, next to the barbed wire fence. Inside they called them one by one. The Second Lieutenant passed up and down in front of the lines three times and first of all indicated Doni. He pointed the baton and shouted:

"Come on, pedimo!"

Doni almost did not manage to see how they dragged him through, how it happened, how he got through it. The fat little Captain jumped up around the table while he was putting questions:

"What's your name?"

"Andonis Sovichanis, Captain, sir!" muttered Doni.

"From which village?"

"From Sarakinovo, sir."

"From Sarakinovo?"

"Yes, Captain, sir, Sarakinovo, in the Voden region."

“Why are you here?” And he came and stood right in front of him, eye to eye; as if he wanted to smile at the conquest near at hand, but Doni answered him:

“I don’t know, sir.”

Slowly the Captain’s smile faded.

“You don’t know?”

“I don’t know, sir. I’m a soldier, they said ‘come on’ - they loaded me on and here I am.” Silence enters the room. Nothing else remains. The silence, Doni and the Captain. But they were not alone. In the corners there were soldiers with truncheons. The Captain circled around the table, once, once again and once more he found himself right before of the eyes of Doni:

“You don’t know, you say?” He went quiet for a moment and then screeched:

“Ti les?”

And Doni did not see when from that pile of flesh something like a hand came out, but he felt a fist on his nose. After that the Captain put more questions:

“Why haven’t you got any hair? Where are your eyebrows? What does your royal hat sit on?” And after every word a single Bam! Barn! Barn! “Will you renounce the Communist Party? Will you sign a resignation?”

Doni tried to answer him.

“That’s how I was born, sir.” And that fist was on his nose again.

“You were born a Communist?”

“No, Captain, sir, God made me without hair.”

“Quiet!” called the Captain and tried to defend God from Doni’s mouth.

He said:

“Don’t shove God into that filthy mouth of yours!”

Then that flesh stopped going around the table.

“Here, sign! Sign that you will be loyal to the King and to Greece, come on, and we will let you go, we will return you to the unit.”

Doni looked at his feet and said:

“Sir, my name is Andonis Sovichanis, endopin, from Sarakinovo, Voden region. When my father served as a soldier in Asia Minor he was called Sovichanis. Now I am a soldier and I am called Sovichanis, I will serve my term and I will get up and go; I have a wife and a home, like every one.”

The Captain shoved a page and a pen under his nose, two men grabbed him from behind by the arms, a third tried to force the pen into Doni’s hand, but Doni stretched his fingers and shouted:

“I don’t know anything. I don’t know anything. I don’t know...”

When they pushed him down the stairs he did not see how many more men were in the line, where Marko was, whether he saw him, whether he was already inside.

It was not until he was in the tent that he pulled himself together. Marko stood over his head, wiping the blood from him with a towel and shooing away the flies.

“Is that you, Marko?”

And Marko said to him:

“Hang in there, my friend, don’t say a word.”

He wanted to ask Marko how he got on, but he had neither the strength nor the voice. The flies attacked his head in a swarm and broke up the picture in his head, the picture of Angelina.

3

They moved them into large tents set up on bare earth, because there were so many of them. Doni and Marko set themselves in the darkest and furthest corner of the tent.

“You don’t know what can happen,” Doni was saying, “it’s different. Here, we’re far away from sight and from the reach of the truncheon.”

Without a word Marko moved next to him and wanted to stretch out, but there was already not enough room, so it struck Doni as funny. He laughed out loud. But nobody turned towards them.

They had picked a bad spot. Warm and stifling. It was as if the air hung in the corners with the men’s odours that rose from the soldiers.

‘We’ll suffocate,’ said Marko. ‘We’ll pass out for lack of air.’

Doni did not agree, he said:

“Look, Marko, these flaps can be lifted up.”

The noise that was made by backsides and legs shifting against the bare earth stopped. They all went quiet. Who knows what sort of frightening thoughts were going through the heads of the people? What misgivings! The group of men was divided depending on who had made friends with whom in the unit. Most of them were from the upper, from the northern regions, Macedonians, other indigenous people, madzhiri and Greeks, villagers and labourers, and mothers’ sons. In that composition no one dared to open his mouth, no one was certain what sort of plague the next man had in his soul.

Doni felt alone. Marko was beside him, but it was as though he was not there. He opened his mouth only rarely and when he opened it, he was distant. Should he look for Angelina in his thoughts? To entice her in his quiet without anyone realising that she was visiting him?

Angelina was the daughter of a fortune teller; if she wanted to, she could come into his thoughts by means of embers and smoke extinguished in earthenware bowls, while her mother rolled her eyes and whispered

words. "The daughter of a fortune teller," the village bachelors made fun of him; who knows from what sort of extinguished ember she was conceived, from which frontier! Because everyone knew Tina Shinikova as a woman alone, a woman who had only Angelina whom she raised alone through wheat harvests and onion bulbs. And, as God was willing, and his parents and Tina Shinikova were also willing, she became his wife but God did not give them children, perhaps because he had once sinned against Him, perhaps that's why God had made him ugly, never to look like a man. And when they took him to be a soldier he left her like that - the most beautiful in the village.

The night was boiling hot and suffocating. Full of men's odours. Marko gave signs through his nostrils that he was already asleep. Doni raised the corner of the tent, but the night outside was stifling too, boiling hot, so you would never desire it. No, it's better that Angelina does not peer in, what would she want here!

While he still had his head poked out a little from the tent, screams were raised in the night, but not from who knows where, but rather from a tent in the middle of the camp. Doni put his head back into the darkness of the tent, into the gentle stirring of the waking soldiers. And Marko moved a little, he started to fidget with his hands, with his feet, but he did not make a sound, he did not ask anything.

Nobody asked anything.

The screams stopped, went quiet, but before long, they heard the voice of the Captain, the voice that they had well memorised in that office. He was asking:

"Pedja, what's going on here? What are these shouts?"

His voice fell off in the commotion which rose, but at the end again only his voice remained:

"We will find them, pedja, we will catch them, they can't enter the tents just like that and beat people with sticks! Now go to sleep, pedja!"

A hush, hot and stifling, descended on the camp but it lasted just long enough for the tense bodies throughout the tents to relax and for some others to get themselves close to a dream, when other screams were heard, from another tent, further away. Nobody fell asleep in Doni's tent until morning. Surely nobody slept in any of the other tents.

Everywhere they expected the flaps of the entrance to be raised and black shadows to rush into the darkness.

When the morning began to peer through the holes of the tent, they were all on their feet and waiting for the trumpet to sound its voice; at once ominous and life saving.

The next night they were prepared. The strongest ones positioned themselves immediately at the entrance. But those men who were chasing away wives from the dreams of the soldiers with bamboo sticks did not come to their tent.

Screams were heard right over on the other side.

"This is not good," said Doni, "they seem to be skirting too far away from our tent."

Marko came right up to his ear:

"I'm frightened, Doni, something is going to happen; this will not finish up with screams alone," and he listened carefully, just in case someone in the darkness was turning an ear towards them.

The thing that Marko was frightened of happened after a few days. In just such a night, hot and stifling, with insects that did not choose where on your face they went.

They waited to hear screams. They waited to hear the voice of the Captain who was always heard after the screams asking who it was, who dared to enter the tents while they were resting and, at the end, promise that he would find out who they were and punish them as they deserved. But not a cry, not a swearword. Nothing but the airless night. Until morning.

The sun and the trumpet woke the camp and no screams came from the tents.

The fat little Captain appeared at the meeting place, ill at ease and with an unconcealed malice. He passed in front of the lines. A few times he stopped, raised his hand with the whip, opened his mouth but said nothing, then again he set off with wild steps in front of the soldiers. Even before he shouted, even before he said the names, the soldiers who were standing quietly in English uniform, but with the Greek crown on their heads and without guns, noticed that two voices were missing, those belonging to the two Second Lieutenants. So they went on an expedition again last night, but how did it happen that they did not drive out screams in a single tent? Some of the soldiers laughed to themselves with satisfaction, having a hunch as to what had happened.

The Captain stopped and screamed:

"Qui-i-i-et! Stand straight - before me and before God! And anyone who has an unclear conscience should step forward three steps!"

The soldiers were quiet. They were all quiet, lined up and rigid - you'd think that they had been carved from something. The Captain screamed again and now openly sought to hear what happened with the Second Lieutenants. Nobody moved, nobody said a word. In nobody's eyes was there a desire to.

They left them at that same spot the whole day, in front of the machine guns levelled at them. While they were standing like that under the sun, with barbed wire around them, and in front of the barbed wire, machine guns, a whisper travelled through the lines like the softest and finest rain. When one of the guards turned around, he was met with a long thread of eyes that froze his bones under the hot sky which descended on everyone like a fired bread baking tray, and he would turn the other way.

When the shadows of the soldiers had crammed in under their soldiers shoes, the Captain returned, he walked the length of the line, at some places he stopped and tried to enter into someone's eyes, but he didn't succeed, so he continued to walk. Finally he understood that he would never again see the Second Lieutenants, that he would not hear their voices. He left. For revenge alone he again left them standing silently before the black mouths of the machine guns.

There were soldiers like that, weak ones who would have made those three steps, but those soldiers knew nothing and those who did know, were held back by stronger soldiers so that they would neither fall under the hot sun nor make those three steps when the Captain passed by.

It went like that until dark, to the deep shadows; a night which was black, but not fresh. They returned them to their tents and did not give them dinner. The tents had been ransacked, the army packs tossed around. Rumours were going around in the tents that some men who had been picked out had already been escorted to the city. Later, nobody knew whether they had come back to the camp or not. And it did not happen again that screams were raised at night from the tents, while all of them were tormenting themselves by trying to entice a woman or a girl into their dreams.

The next day, the Captain arranged trucks enclosed with tarpaulins in front of the line and gave a command for them to get in. During those days, Doni was experiencing a crisis and he took that loading into trucks as the end.

"Marko, friend, the way I see it, they are going to pick us off!" he whispered to Marko, who was thinking the same thought himself.

When their turn came to get in, they did not; rather they kept pushing backwards, towards the end of the line, but once at the end, they could not go back further, because further back there was the Captain and they met him eye to eye and later they did not see how they found themselves above, in the truck bursting at the seams, because the two of them heard the Captain's voice:

"Keep an eye on the one with a head like a bare bum!" and after that, as they were being taken somewhere, Doni said:

"A man doesn't know what sort of thorn he will step on," and instead of the familiar voice of Marko, a perforated bass voice answered him:

"Whatever it is you step on, you will put up with it."

Doni turned toward the voice. He was a tall young man, taller than everyone else, even sitting down, thin, as though leeches had sucked out, not only his blood, but also his flesh. Marko was not there. Doni smiled at the tall young man, but to himself he thought of Marko, because he resented that that Marko was missing; it meant that he had pulled away from Doni after he heard the voice of the Captain, but what good was it to him when they were in the same cauldron. And he continued to smile at the tall young man.

"A man's mouth can get sealed shut - no one speaks to anyone, but I see you, you and that man - you chat together," the young man spoke from time to time and continued, "I am from the upper villages, from the island ones. Christos Soglamov".

Doni did not get to say his name because the truck suddenly coughed hard and the guards shouted that they had to get down. While they were getting down, Doni and Christos were separated; Christos stood at the beginning of the line while Doni stood somewhere in the middle. In the first line from the left Doni also saw Marko; he was standing quietly and upright, even before being commanded to do so,

surely so as not to turn around and see Doni's reproachful eyes. But Doni was not thinking of him, he thought of the tall Christos.

He could see Christos' head above all the other heads and he thought how it was so hard for him being so tall that he could be seen from either end of the line, so that he was always within sight of whoever was standing astride in front of the line. He saw a connection between himself and that man. Doni was like that too, conspicuous, because of his bare head. So, Doni thought, my head looks like a bare bum to that bastard! And he started to giggle to himself. Doni was amazed that he no longer had a single ounce of fear. Maybe it was because of his new friend.

He let his naked and funny rabbit eyes gaze freely, he moved his eyes around and wanted to take in as much as he could with them. They darted from man to man, and beyond the people he gazed at the level yard, which had been strewn with fine, small rocks a long time ago, trampled and compacted, with weed which had pushed up between the little rocks. And here, too, the yard was bounded by barbed wire. Behind the wire, there were some houses. Those houses chased away the fear from his body even more. Surely they had not been brought to this place to be put against the wall; that happens somewhere distant, far away from everything that calls civilisation to mind.

But they did not let him see much, nor think much. The Captain came, standing upright in an army jeep. He drove along the full length of the line, it turned with squealing tires and when he came back to the middle he explained to them that they had to pull out the weeds which had pushed through the earth and around the rocks with their finger nails:

"Don't leave a single stem, you depraved bastards," he said, "and think on it if you do -"

But there wasn't anything to think about because in front of them, right next to the fence on a raised area from which the whole circle could be seen, they were positioning a machine gun, and there is not much to think on with such a toy.

The machine gun stayed there during all of those days when they were puffing out the weeds with wounded fingers and broken nails; it looked at them like a stupid little beast that does not know what to do. Their fingers hunted out the roots of the weeds which held onto the little rocks with countless hairs, and they pulled them out with effort. Because, apart from that stupid little beast that looked at them, the whips and truncheons were cracking.

Meanwhile, Doni found a way to escape from this cursed yard.

Nothing could stop him, not all of the barbs on the wire, not the whips, not the truncheons, not that black punctured and stupid mouth which looked at him indifferently and stupidly. Crawling and feeling his way through the stones, he saw the young men around him and he escaped into their lives, but he startled himself when he had to think up something about them because he could not see another woman; only Angelina roamed through his thoughts and because he did not want her to be the wife of all of them, he returned from their lives into this same yard. He could not even see his own life, to measure it, to understand it.

Only Angelina, his own beautiful wife, covered everything, because she was like shelter over his life and because of that she could not see enough of him. And so, he would return again to the yard with little stones and with weeds around the stones, and with wire around the yard, and above the whole yard, above those little stones which were sticking into the dry earth which were then knitted with weeds, hung the heat of the whole summer, heat full of some unseeable dry chaff.

From the incident earlier, when Marko pushed himself further into the truck while Doni was left on the rear bench next to the tall Christos, Marko did not have the nerve to look him in the eye. Every time they spoke, he would turn his eyes aside or he would look down at his feet. Doni had eyes that were hard to look at, not just because they were not bounded by eyebrows from the upper side, but rather because his gaze was naked, without a shadow.

"There is a man here called Christos," he said one day to Marko, "that tall one. A good young man."

Marko was pulling out the weed and was looking at the stones.

"I wanted to tell you," he started, "have a little moderation with your mouth, we're not here for fun," and he distanced himself, deliberately, so that he would not hear the answer.

They still slept in that same place, where they lay down the first night under the edge itself of the tent, and often they poked their heads under the canvas so that they could breathe clean air. Recently Christos had joined them.

"You always have to be lying down, you can't even have your head straightened up," said Doni to him and laughed stiffly.

"Doesn't matter," said Christos, altogether seriously.

Marko kept his head outside of the tent, sticking out from under the canvas either for air, or because he did not want to talk.

In the tent it was not quiet like other times. Like the first days when they all had pressed lips and pressed thoughts. During the night, first some murmuring could be heard, just two by two, and then the murmuring started to turn into a slightly louder hubbub. But rarely did a conversation begin in which a larger number joined in.

There was fear and a sense of threat.

It was as if each was speaking to himself, about his village, about his childhood, about his family, his home. Some place name could be heard, the name of some river, some village girl's name, some barn, some warm sky with stars, some golden moon shy like a young girl before marriage. Not a single one asked what was happening. They all knew. They were all quiet. There was no longer any secret that they had been picked out as Communists from the army. Some for old sins, some because of their name, some because of nothing.

A short time after that first meeting in the Captain's office, they went on to second meetings.

It was not dusk yet. Nor very fresh. It was just that the sun had hidden itself. Simply that a big shadow covered the yard and the objects. They waited for dinner with their metal plates but it was hard to hold the metal plates with their injured fingers. Then they called out ten souls,

amongst whom were Marko and Christos. All of those called out by name, father's name and family, stepped forward three steps in front of the line. They told them to call in at the office for packets from home. All of them were startled and began silently to look at each other. What sort of parcels from home? They knew that there were no letters from home, let alone parcels. They had to go because they heard the command which ordered them to do exactly that.

Doni, while he could, while the trumpet had not yet sounded, hung around in front of the tent, and after that dragged himself to the dark sleeping mat. Marko and Christos returned without parcels. Until they sat down, until they swam up to their sleeping mats, nobody opened their mouth, but when they lay down, Doni whispered:

“Why did you come back without anything?”

“How do you know that we came back with nothing,” moaned Marko.

Christos was quiet.

“You did not bring any sort of parcel,” remarked someone from near the middle while Christos added to his comment:

“You will all receive that sort of parcel. They are not from home but from UNRRA.”

No one put any more questions. They understood that you had to help the men, not torture them with questions. In the darkness they gathered around them - but how to help them? Doni thought of something and said:

“I'll raise up the canvas so you can get some fresh air!” And that's what he did, and those two pushed their heads outside of the tent. Christos and Marko were carrying some great pain in their souls, they moaned and sighed that they wanted to be brave, to hold out. In the darkness a voice could be heard:

“So, we will eat what's in those parcels there.”

In the morning, when the trumpet called them to the meeting place, they dragged Christos and Marko by the arms into the line because they could not hold themselves up on their feet. Christos' left eye was closed as if by an old copper coin, while Marko had a split lip. Doni stood between the two of them and with his elbows tried to keep them standing straight. ‘So, it means that they have started again,’ thought Doni, ‘surely they will shove that page under our noses again.’

Everything which had, until then, appeared to them intolerable, now appeared to have been just a game, naive and childish. Now everyone began to think only of the evening trumpet. The whole day they steeled their bodies, they tensed their muscles.

Doni got courage from Christos. He was so thin, so tall, as if he was made only of bones and yellow colour, but he held out all the same, Doni thought that he would hold out too.

For days, Christos and Marko were returning to themselves. Christos could not straighten out his back, and the copper coin would not in any way free up his eye. Doni frequently asked:

“Christos, eh mate, tall man, did they ruin your eye?” and Christos would smile:

“Is that important? Here it is more important that they don’t ruin your soul.”

Every evening Doni wanted to hear his name and to step forward from the line, but it was as though they had forgotten him. They called him out one day before they loaded them onto the boats. He knew how to receive a parcel from home. He knew all of the fine points, all the details, and that’s why he was not afraid, not once. The fat Captain was particularly happy that he saw him, he said:

“At last you’re here too, and I had said to myself, ‘that one with a head like a naked bum is missing.’” And he rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

Doni gripped his cap with his fingers; his naked head, with yellowed skin, gleamed in the darkened room. The Captain walked around him. After that he took a rubber truncheon from one of the soldiers who were positioned around the room and hit him two or three times with it.

“Bloody hell. See how he jumps. Isn’t it funny?” So he ordered the soldiers to each have a turn on his head, but he warned them:

“Be careful not to injure that wondrous head!” After that he ordered one soldier to take down his trousers and his underpants and to turn his bum around, and after that he grabbed Doni by the ear and he pulled his head down next to the naked bum of the soldier.

“Colossal! Colossal! This has never been seen before!” And he told the soldier, “Come on, pull up your trousers!” But he put the first question to Doni:

“What’s your name?”

Doni stood quietly and called:

“Andonis Sovichanis, Captain, sir.”

“Where are you from?”

“From Sarakinovo, Voden region, Captain, sir.”

The Captain winked to someone on the left side, while he was speaking:

“From that bandits’ nest,” and one baton whacked him on the head, but not affectionately, while the Captain continued, “from that Bulgarian nest!”

“No sir, our village is not Bulgarian. We are indigenous, sir, Macedonians!”

“All of you are Communists, why don’t you acknowledge it?”

From the other side a bamboo truncheon stretched him out.

“No, Captain, sir, we are not Communists.”

The Captain continued to rage, blowing out his cheeks like balloons and shrieking that all of the upper villages near the northern borders should be set alight and the people should be driven out or should be put under the knife, then he stopped for a bit, he wiped the dots of sweat and continued with a different tone:

“Obviously, those who express loyalty to the King and to Greece, they are something else, even if they are indigenous. Here, sign this and we’ll free you.” Doni kept quiet. He stood and kept quiet. He stood and waited in the dark for a stick to emerge or a baton or a whip or a fist.

Whatever. But he was quiet. He did not open his mouth. He did not give a sign that he was thinking of doing anything with that page which they were showing him. That page is evil, even though it looked white on the table like promised freedom. His silence forced the Captain out of his rhythm again, and he continued to put questions:

“Do you love the King?”

“I serve him, sir.”

“To show that you serve him truly, with your heart, sign that you will resign...” but Doni jumped in and interrupted him, even though it was not good to do that, but he wanted to tell him something which was going around in his head. He was afraid that he might forget it, he said:

“I am a villager, Captain, sir, I have worked on a farm from morning until dusk, nothing else, Captain, sir!” And neither he nor the Captain could be heard any more in the darkness of the room, only the truncheons like paddles on the river when the village women beat and wash thick blankets. There was one truncheon which hit at his body, the strongest and the most malicious. Surely it was from that soldier who had bared his bum. Mostly on his head. And he gave himself courage. ‘Hold out, Doni, don’t scream, so it can be known that you are indigenous, so they know that you are from Sarakinovo where they did not manage to settle any madzhiri, they will make your head a bloody mess, but hold out.’ And Angelina came to him to save him. She swam through the darkness and beautiful, as she was, she stood shyly in front of him. And he no longer felt the truncheons.

They pushed him out the door; rather, they threw him, they threw him onto the dry and hard earth, but Angelina was with him and he felt nothing. He crawled to the tent and from time to time he turned to see whether Angelina was walking behind him. He entered the tent. Christos asked him:

“Did they torture you a lot?”

Doni rambled, he called Angelina, he begged her not to leave him, that she could enter here too, that he was alone. And he was totally lost. Christos and Marko made the sign of the cross. “The dear man is ready to die,” they said to each other. Doni came to again and again he looked for his wife, “What will I do without her?” he said.

4

The next day they collected the tents, they collected all of their few personal things in their bags and they waited at the meeting place. Christos and Marko were holding Doni by the arms and carrying his bag. They loaded them into covered trucks and they passed them through Solun to the harbour. There they loaded them onto cargo boats, they shoved them below deck, they squashed them in like livestock, like common sacks of salt. In a frightening stink, in a fishy stink. They must have transported fish with these little boats. Above them, there was just one opening, through which they descended, but after they put all of them in, they lowered a heavy wooden lid on the opening and they bolted it with something from the outside. Along the sides of the boat, there were some little round holes, with metal lids which were open. Sometimes water would splash through those holes, warm and salty.

Christos and Marko pushed the others to make room for Doni. From time to time Christos was making a breeze above him with his shirt, but it could hardly be felt. Now it stank inside of soldier's sweat and urine. They did not believe that Doni would manage to pull himself together, to come back to himself. Christos would crawl along the sides of the boat to one of those holes, hold his shirt outside and wait for it to get soaked, then when it was get soaked, he would moisten Doni's forehead with it and the two of them were amazed when they saw that he found the strength within him to smile at them and tell them:

"Don't trouble yourself ... because if I am to live ... I will. And I will live

Christos wanted to know who was that Angelina who last night had been reeling through his thoughts and where he had found her. Marko got in before Doni opened his mouth:

"His wife is called Angelina.'

Doni made an effort and mouthed:

“My Angelina is strong ...” He wanted to say something else, he strained, but his throat was dry and it was difficult for his voice to slide through it. It was all Christos could do not to start to cry with his long and saint like face, and Marko did not hold out either. He asked Doni to forgive him for that incident, and for all the days after that when he was careful to avoid him, or rather, his head, which nobody’s eye could miss, and he finished:

“I thought that it was better to be further away from you.”

The boat sailed quietly at first, but at one point it started to lean from one side to the other. Those who climbed up to the holes announced that a wind was passing above the sea, but the damned wind would not get inside at all.

Doni softened at Marko’s words and forgave him, because he knew about his baldness and other things, like the embarrassment of being next to the naked bum of that soldier. He exerted himself and told them that, and after telling them was upset that he had. ‘What have they done wrong that they should suffer with me for that which is mine alone?’ Those around them who heard ground their teeth and cursed the King and all of pissed on Greece.

From the afternoon on, no one wanted to talk. It was so infernally hot that all of them were melting like candles. The stronger and taller ones crawled to those holes, gasped, and waited for some wave to splash them. The disabled ones and those who had been beaten were lying down below. They felt as if the last strength was melting from them and they waited to suffocate because there was no air.

Christos clambered to those holes, argued with others, but not for himself, but for Doni, while Marko pushed those who wanted to stretch out and who might squash Doni. In his thoughts, Doni begged them not to trouble themselves, not to wear themselves out, that they would need their strength, and it would be better if those above deck were to tell them to throw us, the disabled ones, into the ocean, we are just dirtying you and we are suffocating you, the healthy ones. Once he even managed to beg them out loud to sit down, because what use was it to them to look after him as though he were some little candle flame, when the winds were not blowing from outside, but rather, strained from inside? They would not manage to see him out to the end.

Those who were most squashed, most imperiled, those who were in the middle, began to shout, to curse and to stomp with their legs.

One young man climbed up the steps which led to that big lid and, standing on the edge of a rung, addressed himself to all of those who were squashed below in the darkness, which was pricked only by the bright screws of light which came from the small openings along the side. He called to them not to permit such action to be taken with them. “We are not livestock, they are not allowed to shove us in and let us suffocate from our own stink and urine,” and, while he was speaking, he indicated the lid above him with his hand. He called on them all to make an effort with their backs to push out the lid so that some air could come in, so that some natural light from the day could come in. He finished his speech

with manly curses and some of those above deck did not manage to remain indifferent, and called out:

“Sopa bre gajdouri.” After that, another voice joined in with that voice, and said:

“Well, why don’t you open this lid, let the man come out, let him take some air.”

The young man talking from the stairs stopped speaking and was waiting to see what would happen, as above him, a knocking started, they were pulling the bolt from the lid and after that, slowly, as though it were alive, the lid started to lift and when it still had not been fully lifted, not fully pulled aside, instead of letting down clean air, it let down the mouth of a gun which spoke:

“Come on, pedimu, don’t change your mind, show yourself, come out and have a breath.”

But the young man was changing his mind, he looked at those below him as though asking them if he should go out, but he did not want to go by himself, he called them all, but while he spoke next to the mouth of the gun, something like a pole or a harpoon hooked the young man by the clothes and in a moment took him up above, through the opening in the sky. While the people were pulling themselves together and trying to understand what had actually happened with the man on the stairs, because even those who had seen it were not sure what they had seen, the lid dropped and was bolted from the upper side.

Christos, who had watched and followed all of that, said:

“The man’s gone, we will not see him or anything of him.” And the others were quiet, trapped, stock-still, staring ahead of them in the threads of light which fringed through the cracks and waited, waited to hear the voice of the young man, but rather they heard that soft voice that was speaking to someone else a little before asking why he would not open up for the man to get some air and now it was ordering someone:

“Put him on a thicker rope so this pee wit can sit, let him delight a little in the beautiful view - the sea below, the sky above and white birds in the middle.”

Doni lifted himself up a little, he sat between Marko and Christos and said:

“If he has his own Angelina, he will hold out.”

Christos confirmed:

“He has a better Angelina than yours or mine, my Doni, he’ll hold out. You’ll see.”

It turned out that Christos knew the young man. He was from Seres, a Macedonian. Before they had called him up to the army, he had been studying in Solun. They had sniffed out that he was not learning only what they were telling him, so they scooped him up and they dressed him in an English uniform, they put a cap with a King’s crown on his head. Christos had become interested in him one day back when they were pulling out weeds from the yard, he had crawled up to Christos’ ear and had said not to be afraid of him, “We are one people”, he’d said. After that he went to the ear of another man. He was giving courage to the people, he was saying we have to hold out, because something else is

waiting for us. But Christos had to keep quiet because the others were keeping quiet.

On board, truncheons thumped like paddles when they hit wet clothes. Who knows how long it lasted, that thumping of truncheons and whips which just broke through the commotion raised above them to try to make sure that you could not hear. After that they unbolted the lid and again the first thing to poke through was the black steel mouth with many holes on it through which flowed that voice:

“No one stand on this ladder.”

After that, they were dragging something above deck, they brought it to the opening and only then did they see that it was the man from Seres, but they saw him when he was falling, when he hit the ladder, when he rolled all the way down, under the lowest rung. Before the lid was closed that black perforated mouth spoke.

“If anyone else wants to come up, they’re welcome to

The ones who found themselves near the ladder took in the man from Seres, they made a sleeping mat, they threw down some of their own clothes and they placed him onto it - like a corpse. Soon he was giving no sign that he was alive. How could they help him? They could just lament above him if he released his soul - nothing else. They could also wet a rope made of rags in the sea and wash his wounds, but somebody said that the water was salty and they would make his wounds sting, and they did not try it. Christos pushed himself through the people, leaned near him and looked at him - and so that he would not start to cry with both his heart and his soul, he shouted:

“Why have you gone quiet above him? He’s not a corpse.”

And all of them heard how Christos turned his own voice into a song, which at first was just a melody, and then started to separate into words. And other voices started up, they joined with his, softly, softly, they started and they forgot that they were standing around a man who had been bashed, that maybe the man was collecting his last strengths, they were singing, looking at the ladder, looking somewhere beyond the ladder and beyond the sea.

When the young man from Seres raised himself up on his elbows and groaned, nobody heard him, and when they saw that they were not sitting around a corpse but around a living man - he was moving his split lips and following the song, and when they stopped, as though cut off, his voice continued alone, but diminished, and dry. The wonder of the people lasted only a moment, until they pulled themselves together. Powerfully and briskly they continued the song in which a mother waits for a letter from her son, from her son who had been taken into the army, she is waiting and the letter does not come, so she sets off to look for him with black forebodings in her heart, but where would she find him? Where will she see any trace of him, how to pass over so many waters, how to reach the cursed island?

Christos kneeled next to the young man, squeezed his hand, and then returned to Doni and Marko. Not yet sitting down, he was talking to the two of them, he was saying:

“What strength lives in song?”

Neither Doni nor Marko knew to tell him what hides in song. And Christos did not know, he saw, he saw how a song which was not even sung so much as hummed, returned the soul to a beaten young man, raised him up and brought sparks into his eyes. At that moment, someone shouted, one of those who had been hanging at the small holes, he shouted out as loud as his voice could go:

“Land! Land! Land!”

After them, others stuck their noses through the holes and they shouted too:

“Land. You really can see land.”

“What sort of land, people, tell us, is it our land?...”

All of those who had stuck their noses into little holes and who had called “Land, land, land,” did not open their mouths at that.

The boat sounded one short whistle, then one long one, then it wanted to sound another, but the horn turned into some sort of animal snarling which got itself under everybody’s skin, even deeper into their soul. The motors stopped. Those on deck started to run, they lifted some planks and called something to themselves.

Christos was stuck like a leech on one hole, but he was quiet, he did not say anything; he was watching everything that was happening on the shore. When they unbolted the lid, that same black mouth spoke:

“Get out, one by one, with your hands above your heads.”

Christos moved himself from the hole and sat down; he said:

“Let’s try to be last.”

Marko just managed to part his dry lips:

“If you think that’s better, let’s try.” But nobody was getting out yet, everyone looked at the sheaf of light which was being dragged down the ladder and it was as though nobody had the courage to step through that godly dust, they thought that once they put their body into that dust either the dust would be lost or they would pour out in all directions through the dust.

Above, the mouth of the gun moved threateningly and murmured:

“You were ordered to get out one by one with your hands above your heads,” and it did not move from that godly view, that black mouth of death did not move. So they had to set off, one by one, one after another, or three men all at once if someone could not move alone.

Doni tried to get up by himself but pain shot all over him, so Marko and Christos got him by the arms and they put him on his feet, upright. When Christos told them to try to be last, he was thinking of what he had seen through the hole of the boat and when they found themselves above, on the deck, Doni and Marko were convinced that he was right.

Immediately beyond the plank which connected the boat and the shore, soldiers with whips and truncheons were lined up on one side and the other and whoever stepped onto firm land received ‘gifts’ from the truncheon holders all the way to the top, to a clearing.

When they had to pass over the plank, Doni let Christos and Marko go ahead. He said:

“I will go behind you, otherwise we will be pushed into the water,” and that is what they did. Christos did not understand why Doni had proposed that, and when he understood - it was already too late.

The ground on which they had to land was of rock, sun and surrounded by water, at least as far as they could see.

Doni pulled together his last strengths, he sought it in all of the secret places of his body and he straightened himself up. His destiny could strike only at him. Everyone should take what is allotted to him.

Christos went along the plank first, tall, thin, like a banner of their suffering. After him bent over and tense Marko started walking, and deep inside himself thought that it was better that Doni was not between the two of them, because he could go quickly, and he, like this by himself, would try to receive fewer truncheon hits. When they came out above, beyond the row of truncheons, Christos stopped a little, and Marko continued still further above, with the crowd. Christos watched how Doni was taking all the truncheons on his back and he bit his lip.

When Doni reached him he had just enough strength to say:

“This is that island...” and he fell at Christos’ feet. Christos bent over him. Others ran too. But Marko was not amongst them. “This is that island...”

‘Which island?’ Christos asked himself. He thought of the song they had sung on the boat around the man from Seres. His soul and his heart tightened. Surely it is that island, that island of silent rocks, of mute scrub, of sun which drips from the mouth of the devil.

Everything was quiet. The rock, the scrub, the sea.

Some soldier shrieked, did not hold out. The sun was falling into the sea.

5

While the sky and the water levelled their colours, they collected all their documents from them, all their letters, all their personal things, especially anything gold, like rings or watches.

Doni carried his old parents' photo next to his heart, but they did not ask him about it, they simply pulled them from his hands. Christos, who was next to him in the line whispered to him to be smart, not to be pig-headed:

"See how big the water is around us, whatever they want, they will take."

Doni tried to explain to him that that photograph was dear to him because it was of the young years of his parents, because his father looked like him, even though he has all the manly signs on his head. But Christos was right too. When you are here -

They separated them, two by two, they told them to put up tents by themselves from the canvas sheets which they carried in their packs, and not to run away anywhere, nor go further than five meters from the entrance to the tent. Meanwhile, in the tents that they made for only two, they added two more. In Christos and Doni's tent they brought a

little man of about forty years of age, short, tanned, with a beard like thorns knocked into his face, a madzhir from the Gumendzhiski villages, and a young man who had still not put a razor to his chin, some young Greek with the name Niko from the Solun area, who lived there, beyond the sea, with just his mother.

Marko was sleeping in another tent, further up.

The sun made the whole island stink and settled it with large and irritating flies which got in everywhere, and were most irritating when they were crawling quietly along the wounds on your head and face. It was as if the flies did not fly. They were everywhere. They crawled on your face, on your neck, on your hair, on your hands. They got into your trouser legs. They were even in the closed army packs.

They crawled on the little bread that they gave you stingily and made it foul. But you still ate it.

The second or the third day Doni was restored. Christos was delighted. He could never mend himself so quickly. And on that second or third day he was talking:

“Each will get his own, some earlier, some later. Nowhere beyond these waters.”

It came out that the madzhir and Niko still had not received the soldier's loaf of bread like Doni and Christos. They didn't hide it. Doni acted as if it did not concern him, he spoke as though it did not matter to him that those two had been spared for now, that's what their fate had determined; but when Christos secretly dug at him with his elbow, he was startled and began to share Christos thinking. 'What do you know, perhaps they really are not like us, maybe they had deliberately been put with us so that we would shoot off our mouths.' The second day, after the sun had splashed onto the rocks and the flies were getting into their nostrils, the same army trumpet sounded, as it had in Solun. In the clearing that served as their assembly area they were lined up according to all the military regulations and after that they called out names and all of those who had been called out took four steps forward. Christos, Doni, Marko and Niko found themselves amongst those called out while the madzhir remained in the rear lines. Then they turned the rear line to the right and led it far away somewhere, beyond some slopes of rock. Someone said that they were taking them to another battalion, but that detail didn't mean anything to Christos and Doni. Surely they were doing that so that they were not in one place too much, thought Doni, but that, as they understood later was not an ordinary separation. It eventually turned out that going to another battalion had a special importance of its own.

And so, three remained in the tent: Doni, Christos and Niko. And the flies. They could not separate the flies into battalions. Their thirst also remained because the higher the sun climbed, the stronger they felt their own thirst, under their ribs and on their parched lips. Below, from the shore onwards, great waters spread out, they sparkled under the sun like millions of mirrors, but they could not eliminate thirst.

“Do you have any spit?” asked Doni. “I haven't,” said Christos.

The young man didn't either.

“Will they give us water?” continued Doni.

Christos and Niko were quiet.

Toward the afternoon, when the tent canvas sheets did not touch, and the rocks would surely sizzle like heated metal if a drop of water hit them, then, but they did not know how high the sun was because nobody had the courage to lift up his eyes and heat them with the sun, it was then that the trumpet sounded again and called them to the assembly area. A slope extended from the clearing upwards with small bushes and with lots of rocks, and a path meandered over the slope. They led them along that path, over the hot rocks and along the burnt and trampled grass. The path which led above gave courage to Doni. They were not the first to go here and certainly they would not be the last. But what of that? Those

who had passed before them had taken only their own torments.

Whatever was theirs would be waiting for them somewhere above. 'Above' was actually a wide gorge, a ravine which ran from the top of the mountain, part of the way down the slope, a gorge about ten threshing floors wide. Rains had deepened the dry bed, which in places passed through the middle of the slope itself, and in some places kept to either one or the other side. Beyond the gorge -a wall of stone about twenty meters long which ran parallel to the gorge was built higher in the middle, like a church pulpit.

In that wide place they stopped them and sat them down. When they sat and cast their looks towards the wall, they could not see well because the sun was getting into their pupils, but they heard a voice, soft, pleasant, a kind voice which was wishing them welcome. Those who found themselves in his shadow, for whom he was blocking the sun, saw him and understood: a Captain, tall, upright, well-groomed, in parade uniform, closely shaven, with a smile under his nose and a pistol on his belt. Next to him, one on one side, another on the other side, two Second Lieutenants, also with pistols but without any smile under their noses. One of them with a moustache under his nose. On the upper and lower ends of the wall - soldiers with guns and whips.

The sun was dropping glowing embers over the seated soldiers.

When all of them wanted to curse the sun, the Captain raised his hand and said:

"My name is Kostadini Skalumbakis," with a tone that suggested that that information was of particular importance, and later it was explained that, from today onwards, he was responsible for their valuable lives. From the way he said the last words, many men understood that the smile that he carried under his nose was false and put on. At the end he called on them to sing the song about Greece. When his voice dried out over them, a silence descended. Some turned their eyes to their laps, some looks roamed along the slope and those who were most afraid, the weakest, were looking at Captain Skalumbakis.

'What song is that?' many men asked themselves.

The two Second Lieutenants, who were standing like props on both sides, screeched, demanding that everyone look at the wall and sing. For a long time no song vibrated the hot air even though almost everybody was moving his lips. After a time, in the middle, some frightened voices were heard, then the sound spread wide throughout all the sitting soldiers and at the end a strange babbling rose in the hot air.

The Captain shook his head. The Second Lieutenants jumped off the wall, they passed the dry bed and they found themselves amongst the men. One of them, the shorter, fatter one, the one with a moustache instead of a smile under his nose, wandered among the seated men, but in such a way, left to right, as if deliberately avoiding the smooth and bare head of Doni.

Doni tried to open his mouth because he imagined that this soldier was putting on an act, 'May God not hear me, but he is looking exactly at my head, regardless of which saint I call on.' If he were allowed, if he could, he would have bent down towards Christos and whispered in his

ear. "Do you see that hound, frrr this way, frrr that way, but it is me that he is going to hit."

After a time the Second Lieutenant did indeed stand behind Doni and in all of his body he knew that he was looking for him, so Doni was trying to shrink himself, but there was no way that he could disappear totally in his big English clothing, and he heard:

"You with the head like a melon, why isn't there any voice when you are moving your tongue around?"

Doni continued to look at a rock in the wall, hoping that maybe it was not him that was being addressed, but when the truncheon came down on his head he understood that he even had to stand up, not just to answer.

"I am singing, Lieutenant, sir!" and he started to stammer when he rose up above all of the men because he had just that feeling that who knows how high above all the others he had risen, or then again, that the seated ones were trying to shrink and were managing it.

He wanted to add that that was as much voice as he had, that he was thirsty, that his vocal chords had probably stuck together, so it was not strange then that his voice could not come through his mouth.

"Do you know the song, or are you mouthing curses?"

"No, sir," Doni was saying and looked him in the eye, his black eyes with a shiny coat of hate, "I'm not mouthing anything, just the song."

The Second Lieutenant only now thought to ask him what he was called, where he was from and why he was not standing quietly when speaking with him. Doni was standing quietly, straight as a candle, and could not do more; he could not turn into wood or rock. He said:

"My name is Andonis Sovichanis, from the village Sarakinovo, the Voden region, villager, Lieutenant, sir."

The Second Lieutenant pushed the truncheon under Doni's chin, at his throat, but not hard, letting his voice be heard when his turn came, because he had put to him a totally different question:

"Well, why are you singing when you are from there? You do not carry Greece in your heart, Ohrana is what you are. Why are you singing this holy song?"

And he pressed the throat of Doni harder and Doni just gurgled.

"Sir ... Lieutenant ... I have a little heart ... What can be put into my heart... I carry it..."

Christos held his soul tight and counted the truncheon hits coming down on Doni and was thinking 'Poor man' - wham, and who is hit? Doni again - wham, and Marko tried hard to hide his head behind the others. The little Greek Niko who slept in their tent sang the song more loudly so that he could attract the attention of the Second Lieutenant, because in that dying down of the song the words Doni sang started to sound like a pure mockery. And he succeeded, because nobody ordered him to stop the song.

The Second Lieutenant got confused, he pulled the truncheon away from Doni's throat and stood in front of Niko:

"You, little blossom, if I am not mistaken, you are from some Lerin village, aren't you?"

The young man jumped up and stood still:

“No, Lieutenant, sir, I am not from a Lerin.”

The Second Lieutenant narrowed his little eyes:

“If you are not from a Lerin village then you are from further up or further down. It’s not important, but I am certain of one thing, in your veins you have filthy, foul blood and you surely are an Ohrana.”

He went quiet, and through clenched teeth snarled:

“Thieving bastard.”

He finished the sentence with the truncheon which made a red welt on the young man’s face.

Before he ordered him to go over the wall the young man shouted:

“In this pissed on Greece, not even a Greek can be a Greek!” And there, behind Skalumbakis, they worked him all over with other aids, and with other sorts of truncheons, they recorded all his details, from his head to his heels.

Everyone forgave the young man for not managing to hold out, that he permitted himself to scream with all his voice; and from the wall, and from that man built above the wall, Captain Skalumbakis, when he stopped roaring, almost in tears, the words:

“This one really is one of ours,” while when they heard that Christos and Doni and the others did not know what Captain Skalumbakis had thought and how he had come to that conclusion about Niko.

And that’s how their first time sitting under the sun to sing the song ended.

6

Sometimes fifteen, sometimes twenty times they went to that place in a single day, but not when the sun first appeared above the sharp rocks of the mountain ridge, rather when it had climbed very high, when it had set the disc of the sky on fire. As soon as they returned to the tent, the trumpet called them again to the meeting place. And from the assembly area along the slope to that wide gorge with burning rocks and earth.

They always made them sing the one, same song in which Greece was praised. In reality it worked for them as a method of investigation. Because sometimes a man could suffer equally if he was singing and if he was not singing. The Second Lieutenant Maki from Kalamati, the short and chubby one with a moustache under his nose who had interrogated them the first day, according to his own findings and on his own accounts, could point to anyone with his truncheon. The Second Lieutenant Maki was foreplay for what happened beyond the wall on which Skalumbakis stood and laughed with a woman's voice.

Doni and Niko were regarded as pioneers in their own group. They were the first pointed to by Maki's truncheon. And the student from Seres was sent over the wall because he was called Paris, and because he was a student, how could such a barbarian have a name given only to the most high-minded Greeks, and also because he was born in Seres, which until now had been the most pure Greek town and here was this greenhorn student fouling it and, at the end, he indicated with his truncheon that he had to go beyond the wall.

With Christos he used the song:

"Hey, where do you think you are, why are you singing with that ugly voice - and the song sings about our land, the land of Homer, and you are digging to undermine it."

The seated men looked at Christos and nobody believed that such a tall man, such a thin man whose skin was just barely able to hold his bones together could undermine this rocky Greece.

When Maki sent Christos over the wall he called to the soldiers to give the man a little water because he was dehydrated, and they all watched as that Captain Skalumbakis made a monkey of the good Christos. After they led him around under the truncheon hits, they pushed him to the feet of Skalumbakis, who was holding a canteen with water and from two meters above him was trying to hit his mouth with a little thread of water which splashed from left to right, from right to left. Some of the flow splashed on his shoulders and clothes, but not a single drop entered his mouth, and the man Christos moved, he jumped after that thread of water on all sides, sometimes he jumped so hard that Skalumbakis lifted his hand even higher, and Christos begged, jumping up:

“Captain, sir ... Captain, sir ... hit me, here - I will stand still and you hit, but just a drop ... just a single drop of water ... here ... here, splash me ...” and after half an hour Christos stopped jumping, slowly he shrunk, he became stooped and at the end he disappeared beyond the wall, without a sound, without movement, without struggle. The soldiers bent down, they lifted him up and put him on the wall, and Skalumbakis kicked him over the wall. And he fell and rolled to the bottom of the gully. When he stopped, and he stopped on rock, he was on his back and the sun got into his mouth, right to the back of his throat. Those who were the closest to him tried to get up and to drag him to them, but Maki sent them all behind the wall.

Doni dug at the Greek with his elbow, but he did not dare to say what he was thinking out loud. Christos lay on the rock until life started to return to him: first he closed his mouth, then it was as though his hand waved, his body shook and he moaned. He did not know if Captain Skalumbakis was watching him from up above on the wall or whether the Captain had stayed in his eyes from before and could not be chased away. But when he heard that evil laugh of his, he understood that he was still above and that he still held the canteen in his hand. Christos turned on his stomach and crawled through the ravine, he climbed to the other side, to where Doni and Niko were. Once again Christos was not lost, he did not go down, but there was no way he could totally pull himself together, so they carried him back to the tent. He kept repeating:

“Water ... water water

7

They brought the water from Athens by boat, they poured it into holes dug into the rock and in the ground and they did not share it out until two days had passed, after it got a skin of dust, insects and flies on it, after it became as though boiled, and after half was drunk by the sun with its hot straws. Christos was not the only one who bleated for water. And Doni had crusted lips. And the Greek. And all the others. When they came out of the tents they turned their eyes towards the great waters that surrounded the island, they looked at the blueness which at the end merged with the sky, and they waited with the canteen in their hands, they waited to hear that howl of the trumpet which invited them to come to the big holes with dirty and warm water so they could receive their 200 grams.

The first time Christos said:

“This water can’t be drunk, look how it’s red and dirty,” but when his turn at the hole came he handed over his canteen so they would pour him some of that warm and dirty water.

“I will filter it through my shirt,” said Doni, “at least the flies and the insects will be taken out,” but eventually both he and Christos acted like the Greek, Niko. They lifted the canteens, poured them fully into their mouths and did not try to filter them.

Below, immediately beyond the hacked out bank, the sea splashed clean water. It was as salty as the food that they got, like that full army serving of grain with a salty herring on the very top. They received the meal in line and, in line, in front of the Second Lieutenant Maki, they ate it. First they started with the salty herring - woe was anyone who tried to leave the herring to the end or to somehow free himself from it.

Doni did everything the way that the others did them. He stood in line and he ate. He stood in line and waited for warm and dirty water so he could soften the dry skin on his lips a little. He sat in the clearing opposite the wall of Skalumbakis and sang the song about Greece. If they

called him, he went behind the wall obediently and in an exemplary fashion he accepted everything that fate had preordained for him. For him it was important to hold out. He said it often to Christos and Niko, he said to them:

“Put something in your thoughts and it will be easier for you, just as I do,” but he never told them what he put into his thoughts.

Sometimes they caught him trying to smile, to dismantle that yellow and tragic mask on his face, but they did not manage to find out what he was thinking. Christos once caught him by the arm:

“I’m afraid little brother ... I am afraid that something might happen to me.”

And Doni looked hard at those long and dry bones and thought to himself:

‘And what could happen to these bones other than that they can be freed from this blackened skin?’

“Doni, brother, come on, teach me to put something in my thoughts too,” continued Christos, maybe he could free himself from these sufferings.

Doni freed himself from his grip, saying to him:

“When it’s hardest for you that thing will just come to you.”

That day Doni really showed them that he kept something turning through his thoughts, otherwise how could he have returned smiling after everything that happened to him?

That evening for the first time Maki from Kalamati let them fall out of line and freely, sitting down or standing up, eat dinner.

And the Second Lieutenant lost himself somewhere. Doni held his serving in his hand and did not feel like eating. He and the yellow, over-salted herring looked at each other and there was no way he could dare to take a bite from it, and under it there was still something else, but what it was - who knows whether he could identify it, it had neither smell nor taste. And while he was willing the sunset to come with the hope that he would find something familiar in it, he discovered that some young men dashed towards the shore. He said to himself, ‘Why don’t I go too, if for nothing else, at least I will free myself of this meal more easily.’ When he reached them, he saw that they were going after water because, the closer they got, all of them knit their hands around their canteens more and more. Doni, in one hand, was minding his meal, and with the other was trying to unclip his canteen. When he reached them, the first ones were already putting their canteens under a rock where some rare drops filtered down. Doni jumped around the knot of people and could not force his way through to the drops. The other hand in which he was holding his dinner was in his way. It didn’t occur to him to pour it out. Just then, next to him, the voice of the Second Lieutenant came and when he turned around the Second Lieutenant was already there before them.

Maki ordered them to line up and after that gave them a command to march in place holding their plates in their hands stretched out in front of them. Those who had freed themselves of the meal were ordered to fill their plates with sea water. In the push somebody clipped Doni’s hand and his plate was turned upside down right in front of the Second

Lieutenant himself. And even though he saw how everything happened, he was not too shy to order him to fill his plate with water from the sea and after that to march by himself on the spot in front of the whole line. When he stopped counting Doni's marching, he commanded the other soldiers to count for him.

After he ate his meal, and because he saw why they were gathering below, Christos wanted to drag himself down to the shore as well, but he saw the Second Lieutenant, and he stayed where he was. He stood and looked at what was happening. He was sad for Doni. 'Poor man,' he thought to himself, 'does this happen to him because he does not have a head that looks like ours or is that just his star?'

Christos did not stay in that spot from which you could see the shore, because the trumpet announced that they had to get into the tents. He and the Greek were lying down when Doni dragged himself up, but they were amazed when they saw a smile on his face without a beard and without eyebrows.

"You bastard," tall Christos said to him, "you know how to make a joke even with the Second Lieutenant."

While the twilight filtered away, Doni's face darkened, but Christos and the Greek could bet that the smile was still lingering on his face. All the same, from how he lay down on his bed, from the way he was looking for the most comfortable spot for his bones, they could see that he was not far away from total surrender. He had no strength nor any voice to press out from himself.

Niko said that he could never march for a whole hour with outstretched arms:

"Either I would have fallen, or I would have begged them to take pity."

All three were quiet. Niko first gave a sign that he gave into them in his dream. Above the camp an impressiveness arose, suffocating, a salty, dead quiet which the distant breaking of the waves was digging at.

"Doni, hey, Doni," whispered Christos, "are you sleeping?"

For the first time Doni spoke. His voice tore itself out like the heaviest sigh:

"I'm not sleeping."

"I wanted to ask you ... how do you feel?" continued Christos. "Do you need any help?" Christos knew that everyone felt their burden was lessened when help was offered, even though you couldn't help, and continued:

"We all offer to help the other, while actually we want help for ourselves. You're not like that, Doni."

Doni interrupted the monologue, he said:

"That which is mine, is mine."

Christos continued with his thought:

"Maybe it's like that and maybe it's not like that. Because what is it that is mine and what is it that is yours? I think - do we all have to do what you do?"

Doni spoke once again.

"You have no right, Christos!"

Here they finished the discussion, because even though Christos wanted them to continue, Doni got in ahead of him and said to him that he wanted to sleep, to rest. And his dream somehow would not come at all. Niko was whistling with his nose and who knows what he was dreaming, because from time to time he would start to groan, mumbling something.

“You have no right, Christos.”

‘In what have I no right? So he thinks that we all have to be like him, to endure. But how? In the daytime the sun fries, at night the dream won’t come, and all around it’s rock and behind the rock, beyond the rock, water as far as the eyes can see. All of this together with Skalumbakis and the Second Lieutenant who puts just one question:

“Why don’t you sign? Sign and we will return you to your people with all your human features, we will return you to the bed of your wife, to the eyes of your children, and above the bones again flesh will grow.”

Not until somewhere near dawn did Doni go to sleep. Christos fought hard and did not get to sleep.

8

They did not go to the clearing just to sing the song about Greece. They put them on other jobs too. The place where they lined up became small and narrow, so they had to dig around it, to take out rocks and shrubs so that they could tear one more threshing floor width from the rock. With bare hands they pulled out the rocks and they used hoes if they had to dig in the earth. Digging like that they found bones and skulls still with flesh and hair and because of that they did not dig any deeper. They began to take earth from the shore, and on top of the earth, so that there wouldn't be any dust or mud, they placed sand brought from the sea with their army bags. Not everyone saw those bones that they dug up, but stories spread among the soldiers like an evil disease.

One night from the sea a breeze came and blew the sand around.

Somebody said that the sea did not give up sand so that they could cover bones with it, and that's why it sent the wind to return the sand. Meanwhile the sand was not returned to the sea, it had blown over the rocks of the island.

After that day they did not take them away to the shore to step through the sea and to fill their army bags with sand, rather they drove them upwards, in the gully, under the wall and under the shadow of Skalumbakis, who accused them of not working well and that's why today the sand is not in its place. At the end he said:

"Either return the old sand or bring new sand and overnight put on a guard." Having finished, he turned around and went down from the wall, but it was as though he forgot the shadow above the soldiers who were sitting on the other side under the sun. The worst thing was that they felt his shadow on themselves, even when they were chased down towards the sea, again after sand.

That evening, the Second Lieutenant Maki really did put a guard on the sand. One soldier without a gun who had to mind the sand and one soldier with a gun who had to mind the soldier without a gun. Only the

one with a gun knew what he was doing, and the other one, all night, stood like a stupid little beast, he fought with sleep, he fought to remain standing, not to fall to his knees before the gun. And he did not know what he would do if the wind really came.

Only rarely did Marko Kizovski get close to Doni even though they were from the same village, but at that time he came closer, he came close to whisper to him that they couldn't hold out like this any more; he whispered:

“How do you make the wind turn back if it comes from the sea?”

Doni just said to him that if they ordered him to stay the night he would stay, and if the wind came, it would come and it would go, maybe it would take the sand too. There was nothing that could be done about that.

From Doni's tent, only Christos was put to guard the sand, and that was on the night the wind came. There were two changes of the soldiers with a gun watching him, while he raised his head and looked at the sky, but the stars did not say how far away the day was, even though they were all very high up. The black beast around the island slept. Only small waves that could not be seen splashed on the shore, but there was no sign that something was going to happen. With the second shift, the Second Lieutenant came too. He stood in front of him and asked:

“Eh, pedimu, what do you say?”

Christos was most frightened of him because all of those who before him had stood guard on the sand during the night told about the arrival of Maki, about that dark arrival, like a shadow, like a vampire, he came with a whip which couldn't be seen in the night, but which you could feel on your cheek and on your body, and with one single song: What's your name, where are you from, oh, from that bandits' nest, from a shit covered seed, Ohrana, whack, Ohrana - whack, Ohrana - whack, you say you are 'loyal to the King and to Greece, but you do not want to sign that you resign from the Party, then whack!

Christos saw the Second Lieutenant before him like a spirit, like a shadow; he heard his voice, and if it wasn't for that soldier with a gun, he would imagine that he was not standing at night before Maki, but rather that he was sleeping and that he was dreaming him like some bad illness.

He tried to say, to stammer that, there he was, standing, he was waiting and begging the wind not to appear, when the sea awoke. Great waves started to boom on the shore, they threw huge white beams of foam, and the Second Lieutenant turned towards the sea, as if he was really concerned that wind would come, that it would come beyond the waves and lift the sand.

The Second Lieutenant turned towards the soldier with the gun and ordered him to shoot once, as was agreed, to shoot a signal that the wind was coming with the waves from the sea. The soldier lifted the gun and the report was drowned out by the boom of the waves.

The soldiers jumped up, they came out onto the assembly place and on Maki's command lay down on the sand, they all went down to stop the wind. The wind was already stirring around between them and whistled with the fine sand it was carrying.

Christos was lucky that the wind rose up. What happened later put him with everyone else. He lay down on the sand too, with his mouth towards it, so that his eyes would not be filled. But the wind and the fine dust of sand whirled around the soldiers and got not just into their shirts but into their eyes and mouths even though they were trying hard to keep them pressed shut.

Doni and Niko were lying next to one another and Doni was speaking:

“Just don’t open your mouth!”

After the wind threw gusts over the prone bodies, after it swept away the sand between them, it went upwards, towards the rocks of the island. The sea exploded against the shore some more, it threw white rafters of foam, but weaker and weaker and sometime before dawn, the booming stopped altogether. And the wind did not weave between the people any more. And it was not among them. When they returned to their tents, the sun sparkled on the grains held in their clothes, eyebrows and hair. Like fine meshing of water around the island. The Greek said to Doni:

“My mouth is full of sand.”

“Don’t move your mouth,” said Doni to him, yellow in his face and in his soul as, looking back towards the sand, shivers crawled over his body. Wherever the wind had passed between the soldiers, it had licked the sand away and uncovered the red scab of the earth. At the clearing only their sandy outlines were lying, like an impression of the life of the bones and skulls they had found just there.

The Second Lieutenant Maki did not let them go straight to the tents, he made them march with closed fists, but with their thumbs outward, as if they were flashing to the world.

From that day some strange things started to happen. Either all of them had already given in, they were stirred up so they saw things back to front, or everything was back to front. Many men gave in, they signed. They softened up the Greek, Niko, behind the wall on the slope like a piece of hard-to-work-with wood is softened by putting it in boiling water - and he signed, but when he signed they did not release him, they did not return him to the unit, they kept him there, all they did was to give him a weapon and shame. Christos felt sorry for him, he spoke to Doni saying he had believed Niko would hold out.

“There was some spark in his eyes,” but he too wanted to ask what would happen to them, what else were they going to do to them to compel them to sign. But he did not speak his suspicion out loud. He knew that Doni would look at him hard and would laugh because he would say to him, as he always said:

“Go ahead, but how can you sign to say that you are a horse when you are not a horse?”

Christos, with his contorted fingers, gripped Doni’s shoulders and looked into his eyes, as though he was looking for sympathy:

“I am afraid, Doni, do you understand?”

“And what if I do understand? I want to hold onto a little bit of soul,” and he continued to think of Christos and he found fear in himself,

but fear that they were going to break the man, Christos, that they would destroy him.

It was at that time that they demolished the wall above the camp; they separated the meagre earth from the rocks. They took the rocks to the shore, and the earth to the front of the tent of Skalumbakis to make a garden. In a long line - on their backs. They loaded the rocks onto old boats, while those that were left were covered with lime and baked. So, something had to be built here too.

Doni did not have any trade at all and so the only thing there was for him was to carry rocks on his back. Christos, meanwhile, volunteered that he knew how to build, that's what he said, "I am a builder, for generations, we've all been builders in my family." They took him to Skalumbakis together with some others. They began to build. When he returned the first day he said:

"Mr Skalumbakis wants a roof over his head."

"He has a right," said Doni, "so many rocks around and he is staying in a tent."

"Did you say that sarcastically?" Christos looked at him carefully and said to him:

"You've said that now and don't say it anywhere else."

Christos was not getting anything more from Doni, nor said anything more to the others who worked with him. They acted differently. But Doni noticed that the face of the tall builder started to brighten. "From the work," he would say to Doni. "While I am building, I forget where I am, no thoughts go through my head at all." As Christos was happy with that, Doni was happy too. He hoped that they would forget him, that they would save him, if he worked well. Because recently Christos had become more and more afraid, one thought went through his head, that he would not hold out, that they would force him to sign that page. Doni did not even think about himself. When it became hardest for him, he called Angelina. Angelina was such a woman, that wherever she appeared, she covered everything with her image. Only sometimes was he troubled by a thought as to why they did not have children. Because if she had someone with her, of her own blood, surely she would not suffer as much. He didn't even think of a letter. He knew that they only took them as far as the sea. Sometimes they saw the white pages swim in the waves. So it wasn't worth it. They surely didn't want it to be known where they were, and she believed that he was fighting somewhere with the partisans, or maybe she had already mourned him as dead.

But they never let a man take a hold on the most intimate thoughts, it was as though they sensed that someone had already travelled away in his thoughts. And they would throw themselves on him:

"Eh, ela edo!" and when he pulled himself out from the line, the one that was calling him would look at the rock and say:

"Don't you think, pedimu, that this rock is too small?" and he wouldn't even wait for an answer that the rock really was heavy for his back, which was just bones, but would order him:

"Leave it here and go back for another," and make him return to the other line, the one which was moving upwards, he would hit him with the

truncheon or the whip, and upwards, all the way to the place from where they took the rock, he would collect blows from the other truncheons as well.

Doni swore not to call Angelina before his own eyes all the time, because when they got him like that by surprise, he did not have time to chase her from his thoughts and she could see what was happening to him, and he did not want her to suffer.

9

The tents turned ashen in the hot humid air. Not even lizards sought shelter in them. Only the flies felt in their element. It was as though they were the inventory of the tents, just like the army packs, the dinners and the people. It was as if Skalumbakis' office was encumbered by them. So what if you hit some with your hand and kill some tens of them - the others freely and tamely crawl on your hands, on your face, along your neck and they permit themselves to even wander into your nostrils.

One evening, while they were getting dinner, Marko again came up close to Doni and whispered right in his ear:

"Are you holding up, eh, Doni?"

"Is that important?" he said, even before he turned around but when he did turn around he did not leave it at that, he pierced Marko:

"And you are keeping your distance from us."

Marko had something else on his mind, he wanted to ask him something else, but Doni had rushed in, got him at his weakest point because recently, more and more he had wanted to be as far away from the smooth head of Doni and from the tall bones of Christos. He obviously wanted to stay less noticeable. Before he moved himself away he whispered further:

"Are we still going to torment our souls just because of one crappy signature?"

When Doni wanted to meet Marko's eyes with his own, Marko got away, he stopped further down the line.

Doni got his dinner and did not want to eat it, his soul had somehow started to feel heavy.

"Where is your look floating, Doni?" Christos asked him, "are you looking beyond the waters at something or are you peering into your soul?"

Doni put the plate down between his feet, he put his fingers under his hat and scratched his head:

“It’s the same,” he said. ‘Whichever way you look at it, that’s what it is...”

“Only there’s no way I can eat up this yellow fish.” With his eyes he roamed around - young men like him and like Christos and amongst them there were also older ones, and other ages; they sat, some on rock, some on the ground, and looked at their plates. Surely they were imagining water in them. Doni checked under himself and was surprised, because underneath him it was sandy, it was sand they had dragged from the sea. While Christos was chewing, he bared the bones of the fish, he furrowed the yellow flesh of the fish into the sand and the bones - on top of the dinner, just in case, if anybody went by and wanted to see what he had done with the fish. When Christos glanced at his plate, he was amazed:

“So you ate the fish up all the same?”

In the tent they were talking about some improbable things. Some young men had thrown themselves into the sea. Not because they had been beaten, but because Captain Skalumbakis had ruined them, he had degraded their masculine honour. He and some others of lower rank did those sorts of things ... with handsome young men they picked while they were singing the song about Greece. Those who had thrown themselves into the sea had been kept by him in his tent in place of women. Christos, while he was telling Doni that, whispering in the bad smell of the tent, tried to spit out, but his mouth was dry, and he just made the motion.

Doni did not want to believe it, he said that the young men surely must have thrown themselves into the sea because they had been driven mad by punishment.

“Maybe they lost their minds,” he added, but there was no way that he could believe that Captain Skalumbakis had such low thoughts in his head while he stood on that wall with his shadow on them, thoughts which were not deserving of a man with the features of a man. Meanwhile Christos mentioned a considerable number, one which went over fifty. Doni was ashamed because while they had been sitting outside he had not told Christos what he had done with the fish from which he kept only the bones on top of his dinner; surely Christos too would have freed himself in the same way, and now his saliva would not be so dry, surely he would be able to spit and to free himself from that bitterness which he surely must feel in his throat.

“Who told you?” asked Doni. Christos was offended:

“Don’t you believe me?”

“But, just the same ...” insisted Doni.

“I could never think up such things, what do you take me for?”

“Don’t get angry ... but do you believe those stories?”

“No, they are not stories,” Christos sighed and turned to the other side.

“Are you going to sleep?” Doni asked him. Christos did not answer.

Doni turned to the other side and forced himself to get to sleep. Just as a drowsiness started to weigh on his eyelids, Christos spoke:

“We’re going to start to build a church tomorrow. I can’t understand what would they want with a church here?”

Even though Doni wanted to continue the conversation, this time he did not try to fight his drowsiness; the drowsiness turned into a dream, and he found a church in his dream and he and Angelina were in the church, she in a white bride’s dress and he in old clothes and with a bonnet on his head and he was waving his arms, defending himself from the rebukes of Angelina and from the saints. Angelina got angry, she said that she did not want to be embarrassed before God and the Virgin Mary when he would go into the house of God with a bonnet on his head, and she let go of his hand and while she was running away with the white dress through the door, something rang out on the tiles of the church. Doni bent down and found the wedding ring he had given to Angelina before all of those saints. For a long time he held it in his hand, he turned and he asked the icons what all of this meant -but the saints and the Mother of God and the Son of God were closed up in the small area between the curtain and the glass and if they said something, it did not reach the ears of Doni. All at once, one of the saints turned into a goat and the goat looked like Captain Skalumbakis.

He awoke somewhere around midnight and could not get to sleep again. When he woke he became even more frightened. Not because he was dreaming of Captain Skalumbakis looking like a goat, but because of what happened earlier in the dream. He saw that his right palm was closed in a fist but when he opened it there was no ring in it.

‘No, my Angelina would never have thrown away the ring that I gave her,’ he thought, but that was not much comfort.

And for all the time he was trying again to bring his eyelids one to the other, he tried hard to call up the image of Angelina too, but she would not come. Only sometimes would he catch something of her - a lock of hair, an eye which was neither smiling nor crying, a white breast without warmth, as though made of dough, or a bare foot which swam through the darkness, but not towards him, but from him and away.

Just before daylight he thought of what Marko had said to him while they were waiting in line to get their dinner last night: ‘Are we still going to torment our souls for one crappy signature?’

That’s why, later, he did not feel like eating. Oh, my Christos, you are going to build a church, and Marko is devising how to put down his signature. Doni got upset not because Marko Kizovski could not hold out, dear God, it depended on how they pressured you, but because he had spoken to him too - if he already wanted to sign, he should sign. Why put his spoon into someone else’s plate? God willing, Doni would not sign. They could forget about putting him in a trap to make him something that he had never been.

10

The summer finished with the first rains but before that Christos had an interesting experience. It happened when the boat came with water for the officers.

Doni, Christos and two other young men were waiting for the trumpet to sound for dinner and they were sharing half a cigarette between them when they began to bring the water with a bucket to the newly constructed house where they poured it into special pits from which they watered the garden with new dirt and new grass, English grass.

“I haven’t put a drop of water into my mouth today,” said Christos when the last soldier with a bucket on his shoulder passed by and all of them froze when they saw that Christos stood up and carefully, with cautious steps, went to look behind the soldier. Doni tried, with gestures, to somehow make him return, but Christos continued after the soldier with an aluminum cup in his hand, which he was already holding above the bucket and waiting for a convenient moment to scoop. The soldier neither noticed nor heard when Christos got some water and quickly, quickly poured it down his throat. He managed it because he was two heads taller than the soldier and the bucket. And all of them expected he would return after that big swallow of water, but he continued behind the soldier. Clean, fresh water like a sea was rocking in the bucket. Christos carefully again put his cup in the bucket and just when he was lifting his hand, the soldier tripped and the bucket flew forward. It’s over for our Christos, they all thought, but while they were still thinking that and while the soldier was rolling around with the bucket trying to get up, Christos drank the water, hid the cup and bent down as though he was tying his shoelace. The soldier got up, he looked at the bucket, he looked at the trail of water which was quickly soaked into the dry earth, he looked at Christos, who a step or two away from him was folding his long bones and they all already thought that he would attack poor Christos.

Nothing happened. The soldier put the empty bucket on his shoulder and continued upwards.

Christos loosened those few muscles he had and his bones crashed to the ground. Doni ran to him and while he was pulling himself together said to him:

“What got into you, man, you’ve got a wife and children, why risk not returning to them just for a swallow of water?”

Fear still glowed over all of Christos’ bones and through all his veins, and he hardly could make a sound. He said:

“I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know ... I got muddled ... I wanted to bring the other one to you.”

Doni bowed his head. ‘He had time to think of me too.’ But he still did not forgive him the action, he could have lost his life.

After dinner, the Second Lieutenant Maki came and called ten people to come out. Doni, not because he wanted to be separated from the others, rather because he was standing at the side, and some others started to join him at his place and when Maki counted ten he said:

“Take the canteens from the others too. We will go beyond the ridge there’s a spring there.”

And after that he said to them to wait a little until he returned. Doni and some others moved left and right to collect canteens, but half of them not only did not get canteens from the others but they did not wait for the Second Lieutenant, rather they hurried ahead. When the Second Lieutenant returned and understood that they were not all there, that four of them had gone ahead, he wasn’t very angry, while Doni and the others were wondering at this, being as familiar as they were with the Second Lieutenant.

“Never mind, we will find them at the water source,” said Maki.

Was it possible for these words to come out of the mouth of Maki? Until now he had never had a good, civilised word. Eventually, Doni stopped thinking about things which happened and without thinking gave himself to the rocks and the dry earth and tried not to lag behind the others, even though he was the weakest. Maki made a few jokes on account of his head. He said:

“Pedja, this one here has put his bum under his hat.”

And he was laughing, and the other soldiers had to laugh with him too. They went over the ridge, for the first time, and they saw that the island was the same from the other side too, rocky, baked, only it had a spring with a tap. They saw those four gathered at one place and knew that the spring was there.

“Oh, the men have arrived,” said the Second Lieutenant and nobody noticed the evil blister in his voice. While they were going down they did not take their eyes off the men who were lifting their canteens and drinking. The Second Lieutenant hurried his steps and after him the soldiers were stretching their strides too. They also had to hurry because night was already growing on the waves of the sea.

“You are all finished, eh?” Maki asked them.

Not until now did Doni notice that amongst the four was Marko. They stood quietly while Maki looked at them. After that he ordered them:

“Leave your canteens and take your shoes off.”

Marko turned his head towards Doni, hoping that Doni knew why Maki was telling them to take off their shoes. But what could they do, they took their shoes off and after they took their shoes off Maki sent them to run barefoot along the island’s rocks all the way to the ridge and when they got to the ridge to come back, to clap their hands above their head and call as loudly as they could “Here we are, here we are, here we are!”

While they ran upwards, Maki ordered Doni to pound rocks and sprinkle the plate above the tap at the spring and the others brought bigger rocks which could hardly be lifted with one hand.

Marko and the other three got to the ridge and they shouted “Here we are, here we are, here we are.”

Maki gave them a signal to come back, still running. They returned with cut and bleeding soles. While they were still trying to get their breath with their tongues hanging out, he ordered them to kneel with bare knees on the pounded rock. When they were kneeling he put one rock in each outstretched hand which they had to hold level and repeat together in one voice:

“Forgive us, we made a mistake, we will never do it again.”

While Maki was giving out the last instructions, Doni and the others were filling the canteens.

Only one of the four managed to hold the rock level and not beg for mercy. He was kneeling without saying a word, the veins in his neck straining, and Marko and the other two were dropping their rocks lower and lower and in the most degrading manner begging to be released. Then the Second Lieutenant asked them to promise that they would do everything that he asked of them. Marko and one other promised, while the third one, who had until then lowered his arms, sucked together strength from who knows where, maybe from the rocks, which were piercing the flesh of his knees or maybe he had seen an apparition of a saint who gave him courage, but he began to bring his arms level with the man who until then had remained silent, and did not promise anything. Maybe he remembered what that trap was like. Marko and the other little man, with the Asian mouth, put down the rocks and picked out the little rock fragments from their knees which had already started to bleed and collapsed before Maki, saying:

“Ask, ask! We’ll do anything you ask.”

Maki was a cunning man. He smiled maliciously and told them to stand up, then added:

“See me when we get back to the camp.”

Doni knew that trap. His heart beat quickly like the heart of a wild foal and to himself he cursed Marko, he cursed God too for not drying out Marko’s tongue so as not to make such a promise.

The Second Lieutenant did not wait for the other two to fall at his feet. He freed them because it was already getting dark and he had to get them back before the trumpet called them to the tents.

Marko knew that he had made a mistake and he knew that Doni was looking at him with contempt, but it was dark and their eyes could not meet. All the same, along the way Doni managed to get close to him and to whisper:

“I pounded those rocks ...” after that, he returned to the end. When they reached the camp, the Second Lieutenant took Marko and the other one to Skalumbakis.

In the tent, while he was giving water to Christos, Doni did not feel such spite for Marko, as he had at the tap. He said:

“They broke the man.”

“Who?” asked Christos without interest, because fear still strained in him and it was as if he was not at all thirsty. But when he heard that it was Marko, from Doni’s village, he lowered his voice and wanted to hear more. When he heard how everything had happened, when he saw everything like a picture before him, he didn’t have anything bad to say about Marko. He said:

“You’ll see, whenever it happens, they’ll bend us all ... I wouldn’t have held out if I had been in his place.”

“Those of us that are weak, the good for nothings, we hold out longer, I think because we know how to escape our torments,” said Doni while Christos filled in:

“Until we escape from ourselves.”

When he went silent, Christos continued:

“Do you remember the man from Seres? The one who started that song? Today they tied him in a sack with a cat and they dropped it in the sea.”

Doni’s skin bristled. A cat with him in the sea!

“Is he alive?” he asked.

“They dragged him out scratched and bitten, but the cat did not have a better time of it. He bit her through the throat.”

“And they didn’t break him, did they? They can’t break him like they can my Marko.” Doni wanted to find out how all of that had finished. Christos confirmed that really they had not broken the man. When he had come round, when they had pressed the water from his stomach, salty water, he had spat in the face of Skalumbakis and said to him:

“Here’s what Greece has fallen to, fat-arsed poofers to embarrass it!” They put him in solitary where God himself would have given in, but he did not give in, he did not submit.

My Marko did not hold out, not even for ten minutes on pounded stone! What is it that makes people last? Take him - he knew nothing else apart from Angelina’s lap, and nothing interested him, he could sign at any time, he’s not this, he’s not that, not the first thing, not the third thing, but he would, in effect, be confirming that he was something that he had never been. They took him to be a soldier by force. If they had not picked him up, after a little time, he would have gone to hide in the

mountains and would have gone over the border with Angelina. But there you are - now he was here.

Doni was afraid too. He didn't flinch when danger came straight at his eyes. Then he knew what he was dealing with, and that's how he then acted, but Marko was something else, he had the soul of a rabbit, everything was a burden to him. That's why he wanted to turn the conversation to something else. In his thoughts he tipped his hat to the man from Seres, but it was better that they did not talk about him. He asked:

"What happened with the church, my Christos."

Christos answered that the building part of the church was almost ready, now they had to start to render the walls on the inside.

"Are they going to paint them with saints?" asked Doni, while Christos said:

"No, they are going to hang icons, many icons, all the walls will be covered, and on the ceiling they will spread out a big picture of God."

That night was the last night of summer. In the tents it was whispered from mouth to ear about the man from Seres, about two brothers who did not know Greek apart from a word or two and between them had spoken Macedonian and because of that Captain Skalumbakis had first ordered them to hit each other with sticks, and after that he had ordered them to disgrace themselves, one with the other, while he rubbed his hands and walked around them.

The sea awoke. The people were quiet. The sea started to belt the island with white rafters of foam. That night a heavy rain fell. All of those who were sleeping woke. They stuck their heads outside the tents so that they could wash and so that they could moisten their lips. They put the canteens on the seams of the tent and collected the rain.

"God is taking pity on us because we have put up a church," said Christos.

"Amen," said Doni.

But the rain stopped quickly. It washed the dust from the tents, it rinsed and freshened the faces of the thirsty and debilitated people and returned again to the sea which still threw white rafters at the island and burst on the shore. At once after that the sky cleared up and showed the stars. In many tents prayers were mumbled and many said "Amen". After that they slept along with the fearless flies and the annoying fleas.

11

The dry and hot summer simply passed into a winter which was just the same with lots of winds which crept through the tents and blew them out like dresses. Sometimes the tents were pulled out, either from the ropes or altogether with the stake. The uncovered people gathered and bent like worms unexpectedly dug up from soft earth. The winds, overly full with dry husks of cold currents, dried the saliva before it was made in the mouth. Captain Skalumbakis and the Second Lieutenant Maki hid from the winds in the bricked up house and did not much care what the winds did among the tents. The only measure they took against the winter was to give a command for the small tents to be gathered up, and they brought big ones and pitched them on the same place. While the debilitated soldiers worked, Second Lieutenant Maki mocked them.

“The king is thinking of you, pedja.”

It wasn't just that the tents were not warm, they weren't new either. But the island did not recall harsh winters. The winds which blew continuously, and often they were cold winds too, turned the vegetation, which was dry and miserly anyway, ashen, while the sea boomed on the shore with big waves like artillery gunfire.

When he came back from the church, Christos always, always, always returned like another man.

“Something is staining your soul,” Doni said to him once while Christos was quiet and was looking to see whether there was enough room to stretch out his legs. In the big tents there was less room for them.

“It is this dry wind,” said Christos but Doni knew that it was not just the wind. Because it was like that in summer too, but he never had such a preoccupied shadow on his face.

Doni was sure that that shadow was etched on him by the church, that's why he asked:

“When will the first service be held?”

Christos waved with his hand, it seemed to be unpleasant to him to talk about it; either that or he did not have the courage to get into such a conversation. But he tried to open his mouth to say something, then he cut himself off. Maybe he did not believe that Doni would understand him.

But another night, while Doni was trying to entice the image of Angelina like the flame of a lamp, Christos grabbed him by the hand, he even squeezed his hand as though he was guilty of something, and he could not avoid asking:

“What has happened to you, Christos?”

Christos mumbled, frightened.

“Listen, Doni, I’ve never asked you ... what do you think about that church? Do you believe that anything will change when we hang the icons of saintly people in it?”

Christos believed. He believed that the saintly people would not just come to the island. If they, too, looked at the things which were done here and did not lift a finger, then it would be better that they did not come, let them jump into the sea and drown. Doni did not agree.

“Ha,” he made, “it’s good that you believe.”

“Do you not believe?”

“No living person here will believe them. They’re building that church for something else, if I’m not mistaken,” said Doni.

“It’s not good for you not to believe, my Doni, it’s no good.”

“Is it good, what’s happening with us? Come on, be a man and a Christian - go on, say it. Eh -“ and he cursed, he cursed everything in turn, from the first to the last saints, from God to the Mother of God and the Son of God, because they saw how the people were suffering, how the soldiers were torturing them - and nothing. Doni did not know what role that church would play, but he felt ill when they talked about it, he felt it like a blade of prickly wheat grass turned upside down, a damn thing which, if you do not keep still, gets deeper and deeper into your soul with its under side.

From the earliest he could remember about himself, Christos had clambered along walls, he would stand on a rock and he would go upwards as the rock grew, they would be raised together in height. It was that way with his father, it was that way with him. And he always worked conscientiously. On a barn and on a house. And he built the house for Skalumbakis as though some good family was going to live in it. He turned every rock around in his hands and found a place for it so that it looked good and sat firmly. He believed that everything he worked on, he did so with his soul, but when he began to work on the church he understood that, until now, he had not put his soul into anything.

Before they finished the discussion about the church, Christos acknowledged all of this to Doni, and he finished:

“To carry your soul into what you are making is a big thing.”

“Here, neither your soul nor your work amount to five small coins,” said Doni.

Christos did not agree, he continued to persuade him:

“See ... every night when I comeback, I bring some hope, some new hope ... in my heart ...”

He was wholeheartedly given over to the church, not because he carried in himself a greater love for the Virgin Mary and God - they lived in him too like small change - but when such saintly people were settled here, people to whom suffering had been the path to saintliness, things would not remain the same on the island. Many times mounted on some beam, he would start to think, and the others would tease him, they mocked him but he had his wife in his thoughts, was telling her:

‘As they have thought of God, they will not forget that we are people,’ while those who were mocking him, called out:

“Eh - Christos Saglamis, don’t work so hard, don’t forget that they are going to torture our souls here.”

For a long time he wrapped himself further and further into himself and that was why he was questioning Doni and talking with Doni, the man had no hair and no a beard, not a hair anywhere, not on his face, not above his eyes, not above his forehead, so Christos thought that maybe Doni thought like him, but now he regretted it, because Doni said:

“What God, my Christos, there is no God when I am bareheaded, he gave hair to everyone - me, nothing, and what am I, am I a man?”

Christos could not say that he was not a man when he knew that he had a better soul than all of the others, he just said:

“But I do not believe that they will torture us before the eyes of the saints.”

Doni did not want to tell him that it was his affair if he wanted to believe that, but he said something else, which made him quiet; he said:

“I saw Marko on the wall with a gun.”

Christos withdrew into himself, into the warmest parts of himself where he kept his wife and children like the last shelter.

Every night, Doni told something about Marko. Once when his eyes had met with Marko’s, Marko did not know what to do with his eyes and had looked into the barrel of the gun. Another time, when Doni was carrying a heavy rock on his back as he passed by Marko and his bamboo truncheon, he said to him:

“It’s alright Marko, it’s alright, I’m carrying your rock too.”

And Marko, so that the others who were watching him did not do on him, had hit him once with the stick, and had called out to him:

“Don’t drag yourself like a woman, do you have balls in your trousers or not?”

Christos advised Doni, he said to him:

“It’s difficult for the man, do not shove yourself in his nose, his soul has been offended.”

After such discussions, Doni did not know what to think. ‘His soul was offended! They broke the man! Don’t they bend us all? Whose soul was not offended? They put him to kneel on pounded rock and quickly...’ he wanted to shout at Christos, he wanted to tell him “You’re some man - you’ve got a good word for everybody, but what do you think of these ones that want to force us to sign?” He did not ask him. He felt a sadness too. A tall man, taller than everyone, with the longest bones, you would

think that he was not just without flesh but without a soul, because where could it find anchor amongst those bones? And all the same - a man! In recent times it was a rare one who could remain a man.

Marko signed and took a gun. And the young man, Niko, who had just his mother who wanted to raise him as a man, with who knows what difficulties, and here, he had shitted on everything that his mother had done. And if they had at least let him go, to have expelled them from this island, at least to have put them on another, or returned them to the unit - but they put them here so that every day their eyes met and so that they did not know where to look Doni knew that Christos believed in people, he had passed his whole life amongst them, he had built houses for them on a word - he had not been conned, but those people are one thing, those real ones - while that church that they're going to settle with dead saints stuck on cardboard, that is something else. Who knows, maybe that will help him to keep his own soul among those long thin bones.

While Christos was snoring as if changing clarinets in his nose, Doni turned on his sleeping mat and there was no way he could calm the small insects which were crawling on his body.

12

Nothing changed on the island. Only they pulled down a whole hill and they took from it all the rocks and from the rocks they either made lime or loaded them onto durable little boats and later those little boats would shamefully set off over the blue water towards the horizon. Sometimes those same boats brought new prisoners and while some of them were sliding towards the flat area above the shore along the plank through two rows of bamboo sticks, the old soldiers were not permitted to stop and look, but while working, and from that which was naked to the eye, they remembered how they, too, had passed along the plank and how they had been 'blessed' for the first time on the island. Because those bamboo sticks came down on them like holy water, like black magic from the evil eye - big blue marks on your face, on your body, on your soul.

Recently, from the latest combings through the army, along with the men in army clothes, they brought civilians too. First they settled them in their own tents and after that they moved them to other slopes on the island. But when they put those people into the tents, everyone wanted somehow to get close to them and ask them about something, but they, sprinkled with who knows what evil things, were quiet and stirred through the things in their army packs, in their colourful village bags or in their souls. Someone would, all the same, make use of that short stay to make an acquaintance. Doni met a villager from Konomladi called Kole Krokarovski, a strong man who under his clothes still had the whole of his body, and his soul had probably not been much contaminated either.

When they brought him into their tent he did not drop his head and did not stick it in his bag. He said:

"My two brothers are with me, only they separated us."

That Kole did not care what he said. The three of them (treated as Bulgarians for a long time, but "Fuck them, what sort of Bulgarians, when we are Macedonians") had been convicted of the murder of some Gjorgji Juchov, from the same village, who had disappeared at the time.

“Prick,” said Kole, “who knows where he is hiding, but ... go ahead, prove it.”

They had convicted them and sentenced them to life imprisonment, the three brothers, they had sentenced them to life imprisonment because they could not find the body of George Juchov and because the three brothers did not offer themselves as witnesses, and Doni asked:

“As they have convicted you, surely somebody was a witness.”

Kole continued:

“Ah, somebody was found, he said that we had argued ... what can you do ... like all people ... we had argued but with him a bit more than with others, over a bloody boundary. But just go and prove that we did not have such a sin in mind.”

But that Kole knew how to put moderation on his mouth when somebody asked him what was happening beyond the big waters, what was happening with the people.

He did not want to talk about that. Some old man was apparently talking about it, above, where they were breaking rocks. Doni just saw him once from far away, they said to him:

“You see that messy hair, going in all directions? That’s him. His name is Mina.”

Either because of his years, because of the white snow on his head, or because he had a manly heart in his chest - he never closed his mouth, he was constantly telling something, until they hit him with a truncheon across his mouth.

“What sort of name is that?” asked Doni, carrying a great respect in his heart for that white hair.

They didn’t know his real name. Even there, beyond the sea, he was called Mina, they said, and that had stayed with him from the Solun stone quarries. He, his son and other Macedonians who had come from the northern areas where they could not live because the earth did not feed them, extracted rock near the sea for lime and other things. He would light the fuses and, rushing towards the shelter, he would call:

“Get away, the mi-i-i-me!”

He was not interested in anything apart from his work. Not the union, not propaganda. “Every dog barks and will move on, if you do not turn around for him to bite you,” he said.

His son, who worked with him in the same stone quarry, was a man just like that, the same dry tendons and with rock dust in his lungs. Only his son was organised by the union and often went to Solun. He went round and round, told it again and again, pulled this way and that but there was no way he could get a word from the old man that he, too, with his group would join the union. The old man waved with his hands and said:

“Come on, you idlers, you cannot use a word against a horn - rather look after your work while they are paying you a broken coin!”

At the first union demonstrations in Solun, Mina went too, to hear what words his loud-mouthed son would say.

His heart started to beat when he was taken along by the mob, which was carrying slogans and calling for bread, for more money and for

democracy. He understood that maybe this beating of the heart pushes people into these sorts of things and he wanted to go back while there was still time, while he had not started to shout too; just then his son climbed up on a temporary rostrum on the street itself, even before they broke through to the centre of town, to say a word to the demonstrators. The policemen on horseback surged forward and they tore his dear son like a rag from the rostrum. That was the end of his peaceful life. He let his voice go as loudly as possible:

“The mi-i-i-me. Run!” He cast around and found something in the street which could be pulled out and with it started to hit left and right. His cry was the first cry of the bloody Solun week in Solun in 1936. When, after long years, he came out of prison he met with his son at the cemetery and his silence ceased over the wooden cross on which the words had already faded. But the words that had faded were written in his heart.

That had been just recently. They had not let him take a breath, nor to think whether he should escape to the mountains or not; they captured him and here he was.

And those who told of the life of the old man and those who listened, all of them lowered their heads, and in their eyes, the one and the other had new flames, beams of light, little flames of hope.

No one personally spoke to Mina. They just pointed to him from a distance. “It is not important, even if he has been made up,” Doni said to himself. It was important that such a man existed, a man who went from prison to prison and who told his tale so that people could hold out.

Christos and Doni spoke about him with fearful respect.

“You rarely meet such people, Doni,” Christos said.

“We already have one like that. The student from Seres,” added Doni. Christos agreed with that. It was as though Paris from Seres was from the same family. And the two of them knew that Paris was led by a more certain hand, because what was the union compared with the Party? Such people knew why they were suffering, why they were putting up with it, why they were tortured. Christos wanted to put that question to Doni, to ask him why they were holding out and in whose name.

Doni tried hard to hold out in the bareness of the island, under the hot rays of the sun, beneath the wall and under the shadow of Captain Skalumbakis, under the rocks which rode on his back from the hill to the shore, under the winds full of salt. And he chased away the questions which he himself could ask or if he saw that somebody else wanted to put them to him. Marko Kizovski surely asked himself about it many times and that was why he had given in. Mina and Paris surely never asked themselves that question. And in his thoughts he addressed Christos who had such a question stroking his lips, he was saying:

“Listen, my Christos, if I stay like I was when they shoved me in the first truck, I ask you, if I do not sign and if I hold out, what will happen with me?”

Christos did not answer him. He was surprised, he just said to him:

“You’ll remain Doni.”

“What does that mean for you to remain Doni?” he continued to ask him in his thoughts.

Christos had other thoughts in his head. He envied Doni that he was not building a church, that he was just carrying rocks and he was hiding his own stone in his soul, and that saints did not visit him at night and give him strange signs. He tried hard to work out the meaning of those signs and always he came to the same thing: they promised him freedom, a house, a wife and children. He knew that if he asked Doni about that, he would mock him and that’s why he kept quiet. At night he tried as long as possible to stay awake, because he knew, as soon as he closed his eyelids, those icons would come - and what could he do against all those saintly people, he could not even chase them away from his dream!

A day came when Skalumbakis asked all of them who were sitting under the wall and beneath the hot sun, there came a day, actually not any sort of day at all, when the voice of Skalumbakis asked those that wanted to go to the second battalion to move to the right hand side. They were quiet and their eyes were asking what it could mean. Was this some new trap?

First of all, with his head held high, (but he could barely hold it up), with shining eyes, the student from Seres moved to the right hand side, and immediately after, Doni got up and stood next to him. Christos did not have the strength to stand next to Doni, he was afraid to stand next to Doni, he did not know what they were going to do with them. He wanted somehow to catch hold of Doni’s look, but Doni was looking straight in front, into the shadow of Skalumbakis and thinking about that shadow over the ravine and stretched like a black worm over the men. There was nothing else to this dog apart from this shadow. Even if Doni had turned around then, Christos would not have managed to catch his eye, because others pressed in around him and the student, those who found the courage to force themselves to take those few steps.

Christos stayed seated, together with many others. He did not want to leave the church, because who would know how to put it in order as he could, who would find the right places for those saints?

Those saints would not let him lift his bones either. There, on the wall, to the right of Skalumbakis, some shining circles appeared. The saints must have been giving him a sign to stay. And he felt like crying, because he had not sucked up the strength to stand next to Doni, ‘I am a coward, that’s what I am’, he thought, while they took away those who stood on the right hand side of the wall.

In the dust which lifted like a sign to confirm that they were really leaving, his friend Doni could be found too, the good man with the bare head made ugly by God. “Surely that is why he is escaping from the church, he does not want to go into the home of God when he has such a mark.”

Before they took them to work, they had to sing the song about Greece once more. Skalumbakis was not laughing from up on the wall, who knows what sort of evil thoughts were making a shadow on his face.

13

For the first time Doni was close to the student from Seres. They were walking one behind the other, they looked at each other from time to time and were quiet. Doni was walking with a special lightness in his soul. The student was younger than he was, but there were two cuts on the handsome face above the eyebrow and eye like sparks under his forehead.

Doni was the first to speak, softly:

“I was born like this - without hair,” and walked and the student just managed to stretch his lips into a smile and whispered:

“In these times, it’s better not to have it, when they won’t leave it like that.” He was saying that from experience. Where his hat did not cover his head, you could see white circles, like small islands through his hair. ‘His head was probably spotted like that under his hat too,’ thought Doni, so he hastened, being afraid lest they stop the conversation:

“I remember you from the boat,” continued Doni.

“Don’t burden yourself with such images,” said Paris to him.

One soldier of the escort with a gun got close to them and they had to keep quiet and when he was at a distance again they did not continue the conversation, Doni just told him his name:

“I am called Doni, ‘Baldhead’.”

For the first time he told of his own ugliness and they were friends.

In this second battalion, located beyond the ridge on the northern side, they received them differently from what they had expected. For the first time Doni was embarrassed that they gave him the chance to feel like a man. There, they met them with jugs of water, with big earthen jugs full of fresh water, which they brought to the front of the tent when they were passing and offered it to them like something precious that you offer to guests. The soldiers who met them were not hungry and debilitated like they were.

Doni had many questions going around in his head and he thought Paris had the answers to them and surely he would answer if Doni asked the questions, but what happened when they arrived had put him off balance and he did not ask.

They arrived around lunch time, and straight away they were taken to the pots and after so many months they got stew in their plates which smelt like that from home and in which there was even a little meat. After that, they could again drink as much fresh water as they wanted. They put them in tents in which there were soldiers. Until dark, not once did the trumpet sound to call them somewhere. In the circle of the battalion, they did not meet soldiers with guns, nor were there any with braids and sticks in their hands. As they understood the first night, there were mostly disgraced officers and lower ranks in that battalion. They commanded themselves and did not put up with Second Lieutenants like Maki. The commander of the battalion had a high rank and did not want different discipline. In the tents, partisan songs were sung out loud in which they said how Greece has sold her bum to the Americans and to the English and had betrayed the people's revolution. Paris was enraptured.

"Do you see, Doni, nobody can attack these songs here!"

And he continued with passion about how nobody here was afraid of anybody, how they openly talked about the betrayal Greece made at Varkiza, and for all of that time while he talked to him, his eyes glowed like embers in his forehead.

Doni started to withdraw into himself. He did not believe that on this island there was a place where you could really speak and say what you liked, where you could sing partisan songs which the ELAS soldiers had sung while they fought the Germans, for which under Skalumbakis' command you would get a bullet in your head, where as much water as you want was poured, where they even give you enough to wash your hair and to free yourself from those little insects stuck in your hair ('it's my good fortune that I am bald-headed'). Who knows, maybe all of this is a provocation, and whenever it is, the snake will again show its head. He wanted to tell Paris his suspicions, what disturbed his soul, but Paris had opened himself like an old door which afterwards needs a lot of strength to be closed.

He started openly to discuss with various Second Lieutenants and First Lieutenants, Captains and others who could be recognised straight away, even though they did not have stripes on their shoulders. They spoke of the imminent end of the anti-people's regime, about the new initiatives which would be brought by the people's government, which would in any case come to power in Greece. When Doni ended up in such a place where all sorts of plans were made and all sorts of politics were being discussed, he wanted to pull away untouched by such a flame to some certain shelter where he would be alone with his thoughts which Angelina often coiled around. He could not free himself from that dream when she threw his wedding ring at his feet in the church. He persuaded her that it was not nice to act that way, because what had he done to her that she carried on like that towards him, muddying his dream with such impure images; if she was already entertaining such thoughts in her head,

then let her wait for him to return, then afterwards whatever she wants, but it was not nice to do that while he was here being tortured. And it was impossible to understand how, either through that church, or through something else, Angelina turned into a long Christos with a sad face which you would think was about to start to cry, while never dropping a single tear.

‘All right, then, Christos, aren’t you even a little sorry for me, getting into my thoughts and chasing away my wife; not only do you not want to join me on the right hand side, but now you will not get out of my thoughts.’

Doni only had those two to turn to and with whom he could argue about some things. Now, if Christos were here he would not feel so alone. Paris said some things which he could not take easily into himself, and said:

“We are fighting so that we can be equal, all of us, Macedonians, Greeks, Vlachs, Albanians and Turks.”

‘But where have you seen all of us to be in one pot and for the pot not to burst? No, no, that will not be. Christos surely thinks like me, or has he no other thoughts in him now apart from the saints? Who knows what he does at night with the Virgin Mary (may my mouth dry out) or perhaps the other saintly people do not let her hide in that manliness that has forgotten what there is in his trousers?’

One day he acknowledged to Paris that it was harder for him to make time pass here, he knew what could happen to him here, there was not a single surprise waiting from anywhere.

From breakfast to dinner they took them to some work, but it could not be measured with anything they did in the first battalion; here they just moved some things around from one place to another to have something to work at.

Once he felt sad for Paris when he thought of that time when they put him in the sack with the cat and had thrown them together into the ocean. He looked at Paris and could not believe that this man who was before him was that one and he wanted to know what had in fact happened, so he asked:

“Did the little devil scratch?”

“Did who scratch?” Paris was surprised, and Doni understood that Paris had been conducting a conversation with himself and did not know what he meant, so he continued:

“That cat.”

Paris sighed, as though he had torn a part of his soul, and he said something else altogether:

“I heard that they’re going to take us through the offices again.”

That was after those cold rains which marked the end of winter, in a spring which already was not spring but a dry summer. They did not see winter. It was as though the rains were like a colder autumn, and now, instead of spring it turned into summer at once, dry and hot.

Does that mean again from the beginning? ‘What are you called? Doni, “Baldhead”. What village do you come from? From Sarakinovo. From Sarakinovo? From that nest full of bandits? Eh, brother, you will

pay for all of those people that you chased away with rocks when we wanted to settle them there in place of the Turks that left, you will pay for the priests that you shaved and turned back like goats, this head of yours will pay, whack (bam, bam, bam), watch how the truncheons bounce from your head (bam) and why you bastard, yellowed little man, why don't you like the King? But, Sir, I never said that I do not like the King, I was called up to the army and I went ... but I did not want ... eh, is that what you think, little yellow-white bird! (bam, bam) have you anyone in the village? Tell us everything in turn. Name, father's name, family, don't miss anyone out, in turn. I have a father. He is called so and so. And a mother. And she is called so and so. My wife is called Angelina, and from her side there is just one soul, her mother, she is called Shinikova.

"Your wife is a whore, you should know it. Now number the more distant relatives, do you understand? And children, everything. Sir, then I have to number the whole village, one way or another, it turns out that we are all related. That means (bam, bam, bam) then you too were throwing stones at the Greek teachers and held the Greek priests by the robes while they shaved their beards, aha, (bam, bam)! I don't remember anything of that, I was small ... eh, stop, stop. That's what we wanted to hear."

And they don't let you stop. They shove you around with punches and with truncheons and with sticks and with the steel pipe of a pistol, and you lose your voice, just one thing (bam, bam, bam) drills in your ears. At the end they will hold you so you do not fall and in your hands they will shove the pen so you can sign that you resign from the Communist Party, 'But how can I resign, sir, when I do not know it and when I have no ties with it at all, go ahead, tell me to sign that I give up Angelina, that's possible in some way, I know her, I even know her belly button, when she could throw a wedding ring at my feet in the church, then why shouldn't I sign that I give her up, I will sign with both hands.'

The interrogation flowed totally differently from that in the first battalion. After all of the biographical points were read out, a signed statement was put before them expressing loyalty to Greece and to the King and confirming there was no connection to the Communist Party. They were not forced to blindly sign. The statement was read out while they, without being forced, had to decide that either they would remain in the second battalion or they would return. Nobody signed.

When Doni came out of the office, he met Paris:

"Did you shame the man which you have under your hat?"

Doni stopped and looked hard at him, as though he were meeting him for the first time:

"What do I look like to you?"

Paris lowered his head. Doni was right. It was enough that those inside threw themselves at the soul of a person, now he met him and asked him if he shamed the man under his hat.

Offended, he ran to the tent. Paris knew that he had gone too far. Here, where everybody was trying hard not to leave his name under some rock, there shouldn't be pressure from this side too, they themselves tried

hard to be what they were. In the tent he tried to apologise and said to him:

“I made a fool of myself, my Doni.”

Doni did not take it up. And Paris did not insist much.

‘You loud mouth,’ thought Doni, ‘it’s easy for you, you have the Party before you and you swear allegiance to it as though to a wife, but here I am, the Party is nothing to me, nor am I anything to the Party. And I can sign at any time that I withdraw from the Party, but see, why should I sign when nothing ties me to the Party and later it will come out that I signed out of fear. There is nothing that I can resign from -you don’t know that. Before they called me inside, in my mind I signed that I renounce my wife and that was out of spite, because I dreamed that she threw her wedding ring at me in church and you meet me and you ask me if I have shitted on the man that I have under my hat! Which man? What sort of man!’

When warm and suffocating winds started, they lined them up and returned them to the first battalion. Only this time they returned in larger numbers. Doni was happy inside that they were being returned to the first battalion. So they would only have one herring a day to eat, and water - just two hundred grams, but he would see Christos. They would have a chat about all sorts of things, about ordinary nothings. Again they were stepping in the same line with Paris, who had a strong and confident step and looked straight ahead. He was probably crafting something in his head, because one time he started to say out loud what he had been thinking:

“You’ll see, my Doni, you’ll see what I will do in our battalion.”

He spoke with such a tone that you would think that he was going to pull Skalumbakis down from the wall and would climb up there himself and would announce that they were all free, like the birds in the sky which sometimes passed above the island.

“Careful, Paris, don’t shoot your mouth off so openly,” whispered Doni to him.

Before they poured into the clearing, to the assembly area, they passed between two rows of soldiers who were positioned to spit on them and bark curses, but the soldiers could hardly hold themselves up on their feet, not just because they did not want to spit and swear, but because they just couldn’t make a sound. They had just rags left from their clothes, from their bodies only bones were left. It was as though they had been dried in some special manner, so that they would not spoil under the hot sun. But behind them stood other soldiers, well fed and dressed and with guns and truncheons in their hands. All of them swore and spat.

Doni got one gob of spit under his eye and it made his skin bristle and he thought that it was a greeting from Marko on his return. He was not wrong. Marko was standing behind the row and, confused, picking at something on his rifle. Doni spat and swore on the side where Marko stood and because of that a number of truncheons reached out at him. While he was moving on and while that spit was hurting him, and who knows whether it was Marko who spat, it just came from where he was standing, he looked at the camp, at the rocks, at the slope, at the wall, at

the stone-built house of Skalumbakis, and at the other stone-built house - that church without any altar, without any bell tower. At the entry, on a wooden scaffold, they had hung a hand bell, in place of a church bell.

His soul tightened. He did not see the long bones of Christos from one side nor the other. And when they were at the assembly area, while the Second Lieutenant Maki was lifting their chins to mock them with his bamboo truncheon and to spit in their faces, behind the church, there where the altar should be, he saw Christos. What happiness dug into his heart! Eh, friend, you are still wandering around the saints. Christos, without any particular aim, went round himself, and at one point he stopped and looked towards the assembly area where there was more army than at other times.

Second Lieutenant Maki was screeching the whole time, he swore, he made threats, and eventually forced them up the slope, towards Skalumbakis' wall.

14

Maki drove the old ones up the slope as well and even before they arrived in front of the wall they had all mingled. Doni was amongst the first to arrive in front of the wall and sat as close as possible to the ravine, because there he would be better hidden from the eyes of Skalumbakis. There was still no one on the wall. Skalumbakis was not there. The column filed out. And as it flowed, a scream was heard. Somebody shouted to be let go, that he was not guilty, they had forced him, he could not do otherwise. And his voice did not last long, only at the end it got louder and louder - it turned into a long a - a - a - a and stopped. Those who came told that they had beaten or killed one of the leaders, that he had got up their nose so much that when he got close to the column they dragged him in and beat him. They hadn't even thrown him out of the column, they had continued on, all of them, they marched over him and after that nobody knew what had happened to the man.

Just then, to the right of the wall, about one hundred meters away, Doni noticed soldiers on a small elevated platform, soldiers with a machine gun. They were positioning it and they were building it in with rocks. While on the left hand side, on another elevated platform just like the first, soldiers were lying down with guns.

They still could not understand what was going to happen - when the worst thing happened. The machine gun released a blast which passed through the seated people and dug out a trench between them. The gunfire and screams filled the sky. The soldiers scattered in whatever direction their eyes led them, while most dragged themselves downwards, into the gully and down the gully towards the camp, towards the tents. The rifles fired too.

What happened? How did it all start? Did they position the machine gun because of that soldier that was trampled, or had Captain Skalumbakis planned it earlier for effect? Because they had not found Skalumbakis on the wall when they reached it, while previously he had

always greeted them there, standing straight above the wall, astride as though he was not sure that he would be stable.

The survivors returned to their tents. Even though there was not any kind of shelter around, all the same they thought it was better if they returned to their tents, because the shore of the sea was behind the tents and they would be more easily able to pull out from there. By the evening, Skalumbakis still had taken no action. Maybe he was afraid. Until then, there had not been any disorder on the island. And the soldiers with arms were few. Those who had signed were mostly armed with sticks. He, Skalumbakis, by megaphone from the hill, sought representatives. As though he was not guilty for what had happened.

But from the thousands of prisoners, nobody went.

When night descended, Paris and some others put up a boundary and told Captain Skalumbakis that they had done so by having the loudest amongst the prisoners shout it. They conveyed to him that that boundary must not be passed, because whoever passed it would not return alive. And they did not go to dinner. The cauldrons were on the side within the range of the machine gun. The Greek flag which had been flying high on the flagpole was now nowhere among the tents. Somebody said they should build walls made of rock around the tents. And they built them.

Skalumbakis took no action that night either. He must have contacted Athens by telephone and was in no hurry to get on with the job. He knew that it was not possible to go beyond the island, beyond the waters. Nobody slept that night, and the morning brought the screech of a patrol boat which circled around the island and announced over the megaphone:

“All of you, listen here. Those who are Greeks should separate themselves and go up on the hill! Repeat. All of the Greeks should go up on the hill.”

The little boat and the voice bounced off the island. The army remained in the tents. Nobody dared move.

“They’ll make a mess of us,” said Doni to Paris. Meanwhile, Paris was confident that all of this was good and could not imagine anything better, he said, “It’s time for something to be fought for, some people’s rights which must not be diminished: more water, more bread, medicines and different behaviour,” he said. “We are dying like flies, but we are not flies, we are people,” and even though it was not the time for that, he laughed cunningly and added:

“The Captain is probably thinking that there are some weapons amongst us.”

When the sun had risen a degree or two above the hill, some help for Skalumbakis came from the other battalions, armed soldiers came with semi-automatic weapons and helmets. They positioned themselves around the camp, behind all the big rocks and small hills. First they sent soldiers with sticks, around twenty. But they did not manage to get close to the tents, they came under a shower of rocks and had to return. Then a dreadful thing happened. The soldiers were shooting with rifles and semi-automatic guns.

All of those who could move their bones scattered below, towards the shore, towards the piles of rocks they had taken down there earlier. Doni ran below toe. But how could they get over the sea? Could they escape over those waters? Eventually, they were pressed into a trench and built in so that all they could do was raise up their hands.

Many, many, many did not manage to put up their hands. Those who were still alive remained standing the whole of God's day on the flat area surrounded by the barbed wire they put around themselves. They did not let the night enter into the built up section - they chased it away with white flares; when one went out, another one was lit and they spread light like ashes above them. Some found a place and they sat their frightened bones down, others stood the whole night. Doni kept changing his place and when a rocket exploded, he looked left and right for the long bones of Christos. Before all this had happened, he saw Christos in front of the church, but from then he had not seen his height, nor had he meet his eyes. Now, an unfamiliar wind pushed him through the people and some resented him for disturbing them in their escape from this night, from this wire, from this ashen light which got into their souls, from these rocks and from these waters.

"Stop moving. May you turn to stone," a young man said to him. But Doni continued, not turning towards those who were jabbering after him, because he was firmly convinced that he would meet Christos, that he would find him.

He did not find him.
in the morning, because he was the most noticeable and because they found him hanging over the wire, they separated him from the others and they put him in solitary confinement made of coils of old barbed wire so that he could come up with some names. They were after names. But what names could convey all of those people who lay dead in the trench, in the tents, in front of the wall?

A soldier with a semi-automatic weapon was standing in front of Doni, and was being careful not to relax his body against the coils of barbed wire. The sun climbed pitilessly and grew in the bare sky. The rays were getting in all over his body and he was perspiring out the last of the water from the second battalion. He was thinking of the days, but without any aim. He was here to open his mouth, but what should he say? That he jumped over the report of the machine gun? Or, that he stayed alive despite all those bullets whizzing from every direction? He escaped from all of those questions which were swarming him; he looked for Christos in his thoughts as he could not find him outside his thoughts. What is it with his friend? Why was he roaming around the church? He was troubled by two things. First, did they break him and did the saints make him sad, the saints they had hung in the church? While he was thinking like that, he became aware that some things around him had already changed. Either the sky was stirred by something or the sea had woken the wet beast. His skin was covered with goose pimples like that of a small animal when it becomes aware of the hunter. And when he came back from his thoughts, when he interrupted the conversation with Christos in his mind, he saw that in the place of that young man with the

semi-automatic weapon Marko now stood with the same semi-automatic weapon and looking at his shoelaces. He looked at him and spat on the wire.

“What you’re doing is no good,” Marko said to him.

Doni did not want to react to the provocation even though he was burning with a wish to slap him with some things he had been thinking during the whole time they had been separated.

“We are from the same village. I can help you,” continued Marko.

Doni turned around. He sank his naked eyes into him and Marko did not know where to put his own eyes. He knew that Doni could see everything with those eyes of his, but he was not lying, he really could help him. He snuck the barrel of the semi-automatic weapon through the wire, almost to Doni’s chest. Doni felt as though the steel of the gun burned him, but he did not take his eyes off Marko, while Marko mumbled:

“There is a cigarette in the barrel,” Doni looked at the white cigarette. He looked at Marko, and he did not know what to think. What good was that cigarette, what did he have to pay for it? But he wanted to smoke. Above, they were letting them out one by one, from the clearing, from the rocked-up area, and sent them to the tents. Doni, with lightning speed, pulled the cigarette from the barrel because the Second Lieutenant, Maki was coming from above. Marko dragged the weapon out and stood, stone like, in front of Doni. He was afraid that the Second Lieutenant had seen. Maki ordered Marko to pull away one coil of the wire, so that Doni could get out but after that he lifted Doni’s chin with his truncheon:

“Eh, pedimo, what do you say?”

“Tipota,” said Doni.

“Not a single name came to you?” asked Maki again and whacked him on his neck with the truncheon. But not very hard. He did not wait for an answer, he ordered Marko to follow him to the tents.

“When you think of a name, let me know!”

The sun had burst all of the hotness and there was nowhere to go. Slowly it fell into the sea.

15

Paris was not among the soldiers. They did not ask themselves about it. Why ask about it when you know? Now there was nothing better than keeping quiet. So that's why they let him go. He thought of Marko and of the cigarette which he had given him in the barrel. 'Marko. Marko. Who can get to the bottom of a man's mind! He's sorry, he wants me to forgive him, well if he's forgiven himself, why shouldn't I forgive him; his own burden for his bones.'

Now he was almost sure that he would run into Christos. If nothing else, he would return to his sleeping place. He would find him there. He saw him when they took them to get the stingy, soupy dinner. In one of the rows he saw the long bones of Christos with a tragic, saintly face.

"Christos," he called to him after the dinner.

Apart from his plate, Christos was also holding the sleeve of a shirt, tied at the two ends, but he was holding it so carefully that you would think he was holding heaven knows what sort of precious thing.

"Is that you, Doni?"

And just that. He was going after some thought of his own and it was as though he did not have time to get into a conversation with him.

"I need you, old friend," Doni said to him.

They returned to the tent together. Doni was talking so much that Christos could not manage to say a word, even if he wanted to. They moved themselves away into the darkest part of the tent. One time, when Doni stopped and waited for Christos to say something, he thought of the sleeve which Christos had been holding so carefully, so when Christos did not say anything to his river of words, he continued, specifically asking:

"What do you have in that sleeve?"

"Flies," answered Christos with a special warmth.

"Flies?" Doni asked again, not believing.

“Yes, flies. Live flies.” He brought the sleeve to his ear. “Can you hear how they are buzzing? They are alive.”

“I can hear,” said Doni, because in the sleeve there was such a din that it seemed that a whole army was closed up in there.

“One thousand, five hundred live flies,” said Christos.

“So many flies?”

“Exactly one thousand, five hundred flies.”

Doni stretched out his hand in the darkness and he touched his shoulder. That meant both, ‘Oh, my old friend, if only you knew how alone I was down there’, and also some silent question, ‘What is happening with you?’ He simply did not want to believe what was happening. It was not possible for there to be one thousand, five hundred living flies in the sleeve. Christos was joking. Really, there are a lot of flies and they are even tame. But how can you catch so many live flies?

“Have you been collecting them long?” asked Doni.

“All week,” said Christos. “These days I wanted to count them out for Maki, but certainly he did not manage to do that because of the recent events. Doni returned to the church.

“You stayed here because of it that day when I stood on the left hand side, acknowledge it.”

Christos acknowledged something else.

“I was afraid,” he said. Doni sighed. It was hard for him that while they were now speaking he could not watch his face, that good but sad face on which there could never be a shadow of malice.

“What are the saints doing? Did they hang them on the wall?”

“They are silent,” said Christos.

Doni felt coldness in his soul. ‘They were silent! And what did he expect apart from them being silent? Ordinary icons? Canvas and painted colours. And my Christos expected something from them.’

“Listen,” said Doni to him, “they can’t talk. That’s why they are silent.”

“I know, but they could have given a sign. Nobody did anything. Not even the Virgin Mary.”

Doni imagined the Mother of God with Christos in her arms, and it seemed funny to him, she is holding all of those long bones of my Christos in her arms, and around the heads, halos of light. But the face of the Mother of God turned into the face of Angelina, and Christos became an ordinary man who was nuzzling her breasts, so he said:

“Nothing saintly remains on this earth.”

“What did you say?” asked Christos because he did not hear. Doni felt uncomfortable and awkward to acknowledge what he had been thinking and how he had imagined him, so he mumbled, just to say something.

Before they went to sleep, Christos begged him to be careful not to squash the flies. Doni fell asleep and forgot to ask him why he was collecting those flies.

The next day Doni was crying to himself. Christos, with his long bones, stood in front of Second Lieutenant Maid and said to him:

“Lieutenant, sir, I can count out one thousand, five hundred live flies for you.”

The Second Lieutenant pasted a sarcastic smile on his lips.

“Well, let’s see then.” He spread out his hand, totally confident in his win.

Christos untied the sleeve at one end, carefully dipped his hand inside and just as carefully took it out, then he placed a black little insect into the hand of the Second Lieutenant. But that black dot was at once gone from the Second Lieutenant’s hand. Maki laughed, satisfied and victorious.

Christos was taking flies out and placing them down, but nothing remained on the Second Lieutenants hand. As soon as they came to, the flies flapped with their wings and flew away.

“Nothing, pedimu, I don’t acknowledge this,” said the Second Lieutenant and, with his truncheon, lifted up his chin which was already trembling with tears. Doni’s soul started to cry. ‘He’s making a monkey of the man,’ he thought, ‘but why does he need to, why?’

Christos stood; he cried. His arm hung with the untied section of the sleeve downwards and the stunned flies fell from it, crawled on the ground, and then flew off.

“March to your place,” shouted Maki to him and:

“When you count one thousand, five hundred live flies to me, come back for the letter from your wife.”

Christos returned to the line with an empty sleeve.

He has a letter from his wife, thought Doni, but they will not give it to him until they make a real monkey of the man. He decided to help him. Together they would hunt flies and the Second Lieutenant could forget it, this time all of them would be alive and would stay on his palm. Doni showed Christos what he had to do with the flies while hunting them. And that’s what he did. Once he caught a fly, he freed it of its wings and after that he put it in his sleeve. But one thousand, five hundred cannot be caught just like that. You catch ten, you squash five, three run away, you can only clip two. And days passed until the sleeve was full with the required number.

They did not know how many days passed, how many times the sun turned over across the sky, only on the morning when Christos again stood in front of the Second Lieutenant, it was the same as the first. Only may it not finish like that time.

“Lieutenant, sir, now I can count to you one thousand, five hundred live flies, and not a single one will fly away from your hand,” Christos recited when he was standing quietly in front of Maki, shining in advance with happiness that he would outsmart the Second Lieutenant and receive the letter from his wife.

Maki did not expect that the flies would not fly from his palm, that they would tamely and gently roll, one over the other - but nowhere further than his palm. Doni observed what happened from the line and was happy that they had tricked the Second Lieutenant. Maki from Kalamati felt offended, he said:

“I want flies, pedimu, which are not clipped.” And he threw a palm full of tame and gentle flies into Christos face. Not only did he belt him on the face with the truncheon, but ordered him to report to the office. He did not want anyone to mock him.

While Christos was in the office, Doni was thinking what they would do with the man. He had a premonition that the man Christos was destroying all roads to him, but believed in the letter, in his wife’s letter that they could not keep from him for long, and when he would have it in his hand, he would come back to himself. He would fill all the emptiness in him which had already began to eat at his soul.

He had a premonition that they would give him the letter just now. Surely that was why Maid called him; after all of that, he could not have said, “Come on after me, you deserve the letter.”

Christos returned quickly from the office. He had not been beaten, but all the same he could hardly walk and you would think that at any moment he would unload his bones onto the ground. Beyond the tragic furrows on his face he carried something else, another image, or a shadow of something which was burning in him.

That evening, when they gathered in the tent, he was tenaciously quiet. Had they given him the letter? What did his wife write? Maybe he was now carrying her in his thoughts together with his children, with the village, with the sky above the village, and could not free himself from all of it just like that, he had to recuperate from all of that.

He wore his shiny wet shirt across his eyes all day. And they are surely like that now as well, but you could not see them. In the tent it was still not really night, but it was just as though it was night and you could not see. You could just see that Christos looked as though he had had black ashes smudged over his clothes and his face, he sat trapped, unmoving, only his hands moved that sleeve, the empty sleeve in which he had been collecting the flies.

That’s how he left him when he went to sleep.

That’s how he found him when he woke at the trumpet.

That’s how he left him when he left the tent too, but in front of the tent he stopped, then he went back and helped him straighten up, while Christos, like a little boy, obediently went after him. What was happening to his soul? After breakfast, they parted. Doni was taken to carry rocks, while they took Christos to another job. They did not see each other again before the evening. That is, Doni saw Christos.

While all of them were getting dinner, Christos was running left and right and catching something invisible in the air. And, after that, he stuck his closed hand in the sleeve. And he muttered something at the same time. Doni stopped his jumping and asked him:

“What did they do to you, Christos, my Christos.”

Christos continued to jump up, to dart off, to drop to the ground and after that carefully, keeping his fist pressed closed, put it into the sleeve, into the empty sleeve. He continued to mutter, but unintelligibly, unclearly, only once he caught the words.

“Just let me count you ... are you all in my land ... there you are

got you.” And he jumped up, he grabbed, he stuck them in the sleeve where nothing had been placed.

Doni grabbed him by the shoulder, he shouted to him:

“Christos. Do you recognise me?”

Christos just held his look on Doni for a little bit and then continued. What should Doni do with him, how could he bring Christos back to himself, how could he enter into his thoughts and attack all of those flies. He asked him:

“What happened with the letter from home? Did they give it to you?” Some barely visible tremor passed over his face when Doni mentioned the letter, some spark which recalled something to him, but only for a moment, and after that again, a shadow of satisfaction spread across his face, of gratification. You could not even enter Christos soul in full daylight, let alone now that darkness was crawling along the dark waters around the island. Doni knew just one thing - it was over for his tall friend, they had cut off all of his roads and he did not have a way to enter his own mind.

The following days brought the most pain to Doni’s soul. Because one morning he awoke and did not find Christos next to him, he was not sitting and muttering, he was not counting the flies and verifying that they were all here, in his land. The trumpet lay its metal sound over the island and on the souls of the soldiers. Evil thoughts burned Doni.

While he was trying hard to calm down in line, to quiet his palpitating heart, he saw how, from near the church, they were pushing the tall person of Christos with sticks. He did not defend himself. Quietly and gently he took all of the blows, while when they got closer Doni saw that he was smiling with satisfaction. He was smiling when they stopped him in front of the assembled soldiers.

Second Lieutenant Maki politely turned around him, but in a moment he stopped like a crazed horse and turned towards the soldiers and announced:

“Pedja, your church has been defaced.”

And he went silent, to see what sort of effect his words had made, whether a wind passed along the lines and stirred them up. They stood quietly. Nobody showed dissatisfaction that their church had been defaced.

That angered the Second Lieutenant even more, so he continued with a stronger voice:

“This one,” he indicated Christos.

Doni felt weak.

“This one that you are looking at here! He defaced your church. He has to be shot at once.”

And all of the animal blood which he carried in his veins from who knows what ancestor rose in his face. Everyone’s soul trembled. They waited for him to raise his pistol at any moment and shoot Christos, but he continued:

“We were building the church to return to you your lost religion, a belief in God and in the Mother of God. In the next few days a priest was to come to hold the first liturgical service.”

Frames came out of the church, heavy, gilded frames with tongues of glass which were set ablaze under the first rays of the sun as they approached. Soldiers with guns were carrying them. From the shreds which were hanging on the heavy frames appeared a red eye, a part of a halo's light, a black moustache, the handle of a sword, a bare foot.

Christos' eyes sparked. And he was not listening to Maid, but Maid was talking to him, shoved in his face:

"Didn't you sign that you are renouncing the Party, you communist bastard, eh? Speak, I am asking you."

Christos, even until now, was waving the empty sleeve, but when Maid ordered him to speak, he calmed his hand and, looking at the ordered soldiers, into those thousands of eyes through which you could escape who knows where, calmly and tamely spoke:

"Flies ... they did not want to collect flies ... I told them to count flies for me ... how many, how many ... I want a lot of flies ... alive and quiet gentle, but they didn't move, I said in my country there are as many flies as you want ... but you have to catch them ..."

"Stop it!" bellowed Maki, but Christos filtered his calm voice:

"... they won't catch flies, nor will they sign ... I said to them - at least put a cross on that page ... well, you do not want to do it with a kind word, then I have a stick ... you are all apparently Communists ... they did not open their mouths

Christos in his hand was gripping a white page, but Maki hit him with the stick on his hand and his page fell, but the voice of Christos did not dry up:

"Eventually they signed, well, how could they not sign when I press them..."

They did not let him speak. Two soldiers took him away to the office, to Captain Skalumbakis. Maki again threatened them:

"I will crucify like Christ anyone who tries to deface the church." And he left.

Doni made the line crooked and at the price of all sorts of tortures he bent down and took the page that had fallen from the hand of Christos. As soon as he had seen that page in the hand of Christos, he had known that it was the letter from his wife. He was not mistaken. But it hurt him strongly when he managed to read it. So Christos had signed while Doni had not been here, and they had sent an announcement to his wife and the whole village. Some other families had suffered as a result of his signature, and she cursed him, she damned him.

Doni did not have water in him for tears, but he had a soul and that hurt him, it ached. How much longer will I hold out? he asked himself. Not just that day and he could not manage to chase away those crippled icons from his head, those canvas shreds with not fully crippled faith, those pieces of faith which will probably never again be able to be put together so that they can represent any kind of hope.

The body of Christos was not put before the wall and shot with a bullet, but they chased his soul from his body, and then what remained in him? And even as he was, gone from himself, they did not leave him in

peace. After the interrogation in Skalumbakis' office, the Second Lieutenant Maki led him to the front of the church and two soldiers tied him by the shoulders and hung him on the scaffold on which there was still hung a hand bell instead of a church bell. Underneath him, they left a soldier with a gun.

Christos did not struggle and he did not cry. The rope was cutting into his armpits, but it was as if he did not feel it.

In the evening, before they took them to dinner, the whole line was led by the church, so that they could see the man who had defaced it, who had beaten up the saints because they did not want to sign that they renounced the Communist Party.

Christos had hung his head as though he had a long time ago, and a swarm of flies crawled on the wounds in his face. From time to time, some invisible strength would shake his body, his strength was returning from who knows how many ancestors back, and he would lift his head a little, would whisper, his eyes sparking:

"My land ... where is my land ...?"

That was what he said until he could not be heard anymore. His voice dried up. Doni could not avoid shouting out, he could not avoid sobbing aloud when he passed beneath him. And because of his shout they did not take him to dinner, they took him to Skalumbakis. Neither Skalumbakis nor Maki of Kalamati nor the truncheons could drag a word from him. They put him to stand for the night encircled by coiled wire. Every two hours the soldier in front of him was changed. While there was still' enough light, he saw them take the long bony body of Christos down from the ropes and how they left him under the scaffold. Above him, the bell hung mutely and collected his soul. Meanwhile, on the next day, when they freed Doni's body from the coiled barbed wire and took him to the tent, he heard that Christos had not managed to return his soul to his body, nor his warmth. In the morning they found him stiff with flies in his mouth.

Doni did not ask where they had taken him so that he could go to pray for him. All of his bones dragged him towards the earth. And for the first time he was terrified. He found fear in his body, in his bones, in his skin. Fear that he would be left in the land of Christos, surrounded by water, with a sun which passes above it and turns the rocks to embers, those rocks with which it abounds.

That fear was now his hope.

March 1966

Tashko Georgievski's Return

Mateja Matevski

Tashko Georgievski is one of the most prominent modern Macedonian writers, who with his prose work - short stories and novels - has added to our literary and cultural scene. His first short stories appeared in the mid-1950s and he continued to build his opus with a string of novels, bringing into Macedonian literature the theme of man from Aegean Macedonia [northern Greece], the drama of Macedonian man, of the Macedonian people in the debacle of the Greek Civil War and the Golgotha after the unknown foreign places, pushed from his own hearth and put to new sufferings while he neither stops trying nor gives up his hopes. Enriching our literature with his vision of this troubling and brave theme, the prose of Tashko Georgievski has brought to our literature a name with an exclusive talent in which his artistic action, language and style, and his sensibility are affirmed.

Tashko Georgievski was born in Aegean Macedonia, in Greece, on the other side of the border, to one of the thousands of Macedonian families which have for decades ranged through the world, escaping from hunger, from wars, from persecution, from assimilation, from destruction. His family left its village in the time of the Greek Civil War, and the 11 year old boy (Tashko Georgievski was born in 1935) took with him all of the horrors and sufferings of an unhappy and unfortunate childhood, and the drama of his people, his land.

From slavery under the Ottoman Empire to the partition of Macedonia in the Balkan Wars and the pre-war Greek monarcho-fascistic regime under which a part of the divided Macedonia found itself, to the Italo-Germanic-Bulgarian fascist occupation - the Macedonians in the Aegean part were always filled with the desire for a free place under the sun. Just like their brothers who were under Yugoslav and Bulgarian royalty, they rose up for their basic national and social rights, choosing the side of progress and freedom. The Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia paid dearly for their desire for freedom; their clear choice for the anti-fascist and liberating (communist) struggle in the Greek Civil War meant that after the descent into war they met new sufferings: their homes were demolished, they were again tortured, imprisoned, herded to the prison camps on the desert islands of the Aegean. Having managed to

stay alive, thousands of them were forced to leave their hearths, as were the fighters of the liberating army, and crossed the border following the long standing emigration path from the Pelagonija plain to Vojvodina, from Albania to Hungary, Poland, Uzbekistan, America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Spread to every corner of the world in one bitter emigration, which still stands, the defeated Macedonian families still cannot return to their homes, let alone recover from the Golgotha which they lived through and still live through. That is a nightmare which they have lived for years, never free from the desire and yearning to return again to their villages or cities, to the places of their childhood and their youth, to the places of their grandfathers and their great grandfathers from which they were forcefully wrenched by the cruelty of war, dictatorships and forceful assimilation.

That thought of returning, that yearning for a return in dreams and in reality, in all its life, has become the central theme and the basic inspiration of all of the prose of Tashko Georgievski.

How is the theme of returning developed in the novels of Tashko Georgievski?

First. The strong wind of the war has passed and the old villager Adzhigogo from the novel "Walls" returns from prison and persecution into his burning village together with his tortured, sick and broken wife. The village is getting itself together after the war, the sufferings and the terror but the fear has not left the people; suspicion and distrust make the people withdrawn, reserved and turned inwards. Adzhigogo does not find his own house; in the place where it had been are only piles of rocks and ashes. He cannot accept an invitation from his youngest son, who remains live and who managed to get himself a new house, to go and live with him. The headstone to his elder son does not permit him to accept the selfish and fearful life of the younger son. Filled with bitterness, disdain and spite, but also filled with stoicism, with love, he decides to raise his own house from the ashes, building into its walls the bones of his ancestors. He is so taken with that urge that even if walls were taken down, he would remain loyal to the ashes, building them up again, returning to the monument, to the past, to the old hearth, to his roots and the only place where he understands himself and can find himself and belong.

Second. In the echo of the wars, under the pressure of the new wave of terror, under the protection of the partisan units, thousands of women, children, old people are travelling over Kajmakchalan, passing into Yugoslavia and Vardar Macedonia, pouring into the villages of the Mariovo and Pelagonija regions, into Prilep and Bitola. Among the hundreds of suffering families whose men were on the other side of the border in the ranks of the liberating army, amongst the mothers whose just budding young men were stopped at the border and given guns, among the sick women, the dishonoured young women and disabled old men is one young man who can carry a gun. He, Dine Bocharovski, was forced by his friends to accompany his pregnant wife over the border and was ordered to wait: a man would come and take him back among them. The people become accustomed to the new life, waiting for the end of the

nearby booming on the other side of the border and to return to their own homes as soon as possible. But Dine Bocharovski cannot get used to it. Waiting for the man who will take him back becomes more and more vain and hopeless, he is eaten away by shame and the realisation that he is healthy, at the side of his wife and his children and the side of his isolated countrymen. Resettled again, but not in the south and their own houses but rather in the north further away from them, in a new uncertainty, he is filled with spiritual agony and the alcohol he gives himself over to more and more cannot quieten the hell of his hopes and dreams of return. That is the theme of the novel "Winter Wind" which wraps the characters in the motif of returning and plucks from them the reality and ultimately their dreams.

Third. Doni (Andonis from Sarakinovo), in the novel "Black Seed", is imprisoned for the period of his military service simply because he is Macedonian, together with hundreds of other Macedonians and Greek Communists. After harsh tortures, he is driven off to the Aegean islands. The officers of the royal command think up the most unimaginable pains to force the people to endure, make them resign from themselves, from their own self definition, from their own biography. Doni is not a Communist, he is just an ordinary Macedonian villager and he cannot resign from something that he is not (Communist) and even less from something that he is - a Macedonian. The torturers have a cruel fantasy, but passing through all of the pains Doni feels his chest fill with stoicism and eventually with hate toward the people who want to kill the human being in him and in his fellow sufferers. The thoughts of his village and his own Angelina strengthen him in the midst of that hell of sun and salt, hunger and torture. He returns to her when it is hardest for him and that return in his thoughts and in his dream maintains him during the pains, that is the only clear moment of his bitter life.

Fourth. We find Tashko Georgievski's theme of returning not only in the context of the war but even earlier, in his novel "People and Wolves". The young Goni, who is sent by his old parents and the villagers with great love and hope to Solun for schooling, lives through the formative years and great disappointments of a young man in a foreign environment, in which he cannot work out the manner of living, its rules and laws. Saddened and ill, with a wasteland in his soul, he changes his name, renouncing everything behind him, and goes to the mountains amongst the goats and the wilderness so that he can suffer his bitter loneliness and pain. And there, in the midst of the loneliness and the pain, in winter, a wolf night, beside the frozen body of his father who had set off to find his lost son, he lives through his catharsis, resolving his frightening spiritual, existential problem with a return to the village, to his old mother, to his own hearth. Tashko Georgievski in this novel raises the theme of return, giving it prominence in the chronological continuity which from then on, by theme and by destiny, is discovered in "Walls", "Winter Wind", "Black Seed" and "The Red Horse".

Fifth. "The Red Horse". The Civil War in Greece in its last stages was forced to retreat to Albania. There, in a foreign land, the partisan Boris Tushev, a villager from the slopes of Kajmakchalan, ends up without

weapons. His first happiness that he is alive passes, happiness that he remained alive after that hell of battles and the retreat. It is spring, the sun burns, and he would like to be in his own village. But there is no returning, neither to the village nor to the battles. But rather something that neither Boris Tushev nor the few people from his village and all of the others in the holding camp can imagine: the start of their roaming over the world which will change their lives. Hidden in Soviet cargo boats, those from the Albanian ports set off on the waters of the Mediterranean and, hiding themselves and sheltering for weeks, they enter the Black Sea so that they can be dragged over the Caspian waters all the way to Tashkent. But Boris Tushev cannot rest. He gets a job and a good life and starts a new family, but after fifteen years or so, when an opportunity arises for him to return, he does just that. He leaves Tashkent, his wife, his job, he signs a statement at the Greek embassy that he was not a Communist and that he will be a loyal citizen to the royalty and he returns to the exit point of his earlier life, in his own village. The man who in a strange and wondrous symbolism returns to his village on a red horse which he has bought on the road, a traitor to his ideals, becomes a danger for the village, for the regime. He again feels that even among his children that he is not his own man, not in his village, not in the country but still he stays beside them, ranging around, searching himself, until his death.

Reading this novel, many questions are raised about destiny, ethics, politics. Tashko Georgievski gives a hint of them in the journal which led him to prepare the novel. Is Boris Tushev a traitor to his ideals, was he cowardly and selfish to leave the thousands of his countrymen to range around the world, using his first chance, a shameful chance, to return? But Boris Tushev did return. In him the impulse to return was the biggest and most sublime. Before stepping on his own land, in his own village, and even though he is abandoned, avoided, isolated, it is recognized that he shows with his decision to return, with his obstinacy and his pain, the ongoing desire to return of the thousands who were pushed from the land which had belonged to them for centuries and which waits for them with all of its roots, with the bones of their ancestors.

The prose of Tashko Georgievski is not concerned with direct historical, political and philosophical analyses, although the themes of his prose record and sometimes comment on historical conditions. But that which interests him and on which he puts all of his attention is the destiny of a people, his own people. In all of the fears and horrors of the war, the terror, the persecution, for him a central motif remains the uprootedness of his piece of land, that of his grandfather and great grandfather, and the longing to return to it, to return to his fallen-down home. In that blind urge, in the restlessness of exile, whatever it is and wherever it is, he finds the most poetic and the most sublime; he finds all hope and light in the middle of the most heavily layered misfortunes and evils. That is why, as with other characters of his novels, we look at Boris Tushev from the aspect of that urge, the reasons behind it and his behaviour. In that way, the destiny of Boris Tushev starts to raise itself above the destiny of the Macedonian people and their suffering and

becomes universal. It slowly passes beyond his every day life, taking him over more and more. And modern history is filled with many such examples.

Longing to go into the man, into his psyche, into his destiny, Tashko Georgievski in "The Red Horse" speaks in the first person. His Boris Tushev speaks about himself, about the villagers, about the war, about Tashkent, about his return. Only the last, the fifth part, is spoken by Sarbija, his cousin, so that he can give us his view of Boris and his last days. A complete simplicity and density is achieved in the telling, while the monologue form enriches it and strengthens the suggestion of confession. The language is simple, direct, fluid with a few regional words, with place names, not to be picturesque, but because he concerns himself with the essential, with destiny.

In all of his novels, Tashko Georgievski looks at man, his destiny, through life stories with prose of a poetic or symbolic character. His descriptions of nature are to that end, his remarkable sense of the plains and mountains, the seasons, the rains and the snow, the wind, the things of the plain, the whole environment is the environment of his story. Communication is concise, like a momentary description, digression, commentary, all with the sole aim - to find the man. The dialog is direct, reduced to the essential. The character is built continuously, not in one breath; he gives a hint of the character so that it can later step aside for the fundamental goal of the story - destiny. His own destiny, the destiny of his people, the destiny of the land from which he has been driven out and to which he continuously returns, the destiny of the time.

That motif as a fundamental poetic and human preoccupation continuously appears in the prose of Tashko Georgievski. With a feel for composition, with story teller's language, Tashko Georgievski rarely becomes a sacrifice to the construction of the artificial, of turgid and naive poeticizations, of melodramatic histories or of bizarre naturalistic descriptions. He is compressed, minimalist, simple. And that has enabled him for many years to build before us, his contemporaries, the great frescoes of his returns.

The returns are his own personal destiny, and ours. Thanks to him, in the spirit of that yearning from the last century of Konstantin Miladinov for the south, our modern literature is further enriched with something valuable.

Tashko Georgievski

Biography and Bibliography

(1935-1946)

To his mother Tina and his father Aleksandar, Tashko was born in the family Georgievski in March or April 1935, in the spring before Easter. Tina said a prayer for him on Easter Sunday itself. It is known that while Tina was still breastfeeding, the grandfather made a deal with a builder to build a new house. (The house was lived in for 11 years before the Monarcho-fascists burnt it down in 1946.) In that house the boy Tashko began to walk and his first recollections are from there: the front half of the house built first later went to his paternal uncle Risto (Sarbija), the lunches and dinners on the balcony where they set two tables (a big one for the grown-ups and a small one for the little ones). The first recollection was of summer. In that recollection there is also a rolling down on his uncle's stairs all the way to the porch and a wooden board placed on the beams of their part of the house along which you could pass into the one room that was made in their part of the house. That room remains in him forever because in it grandfather Goni and grandmother Jana slept on sofas, it was always full of aromas and smells of cooking and yeasty bread and cheese (there was nothing more delicious than sweet and as yet unfiltered cheese from which secretly you lifted the cloth and with a wooden spoon took a spoonful directly from the bucket), and, because in it, next to the blackened hearth with entire logs, he heard the stories told by the sweet voice of grandfather Goni. They were the first references to the world beyond the yard and the garden. With these recollections also stands the time when the thin, tall, bony boy with just a tunic draped over his body jumps over the fence of the garden and goes down into the river with the big maple, to the nearby cherry orchards, to the threshing floor with rocky earth on which they tied the horses to the pivot and chased them to turn and to mill the yellow wheat. Over there were the cousins and his big brothers and sisters, and the children from the neighbourhood, the games with wooden horses made from blackish mulberry cuttings, and a lamb or two, some goats, some cats, and some small and spotted puppies (after a bite from one of those they took him to Gorno Rodivo to have something burnt under his tongue to prevent rabies). And already it is not just one season but rather autumn is coming

with distilling of rakija in the village still, and winter with snow and slipping. And strangely and incomprehensibly the seasons mix and change: spring, grazing the oxen, goats in flocks pass along the rocky-earth and ring with their bells. Already it is not just the gardens and the orchards that are around, rather also the landscape over the big mountains which surround the village - from the village is a view of the whole of the Meglen region below, while above the village are the secret green forests of Kajmakchalan. The time comes for school, his sisters wash behind his ears and his neck, while his father gives him a piece of firewood for heating which he has to take to school as do all of the other children every day. He does not manage to learn either alpha or omega and the school stops operating because the war starts (first the Second World War and then the Greek Civil War). Instead of reading and writing he learns the alphabet of village life: the plough and sowing, carrying wood into the town to sell for enough to buy some white bread, helping out his older brother with the goats, hiding in the mountains with the hope that he would see a wolf but with fear in his little heart lest he should really see one. The war first appears in the village as a child's game with wooden guns and with bombs made with cans and unburnt fuses taken from the bread ovens. But after that there are also real events: the German army passes through, real battles take place between the partisans and the Germans in the village, partisan leaders pass through their house, real war exercises of the Macedonian brigade which later goes off somewhere.

Together with other children, he and his sisters join the forced departure to Yugoslavia one rainy and foggy night, carried by time and taking the image of Mirka Ginova (who had stayed in their house and slept the night in one bed with his sisters). He is propelled by the day in July when finning gunfire was heard from the thick forest below the village while he had been carrying sheaves from the Padarnica and the running fire had caught Mirka Ginova. They left the same year, in autumn. While his mother was in prison, his big brother in Bitola, the middle brother with the goats, his father an illegal immigrant, with one other family he goes over Kajmakchalan with his sisters and reaches liberated Macedonia - Vardar Macedonia. Starovina is the first place on this side.

1946-52

From then he on shares the destiny of all of the refugees from Aegean Macedonia: they have the hospitality and the open hearts of the liberated Macedonians - but they would have something entirely different if they were to return sometime to their hearths. The village Dolneni, the town Prilep, the train and the winter which took them north, the village Gakovo close to Sombor, on the very border with Hungary, then Skopje - that is the path of most of the refugees and his path from 1946 to 1952. If the place and the time in the village Kroncelovo was mother's milk, Gakovo and the flat land of Vojvodina are the realisation that, whenever it may be, they have to return to the winds of their grandfathers. After finishing junior high school, even before the refugee settlement at Gakovo

was dispersed, the train took him to Skopje. His intention was to become a teacher, but instead he continued his studies at the high school at Cvetan Dimov High School. Gakovo was Aegean Macedonian in miniature - it had people from Solun, Voden, Lerin, Kostur, Drama, Kavala, it had people from every field and from every mountain, from every valley and little lake, and it had people from our Macedonian sea, too. In 1952 they began to return to Macedonia. As they were in one Macedonia, then they were close also to the second and third

1952 - 1956

His entry to Skopje through the great railway station is, at the same time, his entry to Macedonian literature. He does not wait long for his first published work. That happened in 1952 in "Voice of the Aegeans" and in "Young Fighter". But the years passed in the boys-only high school, Cvetan Dimov, keeping company with books and sleepless nights in narrow and cold rooms where the birth of the writer was taking place, where his story identified with the numerous stories of the refugees which were settling bit by bit into the white pages of the note books. All of those characters and worlds remained in the questions of his archive, but they also opened the path for "We Above the Embankment" and for the other books which followed.

1956 -

The following details are also part of his biography: he matriculated in 1956 and the same year he enrolled in the philosophy faculty (Yugoslav language group), the publisher "Kocho Racin" published his collection of stories "We Above the Embankment" for which he won the Kocho Racin Award; in 1959 he married Neda Minkova, the second daughter of Marija Minkova of Lugunci, Aegean Macedonia. Their first child was born in 1960 when he published his first novel "People and Wolves". In 1962 followed the novel "Walls" for which he won the award "11 October", and in 1963 a daughter was born (at that same time he served his military service of six months in the infantry school for reserve officers in Bilekja and six months service in the town Ivo Andric-Travnik). In 1964 after returning from the army he published the collection of stories "Dry Winds", in 1966 he published the novel "Black Seed" for which he won the award "13 November" from the City of Skopje, and in 1967 his second son was born. After that there are only books: 1969 the novel "Snake Wind", 1975 "The Red Horse" (which won two awards: "Stole Popov" and "Kocho Racin"), 1978 the novel "Time for Quiet" (for which he won the Racin Recognition Award) and the collection of stories "House under the Fortress" and in 1980 the novel "Flat Land". In 1988 came the journal "Record of Life" and in 1992 the autobiographical novel "Kajmakchalan". Georgievski has also written 5 radio dramas ("Fires", "Ashes From My Hearth", "Land of Christ", "Return of Boris Tushev", "Chest with the Heart of Father"), more series for children, television films and documentary films as well as screen plays for feature films (Memento, Black Seed, The Red Home, The Yellow Rose). Some of his novels have been translated into Russian, German, Hungarian, French as well as

Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian. This edition of “Black Seed” Is the first translation Into English.