

Chapter One

Stirring his coffee, the Writer was looking out of the window. The narrow pond with hanging thickets of stinging nettle and sedge was gradually turning into a wide shapeless reservoir surrounded with burdock and thistle. Among the green there was rich bright blue iris. It reminded him of Van Gogh, impressionists and delighted his eye. The Writer would squint his eyes, even though the sunlight didn't dazzle him, and sink into his thoughts. A drop of brown liquid was inevitably dripping down the cup wall. The teaspoon was clinking something in a different rhythm to his hand's. The Writer was dreaming.

He was dreaming of the same thing all the time.

After breakfast, without taking a shower, he would hold his hands – exactly like Van Cliburn – over the typewriter, and after a long pause the words “What shall I write about?” would invariably appear on the clean sheet of paper. He wanted to speckle the new text with trendy oxymorons, polysyndetons, pleasing the Writer's heart, allusions and reminiscences...

The Woman who made his coffee and shared the Writer's home, would put her hands on his shoulders, kiss the top of his head and try to console him saying, “It's alright, it's alright!” He would raise his head, hold her hand, squeeze it in his and look at her guiltily. She would say, “It's alright” again, blow him a kiss and disappear. He would stay on his own, sit in the arm-chair and, his

body half turned, watch the light wind swing the curtains in the open window.

Hanging about the rooms, the Writer sometimes came across a pile of papers lying at the front door. The papers were put there by the Woman who found them every day in the letter-box but was not interested in news. The Writer liked to pull out one paper from the pile, open it, turn over pages without reading them. Black-and-white paper pages were gradually covering his desk. Then he would throw them off the desk and give a deep sigh. His hands would be dirty in print. Some time ago the Writer published a novel or, let's say, a long-long story. He could remember the moments it was born very well. Then, in a spasm of creativity, he was grabbing any pieces of paper, old newspapers, envelopes and quickly transferring to the paper thoughts that suddenly appeared, in small handwriting. The Woman would carefully cut the Writer's creations out and glue them on sheets of paper. She was amused but the Writer didn't care about his work. He was writing because he felt like it. It resulted in something filled with events. They were intertwisting, like snakes in a hole, and creating an intrigue, engaging a reader.

A decent magazine published the story by instalments in its last pages. The editor's office was not overcrowded with delighted letters from its readers but a company dealing in public opinion research announced that the story "was liked". The elderly balding editor shook the Writer's hand enthusiastically, "We are full for the next two quarters but after that we would be glad to publish something else!" The Writer was as happy as a child. "They are reading my prose, they like it and want more of it!"

Now he had to write a new book. He knew it would be around three hundred pages long and he knew what the epigraph would be. Even two! The title was cropping up. Something similar to "Les neiges d'antan" ("Snows of yesteryear") by François Villon.

So his morning would start with breakfast followed by sitting at the desk and spending a long time at the typewriter. Its ribbon sometimes got stuck at shifts. "What shall I write about?" There was only a week to the end of the quarter and the Writer was about to understand he would never write anything and he was not a writer at all, he was just an idiot who had been lucky because he had got an inspiration, his tightly sleeping talent had woken up for a moment and he had hit the jackpot. But that was it! In those minutes the Writer really wanted the novel to have been ordered not by some lousy editor but someone in a black cloak and a hat drawn over his eyes, like "Requiem" was ordered to Mozart. Then the work would certainly be going smoothly. What emotions would have been at the start of his work!

But his illusions were disappearing fast and he said to himself, "Enough! This way I won't be able to write anything. I need to experience it. When it goes, it goes. No need to get stressed over it. I will call the editor and tell him there is nothing to publish and I will live my life the same way. Or even better - I will tell him I have written a lot but don't want to publish anything as the readers are not ready yet!" The Woman naively thought she was supporting the Writer when she was saying, "You can do it!" even though she didn't know if he could. He would ask her, "Do you think so?" and she would confidently nod her head and make a sound similar to grunting. That was the sound grandmas normally do when knitting and answering their grand-children's questions.

The rubbish bin under the desk had been filled with a pile of crumpled pieces of paper and the Woman understood the work was going amiss. She was really surprised and alerted by the fact that the Writer had got special paper with water marks and a set of fountain pens from an expensive shop. That had not happened before. It had been her who had glued the extracts to-

gether into a piece of writing. Later on she had to get used to the typewriter's noise. Well, even that was in the past now. Soon the pens disappeared somewhere in the desk drawers.

By lunchtime the Woman used to have come back from work and cook food which the Writer would swallow in a state of deep depression. She would say something usual and everyday, like the railway rumbling behind the woods. She would disappear quietly and leave the Writer on his own, feeling empty, even though he had had lunch, and realizing that was that and he had just to admit it. He had to return to his old work which had suited him before and which he had been happy with. There, in the town council account department, there were always people around, they were always counting something, everyone was counting their own thing, now and again they would lift their heads and give a smile to the world... And every moment of the work day was filled with completely understandable activities. All their "creation work" was to reflect the existing reality in time, fully and truthfully. It was similar to writers' work, but they had to do it in figures put in the vertical and horizontal columns of the balance sheet.

The Writer could feel that metamorphosis and was proud of having been representing reality for a long time. Nevertheless, any memoirs of those years were torturing him. The endless rows of digits would stand in front of his eyes and suppress him.

That was what the Writer found very difficult. He would be walking around the house for hours with his feet in dirty beige slippers with worn-out heels. When he passed by the book shelves, he would touch the backs of beautifully bound books, wipe his dusty finger on his robe and turn the telly on several times. Sitting on the sofa with a back cushion slid down, he would bend his head to one side and squint at the screen. In a stream of

words, phrases and dialogues coming from the virtual electronic world, the Writer was looking for a hint.

"Damn, what shall I write about?" the Writer was pulling his robe belt. "It's silly! Why did I decide I even could write? I managed to once, but that doesn't mean anything... It's possible to do many things just once. Usually only sad sacks can succeed the first time... There are good grounds for saying newcomers are lucky in the casino."

The clock in the lounge was striking every half an hour and the air outside was getting grey indicating the day was coming to its end and it was going out of the window. "There are three hundred and sixty five days in a year, well, sometimes three hundred and sixty six. If you live for seventy years it is only twenty five thousand days and a little more. How many days have I been sitting like this?" This conclusion would give the Writer a fever. He would go to the bathroom to wash his face with cold water and look in the cloudy mirror. His experiences would get dull and his common sense would wake up again. "Carpe diem, carpe diem! Wise men!" he would get distressed. "How can I catch the day? What can I catch? There are lots of them, I don't have to catch them!"

He heard a noise in the front door. It was eight o'clock. It would take some time to have dinner and his thoughts wouldn't be so heavy. After dinner the Woman rattled the dishes in the kitchen. The Writer sat at the table scrubbing the bottom of the yoghurt pot.

"How is our novel? Is it progressing?" the Woman deafened him. She was wiping the table. The Writer sighed, placed his palms on the edge of the table, like a pianist who had just closed the grand piano with unalive keyboard waiting for their notes, and murmured something. The Woman continued wiping the table. Deep down in his heart the Writer blamed her for being so heartless. "Why is she doing it so energetically?" He wanted her to stroke

his head and whisper something like, "You are probably ill. Why don't you return to your old work?"

Sometimes, especially after a light dinner, the Writer would go out into town to walk, to pop into a bar and have a beer and to watch the merry visitors. He was dazzled with their relationship easiness and the sincerity of their feelings. He would be so much more inspired with the careless spirit of the bar that coming home he would be waltzing and exclaiming, "When I have a drink, especially on an empty stomach, my head is full of ideas!"

"Why don't you write them down?" the Woman was surprised. The Writer would shrug his shoulders and lie on the sofa. He was happy with himself and his inspiration and he believed the next day it would flow out on the paper as a prose masterpiece. But soon he would be in the arms of Morpheus and the Woman would gently cover him with a blanket.

The next day would be the same as before: coffee, a brown shapeless stain on the desk, a rattling teaspoon, newspaper rustling and his own hateful face over the sink. "I can't live like this any more," the Writer said once. "Is one painting enough to be called an artist? Is one sonata enough to be called a composer? I have written just one small novel but I have done it with love and I was pleased with it and enjoyed writing it. At the end of the day, Alain Fournier has written just one novel! What about Griboyedov?" Suddenly it started raining. The office window turned into a "crying" face of the Writer in despair. "This is because one of them was killed at the front and the other one died doing his duty... What about me? I am alive..." the Writer thought but he could remember only his happy childhood years. A strong wind is playing with the tops of elm-trees, spinning a weather vane and he is running with his arm high up in the air and a kite tied to it, running as far as he can in front of all the local children. Being short of breath, he stops

and looks up... There is nothing in the sky. Apart from a caravan of freckled clouds and a rainbow from the sweat drops on his eyelashes.

"My God!" the Writer thought. "What if I have already said everything I could? What if I have already got my part of happiness? If I have, what is the meaning of life? What shall I do now?"

Suddenly he felt a lump in his throat and thousands of tears were staying in his eyes and not rolling down his face. The Writer went into the bathroom where there was a medicine box, took the contents of a small jar with red exclamation marks on the label and swallowed them with difficulty washing them down with tap water. In the mirror he could see someone in tears and shaggy. Nothing happened. But then it became much easier – as it used to be when he decided to stick his typewriter behind the wardrobe, get his accounting briefcase ready and polish his boots.

He went back to the room, brightened-up and light. He stood near the window with a view of the pond. A blue flower had fallen and instead of it there was a strange fruit looking like a comic minstrel's hat with jingle-bells. It had just stopped raining and in the drops sticking around sedge, there shone thousands of small suns.

The Woman came home late at night, took her coat off and entered the Writer's office.

He was sitting in his work place with his head dropped and his eyes closed. On the floor there lay desk drawers. In the middle of the desk she saw a white sheet of posh paper with water signs and on it it had been written in an ink pen, "Chapter One".