



**Veselin Milanov Piletić**

**SIGNS OF THE GOD'S TIMES**

**Podgorica, 2010.**

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Publisher  
Studio  
Mouse

Circulation  
500 pieces

Press  
Studio Mouse

*The meaning of prayer is understood  
only by those who ask God to save their  
enemies.*

Mostar, April 1992. War, with all the misfortunes it brings, has become the only reality of this city. Hatred and crime kill the soul of the people. Once again, the attempt to create new borders in these areas bloodied the land of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. The generals of the Yugoslav People's Army convinced the people in Mostar that the army was in control of the situation. Many Serbs believed that the Yugoslav People's Army was the guarantor of their security in this city. The Yugoslav People's Army withdrew from Mostar. The people were left at the mercy of those who organized the local government in the city. Life in Mostar for Serbs and Montenegrins has become a real hell. There was less and less food. Parents who were left with small children when they saw the crimes fueled by national and religious hatred became more and more afraid for their children's lives every day. No one knew what the morning would bring and what the night would bring. The minority population, Serbs and Montenegrins, became more and more victims of those who killed for the pleasure they derived from torturing and killing innocent people. Relatives of those who were wounded, or those who died at the front, joined in the search for Orthodox Christians in the area of their houses and apartments. For Serbs, Mostar becomes another face of hell, another face of death. Orthodox families closed themselves in their houses. Every step outside was a risk, because Orthodox Christians were outlawed in the city. The hunt for Serbs in Mostar has begun. Those who felt hatred towards Serbs could now kill without fear of the law. The law called them to kill. The screams of the martyrs cut the sky over Mostar. Beatings, murders, rapes, the life of a Serbian man or woman has become less valuable than the life of an abandoned dog.

- I had to go out with the children, Ana... We had to leave with the children, we made a mistake! It's my fault! I believed that the army would protect us! I believed that the army would not retreat!

Well, they didn't even inform us Ana! The army has retreated!!! Did we know that!? Did we know they were retiring!? Why did they leave us??!! Why did they leave us Ana!?? How can we save the children??...

- I don't know, Dejan... I don't know... if we go out into the street... at any time of the day or night, there is a danger of being arrested... God... Ljiljana's brother was arrested three days ago... he went to buy bread... . Ljiljana told me ten days ago that they enter apartments...kill them on the spot! Those who don't have money or gold are killed... God, what is happening to us...

It's twenty-two hours and thirty minutes. While the two are talking, their children are sleeping in the room. Ana and Dejan's conversation is interrupted by the detonations of bombs that can be heard in the distance. Nina wakes up, calls her mother through her tears.

- Don't cry my angel... don't cry... Sleep my happiness, sleep.

Ana's hands tremble as she caresses her little daughter. As she soothes her child, there is a strange smile on Ana's face, while tears are streaming down her face. Nina put her arms around her mother's neck and squeezed her tightly. Anna felt like she couldn't breathe. The darkness hid her tears from her child and from herself. After each detonation, Nina tightened her arms around her mother's neck.

- My mommy...my mommy...

In some state of sleep or half-sleep the child repeated these words. The grip of the children's hands around Ana's neck did not loosen, the soul of this child embraced the dearest soul, with a love that was stronger than the power that words have, to represent the love of a child for its parent. When Nina fell asleep, Ana kissed her and quietly covered her. Dejan was sitting in the living room. He was looking somewhere in front of him. He was not looking in the direction his physical eyes were looking. Only he knows where his soul was at the moment when Ana entered the room.

-Ana, is Nina scared?

- Yes, she is Dejan. Children are much smarter than adults think... Nina and Mirko are also afraid, but they won't show it. God...

- Ana, we have to be sober... we have to find a way out of this hell... there must be a way to get out of here... The apartments of all prominent Serbs were stamped. Word around town is that there are lists of Serbs who need to be liquidated.

Dejan paused, after a few minutes he started speaking again.

- A dark morning has dawned on you, city on the Neretva. Black days and a black fate, which the Yugoslavs met again! I am not a politician and I am not interested in politics! I'm only interested in keeping my family safe. I don't care if someone is Serb, Croat or Muslim! I don't value people by what nation

and people they belong to! For me there are only two nations, one is human, the other is non-human. Should I hate someone just because they are Croatian or Muslim?! Should a Croat hate me just because I'm a Serb or a Montenegrin!!? It's mass madness!! Madness!...

Ana, my joy...

He stood up and hugged Ana, who listened to him without wanting her to say anything.

- What will the new day bring?

Dejan asked this question more to God than to himself and Anna.

The clock on the wall struck twenty-three. The two seemed afraid to go to sleep. They knew that the Ustashas raided apartments late at night. Dejan had an automatic rifle and several bombs. He tried to hide the weapon well, so that if the Ustashas came, it would be difficult for them to find the weapon. In the moments when he would see that Ana and the children had fallen asleep, Dejan was tormented by thoughts from which he could not sleep. He knew what he didn't tell Ana. He knew that it was only a matter of day or night when it would be his family's turn.

The mass media call for the killing and slaughter of Serbs. He knew about the Mercedes that drives around the streets of Mostar with a megaphone late at night and invites the people of Mostar to slaughter and kill. "Attention, attention... we purchase Serbian heads for Yugoslav dinars... Code... shit for shit... interested parties should get in touch ..."

He often hears these words at night, echoing through the megaphone. He knew that many of his friends who were connected to Muslims and Croats, not only through friendship but also through blood ties, were sentenced to death. These are people who were Yugoslavs both by birth and by conviction. He knew that they break into apartments and beat, slaughter, rape girls or women in front of their parents, husbands...

At certain moments, he had the difficult thought of killing his children and wife and then himself, to save them from torture, from the butcher, because he expected at any moment that they would break into his apartment. He got up at night to see if the children were sleeping. When he would go back to his room, tears would run down his face.

The morning found him with heavy thoughts that cut into his already tortured soul. Ana got up that morning around eight o'clock. The children were sleeping, Dejan was sitting in the living room.

-Ana, listen to me, I'm going today....I have to try to get the children out of this haunted town. Lock the door!

-I'm afraid...

-Listen to me Ana, my happiness, listen to me...I have to meet some people. I will offer them money to take the children out of Mostar. I will talk to Vlado and Marija in Belgrade. They live well...they are rich...and good people...we are relatives, they will help...

- Do you have a trusted person? Can you be sure that they will take the children to Belgrade??

- He will get the money only when I call Belgrade. When Mirko calls, then I will give the money.

- God...

- Ana... if we wait... every new day is more difficult... they arrest, kill, butcher... Don't cry Ana, my happiness, don't cry...

At 9.30 p.m., Dejan was leaving the apartment.

- Dejan... and... if... no... if...

- Ana, the children must not see you cry.

- If they arrest you...if you don't come back...what will I do with the children....

- Let's trust in God. I will be back. I know what I'm going to do. Do not worry... Lock the door and don't open it for anyone! Can you hear Ana? Do not open to anyone. I will come as soon as I can. I will also bring food.

Around six o'clock, Dejan returned. He didn't say much. For the next three days, Dejan left the apartment. The fear Ana was experiencing seemed to begin to show itself on her face, which was becoming increasingly pale and thin. This woman could not hide the mental anguish on her face in front of her children, especially not in front of Mirko.

-Mommy, when will I be able to go to school again?

- You will go Nina, you will go...

That evening, Dejan and Ana Jelić spent the last night with their children. It's April 1992. The silence with its inexpressible pain touched the four souls, which this night were just one of many families, which the war struck with its hand of death.

- Mirko, Nina, listen to your father, remember what I'm going to tell you tonight for the rest of your life.

While Dejan uttered these words, only he knew how he felt in his soul. He could not let his children see his tears, and in his heart he wanted to hug them and not hold back his sobs. Dejan continued to speak as calmly as he could.

-My children, tomorrow at ten o'clock an uncle who is my friend will come for you. He will take you where I tell him. You will be driven in a car. Mirko, you are going to Uncle Vlado in Belgrade. I will call you on the phone. Mirko, you will call me on the phone to confirm that you have arrived in Belgrade.

- Dad, I won't go... I won't go without you!!! No!!!

- Mirko... you are older than Nina... What you can understand, Nina can't. Me and your mother will come to Belgrade soon. Tomorrow there is room in the car just for you.

Mirko suddenly got up from his seat and tightened his arms around his father's neck. He didn't cry, he just held his father tightly with his hands. He pressed his cheek firmly against his father's. After a few minutes, Dejan felt Mirko's tears running down his cheek. He held that brave boy, his son, and he could no longer hold back his tears.

In a low voice, so that his mother and sister would not hear him, Mirko put his mouth to his father's ear.

- Tajo, daddy, if someone kills you or your mother, I will die. I will cry until I die...

- My son, no one will kill me or your mother. I told you, we will come to Belgrade right after you. Trust your father.

- Dad, promise me.

- I promise you, my son.

- I trust you, dad, because you fulfilled everything you promised me.

Mirko hugged his father tightly again.

-Tajo, I love you very, very much.

As soon as he said these words, Mirko went to sit with his sister. When the clock struck midnight, Dejan called the children to go to sleep, because they had a long and tiring journey ahead of them tomorrow.

-Mom, mommy, can we sleep at your place tonight?

- You can, Nina..

When she answered her little girl, Ana headed for the room with the intention of hiding her tears. Nina lay down between Ana and Dejan. Mirko lay down next to his father. Ana and Dejan did not sleep all night. The darkness hid their tears. Nina fell asleep on her stomach, because that way she could keep her hands around the necks of both mother and father. At seven o'clock the next morning, the children were ready. Ana dressed them and prepared food for them. All the time, she taught them how to behave while they were traveling, as well as when they arrived in Belgrade.

She taught them and kissed them every moment. As she spoke to them, she had a smile on her face, even though she was crying in her heart. At twenty minutes past seven, the doorbell rang. It rang twice briefly and once longer, as agreed. Dejan opened the door. He shook hands with his acquaintance.

- Are the kids ready?

- They are.

- The children will arrive in Belgrade at the agreed time, when your son answers the phone you will give the money. We don't have time to linger. Go.

It was difficult to separate Nina from her mother. An acquaintance of Dejan's who came to pick up the children told Dejan that it was wiser not to leave the apartment. He warned him that there were spies everywhere.

- Dad, when exactly will you come?

- Mirko, I told you quickly, maybe in fifteen days. In 20 days most.

Nina started to cry.

- Take her hand, Mirko.

- I will, dad.

When the door between the children and the parents closed, Ana ran into the room and put a pillow over her mouth. Her scream through the abyss of silence touched the sky and God himself.

Dejan walked through the living room without saying a word for a long time. Time passed. Pain was the only resident within the walls of Ana and Dejan's apartment. Hours passed. For Ana and Dejan, time no longer existed. There was only one time when it was agreed that Dejan would call Belgrade. Ana and Dejan did not know whether a moment had passed or an eternity. At the agreed time, Dejan left the apartment.

- Lock it. Do not open to anyone!!

The moment Ana was left alone in the apartment, she knelt down in the middle of the living room. She prayed to God. She put her palms together and prayed silently. Tears were constantly flowing down her face.

- God, help us... help us holy Lord... help my children... protect them God, please, please. We have given the children into your hands, God... if they kill us, you will be their parent, Lord... you are the parent of us all... Help my children Lord, help my children Lord...help my children Lord...

While she was saying these words, Ana was lying on the floor. She placed her hands as if she were hugging her children.

After more than ten hours of waiting, she heard the key turn in the lock. Dejan opened the door.

- Ana, Ana, my luck, they arrived in Belgrade. Everything is OK! Mirko called me! Everything is OK! God helped our children! Dear Ana...

There is no word that can describe the joy that, in the moments when Dejan spoke, replaced the pain in Ana's soul. She hugged and kissed him, as if he was her child in those moments.

- Ana, I spoke with Vlado. I sent some money... The kids will be fine. Maybe we'll get out of here too.

Ana and Mirko were arrested in one of the raids in their apartment. Ana was beaten and raped in front of Dejan.

Dejan and Ana were tortured and killed in the most brutal way. Their souls from the graves with their screams, through God's justice, do not leave their executioners alone.

Ordinary people in Belgrade, Serbia, Montenegro, Yugoslavia do not know what is happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What the people in Montenegro and Serbia hear through the media is only the surface of the horror that the war brought to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The world knows even less about the suffering of people of all religions and nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

If screams, tears and pain knew how to talk, the world would learn the truth about the tragedy of the people in these areas with tears.

Nina and Mirko were waiting for their parents. No one wanted to tell them that their mother and father would never come.

Belgrade, 1992.

Vlado and Marta Petrović are Dejan's distant relatives. Vlado is a prominent Belgrade businessman. This 50-year-old man is known as a person who uses every moment to increase his already large fortune. The family house in Belgrade has 800m<sup>2</sup> of living space. Nina and Mirko admired the strangeness and beauty of the house they were brought to. Nina was withdrawn and shy by nature. Vlado invited his family to gather in the living room. Vlado and Marta's children, five of them, gathered next to their guests. Everyone looked curiously at Nina and Mirko, who almost cried. Nina's eyes were already full of tears, she sat next to Mirko as if she wanted to hide behind him. She took his hand. Her gaze was not directed towards the children who were looking at her. Nina didn't look up while Mirko was whispering in her ear not to be afraid, because he was right there next to her.

At one point, Vlado began to speak in front of everyone.

- Children, Nina and Mirko came to us today. They are our relatives. They lived in Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There, my children, is war. I told you, and you watch on television...war is a great misfortune... Nina and Mirko will live with us. Nina, Mirko, make yourself at home... Nina, do you know what a zoo is?

- I...

- I watched on TV... a zoo with lots of animals, lions, elephants, giraffes...

Vlado's question was answered by Mirko, instead of Nina, who did not look up, but continued to squeeze Mirko's hand tighter.

-Tomorrow we will all go to the zoo, do you want to?

- We will...

Apart from Mirko and Nina, everyone happily accepted Vlado's proposal.

-Nina, do you want to come with us?

Everyone turned to Nina. There was silence for a few moments. Nina was still looking in front of her and as if she was only making sure that Mirko didn't pull his hand out of hers. Suddenly Nina turned to Mirko, wrapped her arms around his neck and started to cry.

Mirko soothed her. The little boy has already started to take care of his sister. Although there were tears in his eyes, he did not let their relatives see his tears. The life of these children began now in another city, without their parents, with a pain whose depth they will discover in the time ahead of them.

Nina was placed in a small room, which could be said to have been a storeroom before, rather than a room. From the moment they left her alone, Nina cried all the time. When it was time for daily meals, she only came out of her room for lunch, and then Mirko had to beg her. Already after ten days, everyone noticed that the girl had lost weight. Every day she asked Mirko when their mother and their father would come. Mirko comforted her and said that he would come soon, but he himself realized that he could not find a way to comfort his sister. He himself felt alienated, just like a stranger in someone else's house. While consoling his sister, he thought to himself that besides his parents, there was no one in the world, except his sister. Although he fought within himself, there were days when he couldn't hold back his tears because of the pain.

- I'm small...so I...can't...not to cry...

Nina and Mirko are very emotional and sensitive children by nature. These two children were taught by their parents to know what parental love is, and now separated from them, they felt in their souls the emptiness and pain that their children's souls could hardly endure. Nina did not socialize much with children and her relatives formed the opinion that she was a spoiled brat, incapable of being grateful for the apartment and food she received from them. As time passed this opinion became more and more prevalent among everyone in this house. Mirko has already made friends with everyone. He went to play with his relatives, he borrowed a bicycle from them, and after two months of his arrival in Belgrade, he started to love this city. Nina rarely left the yard with him. This usually happened when she had to obey Marta to buy something from the store. One day, while they were going to the store, Nina was silent as usual and then at one point she started a conversation.

-Mirko, mother and father are not answering... Why, why... Mirko, tell me, please...why...

-Nina, Ninice dear, listen to me, father and mother will come, they will come... don't cry... you know they would be angry with you if they found out that you cry every day... don't cry sister. ..don't. Sis, let's sit on that bench for a while. The image of these two children sitting alone on that bench represents the sad reality of millions of orphaned children in the world. The two are alone in the world, but they don't know it yet.

- Sis, I will look after you until mother and father come...

- I... now... I don't understand many things... but I... I... my soul hurts a lot... I... I love my mother and father very much... The other night... I had a dream... I woke up and all the tears were running down my face... I dreamed of my mother hugging me... and crying... and then... calling me... and everything is crying... Dear brother, she was crying all the time... why was she crying?

- I don't know sister... it's just a dream...

- Why did I dream like that?

- Because you cry for her every day...

- I wanted to kill myself the other night...

- What did you want!?

- I...

-Nina!!? What did you want!?

- I wanted to kill myself...

- God... you... so small... to kill yourself...

- Well, I can... I... I know how... I could... do that... jump into the water... from a bridge... I...I found... a rope... and... there's a place where I could hang it... climb on the chair... my cousin... I'm in a lot of pain... here ... in the soul...

With her hand, Nina pointed to the place where her neck and her sternum meet.

Mirko looked at his little sister for a while without saying a word. He was so astonished by the words that the little being spoke that he could not ask her anything for a while.

-And I...what am I going to do, sister?

- Well... you... are a boy... you'll... manage... you're stronger... I... anyone can beat me... and if I grew up I wouldn't be strong... There was silence.

- Sis... do you love me?

- I love, I love you a lot.

- If you kill yourself, I will kill myself too.

- No!! You not!!

- Why not me?!

- You... are not sad... like me... you are cheerful... I mean... you are not cheerful... but... you play... with children...

- Are these all the reasons why I shouldn't kill myself if you do?

- They are... they are not...

- What else is the reason?

- Well... because... I love you.
- And do you know, sister, how much I love you?

Suddenly, Nina wrapped her arms around her brother's neck, so tightly that Mirko wondered at that moment how such a small being could hold him so tightly around the neck.

- Would you kill yourself if I killed myself?
- I would!

Nina was now looking at her brother with eyes that surprised Mirko with their intelligence and calmness.

- Would you kill yourself if I killed myself?
- I told you I would! I would!!
- Then I will never kill myself. I will never!

The little girl took her brother's hand. She held his hand in hers. She didn't speak anymore, she just looked somewhere in front of her.

- Let's go Nina, they will shout at us...
- When they arrived in front of their relatives' house, they were greeted by children's noise.
- Here they are, mom, here they are! - shouted Natasha and Sandra.
- When Nina and Mirko entered the yard, Marta, whose face was contorted with anger, shouted at the top of her voice.
- Little bastards, I take care of you, and you just annoy me!! Did you do that on purpose!!? Where have you been until now?! Come here!!

Marta grabbed Mirko by the ear, pulled him several times so hard that he moaned, and then she started slapping his face. Nina was watching everything, she put her hands on her face, and then suddenly she started shouting and started to hit Marta with her little hand.

- Don't hit him, why are you hitting my brother like that... don't...

Marta turned to her and started hitting her face with all her might.

- Little beast, you go hit me, here you go... let me teach you to be smart... here you go again... you won't get away... I'll beat you until you fall on the floor. And she was hitting her as the poor child fell to the floor.

- So, it's for you to know who is the boss in this house! Get out! Get up! Go to the room, I don't want to see you until tomorrow! Do you hear? There is no lunch or dinner today! Get out! Kids, let's go to lunch. Come on, Mirko! Mirko!? What are you thinking?!

- I don't want to eat.

-You will not! Good! All the better. More for us. Let's go, kids.

And with Mirko's help, Nina barely got up. When they reached Nina's room, the girl almost fell again. Swelling from the blows was already visible on her face. Mirko sat next to her for a long time. He soaked his handkerchief, which was clean, in water and gave it to Nina to hold on the places where it hurts. Nina didn't cry. Her brother saw only defiance in her eyes and some strength that separated her and her behavior at times like this from children her age.

- They don't like us, Mirko.

- No... I don't know... why mother and father don't answer... they aren't there... I thought that... they would already... come... I don't know why... they left us...

Everyone sat together at the table of the large Petrović family house. The main topic of conversation was Nina. Vlado and Marta knew that Dejan and Ana were killed. They didn't tell their children that Nina and Mirko's parents were dead, because they knew that the children would tell the little beasts, as they started calling the little orphans. After learning that Dejan and Ana were killed, Marta started to treat the children like orphans who are now her burden. Of course, she would not bear that burden, but the apartment and property remained in Mostar, the legal owners of which are Nina and Mirko. That was the reason they left the children still in their house. There was also another material interest of theirs, which they learned about from Dejan.

- Dad, mother beat up Nina today, that conceited pumpkin! She is very conceited! She won't play with us.

-Natasha, that doesn't mean she's conceited. She's not like you, her parents... they're not with her like we are all together.

- Vlado, don't defend them! That little beast came out to hit me today!

- Why?

- I sent them to buy something for me in the store, and they came only after an hour! The store is only two hundred meters away. I slapped Mirko, and she started to defend him... and she won't... God forbid... that she should do something like that again...

- You must have beaten them well...

- I did! Woe to them while they are here. I won't put up with them, I have a lot to do with my children anyway! When I tell them, let them do as I tell them!

- Marta, you are not a woman without a soul, but sometimes you are very timid! Take care of those children because now we are responsible for them.

By nature, Diana was more similar to Nina than to her sister Natasha. She was sorry that members of her family treated Nina and Mirko like that, but she was afraid of her mother and had to watch her behavior. Nina and Diana talked like two friends. Their conversation was always honest, when they were alone.

-Nina, my mother thinks you are prettier than Natasha and me, and that's why she's jealous of you. That's why she doesn't love you... I don't think it matters if someone is just physically beautiful, but the most important thing is how beautiful someone is in the soul.

- Yes, that's the only thing that matters - answered Nina.

Diana spoke little in the presence of her sister Natasha, who liked to be in charge, that everything depended on her will. Natasha didn't give herself this right just because she was older, but because she thought she was smarter and more valuable than them.

That evening, around twenty-two o'clock, Natasha ran to her mother.

- Mother, mother...

- What is it, Natasha!?! Why are you shouting?

- I was going, I was passing by the room... I was going to the toilet... so I...

- Tell me what it is or... I'm going to get you in the face..., come on, tell me what it is now or you'll get beaten!!

- I often when I pass by Nina's room... I stop and listen... is there anything... she... cries every night... and tonight... now... she cried the hardest. .. and something fell... like she fell off the bed!

- How does he cry... when I can't hear?

- She is crying muffled... the way a puppy whines... and something thumped... she must have fallen...

- Let her fall! I do not care! In addition to pretending to be a social institution, now I also have to be a nurse! Let's go to sleep.

-What's happening?

- Nothing Diana. Let's go to sleep.

When they entered the room, Natasha told everything to Diana. Diana listened to her sister. After an hour Diana came out and went to Nina's room.

-Nina... she called softly. She heard no answer. She called again and begged Nina to open the door for her for just five minutes.

After a few minutes the door opened. Diana turned on the light. Before she opened the door, it was clear on Nina's face that she was trying to wipe the tears from her eyes.

-Nina, I am your cousin... you and I are not born sisters like Natasha and I, but I feel that you and I are, in spirit, closer than me and Natasha. I can't talk to Natasha like I can to you. Natasha... she is not good at heart... she is my sister, but... she is... she is good, but... she is not like you. Why do you cry every night Nina? I know... that you... I mean... you cry because of your parents, that's normal... but... you shouldn't cry so much.

Nina didn't answer. She looked down, unconsciously, she had assumed a position as if praying to God.

-Nina, do you want to talk to me?

- Diana, your mother, if she finds out that you came to my room... she will beat you...

- Let her beat me. I couldn't sleep when I heard... Natasha told me she heard you cry...

- How did she hear me...?

- Probably... she was eavesdropping by the door of your room.

- She is not good... she hates me...

- No... Nina, she... doesn't hate you... it doesn't matter if she hates you or not... I have money for cookies... you and I are going to get cookies tomorrow... is it okay...

- Good...

The girls were silent. Nina broke the silence.

- Diana, do you know... is my mother alive... and my father?

- They are, they are alive Nina, why so... you ask?

- So if they are alive... why don't they call me and Mirko? Why did they leave us? Is it because they stopped loving us? Why did my mother stop loving me? I love my mother a lot... a lot...

Nina put her hands on her face. She put her head down on her lap. Barely audible this child was crying.

Diana came over and stroked her head.

- Why isn't dad answering? Why? Mother and father love us... no... no... it's impossible for them not to love us...

Tears flowed down that little child's tortured face, which this poor child could no longer stop.

- I... I would go... I wouldn't bother your mother... if I had somewhere to go...

-Nina... you... no... you're not boring...

- Your mother Diana... doesn't love me... I...

Diana had a noble soul that deeply sympathized with Nina. She comforted Nina and promised her that she would not allow anyone to shout at her. Diana tried in every way to cheer Nina up.

- I'll protect you from Natasha, and you'll show me math, is that right?

Nina laughed for the first time that evening. It was already close to midnight when Diana left Nina's room.

Nina was an excellent student. Although Marta employed this girl to work in the house, both when needed and when not needed, she always found time to finish her homework and learn everything the teacher assigned her. Natasha was a bad student. Her mother, who was normally a very ambitious woman, was very annoyed by her.

- If you are a weak student now, when you start studying, what kind of student will you be later?! The day is known by the morning! You have to study otherwise it's hard for you! Natasha did not answer, while she listened to her mother's criticisms. When she would get the unit, Natasha never told her mother. When her mother asked her, she would answer that she got an A. Nina was in the second grade, and Natasha was a fourth grader. Nina was supposed to go to the third grade, but because of the situation in Mostar, she stopped going to school that year. In Belgrade, she enrolled in the second grade of elementary school, which was not far from the house of the Petrović family.

Time passed. As years went by, Nina's features became more and more beautiful. Distinctly black hair, an angelic face and those eyes that increasingly expressed the beauty of her soul, attracted everyone's attention. When Nina turned fourteen, although Marta didn't think so, she became a positive energy, the sun that illuminated this house.

The Petrović family celebrated the birthday of each of their children. It was a celebration that brought together many guests. Among those invited were many distinguished, well-known and recognized personalities from all fields of human work and creativity. At all those banquets, it was usual for Nina and

Mirko to work the most. They served and were criticized all the time by Marta. Nina and Mirko worked together with the servants. In this house, they were really nothing more than servants. Marta's servants. Only the two of them knew when Nina and Mirko's birthday was. Once Diana told her mother that that day was Nina's birthday, Marta beat her so badly that she was never allowed to repeat those words in that house.

Every year on Nina's birthday, Mirko would buy her a present with the money he would collect throughout the year. Nina did the same every year on Mirko's birthday. Before bringing Mirko a gift, Nina was sad because she didn't have enough money to buy him a more valuable gift. On Nina's seventeenth birthday, Mirko bought his sister a beautiful gold chain. Nina criticized him, she told him that he should have bought a less valuable gift. Mirko loved his sister very much. Every injustice done to her by Marta or Natasha, he perceived as his own pain, which was very difficult to bear. At the age of twenty-two, he studied law, and was already in his final year. Whenever time allowed, he went through the student service to work. These were usually the most difficult physical jobs. He worked unloading cement, artificial fertilizers, fruits and vegetables. Mirko gave all his hard-earned money to Nina. No one in the Petrović family ever gave Nina money. She wore the same shirt or pants for years. Only when Mirko started earning, Nina bought new clothes. She had to buy clothes, because Mirko decided not to take food until she bought new clothes. When Nina did that, when she came to Mirko in new clothes, the brother had reason to be proud of his sister. Nina really became a real beauty. Her sadness-hidden smile, when it appeared on her face, would illuminate her soul and the space around her with its unspeakably beautiful light. Nature endowed Nina's face with beauty that did not need external beautification.

-Nina, Nina, my sister, you are a real beauty!

- I'm not Mirko... and did you buy yourself a T-shirt and a jacket, you don't have a jacket... so...

-Nina, I will buy! Don't annoy me. Are you happy when I get to buy the clothes I want? You are, and I'm happy when I can give you money to buy what you want. You wish you would only think of me! Well, it can't be like that!

Nina was laughing.

- There are rare days when I see you smiling like that. Nina, you closed yourself off a lot. That's not good! Nina... it's not good for us here... In this family, Diana is the only being I love.

- I also love Diana, she has a noble soul.

Suddenly, Marta's voice was heard. She called Nina, who answered and immediately went out into the corridor.

- Oh, a new suit! Oops! Where do you get the money to buy such an expensive suit? Do you hear what I'm asking you?!

Nina was silent.

- Where did you get the money from, you frog!

- I bought it for her!

-Oh, brother protector! And where did you get the money from?!

- I'm working, unloading cement! I earned money, I didn't steal it, nor did you give it to me!

- I didn't give them to you? And who has been buying food for you all these years?

- We didn't lie in this house either, we were already working.

They heard the argument between Marta and Mirko in the house. Natasha and Diana had already arrived.

- Mother, what's going on? – Diana asked.

- Here, Mirko is arguing with me, he says that I never gave him money. Asking for money!

- I'm not looking for money! You are not ashamed to speak like that!

- Mother, what did they do wrong to you so that you don't love them?

- Go to your room! Do you hear Diana! You're going to teach me now! I often don't even love myself, let alone love them! I won't argue anymore!

Flapping her hands left and right, this large, fat woman, to whom only Natasha was fundamentally similar in nature, walked away with a quick step.

Only now did Diana notice Nina's new outfit.

-Nina, Nina, how nice your suit looks... Nina, how beautiful you are...

Diana uttered these words completely sincerely. Her noble soul in these moments sincerely admired Nina. Natasha didn't say a word, she just looked under her eyes. Suddenly she turned and left.

-Nina, do you want to go with me to the city, I was thinking of buying some small things for the university? Will you?

- I will, Diana.

- I'll do it right away... come with me.

Mirko kissed Nina and Diana, then went back to his room to continue reading the literature he was preparing for the exam. The moment he sat down, he picked up the book and began to read. He couldn't concentrate on the words he was reading. He thought about the fact that he would have to earn money to pay for the apartment. He had to leave this house. He could not bear humiliation. He didn't know how much time had passed while he was thinking about how to make money. Diana and Nina went to get juice after shopping.

- This is a nice place. Nina do you like it here?

- Well... it's nice.

- What are you going to drink, Nina?

- Juice... lemon juice if you have it.

Yes, the answered the waiter who was patiently waiting for Diana to order a drink.

- I'll have lemon juice too.

When the waiter left, Diana and Nina did not speak for several minutes.

- Nina..., at the entrance I saw some of my friends, they are good guys. If they pass our table, may I invite them to sit with us?

- Diana...if...

- Nina, you know that I wouldn't call them if I didn't know what kind of guys they were.

- Okay Diana...

- Here they are coming here...

- Hello Diana.

- Hello Martin.

- Are you studying Diana or spending time in cafes?

- Ha- ha- ha... I study much more than you, after all, tomorrow they won't ask about physics. Sorry... this is Nina. Would you like to... sit with us?

- I'm glad Nina, I'm Martin, a rare name, but what if I don't have another name. These are my friends...

Diana talked to her acquaintances. After fifteen minutes, Nina told Diana that she was going to get the newspaper. In those moments, it was more appropriate for her to take a short walk alone in the streets of Belgrade. After about twenty minutes, Nina bought a newspaper. When she was leaving the store, where she bought a newspaper, she heard someone's voice behind her.

- Miss... Miss...

The moment she felt someone's hand on her shoulder, Nina turned around.

Before her she saw a young man who could not have been more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. He was wearing a winter jacket that hid his

face from the side. This young man's eyes, while looking at Nina, could not hide their sincere admiration.

- Miss, excuse me... you... you come... you used to come often... to buy... newspapers... here... my cousin works here and I... I was sitting at her place when were... you... coming... Excuse me... I... I'm a little...

In situations like this, Nina would usually say she was in a hurry, or find some other way to end a conversation with an unknown person, but at this moment, she was looking at the strange young man in front of her. His black hair and face that resembled a child's, his confusion, the eyes that looked at her with the most sincere humility, all this made Nina stop and listen to the person who, at that first moment, in some unusual way resembled to her an alien image of the snow that days fell in Belgrade. Nina loved the snow very much. Every day, when it snowed in Belgrade in the winter, Nina rejoiced in her soul as she did when she was a little girl. She imagined God as Santa Claus, and when it snowed, she thought, both seriously and jokingly to herself, that those were God's tears, laughing, just as she laughs and rejoices when it snows. Whenever it snowed in Belgrade, it was no ordinary day for Nina. That's why she liked to walk alone in the white city, as she called it, while it was snowing. She walked alone because she had never met anyone who knew how to look forward to the snow as much as she did. Now, as she looked at that unknown young man before her, her soul seemed to see in his eyes a part of something that resembled a feeling, which came from her dream. The rational part of her being marveled at the momentary feeling her soul had as she listened to the young man's words.

- I... I'm uncomfortable... I didn't want to stop you so you wouldn't misunderstand me... I'd just like to get to know each other... I'd like to be friends.

Nina still stood speechless. She caught her thought that she was surprised it wasn't going. The next moment her mind wanted her to turn and leave. She still stood motionless. The next moment she heard her own words.

- Why do you want us to be friends?

While Nina asked the young man a question, he held his hands in front of him, his head almost bowed, the expression on his face revealed some indescribable sadness. He looked like a servant in front of his master. Although his clothes looked classy, he had a demeanor that was more like a

noble beggar than the kind of guys girls meet every day. The originality, sincerity and sadness in the eyes of this young man stopped Nina from leaving.  
- I would... I don't know... I don't have the habit... I never approach girls like this... I don't approach girls at all...

As if ashamed of his words, he paused for a moment and then continued to speak.

- Don't blame me... I got confused... I... I'm shy... I... I don't know... what's wrong with me... that I'm talking like this...

He paused. He was no longer looking at Nina, but somewhere in front of him. Nina lifted the face of this strange young man with her hand. She did not think about her actions in those moments. He didn't want to raise his head. She ran her hand gently over his skin under his eyes and felt tears running down his face.

-What is your name?

- I... am... a fool... that's my real name...

For a whole minute they stood next to each other without saying a word.

- I'm Nina.

She held out her hand to him and he to hers, and it was as if they did it at the same moment.

-Where are you from? - asked Nina.

-I am from... Belgrade.

-I have to go.

- Will I see you again?

- When did you see me for the first time?

- It's been more than a year.

-More than a year!? Here?

- Yes, here.

- You will see me here again.

- When?

-I do not know. When God wills.

- Do you believe in God?

-I believe. A lot of...

She offered him her hand. At that moment he kissed her hand.

Nina turned and left. She was afraid to turn around. She was afraid to face the feeling that hinted to her that a part of her soul remained with the sad eyes of that unknown man. When she had already gone far from that place, she turned around. She saw neither the shop nor the man. She went back. When she reached the place where she bought the newspaper, she looked at the young man who was still standing looking in the direction she had gone. The snow was falling and intensifying the feeling that was reviving her dream. Her eyes filled with tears. She didn't think about her tears, as if she wasn't even aware of them. It was as if she were dreaming. And it's like he's still dreaming. It's as if he's playing in some kind of circle driven by some strange sadness. Cheerful sadness. Nina had feelings in her soul that she did not understand. Often she didn't even try to understand her feelings. The moment the young man turned and entered the store, Nina, who until then had been hidden behind the corner of a large building, turned and went in the direction of the "Ruski Tsar" restaurant, where she left Diana. It was only when she entered the restaurant that she noticed that her hair was not black, but all white from the snow, as well as all her clothes. She brushed off the snow for a few minutes before entering the restaurant. Diana's cheerful face greeted her. The four of them laughed.

-Nina, I was already worried about where you are...

- I stayed...

All three of Diana's friends tried to draw Nina's attention to themselves. When they spoke, they addressed Nina much more than Diana. All three of Diana's friends could not hide how captivated they were by Nina's beauty. Nina talked to them and in every word she presented to everyone her seriousness, simplicity and naturalness.

It was the simplicity and naturalness of this girl that made her beauty unique.

-Diana, it's late, yours will take care, we could go...

- Yes... really... we stayed for a long time... let's go...

They said goodbye to Diana's friends and left.

Every evening, relatives and friends of this family came to the Petrović house. The large living room was filled almost every evening with guests who created an atmosphere in which conversations on all topics were held.

Nina rarely entered the living room when guests were there. When she entered the living room it was only when Marta ordered her to serve the guests. This would happen on the rare occasions when her daughters were not in the house. Otherwise, Marta left serving the guests to the servants, but she often asked her daughters to serve the guests as well. She would go with her daughters

and praise them for being hard-working and beautiful, and that she would not allow them to marry into families that were not wealthy and respectable. Marta designed serving her daughters as marketing for them. The beauty of her daughters could not be compared to Nina's beauty, so Marta freed Nina from the job of serving the guests. Until Nina's fifteenth year, she worked more than any maid, but over time, as she grew and became more and more beautiful, Marta felt more and more envious, jealous of her daughters, who nobody noticed in Nina's presence.

Mirko rarely sat with guests. One evening, while he was sitting in the large living room, a discussion broke out on some fundamental questions of science and life. Mirko took part in that discussion that evening, unexpectedly and for himself. He left an impression that created respect in all who listened to him as he spoke. The following evenings, most of the participants in the conversation asked Vlad, as the host, where Mirko was and whether he would come that evening. The interest of Colonel Ilić and Professor Marković, especially in Mirko and his praise addressed to Mirko, surprised Vlado, and especially Marta. At Professor Marković's insistence, Vlado invited Mirko to join his guests that evening during the following day.

Professor Marković is a doctor of philosophy. This 60-year-old has dedicated his entire life to science. He wrote several professional books. As a respected professor, he was a welcome guest in Petrović's house, as was his wife Anka, who is a doctor of internal medicine by profession. Colonel Draško Ilić, as well as his wife, were regular guests at Petrović's house.

Around twenty o'clock, Mirko entered the large living room, which was filled with guests. He shook hands with everyone in turn. Soft music was playing. One of Mozart's melodies delighted the present guests. After about thirty minutes, Professor Radomir Lazarevic stood up in front of everyone. About ten seconds after the moment when the professor stood up, the room was quiet.

- Dear ladies, gentlemen, dear friends, at gatherings of this kind, I am a supporter of the fact that our primary goal should be to listen to music and have as cheerful a conversation as possible. However, tonight, I feel it necessary to make a request in this way to all of you. A few evenings ago, we were sitting here in approximately the same composition as we are sitting tonight. The three or four of us were talking, but I believe the others didn't hear us. We often gather here, we often talk about various topics, and yet we have rarely talked like we did that evening. Why have I risen to speak these words before you, while you are all listening? There is a young man here with us tonight who the night before encouraged the three of us to talk about topics that I believe interest all of you. Gentlemen, I don't want to list the human

weaknesses that have turned against humanity as a great danger, I just want to talk about some fundamental questions of life tonight. I believe and I know that there are intellectuals here tonight among you who will take the floor and explain to the rest of us what you know and we don't. Yugoslavia has been in the center of the world's attention for more than ten years now. We live in a country that has been invaded by a military alliance of countries whose strength surpasses all military alliances that I know of. Living in Yugoslavia, we live today a life whose tomorrow we don't know what it will bring.

On a global scale, science today does not help humane principles of living very much. What do I want to say? Scientific achievements are at the service of the military machine, at the service of those whose minds see no further than their need to achieve their goal, regardless of how many people will be killed to achieve that goal. People fight for the earth, no matter that the earth will eventually bury us all. Human beings struggle for power over others. They are fighting for power over other people's territory. They fight to take other people's wealth. Everyone talks about the law, but there is practically no law. The law is most disobeyed by those in power, all over the planet. This world, it must be admitted, is a very dangerous place. The danger comes from a place called human ignorance. I have been involved in science all my life, and yet, before my seventh decade of life, I do not know how to answer some basic, fundamental questions of life. If one of you asked me now how I see the future of Yugoslavia, Europe and the planet as a whole, I really wouldn't know how to answer. This young man... your name is Mirko, he interested me during our conversation last evening, the way he sees the future of all of us. You, Colonel Dinić, see your future and the world as a whole as a soldier protecting the territory of his country. In your opinion, the future of the world depends on the ability of the army to defend the borders of its country, unlike you, the generals of countries who attack the peoples of other countries, think that the future of the world depends on their will to democratize and organize the world according to their will. You, Mr. Stevanović, are a holy person of the Orthodox faith. You see the future of the world in the words of Christ. I would like to hear your opinion expressed in front of all of us here.

-Mr. Lazarević, you are a man whom I respect as one of those scientists who use their knowledge to create good and understanding among people. I am of the opinion that a scientist must have control over what he presents to the world. The misuse of the work of many scientists has produced the weapons of today that threaten humanity.

I believe, Mr. Lazarevic, that we will agree with the fact that this world is not even close to a world that is organized at the level of humanity and respect for God's and human laws. Since its inception, humanity has not and will never,

I believe, be ideal. Self-control, Professor, is not a trait possessed by humanity as a whole. Self-control is the idea, thought and goal of rare individuals, scientists who think and care about the future of humanity. Does humanity, as it is, have a chance to survive, professor?

- I don't know, that's my honest answer.

Colonel Zlatko Dinić stood up and addressed Professor Lazarevic and everyone present.

-Look, professor, around you, look at the largest number of your fellow citizens. This is a city of millions. Professor, there are many who rejoice in the misfortune of others. Many on this planet are like that. Incompetent, unclear to themselves. I wish the truth were different. I would like humanity to be made up of highly conscious individuals who think to other human beings what they think to themselves. It's not like that. Many do not think of others. Many think only of themselves. When they should give good to others, they think only of themselves. When they need to take good from others, they think of others. The world is divided, professor. You know how the borders of today's existing states were drawn. Human bones. The bones of the murdered made real borders between states and people. Our land is our sanctuary. Why? Because our country is a protection for all of us from the evildoers of which there are many in the world. The power of arms and the fear of death only stops evildoers at the borders of our country. Professor, distinguished gentlemen, I have just a few more sentences to say, so you can continue. Stories about humanism and stories they don't want, so it's a story for naive fools. It is a story for those who know nothing about life in this world.

Colonel Dinić paused for a few moments, looked at everyone present in that large living room, and retired to his seat.

Priest Dragan Stevanović took the word again.

-Sisters and brothers, the words I heard from Colonel Zlatko Dinić presented to me humanity and the world as a whole as a place of eternal struggle. I do not dispute, the world does not rest on the foundations of the science of Christ, the world does not rest on the foundations of humanity, but the world with its healthy strength will never lose hope that there will be a better tomorrow. Humanity is not just an empty ideal, humanity is first of all a necessity of life. There is no better and stronger feeling than the feeling when you help someone in need. It is a feeling that words cannot express. It is the feeling that

makes us alive. Without this feeling, humanity has no future. There are those in the world who do not have much intelligence, but those whom God has given knowledge, to see the soul, must fight with their lives for the good of all. Persistent, persistent even when the majority laughs at the efforts of honorable people and missionaries, persistent and persistent even when everyone thinks that this world has no salvation. Salvation after all... is fundamentally not the path taken by the collective being of this world. By saving others, an intelligent human being knows that he is actually saving himself.

Dragan Stevanović paused. His gaze swept over everyone in the room. There was silence for almost two minutes.

- Now, Father Dragan, you have presented a very important thought. Obradović intervened in the conversation.

- I am professionally engaged in politics. I understand politics as an individual's effort to find a way to help his country and humanity as a whole. The thought that a human being, by helping another, also helps himself is a thought... which has existed for a long time... it is a fact for Stevanović that this thought is more of a theory... it's not exactly... One thing is an ideology that seeks its revival in perfection, and something completely different, as Colonel Dinić said, is the reality of our everyday life. Our obligation and duty is to help others, whether we do responsible work at the state level or work at our workplace, in a factory, in a hospital... in any place where life asks us to help.

If we want to create a perfect world, it is enough for each of us to do as much as we can for our country and the world as a whole.

- Mr. Obradović, if you allow me, I would like to ask just one question.

Everyone turned to Mirko, who was sitting on a chair that was slightly separated from the others.

- Why doesn't everyone do as much as they can for their society, their country and the world?

- That, young man, is the question of all questions that we are fundamentally discussing tonight. My answer to your question is that people are irresponsible, unwilling and not intelligent enough to know why they would help others, without any reward.

- Why is a social community organized? - Mirko asked this question in a calm tone.

- The question is too simple. Your question just answers itself.
- I would like to ask you, Mr. Obradović, as a politician who is professionally engaged in this work, to answer my question.
- I guess what the goal of your question is. Every social community organizes itself in order to choose its most capable individuals to perform the job of organizing the work of everyone in the state, that is, the social community.
- Do those individuals who were elected by everyone in democratic elections know that they are responsible to everyone for their work?
- They should know.
- Who is more responsible for his work, the president of the country or a factory worker?
- Both are responsible. First in front of yourself, and then in front of everyone.
- Dear sir, tell us, in your opinion, who is more responsible for his work, the president of the state or the worker who works alone at the machine in the factory?
- Well... the president of the country... certainly.
- The president of the country, respected sir, is the most responsible for all events in the country before the people who elected that person. All major social events that have a positive flow come from a source called the president of the state. For all major social events that have a negative course, the president has the greatest, essential responsibility. That's why smart people have a hard time agreeing to do responsible social work. Unlike smart people, fools fight among themselves in order to assume responsible positions in front of a significant part of the people, who do not make much effort to understand why they should be responsible.
- Work of general social importance must be done by someone. Someone who is smart enough and responsible.
- I agree with Mr. Obradovic. That someone must be truly worthy of his people and their future. Whether everyone will do as much as they can for their country and the world as a whole does not depend mostly on the work of an ordinary worker in a factory, but rather on the work of the president of the country. According to the first, everyone is equal. The first is the leader, who, if he is blind in his spirit, woe to his people.
- Mirko, do... you... believe in God?
- Yes, Father Dragan, I believe in God. Without faith, a human being would be without the basic source of life. Faith, regardless of the behavior of humanity in various times, is and will remain the basic and essentially the only source of human peace or human unrest.
- Gentlemen, have any of you read James Redfield's book - *The Celestine Prophecy*?