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## Seagulls

A sob and a sigh.

In a few moments again--a sob and a sigh.

And again in a while--a sob and a sigh.

The flat rock breathes in and rises above the water. Then it breathes out and sinks under a translucent layer that embraces it like animated glass. The glass bubbles up in white airy fringes and spills in a whisper. Curls of foam and seaweed twist around the rusty flanks of the rock. Its dark back glistens under the morning sun.

"Each wave sprawls out into a python skin--bluish green like the water and white like the foam," said Zhorka Shmorka, staring at the ceaseless game of the waves and the rock.

"Each wave is but a breath--light like the foam, and an eternity--dark as the sea," replied Ninaiko breathing with the rock.

The large sun rose high and became a blinding nail knocked in the eye. The lucent gauzy mist in between the sea and the sky melted away. The sea shrank and sank. The air rarified, thinned, and began to swell out towards the luminous enamel of the sky. The horizon stretched and started to resonate vaguely in the haze.

A cloudlet appeared. The sunshine soaked it and it glowed like a lump of snow. A dark-blue band lay below it across the sky. More clouds appeared. The celestial light surrounded them but could not saturate them to the core. Their rims shone with the color of pearl but their interiors remained opal gray.

A shadow shaped like a cross ran through the two friends' eyes--a seagull circled over the rock. Suddenly, the gull swerved diagonally toward the water. In just a moment it was airborne again, a fish flashing in its beak. The rippling circle where the bird had kissed the sea grew larger and the next wave smoothed it over.

"The wingtips he furrows the air with are pearl gray, whereas his body is as tender as mother-of-pearl," said Zhorka Shmorka.

Rays and shadows mingled over the sea. The sun scattered sparkling flakes over the water and they sank, lighting it from within. Dark-blue bands

hung from the clouds and threw patches where the water was blue-black and mysterious.

"The seagull is perhaps a reflection of the clouds. He dwells among them, doesn't he?" suggested Ninaiko.

The air above the two began to vibrate with a multitude of strong wings, curved like sabers. Cross-like shadows ran on the golden-green sand round the rock.

"Look how many they are," said Zhorka Shmorka, moving his eyes from the shadows to the seagulls.

The birds cut the air heavily and turned their heads as if they were looking for something.

"What if it occurs to them to attack us," whispered Zhorka Shmorka.

"Oh, oh," shivered Ninaiko.

"No, just look at their beaks!" Zhorka Shmorka went on, his hand over his eyes. "Curved and so powerful."

More and more seagulls were flying in. They were circling in disarray and their silhouettes were breaking the rays. The lights and the shadows over the two friends mingled in a flickering chaos.

"So why not attack us?" Zhorka Shmorka lowered his voice still further. "You saw the little fish a while ago, didn't you? Poor thing! Actually it was quite a big fish, wasn't it? Here we are lying peacefully on the rock and then the seagulls fly in and-- But look! Look!"

Some order appeared in the random flight of the birds. They seemed to fly in different air corridors. The ones gliding low went in one direction, the others above them--in another, and still the others in the third corridor--in a third direction.

"They are getting settled to attack. We are finished..." whispered Zhorka Shmorka in a trembling voice and looked at Ninaiko oddly. "Farewell!..."

"Why are you scaring me?" asked Ninaiko. "Do you enjoy making up horrible stories and torturing me?"

"Did you believe me? Did you? Tell me!" asked Zhorka Shmorka shaking with laughter within.

Then he sighed, turned over on his back and closed his eyes. He was no longer interested in the seagulls and forgot all about them. He was trying to relax on the warm rock and melt away in the sunny air. The birds had gone up and the place where the two friends were lying was again drenched in light.

"I guess," Zhorka Shmorka said as he made himself more comfortable, "when you love someone very much, sometimes you feel like having them completely in your hold. And there is no better way to do it than to make

them believe in your horrific imaginings. If you are all alone amidst the horrible things coming to your mind from time to time, this is torture. However, if someone believes you, that makes two of you and this is love. The other person is willing to suffer because he loves you and he likes that torment. Well, things like that..."

"Look at the seagulls," Ninaiko pointed upwards.

Now the gulls were coasting in a thick orderly line. Their wings were locked in position and they were suspended in the air on invisible strings. There were no separate birds any longer but a new gigantic creature made of little black crosses arranged in strict order. The forehead of the creature turned to one side and its elongated body followed suit along an invisible air lane.

"In the beginning, your soul is a clean blank sheet of paper," said Ninaiko. "Then you meet someone and only then do you realize how lonely you have been before. Then a second and a third person appears... But your soul already overflows with words and tiny little wordies. Even the margins and the last little corners of the sheet are filled out--there is no room to put down one tiny dot. And you read your remembrances again and again and with each new person you feel still lonelier. Finally you find an eraser and rub the words out of your soul. But the dreams, the dreams... There is no eraser for dreams."

The creature was probably rising as the crosses were getting smaller and smaller. The altitude transfused it with power and it was shooting up more and more confidently. Its head could hardly be seen, and its body extended in wide spirals almost to the horizon. The crosses thinned out and disappeared. The creature was transformed into a blurred dark line.

"It feels the same when I gaze at the sky, with a tiny hair that's got in my eye unnoticed," Zhorka Shmorka wiped the tears from his eyes tired of straining.

"The stronger it gets and the more it fills up the sky, the smaller that creature becomes," said Ninaiko.

When the spiral rose so high that neither of the two could surely see it, a huge door opened between the clouds. The creature disappeared through that door and it closed soundlessly.

"The end," whispered Zhorka Shmorka and rubbed his eyes.

The air trembled slightly.

"Did you hear the celestial voice?" asked Ninaiko in a whisper, listening.

The two lay as if asleep until the afternoon breeze started blowing and filled their nostrils with the scent of sea. The sobs and the sighs of the rock



grew louder and turned into what almost seemed to be weeping and then into what almost seemed to be chuckling.

“The rock, can you hear it?” asked Zhorka Shmorka without opening his eyes. “It keeps on making sounds as if nothing has happened today.”

“Sometimes I feel like water,” replied Ninaiko. “I want to have something, to keep it. I hug it in every possible way, I hold it tight and it keeps slipping away--as if I am not there at all.”

The sun was rolling west like a penny. The shadows from the beach--deep and blue--were quickly closing in. A cool shiver ran through the bodies of the two.

Wings whirred over them and a seagull perched on the rock.

“I wonder if he knows what’s behind the celestial door?” Zhorka Shmorka shifted.

“He has probably understood the celestial voice too,” Ninaiko raised himself on his elbow.

“What is there behind the celestial door? What did the celestial voice say?” cried Zhorka Shmorka.

“A-ha-ha-ha-ha-a-a!” replied the seagull and its voice faded away in the breeze.

The wind had turned up one dark feather on its smooth wings and underneath a wisp of pearly fluff trembled helplessly.