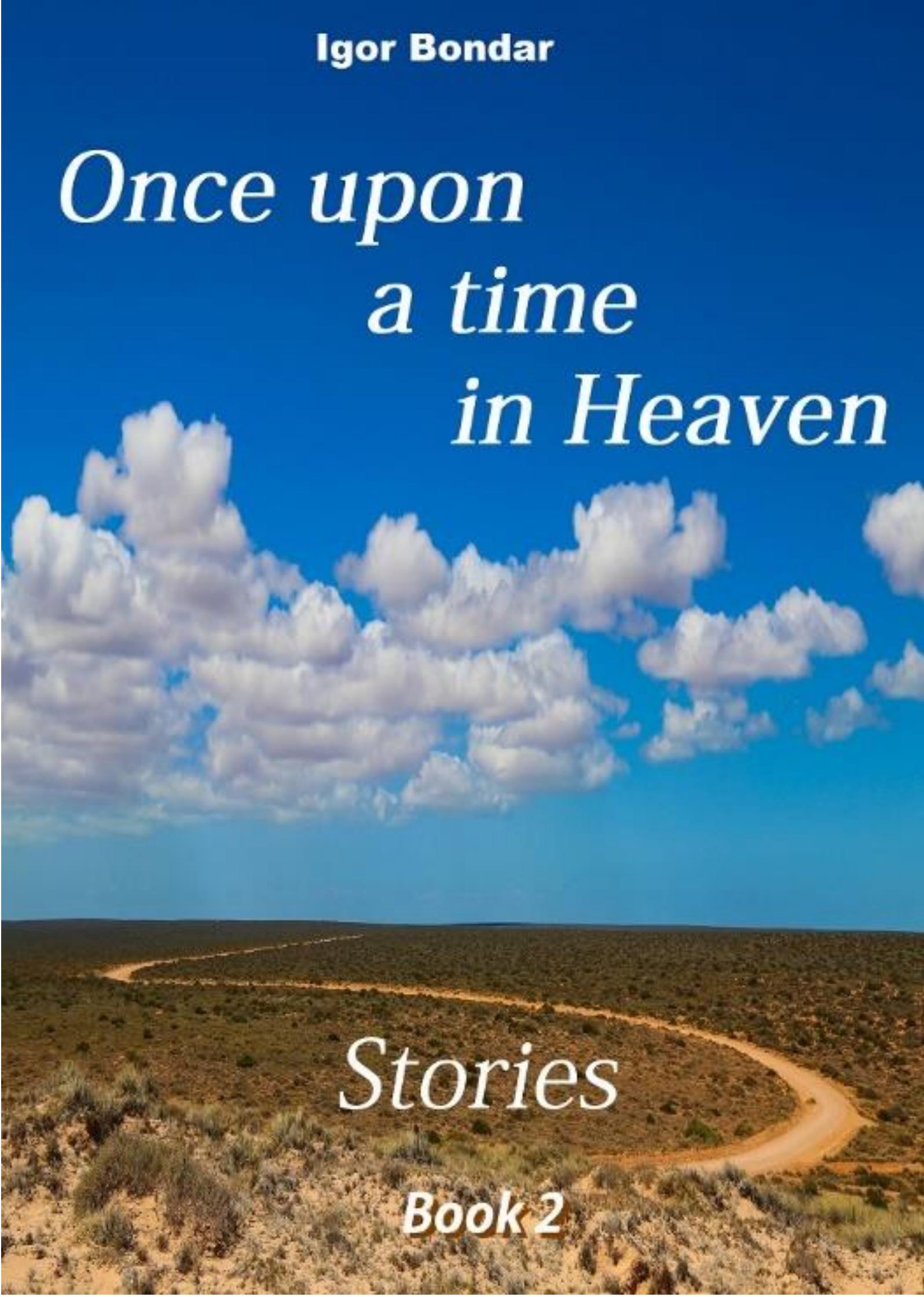


Igor Bondar

*Once upon
a time
in Heaven*

Stories

Book 2



The Bunker

Robert Wilson screwed in the last light bulb on the wall and proudly looked around the room. His personal concrete bunker, located at a depth of twenty meters below the ground, was perfectly ready for use. Thanks to the state-of-the-art life support systems and the stored food supply, Robert and his wife, Dorothy, could permanently hide in this safe shelter for about a year.

Of course, such a construction cost a pretty penny for their family. But now they had a completely safe place, where they could wait out different cataclysms that could occur on Earth. Needless to say, the Wilson spouses were now much less worried about possible nuclear conflicts, killer comets, various tsunamis, and other dangers.

With a satisfied smile, Robert went to the spiral staircase and began to climb to the surface, closing the armored doors on the landings from time to time. He didn't install an elevator in the bunker, because he reasonably believed that he'd better not rely on electricity when it comes to the crunch. Mr. Wilson has always preferred reliability to comfort in his life.

* * *

With his head reclined upon his hand, the angel Anil was looking thoughtfully at his ward, who was cheerfully climbing up

the stairs at this moment. Unlike the happy Robert, there was no sign of great joy on the angel's face. There were reasons for that.

In fact, it all started when his Robert Wilson made his career choice and decided to be a weather forecaster. For years afterwards, he made weather forecasts for people. Those who understand the specific nature of this work can say that the life of a weather forecaster is very similar to walking through a minefield. He must to walk through it every day because people always need the latest forecasts. At the same time, it's very important for a true forecaster not to "be blown up" by inaccurate forecasts, otherwise people would just stop reading them.

Unlike his ward, the angel knew exactly how the weather on earth is actually formed and often cheerfully smiled at some of Robert's amusing maneuvers on this "minefield". Nevertheless, he always helped him to make accurate forecasts, as Robert was a good, kind fellow.

As a result of this help, for many years, Robert has successfully handled the difficult task of making accurate forecasts. A few years ago, at management discretion, he even headed one of the divisions of the company.

But, the constant over-cautiousness at work produced a side effect: Robert's excessive caution gradually became his second nature. That's why building an underground bunker became the next logical step in his life, given all the global horror stories, which the forecaster constantly heard on the daily news.

'Hello, my friend,' a familiar voice behind Anil interrupted his thoughts.

The angel turned around. His friends, angels Blowie and Leno, stood next to him and smiled warmly.

'Hello!' Anil smiled back.

'You don't look happy at all today, pal,' Leno said, as he looked closely at the angel. 'Why?'

'How could I be happy?' Anil sighed. 'My ward has just finished building his underground bunker. Look how happy he is. Protected himself from everything...'

'Yeah, nowadays, the people's faith is great,' the angel Blowie shook his head. 'Back in the day, they hoped to God at least sometimes, but now, they seem to believe just in concrete and iron...'

His friends smiled with sorrowful mien at this sad joke.

'Yes, such times now,' angel Anil said. 'Actually, my Robert isn't a bad man. He's kind and honest. But, he's afraid of everything in this world and has no faith in God. How can I ever wean him away from being afraid or at least smoke him out of this bunker? If this continues, he will soon cease to leave his shelter at all.'

His two friends sat down side by side with their chins resting on their hands.

'Maybe we can flood his bunker or severely damage it?' five minutes later, angel Leno looked up at his friends.

'It's not an option,' Anil shook his head. 'My forecaster insured it well. He'll just start building a new one.'

The angels were silent for another ten minutes.

'All right, friends, let's ask Father for help. It's not a simple question, we're talking about a whole underground bunker!' angel Blowie finally said. 'Our Father always comes up with some interesting solutions in such cases.'

The other two angels looked at each other and nodded in agreement. After that, they all looked up with great enthusiasm.

'Hello, hello, my dear ones,' they heard a familiar and warm voice from above. 'What happened in there?'

'You see, Father,' the angel Anil said, 'my Robert has built an underground bunker for himself. Me and my friends have already racked our brains trying to figure out how to pull him out. Well, and also how to head him in the right direction...'

'The bunker, you say? Yeah, my dear angels, every year our tasks become more and more complicated,' the Father sighed. 'I give people new technologies for their convenience, and they immediately switch to them and completely forget about really important things from their past.'

The three angels nodded their heads with understanding.

'Well, my darlings, I'll try to think of something for you,' the Father said. 'This Robert is a good fellow.'

The angels - Anil, Blowie and Leno - smiled happily.

'Thank you, Father!' Anil said.

'No problem,' they heard an answer. 'But from now on you should be very attentive and ready to come to the rescue at the right moment.'

'We will, Father!' angel Anil exclaimed with joy.

'Good luck, my dear ones!' they heard a receding voice from above.

* * *

The next day, Robert was going down to his bunker in fine spirits. He was whistling a cheerful tune and carrying a couple of bags with the things what could be quite useful for a long stay underground. Inside these bags, one could find half a dozen board games, several thick crossword books, and even Chinese and Russian learning self-study guides.

The forecaster walked into the bunker, turned on the light and... all of a sudden, dropped the bags on the floor. In his favorite rocking chair sat some gray-brown shaggy creature with horns and a tail. It was slowly rocking and whistling a tune, which was very, very nasty.

'W-who... Who are you?!' Robert finally said, beside himself with fear and surprise.

'What do you mean "who"? I'm a demon.' the creature replied and kept on rocking.

'W-what demon?' the forecaster stammered.

'What? Just an ordinary underground demon. Man, I've lived here for a thousand years, and I've never heard such silly questions before.'

'For a thousand years...' Robert echoed.

'Yes, I've lived here for a thousand years,' the demon repeated, sighed sadly and looked at the forecaster with some sort of trust. 'To be honest... what kind of life is this? It's always dirty, damp, and cold. Ugh! I'm glad that civilization has finally reached me. What an awesome bunker you built for me! What did you bring, by the way? Some fun stuff?'

'An awesome bunker for you?!' Robert popped his eyes. He was touched to the quick. 'I didn't build anything for you. This bunker is mine!'

'Your bunker on my land? Without asking, without payment, without any land lease agreement? Such a gross violation definitely gives me the right to confiscate your bunker.' The demon raised his crooked hairy finger for emphasis.

'What do you mean, c-confiscate?' Robert stammered. 'I'm calling the police, they'll throw you out of here!'

The demon roared with laughter.

'Go ahead. I won't be here when they come. You can call them three times to evict the demon, but on the fourth time, they'll find you another bunker in a mental hospital. Well, so that you don't bother them with some demons...'

'How dare you!' Robert started coughing with anger. 'This bunker is mine!'

Never before has the forecaster dealt with such insolence. Not knowing what to do, he picked up a large stick from the floor and was ready to attack the demon. As if nothing had happened, he kept on rocking in the chair and whistling a tune. The man came up, took a swing, and hit the demon with all his might. But for some reason, the stick went through the demon and knocked out a lath from the back of the chair. Robert stared at what had happened.

'Foolish man... I'm a ghost! You can't hurt me. I've lived here for a thousand years, and this is the first time I've seen such an idiot. Even your grandfathers knew a hundred times more about us,' the demon turned around and looked at the back of the chair. 'Madman, why did you ever need to break my good chair...'

* * *

Robert slowly walked up the stairs, came into the house, and flopped down in a chair in the living room. He was too confused and powerless to think of anything.

His wife, Dorothy, who had come in at the same time, stared at him in surprise. She had never seen her Robert like that before.

'Darling, is something wrong?' she asked with concern. 'You look like you've just seen an alien.'

The forecaster slowly raised his head and thoughtfully looked at his wife. He understood that he couldn't succeed in hiding this problem anyway.

'Yes, dear, it is, I did see someone. However, it wasn't an alien, but a demon,' he said. 'I know that it sounds ridiculous, but our bunker is now occupied by a shaggy and arrogant demon.'

Dorothy froze for a second, and then looked around for an empty bottle. She had only heard him saying weird things twice in her life, and the reason for this was always the same. However, there was no bottle, and her Robert looked completely sober. The forecaster sighed, understanding her natural thought process.

'Darling, instead of wasting my time on fantastic stories, I'd better ask you to go down to the bunker and see what's going on.'

Dorothy wanted to fully clear up this matter as soon as possible, so she nodded and headed to the spiral staircase. Ten minutes later, she came back and looked exactly as her husband looked. The woman slowly walked across the room and flopped down in a chair next to her husband's one.

'Is he still there?' Robert quietly asked her after a while.

Dorothy nodded, without a word.

'Is he sitting in a rocking chair and whistling a nasty tune?'

His wife nodded again.

'So, what are we going to do?' Robert asked his third question a few minutes later.

Dorothy's head didn't move.

* * *

The angel Anil smiled as broad as he could. The angels Blowie and Leno, who were sitting next to their happy friend, also smiled happily.

'Yup, my friends, the Father's plan was brilliant, as usual,' Leno said. 'Just one cheeky demon and such stunning effect!'

'That's true, my friend!' Anil nodded happily. 'From now on, my Robert will no longer be in a hurry to go down to his bunker.'

'And we also made him think about the creatures from the other world. Well, if he believes in demons now, over time, he will inevitably begin to believe in us,' the angel Blowie added.

'Yeah, I couldn't have asked for more,' Anil nodded. 'It's not that difficult to plan the rest.'

'Exactly!' angel Leno agreed with enthusiasm. 'Now we have several scenarios, and all of them will eventually help the forecaster to make the right choice.'

Angel Anil stood up.

'Well, friends, let's not waste time,' he said. 'I need to move my Robert on. Will you help me and Dorothy's angel?'

'Of course, friend, we're glad to,' the angels Blowie and Leno nodded.

After that, the three angels went to earth.

* * *

'So, what are we going to do, Robby?' Dorothy asked quietly after a long pause.

'I don't know,' he replied. 'There's one thing I can tell you for sure: we don't need to call the police in this case. Not only is there a real chance to see the psychiatrists, I can also lose my job.'

His wife nodded sadly.

'It seems so. But who will help us? Who even on earth knows what to do with demons?'

'I don't know, Dot,' Robert shrugged. 'Christians, I guess, who else? We have to look it up on the Internet.'

The couple turned on the computer and sat in front of the screen. In a couple of hours, they knew much more about exorcism, demons, and other evil spirits. Of course, the Internet was full of nonsense on this matter, but there were also some worthwhile things.

For example, one very serious company was selling the latest flamethrowers to fight zombies and other imps, and one big esoteric shop offered their customers astral axes to fight evil spirits. As it turned out, Christians also had a wide range of special tools for exorcism. And, they haven't changed much over the centuries.

Until recently, the Wilsons would have laughed out loud at all this information, but now, they had to take it very seriously.

'Where do we start?' Dorothy asked her husband.

'I don't know, dear, Christianity has existed for centuries. I think we can trust them. But on the other hand, science does not stand still,' the forecaster thought out loud. 'This flamethrower is made by a high-tech company, and thousands of people have already bought it. I checked out the reviews – nobody seems to be complaining.'

'Maybe it's because they haven't met demons and zombies yet...' his wife said doubtfully.

'Maybe, but I think it's worth a try,' Robert said. 'Let's first buy modern things, and if it doesn't work, we'll go to plan "b".'

'All right, Robby,' his wife agreed, and they went shopping together.

* * *

The next day, around noon, the Wilsons boldly went down to the bunker. The forecaster was proudly carrying a brand new flamethrower, and his wife was carrying an astral ax.

Fifteen minutes later, they were 'snailing' back up the stairs. Both looked very sad. They were followed by loud and wanton cursing from the demon. The meaning of this cursing could be summed up to a serious concern of the demon regarding his burnt chair, as well as an overall assessment of the intelligence of his visitors.

'Okay, that didn't work,' Robert said slowly after they had returned to their living room.

'Indeed,' his wife nodded, 'we didn't even set his hair on fire...'

'Well, it means that we should go to plan "b",' the forecaster said. 'Let's look and decide what we need for this.'

The Wilsons went back to their computer. For the next hour, they studied in detail the Christian methods of dealing with various demons. It mostly required a cross and a prayer, but sometimes, icons and holy water were also used. According to the reviews of some eyewitnesses, these tools were very effective against demons. Robert and Dorothy switched off the computer and sank into their chairs.

'What do you think, Robby? Should we try this method?'

'What other options do we have? We just don't have a choice, Dot,' the forecaster shrugged.

'I agree,' Dorothy nodded, 'but where can we get a cross, an icon and everything else? We don't have anything like that around here.'

Robert scratched his head and suddenly had a revelation.

'Honey, after grandpa died, there were some things left in our house,' he said. 'As I remember from my childhood, he was definitely a religious man. Maybe we'll find something useful here?'

'Great idea,' his wife said enthusiastically. 'By the way, if you remember, this demon told us that our ancestors had known a hundred times more about them than we did. Maybe it's a sign... But, where are your grandfather's things?'

'As far as I remember, there's a boarded up box and a big old chest in the far corner of our attic. Maybe it's them?' Robert suggested.

'Well, then, let's go and check it out right now,' Dorothy said and got out of her chair.

The couple moved up the stairs to the attic. In a few hours, Robert and his wife solemnly went down into the bunker again. This time, Robert was holding an old cross in one hand and a large red book called "The Gospel" in the other hand. His Dorothy was very seriously carrying some large icon. They've found it all in the old chest of Robert's grandfather.

The procession slowly made its way down the staircase flights and ceremoniously stepped into the bunker. The chair with the demon, which had been rocking in the middle of the room, suddenly stopped. The Wilsons moved toward him, carrying everything they had found in the attic.

'What's that you have there?' the demon asked loudly, and the homeowners could hear a clear concern in his voice.

Without answering the question, the couple kept going. The demon quickly jumped out of the chair and began to slowly step backwards into a corner of the bunker. There was obvious fear in his eyes. Robert and Dorothy, delighted with the success, as if on cue, began to say a prayer, which they had found on that occasion on the Internet. The demon shivered and shrank into a corner.

'Guys, I know that I said some things I shouldn't have,' he muttered, 'I hope that you don't hold grudges...'

The Wilsons' procession was inexorably drawing near. When they were only a couple of meters away, the demon suddenly screamed and disappeared into the concrete.

'Wow, it worked!' Robert couldn't believe his eyes.

'Yeah, Robby, it seems so,' Dorothy sighed in relief. 'Your grandfather really helped us! I'm so grateful to him!'

'All right, Dot, let's leave the cross and the red book with the icon in our bunker, just in case,' the forecaster suggested.

'Great idea,' his wife agreed.

Robert took the tools from the drawer and quickly attached the cross to one wall and the icon to the other. They put "The Gospel" on the shelf, on top of the crossword books and Chinese and Russian learning self-study guides.

After that, the Wilsons happily returned to their home. Having thought a little, they hung another cross from their grandfather's chest in their living room. Just in case...

* * *

There was a feast in Heaven. The angel Anil and his friends couldn't stop looking at the new design of the underground bunker. At the same time, they listened with interest to Robert's profound conversations with his wife on wonderful topics. The breakthrough in changing the minds of the forecaster and Dorothy was really impressive.

In just a few days, the Father managed to turn the situation with the underground bunker from a serious minus to a big plus. The angels wholeheartedly rejoiced and thanked Him. But, the best gratitude for the Father were the Wilsons who'd begun thinking about very important subjects.

Low Tide

There's some infinite magic of nature in tides.

Just a few hours ago, there was a completely different world on this spot – the ocean world. There were swimming colorful fish, running crabs, crawling little sea animals. But time passed, and the world of water gave way to the world of air. And now, the inhabitants of this new world are different birds and tourists, who like to walk along the water's edge.

However, the ocean gave up its territory only for a bit. In just a few hours, the land should anew vacate this place. And then, the fabulous water world will come into its own again.

And so, day after day, year after year, millennium after millennium, water and air share many places on our planet.

* * *

Arthur McKenzie was fifty-three years old and has lived alone on a small island in the ocean for almost twelve years. Arthur was once a very successful businessman, but a couple of serious financial crises that happened in the world almost destroyed his company. Arthur once believed in great and high love. However, on this path, he met mainly disappointments too. That's why Arthur, who loved the sea since his childhood, decided one day to retire from all matters.

He had enough money left to rent a small island cut off from civilization for fifty years. That was a reasonable rental period from his point of view, more than which he did not expect to live. He built a fairly comfortable house on the island and began to live there.

Solar panels served as a source of electric energy, which was quite enough to fill his needs. A small boat from the nearest town delivered the necessary products and some needful things once a month. At this time, Arthur gave his next order to the boatman. There was no phone and no Internet on the island.

Generally, the man provided food for himself. He had a small rowing boat, so he could go fishing, set crab traps, and pick oysters in the rocky part of the island. Besides, Arthur had a small vegetable garden near the house where he grew the vegetables he needed. A dozen fruit trees that the man had once planted on the island also varied his menu.

Arthur was completely fine with plain food, so he usually ordered only bread, salt, coffee, and some other basic products from the mainland. Sometimes, he also ordered some home appliances, which broke down from time to time. Of course, once

in a while, he needed new clothes. Also, Arthur was not interested in any news from the mainland. Always positive news from nature was quite enough for him.

At the beginning of his life on the island, Arthur tried to keep a diary where he wrote down various interesting things that happened to him or thoughts that he cared about. In the first couple of years, he filled up three notebooks but then stopped doing this. The man didn't show them to anyone and wasn't going to publish them. All this was exclusively for himself – the notebook for him was some kind of a close companion, with whom he could share his thoughts in the first stage of loneliness.

Occasional tourists, who sometimes sailed their yachts past the island, docked to the shore from time to time. Arthur has always been very polite to them, but he has never offered them to stay on his island. He got too used to his solitary way of life, so he was afraid that other people could easily disturb it.

At the very beginning of his life on the island, Arthur tried to stay there with a girl, whom he met just before the move. However, she had patience for only a couple of months, and then went back to the mainland. Island solitude, as it turned out, was definitely not for her.

Since then, the man has lived here all the time absolutely alone, and only five years ago, he got a dog – a good-natured Labrador Otello. That's who was absolutely excited about living on the island! Well, among other things, the ever-intelligent eyes of his new silent four-legged friend fit perfectly into the Arthur's island way of life.

* * *

The angel Els looked at his earthly ward and involuntary yawned. Actually, angels in heaven yawn very rarely. Perhaps, it's because they don't have wards like Arthur, who shut themselves from the world. Every day of the earthly life of this island hermit was almost an exact copy of his previous day. The weather was the only one thing that could break the uniformity of his life - the man had to somehow take it into account.

The angel has long lost any interest in Arthur's thoughts. It seemed as though this man created his own, very simple view of the world and learned to live with it. However, Els strongly disagreed with the conclusions of his ward. The angel looked anew at the man, who was sitting near the house with his dog and yawned again.

'Well, my dear, I see that you're really bored with your Arthur, aren't you?' he suddenly heard the Father's warm voice beside him.

The angel covered his mouth with his hand and stood up happily.

'Hello, Father,' he said, smiling broadly. 'Yeah, a little bit. The thoughts of my ward are becoming more and more simple every year.'

At this moment, the angel shrugged with some surprise.

'It seems that in five years, I won't be able to see the difference between the thoughts of Arthur and his dog.'

'Oh, dear...' the Father sighed. 'Looks like I should step in for a bit. All right, my good angel, I'll push your ward.'

'Really? Thank You!' the angel exclaimed with joy and looked at Him with interest. 'What are You going to do?'

'You'll see, my dear, you'll see,' the Father laughed. 'There's a lot of delicate work to do. You know, these hermits can be quite complicated...'

'I know,' the angel smiled.

'Well, then, just watch and wait,' said a warm voice.

* * *

The next day Arthur was gathering oysters in the rocky part of the island. There was a very low tide, and the man was walking between the rocks on the sand, which not long ago was the seabed. He found oysters attached to stones, used a large screwdriver to pick them off, and put the oysters in his bag.

The man had almost finished food gathering for today when he suddenly noticed a small dark cavity between two large stones. It was located at the very bottom of the steep slope of the island. Arthur drew closer and examined it. It was a small tunnel, a little more than a meter in diameter, which went somewhere deep inward.

'It's strange that I haven't seen it before,' the man muttered, a little surprised.

He got down on his knees and looked inside. From the outside, he could see that the tunnel was getting wider and higher. Arthur crawled into the passage, and soon, he could stand inside the cave, bending down a bit. The man wanted to move on, but it was so dark a few steps from the entrance that he could barely see anything.

As he got out of the cave, Arthur went into the house, got his flashlight, which was charging from the solar panel, and went back. There was still some time until high tide. The man climbed back to the cave and turned on his flashlight. It became clear that the tunnel went further inside the island, and it didn't get any smaller. Arthur cautiously moved on, lighting the walls.

Twenty meters later, he suddenly found himself in some underground grotto. The man threw the flashlight on the sides and looked around. It looked like a big room, almost circular in shape, about eight meters in diameter. The distance to the ceiling was almost the same.

'Wow!' Arthur said. 'It turns out I've had my own grotto on this island all this time.'

The man turned off the flashlight for a few seconds and suddenly saw a small beam of light breaking from the very top of the vault.

'It seems that there's a hole out,' Arthur thought and climbed up the rocks to look into it.

It wasn't much difficult for him to reach this opening to examine it. Its diameter wasn't big, slightly smaller than the size of his head. Arthur looked in, expecting to see outside some

familiar spot on the island. However, the things that he saw made him stunned.

The landscape outside was nothing like the island. There was a beautiful green meadow between two picturesque hills. The grass was perfectly smooth and vividly green, and the whole place sparkled in some unusual and beautiful way. He also saw three big snow-white birds flying in the sky. One of these birds landed in the meadow next to him and then... stood up and walked like a human. Arthur almost fell off the stone on which he was standing.

'What is that?' he murmured, a bit at a loss.

Meanwhile, "the bird", as if nothing had happened, walked on the grass, and Arthur realized that it was a beautiful snow-white person with large wings on his back.

'It's an angel...' the hermit whispered quietly and slid off the stone to the bottom of the grotto.

There, Arthur stood in silence for a few minutes, and then he noticed that he was already half knee-deep in water. The high tide was coming in.

He sadly looked at the opening above him and headed for the exit. The tides near his island were very high, and Arthur didn't want to remain in a dangerous trap.

'What unusual news I have today...', he mused as he walked. 'Okay, I will definitely come back and sort it all out.'

* * *

Angel Els did not yawn at all that evening. He watched his ward's thoughts with interest and couldn't stop being surprised. It seemed that in a few hours, Arthur had thought much more than he thought in the whole past year. Even his dog Othello lay a little apart today and looked at his owner with surprise.

'Well, my dear angel,' Els heard his Father's warm voice beside him, 'have we managed to stir up our hermit a little, what do you think?'

'Hello, Father!' the angel happily stood up. 'Thank you so much, it turned out great! My Arthur thought no less than a real professor today. But, what should I do with him next?'

'I have one plan, my dear. Listen... ' the Father said with a mysterious smile.

* * *

The next day, Arthur came to the cave just before the low tide. Today, he wanted to spend more time inside, so he climbed into the tunnel towards the water that was still flowing out. The man was carrying a bag with some tools: yesterday, Arthur realized that he'd better try to widen the passage to the unknown place and get out of it to the outside.

The man climbed up the rocks and clung to the small hole in the wall again. Outside, the landscape was the same, but there were no unusual white birds flying in the sky today. Arthur pulled out a big hammer with a sharp cone on one side and began to hit the stone to the left of the window. However, in a few minutes,

he had to admit that the stone wasn't budging at all. After that, the man tried to break the stone on top of the hole, but it was another failure. It seemed that the wall didn't want to let the hermit into the green meadow.

Arthur sighed, put the tool back in the bag, leaned against the hole, and just looked out. His expectations were met: soon, two large white birds appeared in the sky above the meadow. After circling several times, they landed on the clearing. This time, Arthur wasn't surprised much when he saw them getting on their feet and folding their wings behind their backs. He stared at the unbelievable scene, trying to make sense of it.

One of the angels (Arthur was now sure that they were indeed angels) was moving across the meadow in his direction. Soon, he was walking near the opening.

'Excuse me!' Arthur suddenly shouted. 'Can you talk to me, please?'

It seemed that the angel didn't hear him and walked past. However, a few seconds later, a slightly surprised face suddenly appeared in front of Arthur from the other side.

'Who are you?' asked the resident of the green meadow.

'Arthur,' the surprised man answered with one word. He couldn't take his round eyes off the unusual creature.

The bird-man had a light face, light curly hair, and it seemed that he somehow glowed from the inside.

'Hello, Arthur. My name is Els,' the winged man replied with a smile. 'Are you're just sitting here and looking out the window, huh?'

'Well, yes,' the hermit stammered a little. 'Sitting here, looking at things...'

'That's great! And I'm just flying here...' the angel said. 'All right, Arthur, have a nice day!'

After that, the light face disappeared from the opening.

'Y-you too...' the man muttered with a goofy smile.

After that, he sat by the window, lost in thought, for another twenty minutes, until the water began to flow again inside the grotto. However, he didn't see anyone passing by outside during that time anymore. Finally, with a sad sight, the hermit went down and moved to the way out.

* * *

Late in the evening, Arthur was lying on the roof of his house and looking up at the stars. Sometimes, he liked to look at the sparkling bottomless sky and think. Most frequently, he did this when he'd just moved to the island.

Angels. In fact, Arthur had heard quite a lot about angels as a child, thanks to his grandmother. She liked to tell him different stories about angels, life in heaven. Everything in her stories was beautiful, they were full of kindness and justice. Arthur had

always liked the stories of his grandmother and listened to them with pleasure.

The world, where Arthur had to live as an adult, was very different from the world that his grandmother had told him about. Perhaps, this was one of the reasons, why he decided to retire and move to the island. He didn't like many ugly things of the earthly world and the only solution he could think of was to step aside from them.

In the last couple of days, Arthur has seen something on this island, which was very difficult to believe in. And he could do that only thanks to the children's stories of his grandmother.

The man sighed. Once, he had no doubt that the world of angels exists. Then, he began to question it and, finally, completely forgot about it. And now, it seemed like he got a second chance.

* * *

The next day, Arthur arrived at the cave even earlier - one hour and fifteen minutes before the low tide. He reasoned that this time was already quite suitable to get into the grotto and spend more than two hours there until the next high tide. The hermit wasn't sure whether he could see the angels again or not, so he wanted to have some extra time.

He took a few bananas that grew on a couple of trees on his island, reached the grotto, knee-deep in water, and found an old place on a stone near the opening. Today, he had to wait for more

than an hour, and then, he saw three large white birds above the green meadow again. Two of them landed close to him.

As the angels stood up and began to walk on the grass, Arthur could see the features of their faces. They were clearly slightly different.

'So, angels can be different in appearance, too,' he said out aloud.

As he took a closer look, he realized that one of the angels who flew to the meadow, had talked to him the day before. It was Els. After a while, this angel began to walk again quite close to the hole, where Arthur was sitting.

'Excuse me, Els. Can I talk to you again, please?' the man shouted loudly through the opening.

A few seconds later, he saw the familiar light face on the other side.

'Hello, Arthur. Glad to see you!' the angel said cordially. 'I see you're sitting and watching here again.'

'W-well, that's right,' Arthur muttered. 'Yesterday, I tried to get on your side, but it didn't work out.'

'It didn't work out?' the angel asked and then, having passed through the stone wall, as if it was some light mist, he appeared inside the grotto.

Arthur's eyes flew out of his head. He stared in amazement at the snow-white guest. Meanwhile, the angel first carefully

examined the opening, gave Arthur an appraising look and then said judiciously:

'Arthur, you had no chance to get to the other side. You're much bigger than this opening.'

'Indeed,' was the only thing Arthur could say.

After that, he looked at the angel with great curiosity.

'Then, how did you get here?'

'Me?' Els raised his eyebrows. 'Well, I'm made of a different material, so I can walk through solid objects. Well, like birds that can fly through clouds. Something like that. Do you understand?'

'Y-yes-s, I think so...' the first signs of thought process began to return to the man.

'By the way, Arthur, it's time for you to go outside,' the angel said and pointed to the rising water at the bottom of the grotto. 'All of this is going to be flooded soon, and you need air to breathe.'

'Thank you,' was the only thing the man could say, and then, he obediently began to walk down on the stones.

When he went down, he looked back.

'Els, won't you come over tomorrow at low tide for a little chat?' he asked hopefully.

'All right, I'll come,' the angel simply said with a smile.

Then, he waved at Arthur and walked through the wall. And Arthur joyfully moved to the way out of the grotto.

* * *

That night, Arthur had an unusual dream. It was as if he was sitting next to his grandmother again as a little boy, listening to her story with his eyes wide open. This dream was so bright that the man was wide awake after it.

Perhaps to someone else, such a dream may not seem very strange, but Arthur saw his grandmother in a dream for the first time in his life. Considering that it had been almost forty years since her death, the dream was clearly unusual for him.

Arthur got out of bed and went out on the porch of the house. This night the moon was shining brightly. The sea was completely calm, and the lunar path was going somewhere into the distance.

'It's showing me the way to my grandmother,' Arthur thought warmly and smiled.

He stood there for a little while, admiring the beautiful night landscape, and then went back to bed.

* * *

The low and high tides on the island shifted by about forty minutes each day. So, when Arthur went into the grotto at low tide again, it was late in the afternoon. He thought that he had to wait a long time for the angel, but Els walked through the stone wall just a couple of minutes after him. They said hello and Arthur again couldn't hide his admiration.

'Wow, walking through the walls looks so unusual to me!' he clicked his tongue. 'Els, what's the difference between your body and mine?'

'Actually, they're completely different. The human body is temporary, it's intended only for a few decades of life on earth. It doesn't have a greater need - if a person wants to understand something really important in his life, there's more than enough time for that. And then, he will have exactly the same body as all the residents of heaven do,' the angel looked at Arthur. 'In fact, the aging process of human bodies and the approaching end of their lives even help people in some way. This motivates them to seek the secret of eternal life, and it's only one. As for our bodies - the bodies of the residents of the Heavenly world are completely different: they're thinner, made more from energy and live forever.'

'Forever?' Arthur was genuinely surprised.

'Don't you remember what your grandmother told you?' Els smiled. 'Actually, her words were quite realistic.'

'I thought so when I was a child,' the man said, laughing heartily. 'Are you saying that all this is true?'

'Arthur, who would want to make up all these stories about God, what do you think?' the angel answered the question with a question. 'Do you think that someone could ever send twenty-five prophets and his son to earth, give people commandments, work hundreds miracles just for the fun of it? Actually, it's a lot of work, man. Why would God do that if He just didn't want to help people?'

'Yeah, indeed...' Arthur thought and suddenly raised his eyes. 'By the way, how's my grandmother doing? Is she in heaven? I dreamt of her today...'

'Yes, she's here. She loves you and still cares about you,' Els nodded.

The man smiled warmly.

'Tell her I remember her and love her very much, too.'

'She can hear you, Arthur, she always listens to you.'

'I often thought so, too, for some reason,' the hermit smiled. 'Els, it turns out that anyone on earth can come to heaven?'

The angel nodded silently.

'What does he have to do?' the man asked.

'Read the commandments, Arthur, they remain unchanged,' the angel shrugged. 'That's why they were given to people. Be kind, honest, moral, and everything will be good.'

'And what does it look like, Els, when a man of earth turns into a man of heaven? Of course, if it's not a secret,' Arthur suddenly looked at the angel with interest. 'Does it happen all at once or gradually?'

The angel smiled broadly.

'That is not the easiest question. I'll try to answer in a language that you understand. You often go fishing, right?'

The man nodded.

'A fish breathes oxygen dissolved in water. It's like a person living on earth without any knowledge of God and our world. In this case, his interests are limited to the earthly things that surround him, the things that he can see. And he's kind of breathing them, too. Do you get this logic?' Els looked at the man.

'It's not that easy, but I hope,' Arthur nodded.

'However, if God comes into a person's life, it significantly widens his horizons. Such a person begins to think and sometimes even feel that there's something much bigger and more important beyond the earthly world. He realizes that he can live forever. It's called faith,' the angel Els looked closely at Arthur. 'A person who put his faith in God already becomes like other inhabitants of the sea – those who live in water but breathe air from another world. Like, for example, dolphins or whales.'

'I'm beginning to understand your comparison,' the man smiled, 'and I like it. It turns out that a person who has discovered heaven begins to change?'

'Yes. But faith is only the first step on the way to our world. His next steps - mainly his good deeds and right views,' the angel replied. 'People call it high morals. And if a person begins to live in accordance with the commandments of the Lord, then he like gradually moves to another type of breathing - breathing the heavenly oxygen. And this oxygen changes him and gradually fills him with the knowledge of our world.'

'And what does this person do with this knowledge?' Arthur asked with interest.

'Nothing special, he just lives on,' the angel smiled. 'However, since then he lives a happy life, with meaning and joy. Such a person doesn't need to change his life but can keep living the way he's been living. But his heart and thoughts now will always be in a different place.'

'So he can safely keep living among people?' Arthur asked in surprise.

'Yes, he can, and Heavenly Father will be just happy about this,' Els said. 'The world needs people like that. They help others to get better. Actually, the Father created the earthly world to raise spiritually beautiful people. And any help from His kind children will always please the Father.'

'Hmm... I didn't think so before,' Arthur scratched his head. 'Els, isn't the fact that I moved from all earthly things to the island prove that I'm not interested in different earthly values at all?'

The man looked at the angel with unhidden interest.

'No, Arthur, you've just swam from the big sea to your own little puddle, where no one can bother you, irritate you or make you sad. But you're still just an ordinary fish,' the angel shrugged with regret. 'I'm sorry, but you just hid from a prickly world. You didn't rely on the Father's commandments and didn't move on.'

'Well, that's news to me,' Arthur put his head down, upset. 'It looks like I made the wrong choice once.'

'Unfortunately, it's true. It's much easier to hide from injustice than to live honestly and right next to injustice every day.'

* * *

A week later, the boat was carrying Arthur from the island to the mainland. Several bags with simple things lay on the back seat, and the former island hermit sat on the bow of the boat, hugging his dog, and silently looked into the distance.

The man looked back for the final time at the island, where he had spent a big part of his life. A large poster with the words "Island for rent for not less than 5 years", which he had been making the whole day, was now on the main beach. For some reason, Arthur had no doubt that the Father and angels would bring to this island another man who would also need to understand some important things in life.

He turned away from the island and looked again in the direction of the mainland. Now, the man knew what he had to do.

Arthur really wanted to get out of the water and start breathing the heavenly oxygen. He had a dream to be near his wonderful grandmother, the good angel Els, and the Father one day. And he was ready to fight hard for it. Needless to say that his grandmother, the angel, and the Father in Heaven also wanted it very, very much.

The Year 2060.

Mini Fairy Tale.

Once upon a time, there was a planet in the universe. And ten billion people lived on it. All these people were great photographers and videographers. They had beautiful smartphones-cameras with smart photo editors, and quadcopters that could fly anywhere to shoot anything their owners wanted.

There were eleven billion bloggers on this planet (well, some people had two blogs). All of them had subscribers, and bloggers told them some stories, taught them, shared their impressions, lifestyle, views, and so on. In return, they wanted to get attention, and, preferably, become famous and get as many fans as possible. Of course, they also wanted to get money for their labor.

The locals didn't like to study the history of their planet. In their opinion, the story began with the first smartphone and continued here and now, mostly in the virtual world. Before that, their planet was pretty boring. Well, that was what some top bloggers said.

The inhabitants of this planet barely heard of different philosophers and sages of the past. And this was more than logical for them – what smart things could they ever learn from an ancient man who had never seen a simple computer?

These people didn't believe in God. Of course, they suspected that he was the first and very cool blogger on their planet. But the inhabitants didn't understand why he brought so many strange restrictions to people? Well, he was a bit weird, that's for sure...

In general, this generation did nothing *so* wrong. They just wanted to live by their own rules, speak about themselves, earn money in some way for themselves, and make their dreams come true.

* * *

And the previous generation on this planet is already gone. These people did not have bloggers, and those who broadcasted about something to other people learnt to do it for many years. They read hundreds of different books by their wise predecessors and gained knowledge and wisdom from them. And only then the most talented and bright people could begin to broadcast to others.

Not all of them were great photographers and videographers. And those who actually were, spent a decent part of their lives mastering this profession. In order to show others some beautiful photos and videos, these people often moved far away from home and traveled to the farthest corners of the Earth. They looked for interesting places and situations, carried heavy equipment, and often lived in conditions, which were quite uncomfortable.

That generation had their own heroes, philosophers, sages. Those of their predecessors who have done a great deal for other people on the planet... And, as a rule, their acts were completely selfless. In schools, where the inhabitants of that time were educated, from an early age, they were taught to admire those people instead of themselves.

A significant part of this generation believed in God. As in some higher meaning of human existence. Those people valued

kindness, modesty, honesty, morality and condemned selfishness, coldness, lies, and immorality.

However, that generation is gone.

* * *

And there was also God on earth and above it, the One, who had once created this planet. And He could do anything, but it didn't mean that much to Him.

The only thing that was important to Him was His real children – people who were spiritually close to Him, people with big and warm hearts. And apart from kind and sincere hearts, God had little interest in anything on this planet. Some of His real children had come to His house a long time ago, when there were few people on the planet who could simply read and write. But it didn't really matter to God.

And now, God was looking at His planet, which once looked like a big interesting book. He had always found something to read there before. However, today, this planet looked more like a book cover – a bright, beautiful, sparkling, but just cover. There were no interesting pages in it anymore. And now, for some reason, God increasingly looked at the large switch in the corner. At the switch, that turns off the planets...

(to be continued)

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