

Ivica Đikić

Apparition

Translated by Ivana Ostojčić

PART THREE

FOG

Professor Kirgulla Batur, PhD

Department of Dogmatic Theology and Mysticism

Attn. Prefect of the Order's Doctrine Council, Professor Avil Lahnicki, PhD

IN LIEU OF REPORT

Dear and distinguished Mr Professor,

Let me offer my apologies right from the beginning: this report will leave you disappointed regarding the trust you placed in me by sending me less than a month ago to the Parish of Pom. As you surely know, you gave me a task to spend no more than four weeks there, twenty-eight days, after which, within ten days from my return, I should offer my unequivocal conclusion regarding the character of the peculiar events there. Or, more accurately and exclusively: to inform you of the character of the continuous gathering of animals on the hill of G., after the recent removal of the electric fence installed long ago around the hill by Reverend Leopold Hort. He, as you are also aware, has decided to end his life a few days before I arrived in Pom.

Instead of an official report and any solid conclusion, I hereby send my original diary entries about my four-week sojourn in Pom. These scanty and unpretentious sketches are all I can send you about this case. Another option, the one I gave serious thought, was to send you nothing. I decided to do this to avoid potential misunderstandings and inevitable subsequent explanations. Besides, my ego strongly opposes confessing to twenty-eight lost days and the utter disaster of the mission you entrusted me with clear expectations, as so many times before. These notes, at least to me, create an illusion that the days spent in Pom did not go to complete waste.

To sum up. I failed to fulfil your expectations, but perhaps someone else might succeed – someone wiser, wittier and more informed than me about mysticism, dogma and many other things – and perhaps someone might find my attempts helping, as well as my messy drafts, which I am sending you, among other things, for that very reason. I would love this to happen some time, because since I returned from Pom, I cannot stop thinking about what I experienced there. I would like to live to see the enigma unravel both out of professional reasons and out of common human curiosity.

I trust your disappointment with my failure will be somewhat alleviated by unusually difficult and complex circumstances of this case. This was not yet another in a series of routine verifications of the Blessed Virgin's apparitions, whose rejection and proclamation of blasphemy do not require more than a few days and several conversations with self-proclaimed seers and their ambitious finders and prompters.

As you know from the start, here I was unable to talk to the seers. I did not speak their language, and language, as you also know, is the fundamental means of my work, the tool I use to penetrate the essence, to unmask the frauds and illusions or to unearth the source of living faith. I attempted to compensate for this handicap the best I could, but nothing was enough. There is no literature, or at least I am not aware of such literature, that might be of use in this matter, at least to indicate a direction I should take. I was alone in the hands of improvisation and tapping in the dark.

Also, I should stress that the chief priests did not exactly jump through hoops to help me. I say this hesitantly, but there seems to have been deliberate obstruction in certain segments. I do not mean to speculate about the motifs for such a treatment of me and of this particular task, nor in this do I seek justification for my failure. I only want you to know that this did not go unnoticed, and it is upon you to discuss this in suitable instances should you deem necessary.

Yours loyally,

Sister K.

DAY ONE

I arrived in Pom on the eve of a rainy and gloomy day. In the convent I was welcomed by Sister Olusa Nite. She accommodated me in one of the five equal rooms, small and chilly, with white walls, not slept in for a long time. A bed, a wardrobe, a small desk, a chair, a table lamp, a vase with a bouquet of flowers. Everything is clean and fresh. The bed linen smells of detergent.

It took me more than five hours to drive from the capital to Pom. I am tired. I told Sister Olusa I would skip dinner. She did not like that. She made an effort, she prepared meat and forest mushrooms, she was expecting she get a chance to immediately confess at dinner table, to tell me all she deems important for me to take into account in considering the mysterious events here. She is the only dweller in Pom who knows who I am and why I am here. She wants to take advantage of it, although she probably still does not know what precisely what her goal is.

I remained indifferent to her impatience. Tomorrow I will let her talk, I need her help and it would be reckless to turn her into an enemy. Besides, as things considered, I will have plenty of enemies in everyone and everything else.

Before I went to bed and started writing these words, I opened the window and looked at G. Noise and barely audible clump and jingle of animals came from the direction of the hill. I did not see them, but I could roughly determine their route towards the dark looming protrusion called G. I did not see, so I cannot speak of numbers, but I am certain there were many.

DAY TWO

Sister Olusa immediately divided what she was about to tell me into two categories. What she saw herself and what she heard from others over the course of less than two years she has spent serving in Pom.

She saw Reverend Leopold Hort hanged, the scene that would haunt her forever. She testified his pre-mortal anxiety over the new invasion of animals on G. She testified, even to a certain extent participated in his desperate preparations to, shortly before his death, destroy in a fire hundreds of animals at once, but she was not with him on the hill when he tried to do so.

I am saying 'over the new invasion', because the animals first surged on the hill around twenty-five years ago. I just heard, i.e. read, about this, and only recently, when Reverend Leopold Hort died. Sister Olusa has heard more and more reliably.

Twenty-five years ago, Reverend Hort stuck pillars around the hill every three or four metres and stretched a tall electric wire fence. That way he – as it proved, only temporarily – stopped the transformation of G. into an animal pilgrimage site by way of a very brutal method. It has not been determined how or why the animals started climbing on G., just as we do not know why they again rushed there after the villagers knocked down Hort's deadly fence, but the reason is assumingly, with great certainty, the same. I am supposed to find out this reason.

Sister Olusa heard with her own ears what Reverend Leopold was saying on the phone the day before he died, and he was talking to Albert Koc, brother of Reverend Jokiam Koc.

"Who is Jokiam Koc? Who is Albert Koc?" I asked.

"Jokiam served here in Pom with Reverend Leopold when the animals first appeared. He is no longer alive. Albert, his brother, lives in the capital and works for President Naht. They were both born in Pom. Their parents died. They have no one here."

"What happened to Jokiam?"

"He has been dead for twenty-five years. They say he killed himself. That is what they say, but I am not certain if he did."

She heard village rumours that the death of Father Jokiam Koc was somehow related to the events on the hill, but nobody knows how. Or at least she doesn't know if anybody knows. And how could this Jokiam, or anyone else, even have anything to do with all those animals and their such focused movement?

"What did Reverend Leopold talk about with Albert Koc? Why did he even talk with him?"

"Albert Koc writes decrees for President Naht. He wrote both decrees on our events. Reverend somehow found out. And this greatly disturbed him."

"What did they talk about?"

“I just heard Reverend Leopold’s words. He kept mentioning Jokiam. Jokiam, Jokiam, Jokiam. He asked Albert Koc whether he wanted him, Reverend Leopold, to end up like Reverend Jokiam ended up long ago. He asked if with his decrees he wanted to make him choose Jokiam’s fate.”

Sister did not hear Albert Koc’s words on the other side, but she saw how Reverend Hort completely changed after this conversation: he lost the will to live. She could not prevent him from plummeting.

Tomorrow I shall write to the Order Authority to urgently deliver all they have on Jokiam Koc. And I checked, although it was not easy: Mister Albert Koc indeed wrote both recent President’s decrees on the events here, as well as all other President’s decrees.

DAY THREE

I climbed on G. after lunch. On my own, although Sister Olusa offered to accompany me: she had never been on the hill. I told her I wanted to go alone the first time. I walked in a long row, past animals climbing down the hills. Horses, dogs of all sizes, donkeys, ducks, deer, different rodents, peacocks, cats of all sorts, wolves, sheep, mouflons, frogs, boars... Some I couldn’t even name. And all kinds of birds above and around us. Everything is peaceful, slow, almost solemn, especially on the top of the hill.

It took me a good hour to get to the top. My muscles and bones are not what they used to be, when I could walk and climb for days. Not a breath of wind up there, the air seemed to be standing still. Not a trace of faeces or other dirt. I felt no special smell or stench.

I did the same the animals do: when I got to the large stone crucifix on an elevated concrete plinth, I looked up, where most of the animals blissfully stared, paying absolutely no heed of me. They showed no sign of noticing me. Nothing happened. Nothing was clear to me. Still, perhaps it was way too early to be clear.

On my way back I was caught in the rain and soon I was drenched to the bone. The animals didn’t mind the rain. Every now and then I turned to glance at the hill: nothing was changing.

Olusa was expecting me to say something when I returned. There was nothing to say.

This morning, before going to G., I wrote to the Order Authority regarding Jokiam Koc. So far I have not got a reply, not even that they received my request for their documentation. I was expecting a speedier response, given the priority and urgency of the task that brought me here. Or am I simply overestimating my importance and the importance of this task?

DAY FOUR

I went to the hill with Sister Olusa. Everything was mostly the same as yesterday. Sister would not kneel and direct her gaze with the animals to the same imaginary spot somewhere halfway between us and the celestial vault. I didn't kneel then either. We sat for hours on the plinth and followed animal behaviour and movements. Olusa was sincerely stunned and kept repeating the sign of the cross, all until I forbade her. Her behaviour was unnerving.

A day has passed and I am none the smarter. Nothing will dawn on me simply by observing and listening. I have to provoke something.

The Order Authority did not respond today either. Tomorrow I will repeat my plea. I do not believe the documents will provide anything useful in detecting the animalistic hillside mystery. But the alleged suicide of Jokiam Koc took place shortly after the first appearance of animals in Pom, more accurately, shortly after Reverend Hort desecrated G. with electricity and death, and Jokiam was the only one living with Reverend Hort in the Pom monastery at the time when these strange events came about.

It would be a mistake on my part to fully reject the possibility that the Jokiam Koc files indeed contain something that might serve as a sort of a signpost to unravel the animal mystery. So few straws I can hold on to, at least for a moment, that I have no right to neglect any of them. Nor can I so far fathom why or on behalf of what I would forsake any potential lead to the conclusion. As much as the lead may seem vague or deceptive.

DAY FIVE

Fever and heavy cough have made me bedridden. I have no appetite, although Sister Olusa is a remarkable cook. My arm and leg muscles hurt, which makes me unfocused and nervous. A day lost.

The rain was the death of me, the rain that is now leaving my body as sweat drenching and sticking my skin and my nightgown. I will try to sleep, that is all I can.

DAY SIX

Today was, at times, worse than yesterday. Sister Olusa brought a doctor. I got medications and I need to rest until my health improves. Through the window I saw that the hill and everything around it remained unchanged. And so it will remain, unless I do something.

Another day lost, except that in the afternoon I managed to send a reminder to the Order Authority regarding the Reverend Jokiam Koc files. Perhaps I was too bold in the letter, but the helplessness and inability to pull myself together unsettle me.

DAY SEVEN

I am losing now the third day in a row, aware that nervousness, occasionally growing into anger over physical weakness and the clock that is ticking while I am not moving, will not lead me to recovery. But nevertheless I cannot defy the outbursts of need to tear myself apart and abandon my own skin or simply explode out of misery.

Another day and no answer from the Order Authority. Perhaps the feverish dizziness and overall malaise have made me prone to paranoid thoughts, but this silence about a quarter of a century old case is starting to grow strange. What could possibly be the reason for such mystery? Except the fact that Father Jokiam allegedly committed suicide.

In my current investigations and verifications of rumours about apparitions, I was presented with much eerier documents and I faced events incomparably more horrific than suicide, before which one can only remain numb and tongue-tied. Or it was not suicide, rumours had it, and Sister Olusa also heard?

Did Jokiam Koc see or find out something he was not supposed to know so he was punished and then someone made it look like a suicide? This is a too strongly accusing a thought. But why the silence and the hiding, if it is hiding?

DAY EIGHT

I just read my last night's record and realised I strayed off course and my task in Pom. I am here to discover why animals gather at the hillside. Only because of this! I am not here to investigate the deaths of neither Jokiam Koc nor Leopold Hort. I should bear this in mind.

I cannot allow two tragic events to drag me into a labyrinth of their probable insolvability, which in fact means incoherence with the events on the hill. Except in case the Reverend Jokiam files contain something, which I firmly doubt, that would implicate him – in a so far unfathomable way – in the unprecedented animal invasion in Pom and that it was his obsession with it, together with all other, perhaps more profound reasons, that made him take his own life. And if that was indeed so, did the Order help him see the way out in a noose around his neck?

And here we go again, meddling into police work. I have to stay away from it! Because even if it were so, if Reverend Jokiam was, in fact, in a strange way a victim of distant events on the hill, a question remains I should be interested in: how come he, or any other man for that matter, could be implicated in the animal affair?

I feel like I am coming back to life. I had a nice dinner. Sister Olusa made stew and polenta. I can taste food again. Thank God, the worst seems to have passed.

DAY NINE

A letter came from the Order Authority. It was signed by Chief Pumaj Sin himself. “Dear Sister Kirgulla, after examining your request in detail, we have decided to deny you access to the Order’s files regarding Reverend Jokiam Koc, our late brother. Reviewing the files we regretfully concluded that they contain nothing that you might find useful in the matter of utmost importance that led you to Pom. Wishing you a lot of success and Lord’s blessings, we hereby extend our kindest regards.”

The reply was an unpleasant surprise. But I decided not to dwell on it. It is useless and leads to nowhere.

Today I took a stroll around the village for a breath of fresh air and to soak in the sun, after four days of confinement. I passed by several men and women. Their gaze was inquisitive and untrusting. They probably do not know who I am and were not specifically informed why I came here, but my uniform is enough to cause caution, and sometimes even make them cross to the other side of the road. Sister Olusa says it has been like this ever since Hort’s electric fence some fifty days ago killed seventeen circus animals and since President Naht, in fact Albert Koc, got involved in the matter with his engaged decrees, but the turn could not be so sudden. It had to be lingering a long time. One way or another, no one was saddened by Reverend Hort’s death.

Even if I knew how these people could help me, it is hard to believe they would.

DAY TEN

I shall take Sister Erika, the seer from Cuvarak, to the hill. This dawned on me as soon as I woke up, so I am immediately writing it down. I became friends with her when I was spending six months in Cuvarak a few years ago. I was gathering materials and writing a book there, still unpublished, about the segment of apparitions there related to miraculous healings of people mentally unbalanced and in different ways disconnected from reality. I will take Sister Erika to G. to see if something happens. I shall immediately travel to her.

I returned from Cuvarak two hours ago. Sister Erika reluctantly agreed. I took me many hours of persuasions and pleas. If there was someone else in my place with the same idea, they would be immediately denied, unless the Order Authority requested her to do so.

She repeated several time she was only doing it for me. She was expecting me to withdraw my plea out of courtesy, but I did not. She can come only the day after tomorrow. She insists we go to G. in the night, so that no one would recognise her, which would immediately spark rumours detrimental for both her and the sanctuary in Cuvarak. We quickly agreed we will not inform anyone about our agreement. No one would understand. Perhaps rightfully so.

DAY ELEVEN

A whole day of nerve-racking expectation of Erika's arrival. I could concentrate on nothing, not even food, which worried Sister Olusa.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes. Everything is all right."

"Did you by any chance reach some, God forbid, disturbing discoveries? You seem restless."

I told her I was expecting the arrival of Sister Erika. I explained it had to remain our secret. She was at first baffled by the plan. It took her a while to compose herself and then she came to the brink of anger.

"Do you really think the Blessed Virgin appears on the hill?"

“I do not think anything. I am just trying to eliminate the possibility.”

“It is blasphemy to think that there may be such an option.”

“Please allow me to judge of blasphemy, as I do know a bit more about it than you,” I had to rely on my professional authority. Olusa said nothing, but her remark started to vex me.

What if Erika’s climb on G. does not cause a change of any kind? What do I even expect, what kind of change? For the Blessed Virgin to appear and explain everything to her so she can convey the message? That would be too simple and somewhat banal a solution to this case, but I cannot know unless I try.

Will I be able to contest the supernaturalism of the animal invasion if Sister Erika does not get a sign from the above and everything remains the same? If I am unable to contest it is that an acknowledgment? Acknowledgment of what?

DAY TWELVE

Sister Erika arrived late in the afternoon, sullen and official. She was not in the mood for conversation and social contact. We agreed to go to the hill around midnight. The night will be bright. After that she retreated in her room. She only asked for a pitcher of water, an apple and half a little cup of honey.

She is disdainful because she did not reject me while she had the chance, because she did not make up a decent reason to send me off empty-handed from Cuvarak. I pretend and will continue to pretend not to notice her electrified detachment, like I do not pretend Sister Olusa’s voiceless resistance. I need them.

I urged Olusa to be kind to Erika. To ask no questions and not to tire her. Also, I warned her again not to spread rumours around the village about Erika’s presence, and especially not why she is here. I think she took me seriously.

DAY THIRTEEN

I am writing this at the very end of the day, with fatigue dissipating my attention as wind chases away clouds. I did not sleep for almost forty hours. Things yet need to settle. I write only the gist, i.e. what seems to be the gist.

Sister Erika could not do away with the astonishment as we were climbing on G., as we were treading to the top together with the animals. She kept repeating “My God, My God...”, making the sign of the cross and praying silently. I was calm, although her behaviour irritated me.

When we reached the top, she kneeled below the cross, among the sheep and wolves staring upwards, clasped her hands and started to pray out loud. At that point, all the animals, as if commanded, lowered their gaze and relaxed their necks stretching upwards, to the sky. They did not move, but mild commotion was stirred, a sudden and general drop in focus. I observed, sitting nearby, and after several minutes I told Sister Erika to stop praying for a second. As soon as she was silent, the animals petrified again and looked to the sky. Erika then started to say her prayers out loud again and the animals again relaxed and their eyes started to glance sideways.

We repeated this several times: every time the same thing!

On our return to the monastery we were silent. We did not dare say a thing. This was not the outcome I expected.

I will get some sleep and then, around three o'clock in the morning, in three or four hours, we will again climb the hill. I managed to persuade Erika. We will take Sister Olusa as well.

DAY FOURTEEN

We went to the hill tonight: Sister Erika, Sister Olusa and myself. We prayed together and took turns in spoken prayer for two hours, kneeling among warm animal bodies.

The same thing happened. The animals did not look up while we prayed, but stared to the ground, to other animals or simply to the dark. Some of the animals closed their eyes. When the three of us stopped praying and got up, the animals immediately returned to their original state of bliss, mild hypnosis and stretched necks.

I therefore noticed a pattern and made progress, I just do not know towards and away from what.

Sister Erika in the afternoon travelled back to Cuvarak. Upon her return she was in a much better mood than on her arrival, although she was aghast with the hillside experience. Perhaps even a bit frightened.

“What do you think,” I asked her finally, “why did the Virgin not appear if she was there?”

“There is definitely something there, but we do not know if it has anything to do with an apparition or anything of the sort, let alone the Blessed Virgin’s apparition.”

“Do you believe she would appear if she were there?”

“I cannot fathom how she would appear to the animals while I am standing there, without me seeing and feeling what they see and feel. But anything is possible.”

“Well, not even people standing and kneeling by your side while the Virgin appears to you do not see or feel a thing.”

“True. But do not think it means that there are no apparitions on the hill.”

“Of course not. What happens when we start praying?”

“As though our prayer removes them from a pleasant frequency. As though it interrupts the flow of whatever it is that they climb there for. Or as though whatever it is up there turns their back on them as soon as it hears human prayer.”

“Yes, but how? How is that possible?”

“I helped as much as I could. The rest is upon you. I wish you all the luck.”

DAY FIFTEEN

This morning I prayed out loud on the hill again and the same thing happened. The animals looked everywhere but up and they were relaxed like an army dismissed.

How long could they keep before they became nervous, enraged, or before they dispersed? What amount of prayer could they bear before they surrendered and gave up? What is their patience like and how big is it? Will they become aggressive and dangerous to humans if our prayer over a longer period of time disrupts their ritual, so to speak?

I am afraid I may not be able to grab hold of anything firmer than this almost invisible thread of hope that a plausible explanation might arrive. This fragile premonition stemming from the animals’ response to human prayer is the only thing I can and should hold on to. Nothing else to do but to persist in this to the utmost limits, God willing.

DAY SIXTEEN

I am gathering people around the village for a longer period of prayer on the hill. The sceptic Sister Olusa is reluctantly helping me. I estimate I will need around twenty people who will take their duty responsibly and exchange in prayer for a day or two or three, as long as it takes, if it proves that animals give up or indicate that they might possibly abandon the hill. I know, it is hard to attract so many villagers even to a fine dinner at the monastery, let alone my plan, but I have to try.

How can I protect the people if the animals lose control and charge on them? There is no way to protect ourselves with such indifference in numbers. I expose myself to risk and uncertainty, I will also expose all the people who agree to follow me, but I have to take this responsibility with confidence that everything will be alright. That is not the only or the worst thing gnawing me anyway.

What will it mean if the animals leave the hill due to our persistent prayer? Will this be an acknowledgment of the supernatural, of an apparition? What will it mean if they prove more patient than our capacities for prayer predict? Will this also be a sign of the presence of something higher, but differently higher in relation to the human capacity of understanding and imagination, if we can even discuss this in a manner suitable to serious and rational people?

I do not know the answers, but prayer is the only thing I can do and then wait for something to happen to make it easier for me to interpret the events. Something like the animals' response to Sister Erika's prayer, but a step or two further, more articulate and unequivocal.

DAY SEVENTEEN

In less than two days we have managed to barely get three villagers ready to accompany us to the hill. I am broken in my effort to be serious and convincing as I explain to people what I want from them and why. Why, why? People are untrusting to me and Sister Olusa regardless of the plea we approach them with. Many of them even refused to listen or take us in. This is more and deeper than mistrust. Reverend Leopold must have remained a bad memory. But I have neither time nor reason to delve deeper in the details of that relationship, especially since the villagers are unwilling to say anything bad about the reverend. Or good, for that matter.

I suppose they are aware that any conversation might soon reach the point where they would have to face their share in whatever Hort did to cause their chilling hatred. Whatever this may be.

I now know it will be hard to recruit that many people as I initially had in mind. As many as they finally are, I cannot give up on my experiment. It would vex me to the end of my life if had not tried everything to set the record straight. Another occasion is not likely to arise.

DAY EIGHTEEN

Today only one new member of the hillside prayer group. He asked for money and in advance, that is – immediately. In my despair, I said yes. His name is Barutanski and he is a retired officer. Sister Olusa later told me that the man, together with a companion of his, asked her money to take Reverend Leopold's noose off his neck. The other man's name, if I remembered correctly, was Blit and he suddenly died three days after Reverend Leopold. Barutanski apparently did not take it as a warning or a warning threatening enough, although he is extremely superstitious, like all the people here.

Barutanski is more talkative and approachable than other people of Pom, but he also retreated when I instinctively started to direct conversation to why the village held such a grudge on Reverend Leopold and what he knew about Jokiam Koc. I do not believe there is a collective vow of silence. It is much rather a chained nature of individual fears. And shame. I do not have enough time or power to deal with this.

DAY NINETEEN

Another two came in the morning, they heard from Mr Barutanski I was paying for taking part in praying on the hill. I paid them as well. But I no longer have any money, which will make drafting and recruiting new people very difficult. This was confirmed immediately: all the other people I approached by the end of the day rejected me.

Sister Olusa still follows my efforts with concern and great distance. She participates only as much as it takes not to cause my reproachful looks. And if she is like this, what am I expecting from others?!

DAY TWENTY

It rained most of the day, which made my search for new members of the 'research expedition' difficult. Only one young girl joined us, but she needed no particular persuasion. In confidence she admitted she

was pregnant. I was the first one she told. She does not know what to do because, she says, late Leopold Hort is the father of her child. The reverend always liked children and young people. She will come with me to the hill and pray for the heavens to send her a sign what to do. I am in no position to choose and to analyse the motives of the very few who want to accompany me. The motive is unimportant for my needs.

If the girl is saying the truth, and I believe it to be so, I can understand the villagers' treatment of Reverend Hort better. They think it will be easier to cope with their share in his sins if they forget his name and bury deep inside anything reminding them of him. I should best forget too. This is not why I am here. This is not why I am here!

With Olusa and myself, this makes nine of us. It is a miracle and pure luck I managed to persuade these seven people, or six, since the alleged mother of Hort's child needed no persuasion or pleas.

However, they still have time to betray and trick me.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

Three more. With so much difficulty, imploring, all kinds of promises. Perhaps I would have had more success if I had assaulted them with threats, fear-mongering and spitting promises of hell on all those who would not follow me, who would not answer my call. These folks do not succumb to pleas and humble honesty. They are moved only by cold-blooded blackmail, concrete or abstract, or attracted by the smell of easy money.

Now it is too late, but they should have been tamed mercilessly, and not shown weakness. When they smell weakness and when they are the majority, they cannot contain their vulture instincts.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

Tomorrow morning at seven o'clock we go. Twelve of us. The gathering point is in front of the church. I am so tired I cannot keep my eyes open: Olusa and I have been preparing food and water, tents and blankets, firewood and medications all day.

I need to get some good sleep. God, grant me patience and composure tomorrow!

DAY TWENTY-THREE

Since daybreak, the fog has shrouded Pom like milk engulfs veal liver before frying. Although I should not have, since people in the arranged time could not leave their homes anyway, I sent out a circular message that our action is postponed for same time tomorrow.

Never in my life have I seen such fog. If I had opened my window, it would have crept into my room and in a moment I would not be able to see my reflection in the mirror. During the day it released the ground and the Derim lake off its grasp, but then it set onto the roofs and tree tops. From my window I could no longer see G. or the animals. By the rare and muffled sounds arriving from that side, I conclude that the animals are still there, nothing has changed, fog did not hinder them.

Olusa nevertheless hoped that fog was sent to chase the animals away, to help them retreat with honour so that no one should see their defeat.

If this really happens, what should I conclude regarding the character of the events on G.? How should I interpret them? But I may not need to bother: if Olusa's hopes come true, no one will be interested anymore in either Pom or the events on the hill. No one but me.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

Another fog. Denser and icier than yesterday, but now unrelentingly tied to the ground. Everyone staying put.

Sister Olusa is slowly abandoning her theory of fog. She is losing patience, her nerves are strung. Fog gets into my head, my ears, my stomach, my pores.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

No change. Another night and another day in captivity of fog, in captivity of waiting. People do not leave their homes. Everything is paralysed by thick layers of intangible cotton. Nothing can be done, no one is even trying.

Sister Olusa has even managed to contact the State Institute of Hydrometeorology. They said they cannot be one hundred per cent precise, but this veil does not seem to be lifted anytime soon.

Everything conspired against my mission. Even if fog does dissipate, who knows what comes next to shock and impede me. Perhaps fog was just the first and mildest warning.

DAY TWENTY-SIX

This morning I sent a plea to prefect Dr Lahnicki to grant me an extension of my sojourn in Pom until fog rises. And it seems as though it will never rise, it will simply engulf this place, make it a grey dot on the map of the world.

“But what if fog is a sign? A message to us? If it was not sent to chase the animals away unnoticeably, but to provoke us to give up?” said Olusa during lunchtime. She sounded cautious. I did not tell her that I, of course, had the same idea myself. I asked her if she wanted to tell me that we should cancel the hillside praying. She replied she thought we did not stand a chance in vying with the “enemy” we do not see, hear, know. It would be suicide to stay in this unequal position.

“Last night in bed I was suddenly transfixed by fear. My heart kept pounding like I would burst. I wanted to scream and cry for God, but I could not utter a sound. No words came out. Perhaps we should stop causing bigger troubles,” she said, encouraged by my flailing spirit. She looked at me pleadingly. I said nothing.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

The prefect quickly refused my request. With no explanation. I would not be surprised if he were guided by the same thought as Olusa: is fog a signal, a warning, a message?

How can I know if they are wrong?

I am left with tomorrow. If the morning is bright and if everything goes without troubles, ten to fifteen hours of prayer on the hill, I am convinced, will be enough to set the record straight. I can tell already that my plan fell through. Olusa realised the same, and was suddenly in a good mood again. She made a real feast for the two of us tonight. She even found a bottle of wine. She was relieved. I can understand her perfectly.

Why do I not feel relieved? Will I ever?

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

A miracle did not happen. Fog remained as relentless as gravity. I notified people that we were giving up on the plan, that they no longer had to wait for fog to vanish. I packed my things, although I do not know when I will be able to leave Pom, when fog will let me leave. Impatience and unrest will not be of any use.

I shall seek peace and encouragement in Saint Teresa of Avila, like I usually do in moments of lassitude and temptation. She always chases fog and dejection away from me.

DAY TWENTY-NINE

Fog started to wane a bit after noon and disappeared completely in the next hour. A day shone, made so bright and clear by some peculiar light that it immediately erased the memory of the six-day foam that filled our entire world day and night.

“Perhaps it was a sign,” said Sister Olusa, following me to the car.

“I am afraid we will never know.”

“I hope we will not,” she said with a sigh.

Yesterday the Order Authority informed her to prepare to leave. They gave her a few days. She does not know where she will be transferred. She held me tight while we said goodbye, rejoiced and relieved by my failure.

PART FOUR

SHAME

We paid a visit to Jokiam for the first time in a monks' sanatorium in S. some twenty or more days after we learned he was being treated there, those days, as far as I can remember, when the hill was being cleared, under Reverend Leopold's command, of killed birds. His father, mother and myself came. On the way there we were nervous, we did not know what to expect, but we sensed it would not be pleasant, encouraging and invigorating.

Mother manifested her nervousness with constant failed attempts at starting a conversation on anything, father, on the other hand, resiliently kept quiet until, halfway there, we were stopped by a road accident. Never before have I seen anything similar: he started to swear and rage against the whole world, as though he suddenly discovered a general conspiracy against himself. Our agonising uncertainty was unexpectedly prolonged, and he prepared for the trip to last so and so, and every minute over that amount destroyed his entire concept and made him temporarily lose the power to control his thoughts and actions. I am afraid this could have spread on to Emanuel, but to a much larger extent and in combination with other difficulties. I just wanted to be someplace else, alone, surrounded by books and dusk. Perhaps this too spread on to Emanuel.

We were sitting in Jokiam's tiny room in the old sanatorium building. A nun escorted us to the room. For the most part of our half an hour's visit, we sat in unpleasant silence, looking away and feeling ashamed over the situation we were in and the misfortune that befell us.

"What happened to you, Jokiam?" mother asked.

"I'm being treated, I'm much better," he answered automatically. He was looking at his interwoven fingers, strangely still.

"Do you feel any pain?"

"Not anymore, I'm healthy. I just need to gain more strength in my muscles and my bones."

"Where did you feel pain? Why did they bring you here?"

"In my lungs," he uttered. I could tell he lied.

"It's the rain," I said and Jokiam nodded conspiringly.

“What rain?” father asked.

“Jokiam was caught in that big rain a month ago. I saw him soaked to the bone.”

“Why didn’t you tell us then?” mother jumped at me. I kept quiet and looked down.

“Why didn’t you say so?” father asked somewhat more calmly, but nevertheless precipitously.

“I didn’t think it mattered. People are caught in the rain, but that doesn’t mean they get sick.”

We kept quiet until we said goodbye. Mother and father kissed Jokiam and I shook his hand. I could see he was relieved when father opened the door for us to go.

The second and the last time we saw him was in the sanatorium room seven weeks later, ten days before he died. Mother, father and me again. Another nervous jaunt with only one common thought mother was trying to hide both from us and from herself: to get it over with as soon as possible and return home.

“Will you be out soon and get back to Pom?” mother asked Jokiam.

“I don’t know, they haven’t said anything yet. Ask Reverend Leopold, he knows everything,” he muttered. He was more anxious and fatigued than the first time. He smelled of urine and basic human filth. He hadn’t taken a bath in a long time. His eyes occasionally stayed closed for a strangely long time, as though he extinguished, and he came around only when someone stretched out their hand to touch him or was just about to say his name a bit more loudly. He hadn’t had a good sleep in a long time. He was waiting for our too long thirty minutes to run out.

“Why Reverend Leopold, my son?” asked our worried mother.

“He knows everything. You should ask him.”

“What do you do here all day?” I asked, only to interrupt yet another long silence.

“I pray. You interrupted my prayer. I discovered beautiful new Marian devotions.”

“I also pray all day,” said mother.

I stayed with him for a few more minutes after mother and father left the room. I asked what had happened the day it rained. He was quiet for a while.

“Everything happened and you wouldn’t follow me,” he said finally and asked in the same breath:

“Albert, are you ashamed of me?”

I said nothing. He did not look as if he was expecting an answer, but he nevertheless burst out: "Are you ashamed of me, are you ashamed of me?"

"I am ashamed," I blurted out in my misery, "but I don't know what I'm ashamed of exactly. Tell me, so that at least I know."

"Do you want me to die, do you want me gone?"

I turned and stormed out of the room. He gave me nothing, just like the first time. He did not mention a letter of his I was supposed to get. He did not say he was expecting anything from me or that he ever had, except that I accompany him on that rainy day, but he did not accuse of that either, he seemed more sorry that no one witnessed his experience. Perhaps it would have been different if I had come after him, if someone had been by his side on the hill that day.

"Dear Albert, Reverend Leopold paid a visit yesterday," Jokiam wrote in his second letter which – I should stress again – I did not see before inspector Lau Burmeck gave it to me. This Hort's visit, like all other of his visits to the hospitalised Jokiam, were not registered in the records of the sanatorium in S., so we do not know when it happened. If we knew, we could determine more accurately when my brother wrote these lines and mine and our family's registered visits to Jokiam could not be related so nonchalantly with the time of writing these two letters, especially the other one. But, alas, we have no such records and I do not think it a coincidence. Generally speaking, the only coincidence in everything that happened to me was the fact that I was the only one available to the persecutors.

"Reverend brought the same rope again. He said my illness was incurable and my situation hopeless. Hellish torment was all I could expect for the rest of my life. He said in an official tone, nothing nice will ever happen to me again. 'It is nice for me this way,' I said and asked him: 'Reverend, are you ashamed of me? Do you want me to die?' He said he only wanted my salvation, a salvation for my wounded soul and body from the flames of eternal suffering and that this would be the fulfilment of his and God's expectations. I believe Reverend Leopold will not return for his rope."

On the eleventh day after the last visit to Jokiam, Reverend Leopold Hort and Reverend Leut Aburik, the manager of the monks' sanatorium in S., came to our house. Reverend Leopold took a seat at the table and said straight away officially: "Jokiam passed away. May he rest in God's peace." Mother instinctively sobbed and father and I lowered our heads and rubbed our eyes: I do not know if it was to stop or to provoke tears. Then we all stood up and said a quick prayer for the departed.

“If you agree, we would like to bury him in our cemetery inside the sanatorium. We believe it is the most suitable and practical solution,” said Reverend Leut and added: “Tomorrow. If it’s alright with you.” Father and mother silently agreed, and my opinion was irrelevant. We did not even dare ask how or why Jokiam died. Hort and Aburik seemed to have a false answer in store to that question, and in fact they did not even expect it to be asked, they knew it would bring no use or satisfaction to anyone.

And we wanted it over with as soon as possible and forgotten for good, so that people could not add insult to injury. Apart from the three of us, the only ones who attended the funeral were Reverend Leopold, Reverend Leut and Reverend Diur, the representative of the Order Authority. No one said or gave us anything, except a warm meal and a glass of water, although we did not ask for them at all. We returned to Pom the same day: silent, but with a shared sense of relief.

Shortly afterwards I went to study in the capital. I repeat, in this endeavour I had crucial help from Leopold Hort. Do you believe me to be so heartless and deviant that I accepted the favours and money from the man I knew shortly before that, in the least, pushed my brother towards the railing in the bathroom on which he hanged himself, and then waited the next twenty-five years to savagely pay him back for my brother’s death?

Anything is possible in life, because every man – as banal as it may sound – contains many different men. If something is possible in theory or in fiction or in a rare actual case, this does not mean that it can fulfil the gaping void in the place of material evidence. And if there is no evidence, can anything explain the behaviour of that character from the indictment, the character with my name and last name, since Oktavio Naht fled, that is, my behaviour in the long period between my brother’s mysterious death and Leopold Hort’s suicide, except his, that is, mine mentally derelict and deprived personality? And if that is so, then they should not have brought me before you, ladies and gentlemen, but before a serious psychiatric committee.

“We have testimonies of Nera Vaum and Auba Lutis claiming that you possessed your brother’s letters, that you referred to those letters, i.e. that you mentioned Reverend Hort, even the Order, in an extremely negative context. More accurately, in the context of personal hate. It is not late to confess, Mister Koc. To save us all the hassle and time,” inspector Burmeck again exclaimed triumphantly one day. I cannot say I did not expect something like this could happen, but nevertheless it kicked me in the stomach. They have decided to be the end of me.

“How come they remembered such important information only now, when you concluded what you concluded? Both at the same time? It cannot be that your great catch at the sanatorium, the extortion from Pumaj Sin, suddenly jogged their memory?” I tried to sound composed.

“Don’t expect me to seek answers to these questions. This is not my job. But probably they placed certain facts and names that came out in the meantime in the right context, which they couldn’t have known before. This is not unusual and happens relatively frequently in our investigations.”

“When it comes to this case, nothing is unusual. And the same could be told of many of your investigations, mister inspector,” counsel Riva remarked angrily.

“You have to admit, madam counsel, that first of all it was not usual to establish the Office of Social Self-criticism and turn the state president into an active and regular warmonger. In such a context, there is nothing unusual or strange here,” Burmeck had an answer to everything. He loved the word ‘context’. Counsel Riva and I in our conversations increasingly started to call him inspector Context.

“Even if I concluded rationally that a confession is the least bad an option, that would mean be defeated by Nera and Auba’s lies, and this is something I cannot allow myself to do. I still have a grain of dignity.”

“Perhaps it’s not a grain of dignity, but a bit more than a grain of resentment? Or unproductive bitterness?”

I was silent. Burmeck got up and went for the door.

“We know you also have the nun Olusa Nite. When will you try to force a confession with her testimony?” Mrs Riva asked him.

“Oh well, not that I’ve lost the edge of an element of surprise, I will at least set my own time for the final blow. But you will not wait long, our investigation deadlines are tight, as you know. And until then, reconsider a confession, be rational. Everything else is a mistake, believe me.”

Nera Vamu lied that she saw with her own eyes two pieces of paper written by Jokiam’s hand when we moved to our apartment we bought on a loan. She made up a story that, on the second day after we moved in, she caught me rustling folded papers into a cut in the middle of a thick mattress on our double bed. She made no effort on originality and plausibility – a mattress is probably the most stereotypical option when it comes to hiding paper valuables – but no effort was required here. She made it up that she asked me what I was hiding and that I answered that it was my brother Jokiam’s

letters or some of his documents: she made it up that she couldn't remember with certainty if I used the word 'documents' or 'letters'.

Then she made it up that a few days later she put her hand into the hole in the mattress, but Jokiam's papers were no longer there because I, another of her lies, moved them to another secret place. She made it up that she asked me, when I was moving out of our apartment, if I took the hidden papers, just like she made up my answer that I was not that shocked with the divorce and my new romance to forget to take such important things. Of course, she did not mention it to the investigators until now simply because she didn't know the content of the papers and didn't believe them relevant for my criminal prosecution or anything else: when she heard what exactly they were about and what historical and national importance the papers published in photographs were, she immediately, as a conscientious citizen, informed the authorities and revealed her findings, angry with herself that she didn't recognise them sooner and dig out the truth about them, because the life of Reverend Leopold Hort might have been saved.

Auba Lutis called to complement her first testimony only to lie at the right moment that two days after Reverend Leopold's death I said in her bedroom – relaxed by alcohol and intoxicated by her warmth and passion – that “my work is done now”, that I was “finally at peace” and that “now it's completely irrelevant what happens to Oktavio and the Office”. She shamelessly lied about asking me what I meant, what happened, what was it that all of a sudden filled me with such peace and indifference, and I only mysteriously and contentedly replied: “Everything happened. Everything.”

Why did Auba not make those words up in her first testimony, when she accused me and president Naht of mass political crime? Why did she not lie in her first testimony that, a few days before Hort's suicide, I told her that “I have a feeling the bastard will make a wrong step and that my brother will be avenged” and that I would not answer her innocent questions which ensued? How come she did not immediately lie that I once said that “the Order should be banned by decree” because it is made of “selfish and rotten bastards”? What prevented her from saying this in her initial testimony? She said so many unimportant, incoherent and false things anyway that it is inexplicable how she left this 'fact' out, even if she could not immediately connect my words with specific incriminations?!

Naturally, Mr Burmeck's results were eye-opening and made her finally grasp the true meaning of my coded mantras. It all came together suddenly, as inspector Context said.

And what made me tell her something I did not want to talk about with her in the first place? Why, for the love of God, would I even broach the subject only to refuse to talk about it? Besotted by her fatality?

Hypnotised by her lusting gaze? The prosecutors, naturally, did not give this much thought as well, as they could not allow logic and facts to hinder the construction of a house with a dented roof and a cracked façade anyway.

Your honour, honoured members of the jury, the least I can ask from you is to cross the threshold of this jittery backdrop: that will be enough to face the emptiness of a regime performance.

And then there is, finally, the announced Olusa Nite, the only witness to Leopold's agony and demise.

"Soon after the first decree of President Naht, reverend Leopold found out that the responsible behind it was Albert Koc, born in Pom. That Mr Koc wrote the decree. Since then he lost his peace of mind, he couldn't sleep or eat, or focus on anything. He shrunk like a nesting doll, lost his will to live. In the meantime, I learned from the villagers some things about Mr Koc and his family, although people were reluctant to talk. Despite my interest in the Koc family, people were reluctant to talk to me. All of a sudden they shunned anything related to the reverend. His unrest escalated after the President's first decree and then turned upside down, after the reverend, a day before this death, managed to have a short phone call with Albert Koc. That was the end, although I didn't know it back then. I believed it to be something of a passing nature, as he was prone to dejection before," testified Sister Olusa.

After this contact – sister was the only one in the room with the reverend, but could not literally hear what I was saying on the other side of the line – Leopold obviously fatally threw in the towel, like someone cut off the flow of blood and meaning to his veins, not a sign of yesterday's rapture, activism and confidence, as though he suddenly realised his worst fears came true, he could no longer bury his head in the sand and hide behind fanatic dedication to returning to original condition, but rather that he had to face the inevitable. From that moment on, he was no longer the same, she said.

"I asked him several times what happened, what exactly Mr Koc said, if Mr Koc threatened or terribly offended him, was it something about the animals and the hill... I asked him if he was afraid of something, why couldn't he tell me what was grieving him, why can't he talk to the Chief or some older and wiser monk... I told him I was worried, afraid of his sudden distance I couldn't determine the cause. He just kept repeating, more to himself: 'Jokiam, Jokiam... Jokiam, Jokiam... Jokiam is back... Jokiam, Jokiam...' He no longer heard or noticed me. He was already gone," Sister Olusa testified and I will not doubt her words, although I have nothing firmer or more objective to substantiate them. I won't doubt them since Sister Olusa here and in conversations with Sister Kirgulla Batur, of which Sister Kirgulla's diary testifies, faithfully conveyed what Reverend Leopold said on the phone the day before she found him hanging in the bathroom.

He was dressed in ceremonial attire, she said, his head bent to the right and mouth slightly open. Relaxed and heavy. She could barely find two men strong enough in the village to take the noose off reverend's neck: no one would, so she had to pay these two a substantial sum. He was buried the next day, quietly, with no announcements. Sister Olusa Nite was one of three people by Leopold's grave in his native town of Iktak, on the south border. Next to her, reverend was sent off with muttering and speedy prayers by the Order Chief Pumaj Sin and his younger brother Taksim Hort, a monk serving in the Central Library of the Order in the capital.

Everyone made an effort not to cause particular interest from the public about Reverend Leopold's funeral, which was convenient to President Naht as well. No one will shed a tear for the reverend, the subversive charge of his death was at that moment less prospective than Icarus's flying potential, but it is over now, let us bury and forget him – that was the president's decision. And a very rational one, I would say. Oktavio did not expect things to end in Hort's suicide. He was stunned for a while, as though he got a blow to the chin when his arms were down, but he quickly recovered.

And how did I feel? Shocked, dejected, confused, scared. For the first time in four years of managing the SOSOC, I took a few days off. I did not leave Auba's apartment. Whatever I did to take my mind off, I kept returning to Reverend Leopold's words – “do you want to make me do the same as Jokiam did, do you?” And that excitement of his, the spasm, fear of my power, awareness of his own guilt, which was to me at that point completely unclear... Like never before, I guess that comes with age, something was irresistibly drawing me to face the mystery of my brother's death. I was no longer that determined to escape as I was that rainy day when Jokiam begged me to follow him. I reached a decision, then gave up, and it went on and on. All until my childish fear of dark prevailed again, I believed forever and irrevocably.

And then I clashed with unwanted concreteness in the spotlight, in front of you, in front of everyone, tied and helpless. Such an outcome of such behaviour is more a rule than an exception, but it does not suffice only to know – perhaps I said something like that already – to avoid trouble bigger and worse than the one that makes you cover your eyes: you should kill the hope that you'll be the lucky exception, because there are as many of those as it needs to confirm the rule.

Sister Olusa Nite was transferred, forty days after Reverend Leopold's death, to the convent on the island of Kerl. She departed soon after doctor Kirgulla Batur left Pom empty-handed. The Order Authority has still not sent a new parish priest or any monk or nun to Pom, and over two years have passed. I guess they can coax no one into going there or they simply decided, after all, to leave the souls of the ungrateful people of Pom to the devil, heresy and superstition. The people of Pom, as far as I

know, have not thus far protested over it or demanded to be sent a new chaplain. Everything of any material value was soon stolen from the monastery and the church: from window and door frames, to paintings and benches. The only thing left are large and small crucifixes.

Animals from the entire county, even those from more distant parts, still, as you know, climb the hillside of G. The pathways, watering places and rest stops were built for them, and they repay with mildness and beauty that, as testified by the villagers of Pom, overflow across the fields of poppy, saffron and immortelle, protecting crops of all evil. Perhaps this is where we should look for reasons for the tolerance expressed by vice-admiral Tulenh and his government regarding the abject and still unexplored phenomenon of Pom.

People still arrive from all four corners to the Virgin of Cuvarak. They fulfil vows given long ago, they seek comfort, health, peace, miracle.

One does not hinder the other, one does not jeopardise the other, but I am quite certain one day someone will appear who will – instead of pious dogs, foxes, goats and birds – see the presence of the Devil and signs of the forthcoming cataclysm on G. The rest will only be a matter of technique and organisation, like every true genocide.

If I am released prior to this, I will take my son Emanuel to G., even if I had to kidnap him from Nera; let them catch and arrest us. We will climb that hill of ours, sit under the tallest crucifix in the south, feed the animals, watch the Derim lake glisten and everything will be fine. Comprehensible words and entire sentences will flow out of Emanuel's mouth, his hands and eyes will find peace and our life will be easy, as one poet once said in his poem.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have exposed what in fact the State Prosecutor's indictment actually is and how it came about. To conclude, this is a text that cannot agree with itself, essentially, if I initiated the establishment of the Special Office of Social Self-criticism mainly to implement my avenging plan against Reverend Leopold Hort or, when I already established and launched the SOSOC for the political purposes of President Oktavio Naht, and when I saw all I could do with this instrument, an ideal chance for revenge simply appeared and I could not resist it, despite my iron self-discipline. However, both are not possible. Two random makeshift concepts of my criminal psycho-profile cannot grow side by side. One according to which I had been obsessively and painstakingly preparing since my brother's death to take justice into my own hands, of which there is no single evidence and is based only on an ambitious interpretation of Nera Vaum's false testimony, and the other concept according to which I was not preparing or plotting anything and the revenge plan, inexistent for years, came up only recently with

the first real occasion to harm Reverend Leopold and this spark of revenge would not leave me until the matter was successfully completed.

It is somewhat easier to uphold the idea of a swift and unequivocal embracing of a sudden chance for revenge, than the hypothesis of a quarter of a century long cowardly and hypocritical obsession with creating and waiting for the circumstances to commit the perfect crime, but this fantasy theory cannot be shaken off easily, since such a long premeditation would bestow on my personality a bolded black stain of pathological deformity, which might deeply impress Your Honours, and therefore the State Prosecutors could not resist discreetly placing such a criminal scenario in two places. Just in case, on page forty-five of the indictment, and nowhere else, a hideous combination of two previous hypotheses was introduced: "Although he was not active or doing anything in that respect, the fact remains that the defendant devotedly and committedly set out to cause harm to late Leopold Hort, when this appeared doable without taking too much risk, testifying to his inability to cope, in a mature and responsible manner, with the event that evidently marked his life, especially in the circumstances of the defendant's access to great political and social influence."

Therefore, the State Prosecutors have compiled a buffet-indictment: we will take out before you all we have cooked and baked in a rush, some is raw, some is overcooked and tasteless, but you might find something you like, there's everything in there, you will surely not end up hungry in the face of all this plenty. This is a lazy and shameless ridiculing of law and the criminal process, but why would it be any different, why would the prosecutors try to be coherent and plausible, when they are aware that the outcome of this process does not depend on their diligence and coherence, but on you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, and on your supposed tied hands before the expectations of the mighty.

Ladies and gentlemen, my time is out or nearly out. You know what is expected of you and you are aware what implications might arise should you fail the expectations. But I nevertheless believe in the possibility of a miracle, just like my brother Jokiam: the most resilient faith springs in honest dedication to noble battles which are lost and hopeless to begin with, like mine, but do not think the motive to embark on those battles lies in heroic resilience and conscious suffering for ideals. The motive lies in a small, selfish and indestructible expectation that in ours, of all cases, a miracle will happen or that our 'useless' fight might provoke a miracle. In my proceedings, this would be a miracle of your resistance to the political demands pressuring you. Please allow me to believe in this, both out of selfishness, since every living faith is, essentially, selfishness, and out of respect for your dignity, intelligence and humanity.

Thank you for your attention.

P.S. When I woke up this morning, on the floor by the bed I saw a white rope. I asked the guard where it came from. He said he knew nothing about it and I should ask the warden. I had no time for this because I had to appear before you, but before leaving the cell, I lifted the rope from the floor, took a closer look at it and tested its firmness: as though I wanted to verify if the sender was serious. I noticed a tiny text written in blue ink: "We are ashamed of you."