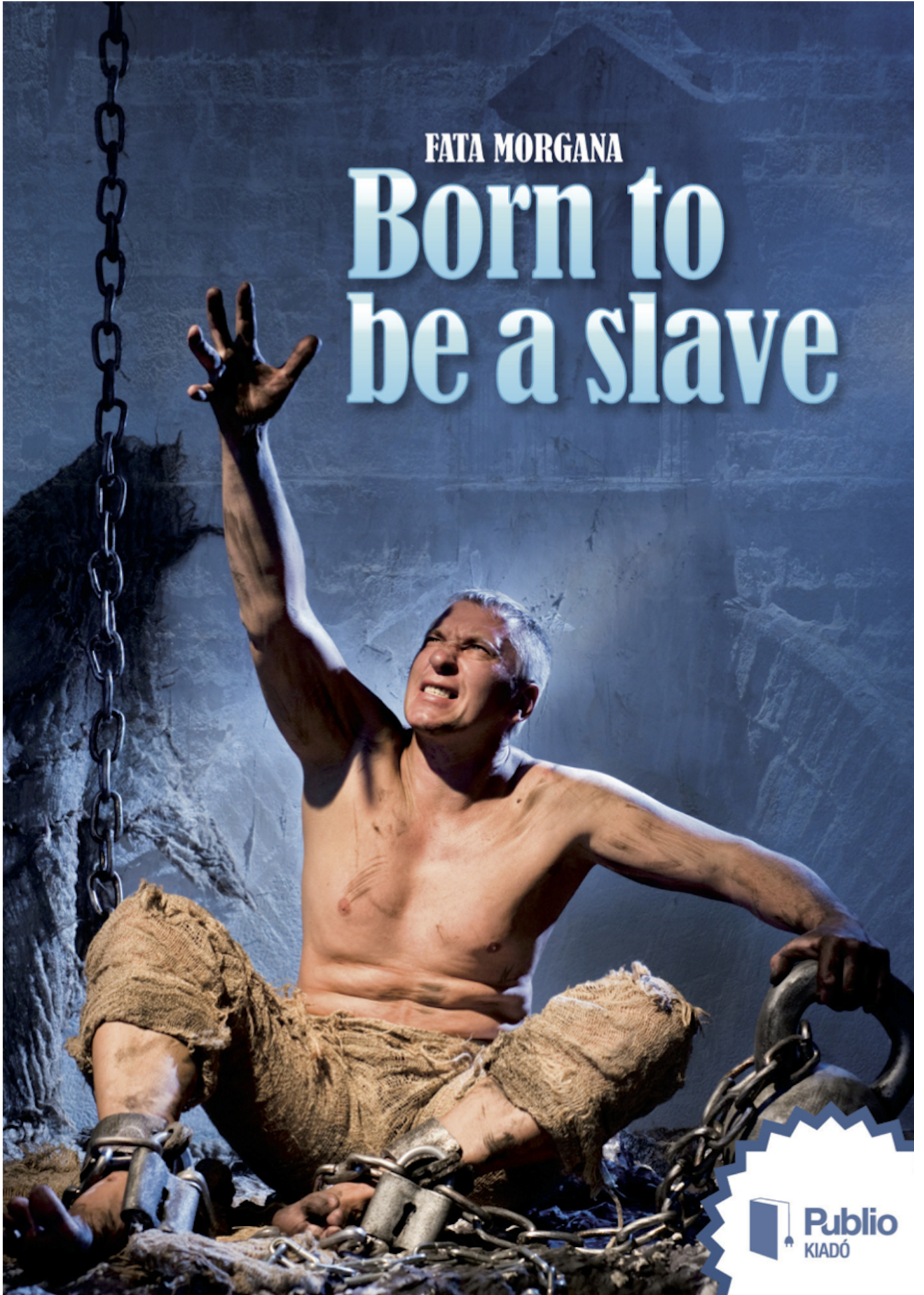


FATA MORGANA

# Born to be a slave



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**Born to be a slave**

Fata Morgana

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Baal came to a sudden stop at the side of the square. He did not look around. He knew these houses very well, including the angular square with the fountain and the war memorial with the names of the once fallen. Today no one was reading them. People didn't even care what stones these houses were built from, what decorations were above the windows - where usually the pigeons were moving about - the fountain was the great spectacle. Rose bushes were languishing in the sun around it. As it was summer, faltering heat was streaming from the metal blue sky. The heat seized the city, the asphalt had been almost evaporating for a week, the heat of the pavements came through the soles of the shoes. All shadows were of use. Those living in the city could not escape even at night: the stones warmed up by the sun were pouring yesterday's heat and were ready to absorb tomorrow's.

Stray dogs and birds were looking for water. People in masses were trying to cool themselves at the beaches. Others were keeping coolness behind sun protecting windows in the beehive of huge high-rise blocks where the air conditioners were working from dawn till late night. The city was devouring energy to fight the huge orb in the sky belching fire.

Baal was not hot. He was wearing a summer suit, a blinding white one, light shoes with holes and a light shirt. He looked just as old as he was, forty five and felt really good. He had felt himself really good for quite a long time.

Something was budging in his pocket. He had it above his heart, in the inside pocket. It was a very short, hardly audible tune. It was the sound of an ancient Eastern instrument, a lute with one string but he heard it even in the city noise. He took the phone out and checked the screen: „L“ sent a message. Lilit used this appliance rarely as well but it was good to have it. They only called each other and sometimes there could be news from somewhere. But it would be better if it didn't as Lilit said sometimes.

The man turned around and went on, at some places the shadows appeared on his back. He found the shop easily as he had been here already. He bought what Lilit asked for.

On his way out he felt what the situation was. The Bad rushed on him, it was familiar, almost intimate. He knew no one else felt it but him. For others it was something strange. A thin boy was stamping his feet next to the entrance, he was grasping something in his pocket. He was sweating and seemed to be very tense. He was about to step inside. Baal's mind showed him the scene in advance. The kid would point a gun at the shop assistant demanding the money from the cash register. The shop assistant would resist, death would come, maybe for both.

He was staring at the boy unblinking, he attracted the boy's look with his will. He looked into the boy's eyes pervasively and he was shaking his head: NO! The other one got the message: they figured it out. If not someone else, this guy in the white suit surely knew what he was planning. And he would be standing here and watch him go inside. He wouldn't have time to get out the gun when this man would already call the police. He was struck by anger, shame and humiliation. He ran away. He might look for another shop. But this was not Baal's problem any longer, he moved on.

The subway station was close, he went down. Cool breeze was in the tunnel finally. Many were enjoying it. Maybe they were not travelling anywhere, they were just cooling on the benches. The train arrived soon and with the same speed it was off again. Baal was at the end of it where one could go through to the other carriage, as always. He sensed a few minutes later that Bad was approaching again. It grew in a big city like weed in the countryside. It sprang from human nests wildly and abundantly.

He looked back. People were approaching to the door in the next carriage. One black, one white, angular, slovenly, with rough faces. They were wild. Only looking for the possibility to pick on somebody somewhere. They needed the Bad, it was their food, they lived on it. Baal was staring at the lock unblinkingly, no one heard the click in that noise, not even him. He turned his back to the door. He knew they would be blocked and they would bang on the door, but no one would help them seeing who they were.

They were shouting bluntly through the thick metal and glass. Baal did not react while the subway was hurtling along. Those were in rage they would have come over just for all that. Their wrath gave them more strength but not enough. They were banging the door with their fists, Baal could hear that through the noise but did not react. He had to go three more stops.

Approaching the stop the train applied the brakes. Baal slowly looked back over his shoulders. The two thugs were pushing people aside to get to the door, they would probably come here. Baal prepared himself for that. As soon as the doors closed those two were already roused to attack. They shoved an old man to the wall, struck a young man on his stomach, shouted at a woman, who was terrified in her seat. Baal knew he had to do something. He was standing at his place not looking at those two. He didn't want to touch them. He gathered all his will and was focusing. Behind his back strange silence came within a second. Only the subway's wheels were clattering. Baal turned around slowly. The two thugs were standing next to each other, their shoulders and arms met. The left of the white and right of the black. As if they were united. Their eyes got stuck and they couldn't say a word. The twofold statue of despair.

Baal hurried to the driver in the front at the next stop. He told him what had happened. The driver promised that at the next stop the subway guards would wait for the thugs. „Did they hurt passengers? And why didn't they run away?“ Baal went to another carriage this time. The guards were there at the next stop, wearing dark blue uniform, brown belts, yellowish badge with the city's shield on it and a huge S on their chests. Even they could not separate the „Siamese twins“ but took both of them away.

Lilit saw him approaching from the window. The house was small, enough for the two of them. The ambient garden was small

behind the undecorated not at all conspicuous fence. With the shadows of old trees and the lawn. A terrace where they could sit. Not now when heat was waving here as a sea even in the suburb. The trees were suffering too. Lilit watered the flowers twice a day. The walls were guarding old silence.

„It’s good to have you home.“ - Lilit greeted him like this. Other times as well. Her face was elderly, but her eyes were sixteen. Black hair, not at all grey, her brown skin resembled ancient ancestors, other lands. Baal hardly slept at night. Sometimes he felt he didn’t need any sleep, it was a total waste of time. Time flew by any way, though he didn’t care about that either. Days, years passed, autumn leaves were falling from the branches turning to dry fallen leaves and parched grass. The years of the past were the soil of future but its mung as well. Lilit was panting very softly and smoothly beside him. Baal opened his eyes in the darkness. He had loads of thoughts. When he heard others were bored he didn’t understand it. Because if someone had enough thoughts in their heads they couldn’t be bored. Nothing had no *raison d’être*. He had to advance, he used to say. Mainly to himself. They didn’t really get together with other people, they rather had superficial acquaintances instead of deep friendships. They switched their place of living every ten years, always had a new environment. New city, new house. They were alive.

Baal fell asleep around dawn but not completely. It was an old skill of his that he was half asleep. Like dolphins. Only one of his cerebral hemisphere was asleep at a time, the other was awake, then they switched. It was natural for him. He had become like this with time.

Lilit was still asleep when dawn came and Baal left the bed. He was pottering in the house then he went out to the garden. It was not too hot yet, the trees enjoyed the hiding cold shadows of the night here and there. Baal was with walking on the lawn with bare feet. The sun was up shining in his eyes for a moment. It was sky light. Reminded him of another kind of light as well, but he didn’t want to think of that now. Something happened in the house, he just understood it... He felt the tiny change. Lilit was not hurt, he was sure of that, he would have felt that. But that small change... He hurried back to the house. Lilit was in the bathroom when the appliance rang once. The sign was shining on his mobile’s screen. A message came from far away. Gabriel sent it. „Today.“

That was it, nothing more. So Gabriel would arrive today. And he always came with a reason. He had to travel a lot, but he could not leave the real message to another person or technology. He couldn’t write it down or send it. Had no trust in the post, in electronics, strangers, nor cyberspace. Besides that old Agreement said: if the Governor wanted something, if he appointed Baal for a new task he sent Gabriel with the message. And Gabriel was happy when he had the chance to travel. When he had the chance to sink that busy modern world unnoticed, the world he could not have seen before. Gabriel’s face appeared before Baal’s eyes, almost heard his fake happiness that seemed to defeat all resistance. When Gabriel would arrive the mood would change for a few hours. It would be happy and free and easy, but only apparently. And bitter too as all three of them would try hard to hide their true feelings. And what the other two already know.

„I have arrived!“

Gabriel’s youthful voice roared not only through the house but the garden as well. He never knew when Gabriel would arrive exactly. „Today“, and that should have been enough. Probably the Governor expected that too from him, Baal had this suspicion. Gabriel belonged to the Governor, though he might have just borrowed him from the Master. He might have been on his way here when he sent his one word message at dawn.

„I’m here!“

The voice surrounded them. Lilit and Baal knew they couldn’t escape, they had to put up with that. There were times when Gabriel didn’t appear for a year. But when he was here again, he never came with empty hands. He brought something. A task. Work for Baal who was not happy. It was nothing to be happy about, not even if he had accepted it before. A long time ago.

„Goldenlit good morning to you!“ - Gabriel loved the Eastern-like rhetorical flourishes. He studied them and chose from them. It happened that he brought two-three thousand years old phrases. He especially excelled in greetings. When he arrived on a workday he did not really adorn. But when he arrived on Sunday, he always surrounded them with ornaments, made them more difficult, added dependent clauses to these greetings. Some were just like best wishes lists. Now he started to talk in a low-key manner at the terrace door:

„Beauty shall follow your days in the future! Only luck should come to you, only Providence should take you under its wings!“

„Thank you, this is more than enough.“ - Lilit was smiling. There were times when she loved Gabriel like a son. Because she couldn’t bear a child. But love turned into indifference, and was gone. Only curiosity was left behind.

„Do you remind us of Providence?“ - asked Baal instead of greeting him. Gabriel pulled faces, but happiness was not gone from his black eyes. All three of them had black eyes. Gabriel was smiling, the hosts only pretended it. Baal rarely had a smile on his face, if he had any at all it came with a bad grace and didn’t stay on long, flew away like a butterfly.

Though Lilit was there, she was not really. She had a special skill to yield in the background, almost invisible when the two men had business with each other.

„Are you hungry?“ - Baal asked. Gabriel was slim, his face was angel like with symmetrical features. Nice lips and black curls

falling on his forehead. He looked thirty. Always thirty. His moves were youthful and unbridled, slightly rash but this was just illusion. He could be morose as well. When it was about work.

He took a good look at the other two as well. He had been here the previous year. Nothing had changed. The messenger was not surprised by that knowing the hosts but he sensed the house remained the same too. They had been living there for four years so they had six more to stay. By the time they would settle in they would have to leave. They could only keep the secret this way.

Lilit's face was wrinkled but suited her. Implied a mature woman with intelligent look. She had a strong body that couldn't be broken even by working in the garden. If it was necessary, Lilit went to do the shopping.

Baal was like Baal. Like he always had been. Robust body though not too tall but showed strength. Whoever he looked at from under his thick black eyebrows would never dare to oppose him. And it was not wise either. Gabriel knew that.

The three of them were sitting on the terrace. There were food and drinks on the table but they had not touched them. They couldn't talk really. They had not expected that. Lilit was only waiting for the right moment to find an excuse and leave. She did not need to know everything. It was better that way. So she went to the garden and thought it was summer. By the time they would see Gabriel again might be winter or next spring.

The two men were sitting at the table looking at each other, waiting. Baal was waiting for the task. But Gabriel asked something else:

„Can you still take it?“

„Why couldn't I?“ - a question was the answer to the question, but the host continued. - „This was the agreement. Until the Governor does not break boundaries... in destruction... there is no problem.“

„Do you think it is you who decides where the boundary is?“ - Gabriel was sarcastic. Baal did not hesitate to reply:

„I am not a machine, but a...“ - he stopped.

„But?“ - the messenger asked quickly while his eyes were flashing with anger, of course he was sarcastic this time too. „But what? Maybe you're a human? Or God? Or angel?“ Though he did not say these loud, still they both knew what he thought. Baal remained silent. Why would he talk about something the other one knew as well. Gabriel might have thought the same because he became serious: „I'll tell you the task.“

Lilit went around the garden. She heard noise from the street, two cars were going behind one another. Those sitting in them were shouting to each other happily, but noise was gone right away, it died. The birds were twittering on the trees. „I wish I heard this all the time and nothing else.“ - she thought. She recalled the sea. Yes, instead of birds' song, the shrieking of the seagulls would do as well, if there was the scenery of the great water. „The ocean is my neighbor.“ - it was ages ago, when she was humming it. Not yesterday. Slowly it was time again to move there.

„...So that was it. I admit, it is not a usual one, but I trust in your creativity. Will you be able to handle it?“

„Tell me one case I did not solve.“ - Baal pushed the words out of himself. It was well seen on Gabriel's face that he expected this answer. He was smiling. The host knew: Gabriel would hardly leave the house by the ordered cab when he would send the message to the governor that Baal accepted the task and would take care of the case. „This is what I am kept for.“ - Baal thought and was not happy at all.

He showed his guest out. Lilit waved goodbye from the garden, Gabriel waved back. The cab turned in the street at the corner. Meanwhile they all knew they were playing roles. Gabriel was aware: he was not a welcomed guest, the hosts were not really happy to see him. They greeted him as if he was a visitor from an ancient world. Then the cab's door was slammed, Gabriel disappeared, who knew for how long.

Lilit was standing among the roses. She changed flowers and gardens every ten years. Here and now she was getting to know the roses. She knew already what underplanting, bud rotting, layering, cutting, rootball, heading, climber or rambler meant. She loved roses. She had no red roses, she thought they were banal, common indeed. She raised yellow ones mainly. Most bushes were „Elina“, „Arthur Bell“, „Holland Gold“ and „Korresia“, but there were also some „Allgold“ and „Laura Ford“. She didn't really like the climber roses, they got lost in their own mass and foliage way too much. She enjoyed to go to the garden on quiet not so hot afternoons in summer to potter around her favorite flowers, to look after them and to find great pleasure in them. It was worth living for that, she once said this to Baal, who only nodded and no one knew what was in his head.

The man came back from the street firmly. He knew he would find his woman among flowers at times like this. He found her. They were under shadows, bathing in rose scent. Lilit knew what she would hear and Baal knew that. So he was short:

„I'm leaving tomorrow.“

„How long are you staying?“

„Five-six days. Then we'll have rest... for a while.“

It was a promise, but an unsure one, even a fake one. There were unpredictable things even for him. But Lilit had got used to this. She smiled at her husband:

„Just do what you have to.“

Baal arrived at the airport.

He was elegantly dressed again. Had cream-colored suit, white shoes and white shirt. He usually hid his thick hair under a hat, just like now. For a moment he remembered, seeing himself reflected in a another we are from the same litter.

He didn't like airports. The bigger it was, the less personal it turned out to be, making the passengers look small, the more he had an aversion to it. This was the only place where he could be checked as well. Where, if he got into an uncomfortable situation, he might use one of his skills, from within himself in order to escape. As he had nothing else.

He knew cameras were watching his steps, his body features might run in appliances recognising faces. He surely appeared before someone, together with a thousand other people within the same hour. But he didn't think of that now. He was confident.

He only came for information. He didn't leave and was not waiting for an arriving passenger. But he went around the airport, watched everything thoroughly. He even went out to the terrace. It was a nice look-out place with an outdoor café. He sat by the barrier and was watching the departing and arriving flights while sipping his coffee. Though there were two runways, all flights left from one, the other one rather received flights. Baal got to know the system and the habits quickly. It was enough for today. What he had been waiting for would happen the in two days. He had time until then. And he didn't worry about his face being on the recordings of the airport cameras. He was here, where sixty thousand people were in and out daily. This many had been here yesterday and would come tomorrow as well.

Then he went back to the insignificant hotel, where he stayed. He had come to the town by train, hadn't left any trace behind himself. Next day he went to the city and rented a car near the railway station. He was driving up and down aimless. Later in a carpark he looked for and disconnected the GPS with what the workers of the car-rent could check where their car was. He spent the afternoon around the airport again. He didn't do anything else but going along the public ways from the end of the runway - that was closed from intruders - to quite a long distance. Flights were going above his head every few minutes, all of them were taking off. He could see the signs on their tails with his binoculars.

The flight he was waiting for arrived on Thursday and according to plans it would leave on Friday evening. It took a government delegation from far away. Baal watched the preparation and the ceremonial reception from the terrace at the airport. A head of state arrived. Guard of honor in military uniforms, soutaches, guns, and white gloves. A military band to play the two hymns. Black limusines, all alike, to make the possible assassins' task more difficult. Baal was only smiling: „If an assassin wanted to accomplish the mission, he had enough courage and skill to do it.“ His confidence was rightful. The victim could not escape. And his friends, helpers, company and servants would die with him. But it would happen only tomorrow. Baal watched the plane rolling ceremonially slowly on the concrete to the red carpet, comfortably as if he was above it all. Many were watching it, guiding it to arrive at the right place. Then the stairs rolled there, driven by an engine and a driver. It was a lot nicer and gleaming as those used by average passengers getting on average planes. Baal could read the proud writing, the name of the country on the plane's side. The country, where an atheist president got the power and had been cutting on advantages and money that had been given to the Church before. They said it was unfair to be partial to the Church at the expense of other churches.

Baal had his own opinion on that as well but didn't tell it to any one. Not even to Lilit, not to mention Gabriel. So he was sitting behind the barrier and was watching the yellow spot on the tail of the plane without blinking. It seemed as if it was pierced by a blue line. This was the sign he had to take care of. He noted it. Meanwhile the plane's door opened, the important guest appeared, the local president went to the bottom of the stairs. The other one was coming down carefully, there were many stairs and he had to be cautious on all of them - if he skipped one he would fall over, roll down and that would be a world sensation. The net community would revel on it and would create pages to like, and would make it even more ridiculous as it was already with comments. But the president got down without any trouble. The band played, head of states and diplomats were shaking hands on the red carpet with a face of being happy to see loving friends they hadn't seen for ages. Baal was not misled by these fake gestures. Probably he was not alone with that at the airport or in front of the televisions. As cameras were rolling around to let the world know about the great event. He wasn't really interested in it. He knew already what he wanted to know. The media told the schedule of the foreign president. Baal was only interested in the exact time of their departure. He knew there would be delay then as well. And he was aware: when this flight would take off - on the vertical stabilizer, that was the yellow spot on the tail - it would have really short time to do what it had in mind.

What it had to do.

In the evening he went to the net room and sat down in front of a computer in the hotel. There were no cameras there, they could not record who was sitting in front of a computer. He was looking a tat least eleven different airliners' xrays and plans as he was interested in planes. He checked ten out of eleven deliberately needlessly as if he was looking at them as well. If the computers had been checked later this would have been important. It was the fifth in line that he really needed. The xrays were quite detailed for a unprofessional to find what he was looking for. He too found it. He observed thoroughly where the things were on the plane. He knew there was no point aiming at the four power plants, as stopping one of them would not cause big problem, buti f it did, the pilot would turn back and land with the other three. He had to find out something else. At first sight seemed puzzling system of wires, tubes, components appeared befor him. Before that he would have never thought a plane was put together from that many components. He

understood now that the number of these was millions.

He got involved deeply in the topic, meanwhile he took care of things if *afterwards* someone was checking these, if the authority investigated who had searched this page - he would be covered. On the other hand he was sure there would be no investigation at all. „It will be an accident. It will be an accident.“, he kept repeating it.

Only later, lying in the bed did he brood about himself. Since when had he had tiny inner fears? Though maybe that was not the appropriate word. He was not afraid: he had qualms. It was less than fear but a lot more than detached professionalism. If he had thought of himself as a professional so far now he started to have doubts. Not in success - but in the target. But he couldn't tell it to the Governor with whom he had never met, or to Gabriel who would not understand what his problem was. But now he didn't want to talk about it to Lilit either.

He didn't sleep well at night. He got used to it, especially when he had to do something. Like on this Friday. He tried hard instinctively to make himself believe as if it was a carefree day, without tasks and aims. As if he was a tourist in a foreign town where he was only interested in monuments and sights. Things had reached the point that he went to the local zoo in the morning, later he had lunch in a common and not really good either restaurant in a remote street. In the afternoon he went to the end of the town by his rented car where there were more cheap motels. He took a room for that night though he still had his room in the town, well until this day. He amused himself with a one person conspiracy game, so he did not think about what was ahead of him during the day. He imagined himself being the suspect *afterwards*, investigation would start, they would look for him all over the place. What could they find? That he had lived in the hotel in the town, that he immediately left after the action. They would be sure he had left the town as he had taken the car back as well. Meanwhile he would spend one more night at the motel calmly. He even imagined to be asked by inspectors why he changed hotels. He would tell them he didn't like the first one as it was too noisy.

He was at the airport before five in the afternoon. His car was in the carpark, he was on the terrace. Again dressed up nicely but not extravagantly. He seemed to be a carefree looker. To the outside world he was. But he was trying hard to suppress the inconvenient feeling inside. He drank his coffee, had a cake - he was one of the guests on the café's terrace. He saw when the foreign president's plane was towed before the central building. First the technical staff was around it, with the security keeping an eye on them, then the atmosphere became more and more tense. When he heard about ten sirens from the town, he imagined the double convoy as the guest was escorted by the local president up to the stairs at the plane. Again guard of honor, bodyguards, military band and an army of securities with wires in their ears... This was a sign for Baal. He knew nothing had come in the way, so they would leave.

He paid and left. The hall was busy, escalators, carpark, car, rolling. He was not excited only had bitterness somewhere inside. He forgot about everything, focused only on the action. He had to succeed. If not, he would have to follow the leaving president, travel to his country and get close to him there. It was not impossible, but would mean tiredness, and extra work and hazard. And what would the Governor think then? And Gabriel, who most probably whispered to him at times? That Baal was not like back in old times? Maybe that he should be relieved? His ambition rose while he knew well that it could be low instincts as well. He shouldn't feel this.

He arrived quickly where he had been before. Where the airport ended, its fence was high and the concrete of the two runways ended in sand. Only the lighting machines that supported landing, the lamps' iron stands were rising high. Dusk was on its way. Baal knew there had been no changes in the things today either as the planes were taking off in a row. Huge airliners were approaching rumbling on one concrete lane by the time they got here they were in the air. They were ascending with incredible noise, rising their gigantic bodies. The other lane was for landing. There were others as well, further away. Obsessed photographers, fans of a peculiar sect. They were competing on the net who could take photos of more planes of different airlines. They had to take the photos themselves and not of planes peacefully resting on the concrete of the airport but while they were in the air. Two or three other cars were parking further away, their owners did not look around, they were waiting for flights. Some were taking photos using telephoto lens.

Baal stood next to his car. He had his binoculars in his hand. The sun was hiding behind clouds in the West, greyness of dusk covered the whole place. Baal was thinking of the photographers not knowing what fantastic pictures they would be able to take within minutes. Maybe there were some among them who would get rich with one or two of his photos or because recording the tragedy of the approaching plane.

Because the next plane was running towards them on the runway. The greyness of air and concrete melted. Noise was coming closer. The binoculars in Baal's hand didn't move at all. He was standing a bit on the side to notice the sign on the tail earlier. And as soon as he saw the yellow circle with the blue lightning sign in it, he put down the binoculars. He didn't need it any longer. His brain turned higher speed. He had no time to waste he knew that well. The effect was better from closer. But the plane was moving on faster every second so he had to hurry. He actually did. He looked at the plane's body from the bottom and the sides, saw the aluminium bottom of it. It just started to retract the landing gear, the wheels hadn't disappeared yet in the body. It flew at the height of a skyscraper, it was both terrifying and admirable at the same time. If Baal thought of the symbiosism of men and machine living together!

But he didn't think of that. His whole brain was focusing on one thing. That certain point within the body of the plane. The one he had located exactly yesterday according to the xrays and memorised it. Though he didn't see through the wall of it, he knew where the thing he thought of was. And he thought of it very very strongly. His brain was so tense, it could blow. He started such a great will wave that was rolling in the air towards the plane. It was almost as big as the plane itself.

Baal was concentrating. Suddenly he had another self that had no sizes, nor shape. It just simply *existed*. It was running in a dark tube that covered the wires. Kerosene was in most of the tubes beside the electrical and hydraulic wires and tubes. The wire from the fuel tanks in the wings ran here. It was divided into four. Two went to the wing on the right and the power plants, two went to the left side. Though Baal had never seen those tubes before he knew they existed. He even knew they were there, where he had seen them in the xrays. And he knew his will was capable of anything.

This time to break one of the tube after the ramification. It didn't matter which one. He was practically heating the tube at one little point. He gave all his strength and energy into it. He threw his will of high heat through his brain. And as the huge machine slowed down by touching the brake, as the small signal brought great brake force into motion - Baal's brain actually made a hole on the tube. A hole made by lively fire. As the fire of the melting metal reached the kerosene, it caught fire.

The plane was far away from the man. The photographers turned away from it too waiting for the next plane to take off. But Baal took his binoculars and watched it. Something implied to him his act was successful. His tiny little piece he had sent there was on its way back with the news. That was not only suspicion or hope. It was certainty. But it had no sign yet. But Baal didn't even take his next breath when suddenly two firelights appeared before the sky's grey background. The power plant on the left was working full force, just like the others, but the color of their fire changed. They lifted the plane, its proud nose was rising upward when for a moment the light of the power plant on the left went out to explode at the same time. Quickly one after the other two fires were seen by those looking. They lit the whole place. Components were flying everywhere. The body of the plane was wobbling in the air. „A bird with one wing cannot fly.“ someone would say it now. But it was not Baal. He was standing still with the binoculars before his eyes. But he soon took it off as the scenery grew a lot bigger, it fell apart, went out of the visual field of the binoculars. So he was watching the plane falling with naked eyes. It exploded maybe at the time of landing or just before that. The ground shook as well. Baal felt the push clearly. Then he only saw the sea of flames. He slightly noticed the photographers jumping into their cars shouting excitedly to get to the scene of the tragedy. But he didn't care about that. He had seen so many fires and deaths. He had to be careful going into town. Firemen, ambulances, policemen came opposite, their many red-blue lamps, the flashing lights were blinding. But he got to the city without trouble. He stopped in a carpark, turned on the GPS again. Maybe they didn't even notice in the car-rental that it didn't work. As they didn't mention it. He paid what he had to, walked to the hotel he had stayed in, took his stuff, called a cab and went to the motel at the end of the town. He would go home from here tomorrow.

In the motel room he put his mobile together again. Until then he had carried it in three pieces wrapped in a tissue. He called Lilit: „I'm fine.“ - he started with that. They had done it like that. Whatever had happened they never started the conversation with „Good morning“ or „Hello“ or any other greetings. They believed they were above these kinds of things. So they were.

„I saw it on tv.“ - answered Lilit. It crossed Baal's mind: ages ago this hadn't existed, news had been passed slowly, sometimes it took weeks. Now people about everything the moment it happened. - „When are you coming home?“

„Tomorrow.“

„Take care!“

That was it, nothing more. And this seemed to be enough. Baal went to bed soon. He was alone in his small room, his skin was cooling after the hot shower. He couldn't erase the scenery from his brain, as the plane was falling and crashed, for a while. He almost fell asleep when he heard his phone signalling. He got a message. He was still on his back, breathing evenly, didn't hurry. If he got a message it would stay there waiting for him to read it. But his old habits worked. Message was news, news was sent by someone to someone else, for a reason and sometimes it was travelling incredible distances. It wasn't sent to be ignored by the addressee. And he was curious as well. He didn't turn on the light, he felt for the phone on the bedside table and pressed the button. „G praised you, and so do I.“

Of course, he could have thought of it. Gabriel sent it, he had no contact with others. Gabriel talked to the Governor. They must have had a busy evening too. He was trying hard not to think of the plane and those who died in it. The technical investigation would note that for some baffling reasons burning fuel got into the power plants and at the same time kerosene caught fire in the distributing wire.

Baal fell asleep and had a peaceful rest until morning.

He loved the most when he could sit in the library room.

This was his real home. They have had a room like that in every house they had lived in so far. At the beginning it was smaller, later it became bigger and bigger. This one now occupied one quarter of the house. It had shelves not only around on the walls but at some places there shelves with two sides hanging out of the wall into the middle of the room. Baal had arranged the books by having a section for the old ones that had been printed in Latin about five hundred years ago. Gothic letters that could be read with difficulty turned into gentle words before the readers' eyes. And there were the works of the thinkers of the twentieth century as well. The even newer century was represented by only a few books.

There was a comfortable armchair in the middle, before that was a smaller table with books waiting to be read. Rarely, when the weather was bad outside, Lilit brought Baal's coffee here. Sometimes the woman took a book from the shelf as well and took it to her room.

Baal read several books at the same time. If they had similar topic he put them on the small table. He read one chapter from one, and then from another one - this way long time dead authors were quarrelling in his brain. He absorbed everything and forgot only a little. Not once it was in him where almost dozen of them were fighting, their arguments were almost coming to life. That they couldn't have done in their lifetime as they had been separated by centuries or continents, they could do now. Inside Baal's head was the real philosophical battlefield and he enjoyed it.

It was the end of summer, when one evening the phone rang. It happened so rarely that Lilit and Baal almost forgot about its existence. Only this time - most cases they were calling wrong numbers - did they remember they had this umbilical cord that connected them with the town during day and night, theoretically with any one living there. That these people could call them and they could call them too, but never did.

Baal picked it up. A man was murmuring Baal's surname to see if it was him. Baal confirmed it was him, then the stranger told his name as well and then continued:

„There is a private adult education centre in the town. It might have a too high sounding name but we really try to organise high quality lectures...” - after a few mainly false modest turns he finally said: - „I heard it from the local antiquarian that you have been buying specialized books about the devil for a long time now. About philosophical schools relating to it. And you are also a regular buyer of other pieces about history of religions. Let's suppose you study these as well. Would you like to come and give a lecture about this at us?”