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Ethan McCoy was lying in the grass, stretching himself out to the full length. He pushed his head backward so as to expose his neck to the heat of the sun. He rolled up the sleeves of his shirt which was more and more getting soaked with his sweat above his elbows, and unbuttoned its buttons thus exposing smooth, white skin of his chest to the sun rays. The sweat drops were running down his forehead and further down his neck, dropping onto a jacket folded under his head as a faked imitation of a soft pillow.

He removed the light-sensitive glasses from his nose and wiped them with a handkerchief, mopping up the sweat. Inhaling deeply, he stared at the sun with the unprotected eyes. The scent of Greenfield started to invade his nostrils, conquering his throat, lungs, his heart. Inside him the memories, ignited with the familiar feelings, were waking up.

The light was so strong that all of a sudden he felt pain in his eyes, so he was forced to close them. Nevertheless, he didn't escape to the protection of a shadow. He was determined to remain exposed to that phenomenon of the space heat reaching him from the unimaginable vast distances with such a great strength. He wanted to suffer a bit, too. He wanted the sun to cause him pain in order to benumb his senses and make him insensitive to any kind of

experiences – both the pleasant as well as the unpleasant ones. Most of all, he wanted to let go that unabated internal pain, that refused to edge away after all those years.

He wanted to soothe one pain with the other. The bodily one was supposed to annul the emotional one. Even before he thought he could succeed, he knew it was in vain. He also knew there was no cure for that pain. At best, it could blunt away some day and turn into a sad and painful experience (or more painful experiences!) and that would be all.

But it will never disappear.

Because if it was to disappear, Greenfield would have to disappear as well. That artificially made grove in which he was resting now beside the river would have to disappear too. The same goes for Willy, then Jason, Derrick, and Sarah. Riv and . . . Susan. Can they disappear, all of them? *May* they disappear, all of them? Does he have the right to ask that?

Or, is it possible that all of them remain in the reality, where they actually are and belong, and he, Ethan, disappears? Both would be possible to realize only by means of some wizardry, some supernatural phenomenon, something which would never happen.

He moved into the shadow, eventually. He took off the shirt, the shoes and the socks and continued with his imaginations. Recalling.

Or gathering up the strength and determination for doing what he was intending to do. That's what he would say if asked what he was doing there. Well, nobody asked him. Nobody knew he was there. He has just arrived, less than an hour ago. He didn't go to the town at all, he went straight to the river instead. To the very place where everything begins, and, therefore, the beginning of the end would begin, too. The very place where he will put a period to the end of a life-story and, if he is lucky, take a new, clean sheet of paper and start anew. No remembrances, no recalling, no past.

At the very least, without the bad memories! Even that would be a lot.

And equally impossible to be done.

The air was still. The river was flowing quietly. Steadily. And so innocently. Nothing had changed, as if nothing has really happened. Effortlessly and seemingly without concern, the river was still giving life to all around it. And taking it . . .

Ethan was watching the river and felt as though the river was watching him. Two silent witnesses, again side by side after so much time. Ethan had often wondered what this moment would be like. Would he find the river repelling, even disgusting, carried by the ravages of time and pressured by anxiety heavy as stormy clouds? Or would it instead be irresistibly attractive, as inviting as it had been long ago when he was still a child?

Taking off the rest of his clothes, he was now standing on the sand along the riverbank. The sunbeams were examining his naked body, a body that had been weakened and slimmed by the avalanche of past events. He walked into the water up to his knees and shuddered: the water was cold. Almost icy. Or was he just too hot after basking so much in the sun?

He hardly hesitated before plunging in. He knew, this time also he wouldn't be able to resist this temptation. Love between him and the river could not go away that easily. As he swam, he wondered if this love would ever go away. Would another parting be even harder that he had expected?

Not far away, a dog gave up chasing a butterfly. Pricking up his ears and staring in the direction of the woods, the dog searched the spot where his master had lain around only a

moment ago. Except for a heap of clothes tossed on the grass, the spot was empty. Sniffing the air, the dog moved away towards the river; slowly at first, and then running.

He stopped at the bank and looked at the water, then he gazed at the other bank. No sign of life on the river. Only along the edge, the nature, butterflies, and the twittering of the birds.

He wagged his tail and whined. Then he started to bark. Soon he was running up and down the riverbank not knowing what to do, and his barking was becoming ever louder and uneasy. He made up his mind to jump and was already in the air when Ethan surfaced – and thus there was no way to avoid the collision.

The sound of the dog's whine mingled with a yell of surprise filled the air and then disappeared in the splash of water. The waves rippled its calm surface.

A bit later, the sun was warming their bodies, drying them. In difference to the hair of the golden retriever, Ethan was already dry as dust. Holding the dog's head in his lap, he babbled to him: "Riv, you big, mischievous, hairy maniac. We could both have been killed. What came over you? Why did you do that for?"

The dog was murmuring away contentedly, putting his head in the position for his master to scratch the itching spots. The uneasiness and worries that made him jump were gone. He enjoyed Ethan stroking him, feeling both safe and beloved, and he was returning the same feelings of love and safety in the same measure.

Ethan leaned and kissed his forehead. "I love you, buddy. What would I do without you?" You are the only one that didn't desert me, he added sadly to himself and closed his eyes.

The breeze started to tousle his brown but graying hair. For a moment, welcome freshness of the air invigorated his soul full of melancholy and sorrow.