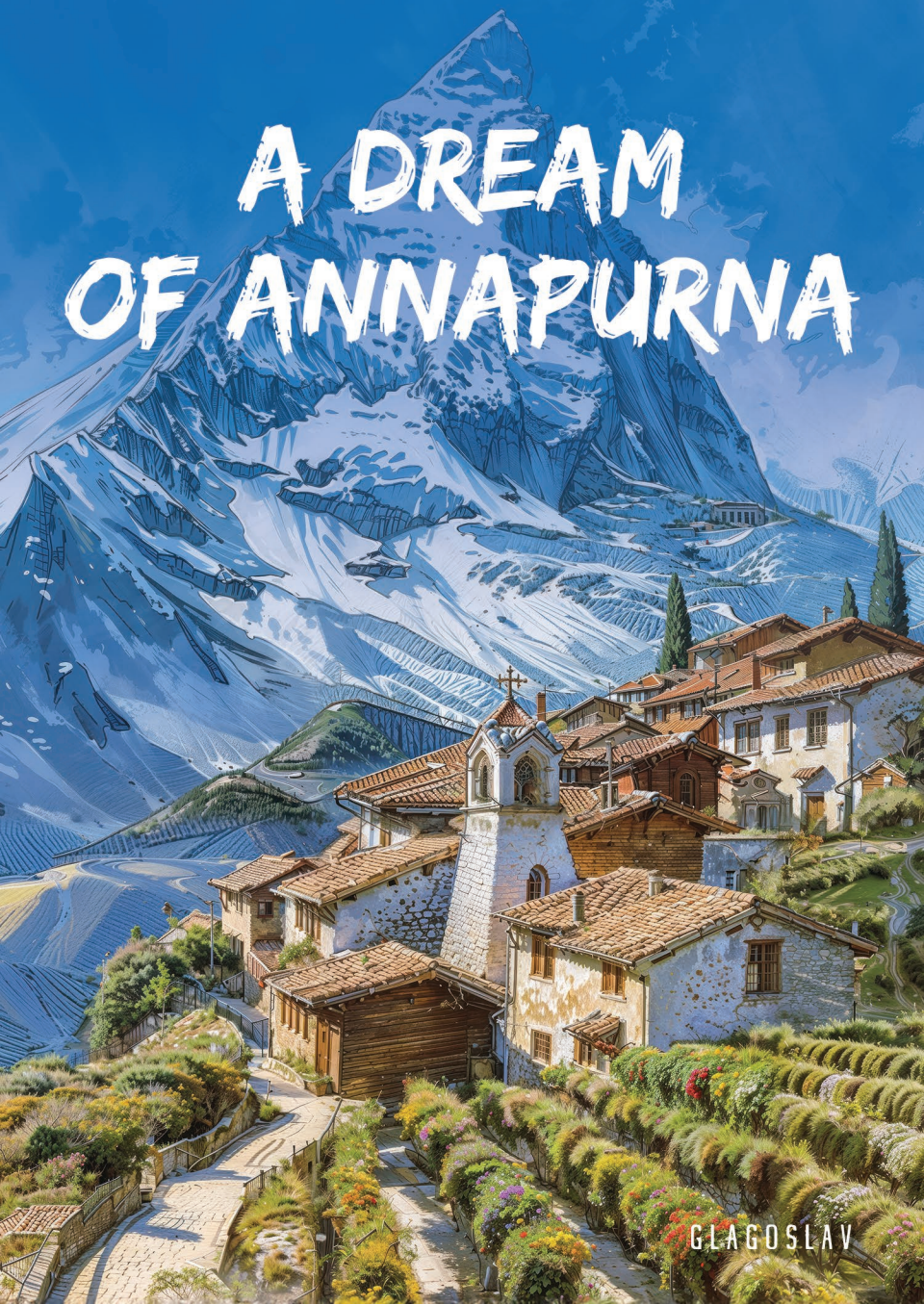


IGOR ZAVILINSKY

# A DREAM OF ANNAPURNA



GLAGOSLAV



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OF ANNAPURNA**

# A DREAM OF ANNAPURNA

by Igor Zavilinsky

Translated from the Russian by Michael and Jonathan Pursglove

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GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS



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Dedicated to my sons and their dreams

With gratitude to two charming old Italian gentlemen whom we met in November 2015 on the trek to Annapurna base camp.

Separate thanks to the owners of Agriturismo Sanguineto, where we spent a splendid four days by the walls of Montepulciano in the summer of 2016, and where I, without their asking, “located” the heroes of this story.

To Igor Tunik: thank you, friend, for your support and faith in me!

To Igor Chaplinsky: thank you for the inspiration from our friendship and travels.

With love to Tuscany. Missing Nepal.

## 1955. MONTEPULCIANO, ITALY

*Don't dare die till you've lived your dream*

“Angelo!”

It seemed to Angelo that he had not yet managed to shut his eyes. To be more accurate it didn't “seem”; he was absolutely certain that it was all a horrible mistake and they were summoning someone else, or a completely different Angelo, of whom there were more than a few in these parts. It couldn't refer to him personally because... well, it just couldn't and that was that. The boy turned over irritably onto his other side and lay still, in expectation of a miracle: they wouldn't summon him any more, they'd lay off him, or the whole thing was a dream. The feeling of pent-up expectation began to subside and blissful sleep to return joyously. His legs relaxed from their tense, curled-up position, and his body began to adopt its usual pose, stretched diagonally across the bed. And at that moment, like a death sentence, louder than before, and divided into syllables, no doubt in the hope of greater understanding, the word rang out: “An-ge-lo.”

Angelo woke up. At least the bit connected to reality did. There was no doubt it was definitely him that was being summoned; he fully understood that his friend Vito was downstairs; furthermore, Angelo had guessed how cross his frozen friend was and was full of sympathy for him. But the commands went no lower than Angelo's head; all the signals and impulses being actively sent out by his brain to his body, fizzled out at the very place where his neck disappeared beneath the warm woollen blanket, and he remained motionless. Angelo

knew very well that he would get up but was absolutely certain that five minutes from now it would be significantly easier to do so. It was a very happy idea – not to refuse to do his duty by a friend, but simply to postpone its implementation.

“Angelo, you idle bastard. I’m cold!”

Vito, for it was he, was standing beneath his friend’s window. Vito hated the cold, even in a Maytime manifestation such as this. The boy was ready to endure hunger, weariness from long hours of walking, and even toothache, but cold he could not bear. Cold paralysed his body and his thoughts, forcing him to think only of one thing – warmth. What was most hurtful was that inability to endure cold was universally treated as a sign of being spoiled or excessively soft. For a lad who had grown up surrounded by four women this was always very painful. Furthermore, from early childhood he had also been teased for his always impeccably ironed clothes, which in these parts were regarded as foppish, for the satisfying lunches in his school satchel, and for the tight schedule by which he lived, which left him no room for manoeuvre. Then there was the cursed, almost total, intolerance of cold. All attempts to conceal this failing, so injurious to the reputation of a sixteen-year-old adolescent, were futile. In this village, in response to an inopportune nocturnal bark, everyone called on the dog by name to desist.

“Angelo! Come on!”

Vito’s voice had gone beyond the angry stage and was becoming more and more plaintive. The last “come on” simply beseeched Angelo to have pity and, if not to emerge at once, at least to give grounds for hope that his friend’s pleading had been heard. Younger than Vito by a couple of years, Angelo naturally knew of the complicated relationship between Vito and the cold, but always kept quiet about it, not so much from fear of receiving a poke in the eye as from tact, possibly innate, or instilled in him by his grandfather. Even at such a young age, the boy wisely considered that everyone was entitled to their own peculiarities. In the final analysis, his own fear of heights was not a sign of cowardice as a whole, but merely a specific attitude to a very specific situation which, like Vito’s love of warmth, in no way depended on him himself. It came from God, as they say.

“Stop yelling! You’ll wake everyone up! I’m coming,” Angelo at last replied, his intonation suggesting that he wasn’t averse to getting up and his friend was making all this racket for nothing and was threatening the implementation of all their plans for the night.

Having convinced himself that Angelo had woken up, Vito fell silent. Hearing the floor creaking, which confirmed the imminent appearance of his friend, he tried to distract his attention from the cold, and contemplated the unusually starry sky. There was much to contemplate; after two weeks of non-stop rain, this was perhaps the first clear night. The stars, like children who had spent a fortnight in stuffy houses, playing and replaying games both possible and impossible and driving their parents mad, had broken free and were scattered about the sky in a multitude of combinations.

Unlike city children, for whom a starry sky, polluted by the light of the megapolis, can, in moments of rural revelation, claim the status of a “wonder”, Vito did not perceive the night sky as something distant and boundless. On the contrary, he thought of it as the wholly real and tangible roof of his small world: the cosmos covered their village like a large cup, with stars painted on the bottom of it. It was beautiful and even enchanting on such nights, but in the mind of a country boy it evoked wholly earthly thoughts about the next day’s weather, and did not take him off into the cosmos.

“Well, have they arrived?” Vito asked in the direction of the staircase, which was creaking beneath Angelo’s feet.

“Yes, late in the evening. What time is it now?”

“Half past one,” Vito’s voice rang out as he tried to conceal a shiver. “What are they doing?”

“Nothing in particular for now,” Angelo replied hesitantly. His information about the goings-on in the bar were two hours old, the two hours during which he had managed to sleep. “They’re getting washed. Genarro is cooking something for them.”

Angelo never called Genarro grandfather. Come to that, he, in his sixty plus years, did not particularly resemble a grandfather; he was a strong, stocky man, whose age had only managed to claim for itself the grey hairs on his head and in his short stubble-

cum-beard. Genarro always lived by his own rules, refusing to acknowledge authorities or the opinions of others; in his time, this had enabled him to avoid Mussolini's populism. However, living in an Alpine village in the north-west of Italy, at the intersection of three countries, Genarro had not given the Duce the slightest chance of winning over his heart with his dazzling speeches. Nationalism was alien to Genarro, as was monogamy. The colourful nature of his ancestry was like the variegated nature of his personal life. This was not a matter of frivolity or licentiousness but simply that Genarro saw his life as being like a hotel in an alpine resort: there was room for everybody there, everybody was warm and comfortable, but, once the holiday was over, the "residents" came together – some till the following year, some for good. His life ran very smoothly and successfully. Over time he acquired some small five-room apartments which, together with the services of a mountain guide, allowed him to have a wholly respectable lifestyle even when Europe fell into the grip of war. On the whole all the years of his life were reasonably stable and, in a way, even monotonous; only one year, 1943, broke the mould and seem to come from someone else's life. That year two remarkable transformative events befell Genarro, two startling leaps: he became a hero of the anti-fascist resistance without once picking up a rifle, and he became a grandfather without being a father.

Well, everything in its own good time. Being indifferent to the Italian fascists, and even more so to the German Nazis, in the torrid 1940s Genarro took a contemplative position, judging people with reference merely to himself and not to their political affiliation or convictions. Over the course of many years in the mountains, among his few friends and large number of residents, there were all sorts of people – from the children of Jewish industrialists from Genoa to officers of the Bundeswehr who came to sharpen their alpine skills.

But one day in March, French partisans arrived and he didn't even think of refusing them. Anyone who knocked on his door was his guest and could count on his help, both in his home and in his mountains. Thus, what was subsequently treated as heroism was simply a matter of principle. Of course, if partisans

had been found in his house, no one would have found his actions exquisite and the result would have been dire. Genarro understood this very well, but stubbornly continued doing things his own way even if this posed a risk to his own quiet life.

In time, his little hotel became a safe refuge for members of the anti-fascist *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans*,<sup>1</sup> with whom Genarro sympathised and whom he helped, not so much because of their convictions but because of their youth. After the war the grateful communists who had formed the core of these bands made much of Genarro's modest contribution to the defeat of fascism and even managed, without his permission, to make him a member of the French communist party.

Truth to tell, by this time Genarro had no time for glory – after all, a grandson had “landed” on him. To be more precise, in that year of 1943 a hitherto unknown daughter had “landed” on him. An eighteen-year-old girl, already with a round little belly, stood in the doorway of his hotel and looked at Genarro with the eyes of his late mother. The resemblance was so obvious that the newly-minted father assumed his new obligations without misgivings or delays. The poor man was so carried away by his new duties that it was two days before the question was asked about the mother of his daughter. It wasn't that he didn't hazard a guess as to who this might be but, let's put it this way, there were two or three possibilities. As for the future of the child-to-be, Genarro didn't even enquire. A couple of months later this whole newly-minted family had to flee: the partisans warned him that information about his friendship with them had somehow reached the authorities. This was advance notice, and had Genarro been on his own he would certainly have ignored the warning. However, his mobility and, to a certain extent his audacity, had sharply decreased with the appearance of his pregnant daughter and the father-cum-grandfather, always quick to make decisions, left the hotel to a young neighbour who had been helping him for several years, and went south.

.....  
<sup>1</sup> An armed resistance group formed by the French Communist Party during World War Two.

They had brief stints in several towns, but circumstances, in the shape of Sofia's swelling belly, forced Genarro to settle somewhere. "Somewhere" turned out to be a little village in the middle of Tuscany, just south of Siena. Some savings and a small income which he continued to receive from his Alpine hotel, together with low wartime property prices, allowed them to buy a two-storey house, with the prospect of opening some sort of drinking establishment on the first floor.

Whether the information about danger had been erroneous or whether Genarro's simple manoeuvre had thrown his pursuers off the scent, nothing more disturbed the peace of the newly-minted father. Plans to return north, if they had existed in Genarro's head at first, fairly quickly evaporated amidst the worries about Angelo, who had just made his appearance in the world, and about his new business. Although at the time it was difficult to call it a business, it simply managed not to make excessive calls on their existing resources. The restaurant was worth its keep later, after the war, when Genarro managed to sell the Alpine hotel at a profit to an American.

"How many are they?" asked Vito in tremulous voice, not so much for information but in order to distract himself from the cold.

"I saw two."

"F-French people?"

"Yes, but one was speaking Italian."

"Are they here for long?"

"Don't know."

"Is that their Peugeot over there?"

"Uh-huh."

The boys went up to the first floor. The interior window of Angelo's room gave a superb view of the whole bar room and bar. The window itself was in the corner and remained unlit. Maybe at first Angelo felt the superiority of his room's layout. Up until now he had never seen at such close range the drawbacks of the restaurant's layout: without leaving his kitchen, Genarro could summon him on account of a plate which, in the old man's opinion, had been badly washed up, and there was nowhere for the boy to hide.



The boys moved up to the window and began to watch what was going on inside the restaurant. At a table in the centre two men were sitting – Genarro in his chef's apron, and one of the Frenchmen, dressed military fashion, although not in a military uniform. There was no sign of the second guest; he'd evidently already gone to bed. The Frenchman was noticeably younger than Genarro; he was scarcely pushing forty. From the window all one could see was his brightly lit face, a determined face with a square chin, a pencil moustache above his upper lip and an ironic look. Vito looked reproachfully at Angelo, who had slept through the first part of the conversation and, trying not to make a noise, sat down on a stool by the window. Angelo, fearing lest he was again smothered by sleep, remained standing behind his friend. The adults' conversation was in full swing.

"... I tell you, Maurice, never in my life have I seen such a crooked mug as on that Pierre. And you know I've seen everything," Genarro was saying, choking with laughter.

"Then I asked him: 'What the hell are you doing in the mountains, soldier. There's enough work in the town,'" replied Maurice in a strong accent. "But do you know what his answer was?"

"Go on."

"The air is cleaner in the mountains!"

Both speakers began to guffaw. Maurice put his hand on Genarro's shoulder, and with the other, beat time to the laughter on the table. Vito and Angelo were dumbstruck; by the light of the lamp they saw that the Frenchman had no fingers at all on either hand. The boys exchanged glances as if checking whether they had seen one and the same thing. Genarro, continuing to laugh and, afraid lest he wake up the sleeping boy he thought of as his grandson, tried to catch hold of the hand the Frenchman was banging on the table; having caught it, he hesitated somewhat – instead of fingers he was holding in his hand only a wrist which resembled a small pancake. The old friends calmed down, sobbing from time to time and evidently recalling the face of the wretched Pierre. Genarro, as if by way of apology, nodded towards the Frenchman's hand.

"A mere trifle, my friend. Payment for the last expedition to Annapurna," replied the guest, calmly and without regret.

"Wasn't that too high a price?" From beneath a scrap of cloth thrown over a basket Genarro took out a large chunk of cheese and began to slice it up deftly on a board. Maurice watched the rapid movements of his friend's strong hands spellbound and said nothing until preparations were complete for a simple hors d'oeuvre to go with a second bottle of wine.

"Well, no one warned about the cost," said the Frenchman, coming back to reality and switching his attention to the cutlery. "However, I got off lightly. Well, it's not for me to tell you..."

"I understand."

"Good Lord, Genarro, why do you have cutlery like this in this hole?" said Maurice, unexpectedly changing the topic of conversation and trying to turn over a knife which was lying on the table. On the first floor Vito coughed and, frightened by the noise he'd made, jumped up and retreated quietly into the depths of the room.

"Do you like it?" asked Genarro proudly, taking the knife, wiping it on the towel at his shoulder and laying it on the Frenchman's palm. "Stainless steel."

"So it doesn't rust?"

"That's what they promise..." said the old man guardedly.

"Who do? The Americans?" Maurice persisted.

"No, these are ours. Italian," Genarro countered uncertainly, fully aware what his friend was driving at.

"Well that clinches it," said Maurice with a laugh. "But look, there's already a mark."

"Where?" asked Genarro with a frightened twitch.

At this Vito, who had returned to the window, gave a start, having banged his head painfully on the window frame.

"No, I think it's the remains of ketchup," the Frenchman continued mockingly, but he took pity on the sincerity of his friend's feelings and added in business-like fashion, "but the cutlery is really good. After the war I managed to do a bit of trading in kitchen ware."

Genarro raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

"I'm no expert, but I do know something about it," the guest continued, maintaining his business-like tone. "Don't be offended if I say I didn't expect to see such knives and forks."

"Yes, there's a whole story behind those knives. I'll tell you another time." Genarro wanted to get back to the topic of Annapurna. "How's your partner?"

"Louis? Well, he also caught it. Although he had more luck. He only got it in the legs," said Maurice almost casually.

"You got it in the legs too?" Genarro couldn't help casting a glance at his friend's stylish shoes.

"Uh-huh," the Frenchman continued in the same calm fashion, as if the subject was not his body but the imperfections of a suit he'd bought. "So I've got enhanced streamlining."

Maurice looked up at Genarro as if testing the quality of his joke. But the old man sat silently, not knowing how to react to the Frenchman's rather cruel jokes at his own expense.

"Maybe I can do some swimming?" Maurice made another attempt to prod his friend into action.

"Yes, or some politicking!" Genarro finally came to life. "To my shame I found out too late. Information takes its time getting here. I dare say you were already at home."

"Probably." Maurice examined his hands as if hoping to see some improvement there. "Those bloody mittens!"

"What's wrong with them?"

"Everything was all right with them – things were bad without them."

Maurice hid his hands in his pockets, as if the flood of recollections had made him freeze up. "Like a fool, I lost them."

"How so?"

"When we got to the top, we were elated." The Frenchman's eyes flashed, as if he were again standing on a summit at eight thousand metres. "Only where did we get the strength from to be elated?"

Maurice picked up his glass in both hands and took a large gulp of wine. He took his time with the story, trying to prolong his recollections and not switch to a less pleasant part of the narrative. But then, with a sigh, he continued. His speech was somewhat ragged – he was clearly embarrassed by his carelessness, faced with such an experienced companion.

"I tried to take a couple of pictures with my camera. But it was completely frozen up and I couldn't feel the buttons through my mittens. In a moment of euphoria I took off my gloves and clicked away to right and left. Then it was Louis' turn. We were like children. We realised we had to get away quickly. The window was closing. And you couldn't really call it a window. The weather was lousy. I looked all round me – the mittens were gone. Already covered with snow, you see. I searched but it was no good and there was no more time. I had to go without them," the Frenchman said, emphasising every word, like a schoolboy reporting to his father on the low marks he's received.

"I can imagine."

"How sorry I was that you weren't beside me then, my friend. With your daft habit of carrying spare pairs of mittens and socks." The tipsy Frenchman laid his damaged hand on Genarro's shoulder.

"Two pairs, my boy. Always two pairs."

"Well, to cut a long story short," Maurice said with a start, reverting to his usual ironic tone, "Jacques had to give me a manicure at base camp. He couldn't do anything else."

With a sad smile the Frenchman blew on his imaginary fingers, like a woman drying varnish on her nails.

There was a pregnant pause. Both speakers had their own thoughts.

"Good Lord. You did that. Eight thousand metres." Genarro poured the wine, trying to imagine himself at that height.

"Eight thousand and ninety-one metres, Genarro."

"I always knew you were the best. I've told you that before."

"You alone were better, Genarro. However, not the best, in any case," said the Frenchman with a laugh. "There was that New Zealander climbed Everest two years ago."

"Yes, I know. All the same, you were the first at eight thousand metres."

"Well, yes. Now I can do nothing for the rest of my life but tell that story."

"Yes, it's just about you!" laughed the Italian. "Or else I don't know you! By the way, what's that lorry?"

Maurice nodded, making it clear that he would answer as soon as he'd eaten his hunk of cheese.

“I’m carrying tyre samples!”

“What?”

“I’m a partner in a company now and am in sales.”

“Is that so?”

“A potential client, a big one, has appeared in Rome, so I decided to call in on you at the same time.” Maurice continued eating his cheese and gesticulating in delight. When he’d finished the last piece, the Frenchman adjusted his chair, as if he wanted to move on to a more important part of their conversation.

“In fact I found out where you lived last year, but I didn’t want to simply write. I’d wait until I was in your part of the world.”

“How did you find me, you vagabond?”

“Well, if it hadn’t been for your glorious communist past, it would have been more complicated.”

“A communist! Yes, I’m still one of those!” The friends burst out laughing again. “Except I yield to you in ideological fervour.”

“You’re a rubbish communist – forgive me! But you’re still on their books, so your comrades-in-arms quickly gave me all your details.”

“There you go. Someone still remembers the old man.” Genarro stood up and went behind the bar in search of a new bottle. “I’m grateful to them for that. To tell the truth, I didn’t think we’d meet again.”

“I never doubted it.” As he got more tipsy, Maurice’s Italian got worse and became mixed up with French words. “I needed you.”

“And why do you, the conqueror of Annapurna, a chevalier of the Order of the Cross, need me?”

“You know why!”

“I’m sure that thirty or so years from now will just be the beginning of a catalogue of your achievements, my dear fellow!”

“Thank you, my friend.”

“So what do you need esteemed Monsieur Old Man Genarro for? Well, apart from getting drunk for free in his bar?” asked the Italian, indicating with a gesture that he should pour drinks from the new bottle.

“I should have told you...” Maurice collected himself and took a big swig of wine. “There’s one small fact you don’t know. Nor does anyone else.”

“You’re gay, Maurice?” yelled Genarro, already rather drunk, in mock horror. “You’d have been better to give me the news by letter!”

Vito and Angelo burst out laughing in surprise and almost gave away their presence.

“No, Genarro, I definitely wouldn’t have come to see you with such news! There’s something else.” There seemed to be a catch in Maurice’s voice.

Realising that it was a matter of some importance, Genarro instantly grew serious.

“You saved my life, old man.”

“Somehow, Maurice, I don’t remember that. If the communists told you that, don’t believe it. It’s not the first time they’ve told fibs about me...”

“We’d got stranded on a slope,” the French man continued, ignoring his friend’s joke and recoiling. “Night had fallen.”

“What height were you at?”

“Difficult to say, but we weren’t that far from the summit. We were simply being blown off the mountain, literally blown off. Do you understand? Annapurna was avenging herself on us for losing her virginity. There was nothing for it but to spend the night in a crevasse. We had one sleeping bag between four people.”

The smile on the Frenchman’s face expressed simultaneous hatred and delight at these memories.

“For four people?”

“Yes, there was Gaston and Lionel too. They were behind us. We turned them round. They wouldn’t have made it anyway. It was suicide. However, at that moment I was sure I was saving their lives. Or increasing very slightly their chances of survival.” Maurice paused for a second, then added: “You know, sometimes I think I tried to increase my own chances by picking up two soldiers.”

“Don’t argue. You saved them. You all got down, didn’t you?”

“Yes, yes. They’re all alive,” continued Maurice thoughtfully. “But that night... Honestly, Genarro, by morning I’d given up. You know that’s not like me, but I’d reconciled myself to death. And I simply decided to go to sleep. No, that’s rubbish... I didn’t decide anything, I simply let go of everything. I didn’t feel any

pain, and at some point I wasn't even cold. I was simply drifting off. Everything was somehow peaceful and calm. The thought of death didn't frighten me. Not at all. You know, I understood there that death is not frightening in itself. People are afraid of pain, not death. There was no pain. Nor cold. After hours of torment, the absence of pain and cold was almost happiness."

"Maurice..."

"Listen. They say that normal people at such moments remember their family, wives, girlfriends," Maurice resumed his habitual ironic tone, "but not your humble servant."

With a nod the Frenchman indicated his empty glass to Genarro and said nothing while the latter filled it again.

"What were you imagining, you French debauchee?" the barman impatiently urged his friend. "Not Laurent again?"

"Good Lord! You still haven't forgotten!?"

"You don't forget things like that, my friend!" laughed Genarro. "You must agree, Laurent was pretty rough-looking."

"No, brother! You won't believe it, but before my eyes rose your snout, not, forgive my saying so, the most beautiful I've ever seen in my life!"

"Well, yes. Where's this leading?"

"Do you remember, one day during the war we were sitting in the cellar at your place and discussing important things?"

"You know you talked of nothing else the whole time, so I don't remember."

"I too hadn't remembered until I started dying. Then it came to me so clearly. In that cellar we ardent brats discussed death. We all argued about what was easier: to get a bullet in the chest or be blown up by a mine. There, lying in the crevasse on Annapurna, I remembered our stupid argument. I thought too that the variant that had befallen me was not bad – was much better than what had befallen many of the lads who had argued in your little Alpine house." Maurice raised his glass, indicating that he was drinking to the comrades who had died in the war. Then he went on:

"Then you used to listen to us without butting in. You kept grinning into your moustache – you didn't yet have a beard – and it was only when you were closing the cellar trapdoor for

the night that for some reason you turned to me specifically and came out with: 'Maurice! Don't dare die till you've lived your dream!' and left."

"Maurice, I don't remember that."

"Why did you address it to me specifically, old boy?"

"If I really did say that, it's probably because, Maurice, I knew about your dream. And for me your death, even the most heroic of deaths, would have been a betrayal. A betrayal of your dream and of those talents which the Lord had endowed you with."

Maurice fell silent, as if he were again reliving those minutes. Then, after a swig of wine, he went on:

"I think at that moment I was already asleep. Then I saw your face, just like in the cellar; you were looking at me from above, through a half-closed opening. The light was pouring through it, dazzling our eyes, which had become accustomed to the darkness. You were saying: 'Don't dare die till you've lived your dream!' Genarro, it was like an electric shock. Annapurna wasn't my dream! We hadn't set out to climb it."

"Meaning?"

"That's a separate story. We had planned to climb Dhaulagiri, but when we got there, we realised that wasn't possible, and went to Annapurna."

"I didn't know."

"Well, you understand how it is: journalists need lovely stories about how dreams are fulfilled. Two Frenchmen, one a hero of the Resistance, went and opted for his second choice," laughed Maurice. "All in all, I got really angry. What the hell am I doing here, I thought? I tell you, my dream of you came just in time. My colleagues were already asleep. How I bashed them, Genarro, how I bashed them. It's lucky I couldn't feel my hands by that time. Just imagine, I'd split Gaston's eyebrow."

"I suppose he doesn't hold it against you."

"He'd have tried. That lucky blighter's split eyebrow was his only injury from the climb. The rest of us had something cut off and that son of a bitch got a bloodied brow. If I'd known, I'd at least have broken his nose. That's the story, old boy." Maurice put both his crippled hands on Genarro's. "Thank God, you haven't figured in my dreams either before or since."



The friends burst out laughing, their foreheads pressed together, their hands clasped. Vito and Angelo, shocked by the story, sat in silence.

Genarro clapped the Frenchman on the shoulder, and poured the remains of the bottle into his glass. Holding the bottle between his two palms, Maurice proposed a toast;

“Don’t die till you’ve lived your dream!”

“Don’t even think of it!”

Somewhat embarrassed by the pathos of the moment, Maurice hastened to continue:

“I’ve got a present for you.”

“You should have started with that, you greedy frog!”

“It’s a great shame that not a single photo from the summit came out. I’m not very good at it and don’t know why that happened, but in the event all the film came out black. So there’s only one left from that film. I left it in camp before the climb.”

Maurice dived into his travel bag, which had been dumped under the table and, not without some difficulty, fished out a photo.

“That’s her?” asked Genarro.

“That’s her. That’s us at base camp with Louis looking at the summit. Here’s our tent. You know, I look at that photograph and try to remember what I was thinking about at that moment. And I can’t.”

“It doesn’t matter what you were thinking about ‘before’. What matters is that you’re able to do it ‘after’. Thanks. If you don’t mind, I’ll hang it in the most prominent place in the bar.”

“Of course, my friend. A second one just like it hangs in my study.”

“Then sign this one.”

“It’s already got a signature: ‘Annapurna. 1950’.”

“I want something from you.” Genarro put a pencil into the Frenchman’s hand.

“Will that do you,” the Frenchman asked and, with surprising dexterity, holding the pencil between his hands, drew some letters in the corner of the photograph. The two friends laughed and embraced.

The children waited for another fifteen minutes or so until the comrades-in-arms went to their rooms, and after this went

downstairs and eagerly began to examine the photograph. Angelo was somewhat disappointed with the external appearance of Annapurna: his childish fantasy and innate fear of heights had, as the Frenchman's story progressed, created a picture of sheer cliffs and a pointed peak at the summit. Undoubtedly the photograph showed huge mountain, which was nevertheless a long way from what the boy had imagined. Vito looked at the two mountaineer figures in sweaters who had crawled out of the tent and were gazing at the snow-covered peak as if pondering whether it was worth continuing. From the sharp ridge leading to the summit the wind was dislodging huge snow prominences, the sight of which made Vito cower. As Maurice had said, in the bottom corner of the picture was printed ANNAPURNA 1950 and a little higher, in block capitals, an uneven inscription had been added: "DON'T DARE DIE TILL YOU'VE LIVED YOUR DREAM! MAURICE HERZOG, 1955."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Herzog (15.01.1919–13.12.2012). French mountaineer and politician. After completing his studies, he fought with French partisans in the Alps. Although himself unsympathetic to left-wing ideas, he served with the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans communist brigade. After the war he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. In 1945 he began working for Kléber-Colombes, a tyre-manufacturing company and took up rock-climbing. He later became co-owner of the firm and headed it until 1958.

On June 3 1950 Herzog, together with Louis Lachenal became the first men in history to conquer an eight-thousand-metre peak when they climbed Annapurna 1 in the Himalayas, the tenth highest mountain in the world.

The return from the summit turned out to be a severe ordeal. Light boots and Herzog's loss of his mittens at the summit, and a night spent in a glacial crevasse on the descent, with one sleeping bag between four (Louis Lachenal, Gaston Rébuffat, Lionel Terray and Maurice Herzog) led to severe frostbite. The two who had reached the summit (Lachenal and Herzog) lost all their toes; in addition, Herzog lost all his fingers. The quick spread of gangrene forced the expedition's doctor Jacques Oudot to do urgent amputations in field conditions and without anaesthetics.

From 1958 to 1966 Herzog was French Minister for Youth and

.....  
Sport and from 1968 to 1977 Mayor of Chamonix. From 1970 onwards he was a member of the International Olympic Committee, and from 1995 an honorary member of that committee. He was a Grand Officier de la Légion d'Honneur (2008).

On December 30 2011 he became a Chevalier de la Grande-Croix de la Légion d'Honneur.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Igor Zavilinsky was born in 1969 in Kiev (now Kyiv). After military service, he graduated from the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute and then went into business. He began writing for electronic media in 2000 but his first printed publication was a collection of novellas *Boatman, I love you* (2018). A second collection, *Lighthouse* followed in 2019, the year in which his first novel, *A Dream of Annapurna*, was published by Samit (Summit, Kyiv). A second novel, *Five Days with Lauren* was published in 2021.

Zavilinsky, who lives in Kyiv, numbers travel and the fortunes of Kyiv Dynamo Football Club among his other interests.

## ABOUT THE TRANSLATORS

Michael Pursglove is a UK-based translator specialising in the works of Ivan Turgenev, and in modern Ukrainian literature. He also writes and reviews for a number of journals, notably *East-West Review*.

His son Jonathan graduated in History from the Open University and is a translator from Russian.

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Although the two main characters in *A Dream of Annapurna* are Italian and the novel is set partly in Tuscany, in many ways this is an international novel, with people from France, Italy, America, Russia, Switzerland, Spain, China, and Nepal playing small but important parts in the story. The settings, too, range from Italy to New York, Paris to Kathmandu, and the lower slopes of Annapurna. The novel is both historical and contemporary, spanning a period of sixty years, from 1955 to 2015, and combining both real-life and fictional characters. The major themes of the novel are universally human and include youth, ambition, age, friendship, fear, bravery, and love. Overshadowing these human characteristics is an implacable natural world. The mighty mountain Annapurna, long the focus of the protagonists' dreams, comes to loom physically over them, but even the permanence of the natural world is threatened by the horrific earthquake which hit Kathmandu on 25 April 2015.

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