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Bestseller

Beka Adamashvili

Bestseller

translated by Tamar Japaridze

Dedalus

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THE AUTHOR

Born in 1990, Beka Adamashvili is a postmodern Georgian author, blogger, screenwriter, and Creative Director at an advertising agency. In 2011 he graduated from Caucasus School of Media at Caucasus University with a BA in Journalism and Social Sciences.

In 2014 his first novel *Bestseller* was published. It became a real bestseller in Georgia and was on the shortlist for the best debut novel at the SABA Literary Awards and as the best novel at the Tsinandali Awards. It also got a special prize at the Iliani Literary Awards.

In 2018 Beka Adamashvili's second postmodern novel *Everybody Dies in This Novel* was published. It won an EU prize.

THE TRANSLATOR

Tamar Japaridze is a highly acclaimed Georgian translator and academic. She was the winner of the SABA Literary Prize in 2016 for the best translation of the year.

She has translated over thirty literary works from English into Georgian, including authors such as William Shakespeare, Rudyard Kipling, Harold Pinter, John Fowles, Henry Miller, Arundati Roy, Irvin Welsh, Bernardine Evaristo, Margaret Atwood and Kazuo Ishiguro.

*To trees
as compensation for the insignificant damage
caused by using paper for this dedication.*

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Quasi-preface

I can hardly think of anyone who is fond of reading prefaces, and even more so writing them. It's because the majority of prefaces are as long as the 21st night in December, as obligatory as complimenting each other at banquets, and as dull as the midnight TV programmes.

As for this one, by good luck it is short and does not provide any space for such lofty statements as: *The Author's style is saturated with extreme lightness and flexibility...; We should also note his expertly veiled symbolism, in which...; In the eclectic nature of the protagonist one can trace the embryo of moderate sadness... et cetera.* Firstly, because this book does not carry a deep and profound meaning; secondly, it is not loaded with ideological symbols the greatness of which is often incomprehensible to everyone, even to the authors themselves.

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I must also warn you right at the start that you are not going to come across dirty words, pornographic scenes, or such shocking tricks which later make the authors measure the level of disreputability of the expressions used in their address. However, in this book you will find drawings and dialogues that (if not completely, then partially, at least) will compensate for the painful deficiencies mentioned above. On the whole, the novel is a light and enjoyable piece and, according to the rough calculation of the Author, can be easily read in 6325 breaths.

A couple of words about the locations in *Bestseller*: part of the action takes place in France. Selection of the country in the given context was purely conditional, as it was based on the phonetic characteristics of the protagonist's name – Pierre Sonnage. As for the second part, it unfolds in Literary Hell, and *since it is easier to draw a devil than a rooster* (as everyone has seen the latter and no one the former), it was much easier for the Author to cope with its description.¹

Well, what else can I say? Welcome your eyes to Literary Hell!

¹ Initially, the Author was not going to paraphrase any “wise words” in the preface, but Confucius’ comparison of a devil and a rooster (the symbols of Hell and France) fitted into the comparative description of these two locations so well that he couldn’t help doing so (embarrassed A/N).

*'And Mahalalel lived after he begat Jared
eight hundred and thirty years,
and begat sons and daughters.'*
Genesis 5:16

'So they all ate and were filled.'
Mark 6:42

‘ ’
James Joyce, *'Ulysses'*,
after every declarative sentence.²

² These quotations have nothing to do with the events unfolding further. The Author simply tried to keep pace with popular trend and thereby create the illusion that deep wisdom is embedded in his book (A/N).

I

PR-Step or Oops! - Straight into Hell...

Pierre Sonnage firmly decided to commit suicide on his 33rd birthday. His motivation was not banal at all, I mean he hadn't caught his bride and the best man making love before the wedding; he hadn't gradually lost everything – his head, hopes and the last shirt – in a gambling house; he had never gone so deep into the existential problems as to be dragged into a swamp of vanity; neither was he seriously in debt to anyone except humankind for building a house, planting a tree and fathering a single son. In fact, when planning the suicide,

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its mission was far more idealistic than the mere prospect of solving the eternal dilemma of the immortality of the soul.

The thing is that Pierre Sonnage was a writer! Maybe unknown and not even socially active, but still. He belonged to the category of the creative individuals who prefer writing many books to reading them. Consequently, he had already published a lot of short stories and even four thick books. In some way he resembled Rubens for being fond of creating massive and heavy pieces. Nevertheless, literary gourmets rated his 'heavy' creations as 'easily digestible'. On the whole, the appraisal was not bad, but the rating didn't seem favourable to Pierre since standing on the same platform with Houellebecq, Le Clézio, and Beigbeder wasn't easy for him. Moreover, there were only a dozen readers at the presentation of his last book. True, he was not planning a grand presentation but we must admit that having a crowd of only twelve readers at the age of 33 is not a big number.

That, of course, could be explained easily: Pierre wholeheartedly believed that 'society was not ready to accept and appreciate his brilliant ideas'. So, in order to guide it to the true path, he had 'to take an effective step'. It was then that the idea of committing suicide, which gave rise to the whole complicated story, occurred to him...

(As Pierre Sonnage commits suicide at the end of this chapter, the Author did not consider it necessary to describe his appearance or personal traits at this point.)

Oh yes, Pierre decided to sacrifice himself to his creative life, as he knew that death has one immortal feature – it boosts

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respect.³ Suicide was the only way for him to achieve eternal glory, because he knew another proven maxim⁴ too: a man had to die to gain a deathless fame.

As one can commit suicide more or less only once in life, he wanted the event to happen with dignity and pomp. Therefore, he began to prepare for it far in advance. He refused to use the rope from the very start, since the rope which he had found in his closet was just as worn out as the method itself of committing suicide by hanging. He rejected the idea of shooting himself for the same reason (besides, he would die with fear before pulling the trigger). What's more important, he was absolutely sure that his brains deserved to be kept in a better place (say a glass container with a special liquid, proudly exposed in a museum) than on an ordinary wall. He even had thought of taking 33 sleeping pills, but later realised that after the autopsy nobody would be able to count the amount of the pills, and this smart symbolism would remain an eternal secret for the history of world literature. True, he could indicate it in his suicide note, but the sentence 'I'm 33 now, so I've decided to take 33 sleeping pills' would sound pretty odd, and he would rather die than write such rubbish!

There were myriads of other methods of committing suicide: demonstrative self-immolation in Rouen Square, jumping from the stream of life into the stream of the Seine, tasting raw fugu-fish, taking a loan from a bank or just jumping

3 He even wrote in one of his novels: 'If we showed our respect towards people as generously as we do posthumously, they would live a much longer and happier life.'

4 The Author could here use the synonymous words, such as 'truth', 'wisdom', 'axiom', etc. But as he is a maximalist, he decided to pretend to be more intellectual (note of the intel. Auth.)

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under the train with his own books in his hand, thus attracting the passengers' attention with his aggressive advertising or with a desperate scream.

However, since Pierre believed that he contemplated the future standing on Newton's shoulders,⁵ he decided to look death in the eye from a maximum height. Naturally, he rejected the moon and Everest at once; Everest because it was far away and the moon because it was even farther. Besides, even if his body was ever discovered, it was unlikely that anyone would consider a French writer who turned into a satellite or froze in the deep snows of Everest a suicide. So, with a cold mind and a warm heart, Pierre chose a height which he could reach quite easily.

Thus, on the day of his 33rd anniversary, he found himself in Dubai – the city built out of almost nothing – to build his own future out of almost nothing as well...

(Based on the fact that the Author hates depicting landscapes as his memory always delicately refuses to recall the beautiful words concerning the details of reliefs and bas-reliefs, he omits the description of any Dubai sights. As for the Burj Khalifa, it's easier to find its image on google than read its description which would take three pages at least.)

And lo, Pierre saw the Burj Khalifa with his own eyes, stepped into the lift with his own feet, pressed the button of the highest

⁵ In order to prove that the Author's knowledge of the word "maxim" was not accidental, here he paraphrases the famous expression by Isaac Newton: 'If I have seen further than the others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.'

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available floor with his own finger, and felt the increasing pressure with his own ears while going up.

“Everyone has their own Calvary,” he said to a 22-year-old girl in the lift, who got confused, left on the 28th floor, and probably thought for a while about what she had heard. Nothing significant, that might have changed Pierre’s life, had happened after that, I mean, a glamorous woman didn’t appear who would first stop Pierre in his tracks and then stop the lift; neither had the electricity been cut off, which would be a sign from above.

It was ascending for such a long time that Pierre even yawned three times, managed to take four selfies, hummed his favourite tune again and again, composed the plot of a new novel in his mind, and imagined the sentimental text (about the ruthless world) that would occur to him during his free fall. In the end, he comforted himself with the assumption that descending would take him much less time.

Psychologists claim (or some people claim that they claim) that when looking down from a height, one feels an overwhelming desire of performing a swan dive. This was not the case with Pierre. Moreover, if not for that damn PR, he would never undertake the *salto mortale*. Nevertheless, imagining the pinnacle of his glory at the pinnacle of architecture, he took a PR-step towards the void without giving it much thought...

...The flight turned out to be so long that on his way to the ground he first believed in Galileo’s theory of falling objects, then in God, and in the end, when he approached the pavement with outstretched arms, he got thoroughly convinced of the infallibility of Newton’s law of gravitation...

II

What the Hell Is Going on?

Pierre was always irritated by outdated idiomatic and often idiotic expressions. He preferred writing: *Her voice was sweet as November* rather than referring to the uniqueness of the vocal cords of the sirens whose vocals no one has ever heard; describing beauty, he avoided the word ‘angelic’ by saying: *beautiful as her own reflection*, since neither do angels pamper us with a frequent exposition of their appearance.

Nevertheless, when he opened his eyes after landing, what he felt could be described as ‘the hellish heat’. He thought he would see a traditional picture of the hospital lights flickering on the ceiling, but alas!

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Despite the fact that he fell from the 147th floor, he was lying on the ground healthy, and the gates in front of him did not resemble the doors to the intensive care unit.

So he got to his feet pretty amazed. The huge gates were inserted into the triumphal arch, and the long, high fence on both sides of it was lined with black obelisks. Strange silence reigned all around. A middle-aged man dressed in the well-forgotten style of medieval clothing stood smiling at the gates. Next to him lay a huge dog tied with a speckled band. From time to time, the dog emitted fire from its mouth leaving a scarlet trace in the air.

*“Why art thou frightened? This hound’s not cruel,
Sir Conan Doyle hath made him look like this;*

He’s an intern, Cerberus is on vacation,” the man addressed Pierre from a distance with a soothing Italian accent, and then decided to make his next sentence more neutral as his manner of speaking might sound a little comical for the 21st-century writer.

Pierre scratched his head. He always did so when he was perplexed, and at that very moment he was indeed as perplexed as James Cook, who realised that the Hawaiian Aborigines were about to cook not *for him* but *him himself*. “I’m probably going to wake up now, and it’s going to end banally,” Pierre thought, and since in our dreams we are all more courageous than in reality, he boldly stepped towards the Italian.

Besides the man and the dog, at the gates stood a device in the shape of a white frame. It was an apparatus of the firm ‘MEPHISTAPPLE’ with a logo of a snake curled round a twice-bitten apple.

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(Here the poor Author thinks that he has discovered an outstanding allusion.)

“This is the hope detector. We try to keep up, or rather walk hand in hand with modern technology,” the Italian said, swiped a finger over the screen of the device and removed the block. “*Vivere militare est...*⁶ So, if you have some kind of hope, you should abandon it here, before you enter.”

“What do you mean?” Pierre guessed that he could no longer guess anything.

“I mean I hope that now you are already absolutely hopeless.”

“Well, right you are, I’m hopeless even for my readers,” Pierre smiled and decided to assent to this self-proclaimed dream, “All that I had, I left behind, um... in my previous life, Signore...”

“Alighieri, Dante Alighieri,” the man clarified and dialled the code 1984 on the electric display to open the gates. “Welcome to Literary Hell!”

The hope that was ‘left behind’ justified itself indeed.

Speaking tripe, Pierre did not even dream of such popular love and admiration. A few sentimental statements and stories proved to be quite enough for tremendous acclaim: the effective headline: ‘Unpromising step of a promising writer’; the words

⁶ *Vivere militare est...* (Lat.) – ‘To live is to fight’. Despite the fact that neither this nor the other expressions that follow fit in the contexts very well, the Latin maxims, to the Author’s mind, add some splendour to his narrative.

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of the next door neighbour uttered with a deliberately surprised face and cautious scepticism: ‘Lately he looked so happy...’; ‘The great sorrow’ of the President (read from the sheet of previously written paper) in connection with ‘the great loss...’; and a dozen more yellow versions, such as: ‘Actually, he was murdered’; ‘Actually, he had an unlucky love affair’ (and the journalists even found a certain Victoria whom ‘Pierre had kissed twice – with the interval of three seconds – on the right corner of the upper lip seven years before’); ‘He was gay, and Victoria was actually Victor’; ‘It seems, he knew several state secrets’, and so on and so forth. All in all, all roads led to *Roamin’ in the Gloamin’* with Pierre on people’s mind.

Newspapers echoed the pulsating television commentary eagerly: ‘A prose writer who died poetically,’ one of them wrote, although what was poetic in falling from a great height and hitting the forehead directly on the asphalt was known only to the author of the article. ‘His books are the showers that irrigate our minds devastated by everyday worries,’ an elderly critic admitted. ‘Pierre suffered from altophobia,⁷ otherwise he would have reached creative heights,’ a self-satisfied writer acknowledged. ‘If he had lived centuries before, Napoleon would have uttered before he departed: France, army, head of the army, Josephine, Pierre...’ a well-known literary critic asserted and thought that he would have written a more competent conclusion if he had read at least one book by Pierre.

Readers, too, were filled with such immeasurable

⁷ The Author knows that the majority of readers will be reluctant to check the meaning of this word, so he defines it himself – altophobia is an abnormal fear of heights.

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enthusiasm that the shelves allotted for Pierre's books were instantly emptied. Social networks were overloaded with comments in which Pierre, decorated with many smileys, was referred to as 'our contemporary Proust/Sartre/Flaubert/Mérimée, etc.'; 'a Caryatid which supported French literature'; 'a literary juggler playing with words', 'a genius whose books don't need a bookmark', and a thousand other appraisals like that. A lot of hearts, repeated kisses and other emoji of admiration were added to the verbal grief in such amounts that one would think the whole country was swept by massive necrophilia. People were worried, people were weeping, people were changing their profile pictures with Pierre's. So Pierre's image was getting from better to best.

One way or another, with a single step ahead Pierre achieved what he could not in all of his 33 years – *he was deified.*

III

Lucy, etc.

“As I’ve told you, this is Literary Hell,” Dante began in about the same tone as the public speaker who draws with a marker on the whiteboard and thinks that he is cleverer than his listeners. “It turns out that all circles of Hell are broad comedy, and Hell is not as scary as I thought. Frankly speaking, I would choose heaven for climate and Hell for companionship.⁸ The main drawback here is that writers are punished for their literary sins, that is, they suffer in the same way as readers do while reading their books...”

⁸ Here the Author must remind Dante that when quoting other authors, copyright should be taken into account!

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“Oh...” Pierre thought, as due to the accelerated pace of Dante’s speech, he didn’t have time to think anything more.

“...Actually, other punishments are also possible,” said Dante who, like the aged Einstein, could not hold his tongue. “Some are forbidden to smoke while working; others – for instance Balzac – aren’t allowed to drink coffee, mainly not to die from consuming too much of it...”

(...while Dante is speaking, the Author will grab the chance and tell you that neither at present nor in future is he going to describe the greatness of the prairies humming in the wind; looks and individual qualities of such strange creatures as rainbow cichlids; details of the characters’ clothes, ornaments of the antique furniture in their rooms, or the beauty of fuzz on their cheekbones. So Dante is dressed exactly as you imagine a man in a medieval attire.)

“...Writer’s block is still a capital offence,” Dante continued, “which was the sentence given to Dumas, by the way, and in order to keep him mentally healthy, other ghostwriters have been writing books for him since he arrived...”

...Pierre was in such a transitional phase of amazement when a person thinks that he is sleeping and dreaming but, at the same time, has no solid arguments to doubt the reality of what is happening. Apart from this, Hell did not look like the place that he had imagined. Moreover, some quarters in Paris (in the city where Pierre always wanted to live) and Cannes (where Pierre actually lived) resembled Hell much more than this place. Here the narrow streets were paved with pages of

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the books burned or torn to pieces by readers (“Sometimes the books were bad, and other times the readers were awful,” Dante explained), and here and there one could see half-torn election posters as well.⁹



“The most unpleasant place is over there,” Dante pointed at the corner. “It’s Rue Morgue. Even professor Dowell buried his head in the sand witnessing the incredible atrocities happening there...”

“Is it a must for everyone to be condemned? I mean shall I also be sentenced to some kind of punishment?” At that moment, Pierre was pretty reluctant to move from one morgue to the other.

“Sure, it’s hell. *Mea culpa*. If you wanted to live freely, you should have stayed in Cannes enjoying the

⁹ *Slaughterhouse – Five* is a well-known novel by Kurt Vonnegut, but it is unknown why the well-known book (as the Author admits) appeared in the footnote.

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sunny beaches there, as your travel agencies advise. Take me, for example – if I hadn't poked my nose into the affairs of *Inferno* at one time, I wouldn't have to act as a guide for all newcomers and repeat the same dull text. True, *Repetitio est mater studiorum*,¹⁰ but I have repeated the same words so many times that I feel like Edgar Poe's Raven."

"A very nice poem," Pierre admitted for the simple reason that Dante's speech had already spread to eight lines, and readers might have got tired of such a long monologue.

"Besides, these days everyone who makes brief sketches about a girl running a shower or an old man's foggy forehead covered with deep wrinkles, wants to become a writer and publish books... certainly, Gutenberg doesn't mind it at all – he was imprinted in the memory of posterity forever and lives in the Paradise of inventors for his great contribution to literature, while I suffer here for his stupid invention, meeting at least ten writers a day and showing them round hell... it seems, the writers will soon outnumber their readers!"

"And what's going to be my punishment?" Pierre inquired thinking of his four books and a dozen readers.

"That will be decided by Mephistopheles' Inter-Hellish Commission, but as I've told you, here writers mostly suffer for the clichés with which they tortured their readers... Something like *Divide et impera*... or whatever it is... Here, in this dark, windowless room, for example, there are locked up the writers who created the illusion of using great allusions, but in reality nothing was symbolised in their writings. Fancy

10 *Repetitio est mater studiorum* (Lat.) – Repetition is the mother of learning. The Author is sure that you must have heard this expression and know what it means, but still – *REPETITIO EST MATER STUDIORUM!*

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that – you write something, and then the poor critics puzzle over the phrase ‘lilies of the field’, trying to guess whether it is an allusion from the Gospel of Matthew, or simply the phrase indicating your botanical passions.”

“And what are they doing in the dark room?”

“Looking for the Cheshire cat... but the truth is...” Dante narrowed his eyes and grinned mischievously, “it’s not there at all!”¹¹

If only Pierre knew what punishment awaited him, he would have smiled too, but recalling his countless, sophisticated metaphors, his desire to smile died away on the way to the corner of his mouth.

“A little further, there is Sherwood Forest... plagiarists are prowling there... but you have nothing to worry about as they rob only the classic writers of their golden metaphors, brilliant similes, and valuable plots, since later they have to distribute all those among beginners and hack writers.”

“You mean those poor souls, don’t you?” Pierre noticed some people heading for the Sherwood Forest.

“No. They are self-recognised writers. They are destined to work hard for ever and ever to grow as many trees in the forest as were ruined to print their stupid creations.”

Pierre remembered his thick books, and an unpleasant tremor ran across his back.

“I feel especially sorry for those unfortunate ones,” Dante pointed to a group of people sitting by the road. “They are the writers who did not favour dialogues, and their poor readers

11 Ironically, an allusion of the well-known phrase of Confucius leaked in this ‘allusive punishment’: “It is very difficult to find a black cat in the dark room, especially if there is no black cat.”

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had to wait for quotation marks to appear over dozens of pages.”

“Dialogues are really necessary,” admitted Pierre in order to enter into dialogue with his companion. “And what are they doing there?”

Dante smiled slyly, “Waiting for Godot...”

“A true happy end does not exist – it’s just the art of putting a full stop at the right moment.”

Life is like that in a film, 2010, Pierre Sonnage

Lucy had one photographic hobby – wherever she saw reflective surfaces, she took selfies. She took them on the surface of her tea, in the car mirror, in the pupil of her friend’s eye, in a shower faucet, with her iPhone in the iPhone of someone else’s, in rain puddles and in a thousand other places of the kind. Most often, she took pictures instead of a shower in the bathroom and believed that with one slight movement of her finger she could seize the moment, i.e. *carpe diem*.

Lucy was a failed hipster. She always tried to erect massive barriers between herself and the masses (though she never used such old-fashioned words as “barrier” in her everyday speech; on the contrary – she tried to speak with trendy terms and buzzwords the meaning of which she herself didn’t often understand). During the day, she wore glasses with coloured frames, and at night, when she took them off together with her ‘hipster’ mask, she became one of the statistically average

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girls with typical bedtime sentiments (that often seem funny in the morning) and untypical thoughts for a hipster, such as ‘future is the future past’ and ‘past is the past future’. She was pretty, not in a sense of the word used by one’s close friends as a comment for one’s photo, but pretty indeed. She had long brown hair and round greenish eyes. Lucy loved writing near a TV with the sound turned down, as well as watching films (already watched three or four times) with her friends in order to see their reactions to interesting moments. She was at the age when girls still hide their diaries instead of their age. But she didn’t want to be a French Frank, and the diaries – those “remnants of the Bronte era” – seemed to her too outdated in the 21st century which was much more suited to blogs. The online diaries seemed to her more comfortable, since she could write about anything in them without losing the image of a hipster or her anonymity: *“I am fond of autumn, the time when the leaves commit suicide. Oh god, why can’t there be autumn all the year round?!”*

God, as a rule, did not pay attention to requests like this, but, frankly speaking, Lucy herself did not very much believe that somewhere, at the junction of the stratosphere and the mesosphere, there existed someone who could individually listen to more than six billion humans. God was a sort of placebo for her, the way of achieving her goal via belief. In addition, Lucy already had one god in the flesh on earth, too:

“Today is the presentation of Pierre’s book!!! I’m waiting for it like someone waking up on Monday morning starts waiting for Friday evening!!!”

...Pierre was a writer. Maybe unknown and not even socially active, but still... Nevertheless, standing on the same

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platform with Houellebecq, Le Clézio, and Beigbeder wasn't easy for him. Moreover, there were only a dozen readers at the presentation of his last book...

One of them was Lucy.

Pierre and Lucy were not even close acquaintances. Theirs was the usual relationship between a writer and a reader, at the level of signing a book and pronouncing a few phrases demonstrating wit. Those witty phrases were mainly uttered by Pierre, and Lucy only smiled in response. However, at the last presentation of his book Pierre even addressed her by name. It was so unexpected she couldn't utter a word... and then Pierre made the usual witty remarks and everything went back to normal...

...A few more days will pass and Lucy, sitting under an autumn tree, will find that everything was not so simple as it seemed to her before; she will find it out while basking in the park reading page seventy-one of Pierre's new book... On it she will spot several handwritten numbers, eight words and one strange figure... It will happen exactly when Pierre enters the lift taking him up to the pinnacle of his popularity, and on the twenty-eighth floor speaks to the young girl about the individual distribution of the burden on the way to Calvary. At that very moment, Lucy will be so tired with the noise of the park and so absorbed in reading that she won't pay much attention to the silence, which will be gradually reigning around her. Such silence in books is described as ominous; as sinister as a phone call at five in the morning.

And then – Oops!

...The flight turned out to be so long that on his way to the ground Pierre first believed in Galileo's theory of falling

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objects, then in God, and in the end, when he approached the pavement with outstretched arms...

...The autumn leaf fell silently on the book. "One more autumnal suicide," Lucy thought and closed her book. "An ideal bookmark indeed..."