**Allora**

Nelly Shulman

In the morning, a light rain was falling, but by noon the weather changed. Someone swept a brightly shining brush across the sky, over the ocher-tiled roofs. An azure glimmer appeared among the clouds. Lingering opposite the restaurant, Maxim looked at photographs of apartments.

He could not ever have this money, but the professor was still searching for the best place to put his desk and the favorite sofa. The church clock chimed five.

Looking at the crowd besieging the restaurant, he decided to eat at the station. Maxim desired to see her as soon as possible. He learned the local word for a railway station second, after allora. Maxim understood that the latter carried an all-encompassing meaning and could turn into anything.

“Allora,” he heard. The restaurateur nudged Maxim on the shoulder.

“Il jardino,” he smiled. “Allora.”

Following him through a noisy restaurant, Maxim stepped into a paradise. The olive tree rustled under the light wind, and glossy laurel leaves glittered above the wrought-iron table. The last lemons were yellowing under a wooden roof of a carved stone box.

A glass of white wine appeared in front of him. The soles shuffled, Maxim was left alone. The garden ran into a secret channel. Blue lightning ripped through the moist air. A kingfisher, darting above the water, disappeared into the sunset gold.

On the bridge, Maxim helped a woman, taping a city view. He dragged down her battered purple suitcase. The sky above the lagoon also turned purple. Motorboats and ferries scurried over the bronze water,

Maxim wanted to tell the woman that he was going to the station to meet somebody but feared to sound ridiculous. He struggled with the desire to confess the future meeting to the restaurateur. It seemed to Maxim that he would understand his excitement.

Birds danced around church domes; the clear evening stretched over the city. The rail tracks disappeared in the darkening azure evening. This place, connected to the land by a shaky thread, was ready to float or soar to heaven.

To his relief, the platform was empty. The black dot was approaching. A female voice from the speaker said something long and beautiful. The professor recognized the names of the cities. She was coming from the capital. She stood there smiling, and Maxim barely remembered to take her bag.

“You came to meet me,” she said admiringly. “I always wanted someone to meet me at this station.”

“That is why I am here,” he no longer worried whether he could take her hand. “Allora, let us have coffee.”

“Allora,” she repeated. Maxim stopped.

“Please, say again,” he asked.

Her words were soft like the water in canals, like the voices of birds over the lagoon. Maxim tried to pronounce it exactly as she said.

“Allora,” she nodded affectionately.