



## *The Land of Birds*

As a child, I often listened to my father's tales about unexplored places of deep rivers and gentle winds. Yet there was only one of them that I remembered the most. It was known as the Land of Birds. My father wrote it on his ice flats expedition in a distant, cold place somewhere between Northern Asia and Eastern Europe. That land, he said, was a different world, completely unlike any place he had ever seen in his life. Ten years ago, his story was on the lips of many local kids, however, was soon forgotten.

Many years ago, somewhere at the edge of the earth, a land stretched far to the east, covered with wildflower fields and short sun-scorched grass. That land was the home of the birds, divided up their manors into four essential parts. Their voices and languages were as different as the babble of a river and the rumble of thunder. The first part of the land was called the South and was the home of the White Herons. These noble large white birds were comparable in beauty to the white orchid for their fabulous plumage. White Herons prided themselves on their beauty and status. Although, despite their ego, they were hospitable and generous to welcome guests who stopped by from distant lands. The second part was the home of the Eagles and Hawks. It was proudly called the Caucasus. Since ancient times, these noble souls have honoured their immortal traditions and eternal family values. Their strong wings dispersed the cold winds, and their flaming hearts strove upwards towards the sun. The third part of the Land of Birds became the abode of owls, as indomitable and wild as Siberian soul. It was the frozen heart of the Land. The owls were adept hunters and often showed cruelty to their fellows. Their house of ice had the scent of death and longing, scaring off other birds that never landed in their places. The last fourth part was called the House of Swallows, located in the most hidden place of the Far East. Its spiritual birds revered the nature around them. Their speech was characterised by tranquillity and smoothness, like the poetry of the Silver Age. For a long time, all four parts held together in a strong alliance until a bitter cold started to wade into all corners of that land. Fighting a place in the sun became a bone of contention between the feathered dwellers. The fire of strife has burned through the thread of unity and destroyed the Land of Birds. Nowadays, it is a cold, lifeless place, covered with ice and drifts, and only the songs of the east wind and occasionally appearing owl's flashing eyes visit this barren land.

The older I got, the more often I told this story to people. I can not say exactly why I remember this tale. Perhaps, sad stories have a strong power over us. Perhaps, they have something important to tell.