

1985

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The premise is: fear leads to self-destruction. The story takes place in 1985 (the worst period of the dictatorship) in Romania. The main character ALBERT MÜLLER (46) lives in Bukarest (He originates from a Romanian German family). One of his colleagues was arrested a few days ago and nobody knows anything about him. He is a journalist, married and has two sons. The capital is prepared for the birthday of the dictator. There are flags and flowers everywhere and of course pictures of the leader of the country. ALBERT MÜLLER is frightened. He decides to travel to a very small village next to the Bulgarian border. (It is obligatory to take part in national festivals, but MÜLLER's brother is a doctor and gives him a certification that he needs peace for a while for his nerves anyway it turns out that his brother must leave the capital and work somewhere in the country because one of his friends wrote a pamphlet.) The border is strictly guarded by the army. In this fish village people are very poor. There aren't any hotels, local people rent their house to tourists. There is only one restaurant which is very strange because the view to the sea is separated by a wall. Moreover the cuisine is extremely bad. There is a shop which is absolutely empty. The main place is the market where local people try to sell their products: fish, handcraft etc. Tourists are adventurers in a certain way because foreigners are constantly supervised and controlled by the soldiers. We can see ALBERT MÜLLER packing in his home. His wife is helping him. There are shells in the flat everywhere as decoration. He is packing with a high degree of accuracy. He is folding up neatly all the clothes. He tends to be very disciplined but he is very upset. In the village he rents a room in an old lady's house. His main goal is to collect seashells, colourful and beautifully shaped stones on the beach. His room is full of these 'treasures'. He also goes to the market to buy exquisite shells from fishermen. He doesn't make friends with foreigners for fear. The shells and the sea are symbols of the liberty. To collect shells is the only way to escape from the grim of everyday life where people can't express their thoughts and feelings freely. To lose the shells it means to lose the hope for life. One day when he starts to walk along on the beach he discovers that everything has disappeared from the seashore. It looks like if someone did the hoovering. The man is deeply disappointed and he has no idea what could have happened. He is so depressed that he decides to go to the restaurant. Here he meets a girl who is wearing shell jewellery: earrings, bracelets, necklaces etc. He asks her what has happened. She explains that the army has collected all the shells during the night to protect the country assuming that foreigners are taking their national treasure out of the country and it is forbidden to sell shells on the market too. The girl tells him that her uncle is a fisherman and he can sell him special shells illegally. Our man is so desperate that he goes to his room and among his shells commits a suicide.