

Всеволод СОЛОВЬЕВ

ВОЛХВЫ



Series of historical novels

Vsevolod Solovyov

Magi (compilation)

"VECHE"

1889, 1890

Solovyov V. S.

Magi (collection) / V. S. Solovyov - "VECHE", 1889, 1890 - (Series of historical novels)

ISBN 978-5-4444-7326-9

XVIII century, Russia. The era of enlightenment and free-thinking under Catherine II gives great results. Freemasons, Rosicrucians and other secret orders of Europe are beginning to intensively penetrate into Russian society. All sorts of mystical teachings are more and more seizing the minds of homegrown philosophers and laymen. Petersburg with great interest and impatience await the arrival of the mysterious Count Phoenix. Rumor has it that this name hides a legendary man, the incomparable Count Cagliostro. Some consider him a great magician and sorcerer, to whom all the secrets of the Universe are subject, others call him an unscrupulous adventurer who has already circled half of Europe around his finger. All sorts of conjectures and assumptions are made about the plans of Count Phoenix, but he does not know about the main purpose of his arrival in Russia
nobody.

ISBN 978-5-4444-7326-9

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Vsevolod Solovyov

Magi (collection)

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about the author

The novelist Vsevolod Sergeyevich Solovyov, popular at the end of the 19th century, "one of our Walter-Scottov" (as his contemporaries called him), was born in Moscow on January 1 (13), 1849. He was the eldest son of the greatest Russian historian Sergei Mikhailovich Solovyov, whose The multi-volume "History of Russia" is still one of the most serious works on the study of the past of our fatherland. The Solovyov House was a meeting place for many prominent Muscovites of his time. Here, for example, historians T.N. Granovsky and P.N. Kudryavtsev, collector of folk tales A.N. Afanasiev, famous writers Aksakov brothers and A.F. Pisemsky, as well as many other interesting people. Such an environment could not to inspire the young man, moving him to independent creativity. In Literature Solovyov enters as a poet, publishing small poems (mostly unsigned) and short stories in magazines. In 1870, Vsevolod completed his studies at the law faculty of Moscow University and entered the service in the 2nd department of the Imperial Chancellery. But the dream of a serious engagement in literature does not leave the newly-minted official. In 1872 Solovyov met F.M. Dostoevsky, whom he would later call his "teacher and mentor". Brought up in the Orthodox spirit since childhood, Vsevolod decides write a novel about the struggle of Orthodoxy with Catholicism, more precisely, with the Jesuit order that came to Western Russian lands. The novel "Princess Ostrozhskaya" published in 1876 was a great success and forever determined the further path of Vsevolod Solovyov - he becomes a writer-historian. For several years, one after another appear his novels: "The Young Emperor", which tells about the reign of Peter II, "Captain of the grenadier company" - about the era of palace coups of the 18th century, "The Tsar Maiden" - about life Princess Sofya Alekseevna, "Kasimov's Bride" - about the failed marriage of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich to Efimiya Vsevolodskaya. The main work of Solovyov in that period becomes a five-volume epic "Chronicle of Four Generations", which united the novels "Sergey Gorbatov", "Voltairean", "The Old House", "The Exile", "The Last Gorbatovs". This the cycle covers a large era, from Catherine II to Alexander I, telling about the fate of several generations of the slowly ruining noble family of the Gorbatovs. Among the heroes of these books - Potemkin, the Orlov brothers, Speransky, Arakcheev and others.

Continuing to write historical novels, Solovyov, at the same time, is experiencing an acute mental crisis. Disillusioned with the inert "state" church, Vsevolod enters path of spiritual quest. He turns to spiritualism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Under the influence younger brother, the famous philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, the writer begins to get involved mysticism. However, there was no real spiritual closeness between the brothers; their relationship did not go beyond the limits of cold secular courtesy. By 1884, the acquaintance Vsevolod Solovyov with Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. The writer hoped to receive a spiritual support from the doctrine of the "woman with phenomena" (as he himself called Blavatsky), but his disappointment awaited. In 1892, Solovyov wrote the book "The Modern Priestess of Isis", in which sharply condemns the theosophical ideas and personality of E.P. Blavatsky. Later, the writer acknowledged the fallacy of his criticism, but then he was already under a new religious influence - the personality of the holy righteous John of Kronstadt, later canonized church. The spiritual quest of Vsevolod Solovyov was reflected in the famous dilogy The Magi (1889) and The Great Rosicrucian (1890). Some researchers believe that the image of the priest Nicholas in these novels embodied many of the features of John of Kronstadt. Another interesting personality appears on the pages of the dilogy - Count Cagliostro, whom the writer portrays not quite the way it is customary to consider the image of this dubious "maker of secret history". Worked on the dilogy Vsevolod Sergeyevich

especially in Paris, where in the National Library he carefully studied the works of scientists and mystics, such as Paracelsus, Eckartshausen, Nicolas Flamel. The writer died on October 20 (November 2), 1903 in Moscow, leaving behind about two dozen novels, many of which are now returning to modern readers after almost a century of oblivion.

Selected bibliography of V.S. Solovyov:

"Princess Ostrozhskaya" (1876)

"Captain of the Grenadier

Company" (1886) "The Young

Emperor" (1877) "The Tsar

Maiden" (1878) "Kasimov's Bride" (1879)

"The Chronicle of Four Generations" (1881-1886)

"Magi" (1889) "The Great Rosicrucian" (1890)

Magi

Part one

*But I will be born to Jesus in Bethlehem as a Jew in the days of King Herod, behold, having come from the east to Jerusalem ... and fell down in obedience to Him: and opened her treasures, bringing Him gifts, gold and Lebanon and myrrh. **Gospel of Matthew (2:1, 11)***

*And if the imam is a prophecy, and we know all the secrets and the whole mind, and if the imam all faith, as if they were mountains, but I don't love imam, I am nothing. **First Epistle to the Corinthians of the Apostle Paul (13:2)***

I

The Empress smiled, and a mocking light flickered in her clear eyes. "Of course," she said, "for a person who left Petersburg two decades ago, much here must seem new and completely unrecognizable, but it is unlikely that the changes that have taken place can amaze someone who left this city as a child of seven or eight ... This is too early an age for observation, and indeed memories are unlikely to be preserved sufficiently complete. "I was not a child then, Your Majesty. I am forty years old, and then, therefore, it was
twenty.

The Empress made an involuntary backward movement, peering at her interlocutor with great amazement. In front of her was a strong and slender man of medium height. Not a single wrinkle had yet touched his young and handsome, somewhat pale face, striking with its firm and calm expression. Immediately, without looking at this man, he could be mistaken for a young man, but now, looking at him intently, the empress noticed that in his interesting face there was no longer a trace of uncertainty, softness and femininity - the companions of the early age. "But
forty years!.. Is it possible?.. Is he laughing at me?" - involuntarily
she is small.

Finally she realized and remembered everything she knew about this man. She remembered that, having allowed Ivan Ivanovich Betsky to introduce him to her today, during the holiday, she thought of seeing a man of mature age. But, looking at him at the first moment, when he calmly and respectfully bowed before her, she forgot about his years. She immediately noticed something special in him, which, of course, she still could not give herself an account of, but which she liked. A minute later, after the first phrases, she had already changed with him into that benevolent, somewhat joking tone, which she often assumed with young people and girls when she was in a good mood. And all day today she was in th
position.

- Is it possible? she finally spoke. - Where did you find the secret to erase the traces of ruthless time? What magicians gave you this art, so precious and unattainable for all of us mortals?

Saying this, she still continued to peer into his calm and pale face, on which a smile now flickered, which for some reason seemed mysterious to her. "Yes, I know, I'm very young," he said, "but I don't know, Your Majesty, is it big
this well-being ... sometimes it's not even completely flattering to seem younger than one's age.

What was in these words - a reproach? Anyway, the Empress's face suddenly turned serious. Her playful, benevolent tone disappeared, and she asked in a completely new voice:

- And all these twenty years you spent abroad, prince? - No, Your Majesty, I came to Russia twice, only I was not in St. Petersburg. - Twenty years is a lot, a lot of time, and from twenty to forty is the best time of life! If you are so amazingly preserved, you must have spent these years serenely and happily?! His face remained calm, and he did not answer. The Empress continued: - Yes, I know, I remember Ivan Ivanovich told me that you are a scientist, that you worked hard, almost in all universities in Europe - in Germany, and in England, and in France ... I envy you very much, prince. But what is especially pleasing to me is that you, having spent almost your entire life in foreign lands, far from your homeland, have not forgotten the Russian language and express yourself in it as if you had never left here.

- Your Majesty, as a child I spoke and thought in Russian, I never forgot that I was Russian, and I kept it in myself. And that I correctly express myself - what is surprising in that? Once upon a time our language was alien to your majesty, and you know it as well as mine, and perhaps much better.

Catherine barely perceptibly nodded her head and rewarded her interlocutor with a beautiful smile. "I am Russian," she said. At this time, the sounds of music heard nearby, the noise and movement of the court crowd, broke into their conversation. The Empress, who always eagerly and with interest peered into new people and was carried away at first by her observations and impressions, remembered where she was, and decided that it was time to stop this conversation. But all the same, it seemed to her a pity to let go of a new acquaintance at once. She took two steps forward, stopped and turned to him:

"Now you're staying here, aren't you?" You did not come to return to Europe again? "I don't have any definite plans yet, Your Majesty. - Tell your father that I am sorry about his illness, that I was pleased to meet you. Yes, I always loved your father, I thought at one time that he might be one of my active assistants ...

To tell the truth, I was angry with him because he always stubbornly kept himself away from the serious role that he could play with his talents. But I have not been angry for a long time ... Perhaps he is right ... Be that as it may, I do not forget the old one: in difficult times he rendered me many services - and I am grateful to him ... Goodbye, and please remember that the son of Prince Zakharyev- Ovinova can always count on my favor. She held out her hand to him with that majestic grace that seemed to be hers alone.

inherent.

"Your Majesty, from the depths of my heart I thank you both for my father and for myself!" - said the prince, touching the lips to the hand of the Empress.

The smart crowd separated them.

II

This conversation took place within the walls of the former Voskresensky Novodevichy, the so-called Smolny, monastery, which for several years has been turned into an "educational society for noble girls.

This educational society was arranged by the Empress on the model of the famous Saint-Cyr Institute near Paris. Ekaterina laid a lot of tender cares on this created with the help of Ivan Ivanovich Betsky, a hotbed of women's education. She took care of the girls brought up in it as if they were their own children.

In the early seventies, she corresponded with Voltaire about her Smolny, told him about the successes of the pupils, asked his advice on which plays girls to play. The great flatterer answered her in such a tone as if he himself were deeply interested in Smolny, gave advice and impregnated his letters with the subtlest flattery.

So the years passed. The queen did not forget Smolny. And now within the walls of the Institute on the occasion of the birth of Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich, a festival was appointed.

This holiday was not an institute one, but a court one - only with the participation of pupils. The whole court was invited, and "persons of both sexes of the first five classes."

It was wonderful May weather. Dense monastery garden, laid out according to the plan of the banner that Rastrelli, recently dressed in bright greens and dazzled with flowers.

Now this whole garden has been transformed; its alleys were splendidly illuminated, and fanciful kiosks and pavilions rose at every step. Down the main alley towered the "ancient temple", created in the twinkling of an eye, but, nevertheless, producing majestic impression.

However, there was not yet much movement in the garden. Bright May evening came on slowly. The illumination had just begun to be lit, and the lights flickered barely perceptibly among the pink light pouring from the sky.

All the invitees were in the large institute hall and adjoining rooms. This whole huge hall was furnished from top to bottom with tropical greenhouses. plants and decorated with wreaths and garlands of natural flowers. Here and there stood out monograms of the empress and whole words and phrases skillfully made from the same colors. These phrases were supposed to express the feelings of gratitude and love of the pupils for their august benefactress, as well as those rules of virtue by which they intend to be guided in life.

In the depths of the hall rose the so-called Mount Parnassus, from its top the pretty faces of the muses, portrayed by nine pupils, looked at the numerous spectators, dressed in costumes of ancient Greek style and each holding their own classical attributes.

It was necessary to do justice to the organizers of the festival and its main leader, "the educator of the children, the German man," as he was called by the teeth of the rock at that time, Ivan Ivanovich Betsky: all nine muses were one more beautiful and sweeter, and the soft folds of ancient Greek robes and delicate the colors of the fabrics highlighted their young beauty and freshness, grace and purity of their virgin forms. And in general in this nursery female education at that time, thanks to some happy accident, beauty and attractiveness completely triumphed over dizziness. This could be seen by paying attention to the two large amphitheatres arranged on both sides of the glass door leading from the hall to the garden. On these amphitheatres, among the flowers and greenery, all the pupils Smolny, who did not take part in the festival program. There have been girls here since from the age of seven and eight to the age of seventeen and eighteen.

Numerous lovers of beauty and youth, who were now in the hall, could admire the endless variety of children's and women's faces, of which almost every one attracted attention, if not by special beauty, then, in any case, by good looks and attractiveness. There were definitely no ugly girls, or, rather, they met only as exceptions. And besides, these rare exceptions were so skillfully seated that observers could not notice them at all. Girls and girls, although dressed in their uniform uniform dresses, nevertheless, obviously, used a lot of art in their dress and hairstyle, and each of them was ready to withstand the most severe criticism. And there were many strict critics-experts. Already from the very beginning of the holiday, both amphitheatres were every minute more and more surrounded by brilliant cavaliers in gilded caftans. True, almost all of these cavaliers were not distinguished by their youth, but on the other hand, their chest was decorated with signs of the highest distinctions, their posture spoke of their state significance. Their important faces, before the stern expression of which a great number of subordinates and petitioners trembled every day, were now illuminated by a good-natured and gentle smile.

And most of all, tenderness and caress was spilled on the ugly, fleshy, until the time flabby face of the minion of happiness Bezborodka, which seemed to be rooted to the place at the amphitheater. His squinting, shiny and moist eyes, like those of a blissfully dozing cat, lit up every now and then, running from one pretty face to another. Finally, he could not stand it, swayed, took a few steps on his thick legs to the very amphitheater and began to whisper something, obviously very dear to the blond head he had chosen.

Others followed his example. The girls smiled, tossed their eyes coquettishly and sweetly, blushed charmingly and responded to the compliments addressed to them by dignitaries - some in monosyllables and timidly, and some with sweet childish courage. Among the huge crowd of guests that filled the hall, here and there, four vestals flashed by. Yes, "Vestals" were the names given to four girls who had just completed their final exams, but had not yet left the institute walls. They were dressed all in white, in white tunics of fine woolen cloth, with white roses woven into their long and thick flowing hair. They were called vestals, and they still had to take part in further numbers of the program of the festival. Their original role was to meet and greet guests at the entrance to the hall. All these four vestals were the best pearls of the Smolny Institute in terms of beauty and grace, and old Betsky involuntarily rubbed his hands with pleasure, watching them, seeing what impression they make on everyone, with what grace, modest dignity and courtesy they play the role of mistresses of this fragrant, filled with greenery, flowers and

the beauty of the hall.

The empress had already managed to tell him that she was very pleased with his choice and that never since the foundation of the institute had such beauties as these four vestals entered the world from its walls.

He saw, as everyone who gathered here saw it, that in general the Empress was pleased with everything and was in the best mood. Now, standing a little aside, he observed with some amazement how long and animatedly the empress spoke with the son of his old friend, Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov, whom he introduced to her. He could not hear the conversation, but he saw the attentive, lively face of the empress. And he had long ago studied this face in the smallest subtleties. He saw the benevolent, sincere smile that Catherine bestowed on her interlocutor at parting. This smile was meaningful - Catherine smiled like that only when she let people go in order to meet with them again.

When the empress went further, towards Mount Parnassus, and when behind her, carefully squeezing forward and trying with all their might to get ahead of each other, rushed

courtiers, Betsky with a majestic gait and evoking a kind smile on his thin, thoroughbred face, which, as it seemed to many, had a great resemblance to the smile of the empress, approached the prince and with an almost imperceptible movement, but firmly squeezed his hand. "My dear friend, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart," he said. But the prince looked at him so absently and vaguely, as if he did not recognize him, as if he had not heard his words. Betsky wanted to be amazed and say something, but at the same moment a young court gentleman hurriedly approached him and hurriedly told him that the empress was asking him. He left the prince and with a somewhat accelerated, but invariably majestic step, headed for Mount Parnassus. Meanwhile, the attention of the empress, rendered by her to a man, almost unknown to anyone here, interested everyone. Many eyes were now fixed on the prince. They asked each other about it. Among those who were especially interested in him was Prince Shchenyatev, a young man known throughout Petersburg, who caught everyone's eye with his excessive foppishness and comical appearance. Discharged to smithereens, all sparkling with diamonds, Prince Shchenyatev now darted from one to the other. His eyebrows rose and looked like two question marks, his eyes burned with insatiable curiosity, his little button-like nose turned red. Choking and lisping, the prince turned to everyone: - For God's sake, who is this? Who? With whom did the empress speak for so long? But no one could answer him satisfactorily, and it was impossible for him to calm down. He was not in a position, in the nature of his character, to amuse himself with something now, to think about anything, until he solved the question: who is this? - until in turn he gets the opportunity to satisfy the curiosities of others. But then he noticed not far from him a man, almost the same as himself, brilliantly dressed, but no longer young, with a good-natured and pleasant face. It was no less than his most famous rich man throughout Petersburg of that time, Count Alexander Sergeevich Somonov, the same Somonov, about whom Catherine, introducing him to one of the foreign envoys, said: "Here is a man who does everything possible to go bankrupt, but there is no way to go bankrupt unable." Prince Shchenyatev realized that the count would probably satisfy his curiosity, flew up

to him, and, bowing respectfully, began his sentence:

- Count, let me ask you, you probably know who this young man with whom the empress spoke for so long? The count looked, smiled good-naturedly, and said slowly: "What young man? And that one over there, you see, in a dark purple caftan!" Didn't your excellency deign to notice that Ivan Ivanovich introduced him to the empress... That one over there, in a purple caftan... - This is not a young man at all, - Count Somonov said in the same drawling and imperturbable tone. Prince Shchenyatev's eyebrows rose even higher, his eyes were ready to pop out, his whole long figure on legs as thin as poles feigned bewilderment. - How? - he could only say, not understanding what the count was telling him. - And so that this is not a young man at all, because he is fifteen years older than you. - Can't be! - If I say, then I know. Indeed, he is remarkably younger... - But who is he? Who? You know him, Count? - Of course I know. Shchenyatev dug into the count, right into his mouth, as if wanting to grab the words, while

they won't fly yet.

"Of course I know," Somonov repeated. - A week ago it was Mr. Zakhovinov, and today it is Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov.

Shchenyatev slapped his forehead.

- And how did I not guess! "Why did

you have to guess?" But Shchenyatev was

already far away and was passing to right and left various details about Mr. Zakhovinov, who had turned into Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov. These details were immediately invented by him; but this creative process took place unconsciously, for Prince Shchenyatev was always sure of what he had just invented, and sincerely considered this fiction to be true.

III

The one who attracted the attention of this, for the most part only having a cheerful appearance, but in essence a bored society, greedy for any novelty, slowly stepped aside. He stopped almost at the very wall of the hall, hidden by broad-leaved tropical plants, wreaths and garlands of flowers.

The crowd moved back and forth in front of him. One after another, various, unfamiliar faces flashed by, and his bright eyes followed them, meeting and seeing them off with a calm, even somehow too calm look. On his pale and motionless, as if frozen face, one could not read either boredom, or fun, or grief, or joy, or kindness, or malice. This face, framed by the greenery and flowers that surrounded it, seemed almost inanimate, almost a marble statue. Even the very glint of his eyes at times became somehow unnatural, inhuman, creepy. Looking attentively now at that face, it was no longer possible to find youth in it: despite the absence of wrinkles, despite all the purity of its outlines, it was a face neither young nor old, but a strange, striking face, as if emerging from an unknown world, where there is no time, nor space, where other, unearthly and inhuman

laws.

If the empress had looked at him now, she would have been amazed, perhaps even more so, but she would have been surprised in a different way. With her penetrating and subtle glance, she would have been able to notice in him all his extraordinariness, which eluded the distracted gaze of the crowd, and she, firm and courageous, full of consciousness of her strength, reason and knowledge, would probably feel embarrassed, and she would be embarrassed, stopping in

bewilderment before a new, obscure and incomprehensible question. But after all, it was not a ghost, not a spirit, not a native of the grave. He was a living person, who had come, albeit from afar, emerged from the darkness and obscurity in which he had been hiding until now, but now he had already gained fame. His past was not that of an unknown adventurer and adventurer. There was a shadow in this past, but this shadow has now dissipated... A little more time - and this man

will no longer raise any questions... Yes, he was a living person, like everyone else, and living human thoughts now flickered in him. Alive... human... but still, probably, none of those who were in this beautiful hall had such thoughts! Why am I here? he thought. - Why is this necessary? What

is unexpected, what is inevitable awaits me within these walls, among this crowd, unnecessary to me and which I do not need, since there is nothing in common between us. I am here because something significant must inevitably happen in my existence ... I know this, but what awaits me? How can I get around the threatening danger? Again the struggle in the darkness, with invisible enemies!.. But there was a lot of this struggle - and the darkness dissipated, and I came out victorious. Until now, I have plunged into fatal darkness, all chained in my cherished weapon, obtained with such difficulty, - and I knew my strength, I believed in it. The darkness did not frighten me, unknown enemies seemed insignificant to me. I fought with joy

almost with delight - and then I always wanted the most difficult, infinitely most difficult! .. It almost hurt me that the struggle was so insignificant, that victory was so easy to come ...

I am stronger with every battle, and now I know how much strength has increased in me ... Where did is this incomprehensible, strange embarrassment, almost timidity?

"Ah, so here he is, my new enemy! Confusion, my timidity is the enemy; i can see him German, I feel, I touch - and I must overcome it! Something

elusive happened in his whole being, which cannot be expressed in words. It was a mighty effort of will, a strain of all spiritual forces. And in a few moments he was already a winner. His eyes flashed with new fire, his dead face revived. No embarrassment, no timidity. He took a deep breath with all his chest. It was as if an oppressive weight had been lifted from his shoulders, as if he had stepped out into the fresh air from a stuffy dungeon, having broken the painful fetters.

Now, looking at him, it was impossible to be frightened by his mysterious appearance, it was impossible to take him for a stone statue. Life swept over him, and in this life there was much happiness for him, since happiness for him consisted in the consciousness of his strength.

"Just this? Again, just that! flashed through his mind. But what lesson will I learn from this motley crowd, what is in it? He

intently, intently began to peer into the faces flashing before him, looking for in them something new and interesting.

But the faces flickered one after another and disappeared. Before him passed men and women, ugly and beautiful, young and old, but he did not notice anything new, nothing interesting in them. He felt and understood that, not being familiar with them, having never seen them in reality until now, he nevertheless knew them well and for a long time, had long ago found out for himself the whole meaning of their life, had long ceased to be interested in this meaning. He remembered his conversation with the Empress. "Yes, she

is the most interesting of all, infinitely more interesting! he thought. – Yes, I was supposed to meet her, and I need to stop at her. Creating it, nature spared no effort, richly and generously endowed it with both light and darkness! And there is so much light that the darkness is lost in it, you won't notice it right away ... And if she knew ... Or am I here for this, so that she knows? But no, nothing tells me that I'm here for her. I am for myself, for myself alone, and our meeting is not for her, but for me. But what can she give me? And what she can give me, why do I need it? He did not have time to notice how something embarrassing and almost dreary flashed through this mental question again. He did not have time to notice, because all attention suddenly rushed to one point. He saw not far from him one of the four vestals. Up to

this moment he had not yet noticed her; for the first time she caught his eye. The vestal stopped a few paces from him. She was a girl endowed with great beauty, or, rather, a lovely child, barely turned into a girl, but already possessing all the charms of feminine strength and power. She was the most beautiful of the four vestal beauties. It was as if she was purposely created to wear this ancient white tunic. Her graceful, but at the same time strong figure, her expressive young face were bound to catch the attention of the artist, languishing in search of an ideal. And the artist would have portrayed her as a vestal, keeping the pure fire of chastity. It expressed, though perhaps unconsciously, the complete triumph of spirit over matter; but above matter, not powerless, but whose power, beautiful, possessing all its charms ... The

Vestal took a few more steps forward, as if heading towards the one who was now looking at her so intently with shining eyes. Another moment and their eyes met. She stopped and froze in place. But her clear, blue eyes, trimmed with dark eyelashes, did not lower, the color of shame did not flare up.

a lively girlish blush on her tender, almost childlike cheeks. She looked straight into those shining, burning eyes in front of her, looked with unconscious amazement, fear, hope, joy. The most contradictory feelings were expressed in her face and merged into one, which it was difficult to come up with a definition. She was amazed, as if bewitched. These shining eyes suddenly took possession of her, her whole being, all her thoughts and sensations. It seemed that no matter what happened now around her, she still would not get out of her stupor. A thunderclap would have struck over her, and she would not have heard it. The earth would open up her - and she would have remained in place, unwavering, riveted by this gaze that swallowed her.

And it could stay that way for a long, long time, always. Even now it seemed to her that a month of Sundays.

But it was only a minute.

He lowered his eyes - and she got freedom. She involuntarily clutched her heart, which suddenly, rapidly, terribly, somehow incomprehensibly hammered.

She shook her lovely head as if to drive away the mist. Then the head bent over her, a strand of thick, knee-deep, long, blond hair intertwined with white roses, slipped from her shoulders to her hotly breathing chest. Thin eyelashes fell, the blush flooded cheeks - and the vestal, seeing nothing and no one, amazed and embarrassed, disappeared into the crowd.

IV

"So your temple has not yet been completely destroyed, O mysterious goddess! flashed through his mind. "You still have priestesses! .. And in the midst of a miserable comedy, childish fun, you found the guardian of your fire ... A child of light, a child like you, beautiful! What a transparent, like a crystal, soul shines in this look ... Yes, the stinking breath of life has not yet touched you. But it touched your girlfriends: they more or less, but have already taken into themselves a particle poison. Each such holiday was harmful for almost all of them, and this day will bring them much harm, but you, you remained and remain alien to all these temptations. How long? What waiting for you?

"I'll meet you again!" he finished his thoughts, perhaps unexpectedly himself, but firmly, confidently and calmly.

The hall was empty. Numerous guests followed the empress into the garden, where in the transparent semi-twilight of the warm evening that had come, the illumination shone. Empty and two amphitheater.

Following everyone else, he also descended into the garden and slowly moved forward along the alley, where from both Wattles of fresh greenery rose on either side, connected with large orange trees. To the right and to the left now and then open pavilions appeared with stages on which pupils in a variety of costumes depicted living pictures.

But he looked at all this absent-mindedly, not understanding the meaning of what he saw. Before him only forms flickered through the eyes and immediately disappeared, leaving no trace in memory.

chatting.

Here he is already at the end of the alley, in front of the "temple of virtue." There was a ballet performance going on, and he heard that someone near him called this performance "La Rosiere de Salency". No one knows where the orchestra was placed, filling the air with a gentle melody. From the green mountain hiding the entrance to the "temple of virtue", graceful shepherdesses descended one after another, carrying their gifts to the one who is more virtuous than all, who is chosen and recognized by all Rosier'oy. But she, the hero of the occasion, is not yet ... she is hiding somewhere. Young cowherd girls are dancing and very with cute, but still rather strange movements, they glorify the virtues of their girlfriend.

The green mountain that closed the entrance to the temple opens up. The temple is open, and in the middle of it is visible an altar with a sacred fire, and around it is placed its virgin guard - seventy vestals. And finally, here she is! Her careless friends are leading her, so pleased with the fun that they have not yet had time to guess to envy her. And this is she again, the one whom he saw in the clothes of a vestal and on whom he settled in thought. Now she has thrown off her clothes of a priestess, she has turned into a shepherdess, but not for long. Around her, her friends intertwine in a cheerful dance, and then they crown her with flowers, literally bombard her with them. Under this fragrant burden, she climbs the steps of the temple and bows to the altar. She is surrounded by priestesses, each with her lamp; and she, all in flowers, in the scattered gold of light curls, is motionless, does not dare to raise her head, does not dare to look at the sacrificial flame burning above her; she, obviously, in her humility, does not know herself whether she is worthy to rise, whether she is worthy to look at him.

But the priestesses lift her up, bring her to the altar, hand her a lamp. Then her eyes rise, and bright joy shines in them. She kindles her lamp with a firm hand from the flame of the altar - and at the same moment the shepherd's clothes fall off her, and she appears before the audience as a vestal. She now stands high and, holding a lamp, in snow-white clothes, looks with a radiant gaze at her former shepherd friends and new Vestal friends, who at her feet, mingling with each other, begin a new dance. But garlands of greenery and flowers appear from somewhere, and the charming dancers are all entwined, intertwined with these garlands. They form a living giant garden. This living garden moves smoothly and gracefully to the sounds of an invisible orchestra.

She keeps looking, motionless at her height, with a raised lamp that does not flicker, does not tremble in her firm hand, but burns with an even flame. She looks, illumined by the sacrificial light, wonderfully beautiful in her virgin beauty. Calmness and quiet joy in her eyes. By right they recognized her as worthy of the crown of virtue, she consciously took the vow of the sacred altar. Trials and troubles do not await her, she is not threatened by a fall, the lamp in her hand will not falter, its flame will not fade ... But now her eyes depart from the dancing friends, from this living, trembling and agitated garden at her feet, he rushes further, outside the stage, to where the audience gathered in a tight crowd. Suddenly her whole face changes. A blush flies from her cheeks, her eyes are wide open, she is motionless, she froze, as if life flies away from her, another moment - and her hand releases the lamp, its flame flashes brightly and goes out ... She staggers ... ready to fall ... Her friends are in amazement, in horror interrupted their dance, rush to her, support her ... Embarrassment, fear are on all faces ...

Confusion and between the audience - this scene is not included in the ballet program. "Dear Rogerson, go and see what happened to the lovely Vestal Virgin—it's true, the poor child is too tired, she's not feeling well... help her quickly!" - Catherine's loud voice sounded under the branches of oranges and oleanders. The lean figure of the life doctor separated from the group, the center of which was the state market, and quickly began to climb the side steps leading to the stage.

At the same time, a man wearing a dark purple velvet caftan emerged from the thick crowd of spectators. He quickly moved away from the "temple of virtue" and turned into a side alley, where there was almost no one, but where the lights of illumination burned just as brightly.

After all, he should have known this, he should have known that it was not for this naive child to fight with his gaze! Why did he embarrass her? Why did he burst into a soul that was not protected by anything from him, that did not expect any danger - is he an enemy to her? He did not wish her harm, he did not want to embarrass her, he simply unconsciously admired her, her virgin beauty and the light of her pure soul, which burned so clearly for him in her eyes. He looked at her unconsciously...

But this was his fault, and he understood this fault, he was dissatisfied with himself. Besso knowingly! It means that he has weakened, it means that he allowed himself to be influenced by this whole crowd, did not protect himself from this harmful influence. Get out of here!.. And he hurried forward. He decided to immediately leave this holiday and calm down alone with himself, to drive away from himself everything that embarrassed him ...

- It is you? Are you here?! – breathed beside him a quiet and gentle female voice. He stopped, and his pale face turned even paler. A stone's throw from him was a woman...

The bright lights of the illumination illuminated her slender, tall figure, her luxurious outfit, her seductive young face with soft, coal-black eyes.

"Or do you not recognize me, Mr. Zakhovinov?" - she said again, and dear cheerful A smile lit up her face, making it all the more seductive. "But I did recognize you!

She held out her hand to

him. He touched this hand and, as it were, woke up from a dream. His face assumed its usual calm expression. At her smile, he gave her a weak smile. "How can I not recognize you, countess," he said, "but you took me by surprise ... I am very distracted ... When did you return to Petersburg? "I have recently returned, but the point is not, sir, but how are you here?" Six months ago, when we said goodbye to you in

Rome, you told me that you were going somewhere, I don't remember where, but not to Russia, and for a long time ... And now, six months later, you are here, at a court feast ... you, a scientist, unsociable, philosopher! ..

- All this is true, countess, and you may be amazed, but remember my last word, how I saw you off ... However, of course, you forgot him ...

- No, wait, I remember you said that we would meet, and we will meet very soon. "So I kept my word. "Yes," she said thoughtfully, and looked at him almost anxiously, as if seeking his gaze.

But he did not look into her eyes. - And you laughed and assured me that this time my prediction could not

come true that if we meet, we can not meet soon.

- Yes, I laughed, but now, you see, I don't laugh ... and I'm even very glad that your prediction came true. You know, all of a sudden I just smelled of Italy, of Rome... Really, I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Zakhovinov!.. And now tell me, how long are you here?.. What are you doing here? - Prince, I finally found you! Are you going to leave? In this case, I am very glad that we met ... I wanted to ask you ... But then Count

Somonov, who was saying this, noticed the countess and stood in front of her bowing

to be.

"Madame, excuse me, for God's sake, for my inexcusable absent-mindedness.

She, contrary to her custom, despite all her resourcefulness, even nothing

She didn't answer the Count, she was so startled.

"Prince!" She couldn't be mistaken, she

heard clearly... what kind of hoax is this? What does it mean? Zakhovinov is a prince! Why, there are no such princes ... But Somonov, obviously, knows him well. Who is he?

She, however, did not betray the astonishment that seized her; a proud, almost haughty expression flickered across her face. She nodded her head to Somonov and the prince and quickly disappeared in the direction of the big avenue. "A lovely woman... and such a clever one, isn't she?" Somonov said.

- Yes! the prince replied coldly. - You seem to have said, Count, that you were looking for me ... Than can I serve? he added.

- Yes, that's what, I wanted to ask you to come to my dinner table tomorrow. I must certainly introduce you to someone. I ask you not to refuse me this, because we have a lot in common, judging by the letters that I received through you from abroad ... Tomorrow my doors are closed to everyone, except for some friends who are eager to get to know you, hoping to know a lot of new things from you.

- Thank you, Count, I'll be with you. They shook hands and parted.

V

In the distant times of Tatar domination and devastating raids of predators on peaceful Russian cities and towns, the dashing Tatar rider Kalat, or Kalatar, lived and acted. Until now, in some places within Kazan, legends and legends about this hero and his violent and brutal exploits have been preserved.

It was, according to legends and tales, even almost not a man, but some kind of monster, something like the Serpent Gorynych. He was almost akin to the devil himself, he had a terrible appearance, extraordinary strength, and the only consolation of his life was to drink Christian blood. Like a stinking hurricane, he flew into Orthodox villages, cities and suburbs, and where he rushes, beheaded and chopped human bodies remain behind him. Kalat will not spare anyone, he will kill everyone, with the exception of beautiful girls and young girls, and he will fasten these unfortunate people one to another with a strong rope and drive him along with all the prey to his filthy camp. He will overeat human flesh, he will drink himself with flammable female tears, he will satiate in every possible way his accursed flesh, and will crush his victims when they are no longer fit for him.

And again it rushes like a hurricane, again destroying Orthodox heads, again dragging youths and girls and stolen belongings.

To hear about those horrors - so the hair on the head will stand on end, and it will seem clear and understandable that that Kalat, or Kalatar, was not an ordinary person, but a creature of the devil, diabolical family and tribe.

And he died, according to legend, not like a man, but tore him apart in an instant, and so tore apart like a bomb, and nothing was left of him. But his filthy seed was not lost and did not dry up. He gave birth to a myriad of children, and all these Kalatarchs went to their monstrous parent, only they no longer had that strength. And the strength began to decrease - and it became difficult for their atrocity to manifest itself. A century passed, another, a third - and one of the kalatarchs appeared to the Tsar of Moscow, beat him with his forehead with all his house and estate, begged him to accept him under the high royal hand and promised, swore to serve faithfully and truthfully. The king gave his consent, but demanded from the Tatar that he be baptized. And the Tatar accepted the Orthodox faith with his whole house, and began to be called Prince Kalatarov.

Both the Tatar himself, and his three sons, and all ten grandchildren kept their word - they served the kings of Moscow faithfully. They served great military services and perished with bones at different times and in different battles for the tsar, for holy Russia and for the Orthodox faith.

And the kings for their faithful service rewarded them with lands and lands, rich estates. A lot of time passed - and only Prince Nikolai Nikolayevich Kalatarov remained from the entire Kalatarov family, and there was nothing Kalatarov in him. He was fairly educated, thanks to the fact that he was the godson of the bosom friend of the Empress Elisaveta Petrovna, Mavra Shepeleva, and through her he got to the Shuvalovs. He served in the guards and was in his time a great dandy and ladies' man. Excessive panache and relentless

the pursuit of women, despite his good abilities in his youth, as well as his knowledge of German and French, prevented him from making a career in the service - he did not think about it. In his thirties or something, he even retired altogether and lived happily ever after in his rich house on the Fontanka. He married at a young age a pretty German woman, Countess Bach, the daughter of a visiting German who came out into the people under Peter the Great and was even awarded the title of count for conscientiousness and caution.

The parent of Princess Kalatarova, despite his county and the high positions he held, remained a German soldier all his life. Her mother, or, rather, "Muterchen", until the end of her days did not leave the habits and way of life of a German bourgeois, she loved the kitchen more than anything in the world, she washed and cleaned everything in the house herself, and often washed the linen for the sake of relaxation and pleasure. But, despite this, the "mutherchen", herself remaining what she was by birth, recognized her only daughter, Caroline, as a real young lady and countess and took every measure to ensure that she was in all respects "eine echle Grafin". She did not teach her what she herself knew and loved, but taught what she did not love and did not know, but what was necessary for a real countess. Karolina played the clavichord and the harp beautifully, sang German romances and Russian songs very nicely, studied not only German, but also French literature, and even spoke Russian well.

All the efforts of Muterchen were crowned with success. Countess Caroline Bach married the last descendant of the Tatar monster Kalat and turned into a Russian rich and noble lady. "Muterchen" did even more: she put into the soul of her Carolina something that was not usually found in the great Russian ladies of that time. Karolina came out as a very serious, reasonable and tactful woman. She fell in love with her handsome and brilliant husband with all her heart, but she soon became convinced that she had imagined him at the time of the matchmaking and at the first time of marriage was not at all what he was in reality. All her dreams were shattered. She saw that she had nothing to think about her personal happiness. The prince was carried away by her pretty face - and nothing more. This little face soon became boring, and he returned to the idle pleasures that were the essence of his life.

Princess Karolina realized that she was unable to change his nature, that it was impossible to demand from a person what he could not give, and, gathering her courage, put an end to all her young, sentimental and tender dreams, accepted life as it was. She is. She gave her husband complete freedom, she was never jealous of him, she always pretended that she did not hear or know anything, looked at everything through her fingers, never imposed on him, never molested him.

She led the house perfectly, maintained contacts and acquaintances, won general respect for herself, and with this respect for herself covered the hole inflicted on the family name of the princes Kalatarov by the prince's frivolous behavior. And she made sure that her husband, in spite of all his frivolity and great pride, loved and appreciated her as much as he could, and recognized her as his only authority.

But the main goal of Countess Caroline's life was her child. He was the only one she had - her beautiful daughter Elena. In this girl she put all her strength, everything that her husband pushed away from her, she gave to her daughter. She loved this child passionately, tenderly, sentimentally. And at the same time she, like her late mother, but only with more skill, took care of her daughter's education. Princess Elena studied the most diverse subjects with the best teachers that could then be obtained in St. Petersburg. And at a time when very little attention was paid to the upbringing and education of young girls in high Russian society, Princess Elena was the most brilliant exception. And nature did not offend her with her abilities, everything was easy for her, she learned everything as if jokingly. If a

mother was a good musician - her daughter excelled her. If the mother was familiar with foreign literatures and was interested in them, the daughter studied them incomparably deeper and more seriously.

Every year her amazing memory was enriched with a wide variety of information.

Not only German and French, but even English were, as it were, native to her - she spoke them with such ease and with such perfection. She is fine

she drew, she had a strong and pleasant voice.

The beauty of the girl increased every year. Mother enjoyed her, admired and I loved her so much that I didn't see any flaws in her.

Princess Elena was sixteen years old, and her beauty, talents and extraordinary education had already begun to be talked about in society and in court spheres. Her appearance was expected from neter singing.

But then misfortune happened: Princess Caroline caught a cold, caught a fever, and through died a few days. The prince, who had already grown old before his time, worn out and somehow stupid, was completely at a loss, did not know what to do, what to do. His house immediately, in an instant, turned, like a princess, into a dead man: the hostess took away the soul of her house with her, and he began to quickly indulge in decay.

Princess Elena, who was preparing for her entry into the world, longing for brilliance, success, celebrations of all kinds, in the first minutes she almost went mad, she herself became seriously ill. But she recovered soon. She was seventeen years old. She somehow survived the first months, tried to become a mistress in her mother's place, but she soon got tired of it. Numerous guests began to appear in the house, and among them there were many such as the late princess would never visit her. let. Everyone looked after the princess, whispered all sorts of compliments to her. She immediately got into an atmosphere of worship and flattery. Her head was spinning, her eyes were rippling, but at the same time she it became fun, she forgot her loss, she began to live day by day.

Finally, the time she has been waiting for has come - she is in the present light. One of her relatives, a court lady, began to take her out. Princess Elena is presented to the Empress, treated kindly her. Princess Elena lit up like a bright star at all balls and meetings. Behind her is a crowd of admirers, a crowd of pretenders. But she still does not think about marriage. She is only seventeen years old. Before going to one of the court balls, a relative who was taking her out mysteriously announced to her, that Count Sonnenfeld of the Prussian embassy asked the prince for her hand. For this groom hlo many people will read it, and, apparently, even the empress was interested in this matter.

Elena laughed loudly, impetuously, quite like a child - one already thought about such a thing. marriage seemed to her absurd and ridiculous. Meanwhile, at the ball, she danced a lot with the count and towards the end of the evening, suddenly, in one minute, decided to marry him.

Count Sonnenfeld was a young German, tall and white, with milky eyes. and a large hooked nose. His movements at the same time differed in importance and angularity. He seemed older than his years and struck me with an amazing seriousness and taciturnity, under which one knows what was hidden - an overly cautious mind or apathetic narrow-mindedness. In general, there was absolutely nothing in him that could attract the heart of an ardent, richly gifted seventeen-year-old girl. Meanwhile, she decided to marry him.

Why? She didn't know herself. It was an instant whim, and nothing more.

He is German - her mother was German. But after all, she herself is a Russian princess, and her mother was born in Russia and has never been abroad. They say Petersburg is now incomparably better than Berlin, and life here is happier and more luxurious, especially at court. And Count Sonnenfeld will take her away to Berlin or somewhere else in the country where he will be assigned. It's good, she knows Petersburg, but does not know abroad, and she wants to go there.

In a word, she decided that she would be Countess Sonnenfeld - she suddenly liked it so much. The father was pleased - the party turned out to be good: the young diplomat is in excellent condition.

and very influential relatives, he is closely related to many of the ruling houses in Germany, he is in good standing with the king of Prussia.

The wedding was celebrated after completing all the formalities with great pomp. The young couple introduced themselves to the Empress, and then Count Sonnenfeld was summoned to Berlin. The Countess made farewell visits and disappeared from the Petersburg sky, shining on it for a moment as a bright star.

VI

Newlyweds on the way from St. Petersburg to Berlin. They are driven by a good six, harnessed to a gigantic dormez, which is a miracle of German craftsmanship and German practicality. This dormez is ugly and clumsy in appearance, but at the first glance at him you can be sure that he will endure any way and any bad weather. It easily and comfortably accommodates six people. In it, not only the countess, but even the count, despite their pole-like legs, can sleep, stretched out to their full height.

During the day, this dormez is something like a small boudoir, and at night it turns into a bedroom with a heap of featherbeds and pillows. Under the familiar and neat hands of the Count's valet Adolf, he instantly becomes in the dining room. A table appears in it, served for two couverts. From its mysterious rooms, boxes and bags go out to light all sorts of road supplies and supplies.

Fat Adolf, whose main distinguishing feature is bloodshot eyes and a bluish nose, serves the count and countess with visible pleasure and with a sense of his own dignity. Then, having finished all his duties and again turning the dormez from a dining room into a boudoir, he performs a hilarious balancing act, climbing with his fat legs in thick woolen stockings on the highest and widest dormez goats. This ascent is extremely difficult for a more dexterous and thin person, but for Adolf it seems completely impossible at first glance. But every time he conquers all difficulties, and the countess, if she pleases to draw back the taffeta curtain of the front window, can admire his broad back, which does not move for whole hours and remains as if rooted to the goats. If the countess draws back the curtain from a small round window that fits in the back of the dormez, she can see her maid sitting among the pillows, boxes and trunks in the booth attached to the dormez. Behind the gentlemen's carriage, four more burlesques hurried, already almost shapeless, similar to anything and at the same time nothing, but as strong as the

count's dormez. All sorts of belongings and the rest of the servants are placed in these trunks: two laundresses, a maid, a cook with a cook and with all the accessories of a camp kitchen, and, finally, the count's huntsman with his beloved dog Nero. At first, this whole train, the whole atmosphere of the journey, occupies the countess and she likes it very much: after all, she never left Petersburg and its environs. But already on the second day of the journey, Adolf

with his bearish dexterity and a gray nose, and the magnificent Nero, raising an enthusiastic bark at stops, bursting into the dormez and trying with all his might to lick the countess in the face, and all the economic and practical German surprises of the dormez - all the bags, baulchiks and others - all this little by little begins to annoy the young traveler. It appears not only fatigue, but something similar to boredom. And boredom

she still never knew.

With each new day of the journey, she also begins to feel awkward, uncomfortable, and although she still does not ask herself where this awkwardness and boredom come from, but if she asked herself well and seriously about this, she would have to answer herself. that both come from her companion and interlocutor.

Yes, she is uncomfortable and uneasy with the count, with the husband whom she has chosen for herself, with the man associated with her for life. She does not ask herself anything else, she does not decide anything, but she already feels her irreparable mistake. This man, her husband, is a complete stranger to her, and not only a stranger, but she does not like him at all, he is boring to her, unpleasant, his presence has an overwhelming effect on her. She is not the same as she always was, she seems to be playing a role imposed on her, unpleasant, playing with forced external calmness and with internal impatience to end as soon as possible and become herself again. The Count doesn't notice. He plays absolutely no role, on the contrary, he immediately threw off all compulsion, he is satisfied to the last degree and cheerful in his own way. This gaiety is expressed in the fact that from time to time he rubs his red, thin hands with hooked fingers, somehow grunts and repeats over and over again: "Jawohl!"

With his young girlfriend, he is helpful to the last degree. Every minute he offers her this or that, takes her little white hand, turns it palm up and gently and long kisses in the very middle of the palm with dry and cold lips. He stares for a long time at the countess's half-childish, charming face, at her deep black eyes, at her hot lips full of healthy young blood, at the thin blush of her tender cheeks, covered like a peach with a golden fluff, at the capricious curl that stands out from under the traveler's head. dress. He looks, and with what thoughts and feelings you cannot make out in his pale, as if faded, as if pewter eyes. He whispers: "Mein Schatz, mein Herzchen!" And again he grunts, and again the self-satisfied "jawohl", and again the rubbing of red hands

with hooked fingers.

The Countess still does not understand anything and does not think about anything, but already these red hands, these hooked fingers, colorless eyes and a long thin hooked nose, "mein Schatz" and "mein Herzchen", and above all the feeling of his dry, cold lips in her palm and for some reason, even more so, this self-satisfied "jawohl" is disgusting to her and is becoming more and more disgusting, irritating her more and more.

Meanwhile, she instinctively hides her feelings and impressions not only from him, but from herself, and plays her part, that is, patiently endures everything, forces herself to smile at him from time to time, occasionally and very carefully, at his request, to touch her lips. to his lean cheek, shaved in front of her by Adolf. But she has to make great efforts on herself in order to calmly endure his caresses ...

Countess Elena seeks entertainment in what she can see from the window, in constantly changing pictures and scenes of someone else's life, unfamiliar to her. But an hour, two, three - and this diversity begins to tire her, loses all her interest.

- J'ai sommeil! - Elena whispers and leans back on the pillows in the back of the dormez.

- Schlaf, schlaf, mein Herzchen! says the Count, straightening her pillows. She

closes her eyes. He looks at her for a few moments, leans over her with

with a prominent desire to kiss her, but for some reason he refrains, moves back to his window and sits, all stretched out, somehow sticking his hooked nose forward and barely audibly humming some German song. Here the

count's train crossed the border. On German soil, the count seemed to revive somewhat, for the first minute even something resembling a twinkle flickered in his milky eyes. He began rubbing his hands with particular zeal, and finally could not stand it and, leaning out of the window, shouted to Adolf: "Nun, Adolph, das ist schon unser Land?"

Jawohl, Excellenz, Gott sei gelobt! - A joyful bass answered him from the goat Adolf. This natural and good manifestation of the patriotic feeling of master and servant not only was not appreciated by poor Elena, but even had a hard effect on her. She got pinched

her heart ached almost as much as on the day she buried her mother. Suddenly, after these joyful German phrases, she felt that her homeland was left behind, that she was in a foreign land and alone, completely alone, that she was a prisoner. She suddenly, painfully, wanted to hear the sounds of the Russian language, although she had not spoken it very often before and preferred French speech to it, which was already heard almost everywhere in the high Russian society surrounding her. The German language, the language of her mother and grandmother, always beloved by her, which had been the language of her intimate conversations with her mother, now seemed to her completely alien, unpleasant, dissonant, almost disgusting in the mouths of the Count and Adolf. And she had no one to exchange a Russian word with; even her maid, who was sitting in the back booth of the dormez, was a German. The count did not know a single Russian sound and for some reason, as Elena had already noticed, he even treated these sounds contemptuously. In the first days of the journey, hearing some Russian word, he turned to Elena, mockingly wrinkled his nose and, twisting his mouth in a grin, asked:

- Nun, nun, was bedeutet das? - and at the same time, godlessly distorting, he repeated the astonishing his words.

- Aber, Gott, was für eine barbarische Sprache! he always finished. Then Elena calmly translated the words for him, and it never occurred to her to be offended by his mockery of the Russian language. Now, for the first time in her life, she felt Russian. This German land, the land of her husband and Adolf, the land of her grandmother, seemed to her not only alien, but almost hateful. She wanted unbearably with her whole being to go back to St. Petersburg, to her home, to her former life. She was no longer able to play her part. She sobbed uncontrollably, loudly, almost hysterically.

The Count looked at her in astonishment and, as it were, somewhat alarmed. But his anxiety immediately vanished, leaving only amazement. He asked her what was wrong with her, why she was crying. She didn't answer and continued to sob.

He asked again in a calm voice, but very insistently. - Oh, leave me, leave me, please! she whispered through her sobs, pulling away from him with horror and disgust. He slowly and carefully took out a bottle of aromatic vinegar from the trunk, put it on her knees, and then turned away and sat silently, stretching out long legs and looking out the window.

Finally, her sobs subsided. Then the Count turned in her direction and said: "Have you calmed down, mein Herzchen? Well, it's good ... it's not known why crying and sobbing like that is not suitable for such an intelligent and educated person like you ... I hope there won't be such strange things in the future ...

She didn't look at him, didn't say anything to him. She did her best to suppress all her feelings and continue to play the same role. A new feeling arose in her, not yet defined, but strong. She said to herself: "I will never cry in front of him ..." There were two days left to Berlin, and the count found that the time had come to dedicate Elena to everything that she should get to know as Countess von Sonnenfeld-Sonnenthal. He obviously prepared for several hours, because he was extremely silent, deep in himself. Then he finally proceeded to explain. He became even more wooden, his hump-nosed head lifted proudly, and he began in a measured voice and in such a tone, as if he were performing some kind of sacred rite, as if entrusting Elena with a deep, important secret.

Previously, he explained to her that she was no longer Princess Kalatarov (Elena could hardly contain her indignation when he godlessly and, obviously, mainly out of contempt for the "barbaric Russian language" distorted her generic and now especially dear name to her) and that she should forever renounce the old tradition that she enters the famous house of the Sonnenfeld counts, the Sonnenthal barons and should be a worthy bearer of this

glorious name. He hastened to add that such, of course, she would be, for if he had not hoped for this, he would not have chosen her as his wife. Elena flushed and barely restrained herself from telling him, with her former childish glibness, that it was not at all a special honor for her to be Countess Sonnenfeld, Baroness Sonnenthal, that she was Princess Kalatarova and it was not he who did her honor by choosing her, but she did him - agreeing to wear his name.

But she refrained and listened to him silently.

Meanwhile, the count became more and more solemn, and his nose rose more and more proudly. He explained to his wife the whole history of his ancient family, listed in great detail all the glorious deeds of his ancestors, the wars in which they participated, the distinctions they received. He described with the accuracy of a geography textbook all the estates and castles that were once in the possession of his family. He passed on to her the history of all the noble German families with whom the Sonnenfeld-Sonnenthals had been related for five or six centuries ...

Dormez stopped, the doors opened, Adolf, even more reddened from the native air, appeared with breakfast, lunch, and supper. The huntsman approached the doors respectfully, and Nero rushed in with a loud bark. The healthy, smiling, German face of the maid was shown, respectfully asking Elena if the countess would like to order something for her ...

The count stopped for a while, spoke in an affectionately commanding tone with Adolf and the huntsman, ate and drank. But as soon as the door slammed shut and the dormez started off, the endless story about the Sonnenfelds-Sonnenthals began again. It seemed to Elena that she was present at a lesson in history and geography. But since this lesson lasted more than a day, then, despite all the comprehension and ability of the student, it became unbearable. Her head was simply foggy from all these uninteresting details of a life alien to her and incomprehensible. All these counts, barons and fursts appeared before her, as annoying puppets, jumped, grimaced, lived in their castles, reconciled and quarreled among themselves, entered into marriages, gave birth to children, died - and disappeared without a trace, were immediately forgotten by her ...

Meanwhile, the teacher was inexorable: noticing that she was beginning to listen to him absently, he would stop and ask her questions, forcing her to prove to him that she understood and remembered everything. If she answered inappropriately, he patiently began to repeat and told her that she needed to know exactly the whole history of her family, that otherwise he could not even introduce her to his numerous relatives. And he wants everyone to love her and make sure that his choice is successful ...

Finally, already approaching Berlin itself, the count finished his lesson and sat somewhat tired, but satisfied, with the consciousness of a man who has successfully fulfilled an important duty. ness.

Elena revived. The lesson was over; all the counts and countesses, barons and baronesses immediately flew out of her head. This long, tedious journey was coming to an end. The countess became herself, that is, a living, carefree child. She suddenly forgot everything that had befallen her for these days are like an oppressive heaviness, like fog, like darkness.

She thought that she would come to Berlin and a new life would begin for her. She knew that she would go straight to the court, vanity spoke in her, a thirst for brilliance and worship. She firmly believed that she would charm everyone there, from the king to the numerous new relatives, that she would take first place everywhere and everywhere. After all, she knows that she is beautiful, because everyone told her that she sings like an angel, and even the count once compared her playing the clavichord with the playing of Saint Cecilia. She is smart, she is very educated, she knows a lot. After all, this is all true, and everyone will admire her, fun awaits her. She, like a child, was already beginning to anticipate this fun. She believed in him because she needed to believe in him so badly.

VII

Late on a rainy evening, the newlyweds drove up to the house of the Sonnenfeld counts, and from the very first steps Elena was disappointed. She expected, judging by the stories of her husband, to meet almost regal splendor and luxury. Meanwhile, in front of her in a rainy darkness, some dark, gloomy and small building.

A heavy iron door opens, with a lantern and a large bunch of keys in hand, a small, poorly and ridiculously dressed old housekeeper appears on the threshold. It turns out that the count's parents are in their family estate. The house is empty. The old woman looks askance and bewildered at the young mistress, makes the most hilarious curtsies in front of her and the count, urinates something, kisses Elena's hand. Finally, she more clearly announces that, judging by the letter she received, she was expecting the young owners not earlier than in a week and that therefore, if you will excuse her, the house is not quite ready. However, she will immediately arrange dinner and

prepare a bedroom for the "Eccelens".

The old woman claps her hands, screams piercingly invitingly. At the top of an old stone staircase, two sleepy German faces appear. Doors slam. Some kind of toothless, dilapidated old man in a worn livery brings a wax candle in a heavy chandelier. At the pale flicker of this candle and the old woman's lantern, Elena, leaning on her husband's hand, climbs up the steps of the stairs.

They pass several small rooms, musty and cold, and stop at dining room.

– Jawohl! - the count announces with a satisfied tone. – Wir sind zu Hause! He is at home! And she? Where's she? She almost collapses on a stone-hard and stone-cold old leather chair.

and looks around sadly.

A rather large but cheerless room with narrow windows and a stone floor. Dull-painted walls, antique furniture, clumsy, dusty, heavy, huge carved sideboard. In the back of the room there is a large fireplace, near which a toothless old man is now busy fanning the fire with old furs. The Count paces from corner to corner on his long legs. The old woman, jingling her keys, minces after him and reports something to him, which Elena does not listen to. The Count keeps repeating: "Jawohl!" - and in turn orders something to the old woman. So she disappeared behind the door. The count approaches his wife and takes her by the hand. - Oh, wie bin ich zufrieden, kuss mich, mein Schatz!.. Yes, kiss me, your husband, in this

old grandfather's house.

Legitimate desire, and good words. But Elena trembled all over as she kissed the count. She simply felt eerie in this cold, unwelcoming house. An almost panicky fear came over her. - So cold! she whispered sadly. The count hurried out, returned with a warm shawl and wrapped his wife around it. But she kept trembling. "I ordered a big fire to be built in the bedroom - you'll warm up ... The house is empty, unheated, they weren't waiting for us," he explained. The old clock in the corner of the dining room struck midnight, and every sound of it echoed sadly and painfully in Elena's heart. Finally dinner was served. The count ate with appetite and at the same time drank heavily from the old bottle brought by the shining and shiny Adolf. Elena couldn't eat anything. However, her husband almost forced her to drink wine and announced to her that it was not wine, but real nectar, the old Rhenish one, which is already in the royal cellar.

it's not too far.

A wonderful fragrant moisture ran warmly over the members of Countess Elena and somewhat warmed her and revived her. Having finished supper, the count took his wife by the arm and, with his solemn, wooden gait, led her into the bedroom. Here Elena found the old woman with the keys and her maid cleaning the room. The maid immediately disappeared, but the old woman was in no hurry to leave. She stood with a candle in her hands, quietly jingling her huge keys. Her wrinkled, comical, frog-like face shone with visible pleasure. Her small watery eyes darted curiously from count to countess and back again.

Meanwhile, the count drew himself up to his full height, proudly raised his head and froze in this solemn pose. The candle, trembling in the old woman's hand, illuminated his face from below, changing his features and making them extremely ugly and at the same time ridiculous. Now the count's hand rose, stretched forward without bending, and long red fingers pointed to Elena at something.

She looked at this direction and saw a huge old bed under a dusty heavy canopy. She did not immediately understand what it was. Her gaze caught only proud howling, self-satisfied and solemn expression in the face of her husband and the ridiculous ugliness of this faces.

Suddenly the old woman began to squat hard and wish the young gentlemen good night. Now, not only in her face, but also in her crouching, and the sounds that flew out of her toothless mouth, she became quite like a frog. She backed away to the door and kept crouching and croaking. Finally she disappeared and locked the door behind her. Elena did not even find the strength in herself to take care of her toilet properly, for the first time in her life feeling completely broken, weakened. She glanced around the room, as dull and faded as everything else in the house, just as cold despite the fire that burned brightly in the fireplace. She went up to the bed and, quickly undressing, buried herself almost headlong into the soft feather beds. She lay with her eyes closed, just afraid to think about anything. Sleep sooner! So the count undressed and, like her, buried himself in the feather beds. Are you sleeping, Countess? She didn't answer. - This is our family bed, it has served four generations of our family! the count announced, burrowing even deeper into the feather bed and instantly snoring.

Elena opened her eyes and watched how the gloomy room was illuminated from the flames of the fireplace by an uneven, flashing light and then faded, how long, flickering shadows walked from all objects. Minute after minute passes, and she still can't sleep. Now, all over the room, she hears some strange rustling ... and suddenly she remembers the words of the count: "Four generations have slept on this bed!" And she begins to imagine these alien, long-dead German counts and countesses. It seems to her that these terrible dead men come up to her and look at her with amazement, and just now they will pull off their feather beds from her and drive her from their birthplace. Her teeth are already chattering in fear. She drives away these ghosts with all her might. Finally they are gone, they have disappeared without a trace, even the strange rustle in the room has stopped. But now she is disgusted, terrible and terrible this very bed of other people's dead people. No, she will never sleep on this bed and live in this terrible gloomy house! Finally she fell asleep and woke up only when her husband woke her up, announcing that

very late, that breakfast was waiting for her for a long time.

In the light of day, the house of the counts Sonnenfelds no longer seemed terrible to Elena, but on the other hand, she walked around it, made out even more clearly all its nondescriptness. She did not appreciate the peculiar

artistic seal of antiquity, lying on this old house, which was so unlike what she was accustomed to since childhood, what she expected.

But after all, all this can be updated, rearranged, done the way she wants; after all, the count himself has enough funds for this, and, finally, she has - she is not a dowry. She tried to move quickly to dreams of the fun that awaits her. She's been using all day of her maid, Louise, was versed in the things and clothes brought from St. Petersburg and asked her husband if he would soon introduce her to the king and all her relatives.

He replied that soon, and in a few days he fulfilled his promise.

But each new trip disappointed Elena. She saw everything alien and unpleasant everywhere. Everywhere she was met affectionately and showed her all signs of attention. But nowhere did she find what she dreamed of: neither brilliance, nor luxury - everywhere excessive simplicity and funny, as she seemed odd.

Almost the same impression awaited her in the palace. After the splendor and splendor of Catherine's palace, the court of King Frederick seemed very miserable and poor. And the king himself somehow did not look like a king. He met Count Sonnenfeld very affectionately and familiarly. He treated Elena kindly too, even took her by the chin and said some kind of ambiguity, to which the count smiled respectfully and which Elena did not understand. The king asked the young countess a few quick questions about St. Petersburg, about the Empress, about Tsarevich Pavel Petrovich, and then expressed to her that he very much approved of Sonnenfeld's choice and hoped that the new German the countess will soon become tame and become one of the best ornaments of his court.

"But the countess is very young," he added, "and must be an attentive pupil."

their respected relatives.

He named the names of these relatives. Elena replied that she had already had fun with get to know them. She didn't have to say anything more. The king said goodbye to her with a smile, like a grimace, and disappeared.

VIII

Five years have passed. Countess Helena Sonnenfeld von Sonnenthal from the lovely girl turned into a beautiful woman, which was impossible not to admire. Nature endowed her great health, and this health was able to withstand the stubborn struggle with the hardships of life. Thanks to this health, she developed luxuriously and magnificently. Stately and strong the shape of her beautiful body indicated the rich strength of youth. A healthy and tender blush covered her cheeks, only her deep black eyes, often appearing in them with a thoughtful, sad expression, spoke of the fact that under a happy and healthy appearance, under this shiny surface hides in the depths a heart that is not at all happy and contented.

Count Sonnenfeld has changed much less over the years. He only became even drier, his thin hooked nose protruded even more and even seemed to twist a little to one side. His colorless eyes still betrayed neither thoughts nor feelings. He was still mysterious and silent. His contented, triumphant "jawohl!" distributed much less frequently. and much less frequently did he rub his red hands.

Deciding to marry Princess Kalatarova, the count acted judiciously and intelligently. He is like it seemed to him that he had thoroughly considered this act. The count was a real Prussian patriot, wholly devoted to his king. The affairs of Prussia were his affairs, royal plans and goals - his plans and goals. Destined to act in the diplomatic field and sent to St. Petersburg, he thought only of how to contribute to the close and lasting rapprochement between Prussia and Russia and to extract from this rapprochement as many benefits as possible for his fatherland. He decided that by marrying a Russian girl of the highest circle with great connections in Petersburg society and at court, he can easily achieve exactly what he could not

achieve on your own. He will be able to render great services to his homeland. Princess Kalatarova was just as if created in order to become his wife. The only thing that confused him for a moment was the fact that she was a foreigner and did not belong to his religion. But he immediately realized that there was a lot of German blood in her. In addition, she is almost still a child - he will temporarily remove her from Russia and re-educate her. He will turn her into a real German and Lutheran. And when this re-education is over, when she entirely belongs to him, his homeland and family, imbued with his interests, then he will return with her again to Petersburg and with her help will serve his king great service. She will be an indispensable assistant for him, she will become an exceptional woman, one of those women who hold in their hands the delicate threads of political interests and play a large role in the destinies of states. She is so young, she is still a child, and yet everyone is already talking about her amazing education, her talents. To educate her, develop her and how to direct her is the husband's business.

This is how the German diplomat reasoned, and these reasonings seemed to him infallible. They were approved by the king himself, from whom the count had no secrets.

But what was so clear and simple, what seemed so easy, turned out to be impossible. The young countess decisively did not live up to the hopes and expectations placed on her. The count's program, deftly and consistently drawn up, lacked one paragraph that should have said that all this would certainly happen if ... if the countess would love her husband. The count considered this paragraph superfluous. How can she not love him - is he not worthy of love? He is an honest and good man! There had been absolutely nothing in his past for as long as he could remember that he had to blush for. He honestly and proudly bears his old famous name. He never, even in his early youth, allowed himself any special hobbies. No one has ever seen him indulge in dirty passions. He did not waste his property on cards and women, but on the contrary, he took care of this property by all means and increased his income by saving. So did his ancestors, great-grandfather, grandfather and father. That is why Sonnenfeld von Sonnenthal is one of the richest families in Prussia.

It is true that he has a fondness for wine, for old Rhenish wine, but then again no one can say that he has seen him drunk. That would be unworthy of Count Sonnenfeld. Their whole family was distinguished by sobriety. No one has ever seen the count's wrath either. He is strict, but fair with servants and subordinates, and for this he must be respected - and respected. He is patient and prudent, under no circumstances does he allow himself to leave the aristocratic calm and humiliate his dignity in one way or another. He is an impeccable husband, devoted and faithful to his wife. He would never allow himself to look at another woman. All Sonnenfeld von Sonnentali were faithful and exemplary husbands, and having such a beautiful wife, this is not difficult. Moreover, even in his youth, the count did not think much about women. He is incapable of passionate love, blind infatuation, he does not even know exactly what love is. Yes, and why all this? After all, he is not a poet, but a diplomat. Excessive passion and enthusiasm would only spoil his life, his activities. Moreover, a flame that flares up too quickly burns out, and it glows with a small flame, but this flame will last for a long time.

The very first time of his marriage, he admired the beautiful Elena, because he had eyes.

Elena's beauty even aroused his cold imagination for minutes, but he soon calmed himself, soon cooled off, and the countess ceased to be a seductive woman for him, turned into a beautiful lawful wife, who should be close to him both by duty and by her own desire. He cherished her because she was his wife, and cherished her even more because of the goals he connected with his marriage.

Seeing that it is not easy to get along with his wife, that she has many whims and, in general, such qualities that for some reason he did not expect and which, probably, would not be in his wife if he

married his compatriot, he was embarrassed, even indignant within himself. But then he decided that she was still a child, a spoiled child, that although she was very educated, she was brought up "there" ... He mentally emphasized this word contemptuously. All the more so, it means that for the first time it is necessary to remove it from all the former and seriously and prudently engage in its preparation. It seemed to him, and so it was, that he had done everything in his power to achieve his goal. He made every concession and spoiled his wife in every possible way; her childish whims were endured by him patiently, her strange demands were fulfilled ...

They lived for two years at the court of Frederick, and their life was not at all the same as the count was accustomed to. The young countess turned everything upside down in her own way. The old Sonnenfeld house was quickly transformed - excessive luxury flooded into it. Yes and internal home storage life turned out to be not at all German, not patriarchal.

The countess had her own rooms, she even flatly refused a common bedroom, from the old bed of the count's grandfathers and grandmothers, terrible and disgusting for her. She built her own nest in the old, stale walls of the Sonnenfeld house, where, if not, there was as much warmth and light as she wanted, but where, nevertheless, she settled down more or less to her liking.

Everyone was amazed. The German ladies even became indignant, but the count remained invariably calm, rubbing his hands and saying: "Jawohl!" In these two years of German court life, Elena did everything to live calmly and cheerfully, but did not achieve either one or the other. During these two years, what she had only unconsciously felt during the journey from Petersburg to Prussia, was now clearly realized in all the smallest details. She not only did not love her husband, but he was even antipathetic to her, and this antipathy of his at times affected her painfully and painfully. Only his suppleness and the freedom granted to her, only the coldness of his temperament, made it possible for her to endure him somehow. Without all this, she would have reached despair.

But he was still so hard and unpleasant for her that she capriciously and painfully hated even everything that he loved, that was close and dear to him. She could no longer reason and feel calmly and impartially. German life, the properties and characteristics of German people, with whom she still had a lot of common blood, under other circumstances, with her beloved husband, she would probably have liked it, and what the count hoped for would probably have happened: she would turn into a German countess. Now this has become impossible. She capriciously hated everything German, hated all those counts and countesses, barons and baronesses, with whom she had to meet daily, she hated even the king himself, despite the fact that he was invariably almost paternally affectionate with her and from time to time visited their house. He had not yet refused, just like the count, to find in her a convenient and useful tool for achieving some important political plans in the near future.

schema.

These royal hopes placed her in an exceptional position at court. They did not allow all that hostility, indignation and envy that her new German relatives and, in general, almost all the ladies of the court, immediately felt towards her. And this hostility, though deaf and hidden, was great. Elena perfectly understood this and answered it with sincere contempt.

She achieved her goal, she shone, excelled, was surrounded by everyone's attention, as well as the worship, although respectful and almost silent, of the brilliant court youth. And she tried to live it all. She had merry moments, little celebrations. But this unhealthy fun only spoiled her - she learned to mock people, to anger stiff German ladies and girls. And in the end, all the same, longing and boredom remained, there remained an unloved, unbearable husband.

The countess read a lot, continued her artistic and literary education. Sometimes for whole days she did not leave the palette and brushes or the musical instrument. This was of some help to her, but not for long. She became more and more bored, she gradually began to have real whims, real irritation. The long-suffering earl was now decidedly displeased with her. Her re-education, her conversion to the German pat

the riot failed, it dragged on ...

So the king once, in a private conversation, patted him on the shoulder and said: "Nun, mein Keri, es geht nicht gut?" Seems like we made a mistake? He only said that, but the count understood perfectly well what was the matter. He returned to himself gloomy

and for two whole days he did not see his wife.

But then the following happened. The

king did not express his thoughts to anyone except the count. The count, for his part, of course, confided to no one about his conversation with the king. Meanwhile, the walls turned out to have ears, or rather, the German courtiers turned out to have an unusual instinct. Less than a month later, the countess noticed a great change in the way the ladies of the court treated her. In less than two months, open war was declared on her from all sides, as helpful people now and then conveyed to her that they were saying bad things about her here and there.

Finally, the count himself found it necessary to explain himself to his wife. Unperturbed and calm, as always, with almost fixed eyes and a fixed expression on his face, he, choosing the most polite expressions, announced to his wife that he was dissatisfied with her and would be very glad if she changed her behavior.

The countess, not knowing anything bad behind her, knowing behind herself only that she was too patient, that she was too languishing and suffering, that she was deprived of light and air, became indignant and demanded from her husband with eyes burning almost with hatred that he should not dare to insult her. He looked a little surprised, shrugged his shoulders, and then, in the same calm tone as he had begun, said: "I didn't

offend you in any way, countess, and I can't offend you, for I am your husband, I only care about you, and I repeat, I don't like your behavior. If you want to know what exactly I do not like, I will say: you are too frivolous, you forget your dignity, you forget that you are my wife and that your name and position oblige you to a lot. You don't respect enough the people you should respect. You are too familiar with people you owe respect. Finally, it is very hard for me to say this, and I never thought that I would have to say this - you are too free with men ... you are always surrounded by a crowd

youth...

He wanted to add something else, but fell silent, struck by the expression of her face, the thick flush that rushed to her cheeks, and the passion with which she rose and stopped in front of him.

- What?! she whispered, and indignation and anger sounded in this whisper. But suddenly she made an effort on herself, calmly returned to her place and contemptuously chuckled. "No,

you definitely shouldn't be angry with you!" she said with such inimitable contempt that even he felt embarrassed. "I don't respect the people I should respect?" But why should I respect them? I do not know that! I am familiar with them, but I don't even understand what you mean by this familiarity... or...

She paused for a moment, but then calmly continued: - I behave indecently with men! Count, think what you are saying... think carefully! Oh my god! she laughed. "It's not enough for you to start being jealous of me ... for whom ?! The Count shifted uneasily in his chair and lifted his head proudly.

"Am I... jealous?" he said with his dry lips. "I didn't tell you that, and I never will." Count Sonnenfeld cannot be jealous of his wife, and Count Sonnenfeld's wife can never fall so low as to give rise to jealousy. She wanted to smile evilly, but she couldn't. There was something new in the Count's words, some power unknown to her. Even his very almost unbearable figure for her, his face with a hooked, lopsided nose and colorless eyes - all this suddenly changed. She never saw him like that. And in any case, he seemed to her all the same more interesting. However, a moment passed - and he again turned into the former count. He stood up and said quietly to her, "No, you misunderstood me. I did not come at all to quarrel with you. Think carefully, my friend, about what I said, and perhaps you will see for yourself and feel that I am right. I see and feel the same!" exclaimed the countess. - I see and feel that I am dying of longing and boredom! And she burst into tears, which had not happened to her since the very crossing of the Russian border.

IX

The count could not understand the reasons for his wife's anguish and boredom. What does she lack? She seems to have everything a woman could want! True, the thought flashed through him that she yearned for Petersburg, but he immediately drove that thought away.

In the position and mood in which Elena was now, there was no point in even thinking of taking her to Russia. Not only will it not bring him any benefit, but it can even cause great harm. He still did not want to give up his hopes and plans, and, especially after the words of the king, he certainly needed to prove that "they" were not mistaken. After all, if he made such a mistake, it means that he is insolvent, and he would never come to terms with this thought.

She must be unwell, he finally decided. She is fresh, full, but still he noticed in her at times some oddities, as if fatigue. Yes, and her very distance from him, her coldness, everything that he had not paid attention to before, he now attributed to illness.

Finally, after all, there is another very important circumstance: they still have no children, and meanwhile, he needs a new successor to the Sonnenfeld family von Sonnenthal. And he also ascribed this circumstance to her illness, he did not ascribe anything to himself. He brought together the best doctors. But the doctors unanimously decided that the countess did not have any illness, although there was, obviously, some disorder. She needs a change, she needs a quiet life away from the noise of the court, the country air and tranquility should have the best effect on her. The count was even surprised - how he himself did not guess about it. He announced to his wife that she was going on the road, that they were going to Sonnenfeld Castle to his parents. Elena showed some pleasure at this news. She was so tired of this yard. She herself felt that she needed a change, no matter what.

"Yes, under the influence of my kind mother, I will finally achieve everything!" thought the Count, as in better days, smugly rubbed his red hands and loudly exclaimed "jawohl!"

He took a vacation. They are in Sonnenfeld. This time Elena liked the old castle in the middle of a dense, centuries-old park. In the first year of her marriage, she came here for two weeks to introduce herself to the count's parents, but that was in winter. Now the castle produced a completely different impression. Spring was in full swing.

The old countess greeted her daughter-in-law very kindly. Her son had already told her that he was expecting maternal help from her, that he intended to entrust his wife to her and hoped that with her good influence she would make a worthy Countess Sonnenfeld out of a young woman. He didn't regret

attacked his wife and did not arm his mother against her. In general, he never complained about anything and did not confide anything from his inner life to anyone. The old countess was ready with great pleasure to take up the work proposed to her by her son. She felt that this was where he should start. Two years gone! Elena is still so young - she is only twenty years old ... Of course, it is very bad that she is a foreigner, but still, she has German blood in her - this circumstance reconciled the countess with her daughter-in-law. Elena felt kindness and affection in the old woman and warmly responded to them. She was tired of her spiritual loneliness and the lack of sincere participation and affection in the people around her. As for the old count, he was almost no longer a man. He could not see well, was completely deaf and, apparently, fell into childhood. Yes, and he was a lot of years - about eighty. He once played a prominent role at court. He got married very late, he raised and arranged his only son, and then he felt attacks of old age and illness and left all business, retired to his family castle.

At first, in the village, Elena rested from city life and, apparently, became calmer. She hardly left the old countess when she was at home. But she walked a lot in the shady park, often made long trips through rather picturesque surroundings, either in a carriage or on horseback. She is addicted to horseback riding. Finally, she had with her a supply of books, her paints and canvas, her musical instruments. In the silence of the village, little by little, she calmed down from the evil irritating feelings that agitated her at court, from small intrigues and gossip, from unfriendliness and envy. She even took an interest in her household

mother-in-law, got acquainted with all the animals and birds that filled the castle.

But for a long time this quiet, monotonous life could not satisfy her. First of all, animals and birds should be eaten. The best views of the surroundings became familiar, the trips began to seem tiring. Every beautiful corner of the park has already been reproduced on the canvas by her quick and bold, although somewhat careless brush. Books have been read. The nights have become darker, thicker. The foliage of the park began to turn yellow and crumble ...

Meanwhile, her husband's vacation was over; the count had to return to court. He offered she should stay with her mother for a while.

Although autumn in the country, in this quiet solitude of the castle, which every day was losing its attractiveness, did not smile at her, but there, in any case, it was even worse. And most importantly, he is leaving; she will not see him, will not feel his presence; After all, this is their first separation! She happily agreed.

Before leaving, the count had a brief explanation with his mother: he asked to make his wife the way she should be. The old woman nodded her head and said: "Be calm." The count left full of hope, and the countess mother immediately set about her task. The rainy autumn days, the impossibility for Elena to go out and travel - all this of itself brought the old woman close to the young woman. Now they were inseparable for days on end. The old countess took up the matter prudently, but nevertheless Elena very soon noticed that she had become a student, that she was given lessons from morning to evening, that they were dissatisfied with her, they wanted to remake her, they wanted to make her exactly the kind of German lady on which she already quite a look and over which in my heart I even laughed too much. As a result

of such discoveries, her sincere and kind attitude towards her mother-in-law gradually disappeared. She began to notice in her such funny sides, such incomprehensible features to her, which she had not noticed before. At first, the edifying conversations of the old countess seemed to her only amusing, but soon they became only tiresomely boring for her.

Elena began to use all sorts of tricks to avoid her monotonous companion. But the old woman always outwitted her and managed to always be there, with her. She was carried away by the performance of her maternal duties, lost all intelligence, all tact, and, like an old woodpecker, monotonously and tirelessly pecked and pecked ...

Elena showed great patience and great restraint - qualities she inherited from her mother and grandmother. But the more she endured, the more she restrained herself, the more she was crushed by longing, and she became even worse than back at court. She almost suffocated. Even her good health began to betray her at times. She turned pale and lost weight.

Meanwhile, the count wrote to her that, on behalf of the king, he was going to Sweden and would return not earlier than four or five months later. And he wrote this on the eve of his departure ...

Two months have passed since this letter. Elena had completely hated her mother-in-law, hated her with all her being. And more than one mother-in-law had become hateful to her, now the whole old castle seemed disgusting to her with its oppressive monotony, with its respectful and devoted servants, with its animals and birds. She felt that if

If he stays here longer, then he won't be able to stand it anymore, if not today, then tomorrow, all this will end in a sharp and rude break with the old woman. Moreover, she felt really sick. She announced to the old countess that she was ill and must immediately go to Berlin. The old woman was frightened and offered to prescribe any kind of doctors. She considered Elena's trip to Berlin impossible, because she could not accompany her, could not leave her husband. But Elena insisted on her own and, to the great displeasure of her mother-in-law, left for Berlin ... The doctors had to admit that they were mistaken: the village did not improve the health of the young countess, and even, apparently, worsened. Elena spent three months in almost complete seclusion, visiting no one and rarely receiving anyone.

Finally, the count returned from Sweden, very dissatisfied, although apparently calm. As usual, he listened intently to the conclusion of the royal physician, which consisted of the following:

"The local climate is bad for the countess, there is nothing to treat her, she needs as many impressions as possible. If she did not recover in the seclusion of the country, then she must recover south."

The count thought for three days. After all, however, she is his wife, after all, however, he must certainly have a son and heir. In addition, he still, almost with painful obstinacy, did not want to admit his mistake and fall in his own eyes. He took a diplomatic mission to Vienna, and then to Italy and left with his wife.

X

This time the doctor's prediction came true. Elena's healthy nature, her youth, triumphed over nervous weakness, over the heavy traces of long anguish, irritation and dissatisfaction with life. The wonderful climate, the variety of new impressions made the young countess start up. She instinctively loved life, wanted to live, and greedily caught all living impressions, intensely enjoyed them, passionately penetrated them. All she needed now was for her husband to leave her alone, not to poison her with his closeness, his presence, his cold attention. She almost made it. The count was completely absorbed in the assignments of the king, complex and serious. The diplomatic string, patriotism and, finally, self-esteem spoke stronger than ever in it. Even if a mistake is made, then, all the more, he must prove to the king that he can serve his purposes with benefit, that he is fully worthy of the trust of his monarch.

He had no time to take care of his wife, and besides, he was too dissatisfied with her, feeling felt insulted. He recognized her as ungrateful.

"Das ist eine verdorbene Natur! he said to himself. - It's an empty flower! She learned a lot, she still reads a lot, she can do everything, but education has not brought her any benefit, she is empty. After all, she is no longer a child - she is twenty years old. A disease, God forbid, that it be only a disease - it will soon get rid of the disease, it will bloom again.

I will wait, I will wait patiently..." he finished his thoughts and hastily drove them away from him, as they involuntarily annoyed him. He tried to forget both his wife and all the anxiety she raised in him. This anxiety was so inconsistent with his character, spoiled his life so much, prevented him from completely devoting himself to what he considered his vocation. By a stubborn effort of will, having driven away the rising fog from himself, forgetting his wife, he indulged in his work. He studied hard and slowly, with great difficulty, but still thoroughly and conscientiously, all the subtleties of the policy of the European powers, all the intrigues of the courts. The king was pleased with his activities, and that was all he needed.

Meanwhile, Elena shone in Viennese society. It

became fashionable, and although, of course, it could not but arouse envy and hostility in many, it was still not the same as at the court of Frederick. Here she was a guest - today she is here, and tomorrow she will rush far away. The Viennese ladies found that against her, although too bright and offensive for them, but still temporary successes, there was nothing to take drastic measures. During the year of her village life, Elena somehow developed and matured in a special way. She was already somewhat different than at the court of Friedrich, she had a different attitude towards everything that surrounded her. She calmly and impartially peered into people, into their relationships, characters and mores. She began to recognize real life, and such phenomena caught her eye, which she did not even notice at all during the first time of her married life. Now questions about moral and social morality already arose before her; about the fate of a woman in the family and society, about her real duties and rights. Before her, finally, the fatal question arose about the rights of the heart, about love. For the first time, she consciously related to her heart and realized how empty this heart was, how little warmth and happiness it contained. She also understood not by imagination, not by cold arguments of reason, but with all her blood, with her whole being, that she lacked this warmth and light, lacked the sun. She learned that she not only could, but must love, that it was her right, her destiny. Love is the sun of life. Why is she deprived of it? An unsolvable riddle stood before her. Yes, she has the right to love, but she does not have the right to love. And if she had this right, then whom and how should she love?

Until now, she only laughed at all her secular admirers, sometimes they amused her. Now she began to peer into them and evaluate them. Having immediately crossed out those who, at the first roll call, turned out to be unworthy of her attention and could not interest her in absolutely anything, she nevertheless found herself face to face with a fairly large crowd of more or less interesting people worthy of attention. Each of these people (she could not help but feel it) looked at her with special eyes. Each of them came into a special state from the slightest sign of attention from her and her slightest smile. She was too good and brilliant to be otherwise, too smart to be wrong about that. She carefully examined her fans, and the first conclusion she made was in their favor. All of them, from first to last, turned out to be incomparably more interesting, incomparably more attractive to her than her husband. With each of them, she would probably be unhappy, but calm enough.

However, this first conclusion, made by her, could not make her in any way seriously take a great interest in anyone. It has long been clear and obvious to her that not only in Vienna, not only in Italy, in Rome, where she has already lived for half a year, but even in the patriarchal society of the Berlin court, women, with very few exceptions, are very frivolous, very spoiled. and easily look at morality. Even seemingly unusually prim, cold and unapproachable young ladies under the mute allow themselves anything. She knew many intimate stories, she knew many of the most flagrant violations of marital fidelity, and she saw that all public opinion boils down to the demand to hide ends in

water, not to be conspicuous, not to cross a well-known, very thin, barely noticeable line, beyond which will start the scandal.

To go beyond this line, which can only be seen with a particularly sophisticated vision - and not only a real misconduct, a real violation of morality, but also every awkwardness, every correctable mistake, turns into an enormous guilt and causes public punishment. Stay within this line - and even the crime is excused, you can do anything with impunity, without harming yourself in the opinion of a strict society, remaining in its place, with all its rights and benefits. Doesn't mean anything at all everything is sewn with white thread and is *le secret polichinel*. Society chuckles, shakes shoulders, secretly slanders, but still admits, excuses, looks through his fingers. Here mutual tacit agreement in the interests of each other, mutual concessions.

Countess Elena pondered this for a long time and seriously, recalled everything she saw and heard, and momentary whims, passions, mistakes, gross immorality, deceit and lies passed before her. But she did not know a single example of true, selfless and all-consuming passionate love, that feeling, which, as she thought and believed, many and many can forgive.

She knew well that in her place, in her circumstances, most of the people known to her young women, without hesitation, would choose from among their admirers a more suitable one, would be carried away by it, then they would move on to another, to a third - and would justify themselves, and would be justified. But she was in no position to do so. The count could be very dissatisfied with her, could consider her a spoiled nature, but meanwhile there was a true and a rare quality: she retained in herself that moral purity, that proud sense of her own dignity, which constitutes the highest strength and beauty of a woman.

She could suffer deeply from her messed up life, but she could not do what which would make her stop respecting herself. She felt that in that case she would even more unfortunate that she would have already lost her last property. She was right in in such a position when it is easy to captivate a woman, when it is most convenient to take possession of her, when she has least means of protection. And meanwhile, in spite of all this, it was very difficult to take possession of her. difficult. In order for her to forget her purity, her self-esteem and pride, so that she would look at the fall as happiness, it was necessary to make her fall in love with everyone. forces of the soul, to force to bow before a person, to recognize him worthy of all sacrifices. If she met such a person, she would make all the sacrifices for him. But such a person she still hadn't met anyone like that in the crowd that surrounded her and tried to seduce her. She was too subtle and artistically developed, too smart and too good at yourself to be wrong. Besides, she knew that such a mistake would be fatal for her, equals death...

XI

The count and countess spent the autumn in Rome.

It seems that the clear skies of Italy have never been as beautiful as that year. All artistic instincts awakened in Elena. All my unsatisfied passion, all She gave the warmth of her soul to the regal nature that surrounded her and to the immortal monuments of art that had once matured in the midst of this nature. Rome provided a young, talented young woman with many aesthetic pleasures. She often hid from society and spent whole hours in museums and the ancient ruins of the dead great city.

When the heat of the day subsided, often her carriage stopped at the Colosseum and she hid in these ruins, and for a long time remained alone there, among the dead silence of the millennia.

memories. These were hours of pleasant oblivion, fragmentary, whimsical thoughts and sensations, hours of true poetic solitude. On one of these mysterious evenings, in the midst of a pale glimmer, warmly and softly pouring from the sky, the countess ran into a man she did not know. Even before that, she occasionally met various travelers and travelers in the Colosseum, but so far not a single word had been uttered between her and these people she met. And this stranger came straight up to her, spoke to her, and she answered him. He was young, not distinguished by outstanding beauty, but his pale and thin face, his bright and shining eyes involuntarily made a strong and somehow special impression on Elena. Then, after this first meeting, she did not remember anything, could not imagine either his figure or his clothes. But before her and stood relentlessly his amazing eyes. He spoke to her in Italian, warned her that, while walking around the Colosseum, he noticed several people of a very suspicious appearance, that the other day there had already been a case of robbery of a belated traveler. He advised her to stop walking and volunteered to lead her out of the Colosseum. She was not frightened, somehow did not even realize that it was possible to be frightened, and allowed him to guide her. She mistook him for an Italian. But in a conversation, he told her that he was a foreigner, that he was Russian. She revived. She rarely had to meet with her compatriots: the count very skillfully removed such meetings from her by all means; the same Russians, with whom she nevertheless met, turned out to be uninteresting.

He gave his name to her, but the name Zakhovinov told her nothing. She did not know, never even heard of anyone who would bear such a surname. He explained to her that this was not surprising, since his name was not famous for anything, and he himself constantly lives abroad, moving from country to country, from city to city. To her question: "What is he doing?" – he very simply said that he did not have any specific occupations. Meanwhile, the conversation, against the will of the countess, was fastened. She asked to know exactly where, in what countries he traveled, and found out that he lived for whole years in Germany, England, France. He traveled all over Europe, was in Spain, Greece, Turkey. He was also in Egypt, and you never know where ... He brought her to the carriage, bowed respectfully before her and disappeared. Her stagnant horses rushed off, and she managed only to nod her lovely head to him in gratitude. She thought that this man, whom she mentally called "strange", appeared before her for a moment, that this was the first and last meeting with him. But from that day on, their meetings were quite frequent. Zakhovinov came across to her here and there. He interested her more and more. Finally she invited him to visit her, and he took advantage of this invitation. A very special relationship was established between them, which she had not yet had before.

with no one.

Zakhovinov did not care for her at all. In front of outsiders, he behaved with modest dignity, even tried to hide himself, as it were, did not pay attention to himself. But at the same time, he seemed to feel at ease. And the strange thing is, no one knew him, his social position was uncertain, and yet he did not arouse either curiosity or amazement in anyone around the countess. His presence at the Sonnenfelds was tacitly accepted and acknowledged as a fait accompli. Soon Zakhovinov became a member of the most intimate circle of the countess, appeared in her house almost daily, but no one, not even the count himself, paid the slightest attention to this. Subsequently, this circumstance began to seem very strange to Elena, it was almost unnatural; but then, in Rome, she did not think about it at all, and in general she did not think about her new acquaintance and the meaning of this acquaintance. She simply used everything that Zakhovinov gave her.

Left alone with him (and this happened very often), she impatiently and eagerly listened to shivered in his stories, in everything he told her. She did

not see how time passed in his presence, as if she were reading the most interesting book. And in each new chapter of this book, she found exactly what could interest her at that moment. She thought more freely and more deeply with Zakhovinov. He awakened in her all new thoughts; sometimes he forced her to dwell on such questions, the very existence of which she had not even suspected before. Little by little, he began to lead her out of the material world in which she lived. He led her into another, mysterious, mystical world, full of great dreams, bright and bold hypotheses. He spoke to her about the secrets of the universe, about the wonders of nature, about the mighty forces of the immortal spirit. Each time he lifted her higher and higher, and she experienced a blissful fading of her whole being at this dazzling, mysterious height, from which what she had hitherto considered the only "real" life seemed so insignificant, almost ghostly.

He left - and for a long time she remained as if in a child, under the charm of his words, and it was hard for her return to reality.

He was leaving, and she was waiting for a new meeting, but she waited without melancholy - her eternal, haunted everywhere her longing has now subsided ...

Once Zakhovinov came to her and announced that he was leaving. She even seems to be indifferent reacted to this news, did not attach any importance to it, simply did not understand it.

She took leave of him graciously and without any sign of emotional agitation. He told her that they would meet soon. She laughed and began to prove to him that it was impossible, that he was going in one direction, and she in

another. But when he left, her longing returned.

As soon as he disappeared from her circle, something strange happened in this circle. They started talking about Zakhovinov, and they started talking unfriendly... He was suddenly recognized as unworthy to occupy the place that he occupied in this elected, high-ranking society. Who is he? An unknown, dark person, without a name, without a position. How did he get in here? How was he looked upon as an equal?

And the countess herself asked herself the question: who is he really? But she had to leave the question unanswered. Her sadness grew with each passing day. And suddenly a storm hit her. She immediately did which I haven't thought about until

now. She came and announced to her husband that she could no longer live with him. The Count fixed his pale, wide eyes on her. He made her repeat. He did not believe his ears. – What does that mean? From what? he asked confused.

XII

The count's dry, yellow face turned crimson. His colorless eyes were filled with blood, a vein appeared on his forehead, his sharp chin jumped in a strange way. He sat without moving and only repeated almost silently: - What does this mean? .. I must not understand you quite right ... Explain yourself, countess! ..

She stood before him in all her dazzling beauty with a pale and frozen face. Her deep eyes shone sadly, but at the same time resolutely, from under long black lashes.

I think I speak clearly and simply! she finally said. "God alone knows how much I endured, how much I endured! But I am a man, not a stone... I have no more strength... Release me, I cannot live with you. The count squeezed the arm of the chair with all his might and said in a calm voice:

"What have I done to you, what have I done wrong to you? I don't know my fault. But, be

maybe there's a misunderstanding between us... in that case, we need to clear

it up... - Yes, finally understand that I don't love you! Elena burst out. The

count shuddered, the arm of the chair crunched under his hand. But in a moment he was calm again, only a thick vein stood out on his forehead even more strongly. "You don't love me...your husband?! So tell me again: why, what did I do to deserve this?

She was

silent. "Have I committed any deed unworthy of an honest man, unworthy of my name? Or maybe I broke my vow, maybe I cheated on you? Why are you silent? Speak... answer!

I don't have anything to say, I already

said it. Even fire flared in his eyes. With a jerky movement he rose from his chair.

and fell into it again.

- So, then ... what? All the color drained from his face, and it became deathly pale. "It means that you are not worthy of the name that I entrusted to you, that I gave you before people and God. So, you allowed some kind of criminal passion in yourself ... and disgraced me ...

He got so drunk on her. He was terrible.

Now, in turn, Elena flared up. "No," she

said, not lowering her eyes before him, "I did not dishonor your name in any way. I did not allow any criminal passion in myself. I didn't cheat on you and you must trust me. He was looking at her, all turned into sight. He eagerly and painfully read in her eyes.

At last he believed her; not to believe her would have been such an unbearable blow for him.

- So what? he exclaimed in confusion. -

Count, excuse me from this difficult explanation for you and for me, let me leave ... I told you everything ... my decision is unchanged. Let's do all this calmly, peacefully, without publicity ... Count, understand, I have nothing against you, I know you are an honest and good person ... I thank you for your attention, I know ... you always showed it to me, thank you for your care about me... But release me... - No, don't leave! he said authoritatively. He didn't understand anything. He vaguely

began to fear for her sanity. What is she saying? After all, this is madness, because it is not consistent with anything. - Don't go and change your mind! What a contradiction in your words! You assure me that you are faithful to me, and I believe you. You admit that I have always been an attentive husband to you, that I took care of you, that I am worthy of respect ... And you declare to me that you cannot live with me, you demand separation! .. Elena, my wife, think again, sit down, give me your hand, calm down... He took her hand with his hand cold as ice. But this touch of his, his last words, in which she even heard something like a caress, raised a whole hell in her. In an instant, all these five years of painful life with this stranger, now completely disgusting to her, stood in front of her. She tore her hand away and, choking with indignation, said:

"But understand, finally, that I have never loved you for a single minute! - What?!

he exclaimed, rising from his chair. - What?! Never loved?

She thought that he would kill her, so suddenly he became terrible. But he only proudly raised head and looked at her contemptuously.

- Never loved! But if this is true, how dare you marry me and deceive me? Have I married you by force, taken you by force? Did I humiliate myself in front of you, begging for your consent? I made you an offer - and you accepted it immediately, with visible joy ... Or am I lying? Wasn't it like that? She was not embarrassed by his contemptuous gaze. - It was so, but you forget one thing: I was a child ... - You were seventeen years old. The girl in these years is not a child. If you had been a child then, you would not have been married to me. They come out before that. You were an adult, mature girl; everyone was talking about your intelligence, about your great education ... If you were a child, I would not stop my choice on you, I would not marry you ... Well, now, in any case, you are not a child. Tell me what have you done with my life? Now you are not a child and must understand everything. Why should I endure this disgrace, such as has never happened before in my family?

I don't see any disgrace here. This is a big mistake on your part and on my part - and nothing more. I don't blame you for anything, don't blame me either. I believe and understand that it's hard for you now, but it was hard for me for five whole years ... and you must admit that I took care of you for too long. Believe me, I fought to the last ... I can't take it anymore, don't demand the impossible, free me, free yourself ... We are not made for each other. Maybe all is not lost yet, you will still be happy. After all, you didn't love me either, and if you did, you can't love me now ... The Count did not restrain her. He remained motionless in his place, overwhelmed by the unexpectedness of what had happened.

For the first time in his life, he was completely taken aback. He realized that it was all over, the gap was complete. He no longer has a wife. Yes, even if she came back now, he can no longer accept her after everything she said. She inflicted on him at once all the insults that can be inflicted on a person.

No, it's a lie that he didn't love her, no, he loved her, even too much. He was too weak with her. If he had not loved her, he would have acted differently, would not have forgiven her for her whims, whims, would not have endured everything that he had to endure and listen to. He would not forgive her for her neglect of her mother, would not take care of her health, would not arrange his life for her in this way, and not otherwise. And here is gratitude!

The Count sincerely forgot that he loved her, at least not for her, but for himself, that he loved her chiefly for the sake of those goals which he set himself to achieve with her help, on which he stubbornly stood. But be that as it may, she is right: he loved her, but now he cannot love. He will never forget and forgive her all these insults, he will not forgive her as a husband, but most of all as Count Sonnenfeld von Sonnenthal.

Yes, of course, he should not disappear because of this shame! Yes, it's a shame, but he must come out of it with honor. He should not disappear because he did an unforgivable stupidity, entrusting his name and his life to a foreigner of wild Tatar origin, incapable of understanding and appreciating everything that is sacred and dear to him, who laughed at everything before which he tends.

The count locked himself in, did not go anywhere until the next day and did not receive anyone. Then he left his rooms calmly, with a majestic, proud air, and set about his usual activities. He did not want to see the countess and sent her his decision in a letter.

He wrote to her that he agreed to part with her, but not otherwise than formally divorced. He undertakes to arrange a Lutheran divorce, for which he cannot meet obstacles. But she is Orthodox, she is married to him not only in the Lutheran, but also in the Orthodox Church.

He advises her to immediately go to Petersburg and settle the matter there. There will be no problem on his part. The Countess read this letter, reread it several times, and sat motionless for a long time.

And tears, one after another, rolled down from her eyes. But these were her first happy tears.

Of course, she did not hesitate to leave. A month

later, she was already in St. Petersburg, she had already introduced herself to the Empress and received hope for a speedy end to her work. The halt was only for the inevitable formalities, and these formalities were dragged out because of the slowness of communications between Petersburg and Vienna, where the count was now located.

Countess Elena again entered the Petersburg house of her father as a hostess. She found this house in a sad desolation and disorder, but he was still dear and dear to her. It seemed to her that she woke up after a long illness, after a painful delirium. It seemed to her that she again returned to the happy days of her childhood and adolescence.

She found her father decrepit and haggard beyond his years. She almost did not recognize this handsome dandy, the winner of women's hearts, who turned into a good-natured and stupid old man who dived into even the simplest things with visible difficulty.

The father groaned and gasped, listening to the confessions of his daughter. But he decided that everything was for the best. He was glad to see her, because he felt completely alone and abandoned. And now, with her arrival, he would no longer be alone. Now he has a good nurse.

XIII

The time has long passed when the atmosphere of the life of the richest Russian nobleman and dignitary seemed dark and poor to a visiting foreigner, when a rich and burly Russian man huddled in low, tiny apartments and was content with the most unpretentious things, knowing that even the great sovereign in his royal wards lives a little better than him. The time has long passed when the royal atmosphere of the court of Alexei Mikhailovich seemed wonderful, unprecedented and unheard of, where, when approaching Europe, a lot of alien, overseas appeared.

Since the time of Peter the Great, European concepts of luxury and the desire for this luxury began to penetrate into Russian society. The great king loved simplicity for himself and himself was content with little, but he also found it necessary not to lose face in front of foreigners. Many of the Russian nobles and statesmen of that time lived very

widely and with their splendor amazed even foreign residents.

During the reign of Anna Ivanovna, the luxury of the court and houses of eminent Russian people was extraordinary. Many believe that the temporary worker Biron even deliberately developed this luxury by all means and demanded insane expenses from influential Russian persons precisely with the aim of ruining all the rich and famous Russian families. Under the Empress Elizabeth, these insane expenses for furnishings and for life, as it were, were somewhat reduced. But this happened not because there appeared in high society a consciousness of the uselessness of such expenses, but simply because everyone spent too much, got confused in their affairs and involuntarily had to reduce spending in some places and in some ways.

But no matter to what extent the luxury of high Russian society reached in the first half of the eighteenth century, there were still many contradictions in this costly life: next to the excessive brilliance for show, even not for a particularly attentive look, the coldness and unattractiveness of the former coarse mores and habits appeared. Often there was gold on the outside and dirt on the inside.

Only with the accession of Empress Catherine II did high Russian society become be able to live not only richly, but also with all the conveniences developed by life in Western Europe. The brilliance of Catherine's court could only argue with the French court and left far followed by all other European states. As the empress lived, so they tried to live and her close associates, as well as all the rich people who considered themselves belonging to the highest circle.

Russian antiquity with all its dark and light sides, with everything that was in it not only reprehensible and in need of change, but also with everything that was in her good and original, which should have been kept completely intact, was subjected to final exile and oblivion. French became the fashionable and beloved language of society, and with this language French fashions invaded and overran everything. Russian people of the highest circle sometimes seemed to be all-perfect Frenchmen, to fortunately, only in appearance, speech, habits and surroundings. In the last fifteen years there have been not only the royal palaces, but also the halls of all the nobles were renovated, altered and rebuilt beyond recognition. All this shone with a new brilliance. Europe now and then sent to St. Petersburg for expensive, sometimes insanely expensive price, the best products of their industry. But this is not enough - she sent to St. Petersburg and the best works of her art, her genius.

The richest Russian houses began to be filled with both ancient and modern paintings of famous foreign masters, creations of famous sculptors. In Russian expensive collections, museums, libraries appeared in houses.

Along the recently still deaf, poorly built-up and even poorly paved streets of St. Petersburg, majestic buildings now rose, containing real treasures.
every kind...

Wealth, luxury, quirks of refined taste!
wealth, not luxury - there is something almost unbelievable, fabulous, far beyond all expectations, rumors and gossip. In this huge dwelling, in this long row of spacious halls and galleries, there is some special air. When you get here, you are immediately transported to quite a fairy-tale world, reality is forgotten here, it floats like a fog. Is not Petersburg is something bewitched, existing outside of space and time. This is a palace Chernomor, this is the realization of the most passionate, most daring dream of the longing for earthly beauty of the imagination.

Everything that can give gold, to which there is no account, everything that art can create man - everything is collected here. But it was not collected in sequence, not in order, not according to a worked out plan. On the contrary, here is every lack of plan, here is the greatest, almost chaotic disorder. But it is precisely in this chaotic mess that there is something special, artistic and subtle harmony. Unexpected and bold mixtures of the most diverse objects, an unusual combination of capricious forms - all this leaves an imprint of fabulousness on a wonderful home, all this strikes the eye, fascinates and confuses ...

Who is the owner of these riches? Who is the creator of these magical halls? Who managed to combine here the splendor of the West with the hot fantastic luxury of the East? Whose whimsical dream has found fulfillment here, has created in reality a hot night dream? Who is there master? - Potemkin...

The thought of the writer of everyday life, weary of all the wickedness of the day, sometimes likes to be carried away into the past and evoke from the depths of its former half-forgotten images. In quiet hours of solitude, the present is forgotten with all that "sufficient" for it, and awakened memory offers a supply of light, received by her from the treasury of history. And this light, penetrating through the fog and darkness of the past years and centuries, little by little illuminates the full movements, the pictures full of life. Needs no, that those pictures were there, that the people who acted in them lived! It's in our power to revive and resurrect them, for nothing of what was, is lost, does not disappear in nature.

Yes, we have before us living people, real events, and only by observing them at a distance of centuries, can we see them calmer and clearer, understand them deeper and judge better, more impartially. Not a shadow or a ghost - Potemkin. He is alive and clearly visible among the motley, shimmering with all colors, brilliant life that surrounds him. Everything that obscured him, everything that was imposed on him by his contemporaries, who poorly understood him, who were alien to impartiality, departed from him and dissipated. He is now freed from everything that does not belong to him, and is the way nature created him. And he involuntarily attracts to himself, this sorcerer, this mighty Russian man, one of the most glorious and worthy sons of Russia, a giant - an exponent of the best qualities of the human spirit and the most interesting weaknesses of human flesh.

Above his proud and sad head a star burns brightly, it burns with a beautiful but changeable light. That is the star of his fate, the star of the true chosen ones, the favorites of nature. In its clear and pure rays - victory, in bloody - fall ... Did he feel it above him, this wonderfully beautiful, temptingly terrible star of fate, when he grew up and grew stronger for life in the poor Smolensk estate of his father? No, of course, he was the same child as many other children - lively, quick-witted, lively, but sometimes also a dreamy child. It is unlikely that he thought about his star-destiny even then, as his father brought him, in the sixteenth year, to Moscow, assigned him to the noble gymnasium, established at the then newly opened Moscow University, and at the same time enrolled a reytar in the label Guards Horse Regiment. The young man was healthy and strong, a strong spirit developed in a young, strong body. Liveliness, curiosity, brilliant abilities and amazing memory made learning easy and enjoyable. A gold medal for success in a year, in two - a trip with the director of the university to St. Petersburg, presentation among the best students and students of the curator of the university Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov. Potemkin and his comrades are being taken to the palace. Empress Elizabeth meets them with caress and greetings. "For the best encouragement

and Encouragement of the Student Youth" they are awarded ranks, although they remain at the university until the end of the course. Potemkin has been promoted to corporal. He is again in Moscow, at the student skamie.

And here, perhaps for the first time, the young man sensed his star-destiny, she illuminated him with all her beautiful, seductive, changeable rays. He immediately changed. He understood, or rather felt, that the wondrous star was drawing him back to where he had just returned from, to the halls of luxury, power and glory, to the very steps of the throne. He had already seen splendor and grandeur and could no longer live without them. "All this must be mine!" he wanted passionately with all his being. "All this will be yours!" - in it and above it whispered a mysterious voice to him. He completely stopped learning, from the first he became the last. Why is this teaching? Doesn't he know that he only has to want to - and without any labor and effort he will know everything, anything, he will become more learned than the first scientists? But now he does not need university science. Now he is tormented by a different thirst. His spirit suffers, and hungers, and thirsts; a mighty struggle of maturing, rushing to the activity of living forces seethes in it. What will ease him, what will soothe him, what will saturate him? Not in fun, not in revelry, not in a drunken child, he seeks to quench his thirst, forget his anxieties and torments - he seeks this in faith, goes to monasteries, talks with monks, reads holy books, prays. Fervent prayer, religious and philosophical reflections, the spiritual and mystical world with all its mighty and holy images, with all its lofty inspirations save the young man from despondency and despair, raise him to those areas where his spirit breathes easily and freely. But the star-destiny is hotter, burns more clearly above him, and the mysterious voice sounds more insistent, more seductive: "All this will be yours!" And he can no longer resist the enticing call. "There! Petersburg!" He has no money for the road - his father is poor and sends him from the village

very little. He goes to Moscow Archbishop Ambrose, says: "I must go to Petersburg, my destiny awaits me there!" The archbishop doesn't mind, apparently has no doubts in the words of the young man, is under his charm, imbued with his thoughts and feelings, and gives five hundred rubles for his journey.

Potemkin in St. Petersburg, accepted into active service in the regiment, promoted to master. He has no money, no connections, no acquaintances. But a star burns above him. He converges with young people from the best families. He becomes an ardent supporter of the Grand Duchess Ekaterina Alekseevna.

A significant day June 28, 1762. Potemkin in Peterhof, among those around him empress. She takes an oath from the guards, rides up on a horse, like a man, in uniform, to the Horse Regiment. She draws her sword and suddenly sees that there is no lanyard on it. This confuses her. Then the young Potemkin, who does not take his admiring eyes off the empress, in an instant he drives up and, with a deft movement, tearing off his lanyard, gives it to Catherine.

The lanyard is accepted with a gentle smile. The young sergeant wants to drive off, but his horse, despite all the efforts and pain from the thrusting spurs, he stops in his tracks next to horse of the empress. The fate star burns brightly and fieryly and merges with a similar radiant star. From now on, two significant destinies have converged, and from this day begins the almost magical fulfillment of everything that the poor Moscow student dreamed about vaguely and vaguely ...

Seventeen years have passed since then, and it seems that nothing is left of the former Potemkin. Now this is the first person in Russia, the all-powerful, most powerful nobleman, in front of to whom everything bows, trembles. One of his signs - and the fate of people is decided, change events almost already accomplished, history will be revealed. Honors, titles, insignia, wealth without count and measure - everything that a person's ambition and love of glory can desire, all this came to him, came of itself, without effort, almost without struggle, achieved by means that did not disturb his conscience.

The great empress of great Russia acquired in him a man equal to herself, Russia acquired in him a great and glorious worker. He was right when he thought and knew in his youth what he should want - and he will know everything, if he wants - and he will do everything. Now he knew and did everything that was necessary for his homeland, its glory, strength and power.

Centuries will pass, but the significance of the glorious deeds and deeds of the sorcerer Potemkin will not disappear, not will be forgotten, because he did exactly what Russia needed.

If we follow step by step his significant, fruitful and all-round activity, it will naturally appear that this amazing person had to work tirelessly, from morning until late evening, he had to devote himself entirely to state work. And meanwhile, this was not the case - he acted on inspiration, instantly, magically. What another would take months, he accomplished in minutes and hours. He was illuminated happy thought, and immediately, as if by magic, unfolded in front of him in all the smallest details the most complex and vivid picture. He saw everything before him circumstances, all combinations, all the inevitable consequences of a case that was still a minute before that alien and unfamiliar matter. He saw, and therefore could not be mistaken.

And when he saw and knew that such and such an idea, such and such a deed was useful and necessary for Russia, he wanted their immediate implementation. He unconsciously possessed the secret of such desire, before which all obstacles fall and disappear. His will was law, but not at all because he was a temporary worker, a favorite of the queen. His favor was ending, Catherine's cordial attitude towards him changed, she was dissatisfied with him, seriously angry with him, she was even indignant, wanted to free herself from his influence, did not want to listen to him anymore. But he appeared with his own thought and will - and the mighty ruler Catherine, firmly prepared to fight him, involuntarily yielded to his thought and will.

With such magical work, with such exceptional means, the sorcerer had a lot of free time, and yet not called by his higher voice, demanding his work for Russia, he indulged in laziness, idleness, the pursuit of pleasure and languished.

There were days, weeks when he seemed to be the personification of all human oddities, quirks and whims, sometimes reaching such extremes that people, who did not understand its complex, exceptional nature, had every reason to fear for his mind, or consider him a petty arrogant drunk on power and might.

The son of a Smolensk landowner, an almost impoverished student, now bathed in gold, and no luxury could not satisfy him. Every now and then the most extraordinary desires appeared in him, and messengers rushed hundreds and thousands of miles to get some rare thing for him, some strange food and returned with the object he required when he forgot about his whim and wished for something else.

There were days when he suddenly disappeared for everyone, did not let anyone in and wandered unwashed, half-dressed, with a gloomy face in his fabulously luxurious halls. Everything became quiet around him, as if dying out, and in the midst of this silence only his heavy steps and deep sighs could be heard...

XIV

Amidst the artistic confusion of a vast room, the purpose of which was impossible to determine, such a mixture of the most diverse objects reigned in it, on a low and wide oriental sofa, surrounded by soft, intricately embroidered pillows, lay Potemkin.

The time was approaching noon, but the "Highest Prince" did not think about the time, forgot about it. Unwashed, uncombed, in a soft silk dressing gown, in shoes on his bare feet, he turned first on one side, then on the other, looking for the most comfortable position. At last he found the most comfortable, laziest position. Then he opened the book of the church seal, which lay beside him.

with him, and arranged her on the pillows so that, without the help of hands, she herself would hold herself in her proper at a distance from his eyes, so that it would be convenient to read it without changing the found lazy position. Having arranged everything in this way, he suddenly and completely plunged into the book.

Potemkin was forty years old, and the years left their imprint on him. On his open, peculiarly handsome face, with a long and thin hooked nose, a very special expression was now established. In this expression, which immediately struck everyone and on everyone which made a strong, indelible impression, apparently combined the most diverse, incompatible properties: insight and absent-mindedness, pride and innocence, haughtiness and kindness. But all this was dominated by the mind, deep, clear, brilliant, united with a mighty, all-conquering force.

When Potemkin appeared among the crowd of dignitaries and courtiers in silk, velvet and gold, studded with diamonds and stars, it exuded almost regal grandeur; looking at him, one could not for a moment doubt his exclusivity and his power. No one, like him, was able to destroy and erase the most lofty yourself a person. No one, like him, knew how to push away from himself or attract to him with one glance. Every day, his every appearance among people and his contact with them brought him new enemies and new admirers. But his enemies were still powerless, and in fans he didn't need.

Here, on this couch, unwashed and undressed, Potemkin, of course, was different. Its big and a strong, but too early weaned figure, not brightened up by shiny clothes, a sleepy face with wrinkles that stood out sharper on the forehead, around the eyes and around the mouth, could not but deprive him of a great deal of charm and majesty. But still, the artist would now stop with delight

hover over his shaggy, lion-like head and would follow the play of feelings and thoughts on his features, in his gaze, deepened in reading. Everything he learned from the book, which obviously interested him deeply, was expressed in his face. He read a work of one of the church fathers, strong in spirit and thought. He began with a simple attention to other people's thoughts, passed into doubt, into distrust, then the struggle of spirit with matter began, matter was ready to overpower and revolt; but suddenly the spirit triumphed: a thirst for truth, light, love... prayerful tears... sorrow for the sins and weaknesses of the flesh... and then suddenly doubt again from somewhere... Potemkin left the book, threw back his head and closed his eyes. When he opened them, he noticed a human figure in the back of the room. The silence was complete, the figure did not move, and he immediately recognized her as his secretary. He looked at him for a long time, still under the spell of the world of feelings and thoughts that was far from reality, filling him. At last he spoke in an angry voice;

- Is that you, Fomich? What do you want? .. What are you doing? The secretary, a man of indeterminate years, with a not stupid bony face, polished, personifying modesty, moderate subservience, but at the same time, obviously not very easily lost, said quietly:

- Your Grace ordered to report on Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov ... They are here

With...

- Who it? Potemkin asked irritably. "Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov... By order of your lordship, yesterday I wrote an invitation... with your signature in your own hand. Appointed to appear today and at this hour ... And I was ordered by your lordship to report immediately.

Having said this, the secretary waited, remaining motionless. A minute passed, then another. - Yes! I remembered!.. Call! Potemkin finally shouted quite angrily. - Where do you order? - Here ... What do I need to get dressed, or what? The secretary has disappeared. "Here's another ... very necessary! thought Potemkin. "They won't let me rest, they won't let me think ... The queen asked me to look at this new prince from foreign lands without delay ... To look without passion, ask and report ... It seemed very interesting ... Oh, yes, it's not interesting to me! .." His thought about yesterday his meeting with the empress was cut short, and he suddenly greedily grabbed the book. A word, another, a third - a phrase. So it splashed from this phrase with a mysterious light. "Not here, but there! Here is corruption, there is life, truth, love..." All around is just as quiet; but Potemkin feels that someone has entered, that someone has stopped a few steps away

From him.

He closed the book with displeasure, half-turned on the sofa, and glanced at entered.

- Prince Zakhariev-Ovinov? he said, yawning. - Yes, I am Zakharyev-Ovinov ... I received your letter, prince, and on the date you appointed me hour, as you can see, I am.

These words were uttered in a calm, even, as if metallic voice, in in which there was no expression, no feeling.

- Hello! Potemkin yawned again. - Hello, prince! – sounded the same unspeakably calm voice. Potemkin completely turned around, raised himself somewhat from the pillows, lowered one leg from sofa, the shoe on the other foot fell on the carpet.

Now he looked with surprise at the newcomer. He was not surprised at the ordinary youthfulness in him that the empress had told him about, he was struck by something else, struck by the special calmness of this man, and in this calmness he immediately felt a proud, self-confident strength.

He had never seen such people, and now, for many years now, everyone had been bowing before him and, if not trembling, then, in any case, pondering their every step, every movement, word. He was used to the fact that every phrase addressed to him, without fail, began with "your lordship."

So no one came to him, did not greet him, so no one spoke to him. He saw clearly and unmistakably that this man was not only not embarrassed, but felt at home and that this ease of his is quite natural.

Potemkin became interested in earnest. And suddenly, without noticing it himself, he rose heavily from the sofa, thrust his bare foot into a shoe that was lying on the carpet, wrapped his dressing gown, went up to the guest and held out his hand to him. He seemed to be burned by the touch of a gentle, almost feminine, but strong hand of the guest. - Please, sit down! he said, pointing to a chair. The prince sat down with a slight, barely perceptible smile, so slight and barely noticeable that Potem

kin couldn't decide if she was real or just imagined.

Then they were silent for a few moments and gazed at each other intently. It was some kind of mute, terrible fight without any hostility. Finally, the bright, powerful look of the guest won over the host. Potemkin lowered his eyelids. Color flared on his cheeks. But he himself did not give any account of his feelings.

XV

Zakharyev-Ovinov was the first to break the silence.

"Prince," he said, "I came to Petersburg, summoned by a letter from my father. My father is ill, and although his illness is not life-threatening, he is bedridden with paralysis. He lost almost simultaneously his wife and daughter three years ago, and this misfortune was the cause of his illness. He had a son, the only representative after him of the old name of the princes Zakhariyev-Ovinov. Now exactly half a year, as a severe fever in a few days took away this thirty-year-old man, full of strength and health. You knew him, prince, he served under

your superiors and enjoyed, it seems to me, your attention.

"Yes, I knew your brother quite closely, he was a capable and good man, and I thought that he had a good road ahead," said Potemkin, raising his already calmed, full of eternal strength look at his interlocutor. "But something else was destined," continued Zakharyev-Ovinov. "Father barely endured this new grief, but he endured it nonetheless. He

was completely alone. Then he remembered me, his eldest, but unrecognized, illegitimate son ... however, he never forgot about me, only we had not seen each other for about fifteen years ... He turned to the empress with a request to transfer all rights and family name and title to me. The empress fulfilled this desire. I knew nothing and was very far away. My father's letter, informing me of everything that had happened, completely changed and greatly upset my plans. But I could not refuse my father's insistent request to come... I am here, and therefore - for there is nothing in nature that does not follow one from the other as an effect and a cause - I am now in the sphere of inevitable causes and effects, which are already formed in addition to my will...

- What do you want to say? Potemkin said rather casually. - Only what I have already said: my only free action is out of unwillingness to offend my father, out of a desire to at least reconcile him with fate and speed up my arrival

to Petersburg. Everything that follows, until something new and serious happens, while I am in the sphere of influence of my free action, that is, my arrival here, is no longer my business, but the matter of circumstances arising from one another ...

"You, my lord, are a philosopher! Potemkin smiled. "Are you not a philosopher yourself?" – Yes, and my philosophy must tell me that all your detailed, philosophically narrative word you led to explaining to me the following: I owe the pleasure of seeing you not to your desire, but only to the force of circumstances?

- Quite so. The

"Honest One" did not want to get angry, but he was definitely not used to such conversations, and he involuntarily felt uneasy. - I'm not holding

you, if so! he said in an uncertain tone. "No, prince," and Zakharyev-

Ovinov's brilliant, embarrassing gaze rested on Potemkin, "no, if I submit to circumstances, you will submit too." You must, according to the promise you made to the Empress, look at me carefully, question me and convey your conclusions to her. Do it, and I will help you.

Potemkin made a quick movement and threw the pillow away from him. Nervous excitement arose in him, he began to become interested, although he could not yet determine what exactly! This new Russian prince, this former Mr. Zakhovinov, so unlike other people, now repeated the words of the empress, which he could neither hear nor know. Strange accident! Zakharyev-Ovinov, meanwhile, continued: "I will tell you frankly, because I want to speak frankly with you: I submitted to the inevitability of going to you with some displeasure. But now I feel good and satisfied that I am with you and with you. Despite the fact that I lived very far away and my own life, in these last years I could not help but meet your name - it is too loud. I have more than once dwelled on you in thought, but I had no time to dwell on you for a long time, and therefore I did not know you well. I see now that in general you are very poorly known ...

"Weird! Weird! thought Potemkin. "What is he saying, how can he say that, and why am I listening to him?" He is some kind of impudent maniac... some kind of fool with pretensions..." However, he listened to him with ever-increasing interest and involuntarily admired his face, beautiful in its icy calmness, his bright eyes, from which incomprehensible rays poured out. He was attracted to this impudent maniac, and at the same time he felt in himself something, as it were, even terrible. Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov continued: - Yes, you are very poorly known ... But this is how it should be ... People like you are always bad

know...

"You speak as if you suddenly, instantly recognized me! Potemkin interrupted and laughed. But it was not the most sincere laugh. "Now I know you, Grigory Alexandrovich," said Zakharyev-Ovinov very firmly and very calmly. "Grigory Alexandrovich!" Who dares to call him that now? But Potemkin did not even notice this. How do you understand me, my lord? "I understand you as a very unhappy person. Potemkin said nothing. He became all attention. "You are a very unfortunate person," continued Zakharyev-Ovinov, "and you yourself know this very well. You have everything that you considered happiness, but happiness is still not and never was. For is it possible to call happiness the brief moments of self-satisfied self-love and pride,

walking in sensual pleasures? All this may be happiness for many, but not for people like you. After all, you know that after such brief moments there always come hours and days of greater heaviness and languor ... Achieved, drunk to the bottom - and nothing but bitterness, nothing but the consciousness that it was not worth achieving! Is that so, prince? Do I understand correctly?

"That's right," Potemkin said gloomily. - And

if it's true, then I'm not a daring maniac, not a fool with pretensions, like you now called.

"Have mercy, prince, when did I ... call you that?" The face of the "brightest" turned pale. "Whatever," they thought.

Potemkin impetuously got up from the sofa and began to pace the room with heavy steps. His eyebrows drew together and a deep wrinkle appeared on his forehead. And in the midst of the rising fog, it was like knocking on my head: "What is this? Am I dreaming?.. Am I delirious?.." The strange guest said: "Why are you unhappy? You have everything that has a price in the eyes of people: what you have is enough in abundance for a whole crowd of people greedy for earthly brilliance, honors and glory. What do you need? What are you looking for? I look forward to hearing. And Potemkin answered: "I don't know what I'm looking for, I don't know what I need; but I need something - and I'm looking for something

all life...

- What a pitiful impotence with such strength! exclaimed Zakharyev-Ovinov. - How can you, a man of deep intelligence, do not know what you need? The answer is simple. If nothing earthly gives satisfaction, cannot give drink and satiate, if hunger and thirst remain the same, then we must look for food and drink not on earth, but somewhere else ...

- On earth, a person has duties, there is a duty ... appointment! Potemkin said. - True, but I do not want to say that you should leave the earth, I only say that not everything on earth is earth. And you understand this well, the proof of this is this book you read ... But it's not about books! If you want something - know how to take it! You often think that everything is available to you. Much is available to you, but you have captured too much superfluous and unnecessary, and this burden is crushing you ... Will you ever drop it? Will you perish under its weight?.. Potemkin was breathing heavily. His face showed confusion and anxiety.

- Stop! he said in a dull voice, grabbing Zakharyev-Ovinov's hand and squeezing it tightly with his strong hand. - That's enough!.. It's hard!.. But who are you, reading in the soul of a person, seeing his thoughts? Where did you come from, where did you learn all this?.. Who are you? "I'm a man who doesn't need anything... So tell the Empress about me..."

XVI

Minutes passed, an hour passed, another was already ending, but Potemkin did not notice the time, carried away by a conversation with his strange guest.

Now he had already ceased to be embarrassed by the unusualness of this conversation, he had ceased to struggle with the unexpected influence on him of a man who dared not only to come to him as an equal, but even to look at him, "the most luminous, omnipotent Potemkin", somehow from top to bottom with some kind of then of a bold, embarrassing and incomprehensible height.

The habit of dominating, commanding, seeing as due and natural general admiration and subservience was forgotten. Potemkin no longer thought that he was Potemkin. He was now only a man, deeply unsatisfied in his higher thirst, which had tormented him all his life, and eagerly absorbed strange, mysterious speeches, which seemed to him exactly the living moisture that he had hitherto sought in vain. "The one who does not need anything", after

the first minutes of the struggle he immediately defeated him, who needed so much and who was so needed. "Maniac" fascinated him and took possession of his whole being as completely as he took possession, even against his will, of the young and pure soul of the vestal of the holiday in Smolny, as he took possession of the soul of the beautiful Countess Sonnenfeld, yearning for life and

happiness. Potemkin finally forgot where he was, with whom. He seemed to be conversing with his own soul, from which he had and could not have any secrets. He relived again his entire inner life and, dwelling on certain moments of this life that were especially memorable to him, he asked questions and demanded explanations. And each time he received these explanations and remained completely satisfied with them. He now had no doubt that the one he was questioning knew everything, that he had nothing to tell, to give any details. The one who spoke to him really knew his whole inner life as his own, only he knew it deeper, more perfect than he himself. When at last the spell dissipated and Potemkin returned to material reality, saw himself among familiar surroundings, in a dressing gown and shoes on his bare feet, and in front of him was Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov, it seemed to him that he had just woken up. What was all this? Could it really be a dream? And couldn't this have been a dream? He almost wanted to ask his guest about this, he wanted to apologize to him for falling asleep ... He glanced at his watch. However, this dream lasted more than two hours! And the guest is all here, he is not at all amazed; his interesting pale face with clear, terribly shining eyes is still calm ...

No, that was not a dream! But what? And suddenly Potemkin felt that he should not dwell on this question. And he didn't have the strength to stop. He was swallowed up by another sensation, another consciousness: he, who despised so many, cold, indifferent, lonely, and who loved himself as if only out of habit, out of necessity, fell in love with this strange man with all his instantly warmed heart. He seemed to be reborn, as if returned to the days of his dreamy youth. Together with this flaming love, all the burden of years, honors, glory, pride, greatness fell from him. There was both tenderness and timidity in his love, almost worship. A scene took place, the reality of which would hardly have been believed by an outside witness. But there was no such witness and could not be - no one dared to appear in the apartments of the "highest" without a call.

Potemkin opened his mighty arms and, with a transformed, beautiful face, drew Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov to his chest.

- Brother! whispered his lips. - You do not need anything, but I need you to be a brother, so that you save me from longing, despair and

evil. Zakharyev-Ovinov answered calmly:

"Yes, you are my brother; but I'm unlikely to save you... - Do you see my inevitable death?

And Potemkin's voice trembled involuntarily, and his heart almost stopped beating in anticipation response.

The answer

was: - We always stand above the abyss ... one wrong step - and the abyss can swallow us ... and the higher we climbed, the more terrible our death. I cannot save you, for it is not I who command fate... I can only warn you and warn you: danger is near, it is knocking at your gilded doors. You have a fateful meeting. Once again you will seduce yourself with the charms of female beauty, you will forget what these charms are and what they cost, what is hidden behind them ... But at the most dangerous moment I will be with you ... I promise you this ... But then will you want my help?

- Prince, such a danger, it seems to me, is not very dangerous for me? Potemkin said, and a smile flickered across his face.

- You are mistaken and in vain you rely so much on your strength: chains woven from flowers, harder to break than iron chains.

- In that case, I will wait for you, according to your word, at the most dangerous moment ... And I will say to the state lady that you are "a person who needs nothing." Or no, I won't tell her this: she doesn't meet and doesn't know such people, and therefore she will feel a great need for you. You must remain completely free. So right?

"If I don't need anything, then it means that I am indifferent to both slavery and freedom. Do as you know, I rely on your mind ... They hugged again, and Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov left.

XVII

In front of the entrance of the "highest" a carriage was waiting, the doors of which were decorated with a coat of arms with a princely crown. Zakharyev-Ovinov silently got into this carriage. Coachman for a moment hesitated, waiting for the order, but since the order did not follow, he decided that, therefore, he had to go home. The black horses set off quickly, at an even trot, and fifteen minutes later the carriage stopped in front of an imposing and noble-looking house. The old venerable valet, apparently waiting at the front door, began to descend from the stone steps to open the carriage door, but Zakharyev-Ovinov had already warned him and quickly went up the steps. The valet barely had time to open the heavy oak doors in front of him and at the same time report: "Their excellencies deigned to ask you twice and ordered to report to your grace that they are waiting for you. - Good! - said Zakharyev-Ovinov, handing his cloak and hat to the valet and heading for the wide front staircase leading to the second floor, where the front doors were located.

rooms and where the owner was also placed.

A deep silence reigned in the house, and in general this beautiful, richly furnished house gave the impression of an abandoned, deserted dwelling. Here death passed, took three lives one after another, and this, as always, was felt, if only there was someone to be aware of their subtle, but, nevertheless, not imaginary, but real sensations.

Zakharyev-Ovinov walked through a vast hall, where from the white glossy walls looked old faces of family portraits, for the most part distorted by an inept brush, passed several more rooms, from where the traces of a life recently interrupted and alien to him blew on him, and knocked at the locked door. - Who's there? he heard from within. - It's me, father. - Come in. He entered, and his eyes rested on the old man, sunk into a huge, cushioned armchair. The old man had a haggard face, yellow as old wax, with almost

faded eyes, with features already, obviously, greatly changed by life and suffering, but still not devoid of great attractiveness. Almost the entire right side of the old man's body was paralyzed. The leg did not work at all, the arm could hardly be raised. Despite the fact that the room was hot, almost stuffy, the old man wrapped himself in a fur robe.

"Hello, son," he said in a weak voice, placing on the table the book he had read before. The

son approached, bent down and put his lips to the cold, senile hand of his father. "I thought that you had returned long ago," the old man began, "and I sent for you. After all you told me that you would only go to Potemkin. Where were you all the time? - I was only at Potemkin's and now directly from him ...

- And that's true, I'll have tea, it's apparently invisible to the people, you won't get to his newfound Lordship...

- Today he has not a soul ... -

So what are you talking to him all the time? – somehow incredulously asked the old prince. - Yes, all the time. The father raised his fading eyes to his son and looked at him for a long time with an indefinite

expression. There was silence for several minutes. Finally the old man interrupted him.

"If it's hard for you with me, go away, leave me," he said, and his voice trembled, and in a sigh was heard in that voice.

The son pulled up a chair and sat next to his father. His calm and cold face remained unchanged, although he understood both his father's look

and his sigh. "Father," he said, "it's not at all hard for me with you, it's hard not for me, but for you, and I would very much like to remove this burden

from you. "Then take it off me!" - and deep suffering was depicted on the old face of the prince. - Since you were with me, we have never been alone for a long time ... there was no time. I know this... but today I ordered not to receive anyone... I would like to talk to you and explain a lot to you... Yes, take the burden off me... let me feel that there are no middle walls between us... that you forgive me your past.

- Father, I have nothing to forgive you ... I am grateful to you for everything ... - No, it's not this, not that! - suddenly reviving, forgetting their weakness, their suffering, exclaimed the old prince. - These are words, I hear them, but I don't feel them ... The son intently, with his steely, brilliant and cold gaze, looked at his father. The old man continued with the same excitement: "Of course, you can, without knowing much, blame me ... I never talked to you about anything ... we didn't see each other for fifteen years, and our last meeting was short. You don't know me very well, and I don't know you very well.

"Who is to blame for this?" - flashed through the thoughts of the son and froze. He listened: - What was, that can not be returned and not changed. I cannot and will not justify myself to you. But I'll tell you how it was. Long, far away! I was young and lived only for pleasure. My leprosy and the account was lost ... I was close to the court. The late Empress Elizaveta Petrovna favored me, and I was in her close circle even in her difficult time, under Anna Ioannovna ... I once quarreled with Alyosha, you know, Razumovsky ... he, a singer, a khokhlenok, squeezed painfully in front of me. I honored him as it should... He would have been fine, but there were others... reported. And I received the following order: "If I don't want to lose favors in the future, I'll drive off to my Novgorod estate Zaselye, sit quietly there alone, not to communicate with anyone, to think again, to cool down and wait for a gracious permission to return ... "So I drove off and sat quietly, without communicating with anyone. As I was driving, I thought I would die of longing and boredom. And less than ten days later, my joy began. Alyonushka, the daughter of the late father Nikita, our village priest, grew up in our house, in Zaselye, while still with her mother. I remembered her as a small child, but when I arrived then, I see: a girl of unspeakable beauty. And as I looked at her, from that very moment I did not see anything else around. She and she, everywhere and in everything she! We fell in love - I her, and she me - without looking back, we did not part for one hour. And so weeks went by, a month, another, a third, six months passed ... The old prince stopped all transfigured. He even straightened up in his chair, even in his dull eyes the fire of life lit up. The son's face remained calm, only it seemed to darken a little, as if even aged. Father continued: "After six months, a letter came to me signed: "Elisabeth." ordered to arrive. I wrote that I was sick ... A month later, a new order. I write again: "It's very sick, but how

I'll get better - I will. A month later, the third order, the strictest. It was impossible not to go. And since it's hard for Alyonushka and me to shine. I wanted to take her with me, but I decided that I had to wait ... her health was not like that then. I yearned without her in St. Petersburg and counted the days... Not long now! Our good mother Elisaveta Petrovna, as soon as she found out about my grief, but she saw it, she herself sent me to Zaselye, and volunteered to be your godmother ... I did not find my Alyonushka alive ... The voice of the old prince broke off. The distant past came alive. Eyes dimmed and

from them, tears rolled one after another down their yellow, dried cheeks.

The son took his father's hand and held it in his, and warmth developed over the old sick body. This shaking of the filial hand aroused life, softened the anguish. "Here comes the weight! Is that right, father? Falling down, my friend! whispered pale lips. The son continued: "Let the conversation about the past between us be ended forever. Everything you can tell me, I know... You loved my mother... she was not destined to live - it's not your fault. You were destined to live. You consoled yourself, got married, raised children... You endured severe trials. Now they have done their duty towards me...

- Did you do it? Did he perform it properly? - the prince spoke, again animated. "I don't dare, I can't hide before you: before these heavy losses, before this illness of mine, I thought very little about you. Fate deprived you of your mother, but you could have had a father, and you had no one. Only now I understand it. You grew up in the hands of others, you lived far away from me ... in a foreign land ... I even forgot sometimes to send you money ... maybe you needed it ... The son smiled and shook his head. "I never needed. I have nothing to blame you, father. Know that if I had been Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov from birth and lived with you, in this house, surrounded by the tender cares of my blood, my fate would have been much worse. Know that I am pleased with my fate, and what for another would be evil and grief, for me turned into a blessing ...

- Your speech is dark for me and incomprehensible! the old man said sadly. "Yeah, I don't understand you either. I know that you have great book wisdom, great knowledge, but I know too little about your life ... But I would like to know, I would like to know why you are like that?

- Which?

- Not like everyone else ... not like

that ... But the old prince could no longer finish his thought. The son stood up and slowly raised his hand. His father's eyes closed at the same moment, he threw his head back on the pillows and fell into a deep, restful sleep.

XVIII

For a few more minutes Zakharyev-Ovinov held his hand over his father's head, and the old prince's features took on a more and more calm, even some kind of blissful expression. Here a faint smile flickered on the senile lips, now the yellow, withered cheeks were covered with a slight blush. The old man made a movement in his sleep and put his hand on his heart. He whispered something, but something could not be heard.

And at that time, before the mind's eye of the son, pictures were clearly and distinctly drawn ... Clear summer days ... centuries-old maples and lindens ... the waters of a wide, fast river ... the mysterious fragrant depth of a dark pine forest ... pale evenings, full of inexplicable silence, bewitching the soul ... The light and radiance of a young , of trusting beauty... young love is earthly, hot, crazy and powerful, like all this nature...

"Relive your former intoxication - it was still the sweetest of all your intoxications, relive it again and rest from the suffering of poor, worn-out flesh ... here is my gift to you! - and he is a hundred times more precious to you than to me all that you now give me! So Zakharyev-Ovinov thought, and once again fixing his cold, imperious gaze on his sleeping

father, he left the room. He again passed through the empty front rooms and went down the stairs to the lower floor, to the room he occupied. On his arrival from abroad to his father's house, he himself chose these three rooms, small and rather dark, overlooking a small but densely overgrown garden. Almost from the very foundation of the house, these rooms have never been inhabited and have always been intended for visitors. Zakharyev-Ovinov chose them precisely because they were not inhabited. And even then he aired them for three days, holding the windows wide open and ordering them to heat the stoves well, despite the warm spring weather. Then he himself, several times a day, fumigated each room with some very aromatic kure.

and sprayed all the walls and all the furniture with some fragrant, green liquid. Now, despite the open windows, the rooms were filled with a somewhat stupefying and strange smell, obviously pleasant and familiar to the owner. Zakharyev-Ovinov, having come to his room, took off his elegant attire in the bedroom and put on a black velvet caftan, which was his favorite at home. Then he went into the first room, larger than the other two, and which served him for his studies, to which he devoted much time from the first day of his arrival. Here stood a large oak table; on the table are several books, a box of marvelous mosaic work, an inkwell, and a pencil case with goose quills. Zakharyev-Ovinov sat down at the table, unlocked the box, took out a voluminous notebook and

began to write.

But before he had written even half a page, there was a knock at the door. He raised his head, listened, an irritated feeling flickered across his face, but it immediately disappeared. He took his manuscript and put it back in the box. Behind the door along with repeated knocking

a voice rang out:

- Prince, your servant is not to blame, I did not allow him to report ... If you are busy - tell directly, and if you can, let me in without ceremony... Do you recognize my voice?

- I know, you are welcome, count! - answered Zakharyev-Ovinov, going up to the door and unlocking her.

Before him, in gold and regalia, beaming with contentment, stood Count Alexander Sergeevich Somonov. They said hello. The count hurriedly entered, as if afraid that the owner would not let him in, but would ask him to enter the front rooms, while he, without even thinking about his importunity, which was not at all in his character, tried to get in here. With a quick, curious glance, the Count looked around the entire room in an instant. But this first inspection could not satisfy him. He saw absolutely nothing unusual and special, which, apparently,

expected.

The room of the "new prince" was the most ordinary room with heavy leather furniture. leu, a large bookcase and several paintings on the walls. All this atmosphere, obviously, had been here before, before the arrival of the new owner, and said absolutely nothing. Zakharyev-Ovinov offered his guest an armchair. "Why did you deceive me, prince? - began Count Somonov. - promised to come to

I had lunch on the third day, and they didn't come.

"I myself was very sorry about that," replied Zakharyev-Ovinov, "but in my letter I stated the reasons for the impossibility of being with you: urgent matters related to my new position, as well as the health of my father ... He felt very ill in the morning and asked do not leave me; I was detained all day.

"Yes, of course," Somonov drawled, "I understand all this and do not pretend, it's just a pity I've been waiting for you... and I'm not the only one.

Zakhariev-Ovinov smiled. -

You are too kind! My presence, perhaps, would only spoil the mood and yours and your guests. I lost, not you.

"However, prince," Somonov interrupted him, "it's not about compliments at all. My friends and I need you badly, and you know why. Zakhariev-Ovinov smiled once more. "That's the point, Count, that I don't know, or rather, I know what you're putting on me.

expectations that I can't meet. Somonov even

flared up. Why hoaxes! he exclaimed. "After

all, I have had news of you for years. Yes, and you brought me letters from abroad, also proving that I was not mistaken about you. I know that you are engaged in the great and unified science of nature, which is the highest interest of my life, and I have every reason to believe that in you we can and must find a person for us who is extremely necessary for us, by all accounts, an experienced leader. Zakhariev-Ovinov shrugged his shoulders. - I assure you, count, you are mistaken ... The great science of nature! I have no reason to hide that I am not at all alien to curiosity ... Wandering around the world, I learned everything I could, I sought meetings with learned people, made acquaintances with them, talked, learned from them, argued with them a lot. There are Freemasons among my acquaintances and even friends. I know that you are interested in all this, all sorts of mystical questions. I have heard, and now I am convinced that you are engaged in Kabbalism and in general the ancient, long-rejected sciences. I will always be glad to have the opportunity to talk with you about all this, since these questions also interest me to a sufficient extent ... But that's all. I cannot assume the role that you want to give me, I cannot, because this is not my role.

Somonov looked inquisitively at him, but could read absolutely nothing in his cold, vaguely smiling face. "However," he stammered, "how is it? Suppose, in the letters delivered to me

no instructions... But according to previous letters...

"What, Count, did these former letters of your foreign correspondents say about me?" Somonov began to worry. He felt himself in some awkward, strange position. "Why is he fooling me," he thought, "what does it take to make him be frank?"

"In previous letters," he exclaimed, "we were informed of your imminent arrival and promised us much from your arrival. I and a small circle of my friends, devoted to common interests and pursuits, were waiting for you like manna from heaven ... - You were not waiting for me and you were not informed about me, - Zakhariev-Ovinov said quite simply. - How! - Somonov did not know what to think, he was completely at a loss. - Soon, the one you are waiting for and about whom they wrote to you should really come here. Agree, then, that I should not be an impostor, and that you, Count, put me

in an awkward position.

Somonov could hardly believe his ears. - Who should come? he whispered, looking at Zach almost meaninglessly. ryeva-Ovinova.

- Who? A great sorcerer, as he is considered by many in Europe... a man of many names, but best known as the Count of Cagliostro. At the sound of this name, Somonov jumped up from his chair, and instead of the unpleasant embarrassment in which he had hitherto been, his face showed joy, excessive, enthusiastic.

– Is it possible?.. The divine Cagliostro himself is coming to us! he cried. - Le divin Gagliostro!... Dieu, quel bonheur! Zakharyev-Ovinov looked at him seriously and calmly, but obviously did not notice him, did not

heard - thoughts suddenly went very far. "Prince, do

you know him?" Are you intimately acquainted with him?.. Prince, what are you

doing? Zakharyev-Ovinov woke up. - Yes ... you are talking about Cagliostro ... No,

I do not know him, I have never met ... - It cannot be! .. I cannot understand why you

need to hide from me? - I assure you that I do not know him, I have never had a chance to meet ...

According to rumors

I know him well, of course. "And

he's coming here?" Is that right? ..

- He is not coming yet, but he will arrive soon if you call him ... It depends on you ... only are you sure that you need his visit and will bring any benefit?

Somonov did not answer, but only looked at the prince with regret. - In that case,

write to him, invite him, and I guarantee you that he will not delay

take advantage of your invitation... But...

Zakharyev-Ovinov stopped before finishing his sentence; he saw that every "but" was now a demon.

healthy.

"I will write to him today, right now... I will send my letter by courier," Somonov repeated excitedly and already to himself, and began hastily saying goodbye.

Zakharyev-Ovinov saw him off, returned, locked the door with a key, and again took out his notebook from the mosaic box. "Butterflies!. Midges! .. - he thought. - So they fly to the candle ... and scorch their

weak wings ... and die ... And the candle will burn out and disappear without a trace, even though it was kindled from the eternal, life-creating fire of the world ... You will discover the great secrets of nature! .. For you to break the sacred vow of silence !.. No, I didn't come to you, and I have nowhere to lead you ... Before you, I will remain in the clothes given to me now, perhaps precisely in order to more accurately hide myself from the eyes

your..."

Part two

I

Huge wealth, good health, attractive appearance, love of good and beauty - a favorable fate endowed Count Alexander Sergeevich in abundance with all this Somonov. From the first days of his life, a wide road was cleared before him for all kinds of well-being and pleasures, everything that not only stepsons of fate and nature fruitlessly dream of, but sometimes legitimate, true children of the same fate, the same nature.

Everything turned out so that it was easy for the count not only to live freely, cheerfully and happy, but also to spread contentment and fun around you. inborn tendencies to he was encouraged. Coming to adulthood and becoming the owner of a huge hereditary fortune, the first foundations of which were laid God knows in what antiquity by the labor of his ancestor, Coming out of the Russian peasantry, the count was primarily concerned with his own fun and the fun of his neighbors.

It occurred to him to build a luxurious dacha on one of the outskirts of Petersburg, surrounded by a huge garden, where not only his acquaintances, but in general, could walk and relax. all residents of St. Petersburg.

The count loved the arts and was quite a deep connoisseur of them. He not only bought in Europe works of art, but also dreamed of Russian art. Looking after Russian talented people and finding a person who seemed talented to him, he always patronized such a person. So he brought up and brought to the people, by the way, a young capable architect by the name of Voronikhin. It was to this architect that he entrusted the construction his dacha. Work began to boil, and to the surprise of everyone, a huge house of excellent imposing architecture was quickly erected.

Then the count bought up the adjacent lands, covered with a dense forest, descending to the very the river, and in less than a year his dream came true - the neglected forest turned into a beautiful garden laid out according to the plan of the same Voronikhin.

In this garden, among pavilions, kiosks, and all sorts of picturesque corners devoted to rest and peaceful conversation, towered precious sculptural works, taken out from abroad. The public, freely allowed into the count's garden, could marvel and admire sphinxes, centaurs, on huge and graceful marble vases filled with fragrant flowers.

In the middle of a vast pond, bordered by a bright green velvety lawn, towering There was a gigantic figure of Neptune with a trident.

On the sides of the count's terrace, statues depicting Hercules and Flora of the Farneses sparkled with their marvelous marble whiteness.

In winter, the count's garden was usually tightly closed. But as soon as spring came in his rights, he unlocked and became available to everyone. In the summer, the count lived with the court in Tsarskoye Selo, but on the eve of holidays and Sundays, he invariably came to his cottage, and then there was a great feast from morning until evening. Music was everywhere wood vaults. Petersburg residents rushed to the count's garden and often spent with their families all day. There was no restaurant here, but meanwhile everyone could get both food and all sorts of strong drinks at the lowest price. Huge Count's the servants arranged for themselves a very profitable occupation from the food of the visitors. Both food and drinks were free. That is, at the expense of the count, and thus any, even the most the low wages levied on walkers were a net profit for the earl's servants.

Satisfied, drunk and listening to music, everyone could go to the very terrace of the dacha and be present as a free spectator at the count's feast.

Count Alexander Sergeevich and his numerous guests were not at all embarrassed, turning, so to speak, into actors and becoming the center of countless glances of the crowd. These their glances did not in the least prevent them from feasting and having fun. From the terrace incessantly came laughter, noisy conversation, lively debate.

And it often happened that, at a sign from the good-natured host, sounds of cheerful dance music. The count sent out invitations to all garden visitors to dance on the cleared area in front of the terrace.

This invitation was immediately accepted, dances were arranged, and finally ended with that the eminent host himself joined the dancers, offered his hand to the first lady or girl he liked and began to dance with her.

The popularity of Count Alexander Sergeevich was great. Almost all of them in Petersburg knew by sight. He affably responded to the respectful bows addressed to him, affectionately smiled at all the beautiful women, caressed the children. But at the same time he never lost his dignity. Kindness, affection and simplicity of his address, familiarity with the people of the most different classes of society did not in the least prevent each and every one from seeing and feeling in him a real nobleman and respect him. At the same time, his simplicity and these holidays, in which he took part, made it possible for many to turn to him personally with all sorts of requests for help. The count accepted all requests, and his extensive charity sometimes bordered on mere extravagance. He helped indiscriminately, poured money right and left.

This, in any case, gave him the opportunity to see satisfied, joyful faces and know that he is the cause of these joys and contentment. He found that he could not be sorry for any money paid for such impressions, and with a good-natured smile he listened to the remarks of the empress, who reproached him that, in the end, even his enormous fortune could not be enough for such philanthropic quirks.

"Enough, Your Majesty, I can assure you that enough is enough!" he repeated firmly, and was right: his fortune, once mined in the bowels of the earth by calloused peasant hands, was enough not only for his lifetime, but also for the wide life of his offspring ...

It would seem, what else was there for Count Alexander Sergeevich to look for, how could he not be content with such a free, wide life? But it turned out that he had all this few. Everything was given too easily, it was worth wanting something, and it appeared like in a fairy tale, "by magic". And now he was irresistibly drawn to something that could not be bought by anyone. For what money, which neither the name, nor the position, nor the connections could give. He didn't have long think about what it is, what he so wanted. He read a lot and was the son of his time. And in his time there were many minds, mystically tuned, languishing and bored in the midst of visible reality. These minds, carried away by the thirst for the miraculous and unable to find satisfaction of their thirst in too high and great purity and simplicity of Christian teaching, returned to ancient and medieval dreams, searched for the remnants ancient secret sciences and tried to pull off the veil from the mysterious face of Isis.

Classes in cabalistics, magic, astrology were in use. Found all over Europe scientists and serious people, without any visible signs of insanity, who deeply believed into the possibility of finding a "vital elixir", through which one can extend human life almost to infinity, and a "philosopher's stone", with which it is possible to turn crude metals into pure gold. These people devoted all their time and everything their funds for the "great cause", that is, for the alchemical procedure, as a result of which what was obtained, however, was not at all a "philosopher's stone" and not a "vital elixir", but something else, very interesting, but still not satisfying the seekers.

Next to people sincere and seriously enthusiastic, there were many charlatans and crude deceivers who exploited gullible lovers of the mysterious and robbed in their most stupid way.

Simultaneously with the "secret" sciences, animal magnetism began to come into fashion, or "mesmerism", so named after its herald, the German Mesmer, who forced talk about yourself all over Europe...

Count Alexander Sergeevich Somonov was fond of both "secret" sciences and mesmerism, and every kind of mystery. He and his circle of friends made all sorts of "experiments", looking for persons capable of falling into a "mysterious dream". About them, and mainly about the count, every now and then in St. Petersburg society they told all sorts of stories that provided abundant food for ridicule. The Empress often amused herself over the fact that the count "magnetizes" ladies and maidens. and "makes gold out of stones." She even thought of writing a comedy, the hero of which would be a wasteful alchemist.

The count was not embarrassed by anything, more and more carried away by his mysterious occupations and only waited for a leader, a great adept, who would lead him and his friends into the temple. Isis and would have opened for them the face of the goddess of nature.

II

About a month had passed since Count Somonov came to Zakharyev-Ovinov and he at first embarrassed him, and then pleased him with the news of the imminent arrival of Cagliostro.

During all this time, apparently, nothing outstanding happened in the life of Zakharyev-Ovinov. He obviously did everything in order not to draw attention to himself, not to force anyone to talk about himself. Many of his father's old friends and relatives, who still barely knew of his existence and were not at all interested in it, now they very much desired acquaintance and rapprochement. The old prince, hopelessly ill, wait for that, he will die. This new son is the only one heir to his great fortune, the only legal bearer of his old name. After the gracious attention shown to him by the empress, there is nothing more to think about. Immediately and silently, as if by a given sign, everyone decided to forget the past, recognize the new prince as his family. Especially women, and especially young women, were very interested in the young prince. He had only to surrender to the flow, and he would immediately become the most fashionable man in St. Petersburg. But he did not want this at all, and at first he could easily hide without paying any attention to it, without stirring up rumors. heavy his father's illness, on the one hand, and the summer lull, on the other, allowed him not to be in society.

Potemkin no longer called him to his place, but the empress reported him in such a spirit that it was a really interesting and learned man, which, of course, can be of great use coincide with some business, but until the fall, due to family circumstances, a recent driving and all sorts of household chores, you have to leave him alone.

The Empress did not object.

Thus, Zakharyev-Ovinov was given complete freedom, he enjoyed her in the sense that he spent all his days in his three rooms or in the little garden for his father and writing. However, he spent three or four hours a day with his father. The old man gave him all the necessary explanations, gave him all the affairs, accounts and calculations, handed over to him all the family documents. Sometimes a conversation struck up between them, sometimes the son, in his metallic voice, told his father very interesting things about his travels in different countries. The old man listened attentively, with visible interest, asked questions. But as soon as these questions touched the personal, the inner life of the son, the circumstances of his personal past, invariably there was one and the same scene: by a barely perceptible wave of the filial hand, by the first imperious filial the old prince fell asleep for several hours and woke up refreshed and animated

having completely forgotten the conversation that preceded his sudden sleep, forgetting for some time his ardent desire to penetrate into his son's past ...

It was the end of June. Zakharyev-Ovinov received an invitation from Count Somonov to his dacha. This invitation meant that the one who was so expected had arrived and temporarily stayed with the count. The count ended his note as follows: "I flatter myself with the hope that no circumstances will prevent you from visiting me and enjoying the conversation of our famous, for so long awaited guest.

Zakharyev-Ovinov, after reading this note, shook his head, but decided that he would go. He even for a moment came out of his cold calmness and felt that tomorrow he was somewhat interested. At the appointed hour, his carriage stopped at the fence of the Somonovsky garden. The weather was rather fresh and unreliable. In the morning, the rising wind brought clouds, and in general, an approaching bad weather was felt in the air; therefore, despite the holiday, the count's garden did not present its usual liveliness. Walkers met, but they were few.

And the house itself did not have its permanent open, so to speak, through view. At first glance, one could see that something exceptional and important was taking place in this house. Even the count's servants seemed rather solemn and important. Numerous carriages in the vast courtyard indicated to Zakharyev-Ovinov that he would be present at a very crowded feast and meeting.

And so it turned out. In the reception rooms he found a crowd of guests - men and women. mno some of them already knew him, and his appearance was

noticed. He exchanged courteous greetings with acquaintances and hurried forward to the meeting that awaited him - not with the owner, not with the "divine Cagliostro", for the sake of which this crowd, greedy for new impressions, had gathered, he now forgot both the owner and Cagliostro. He felt, distinctly and clearly, the presence of someone who was connected to him by secret and strong bonds, perhaps much more secret and strong than he himself seemed to think.

"She's here! he thought. "So it's time for us to meet again... so, right now she needs me ... Yes, of course, right now, right today ... "

Countess Sonnenfeld, slender and beautiful, was walking towards him. But she had not noticed him yet, the look in her deep eyes was either thoughtful or absent-minded. "Countess," he said, and in his voice sounded, it seemed, unusual for him softness and even affection.

She stopped. Her eyes flashed. What flashed in her eyes - fear or joy? - Mr. Zach ... prince! she said with a slight smile, holding out her hand to him. "I thought that you had already left, that you weren't here..."

- You didn't think so, Countess... - In

any case, I wanted to think so... Why didn't I meet you anywhere? Why didn't you visit me, your old acquaintance? Didn't you know that I would be glad to see you at my place? "No, I knew that you would be glad to see me," he answered calmly, "but until now you didn't need me ... Both I and you

had your own affairs ... You had to end the divorce, and it absorbed you you were just thinking about it. I didn't want to interfere with you, and I couldn't be of any help to you in such a matter ... - Yes, you are right ... right, as always, - the countess said thoughtfully, - but now my

things are over... I...

"You are free," Zakharyev-Ovinov interrupted her, "you can calm down ... take a cold-blooded look at the past and think about the future ... Or, perhaps, you don't want to think about it? - I haven't had time to resolve this issue yet... This month has passed so quickly, in troubles... I haven't seen him!

He looked at her wonderfully beautiful face, full of some special noble charm, looked into her eyes, from the depths of which he could see the temptingly diverse world of her languishing soul, full of still unsolved mysteries, and an expression of participation, compassion, pity flashed and disappeared on his face. cold features.

"Yes, time is passing quickly," he said, "perhaps even too quickly for you—and we must use it. You are now in a fog, you are not aware of yourself ... You are not aware of what it means, what meaning this freedom you have received has ...

"In that case, come to me and explain. After all, there, in Rome, you explained and explained a lot to me ... since then I have had a lot of questions, and I think only you can solve them. Come to me and take a look at how I live now ... I live better than in Rome, calmer, quieter ... She stopped and looked at him with an expression that was hard to expect from this worldly beauty, accustomed to meeting universal admiration and worship. It was the same expression with which frightened and lost children look at a man who has come to calm them down and bring them home... ... lead ... "And the one who takes and leads, takes full responsibility for the childish soul that selflessly submitted to him, who transferred herself to him.

So the former Countess Sonnenfeld extended her hand to Zakhariev-Ovinov, and her eyes told him: "Take ... lead!" Without embarrassment, he took her hand and said: - I will soon come to you now. She moved away, and at the door of the adjoining room he saw the man who had noticed him and

to him the owner.

III

Count Somonov was in an excited state. It was noticed and concern, and joy, and enthusiastic solemnity - all together.

He tightly squeezed Zakhariev-Ovinov's hand and whispered to him: "It's good that you arrived on time, I need to tell you something ... Please you, follow me before I am detained.

He led the prince into a room where there was no one, locked the door behind him, and excitedly started with a voice:

- Tell me, for God's sake, prince, did you tell anyone but me about the imminent arrival Count Cagliostro's trip to St. Petersburg ... and in general did you talk about him with anyone?

"I didn't talk to anyone but you and I didn't tell anyone. And in general, few with whom all this time to see.

"Thank God," Count Somonov interrupted him, "however, I thought so, you know better than anyone that one should be careful in cases of this kind. No one here knows about the existence of Count Cagliostro, except for me, my friend Elagin and two other people. Today I will introduce to my guests the foreigner Count Phoenix and his wife... Pony, he is Count Phoenix, not Cagliostro. So it is necessary ... this is his desire. Under this name he travels.

- I know it. He was also called so in Courland, where he was recently, - said Zakhariev-Ovinov

"Well, yes, well, yes, and we must protect him from all sorts of accidents and all sorts of unpleasant stay, sacred to keep his secret.

"Such a secret, Count, of little importance. If Cagliostro wants to be called the Phoenix, having any reasons for that or even not having them at all, that is his business. As for the troubles that may be with him, it seems to me that we have nothing to worry about protecting him and protecting him - a person as powerful as Cagliostro, or the Phoenix, himself can protect not only from troubles, but also from any danger.

Somonov looked intently at the prince. "Yes, of course," he said, "only, excuse me, but in your tone, to my amazement, I notice something almost hostile to the famous person who came to us. Tell me I'm wrong!

Zakhariev-Ovinov smiled. "Of course, you are mistaken, count," he said, "there is no hostility in me and there cannot be. I am as interested in the Phoenix Earl as you are, and was very pleased to receive your invitation. But tell me, what do you think of this man? Surely you have already seen it?

Count Alexander Sergeevich suddenly perked up, his face took on an almost breathless expression. vein expression. -

Oh, what a man! he exclaimed. - Yes, what to talk about it - you will judge for yourself ... He had already arrived for a week, but he asked to be given the opportunity to rest and look around. And he did not come alone, but with his wife, Countess Lorenza ... My God, what a woman! What an extraordinary charm in it! She is truly a worthy wife of her divine husband! What do you know about his plans? How long will he stay here? .. - Fortunately, for a long time. Today he has allowed to gather all those whom I more or less consider capable of being interested in more than one gross matter. He promised to show us something we haven't seen yet. But, of course, you understand, this is only the first beginning ... He will not open himself to everyone! He asked to call as many guests as possible, men and women. From all those assembled, he himself will choose those who are worthy to see more. Of these chosen ones, the most worthy will later turn out to be. Thus, naturally, by itself, a real chain is formed. I'm telling you all this because I know that you will be one of the links in this chain ... - Why do you think so, count? asked Zakhariev-Ovinov, holding back a smile. - Because I already told him about you, he got interested in you and he told me that he would be very glad to meet you and that he hoped to find in you a friend and a person dedicated, useful to the cause. However, isn't it time...

Count Somonov hurriedly took out a watch from the pocket of his jacket and decided:

- It's time! Stop, prince, in the green drawing room and wait for me, I want you to one of the first to meet the Count Phoenix and the charming countess.

- I will fulfill your wish with great pleasure! - Zakharyev-Ovi replied with a bow new

They entered the green drawing room, and Somonov hastily disappeared.

Every now and then men and ladies would appear in the drawing-room from neighboring rooms, but for some reason men and ladies immediately disappeared. None of them seemed to notice Zakharyev-Ovinov, who sat down at the window and gazed thoughtfully straight ahead into the depths of the garden.

The thoughts of the "new" prince flew far away. He imagined a gloomy room in an old castle in southern Germany. He saw dilapidated folios covered with the dust of centuries with strange characters inscribed on them, mysterious hieroglyphs, numbers, formulas and symbols. Two elders explained these signs to him, revealed to him the meaning of numbers and symbols.

Like the ringing of a solemn gospel, the words sounded above him: "Omnia cum pendere, numero et mensura!" The mysterious signs turned into bright thoughts, into living forces and revealed to him, amazed, filled with blissful awe, the marvelous, eternally unchanging secrets of nature. Hours, days, weeks passed within the walls of the old castle, and he did not notice life and did not need

was given in any impressions of the outside world. The conversations of the dilapidated, almost lifeless, but strong in mind and knowledge of the elders made up his entire existence, sated and strengthened him. And when he left the old castle, he felt like a new person, and the whole world seemed new to him, having nothing in common with the world he had known before.

"And you were there too! thought the prince, returning to the present moment. - was in the same great school! Dead brother! Show yourself, let me see you fall!"

As if in answer to this thought, one of the doors of the green drawing-room style of the host, accompanied by the one whom Zakharyev-Ovinov called "the dead brother."

He was a man of about thirty, of good average height and strong build, inclined to be overweight, but quick and agile in his movements. The features of his face, though indistinguishable correctness, were, however, very attractive. Broad intelligent forehead, fiery eyes, who shone with insight, quickness of thought and great strength - all this could not but to pay general attention to him, could not but single him out from the crowd at once.

This man shone with gold and precious stones, but at the same time seemed too fancy. Shine and wealth went to him, somehow merging with him, made up with him something in common, inseparable. It was even hard to imagine him in modest clothes, no gold or diamonds.

Next to him, leaning on Somonov's hand, with a graceful and light gait, as if barely touching the floor, hidden under the precious lace of a dress, but, probably, with lovely legs, a young woman of about twenty-four appeared. She couldn't be called beautiful. but it was also impossible not to admire her from the very first minute. She seemed to be the embodiment of that charming femininity, which is immeasurably more charming than strict and regular beauty. An artist who worships the classical ideal would perhaps find some flaws in her, would find, for example, that she could be a little taller, that she a slightly large mouth, a somewhat small nose, and something else of that kind - but this same strict artist, probably, would have fallen in love with her without memory, if she had wanted to. Her big the black eyes were of those eyes which, at any moment of time, could convey the the opposite feeling can both revive and kill a person. No brush, none colors could not convey the matte whiteness and tenderness of her lovely face, tinted thick, dark brown hair. Her outfit was luxurious, diamonds sparkling on her, great. But in contrast to her husband, without this rich attire, without these diamonds, it would probably be even better.

Count Alexander Sergeevich fixed his triumphant gaze on Zakharyev-Ovinov new.

- Count, Countess! he exclaimed. Here is the man we were just talking about. He is the first to meet you here, and I have every reason to think that this is a good meeting!

Countess Phoenix nodded her pretty head, glanced quickly and boldly at Zakharyev-Ovinov, and smiled at him. He bowed respectfully to her, but as soon as he noticed her, he looked at the Count Phoenix. He approached him with outstretched hand and spoke in French, glibly and correctly, but with a rather noticeable Italian accent.

"Prince, I know you are almost as much a foreigner here as I am, I know that you are a learned man, in a word, everything that I know about you, and I know, perhaps, much more than you suppose." , makes me consider it a special pleasure to get to know you, and I hope that our acquaintance will not be fleeting.

All this was said in the most gracious, but at the same time somewhat assertive tone.

Zakharyev-Ovinov lowered his eyes; his face suddenly stiffened, frozen in the most indefinite expression.

"Count," he replied, "if you know more about me than I suppose, then I probably know you less than you think. But I, in any case, hope that our acquaintance

not fleeting.

"What does he mean by that?" Count Phoenix thought, squeezing his hand.

Zakharyev-Ovinov responded with a firm handshake, raised his eyes, and their eyes met. For a few moments they stared at each other, and the "divine" Cagliostro felt somehow uneasy. He expected to meet something completely different, and most importantly, he did not understand what he had met, he did not understand, who knew how to immediately guess people, immediately give himself a correct conclusion about them. "What kind of person is this, what is special about him? he mentally repeated.

"We never met, as far as I know; but, probably, he is prejudiced against me, or, perhaps, he is close to one of my enemies, or ... he is simply jealous of me! .. I will see all this and conquer you, Russian prince, as I conquered many like you ... I have never felt such strength in myself as I do now..." "You are counting on seeing and subduing me, you consider yourself especially strong now... You are stronger than I thought, but still I will not give you the opportunity even to fight against

by me..."

Count Phoenix shuddered. He did not hear these words mentally uttered by Zakharyev-Ovinov, but he felt them, indefinitely, indistinctly, but still so much as to be embarrassed by what he took for his own, suddenly flashed thought.

He looked intently at his new acquaintance, who looked at him simply and directly, and calmed down. He did not understand and did not feel that the Russian prince, by an effort of will, had deprived his gaze at that moment of all its usual strength.

Somonov did not notice and did not see anything, completely absorbed in his charming lady, who asked him a variety of questions in a singsong voice in a rather strange French language. Several ladies and gentlemen entered the green drawing room. Countess Sonnenfeld appeared at the door, and

behind her the long, comical figure of Prince Shchenyatiev. He quickly, quickly, choking and lisping, whispered something to her.

The owner decided that it was time to start the ceremony of introducing the St. Petersburg society Count Phoenix and his wife.

IV

The feast was in full swing. Count Alexander Sergeevich was really created for the role of an amphitryon. No one, like him, knew how to be the owner of such a house, where each and every one felt free and pleasant, where hours passed unnoticed in light and lively conversation, where lovers of culinary arts and admirers of Bacchus, whose wonderful image flaunted on the plafond of the huge count's dining room could indulge in a wide variety of pleasures. These pleasures were already anticipated at the first glance at the artistic menu, laid out on all couverts and never deceived even the most capricious gastronomes. Thus, the invitations of Count Alexander Sergeevich were very much appreciated, and everyone was in a hurry to use them, despite the significant inconvenience for them

associated with a trip to his dacha. This time the count's invitation was especially tempting. He managed to interest society in the arrival of Count Phoenix, managed to start a rumor about a mysterious foreigner, from whom everyone expected something special and unusual. Of course, among the persons invited by Count Somonov, there were many scoffers who claimed that the visiting phoenix was not a "phoenix" at all, but simply a charlatan and a magician; only after all and the ball-

latan is interesting to listen to, and magic tricks are pleasant to look at in luxurious surroundings, among exquisite feast.

Count Phoenix himself understood very well the difficulty of his position among this alien society. Until recently, he considered Russia a completely barbarous country, considered the Russians completely savages. But he was already convinced of his mistake. Reception made to him by Count Somonov and a circle of his close friends who were engaged in "secret" sciences, did not deceive him and did not cloud him. He knew that the society of the Northern Russian capital consisted far from being one of the Somonovs, Elagins and the like, that in general northerners are much more cold-blooded, more prone to skepticism, more reasonable and thoughtful than his ardent compatriots - Italians, carried away, frivolous French and dreamy, inclination
nye to mysticism Germans.

Meanwhile, he believed in his own strength, and the difficulty of the task only aroused his energy. He had broad goals, and he decided at all costs to triumph over the Russian coldness. He knew that he would be met as a charlatan and magician, but after a few hours he should change his mind. The fight has begun.

By the end of the dinner, Count Phoenix had won over almost the entire assembled society, had become a real center, absorbing everyone's attention. If he played a part, he played it impeccably. First of all, all doubts about the aristocracy and the truth of his origin melted away and completely evaporated. The most incredulous people abandoned the idea that he was not a foreign count at all, but some kind of rogue adventurer. He was the personification of the most elegant, well-mannered man of the world. First he he behaved with restraint and with magnificent dignity, weighing his every word. He made everyone want him to talk, and when he felt this general desire, he became talk entertainingly, cheerfully, witty about a wide variety of subjects.

It seemed that his every word, accompanied by the sparkle of his eyes and the sweetest smile, showing his dazzling white teeth, had a special attraction. hundreds and thousands of his words formed a thin, invisible, but strong web, this web captured one and all, and he could freely pull his unconscious, enchanted
them captives.

He did just that. Convinced that no hostile influences were acting against him, that he was the master of the situation, he turned the conversation onto mystical grounds and boldly began to act in this familiar and habitual area. Even people who are completely alien to everything that is not relates to the topic of the day and to the visible, tangible reality, became interested in his stories about what power a person as the highest creation of God can get over nature, to what extent he can subordinate the laws of this nature to himself and dispose of them
at your discretion.

"No one is to blame," said Count Phoenix in a melodious, sweet voice, "no one is to blame if people do not want to use the wealth provided to them by the grace of God, if they do not want to develop their strength and prefer darkness to light.

- Why don't they want to? Countess Helena Sonnenfeld interrupted him, listening eagerly all the time. - Probably, there are a lot of people who would like, would like to being; but in order for desire not to be fruitless, it is first necessary to have the certainty that it can in general be quite feasible, that there really exists in nature what one wishes, what one wants to desire...

Count Phoenix glared at the lovely woman with his fiery gaze. He already noticed it for a long time, and not only noticed, but also "outlined". He immediately felt that this beauty, in her organization, belongs precisely to such beings, through which his power can be shown. He needed this beauty, and now he was convinced that the secret,

to him alone, the driven efforts he used throughout dinner in order to attract her to him were not in vain. "And you, Countess, don't you have such confidence?" - he asked. "I don't dare to say what I have... I don't know... but, in any case, I would very much like to be sure that we are not blind and deaf creatures, bound hand and foot."

time and space. Count Phoenix,

without looking up, looked into her eyes, and she felt an involuntary inner tremor from this look. She did not like this man, but against her will she experienced his influence. In general, for several minutes now she had been in a very strange, serious condition, like a person starting to get very sick.

"You say that we are blind, that we are bound by time and space," said Count Phoenix, "but if you want, I will prove to you that you are mistaken, if you want, I will prove to you and everyone who has gathered here that you can see, not constrained by space, can you, remaining here, among us, see what is happening far away, anywhere, in any place on the globe you want?"

Everyone held their breath and froze as if petrified. The huge, magnificent dining room of Count Somonov suddenly portrayed the banquet hall of the enchanted castle, where the prince had not yet penetrated, whose kiss should awaken the beautiful princess and her entire sleepy kingdom from a magical sleep.

"Of course... I want..." Elena whispered, as if half-forgetful. - So I'll prove it to you ... Count Phoenix looked around those present with a calm and at the same time authoritative look. He challenged and took full responsibility. The dining room revived. Lunch was over. The society hastened to move into the living room where the experiment was to take place.

What experience? What will it be? Everyone was in an extremely excited state. Count Phoenix approached Elena and offered her his hand. She obeyed automatically, she obeyed, she could barely stand on her feet, her head was foggy, her thoughts were confused. She was looking for someone with her eyes, looking for someone's help ... But the one she was almost unconsciously looking for was far from her. Zakharyev-Ovinov let everyone past him without moving. His pale face

fell cold and indifferent.

V

The huge windows of the living room were hidden behind heavy curtains. The vast room with a high stucco ceiling shone all over with light from a lighted chandelier and numerous candelabra. Everyone's eyes focused on Count Phoenix and Elena. The mysterious foreigner led his lady to an armchair in the middle of the room, asked her to sit down, and then turned to the host, who happened to be near him: "I ask you to order a low table and a decanter of water to be brought here - nothing else."

no need.

This demand was immediately fulfilled. All with amazement, and some with bated breath, waited for what would happen next, what role could a carafe of water play? Elena sat motionless, with a fixed gaze of wide-open, almost fixed eyes; her arms were lowered helplessly, only her chest was breathing rapidly and impetuously. - I ask you to look intently into this decanter at the water! Count Phoenix said loudly. "Think of something that you would like to see, or rather, think of someone

who would you like to see. Stop at that thought, forget everything else, and look at the water.

Having said this, he walked around the chair on which she was sitting, raised his hands and lightly touched her shoulders with them. She made an impulsive movement, pulling away, resenting his impudent touch. But he was already in front of her and intently, without blinking, glared at her with his black, like coal, and at the same time shining eyes.

She felt his eyes fixed on her. There was no way she wanted to raise her eyes and meet that look, which was unpleasant for her, simply tormenting, throwing her into heat, then into cold. And meanwhile, against her will, she nevertheless raised her eyes and looked at him - she looked and felt that she was in the power of this man.

But she doesn't want that! What madness! What is it with her? Why does she have such weakness, such a lack of will, and what a stupid experience it is to look at the water, what can she see in this water? Charlatan, magician, deceiver! He fools everyone. And she succumbed ... and she put herself in such a ridiculous and stupid position! Everyone is looking at her, everyone will laugh at her, everyone... No, no, she will get up and leave now. But she didn't get up, she didn't leave. She, as if enchanted, powerless and weak-willed, looked into

the eyes of the man standing in front of her and now possessing her.

- Look at the water! he said in an authoritative voice. She obediently carried out his order, began to stare intently, without looking away, into the decanter of water. - Think of someone! he demanded even more commandingly, even more authoritatively. And at that very moment she began to think of Count Sonnenfeld. The whole society moved little by little to the middle of the room, surrounded Elena and looked

on her.

There was complete silence, no one moved. Elena forgot everything and everyone, did not remember where she was, did not notice now that she was turned more than fifty glances, only thought of Sonnenfeld and looked into the decanter of water.

Three, four minutes passed like that. Suddenly Elena shuddered all over. Her face was covered with deathly pallor. In a strange voice, as if in a strange voice, she shouted:

- I see!

She really saw. Now before her was not transparent water, but clearly and distinctly, like the reality at which she looks through a diminishing glass, a room suddenly outlined itself, and she recognized this room. It was her ex-husband's office in Vienna. Here he is, only reduced to the size of a puppet. He sits at the bureau and writes, from time to time scratching with his red hand the tip of his long, hooked, lopsided nose. So he turned around and looked ... and it seems to her that this tiny Count Sonnenfeld sees her and looks at her with his pale eyes. He got up and walked around the room...

And suddenly everything disappeared. She no longer thought about him. She was suddenly filled with the thought of another person. This man is close to her, in the same drawing room of Count Somonov, where she is. But she does not remember where she is, and she completely forgot that he was here, so close. She only thinks of him... Again, the smooth, motionless surface of the water begins to fade, and then suddenly lights up with some kind of pink light, and something emerges from this pink light... Clearer and clearer... the room, only it's not an office in Vienna... It's room unknown to her. She never knew and does not know such a room. The room is small and simply furnished: a large table, an inkwell on the table, candles under a shade, a large open mosaic box filled with papers. Further on is a wide sofa, several heavy armchairs covered with dark leather upholstery... He, the one she thinks of, sits in front of the table and seems to be waiting for someone. Yes, she feels, understands that he is waiting. And then the door quietly opens ... a woman in front of her. She looks at this woman. She seemed to have caught a glimpse of that lovely young face somewhere, those clear eyes,

that wonderful blond hair... She must have seen this woman somewhere, or rather, this young girl... But where? when? She can't remember it. She is only involuntarily struck by her beauty, especially pure, especially clear beauty. She is waiting with a stopped heart, what will happen next ... yes, what will happen next? How is she

here, this young beauty? where is she from? who is she? why? Why is he waiting for her like that?

So he saw her... he stood up to meet her... he goes to her... they are in each other's arms!.. Elena cried out weakly and staggered away from the decanter, in exhaustion she bowed her head on the back of the chair. She closed her eyes, but immediately the commanding voice of the Phoenix Count woke her up. "Well, Countess, have you convinced yourself that you can see without being constrained by either space or time?" But she didn't answer him. She couldn't help herself. Her heart ached with tormenting, heavy anguish, and she felt how in this yearning heart rises a still unknown to her and incomprehensible, unbearably painful, sharp and burning sensation. "Countess, calm down! – meanwhile spoke Count Phoenix. "I didn't mean to scare and embarrass you. I only wanted to prove to you the truth of my words... – Perhaps you have proved it to the Countess, but you must admit that nothing has been proven to us yet... Count Phoenix turned around and looked at the speaker. Before him stood Prince Shchenyatiev, and his comical face with a small nose and rapidly blinking eyes expressed a mixture of courtesy and malice. "Meanwhile, we are all too interested," Prince Shchenyatiev continued, "be so kind, count, make some experiment that would convince all of us, who are not yet believers, but very much want to believe ... I give myself to you in power, do with me, whatever you want, dispose of me as you please ... I am ready to accept all suffering for the sake of the common good. The Phoenix Count smiled. "Your remark is sound," he said, "but you didn't let me finish..."

Anyway, I won't bother you...

He did not finish his sentence, and at that very moment Prince Shchenyatiev, himself not knowing how and why, suddenly jumped aside and fell silent.

"Look at the water again!" Count Phoenix ordered, turning to Elena. Without any reasoning, without any thoughts, suppressed by her melancholy and painful feeling, she carried out his order.

Look and speak out loud everything you see. Everyone in the room froze again. A minute passed, then another. - Now you see! he announced in his loud, commanding voice. – What do you see? "Road..." she said softly. - Look closer ... look! - The crew ... the carriage rushes with six. - Who is in the carriage, who? Look! She was apparently peering, trying to see who was in the carriage. - Is there anyone in it? - Yes ... I see ... someone ... - A man or a woman? - A man ... one ... - Do you know him or not? "Wait a minute... now I see... yes, I know him... this is Prince Potemkin... There was a movement between those present.

– Where is he going? Count Phoenix continued to ask. - Look at the road. "He's coming... coming here... he's close... very close..." "Look..." The carriage is turning... the carriage is pulling in... the prince is getting out... he's gone out... At that moment the doors of the living room opened and a loud voice announced: "His Grace Prince Grigory Aleksandrovich Potemkin. Some of the ladies cried out, and the whole assembly began to fuss. Count Somonov hurried to the door. Elena was almost unconscious, completely exhausted. Count Phoenix looked at everyone with a triumphant look. The majestic, mighty figure of Potemkin appeared at the door. "Count," he said, turning to the owner, "I didn't think to be with you today ... About three hours since I arrived from Tsarskoe, I thought of resting, but it became boring, I remembered that you had some kind of performance today ... tricks, or something ... well and went. What is happening to you?"

Everyone heard these big words. No one, of course, could have imagined that there was a conspiracy here and that the brightest in the conspiracy. The impression was complete.

VI

Elena came to her senses. She was no longer at the mercy of the Phoenix Count. He released her, even almost forgot. Now all his attention, all his thoughts were turned to Potemkin. He saw it for the first time and peered at it attentively, trying to make it out right away, to understand it, to understand it so that there was no mistake.

They came to Petersburg mainly for Potemkin. Potemkin played the first role in his broad plans. While Somonov was telling his Serene Highness what the matter was, Count Phoenix was all on his guard, preparing to take the stage and make a proper impression on the powerful Russian nobleman. This minute has come; now he needs Elena. She is well prepared. It will help him achieve today everything that can be achieved for the first time.

"But where is she?"

He searches for her with his eyes. She is not. She disappeared. But she can't be far away. She didn't have time to leave the house yet. He will return it now, return it without moving. A strong magnetic connection is established between him and her.

He mentally, in a way known to him, calls her, pulls her to him with invisible the threads with which he entangled her.

But she is not. He looks through the door from which she must involuntarily and obediently appear. And her everything is not! And he suddenly becomes somehow awkward, hard ...

He feels that he is wasting his nerve force, he feels that something strange, unexpected, incomprehensible is happening. He is paralyzed, exhausted. But if he had been more attentive, if he had counted less on his strength, if he had not thought exclusively about himself, Potemkin and Elena, he would have noticed that the look of bright, shining eyes had been following him for a long time, that the strength of this look immediately cut off all the threads, with which he connected Elena with himself. Yes, she is free, but she is both sad and embarrassed.

Her head is heavy. She can't stay in this living room anymore. She understands that now everyone will have to turn to her again, that she will have to endure Potemkin's interrogation. She hurries to take advantage of the freedom granted to her, perhaps for just one moment. A minute, another - and she is already on the porch ... her carriage is served ... she orders to go home as soon as possible.

She is at home, that is, with her father, in her former girls' rooms. What happiness that she had escaped, that she had managed to escape, that she did not feel the power of this incomprehensible, terrible man over her here. Who is he? But why should she think about him; we must rather forget about him, we must arrange

so that no one will meet him again. She even trembled all over, imagining his imperious, enslaving look, his impudent touch on her bare shoulders, covered only with a slight gas. She almost hated this man, but her hatred and disgust were mixed with fear, a kind of panic fear that made her tremble.

went to all the members.

And that other one, also a mysterious person?.. Her heart suddenly ached with melancholy and pain. But at that moment her father came to her. The old prince Kalatarov—now no one called him anything other than the old prince—beared all the signs of premature decrepitude. His back was hunched over, his head did not seem to rest firmly on his shoulders, and now and then swayed first to one side, then to the other. Often in the middle of a conversation he suddenly fell silent and thought, or, rather, simply stopped thinking altogether: his lower lip drooped, his eyes began to look senselessly at one point, for the most part directly at the face of the interlocutor. He didn't hear or understand anything. After a few moments he came to his senses and tried his best to hide his forgetfulness and distraction. He was obviously aware of this in himself and was tormented by it.

In general, in the last year he began to avoid people and, all his life, not knowing how to spend alone, now for whole days he did not leave the house, not receiving anyone, except for the faces of his closest ones. Not so long ago considered the first dandy in St. Petersburg, now the prince wrapped himself in a dressing gown and slapped shoes around the rooms from morning to evening. Sometimes excitement and anxiety were noticed in him, and no one could get them out of him in any way. Meanwhile, there was a reason, albeit a very strange one: the old prince was pursued by shadows cast by objects. He turns the chair around, sits down in it, and suddenly he is struck: why is this shadow from the chair and from himself so long and lies precisely in such and such a direction? He jumps out of his chair and starts to turn it in every possible way. And then he notices a shadow from a table or from another object and is completely confused. Shadows torment him for several hours, he fiddles with them, rearranges all the furniture. Finally, he will be exhausted and fall asleep, and after a day or two, his shadows will again begin to haunt him - just devilry! He considered it as a devilish obsession and took it for a prayer. But even during prayer, sometimes the shadow from the lamp in front of the icon caught his eye and plunged him into complete despondency ...

The prince, going in to his daughter, kissed her and sat down opposite her, wrapping the hems of his dressing-gown. - Why are you so early, Lenoshka? - he asked. - I have tea, with Count Alexander Sergey there are a lot of people, a lot of fun ... he always has fun, and they leave late ... Why are you?

"Something is not feeling well today, father," Elena answered. -

Enough, Lenoshka, what a disease there! Yes, and it doesn't suit you at all ... You have a good time, but look after your fiancé ... For a long time, you yourself know, it doesn't suit you.

Why not?

"Why? .. Everyone says with one voice that you must get married now, the sooner the better ... You can't be alone, you can't be - that's right ... Only choose your husband here, Lenoshka, don't leave me, don't leave ... - I won't leave, - Elena whispered mechanically. "That's it ... but if you're unwell, then you lie down, and fall asleep soundly - everything will go to sleep ... well, Christ is with you, my beauty ... The prince, with a sudden onset of old age, also had an old man's manner of speaking and expressing himself. He seemed to be completely different from the person he had been all his life. And this change in him was so striking that Elena, in spite of all her absent-mindedness,

looked at him in amazement and listened to him.

Groaning, he got up from his chair, went up to her, piously crossed her, kissed her on the forehead, he repeated once more: "Lie down, and sleep well," and, slapping his shoes, he went out.

Elena did not follow his advice - she did not lie down and did not fall asleep. For a long, long time, not noticing the time, she sat with her head resting against the soft back of her favorite armchair, embroidered by the skillful hand of her late mother. Her deep, beautiful eyes looked dejected and sad, her whole face turned pale and expressed suffering.

She involuntarily thought of her father's words; these words led her to thoughts, no longer new, but never before had appeared to her so clearly, simply and definitely.

After all, now she finally achieved what she was so eager for, what she had been waiting for. She is divorced from her husband; he is a stranger to her; she is free. Until recently, it seemed to her that this was precisely what everything consisted of, that great happiness for her consisted in getting rid of what she hated, intolerable person.

But now that Count Sonnenfeld had become a stranger to her, he no longer seemed hateful and terrible to her, now she had no bad feeling for him. There was no malice or reproach in her heart. She immediately got the opportunity to judge the past without any prejudice. A big mistake was made on both sides. He had to pay for the mistake, he had to suffer... But he, too, suffered, though in his own way, but he suffered all the same. And she even felt sorry for him... She also thought that it depended on her to reduce the suffering. Why hadn't she released both herself and him earlier? But, no, it means that it was necessary, it means that this is how everything should have turned out ... She is free! What's next? She saw clearly now that this freedom could not be the end, that this freedom was nothing but the first means... to what? Luckily. But there is no happiness!

Never before had she realized so painfully clearly that there was no happiness, there never was, and that without it she could not live. An hour passed, another passed, and she still sat motionless, gazing into space with wide-open eyes, from which quiet tears rolled down one after another, and kept thinking about

that there is no happiness.

But little by little, something strange began to happen to her. Forgetfulness came over her, quiet and sweet. It was as if some kind of vitally warm breath was hovering over her, engulfing her all and taking her somewhere. Her eyes sparkled, the last color escaped from her cheeks. Motionless, beautiful, frozen, she obviously fell asleep, but it was a strange dream, almost a dream of death ...

* * *

At this time, Zakharyev-Ovinov was sitting in front of his desk, among the furnishings of that room, which Elena so clearly saw in the decanter of water. Two wax candles burned on a table under a lampshade, and their faint light almost disappeared and was lost: a full, bright moon looked straight out the window, filling the whole room with silver and blue shadows. The reflection of the moon fell on the face of Zakharyev-Ovinov and turned him into a wonderful marble statue. The "new prince" was thinking about what he had just witnessed. He thought about the experiment performed by Cagliostro on Elena, and mentally addressed the "dead brother", as if talking to him:

"Now I know all your strengths and means, I know what enormous, incalculable wealth you could contain in yourself ... But you collected only a part of it and madly, suicidally squander it. You died for eternity, and the burden of such a responsibility will fall on you, which no man can ever endure and endure! You have been surrounded, darkness has taken possession of you and is drawing you to eternal death... You were sighted, but blind and do not see the black abyss under your feet; you think that you are standing on solid ground, and you do not feel with what desperate speed you are striving down, into the very depths of the abyss ... I cannot save you, and I am not responsible for you, but I will not let you destroy those who can rise to the light and not be blinded by its radiance ...

Yes, you, just like me, immediately saw and understood what wonderful inclinations lurk in this beautiful woman! You hastened to put your hand on her. But for what? In order to ruthlessly destroy her, in order to use her, her fresh hidden powers for your pitiful, earthly purposes... And you, you foolish blind man, did not feel that there was already a seal on her... Before you, I imprinted her and will lead her to salvation! . Elena! whispered Zakharyev-Ovinov. "The time has come... I want to get to know you better..."

I want to see you and talk to you..."

He got up from his chair, took a few steps and stopped. His eyes flashed. "Elena! I want to see you! Come!" – in the deep silence of the night sounded his voice. Moments flew by, and now in front of him, in a strip of moonlight, appeared, as it were, a light, white cloud. It quickly thickened ... another moment - and Elena stood in front of him, all embraced and penetrated by a ray of the moon, all shining with dazzling, unearthly beauty. Yes, it was her face, a living face lit up with a bewitching, caressing smile. Her deep eyes gazed at him with admiration. It was her living face, and meanwhile through the outlines of her full dignity and grace of a figure, through the folds of her white clothes, the objects behind her shone now more clearly, now more vaguely. It was an incomprehensible creature, a lively, spiritual dream... Zakharyev-Ovinov leaned on the table, calmly and solemnly looked at her,

being her.

- Elena, my friend, do you see me, do you hear me? he said. "I see... I hear..." a weak but distinct voice sounded in the silence. - Perhaps you are unhappy that I put you to sleep and called you? - I'm not happy? Oh my god, I'm so happy! A blissful smile spread across her face. - The one who made you see in the water, did he trouble your soul? Are you afraid of him? "Yes, he has troubled my soul... yes, I am afraid of him. - Do not be afraid, he has no power over you ... I destroyed his power ... - You! Yes, it's you! Dear, if only you knew how much I love you! Inaudibly, like a light breath, she moved towards him, stretching out her pale, almost

transparent hands and looking at him with adoration, with delight, with selfless love.

But he backed away from her. An instant before, his calm face was distorted, as it were. suffering. - Do

you love me? You "so" love me! Unhappy! he whispered in horror. - Get out! Her hands dropped. Tears glistened in her eyes. A deep, heavy sigh passed and

froze. She wanted to say something, but she couldn't.

She melted, evaporated, the outlines of her face, her figures merged with the moonlight, and fled with him and disappeared without a trace.

Zakharyev-Ovinov desperately clutched his burning head with his hands. "She loves Me! He loves me with a passionate, earthly, fatal love!.. What about me? And I? Don't I love her? I love like a contemptible, pitiful slave of the flesh, I love with all my heart, with all my soul, I love with every drop of my blood!.. So that's what it means, that's why I'm here!.. So that's it, my last test!..»

VII

But what happened in Somonov's living room after Elena's disappearance? The Count Phoenix remained stunned for a few moments. Convinced of Elena's extraordinary sensitivity, of the happiest for him and necessary properties of both her bodily and spiritual organization, he expected to produce that evening a whole series of

most interesting experience. This exceptionally crafted young woman, so fast and skillfully prepared and tuned by him, was in his hands an obedient instrument with which an experienced master could dispose of it at will. His active thought, his ardent imagination created for him, so to speak, a whole program of performance, and he had to charm everyone with this performance, and above all to charm Potemkin.

And now this obedient, flexible in his hands, like wax, captivated by him is gone. Her absence confuses all calculations, changes the program.

However, it was not this circumstance that confused him and amazed him. After all, a few hours ago he did not know Elena, did not think about her. She was a happy surprise for him, and nothing more. The program with her participation was created suddenly, by inspiration. So, there was another program. We'll have to go back to this old program. It will be a little more difficult for him. Maybe maybe the impression will be less strong - that's all. And then he somehow catches up lost...

But she disappeared! Some unknown force destroyed his strength. He knew he needed something quite exceptional for this connection to be broken against his will. This circumstance alone amazed him, embarrassed him, deprived him for a time of his self-control and tranquility.

However, he quickly mastered himself and with full dignity and consciousness of his strength met Potemkin's gaze that turned to him.

"So this is your magician?" Well, show it to me, let's see what kind of bird it is, - Potemkin said to Somonov, - let me see if he will lead me ... but I would like him to lead me - death boring!..

Potemkin was bored all that day, from the very morning. He already stood up with his left foot. All of it angry, everything seemed to him vulgar, stupid, annoying, completely meaningless. Only in during a long morning conversation with the empress, he somewhat perked up.

He presented to her the wide ones created in his thoughts and imagination as he outlined them, plans for the structure of Novorossia.

He suddenly left with a clear, illumined eye into the depths of future times and fervently, eloquently prophesied to the Russian tsarina about the enormous significance for Russia of the new land he was creating.

He took the queen with him. As always, calm, reasonable, afraid of hobbies, she succumbed to the charm of this fire-breathing man and was imbued with faith in his prophecies.

She approved of all his decisions, plans, and with a confident, firm hand she inscribed on the bottom papers he sent: "Ekaterina".

He was animated and pleased, but as soon as he left her office, his warmth, inspiration, the revival instantly disappeared. He again felt engulfed in an atmosphere of lies, falsehood, intrigue and flattery. Disgust and boredom took possession of his soul. Long bored, long known, disgusting picture! And most importantly - a long time friend! There is nothing new, unexpected, original! After all, he knows all these people by heart, sees through them and despises them deeply, to the point of disgust ... Court women! - but he knows them too well, too, and all of them, despite their beauty and youth, became boring to him, as monotonous, every day served dish. It happened, and not so long ago, beauty and youth stopped him attention, forced to forget about everything else, captivated by themselves, stirred the blood, promised moments of oblivion and delight. Now no one promises him anything. He looks at these manno, skillfully dressed, coquettish beauties, each of which is ready to lavish before him his smiles, none of which dares to play before him the role of an impregnable fortress—he looks and sees in them only flaws, and his inquisitive, accustomed look immediately notices in them exactly what they are trying to hide by all means ... Potemkin is absent-minded. He

he looks frowningly, like a frowning cloud, he is impolite, even rude. It's stuffy to breathe nothing...

He left. And boredom haunts, and longing sucks. If only to find something, something completely stupid, wild, even ugly, but only new, unfamiliar, unexpected - if only to have fun!

He's here, and he seems to be promised something. Somonov, excited, enthusiastically tells him about the amazing experience: under the influence of a foreigner, the former Countess Sonnenfeld announced here, now, to everyone, about his arrival ... Yes, of course, she could not know that he would come. But after all, this is only an accident, and, finally, what is interesting here? What is interesting for him? Well, I guessed it, and that's it ... Besides, it was without him: he didn't see anything and did not hear...

Discharged to smithereens, showered with expensive stones, the man in front of him laid out nibbles. Somonov introduces him to a visiting magician. "Count

Phoenix - the devil knows what it is! .." Potemkin looked, saw a beautiful, energetic face, lively and penetrating black eyes, looking at him boldly. He casually nodded his head at the respectful bow of the foreigner, sneered contemptuously, and thought: "However, it must be a rogue!" Count Phoenix was not at all embarrassed, although the meaning of Potemkin's smile and even the essence of his thought were clear to him. In his melodic voice, in beautiful phrases, he expressed to the Russian nobleman that he was proud of the honor of being presented to him and that he would do everything to prove his deep respect for him, not in words, but in deeds. Potemkin did not find it necessary to stand on ceremony and respond to courtesy with courtesy. What did he care about "this rogue" and the opinion that "this rogue" will form about him. He was bored. If they show him something interesting, great! And if not, he will leave to be bored somewhere else ... He almost expressed it directly, demanding that he be shown something of interest

Noah. Then Earl Phoenix began to implement his original program.

"Your Grace," he said to Potemkin, "you are wrong to take me for a conjurer or something like that, you will very soon see your mistake, for which I do not pretend in any case. You want to see something out of a number of familiar, daily occurrences. If you want, I will show you a lot of this, but everything needs gradualness, consistency: not I will begin to show, but my wife.

"Your wife... Countess Phoenix... where is she?" Potemkin said with a smile that could destroy anyone. But she did not destroy the Count of Phoenix at all. With a graceful and dignified gesture, he pointed Potemkin to Lorenza, who was sitting nearby and calmly looking at the speakers. Potemkin looked and saw a lovely woman. He immediately, in the twinkling of an eye, made her a proper assessment. She was exactly his type. He just loved such an irregular, capricious beauty. He quickly walked over to Lorenza ... another minute - and he was already sitting next to her. The expression of boredom and proud contempt fled from his face...

She chirped something to him in her strange, funny, sweet French, and he listened intently. He kindly, patronizingly, affectionately smiled at her. The pretty sorceress bewitched him more and more every minute. "Well, your grace, would you like my wife to show something interesting and worthy of your attention?" asked the Count Phoenix. "She has already shown me the most interesting and charming—she has shown herself," said Potemkin, not looking up from Lorenza.

The Phoenix Count bowed, thanking him for the compliments. And now on his lips a glimpse a mocking and contemptuous smile.

"You are very kind, prince," Lorenza laughed, while her velvet eyes looked mysteriously and strangely at the "brightest one," "but if my husband promises something, he fulfills the promise, and when he needs my help, I I'm helping him... My friend," she turned to her husband, "if you like, you can start the experiment. The word "experience" flew around the living room in an instant. As before

Helena, so now Lorenza became the focus of all views. Something sudden happened. Count Phoenix leaned over to his wife, put his hands on her shoulders. Then Potemkin and everyone who was close by heard him quietly but commandingly order her: "Sleep!" He pressed his eyes with his forefinger, then opened them again and stepped back.

Lorenza is dead. Her eyes were open, but their look became very strange. The husband approached her again, lifted her from the chair. She remained motionless, like a statue, petrified. She made such a special and terrible impression and at the same time was like it is so pitiful that it became difficult and unpleasant for many.

Count Phoenix felt the general impression, quickly seated his wife in a chair and closed her eyes. He turned to Potemkin, Somonov and everyone around him.

"Please," he said, "leave her for a moment and follow me." Everyone went into the next room, with the exception of two ladies, as if chained to the spot with amazement and not taking their eyes off Lorenza, and Zakhariev-Ovinov, who was sitting motionless in the farthest and less illuminated corner of the living room. From the very appearance of Potemkin he remained on the sidelines, and no one paid any attention to him.

Meanwhile, Count Phoenix locked the door behind him and said: - We left her sleeping, but this is a special dream, during which a person has such abilities that he does not have during wakefulness. You will see that my wife, although apparently asleep, sees everything with her eyes closed, that she can even read man's thoughts.

- As if? exclaimed Potemkin. "Since you were the first to voice doubt in my words, Your Grace, I will ask you to make sure. Be so kind, think of something, decide what my wife should do, and she will guess your thoughts, do everything that you mentally order her to. What would you like to order her? - It's my business! Potemkin chuckled. - Yes, but in this case, no one but you will take part in the experiment, and in general, it seems to me, the experiment will be less convincing. I warn you that I will not follow you, I will stay here and let someone watch me. Potemkin surrendered. - Good! - he said. - Let's decide this: Countess Phoenix first of all should sing something to us, she probably has a lovely voice ... - You will judge this, she will sing for you ... - I don't want to bother her at all, and therefore let her, having finished singing, come out from the living room to the balcony, pick some flower and give it to me ... You see ... all this is very easy. Only you, sorcerer, stay here.

- Not only will I stay here, but I allow you to tie me up and guard at least a whole regiment - I won't move ... Go, your grace, go up to her and ask if she sees you and your thoughts? Then blow in her face. She wakes up and does everything.

- This is interesting, - said Potemkin, - my lords, let's go, let someone stay with the sorcerer.

However, no one wanted to stay. But Potemkin looked at everyone with a frown, and only a few remained. Then they all left, locking the doors behind them. Potemkin went up to Lorenza and, admiring her lovely, frozen face, said to her:

Belle comtesse, me voyes vous? Do you see me? - Yes I see you! whispered her pale lips. Then he thought about what she should do, and asked: - Do you see my thoughts? - I see ... He breathed into her face, she made a movement, opened her eyes and looked around her in amazement for several moments. At last she evidently woke up completely, got up from her chair,

wanted to go, but suddenly stopped and began to sing.

Her voice was not strong, but sonorous and tender. She sang an old Italian barcarolle. Everyone listened to her with pleasure. Potemkin stood in front of her, straightening up to his full mighty height, and admired her. The barcarolle is over. The last sound stopped. Lorenza held her head as if she remembered something, then quickly walked to the balcony, opened the glass door and returned a few moments later with a flower in her hand.

She went up to Potemkin, smiled charmingly, looked into his eyes with her temptations. with piercing eyes and gave the flower. He kissed her small, almost childish hand...

There was a commotion in the living room. Everyone was amazed, admired, almost all the ladies were simply horrified. Potemkin fell into thought, moved away from Lorenza and sank heavily into an armchair. -

Yes, it's interesting!.. It's God knows what it is! he whispered to himself in confusion. At the same instant, something made him turn around - and he saw Zakharyev-Ovinov next to him. He winced involuntarily.

- Prince! he exclaimed. - Are you here? - The minute is close! said the calm, so memorable voice. Potemkin wanted to say something, but seemed unable to figure it out right away. His eyes dropped. When he picked them up again, Zakhariev-Ovinov was no longer near him. He was no longer in the living room.

VIII

The program was a brilliant success. The Count Phoenix has won a complete victory. Not only general The public was interested in the highest degree, but Potemkin himself forgot his boredom.

He no longer mentally called the foreigner "rogue." He did not name him in any way, but with visible interest and animation he asked him questions and talked with him, from time to time glancing at the beautiful Lorenza, now surrounded by ladies, somewhat languid and tired, but only more prettier from this languor and fatigue. Count Phoenix spoke, apparently, only to Potemkin, but so loudly that everyone could hear his words.

He spoke in a calm, confident tone; his handsome face breathed a special animation and became more and more attractive. What was he talking about? Actually, about nothing and about a lot. If we were to write his words, they would be only fragments, some kind of hints, half-revelations. He hinted at his mysterious knowledge, to which, it seemed, there was no limit, at his past full of secrets and exceptional significance. A cold-blooded and calm listener should have drawn the conclusion from these words that this Count Phoenix is either half-mad, or a charlatan-deceiver, or a being, although in human form, but standing above people.

Where, however, to stop, under which of these three categories to bring him? Semi crazy? But in it unusually thin observation is noticeable. He is amazingly self-possessed. In the environment surrounding him, there are many people who are both calm and reasonable. And, finally, his first listener, His Serene Highness Prince Potemkin, is not the type to let himself be fooled by a half-mad man. In a word, if he is mad, it is by the kind of madness that draws sane people along with it.

A charlatan deceiver? So almost everyone here looked at him, and especially Potemkin. But he managed to overcome this opinion. With the help of two women, he showed miracles that could not be faked in any way. Well, is he really a great sorcerer, a conqueror of nature?..

The question remained open. The hour was already late, and the guests were leaving, taking with them a vague, indefinite, but strong impression, they were leaving, as it were, intoxicated, foggy. Finally, only a few people remained in Somonov's living room. Potemkin was still sitting, lounging in an armchair. There was a thoughtful, uncertain expression on his face. So he turned to the Count Phoenix: - What you and your beautiful wife showed us, and what you say, is very interesting.

Resno, but have you thought about where you showed all this and to whom you showed it? Count Phoenix looked him straight in the eyes with a smile. - What is there to think about? he said. - And here's what, dear sir, because we are barbarians, and therefore dangerous. We are interested and cannot stop until we consider ourselves satisfied. Do you think that we will let you go, disappear, only to tease our curiosity, only to embarrass us? "No, I don't think so, and if you remember, Your Grace, I began by saying that I

I can show you a lot of interesting things and that I want to prove to you, not in words, but in deeds, my deep respect for your person. I am ready to fulfill all your requirements, I promise not to hide anything from you. But, you see, I can't satisfy all your desires in one hour, in one evening, right away? Besides, ask our esteemed host what I was talking about with him today.

"What did he talk to you about, Count?" Potemkin asked Somonov. He, although not particularly willingly, explained everything about the proposed composition. chain.

Potemkin listened with interest. -

Well, what did you make your choice? he turned to the Count Phoenix. "The choice has been made," the sorcerer replied calmly. - The chain formed naturally, by itself. Everything that was superfluous, everything that interfered, is gone. Here now, in this room, are precisely those people with whom I can and must be frank, with whom I can and must dedicate much. Are you willing to form the chain necessary for the manifestation of certain powers?

Of course, everyone loudly and hastily expressed their desire.

"Only one person is missing here," Count Somonov exclaimed involuntarily and almost unconsciously, "one link in our chain is missing. The Phoenix Count's eyes twinkled. "I already noticed," he even said in a somewhat harsh voice, "that the chain should have formed naturally and freely. No one forced anyone to leave or stay. It is precisely those who must enter the chain that remain; only persons who have left are those who are either useless or even harmful to the formation of a real or strong chain.

- I'm here! Suddenly, a strange voice sounded.

Everyone involuntarily shuddered and turned around. The figure of Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov appeared at the drawing-room door. Slowly, with a calm step, he approached the speakers. A light color flared up on the face of the Phoenix Count and disappeared. A light color also flared up on Potemkin's face. Both of them felt uneasy, both started up, and both did not realize their feelings. - So, I am at your disposal, gentlemen, - said Count Phoenix, - when will we meet, where will we meet? Why delay! exclaimed Potemkin. "We must strike while the iron is hot!" It's really late tonight, it's time for everyone to sleep, and tomorrow evening we'll get together, and I think it's here, at your place, Count Alexander Sergeevich, right? Somonov was delighted. He was precisely afraid that Potemkin would order everyone to come to him and then it would turn out much worse. Count Alexander Sergeevich did not count on Potemkin at all. He invited him only as a result of the demand of his "divine guest". Potemkin could be a hindrance in business, but meanwhile nothing can be done about him. It's good that he is in some special, almost uncharacteristic state of mind ... Let everything be as it should be, as intended ... Thus, it was decided to get together the next evening, and everyone left. However, before parting, Count Phoenix suddenly decided that the chain was still incomplete and that Countess Sonnenfeld should be invited. Everyone agreed with this, but Prince Shchenyatev expressed particular pleasure. He is not himself

I remembered with joy that I had fallen into the chain.

IX

The next evening, at the appointed hour, everyone was assembled in Somonov's office. Even Potemkin did not keep himself waiting. He seemed to be a completely new person; there was no trace of his habitual carelessness. He turned into a hospitable simple man, was friendly and affectionate with everyone, and was especially affectionate with the beautiful Lorenza.

She seemed somewhat distracted and thoughtful. As for Countess Sonnenfeld, then she, on the contrary, was obviously in some kind of excited nervous state.

Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov appeared after everyone else, already at a time when everyone's attention was drawn to Count Phoenix. At his entrance, Elena turned pale, but immediately coped with herself. Even her hand did not tremble, touching his hand.

He moved away, and she continued to converse in Italian with Lorenza.

Potemkin, so to speak, opened the meeting. - Here we are all gathered!

he exclaimed. - And each of us, of course, suffers from great impatience. Mister sorcerer, why did you gather us together? Count Phoenix sat with his head bowed thoughtfully. With this appeal of Potemkin, he

he fixed his black, gleaming eyes on him and smiled, half ironically, half sadly. - Mr Wizard!

What a joke in this title! he exclaimed. - Not at all! Potemkin interrupted him. "Believe me, if I had intended to ridicule, I would not have come here today. Since yesterday, I have thought a lot about what I had to witness, and calling you a sorcerer, I called you what I call you in my thoughts. For me you are a sorcerer, and nothing more. Yes, we all do not know who you are.

The face of Count Phoenix turned pale, and on this beautiful, energetic face flashed something like sadness, like suffering. "Prince," he said, "what question are you asking me!" But after all, it is with this question that we must begin, in answering it, I can only prove how seriously I look at our meeting today. I am in a foreign country, among people who yesterday were completely

alien. But both I and my wife know very well that we are not here by chance. Are you asking me who I am? And if it is difficult for me to answer this question myself? I can speak only sincerely, without any hesitation. And this sincerity, I know it and feel it will connect and connect me with my new friends. Listen to my confession and judge for yourself about who I am. Where I was born, who my parents were, I don't remember. This question, of course, could not do not occupy me, but I have never learned anything definite. I only have vague assumptions so vague that there is nothing to talk about them. I spent the first years of my childhood in Medina, Arabia. There I was brought up under the name of Asharat. I lived in the Mufti's palace. I remember well that I always had three servants with me: one white and two black. With me was also a mentor-educator named Althotas. I always remember him as old, but strong and cheerful. This Althotas was the closest person to me, and I have always loved him very much. Later, in response to all my questions, Althotas told me that I had been left an orphan since I was three months old. age and that my parents were of high and noble birth and Christians. But I have never been able to get him to give their name, and also the place of my birth. However, from a few hints that escaped him, I can assume that I was born on Malta. Althotas cared a lot about my education. He himself was a real scientist and possessed the most versatile and profound knowledge. I had good abilities and I learned everything very quickly; but more than all the sciences, physics, botany and the medicine. In these sciences I made rapid progress. Althotas and I both wore Muslim clothes and seemed to belong to the Mohammedan religion. But it was only in appearance, but in reality we professed the true religion inscribed in our hearts: Mufti often visited me. He treated me with great kindness and, seems to have a lot of respect for my teacher. Althotas taught me most of the Oriental languages. He often spoke to me about the Egyptian pyramids, about those huge dungeons dug by the ancient Egyptians in order to keep them there and protect them from the insult of time. treasures of human knowledge. I was twelve years old when Althotas announced to me, that we must leave Medina and begin our journey. We arrived in Mecca and stopped at the sheriff's palace. I was clothed in magnificent clothes, and on the third day after On our arrival, my tutor introduced me to the sheriff, who was extremely kind to me. At the sight of this ruler, something special happened to me. I felt an extraordinary excitement and tenderness; began to cry with joy and noticed that the sheriff was barely refrains from tears. For three years I remained in Makkah, and scarcely a day I didn't call the sheriff, and every day he proved to me that he loves me more and more. But why does he love me so much, why do I love him so much - I did not know, and no one could do anything to me. explain ... For some reason it seemed to me that the Negro assigned to me and sleeping with me, knows a lot, and I began to question him. But the negro was silent and only once told me that if I have to reach Mecca, then I should be afraid of great misfortunes and what is worse all I have to fear is the city of Trebizond.

Once the sheriff came to me. I was extremely surprised, because until then this had never happened. He embraced me with special tenderness, told me that I must always worship God and that in this case, in the end, I would be happy and know my fate. Then he he wept bitterly, hugged me again, pouring his tears over me, and went out, saying: "Farewell, unfortunate son of nature!" On the same day, Althotas and I left Mecca and went to Egypt. I have visited these famous pyramids, which, to the casual observer, are nothing but an enormous mass of marble and granite. I got acquainted with the guardians and servants of various temples and generally penetrated to places where access to any traveler is closed. I learned a lot, learned and experienced a lot, then, accompanied by my tutor, I traveled for three years to various states of Africa and Asia. In 1766 I arrived on the island of Rhodes and then soon boarded a ship bound for Malta. We are there

were received with great courtesy, and Grand Master Pinto placed me and Althotas in his palace. Then, by order of the Grand Master, the cavalier d'Aquino, from the famous family of the princes of Caromanica, was assigned to me. He accompanied me everywhere. Then I put on a European dress for the first time and received the name of Count Cagliostro. Althotas also turned into a European, and I was amazed to see him in spiritual clothes, with a Maltese cross. I'm sure Grand Master Pinto knew about my origins. He often talked to me about the sheriff, but he never wanted to speak clearly. He was unfailingly kind to me and promised me a speedy promotion if I decided to join the Order of Malta. However, I was not able to accept his offer - I had a different fate ... In Malta, I lost my only friend and mentor, the wise Altothas. Before we parted, he begged me to fear God and love my neighbors. He assured me that soon I would see the fruits of the knowledge I had acquired with his help. And he was right. I had nothing else to do in Malta, and accompanied by the Chevalier d'Aquino, I began my travels again. We visited Sicily, the islands of the Archipelago, and finally found ourselves in Naples, the homeland of my companion. From here I went alone to Rome. Count Phoenix stopped and with shining eyes looked around his listeners, who were attentively following his story. Potemkin was about to say something, but the "sorcerer" warned him

dil.

"I feel," he exclaimed, "that you are all interested in the question, where did I get the funds for my life and travels? This question never crossed my mind until my trip to Rome. I never had to think about money. Althotas, and after him the Chevalier d'Aquino, were my bankers. If I needed money, I turned to them and never got a refusal. When I was about to go to Rome, d'Aquino gave me a very large sum, saying that the money belonged to me, but categorically refusing to say how or where. He added, handing me a package in the name of the banker Bellone, that when my funds were exhausted, this banker, on demand, would give me the amounts I needed. Soon I had to make sure that I was not deceived ... In Rome, I began to lead a very secluded life and study Italian, but not even two months had passed when a messenger from Cardinal Orsini came to me and announced to me that his eminence was very eager to meet with Count Cagliostro. I had to appear before the cardinal and was received by him with all signs of attention. A week later I was introduced to the pope, and since then I have become a very frequent visitor to the Vatican... The "magician" stopped again. But this time he did not fix his eyes on the listeners. He seemed to have suddenly forgotten everyone and everything. He gazed long and lovingly into the eyes of Lorenza, who was smiling kindly at him.

"I was then twenty-two years old," he began again, "a happy accident or ... no, why should I call a chance what was my fate!" It was not chance, but a happy fate that forced me to meet a lovely girl, still almost a child ... in a word, my Lorenza. We fell in love and got married. Since then we have been traveling together. We traveled all over Europe... My kind wife filled in my heart and in my life that emptiness that I felt since the eternal separation from Althotas. She is my true friend and helper. And the goal of my life is to dedicate my knowledge to the benefit of my neighbors, to heal ailments, to help those in need, to bring all kinds of help to those who turn to me for help, who need it. For the same I am here, within Russia. Here is the outer story of my life; I don't tell it often, and I've never told it with such confidence in my listeners as I do today. He fell silent. What was special and striking in this story, which Cagliostro repeated ten years later and confirmed in writing before the court of the papal inquisition? Absolutely nothing. This story could seem nothing more than the fiction of a visiting adventurer. In addition to hinting at

the mysterious and high origin of Asharat-Cagliostro-Phoenix, it contained nothing, absolutely nothing that could captivate the listeners, and this very hint could only completely destroy their confidence in the narrator. Meanwhile, everyone was engrossed. Meanwhile, this fantastic story produced some kind of magical, bewitching effect on everyone. Even Potemkin sat thoughtfully, dreamily and affectionately looking at Cagliostro-Phoenix. Even Elena forgot all her fear, all her disgust for this man and did not take her eyes off him.

Only Zakharyev-Ovinov's cold face expressed absolutely nothing, only his eyes were downcast. But then he picked them up, his brilliant gaze slid over the face of Cagliostro and again, as it were, went off into some distance. "Count Phoenix," he said, "you gave us the story of your life and now, based on your words, we know who you are, as far as you yourself know it. But still, we've come a long way... May I ask you some questions? "I am waiting for them," said Cagliostro, looking with unconscious and anxious amazement at this man, whose presence here was unpleasant to him. Yes, very annoying. And yet, despite all his secret means, he could not get rid of this presence. Why it was unpleasant to him and why he could not get rid of it - he did not know. Something incomprehensible prevented him from dwelling on this thought. As soon as the matter concerned Prince Zakharyev-Ovinov, Cagliostro did not think, did not reason - he only unconsciously felt.

"You said that you spent a long time in Egypt," Zakharyev-Ovinov began, "you mentioned the pyramids, your activities, that you penetrated where no one has access, that you learned a lot. Was it not there that you were initiated into the highest mysteries of nature? - Yes, there I was initiated ... - You promised to be sincere, not to hide anything from us, tell us about it

dedication.

Cagliostro's eyes gleamed, a color flared up on his face. He clutched his head with his hands and even got up from his chair in agitation. His face was beautiful, it seemed to find a breath on him.

novelty.

My God, what memories! he exclaimed. "Listen, my friends, I will tell you everything that can be said... My tutor Altotas, the great sage, one of the bearers of the highest knowledge that has been collected in mankind from the beginning of centuries to the present day, announced to me that he considers me sufficiently prepared and enough strong enough to penetrate the temple of knowledge and endure there the tests that everyone who wants to prove that he is able to bear on his shoulders a great, precious burden must be subjected to. But he didn't initiate me. He introduced me to another sage, a great hierophant. I was given all the instructions I needed. I had to cleanse myself and prepare for what awaited me. I prayed and fasted for a long time. And finally the day came when, in good conscience, I told my mentors that I felt ready ... Accompanied by an old hierophant and two still initiated young people, in the middle of the dead of night, we set off from ancient Memphis to the pyramid of Cheo the dog. I already knew this pyramid well and I must tell you that it is in vain that it is called the Cheop pyramid: its real builder was Thoth, or Hermes, the greatest of the sages of the world. He created it precisely in order to preserve in it for future centuries, for future millennia the treasures of his great knowledge. We approached the pyramid and stopped. The night was bright enough. I had already been here more than once and now I did not understand why we were stopping. I knew we were going into the pyramid, but there was no entrance from that side. However, I did not have to be surprised for long, or, rather, from that moment all that amazing and unexpected thing that I had to experience began. The hierophant struck one of the ancient stones at the base of the pyramid with a hammer - and suddenly the stone gave way, a small door appeared in front of us.

They blindfolded me and led me away. I know that we went down the stairs and descended for a long time. When my eyes were untied, I was in a vast hall, brightly lit from somewhere above. In front of me was a significant size and amazing ancient work sphinx. Never before had this mysterious statue struck me so. I couldn't take my eyes off him. The beautiful and a terrible, cold and mysterious human face. An incomprehensible being: and terrifying, and attracting to itself - the head of a woman, the body of a bull, the paws and claws of a lion and huge wings! .. The hierophant came up to me and put his hand on my shoulder. "My son," he said, "before go on, stop and look at this sphinx. At first glance, he is terrible, he can pretend to be a monster. And meanwhile it is a symbol of the deepest beauty and truth! This the sphinx is nothing but the title page of that great book you wish to read. it the first riddle, the great riddle! And it was not Oedipus, as it is said in the fable, who allowed her - another in her meaning, and I dare to tell you, because I hope that you will be worthy to read great book. If not..." Here he fell silent, and an involuntary trembling ran through my veins ... "Are you ready to listen to me?" - "Ready!" I said looking him straight in the eyes. and holding his gaze. Two initiates brought me at that moment a long white robe. And so, with their help, I threw off my robe, and there was nothing on me but this long tunic and sandals on the feet. Then the hierophant brought me closer to the sphinx and spoke: "Look, you see a human head, a woman's head. She personifies the human mind, which, before entering the arena of the future, must study the goals of its desires, the means to achieve them, the obstacles to be avoided, and the trials ahead ... The body of a bull means that a man, armed with knowledge, must, like a strong and strong bull, with tireless will and infinite patience pave the way step by step, leading to success or failure ... The lion's claws mean that in order to achieve the goal, planned by the mind, it is not enough to want, but one must dare, it is not enough to work, but one must smash and force their way through... Eagle wings, look, they are not raised, they are lowered and cover the sphinx with themselves - and so, with the same eagle wings as dense and impenetrable cover, you should hide your plans until the time comes it is time to act decisively and in the daring flight of an eagle to ascend to boundless heights! Be able, my son, to see rightly and to desire justly, be able to dare everything that your conscience allows you, be able to remain silent about your plans ... And if in front of your perseverance and patience, tomorrow is nothing but a continuation of the efforts made by you today, go firmly, go towards your goal... Seven geniuses, keepers of the sacred key that locks the past and opens the future, will put the crown of the "rulers of time" on your head, and you will become the successor of the great Hermes, just like Pythagoras, Plato and all wise magicians who once stood here, in the same place where you are now.

Having said this, the hierophant blindfolded me, and I heard him depart. someone took me by the hand, and we went. Again the stairs. A voice near my ear whispered to me: "Count the steps!" I counted twenty-two. We stopped. I heard the heavy door open and close behind us. A few moments passed and we all walked. Suddenly the one who led me by the hand, stopped me and exclaimed: "Stop, don't take a step, otherwise you will fly into a bottomless abyss! This the abyss surrounds the "temple of secrets" on all sides and protects it from the invasion of the uninitiated. We've come too early, our brothers haven't gathered yet, let's wait for them. But if you value life, stay still, cross your arms over your chest and keep your blindfolds on. until you are told to do so. Remember that you are now in our power, that you no longer belong to yourself and are obliged to obey us implicitly; just do it and by proving to us that you really are in control of yourself, you can avoid destruction and achieve everything that you aspire to. "I already know this and am ready for anything," I said. Gone a few moments. Then I was told: "Take off the bandage!" I took it off and my heart

trembled involuntarily. In front of me stood two creatures in the same long white robes as me, only one of them was girded with a gold ribbon, and the other with a silver one. One of these creatures had the head of a lion, and the other had a bull's head. I had not yet had time to peer into them, when the earth opened up almost at my very feet with a terrible noise, smoke swirled, and among this smoke I saw a rising skeleton. But this skeleton was as if alive, it moved and in its bone hands held a huge scythe, the tip of which shone, apparently heading straight for my chest. At the same instant, a dull, terrible voice rang out from under the ground: "Woe to the uninitiated, who dare to disturb the peace of the dead!" But I was no longer afraid of anything, I felt an uplift of spirit in myself, I felt strength and strength in my whole being. I was ready for any tests, for any spectacle. I calmly looked at the skeleton, grimacing terribly in front of me and baring its teeth at me, at the point of the scythe, almost already touching my chest ... I don't know how much time had passed, only suddenly the smoke from the ground began to rise even thicker, and when it cleared, no skeleton, no scythe, no monsters were gone. There were only two initiates with me, and one of them said to me in an affectionate voice: "You felt the cold of death and did not retreat, you saw horror and did not flinch! In your homeland, you could be considered a great hero, and posterity would honor your memory. But our courage and courage are still not enough. There is a quality incomparably higher, and this quality is voluntary humility that triumphs over vain pride. Are you able to win such a victory over yourself? "I don't know what I'm capable of, but I'm ready for anything," I replied. "In that case, you must crawl through this dungeon until you find yourself in the sanctuary where our brothers are waiting for you to give you knowledge and power in exchange for your humility. Take this lamp and crawl in darkness and loneliness.

I received the lamp. In front of me, as if by itself, a stone fell off, opening a narrow opening. I crawled into it. The stone noisily closed the hole. I am alone, in some kind of cold chimney, where you can neither stand nor sit down, where there is just enough space for a person to crawl. It seemed to me that I was in a coffin, in a gloomy grave. The earth surrounds me on all sides, almost compresses me. There is no return back. And what's ahead?! I'm crawling, I'm already starting to get tired - and there is no gap ... Deep silence, stale air, almost breathtaking. The weak light of my light bulb, now and then ready to go out, illuminates only the black earth, the damp earth. I stopped for a moment. What incredible, impossible silence! Hurry, hurry forward! I crawled again. When is the end? Where did I crawl? What if it's a trap? It seemed to me that hours passed, and still there was no end to my painful path. What if I don't go there? If I missed a turn, where should I go? I almost stopped at this assumption, since the earth was already positively compressing me to the point that I was almost unable to move. There is barely enough room for my body. And ahead of all the same darkness! The cold, damp earth squeezes me with its gloomy embrace... I almost suffocate. My heart is beating hard, my head is pounding. I'm dead, I have nowhere else to go. I am forgotten in a deep terrible grave. I am alone, hopelessly alone... no one sees me... no one hears me!.. Forgotten? But my lamp has not gone out, it illuminates me. My lamp is like God's eye watching me and seeing me in the depths of my cold grave... I am not alone, God is with me!.. And as soon as this thought dawned on me, I felt a deep calm. Amidst the imperturbable silence there was a rumble, something seemed to collapse in front of me, and I saw a light, a faint light, coming from somewhere far away. The earth no longer presses me - the vault above me has expanded. I can stand up. There is a staircase in front of me. I have to descend even deeper into immeasurable abysses. And I'm going down this staircase, counting the steps: seventy-eight. Here is the end. But what is it? The last step - and in front of me is a deep, gaping well. The light is dimmed, only my lamp barely disperses the darkness. I climbed back a few steps and began to look around. To the left, I noticed some kind of passage and again made out steps in it. There! There must be some way out there. Why did the sight of a bottomless

Is not God with me, and have I not voluntarily undergone all trials? I went ahead. And here is the staircase, and I again count the steps - there are twenty-two of them again; in front of me is a cast-iron grating, behind it is a gallery, on both sides of which there are images of sphinxes. I counted them - twelve on the right, twelve on the left. Standing between sphinxes

high tripods, fire burns on the tripods. Footsteps are heard. A person unknown to me the clothes of the hierophant comes to the grate and opens it. He looks at me with a kind smile. "Son of the earth," he said, "bless your coming. You escaped the abyss by opening "the way of the wise". Not many of those who, like you, aspired to wisdom, triumphed over these trials, many perished. You are guarded by the great Isis, and I hope she will bring you unharmed to the sanctuary where virtue receives its reward. I do not have hide from you that many more dangers lie ahead of you. But I am allowed to encourage you by explaining to you the symbols, the meaning of which strengthens the heart of man. Do you see these images inscribed on the walls of the gallery? Let's take a look at them. Listen to me, and if each my word will be imprinted in your memory, then when you return to earth, all the power of the rulers of the earth will be insignificant before your power! .. "

I looked into the face of the person who told me this, and an involuntary sacred thrill ran through my veins. This stern but beautiful face could not deceive. It is clear depicted deep wisdom, combined with ruthlessness. I was convinced, I knew everything my being, that a great moment has come for me. I understood that I would now be mysteries are revealed, those mysteries that I have long thought about, longed for. The penetrating gaze of the hierophant unknown to me evidently read my thoughts and understood my feelings. "Yes, I will reveal great secrets to you," he said in a solemn voice, "but first you must swear that you will be able to keep them, that you will never reveal them to anyone. Can you would you swear?" - "I swear!" I whispered. "Well, and know that if you become an oath-breaker, invisible vengeance will follow you step by step. It will overtake you wherever you are, even on the steps of the throne, it will overtake you and you will perish. Look, this is what awaits the perjurer! .. "At these words, I clearly heard some kind of a desperate cry, it was heard close, but I still did not see anything. Suddenly a few steps away the wall instantly opened up for me, and I saw a huge sphinx waving its iron paws of a man who writhed in terrible agony, emitting desperate groans. What is it this was how it was - I could not understand anything, I only looked at the disgusting sight with a feeling of pity and horror. The Sphinx was motionless, but meanwhile the gigantic paws were moving, the blood of the unfortunate victim was flowing, and soon there was a lifeless corpse in front of me, on whose face, with wide-open, out of their sockets eyes, froze the expression inexplicable horror and suffering ... And instantly everything disappeared - no sphinx, no corpse, nothing. There is a wall in front of me. "Thus perishes whoever breaks the oath given in this place! - the hierophant said. "Now listen!" And every word he uttered, like a hammer, was hammered into my brain and into my heart and imprinted in them forever.

Cagliostro was silent, and everyone was silent. Everyone sat with bated breath, amazed by this story, carried away in a land of wonders and horrors. This went on for several minutes.

- Count Phoenix! Zakharyev-Ovinov said at last. You see, we are all amazed, but remember the words of the Most Serene Prince: "We want to know to the end," and you stopped at the very interesting place. What did the hierophant tell you? What secrets did he reveal to you?

Cagliostro replied:

"I promised to tell you everything I can, and I keep my promise, but you heard that I took a terrible oath to keep silent about what I was preparing to find out. Do you really think that I will break it? - How! exclaimed Zakharyev-Ovinov with a slight grin. "So you're still under the oath?"

I thought, listening to you, that you have long since freed yourself from all bonds, that you have risen above everything and are at such a height where all oaths are forgotten, where all fear of revenge is destroyed. If not, if I am mistaken, if what you are conveying to us is really serious truth and you are subject to vengeance, remember, because it must overtake you wherever you are. Who knows, perhaps even here, in the country of the northern barbarians,

a vengeful eye follows your every step...

Cagliostro looked at him uneasily. "No, prince," he said, "I know what I'm doing. I had the right to tell you what shield But, mind you, only you - I do not tell this right and left!

- Why interrupt him! exclaimed Potemkin. "Let him talk, it's all very interesting and, in my opinion, full of meaning. Count Phoenix, tell us, without breaking your oaths, about further trials.

Cagliostro suddenly felt like a new surge of strength. He conquered that awkwardness, that incomprehensible anxiety that was aroused in him by the presence and words of Zakharyev-Ovinov. Now he proudly raised his beautiful head and looked directly into the eyes of the one who so embarrassed him. He met a bright and clear painfully penetrating look. This look seemed to awaken in him some forgotten memories. He knew that look—terrible, powerful, and cold. And he withstood it.

I have conquered the earth! he exclaimed. - I defeated the first element, I had to defeat air, water and fire and then endure the last trials, the most terrible of all, although in appearance the easiest. All this I will tell you, without fear of any vengeance and without recognizing myself as a perjurer! ..

X

Cagliostro fell silent, leaned back in his chair, and from his absent-minded, wandering gaze one could conclude that he had suddenly forgotten everything around him. But here it is again his voice:

- When the hierophant explained to me the meaning and significance of the images inscribed on the walls of the gallery of sphinxes, when we were at the very end of this gallery, he unlocked the iron door, and the following spectacle presented itself to my eyes: in front of me was another extremely long gallery, but narrow and dark, in the depths of which a flame burned brightly. Yes, in front of me in the distance was a whole sea of flames!.. "Son of the earth," said the hierophant, "I see confusion in your eyes, this flame frightens you. Meanwhile, you must go forward and not stop at any obstacles. Know that trials, obstacles, and even death can only frighten weak beings, for whom the temple of wisdom is forever closed. If fear can seize you from anything, why are you here? Look at me: I once passed through this flame as easily and freely as through a flower garden of roses. Go and do not return, for there is no return. I will lock this door, and you will knock on it in vain. Farewell or goodbye." With these words, the iron door closed behind me, and I was left alone. He was right: in the first minute, this flame boiling in front of me, into which I obviously had to rush, frightened me. I have never been a coward, but from childhood it was the fire that confused me. I quickly walked down the long gallery and stopped a few paces from the flames. From where it rose a little - I could not imagine, I saw only one thing, that in front of me was a gigantic fiery furnace and that I had to enter directly into it. The heat of the fire has already seized me, I involuntarily

new. A shiver ran through my limbs. But then a saving thought flashed through my head: what was the point of all this lesson of higher wisdom, which I now received in the gallery of sphinxes from the hierophant? After all, this lesson would be useless for a man sentenced to death. This is just a new test. How it will end, I don't know. But so far I have come out unscathed even from the first trials. Forward! And I firmly went straight to the fiery furnace. Another moment and I'll be on fire. But what is it? The fire, as it were, subsides, falls. Before me is a through iron floor. The flame is already down below this floor. The danger from fire is obviously diminishing every moment. I notice a fairly wide stone passage at my very feet and boldly step on it, picking up the skirts of my long clothes. I run over the flame, I run forward. And as I run, the flame rises behind me. Another moment - and the end of the trial by fire, another moment - and complete safety. But what is it? The flame behind me is two steps away from me, it rises higher and higher and higher, and in front, also two steps away, a dark water... Oh, the weakness of human nature! I started, I stopped, almost driven to despair. But that was for a moment. Did I have enough evidence of my safety?! I boldly stepped into the water and went. The water is getting higher and higher. Here it reaches me up to the neck, one more step - and I have to swim so as not to choke. Well, I'll swim ... Forward! .. Forward! .. However, I didn't even have to swim - my legs again felt solid ground under them, and soon I got out of the water. I felt the steps of the stairs, got up and found myself right in front of the door. Flames raging from behind illuminate this locked door... I wait. Why is it that no one opens it in front of me? I'll try to open it myself. Here is a picture of a lion's head. In the teeth of the lion there is a large metal ring in the form of a snake devouring its own tail. I grasped this ring with all my strength - and involuntarily cried out: in the twinkling of an eye I felt that the floor was receding under my feet. I grabbed the ring even harder with both hands and hung in the air. The flame went out. I am in total darkness. A moment, another - all is quiet. Well, I'll hang like that until I have the strength. And then? Then something will happen. Of course, salvation. And if not? From the depths of my consciousness something whispered to me: "Well, then, death!" But I had not yet had time to finish my thoughts when I felt some kind of touch on my feet. The iron floor was under me again. I released the ring from my stiff hands and the door opened. A light flashed before me, and I found myself among the people. Before I had time to look around, they blindfolded me and led me somewhere. We walked for a long, long time. I could hear the iron doors opening and shutting again in front of us. Finally we stopped and my eyes were untied. I found myself in a vast underground hall brightly lit by flames, in a large assembly, among which were the old hierophant who led me to the pyramid, and another hierophant who was with me in the gallery of sphinxes. I have no right to tell you what I saw in this hall, but I can convey the meaning of the speech with which the old hierophant addressed me. He told me: "Son of the earth, you considered yourself a scientist and wise and were proud of your knowledge, you heard that we possess treasures of secret sciences, the highest knowledge of the forces and laws of nature, and a desire burned in you to penetrate to us and receive our knowledge. Are you satisfied with the fulfillment of your rash desires? You are between us, in our sanctuary. You passed some tests and learned something. You should now clearly see that all these trials you have passed only seemed serious at first, but in essence they were a game. Where did your crazy ambition, your pride and your credulity lead you to? Here you are, tired, chilled, in wet clothes - and don't you understand how ridiculous you are?! You are our prisoner, you are in the hands of a secret society unknown to you, whose secrets and knowledge you wished to use. We did not call you, you yourself came to us and must be punished for your insolence, for your madness. You're in a dungeon from which you can't get out. You have heard about the trials to which we subject the neophytes, and now, at this moment, you are finally convinced that these trials are only a game, just a joke, as I myself told you ..

that this is all that you defeated everyone, achieved everything, and now the highest wisdom should open before you, and we will accept you into our midst as worthy, as equal to us? If you think this, then you are cruelly mistaken: you have not yet passed a single real test, you have not yet proved to us that you are worthy to be between us. You have proved only your boldness, but this is too little! However, we do not want your death at all, and it depends on you to prove to us that it was not idle curiosity and vanity alone that brought you here. Do you really want to be between us?" I replied that I wished, answered from the depths of my consciousness, and the tone of my answer obviously made an impression on everyone present. The hierophant spoke again: "According to the immutable, eternal laws of the hierarchy, I am called here to be the ruler. All the magicians that you see here, despite all their dedications and knowledge, they have achieved, obey me unquestioningly. Swear to me, too, that from this moment my word will be law for you, that your obedience to me will be slavish obedience, that you will not even allow yourself to stop for a moment and think: am I right or not, good or evil lies in my order. !.." – "I swear!" I said firmly. "Watch out! exclaimed the hierophant. - If you swore only with your tongue - woe to you! We read in hearts, we see thoughts - and lies are punished with death!" The hierophant went up to the table, took two golden goblets standing on it, and offered them to me. The cups were the same, and the liquid contained in them had the same dark color. "In one of these cups," said the hierophant, "the most harmless drink, in the other deadly poison. I order you to take one of them and immediately drink in one gulp!" I extended my hand. It didn't matter to me what I drank - life or death. I was in a special, excited state. I didn't think about anything and I wasn't afraid of anything. I took the cup and drank it at once. Pleasant warmth spilled over my lips, chilled limbs. The hierophant put his hand on my shoulder with a gentle smile. "You have drunk life," he said, "and you could not drink death. There is no poison in either cup..." Then they blindfolded me again and led me away. Again a door opened for me. I was told: "Stay still until you are convinced that complete silence surrounds you, then remove the bandage from your eyes." The door was locked. I heard footsteps receding, and now these steps froze. Everything was quiet. I tore off my bandage.

XI

I was in the midst of a beautiful hall, whose high arches were supported by huge granite columns, full of hieroglyphs carved on them. A bright light fell from somewhere above. Incense burners were placed on the mosaic floor, and their smoke carried fragrance throughout the hall. A purple curtain embroidered with gold was stretched out between the columns and lowered. A few steps away from me was a bed covered with a precious golden cloth. It was only at the sight of this bed that I felt all my weariness. I almost fell into the soft pillows. At that moment, I heard footsteps. Yes, they were steps. I saw four young and handsome people carrying a bath. They placed the tub next to me, bowed respectfully and asked me to take off my wet clothes and sit in the tub. I did it with pleasure. The warm aromatic moisture in which I immersed myself filled me with inexplicable bliss. When I took a bath and was about to put on the new clothes that had been brought to me, two of the young men suggested that I first let them strengthen me with what they called a massage. They told me that after the massage all traces of fatigue would disappear and I would feel especially strong and cheerful. I nodded my head to them in agreement. And then their quick skillful hands covered me with some kind of fatty, fragrant substance and began to rub me. At first, I even felt pain. It seemed to me that these two strong men would crush me and break my bones. But soon I became convinced that they were right, that their massage really had a firming, renewing effect on my entire body.

action. Finally, the massage was over, I was dried off, washed with fragrant essence, dressed in new clothes. And I, who had not long before felt an irresistible desire to lie down and rest, now, on the contrary, was as fresh and cheerful as never before in my life. I wanted to move, the forces of life were in full swing in me, but at the same time I felt a strong hunger and thirst. I didn't eat anything for about a day. The young people retired, carried away the bath, and a few moments later, next to my bed, in its place was a table laden with all kinds of food and drinks. My servants had no reason to beg me to start eating: I never satiated my appetite with great pleasure. The dishes seemed to me unusually tasty. But now my hunger is satiated, my thirst is quenched. The young acolytes carried away the table, and I was alone again in my luxurious bed. Some special blissful state fills me. I feel how hot, powerful blood boils in my veins and at the same time sweet languor spreads throughout my being. Vague images swarm before me, strings sound like strings in my soul, something seductive, sultry is dreaming ... The spirit is taken away from a new hunger, from a new thirst ... Everything that until then, at other moments, tempting, mysteriously rushed before me, everything that attracted me and against which I fought: earthly love, earthly beauty - all this again comes to me and calls, and beckons, and enchants. Suddenly, no one knows where, melodic sounds are heard... The music is closer, clearer... These sounds spoke the same thing that was inside me... These sounds called for pleasure, breathed all the temptations - and I involuntarily listened, and my heart involuntarily echoed them, sounded along with them. Thoughts were foggy. I forgot everything, the past disappeared... all the wise instructions of my tutor Althotas, all my knowledge, all my strength - everything disappeared. I called beauty, I called love, I called pleasure! And then the purple curtain rose in front of me, and among the smoke of the incense burners between the columns covered with golden hieroglyphs, I saw something. Yes, something was moving there, and although I could not understand, could not guess what it was, nevertheless, with all my soul I strove for this incomprehensible phenomenon, hurried it, waited impatiently for passion. I got up from my bed and quickly rushed there, to a wide strip of bright light pouring from above, behind which an incomprehensible, magical movement took place in the smoke of the incense burners ... I climbed the mosaic steps - and froze in amazement and delight. Among the streams of mysterious light and clouds of incense, I saw a crowd of such lovely women, which were hardly dreamed of even by the inflamed imagination of the worshipers of Mohammed. Yes, these were truly the most seductive houris of Mohammed the commodity of paradise ... What is it? Am I delirious? But no, it was not delirium, not a dream, it was heavenly visions... Nature created these daughters of temptation from flesh and blood and endowed them with all the charms of earthly, living, boldly domineering beauty... And each of these beauties seemed to be the highest, most beloved creature nature, looking at each of them, it was thought that nothing could be more beautiful, more seductive than her ... And yet next to her was another, not at all like her, but no less beautiful and seductive. And next to this other - the third, fourth ... and there was no end to beauty, temptation, charm. A variety of beauty and a variety of clothes: symbolic Egypt, sultry and mysterious India, Greece marvelous in its plastic simplicity - all countries of the world, all epochs of mankind sent me and showed me what they considered beautiful, what they clothed their favorite of their daughters ... I stood motionless, with a madly beating heart, with a burning head, and my greedy gaze insatiably followed this living vision, this embodied dream. A moment - and I was surrounded by a swarm of beauties; they looked into my eyes with caress, with greetings, they entangled me with garlands of fragrant fresh roses. I felt their sweet breath, the warmth of their young, virgin body... They whispered to me words of love, words of passion; they promised me all earthly bliss, which I had never known... My head was spinning, the ground was slipping from under my feet... just a moment more and I would be in their power, I would surrender to them, powerless and weak-willed... But suddenly something trembled in the depths of my consciousness. - something, and the thought, clear, bright and cold, flashed through my burning he

but death, not triumph, but humiliation! After all, I knew it, I knew it for a long time! With this knowledge I came here! Why did I allow all this hell, all these torments in me? Why did I call them - this spell of seduction? But no, I didn't call them... where did they come from? Why are they? Am I here for them? Are they promised to me at the end of the trial? Do they contain the reward of the conqueror of the flesh? Do they contain the secret of the highest knowledge of nature? Madman! After all, this beauty, these charms, these caresses, smiles and roses are only new trials! .. "With an instant effort of will, I mastered myself, and nothing but contempt could be read in my eyes, these affectionate, pleading, covered with passionate moisture eyes. And I did not run away from them like a coward, I did not hide from them like a powerless one. I seized the fragrant garlands wrapped around me, and tore them apart, and threw them into the beauties that surrounded me. "Go away, leave me, I don't need you... I'm not your slave!" I said firmly. The sound of music stopped. One by one, the daughters of temptation departed and hid in the clouds of incense. But each of them stopped in front of me, all illuminated by a streak of bright light, all sparkling with crazy, defiant beauty, and begged me with a passionate look, and beckoned me ... But I did not move from my place. And here I am alone - they are not! I turned around and saw behind me the calm, majestic figure of a gray-haired hierophant. The steel of a dagger flashed in his hand. "My son," he told me solemnly, "this time you have passed through the true test. If you could not stand it, if you succumbed to temptation, you would prove your shameful and criminal weakness... If I did not stand it, I would be a miserable deceiver in our eyes, a contemptible creature, staining the holiness and purity of our temple with his presence... You would be useless for life, and I would take your life with this dagger at the very moment of your fall! ..». He dropped the dagger, came up to me and hugged me. "Raise your head, conqueror of the flesh," he exclaimed, "and boldly look into the boundless realm of the spirit! You are worthy to read the great book of nature. The ancient and eternally young Isis will take off her veils for you, and you will see all her imperishable beauty, and you will enjoy this divine beauty ... Hello to you, my son! hello to you, my brother! .." The story was over, and Cagliostro, looking at his listeners, was immediately convinced that the goal had been achieved. Yes, he knew very well what he was doing and what he was striving for. It was just such a story, conveyed in that frank, ardent and mysterious tone, that was needed to make a proper impression on the only person about whom Cagliostro was now thinking.

This person, capable of a quick passion, but just as quickly and cooled down, had to be constantly and versatily carried away, not to let him cool down. The wise student of the Egyptian hierophants decided to act in this way, with all his dexterity and courage.

During the story, looking at Cagliostro, one might think that he did not notice anything. he hopes, he does not see anyone, that he is completely given over to his memories and only that which he depicts with an ardent word rises before him. And yet he didn't get carried away for a moment. His penetrating gaze vigilantly followed the slightest change in the expression of Potemkin's face, that is, the only person whom he had to captivate. And if Cagliostro stopped, he did it not because he had nothing to tell, but because his observations were over, that he was convinced that his goal had been achieved.

Now he knew Potemkin, studied him, now in his face, as in an open book, he could read his whole soul - clearly and unmistakably. He saw that he had succeeded in touching in this amazing man, whose exclusivity he well understood, exactly all the cherished strings that could sound to him in response. If, starting his story, Cagliostro still had doubts, now there were no doubts: the all-powerful Russian nobleman is, first of all, a mystic.

He could be amazed by the experience with Lorenza, but not for long. He could be interested in the story of the mysterious origin of Asharat, but only for a moment. But these trials in the dungeons of Egypt raised in him a whole new world of thoughts and sensations, disturbed his bored and languishing soul to the very depths.

"It is easy to summon a mighty spirit, but once it is summoned, it is not easy to cope with it and force him to serve the daring defiant!" - involuntarily flashed through Cagliostro's head ...

He decided, however, that he would cope with the mighty spirit he had summoned and force him to serve him. As for the rest of the listeners, there was nothing to think about them. Count Somonov and his friend, also a well-known rich man, Elagin, belonged to the "divine" Cagliostro in body and spirit and were ready to follow him not only to the Egyptian dungeons, but even to the very depths of hell.

End of introductory segment.

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