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Sergey Solovyov

Immortals. Alma and Scythe of Death



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Аннотация

НЕЗАКОННОЕ ПОТРЕБЛЕНИЕ НАРКОТИЧЕСКИХ СРЕДСТВ, ПСИХОТРОПНЫХ ВЕЩЕСТВ, ИХ АНАЛОГОВ ПРИЧИНЯЕТ ВРЕД ЗДОРОВЬЮ, ИХ НЕЗАКОННЫЙ ОБОРОТ ЗАПРЕЩЕН И ВЛЕЧЕТ УСТАНОВЛЕННУЮ ЗАКОНОДАТЕЛЬСТВОМ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬ. The second book from the series «Legends of the Russian North.» The one who wanted to make everyone happy, and be happy herself, herself became the Immortal Witch. The ministry did not bring her happiness, and Fear and Horror themselves went before her. The Army of the Dead was at her mercy, and war became her calling. «When they want to make all people kind, wise, free, abstinent, magnificent, they inevitably come to the desire to kill them all.» Anatole France.

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Sergey Solovyov

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**When they want to make all people kind, wise, free,
abstinent, magnificent, they inevitably come to the desire to
kill them all**

Anatole France

Prologue. Mortal horror

Three hundred dead walked in measured steps along forest paths, not knowing fatigue. With perseverance and indomitable ants, they seemed to have flown over fallen trees, bypassed hills and swamps, which had already begun to freeze, covered with a thin crust of pure ice. No complaints of fatigue or cries of joy were heard from these creatures. They did not make a sound, only rustling and cracking of branches and cones were heard in the morning forest. Quietly go, and they did not need to bypass simple obstacles, and it does not matter. And seeing and sensing these creatures, the forest dwellers hid in their holes, who had, or at least some shelters. Wild fear, or rather horror, grabbed all these places into his arms. The trees seemed to be frightened too, and rustled with still uninvited leaves much quieter, and as if they raised the branches higher, allowing uninvited guests to pass faster.

In the hands of these guests there were only bitch clubs, the dead could not manage other weapons. Neither sleep, nor water, nor food were needed by these terrible creatures, this unspoken horror of Priob and all of Siberia. And not only Siberia, but also the White Sea, and all places up to the distant mountains of the Hindu Kush.

It was Siberia, for even then, in those ancient times, this land was called by the name of one of the tribes of the Gantov-Savirs

or northerners, here someone heard and pronounced. Nearby were the Sayan Mountains, where the Sayan people, who were part of the Ghants, lived. And now, this small army was going through these places, to the borders of the steppe that were already close. The time was still closer to winter, although it was far from cracking frosts.

Several paths led this horde to the creatures of strangers in order to take revenge and calm down their hatred. The dead did not care, but their mistress was waiting for revenge.

Away from these roads, nevertheless fearing the dead, they walked, finding salvation and refuge here, hares, fallow deer, and even deer. The whole animal knew that no one would touch them here, although the smell of the dead from those walking was frightening, and even very much. And every creature longed to touch the mistress of this army. Even a simple touch cured all ailments, and the animals knew it.

But, wolves did not come close to the dead, they only sank their song, and hid in the thickets.

There was a huge elk, spreading the branches with horns wide, like harrow arable land. True, there was a thick bone plate between his lips, with two straps. And, this harness was controlled by a saddle, because the moose does not need a fur blanket and a belt. Of course, after all, the lord of the forest was not alone here, on his back, in the saddle, a tall girl was sitting.

The individuals walking through the forest were her, obedient only to her will by a terrible army. She kept behind this creepy

crowd, those who have long left the world of people.

Still, the girl was very good-looking, but she looked absolutely incredible. The leader was very young, but this did not bother anyone, at least of those who could be embarrassed here. Really, there were other people nearby, but apparently submissive to any Will of the Princess.

Apparently, she was not even seventeen years. But she was different from the other seven men and women who rode with her, the fact that her face was dazzling white, her eyes were black, and her lips were blue. Ashen hair completed this incredible look. A warrior riding a moose corrected the band with a huge scythe with a silver metal blade. The sword of excellent bronze hung on the left side, without interfering with the rider. The bandage with severed heads and smiling others after death did not bother her at all, even the dull knock of their blows against each other.

In the girl's retinue, Seven people followed her, no more and no less, as it followed according to ancient customs.

— Atey, Jaromir. Kurei, Salit, “she shouted,” are you not tired? We’ve been going for three days. You should rest.

“Your deck can endure, Princess. It remains very close, — answered the eldest of them, Atey.

Large snowflakes began to fall, some fell on the hair and face of the mistress. Only something they did not melt, as if there was no human warmth in the beauty. She just blinked, dropping stuck snowflakes from her white eyelashes.

The expression of the marble face did not even change, the girl corrected the sable of the sheepskin coat gate. and a huge triangular snake head suddenly leaned out of the gate of her knitted shirt. The motionless eyes of the monster looked around all the companions, then the reptile's body curled around the mistress's neck, but so gently that it did not prevent her from driving. The girl stroked the snake's head, in response the forked tongue touched her cheek. So a monstrous guard and froze without fear of a cold day.

Kurei looked at it calmly, Jaromir turned away while it was hard for him to look at such things.

“Nothing guy, get used to it,” said Atey quietly, “and we didn't get used to it right away

— It doesn't work. It's not human.

— The princess is above all, she is not a person for a long time. Yes, and we too. Remember how it is said:

“He who tasted them cannot live among mortals”

— Who knew that it would be so. Unusual, now in the dark, as an owl see. I can stay up for a whole week.

“You swore allegiance to her, and she saved you from death,” Atey recalled.

— Everything is so, foreman, everything is so...

Jaromir stroked the big head of his elk, the animal slightly turned his head to him and the rider put a cracker with salt in the big mouth of his favorite. He began to crisp quite. The young man decided to call his horse Horn. It seemed so quite funny.

All seven were on moose — the whole deck, four men and three women. A couple of draggers also moved behind them, they were already dragged by deer. Basically, there was honey, the food of the Princess, while the companions ate on the campaign with one fish.

— That's it, the day will be. You need to eat, — said the Princess, and raised her hand.

The dead on command just sat down and did not move. They were not disturbed by a weak snowball, but they did not please either. They just didn't feel anything. The princess deftly climbed the branches and settled in a huge hollow in the tree. Atey and Kurei stretched out the tent, Jaromir was handed the prison. Salit collected branches for the fire, all in business.

— Yes, I didn't catch her with this, — the young man didn't understand, — it never worked out. A wise thing. Let's weave baskets, catch them in traps.

“You can do it now. In the meantime, we will start the fire, but we will put the boiler to the fire. Don't forget the loot basket.

Jaromir approached the bank of the river. It was a long time before the ice, the water did not catch on with weak frost. Reeds on the shore grew densely, but only remained of it. tough thickets, and it was uncomfortable to go there. Finally, the fisherman saw a stone that had completely grown into the river sand, so that it was almost flush with the water in the river.

The young man looked carefully into the water, and he himself did not believe in what he saw — fish in the water column. Lazily

moving huge pike. One blow is sharp — and the fish weighing in the pud fluttered on the tip of the tackle. Another shock, and now the perch was caught halfway. Soon the basket was full, but Jaromir doubted whether he would lift this load! Almost half his weight! But the power became really heroic, so it easily brought to the fire. and didn't even sweat.

Atey looked at him and smiled, Kurei just grinned, adjusted his hat and turned away, moved the burning firewood in the fire with a wand. Salit said nothing, just looked at the catch and appreciated the prey of the new one.

“Put the fish down. Now we will clean it, — said Tiya, with an elusive movement taking the knife out of her sleeve.

— Well done, earner, Sana added as she crouched down nearby.

“Great catch,” Ana agreed.

Virgin warriors got down to business. All of them were also young, the eldest was no more than twenty veins.

The smell from the boiler was amazing, Atey gently touched the pieces with a spoon. I tried the food, and nodded my head approvingly. He began to lay out the long-awaited dinner on wooden plates.

— Good fish, — praised Kurei, — eat more, in reserve. Three more days to go. There will be no more halts.

“That's for sure,” Atey agreed, biting bitterly into the fish's tail.

Jaromir believed new friends, and was able to eat twice as

much as usual. Sana curiously watched the efforts of the young man, pushing Tia with her elbow, so that she would also see such a sight.

Now they had to sleep off, for a whole week of wakefulness. Everyone wrapped up to protect the heat. We fell asleep almost instantly. The Princess's terrible cry snatched them out of their sleep:

— Get up! We have to go!

Jaromir did not hear anything like that, only on the day when he died and was born again. The deck woke immediately, as if no one had slept. The tent was assembled, the blankets were tied to the backs of the dry, the cauldron was clean, and the Tsarevna's army moved on. The taiga was ending, and now the broad steppe extended in front of them. According to the sign of the Princess, a couple of dozen dead ran ahead of the detachment, deep into the lands of strangers.

— Atey, — the young man asked, — they don't speak? Which ones are sentinels? The living dead have nothing to say!

“They'll just come back if they find strangers. We'll understand.

But it all started just rapidly, so that no one expected.

The battle began suddenly, at the forest edge, arrows whistled, sometimes clay balls fell apart with a crash, fired from slings when they fell into the ground in front of the detachment.

The princess already smelled the smell of enemies, strangers, who were again there, who came to Her land. A scythe, known

to everyone in Siberia, was already spinning in the hand of the beauty — from Gandvik to Oum and the steppes of Semirechye, behind which were the steppes and deserts of eternally hungry strangers. This weapon drove even notorious villains from the Eastern Deserts into awe. There were no people who saw that blade and they weren't scared.

“Athey! she shouted to the brave warrior, who had already delivered the bow and arrow, — strangers should not go around the hill! Let everyone come with you, except for Kurei! But do not go to the trouble, do not bring the fight to swords! Look, don't lose your head! — and she threatened him with an oblique Death.

— Yes, Princess! he smiled, putting on a helmet made of wild boar fangs — whatever you want!

The huge Elk Ateya, Sliver, quickly dragged over the hill, and after him they went, the same on elk, and five boys and girls, already with bows at the ready

On the warrior's chest hung a band with five severed and smiling heads of the leaders of strangers, in good memory of her wars. All around the same neck wriggled, trying to warm up on the cold skin of the Princess, a snake, the well-known viper Skara. She rarely crawled away from the hostess, and now, as if feeling a battle, she opened her mouth wide, exposing her poisonous fangs. The dead Princess tried to calm down. The girl raised her head, and again stubborn imperishable snowflakes fell on her snow-white face.

Here strangers, in their misfortune, ran into her watch from the Dead, two of whom attacked a hundred aliens, and they fired arrows and stones in response. The dead were not afraid of anyone, did not understand or say anything, but they steadily followed all the orders of the Princess, and she instructed the dead servants to attack strangers wherever they were felt.

— You and I will lead the Dead, Kurei, — she called the remaining magician, holding a clove on a long handle in her hands, — But you watch the wagon train so that the Revived do not destroy everything.

“I’ll do anything, Princess. I’ll look after it properly,” nodded Kurei the Magi, putting on leather armor.

Magus put on his helmet and lowered his eyes. He knew what would happen now, and saw this more than once. Her rage, lissa, was always just boundless. Skara simply rose on her tail, and the Princess’s face turned black from anger and hatred of strangers.

The princess made a thunderous cry:

— Forward!

The Princess’s white braids fluttered in the wind. The leader of the Dead sent up her elk, Hot, who only shook his huge horns, obeying the mistress. The dead army did not lag behind, not paying attention to knots, or to fallen trees, bushes, and yes, and pits. The Dead did not even notice such trifles, jumping over them or crossing, sometimes even crawled over.

Satellites beat arrows from the hill, laying enemies, and yet entered into hand-to-hand combat. But, those who followed the

Princess possessed inhuman strength, and their opponents flew up almost a fathom from the blows of the tree sticks of the dead. But now, the Princess flew up to the enemies with the Scythe of Death.

Hot burst into their ranks, a terrible blade mowed down strangers, leaving no wounded. Blood flowed like a river, and that was no exaggeration. The Spit of Death, forged by the Magi from gray metal found in Taimyr, chopped up human flesh, as if it were cow oil or salty breasts. The hands, legs, heads of enemies fell on the ground in dozens, because the Princess was many times faster and stronger than an ordinary person. Some tried to fight, throwing in her darts and spears, from which she easily dodged. But here, the tallest and strongest, the leader is visible. rushed forward screaming and tried to hit Goryachy with his club. But the elk, standing on its hind legs, only hit the front legs with its hooves at once, crushing the madman's head. A dead body, with a limp head hanging off like a sliver from a log with an ax ular. Hands, heads, cut bodies remained behind the passing Princess, and the forked hooves of her elk only drove the bloodless flesh deeper into the ground.

Kurei fought nearby, beating off blows with a shaft, and punching the skulls of strangers with cloves, easily piercing their leather helmets. The matter was familiar to him — he had been fighting in the Deck of the Princess for thirty years. But the Magi came to watch. that the Dead would not dare to call — prey was needed.

The dead raised and lowered their clubs at a terrifying speed, turning strangers simply into howling pieces of meat, driving these remains into snow-covered steppe grass. A terrible army crowded the army of strangers, knocking down the remnants of those who wanted and could fight. The dead, like boiling water against the snow, and their opponents melted, only turned not into water, but into bloody mucus under the feet of the Immortal Army.

The companions fought on the hill, preventing those strangers who hit the run from hiding. Jaromir had not seen before that people could shoot bows like that. The arrows of those who tasted them overtook the enemies and for four hundred fathoms! The figure of a person was seen much less than a children's toy, but arrows overtook them. The satellites did not spare anyone, this was not sung in the ancient songs of the giants. Sana, without even thinking, shot a whole family, and the corpses were lying near the red tape thrown by strangers.

The battle was terrible, because strangers tried to protect their wagons and tents, a camp where there were women and children. But everything was in vain, and the Tsarevna's army approached the camp, closed with slingshots and drags.

The princess stopped the Dead and drove out on Hot to the front of her rati. Even looking at the Dead now was scary — everyone was covered from head to toe with the blood of their victims. Their silence was even more monstrous. They did not show themselves without an order.

Then the magician of strangers rose to meet, who decided to test his luck. With a rod hung with bells in one hand and a stone ax in the other, an elderly man with a gray beard stepped forward. He squeezed between the drags, and leaning on the staff, quickly approached the warrior, with a blackened face from anger.

“Dead Princess! I ask for mercy for those who survived! The chief, Erlan, was killed by you. It was he who did not obey the covenants and went on a raid. Now he is punished, the soldiers died and we will give any tribute.

— Stop lying, Magi! I was overly patient. You violated my command.

“The First Princess forgave people,” the old man whispered quietly, his head down.

“I’m not Ilse! ‘a loud voice rang out, and Skara hissed and rose above the lady’s head. She opened her mouth, and buried poison from terrible fangs.

“You can’t kill everyone,” the sage tried to reason with the enraged Princess.

— Ten will remain. With you, Magi. That’s my will.

And with these words, the Princess sent the Hot One forward, and he jumped over the weak fence. Jaromir was simply stunned, never seeing such a thing. It can be seen that before the lady fought only a quarter of the strength. The Spit of Death curled as if it were dragonfly wings, but under these swings blood gushed like a spring stream. The massacre did not take much time, and the Princess was not at all tired. Having finished this business,

familiar to her, the warrior, with her hands covered in blood to the elbow, pulled out a red tape with deer trying to rest. The startled animals' futile attempts failed to impress the white-faced witch. She just pulled the lines, so much so that the horned ones fell to the ground. Then, knocking off his hooves. they jumped up, but the Princess, touching their heads, reassured the unfortunate animals with one touch.

Her face from black became already light blue, you can see the rage was leaving. And the mistress dragged seven children, like a mother cat dragging kittens. Her hands held all three or four in each of their small palms. She put them on red tape. The magician Kurei also approached them, but with a bowl of honey in his hands. The last by the legs of the Princess dragged two women, half dead from fear.

— Well. Magi, now you get it? she asked calmly.

— Yes. and so are our people. Here, drink from the road, lady! and he held out the golden cup. And next to it stood a tavern with water.

The princess nodded, thanks to a caring companion, and stretched out her hands. Kurey slowly poured water, and the cool liquid turned red, falling to the ground, washing off the blood that had already begun to stick together. She washed her face, quickly took out a copper mirror, and began to draw an almost human face for herself. True, it turned out even worse. Carmine lips, round blush bright red on cheekbones. On an absolutely white face, it looked just incredible, but, amusingly, the girls and

women of the giants began to decorate themselves as well. Magus was now lost sometimes, although Skara always helped out.

— Take a dozen reindeer and leave, Alma ordered. still standing magi.

— I will ask the mistress to have mercy, and melt your frozen heart. Ella will be kind to you! shouted to her the magi of strangers at parting.

All those ten people who remained from a large tribe of strangers, from several clans, with little hope of surviving in the winter steppe, went into the distance.

Kurei, with a bloody clove in his hand, sat astride, inspecting the terrible battlefield. The man carefully hid the golden bowl of the Princess in his sum, removed the korchaga. He, without repairing, stepped over two torn bodies, a skin torn alive by Alma in the fever of battle. and lying now with a stupid tourniquet.

— Well, this... — the magician was upset, looking at the mess — well. I hope she has already forgotten about it.

There were more chopped bodies on the cut field, and they became useless. But those three whom he killed could be used, and the economic man carefully plucked them aside, laid them flat, prepared them for revival. Sensible of weapons, what is better, put in heaps. Kurei, looking around, drove up to the Princess, the carmine lips spread apart, exposing the pearl teeth of the beauty, black eyes looked, almost without blinking.

— Collect all the prey, magi. We need a lot.

Cooray just shrugged. Everything has already been collected,

a lot of good, but I was not going to argue with the Lady. There were many things to do, and so was the booty. Satellites laid out bronze, bows with arrows, suitable weapons. Felt, excellent work, was built in perfect order.

They found a lot of furs, took two magnificent yurts for themselves, a whole herd of deer, which was looked after by Sana, Tia and Ana. Animals looked around fearfully, straying away from dead bodies and blood that began to thicken and freeze. The princess dismounted, and wandered around the battlefield, looking for the loss. Finally, there was her loud exclamation, an instant blow with a sword, and a severed head pumped in a thin girl's hand.

— Kurei, you found a case, — laughed Atey, knocking his elbow to his side.

The wolf just sighed, threw his sum on his chest. Well, no luck... Others will rest, and work was waiting for him — to hang a new head on the belt. It's good that like last time, at least the scarecrow did not have to be made from the skin.

Snakebite, damned witch

Mother's death

This night was alarming. The parent slept badly that night, the woman tossed and turned endlessly under the deer cover. It pressed hard on the chest, the unfortunate suffocated, and her legs, even in woolen stockings, were numb and cold. I fell asleep so hard, heard my daughter moving, and a small viper curled up next to her. The unfortunate mother tried to insist that she would throw out a new toy. yes, where it hit such tears that it agreed, and allowed to leave at home. She only ordered that she herself would follow, so that inadvertently the snake would not fall under her feet. The girl smiled, agreeing to everything, understandably nodded her head, with funny clumps of hair. She has only seven curls of very blond hair left on her head, like all the giants that boys have, like girls. In response, she kissed her daughter, she always saw how the girl took care of her.

She was the wife of Res, the brother of their leader Child, and poor Alma only one was able to survive out of five children. Therefore, for a woman, their child was the only joy. And here, inappropriately, the disease fell on the tribe in their village. After a severe fever, Asna could not recover for a long time, and her heart began to hurt. Often heavy behind the sternum, but

drinking helped the magician Uday, immediately removed the aches and breathed easier. Skilled herbalist, caring. How many sick people came out. And she almost helped, but so far she could not fully recover.

But now, she fell asleep, as if she had fallen into deep blackness. It seems that I did not see anything, and then, as if the curtain was removed before my eyes. Blackness disappeared, and Asna looked as if in a clean window, and not from a fish bubble, but a hundred times more transparent. I dreamed incomprehensible, as if her daughter, little Alma, had grown up, got into an unknown place, her clothes were incredible, in a variety of colors.

One that no one here has ever seen — as if the flowers had blossomed. Shoes — in three straps, as if there is nothing. Her daughter ate only honey... And others who were nearby ate wonderful food. The food comes out of the box, ready and hot itself... But all the rest is small growth, Alma is only reached to the shoulder. And next to his daughter, a young man, to what he is smart and prigozhy, it is immediately clear that he is a magician. And also tall and slender, like all the giants. But he is cut and dressed — very funny and looks like Alma with his face. And my daughter looks at him, she cannot see enough, and there are six more beauties around. But the young man only welcomes Alma. Asna even heard the name when she turned to Alma's chosen one:

— Ilya, we have to go.

Here she was completely delighted, and the woman was frightened — but how, Alma got a guy with that name, a name like one of the Twins — Ull or Ill. Here you will be scared... Asna woke up with difficulty, squeezed her chest so that she could not breathe. She could only whisper:

— Alma...

— What is mommy, — the girl whispered quietly in fright, sitting down nearby, — I'll bring you kvass now... Everything will be fine.

— Don't, don't, — the woman whispered, — forgive me, I'm leaving...

— No, don't die mommy! — and Alma hugged the woman, kissing her cheeks, forehead and lips.

— I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm guilty... Try your best to stay if you are destined...

— Good, good... Everything. as you like, don't just die!

— And I saw your betrothed... Not from our places as if: He is a magician, for sure. And his name is remembered — Ilya.

Then she only whispered something, and could feel her hands and feet getting cold, and heard Alma crying, and this was the last thing she could understand.

Stepmother and stepdaughter

Res looked at his dead wife, at Alma, who was sitting inconsolably nearby. It was hard on my heart, but you can't do anything. Show his pain when others look at him — he could not. I didn't want to be weak in front of people. I also noticed a snake wrapped around the baby's neck, but did not want to interfere. Like — well, good. Did any of the giants offend the snakes? So is their progenitor, Ull-Veles was born from a snake. Let my daughter mess around if it makes her feel better.

— Let's go, Alma. let's go daughter, — and took her in his arms, — now the magi's mother will be prepared on the last journey. The road is long, not simple. What could I walk along the ice bridge, where the Twins will meet her, Veles da Elena the Beautiful. Elena will light a light and illuminate the path, and Veles will lead to God's abode, where souls are waiting for incarnation. Mom will come back later.

— And if I try to resurrect her, I will go to Ella — Elena, I will ask to let my mother back?

— Rarely can even the strongest witch get to that monastery in a dream. Basically, they lose their minds, and in reality they dream like poor Chrysa. She also tried to resurrect her friend, but could not go that way. And now she has become a fool.

— And if you ask Ilsa? Dead Princess? She also raises the dead?

“Would you like that?” Ilsa is kind, like Ella herself, but she cannot resurrect the deceased. He can heal, who is still alive. And so, the dead will remain dead, he will just walk, but do a simple job that the Princess will order.

Alma sat and listened, even tears stopped dripping from her eyes. She could not imagine this. No, I heard all the giants talking about Ilsa’s Dead Rati, and I saw the Princess herself. Her beautiful eyes cannot be torn off, but her face is always sad, and she will never smile. And the face is so white, and the lips are blue. But he loves children very much. Only now, she did not have time to come to their village to cure her mother, and Alma burst into tears again and hugged her father. Everyone knew that the Princess visits all the villages and fortresses in Priobye in turn, helping the suffering.

“Let’s go Alma, lay you down,” said the father, taking his daughter to other rooms.

The girl lay down on a straw mattress, put a pillow of soft sheep’s wool under her head, and her father wrapped her in a felt blanket. She looked at him, thinking that she would be left again, but a loved one was sitting next to her, and the girl calmed down and finally fell asleep.

This day has come, a sad day of farewell and funeral. Asna’s body was carried out on a stretcher so that her relatives could say goodbye to the departed one. They took turns coming up memorising expensive traits, Alma and Res were here too. Then

the husband covered his dead face with a wooden mask, and the servants of the Magus Nargiz carried the body into the forest. The funeral custom of this kind of giants was not so simple — men were buried in the canopy of trees on canopies, placing the body in a wooden deck. Women and children were buried in the hollows of huge trees.

In this tribe, the Magi taught that the first people were created by the God of Heaven and the Goddess of Water from trees, having cut a log. In other tribes, further south, it was believed that the gods created people from the dust of the earth. Therefore, the southerners buried their dead, coating with clay. But for some southerners, the custom was even more complicated. The body was boiled in a huge cauldron until the meat and flesh moved away from the bones. Then the bones were covered with clay, painted and dressed in new clothes. They made a new body for the dead, preparing for the revival promised by Ella.

Res himself lifted his wife's body, which became so light and naughty. The mask tree seemed to become part of his Asna, and she is part of this tree. The hollow was prepared, and he sat his wife on a seat in the depths of the trunk, and put a pot of drink on the road to the Ice Bridge. But here, the body was hidden in a tree, and music began to play. The stub concealed the burial site and the burial site was now not visible.

Horns and pipes screamed piercingly, and witches and magi began to dance a prayer, praising the Twin Gods with a plexus of arms and legs, to the melody that drove any person crazy. There

were tables for commemoration, and relatives ate and drank, in memory of Asna.

Alma was sitting near her father, and her snake Skara was quietly lying in a bag, warmed up on the owner's body. The girl ate with difficulty, she was sad and hurt. Honestly, for several months she felt that her mother was dying, but she still wanted that this would not happen. Every night she listened, she breathes or not, prepared a healing decoction. I walked with my mother by the hand so as not to leave her alone. Helped at home in everything that would rest more. Even a decoction of willow bark, which the girl did herself every day, adding mint and lily of the valley, did not help. Even the pigeon fried leg, so smelly, lying in front of her, did not please Alma. Even worse was what she had in front of her eyes.

An unfamiliar girl was sitting next to her father, imposing ritual food on him, and pouring mead from a large clay reaper into his wooden bucket.

Witch Agna

They lived near a fortified village, and there their family had its own corner. But rarely did anyone stay in the fortress house for a long time, everyone tried to live on their estates, where it was possible to freely keep cows, deer and elk. So Res's house was a large estate, with sheds and a stable, and now he brought a new wife into the house, but not just a wife, but the widow of a deceased friend with two daughters. The woman's name was Iya and the girls were Fita and Vita. Both were the same age as Alma, and she thought at first that they would become friends.

But, somehow it didn't work out very much yet. The girl kept thinking that if she were a boy, it would be easier, now she would live in a squad house. But she also studied, with Agna — a witch, with the terrible Agna-herbalist.

The girl was now walking along the forest path, brushing off mosquitoes and gadflies with a twig, stepped over a log, and now she was pushing through the bushes, wincing from injections. She made a small hook to bypass a fallen huge tree, and accidentally fell into a forest clearing. She often went to the forest for mushrooms and berries, and was not afraid to get lost. All forest dwellers loved the forest, and the forest loved them. Alma knew how to walk in among the trees very quietly and carefully, moved the twig away from her face. And then something happened that was impossible to expect.

The girl saw a black court, about which she had heard a lot before, and considered it a fairy tale. In the clearing, the crows stood in a semicircle, like warriors at a gathering, in the middle sat a hoarse crow, hanging its beak to the ground itself, three raven guards stood nearby. But, karkala and karkala, it just flooded in its own way, like a crow. When the first finished, the second began, and then the third. Then they croaked in turn, and stepped aside, and the hardest thing began... The crows began to approach the convict and began to beat the crow with their beaks on the head in turn.

The girl could not look at it, and just ran away, and did not look back. Not once. She was breathing heavily, and finally returned to the path leading to the house of the healer

Alma was now walking back through the forest, when suddenly a crow flew after her, as if to a friend, croaked, attracting attention, trying to say visibly, curled over the bush, and still led to a wrecked bird. The crow bounced, and seemed to point to the sore wing. The messenger bird sat down nearby, looking after the girl. Alma did not know what to do, looked at one, then another bird, wide open beaks. The crows only sparkled with their eyes, and suddenly the one that led Alma carefully took the witch's student by the hand and pulled her to the sick crow.

— Stroke? she asked doubtfully, bringing her fingers gently to the grey feathers.

— Carr! — the answer could only be that. The crows could not speak humanly.

The girl stroked the crow on the head, then on the injured wing. She got a little bit into her head, but then the pain passed, and she looked at the bird, the wing was already in order. Two crows now croaked endlessly, then rose into the sky, and made a circle over the surprised Alma.

It was not far from Agna's estate, and the girl saw a familiar wattle tree surrounding the buildings. The herder's dog, Serko, was already rushing to her, wanting to say hello, and he would be fashionable to play. She patted the shaggy dog's head, and the dog poked into her hand, remembering the smell of the guest.

— Hello, Alma! — a witch came out on the porch, with her head wrapped in a scarf, in spite of the heat. He was dressed in a regular linen knitted dress, with an apron tied around his belt.

Agna widowed for a long time, her husband died in battle, with strangers, three years ago. But she coped, although there were enough cases.

Next, a flock of the hostess's daughters fell out, and hung on Alma's neck. Skara, like a curious creature, stuck her head out of the bag and hid back.

— Leave the guest alone! Gela, Zia and Mila! Play in the yard! And Serco will look after you!

“All right, mommy! — Mila answered for all, and dragged the sisters to the lawn, and after them, waving his tail, went to do the dog business.

Alma smiled as she looked on. They live well, peacefully and pleasantly, always doing without screams in this estate.

She even envied a little, everything is completely wrong with Fita and Vita and their mother Iya. I remembered the usual cry of my stepmother:

“The witch is damned, the snake is under the blood!

They sat down on a bench next to the house. Wonderful witch flowers also grew nearby, with a slight breeze, the flowers began to dance, bent and unbend the stems, tilted the inflorescences, and seemed to hug each other with green leaves.

“And the flowers are alive,” Agna said quietly, “don’t doubt it, Alma.

— Can the crows speak?

— Everyone knows how, every living creature. Well, we start working with herbs.

The lesson lasted a long time, and the mentor studied with a diligent student for a long time and persistently. The girl was intelligent, and she was interested in everything. Alma now cut the grass with a flint knife.

— Remember — a flint knife is better than a copper one, the grass remains stronger. Look, and she showed a copper blade with oxides.

— Well, — the girl seriously nodded to the mentor in response, continuing to work. Skara wrapped herself around the wrist of her left hand, not interfering with the hard work. Agna just shook her head at it.

The sun began to decline, and I had to go home. Alma gathered, and slowly moved along the forest path.

Goose Alma saves the village

There was a lot of work for Almy- to apply water, sweep out the house, grind grain. The bread was baked more often by the stepmother, and he left the oven, fine and baked.

The girl fed the bird, putting the chopped nettle in a trough. Suddenly something poked her in the leg.

— Ha — Ga — Ga, — the goose gave an offended voice.

— Come on, get in, 'she replied, and picked up the bird.

He pinched Alma lightly, politely greeting the hostess, then spread his wings and raised his tail higher, and the bird was next to the trough with food, and began to grab food with its beak. There were two wild cats nearby, which rubbed against the girl's leg, and immediately rushed off, raising their tails. On the doorstep of the house stood Fita and Vita with stones in their hands.

“Why?” — the girl was indignant, — what prevented the cats?

“The birds will be devoured,” Fita frowned, but threw a stone on the ground.

— Exactly. Forest cats — they are evil, — even Vita noticed, proudly turning her back to Alma.

She just sighed bitterly, and again began to work. There were many cases. Then again there was a cry in the house, Alma ran to the door, and her snake flew into the girl's face. I caught it and hid my favorite in a sum on her side. I was always to blame. Well,

everything is better than how to get a hot poker in the leg.

— Oh, you damn witch, a snake under the deck! ‘the stepmother shouted, blushing with anger.

— She doesn’t touch anyone... ‘the girl tried to intercede for Skara.

“Come here. Vita’s stomach hurts again.

— Now, let’s fly.

Alma went to her potions, scattered on clay pots. All this wealth was on the shelves, in true order, each pot was marked with different signs. She ran her fingers through the signs and removed the necessary drug from the shelf. Birch coal is great for stomach pain, and the witch’s student stirred tar coal with water, poured the potion into a wooden cup. Alma brought the medicine to Vita, who was lying on the bench.

— Now half drink, and the other — in the evening, — she said sick.

— Okay, — the sister answered reluctantly, but drank a drink.

The stepmother looked attentively at the treatment, without saying a word of gratitude, but did not forget to remind about the work:

— We also need to ask the cows food.

So there were enough things to do, except for those days when Alma studied with Agna. Nobody dared to argue with the witch, it is more expensive for themselves. The work of the bull is over, everyone was waiting for dinner, wheat porridge with cow oil and cottage cheese. And drinking from dry forest berries.

Resa, the father of the family, was not at home as always. Now he led twenty people on plows along the Ob with goods to Gandvik, for great bargaining. So Iya became the head of the house, and she also kept order.

Alma ate with pleasure, during the day of work the desire to eat did not disappear. The wooden bowl was freed from porridge, and so was the spoon. Then, after the meal, it was always the turn to wash the unwise dishes in the house. Fita and Vita did not wash their hands.

It was time to sleep, and the house was locked for the night. Alma also went to bed. The mattress, stuffed with fresh grass, took the girl in its cozy embrace, and the felt blanket quickly warmed up. But for some reason the dream was alarming, she saw all the terrible things. And then through the drag there was an angry eggnog of a goose:

— Ha-Ha-Ga!

Alma jumped up, but the dog did not bark and apparently was already killed. She ran to wake her stepmother and sisters. They hardly wiped their eyes, did not understand what was the matter. But, then they began to break into the house, trying to break the doors. Iya quickly realized what was the matter. First of all, her hand reached for a rope tied to a bill, a copper plate. A deafening ringing rang very close, and after a couple of seconds the ringing spread throughout the area. But before help, you had to save yourself.

— Quickly, in the underground! 'the stepmother shouted.

The stepmother grabbed the coveted lark with the most expensive property, and ran down, the girls rushed after her. The shield of the secret passage leaned back, Alma lit an oil lamp, illuminating a long-dug underground passage. They entered there, and closed the passage with a shield, and pulling out a rope, closed the strong shield of the secret passage. Now they crawled to the exit, to the bank of the river, where the house stood — the fortress. But now, in clothes smeared in the ground, they rushed to the fortress. Warriors were already gathering here, new and new giants ran up with spears and shields, bows and arrows. The Res family was noticed by one of the elders, Gooday.

“Hello, beauties. Have you heard your first call? ‘he asked.

— Yes, for sure, — answered the stepmother, — they began to break into our house. I hit, and we ran.

— Thank you. Sit down, wait. Strangers attacked us. But nothing, we’ll fight back.

The soldiers let the family go along the bridges to the fortress, and they themselves stood guard. The rest, about fifty armed people, ran faster than the wind to the estates of the village.

Alma sat down on the bench, and roaring with her snake. Scarah then wrapped around her wrist, becoming like a bizarre gray-sulfur bracelet, then crawled away

around the body, making the girl giggle, and fit around her neck with a wonderful necklace. Fita and Vita lay nearby, but no longer climbed and did not interfere. Iya measured the earthen floor with steps, sometimes looking at her stepdaughter.

“Sleep better. “It’ll be over soon,” she said quietly.

The woman sat on her three-legged stool, and looked at her daughters and stepdaughter who had fallen asleep. She stroked the head of Fit and Vita, then, in thoughtfulness, brought her palm to Alma’s hair. But on the girl’s neck, in warmth and comfort, Scara was dozing, her head next to the hostess’s ear. Iya pulled her hand away in fright, and only shook her head, trying to sort out her feelings. Now she heard noise in neighboring houses, cells, quickly filled with people, like a big hive of bees. The woman took a black pot and went to get water. And I met a neighbor.

— Hi, Iya.

— hi.

“Thank you for raising the alarm. Everyone was saved. Both we and the neighbors. Let’s go to the well. Do you want a gingerbread treat? Managed to capture.

Iya did not believe her own ears. Is this Tuya, whose water in the rain will not be interrogated and she treats with gingerbread? But she went nearby, trying not to be surprised at anything. Four more hostesses passed by them, not too lazy to bow low to Iya. Ten women stood near the well, animatedly communicating and gesturing. The neighbors got up, waiting for their turn to get water. Two men tirelessly pulled up buckets of water. Excellent, fresh and cool water filled the clay vessel, Iya went to her cell, Tuya caught up with her and handed her a treat.

“From the bottom of my heart,” said a neighbor.

— Thanks. ‘the woman replied.

But there were no daughters on the benches, and the hostess was worried in earnest, and again went out into the yard. But soon the children returned from a walk.

The girls found the latrine they needed. Large wooden pipes at an angle were directed from the fortress, preventing sewage from poisoning residents in a crowded place, where they only waited out the danger. There was where to rinse your hands. So, it wasn’t that bad, even here.

Food was found, the woman brought water, and the family quickly satisfied the hunger. So we spent three long days in this shelter.

But now, the fortress was again filled with a cry. Iya jumped out, and the children peeked in fright at the doorway. But then there was a cry of joyful messenger:

— Enemies chased away! Go back to your homes!

People gathered, leaving their almost cozy, but cramped shelter.

Alma bear

Winter has also come. With the beginning of the cold weather, sick people began to visit, who were far away or hard to go to the forest witch. We heard in the village about a student who already knows how to put the unworthy on their feet. And although Agna did not allow people to go to Alma, and Gooday, the foreman, was against it. But all alone for the forest, for three versts, or even in the village. No, there was no such thing that she would be allowed to give birth without an art. Not by custom it is a sin. And they often came with fever and scorcher, it happened that twice a day. Today, too, Alma was busy working on Tui's wound that cut her arm.

— Is that better? — the girl said everything, feeling the bloody festering scar with sensitive fingers.

And exactly, right before our eyes, the wound dragged on, brightened. It was clear that the heat was also asleep in the unwell. But the girl felt unwell, dizzy, and there was fog in front of her eyes. She almost felt the cup of honey and emptied it. It got better. True, Agna did not teach this, and it was impossible to teach anyone. And either you can or you can't.

“Thank you, beauty. I brought you honey, “the woman replied,” and a bag of flour. “So you, hotel. Is dad on a hike again?”

— Nothing can be done, — Alma answered seriously, —

men's affairs. There is no way without it.

— Here are also gingerbread cookies, — and the guest moved a wooden plate with a treat.

But in response, the girl only smiled weakly, but did not touch the area, only removed her hands from the table.

— What's wrong with you?

“It's all right,” Alma said again, trying her best to stay on the stool. The floor seemed to be spinning underfoot, worse than after riding a carousel.

Tuya got up, went up, and bent down, kissed the girl on the pink cheek. The neighbor left, the young healer remained sitting. But then Iya saw that her stepdaughter had settled idle, was sitting, the snake was under the deck, dangling its legs. And I could not stand it:

— Nu-ka, bring water. See it's over in the house? — and pointed to the empty buckets.

Alma nodded calmly, threw on a felt jacket and walked outside, stumbling through the stride. She lifted water through force, poured full buckets. Koček did not notice, and stumbled, moreover, hitting painfully. Water spilled on the snow in the yard. But from the porch there was a flood of laughter, Fita and Vita simply could not restrain themselves.

Alma, furious, threw the bucket, and walked away from the house.

She no longer thought what was happening, what was the

matter, and did not even notice the snow falling thicker from the sky. But felt armour, a hat with long ears and felt boots made it possible not to think about the bad. The girl dragged a sled with an edible, just in case, and what would have happened to come to someone else's house.

— Nothing, I'll beg for Agna's service. I will not be a burden. Many people already go to me for treatment, and people bring me good — some fish, some mushrooms, and some honey. Sometimes even grain was given. But, Skara, — she said to the snake curled up on her neck, — there is little grain, everyone takes care of it.

Indeed, there was no one to talk to on the road. Only pines, birches and ate. But it's too early to talk to her with trees, although Alma still hoped to beg her father to send her to Alatyř Island in two years, with other Chosen Ones of all Gant tribes.

In the meantime, she sadly trampled fresh snow into the trail with her felt boots. She shook the branch, at the same time pouring a whole bunch of snow by her collar, and began to shake off awkwardly.

— Judging by the trees, it seems that she has come... — the girl whispered to her linguistic interlocutor.

No. there was a language, and even some kind of red, bifurcated, only her favorite could not speak, at least humanly. But it was necessary to go and go, and the path was not close. She was noticing the road. Here are the familiar pines, with lightning-burned pinnacles. Alma even perked up, it was still cold, and the

soldier stopped warming as it should. And there was still a mile or more to go. But then a branch crunched under her foot, and she lost her balance, falling face down into the snow. She turned over on her side, pulled her leg towards her.

The foot ached, and it took time to heal. There was one way out — here, not far away was an abandoned bear den. Carefully stepping on a sore leg, Alma went to a noticeable place.

She worked quickly, spreading snow and branches, and fortunately the entrance to the den opened.

— Well, Skara, I'll be like a bear, — whispered the snake, and crawled inside, not forgetting about the sled with luggage.

Inside it was cozy and warm, although the smell was heavy, bearish. The girl nimbly threw off felt boots and onuchi, and felt the swollen place with her hands. It is much more difficult to treat herself than others, and she was very tired, and immediately fell asleep, just pulling on felt boots. She woke up because next to her, warmed up, lay two huge forest cats, moreover, loudly purring into her ear. One still managed to touch her nose with his tail, and the other licked his cheek, saying hello. But it seems it was still dark, and Alma fell asleep again.

It dawned, the wanderer got out, pulled out the skids. There was food, divided honestly: bread and honey, Skara — half of the boiled egg, cats — got fish, half of each. Breakfast was over, the pets rested — one on her neck, the rest at her knees.

— Well, what? Will you take me to Agna's estate?

Since no one entered into an argument with her, the frames

in the skids were also suitable for cats. Nothing, the fluffy assistants dragged quickly. True, it was not easy to manage with a wayward brotherhood. The animals managed to fight in the frames, Alma then suffered, dismantled the belts. But, then the cats cheerfully ran, and even faster, seeing the shelter of the witch. At the gate, apparently, Agna herself was waiting for her, holding Serk's collar. The dog was eager for the wagon, to greet Alma. But the cats did not understand what was the matter, and without thinking to be scared, having fluffed up to the point of impossibility and lifting their tails, they dragged the sled. Both gathered honestly to fight the dog. The girl had to get off. Alma sat down next to the cats, and looking into their yellow eyes, began to say:

“You can't hurt anyone here. Who lives here, no people, no birds, no dogs. Nobody.

— Well, did you tell them everything? They are smart, they understand everything. Let them come to my yard too, student, — said the woman.

The skids were now driving slowly, the cats even let the dog sniff itself, even poke its nose, but they themselves, however, did not forget to do it either. That girl jumped off the sled, oohed and remained standing, waiting for Agna to come. Then the girl bowed to her belt, and said the words learned by heart:

— I came to you, if you don't drive.

“Stay if you wish.

“You just don't give me to Iye. I'm tired there at all, there is

no urine.

— Will Father return? Res will come for you. You know yourself.

“No, I’m not coming home. Enough, — the girl stubbornly pursed her lip, — and Goody will certainly send me to Alaty. And you ask for me, Agna. I also want to pass the art.

“I’ll try. You will grow up until two years will pass and in your fourteen you will go to the halls of the chosen. And rest, go, how many things are waiting for you.

Alma did a lot, and there was enough housework, but there was no anger or fatigue. No one shouted at her anymore, even the cats from the yard did not think to expel. But they did not let down either — they did not touch the domestic animals, they did not offend anyone. They loved to sit under the roof of the barn. Mice were caught, so much so that now they have become a rarity here. Well, Agna’s elk, Tito, is a strong animal, much taller than a girl, and obeyed the guest like Serko, a dog.

But for sure, according to Agna, two days later, Iya arrived with the foreman of their village, Gudey. He was a prominent and stately man. For the sake of such an occasion, he put on a high hat, a white sheepskin coat, and took his favorite carved staff. The stepmother, on the contrary, dressed like an orphan, an old sheepskin coat, a gray knitted handkerchief, as if a really bitter widower had arrived. Agna bowed to the house of guests, sat down at the table. The house was rich. Meat, fish, and three types

of salted mushrooms, bread and berry kvass. The foreman sat at the head of the table, saw, to Alma brings devices and dishes. I tried everything, praised.

— Thanks for the bread, for the salt. So we ask you to return the child, the daughter of my brother, Res, home to her mother by law.

“This is how she learns from me,” the witch led the conversation, “everyone from the village comes to me, but it’s not easy. Then I offered the girl to live with me for now, as an assistant. I did not force her and did not deny her. Ask yourself.

“Alma,” Gooday asked, “you want to, and you’ll come home. I stayed and that’s enough.

The girl was to become an adult, and it was stupid to show resentment. Really. it was given to her with difficulty. But she knew that if she began to remember the evil that her stepmother had arranged for her, no one would believe the girl’s words. Strict stepmother means reasonable, caring. And Alma began to talk about her mentor:

— Here it is easier to learn skills. I already fly people. She helped many, but always under the supervision of a mentor. And so you have to lose how much time until I come to Agna’s estate. It’s hard, especially in winter.

— Yes, but they miss Fit and Vita. They feel bad without a sister, — Iya tried to remind the foreman, — and what will I tell her husband, Res?

“It’s not easy. But really, I’ve heard a lot about Alma’s skill.

For all relatives, the village is better if she learns, but we will have our own Chosen One. Although, it would be better if you, Agna spread the bones on her. Then everything will be truer.

“You know, Goody, you can’t do that until she’s sixteen.

— Well, — agreed the foreman, — Everything turned out kindly, I see. Let the student live with you, and then we will send her to Alatyr. I’m glad? the foreman asked Alma.

The girl sat with her face flushed with pride, and only nodded back, agreeing.

The guests left, but the hosts stayed. Agna approached Alma, corrected her rare curls, and praised the girl:

— Well done. Do not put your anger in your eyes, but show pain. You will soon understand yourself. Not all people are good, you know better than me.

— Yes, I know...

Bear holiday

The time of the Bear holiday, Komoeditsy, was approaching. Again, the best hunters went to the forest to get a forest owner.

Well, the time for spring and fun and weddings has come to the forests. Alma’s cats also went to marry. One night, the girl just fell off the bench after hearing something terrifying. Alma heard a heartbreaking cat howl from the forest. With such intricate trills and howls.

“Why, are you listening?” — smiling, asked Agna, — your cats are nimble... There will be many kittens.

— Well, they are fast, affectionate...

The witch laughed, and wrapped herself in a scarf better, poured a fragrant infusion from the zhban into a wooden ladle. The girl drank a little drink and calmed down slightly. She sat down again and went to bed.

But the festive week has begun, and Alma woke up to unusual smells that filled the house. Gela, Zia and Mila were already raving about the hilltops, wearing birch bark masks on their faces. The student got up from the bench, still feeling tired after yesterday's hard day, two healings. Staggering a little, she went down to the basement, where she washed, then dressed, and joined the mistress of the house in preparing a treat. True, now you can't take part in bright processions, and not sit at tables spread out under apple trees with ritual food...

— Agna, but what are people getting married for? Alma asked, thinking about it.

— So for love for each other, together everything is better than one, — the witch answered without looking up from the rolling pin, rolling out the dough, — and so it is commanded — husband and wife.

— Why don't you get married again?

“I'm not alone. Three daughters, and you live with me. There is no time to be bored. And the husband was, only he drowned.

— it's not clear... Ilsa was gone for a long time. She loves to meet comedians with us. And she didn't send anyone from her deck...

— Here I agree, — the witch said to the pupil, as an adult, —

and there is no messenger. No matter how bad it is.

— And why something? — and Alma's eyes are like scallops.

— You know that Ella herself left, and all power on Ilsa left. And Ilsa for Ella the Dead Princess became. And Ilsa could leave...

— But how... — the girl laughed nervously, — she could not leave us herself, Not according to the Covenant.

— Let's see... Come on, master pretzels. And then the stove warmed up.

Alma nodded, and began to further lay ready-made kalachi and pretzels and sprinkle them with poppy seeds. She did it herself, and looked at herself. If her father had seen it now, I suppose he would have praised it.

But here. Agna herself began to send delicious zags to the throat of the oven. It went quickly, and now it was necessary to wait two hours. Porridge and meat were cooked for a long time.

— Father asked about you, Alma, go home. I saw him at bargaining. Sad for you very much.

The girl quickly looked at the mentor, tightening her lower lip, but only shook her head negatively. Agna just sighed, and again took out a rope weave and handed it to the girl.

— Here, repeat my message.

Alma took a ball, and began to quickly knit knots, checking with the sample. Finally, it was ready, and she gave the lesson to the witch. She began to read:

— I made a message — “You will go to the right — you will

find good luck.” And you tied the knots like this:” You will go to the right — you will find a wife.” Not bad either, but you made a mistake in two signs. We will repeat over and over again.

Alma tried, knitted and loosened knots until Agna nodded her head contentedly and kissed the girl on the forehead. The student smiled rather. After all, everything was quite good, and no one else harassed her, haunting her with nagging and threats.

But they sang pies, and meat and pearl barley porridge froze in the oven. And they had a holiday, no worse than in the village. They lifted the dishes upstairs, placed them on the table, and called Gela, Zia and Mila. The kids sat down at the table, and their mother asked them after reading the saying:

— Goose-goose?

— Ga-Ga-Ga! they answered with a laugh, and began to knock the boats on the table.

“Do you want to eat?”

— Yes, yes, yes!

And they moved plates of porridge and meat. After all, the word “Gant” meant “Goose,” Goose was a sacred animal, farn — a vahana tribe of northerners. Agna and Alma, laughing, also started eating. It was such a beautiful and bright day! Well, in fact, the porridge was a success and the meat with grains and lingonberries were also great.

But then, screams and ritual songs rang out, demanding the owners of the estate. The dog barked loudly. The witch and her pupil looked at each other. It was necessary to meet guests,

especially on such a holiday.

Three men bounced, danced and growled at the gates, dressed up in hides and masks depicting bears. They dragged a skid with gifts covered with burlap. It was strange, because these guests in masks demand gifts from the owners, and not vice versa!

— Call, — and Agna bowed to the guests belt, touching the ground.

Alma also repeated behind her, trying to keep up with her mentor with neither skill nor reason. Mummers went into the yard, bowed themselves. Then one of them, and not the tallest and stately one, took off his mask, quickly approached Alma, grabbed her and threw her into the air. The girl laughed, as in childhood. The guest then wrapped the young healer in an embrace.

— Father, — she just whispered, tightly hugging the long-awaited guest.

— Alma... Grew so and so. Soon you will go out as a bride, Res also laughed, — I just brought the grooms here so that they would not go ten times.

Two of Resa's companions took off their masks, turning out of the bears as prigozhy fellows.

“This is Nadar,” the man called one, “and this is Yalin, our strongman and wrestler. He is also yalin in the melons of our magician, Vinal. And he is a good hunter to Nadar, and that on the horn, that on the horn plays so that you hear.

Alma looked at both. Nadar was still more priggish, with dimples on his pink cheeks and smiled well. Yalin seemed to the young zazzarka too big even for the giants. It was fashionable to look at him only with caution, she admitted to herself. And then Skara decided to meet. She suddenly wrapped herself around the hostess's right wrist and raised her head and showed her tongue. Nadar only smiled, and Yalin took half a step back, though without changing his face.

— Let's go to the house, the treat is ready, — Agna sharply intervened in what was happening.

— Yes, and we have gifts in store, — and Res began to lay out bundles in front of him, — these are your sheepskin coat, felt boots for your daughters, Agna, a barrel of dried fish, felt blankets. And to you, healer, on a fur coat, — he showed a couple of sables, — and a bear cub.

— And your daughter, the feeder, also knows how to treat. Yes, and better than me, — the witch praised the pupil.

— My hand hurts, does not pass. As the beast was beaten in the Jellied Sea, it never passes, “Res complained, pointing to his left shoulder.

Alma looked, smiled, just put her palms on the right. not on the left shoulder.

— You forgot, Father. Your right shoulder hurt, not your left. Okay now?

— Well, that's it... Let's go to dinner, — as if the hostess sentenced, whose face now became completely alarmed.

Now the guests have taken off their bear outfits, remaining in festive, embroidered clothes. The young men took gifts, and came after the mistress of the house. Alma walked next to her father, he took her hand.

— Didn't you miss me here?

“I missed you, Father. Glad you came today.

— What should I do? Gandwick has rich booty. You can exchange a lot of things.

— They live richer in Oum and Sargat. Arable land is large, and you can exchange a lot of things for grain. They have a lot of copper. Here we have, in Sad, and in Wart, if only sable and fish. Well, barley grows with difficulty and there is oil, underground, smelly and sense from it that it burns well.

— Smart beyond your years, you daughter, — Res remarked in a satisfied voice, — and Ouma da Sargatu and the forest are needed, and even then from Gandik there is venison, fur, fish tooth, river pearls. And everything could not go to Oum?

— I agree. Does the hand definitely not hurt?

— No, everything is fine.

Gelya, Zia and Mila behaved decorously next to empty plates. Agna put them pies now, and put a treat for Nadar, Yalin and Res nearby. Alma helped, and so as not to embarrass anyone else, she hid Skara in a wing under her bed. Little girls grabbing their plates, sat opposite Nadar and Yalin, and began to persistently regale with various goodies. Agna tried not to laugh, looking at the scarlet faces of two young men who had silently suffered from

childish spontaneity. But, they tried to hold on, and not drop the glory of the wataga rowers of Res himself.

The feeder himself sat next to Agna, and whispered with the mistress of the house about Alma. Both often nodded at the girl, then smiled in agreement. The young witch doctor, having made a straight face, slowly ate a pie filled with dried and then soaked apples. It turned out very tasty, especially with melon honey. She looked at Nadar and almost laughed. Only a miracle saved from a shameful situation.

“We have a big dowry,” Gela said a little lisping, “and our family is good, no one was sick with bad diseases. And as I turn sixteen years old, you will send matchmakers.

“I’ll send it. What about Mila?”

“Let’s figure it out,” Gelya encouraged him.

So matchmaking was in full swing here, but Zia was not lost either. But, I must say, Yalin was not against it. He fished a bronze turtle charm on a belt out of the bag and put the gift in front of the girl. She was delighted to put a strap around her neck.

— Well, okay, it’s time for us to return to the village, to our Sad, — Res sentenced. like a senior, wearing a hat, covering his shaved head. No, there really was a small pigtail on the back of his head. Only in the cold you will not warm her, and without a hat in any way. Nadar and Yalin had no more hair on their heads, just small light pigtails on the back of their heads.

— We were glad to you, dear guests, — the mistress of the house said ceremoniously, — here, on the road to you.

And she brought each a pot of her honey.

Herald of Grief shouted that Ilsa fell asleep

Suddenly in the evening there was a crash, but it was as if now the tyn would fall off. Agna, in one shirt, jumped up, put on a sheepskin coat. Restless Alma followed her, wrapped in a blanket.

— Open up! We are in a hurry! ‘the cry came.

— Lute. or what are you? the witch answered, standing on the porch.

— Agna, I am it! And with me and Tata!

“The twins are with us,” the hostess said, and went to open it.

Alma helped open the entrance and a rider and a rider on stately moose drove into the yard. They immediately dismounted and bowed to the mistress of the house. They were a man in his twenties and a woman in her twenties, tall, with bows and arrows over their sheepskin coats, daggers and axes on his belt.

— Come into the house, from the road.

But Lute showed a black ribbon tied on his sleeve and shouted:

— Tell everyone! Ilsa fell asleep! Everyone can say goodbye to Madame!

“When... Agna barely spoke at once.

— Two weeks ago. In Gandwick. Sentenced, to take her to all the villages of the giants, so that people would say goodbye to the Dead Princess, see her for the last time! The train will be in

the village in a week, but they will call you, do not hesitate!

— Wait, at least take pies on the road!

Lute nodded, and handed the birch bark to the girl. Alma ran headlong into the house and returned with an edible.

— Here, take this!

— Be sound, beauty! Don't hold a grudge against us! — the young man answered, turned the plow, and the sinister jumped further.

— What he said, — the girl was confused, — as if she would die soon!

“He will not die,” said Agna, throwing a constipation on the gate, “he will never die.” Neither he nor Tata, none of Ilsa's deck. What is worse for them...

“Why?”

— We went to the house, otherwise you froze already.

The witch let the pupil forward, and closed the door behind her. The door was good, oak, and living inside felt for warmth. The same door led to the upper room, where they slept and ate. So the heat was kept well, but they heated the stove and cooked food in the basement.

— Well, what? Alma asked impatiently, sitting down on the bench.

“Lie down and cover yourself with a blanket.

— Yeah...

— So... All of them, seven of her Companions, tasted the blood of the Princess, ikhor. Here we have blood — red, and

the Princess — like water, bluish such. And the power in her is great — who will drink the blood of the Princess will never die. And even if they are wounded and killed, they come to life again. After all, they are given to the Princess for war — she protects our lands from strangers, and so that they would not be killed, Ilsa gave them such power. And before her, Ella granted her Companions such a gift. But Ella said:

“So that everyone from her deck, when she leaves, heads are deprived...”

— Why... — Alma was indignant, — what are people to blame for?

— Yes, listen, you, egoza... “That those deprived of goals would wait for the awakening of Seven Dead Prinzess on time. And in order for the Chosen Magi to create a secret place, and there to keep the bodies and heads of the Immortal Knights in care, that there would be someone to fight for the Chosen One at the end of Time”

— And what’s the Chosen One?

— He will appear at the end of Time, the one who will wake up the Sleeping Princes with a kiss and love one of them.

— Yes, now only the First Princess fell asleep...

Agna nodded, agreeing and sighed heavily. She straightened the blanket for the girl, and continued:

— It will be hard for the Immortals to wait for this hour. And no matter what terrible troubles they did on earth, Ella ordered it. It’s not in their prison to sit, it’s not known how old.

— Yes... — whispered Alma, whose eyes began to stick together, — and I would... but I would... — and fell asleep.

And Agna and Alma thought maybe it was a dream? An evil dream in which anything is possible. All these days passed calmly, but now, on the seventh day, the roar of the bugle rejoiced, which made them jump from their places. Then the neighborhood broke the ringing of tympan.

“It’s her,” Agna said, “we’ll meet the Lady properly.”

She first painted the girl’s face white, let her lips down red, as did her cheekbones. Then the witch’s face became painted in a similar way. The daughters of the mistress of the house began to look the same, with white faces. They went to the outskirts, waiting for Sleeping. In front, with a burning torch, one of the Satellites was traveling, and four more carried a golden forged coffin. The strength of the men from Ilsa’s deck was incredible.

The procession was closed by the Chosen Ones who came from Alaty. Ahead was a tall woman, also wrapped in the very eyes in a black cloak. Seven students in gray raincoats, with hoods draped over their faces, with horns and horns that display a sad motive.

— Hi, Agna.

“Good to see you, Mara. Although the case turned out to be bad.

— It all happened, as it should have, herbalist. And we are saddened, but also great joy. For seventy years Ilsa carried a

heavy burden, now she can rest. Everything happens, as Ella promised:

“And the Seven who come for me will all fall asleep in the cave”

“What’s next?”

— Then everyone knows:

“The chosen one will come on the Terrible Day...

He will only touch the frozen stone...

How to break through the high cold of ice...

The ice throne is standing and the Savior is waiting...

And then with Seven Ilya will take a cool place”

— Surely the name is known?

Mara only nodded her head happily, as if she herself would live to see that hour of hard time. Agna hardly understood the mentor.

And the woman saw a family of herbalist, standing in mute delight and grave fear, looking at this procession. The young healer did not take her eyes off the last shining chambers of Ilsa. On the sign of Mary, the lid was removed...

Alma pursed her lips, remembering the face of her deceased mother, how she immediately changed. My face stretched out, my eyes sunk. At first she tried not to look at Ilsa. But, one look and she could not resist an admiring sigh.

Gela, Zia and Mila stood nearby, eyes rounded on dazzling white faces. There were no pranks, no screams.

The dead Princess lay face up, with her dazzling white face,

as if she had just fallen asleep. The girl was not afraid to touch the fingers of the Sleeping Princess. They were hard as stone and cold as ice. It was impossible to move them even by hair. Mara watched Alma touch the Princess's hands and did not interfere. The mentor even became interested in what Agna's student was doing.

— She seemed petrified, girl. And she became harder than a stone, — the Mentor quietly said.

“She's not dead, that's for sure,” the young healer said quietly, “she can even hear us. A little...

— Alma cures the afflicted, Agna explained.

— I will go to you in a year, to Alaty, — the girl boasted, looking at Mara with enthusiastic eyes.

“We won't be able to return to our chambers until three months later. It would be easier to go on a long journey with us. Than in a year to swim along the river, and then by sea.

“I've wanted to go to Alaty for a long time. But, it's like an elder and magi decide.

“I promise I'll talk to Goody and the Magi Vinal. In the meantime, prepare your box for the long journey. Won't you be scared?

Alma just shook her head, showing how she wants to go. But again she looked at the golden coffin.

“Well, it's time for us to move on,” the mentor sentenced from a secret place, “now to Grustina, then to Varta, and there Sargat and Oum are waiting for us.

Satellites picked up a heavy load. and moved along the road to the village, where the inhabitants were to say goodbye to Ilsa.

“Don’t lose your head”

Alma kept looking at a beautiful carved casket, which she traded for rich furs received for healing. And what is it? Isn’t a saved life worth anything? Yes, people themselves carry, it does not require bribes from anyone, no matter how much they gave, that’s all right. So she needs to eat, and during this time, while she came to her senses, she would have caught fish. Well, okay, and ran her hand over the casket, to the wonderful work of a craftsman. And then Mara promised to take with her, and there is no one? How much time has passed. Or what happened in the upper lands, in the Ob origins? The girl went into the yard, do business, feed the cattle. The main thing was to feed the dry.

The dog also flew up, flattered, wanted to be stroked. Serco put his head on her lap, and at the same time she pulled out a burdock from her hair, but she did not forget about dog ears. The dog licked its hand gratefully, and walked nearby.

The girl went to the barn, to the stall, where there was already an old unsuitable grain, in order to set it on food. She poured a full leather bucket with a wooden scoop, and heard a rustle in the hayloft.

Frightened, she grabbed a wooden pitchfork and poked it into the dry grass a couple of times. Listened, not knowing what to think. Nobody responded...

“Don’t call anyone. We will not do evil, — said Lyut, who was

familiar to her, who crawled from above.

“Can’t you bring bread?” Tata added, “and this is for you,” and she held out a couple of partridges.

— Okay...

A girl with a fast-knocking heart ran to the house and took one loaf of bread. I put the birds in the basement. and returned to the barn.

— Thanks. What’s your name, girl? ‘a smiling Tata asked.

— Alma...

— Such a thing, Alma... Do you know where the Magi Vinal lives? We need friends to help out.

The young healer stood, thinking. She looked at the sky, the sun hanging high, and it was far from sunset. Then Lute intervened:

— You won’t regret it, Alma... — and took out two full handfuls of gold rings.

It was a lot, a lot... For four rings, weighing each spool, it was possible to exchange a cow, and two calf rings.

— Don’t... I’ll bring it. Only Serko will tie, otherwise he will match me.

The dog tried to play, but the girl only hugged the dog and tied it to the fence. She took the uninvited guests out of the neighborhood unnoticed. Lute straightened the bag behind his back, and outweighed the weapon comfortably. Tata also did it, in addition, laying braids around her head, and covered them with a hat.

— I'll carry you, just hold on! — and the young man grabbed Alma in his arms, and she grabbed his neck.

The satellites ran... The run was simply incredible, they would easily overtake the best elk and any dog, the trees simply merged into a common green mass. She held on to her neck, afraid to fall, but Lute held the girl as if she were just a cannon. His breath did not go astray at all, but he did not even blush, as if now he was slowly walking in the shade of trees, and did not run faster than a frightened hare. But two ran to the village, and Alma showed where the Magi estate was on the outskirts.

— Here...

Lute and Tata made a circle, going into a dense forest, bordering the tyn of a large estate. But on one side of the building was covered only by an old wattle, and the tyn was only with the main one, at the gate of the house. They came very close, but then Alma saw something that she later remembered all her life.

There was only one girl wrapped in bronze chains. The ground around was just covered in blood. Nearby were five oak decks, each in fathom. In four decks lay decapitated and immovable bodies.

Three magi stood nearby, and Alma did not know two of them, one was Vinal, whom she knew. And two dozen novices, in heavy armor and with shields and bronze axes in their hands. Vinal hit the ground with a staff...

Tata clung with her hands and feet to Lyut, who had already jumped with a silent cry. The companion's sword fell into the

grass, and the girl covered his mouth with both hands and only whispered:

— You won't have time, and at once you won't beat twenty, and ten too, — and sobbed.

Alma looked at this crimson lawn. The magician's apprentice, the hulking Yalin, dragged the bound girl to the chopping block, holding a bloody ax in his right hand. The captive herself laid her head on the chopping block and said loudly:

— Remove the scythe, non-patch. You hit badly... — and smiled without fear to her executioner.

Yalin nodded, and took a scythe in his left hand. He swung, and the copper blade cut the neck at once, and a stream of blood gushed up. As if a living, headless body jerked, straightening, and took two steps forward, to the magi, which caused them to recoil at once. But then the corpse fell into its own blood, so that all the clothes were painted red. Yalin put his head on the chopping block, then put the body in the deck. What was not clear, he put a copper plate in place of the cut, then put his head on, and drove the ax into the churbak almost along the casing.

“They forced me to do the worst,” he said, barely throwing words at the Magi, the young man.

— So according to the Testament we did everything, Yalin. For their own benefit, — Vinal urged the novice, — they cannot die. Put your head to the body — so any of them will come to life in three days. But Ella herself ordered that the Immortals wait for the Dead Princes in a secret refuge.

So we will put them side by side with Ella's Companions, and they will wait in the wings. You didn't kill them, but simply put them to sleep. Let's go, eat, rest, — and Vinal took the unot by the arm, like a small one, — And the other novices will carry the bodies to a secret place. Now another hundred soldiers will come. Two on the run, — said Vinal heartfelt, looking into Yalin's eyes.

Alma sat like that, with a whitened face, unable to stand up or sit down... The girl finally let go of Lyuta, and he noticed something invisible, like a petrified girl.

— Let's go," Immortal whispered, putting his hand on her shoulder, "we'll take you home."

— Yes? — only said the survivor of this horror, unable to move.

"I'll carry it," Tata said, embracing Alma.

Both Ilsa's companions ran to Agna's estate quickly. The girl went immediately with buckets to the well. They stripped Alma, leaving her in one shirt, and began to slowly pour ice water on her, trying to revive her. After six buckets, the heavy medicine worked, and Alma jumped up and shouted indignantly:

— Enough! Cold — how!

And then, finally, burst into tears. Tata hugged her, began to stroke her wet back and head, trying to calm her down. And Alma whispered endlessly:

— And he chopped not sorry... And she, already without a head, jumped up, and again fell into her own blood... Why so?

— So it happened... Do not be sad, Praise she did not die to the end, she sleeps simply. They will stick their heads, she will be alive again. There would be bones, meat would grow...

— Really? — and Alma raised a burrowed face to a new girlfriend — and so everyone?

— No. Only those who tasted them. Ilsa gave us her blood to drink, and now we cannot die. Now let's go to a secret place and wait. Just don't tell anyone about us.

— How did they capture your comrades? You are stronger, much stronger than any person. And faster...

“What do you say?” Trusted Vinal...

— So we came, — sadly let the Immortals know, carrying a heavy load, — here, they will never find Ilsa.

Indeed, a deaf and inconspicuous place, with mountains, completely overgrown with low fir trees. These elevations were interspersed with ravines strewn with limestone debris. Here he stood, waiting for the decision of the Magus, a golden coffin. Vinal looked at the Immortals with the usual cunning.

“They were not even tired, but carried several miles in the arms of the Dead Princess. What can I do here, and I can't understand yet. After all, everything turns out so and so badly” — thought the magician of the Sad.

Magus was alone, did not take with him either Akat or Zenz. Yes, and the Unotam was careful to give out the secret. And the Immortals? An inner voice asked out of place, immediately cut

off by the owner. Vinal looked up at the sky, where the sun was just fierce.

— Open the coffin, let's say goodbye, — the old sage said quietly.

Tata and Praise without saying anything. removed the richly decorated gold cap. and lowered the veil, showing the sun the poor face of the Princess. Vinal kissed just the ice and stone-hard palms of Sleeping. Yes. Nothing had changed, though he had hoped so. That Ilsa will rise, and again say her favorite words:

“Good to see you, old badger”

But no, the blue lips did not flinch, and the hands lay immovable

— Decide who will carry the coffin, — with difficulty uttered the magi, and looked at the others.

“We all are. Praise will be with the Torch, lest you get lost, “replied the intemperate Lute.

Vinal did not give a look, he only grabbed the coveted leather bottle with a secret potion, hidden in the floors of the Vedic cloak. Magus knew that those who tasted them in the dark saw better forest cats.

Six, as a sign of devotion and honor, carried a golden coffin, the magician walked from behind. The place was secret for everyone, and the funeral was also secret. Although no one thought that the Dead Princess was dead. After all, the one who is already dead cannot die. But, farewell to the Defender of the whole Priob looked unnecessary... Modest. But, there was

another farewell, where in front of everyone they put the same golden coffin in a huge mound, almost a whole mountain high. Only the imaginary coffin was empty, made only so that no one would dare to disturb the Princess ahead of time.

The companions carried the lady in a dark tunnel, skillfully bypassing the pebbles. After all, they saw in the dark, unlike the unfortunate Vinal, who stumbled endlessly and beat off his legs. But the Magi did not walk empty-handed, but with a large deck full of honey. But now, the room appeared. They put a coffin on three large hewn stones, and put a treat next to it for Ilsa when she woke up. Although she did not eat anything. But honey ate, and after a long sleep, food will be needed.

Back to a small village, where an empty grave hill stood near a high rampart, they reached at the height of the memorial feast. Rich food calmed the grief of the inhabitants of a remote place.

And here, next to the table, sat the Magi Akat, Zenz and Unot Yalin, a huge hero. Honey, beer and pies all reinforced the strength of the saddened giants.

In the early morning, the Immortals and Magi set off on their way back. The path now lay far ahead. The deer dragged luggage tied with belts, laid on perfectly worked draggers. People walked on foot, putting boots on green grass. The sun shone over their heads, as if the luminary was unaware of what had happened.

The last day was not far from Grustina, Vinal and Akat were especially protected by reindeer teams. And they stopped along the way very often. Tata caught up with the rest of the Immortals,

and quickly whispered to them:

“We have to go. And then the ice chambers will wait for us.

“You always suspect everyone,” said Praise quietly, “we know Vinal when he was still walking under the table. He won’t do that to us.

— According to the covenant, he will enter, shove into a secret peshier. At least drink my potion. They will put us to sleep, and then they will cut off our heads. Then we won’t wake up until the last days.

Only Lute reached out for a simple wooden flask, and drank three sips. Tata herself drank. No one else wanted it.

— So it all happened... We could barely crawl away from the fires. There was no strength at all, they walked with difficulty,
— explained Lute.

— And what you didn’t break out with fight, all together?

Here the Immortals grinned, and looked at each other, and almost affectionately at the girl.

— So all the warriors of the giants would chase us if we shed the blood of the magi. And now Vinal will not say a word that we fled. Both Akat and Zenzo saw that the seven moons lay bound and sleeping. And only Vinal and Yalin now know that the two have gone into hiding. They will not look for us, so that their oversight does not become known to everyone.

Alma wiped her face with her palms, and nodded her head, agreeing with the interlocutors.

— This is for you, in memory of us and as a reward for help. Well, for a dowry. You are such a beauty, “Lute said quietly, laying a cat with golden rings.

“You can’t refuse a gift,” Tata added, kissing the girl on the cheek.

— Don’t remember dashing, whispered Alma.

— We’re told, ‘and Lute chuckled,” Don’t lose your head’

— Don’t lose your heads...

Way to Alaty

A cat with gold rings was lying at the bottom of the box with Alma's things, and she left him alone for now. At first I wanted to buy a calf, new red tape, Agne sable, girls toys... But how to explain where such wealth came from? She didn't really know how to lie, she didn't learn somehow. And the mentor will have to explain everything, tell about the Immortals from the Deck of Ilsa, only the young witch doctor did not want evil to Lute and Tata. Alma slept very badly for the last month, she dreamed of the face of Praise, at once the dead face of a girl standing on a chopping block, in a bloody puddle, already with inanimate eyes.

Well, now it was occupation — cut the grass to dry for the winter. Mint, good grass. And it smells good, and it helps for the liver, and for coughing too. Better, of course thistle. But it is necessary to collect it later, she said to herself.

— Thanks for the gifts, Alma. Only you forgot yourself, — only Agna noticed.

— Yes, I seem to have everything. And sheepskin coat, and felted boots, fur shower. Set of knives, boiler.

— Okay, kind soul...

— Agna, did you talk to the Immortals?

— She spoke, but did not speak. They don't like it when they talk to them. They don't trust others much.

— Are they strong?

— Stronger than an ordinary person several times. They do not age, they cannot die. But they were all already put to an ice bed, sleep and wait for the awakening of their Princess. Now their chosen magi take care. And there are already fourteen Immortals waiting in the wings.

Alma lowered her eyes to the floor, staring at her shoes. Just not to laugh, she said to herself, remembering her new friends. And then she suddenly ran into her room, poured half of the gold, and returned to Agna.

— This is for you, — and she poured out her gift in front of the healer, — as a keepsake. I'll be gone soon, and not for one year.

— Alma, yes you were like my own, — and Agna hugged the pupil, — But, well. Let it be as it will be.

They stood there, embracing, for a while, the healer stroked the girl's hair.

“Now you can stop shaving your hair. Selected hairs do not cut.

“That's good. It's hard to cheer, to be honest, “Alma smiled, imagining how she always suffered with a razor.

“I think it's time to sit down to dinner. Call the girls from the yard.

The young witch doctor went downstairs and found Gelya, Zia and Mila in a thicket of raspberries picking berries. They were collected, of course, immediately for their intended purpose, so that the lips and cheeks became stained with red juice.

— Let's go eat! Alma shouted almost sternly, there is time!

She took turns washing each tricky face and little naughty pens, then sat everyone down at the table. The hostess of the house put ordinary fish and barley porridge on the table. For the best mood, I put on a freshly scraped table and a zhban with berry broom. So they quickly ate, and everyone settled down to rest.

The next morning, those who were not too expected so early came. Barked Serco, notifying the owners of the guests. Alma and Agna looked at each other, and the girl ran to the gate, to see who showed up. But it turned out that those whom she had been waiting for so long had come.

This pulled up the long-awaited train with Mara and her Chosen. The mentor from Alatyrs herself, without sending anyone from the unots, knocked on the gate. An excited Alma ran out to her. But then cats ran up, sticking out cunning gray muzzles into the gate. We looked at the guests, and looked back at the hostess, as if advising:

“Drive them out of here! Burn!”

But the girl scratched behind the ears of both, and forest purrs. raised their tails higher, proudly retired.

Mara just shook her head when she saw such unprecedented. So that forest cats would live on the estate, and still give themselves to stroke. But the matter was more important, and she uttered memorized words:

— If you haven't changed your mind, then get ready, and let's go. Now we will reach Sad, and then along the Ob, to Gandvik

itself.

The girl just nodded, and ran up the stairs to the upper room.
— Agna! Mara came with novices!

The hostess was all white, and grabbed the jamb of the door, but quickly crept up. She collected the entire stock of bowls and spoons, and put it all hastily on the table. She began to hastily cut the already cooked, and Alma also armed herself with a knife and began to cut smoked meat and fish, laying out treats for dishes. She then brought in cold kvass, earning an approving nod from the landlady.

— Go, girl, natopi bath. It's not the case when they go from the road to the house without washing. And I will finish everything. And take the kvass to them, put it in the dressing room. You will take towels in lara, there are also birch bark cups.

Alma nodded, and quickly walked to the low chopped house. The water was cooked, there was a whole hollowed tub. There were gangs and washes. She ignited the fire by tipping fresh coal from a stone pot braided with ash. It was in such pots that the giants kept fire, changing coals for fresh ones every three days.

The fire flared up quickly, and began to demand additives, extending his fiery fingers to the young healer.

“Enough for you, insatiable,” the girl said. — better faster water gray.

Agna was rich, and here stood a huge good bronze cauldron, in which the water was warmed. She would put in and put in poleshki and soon the bath was very hot and the water was

boiling.

The girl rinsed her hands, and went after the Chosen Ones and Mara. Everyone sat on the blockage, throwing back the hoods of their cloaks. And for sure, all these were very young girls. But how old their Mentor was completely impossible to understand. There were no wrinkles on her face, and any traces of age. But her eyes... As if they saw everything and knew everything. Well, she did not sit idle, but knitted the knots of the message. The novices, without saying a word, repeated the work of Mary.

— Hello, Alma! ‘she said first.

— From the road to the bathhouse you would, and there and lunch will be ready, — slowly and clearly fulfilled the order of Agna girl.

Mara nodded, and rose, followed by her novices. The young witch doctor led them to the bathhouse, and opened the door. The inside smelled of heat

“Everything is there. Towels are here, kvass is ready too.

— Thank you, — the woman answered, — come with us.

Alma did not repair, and began to undress with everyone together. Sometimes she looked at Mara, whose beautiful body was completely covered with tattoos, except for her face. Snakes, deer, moose and fish adorned her skin, elephants scattered hand and foot. Her novices were also noted, but in completely different ways: in some moose, in others snakes, in others turtles on the shoulders and hips, and only the back of one of them seemed to be guarded by a griffin. Miracle — the animal opened a terrible

beak and spread its wings, covering both shoulder blades of her back with them.

The mentor stared at the bright red scar on the girl's thigh, and without understanding looked at her. Alma flushed and whispered:

— This is from the stepmother... Snatch from the furnace... It just happened.

Mara did not say anything, only helped the young healer to flatter her hair. The chosen ones decorously, as if on the market, went in and sat on the shelves. Indeed, it was good, and the kind warmth calmed. True, here the young students shook a little, and the bath was filled with girlish laughter.

— Meet, this is Alma, — introduced the Chosen witch doctor, — she will go with us to the North.

— Hello, Alma. Ya-Tala, this is Tara, there is Gita sitting by the gang, and Senta next to her. On another shelf Lipa, Kata and Luta. Sit next to me. Are you from Sad?

— Sure...

“I'm from the Dvina coast. Ilsa rarely looked at us. More and more visited Oum.

Tala again began to soak, and poured hot water. Alma also put the soapy root into action, washing away sadness and fatigue.

— The hair has already grown a little, — said Mara, who returned from the dressing room.

— And as soon as I get to Alatyr, will they also make a drawing on the skin?

— No, only after apprenticeship. In three years.

“I’m twelve years old!

— At fifteen, then you deserve it. By vocation and drawings will apply.

Soon they were sitting on the bench, and combing their hair. Alma had a good crest, a fish tooth, and master Salit, the son of the famous Uwei, worked for her.

— I’ll go home, I’ll probably have lunch ready, she told Mara.

She just nodded, and also began to dress, starting with twisted bracelets. The girl dropped into the house, where she saw Agna wiping her tears with a handkerchief. She was frightened, and hugged the woman.

— What is it?

— Everything is ok... — answered the hostess, — you’ll be back in three years, right?

— Of course... I won’t stay in Gandwick. It’s cold out there.. Agna, can you reduce my scar? — and she lifted the hem, showing the burn.

— No, it will not work... I, not you, I do not know how to treat with the imposition of hands.

— Yes, I tried how many times, and everything does not come out...

— Go, call guests, — Agna reminded, — already hungry. Lunch is good out.

Alma returned under the canopy, where the guests rested. Everyone sat cheerful and ruddy.

“Come and eat out of the way. Is everything ready.

Everyone really liked the treat, no one refused the supplement

In the morning, Alma walked among the new friends, the three of them, together with Lipa and Katya, closed the line of draggers and watched the deer so that the laid and tied belongings would not be lost on the road. Oleshki ran cheerfully, there was no need to spur them on. Before Sad, it was necessary to go another two versts. The chosen ones and the new novice fanned themselves with twigs, driving away annoyingly buzzing gadflies and mosquitoes. Something, but this good was enough in the taiga. But Alma sighed heavily, recalling the morning farewell to Agna and her daughters. The young witch doctor kissed Gela, Zia and Mila a dozen times, and hardly broke away from their small and tenacious handles. The healer herself, the owner of the house, only wiped away tears and waved her handkerchief, wanting an easy and direct path.

— Wasn't it a pity to leave? Kata asked.

— What should I do? Got to go. Without this, it is impossible,

— Alma answered judiciously.

— Your mother is kind, and little sisters, — added a drop of tar and Lipa

“No, she's my mentor. Mother died a long time ago. And in Sad lives a father and stepmother with her daughters.

Lipa only shook her head in response, but was not surprised either. Him to get into family quarrels? You still don't know

anything good, except for words about resentment and anger. Since their new girlfriend lived away from her stepmothers, it means that there were reasons. And she also saw a trace of a snatch on the girl's leg.

Lipa was from Gandvik, from a family of fishermen. Father, and her three brothers were also sailors. We even visited Grumant, an island where a combustible stone lies right on the ground. They brought him to Gandvik this stone, to show people. And it burns hot-hot. But they go there for a fish tooth, and there is not much room in the boats, and there is enough firewood without firestone. So the girl knew about the fisheries on the Studenny Sea. And what else to do there? True, people also grazed deer.

Kata was from the grain and rich Oum, where the houses are full of grain reserves, and in the underground everyone has a lot of bronze, and jade brought to exchange. Bulls and cows were the basis of her family's wealth. They plowed land on bulls, and both a fish tooth and pearls were exchanged for grain among the northerners. Katya had no brothers, only sisters, and everyone is older than her, so married. And she wanted to come home after that. how the art will pass.

— Do they tell the truth that you have a hand snake? — asked Lipa at random

Alma simply opened the shirt gate, and both girls completely saw what they took for an elegant motley — a snake sleeping peacefully around the girl's neck.

Kata and Lipa only sighed in surprise when they saw this. Many had favorites. but such...

— I still have two forest cats in the estate, — added a new novice.

“Anything can happen,” Kata agreed judiciously. And it is true that it is in vain to argue, because everyone knows that a forest cat cannot be tamed.

But the estates of the huge Grustina appeared, surrounding the mighty rampart of the city. Mara knew where to go, and took her charges to where Alma had to visit...

And exactly, a number of the Chosen Ones dragged themselves to the huge courtyard of the Magi Vinal. The young girl grabbed the edge of one sled, her legs were already reduced when she remembered the Immortals beheaded here.

— Alma, what’s wrong with you? — Kata was frightened, — Lipa, give herbal infusion. Moreover, there is more in the flask.

Lipa, not a proverbial, held out the flask, and the Chosen One poured the infusion into a birch bark cup and clung it to the hands of their youngest. She only grinned wryly, but drank to the bottom. The medicine was not bitter, but the alarm immediately receded.

— Well, another thing... And how will you collect fish on Alaty? the Chosen One smiled.

Vinal, apparently, was notified of the guests, and had already met them along with household members, unots and novices. His wife carried out a loaf of bread and a cup of salt in front of Mara.

She plucked a piece, added salt and tasted, sharing bread and salt with the owner. Magus smiled, and pointed to the set table:

— Taste the guests dear... And the unots will look after the luggage.

“Thank you for the honor, Vinal,” Mara said.

“This is my wife, Malina. The daughters of Tia and Dew, and a son, Smel. Chosen novice, Yalin. Both smart and strong.

With these words, Alma wanted to leave everything, and run wherever her eyes look and only restrained herself by violence, remembering who she was with now.

The chosen ones were seated at a large table, opposite the village of Vinal with his family, and the novices delivered treats. Magus sincerely longed to please the Chosen Ones and surprise them with headbands. Three types of fish, black and red caviar, pies, barley porridge. cooked with onions, three types of lingonberry gravy, cranberries, sauerkraut. Alma also checked the bag where Skara was resting, stroked her cool head, and put a piece of boiled egg.

She would also try everything, but to her misfortune, she spread and laid out all these goodies Yalin. The girl nodded to him with difficulty, as a friend, and remembering how he chopped his heads, again his head ached wildly. The novice really tried, skillfully working with a scoop and a wooden shoulder blade, so that the guests would not feel bypassed.

“Do you know this novice?” asked Kata about the important thing.

— There was a case... Came to us with Nadar.

— And he is prigozhny, right?

Alma almost choked, remembering Yalin's hands, covered in blood on the very elbows. Only she could not tell anyone...

— Alma, here the duck is very tasty, — said Yalin, as if jumping out of the ground.

She nodded her head with difficulty, looking with dead eyes at his fingers... It seemed to the girl that a huge ax would appear again in the novice's hand, and that in front of her was not a man, but a terrible creature from the most terrible legends. But then Kata helped out:

“I have ducks too,” and looked at the young man with pleasure.

Then something happened that Alma did not expect: Yalin's face became redder than ripe strawberries. It was so incredible that the girl, as if forgetting, instantly swallowed the meat lying on her dish. Lipa slightly pushed Alma's elbow, and made a grimace, nodding at their friend and Yalin.

But the novice managed not to spill the treat from the pot, and approached the other Chosen Ones who were sitting at the table. Kvass was also suitable for everyone, currant, just excellent in taste. But all the good and sometimes even the bad ends, and the feast ends. Alma breathed a sigh of relief, hoping that she would no longer see Yalin, at least in the next three years. She thought again — should I go home? But I didn't want to see Iya's face at all, like her daughters.

And the next morning the Chosen were waiting for the rook,

which was supposed to deliver them to Gandwick

Alma sat on the boat bench and sighed, remembering when what she dreamed of happened? She even undertook to bend her fingers... Well, actually, two out of ten came out. The fact that Agna will take her to her, and the fact that they will take her as a novice to Alatyrr... She looked at Katu, who spoke animatedly with Yalin, and turned away, even from grief she took out a ball of rope, and began to weave and repeat the signs.

Ten rowers and a feeder were given to them by the guide Goody, and Vinal sent his beloved novice to emphasize his seniority. The rook was ruled by Ard himself, the best of the feeders on the Ob.

She looked at them again, and decided that if it were not for this execution, she would have considered this hefty student of the Magi quite a good fellow, and no longer condemned Katu. Linden sat down next to her and handed her friend a cracker.

— So everything is more fun, — she noticed, and put on her cheek too, — I see, you don't like Vinal's loss?

— I don't know... — the girl tried to evade a direct question.

— So prominent, but something oppresses him... As if he did what he did not want, but forced, but could not refuse.

“You're wise, Lipa.

— Look how he tries to hide his hands. Looks at Katu more askance, and not straight. We were taught for a long time so that we could immediately understand that the interlocutor was

hiding something important, or uncertain, or scared.

Alma nodded, agreeing with her new friend, and looked at the stern where Ard was talking to Mara. The day was calm, and weak waves hit the leather side of the boat. The girl tentatively touched the ribs of the boat, triggered from the ribs of the whale. Still, it is unusual to sit in a leather boat. Skara also became curious, and she wrapped herself around the girl's left hand and raised her head.

“Don't doubt it, girl. Our ship is strong, — shouted the feeder, — everything is sewn well!

Ard was a seasoned sailor, saw everyone, but what he saw — a viper gliding along his arm — deprived him of confidence. He took off his hat and wiped his sweat. The Mentor returned to the stern again.

“What is this girl with you?” She even has a snake instead of a cat!

— And forest cats live in her house. Nothing, the snake won't bite anyone, make no mistake, feeder. I always have wonderful novices. One, you know, carried a bear cub with her...

— AND? Left at home?

“Worse, much worse. feeder. I had to hire a special carbass for her, and Mara laughed, and Ard sighed sorrowfully.

The sun began to decline, and the merrymakers began to bring the rooks to the shore. Four of them jumped into the water, and began to pull the ships by the ropes and pull them out onto land. The pillars were hammered into the sand, and these river horses

of the giants were attached to them so that they could rest. And people could spend the night in with great convenience.

The merrymakers began to set up tents, a slight haze of fires rose into the sky, the air was filled with the smell of porridge and fish brew, the usual food of everyone walking along the river. Alma also did cooking, gutted and removed scales from fish. Kata and Lipa also did not shy away from doing their usual thing. Soon everyone was sitting with spoons and wooden plates, happily saturated with hot food. Still, it's hard to eat only breadcrumbs and dried fish.

Alma stretched out with pleasure on a pile of fresh hay, which replaced her feather bed. From under the felt blanket, only the girl's small nose stuck out, she quickly warmed up and fell asleep. I dreamed, to be honest, all sorts of nonsense, but then... I saw two bears playing in the water, and dragging fish from the river for fish. And then, on the other hand, clubfoot began to roll logs up and down the slope. Strange dreams...

In the morning, the horn woke everyone up, and the oarsman showed his hand to the mess on the shore.

— I haven't seen this for a long time! — he shouted, — you see, clubfoot roads do not give us!

— What are you, Vitya, did they tell you? Ard shouted back.

— No, growled only...

The feeder laughed, and reached for the heavy bow, and threw the quiver behind his back.

— Korsha and you, Yalin. Take the horns and go.

“No need to kill anyone,” Alma stepped forward, “I will ask the bears to leave.

Mara turned her surprised face on the novice, even took off her usual hood, but did not say anything, and nodded, asserting with her will what was said. She came closer, and took the brave girl by the arm. In the other, there was an indispensable staff.

“Let’s go. You understand that we will not achieve anything like that. I have a couple of crackers with me, the bears will get scared and leave.

“I can handle it, Mara,” Alma replied quietly, “I’ll talk and they’ll leave.

The girl tried to gather strength, breathed more often, as if she was saying to herself, those words, just words... Her ears no longer heard anything, as if covered with wax, and she saw only animals playing with logs. She walked, crossing the branches and needles. The bears roared, turning their faces to the intruder. One of them stood on his hind legs and walked forward. Alma was not afraid, just looked into the eyes of the beast and began to whisper:

— Leave the owner of the forest. Enough, played. We need logs. In the forest, the berries are ripe, and the borti are full of honey. What are you supposed to do here?

The bear fell on his front paws, becoming much smaller, and roared, exposing terrible fangs.

Scarpea, apparently sensing something, crawled out of her sleeve, and stood on her tail, and opened her mouth wide,

showing her teeth. Mishutka looked at the snake, roared again, and thought a little, and began to leave. Both others followed, leaving the shore to people. Mara, having already taken out her crackers from under the cloak, tried her best to show equanimity. True, it did not work out very well — the carved staff, apparently, stuck between the branches, escaped and fell to the ground. Alma bent down, and filed a symbol of mentoring power.

— Thank you, — just say the leader of the Chosen.

— Nothing... It's just that Scarpea was worried about me. But I would calm the bears down anyway.

The girl stroked the snake on the head, and she again snuck into her sleeve, and a minute later she again settled on her neck, in the form of a colorful decoration.

— Look after her in the halls, it's always cold in Alaty. What kind of krynka to start, so that at night she would be there and would not scare anyone.

Alma nodded readily, and followed Mara, again confidently marching to the camp. They were greeted enthusiastically and warily. The merrymakers were now wary of looking the young novice in the eye.

— You can go. Rooks are loaded, madam, “Ard Mare said.

And exactly, the boats swayed in light waves, five steps from the coast. Alma looked doubtfully at the water, regretting that she did not have leather pants and high boots with ties, and doubtfully tried water with a shoe. But then the merrymakers began to wear the Chosen Ones in their arms. Here they carried Katu, then

Lipa. The girl patiently waited for her turn, but all the oarsmen grabbed the bales with the remaining good, trying to get around the young witch longer. Alma just pursed her lips, took off her shoes, lifted the hem higher than her knees, and entered the water. It's cold, but nothing, I got there, I pulled myself up in my arms and climbed onto the boat, sitting on a bench. The legs were almost dry, the shoes lay nearby. She sat quietly, not going to talk to anyone else, and began to knit knots on a ball, trying to make a polite message for her father. Scarpea stretched out, looking at what the hostess was doing, and returned to her place.

The boat glided but the water surface, the rays of the sun reflected and played in the waves. The logs lay near the shore, the bears were not nearby. The oars knew their business, and the blades entered the water according to and to the beat, almost without splashes. Everything was quite good, until the evening.

The places were very beautiful, Alma admired the steep shore, as if beaten off by a talented carver. The left bank was Cretaceous white and very steep.

He turned the steering oar on the stern, and he went to be replaced by an intelligent fun-maker, Dalir. Strong, wiry, also with a shaved head and a pigtail on the back of the head. But then there was a cry, and Mara herself got up to see what happened.. Ard remained at the steering oar, and Yalin and Malin sat down nearby, adapting a piece of the board to the brush and winding it evenly. The tire held well, but the bones will grow together from a month, everyone knew

Alma looked at it, there was no desire to climb anymore.

— Alma, won't you look at the Way of Life?

— If he is not afraid, — the girl noted, — and so, all the rains and storms will become him. You will replace swallows, you will predict the weather. A cloud in the sky — and you are right behind the poppy infusion, — she said to the wounded.

— What are you, — said Mara, shaking her head, — well, you can't do that...

“Won't the snake bite me?” ‘the Way worried.

— No, immediately eat, — the novice told a terrible secret, — she is gluttonous with me...

“Sit down,” Ard interjected, “the healer will heal you.” Don't be afraid.

Next to Alma, the village of Mara, having prepared a flask with put on honey. The girl just sighed — exhaled, and put her hands on the arm of the patient. She could feel the heat pouring into his arm and her legs getting cold. The healer did not close her eye, watched how things were going. But her eyes darkened and she could hardly see. Her sensitive fingers ran along the brush of the new feeder, and the words were said:

“I did what I could.

The way jumped up, moved his fingers, and his face brightened with joy. Ard did not get up, but only tried with his hand how the merry man wields his fingers. The sailor only shook his head in disbelief, not even believing himself.

— I haven't seen this for a long time... Since Ilsa left, — he

said, — Mara, the goddess herself noted you.

— Ella remembers us... Do you want to eat? — the mentor asked with concern, looking into the girl's empty bowl.

— a little... the healer whispered, wiping her eyes.

The leader of the Chosen herself, without repairing, filled a cup from a jug and moved it to the ward. Alma eagerly, in one sip, drank a sharp-smelling liquid, and she immediately felt better. Unbearably pulled into a dream, and the girl wrapped herself in a raincoat, lay down, curled up on the bench. She was not disturbed, and sleep was simply healing for her. She woke up only when the sun rolled over the forest. And for some reason already on the couch, in the tent, and covered with a blanket. Alma jumped up, checking her clothes in fright, running her hands over her body.

— You what? Lipa asked in fright, “Also a sleepwalker???”

“Why is that?” — and Kata looked at her friend — she was tired just, bowed. Can you all do that, Alma? Heal?

— Well, almost... How am I here? I fell asleep on the bench, on the boat?

— Well, yes, and the four of you were merry and removed from the ship. Ard was worried about everything, would you wake up? They took you to the tent.

“What about the shoes?”

— Yes, they stand nearby.

— All right, let's sleep. Tomorrow again on the river go.

And exactly, an early wake-up, a quick breakfast from the

remnants of dinner, and the boats sailed again. Alma slowly prepared to enter the water, had already removed her shoes. But then, two merrymakers approached her, and picked up the Way in his arms and carried it to the ship. Well, even though Scarpea did not stick out and scare the rower.

Expanses of Gandvik

So they walked along the river for almost two weeks. Often they met those who went to the riding cities, with boats full of goods. Even sailors came from the White Sea, from the large Dvina River. Well, Gandvik is called, everyone knows this, from the giants, simply the word means the bay of giants.

And here, in the lower lands, it was certainly colder, and Alma took up her lark and took out a fur fufike. I dressed, and with pleasure felt that I was finally warm. Kata also warmed up by wearing a quilted felt jacket.

But Lipa was glad that she would visit again at home, where she had not been four months ago.

— Now we will be met by the Magi Auld and Foreman Sineon, the venerable people of Gandvik. And I will ask my mother to visit. I have three more brothers, Pirga, Dragut and Virga. My mother's name is Kalma, — she said, — we have a large longboat, we go to the sea for fish on it. All kinds of fish are full at home, you haven't tried that.

“They brought us too. And salmon, and good cod, — Alma did not agree, — herring too. And there are a lot of river fish in Sad.

“We have muksun. Try... There is no better fish.

But while the friends were talking, the shipbuilders threw the ropes onto the pier, and pulled the boat to the flooring from the

boards. On the gangways, people went ashore Gandvik, where the Magi and the foreman really expected them, and a dozen residents of the city. But people came up and came up to see Mara herself.

— Hello, Mara!, — simply, like an old acquaintance, said the Magi.

He was not at all an old man, about thirty years old, with a staff of fish tooth, good work and a huge price. He bowed slightly to Mara, showing his reverence. But what did the Mentor not like that Old hid his right hand behind his back, but averted his eyes...

“Grief befell us. Ilsa left. Everyone thought it would, so when Ella left, transferring the power to the successor. How will it be now... — the magi spoke slowly, looking into the eyes of the Mentor from Alatyr.

— So it is necessary to ask Pryakh, they know better about the will of the gods.

“I’ll beg you on Alatyr. Will you allow it?”

— Not for yourself, but for people. I myself beg the mountain lords to spread the bones for you. Hermits will not refuse those who ask from the bottom of their hearts.

Auld just broke into a smile, as did Petty Officer Sineon standing next to him.

— Don’t you know if Ouma da Serponov is calm? Are strangers attacking? Ilsa sleeps, and there are no more immortal armies ready to defeat any enemies.

“No one knows Ella’s intentions, Elder. She promised to help...

“We are faithful to Ella’s Covenants. In two days we will prepare the best rook for you. Our sailors will instantly deliver you to Alatyr, — the cordial foreman promised, — but for now, live with me, there is enough space.

“Thank you for your kind words. And you are Auld and you are Sineon, meeting us with good, and not for the first time.

Alma saw Kata and Yalin step aside, whisper. The Way approached the young healer, and raised the fist of his right hand to his forehead, giving unprecedented honor to the young novice. Everyone looked anxiously at the Watazhnik. He put his fingers in the little palms of the girl, as if not noticing how he wrapped Scarpey around them for one second, connecting them.

“I’ve had a dream. I know who you are, “he whispered,” I must serve you. “I will be faithful until death.

— Way, come here! Ard shouted.

— Go, don’t sack, the girl ordered.

The way quickly returned to his artel, the feeder grabbed him by the shoulder and dragged him away. The merrymakers slowly went to their boat. The foreman, pretending that he did not understand anything, led the guests to him. The chosen ones walked decorously and measured, without losing dignity, the sailors carried their belongings.

Alma looked at the houses of the large two-story Gandvika. Dogs, guardians of houses, crawled out into the street, tearing

their skins to blood, ran after a small healer, trying to poke their noses, if not in her palm, then at least in her leg. She had to sit down, stroke almost every one, and say sternly:

“Go home. They are waiting for you!

The tailed satellites ran back. But even returning to their estates, they continued to howl sadly. Sineon turned and frowned. I couldn't say anything. Chosen ones, what to take from them.

Alma looked carefully at the houses of the city. Fences, perhaps, were stickier, and so — it is very similar, everything was at home, in Sad. And, wild stone sheds met. Lipa came closer to Mara, and whispered with the mentor, and she finally agreed.

“You can come to me. Kata where?

“Yes, here I am,” said a friend.

“Mara let me. Come to me. Meet my family. We are fine — and she smiled weakly.

Three novices went to a large estate, and after them Old's unots dragged a dragnet with their stalls. It was hard for the young man, because the belongings were considerable. But he tried to show that he had nothing to do with everything, but it was clear that he was sweating.

“Here is my house,” Lipa let her friends know, and opened the gate.

The dog recognized the mistress immediately, greeted him for a long time, then ran up to Alma, and rubbed his head on her hand. Hearing voices in the yard, they came down from the room and home. There was a grayish one ahead. a very tall man, like

all the giants, followed by a slightly overweight woman, and after them, smiling, the Lipa brothers appeared, apparently, weather.

— Ah, Lipa, it's good to come! Father said, hugging his pet.

Finally, the girl dealt with her father, mother and brothers, turned to her friends.

— This is Kata, and Alma, the great healer and healer. Well, this is my father, Arn. My mother's name is Kalma. And these are my brothers — Pirga, Dragut and Virga.

“So young,” Arn could not believe.

“Your leg hurts, fisherman. If you want, I'll heal right away.

The man only led with his shoulder, and took three steps forward, not a drop believing in the words of the girl. He was used to trusting wise, elderly healers, there was also a girl who had barely reached female age.

Alma grinned at the man's disbelief, and which leg hurt the man. The black stripe was on the right knee. She bent down a little, and barely touched the sore spot. Arn's face changed indescribably... He easily sat down, then jumped, and sat down again. Then he climbed the stairs, and returned with two skins of sables in his hands, and put the gift in the hands of the guest.

— Noooo... — the girl tried to deny, — I'm visiting...

Kata shook her head, showing that the gift should not be refused.

“I walked with difficulty. That's not enough...

Then Kalma grabbed her husband's hand, and looked at Alma and Lipa.

“The furs are very beautiful. Thank you, — answered the medicine woman, and then Arn calmed down.

— Our bath is hot, wash from the road, — suggested Kalma.

It was impossible to refuse, not according to custom, and Lipa led the Chosen to a low house, above which smoke from a hot stove rose.

— Here, come in. Everything is ready, “she said, opening the door to the dressing room.

And exactly, kvass stood on the table, as well as herbal infusion. Alma looked around, but our covered wing, where she carefully put her snake. Scarpea reluctantly left the cozy and warm place. The girls quickly found themselves in a bathhouse, where they could warm up after a long journey. After the girls began to comb their longest hair. Well, Alma, who had just come out of childhood, had long curls alternating with very short ones, however, light and reddish, like all giants. Again, she mowed her eyes to the drawings on the skin of her friends, and yet there were differences.

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