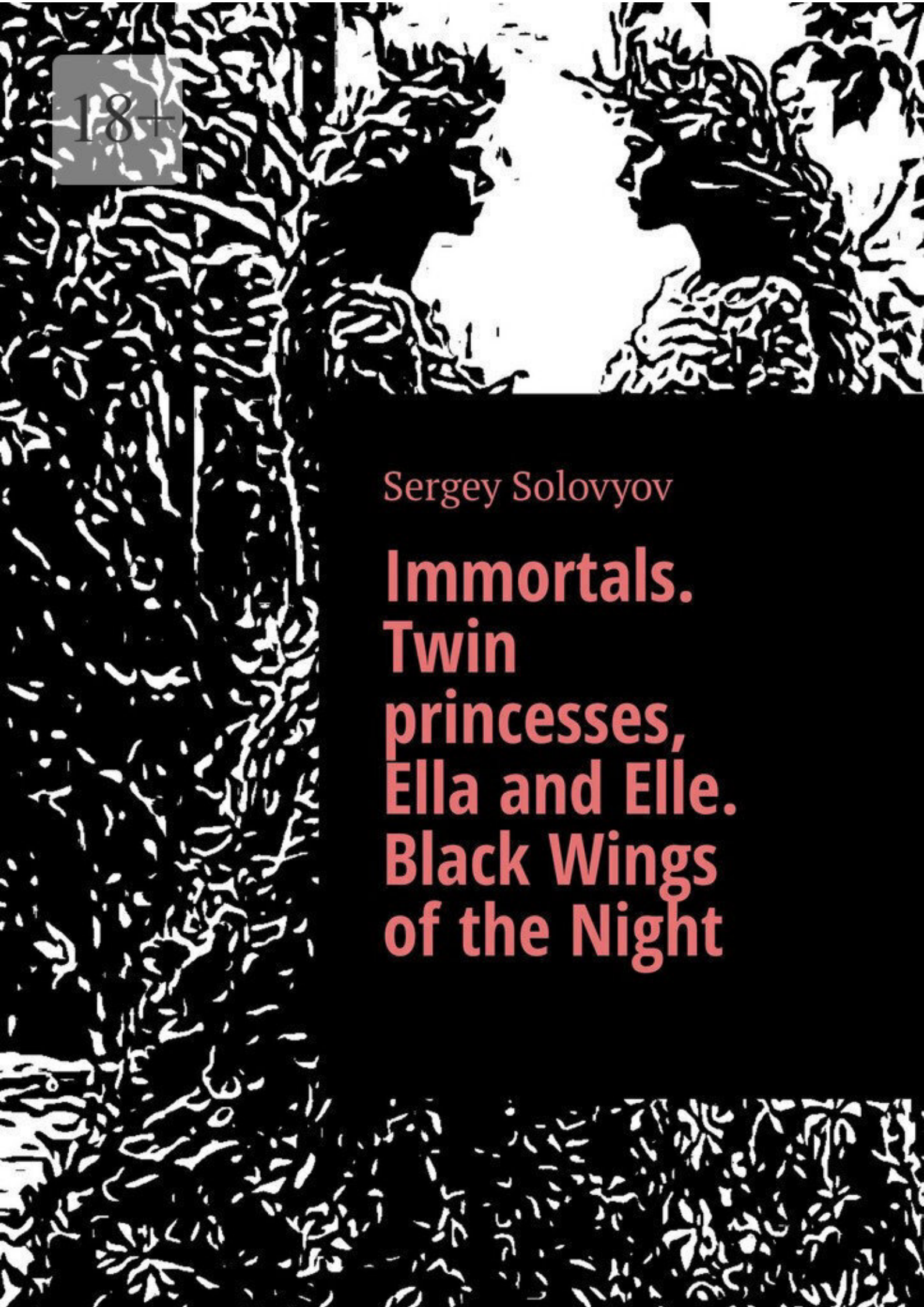

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Sergey Solovyov

Immortals. Twin princesses, Ella and Elle. Black Wings of the Night

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«Издательские решения»

Solovyov S.

Immortals. Twin princesses, Ella and Elle. Black Wings of the Night / S. Solovyov — «Издательские решения»,

The third book in the cycle “Legends of the Russian North.” So, the Dead Princess Alma fell asleep, and troubles came to the Siberian lands. Elder Ouma, the proud Savir, wanted to take all power into his own hands. Nothing stopped him along the way, neither vows nor Covenants. A terrible feud took up a forest fire. And who can now stop the terrible war? Only sisters, Ella and Elle.

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Immortals. Twin princesses, Ella and Elle. Black Wings of the Night

Sergey Solovyov

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Trouble and twins never come alone.

PROLOGUE

— Well, Atey, then go?

And Immortal showed his teeth in a cheerful, frontal grin. The evening was not bad, and the day is good, so the knight did not tire. The interlocutor, in response, only led with his shoulder, disagreeing. No, not that I would be tired. I wanted, to be honest, another…

— What, you say, Tivda… You see, it's dark, and the fog has already fallen on this thicket. Will you allow, perhaps, to put on your wings? It hurts the hunt in the case to check this game… I only heard about this in fairy tales

— You yourself remember, knight, the last words of the Dead Princess… You can't show yourself to us. After all, we promised Alma, — reminded another, Atey.

This hero was pososanitsa, more often than others. The article stood out among these warriors.

— Don't worry, Kashchey. What do you think, will the Brothers wake you up and take your wife out of the shelter? — tongue-in-cheek Sana also grinned, — will the glorious woman not stand before your brothers-in-arms?

— You, here, glory, and the mind is sharp, but…

— What, and beautiful very? — Waking up, said Immortal.

Vataga heard this, laughed amicably, even Tivda, unable to restrain herself, slapped his knees. And he himself loved to joke, and appreciated the sharp word, in time and to the place turned by others. Kaschei smiled at the Slavic woman, looked with pleasure at his sweet face. No, the girl was pretty, but not for this there was fame about her throughout Siberia. And as about the incomparable archer, who did not give a miss from the heroic bow and half a mile.

And another would be wonderful, of course, for an ordinary person. Not a single dog was near these hunters. And the fact that the conversation was in pitch darkness, under the huge branches of century-old pines, throwing black shadows to the ground. What was the blackness of any night for the Immortals, who saw everything in the dark, better than in the light of the Sun!

— Okay Atey… We will fly before dawn, persuaded, but we will bypass Oum, Sargat and the Fortress with forests. We have nothing to catch the eyes of mortals. It will be bad if Mara is offended, but the Sisters will send us.

— Okay, scare us, Tivda, — whispered Kurei, — we honor the Contract, and we are in order. That's it, getting ready!

And eight knights and poles, dropping bags on the ground, took out of the luggage the most expensive thing they had with them, in this wilderness. These were wings, still precious Acasta work, obtained by the restless Tivda. Kashchey himself, lovingly smoothing the suspension belts, quickly put on his wings, outweighing the bag with the load on his chest. He slowly walked around the rest of the brothers, looked to see if everything was fine, adjusted the belts on Tia's shoulders.

"You can't rush here. This post-frame can dig into the shoulder. There are no trifles in the preparation, — and smoothed the belt and shoulder of the girl.

To tell the truth, the rest of the Immortals disliked the oldest of them, looked after him. Although, this knight was wiser than each of the vatagi, even smarter than Atey himself.

— Thank you, Kashchey, — the Slavnitsa quietly said, having examined the correctly laid belts on her chest.

— What is there… Well, everything, in the sky!

Tivda stood on a hill, spread his arms to the sides, checking the mounts, then folded his wings at the sides, and jumped from his seat, immediately, five fathoms high, and waved his powerful wings very powerfully three times, marking out small branches on the ground at once. He immediately twinned a big circle, turned over in the air like a swimmer in a river, and rose higher, disappearing into impenetrable cold fog.

A cold drop of moisture treacherously fell behind Kurey's scruff, and he squinted.

— That's how it is, — muttered the magician, — I can't get used to everything.

But, immediately jumped, immediately waving his wings strongly. And he almost put it on a huge pine, but the clever Immortal was able to dodge, and rose higher, passing a dangerous level. Other Immortals followed him, like huge geese-swans following their leader.

Tivda looked back, noticed that everyone was flying in a single formation, behind him. Nobody lags behind, keep order. Then, read the whole day, quarreled with each other, and here, at once, everyone fell silent. After all, it is no wonder to see and feel this. Kashchey himself, as if born anew, was so good for him here in the heavenly heights. But, and not to forget about the matter, and the leader again looked at his own people, figured out the direction.

Their heavenly wedge stretched to the South-East, leaving the Great Ob on the right. They walked quickly, hoping to pass open places while it was dark, and a thick and dense fog hung above the ground. Mortals could not see them, as this Chosen One hoped, moreover, still taken by Elena the Beautiful herself.

Kashchey looked now without stopping, to the East, where the Eternal Sky itself was poured with the forerunner of Light, the new bright birth of Solsebog. At first, the entire horizon turned pink, the paint reflected on the chain of low clouds. White light lamb, driven by the wind, seemed to be overwhelmed with shame, for the fact that they were only present at this sacrament. But, the color of the clouds quickly gave way to gold, like hot gold becoming red.

"We must go down!" Tivda shouted, dawns!

It was necessary to decide faster. And then, soon the fog will go away, and although the places here are not crowded, the shepherds with their herds were not rare guests here. But he did not want them to be noticed, but the news of that spread throughout the lands. It could have turned out that way, and not that it would have been good, as Kashchey immediately estimated… Such a fuss will begin, but he got into alterations before, and did not want it anymore. I immediately recalled how he himself hung with his ribs on a stake, even his teeth turned down…

— There, look! Strangers attacked our trading vataga! Curey shouted, pointing to his comrades.

— Where? Atey did not understand, flying closer.

And Kashchey made a U-turn, everyone got up, and shouted:

— Look to the left, in the clearing…

"What are we doing, Tivda?" Sana asked.

The oldest noticed how rows of strangers were approaching a number of carts that protected only a few giants with bows and arrows in their hands. There were a hundred enemies, or even more. The merchants were doing bad, the oohs were bad…

— Down, we beat them only with wings, we kill everyone! Kashchei shouted — I hope Mara will forgive us, — he said in a whisper.

He was now declining quickly, so that he already laid his ears. And the wind whistled, and the belts holding the wings simply dug into the chest, preparing to burst. The Immortal was saved by great skill… And then Tivda was able to hit the wings so that their copper upholstery immediately cut in half a dozen strangers, and the black feathers at once became red from the blood of evil finders. A wild howl filled the forest. Tivda did not hesitate, and was already on the ground, began to chop the wings of the rest. Strangers tried to throw darts at him, but where can mortals compete in battle with the Immortals? No copper tip even touched his clothes.

— Right, left, go around them! Don't let anyone leave! Kashchey shouted wildly and terribly, rubbing his teeth evil, like an evil bear.

He rushed forward, and chopped with his wings, not allowing the enemies to come to their senses, severed arms, legs, and heads fell to the ground. Tivda was covered in blood from head to toe. Here, he was able to abruptly stop the blow, noticing Sana nearby. She dived under the open wing of the fallen, and shook her head condemningly

“Very fast,” she whispered slowly and quietly.

And a bloody drop fell on her forehead, painting the pearl pendant scarlet. Slavnitsa just froze with anger, and blushed. Kashchey took a couple of steps back, and spread his hands to the sides: “Sorry, they say… Not to blame.” True, here he already calmly exhaled and looked around, lowering and folding his wings, dropping blood and dirt from them. It seems to have been done, and took a couple of minutes, no more.

Everything, all strangers were killed, or writhed, chopped and dying, tried to climb, or crawl to the forest, sliding along the smooth, like ice, bloody grass. Salit and Atey walked around the field, swearing field, and with klevets in their hands. White wings, folded behind, dragged along the ground. The lower edge, covered with feathers, became simply blood-red from blood.

“Better look,” said Atey, “no one should leave…

— Yes, I see! Salit answered, throwing the clove from his right hand to his left.

Vityaz did not even shy away from such hard and evil work, looked at both, and occasionally bent down to finish off everyone still alive. There was no mercy for anyone. Here, not only the eyes helped, but also a sensitive sense of smell, which made it possible to understand who is still alive and longs to hide from them. Kashchey walked along the edge of the clearing, examining the dense, in places broken off just during the battle, hazel bushes. This is not to say that I smelled something, but it just seemed that I heard some kind of rustle. Very, very quiet. The immortal is used to trusting himself, took a couple of inaudible steps so as not to scare off the prey, bent down, and grabbed a stirring bundle wrapped in felt in bushes. He pulled it out at once, and pulled it out from under the lower branches, as if he had dusted off the stuck garbage as usual.

— What is it, Tivda? Sana shouted, who did not understand what had happened, whom did she catch?

But then the little handles were shod, as if they had caught the knight’s neck, and the piercing blue eyes of a little girl looked at him, pressing her lower lip with excitement.

— Everything is fine, little, — the hero quietly said.

And the Hanza, simple drovers, were already approaching Tivda, and ahead of everyone, the merchant was in a hurry, with a staff in his hands. The man sometimes stumbled, wiped his red and sweaty face with his sleeve with excitement and fear.

— Oh thank you, knights, saved us, — he began a simple speech, looking around the winged army, — here, take, as a gift… — and held out a leather cat, — do not think bad, from a pure heart! And I, the merchant Rast Gorazdovich, live near the Fortress, in the estate, near the Proni river. You will be in those places, come to visit, I will be glad. With the goods, we go to Sargat. And here, they ran into an ambush, it would be bad, if not your help…

— It just so happened, Rast Gorazdovich. Keep quiet about us that you met in these places. This is the case, — Tivda said quietly, but significantly, — otherwise I will come to you at night, and then do not be offended, I will solve everyone…

— Who doesn’t know you, Kashchey the Immortal? — and the merchant bowed low, — I will be silent. So no one has seen you, just read a hundred and twenty years…

Rast noticed other Immortals, but here he preferred not to utter a word at all. For everyone knows that: “Silence is gold.”

— And here’s another… — continued Tivda, — I found a child, a girl. Who was in your wagon train with your family?

— I remember… Yesterday, the young people nailed to me… But, the clothes were without family signs, I don’t know whose family. And yes, the young woman had two children in her arms, for sure… Rust recounted.

And then he closed his eyes, but made a sign, bending his fingers, making secret hustles that drove away evil spirits. And Tivda himself remembered the customs that the Magi of Gemini did not hurt. Sometimes they demanded to give one of these children to another village, so as not to anger

the spirits. And these, apparently, decided to leave the village themselves. And strange of course, yes, that's how it happened…

— Okay, merchant, thanks for the news. But it's time for us to say goodbye, "Tivda said loudly," but don't forget what you promised me, otherwise I will make you remember your words."

The merchant here again grabbed the handkerchief, began to rub his forehead as if he wanted to wipe to blood.

— Here, Tivda, take the bag, — Tia suddenly said, — otherwise the girl will fall. What can you even call it?

Kashchei thought only for a moment, then a mischievous smile lit up his face, and he replied:

— Since I myself found a child near the tree, so be it. I won't leave it, I'll take it with me. And I have already chosen a name, I will call Ella!

— For this, or what, the name of the drug? Tia laughed, pointing to the tree trunk.

— Exactly.

Kashchey answered so, and lied. He chose the nickname of the find by the name of his mistress, Elena the Beautiful herself. Only, I could not say this to anyone. I decided that it was not worth it, and my soul became heavy and dreary.

In the meantime, the Oldest was fitting a bag with a girl on his chest, the Brothers managed to collect the most valuable from the broken bodies. Atey spoke thoughtfully, noticing surprise in the eyes of the merchant:

— Do not disappear good! And then, we change all the necessary trifles for gold and furs.

And the brothers continued their sad craft. But, a full bag of suitable differences turned out. Salit took this bag, without thinking, calmly hung it around his neck.

— That's it, you have to fly away! Tivda said calmly, looking over the others.

He jumped high up, spread his wings, and rose higher, twenty fathoms, as the merchant Rast himself decided. Well, and after him the other Immortals took to the sky. This flock, having made a circle over the clearing, stretched to the Southeast, to the White Mountains, as Rast Gorazdovich joyfully understood.

***

They flew back already, and each with a load. Of course, what are the extra three pounds for the Immortal? Almost nothing. But, with this weight of precious jade, they got a little slower. I had to sit on the ground more often, wait out the bright time of the day. And now, at the next parking lot, the Slavs started a fire, but they began to cook a good stew from a Belarusian woman caught in the river. Atey da Salit, with his bare hands, on an argument, took a pair of large fish in cold water. And Kurei, as the smartest, made a fire.

Well, Sana and Tiya, having cleaned, and chopped into large slices, put the fish in a cauldron, cook. There was also a bit of barley cereals, and good herbs for seasoning, also scored Kurei.

— Your daughter, Ella, was completely weaned, Tivda. That's right, it will go to you, you are with us — Kashchey, — piqued comrade tongued Tia.

The oldest looked at the girl's pink cheeks, perky blue eyes, and, in general, was pleased with himself.

— Yes, it seems to eat. So, now…, — he said.

True, the girl sitting on a stump, and chatting with her feet, ate only sweet raspberries collected in the forest. She did not even pay attention to the crackers and smoked meat lying next to her, in a bowl. Tivda got hooked nearby, trying to feed the child. But, she only smiled, but pushed his hand away when he tried to put meat in her mouth. Vityaz only sighed heavily, looking at the girl. Indeed, she now seemed very thin, in her gray shirt. He looked at the girl again, sighed heavily, as if he had decided for himself. Kashchei waited until the Spruce had eaten the berries, and put it in his breast bag.

"I'll be back soon! he shouted to his brothers, and took to the sky.

Ella habitually settled in a bag, and gawked at the forest rushing under them. She did not close her eyes, was not afraid, only screamed softly with delight. Well, Tivda, noticed a large estate, as if hiding among the trees, and went down there, hiding behind the tyn.

young pines. He checked the smoothness of the logs, ran his palm over them. And the gates, beautiful, carved, cool. Well, and Spruce only gawked from her shelter, but modestly kept quiet. True, she could not resist, immediately tried a tree with her palm, but now she pulled back the handle, as if burned, and looked at the knight.

"I know the witch lives here. But, she's kind… he muttered almost calmly.

Kashchey listened everything, but sniffed, trying to make out who else could be in the estate. I didn't want to show myself to strangers, I took it. Finally he decided, and at once, in one jump he jumped over the fence designed for mortal people, but not for the Immortals.

He looked around and went to the carved porch of the house. But, then the door opened, and a woman came out to meet, about thirty in appearance, in elegant clothes, but without tribal and generic embroidery. She was good herself, you just can't take your eyes off. A cute face, with barely peeping freckles, blue eyes, full lips, and blonde hair not covered with a cape, were braided in a tight braid. She held the dog resting on her collar. He definitely did not want to be here nearby, pulled his nose, sniffing to the guest. And he could not calm down.

— And, Kashchey, you came to me… And I kept thinking, you will come, you will not come. I've long sensed you.

— Hello to you, Gaida, — and the knight bowed his belt, — so I came with a request… If you can't drive!

"Yes, I see already," she chuckled, "Glad I came." Come into the house. I'm exhausting the bath for now, and she walked past, leaving the door open.

Well, Tivda sat down on the blockage, and took off his wings from the back. He also released little Spruce from her shelter, took the girl out of a leather bag and put her on a bench. And the dog immediately came to meet her, poking his nose into her shirt, and she was vividly interested in dog ears. Then, two forest cats came up, see who came here? They walked nearby, and lay down next to the girl. Soon the owner of the estate returned.

— Well, Ella? Let's go to the bathhouse, — Gaida said calmly and quietly, taking the girl in her arms, — you need to wash yourself out of the way. And you sit still, — said the hostess Tivde.

Ella nothing, did not shout, behaved calmly. She looked back at Kashchei, and did not break out of the wrong hands. Well, the knight, while he slowly checked the luggage, was satisfied with himself. It seems that everything was as it should, so far…

About an hour later, the woman returned to the house, with Ella wrapped like a doll in a gray cloth, so that only her pink nose stuck out. The witch entered the house, beckoning the cats after her. They followed her orders. It seems to be slowly so, with high tails, and then just running. The woman returned back with a basket containing linen and towels.

— Well, Vityaz… Now your turn. The bath is exhausted, let's go. Leave your goodness here in the canopy.

"All right," he replied, and smiled.

In fact, do not go with weapons and luggage to the bathhouse? He left in the canopy not only a club and a dagger, but also a travel cloak. He hung wooden wedges on the straps driven into the wall. And I also checked if it was exactly hanging. He lacked reproaches for all sorts of nonsense…

— Why are you there, Vityaz? Let's go, otherwise the water will cool down. Or is it already used to washing only with dew in your forests?

— And the dew is good. if only the eternal gatekeeper in the Royal Palace Oum did not put.

— At least help to convey the basket, — said the woman, smiling.

Well, the knight took of course. It was necessary to help. And he didn't even feel all this weight. And the bathhouse looked quite usually. Yes, what there, after all, he built it, dragged the logs himself,

and folded the furnace. Now he calmly opened the door, let the owner of the estate forward, and put the basket on the bench. It was beautiful here, cozy, elegant wicker mats laid out, nice to sit down. There was enough light that got through small windows covered with pieces of mica in a typesetting frame.

— Well, undress. Or will you wash in boots? — a completely unexpected question was filled in.

— I quickly — and Tivda began to take off his clothes.

Occasionally I looked at Gaida herself undressing. She took off her frilly skirt, cape, then came the turn of the embroidered shirt, in two movements, bent down, took off her shoes. And she remained sitting, braiding her hair. She did it slowly, saw how he admired her. The woman's beautiful, full breasts just glanced. She stretched her hips, strong slender legs in front of her, played a little with muscles. Tivda saw how dexterous fingers remove hair, as a woman took off temporal rings, earrings. He felt that he got hot, I thought it was true that because of the hot steam room, here, behind the wall.

— Help me take off the necklace, otherwise it got tangled in my hair, she asked.

Shouldn't a knight help a woman? Tivda jumped up, moved closer, she turned her back. The floral scent, complex and inviting, was felt side by side. On the neck, under thin, satin skin, a vein was beating. Drawings adorned her back and shoulders. He removed his hair, and slowly untangled his hair, carefully removed the gold chain with discs, and decorated with gems. True, he could not tear himself away from the other, those gems, as if burning on beautiful roundness, so beckoning his gaze. Then she quickly turned, looking first into his eyes, then the woman lowered her gaze below.

— Why immediately to the steam room? — the witch spoke slowly and a little hoarse, — I see you tired of the road… And I will help you… You can do something else… — and she just dug into his lips with her own.

Tivda felt the touch of her body to her, stroked the smooth skin on the back of the beauty, felt the strength of her buttocks, the pliable softness of her breasts. They slowly sank to the bench, without ceasing to touch each other. Kashchei's love fervor did not fade away for a long time, but there was time for a steam room.

The bath at Gaida turned out to be noble, hot and spiritual. And there was expensive soap, not just ash or sand.

— I cook myself, — the witch boasted, soaping her back with a washcloth, — with flowers… Do you feel how good?

— Exactly… — Tivda said relaxed, and clapped a birch broom on the back, and then, and a little lower.

"What's gone wrong?" Come on, now do it for me too…

And the woman lay down on the shelf. Porridge at once doused her with warm water from a linden gang, and began to rub with urine from the very heels to the neck. Then a steamed birch broom went into business, and then, again, soap. The water smelling of floral soap was mercilessly washed away, and the witch turned over on her back, looking mischievously at Kashchei.

— I already thought, suddenly I disliked, — the witch said loudly, — or you're tired, I'm tired here with me…

— I must remember that the Immortals do not know fatigue…

He quickly kissed her lips again, and attracted her. And Tivda hugged her, began to shower with quick kisses. When finally, he was a little flushed, pulled away, Gaida quickly kissed him on the cheek, ran sharp marigolds on the back of the knight, attracting attention:

— So that's what, div… Leave the girl with me. Here she will be better than a receptionist in Gandvik. Think about it. I know the words that Elena the Beautiful said: "There is no place for Immortals among Mortals."

— You need to look… Spread the bones on it, Hyde. As the Gods say, so be it.

— Where did you get it? I see that it's not yours? — she said, wiping off the tattooed body of the knight with a towel — did you find something? So her twin sister remained. I noticed an acorn-

sized birthmark on Yeli's right forearm. You took one of the two, knight, broke the family, separated the sisters.

— Fight was, picked it up in bushes. There were no parents nearby, — he made excuses, — Do not leave the girl?

Really… And before his eyes again stood the picture of that day, that quick fight. And I could not remember noticing a Hanza family with children. And he, it turns out, separated the twins? It turned out badly, as Immortal thought…

— Blimey… — the witch continued to speak quietly, with a smile, — Surprised, right word… Fallen, and saved the child? 'she chuckled.

— That's how it happened… — and Kashchey sighed, and rubbed his right side, — I, here, hung on a bronze stake read, fifty years… And Alma saved, was not afraid of death, did not ask for anything in return… Since then I have given the Covenant, I do not leave anyone without help…

— It's a pity, I didn't know before, — and the witch stroked his cheek, and then kissed him, — okay, we must dress and go to the house. And then it's time for us to dine.

Tivda dressed himself and helped the hostess. He watched her adjust her clothes in front of the copper mirror. Finally, they went back, the witch first, and the knight a little behind and from the side, as if looking after the beauty. Rose she on the high porch, opened the door, pulling at the carved, skillfully worked, ring.

— Come in or something, dear guest… said the woman, and bowed to him according to custom.

— Thank you, mistress — and the diva bowed his head back, took off his hat and went inside.

It was dark in the canopy, and Tivda did not distinguish this, he saw it in the dark, no worse than another in the light of the sun. And Gaida lit an oil lamp from smolders in a copper vessel of hemp rope, and went up the steep stairs to the upper room, to the living room. Here, on the bench, Spruce sat and did not get bored with the cats. I definitely didn't get bored — I frolicked, and fluffy animals took care of her, didn't scratch, didn't bite. But they were not allowed to leave either.

— Sit at the table, — said Gaida, defending herself to Ella, — everything is ready.

She nodded in a completely adult way, and sat on the bench at the table. The witch opened a large box, and took out a carved box. Slowly, slowly put this thing, like a big treasure, on a wide table. She prepared and laid an embroidered towel. Finally, she took out a suede bag from the box, shook it three times, but shook her head and put it back.

— No, it won't be okay, — the witch said to herself, — Listen to me, Ella… — I turned to the girl, — At all, take the bag, and shake, shake well. Here, wisely, you have to do, there is no need to rush…

The girl did what the witch demanded. I didn't argue, I just looked around at Kashchei, apparently, I was already expecting bad things for myself. Gaida closed her eyes, began to swing on the bench, quietly humming something to herself. Then, for a long time she created hustles, beckoned. And Spruce put in front of her a bag with alchiks covered with runes.

I saw and more than once Tivda these signs, the oldest among the giants. But rarely they write, only sacred hymns. Runes are the connection of mortals with the Gods, so the Gods speak to people, giving strength to fortune-tellers. And those interpret what Veles says. After all, it was he, Elena's brother, who gave people runo signs.

Well, Gaida opened her eyes, and began to take out three bones at a time, and put them on a towel. I finished three counts, only then I dared to breathe. Three times three, the most sacred volshba. Tivda knew it.

The witch began to read, in holy verse:

— The finder should stay here…

Skills and strength to gain…

But in evil yes difficult hour

It's time for her to fight…

Gaida quickly said this, immediately hid the bones in a bag, soaked her sweaty forehead with a handkerchief. I fed myself a full bucket of kvass, and instantly drained it.

— Like this… Heard the will? Deal with it… And she will be fourteen years old, I will send a girl to Alatyr, to gain intelligence. And here I will teach you everything I know. Okay, and now you need to eat. Is everything ready! I sensed yesterday that guests should be expected!

And she began to lay out treats on the table. Pies, spiritual baked meat, barley porridge generously flavored with onions. In the middle was a large reaper with apple brew, just giving off a wonderful smell. For Eli, Gaida finely cut the meat and put it in a small area, arming the girl with a comfortable spoon. She began to eat, smiled slyly, looking at the witch and diva, cheerfully chatting her legs. In general, she was completely happy and calm.

Tivda, felt hungry, and paid tribute to both meat and excellent pies, did not disregard porridge. I drank an apple drink, felt that I was full. He got up, stroked the girl's shoulder, and calmly said:

— Well, Ella, I gotta go. And you, stay with Gaida…

But here the usually calm girl frowned, and clung to the sleeve of the knight's jacket, so tightly, and unexpectedly said, almost shouted:

"Where are you going?" I'm with you!

Immortal is directly stunned. He looked at the child, as if recognizing him anew.

"You can't talk. She was silent all the way, — the knight said quietly.

"I didn't want to and didn't say," the girl stubbornly said, "but here you are leaving me." And my parents left me! Nobody wants me! she burst into tears.

The witch stroked the child on the head for a long time, calmed down, then kissed the pink cheek. The spruce still, buried, hugged the woman by the neck. Well, Tivda sighed with relief, and began to equip himself. Bag on the chest, dagger and clove to the belt, and wings behind the back, and everything was ready. On the porch came Gaida, with Spruce in her arms.

— Goodbye, witch! 'he shouted, adjusting the luggage on his chest.

— See you, div! 'the hostess replied.

And Ella also waved her little pen. Kashchei grinned, waved both of his wings, and jumped into the sky. A few flaps of the wings and he was already high. Then he made a circle over the estate, turned over a couple of times in the air, and flew to the river, where his brothers were already waiting for him.

PART 1 Krasa's Apprentice — The Traveller

CHAPTER 1 A family living on the outskirts

An ordinary day on the estate and began as usual. The sun had just risen, rolled out from behind a distant forest in the east, and the villagers were all on their feet, in an important matter. There was nothing unusual, everything went according to the once and for all established routine. Who has a rope creaking at the well, the owners collect water in tubs, and who melts the stove, if not in the house, so in the summer kitchen, calculating housewives take up cooking, prepare food for their households. Men, they do their own thing. Some feed is given, or cows are driven to the village herd, where the shepherd Atmai is already tapping the whip on his red boot, waiting for all the cows and gobies to gather. The village was rich, which means that there were plenty of animals.

Radko drove his sheep out of the yard, from a large barn made of pine logs. He led this herd, as usual, an old goat, and his charges were quite obedient to him. Especially, with the help of a couple of master dogs, wisely and really, helping the owner. Sheep walked almost in formation, crowded together, sometimes bleated loudly. Their thick, but unstable herd, came out of the gate, to the outskirts. The goat, proudly carrying formidable horns on his head, led the wards from the village. And then, the herd itself knew the way, to the grazing that belonged to their village according to custom, and according to the Truth of Warta.

And Radko's wife, Mlada, set about the dough that had been set since yesterday. She took off the towel from the tub, straightened the high-raised dough with her fingers.

— Look and learn, Elle, how good bread comes out. Now, the stove will trample, and let's start putting loaves in the vent with you. And from the remaining good pies we bake. Have you already prepared the filling?

"So of course, Mother! said the girl, nodding her head, so that the tight braid swung.

The woman looked happily at her child. And then she got ugly as a beauty. High and fine, with a heavy, slightly reddish oblique. Yes, and the Sun blessed, generously showering the girl's face with freckles.

— My clever… What did you do without you… Your brothers, Arpad da Zaley, of course, but there, in a community house, they disappear, instruct them.

— Why so? Could live with us. And we are better, and more fun.

"As is customary. And in two years, they will cut off their hair, and they will be able to acquire their own household. Zalya will help us like the youngest, but you, you go, and we will marry you.

"I don't want to get married. Here, I study in the evenings with the mentor Dirka, an herbalist, as she will become. A good thing, and necessary. And then I saw a dream, mother, — and the girl looked into Mlada's eyes, — her missing sister… She is alive, for sure… And where she is, so Elena the Beatiful did not indicate, I myself must find the missing…

— So we were looking, looking… — the woman whispered sadly, hanging her hands, — and Rasta Gorazdovich was asked if he had seen anything? Or himself, or his unots from the caravan. On that day, strangers attacked, and we rushed to run. And our wagon turned over, I pulled you out, my father dragged me… The wheels were lifted, the wagon was turned over, the bags were in place, but your sisters, no… So she disappeared… Radko and I are to blame, but what can we do? — and the woman cried, wiping her tears with her sleeve.

— Don't, don't cry… The main thing is that she is alive, for sure. And so, you see, and find a sister…

"Where are you going to find her?" All this happened far, behind Oum. And we are in Warth now. Read, with a thousand miles from those places, if not more… Well, we cried, let's bake bread

and pies, otherwise the hungry father will return from the field… But look, without Krasa, do not engage in witchcraft yourself, you will make yourself bad, but you will put trouble on us!

— Well, well, mother, — the girl answered a little frightened, taking up work.

Soon, two heavy baking sheets went to the furnace, heavily loaded with caravans. Around there was a smell incomparable, exciting, exciting, attractive, bread…

Even Zubok came running, the house keeper, waving his tail cheerfully. I lay down nearby, sticking out my red tongue, as if I wanted to ask: “What are you doing here, mistress? What is such a smell throughout the estate?”

Mlada smiled, pulled out fresh bones, put them in an old sherby bowl, and put them in front of the dog. He gratefully wagged his tail, and began to treat.

— Well, you can go to your Beauty. Come back in the evening, we’ll have dinner together, “Mlada said slowly.

— Thank you, Mother!

And the Christmas tree rushed to dress until the strict mother changed her mind. She took with her a suma woven from a bast, put bread in it on the road, and her favorite wooden cup, drink water.

CHAPTER 2 Witch's Chambers

The tree walked quickly, but looked under her feet. And then, in bast shoes, you always need to walk carefully, otherwise you can pin your leg with a bitch. And it hurts, and it's a shame, you need to look at your feet. And it was not far to go from their village, to the witch's estate, only two miles. It is possible along the river, but back, against the current, I did not want to rest so hard with a pole, it's easier, to walk on my own two. Indeed, it would be better to dry, but she did not have her own elk, only she had a secret, this handsome Faithful clicked. My father drove cattle on it to the pasture.

Well, the girl went like that, leaning on the staff. Sometimes, she removed thick branches from her face with a long stick, or, she rustled lying branches or bushes, trying to scare the snakes. She did not want to kill forest inhabitants, but she did not want to be bitten either. So it was already once that a viper bit her in the leg. Nothing, survived, although the ankle was swollen, and she saw such visions — words cannot describe, no one would have believed. She never told anyone. Why? If you say, mother and father will swear, they will not be released into the forest, so sit in the house, wool strands. No, the girl knew how, but she did not like such a thing. Dull hurts, slow, leisurely. But now, she snuck through the dense bushes of hazel, and ended up at the witch's estate, decorated with cow skulls hanging on the stakes of a solid fence. I also noticed a dog running up to the gate and merrily twirling its tail. She opened it herself, hearing how much the willow hinges creaked, pulling the door to the entrance bars.

— Well, hello Druzhok, — the girl greeted, ruffling the wool on the head of a hefty dog, — here, to you, — and handed him a piece of bread.

He instantly swallowed, and without chewing, with dignity led the guest to the porch of the house, and even pushed him to the seedling with his nose. The tree smiled, straightened the hem, and knocked on the door.

"Come in already," came a deaf voice outside the door.

The girl pulled on the door ring, opening the entrance. The loops, already old, from the lashes of wild grapes, creaked mercilessly, but the guest has long been accustomed to this. In the canopy, on the wall, a small lamp hung on the wall, slightly illuminating the dark room. Here, Elle hung up her travel cloak, but left her paws so as not to trample in the house. And she dressed wooden sandals lying here. A simple thing, from a board, but with two leather straps that support the foot. They dressed the same shoes in the bathhouse so as not to get burned.

— Here I am! said the girl loudly, going into the basement.

It was not dark, yet two windows let enough light through the frames, with copper bindings with pieces of mica. Here stood in the corner a stove, built of stones on clay mortar, and oak shelves on the walls, with pots and pots laid out on them, and bundles of herbs. The table was also not free. And his mistress was sitting at home, rubbing the potion in a stone mortar with a pestle.

— Good day, beauty! said the witch amiably.

"And to you, Krasa!

It is unclear who called the herbalist that name. She was chrome and humpback, with one hand shorter than the other. But, was trained by good mentors, and used her potions sick well, so many recovered. But, no one except Elle wanted to study with a witch, so the girl was her only student.

— Here, here and pies, and the hitches baked you. And with poppy seeds, and apples and honey. Try… — the herbalist said with a smile, putting a wooden bowl with a treat in front of the guest.

The girl did not refuse, tried delicious cookies, pleased the hostess. She knew that Kras was very happy with her, and she loves to pamper her student. Washed down with a tasty berry brew flavored with mint.

"It's time to get down to business," the witch said her usual saying.

And she began to show and tell the girl again about the secret power of herbs, how to treat them. Simple drugs, like crushed willow bark, or dried raspberries, suitable for removing heat. Lily of the valley and valerian root, well suited for a tired heart, an infusion of burdock, for the treatment of the liver. Honey and plantain leaf, for the treatment of cuts and wounds.

Behind the whole thing, a persistent knock on the door distracted both. The dog also barked, as if warning the hostess about those who had come. Krasa sighed with displeasure, rinsed her hands in the washbasin, wiped it with a clean rag, and went to open the door. The tree remained with the herbs, and kept order. I knew that Ryzhik, a domestic ferret, could drop in and arrange his order in the canopy, turning all the plates and pots upside down. Yes, actually, he was already here, instead of greeting, poking his nose into Elle's leg. But the girl did not sleep either, quickly took him in her arms, distracting. And she released a ferret rushing around the yard, doing business, catching mice.

— Good day, Krasa, — said the visitor, — here, she brought her daughter, look, fly her, do mercy! And I, here, brought the hotel, — put the basket on the doorstep.

"Let him come, I'll see," the witch replied amiably.

— Stasya, come here, — the woman called the girl.

She approached reluctantly, frightened by the sight of a hunchback. And then, after all, they talked a lot about Beauty in the village, and Elle heard these stories.

That they say, it can jinx, and curse. And at night, they say, flies in the sky, on the floor. To be honest, Yolka then asked her mother to send her to witch training. I saw in a dream that it flies in the sky, looks down at forests, fields… True, it does not fly itself, but carries its winged knight. And then she herself wanted to rise into the sky, what if the witch teaches? Let not on the wings, but on the dais.

And Stasya came up, and Krasa sat down sick on a bench near the house, in the light. She beckoned to Elle with her finger, she was reluctant to take a couple of steps.

— So what do you say, girl? — the witch whispered, grabbing her student's hand, — look how she taught you… Do not look with your head, but with your heart…

And now the witch's voice was heavy, heavy, as if pulling along, dragging and dragging, twisting. The tree closed its eyes, trying to concentrate. She blinked several times, but, now, she caught that mood, the right state…

And I saw something else… Stasya's sad, pale face, and a black strip of thick viscous fog on her chest. The student looked at the mentor, and whispered quietly:

— I see everything… She needs a breast collection. Drink this infusion, and also In three months everything will pass. But, it is impossible for her, it will be bad.

— That's right… And let the infusion of willow bark drink for two weeks, — added the hunchback with a satisfied voice

— Thank you Krasa, and you Elle, — the woman bowed, — health to both of you!

The afflicted are gone. But, they left, others came. Here, Krasa herself was engaged in a festering cut at the owner of the family. And the Christmas tree only helped. The witch worked for a long time, and then, washing her hands in a trough, she said displeased:

— Here, it became bad as Alma left… And at least how strict was the Dead Princess, but so many sick were not with her. Mistress, it happened, will lay hands, and that's it, man came to life, although he stood at the very gate of the Kingdom of Death…

"Well, didn't Alma cure you?" — the girl did not understand, — did not descend, did she pass by?

"So I hit my back a year later, as Alma fell asleep," Krasa answered sadly, "you see, I was unlucky," and dabbed a bitter tear with a handkerchief, suddenly rolling off my eyelash.

— You look, and I will cure you… I can, make no mistake!

— You don't say! — and Krasa covered Elle's mouth with her palms, — Elena the Beautiful will hear more, may she give you full measure, and give you what you ask… What good was Alma?

Read, as hunchbacked as I am, no happiness, no joy. Except, perhaps, the power of the great… Well, from that strength the Princess had

No good. So Elena served, consider, one hundred and fifty years… But, the warrior was, where before her Ilse the First-Called!

Elle listened to this, wide-eyed, and almost open her mouth. After all, Krasa said something completely different about the Dead Princess, unlike what the storyteller Gorazd hung from their village when he sang at feasts. Not stories about the exploits and long campaigns of the lady and her invincible army. And about how hard it was for the Princess to carry this burden, unbearable for anyone else. And she dragged it on herself, and for more than one year…

— Okay, stop being sad! Let's go and eat some pies, but let's get down to business again! — Kras returned her pupil from thought.

The girl immediately thought to lose heart. The tree nodded, and carried a heavy basket inside the house. The hunchback walked behind, sighed, and looked longingly at her student, and at her sick hands and feet.

CHAPTER 3 Elder Oum

“What else is there?” ‘the dozen man who was sitting in the carved chair muttered with displeasure.

And in order to disperse the darkness in the upper room, rays inserted into bronze stands burned in the corners. And at each ray there was a bronze sucker with water, at which embers and ash fell. Oil lamps are birched, and candles are even more empty. They said behind the eyes that the elder was greedy, oh and greedy. But, nevertheless, he was sensible as the owner of the estate, he took care of the fire, the most difficult and terrible thing that could happen even in a solid house assembled from huge logs. Everyone knew that even a small unnoticed corner could cause great, or even irreparable trouble, deprive an entire family. But it was so warm here in winter, and cool now, in hot summers.

After all, the owner of the house was very busy now, slowly knitting knots to send a message to other important people. He even adjusted the hanging sleeves of his shirt, hiding them under his golden wrists, no matter what got in the way. Rather, it is to say, exactly one husband who was more than many in the whole district, and even in all Siberia, in all Russia. Therefore, he performed everything carefully, there could be no mistakes. He checked again, running his dexterous fingers through the message. Then, folded a cunning belief into a great depth, melted the wax, and sealed it with his seal. Finally, he sighed wearily, and knocked on the door with his staff, and looked back at the wall, already a little as if painted with ocher paint. Somehow it immediately became more fun in the soul, and the hand itself reached for the bucket with kvass.

The man looked into the corner, from where everything was heard a dull and monotonous creak. On the toy skate, the lad was swinging, slowly, but also without stopping this action. Savir sighed, frowned, came close, raised his hand… And stroked his shaved head, with a few blonde locks hanging down his slender neck.

— Yes, Father, — said the young man, credibly raising his huge blue eyes to his father.

— Everything is fine, Rata, everything is fine… ‘the elder of the Great Ouma muttered.

He turned away, but sighed again in sadness. And then, everything is fine in the house. And his wife, Astya, gave him four children — weather. I loved, Sarta, I live, and now… Rata was born… He was good-looking himself, but his mind failed. How many did not take him even to Gandvik, and to the witch Gaida in the White Mountains, nothing helped. So his youngest remained, by reason, as a five-year-old child. Moreover, he got a small hat, wears it without taking it off, and even sleeps in it. Earlier, Savir hoped everything, a new Dead Princess is born, and will heal his child, who is mournful with his head. But, eight years have passed, hope has gone somewhere, dissolved, melted like snow in the spring. True, Savir Katovich loved the youngest, and he seemed to be helping him. He will sit down like this, smile, and then the head passes, and all the alarms disappear. Therefore, I wanted to hit Ratu, so as not to distract, but then stroked him, for good luck. And then, once again let the unot know, pulled the leather strap, and the bell rang deafly.

And it was still dark in the upper room, although the sun’s rays bravely tried to break through the window, tightened by a bull bubble. Still, it was still an early hour, and Yarilo had just begun to climb the sky in his golden chariot.

— Name, Savir Katovich? opened the door, said the melancholy, bowing low.

A young boy, in neat clothes, made of gray linen, but with an elegant wicker sheepskin coat, made a belt bow, staring at his new shoes and onuchi, intercepting pants and shin. It was convenient to walk like that in summer time, much better and more pleasant than in boots.

— Yes, Uleika, and you will not wait, — and with the done severity banged an empty bucket from kvass on the table, — Only to send you for Death! — threatening with a stick, the owner of the house said menacingly.

“So Alma has been sleeping rough for three years,” the young man answered, raising his head from the floor and smiling slyly, “she will not come.

— Look, at once everyone broke up, the fear lost… And then, stand you like Zia with Okast, in the royal palace, in the manner of a scarecrow. (Elena the Beautiful punished Zia for pride by making him a clay figure, and from Okasta a scarecrow, removing his skin and stuffing him with straw. Book “Ilsa the First-Called”).

— So Elena Beautiful gape did not execute anyone.., — dared to object here.

— U, I am to you! Here, I lived, heard enough… — and again threatened with a stick, — You look, you found time to joke… There would be a man, and there would always be guilt for him, — the elder objected thoughtfully, — here, do not reason, but take this sum with a message,

— Yes, I have my own sum? What is yours to carry?

— It is said, take my sum, it will be better than yours, not thin. Yes, go to the merchant Rast Gorazdovich. Remember where he lives?

— And then. Not far from the Fortress. He has a large estate, no words. I would also like this!

“Don’t be jealous. Here, take your dry, go, but do not sack. In the kitchen, near Bortikha, there is something to eat on your way. All right, go.

— Understood, Savir Katovich, — and the unot bowed again.

Then the messenger deftly removed his children’s curls under the hat, and left the upper room. At an early age, his head was shaved, only a few curls hung from smooth skin. And the time of initiation will come, and they will cut off his relatives and other tufts of hair on his head, leaving only a pigtail behind his right ear, like all the men of the Hanza tribe or the giants, who spoke as they said. And the leaders and other prominent people who passed a special Dedication did not shave or cut their heads anymore, so Savir Katovich went unshared, already read as twenty years.

The elder waited, as he closed, creaking, door by door, quickly jumped up from the chair, and on his toes he went to the door leaf, listening. I could not stand it, even looked into the gap, but isn’t it worth it, does not peep and eavesdrop? Then, sighing restlessly, and grunting more for order rather than sickness, he returned to his chair. For a long time I listened to the noise in the courtyard of my estate. I heard how the gates of the barn would be fastened, how the hooves of a dry man thundered on the log flooring, how Uleika shouts:

“Open the gate! Everyone is happy to stay!

The messenger left, the elder looked around again, trying not to forget anything. And then it was as if the heart was racing.

— I didn’t forget a little about my art, — he whispered, — this is how it happens…

He only shook his head condemningly, but set to work. Instantly removed the bronze writing from the table, but brushed it off and threw a wooden crumb into the bronze brazier. With his palm, to the touch, he carefully checked the waxed surface, so that the cleanliness would be real. He could not be mistaken, and let himself down. And he felt like a forest beast in thick more often that they were watching him. True, the elder was very, very careful, and not for nothing. Today, on this short summer night, Savir Katovich made up not one message, but two at once. He poured himself a dark kvass from the end, drank at once, and whispered, reassuring himself:

“You can’t catch me by the hand, no matter how hard you try! You all don’t have enough intelligence! Who are you all, gray and poor… You will not find, no matter how hard you try… And I would have to compete with Alma herself, and also with Elena the Beautiful herself. But, this could only be dreamed of, or seen in dreams. So you have to vegetate here, among you, unworthy…

CHAPTER 4 War has come

Suddenly the circle of bugle cut the frozen silence of the village. Even the news of a forest fire, the horror of these places, was not so by ear. Piercing, as if evil, this sound tormented the hearing of every Hanza, because it meant the most difficult thing that could happen in these remote places… This voice seemed to reflect from the roofs of houses, from the huge trees of impenetrable thickets and lean copses spread around. And the trumpeter turned on the ass of his plow, as if not everyone heard. And that's right, there were a few inhabitants here. In these places, where people lived much less than bears in the forest.

But, then the turquoise himself opened his mouth. He gained air in his lungs, and shouted to the whole district.

— War! Ordered to gather an army, and go to Varta. Trouble came to us again! Please, good people! Elder Palak calls for one man from every smoke! And Likon will be the eldest over yours!

The messenger finished his speech, nodded to the trumpeter, and both, hitting the sides of their plows, went to another village. There were a lot of them here, in the suburbs of beautiful Warta.

Two guys who were passing nearby ran to different ends of the village, carrying such news to others. The noise rose, homon, and then, for ten years there was no big war, For a long time the Hanza did not leave these places on distant campaigns.

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— Well, all the wife, collect bags for me on the road, — Radko calmly said

"I'll put it all down now," Mlada replied.

I saw how my husband checks three bales with arrows, each tip, each plumage. Then, and a spare bow. The usual one, with the bowstring removed, hid it in bulk. Old, still grandfather's leather armor, with sewn bone plates. I tried it on, pulling up the straps. Next to the table he put a helmet, assembled in the same way, made of thick leather, with bone plates. I tried like a shield-wing sitting on my hand, which each Hanza threw behind his back when firing from bows. The shield bent like a bird's wing, and a rib was inserted outside, then the shield became stiff, and was suitable for hand-to-hand combat.

At the table sat the sons, Arpad and Zaley, came running from the pack, said goodbye. They behaved decorously, kept quiet while Mlada and Yolka gathered their father on a long journey.

— Well, — finally, Radko said, looking around his supplies, adjusting the thin tops of his boots, — everything is ready, I have to leave, with everyone. It's all right at home. You, now, Arpad, as the eldest, which means everything is on you until I return. You know the order. There are a lot of stocks, grain and meat in the cellar, everything is fine with us. Live together, according to the Covenants. And it's time for me on the road.

He hugged each of his sons, kissed his wife. He went to the Christmas tree, stroked his daughter's hair, took her hand, and said:

— You're smart beyond your years, I hope so. And I will return from the campaign, and you will go to Alatyr, as Krasa said. And Priya herself, the Chosen One from Warta, also hangs, she even sent me news. I'm sorry, I didn't tell you, I thought I would say in the spring…

— Father… — The Elle just threw up her hands and covered her face.

"All right. Let's sit down on the track, "Radko said calmly.

He noticed how confused his daughter was, his wife was attached, his sons were diligently making serious faces. It was quite calm in his heart, at home everything was as it should, as the father of the family decided. Finally, he got up, sighed and grabbed his camp belongings. I felt a difficult burden, but I knew that his dry would easily lift and not like that. And, rattling his armor, he went out into the yard, skillfully fastened his entire belongings with belts, stroked Rogach, treating his old friend with a carrot. The sons opened the gate, and the horseman drove out of the outskirts, where

other soldiers were already gathering. The senior of their detachment, Likon, raised a flag above him so that everyone could see who his fellow countrymen were going to in battle and on a campaign. Radko never turned around, did not look at Mlada, who was standing at the fence, and waving his handkerchief for good luck.

CHAPTER 5 Savir Katovic's family. Rata embraced by fire

The elder was sitting at the table, personally unwinding the ball of the message. The nodules familiar to him on a long rope brought new news. The countertop was not easy, covered with seeded fine river sand, on which the owner of the house now depicted the surroundings. And the detachments, their own and others, were depicted as figurines of soldiers of different colors. Not that it would be beautiful, but clear and intelligible.

Nearby is a settled, already overweight man, with an impressive golden hryvnia around his neck, and already gray-haired shikha on the back of his head. The guest was not young, but not old. He looked at the lamp, burning with a yellow bright flame, then at his interlocutor.

— So. Savir Katovich? — he said, — Isn't it time for my rati to go camping? It's hard to say, our brave guard in the Fortress to hold on?

— Take your time, Sejan Plenkovic, take your time… Here, an army from Warta will come, then we will take our own… You'd better take a look at what our messages send… You see, they have gone too far, the tangles are quite imposed, and I am shining here, and I am disassembling. But, our business is not bad. Our allies are in two transitions from Oum. And Sabadayev's army cuts us off from the river. So, it turns out, we should go into business only as the ship's regiment from Warta approaches. Not before.

— You speak sensibly, Elder! — the old warrior beamed, — we will press them here, knock them over into the river, and the matter will end. Such is my idea… What do you suggest?

— The matter is… So it is necessary to hold three hundred riding, you never know what Sabaday will throw out. And we can, then, break the battle with this force, in our favor. If anything, it will not go so.

The governor scratched his chin, bowed his head, looked at the map depicted in the sand. And, hesitantly nodded, recognizing only the intelligent elder's plan, and only he slowly uttered the long-awaited words, as if he had sentenced:

— I agree, Sejan Plenkovic. It will be according to this, and put his heavy palm on the edge of the table.

As if he added so much heaviness, weight to his speech. He looked at Savir, he did not change in his face, the elder did not show pleasure or annoyance.

And the young man calmly entered the room, looked almost indifferently at the map, nodded to his father. Then he bent his head to his shoulder, so that the long curls of the children's hairstyle fell on his face, and he hastily corrected them.

— Manis will be taken prisoner. Yes, it would be better to kill him, — the boy said, and just as calmly came out as he appeared, — everyone will become calmer.

He said such terrible words, simply, without expression. As if he was talking now about rain outside the window, or about young leaves on linden, which grew next to the estate…

— What??? Seyan did not immediately understand the simple words.

— Rata, my youngest. Everything speaks, he is weak on his head. You're sorry…

— I remember, Savir Katovich, I remember… He got sick, but never cured. Well, I will go to the soldiers… 'the man added with participation.

And then, not everyone knew about such a misfortune in all the lucky elder. And here, what a misfortune with the youngest son. Seyan Savira regretted, but he could not say this out loud.

"And I'll be there soon," the elder shook the governor's hand.

Savir waited until an important guest left, and quickly went to the children's chambers. The eldest sons, Umil and Sarth, lived separately, in their towers, but in a huge family estate. And the younger ones, Zhiva and Rata, lived with their parents, under their father's eyes. The wife met him here, bowed according to custom.

"What's gloomy?" said his wife, Astya, carefully.

"What to do, my sun," he replied, "you know, the war has come. Worries have increased. But nothing, we will manage ourselves. Where are our children?

— Rata went to Zhiva, they are sitting in the world. Everything is fine, — and took his hand, calming, — yes, evil people say on our son… He is smart with us, but, in a special way, not like everyone else… — and wiped a tear with a handkerchief.

— Okay…

Junior, was like a thorn in the elder's heart. Srodu did not go hunting or fishing. He did not like to water, he could not stand long trips, he was afraid of mosquitoes. And as he fell ill, he began to speak. Most loved now on a swing swing. He will sit down and swing, swing… He could not get off all day. And, sometimes, he looks like this, it is not clear, and says, so at least stand, but at least fall. I recalled how a week ago I walked past the barrels of caviar, led it with my finger, and spoke like a hammer:

"This one is incomplete…"

And it turned out that it was incomplete. They did not report the eggs, monsters, and Rata, well done, spotted. And then, immediately found out that Umil's wife was not happy. Also important, for the whole family news. So it turned out that the son, although he was not strong in mind, was of great benefit from him. Only now I had to keep quiet about it, from different conversations. People are evil, but stupid, the elder himself always remembered, did not forget. As well as the fact that his peers in childhood, others who got out, also did not complain. That he pulled the bowstring badly, he was weaker, read everyone, and they did not let him forget about it. And he, nothing, surpassed them, narrow-minded, and intelligence, and prosperity. And nothing, the time will come, and I can get even, as the elder always reminded himself.

And here, how to know that the Lady of Heaven did not punish him, but blessed him with a younger son. It was just that one had to own it wisely, wisely… But, Savir himself was not a madman, he did not tell anyone about Rata's skills, away from sin. It is foolish to know a lot, and even more so smart… But the words of his son about Manis Sabadayevich alerted the elder, oh, and alerted…

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Opened the door of the Svetlitsa beloved daughter Savir Katovich, yes stunned. Everything seemed to be fine, but here… He put his head on his sister's lap and slept. Alive and did not move, froze, as if petrified. And the son's head, like a golden fire, burned, hugging with radiance. The father was scared for his son, he didn't know what to do. Savir grabbed a jug of water, wanted to extinguish the fire, but Alive only waved her finger and quietly said:

— Everything is ok… This often happens to him in a dream. Just don't disturb him… And then it will be even worse at night…

Worse? Yes, it happened and worse… Exactly, Savir saw this passion, as Rata walked on the roof with the moon. He did not fall, did not break down, walked as if glued. He himself then climbed into the window, but lay down to sleep, as if nothing had happened. And then I didn't remember anything. It's good that none of the servants saw it.

— He said nothing more? Do not remember? Elder asked his daughter.

— Stood, looked at the box in the corner… Then, this toy, — pointed at the rider on the horse, — dropped it, sat down next to it, and fell asleep…

— Well, okay… I'll go..

There was no need to interfere here, and the elder hurriedly, almost running, left the street.

***

As soon as I went to my place, I immediately began to squeeze the signs with bronze writing on birch bark, and worked hastily. But it was not easy. The message was wound on a churbachok, a kind of long ribbon turned out.

"Be careful. Do not go into battle equestrian"

A short letter came out, a short one. And as I finished, I took it off, so it was impossible to read clearly without a churbachka. The elder took out a travel bag, and put the message there.

— Hey, who's there? 'he shouted to the unots.

— Yes, here I am…

— So, Dirk… You take the dry, but you jump to the merchant Rast Gorazdovich, who lives at the Fortress, in the estate, near the Proni river. Give this bag to him. Understood me well? Look, don't mess up!

— I will perform everything, Savir Katovich! — nodded the lad, — I'll tell the merchant Rast Gorazdovich!

— Well, don't hesitate!

And, the elder gladly looked at how the boy began to run to fulfill his order. Here, indeed, it was necessary to hurry so that with such difficulty the conceived did not break!

CHAPTER 6 In Marching and Fighting

— Well, young man! Doing well! — confidently said the foreman of the boat to a very young fellow, — but what can I say! Great benefit from you, Olen!

— Right, you say, Irn! — added the merrier sitting next to him, — smart guy! I got my hand. And look, just like new! — and played with his fingers, almost hidden under a clean rag.

— Yes, when there was a new one, Clever! Yes, you yourself are older than this boat!

— Nothing, Dar. Although old, stuck! And the boat is excellent, sewn conscientiously, where good!

Irn just grinned quite a bit. The old one says correctly, right… And the craftsman Capray himself sewed them with a rook, what a good rook! He assembled the frame of the vessel from well-fitted oak bars, and sewed the sides of the boat from the best seal skins. Here is their boat, like a sea beast, and cannot sink, and in the very storm of water does not fall. And how many storms have been, and that's all, let's nip their little girl!

— Exactly! — added a third, — and the back is now like a young one! For our artel, such a witch doctor is very good. Otherwise, Golovan, Magi, is busy. We are not alone for him, others also use.

— Well, it means that they decided so! And you agree, Gunei, and you are Dar, and you, Umil?

— Yes, all the community agrees, — the elderly Umil answered decorously, — you sensibly realized, Irn!

"So be it! — and the foreman slapped the boy's thin shoulder, — you are with us, in our artel!

— Thank you, Foreman Irn, and you, merry artels, — Olen said, carefully getting up so as not to fall while pitching, — I will not let you down!

— Here, well done! — approved Abil and laughed, — sit down, sit down soon on the bench, otherwise you will fall!

"That's right, grandfather! And how do we now without a healer? — added Guney, looking at his comrades, — we must also take a walk at your wedding!

Olen blushed his face a lot from such words, which made the tongued merrier even more pleased. The artelshiks laughed cheerfully, pleased with the fence joke. Irn just grinned, but took up the rook rule more firmly. Their ship went up the river, in general formation. And there was still a day to go three, no less. Indeed, mother Ob spoiled, the wind was passing, but not strong, and the path from Warta was not difficult. And now, it turned out, there was no cloud in the sky, no cloud. The foreman looked ashore, noticing the badges of the banners of soldiers from Warta.

Detachment after detachment rode along the Ob, and military supplies were loaded on the rooks, and they were dragged along the shore by the sword. Warta's army was considerable, almost thirty hundred riding soldiers stood under the banner of the governor Likon. Yes, and on the ships there were convoys, those who were supposed only to help the horsemen, but to guard the camp, there were almost a thousand of them. Here, among these warriors, were the artisans of Irna, and among them Olen.

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The sun, having played enough with fluffy clouds that became scarlet from the fierce touches of the luminary, tired itself. It left, hid behind distant forests, staining the sky in the west with ardent crimson. Guney and Umil hammered sharpened timber into the coastal sand. Blows with wooden hammers were fast and dexterous, so that the sharpened point quickly sank into the ground.

Well, the belt holding their rook while holding Irn himself. Meticulously followed the work of the artisans, and personally wound a strong belt around a seemingly reliably clogged beam. Then he twitched whether he was standing firmly, checking himself. You couldn't rely on chance here.

— Well, foreman, is it good? — said and very seriously Clever, suddenly slapping his cheek.

— Why, decided to punish himself? Irn chuckled.

— Not for anything, like.. The mosquito is… — and showed, holding prey by a tiny wing.

— Let go, — the foreman quipped, — you can't boil a stew out of this. Let's go, we'll help put up tents.

The artisans set up two tents exactly, stretched the ropes, scored stakes. Two, began to cook. The fire was already burning, and the boiler hung over the brightly flaming logs. Olen, sat down next to Dar, checking the bandage on his arm, and has already changed the plantain to fresh. The foreman just sighed, but patted his mustache with satisfaction.

— Everything, in practice, it seems… he said, looking around the camp.

— And then, Irn! Everything is in order. Soon the stew will be ready, — said Guney, shaking off the sand from his pants.

— Let's see… As we eat, we will put the guards out all night, so that we would stand in threes, with bows and clubs. And leave one on the boat, more ceiling…

— Irn, I'll watch the boat, — Olen suddenly turned.

— Well… But, look in both eyes… — said the foreman, and almost menacingly shook the brush with his index finger exposed, looking at the boy with obvious doubt, — keep the weapon at the ready, you never know that the Bowstring is superimposed on the bow, and the arrow would lie nearby… Oum is not far away, which means that strangers can fall on us. They are nimble warriors, you won't hear right away…

— Be alone Irn, I won't let you down!

— Okay, eat, take your bag and or on the boat.

Olen nodded, and sat down with the others by the fire. Here he was endowed with a full bowl of delicious brew from fish and barley cereals. The stew came out tight, as much as a spoon stood. Irn, like a foreman, tried the brew first, soaked his lips. appreciated.

— It turned out well. You can eat, — he deeply appreciated

— And then! But what do not say, and Harei cooks a stew better than yours! 'called the rubbish Guney.

— Nothing, then you cook in the field for everyone. How will we be on the campaign, right, eh? — Harey objected cockily.

— So it will come out, — the artist evaded the answer.

Such words caused another explosion of laughter. To tell the truth, no one refused the stew, the artless cooking was not poured into the sand of the camp. Ate Spoons on bowls knocked fast. Yes, that evening the artisans ate quickly, saved time for sleep. They knew that they would raise them before dawn, and this was the last day crossing to Oum.

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Olen looked at how Vataga was having dinner, and he himself ate slowly and slowly, often throwing fish bones into the river. Then he got up from the bench, calmly washed the bowl and spoon with sand, climbed onto the boat, and sat down, inspecting the river bank, swallowed from a wooden flask of grass infusion, and stretched chilly. Evening fog spread over the river, and it became cold. The boy hastily wrapped himself in a felt blanket, and then it became much more pleasant. The air now seemed not dank, but simply invigorating, the breeze was not piercing, but only fresh and pleasant. I didn't want to sleep yet, but he still put rye cracker in the area. Quite a pleasant treat, especially if soaked in water. And when you eat, you don't want to sleep, Olen only learned this on a hike.

And then, put the plate on the bench, and it seemed that the water splashed. He looked carefully overboard, behind which the calm water surface also turned black, not far from last year's reeds, which had long lost their hats, stood in an even formation. True, it seemed that two of them, as if not to the beat of the wind, were swinging. Olen quickly grabbed the bow, and without hesitation, launched three arrows one after another. Heard two screams, yes from the water, all in the river

grass, a man rushed at him. There was no time to think, Olen hit the unknown on the head with a heavy oar.

And here, from a high bank, as if hearing these screams, strangers rushed to the camp of the Khansa. Arrows whistled, darts fell, puncturing the fabric of tents with copper stings, or went into the sand, burrowing deeply, trembling, as if with resentment. However, the guards were at the ready. Horns honked, calling the Hanza to arms. Well-aimed arrows and streets flew in response, a fight ensued.

Olen, I didn't yawn here. Migom put a flexible shield on his left hand, covering his back, again took up the bow, and began to fire arrows, knocking the running strangers to the ground. And they shot back, and saw that they hit. Gunei was shot in the leg and Harei in the arm. The artisans grabbed the strangers in hand-to-hand combat, and the desperate Irn smashed the enemies with his club, on a long, almost fathom, handle. But, all one thing, the ship's rati had a hard time, because horse warriors had already come to the aid of strangers. Olen has never seen such, but there was no time to be surprised. Warriors were already retreating to the boats, as a terrible roar of battle horns rang out over the night forest, and hundreds of Hanza peaks fell upon strangers. The warriors, on large and strong moose, immediately overturned the horse army of strangers into the water, and began to beat the enemies, giving no mercy to anyone. They stabbed and chopped, tired the shore killed, so that the dead lay on the dead. Only a few, abandoning horses, rushed into the water, hoping to escape. But several rooks followed them, and the warriors of the ship's rati beat and drowned strangers with oars. Olen jumped out of the boat, noticed that the one whom he stunned with an oar was trying to get ashore. Wheezing, but trying to get up, falls back, choking on water. Then Olen pulled this man ashore by the collar, and twisted his hands behind his back with a strong belt.

I saw several prominent soldiers on moose approaching them, with a band of troops. Among all stood out, shining with copper armor in the sun, the governor of all rati Vara, Likon. Then one of the riders dismounted, and came closer.

Olen turned very pale, but he was going to give a dragonfly, like a gray hare who noticed a wolf in the bushes. But I didn't have time.

"I didn't expect that," Radko said calmly, without anger, removing the helmet from his sweaty head, "what's your name, well done?"

— So Olen… — the young warrior answered quietly.

— Young, but he knew how and brave, — Irn who came up began to praise his fighter, — the first alarm raised. So, he caught the enemy scout, — and poked a club in the shaft lying on the ground, — both smart and good… And he cured two patients in Vatag.

— Really? Radko chuckled, the herbalist, then?

"The magician is simple," Irn smiled.

— Well, this is the case, foreman, — the approaching leader intervened in the conversation, — since such an intelligent one, let the military work cope with the healers and healers. He has nothing to rotate the oar, fill the corns on his palms. It is unreasonable to plow everything like earth on a crane.

— So of course, Licon… — reluctantly agreed with the leader Irn, — let him gather… And the prisoner, drown, or what? What is the gap to feed?

The prisoner tried to get up, but he could not straighten himself, and writhed like a caught fish. Finally, everyone was tired of looking at such attempts, and Radko put him on the sand. Likon himself with curiosity, slowly and meticulously, as if buying a cow, looked around the stranger, suddenly laughed, but in a rush of feelings he hit his knees. What surprised even his dry, twisted horned head.

Olen looked at the bound stranger, not really understanding what was the matter. What's the catch? A mop of black wet hair on the head, pants made of thin skin, a jacket made of felt, with generic signs at the gate. There was nothing of the kind. Well, the boots are embroidered, patterned thread, were good, I bet not.

— So you know who you are… 'he stumbled for a second," he took? So this is Manis himself the son of the leader Sabaday. I saw his father very young, the Princess Alma released him from the field, on parole, that she would not fight. Deceived, see, Sabaday…

“What are you saying! The word given to the greatest Alba is sacred! My father did not lie, but twenty years have passed. Well, without the Dead Princess, we can defeat you!

— You are looking, you talked like a real one, — Likon grinned, — Radko, went the messenger to Oum, the way will give the news to foreman Savir that we have Sabaday’s son, Manis in our hands. And to you… Here, a reward, — he turned to Olen, and put a gold bracelet in his hand.

“And I’ll pay you, girl! — shouted a stranger, — I must stay with you that I did not kill!

In such a crowd, the artelshiki did not understand what they were talking about. Guney, the man twisted his finger at his temple, they say, the boy was damaged by his mind, everywhere now the girls are imagining.

Irn was surprised, but did not show it. In the meantime, Dar let down the skate captured in battle, on which the leader’s son, captured, was seated. One of Licon’s warriors took this horse under the bridle, and the other rode behind.

— Okay Olen, say goodbye to your own, yes, come to the wagon train of our rati, — the leader said slowly and calmly, — the Magi Golovan and the Chosen One herself, Kida with her notes will be waiting for you. Unotkami,, that is… And this, — and the foreman quickly tied the nodes of the message, but sealed it, — you will give it yourself, personally, to Kid… Look, don’t forget!

And Likon looked so attentively and expressively at the youth that he did not dare to talk.

— Well, — quietly, without arguing, Olen answered, — now, I’ll only tie my own… How can I leave them?

The foreman, agreeing, nodded. He and his retinue slowly drove around the shore, as if looking, which he did not lose. Finally, he turned around, and wanted to drive up to Olen, but he thought about it.

The riders left, and he, the artel healer, set to work. Not like heavy, like nervous. I had to get used to it in order to teach myself to persuade the wounded that everything would be fine, the pain would soon go away. The person sat next to him, looked into the eyes of the doctor, and had to not only trust the treatment, but BELIEVE. Medicine. Just washing and sealing wounds, applying good herbs, and wrapping clean rags with blood on the bodies of tired soldiers, all this was much easier…

The rest of the artisans were engaged in an important matter — collecting prey from bodies, stripping to nudity, and throwing the dead into the river. They put their own dead separately, wrapped them in burlap, put on belts to hang them on the upper branches of trees, according to the old custom. And, to the joy of the whole artel, a lot of good has accumulated… There are eighteen pairs of boots alone, but ten pairs of chobots. Daggers, about twenty, clubs with a short shaft as much as thirty. Olen did not hide his eyes when he saw this. Having finished everything, and having said goodbye, he slowly wandered to the wagon train of the heavy rati Varta.

CHAPTER 7 Student at the Chosen

At the wagon train there was a vigilant guard of a dozen soldiers, but Olen was missed, according to the sign of Radko who was waiting for him.

— Well, and came. What, satisfied? 'asked the youth warrior.

— Yes so… In general, everything, as I thought… Well, almost…

— Almost… — Radko grinned and shook his head, — went to the Chosen One, she is waiting for you.

Here were rows of huge carts, with wheels half the height of an adult. A couple of oxen were harnessed to each. And, not far from the teams, there were tents, and in front of them were benches on which the unkind sat and waited for their turn.

And nearby, the Chosen One acted as a priest, in the usual outfit for her class — a black frilly skirt, shirt, and felt sleeveless jacket decorated with red embroidery. A red plat hung on his shoulders, leaving his blond hair in a knot open. Well, twisted gold bracelets from wrists to elbows adorned the woman.

— Oh, they finally came… Why did you dress up like that? Instantly, change clothes for girls! she looked menacingly at the youth, and even stamped her foot.

— You see the father, — said the girl, — Chosen, so immediately found out…, — and the girl gave a message from Ramid.

The chosen one instantly broke the seal, read it, and strictly looked at the girl. True, Elle thought that Kid was about to laugh, judging by the way her lips curl.

— What did you think, Elle, dressed up as a lad, called herself Deer, and no one will recognize you? Radko said quietly.

— Yes, everything seemed to be fine. Coped… Among the artisans, consider it your own. Everything is more fun there. Maybe you can come back, eh, Father? she looked hopefully into Radko's eyes.

But he shook his head. The Elle only sighed with regret, understanding and accepting the inevitable.

"Will I wait a long time for you?" Kid lost patience, and even frowned, showing rigor.

— Well, it's time for my father, I'll see you again, — and the Elle ran to the carts, change clothes.

Radko bowed to the Chosen One, and quickly left this place. It did not hurt well here, where they treated the wounded and mutilated in battle.

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— Well done… Although no, smart girl! — Kida was found, and she herself smiled mischievously, looking at the Elle, — Otherwise, and while I am confused, who are you, the young man was a girl?

— So you, Mrs., know better, — Elle was found.

Kida's pupils are already accustomed to this, but they all laughed at one thing, watching how the new one blushes. Now, in a simple girl's outfit, however, with an expensive gold gift bracelet on the wrist, no one would have believed that she was not a girl.

"True, you cook the potion well. Better than others, — the Chosen One praised, — did she learn herself?

"From where. Kras instructed me. Our healer from the village. Big herbalist. What he just does not know how, — the girl praised Krasu, — she taught everything.

— So… — held out the Chosen One, with already condemning intonation in her voice.

And, she took a closer look at the new student, as if she wanted to find in her an unknown flaw. A small wormhole, in this golden apple.

— This is bad? — not understanding, answered Elle.

— Not that bad, but not good… Well, how to say… It's the same as cooking mushrooms with honey…

— A little strange food, — picked up the Elle.

— Well, the same in the witchcraft. She can do what was considered incongruous. Like a birch with apples on branches, And a herbalist, and a fortuneteller, who submissive bones. This is a rarity. About like… Hare with fangs, like this… And, she did not pass the initiation, she learned herself… Therefore, I look after her, no matter what happened.

It seems that the Christmas tree was beginning to understand… Something extraordinary means… And it scares the Chosen One…

— Well, why did everyone freeze? Listened, and enough! Or there is nothing to do, everything has been redone? Kida said sharply, looking strictly around the students.

Here everyone would not run in, but they began to continue their usual work. They rubbed herbs for potions, two prepared bandages from pure linen. Well, Yolka went through pots of ointments in a large lara. For convenience, with colored labels on the walls.

"Don't be offended, I'm on your side," Nata, one of Kida's students, whispered carefully, "forgive the ants in your felt. It's all Lika… That she-wolf…

The Elle recalled last night. Yes, the red ants kept her awake. And now I felt itching and pain on my shoulders and back. Not that I would be surprised at such a meeting, but it was a shame. In the artel, they treated her where kinder, but here, immediately hated, or, most likely, frightened. She heard that male societies are much kinder than girlish ones, and now she is convinced of this. Intrigues, distrust, whispering from all angles…

— Is it true that you had a lover in the artel? Nata asked, with a bite of her lip, just as quietly but hopefully.

Her whole appearance said how now the girl languishes with curiosity. The Christmas tree was not stupid, and did not spoil such a game. Otherwise, it would be unforgettable…

— I can't answer… she whispered, making a deliberately stern face, and turned away.

Her interlocutor nodded with a serious expression. As you can see, the answer seemed more than sufficient. And, pleased, Nata moved away, and began to whisper with her two friends. The Christmas tree was not disappointed, everything turned out, as she expected, the gossip began to spread instantly, like a trail on the water from an abandoned pebble.

CHAPTER 8 The host at Oum. New battle

Radko hastily dressed in his armor, tightening the straps on his sides. So at these moments he wriggled like a cancer who would like to climb into his panzyr. And although the matter was already familiar, and the warrior sweated from such labors. Sheko, an old friend and neighbor in the village, also came to the rescue. I couldn't do it myself!

— Let me help you, — said the warrior, in response to providing such a service to a comrade.

Finally, Radko put on a helmet, and a sharp-headed bone helmet, decorated with skillful carvings, completely covered his head. Checked once again, the belt of the shield, and then, in such a matter there were no trifles. Then came the turn to transport with a dagger. He threw a pile behind his back and a quiver full of arrows. And in his hands he took a battle ax, a club and a spear. This weapon was attached to the plonk.

He was not alone in a hurry to the camp square. Warriors from their tent, and others who stood nearby, walked to the fence, and brought out their plows. Mighty animals, accustomed from childhood to their gray-haired, were obedient. Radko pleased his moose with a cracker, and stroked his face. Then he fitted a leather bib to protect his faithful friend from enemy arrows.

— Well, that's it, we leave! their centurion, Vatey, shouted, looking around the assembled riders.

The warriors sat on the backs of their dry, covered with felt blankets, and with rollers to make it more convenient to sit, and their first dozen slowly began to travel to the edge of the forest, to the place assigned to them for the battle. It was a cool early morning, which was pleasing. Nevertheless, the armor warmed, in the literal sense of the word, especially the quilted armor. Even a light breeze rose, and as if to help, blew at the back of the Hansa soldiers.

Radko sent his plow to his left, hitting his rump with his right knee. He understood any order at once, turned a little, like the whole row of horsemen. Ahead, half a mile from them, in the field, he noticed the front line. The leader of the Hansa, counted on a fight, but did not want the battle to begin suddenly. Strangers, until they approached closer than five miles.

But, scouts, with a leisurely trot moved forward, with bows at the ready. Apparently, Ramid had already decided everything, and was ready for battle.

— Hey, guys! Vatey shouted, — as the battle begins, our hundred goes to the left, behind a blockage of trees. We are in no hurry, we let in three arrows, and then we act… Is it clear to everyone? It should come to copies at the very end of the fight! And only then, and put the clubs in business!

Radko grinned, as did the other warriors. Who didn't know their centurion was a bit tongue-tied? So, on the other hand, skillful and sensible, and in any fight he thinks quickly.

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Radko noticed how their scouts, at a gallop, were leaving. Apparently, it began… And, after a couple of minutes, hundreds of mounted warriors appeared, on squat forest horses. Something was shouted, but it was not heard. But, from the cannon of the forest, suddenly two horns sounded intermittently.

— All right, let's start! Vatey shouted. First, dozens of Palak, Zvan and Lita start!

Earlier, as a child, Radko believed that riders throw themselves together, with one fist. But here, I understood a lot. In order not to be knocked down, the elk squad attacks in parts. The rest, hold the place…

Other warriors and hundreds of others rushed into battle. Hanza showered strangers with arrows without entering into hand-to-hand combat. Before reaching a hundred steps, they turned away and rushed back. Strangers began to pursue. True, they were a little stunned here. Fresh Hanza rushed to the rescue, and arrows flew again, knocking enemies off their horses.

Radko saw returning warriors from dozens of Palak, Zvan, and Lita being built behind them. Squires, unots, ran up to them, serving full quivers of arrows, instead of devastated, and bowls of water, to get drunk. The battle horn buzzed again. It seems that their turn came, and Radko with everyone, sent his plow forward.

Now, feeling beneath him how the moose was carrying you forward, he looked only forward. He held the bow in his left hand, controlling only his legs.

— Let the arrows! heard the voice of the foreman.

And here, hands did business, as if by themselves. He pulled a string, shot and shot. I just saw how the red plumage disappears in the distance, and there, in the enemy formation, someone falls from a horse, or a horse, burrows into the ground at full gallop, or falls on its side, crushing a saddle. Screams, rumblings, swearing… Arrows also sang above them, only strangers. But now, their dozen unfolds, and Radko and his own gallops back. Then an arrow hit the shield behind her back, felt as if she had been hit with a stick. Towards with bows in his hands, another dozen Hanza galloped, and they walked between them, as the scallop teeth pass between the hair.

Then they turned around, and again showered strangers with arrows. Then, along the roar of the horn, they returned, and hundreds of them stood in the last row. Here they sounded their horns, their hundred, led by Vatey, began to go to the left, hiding behind a blockage of trees. They have already seen the chipping faces of strangers.

But, the joy was short-lived. Peshtsy and unots, covered with rubble, brought down hundreds and hundreds of stones from their slings on the finders. And the weapons are so unwise, but they knocked down dozens of enemies to the ground. Horses laughed in fright, threw off riders. Strangers, of course, began to dismount, and rushed to the blockage, trying to make way for themselves. Hand-to-hand combat boiled over. Strangers were thrown with poles and bugs, but they did not let up, climbed forward, throwing darts.

And maybe they would still break through, despite the many fallen.

Vatey looked at his soldiers, tightly clutching their weapons. Apparently, everyone was ready for a decisive battle. And the centurion shouted:

— Well, geese?

— Ha-Ha-ha! they cried enthusiastically in response.

Goose, was sacred to Hanza, in fact, Hanza meant goose, and now the fighters considered themselves sacred warriors who stood for all the people. And their determination was simply unbearable.

Yes, here from both sides hit the horsemen of the Hanza on the mighty dry. Their onslaught was terrible. Moose were not afraid of anything, and were much stronger than horses. Horses neighed, moose roared in rage, clods of earth flew from under their hooves. Forest lords knocked horses to the ground, and their saddlers put spears and clubs into business. The palace of the Hanzas is not like such weapons of other tribes. It consisted of a pommel, and a long shaft, almost the height of a person. And, now, such a weapon was very useful. They could get the enemy from afar.

Here and Radko, breaking the spear shaft, fell from the back of the plow. Two strangers rushed at him, throwing darts. Copper points hit the bone armor, breaking a couple of plates. Hanza growled with rage like an evil bear. It darkened in his eyes with anger, hands and feet, as if nothing weighed, and time stopped. He snatched his club, dodged, bending sideways, from the injection with a dagger, and he himself brought down the club on the enemy's head. I didn't hear the nasty crunch of bones, my ears felt like wax. Radko jumped away from the falling body, took another step to the side, and with a clever blow knocked down the second enemy, unexpectedly hitting him in the face with a poke of the top of the club. Then a third ran up from the side, to whom Radko put his shield under attack, and then hit the enemy in the groin with a long pole of the club. The enemy's eyes rolled back at once, his face turned white, he fell, and curled up in terrible pain. And the fight continued, and there was no time to rest.

The finders fell, already dozens, tired of bodies and so crushed grass. They also blew horns, asking for help from their own. But, everything was in vain, and Hanza defeated the enemies, and there was no mercy to anyone.

Which of the strangers managed to escape, only he was lucky to survive, in this terrible battle. But, the leader of someone else's army did not come to the rescue. And the sun was still rising across the sky in its golden chariot, to the very height. It wasn't even noon before it was over.

CHAPTER 9 A Thin World After a Quarrel

The army of the Hansa stood in the middle of a field dotted with killed. Yes, the warriors of Warta carried their dead to the copse, where they were dressed on the last road of the Magi troops.

Among the hundreds of horsemen, stood Vatey, proud of his warriors.

— All well done, survived, and they took good prey in the field, — the centurion quietly said, — that's how many horses they collected

— And the army of Oum never came… said the tenner Palak, still quieter.

"You can see late, the pants were tied," Zvan whispered angrily.

— Maybe what the matter is, — explained Vatey, — we ourselves survived.

— What prey… If their convoy and camp, then the matter is different. And so we got it, it's a couple of tatty boots on my brother… And the arrows were spent, and their price is considerable, two gold rings for a dozen, — Palak began again.

— Enough for you to mess with everyone! — Vatey could not restrain himself, — let's see that Likon himself will speak at the gathering…

I saw Radko, as angry, angry warriors. And then, the battle is over, why are we standing? What are the elders doing there? Or again, what kind of deception did you start? And it's bad to return home without prey. And, the master does nothing just like a gunsmith.

But then, unexpectedly, there was a long roar of the horn. Radko listened, but exchanged glances with fellow villagers. Dar nodded, and said quietly:

— Indeed, not our horn gives a voice… Not our voice, that's for sure. And not strangers…

"Maybe from Ouma?" Is the army coming? — tried to guess the warrior

"We'll find out now," Palak said calmly.

The warriors noticed how the foreman Ramid, with a banner and with the units of the retinue, trotted towards. They didn't wait long. Likon returned to the army of Warta not alone, but with a detachment under the banner of Ouma. On the pole, the rider carried the Golden Dragon. And his personal vigilantes, according to the old custom, carried white swan wings behind their backs, in memory of the winged warriors of the First Queen Ouma, Elena the Beautiful herself.

— Look, — Patal grinned, but smoothed his mustache with his palm, — surely the foreman Savir himself came? And the Golden Dragon has not been taken out of the White Palace since the time of Ilsa! Exactly, all the old people say that!

— Now we find out what and what, — Radko said quietly, — I don't like all this!

— Okay, you have to listen to all one thing! 'the judicious Zvan remarked.

But then two leaders drove up to Warta's army. The horn sounded piercingly, calling everyone to silence and attention.

— Here, the word will say our ally, Savir Katovich himself! Foreman Ramid began to say, listen to him!

— Valiant warriors of beautiful Varta! Savir said loudly, raising his right hand in greeting, thank you for your valor and steadfastness! You came to our aid, in a hurry, forgetting about yours! And we remember that! Manis, the son of Sabaday, the leader of strangers, brought us the news that his father wants to make peace! There will be no more war, but friendship and consent! Sabaday also gives each Warta warrior twenty rings of gold!

At first, the soldiers did not listen very credibly to such a speech. Could anyone believe in the friendliness of strangers? More than once or twice they attacked the lands of the Hansa, especially if in such years the Dead Princess with her army did not take care of them.

"But Sabaday asks for permission to collect the bodies of his slain soldiers," Savir continued, "then his army will leave our lands." And bargaining will be conducted near the Fortress.

Well, Savir Katovich was known in all Russian lands for his art, but for his craving for various tricks and intrigues. He sowed, like seeds on arable land, discord and discord, knowing how to multiply his wealth. Who did not know about his boats, plowing the jellied seas in search of new wealth? Yes, trade was able to increase, enrich Oum, and even Sargat, and silver from distant lands flowed to distant Gandvik, but it was not in vain that they said that foreman Oum had not one language, but ten… The warriors doubted the words of this leader.

But, then the horn sounded again, and Savir's unots began to bring and put suede bags heavy in appearance at the ranks of the soldiers. Then, at once, the ties were loosened, showing the contents. Hot gold flicked in the afternoon sun.

"There's a lot here to calm your sorrows! — this nightingale from Oum continued his song, — centurions will receive gold hryvnias… Yes, I know, the thoughts of brave soldiers who defeated the enemy… What better warms the heart of a powerful fighter, like the goodness that can be obtained in the wagon train of a broken enemy… But, it is also known that a cornered wolf is especially terrible, and an unreasonable earner, wanting to get a tattered gray skin, can lose his life. So here, strangers, protecting their wives and little good in the wagon train, will take a lot of lives of Warta and Oum fighters. Instead, Sabaday gave a ransom, and the promise henceforth not to attack our lands, and not to impede bargaining and our merchants. May there be peace and friendship, not blood and war! Manis, the son of the lord Sabaday, will say the same.

The scream and crash of weapons filled the entire field. It seemed that these sounds were reflected from the trees, and rise into the sky. Hanza warriors pounded poles on their shields with poles, not holding back, yelling at the top of their lungs. The triumphant Savir brought a stranger in front of him, and Radko recognized this man, And indeed, it was the son of Sabaday, captured by elle. But, from the side of the boy stood the hefty unots of foreman Oum, covering the important prisoner with their shields. You never know what, but in the heat of the moment one of the Hanza darts will throw, and the young man will disappear…

"I'm like my father's mouth and voice… Manis spoke very loudly, I speak from a pure heart! Stop testing each other who are braver or stronger. Whom the gods love more. You can do business, there is no shame for men. Each house will have prosperity. Let there be peace. And even a thin world is better than a good war!

CHAPTER 10 Feast yes…

Radko, along with Dar and Zvan, were on the road, watching outsiders collect their dead. Several dozen people, with a couple of shamans, were engaged in this mournful business. They laid the dead on two wheels, with horses harnessed to them. One held animals under the bridle, wheezing and picking their feet, smelling blood and death. We were in a hurry to lay down, finish, just complete this lesson before dark.

It seemed what to fear here? But Ramid did not trust either Manis or Sabaday, expecting some kind of caverza.

Radko felt that he got hot. And the fact that the shirt under the armor was wet with sweat for a long time. And now you can't take it all off yourself, you can't, you had to endure. True, I took a flask of water from my belt, drank a little, and felt a little better.

— Is it hot? asked, chuckling, Dar.

— Yes, it seems, nothing, — answered Radko, — do you want?

— Beer or something?

— No, the water is simple.

"I'll wait for you. Soon, the Peshtsy said that the Savirovs would set the tables. With a rich, they say, treat.

— So does Savir Katovich feel sorry for salted fish? — Dar laughed, — or did the turnip not get ugly?

— And what, only fish will be at the table?

— Well, maybe turnips and mushrooms. And plenty of barley bread…

— Well, okay, Zvan, — Radko laughed, — and so, read, we sit on breadcrumbs for several days and dried fish. You look, at least kvass will be given enough. We'll get drunk…

Indeed, eighteen golden rings lay very well in the mosh, warmed the heart. And each of them gave a pair of rings to those who lost their plums in battle. And the foreman Ouma gave a lot to the dead warriors of Warta, and more and more expensive sable furs to calm down the tears of his relatives for the departed.

But now, it seems, strangers finished their mournful business, drove heavily loaded carts over the distant forest, where their army of finders was waiting. Waited more, and buzzed in an unfamiliar way of the horn, stretched huge

carts to the east. They were accompanied by hundreds of mounted warriors. Sabaday's army returned to their steppes.

Here and Zvan grabbed his horn, bound in gold, and missed four times. The experienced warrior made it known that the finds were leaving the Russian lands. And the answer I heard how their troops answered him from the camp.

"Well, you can come back," Radko said quietly.

— Exactly, Dar agreed, turning his plow.

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And in the morning, next to the capital Oum, huge tables were set up. They immediately scurried around, putting dishes and wooden dishes on them. Simple, unpainted. But, however, the youths were cheerful, and greeted the soldiers warmly. Although, it happened in different ways, and often the courtyard did not hurt the relatives. They considered themselves in a higher place, these servants.

Radko approached one, looked closely at wooden dishes full of treats. There was a lot of things here, from the bounties exhibited not at all by the Torovaya foreman Savir. Nearby stood reapers with honey, beer and kvass,

— Hear, Zvan… And here, and not only turnips… he chuckled, and dried fish with breadcrumbs.

— Yes, it is strange. It is unusual for Savir Katovich to scatter. A man known for his tightness. Like his whole family. Have you been to Oum? And at the Golden Palace? Have you seen a huge fortress with a rampart?

— So where… Although I always wanted to. And my daughter, Yolka buzzed all her ears. Say, look at the White Throne, and the very Palace where Elena lived.

— You look, tomorrow we'll go, we'll see. Okay, let's go, we'll sit on the grass until they called to the tables! said Dar.

And the warriors from the hundred Vatey, leisurely stepped aside. Kalei, without saying a word, threw the harp from the back, and slowly sang, skillfully sorting out the sonorous strings. Hanza gathered around him, listening to an old song. As if alive, the Immortals, the Fallen servants of Elena herself, stood up in front of the experienced warriors. He sang about when they still had white wings, and did not turn black from mortal sins. The soldiers were silent, everyone was thinking now, about their own. They remembered their families, their home.

"Are you all standing here?" And why? Pinned down, but hung their heads! — Vatey said deliberately cheerfully, — go to the tables, everything is ready! Baked meat is delivered! Here, you can't hesitate! Otherwise nothing will get! Yes, and Kaley will sing to you later, which is more fun, as the bowls of three put honey will disappear! Well, or four!

— And you sit down with us! Dar suggested, why did one settle?

"Where am I without you?" 'the centurion laughed.

Radko sat on the bench among his comrades, and the unot, passing along the table with a basket, endowed him with a magnificent piece of baked meat on the bone. It turns out, a noble venison, when they bake a carcass in a pit, with burnt coals. It is baked for almost a day, and the meat comes out incredibly soft and tender.

The treat barely fit in the bowl, it exuded a bright aroma of horseradish, currant leaf, wild garlic. The knife immediately, as if it were in his hand, the sharp bronze of the blade cut off the juicy slices. I tried it, and just stunned. It was just incredibly tasty, especially after crackers, and camp porridge, and stews. And especially, with a piece of excellent, slightly salted bread. And next to it, on the table, there was a green onion. In general, it was impossible to distract. But then the melon came again, and filled the buckets with sparkling dark beer. Dar lifted his cup. And then, and others stood up. And there it began, and beer, and behind it and put honey. It was fun, Kaley started a new song. And the unots brought a whole-fried bull, and the soldiers simply shouted in delight…

CHAPTER 11 Christmas tree, Tisat and patterned boots in the night fog

The chosen one sat at the table, with a perfectly straight back, like a great lady between the people, and she was among her faithful students. Carefully combed long hair was not braided, but simply fell on her back in a golden wave. She was used to respect and worship. Yes, and deserved it. Such a bee is a uterus, and around it swarmed working bees, young girls whom she instructed.

— Elle, be kind, put here a reaper with currant brew, raspberry is not worth it, it's more likely a medicine… And let them bring strawberries. Yes, Tisat remind you of currant kvass!

"I'll do it now, Kida," the girl replied, and walked away from the table.

It was necessary to hurry, the chosen one did not like to wait long. Yes, and go not far, along the path, and there she noticed a girl at the carts of cheerfully homing unots. Yes, and well, her shoes were at ease, the pistons did not rub her legs, and the wrapper was fine and soft, made of good linen, her mother did not skimp on the children, as Elle thought with gratitude.

"Good day, youths," the girl said decorously, approaching Savir's notes, and bowed politely.

"And you, hello," answered the eldest of them, and also bowed.

— Tisat, — she began to say, and tried to say it convincingly, like a lady, — The chosen one wants strawberry and currant brew and certainly currant kvass.

— Of course. Now I'll take it, beauty, "he said.

The girl did not notice that she managed to instill reverence in the youth. The Elle frowned a little with light eyebrows, but the words of the prigozhny youth were pleasant to her. And, she hoped that she did not blush, but, just in case, and of course, not from embarrassment, turned away. What else is it to be embarrassed by her! After all, she took Sabaday's son prisoner!

"We heard here that you captured Manis. And how could you? Directly incredible! Tisat asked her, looking quickly at the guest.

"It happened," she fumed, "let's go."

There was a reluctance to explain that she was in men's clothes that day. Somehow it turned out wrong, although then she did not think so.

"Come on," Tisat nodded, and rolled his supply cart.

She walked behind, watching how funny the wheels sometimes bounce, but the lug deftly kept its balance, and not a drop of drink spilled from the pots. But the boy himself was pleasant and funny, and it seems that she liked it a little. Yes, and looked good. They came quickly, but faster than she would have liked.

The boy put drinks on the table, then bowed low to Kid. And the boy stood behind Elle, whispered quietly:

— I will wait for you at the parking lot, where there are nut bushes. The sun will set…

— All right, go away. You have nothing to do here! — strictly ordered the Chosen Youth, — hurry up! Elle, and here you are, sit next to it. Look, they brought us fish!

Indeed, while she walked and wandered, there was a whole trough on the table with a huge baked sturgeon. And it looked great, and smelled even better from this food. The chosen one, armed with a wooden spatula and a spoon, laid out treats in bowls, generously endowing her students.

— Here, Elle, you are the best. And then emaciated like, right skin and bones, — she said carefully, — here, eat. Natka! Lika! And you take it!

The students took the food, and decorously, without pushing, sat down nearby. Like Gata and Dita and Priya and Mia, all Seven, everything turned out right according to custom. And the Chosen One always followed this order, without doubt and without changing anything. On a wide platter, in front of them, lay bread cut into narrow slices. And, not ordinary barley, but wheat. Well, how can you not respect such a welcoming owner! And the Christmas tree decisively proceeded to treat.

Such a fish is good in itself. True, her mother added grated horseradish and currant leaves, but, judging by the taste, the Savirova cook adhered to the same rules. The fish cooled down, and to the very extent, hot, but not burning, and simply melted on the tongue. Washed down with currant kvass, and then screams and songs rang out around. The warriors rejoiced at their joy.

The chosen one whispered something quietly, looking around. It was evident that she was annoyed by all this. Kyda first rolled her eyes to the sky, then simply joined her eyelids, unable to restrain herself.

And Elle looked at her products, but Lika and Nata only hastily turned away. Last night, the girl had to take a good look at her "girlfriends" for their "jokes." Several cracks and slaps, as Elle hoped, brought the girls to their senses. She wasn't going to forgive the ants in her bed. True, now Elle kept thinking about whether or not to go on a date with Tisat. In the end, and pleasant weather, it will be cooler than now. And then, right, I thought it was not clear to myself what…

Not far from the Kida tent stood a sundial, measuring the time from sunrise to sunset of the daylight. A long shadow indicated that there was very little time left. And Yolka again had to get out, but without asking. Where to go? Although, the girl thought it over well. Now she was sweeping the earthen floor of the tent where Kida treated the suffering.

And Elle, like a businesswoman, again got hold of a man's dress — pants with a pattern at the ankles, and a wide jacket, with generic embroidery.

"Exactly, Agnas's family, from Oum. And, still, — she whispered quietly, — thank you, boy..

Each family had its own pattern, and everyone from Hanza would easily understand it. It's like identifying your haired by the horns, it would be impossible to make a mistake, as the girl thought now.

Well, the hair should have been covered with a hat with long lobes on the sides. This dress was, fortunately, inconspicuous.

In the meantime, she diligently fulfilled this lesson, continued cleaning. And, in fact, very deliberately leisurely. I listened all the time, as if not to be taken by surprise. Finally, I decided that it was time to change clothes. Having completed her transformation, she sat down for a short time, corrected the screwdriver on her feet. I checked if everything was in order, and only then decided completely.

Carefully diverting the canopy, she looked out of the tent. None of the students was visible, no one scurried, crushing the slightly trampled white sand of the parking lot with light shoes. A slight rustle appeared, but no, Yolka did not notice anything like that. She pulled the canvas, the canopy, and began to quickly change clothes. She carefully put the girls' clothes in a bag, threw them behind her back. No, of course, I looked in the bronze mirror, exclusively for good luck. But, I was pleased with myself, and got out, lifting the linen wall, and crawling, quickly screamed into the bushes.

I remembered the road well, but tried not to be noticed. She ran quickly, and saw Tisat standing a little to the side of the hazel bushes. She suddenly wanted to surprise the youth, well, maybe a little scared, if possible. And she, not thinking about the knees of her pants, crawled through the thickets. A couple of times I touched old bitches with my feet, and almost cried out in pain, but restrained myself. But here, she was attracted by four people hidden among the trees. The Elle noticed, according to foreign shoes, that two of them are finders, recent enemies. Others, hanza… And one of them had noticeable, embroidered boots, and both were wrapped in raincoats, and there were no faces to see.

The hand itself reached for the knife hanging on the belt, and grabbed the bone handle. The girl tried to hardly breathe, and get closer to hear what the conversation was about. Even her lips were pursed with excitement. Maybe it helped, but now I was able to distinguish the words by ear:

— … So let's decide.

"And we don't mind," the foreigner said.

The Elle shuddered. The voice was Manisa, exactly… But the clothes that the young man had were no longer simple, camp, but rich, embroidered with a whimsical pattern, very elegant. The girl,

for example, really liked the new look of this young man. She froze, almost did not breathe, although her legs began to go numb, it was very uncomfortable to lie.

"It's better to agree than to fight. And the benefits for everyone will be great. And our union will bring a lot of benefits, — the Hanza broadcast, — enough to fight endlessly.

— What will the elders of Warta da Gandvika say? And Sargats? Serponov and Sad? Manis recalled in a calm voice.

The Elle tried to examine the speaking Hanza. It was inconvenient, because she lay behind a man with patterned boots. But I tried to hear everything and remember the girl. I understood how important it is. And the nasty branch hung right in front of her eyes, as if she did not understand this, and cheekily scratched her forehead.

— Let's agree… With Elder Serponov, Urgaz, I am great in friendship. And Gandvik the Great — he is so far away, from us, but they have few soldiers. — repeated hanza, — And that's what. I'm sorry that it happened, but the girl captured you.

"It's my own fault… I wanted to go to Oum, but I didn't understand that Dargat was preparing an ambush, so I got caught… And the girl is great, nimble. I'd take her as my wife.

The Elle almost shouted, in indignation. What did you invent that she would become the wife of someone else, but came to her senses.

— Nothing, the matter is young, you will have time yet… Still, what do you think about our contract?

— What? And my father does not mind that we would agree. He himself asked to convey such words to you, as a year ago, — Manis reproached.

— Not the time was yet… And even more so, in the time of Dead Princess Alma. You remember yourself, or your grandfather told you that the Princess was too cool. And I would instantly let go of my skin, but filled it with straw, made a scarecrow. That's for sure… And I would make a necklace from the priest of your head. Her magician was a great craftsman, he created many curiosities.

— That's good that she fell asleep long ago… And we, because there is no time to sleep here, right…

Here Manis wanted, as you can see, to name his interlocutor, but the Christmas tree spoiled everything with excitement. A knot crunched loudly under his left hand, and stuck in his forearm, piercing the felt of his jacket sleeve. She screamed muted, could not restrain herself, and these four froze, listening. And she pulled her legs to her stomach, rubbed her hips and lower legs, preparing to run without looking back. And it's good that it got dark quickly, but the fog began to fall on the ground. And Elle pulled a wand towards her, and threw it without panache, landing in a distant elderberry bush. Strangers and Manis turned to the bush, and the girl ran the other way.

Branches and branches with old leaves mercilessly creaked and rustled under the leather soles of her shoes, and she looped between bushes and trees like a crazy hare. So fast, she probably never ran. Finally, she screamed into the hollow of a fallen tree. And, what is good, fog quickly fell into this hollow of the forest thicket, as if the spirit of this place deliberately caused this hassle. The Elle, arms and legs pressed, lay barely breathing. I heard people pass by, and one of them whispered quietly:

— You can't see what the guy was running for…

"I'll find it soon, Manis. I noticed what kind of embroidery on the jacket, which one of the genera… It's good that it's not from Warta.

Elle's voice seemed to recognize. And the face, under the cloak was not visible. But now, the noise from the steps was moving away from her shelter, and she waited and waited. I was afraid that I would run into those people now. Finally, everything calmed down, and in the dark Elle had to get to the carriage of the Chosen One. It was good that the sky was clear, and she quickly walked along the Travel Star. All one thing, soaked through the night dew. And as I came to the wagon train, I almost screamed with joy. Again I had to crawl under the wagons, wait in the shadow of huge wheels. And

then the students could not sleep, dragged next to the tents. I saw Natka and Lika swear again. But the Elle got to the tent, where it should have been cleaned, and crawled, lifting the canvas of the wall. She quickly pulled off her wet men's clothes, began to bandage her hand with a strip of clean fabric. The blood did not flow, the wound was clean. Here, squinting, one might say with pleasure, she dressed in a frilly skirt, a shirt of a thin canvas, and a jacket, quickly tightening the ties. She straightened her hair in front of the mirror, removed the dirt from her nose and forehead, and did not have enough to appear dirty. She sighed, remembering where she managed to smear herself like that! I checked the jewelry, and only now calmly sighed. She lit an oil lamp, and slowly and proudly went to her tent.

— Elle, haven't you gone to bed yet? Nata asked, pulling the blanket to her very nose.

— So everything is in work, not like you, fall asleep, — the girl answered, — warmth yes well here…

— And we thought you ran to the guy on a date, — added Lika, turning over on her side, and putting her palm under her chin, — Tisat, he is prigozhny…

The girl looked at the Christmas tree with a slight smile, as if expecting some details. Not a little she believed the words of such a late girl.

"Everything would be lamented to you about the youths," she answered strictly, "it's time to sleep!" Dark…

And the Elle blew out the fuse of the lantern, it hissed offended and went out, releasing a trickle of smoke at last. And the girl sat on the mattress, taking off her shoes, hastily undressed. She put her skirt and jacket carefully on the seat, but it was hard to take off her shirt and painful. She gasped, touching the broken knee, The night shirt of the gray canvas without sleeves covered her body. Immediately it became a little easier in my soul, but anxiety did not leave her. The girl quickly curled under the soft felt of the blanket, stretched with pleasure, stretched her legs, playing with her fingers. It became warm and good, she sighed, and closed her eyes, falling into sleep almost in an instant.

CHAPTER 12 Zhiva wooed

The girl settled in a chair, stretched her legs, felt the teeth of the comb gliding gently along her hair. She almost fell asleep under the measured movements of her black. The clever and skillful hands of the woman slowly continued, without interruption, did their usual work. She did not touch or scratch her scalp, everything came out okay and somehow beautiful. And she was dressed, although simply, but neatly and okay, she looked nice to the eye. Even her wrists were decorated with bracelets, but, of course, copper, and not gold or silver.

"Well, I'm tired today, my beauty," the Chernavka said, "but I leaked a lot today." Mother could not get enough of you, she praised and praised everything… Everyone was happy, happy.

Alive and could not believe such words. Mother more often scolded her, called her only daughter so only crooked indiscretion. Astya did not give sweats, mother was harsh, oh… Everything showed how they weave behind the machine, so that the canvas would come out even and smooth.

"Thank you, Jarka. — said firmly Alive, looking in the mirror — Since you, no one can, that's for sure… Hair after your crest, just burning, glittering…

The mirror was old work, they said, the craftsman Acast himself created it. Smooth and even, with a better reflection, it was inherited in the family of Savir Katovich. And now Zhiva got it.

— And then, my child… And well, everything is so good… So, the matchmakers arrived, Father ordered you to dress up. You are my beloved beauty, — the chernavka said with feeling.

— Why didn't Mother come herself? — the girl answered with a call in her voice, — it must be, if according to the Covenants. I suppose, according to Elena the Beautiful herself, it is written on gold tablets, and it is inappropriate to violate this… Even her…

— Will be, will be Mrs. Astya in the refectory, otherwise how? Tomorrow, everyone will gather, do not doubt… And the brothers will arrive… Everything, as it should be…

— And Rata? Will Rata?

— Yes, I don't know… You know yourself, if your brother is not needed… Then no, what should he do there?

"He is not insane! And you… Don't dare! 'she shouted, stamping her foot, 'take him here fast! I order!

Chernavka threw the ridge, bowed, bowing her head almost to the floor, and was about to run, when suddenly…

"You forgot the braid. Here, you finish, so run after my brother, — the girl recalled.

"I'm sorry, madam. murmured the chernavka.

And, quickly, but skillfully performed her work, completing everything to the end. Alive bowed her head, checked how she would fulfill all this. And, ahead, the thought was already flying, and she smiled a little. But so that the cunning Yarka would not have guessed. After all, the girl knew that the chernavka was listening, she was reporting everything to the priest about her, and about her brother. Yes, she could not do anything, but there were no servants.

Yarka bowed, but quickly left the girl's lady. She moved her legs like that, did not contradict. And then, and heard Live long-awaited steps, and a sweet voice:

— What, called me, sister?

— So it is, — muttered Zhiva, and hugged and kissed her brother, — I heard, are they marrying me?

— Exactly, the whole estate says that.

— I ask you to help…

Rata looked at her as if he had never seen her before. He bowed his head to his left shoulder, squinted a little, and took his sister's hand.

“It won’t work tomorrow. There are many guests, and the estate is full of notes. You have to wait, two days. You’re not in a hurry, are you?

She thought a little, remembering her own. And then, even the prigozhy son of the governor Seyan, the cheerful and talkative Umir, was not in her thoughts. Only the resentment remained, the day arose when, according to the single word of her father, Savir Katovich, Umir Seyanovich retreated from her. It seemed lively and strong, and then, immediately blown away, like a fish bubble. So the annoyance was still in her heart.

“There’s enough gold. Do you want to live in Varta or Sad yourself, Rata?

“I don’t mind. I would also like to visit Gandvik, but how will it come out… But, for you, sister, the main thing is to survive tomorrow. And then, everything will work out, be sure!

Rata’s words were, right word, like a sip of water for a thirsty person. It became easier on the soul of the girl. And then, she knew that Rata was not mistaken, she had only to be able to listen to him.

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Savir Katovich was restless in the morning, oh, and not calm. He personally went around the entire farm of his estate, as soon as the sun rose. He looked around, and cows and geese, checked how the servants were doing the job. But, everything seemed to be in order, and all one thing, the heaviness hung on my heart, could not calm down in any way. Even now, he ate and drank a full ladle of put honey, but he had a long time with his wife surprised by such a turn.

“Why are you, Savir,” she murmured when it was over, “as if you were younger?” Or did you decide to marry?

— She said too, — he grinned, gladly flattening his wife’s lush chest, — you, my beauty… So, hard in my soul, as if I was doing the wrong thing…

And now, years later, his Astya was beautiful. Savir did not take other women for himself, disdained.

— So the daughter is on the son of Seyan? Why interpret? Prigozhiy, yes, okay?

— Sluggish hurts, there is no solid vein in it… Our daughter will turn them. And there is another groom. You can’t lose here, Astya

— Just do not deceive yourself, — the woman quietly said, turning on her side, and now she looked into her husband’s eyes, — sometimes, it is worth taking her time…

— Oh, tip your tongue, Astya. But, smart, just like a snake — a scratch…

“Really? she grinned, moving closer, and, is it so cold?

“Not at all,” he whispered, covering her mouth with a kiss, “you just do wonders…

The woman smiled, pre-war with such words. But, as if she remembered something, looked at the door, listened, but calmed down in her husband’s arms.

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Savir Katovich stood on a high porch, and his wife, Astya Yamaevna, in expensive clothes, everyone was waiting for the guests. In the courtyard, on the benches, buffoons sat and bored, folding goose and horns, waxwings and pipes in a row. Also expected.

— Where is this long-awaited groom? Astya muttered quietly, curling her brightly painted lips.

Savir only smiled rather remembering this morning. And then, he and his wife did not hit their face in the mud, I suppose, they were not worse than young feathers. And the spouse, and made up, all according to custom. And she whitened her face, bright punchy lips, and blush on cute cheeks play with fire. Savir Katovich could not resist, put his hand on his wife’s strong ass. She mowed her eyes, smiled.

— Going, going! there were cries from the street.

It is understandable, onlookers gathered a lot. The children sat down on the neighboring fences, anticipating a rare sight. And so, the hooves of the horses were caught, and elegant riders appeared. And ahead of everyone, a young man dressed in a dark blue caftan was driving, just glistening in the sun. In a rich sable hat decorated with feathers.

The gates creaked, the melancholy did not fail, they opened the entrance for dear guests in time. They dismounted in the yard, the unots took the horses under the canopy. Finally, the groom himself, with two respectable-looking companions, climbed the porch.

Savir saw how she changed in the face of Astya, almost grabbed the railing. The elder quickly said:

— Is it healthy, Manis Sabadayevich?

And for sure, the young man, in a blue shiny caftan, it was Manis Sabadayevich himself, the son of Sabaday, the lord of strangers, with whom all the khanz so often fought, and with whom peace would now be concluded.

— Before you is our Manis, — began one of the companions, — And we ask for him, you have great honor. Give your daughter I live Savirovna as a wife to Manisa. And the warrior of the steppes is strong and dexterous, but he does not have a warm hearth without a good wife. And here are the gifts, for honor, not for purchase, kind Savir Katovich. Is it possible to pay with something such an honor?

— We are glad to see you, dear guests! Go to ohm, taste bread and salt! — answered, stammering, Astya.

It was evident how surprised the woman was by such a groom. Savir just felt with his skin that if he were not there, Astya would have escaped. And it was much easier to blush and pale under a layer of whitewash. Well, he himself kept calm. He pushed his wife a little, so that he would come to his senses of course. Well, she still said her due:

— Here, knock down from the road, dear GOST!

And she brought a reaper with a drink and bowls. Yes, poured a drink for everyone, so they didn't shake their hand either. Those, remembering politeness, drank, but with pleasure.

— Please, please, to the table. In the garden, everyone is just waiting for you… — said Savir, taking Manis by the arm.

He let him down, and the rank seated the groom opposite the bride. Alive, sat, lowering her head, and did not raise her eye. Rata calmly drank kvass. The older brothers, Umil and Sarth, as Manisa saw, turned pale and blushed, almost grabbing their swords. Astya held them, grabbing both hands.

Here, nearby is the governor Seyan and his son, Umir Seyanovich. Volhv Salim. Ouma, Zatey da Gatal, Umil and his nephew, Urd, also came. There was also foreman Ramid, known for his luck on long trips, And behind each stood their youths, and for honor, to serve at the table. Well, of course, and everyone had fear, no one knew how such a feast could end. Good, or bloody fight.

— Remember many, years of wars and endless fights between hanza and strangers. It happened, but now, it's time to live in the world, enjoy the times of prosperity and peace, — Savir said enthusiastically, — wealth, so it goes into our hands, so why refuse! Caravans of expensive goods will go east to the lands of Zhou, and our furs and jade, copper and tin, we will get silk and expensive stones… We can sell a lot, oh and a lot…

— Yes, Sabaday will be happy to skip the caravans with the goods. It will be beneficial to both you and us.. A good world is much better than an evil war, "Manis said.

He got up, and during the speech he turned, giving himself to everyone to consider. And then, stared at him, as if a monster from terrible dreams. And when they saw closer, they noticed that they were saying okay, but sit down with themselves, albeit not in a local way.

"It's good," Salim began to say now, "that peace and tranquility will come." And as a sign of this, Manis asks for the hands of his daughter from Savir Katovich, Zhiva Savirovna herself. So that trust becomes stronger, and friendship grows out of enmity.

Everyone fell silent, it became quiet, you could hear the zanpvesi swaying from the wind. Nobody wanted to talk, everyone expected the other to say.

— So let's drink to the health of Manis Sabadayevich! — again helped out an old friend of the Magi, and the first raised a bowl of foam beer

Here others supported, caught instantly empty bowls on an oak table. Beer poured like a river, honey set, flowing, and a bitten-narrow stream. One Alive, just sitting and silent, was quiet and thoughtful, did not even touch her cup.

CHAPTER 13 Oum. Secrets and pattern on the jacket

She did not look at her feet now, but, without lowering her eyes, she looked at the huge shaft of Oum, towering above the landing. Here, too, there was something to see, and the bargaining was rich, on the square of the city. But to be here, and not to see the famous fortress of the whole Priob — it would be simply incredible.

"Have you been there, Father?" Elle asked quietly.

"Yes, more than once. We lived in two daytime passages from here, not far from the Fortress, which the Fallen of huge boulders laid down.

— And what, really? And worth it?

"What will she do?" Kamenyuki poods one hundred each, no less. So an invincible wall with a rampart came out, protection from strangers. And in the shaft of Oum, right in the ground, the whole city is built, the hive is real. Living quarters, like honeycombs, and a couple of wells, so there is water there, and the drain for dirty water is arranged. Everything is done according to the mind. An intelligent place where it is fashionable to sit out from any enemy.

— So let's go, why should I stand here? — and the Christmas tree pulled in impatience, grabbing the hand of her father, right to the drawbridge.

Here stood a guard, with a dozen soldiers, with spears and clubs, and shields thrown behind their backs. Everyone is barely older than Elle, as Radko noted with annoyance. Only one, apparently, uncle mentor, was a gray-haired barbel, with a golden hryvnia on a mighty neck.

— Hello and you, dear guests. In time, you came to our aid from Warta, — said the honored warrior, smiling, and straightening his thick mustache.

— And you have a good morning, Vityaz. You and your collars.

— Yes, what kind of guards they are… So, while only the youths are bewildered, everything must be taught, but looked after.

— So we would like to go to the Golden Palace. Here, my daughter has never been there. Just heard.

— Why not, since the soul asks! Come on in!

The youths smiled, noticing the prigozhny girl. Well, the Elle held on briskly, did not turn up her nose, but everyone would understand that she knew her worth. And they went inside, so the Elle forgot about everything. I walked around the wooden stairs leading upstairs to the living quarters of the fortress. The wooden platforms in front of them were empty, and there, above, Elle noticed that there were even windows in the burners, with a bull bubble inserted into the frames. And then, as many as three levels were in this house — the fortress. And this gigantic house could accommodate almost five thousand people, no less. Everyone who lived in the village of Oum.

— Just incredible! whispered the surprised girl.

And then, Savir Katovich himself walked past them, surrounded by friends — comrades and two dozen unots. Radko, remembering politeness, bowed, and the foreman nodded back. The warrior was not particularly distinguished, but his daughter… Before her, Savir immediately stopped, which made the girl blush. And then, such a well-worn husband shows her honor.

"Thank you girl for your valor. Manis Sabadaevich himself captivated, from that great benefit happened to the capital Oum and all of Russia, for sure. How are you called? looked at her carefully.

"I am a Elle Radkovna, according to my father," she whispered.

— Here you are, girl. And you, and your father. Ikmore! "he shouted," carry my casket!"

The dozen unot threw back the cover of the carved shelter of all sorts of things, and Savir himself, with his sleek handles. took out of it an excellent military belt, and a golden bevel, weighing at least ten spools.

— This is for you… — said the foreman, in the kindest voice possible, — for good memory!

And the Elle was already stunned when she saw on the junk the very patterned boots that she saw last night on that stranger with her face covered. What spoke to Manis… I took a step back in fright, but now I came to my senses, it would be stupid to run, it would mean simply giving myself away… She tried to calm down, but turned very pale, and immediately turned red.

— Take it please, otherwise you look how your face has changed, — said Savir, — from a pure heart, do not think bad, the reward is deserved…

The tree stood as if petrified. Here Radko himself secured the gift of a drawn man in his daughter's hair, and he himself dressed a new belt decorated with gold.

— I thank, Savir Katovich for honor, for affection, — the warrior thanked, having bowed in a belt, — and to us, it's time. We must have time to look at the White Throne in the Golden Palace.

I did not understand Radko why the Elle behaves this way, but he himself knew, and for a long time that it was not worth showing disrespect to those who were found, then he could go sideways.

— Yes, the famous place, from Elena itself remained. — continued to explain Savir, — Let's go, spend and tell everything. We have something to look at. Ikmore, run, tell me that we will come up now!

The Christmas tree just looked around, but was it possible to escape from here? I had to go with everyone, and smile in addition, so that the Savirovs would not think anything like that. That, they say, the girl is ungrateful, or that she is up to bad things.

And Radko did not understand what was the matter. But, I thought and decided that my daughter was a little worried, and that's all. True, he decided not to interfere, not to torment his daughter with questions, especially in front of the Savir Unots.

And at the gates of the palace two guards were bored, the service was not heavy, just boring, standing here, and keeping order. But, here both seeing Savir Katovich, at once transformed, took on a young look, settled down. The foreman said nothing, only sighed heavily, as if he had lifted a heavy one.

— Here, come in, I'll show everything, — said Savir, — here, nearby. And further — the front hall… Here, look yourself, girl…

They climbed the oak steps of a steep seedling. The railings and pillars were decorated with skillful carvings, and in addition, they were generously painted to the place. It looked as if there was a Elle in a wondrous forest, surrounded by trees, on the branches of which sat wondrous animals and birds that met her. Savir looked back, pulled the ring, and opened the door wide, opening the entrance. Copper lamps burned dimly in the canopy, accelerating the darkness.

They went on to the chambers. The walls were richly decorated with carvings. The skillful craftsman with an inspired cutter left in memory the deeds and exploits of Elena, here on earth… The Christmas tree looked at it, eyes wide, just unable to come off. Here the Lady resurrects the beaten army of the Hansa, then, calls for the service of the Seven Fallen, amazes with her strength the army of strangers. How they crown her to the Kingdom, and she punishes Zia and Oakast for pride. Then, he puts himself instead of Ilsa the First-Called, depicted, like the Mistress, with a piercingly white face. And the last picture — Elena finds her brother, and with him ascends into the bright blue sky, which has opened like a blossoming flower bud. The Christmas tree even touched this ocher rhombus with petals, which let Elena and Veles onto the Heavenly Road.

The girl even sighed, trying to remember these paintings forever. There is no dispute, and in their Warth they depict a similar thing, and the work of carvers was good, but…

— The craftsman Akast personally saw all this, — Savir said quietly, — so he was able to make such beauty… Well, let's go further, it will be even better.

The Christmas tree doubtfully listened to the last words, but led an incredulous shoulder — but does it happen better? Could this be? But, she followed the escort. His unot opened the gilded bronze doors in front of them.

But right, beautiful walls, completely decorated with carvings, but covered with gold. White throne, with griffins carved from limestone. It looked like it came here from another, the Mountain World. By the manifest will of the Lady, and maybe someone else… All this attracted the eyes of those who came to this hall.

— It was revealed that day when Ilsa the First-Called fell asleep. — Savir broadcast with a gloomy expression on his face, — Bilkar's grandson came, and everything has already been done… He swore, they say, saw here the scurrying fingers, the faithful servants of Elena the Beautiful, who painted this hall. Only my father, Katko Okastovich, did not believe the junk… He ordered to beat until he said…

"So what? whispered a frightened Elle.

— Again it turned out badly… Died under the lashes of the unot, did not say anything, and on the night my father died… He shouted terribly, but no one could come, his chambers were locked… Then, — and Savir spoke, and with his right hand as if he had opened the door, — in the morning they themselves swung open, and on the bed, in a swan feather bed, as if in a bloody tub father swims… All blood leaked to the drop, through small cuts.. There was no living place on it, it was all cut up, from head to toe… So his fingers executed him… Okay…

The Christmas tree looked from the foreman to the decoration of the Golden Hall. And there was something to see.

Here in front of the Throne itself, there were two tall idols made of wood, insured, albeit executed, right, by a skillful master. One, worked like a man with a bear's head, only painted white. Another, like a stump with round eyes, gray, with wonderfully spread hands.

— So who is it? — Yolka whispered, — after all, people say different things, you don't know what to believe…

— Zia — Bear this, and Okast, who has become a scarecrow, a scarecrow, the guardian of her chambers. And as Elena and her brother left, Ilsa the First-Called found another occupation for them, — Savir slowly broadcast, — always guard the entrance to Tartar so that the Fallen do not rise ahead of time. Such an eternal service fell to them from the Princess — to be in that secret place until the end of time, until the whole world falls… 'the foreman continued the speech.

— Hard business and difficult…

Savir noticed that the girl said this with respect, and blossomed directly, amused at once. He even unbuttoned the shirt gate.

— And here I am, consider, the great-grandson of Elder Oakast… They remember in our family about that day, and they keep the memos, about Elena the Beautiful herself. Here, such, girl.

— And where are her wings, her, and Ilse the First-Called?

"Nobody knows that. And such craftsmen were translated, and Alma Braid of Death, had no wings, like her Immortals. Maybe this is fortunately, otherwise she… — the elder almost said: "I screwed up the affairs," but I settled down, covered my mouth with my palm, — And the throne always awaits Elena the Beautiful, the Snow Queen. Her yes twin brother, the greatest Veles. When they ask, no one knows, but we always wait and hope.

— It's so established, — said Radko, breaking a long silence, — thank you for showing everything, Savir Katovich. Let us go, there will be something to tell at home.

The elder nodded a little, smiling favorably.

CHAPTER 14 Must be able to leave on time

And Radko already shuddered, feeling, as if with ticks, his daughter's fingers clung to his forearm. After all, they are fine, thin and smooth, but now, as if they were made of stone,

Father looked at her, and she turned terribly pale, barely breathing. Radko hastily led the Elle out of the palace. The girl just hung on the hand of a frightened warrior. And I didn't know what to do, I wanted to look for a herbalist. But, finally, Elle began to recover. She looked carefully at her father, as if she had seen him for the first time. She turned her head, calmed down that she was already on the square of the city.

And here life continued, as if nothing terrible had happened. The wheels of heavily loaded carts creaked, carts of peddlers carrying goods scurried. And the inhabitants of the huge city were in a hurry to bargain. Who is in the case, and who, and just look at different curiosities from distant places, or even countries. A little further away, the merchants' drownings, swept out the rubbish from the boardwalk, so that everything looked beautiful and okay.

— Oh, and it's good here! — she said, seeing the bright color of the sun, — Father, I heard that… — Elle began to speak out, — Not today, of course. Well, last night… So the Savirs, Ikmore, started treason. Negotiated with Manis, whispered secretly, in the bushes, during a feast. I saw everything, but I ran away from them, did not catch me…

The daughter lied a little. Well, she could not say that she went on a date with Tisat? It was much more terrible to tell her such a father…

— Why did she decide that Ickmore? So he is only an elder, not a deliberate knight, but a husband who has not reached out? What could he discuss and promise?

— Noticed noticeable boots, embroidered richly with him. So I remember…

"And they remember you too, that's for sure," Radko said, losing patience.

— No, I was in a man's outfit. In a unot jacket, pants and a hat.

— What was the embroidery on the felt? What family? What are the signs? — squeezing his jaws spoke Radko, — who knows how the case will now turn…

— This is the family of Agnas, from Oum. And, Father, do you think that those people will rush to look for unot? The guy whose jacket was?

The warrior nodded wearily, and led his daughter away from the city. The Christmas tree now barely moved its feet, stumbled through the step. Although she lowered her eyes, looked only down, she just stared, without taking her eyes off the log pavement.

***

They walked now quickly, along the streets of the city, Radko personally examined each sign on the fence post of the estates. The tree still could not recover. Dogs barked, from behind fences, scaring strangers. But passers-by looked around at the newcomers, not too pretentious and friendly.

— Looking for someone, so I can help, — finally, the friendly guy turned to them, — my name is Usol.

The boy was very young, dressed in the usual clothes for every Hanza. Linen, in summer time, pants with embroidery at the ankles, a shirt in a blue check, and a jacket, now open in warm time. The shoe boy had light pistons on his feet, in strings. The Christmas tree looked at the embroidery of the jacket by the throat, and just stunned… Those same signs, Agnas's family… I noticed that my father understood this too. True, she noticed that Usol was half a head shorter than her…

— Usol, take us to your home, there is no time to explain! Radko said quickly.

— No, you can't… We have grief, Agna was killed, — the boy said quietly, — a bad time for the guests.

And for Elle, these words of the boy became like thunder and lightning, hitting very close. She seemed to be deaf here, only reduced eyebrows, suffocating in heavy flour, gained a full chest of air and only then was able to exhale…

Usol looked sadly at his estate, and did not notice how the Christmas tree changed at once. Radko instantly understood everything, threw a raincoat on his daughter's shoulders, and covered her face with a hood.

"All right, we'll go then. We will not disturb you on such a day, — he said calmly polite and decent words.

He knew what to say a man, especially in an hour of pain and grief. I visited different cities and villages, and even knew how to solve in a word what others tried to solve with their fists. And then, and spears and clubs, when a simple quarrel turned into a bloody swara.

— All right. Maybe convey what? Usol asked, calmly looking into the eyes of the interlocutor.

— No, probably. Better, then…

And both slowly walked away from the posad. They had nothing more to do here.

"We'll take the boat down the Ob tonight. I have a letter from Irn… And in Gandvik I will put you on a boat that goes to Alatyr… You will be safe with the Chosen. You will live in those places until everything settles down.

— And if you tell, our foreman, Ramid, about the secret, let him know?

— So who will believe you, girl, your words? They will say, they say, the Slavic woman came up with, it seemed to her all this, in her youth. It happens, they say… That's it, stop chatting, let's go to the pier. As Usol tells that they came, and asked about his family, so the elders from their kind will understand a lot… They will start a search… Who killed their relative, why. They will come to us, you will say what you saw… Did you recognize Ikmora by her voice?

— No, only boots… Everyone is embroidered, — she barely audibly whispered, — oh, the voice is not the same… And what, we will be to blame?

She stood in complete confusion in front of her father, not knowing what to do now. I didn't do bad, but it turned out how bad it was, and the guy died, but it turns out that she was to blame…

— Yes, ours won't leave us, but it can and to Court fight reach. No, get out of here, it will be better. Moreover, for everyone. And for us, and for the Agnas family, for young Usol. How can they compete with Elder Savir and his neighbors?

Elle heard these words, and understood that her father was right. Confused business and thin, very thin…

***

A gray cloak is good clothes for those who want to hide their face. It seemed to the Christmas tree just such an outfit now unusually suitable. And it didn't seem hot in him, I could just walk calmly. And it's very good that her father was walking next to her, it added calmness and confidence.

— So, daughter… Now I will leave for our camp, to Palak. Let our drinker be delivered home, prey, so that he would convey the news from us to mother, Mlada. And take the things that you need to take with you. I'm quick, wait for me at the dock!

Radko ran to the outskirts of Oum, where an army from Warta was camped. Yolka understood that her father was doing everything right, but she was uncomfortable, now, here she is completely alone. Everything seemed to see this Ikmore here, or that, in patterned boots. And, I tried not to look at other people. I wanted, I really wanted, so that they would not notice her.

The girl saw how passers-by looked back at her in surprise, but now it did not bother her. I even noticed Tisat in a hurry, with a rocker on his shoulder, and a load. It can be seen that the boy was busy with something, and now she did not want to distract him.

Nearby was a descent to the river, from which a large pier was erected, with several berths and gangways. There was even a wide road covered with steep-sided logs, which would be easier to lift the cargo brought by the rooks to the capital city. So it was much easier to slide the sled with packs and

bags attached by belts. And now the loaders pulled out rich goods from the pier to the warehouses, harnessed to rawhide buildings, and the elder only shouted:

— And, once! More! Naddai! A little more!

And the dozen artelshiki coped with such hard work. This is not to say that it was easy for them. It seemed a little more, and the wooden runners of the sled would smoke, but no, the belts survived, and the load was not damaged. Sleds, as if alive, poked at the open gate of a huge barn. Immediately a merchant with unots jumped out, and smiled so broadly, as if he had met the most long-awaited relatives, nothing more than siblings.

"Finally! Paley, great job! Here, and the promised! — the merchant said and put the canvas bag in the hand of the eldest of the artelshiks.

— Always happy to help, Utmar! Always. It's good to deal with you!

He was pleased, but tried not to show the view. And his artel made an encouraging noise, showing approval to the grip of his leader. The workers approached the breeder, clapped on the shoulder, the same stood proud and important, and then began to divide the merchant into their awards.

True, the Elle saw that they paid attention to it, and hastily turned away. She began to go down, trying to go faster, as quickly as possible. I could, I would run, but my legs still moved badly, braided. She walked, trying not to slide along the wooden plaques, driven into the ground here. I looked around, noticed a couple of rooks standing at the pier. The ships were large, or it seemed so simple to her now, in as many as fifteen ukyuchins on each side. But, here, there were no watazhniks nearby… As luck would have it, none of the rooks were loaded with goods, no one was going to leave Oum. True, small fishing boats slowly cut through the water surface with sharp noses.

The Elle from fatigue just almost fell on a hefty churbak, legs gave way, no longer held. I sat down, so it immediately felt better. I had to catch my breath, and I really wanted to drink, as she felt. Now I looked around a little calmer, only a little calmer. And the breeze blew, light and pleasant. And then, as if as a reward, she noticed a boat walking along the river. And the helmsman ruled right to the pier. The mast was lowered, and the ship was now only on oars. There was already a paddock on the nose, ready to throw a rope to the pier. And the loaders here were ready to help moor, counting on a small bribe. The Elle gladly watched the fine and dexterous merry people, as they pull the rook closer, putting bags of wool under the sides of the sealskin, so as not to damage the ship.

Finally, the oarsmen began to demolish the bags on the pier, laying evenly, as if on a corner. They argued the case… They quickly finished everything, the clerk ran up, began to count the goods, and then gave the tags for receiving the goods to the senior of the vataga. Here, however, a girl came down to the pier, like Yolka, wrapped in a raincoat. Yes, so the cloak hung down that you can't see your face, only Yolka noticed the clear blue eyes of this stranger. Yes, something twisted in her heart, as if she felt something…

I could not think, otherwise I would certainly come closer to the girl. But then, shouting at the pier, residents of the city began to run away. And, judging by the embroidery, from that very ill-fated family of Agnas. The tree sat down, hiding behind the logs at the pier. And then, at the gatherings, taking advantage of the bustle that had begun, she climbed onto the boat and lay down on the bench, quickly covered herself with a thick canvas, apparently from a sail. She hid, thought only to wait here.

Well, on the pier they shouted for a long time, and they fought, judging by the screams. But then, someone gently pulled the canvas. The tree squinted strongly, the sun beam blinded his eyes. In front of her stood a smiling quilted jacket, suddenly he bowed to her, and shouted:

— Guys, everyone is on the bench! Mrs. Spruce is already on the boat! Let's get out of here!

— Thank you, Bras! Let's go! — there was a response cry, — now we are leaving! For goods ahead crying! And the tags, here they are, the tags! On the rook, guys, stop waving your fists!

— Exactly, Gorazd Artakovich! Madam is with us! 'another voice replied.

And on the boat they jumped, and just ran along the gangways. The nimble guys sat down to the oars, one of the merriers cut the rope with a dagger, and the rook quickly, like a grasshopper from a twig, bounced off the pier, and quickly ran along the water surface. The tree sat in confusion, not understanding what was happening. She frowned, but kept quiet, not understanding what to do. Indeed, from one misfortune I got into another, at least howl now, but at least cry. And there was no time to think. I was going to rush into the water, and there, how lucky, I even got up…

But a dozen feeders went to her, in leather palm clothes, with a thin golden hryvnia around her neck.

“It’s all right, Mrs. Spruce. The cargo was handed over, the tags were received. Your mentor will be happy. And what they started to cook on the pier, you will not fail, the Oumans were the first to start. And we go further, to the Great Gandvik. We remember what Mrs. Gaida said!

She just nodded, pretending to understand. Who is this Gaida? And this hero recognized her? Why? Thoughts got confused in her head… The main thing, of course, was that she escaped from Oum. But, she, Spruce? So her name is a Elle? Or…

PART 2 Gaida Apprentice and Krasa Apprentice

CHAPTER 1 The Mindless Witch

The girl got up with difficulty, from the wooden pier, holding her head with both hands. The crown touched, under the scythe laid in the roller, the bump swelled noticeably, but, fortunately, there was no blood. The arms and legs were also intact, only the cloak got a little dirty, she dusted it off, and even pulled it off the floor from a good canvas, fearing to get dirty.

She was sick, everything around her eyes, spinning, as if she had only got off the fair carousel, off a painted wooden horse. But then she noticed that her boat was going down the river. She just choked on such injustice. How could this be?! Already going to scream, or run along the shore for a boat, but here, someone persistently tugged at her cloak, trying to attract attention. The girl turned around, about to fight back, her hand had already found the handle of a knife hanging on her belt.

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