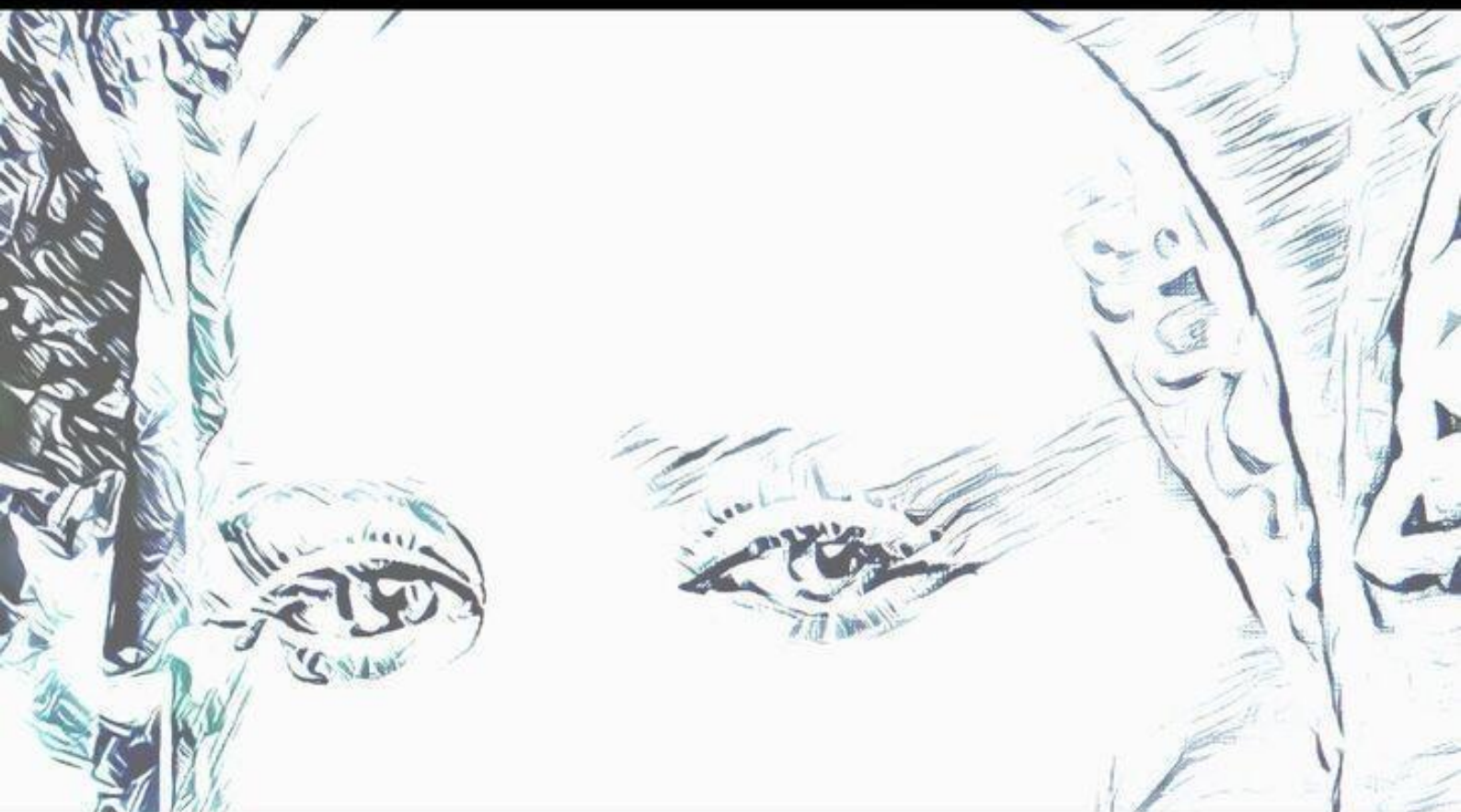


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Sergey Solovyov



**IMMORTALS. DEAD
PRINCESS FROM THE
FORBIDDEN ISLAND.
SEVEN STORIES
ABOUT ELGA**

Sergey Solovyov

**Immortals. Dead Princess
from the Forbidden Island.
Seven stories about Elga**

«Издательские решения»

Solovyov S.

Immortals. Dead Princess from the Forbidden Island. Seven stories about Elga / S. Solovyov — «Издательские решения»,

The book «The Dead Princess from the Forbidden Island. Seven Stories» continues the novel «The Dead Princess and the Seven Dreaming.» «The Dead Princess from the Forbidden Island. This book promises to interest a wide audience of readers with its fascinating story about the Life of Elga, the great witch. Although Elga became the Dead Princess, she found the strength to become a mother, which personifies the eternal circle of life and death.

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Preface

The great river Ob carries its pure waters to the sea-ocean, and a long time ago a people lived on its banks, about which there will be a story. These people lived not only on the river, but also by the Jellied Sea itself, and among them were both the strongest magi and the witch, whose power did not know the limits. The islands of the sea are also full of secrets, and on one of them was the refuge of the great sorceress, the Dead Princess herself, and her faithful servants and assistants — the Seven Dreams. They were intercessors and patrons of these lands and people, although people were not able to look at them. The Gray Wolf, the faithful servant of the Dead Princess herself, Elga, also lived with them. But there were great magi before them, those who were doomed to difficult service by the Great Guardians of the World themselves.

Dead bees don't buzz

The first story. Beginnings

A little girl standing next to the porch of the house, enthusiastically played with the same small ferret. She stamped on him with her foot, he also stamped in response, jumping up, with all four paws at once, and spun around her with a young one.

— Elga, — shouted to her mother, walking from the barn, with a wing of milk in her hands, — again picked up someone?

— This is not someone, this is Ryzhik, — the girl answered, reaching out her hand to the pet to stroke, and he, instead of biting her, just sniffed his fingers and allowed himself to be scratched on the head, only raising his ears up, and carefully looked at her with his bead eyes.

Mother just shook her head, and calmly passed by. She is already used to the fact that none of the animals will offend her daughter, and she drags everyone into the house. There was a good thing about it. In the barn, when Elga came, the cows behaved decorously, and did not try to push her or anyone else against the wall. And with her alone it happened, and only the whip helped from severe bruises. Well, a ferret? Ferret as ferret. It's also good, there will be no mice.

“Let's go for lunch, everything is covered,” she called her daughter.

— And Ryzhika?

— Find the old bowl, with the edge beaten off. I'll pour him milk.

The girl ran to the basement for an old wooden bowl, and the ferret jumped after her.

A large family sat at lunch, mother, Gita, father's name was Kuvar, brother, Takai and sisters, Zarena and Tara. Elga looked at them again, over her bowl, closed her eyes, and again saw a dark stripe on Zarena's chest. She sighed, and again looked into the bowl, eating boiled fish, drinking yogurt from a wooden cup. Everyone ate, and the girl approached her mother, and looking into her eyes, pulled the sleeve of the dress.

— Mom, listen, it's bad with Zarena. she said, looking straight into Elg's eyes, She was sick. Let's take her to the witch. And then suddenly she has a fever? Gita asked her daughter.

“I thought again. — the woman frowned, — Do you want to go to Kara, dig into her stones?

“No,” Elga replied with her head down. “It's great to look at the pebbles though, ‘the girl sighed.

— Well, let's go to the healer today, — she shouted to Zarena, — And you will go with us, — she looked into her daughter's eyes, — we will finally find out what the matter is.

Gita prepared gifts for Kara, and put everything in a basket. We dressed in everything elegant and Zarena and Elga, in the guides took the dog from the yard. The witch's house was not far away, but not in the village itself, the healer explained that it was hard for her to live with people next to her. And they walked along the path, and sometimes Elga, playing with the dog, overtook her mother. Flowers grew with might and main, and there were many bees, it is a pity that not only bees flew in the air, and unloved mosquitoes, and horseflies came across. The gita fanned itself with a twig, driving away mosquitoes, and the daughters also behaved, maybe only waving much stronger. Around the house of the sorceress stood a wattle, almost human in height, and beautiful carved gates with a gate, a gift, as the healer herself said, of one person cured by her, covered the entrance to the courtyard. Geeta knocked on the wicket, and as everywhere, the dog barked, either greeting the guests, or showing her service to the owners of the house. Soon there was a noise of footsteps, and the bolt of the opening wicket creaked.

— Hi, Gita. Glad you, and came with your daughters? Come in.

— And to your good health Cara, “Gita bowed back,” come on in, ‘she told her daughters.

The guests entered the courtyard, Elga tied the dog, and Kara took them to visit. The house was ordinary, made of logs, on a high basement with a gable roof. The porch was rich, decorated with wooden carved lace. They climbed the stairs to the house, and the witch opened the door to the

upper room. Elga eagerly looked around, hoping at least here to see the unprecedented. But nothing like that — wooden benches in the corners, a table, four lamps, two large larks for clothes and things, a couple of shelves on the walls, with all sorts of things, small pots, a silver bucket, wooden cups, bowls and spoons.

— This is for you, — and Gita gave the basket to the mistress of the house, — look what happened to Zarena. — and approached the witch, looking back at Elga, who was considering pebbles with signs and sniffed at the bunches of herbs lying nearby — look, do mercy that with the youngest.

Kara quickly cast a glance at Elga, and in response nodded, and approached Zarena.

“What is your girl?” the witch looked into the girl’s eyes.

“I don’t know. — and she shook her head, — The sister saw something, so they came to you. I coughed a little.

Kara again looked into the girl’s eyes, listened to her heart beating. She sighed and said:

— Remove the cape and sleeveless jacket.

And she leaned her ear against her chest, listening to something, listening for a long time.

— Dress up.

Vedunya went to Gita, poured kvass into her cup, and served it to her, then poured drink and daughters.

— Everything will be fine, they came on time. A month to brew herbs and drink decoction — and she served two bunches of herbs — her sister saved, — the witch Gita smiled. And how old is the youngest?

“Seven,” the mother looked anxiously at her daughter playing in the corner.

— Elga, — called the witch girl, — sit next to her. What did you see at Zarena’s?

And the girl, a little confused in words and suffocating with excitement, told the hostess about the black stripe on her sister’s chest, and that she had been seeing this for more than a week, every night. And yesterday and in the afternoon it happened. And Elga burst into tears

— What’s wrong with me, Volkhovitsa?

— Everything is fine, girl, — and she kissed the girl on the forehead, — the gods chose you to help people. Your fate is like that. In the meantime, go with your sister to the yard, play there.

And Zarena and Elga ran out of the house, and Gita sat next to Kara, and waited for her words, with a stone on her heart.

— Will you spread the bones on Elga? — asked Gita, — I will call her.

Cara moved away from the guest after these words and fell silent for a long time.

— I’m afraid, — and hung my head, — At the age of twelve you will send Elga to Alaty. I did not guess her, I’m sorry, I’m afraid that I will see the wrong thing. Once a week, send her to me, teach, talk about what you can, and take care of her before leaving. — and looked carefully — and if something does, it will help someone, but go blind, do not tell anyone, run to me right away. This power is growing in her, and blindness will only be for a while. — I sat as if I didn’t want to say — don’t be afraid, Gita, neither her nor me. There is no evil in us, not a single drop.

More than once, but a couple of times a week, Elga ran home to the healer, learned to learn the powers of herbs, see diseases, and feel the weather. Glory in the villages around Varta scattered about the mighty healer. But not about the little girl, no. Not yet. Everyone talked about the mighty Kara, who sees all the ailment, but she can help. But the baby helped her — just take a look, and already sees what ailment happened. All Lukomorye and Obdoria knew about miraculous healings, Kara, the great healer.

And it happened that it was supposed to happen. Once the children of Gita and the neighboring children played, Elga had already grown up, she was almost twelve years old, and she watched the little ones. The summer was hot, the children were fiddling on the shore of the lake, Takai, the younger

brother, was only nine years old. They splashed in the water, and they suddenly howled, and the whole gang ran to her, only waving their hands.

— Takai drowned! Takai drowned! — shouted the baby.

Elga was both in a dress and dived into a whirlpool, and grabbed her brother's hand, you can't grab your hair, there's nothing to grab — several curls on your head. I pulled it out, and my legs almost gave way — I'm not breathing anymore. She began to beat him on the cheeks, squeeze his heart, still, his brother did not breathe. It darkened in her eyes, and as if fire came to her fingers, they became hot, as if they were puffing with fire, and she put her hands on Takaya's forehead, not paying attention to the screeching children who, seeing this, all ran into the village in a crowd. Elga managed to breathe only three times, her fingers got colder again, and she heard her brother coughing, spitting water. But before her eyes it was dark, completely dark. Elga grabbed her eyes, thought that sand had hit them, she rubbed them fiercely, trying to see at least something. She stretched her fingers forward, feeling only the sand on the shore, then brought her hands to her face, again groping her eyes with her fingers. Elga wept in fear as she led her hands in the air.

“Sister, what's wrong with you,” my brother shouted, and took her hand.

— I don't see... — she whispered, — take to Kara, — she quietly asked, — not only home...

The brother looked at her face and did not recognize her. Her face became piercingly pale, as if from ice, her lips turned blue, and her eyes turned black, instead of her blue. She looked sideways, past him, turning her head on his voice, not seeing anything, only holding his hand. He could not answer, only nodded his head, only then realized that she did not see this.

— Come on, sister. Hold my hand.

He led her, as he saw one blind old man in the village. Takai tried to look at his feet so that Elga would not stumble, and walked slowly, she gullibly walked with him, stepping foot in leg. Brother squinted at his sister, all hoping that she was joking, now she would laugh, and say that here, they say, and you believed? But no, all the same scary black invisible eyes and the same bluish lips. Only all hope for Kara now. His legs themselves became cotton with fear and fatigue, and his stomach was reduced, and he walked barely — barely, but nevertheless brought his sister to the cherished place and shouted that he had strength:

— Help! Help! — and drummed his fists on the wicket boards, — Where are you all? Help!

Kara came running, opened the gate, and when she saw her brother and sister, she just said:

— Elga... Poor me, — and picked up the girl in her arms, and Takai closed the gate, and sniffing his nose, followed her. The witch headed up into her house and put the girl on the bench. Elga raised her head a little and asked:

— Drinking... Don't tell mom... — and cried again.

Kara poured kvass, and gave both brother and sister a drink.

— Sit down, — the Volkhovitsa called the boy to her, — tell what happened.

— Yes, I, — the child began confusedly, — we played in the river, and then I began to sink... I don't remember further... He opened his eyes, and his sister seemed to be icy, and his eyes were black, and his lips were blue, and showed with his hands, — she did not see, did not see anything, and put her hands out, tried to find me with her fingers... Then she called me, and I brought her to you. Cure her, Cara? — and he sighed heavily, already without any hope.

The witch sighed heavily, took the empty dishes from Elga's hands, smoothed her hair.

“Don't hang your noses, swan geese. Soon she will come to life, do not twist. She revived you, Takai. You see, has not died yet, but she spent a lot of effort on you, so she went blind. Now he will lie down, and I will take you home.

“Are you saying that?” the boy swallowed, and the paint began to return to his pale face.

— Yes, much more true. Did anyone else see how she treated you?

— Yes, — Takai turned white again, — they all ran home...

— I'll go down the dogs in the yard, but I'll hang the pole higher on the gate.

— Why? — the boy was surprised, clutching his hands in the shop.

— Everyone was frightened, which means that their relatives will soon come running here. Fear he is... You will not understand what people are pushing.

Kara ran into the yard, returned, and just as quickly closed the door to the house, and closed the inside and shutters on the windows. I checked if I closed everything tightly by pulling the bolts. The light now made its way only into the holes in the shutters, and it became gloomy in the upper room.

— Light, light, I see light! Elga shouted, looking at the beam passing through the hole in the shutter. She stood up and sat on the bench, held on to it with her left hand, afraid to fall, and put her right hand forward, in front of her, trying to see her fingers.

“And I don’t see any more...”

— Soon everything will pass, — said the witch, sitting down next to the girl, and stroked her hair, trying to calm her down, — soon, until night you will heal, you will see everything as before.

— Exactly? Elga asked hopefully.

— Of course.

But then there was a strong crash in the street, blows to the gate, and screams were heard:

— Open, witch doctor, where is the witch hiding?

“Who are they looking for?” — the girl was surprised, staring at the wall of the house with blind eyes.

The rumble did not last long, there was a stomp of dozens of legs in the yard and, having broken the gate, they began to break into the door of the house. Deaf blows to the shutters, from thrown stones were heard again and again. First, once or twice, and then as if the hail was poured into the windows. Suddenly there were screams, and the roar of blows on the door died down, and there were no more screams in the yard.

— Probably, Seven appeared, — reassured the children of the healer, who was sitting next to them, — All the magicians of the tribe, and maybe the leader, our Umbevar and the elders came, — and kissed both on the forehead, but began to lay Elga’s braid to calm her down so that the girl would not tremble anymore.

Below, there was a knock again, but already quiet, and then repeated again and again. Takai again grabbed his knife by the boot, but did not expose the blade — a bad omen without the need to get the knife. Kara went down, and got up already accompanied by eight adult men.

— Hello to you, Kara, — the leader greeted, — came to you to see how you live. Without an invitation, do not hesitate — and he smiled taut, and, as it were, accidentally looked around the upper room. His eyes settled on Elga, who was sitting on the bench. The healer then recalled all her life how Umbevar’s face changed from tanned to milky pale. But then the Seven Magi of Warta entered, with carved staffs in their hands. Urgabaz, Ratag, Silk, Atamas, Purusha, and Nurchat with Respa. All Seven of the Chosen Tribes came to the witch’s house.

— She needs to go to Alatyr, — the eldest of them, Urgabaz immediately said, — and he sat down next to the girl, looked at her face and eyes, — soon she will see. Not for long, but I spent a lot of effort on healing.

“Exactly,” Ratag muttered, “make no mistake, Umbevar, she’s not one of the icy people. And it’s easy to check — and he took out a dagger from behind the belt.

— I won’t! Takai shouted wildly, taking a small knife out of his boot, and rushing to shield his sister.

— Calm down, kid, — Umbevar intervened, — a small injection in the finger, because we only need a drop of blood.

— Everything is fine, Takai, — Kara approached him, putting her hand on the boy’s shoulder, — no one will offend your sister here. I will check Elga. Give me your knife.

The boy, biting his lip, extended the handle to the healer. The woman took the knife in her right hand, and, taking a deep breath, and remembering herself and Ilios and Leto, she carefully approached the girl.

“I heard, Cara,” and she reached out credibly.

Mara grabbed her wrist with her left hand, cutting the girl’s ring finger pad with her right. It seemed that even time had stopped, and in the upper room, as if the air had thickened with tension, everyone was not breathing, but now, a red stream of blood ran down the finger. A noisy sigh was heard in the upper room, a sigh of relief from frightened people who did not know what to do next.

— You were right, Ratag, — Urgabaz’s colleague approved, — but still, the girl needs to drink more, honey will do, Kara. That would be faster.

The healer brought honey, and buckets for everyone, bottled the drink and distributed it to the guests, and took special care of the girl, putting the drink in her hand. Another couple of hours passed, and Elga’s eyes began to glow, and she, as the magi said, already saw her fingers held up to her eyes. And she looked at them happily until she calmed down.

“We’ll go,” Umbevar said, relieved to tell Kara, “I’ll send the masters to fix the gates for you.” Don’t grumble at them, “he sighed. “Scared. But the dogs were not touched, and the farm was not damaged? People thought that the Seventh Witch was born — and laughed, looking around those present. But the faces of the Magi seemed to be petrified.

Cara only shuddered, remembering the unsheathed bones.

A girl was sent to Alatyr a week later, just one, with a guide, and with many gifts, if only Mara would accept the girl for training. The boat went along the Ob, with a considerable vataga on board, eight rowers, and the old sailor was controlled by a steering oar. Elga first ran from bow to stern, and from stern to bow, could not see enough on the banks of the river, on the splashing waves scattering in front of the bow of the ship. They passed for a long time on the oars of the Ob Bay, the wind was unfavorable, and they tried to get to Alatyr for a whole week. The gray waves of the Student Sea fought against the leather sides of the boat, knocking the sailors to the Yamal Peninsula, and the feeder with his paddle laid the course more seaside, and managed to get into the bay of the island of Recluse. The sailors raised a pole with a sign that the Chosen would see the messengers from Lukomorye. When the boat began to scratch the bottom of the bay, the Huns, all nine people, jumped out of the boat and began to pull it ashore in their arms. The girl, wrapped in furs so that only her eyes could be seen, sat on a bench and turned her head, trying not to miss anything. The forager hoisted a pole with a sign, and the carpenters began to unload the boat, folding the load under the canopy, and one of the sailors ran to light a fire in the guest house, which was standing next to the pier.

Three women came to them, wrapped in black cloaks, and leaning on staffs.

“Hello, feeder,” the eldest of the women bowed to him a little.

— And hello to you, Mara, mentor. Hello to you and gifts — and he circled the bales and baskets folded under the canopy. — and a message from the leader Umbevar and the doctor Kara, — gave the woman a wooden tablet.

She immediately ran her fingers across the line, reading the cut signs, and her lips whispered something to herself. The woman frowned, and looked preoccupied towards the guest hut, thinking that the new novice was there.

— Where is the called? — asked the mentor and looked at the feeder, not understanding anything.

He, smiling broadly, and adjusting his hat, replied:

“She’s here, Mara.

— Where? — and she was already beginning to lose patience, looking around the hefty sailors standing next to her.

— Yes, here she is, — the man showed his hand to a pile of furs, — she pretended to see.

And then, instead of the expected girl, a very young snub-nosed freckled face seemed from under the fur coat, with a wide smile all over her mouth.

— Hello to you, Mara, — said the young creature, and taking off his fur coat and fur cape, remaining only in a fur jacket. She finally got out of the boat, carefully stepping over the paddlers' benches.

“They sent me to you,” the girl said in a pleasant voice, “they said that it was necessary,” she added, not cheerfully, and sighed, “I could not stay at home.

— She can't be here, she's too young,” Mara replied, and looked at the letter, reading it to the end, and immediately changed her face.

— But they always expected you here,” the mentor said, changing her words and tone, “don't be sad, and it's not bad here on the island,” she tried to calm the girl down.

— Well, you are a goose, I made fun of it, — the woman grinned, — Thank you feeder. Go home tomorrow, “the mentor told him.

— Thank you, Mara — and he bowed to her, and the sailors went to spend the night warm.

The mentor walked back light, and Elga and two girls carried the things of the new arrival. The girl all bent over under the weight of her load. Umbevar did not regret good, and his parents put gifts for many years ahead. Two dogs met them at the cave, and the novices, accustomed to everything, were surprised that huskies just did not throw their tails in front of the girl. And Mara looked at it, and just muttered to herself:

“And they didn't lie to Kara and Umbevar in the letter. Although it would be better to lie.

— Come through, Elga, she told the girl, lighting a wick lamp.

The mentor went ahead, Elga followed her, the novices walked behind. The witch opened the bronze-upholstered door of the chambers, and the girl saw a chamber with ocher walls flooded with gold light, and crossed the threshold. Four girls looked at the guest, not understanding who came and why, and transferred their surprised eyes to the mentor.

— This is our new sister, will comprehend the knowledge available to the elect here on Alatyir. And that age is small, so it doesn't matter, it will grow up. Her name is Elga. Here is your shop — and she showed a free one — and a chest for things and clothes. “And here we go, girl. Do not go to the far part of the island, there are houses where the Virgins of War live. Only Pryakhi communicate with them.

Elga only opened her eyes wider, but she could not believe Mara. Warrior virgins! Many heard, but no one saw. Here, it means they live on the Hidden Island.

The new student sighed heavily, put the bales, laid out the furs on the bench, put the sheepskin coat in the chest, remaining only in a knitted dress, sweater and fur sleeveless jacket. In such clothes there were other girls who studied with Mary, from among the Seven Chosen, as they all called them.

“My name is Raxa. How old are you? “asked one of them, taller than the others.

“Twelve,” Elga answered, looking at the others.

— And you are all the Chosen Ones? asked the new girl, not believing her eyes, looking at girls from fifteen to eighteen years old.

— Neither did you, Raxa laughed.

A thin girl's hand leaned out into the street, checking to the touch whether it was raining or not. Following the hand, a young, freckled snub-nosed face appeared, and a mischievous rain dropped its drops directly into the wide-open blue eyes, so that the girl smiled and blinked, and began to hastily wipe her face.

“Thank you,” she said, her face in the air, “but I was washing myself today,” and she pulled the hood of her fur jacket over her very eyes.

She climbed out with a basket and dragged sledges for luggage, carefully getting out from under the hanging walrus skins that closed the oak door, which closed the entrance to this dwelling in a

stone mountain. In the morning, a corrosive and boring rain dripped. He was unable to wet the rocky soil with sparse grass, but he could not allow novices to pick mushrooms and ripened lingonberries. The girls could only quickly do the necessary — feed the dogs and collect fish from nets woven from willow rods, where she managed to get full overnight. Today Elga was unlucky, she had to do all these important and necessary things. So the girl set off, hung a bronze dagger on her belt, and in her hands was a long club, taller than her height, with a stone top. Only three likes volunteered to accompany her. The dogs did not like the rain either, and they were already bored under the canopy, and the walk promised them a bit of prey, fresh, not frozen fish. True, they had to honestly work out all this, they lay in a sled and post-frames for dogs to harness them on the way back when the sled is full of fin and fish. True, Elga also took the fire with her, in an ivy-covered clay pot closed with a lid, the coals cooled less in it, and it was always possible to light a fire to warm up on the way. Alatyr was a very large island, or rather, two islands lying opposite Gandvik and Ob Bay, from which you could get into the great Ob River, stretching with its branches from the distant South in the Studenoy Sea. And along this river lived the people of the union of the Seven tribes, but they were all Hans and Mansi, and the surrounding tribes called who was more convenient. So the novice pulled the sled forward, to the bay, where there were fences where the fish got, especially at high tide. On the shore lay parts of the trees that the girl left in a heap, away from the surf, and the dogs, Ukhvat, Chernushka and Squirrel, sniffed the shore in search of something edible. But on the stones, apart from algae, they still did not find anything, but did not lose hope, ran far ahead, so that only the tail of Squirrel was visible, glistening with whiteness among the boulders. Elga went to the net, half hidden by water, and took out from the sled a net woven from a bast, with a long handle, began to pull out fish and put them in the basket. There was little prey, and she sighed, dragged the sled further. In another bay there were more fish, and she fed the dogs, giving each, so as not to offend, a fish. Her assistants were crammed together with prey, and Elga fastened baskets in a sleigh, and prepared frames for dogs.

— We ate, we need to work, — she said affectionately, wearing a harness for each of her tailed assistants.

The sled was now pulling likes, the girl was having fun, but here, as always before the storm, she had a headache, and so much, then she closed her eyes and grabbed her fingers in the whiskey. From the refuge, at home in the mountain, where all the novices lived, it was far away, and she knew that they would not be in time, and it was better to wait out the storm in safety. Not far, as she knew, there was also a mountain eaten by passages in the stone column. Elga decided to escape there, and teased the tailed assistants to move faster. They also felt unkind, and let down, pulled the posts, but obeyed the person. The sled runners all glided across the rocky ground, bringing them closer to the target. The cavern in the rock was half her height, so Elga climbed into the shelter on all fours, and dragged the stubborn animals there, who almost turned over the luggage, but the girl clung to the baskets in time with two hands. The novice dragged each of the pets by the scruff of the neck, who whined plaintively, resting their paws, but it did not even occur to them to bite Elga's hand slightly. The girl prepared a place for a fire, broke knots, and took out the coveted pot of coals. Next to the wall lay a large pile of firewood, it is not clear who left, but so useful today. With bronze tongs, she took out a suitable, hot burning corner, and threw it next to the firewood, fanned the fire, and soon the warmth was warming the girl. The dogs all held on to her back, huddled together, and so warmed each other. Elga took out the fish, gutted, gave her head and giblets to her now very timid defenders. She watched branches crack in the fire, and a storm rages outside, with strong winds and piercing rain. The fish was soon ready, the novice took it off the rod. Dinner did not take long, and Elga, wrapped up, tried to fall asleep. She woke up from the fact that it seemed to her that someone was looking at her. She opened her eyes, but in the dark she saw only the glowing embers from the burnt fire. And suddenly it seemed to her that some creature had slipped past, and heard the dogs whining, who warmed her back. Here, a small figure slipped past the brightly flaming embers, and Elga rubbed her eyes, believing that she was close to her, and she shook her head, driving away the

dope. But then two came up, and stood up so that she could see them, these fingertips, and they were the width of a person's finger.

Novices stood in the open, wrapped in raincoats. Mara showed the Chosen stars, and how they revolve around the Earth. How to find the Queen, the North Star, and how to find the way to the North along it. She showed the most important constellations, and presented each with a calendar made of wood, with notches on the days of the most important holidays. Summer solstice, winter solstice, spring and autumn, all of which were noted on these tables. And how to find planets among the stars. The novices listened to all this, opening their mouths, trying to remember and understand everything. Each repeated Mara's lesson, and they were able to find both the North Star and other stars in the firmament. Then, everyone gathered, and as if listening to the music of the heavenly spheres, and went to the meal.

Dinner in the cave ended early, it was barley porridge and always fish, washed down with herbal infusion. Wooden bowls and spoons are already clean of leftover food, because Mara does not like when food is wasted.

“What did you eat?” — asked the mentor for the sake of the order of her novices, — remove from the table, and sleep.

— Mara, and you will not tell us a fairy tale, — asked the youngest, gracefully smiling at Mara, knowing that she would not resist her request.

— Clean up after the meal first, — all the same confidently, but not at all strictly added a young woman, or looking young.

The mentor left the table and went to her cell, and behind her Elga winked with her friends, and they only shrugged their shoulders in response, making signs to each other with their fingers, and who was terribly grimacing, nevertheless fearing that the mentor would turn in their direction. The girls quickly collected the dishes, brushed the crumbs off the table, and their famous oak millennial table, covered with ancient carvings, was tidied and cleaned. Two went to wash the wooden dishes, and the rest put the shops in place. Soon they returned, Tansy and Tina.

— Elga, well? Tansy, the oldest of the novices, asked, taking the hand of the girl, the youngest of them, Mara's favorite.

— Go to her, — pushed her and Vlast, and Nara, Gata and Una stood nearby. And Vara, her friend, put her chin on her palm and looked kindly, without taking her eyes off.

— Yes, go already, I suppose waiting for you to ask, — added her pinch of salt and Gata.

Elga sighed heavily, pretending rather than really, and deliberately barely moving her legs, looking back at her friends every step, went to the mentor's bed, covered with a fur curtain.

— Mara, you're done. Tell us a fairy tale, — the girl said in her unctuous honey voice, — do not fall asleep in any way.

— What are small ones? — the woman replied, strictly done, suppressing the chuckle.

— See, the storm will be, does not give us sleep — the novice did not even lie, — tell us.

— Well, let's go to bed, — agreed Mara, opening the curtain, and the girls, like mice, fled to their shops, and took cover with furs, only their curious eyes stuck out.

The mentor took a chair, put it in the middle of the cell, sat down, and began her story:

“On a distant — distant Grumant island, there was an old man with an old woman. All their children and grandchildren died, carried away by a reckless woman, and only an old deer remained from good, and the nets and traps were fishing, which the grandfather bypassed day and day, collecting some fish for food. In the spring they saw off flocks of goose flying to the North, all thinking whether children and grandchildren from the kingdom of Ella would return to them. So grief and poke the old man and the old woman until dactyl came to them one wonderful night.”

— Who? Gata got into it with the question, and everyone shook at her.

— Dactyl, a little man, growing in width of a finger, and therefore is called dactyl. Well, continuing? Mara sighed.

— Yes, — the girls eagerly agreed, having stopped tossing and turning,

“At first, the people are old and did not consider him, he was very young, showed up to them somehow, began to help in business. I climbed onto the deer, climbed into the very ear, and let’s rule it like a driver. The neighbors see that the sledges, full of fish, themselves, are going without an old man. They were surprised, thought — an enchanted deer with a grandfather and grandmother, and offered them to replace a young deer. Grandfather agreed, but the dactyl remained in the ear of the old deer. They sit, the old man and the old woman are sad, they remember their dactyl finger, the grandmother cut the fish, but she began to divide.

“This is for you,” Grandma says to her grandfather, and puts a piece of fish in his bowl, “and this is for me,” and puts it for herself, and eat it in sorrow.

Well, the dactyl is small, but his voice is sonorous, he came home, sees, the fish is divided without him.

And the dactyl will scream: -And me?”

The narrator shouted very loudly, which is why a couple of girls, frightened, climbed under the blankets, and Elga only laughed loudly.

“Go to bed,” Mara said imperiously, and blew out the lamps, leaving only one.

Elga did not believe her eyes, such a very small man, less than a toy, and next to him stands the same.

— What came? — one shouted piercingly, so the girl’s ears were blocked, — here is our house.

— Get out of here,” another munched a bumblebee, -we live here.”

— Hello to you good people, — said hello, as she was taught, novice, — you see for yourself, a storm. I’ll leave in the morning.

“Get out of here. Come on, come on, it won’t blow away, I suppose. Mara said that no one else would come to us.

“Until morning, please.

— You are looking, dylida persistent. — the eldest of the dactyls got angry, — Well, if you serve and help us, come here whenever you want, and live here as long as you want. And we will fulfill your desire too. One thing.

“What do you want me to do?”

— Lemmings expel. Climb everywhere, just like you. They don’t let you live. Ours is a cave, and they are right there.

“How am I going to get them out of here?” Will I run after them with a stick?

— Think for yourself, oryasina. Mara learned you many wisdom, so you decide.

The girl thought, after all, the mentor taught them a lot about everything, how to treat, how to calm down blood, how to take childbirth, and drive away the reckless woman. She sat down, bent her fingers, spoke all the lessons of Mary, remembering them by heart, whispering to herself. And so, it seems, they remembered — lemmings love playing the pipe in a certain key, and the pipe should be reed, about seven holes.

— I need a reed, dactyl, — said Elga, — with her, I will do everything right.

“All right, wait,” one of the fingers said, disappearing into the mountain.

She sat and waited, just prepared a knife in order to create a pipe.

— Take it, — a familiar voice rang out, — you will be ready, call.

Elga cut off the knee of the desired length, and making the necessary holes, made a pipe. I cleared her of litter with a twig, looked at the fire, saw that everything was done well. Elga once again meticulously examined her product, frowning at her blonde eyebrows and pursing her lips.

“What are you looking at?” Haven’t seen enough? asked her familiar thin voice, — holes, you think, a lot or a few? was acutely interested in dactyl.

“What’s your name?” asked the novice.

“I am Talin. And you, recluse?

— Elga, yes I am a novice only, soon I will return to myself, in Lukomorye. I did what you want.

— Will you drive them now? — immediately got down to business finger, sitting on a small bench — I will look.

— Where do you live? — the girl looked around, — here only you two.

— In the depths of the mountain. We can’t dig big tunnels because of these... If you do more, they are right there.

“And I thought you were at war with them.

— Sure. We fight with swords! — laughed, clutching his stomach, finger, — oh yes. Forgot. With me, it’s Faline. Get started.

“One more thing. Have you seen the shuttle here? On the water to swim?

— Yeah. Away there, there is. In the tunnel away, whole. And what’s next?

— I will play, lemmings will follow me, I will go to the shuttle, and to the bay, and lemmings will drown in the sea.

— Let me think... Who will be in the boat sitting on the oars? We will make a gate, fix the rope by the bow of the boat, and we will pull the rope, and then we will pull you with the boat together across the bay, and after you the lemmings will go to sea.

“I’ll go get the shuttle. — the girl decided, and did not hesitate to go to the branch of the cave.

In her left hand was a burning branch, weakly illuminating the road. On the road lay many stones, large and small, the girl carefully stepped over them. But Elga walked forward, and suddenly, near the wall itself, all covered with cobwebs and dust, stood the long-awaited shuttle. The novice came closer, and the branch began to collect a silver thread mixed with dust. Cheln was small, with sides of solid whale skin. At the bottom, at the very bottom, lay the remains of a man. These were only bones covered with blackened skin, dressed in leather clothes. The body curled up, obviously, as the girl thought then, the deceased froze in the cave without waiting for help.

In a decaying bag lay two longest sword-stingers, in expensive scabbard. One was trimmed in Indrik the Beast bone and the other in gold. And nearby lay two wands, carved from stone, on the handles of a deer horn. The girl left a bag of loot in the shuttle. Elga only sighed, with anxiety that she would have to disturb the remains, and began to dig a hole with a stick to bury the bones. The work took a long time, and the girl was tired. Carefully, so as not to scatter, she lifted the dead body, and cried out in horror, dropping the body to the ground. The dead man’s eyes were scorched, and red clay was stuffed into his eye sockets, his hands and feet were cut off, and his body was sprinkled with ochre. A hefty piece of petrified ochre fell out of the jaws of the skull. Elga covered her mouth with a handkerchief, containing her feelings, and her heart beat often, often. Her instinct almost vomited, the girl covered her mouth with her hand. She was able to calm down violently.

“Who are you,” only this thought beat in her brain.

The novice nevertheless overpowered herself, and with shaking hands put the remains in the grave, and covered the dead man’s last refuge with stones and pebbles, trying to drag larger stones onto the grave hill. She sighed with relief, having finished work, and carried a light boat to the exit, but stopped several times, catching her breath. She stained her palms in dust and cobwebs, and now she really wanted to wash her hands and wash herself. At the exit, many dactyls awaited her, they looked like a red-brown swaying carpet on the floor, and in front of them lay tools more like spools of thread.

— Here, and the shuttle in place. — Falin shouted to her, — now we will fix the bow of your ship with ropes, and we will pull, and you will play the pipe. Don’t be afraid, you won’t step on us, we will all be ahead of you.

— Okay, I’m waiting, tell me how you will be ready.

— All right. And I need to wash my hands.

— You are looking for the princess. Here, there, and he pointed with his hand at a small stream that was beating in another tunnel.

The girl was able to wash her hands and wash herself with ice water. At first, she fiercely wiped her hands with sand, almost peeling off her skin in order to wash away even the memory of the buried dead. She came looking around where she would rest. Elga sat down on a log, and leaning her back on the wall of the cave, dozed off. It was already night, she was tired and exhausted, and there was no strength at all.

— Wake up, dormouse, — Falin shouted right in front of her nose, — and do not be afraid, why did you immediately turn up? Your fish will not disappear.

The girl hastily opened her eyes, and in front of her again stood her, already her, fingers. And exactly, she turned around, looking at whether her sledges with luggage were in place. Elga got up and looked at her, now her shuttle. His nose, like a net, was covered with hundreds of tied dactyl ropes, and they stretched twenty cubits forward. The novice sighed several times, and started playing. From where, it is not clear, but hundreds and hundreds of rodents moved nearby, and without turning around, Elga went to the bay, and the shuttle smoothly stretched to the water, as if by itself. Sometimes she turned around, without ceasing to extract the melody from the reed, and saw a gray carpet of lemmings stretching behind her. Step by step she was approaching the bay, already her lips were starting to close, but the girl tried her best. Finally, the shuttle slipped through the low water, and she went faster and jumped into the boat. The ship jerked, slightly scooped up water, but stretched along the water surface. She turned around and saw that the lemmings were not thinking about going into the water after her, trying to swim. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that none of the rodents were climbing into the water anymore, and hundreds of them had already disappeared under water. Her lips and cheeks were numb, but Elga tried to give out the melody from the pipe. But finally, it was over. The sea water swallowed everyone who went after her. Exhausted, she lowered the pipe and sat down at the bottom of the shuttle. She caught her breath, and unhooked the dactyl ropes, and took a small oar, and began to rake to the shore. The oar was small, so it moved slowly, and the shuttle did not come to the shore soon. She felt the friction of the bottom on the pebbles of the shore, and raising the hem, jumped out of the boat, and then dragged her into the cave. Elga has already pondered how to deal with her prey. She was not going to leave her here. But the girl really wanted to sleep, she almost fell from fatigue. She was transported midnight, and so tired! Although it is not night here, and now the sun almost does not set over the horizon. But I still want to sleep, and Elga, falling asleep right on the go from fatigue, almost struck the rock with her head, but still filled the bump, and immediately woke up, and fiercely rubbed the sore spot.

— How it hurts, but it became easier. I even woke up. 'she said aloud.

She again crawled into her shelter, lit a fire, laid out furs, hoping to sleep at least a little. Her dogs climbed to her, wagging their tails. Two lay down to warm her back, while the other settled in her legs. She sighed, reached out a couple of times, and fell into a rough sleep. As Elga recalled later, it would be better not to fall asleep.

She saw the same cave where she was forgotten. The darkness of the caverns was illuminated by brightly burning torches, and three women, wrapped in raincoats, quietly crept across the floor covered with sand and pebbles. The long shadows on the walls seemed to be peering into the hidden corners themselves. Three, who wanted to remain unknown, were looking for someone, already looking at each other in confusion. But Elga's dream did not indicate her faces, they were covered with felt raincoats. The trinity searched the tunnel after the tunnel, not letting a single back street pass. They were already struggling to rearrange their legs, when suddenly they saw two burning torches in the impenetrable darkness of a small cave. The pursuers turned their faces to each other, covered with raincoats, drank each potion from small eggplants, and... extinguished their fire. Elga saw a

man sitting in her, now of course, her shuttle, carefully sorting through his treasures. First, he took a sword trimmed in gold, took it out of the sheath, turned it like that, and removed it, pushing the blade into the mouth. He also played with a sword trimmed with Indrik's tooth. The torches burned out, she saw the shaved head of a wanderer, and a braid on the back of her head. But the bad thing is that she saw his face, and his eyes, and he jumped up, feeling her presence.

Too late. A cleverly thrown rope, with three tethered stones on each side, wrapped itself around his throat and loads hit his face, smashing his nose and forehead into blood. In surprise, he dropped his sword, and then another similar weapon wrapped around the torso, and then a heavy club fell on his head. The unfortunate man fell, and he was immediately tied with the strongest belts. The women prepared torches by sticking them on four sides and lit them. They stood opposite the shuttle, and suddenly, one of them, hit a bone-bound dagger in the chest, plunging the point into flesh to the handle itself. The convulsions twisted the dying man, and everything seemed to be over, but Elga somehow knew that she was not.

The witches, and it was they, sprinkled the body of the killed with ocher, the other opened her eyelids and pulled out her eyes, throwing them to the ground, and covered her empty eye sockets with ocher as well. The third witch was waiting for her turn, and the girl, herself cold with fear, could not escape from this dream. She couldn't feel her arms or legs. And so, the third, with a quick blow, obviously a silver dagger, cut off the tongue, stuffing the sorcerer's mouth with ochre. Then she separated her hands, dodging the stream of blood that hit from the body. After standing a little, she cut off her feet just as quickly. Blood flooded the entire bottom of the shuttle, and two bloody, mixed with ocher flow, flooded the face of the executed. Women stood near the body, their faces also covered their hoods. They did not remove the daggers, then they wiped the blades off the clothes of the dead, turned around without saying a word, and went into darkness. The torches were left to burn. Much time passed, the torches began to go out..

The body begins to move, bending, like a fish thrown ashore. Then the corpse rose, but without support on the feet of his feet flopped back into the shuttle, and fought for a long time, trying to break the belts. All attempts to free themselves were in vain. The cracked torches went out.

Breathing heavily, Elga jumped up, almost stepping on the dog's tail. She was sweating through and through. The whole body was bursting with fatigue, and her right arm and leg were reduced, and she could not walk normally yet. Before her eyes, everything stood the face of the murdered man, the one whose body she threw into the pit, covered with stones. She wiped her face with a towel, trying to catch her breath.

I didn't want to return to the grave in the tunnel, but she was eager to check, but was everything exactly as she saw? Elga got up and put her breath in order, as Mara taught. The arm and leg moved away, the girl went to a familiar place, illuminating her path with a burning branch. The darkness of the underground passage receded in front of her and closed behind her. She remembered the road, and the path did not take much time. Here is the grave hill. Elga winced when she saw the biggest rocks fall off the mound. "probably didn't lie well," she reassured herself. "But she was looking for something else. With inquisitive eyes, the girl looked for traces of torches seen in a dream, and no matter how regrettable it was to admit, the dream was prophetic. The remains of torches, not seen by her yesterday, rose above the sandy floor of the cave. The chosen one also examined the stone wall of the cave, trying to find more traces of the incident. Why did this sorcerer come here? Nothing. She just sighed heavily, once again running her gaze across the stone walls. I walked along the sandy floor into my cave, and tied the shuttle to the sleigh. Then, thinking, she untied it, remembering the blood flows at the bottom of the ship. But she put her find, swords, in sledges, and hid the wands in a cave. Baskets of fish stood whole, Elga put out the fire, and pulled the resting dogs with a sleigh out. Finally, she was able to go to the cave of the Chosen. The weather was excellent on the island, and after yesterday's storm I could not even believe it. The team dragged the luggage quickly, the runners

slid along the rocky ground, and soon the girl was already near the entrance to the mountain. Next to the door stood two chosen ones, while others, as she saw in the distance, reached the guest hut. She was spotted and the girls were almost running towards her. She stopped the sleigh, harnessed the dogs, and carried the baskets to the entrance.

“Hello Elga,” Tansy said to her, smiling, “everyone was waiting for you yesterday, but they saw that the storm was playing out. Mara sent Gata and Vlast to check the guest hut, she thought that you were waiting for bad weather there. Uta and Nara go around the shore, and Tina, and she nodded to her friend, is doing business with me. — she made a face, — graze goats. — Well, go to Mara, she was waiting, we will take the fish to the glacier.

Elga only nodded, agreeing, and dragged a leather bag, which Tansy and Tina looked at with curiosity. The girl pretended not to notice this interest, and having bent off the canopy, she went to the cherished door. She felt tired, wanted to eat and sleep, sleep and eat, and it is not even clear what is more. Eyes stuck together on the move, Elga shook her head, and took up the door of the handle, pulled it, and went inside.

Inside warm and well, the girl even smiled with joy, but the smile disappeared after looking at Mara’s face. The mentor shook her head reproachfully, and the novice only smiled, leading her shoulders.

— Sorry, Mara. It just so happened, storm. But this is what I found — and she handed the bag to the mentor.

The chosen one lowered the bag to the floor, sat down and pulled out two swords, and put them on her lap. The scabbard shone with gold, and the bone of Indrik the beast. Mara flattened the finds with her palms, sliding her fingertips across the reliefs as she enjoyed the pattern. Her eyes glided over the beautiful things, and she completely forgot about the novice, and could not tear herself away from the beautiful things.

— Mara... said the girl quietly to the tutor.

— What? — the mentor woke up, — yes, everyone was worried... You disappeared... — she said, but looked only at the swords, — Where did you find it?

— Dactyli tied up, — the girl answered, without batting an eye.

Elga did not expect to hear what she heard. It was a loud laugh from Mara, always restrained like that. She laughed, wiping away tears, and then with two fingers, not having the strength to say a word, showed the size of the men between the thumb and forefinger.

— How is it? she barely uttered, continuing to laugh. — No, I was also an inventor at one time, but you... — Okay, talk seriously. she finished, looking at Elga.

“Well, they told me where they were. I spent the night in their cave. — the girl hardly picked up the words.

— Girl, — Mara came close to the novice, — What were you doing there?

— I waited out the storm... — the student said very quietly.

— AND? What did they demand in return? What in return? — she hung over Elga, and bored her eyes.

— Nothing... — the girl managed to resist rash answers, — helped to drive the mice out of their cave.

“Do you know whose weapon it is?” she pointed to the swords on the table.

“No,” the novice replied almost honestly to the mentor, “they didn’t tell me.

“As they seemed to you, I don’t even understand,” the woman threw up her hands, “how much I tried... Okay, go to your place. Sleep, got you this night.

Elga quietly pulled out in relief, and went to herself, in the cell of the novices. She took off her jacket on the go and fur sleeveless jacket, sat down on the bench, threw off her fur boots, and climbed under a warm blanket of sand skins. Only her head was slightly accustomed to the fur of the headboard, as a healing dream snatched her from the real one. She did not hear the voices of

the friends gathered around her, and those who saw the heavy sleep of the youngest of them did not bother her, talking only in a whisper.

She saw in a dream an endless nightmare, all rising from the bottom of the shuttle of a murdered man with his eyes and tongue torn out. The dead man kept turning his face to her, with eye sockets and mouth stuffed with ochre and paths of blood and dirt running down to his chin. Then she saw a hill moving from the inside, with stones rolling and hitting each other from a grave embankment. Only in a dream the embankment was huge, several times taller than its height, and hung over it like a terrible sea wave. These huge, rolling stones fell on her, pressed on her body, preventing her from even breathing. She could not wake up again, only moaned in her sleep, rushing under the blankets, pulled a fur cover over her head, and curled up on the bench.

The next morning, all the inhabitants of the mountain chambers woke up and washed. The girls looked anxiously at Elga, with a gray face and black circles under their eyes. Gathered for breakfast. Mara looked at the girl, who only picked the porridge with a spoon, and she ordered to season it with honey, and not with everyday linseed oil. The novice was not herself. The mentor approached her, put her hand on her forehead with concern. The heat is not. She sat back down.

— Elga, eat come on. Is the porridge tasty, with honey, or did you miss the milk rivers and jelly banks of Yamal? — the mentor tried to joke, — today we'll go to the bathhouse.

— Yes, jelly shores... how the juice of the earth will spill, so everything... you can't drink from Obi. Elga answered, staring from under, and grabbed the porridge with a spoon. "Delicious," she smiled

— And then! Eat come on. And then yesterday I worked hard, see.

After breakfast, having a little rest, Mara led the novices to comprehend the secret struggle in order to protect themselves if there was such a case. Pupils threw each other on soft grass carpets, and learned terrible, crippling punches and kicks. Then there were dances, or rather, movements of hands and feet, to the ringing of metal plates, during the service of the gods and with secret spells. Here every turn of the hand or foot, the bend of the finger is important and unique, and means something extraordinary, and Mara forced each to repeat the movement several times.

They also drank a bathhouse in one of the caves of the mountain. The fire was still enough, and the bath was heated hot. Mara only poured water on the stones, and the girls steamed, cleaned the body and soul. Elga stopped looking at one point, as if not seeing anything around, and the circles under her eyes came down. True, after all, they say that those who steam do not age. But Mara decided to take Elga to Pryakh, to find out what happened to the girl.

But then, in the evening, he brought the sailors from Gandvik to them. They raised the flag that they were asking for help, and went to the fellow tribesmen of Mar with Elga and Tansy.

The girl saw a familiar boat on which she was brought to Alaty, and dreamed, what if there would be the same people, or would they bring news from their own family? But it's bad that the mournful flag flew over them, got sick right, or who died. The mentor marched slowly, leaning on the staff, and Elga wanted to jump, find out what happened. As always, the dogs guarding the Chosen also ran after them.

— Do not rush Elga, eat yourself, — taught Mara, — you cannot show them that you are just a girl, not the Chosen One. They will not respect — they will not believe, but they will not believe, and they will not come to you for help, and they will not listen to what you say.

— Well, Mara, — the girl answered her without a fight, remembering the lessons.

Tansy was silent, she did not say a word, she was already thinking about her Dedication, which should happen in a couple of days.

The carpenters almost ran towards them.

— Favorites, help. One of my sailors was wounded.

"Now, good man, let's see," Mara answered, looking behind the Watazhniks standing, and saw a stretcher with a wounded man.

— My name is Katwar, and he, the merry man, my nephew, is called Sadok.

— Well Katvar, — said Mara, approaching the stretcher, and examining the sick person, — he has a fever, but he is alive, — and she quickly looked at Elga, — carry him to the guest hut, but natopit there, do not spare firewood.

— Well, — answered the feeder, and Vataga picked up the patient, and carried the stretcher to the house.

“Elga, can you?” Mara asked in a whisper, “will you help heal?”

“I can,” the girl answered firmly and confidently, throwing the cloak over her head, covering her face.

Tansy stayed with the dogs, and the other Vedunyas climbed into the guest hut. They started heating, the stove was hot, but the house was still cool.

“Get everyone out,” Elga said firmly, looking at Katwar through the crevice from under his cloak, eyes suddenly prickly as the points of daggers.

“Got it, madam,” the feeder nodded back, “will I stay?”

— You will help, said the novice so convincingly and firmly that even Mara nodded approvingly.

— Let them warm the waters, let them stir with honey, somewhere on four buckets, — the girl already commanded, shining with strict eyes from under a black felt cloak, — and the willow bark must be thinned, — and she served a large piece of dry bark from her bag.

Katvar went into the courtyard, where the sailors took up business, and stopped wailing and guessing at the death of the Watazhnik. Some chopped wood, others pushed bark, the third went for water to the source. The work boiled over, even the feeder rather grinned: “Women know how to find work for men.”

Elga, on the other hand, sat on the bench next to the dying man, breathing with great difficulty, his face was covered with dying sweat.

— Mara, stand behind, — the girl asked, throwing back the cloak, and putting her palms on the sailor’s forehead.

Elga tried to focus, as then, on a terrible day, saving her brother. How’s Takai? I probably grew up above me. Uninvited thoughts crept into my head about my mother and sister. She closed her eyes, trying to distract herself from everything, collecting heat into her hands, and looking only inward with her eyes. Finally, the warmth burst out of her, and she heard the young man’s deep breath. She opened her eyes, knowing that she would not see anything, and with the usual movement she again pulled her hood up to her very nose, so that no one would see her face, which had now become so terrible.

“Mara,” she quietly called her mentor, “come, I don’t see anything,” she muttered, eyes wide, but she saw only blackness in front of her.

She heard the steps of the Chosen One and felt her palm on her shoulder, and the girl took Mara by the arm. Elga got up, leaning heavily on Mara, and still almost fell, her legs buckled, and she lost her balance, so the woman hardly picked her up, weakened so much, and sat her back.

— Catch your breath, — the mentor said quietly, — we have nowhere to rush.

“Drink,” she asked plaintively, barely breathing from the strain.

“I’ll bring it,” came an unfamiliar voice nearby.

“Lie down, just come to life,” Mara joked, “Katwar will bring.

The feeder returned with a warm drink in his hands, and almost dropped it. He did not expect to see his smiling nephew sitting on the bench. Let it be so pale, but healthy, completely healthy.

— Mara, this is a miracle — only Katvar was able to utter, putting the vessel on the table.

The feeder looked again at the smiling Mara, and the healer, groping in front of him with her right hand, apparently a terrible old woman, wrapped up to her eyes in a black felt cloak. The healer barely stood on her feet, probably from old age, and held on to the hand of the Chosen One.

— Thank you, Zadok. — Katwar turned to his nephew, — The chosen one breathed life into you again.

“Yes, uncle,” the young man stood up and bowed hastily before Mara.

“Not me, but Elga,” she nodded at the cloaked woman.

Zadok stood in front of the healer, bowed before her, and said:

“Now I have to serve you,” and the young man tried to put his palms in the hands of the healers, covered with a cloak, but she only hastily pulled them away from him.

“Sadok, Mrs. Elga is tired. — Mara said sternly, — Do not be offended.

“I understand,” the young man nodded, “I would like to stay until tomorrow, and thank Mrs. Elga for her kindness.

“Madam Elga to meet you tomorrow,” Mara chuckled, and hid her smile, “and now we’ll go.” We have a lot to do.

And they left the house, on the stairs the girl just hung on the mentor’s left hand. They went to their monastery, and Elga held on tightly to Mara’s hand all the way, afraid to fall on uneven ground.

— Uncle, but the medicine woman is blind, — said Sadok, looking after the departing women — you see how she walks, how she steps with her feet, she only hopes for the Chosen One.

— Exactly. But she walked here herself, with her own feet. I saw it myself. She is tired of seeing Sadok, she has suffered with you.

In response, the young man only shook his head, and his braid swung at the back of his head. What will happen tomorrow? Who knows.

— Don’t say anything, Tansy. — immediately stopped the ohs of the novice Mara, — you took an oath, so keep it.

The girl looked at Elga, her face, invisible eyes, asking for a half-smile on her blue lips, and the way a smiling girl usually holds on to the mentor’s hand. She couldn’t say anything, she just didn’t have the energy to look at it. If this is a gift, then what is the curse???

— Go to Pryakh, say that I want to come with Elga, — ordered Mara Tansy, just petrified, seeing the healer, — but don’t stand with a pillar.

— Well, — the novice woke up, and went, but almost ran to the monastery of Pryakh.

Mara walked with the girl along the path very slowly, trying to walk on flat ground, bypassing stones. The girl still stumbled twice, broke her knee on the stones and burst out of resentment, sitting on the ground. Tears from her eyes rolled like a river, she could not say anything, only wailed, and did not want to rise. The mentor calmed her down for a long time, like a small one, and by force she was able to lift and drag her into the monastery, home. She said everything endlessly, how smart and beautiful she was. Yes, she was now small and vulnerable, with a very sore leg, and even blind now. Not far from the mountain they were met by Tansy, hurrying to them.

— The spinners are waiting, Mara, she said, her eyes fixed on the healer’s burrowed face.

— Let’s go to the Hermits, we are already waiting for us, Elga, — the Mentor said softly and quietly.

“Okay, only it’s hot in the raincoat,” she capricious, “and her leg hurts. Yes, and I do not see now.

— I couldn’t let you in a hut to lie down, I’m sorry, — the mentor answered, — soon you will rest.

They walked together past the rainbow columns, on the way to the chambers of the Recluses. The bronze-covered door, squeaking, opened, and the novice let them inside. Mara led the blind inside, and put her on the bench. The chambers of these women did not differ much from the chambers of seven, the same shops covered with skins, the same lari for clothes and property, nothing incredible, such an expected anger. Now they sat opposite them, three witches and recognized fortune-tellers recognized as Guardians. They looked at Elga without taking their eyes off, and without saying a word. But now, looking at each other, they finally decided.

— Hello, Chosen One, whose fame will now be known not only in Gandvik, but also in Lukomorje and Obdoria. We are about you, Elga, — Pryakha slowly uttered his thought. — and

you will pass the dedication in a week. Pulling is pointless. You are the strongest here, and with Dedication you will gain the strength that you need, the strength so that you do not lose your mind. You don't want to be a fool, do you?

— No, I don't want to, Pryakha, — the girl answered with a deaf voice.

— Mara, you'll keep the sailors quiet about the cure. said the mistress of the mountain in one voice.

— And you Elga, tell us about two found swords, but first you will spread the bones of purpose. On your fate, — added the recluse.

— I don't see anything yet, — the novice was surprised, — how I will be the bones of fate. And I won't see the signs.

— You don't need to take bones. Fate is blind herself, and the bones pull, not looking inside.

— I'm ready — and Elga sighed, deciding that it was impossible to argue, and squeezed her lips, preparing for the inevitable.

The spinners got up and removed the silver casket on the legs from the supplier, in the form of eagle claws, and from it, lifting the lid, they took out a leather bag with rattled bones. The recluses looked at each other, and one of Pryakh got up and gave the other the coveted leather bag with bones, and she, taking it with both hands, handed it to the blind.

— He is in front of you, stretch out your hands and take it, — said Pryakha Elge, — Shake it up. Pull three times one at a time, and put on the table. Understood? — said the woman, — Mara, no sound. — sentenced the eldest of the Recluses.

Elga already had a difficult day today, she went blind, albeit very tired for a while. Getting up, she swayed, and only the mentor managed to catch her falling body by the hand. My head was spinning and there was not enough air, she had nothing to breathe. She shook the bag as she was ordered, and through force, groping the neck of the leather bag, she launched her right hand there, wiggling her fingers inside. The bones rattled, and Elga, remembering all the gods, pulled out one, putting it on the table, then, sighing, another, and, already exhaling, put the last one. And so she took out three times three bones, nine in total, no more, and no less.

Mara looked at all eyes. The first, second and third... how good it is that Elga does not see now... But the mentor still looked sideways at the novice, standing straight like a stick, next to the table, trying to hear what was happening. The mentor herself barely stood on her feet, seeing the signs on the bones, and only managed to grab the tabletop.

“What is there?” Elga asked in a weak voice, “why are you silent?”

— Many achievements await you, and the glory is immortal, — answered Pryakhi, showing Mara the wise, that she would be silent, she only shook her head in response, disagreeing.

“We're done with that. Chosen, since you got swords? — again began the interrogation of Pryakh.

— Dactyli gave, — the girl answered honestly, or almost honestly.

“In the cave next to the bay?” one of them asked, while the others stood with the eyes of a novice.

“It is,” she replied.

“And besides these swords?” said the mistresses of the mountain eagerly, “was there anything else?”

— No, it wasn't. Elga said firmly, just that. And nearby was a hill of stones, grave, maybe grave.

Again the spinners looked intently at the novice. But she did not see them and it is good that she did not see them. I have not seen this desire, such excitement to pull this secret out of her. Indeed, during this time she got used to controlling herself and being firm. The spinners themselves breathed intensely and winked, were afraid, now they were afraid, to get this secret out of her.

— Until you visit Scarapea, you will live with us. Mara, warn the novices that we will have a girl to live.

“What about Zadok?” Mara asked, grinning to herself, “he must thank him for saving him.” Feeder Katwar thanks very much.

— Well, just after lunch let him come to us, not slow down. — Pryakhi said firmly, — And let him take his chest too, he will not forget. Coming back is a bad omen.

Mara brought Elga out of Pryakh’s chambers, and she barely rearranged her legs.

“Why am I so, Mara,” she lamented, “everything is wrong with me...”

— Do not twist, the morning of the evening is wiser. And what’s wrong? The young man saved his life, the Hermits allow you to pass the test. Get enough sleep, and there the world will seem different. So it is clear, I dragged you here, but I myself was forced.

— Probably, it is, — the girl agreed, — went to bed...

The night passed like a whole year. Elga opened one eye, and slightly raised the fur blanket, examining the chambers. The shops of other novices were covered with fur covers, but there were no sleeping or at least sleepy friends here. She threw back the blanket, and quickly dressed. All and business-knitted dress and fur sleeveless, and felted short boots. Cool after all. I thought about breakfast, and I wanted to eat so much... She took a bronze mirror, looked, everything is fine, and not blind, as the girl thought.

The girl entered the upper room, where all the novices just sat down at the table for breakfast. Gata and Tansy looked at her with such fear, so Elge immediately wanted to eat, but there was a desire to run away without looking back, and she turned to leave.

“Sit down with us,” Uta and Nara shouted to her, pointing to the place between them, “that’s your bowl.” Put the fish for yourself and settle down. Fresh bread was baked.

Indeed, there was a smell of fresh bread in the upper room, and the youngest novice did not even notice it.

— Good morning,” Mara said to her, “sit down, dormouse.” And then soon go to the pier, to the sailors. I still have to comb your hair and dress you up.

— Why is this? — the girl jumped up, retreating from the table.

— You are now not just a novice, but a great healer, and you can’t go out as to people.

— And now it will always be so? — and she looked at Mara from scratch.

— Always, berry, — answered the mentor, smiling, — Eat come on. The fish turned out well.

Elga sat down between her friends, and put baked fish out of the pot. She looked at her friends, they laughed, looking at her, and ate with visible pleasure. Looking at them, she finished everything quickly, both fish and bread. Then the mentor took her to her, and all the Chosen Ones followed her. Everyone found things to see how Mara would dress up Elga. The woman sat her on a chair, loosened her braid, and began to comb her long hair. First a rare ridge, then frequent. Having combed, she braided, stabbed her hair with a gold hairpin. She decorated it with earrings and temporal rings made of gold, and took out one of her kokoshniks, decorated with Dvina mother-of-pearl. She laid a necklace of small gold beads around her neck. Thinking, she took out a sleeveless jacket.

— Well, now right at least a wedding, at least a dinner party, — Mara sentenced, — Krasa Nenaglyadnaya.

Only ochs-ochs were heard around, all the novices came to inspect Elga’s outfit.

“It can’t be better,” said Gata.

— More beautiful than everyone, said Tansy cut off.

And Uta and Nara, and Tina and Vlast, only nodded in agreement. All the novices looked at the outfit of their youngest with approval. They were all beauties themselves, but in such an outfit Elga was like Dawn-zaryanitsa, and it pleased them. It’s not for nothing that they say how you will seem, so they will think about you. Their healer should not appear to the feeder as a zamarashka, but should seem to her in all the color of her beauty and power.

“It seems good. Now I will dress, and we will wait for the feeders in our tower, where we only accept dear guests.

Mara also wore jewelry befitting her dignity. And they went to the guest hut, and sat down on the chairs of the Chosen. They began to wait, sitting on carved chairs. And four soon entered the tower. Katwar walked with Sadok, and behind them two sailors carried an oak carved casket. People from Gandvik looked at the sitting Chosen Ones with all their eyes, because all the guests of the island were accustomed to the unwise clothes of the witches, in which they see them on the shore, and here in front of them sat two women in all the brilliance of beauty and precious jewelry. The sailors were also dressed in all the best that they had with them on the voyage, and the elder and younger were worn in their right ears according to the earring adopted by the Huns, and both were clean-shaven. The nurse’s nephew stepped forward, and, looking back at the elder, began a sublime speech:

— Hello to you savior. The chosen Alatyr Islands are famous for their great art of delivering the afflicted from diseases, — said Sadok, uttering the learned words aloud, — You have surpassed everyone. You, so Beautiful and condescending, saved my life, and this is my gratitude to you — and he called the merrymakers with a wave of his hand, and they brought a carved casket and opened its lid. A sigh of admiration swept through the upper room, because the chest was full of sable skins.

“This is so that you do not freeze and grieve,” said Zadok, looking at the beautiful healer, and suddenly quickly approached her, and put his hands in her cold palms, “you saved me,” he lowered his head to the floor, and I am in your power.

— What to answer, — turning her head to Mara, Elga whispered in fright.

— That you accept his service, and you will reward him for diligence, — answered the mentor.

— Yes, I have nothing, — the girl was indignant.

“There will be many more. Say, he should not stand in a bow forever, — the woman whispered.

— Now, — the healer said quietly, — I accept your service, and I will reward your loyalty, — Elga said firmly and loudly.

Zadok straightened up, and, smiling, returned to his sailors. Elga also stood up, and her face turned a little red with excitement. And she noticed that Katwar’s health is not all right either. Dark stripe on the chest, and seen even better when she closed her eyes. And now she also joined her eyes, and so it was, she was not mistaken. She just sighed, preparing for the inevitable.

— Katwar, you’re sick too. If you are not cured, you will die in six months. If you are not afraid, I will cure you, — she said firmly, and watched how the face of the feeder changed.

“I saw you suffer, maid. I don’t want to hurt you, “Katwar replied harshly.

“Do you want to die?” the girl wondered.

— I’m not afraid to die, but I don’t want to bring Death closer either, Madam.

“Well,” Elga replied, “sit on the bench, it will be fast.”

All who were alone moved away, not wanting to interfere with the healer. She rolled up the sleeves of the dress, so that they would hang down, did not interfere, exposing golden twisted bracelets, sat down next to her, and put her palms on the forehead of the feeder, and he only shuddered. The novice closed her eyes, and it seemed to everyone that it had become darker in the upper room, as if the oil lamps had stopped burning. Elga’s face turned pale and her lips turned blue, she opened her eyes, and they were black instead of blue. The girl got up, staggering, but she saw, albeit badly. The feeder also got up.

“And that’s right, breathing better,” Katwar smiled, hitting his chest, but the smile came off when he saw the healer’s face. “What are you doing to yourself... Thank you for not sparing yourself for us.

— Everything is fine, — Elga smiled with blue lips, and the frost rubbed this smile on the skin, — soon I will come to myself, it will pass soon, — and she touched her face, — And so she would reproach herself that she could help you, not helped.

— Everything is wise with you, on Alatyr island. But you decide to come to us, after the dedication, — he bowed low to Mara, as the main one, — We will put your house in Gandvik for now. Why should you go to Altai or Varta, down the river? And you will come to us, maybe Likta, you will heal our holy fool.

“Thank you, Katwar, for your kind words. This is how your elders will decide, yes Seven. Maybe they will call me to their place, to Varta, they will need a healer.

“But nothing. You can live at home and visit us. That’s right, Zadok, and Katwar hit his nephew in the side.

“Exactly,” he replied, smiling.

He looked at the girl alone, and did not look away. Others, even Katvar, who was not afraid to go to the walrus with an ax, could not look directly at the young healer, avoided looking into her eyes. The feeder looked at Mara, who was very beautiful in this outfit, at the walls (on which there was nothing), at the carved chairs, at the table, floor. Anything but Elga’s eyes. Yes, others generally stared at the floor, as if they were trying to see their fate there, or the floors were carved in the house.

“And we also brought you honey, Chosen Ones,” said Sadok, and put on the table three large taverns entwined with vines.

Mara got up from her chair, and poured honey over the buckets, and the biggest one brought it to the girl who took it in her hand and looked at the guests. Those also froze and looked at each other, hesitated, no one knew what to say, finally, Katvar raised his drink up:

— For the health of Elga, the great healer!

The sailors screamed enthusiastically, Mara smiled too. And the healer herself drained the bucket in one fell swoop, because she wanted to drink terribly. She touched her face as if by accident and felt the numbness go away. The skin became smooth to the touch rather than stone-like.

— We will go, Chosen — after all even the broken wolf Katvar didn’t understand who is in charge at owners, and didn’t want to offend anyone therefore began to speak so floridly.

Mara with a half smile drank a little from the bucket, looking at Sadka and Elga. Her eyes were already dark blue and her lips pale.

The sailors bowed again, and one at a time began to leave the tower, knocking their boots on the stairs.

— Who liked it? — the mentor asked the healer, — the witches are getting married too, — she smiled, finally driving Elga into the paint. She had not yet completely melted, and her face was a little pink, and so it would be punchy.

— Is it hot here or what? — I looked at the girl with a bored look, — they hit her hard. It’s time for us to return to our chambers.

The girl did not answer anything, only turned to the wall, and corrected the temporal rings.

— Come on, Mara.

— Sable do not forget, your reward. And honey.

“I won’t tell you everything,” the girl whispered, looking around the room.

“I’ll help you, okay. Take the sled. Moreover, soon your art.

They collected gifts, and leaving the carved tower, they put them together. Mara went to the warehouse, where all the belongings were stored, and brought skids and belts from there. The mentor worked hard, fastened the load with belts, and Elga helped her. Finally, the cargo is tied tightly to the skid, and they dragged to their cave.

Uta and Tansy stood at the seedling, talked, and when they saw Elga and Mara dragging the sled, they ran up to them and took hold of the ropes, dragged the sled with gifts to the cave, then helped to lift all the belongings upstairs.

Novices, all six, were waiting for them, sitting at the table. Mara began to put the gifts of sailors on the floor. The girls looked at all this with admiring eyes, because none of them, despite their age,

had yet deserved this. Elga looked at Mara, and gave a pair of skins from the casket to each, on a collar for a fur coat. She also put aside a share for Mara and Pryakh, leaving herself three skins.

“And to yourself?” asked the incomprehensible Tansy.

“That’s enough for me,” the healer replied.

Another week passed, and after the bath, Mara led Elga in clean clothes to the Pryahs for parting words, and then to the art. Again, a familiar move in the mountain led the Chosen to multi-colored pillars, and between them the cherished door awaited them.

— So you came, — said one of the nameless, getting up in front of the guest, — are you ready to accept fate? After all, the Serpent or the worm, and there is fate itself. He is always young and always old, there is no time for him, for he himself is this time. Mara herself guides you, and you learn the truth, and you learn yourself.

— And he is good or evil, — the girl asked in excitement, — how does he understand everything?

“He’s not evil. But he does not understand, and does not feel the difference between good and evil. Curious very much. He doesn’t like blood, — the recluse recalled everything painfully, bending her fingers, — You can ask him what you want, how you pass the art.

— Everything right? — the girl’s eyes sparkled.

“And he’ll give,” chuckled another Pryakha, “but not as you expected. He will think for you, and for you he will decide how you will be better, only according to his understanding. After all, the future is also aware, — the woman grinned. — So be careful. We’re waiting for you, come back.

They came out of the Recluse chambers, and did not utter a word to each of them before they reached the secret cave itself. Mara opened the door, inviting Elga inside.

— Mentor, and the torch? — looking into blackness, not understanding, the girl asked.

— You’ll have to choose with your heart, remember. And the light is not needed there, shine and it burns in you like a torch. You must find a secret place yourself, by the power of your feelings. And remember — he is under the skin of golden sheep, there is his refuge.

Elga entered the darkness and Mara closed the door to the cave behind her. The girl stood, listened to the steps. Steps, they were not, the novice thought that the mentor remained waiting for her.

The girl folded her hands on her stomach, and closed her eyes, trying to find peace, because for some reason her heart beat terribly. She gained more air in her lungs and exhaled slowly, and so several times. Here, I finally felt that my heart was beating smoothly, and began my journey through the dungeon. Step, another, third... The floor was smooth, as if sanded, and easy to walk on. It was like a black haze around. She walked carefully, groping the corridors with her hands. Step one more step, that’s the fork. She closed her eyes, trying not to think, and went to the right. Potom- left... So she chose until she buried the wall, and she was dazzling white, as if glowing. After running her hand over the wall, she buried herself in a large fur hide and pushed it away. Fingers groped for something... incomprehensible, huge, cold. It was rounded, moving under the arms... She tried to ask, but as if her heart was covered with a crust of ice and the ice bound her lips...

— Not so... — passed in her head, — ask wisely...

— You... — the subject began, not knowing how to start it.

“Yes, it’s me,” the creature said, as if it had breathed a thought into the girl’s head, “what you were looking for...

— I have to...

— Find out... Ask... tell? Yes, you must know... — it said faster.

— How is it? — Elga did not understand.

— Find out who you are... — said without saying the worm, — answer me, who are you?

— Ya-Elga, passing art, healer...

— No, not that... think...

She also called Python a lot of important things to herself, but he replied that no, not that. She needs to think. Think with your heart, think with your feelings. She was already breathing heavily, tired more and more.

— I... imperfect...

— Yes... and?

— I am a man! — she seemed to exhale, saying these words out loud on a whim, and this sound echoed in the cave.

— Right... Now you can be the real Chosen One, truly knowledgeable. What do you want?

Elga remembered Mara's words too late, when she had already expressed a desire.

— I want to help people, she replied, thinking then that there was no wrong with that.

“You'll help. Go.

She seemed to be icy when she heard this, and wondered if she had said too much.

She went the same way, but already now she could see in pitch darkness, feeling the difference between coal-black and gray-black, and ash. Everything was in front of her in such gray-black colors, but she walked confidently to the exit. The sound of her footsteps seemed to be reflected in her head, and even the quietest rustle seemed louder than a mountain collapse. She just began to count her every step, without even realizing it. Here is the door, also inhabited from the inside by chased copper with floral patterns.

“I walked three hundred and twenty-nine steps,” she said aloud, and turned her head back, examining the narrowing blackness of the cave.

She took up the handle, pressed a little and opened it. Elga took three steps, left the cave, and next to her stood in the darkness of Mara, like a marble statue, quiet and silent.

— Let's go, — the girl said quietly, and carefully took the mentor's hand.

— Let's go, — she said even quieter, — I want to drink.

They got out, and the sun itself rejoiced in it, gently stroked its rays. They stood and squinted after the dark kingdom. Mara had very dry lips, and eyes, circled in dark circles, as if something bad had happened in a few hours. The girl looked away, as if she had not noticed anything, not wanting to ask. Sighing, she led Mara to the chambers of the Chosen. Six novices sat at the table, jumping up when they appeared.

— So long? — asked Tansy, looking at those who entered in disbelief, — does it happen? Where were you?

— Drinking... Give me honey, — Mara barely said with dried lips.

— Where were you? — Elga laughed, but in response the other girls only looked at her as a holy fool.

Uta and Nara, and Tina and Vlasta and Gata, looked at them with wide eyes, as if they had come back from the Ice Trail, moving the writhing to them with honey, and two buckets. The mentor splashed into Elge's ladle, and drank the rest directly from the pot. Mara drank so greedily, swallowing honey, as if it were the last honey in her life, and could not get drunk. Finally, having emptied the korchaga, and looking at everyone with sparkling eyes, she said:

— I'm going to sleep. I'm tired. Wake up, drown the bath with Elga.

She stood up heavily, leaning against the tabletop, and went to sleep in her nook, covering the curtain. The rest, fearing to make noise, sat down next to the witch who had passed by.

— What so long, Elga, asked Tansy, resting her palms impatiently on the table.

— A couple of hours was, — not understanding, the girl answered, — what, how long?

— What are you! — hissed like a snake, Gata, — a whole week has passed... We already thought you would not return.

— Yes you!! It cannot be... — Elga jumped up, breaking her knee on the table, and immediately hissed in pain.

“Be careful,” Vlasta said.

— It hurts how, — the chosen one began to rub her leg, — I did not know... for so long... That's what she wanted to drink so much, — and nodded towards Mary's chambers, — I thought that two hours had passed.

— Soon you will go home, — said Vlast, who missed the family very much, — you see how good. You'll finish your dedication tomorrow. Tattoos will apply to you.

— Let's eat, but I'll go to bed, — Elga smiled faintly, — otherwise, it turns out, I didn't sleep for a week.

Exactly, said Gata, moving a bowl of fish to the new witch.

The girl ate everything, lying in the bowl quickly, and others also did not even eat, but rather, looked at her, swallowed without chewing, their food. There was almost no talk, and the girls, apparently, hoped to ask Mara about everything later. Nobody wanted to climb with conversations to the missing in grief, especially looking at her lost face. Elga cleaned her bowl and spoon, and limping went to her shop, not believing how she had spent a whole week in the cave, and did not notice it. She sat down on the deer's skin, and again remembered her art, the path in the cave, and tried to remember where she had been for so long, saying to herself her way in the darkness, and only shook her head and wrinkled her eyebrows, trying to understand what had happened.

“Go to bed,” Tina whispered, stroking her shoulder, “don't maul yourself in vain.

Elga squinted, looked attentively at the speaker, as if she had seen her for the first time, but nodded, undressed, and snarled under her furs, immediately feeling the warmth surrounding her. Merciful Hypnos joined her eyelids, and the girl, stretching, quickly fell asleep. Dreams did not torment her, and she woke up with a bright head, without hidden fears and without expecting bad things.

— Now we will eat, and we have further dedication to extend, — reassured her rested mentor.

“How you waited a week for me, Mara. Without water and food? — asked the sad Elga, looking around the mentors, looking for unfamiliar features in her.

“It was necessary, so I was waiting,” the woman answered deliberately simply, but she was given a satisfied smile by a recognized teacher, joyful for her student.

The way to the steam room did not find a lot of time, and there they were waiting for Pryakhi, who were already warming up in the steam room. Elga saw their tattooed bodies, and Mara was decorated with drawings of curled snakes. Spinners were not at all old, at least in appearance. But the girl was already warm, and was glad to bathe. She quickly undressed, and seeing the inviting gesture, she sat next to the Harites.

They steamed for a long time, doused themselves with water, the girl felt rested and soul and body. Finally, the Recluses looked at each other, and the young healer realized that a long conversation would now begin.

— What Elga decided, will you stay with us, or will you go to people? — asked one of them.

— We are not torturing you from empty curiosity, added another.

“And what drawings should we put on your body,” said the third Harita.

— And I am glad to your word, Recluses — Spikes who know the Law, but I will go to people.

“Your choice and your destiny,” the first said, “but if you stay, you will be one of us when one of Harith dies.”

Elga's heart contracted at these words, and she looked at Pryakh, and none of them was sick, she did not see a dark spot or a strip on anyone that spoke of a serious illness.

— I don't feel that any of you are sick, I don't see it, — the girl answered with doubt in her voice.

“And we are not eternal,” the second grinned, “red blood flows in us, not transparent ichor.

“I wish I could go home,” Elga said quietly but firmly.

“So be it,” the third nodded, and went to the delivery with needles and paint. Near the table is a small vessel.

— Drink it, Elga, it's poppy infusion, she said, holding out a small vessel. — you won't feel pain.

“I have to feel everything,” the girl replied. — I want to understand everything and carry it through myself.

The other Recluses, and Mara, having steamed and washed, surrounded Elga, and showed her where to lie. She frowned, not understanding them. But here, the first of them, took the needles, and dipped in the paint, and the other rubbed Elga’s legs dry. Harita began stabbing from her hips. The subject felt every injection, and saw droplets of blood flowing onto the bench. This procedure took a long, very long time. Wounds were wiped clean of blood, and the drawing was applied further. Soon a pattern of snakes was visible on one thigh, soon another. The recluses switched hands. And there were already visible images. Even the forearms and neck were decorated with wriggling snakes and griffins. Elga looked at her drawings and drawings on other women’s bodies. The difference was immediately noticeable. But the girl was afraid to ask, she did not try out the secret, not revealed to her. The work was finished, Elga’s body was covered with bandages made of thin canvas.

— The drawing is different, because you go to people, — answered Mara to an unspecified question, — those who live among people and help people, griffins are portrayed more, snakes are less. Maybe you will stay? the mentor asked hopefully.

“I can’t forgive me, Mara. And I want to see my relatives.

“They are afraid of you,” Mara replied bitterly, “and always will be.”

They began to dress, and Elga shook everything in pain, embarrassed to show the inconvenience, but finally dressed, in new clothes, with another embroidery — embroidery of a real witch. Harita, already dressed, approached her, calling out.

— Lodya will come, come will say goodbye. It’s a pity that you will leave. — she added, without waiting for an answer, left the bath for herself, with everyone together, in her chambers.

— Mara, let me know on Gandvik, what would send a boat for a new volkhovitsa, — said, sighing, harita, — smoke over the mountain will be a signal.

The mentor nodded, agreeing with the Recluses. And Elga overdressed with Mara, not understanding what was the matter.

“Are they saying goodbye to everyone like that?” the girl asked.

“You are not everyone,” Mara answered briefly, dressing up, “let’s go, we have to go.” And make another smoky fire, there are a lot of things ahead.

Elga nodded, wearing bracelets and a fur sleeveless jacket over her dress, and draping a sheepskin coat, afraid of catching a cold after the bath. They passed the corridors to the chambers of the Chosen, the girls met both Mara and the new witch joyfully, and in the afternoon a festive feast awaited them. The feast dragged on for a long time, and Mara ended the meal with an old tradition, which everyone asked her to tell about.

— Mentor, tell us about the ancient Princes! — asked Gata.

“Do not fall asleep later,” the woman grinned, “which one do you want to hear about?”

— About the sixth, about the great, about the last, — they all said.

“What are you like magpies,” Mara began decorously, “Ilda called her,” she began, sitting down in a chair.

“And she was the strongest of the Dead princesses, those who have been sleeping for a long time. **She was the sixth**, and she was from Oum itself, and now sleeps heavy in the Ural Mountains. She was strong, mighty, and also created an army from Inanimate — not dead. And the faithful magician served her, her servant, he was that miracle, alive, he did not pass by the Tree, did not become Dreaming forever. Ilda settled somewhere on the island of the Student Sea, no one remembers what he is called. She helped people, cured the people of Gandvik, where she often visited. Once, she raised the dead from the ground, because she felt that a great enemy army had attacked us.

Remember, the Princesses smell their own blood, know where it pours, and try to help. So Ilda raised the dead and led them into battle. But the Princesses could not keep more than three hundred dead in submission. And its magician, Ilm, managed to make the Wands of Power. With their help,

the Dead Princess was able to hold three thousand Inanimate. And with that army, she interrupted the milestones of the enemies of the Huns, so that the geese had no one to carry into the country of the dead. Strangers ran away with their herds from our borders, and the dead, raised from the battlefield, replenished the army of the dead. But soon Ilda fell asleep, and Ilm disappeared, and the wands disappeared with him. Where the Nezhivikh army went is also unknown. But strangers are still afraid to disturb us, remembering the sea of those killed by the dead, all exterminated, and what was worse than those taken to the service of Ilda. But according to all prophecies, the Princess will be Seven, no more and no less. And when the Guardians create the next Dead Princess, no one knows. How they, the great sorceresses, become Princesses with Ice Faces, no one remembers. After all, it's old and terrible, many are afraid to think about it."

Mara looked around the girls listening to her, shook her head, and went to bed.

She fell asleep immediately, only covering herself with a fur blanket and closing her eyes. She got into an area where everything around her was gray and foggy, and thick and dense haze prevented her from walking. It seemed to the girl that she was walking in the water, every step was given to her with unthinkable effort. The legs fell through, sticking inside this fog, and then, as if they were tearing themselves out, and so she went on and on. Elga raised her head, trying to figure out where she was? Gray-gray sky. Only grey, grey, everything around is grey and no other colours or shades animating the place. As if the rays of the sun never penetrated this wet drizzle hanging in the air, as if the rain did not fall on the ground, but remained hanging in the air. She walked on, amid ghostly, grey flowers that smelled of nothing, with stunted grey grass beneath her feet, seeing no living creatures here. She slowly, braked, turned her head, wanting to look around. So she slowly walked on, seeing the mountain, and the waves of the same gray, lead sea, slowly beating into the rocky shore of the island. Approaching the mountain, she saw an opening removed by a wild stone with a huge oak door, upholstered in green copper. The door, taller than her height, suddenly opened in front of her, and then the passage into the cave gaped with its coal blackness. Something seemed to prevent her from entering this alluring darkness, her heart sank and her head ached. Here, from the cavern, she saw a gray light falling on a familiar male figure. A man, distinguished by his blackness even from the darkness of the cave, stood with his back to it, and beckoned, dancing on the move, and weaved a spell to the beat of inaudible music, bending his fingers on both hands, changing the position of his hands and feet. It seemed to the girl that she had seen him somewhere, but she could not remember, no matter how hard she tried, even clutching her fists in a dream. The sorcery did not last long, and behold, he quickly turned his head back, and her heart contracted. It was Ilm, buried by her in a dactyl cave.

"It's your home, and they're waiting for you. Don't forget what you hid. Thanks for the kindness," the ghost said.

And the vision crumbled like a house of twigs, and Elga opened her eyes, choking with fear, staring into the darkness.

The girl was breathing heavily, and her shirt was saturated with sweat. She got up and took out another from the chest, and changed her clothes. I poured water into the cup, and a couple of times I got my teeth on its wooden wall, of course, not out of fear. After all, the Chosen are not afraid of anything.

— What are you? — called her Mara, — does not sleep?

— I wanted to drink," the girl replied in a whisper.

— And I have nightmares. I can't understand anything, — and the mentor looked at Elga probingly, — did you sleep well?

— Excellent, — the Chosen One lied, — you see, I was in business all day, tired, and sleeps well.

— Lie down, rest, the woman said.

Quickly walking to her shop, the young healer sniffed into the arms of the uncooled fur and soon fell asleep.

The next morning there were again lessons and artworks prepared by the meticulous Mara. How to put bandages, how to treat fractures and bruises, monitor the unworthy and help women in labor. Everything was important, and the mentor was strict. They taught and repeated letters, but not one fortune-telling, they only communicate with the gods, ordinary, but from knots, for small letters and news. And again, in the evenings, she showed both the Starry sky and its maps. Mary had a map with constellations of bronze, and luminaries of gold and silver on it. So the days passed, and suddenly, and this always happens suddenly, a sail on the mast appeared on the horizon, among the Student Sea, and a pennant developed on it. By color, the Chosen understood what the sailors came with — with new inhabitants and pick up new witches, or pestilence came and help was needed, or strangers attacked. Or, best of all, it's time to bring supplies to the island. This time, judging by the pennant, they went to pick up a new volkhovitsa, and brought a new student, so that the wisdom of Alatyrr would not run out.

“Pack up, Elga. We have already seen a sail on the horizon, — Mara told her, arms crossed on her stomach, — and go to the Spices, they are waiting for you.

“Well,” the girl replied, worried, “I’m going to the Pryahs.”

Elga dressed, and leaving the chambers, went into the passage leading to the burners of the Recluses. She knocked when she heard the ritual answer:

— Asking here will always help.

The girl opened the door and entered the monastery, where they were already waiting for her.

— It’s a pity that you are leaving Alatyrr, Slavnitsa. Be careful among people, danger awaits you everywhere.

— Start a housekeeper, at home, in Varta, — advised another, — years older, but what would be stricter. And remember the Covenant — do not resurrect the dead, the punishment of the Guardians will come immediately, and you will not have time to blink an eye.

— Everyone will expect help from you, love everything, or even be afraid. — said the third, — and you will break, no matter how you like — they will hate right there. You will not remake yourself, you will not be able to refuse treatment to anyone, but do not strain your strength. There will be many who ask.

— You’d be better off here, ‘the first added.

“I can’t stay,” Elga whispered, her head down and holding hands.

“And we can’t leave with you to protect you,” the second added sadly. — but here’s a gift from us — and she gave the girl a silver mirror of excellent work, with a handle decorated with minted geese.

— Thanks.

— On a good memory, and that I would see myself in the mirror, always, what you are, — said the third.

The girl left Harith’s shelter, not knowing if she would return to this cave. With quick steps, she came to the place that became her home for four years. Bales and lari were ready, everything was laid, and in one of them were the Wands of the Force. The girls, her friends, stood nearby.

— Come on, little one, — Gata laughed, — we will help you with luggage.

— Exactly, — Tansy grinned, — you are still small, and so much you drag. And the marina is still a long way off. Let’s go, Elga.

The chosen ones grabbed the healer’s luggage, and lari and bales swam ashore on the island in the hands of the girls. They all came out of the mountain together, and the sailors were already looking forward to them on the shore, and a girl, a new novice, stood next to them. Nearby were stacked supplies and gifts from close novice girls. Mara also followed the Chosen Ones, and even

further from everyone, like three shadows, Pryakhs also went. The mentor was ahead of the Chosen, and approached the sailors.

— Hello, servants of the sea.

— Hello to you too, Madam Mara,” the quilters bowed all together, and with them the girl. — The news came to Gandvik that you are sending a new healer to the world, and the boat is waiting for her. And we delivered a new novice to Alaty, and the feeder nodded at the girl wrapped in a fur coat.

— My name is Uxa, I’m from the scolds, — the girl slowly said, glancing from Mara at Elga, — I arrived at the word of the elders, and stretched out a rope with knots.

Mara ran her fingers through the letter and nodded thoughtfully.

— Everyone is happy for you, Uxa. Take your things, and go to the chambers with the other Favorites.

The girl nodded, and went to the novices, and Mara went to the feeder, and began to speak with him very quietly:

“What’s your name, guardian of the sea?”

— They call me a cross, — he smiled broadly, — I’m also from the scolds, Dvina and I came, but we will deliver the lady to Gandwick, do not doubt it.

— The feeder, the healer is not a simple magician. Be calm, and don’t be scared if anything. She can do a lot, and I don’t frighten you. Her name is Elga.

“Thank you, madam. We will take care of Mrs. Elga, and he bowed to the mentor.

Mara approached Elga, who was hiding her hands behind her back in excitement, and turned to the mentor.

“It’s time for us to say goodbye. It’s a pity that you are leaving us, but nothing can be done. Happiness to you, and be careful.

“Thank you, Mara. I was glad to be with you — she turned her head, and shuddered when she saw Pryakh, immovable, covered with black raincoats, and more like huge silent boulders.

Elga did not say a word, and stood next to the carpenters. They grabbed the boat, raised it, and went through the surf. Soon the boat swayed in the waves, and the sailors, in leather clothes, picked up the girl’s things and put them in the boat. Then Clest picked up Elga in his arms, and transferred her to the boat, and climbed over the side of the ship himself. Paddlers hit the waves with oars, pushing the vessel away from the island. The girl saw how the backs of the merrymakers began to bend and unbend, leaning on the handles of the oars, and whipping the sea, like cream in a wing, without hope of getting oil from the waters of the Jellied Sea. The shore was moving away, and the healer saw how women in black raincoats approached Mara. Elga, when she lived on Alaty, saw off the seven Chosen Ones, and the Pryakhs never went ashore to say goodbye to the students. The girl did not hear, and could not hear their conversation.

“You didn’t tell her? ‘one of Harithas Mara asked.

— No, and she has not yet recognized your names, — the mentor grinned, — Sveta, Rada and Dara... Your names, the names of the Harit-Recluses. And every time these...

— So is Mara’s name...

— She couldn’t tell her... What is ahead of her — and she closed her eyes with her palms. The sea wave hit, and water fell on her face and salty moisture flowed between her fingers. Mara removed her palms from her face, and so she stood, barely breathing, biting her lip.

“You’re crying,” Rada asked her.

“It’s a sea wave, Recluse,” Mara shook her head.

“She’s a tough girl, she can handle it. She has to take it.

— But she has so much... — and Mara lowered her head down, eyelids adjacent, and clenched her fists in impotence and remembered the day of fortune-telling, fortune-telling on the fate of Elga. That day stood before her eyes again

“At the call of her heart, she tried to grab the bones, but the Recluse managed to pull them out earlier, and removed the bird bones with signs of fate.

And only in the memory of Mary all these words burned:

“You go, you won’t disappear

You will be the seventh, you will not die

Then in the ice, as you fall asleep”.

The story is the second. Warta

The sea met the healer affectionately, the waves of the Student Sea did not hit the side hard, and the wind was passing, North-East, and drove the boat from Alatyr directly into the Gulf of Ob. Klest raised the sail to save the strength of the rowers, and he himself stood up to the steering oar. He was afraid for the girl, how will the sea take her? But she did not sway, and she ate smoked fish with quilted jackets, and rejoiced at the salty splashes that fell on her face. She seemed to be a sailor herself, she lacked only a leather jacket and the same pants with narrow soft boots covering her leg. And her began to help his people cope with the tackle, manage the sail. What he was afraid of was whales in the strait, which come across here very often. But he hoped that a couple more days, and they would already approach the mouth of the Ob, and the whales try not to go to the shore.

But no, as he nodded himself later, he jinxed his luck. Forty cubits from the ship, he saw a killer whale fin flashing in the waves. And a whole flock appeared, the feeder clenched his teeth, hoping for the best, and only wrapped his left hand around the mascot hanging around his neck, on a leather cord. Only the girl did not seem to understand all the danger threatening them all. She stood up to the side of the lodge and held out her thin hands with her open palms to the whales, and her hair developed in the wind. The healer whispered something, and the whales seemed to scream back at her, with their whistle, familiar to every sailor of the Studny Sea. Killer whales stuck out, shouted and again plunged into ocean waters. The girl suddenly turned and looked judgmentally at the feeder, and then turned to the whales. Killer whales shouted again, but suddenly dived at once, and no longer showed up.

Klest still looked at the witch's back, and did not dare to say a word out loud, and the team did not give a voice, and you could only hear the splash of waves, and only the silent breath of vataga was heard above the waves. All the sailors looked only at Elga, and that, towards the sea, where the whales disappeared. Finally, the girl turned and went through the banks of rowers, and stood on the stern next to the feeder.

“Klöst, do you hit the killer whales?” she asked quietly, and looked intently at the helmsman.

“It happens,” the sailor shrugged.

“No more,” said the healer quietly, “they asked.

— Who? — the helmsman's eyebrows climbed onto his forehead, — are they? — and he waved his hand at the sea waves.

— Yes, — the girl nodded her head, — they wanted to sink the boat. I said you can't. But when I'm gone, they'll attack. They will remember you and attack you.

— Madam, — the voice of the scolt trembled, — what will we eat? We live by the sea?

“There's a lot of fish here. You have networks. And when you see them in the sea, you can catch fish with a net, closer to the surface of the water. They are like dogs, they will drive you fish. Only share prey with them.

“As you tell me, Madam,” Klöst bowed and remembered Mara's words. “The feeder, the healer is not a simple magician. Be calm, and don't be alarmed if anything. She can do a lot, and I don't frighten you. Her name is Elga.”

Then they walked calmly along the sea. So the long-awaited Gandvik, the mouth of the Ob, appeared.

— Elga, here we will land you ashore, further to Lukomorye you will be delivered by boat.

“Thank you, Klöst.

— You, madam, for saving from killer whales.

The sailors unloaded Elga's things ashore, and they themselves went to acquaintances to exchange their goods for the products of local craftsmen. Two sailors remained with the girl, who

tried not to look her in the eyes, were afraid of the evil eye. They loaded her belongings onto a skid, and went to Sadk's house. Three children ran towards them, waving toy bows.

"Where are you going, knights?" Elga asked without a smile, "won't you help the wanderers find Sadc's house?"

— The future warrior will always help the Chosen One, — a little lisping, the knight answered, shaking his shaved head with several curls, — follow us, madam.

The girl moved behind the guide, who led her down the street between the fences and wattle houses. Finally, the guide poked at the gate, and with his squad galloped somewhere into the distance on an imaginary deer. The witch knocked on the wicket, and listened later. Finally, the dog barked, and steps were heard in the courtyard of the house.

"Who's there?" sounded a man's voice.

— Elga, a healer from Alatyr. 'the girl replied to the landlord.

The wooden bolt creaked, and the gate hanging on the willow hinges opened. Dissolved the entrance tall, like everything in this land, a middle-aged man.

— Be sound, madam — and he bowed low, touching the ground with his right hand — glad to have you here. And these people are with you?

— No, these are sailors from the boat, chipped, helped to convey the luggage. Thank you, then yourself, — said the girl to the sailors.

— My name is Trept, I am Sadka's father, — and the owner of the estate picked up bales and bark with both hands and carried it to the house, — close the gate, — he told the girl, turning around.

The door to the house was open, and next to the entrance sat a dog, waving its tail affably, and standing on its paws when the guest approached. Elga calmly and without fear stroked the dog, scratching her ear, she sniffed in response, met. Trept only quacked when he saw it and scratched his chin.

— Let's go, — and he went upstairs with luggage, to the upper room.

At the top was a pair of small windows, tightened by a bull bubble. The rooms were very clean, and an elderly woman in an ordinary knitted dress and fur sleeveless jacket walked towards her, and she was dressed and an apron, you can see the hostess was preparing something.

"Thank you for coming in. My name is Arza. If you stay, we have Elga, and there the boat will sail to Varta, — the woman said, — sit down, we will have dinner. In four days, the cargo will be ready to be sent to the upper reaches, and you will go with them along the Obi-matushka. In the meantime, you will see how we have in Gandvik, maybe you will like it.

— And thank you for sheltering.

"How not to greet you. You cured our only son. Trept and I have a daughter, three, but already married, live in our families. — suddenly jumped up, hit herself on the sides, — Why am I. You eat out of the way, but I'll exhaust your bath. The bath is good, recently re-folded. Now I'll bring the meat from the basement.

— No, I don't eat. If only fish or milk, you can and yogurt.

— Well, — she nodded, not getting into the Vedic secrets, and went down to the basement, soon returned, brought a couple of fish and a yogurt.

— Tremble, have a seat! — she called her husband, and put on the table three wooden bowls, and three spoons.

She took a jug and a wooden bowl for washing, poured the guest on her hands, and gave a towel to wipe her hands, and washed her hands herself. My husband came, poured on his hands and him. Finally, everything was ready, and they began to eat. Trept cleverly cut the cod into pieces and cleaned it, put it in a bowl, and everyone took parts of the slave carcass. Elga ate the treat with pleasure, washed down with yogurt. After all, there were only crackers on the voyage and salted cod to death.

"Your house in Gandwick is almost ready. Katwar did his best. Don't worry, we'll look after them. Do you want, take a walk, show your possession?"

— Let me eat, and I need to wash from the road, — the wife intervened.

“Of course it is,” he said, finishing his meal. — I’ll go, then I’ll cut wood.

After the meal, Arza led the healer to the bathhouse, already flooded by her husband. Elga basked with pleasure at the hearth, poured warm water, sometimes caught the hostess’s gaze on herself.

— These are the signs of the Chosen One, — she explained her tattoos, — as the Dedication passed, so they applied a drawing to me.

“I haven’t seen that,” the woman said curiously. — Yes, you are still...

— I got to Alatyr at twelve. Three years have already passed. And you really have a noble bath. Rested well, thank you.

After washing, Elga rubbed herself with a towel, and began to comb her unstressed hair with a comb. At first rare, then frequent. Arza, already with her hair styled, approached her.

— Let me help you, — and reached out with her wooden crest, but the Chosen One deftly ducked.

“You can’t, Arza. You can’t touch our hair. No offense to you, but the Law is like that, do not hesitate.

“But your hair is beautiful,” the woman smiled, moving away from the Slavnitsa, all surprised. It seems to be ordinary, like everyone else, freckles on all faces — otherwise it is impossible and this is impossible. What is possible?

They returned to the house, Arza treated the girl with berry kvass.

“Did you want to show me my house?” Elga asked the owners.

— Exactly, Trept said, and began to gather.

Arza also dressed, throwing a warm felt cloak on top, and Elga threw the same one, and the owner of the house put a felt jacket over his usual clothes, belted with a belt.

“Well, let’s go,” he said, adjusting his belt dagger and taking a staff in his hand.

Elga and Arza took the same staffs, just in case. We walked down the street of the village, avoiding stepping into cow cakes. There were a lot of cows, and the girl saw a considerable herd being driven to a distant meadow. But they tried to cope with the manure, sometimes the owners of the houses, as she saw, threw it into ditches along the road, scraping the manure with wooden shovels.

Finally they approached the Elga estate. The house, where several carpenters still worked, stood not far from the pier, but also not close to the labaz, where goods were put for exchange, or sent to the upper reaches, or to the Dvina, to the skolts, or further, to the Kama to the mards and magicians.

— It’s a pity, you haven’t seen our Bear holiday, — Trept told the girl, — we have a beautiful time and a lot of fun.

— It’s good that they didn’t send me so early, so even at this time there is a lot of ice in the sea. I will be with you, in another year, I will watch the Holiday here.

They entered the open gate, and saw how tightly tied reed sheaves were placed on the roof so that water would not flow into the house. Not much left. Katvar put the door to the house rich, on bronze hinges, and not on wicker ones, like many. Beautiful house, the first in her life. She went around him from all sides. The lower crowns are oak, will not rot. Window as many as three, all bullish bubble tightened. Platbands are carved, and intricate carvings adorned the doors too.. Very well built, with love.

“Where is Katwar and Sadok now?” the girl asked.

— They went to Grumant, — looking at each other, the parents of the young man smiled. — How do you like the house?

“Beautiful. I will come, — the girl smiled, — to visit you.

We went back down another street, past the bargain. And Elga saw a dirty-dirty man lying next to the ditch, and something from her fishing.

— Who is it? — the girl asked with a whisper of her guides.

— Likt, — Arza sighed, — as his youngest, most beloved son drowned in the sea, so he entered the kingdom of the gods, without dying himself. At first I didn't sleep at all, then I started talking, I left home. Not violent, smiles endlessly, but storms know how to predict. One word, God's man, holy fool.

Elga approached the man, squatted next to him, adjusting her cloak and dress so that they would not lie in the mud.

“Lict,” she said quietly.

He turned around, sat on his knees, oblivious to his dirty pants, and looked intently into her eyes.

— Ella? — he asked quietly, squinting, — how is my son? — and moved closer to the girl, — cold there?

Arza looked at it with all eyes, but hearing Licta's words, she clasped her ears with her palms, afraid to hear it.

“Lict,” she called him again, “the son let you go long ago,” and threw the cloak on his head and himself, so that no one could see their faces.

Elga under the cloak put her palms on the holy fool's forehead, and felt her fingers become hot and closed her eyes. After a moment, she got up and threw back her cloak, afraid to open her eyes. But no, she saw. Nearby stood an elderly man shaking off his clothes from dirt and debris.

— Hello girl, — he bowed, — I'm sorry that the clothes are smeared, — turned and was about to go, when suddenly Trept rushed to him.

— Hello, Lict, buddy!

— Hello, — the person who does not understand him yet answered, frowning his eyebrows in annoyance, looking at his dirty clothes — you changed something a lot while I went on business, — he said, frowning his eyebrows, — and I see, dirty all.

— You fell into a ditch, — and I helped to pull you out, — Trept invented on the move, — I will accompany you, — he said, and turned to his wife, and she nodded her head, agreeing, — I need to come to you, and I need to talk. About Sadok.

— Let's go, — just answered the former foolish, — the wife will be glad to you.

Elga stood, trying to catch her breath from the tension, and her head was spinning. But she didn't go blind! She was so glad she was ready to scream. And they managed to cure the unfortunate, which no one could do for a long time. Arza approached her with a quick step and kissed her, quickly, quickly, slightly touching her cheeks with her lips.

— Thank you. The gods sent you to us in a good hour, kind girl, let's go home, rest, — she came closer, and looked at her face, — You are whiter than snow, in the face of no blood.

The healer only sighed doomedly when the woman took her old hand and took her home. They came soon, and the girl, only with difficulty undressed, drank honey and fell asleep.

The morning was beautiful, the sun was shining, it was warm. Elga and Arza sat on the litter after a meal, listened to the chirping of birds, both had an excellent mood. Suddenly they knocked on the gate, and a hum of voices was heard.

— What is it? — and a premonition pricked in the girl's heart.

But it did not deceive her. From the barn, hearing a knock, Trept came up and opened the wicket. Twenty people came in, in front was Likt, prettier, shaved and combed, and his relatives and acquaintances followed him. In the hands of the man were the skins of beavers, as far as the girl managed to see. The healer approached his healer, and she stood up, as a sign of decency.

— Hello to you, beautiful guest, — Likt began kindly, — you helped when no one asked, you did it without asking for anything in return, you did good at the call of your heart. Thank you for returning my mind — and handed her a heap of beaver skins — so that you would be even warmer, and your life is smarter. Katwar was so right when he built your house, and we laughed at him. And this is for acquisition — and gave her a leather bag.

— What is it? — the girl did not understand, feeling a great burden in such a small volume.

“Gold,” he said, and bowed, and was about to leave.

— I won’t be able to stay here much longer, but I promise to come more often, “Elga said after Lictu in an embarrassed voice.

“And that’s good. We do not hope for more, — he said approaching the gate, and suddenly, as if remembering something, he returned, — Come to us in the afternoon, we will be glad. And with Katwar and Arza. — he stood with his head down — Did you cure me for good, Elga?

— Yes, the darkening of the mind will not return, — the girl answered confidently.

“I will go,” and the man, no longer turning around, left the yard.

Soon the invitees began to dress in all the best. The owners of the house dressed in festive clothes with embroidery, Arza wore a necklace over the best knitted dress with embroidery. The man also dressed carefully, he was wearing excellent leather pants, a strong shirt, the same with embroidery, family signs, soft sailor boots, and Trept put a silver earring in his ear, familiar to any Hans-goose. They sat down, wait for a guest from Alatyr. Finally, pulling back the curtain, Elga also came out, in all the brilliance of her beauty. A well-made dress tied with a belt of excellent leather was familiar, and otherwise the healer was brilliantly like the sun. Her head was crowned with a kokoshnik strewn with pearls, and a golden month burned in the center of the dress. The temporal rings were gold, as were twisted bracelets on the wrists and on the forearms, while on the chest hung a golden talisman held on a leather cord. Earrings in the ears were magnificent work, and decorated with gems from the Urals. The girl saw that her outfit was dazzling in the eyes of the owners. Elga stood, rather smiling, and recalled Mara’s lessons: “You should be regal, and not seem like a zamarashka in their eyes, no one will listen to a zamarashka. You have to inspire respect.”

“Let’s go,” Trept said simply, “we are ready,” he said nothing more, more, many more his eyes declared.

Lict’s house was not far away, and they were met at the gate by his children, who saw off the guests. The treat stood in the open air, so many people would not go into the house for anything, there would simply be no place for everyone. Lickt and his wife sat at the head of the table, and the rest — as they had to. Seeing the healer, the owner got up from his seat, and raised his hand with a goblet in greeting. They sat at the table in empty seats on the bench. The fun was in full swing, honey poured by the river, Lict spared no supplies in honor of the cure. Previously, Elga was not at feasts, and she would not have been allowed before, she was too young. But now, the Chosen One from Alatyr covered this holiday with her presence. Everyone was glad to her, looked with joyful, friendly eyes and smiled. But Pryakha’s words sounded in my head: “Everyone will expect help from you, everyone will love, or even be afraid. And if you break, at least somehow they will hate you right there. You will not remake yourself, you will not be able to refuse treatment to anyone, but do not strain your strength. There will be many who ask. “The girl only sighed heavily, remembering these words.

Drank from a cup of sweet honey, but only heavy thoughts climbed into my head, but she tried to drive them away. And as if they looked at me, if Sadoka had not cured, nor Likta... But I would not have got to Alatyr if my brother, Takaya, had not been saved. My fate means so, and there is nothing to do with her sores, she pulled herself up, and smiled strained when Lict himself came up to fill her cup.

“What’s not fun, lady?” Surely honey is unsweetened or pies are not satisfying?

— Everything is fine, the owner is friendly, — the girl nodded, — so, I thought.

— Do not twist, soon I will deliver you to Varta. I’m the best feeder on Obi. And Vataga is my best, do not doubt. The day after tomorrow and go. Come to the pier in the morning, we will wait for you.

“Thank you, Lict.

They sat still, and then, Arza, pretending that she could not, gathered home, and Elga and Trept went with her.

“You see how everything was decided,” said Sadok’s father, as if persuading the girl, “the day after tomorrow is already on the way. Not instantly, but you will soon reach your Warta. Likt is a reference feeder, do not doubt, he went a lot, both by sea and by rivers.

The day passed quickly, the Chosen One did not notice. And on the day of departure, the healer dressed simpler, in a simple road dress, and escorted by Arza and Trept, came to the pier. Here, the boilermakers equipped three boats with goods for sailing, and Likt ruled one of them. He then met the girl.

“I’m not happy with anyone like you,” he said immediately. “Here, and he proudly showed a thirty-six-seater ship, forty-two cubits long (14 meters), worked out of walrus skins, on a frame of whale ribs. “We’re leaving soon, you’re on time.

After a short time, the lodges fell into the arms of the Ob, swaying on its waves.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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