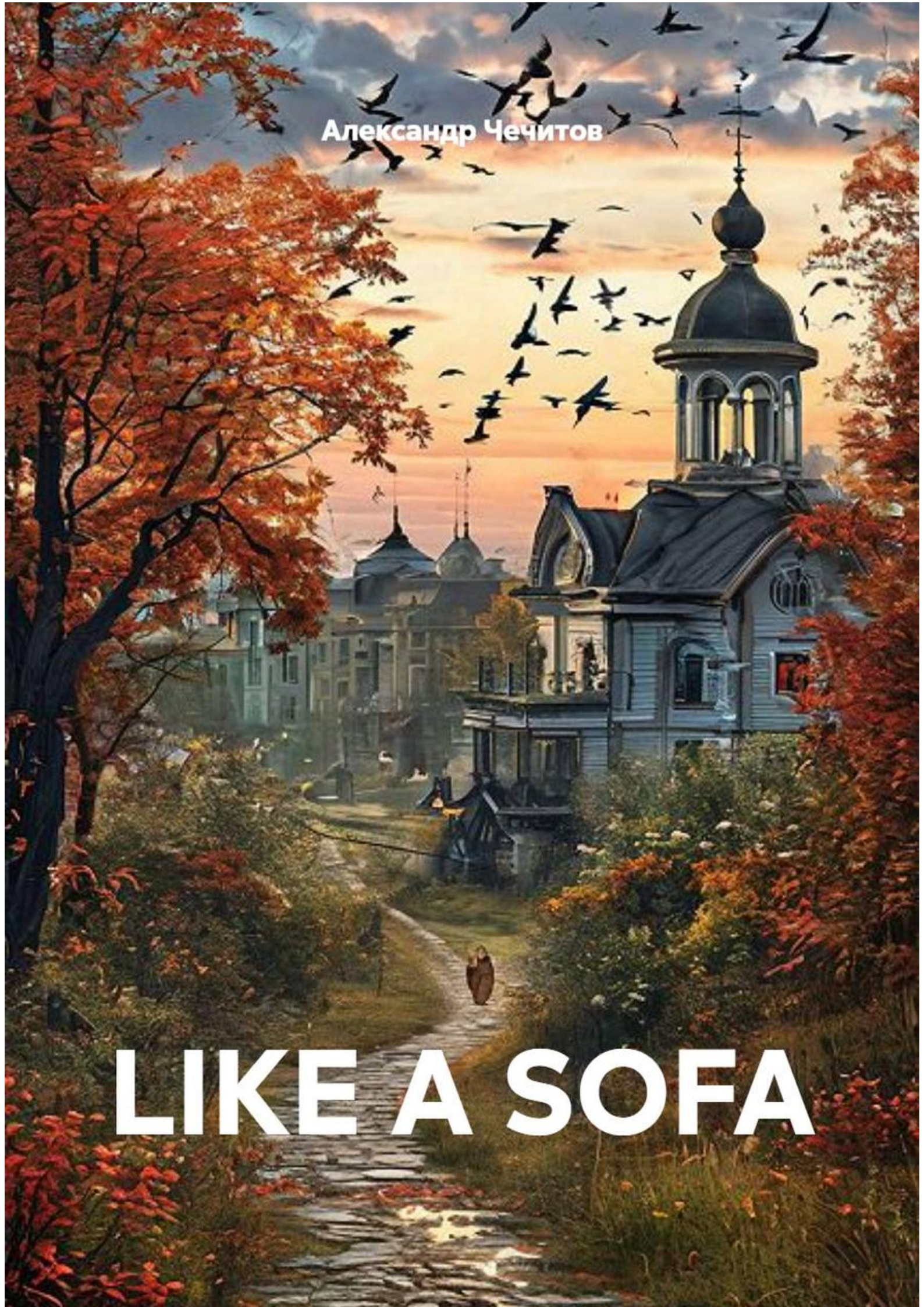


A detailed painting of a church in autumn. The church has a dark, multi-tiered dome and is surrounded by trees with vibrant orange and red autumn foliage. A path leads towards the church, and a small figure is visible in the distance. The sky is filled with many birds in flight. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Александр Чечитов

LIKE A SOFA

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«Автор»

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Чечитов А. А.

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A typical pursuit of happiness, or a mindless following of someone else's whim?
This was the question faced by Oleg Ivanovich Kuchkin, whose life was similar to thousands of others, but ended in a strange way.

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Александр Чечитов

LIKE A SOFA

Oleg Ivanovich Kuchkin's right hand went numb from the tips of his fingers to the elbow as he was almost finished with his fried eggs and morning coffee, and a couple of seconds later, a bitter, pulsating ache spread deep within his chest.

"It's probably normal to have a heart attack at the age of sixty," Kuchkin thought vaguely, "but maybe not." Who knows? If Karina Sergeyevna had been there, she would have told him what and why. Unfortunately for Oleg Ivanovich, his wife had passed away two years ago. Kuchkin visited her grave twice. The first time was on the day of her burial. The second time was a year later, when his two daughters persuaded him to go on a visitation day. After tidying up the artificial mound and clearing it of grass, Oleg Ivanovich hurried back home. In fact, Oleg Ivanovich was even afraid of the idea of visiting the cemetery even once more.

"My God, isn't it obvious? I want to remember Karina Sergeevna alive," Kuchkin replied impatiently to his youngest daughter when she tried to persuade her father to visit the cemetery once again. "It seems quite simple to leave me and the good memory of your beautiful mother alone." As was his habit, both during his lifetime and after his death, Oleg Ivanovich referred to the deceased in the past tense only by her first name and patronymic, occasionally deviating from this practice.

In his early youth, Kuchkin Olegzhik dreamed of becoming a carpenter. When his mother asked him about the reasons behind this aspiration, Oleg responded reluctantly. His mother worked as an elementary school teacher near their home and encouraged her son to follow in her footsteps. However, Kuchkin did not support her hope.

"It's just a necessary profession, that's all," Kuchkin told his father, who repeated his wife's question. Kuchkin's father worked as an engineer in a design bureau responsible for flight development, which also did not appeal to Oleg. Kuchkin's parents hoped that by the time he graduated from high school, he would change his mind and choose a profession that did not require hard work.

However, the years that passed quickly made it clear that Oleg's opinion had only strengthened over time. After completing his final year of high school, Kuchkin was not accepted into the army due to his poor lung and heart condition.

After completing his vocational training, Kuchkin, as he had dreamed, went to work at a furniture factory as a carpenter. In his early days, the thick June heat made young Oleg dizzy. His colleagues, often intoxicated, unleashed their foul language, swearing and even engaging in fights for no apparent reason. Much of what Kuchkin did was different from what he had imagined a carpenter to do. And yet, on the whole, he was pleased with the state of affairs. To some extent, Kuchkin felt like a sculptor when he was making good chairs and stools.

"If I had become a teacher, as my mother had asked me to," Kuchkin mused, "I would have been in constant agony. Teaching children is a lot of work! They can be spoiled, and you have to take them on trips, for example. No, thank you." A tree is much more malleable than a human, even though it can't respond.

It had been about two months since Kuchkin started working at the factory when he met Karina Sergeevna. On the last Saturday of July 1969, Oleg went to the fish store on his mother's behalf. The queue stretched almost to the entrance doors.

"If only I could go fishing and catch a lot of fish," Kuchkin thought, "my mother would be amazed."

"What are you talking about, you eccentric?" a nearby girl asked. Kuchkin's eyes darted around, and his gaze fixed on Karina Sergeevna's forehead.

"Here's a turn-up for your collar!"

- what?

"Oh, I'm sorry," Kuchkin said, embarrassed, "if you heard what I said, it wasn't directed at you. I sometimes talk to myself. I want to say it to myself, but it comes out. It's a bad habit, to be honest."

The girl laughed.

"Have you bought fish here before?" asked Karina Sergeevna. "My grandfather told me to buy it, but I don't know if it's good or not..."

Kuchkin's pale face flushed, and he mumbled something incomprehensible.

"It's a shame to be so shy around a girl," Oleg thought with annoyance, but he still turned away when Karina turned back to him.

"You're a strange person," Karina Sergeyevna laughed, "why are you hiding? Is the police looking for you?" The police didn't seem interested in Kuchkin, but he desperately wanted to disappear from the curious eyes of the onlookers who were listening to his conversation with Karina. The line was moving like a snail, and the slow-spinning fan in the far corner of the store seemed to be almost dead from the double load and the smell of sweat from the overheated bodies. Karina Sergeyevna's bubbly, youthful laughter echoed through the store's windows and shelves. She seemed to be genuinely smiling at everyone, playfully teasing the heat and the slow-moving line.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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