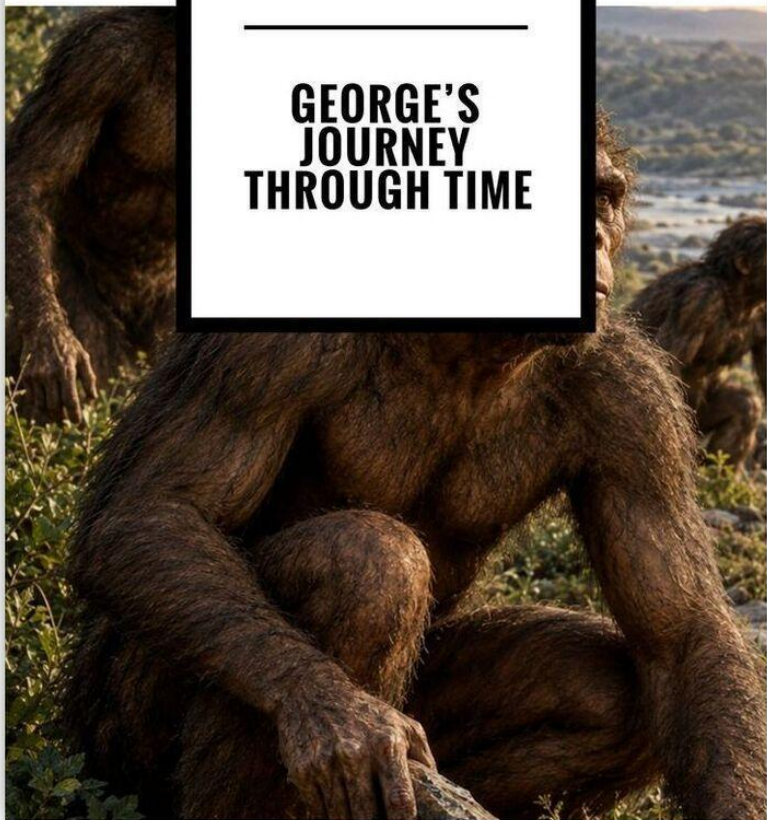


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Sergei Yazev –
Kondylykov

**GEORGE'S
JOURNEY
THROUGH TIME**



Sergei Kondylykov
George's journey through time.
Meeting the First Humans

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Аннотация

The millionaire's son, George Tim, goes to a quiet provincial town. And there, unexpectedly for himself, he falls in love with a poor singer named Marie. His father throws him out of the house and disinherits him. Suddenly, Marie falls very seriously ill. And then one day, a call rings in his deserted apartment. That's how George meets Charles Smith and the inventor of the time machine, Tom Hughes. They George and Marie will have to endure many trials, but great love conquers everything.

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George's journey through time Meeting the First Humans

Sergei Yazev - Kondylykov

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GEORGE'S JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

Meeting the First Humans

*Dedicated to the delightful and charming
Miss H.*

Chapter 1

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

«Dear George, do you remember your good old Aunt Maggie. True, when we visited her, she was very young, and you were so small that when she and Uncle Lucas gave you a teddy bear, at first you were very scared, and then you liked it so much and you played with it so much that you even forgot to thank your aunt.»

George took a lazy sip of the cold, foamy beer and continued reading.

«Aunt Maggie has not forgotten you at all and is inviting you to visit her for the holidays. Of course, a small provincial town is not the beaches of Miami Beach or Hawaii, and there will be less entertainment there, but my dad and I believe that before you start working in your father's company, you should relax a little. And Aunt Maggie makes your favorite apple pies so deliciously that I think you'll like them. Go George, you won't regret it. However, if you want to relax in Florida or at another resort, we will immediately send you a check. Congratulations once again on the successful defense of your thesis. Your Mom.»

George re-read the letter again, leisurely finished his beer, stretched with pleasure and thought. «What, shouldn't we really give up for a week or two in my aunt's wilderness. Plunge into

this sweet provincial life, slowly, drink tea with cherry jam at your aunt's in the garden, throw off all this annoying burden of worries and concerns, often small and unnecessary, finally feel like a person, and not a cog in a big city, and at the same time, if there is time, work on the project of your electric motor.

George looked with pride at the sheets of Whatman paper scattered randomly all over the table. Here it is his brainchild, an electric motor with a fundamentally new design, which was approved by Professor Carrigan himself.

«You have a great future, my boy,» he said to George after a brilliant defense of his thesis, patting him on the shoulder approvingly. «Your electric motor is fraught with great possibilities, however, this is still only a project, for now only an idea that still requires hard work, but don't be afraid, contact me, and I will definitely help you.

In the hot summer silence a fly buzzed loudly. «As a matter of fact, no one is keeping him in the city, they can send him a diploma with all the documents by mail. His wedding with Lucienne is in exactly a month, besides, she now has an internship in some reputable law office, so there will be no need to relax together anyway. It's been decided: I'll warn Lucienne and go to my aunt.» He impulsively jumped out of bed and dialed a familiar number. «Unfortunately, I'm not at home right now,» he answered. in the melodious voice of Lucienne the answering machine, «if you want to leave a message, speak after the long beep.»

«Lucienne, dear,» George spoke in his rich baritone, «my aunt is inviting me to her place for apple pie and tea, and this, if you want to know, is my favorite dish, so tomorrow I'm going to her on the first train. I'll stay for a week or two. Don't be bored, dear, and don't worry, I'll bring you real strawberry jam from there. Kisses, George.»

Going down to the dormitory lobby, he sent a laconic telegram. «I agree, I'm going to my aunt. No money needed yet. George.» The sun was just rising, and the first morning train was already taking George away from the huge, stuffy New York to the north.

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«But you haven't changed a bit,» his aunt told him in a ringing voice, «except that you've grown a little and grown a mustache, now I have to stand on tiptoe to kiss you.»

With these words she stood up and kissed George first on the forehead and then on the cheeks.

«What clear young eyes she has! — George was amazed, «but mother wrote in a letter that she recently turned seventy years old, or does the provincial air have such a beneficial effect on her?»

— Where is Uncle Lucas? He's probably digging in the garden right now?

«You guessed right,» she answered, «especially for your

arrival, he picks the largest, ripest cherries.»

«Here I am,» said a short, stocky old man with a thick wheat mustache as he entered the house. ABOUT! How big you have become, my boy. But he came to us when he was very tiny. Do you remember the big teddy bear we gave you back then?

«Yes, I remember,» George answered, «and I even apologize for my behavior at that time,» he added with a sly smile.

«Well, now let's eat the cherries,» said Aunt Maggie.

George, leisurely, ate cherries, answered questions from his cousin and enjoyed the peace, quiet and homely comfort.

— You are probably tired from the road and want to rest a little? — Uncle Lucas asked sympathetically, — your room is on the second floor. Of course, we don't have the same apartments as your parents, but you are guaranteed fresh air and birdsong.

Lying down on the bed, George wanted to read the latest newspapers, which he had taken with him. But the sun shone so brightly, and the birds in the garden chirped so cheerfully and carefree that George's eyes closed of their own accord, the newspaper fell from his hands, and he fell into a young, healthy sleep.

He woke up when the luminary was already completing its leisurely, measured course. «How long have I been sleeping? — out of habit, he thought with alarm, but remembering that everything was already behind him, that the thesis defense was successful, that his electric motor project was approved by Professor Carrigan himself, he smiled carefree, — Rest, George,

and enjoy life! — he said to himself and began to slowly dress, feeling, literally with his skin, how this measured provincial life envelops him.

The sun was already almost setting, and its last golden rays were still illuminating the Earth when he, having talked enough with the old people, left the house. A warm, pleasant breeze was blowing, George walked along the evening street, inhaling with pleasure the air filled with the thick smell of herbs and the aroma of ripening apples; soft, pleasant music was heard from the windows of the houses.

«How about I go to the nearest tavern and have a couple of glasses of beer before bed,» he thought. And after a few minutes, having asked a local resident, he headed to a small local restaurant with the lazy, relaxed gait of a man who has done a good job and knows his worth.

Having sat down at an old, but neatly worn wooden table, and happily sipping cold, foamy beer, George slowly began to examine his visitors. These were mostly local workers. In their knobby, tanned hands they held mugs of beer tightly.

«This is probably how they hold a shovel or pickaxe in their hands, firmly and reliably,» George thought with unexpected warmth. The men, resting after hard work, had a quiet conversation and were clearly expecting something. An elderly gentleman was sitting at the next table reading a newspaper.

«Nothing special,» he thought, «so he can finish his regular drink and calmly go home, especially since in a month he has

a wedding with Lucienne, and he hasn't even had his wedding tailcoat sewn yet.»

«Incomparable Margot,» the loud voice of the restaurant director interrupted his thoughts, and an angular teenage girl in a modestly tailored dress came onto the stage.

«Probably some third-rate singer with the voice of a broken gramophone,» George decided to himself, «well, there's still time, we can listen to her too.»

Meanwhile, the girl smiled into the audience and began to sing. Her unusually strong, enchanting voice literally crushed, crushed, and shook George. From amazement, he was even speechless for a moment. Bravo! Bis! More! The enthusiastic audience screamed. Bravo, encore, having forgotten about everything in the world, the stunned George shouted along with everyone else.

And the girl sang and sang, and her voice, now tender, like the breath of a spring breeze, now rumbling, like the ocean during a storm, now insinuating, like cautious steps in the night, touched the most intimate, most hidden strings of George's soul, carried him far, far from this small provincial tavern, from this small provincial town, called and beckoned him along. The entire hall at this time was in her power. But she sings without a microphone, George noted in surprise.

Seizing the moment, he collected all the cash he had and bought a large bouquet of roses.

«Madam,» he wrote, embarrassed and blushing, «an admirer

of your talent wants to meet you. Having inserted a note into the bouquet and handed it to the waiter, he impatiently awaited an answer.

The answer came within a few minutes.

«My program ends in half an hour, and if you don't mind, we can take a little walk. Margot.»

George's sleepy calm vanished. For some reason, his hands suddenly became sweaty.

«What will I tell her, what will we talk about?» — was he feverishly spinning in his brain?

— Aren't you tired of waiting for me? — rang a clear melodic voice. — I am the same Margot you wanted to meet.

A short, slender girl stood in front of George's table.

— George said, embarrassed and blushing.

From excitement, all the words that all guys usually say when meeting girls flew out of his head.

The long awkward pause was cleared by Margot.

«I live not far from here, she said, smiling, «very close, and if you're not in a hurry, we can take a walk and look at the stars.»

«But her smile is similar to the smile of Mona Lisa,» noted the amazed George, «just as simple and just as mysterious.»

Wanting to take the thread of the conversation into his own hands, he solemnly said:

— You have a wonderful voice, madam. With such a voice you can only perform in Lascala.

«I know,» she answered simply and seriously.

During a leisurely conversation, it turned out that Margot was Marie's stage name. «That's what the restaurant director calls me,» she said — she is the only daughter in the family and has a passion for singing. She even sang in the church choir, and it was the local priest who advised her to continue her musical education. But her poor parents cannot pay for her studies at the conservatory, and she is forced to perform in this restaurant every evening for \$100 a week, and on Saturday and Sunday also during the day, thus earning a living and somehow supporting her elderly parents.

A wave of infinite tenderness suddenly overwhelmed George: «We've known each other for about 15 minutes, and there is no one closer and dearer to her,» he thought with horror and delight, «Eh!» «If someone attacked us,» George suddenly thought, «I would have protected Marie; it's not for nothing that I am the university boxing champion.» But as luck would have it, no one wanted to attack them, and even the cats, who usually stage their concerts at night, this time behaved unusually quietly.

The moon was shining softly.

So they approached, peacefully talking about all sorts of trifles, to a small modest house, buried in the greenery of trees.

«Well, here we are,» Marie said with a smile, «Look!» — she suddenly said quickly and unexpectedly, «look, George, the star is flying.» Make a wish George.

«Let Marie love me,» George suddenly thought unexpectedly.

As if guessing his desire, Marie looked long and hard at

George.

«Goodbye, George,» she said quietly and thoughtfully.

«Goodbye, Marie,» George replied.

He did not go home, but flew. The meeting with Marie literally turned him around. No, he was not new to meeting girls at all. He enjoyed attending discos, parties, in a word, all those events where guys usually meet girls. But when communicating with them, George did not experience even a bit of embarrassment or timidity; on the contrary, feeling his masculine superiority, he allowed himself to lazily draw out his words, as if inadvertently, during a conversation, take beautiful, spectacular poses, showing off his muscular torso, or strain his trained biceps, noticing at the same time from the corner of his eye the effect this produces.

Marie was not like that. This strange, incomprehensible, incomprehensible mixture of an adult woman and a girl simultaneously attracted and repelled him. This unexpected transition in conversation from quiet, deep sadness to an explosion of unbridled joy even frightened him at first.

This lively, genuine interest in life, literally in everything that happens around, reflected in her beautiful live eyes, in her every movement, literally attracted him to her like a magnet. «Only Mona Lisa can smile like that,» he repeated to himself, confused and happy.

Arriving home, he quickly undressed and went to bed. The moon was shining high in the night sky. The night breeze

quietly rustled the leaves in the garden. But sleep did not come. Completely unexpectedly for himself, he jumped out of bed and went to the window:

«If only his classmates would see him now: a university boxing champion, a graduate of New York University, a future leading engineer, what would they say,» he thought with a smile.

«Am I really in love?!» «He asked himself with joy and anxiety, «was it really possible that some girl, some pretty girl, his dear Marie, could turn his life around like that in just one hour»?!

«What about Lucy? «He suddenly remembered, «after all, we're getting married to her in a month?»

«What about Marie? «How can I live without her beautiful, wonderful eyes, how can I not hear her deep, strong voice for at least a minute,» he thought.

Emotions took over George again. He stood and stood and looked at the starry sky. A luminous bright point flashed in the sky.

«Make a wish, George,» he suddenly remembered Marie's beautiful, deep voice.

«I want you to love me, Marie,» George said quietly and soulfully.

«And I would bring her coffee in bed every morning,» he suddenly thought and laughed joyfully.

Morning has come. A fresh summer breeze ruffled George's hair, and the first golden, mischievous ray of sun first climbed

into his eyes and then settled comfortably on his nose. «I'll lie down a little longer,» George decided through his doze, but the persistent ray burned his nose and didn't want to go away.

Apchhi!!! — echoed in the room.

Be healthy, George,» he said to himself and jumped out of bed elastically.

Going down to the dining room, he found his aunt there too. The cousin, despite the early morning, was already busy with breakfast.

«Good morning, aunt,» said George and, unable to contain his emotions, hugged her and spun her around.

«Careful, you're such a bear,» the aunt jokingly fought back. — What's wrong with you? Your eyes are shining so much, you might think that a beautiful fairy came to you at night and fulfilled your deepest desire. I know, I know,“ after a pause, she added with a playful smile, „you and Lucienne are getting married in a month, so you're buzzing like a streamer in the spring.

«I won't tell her anything yet,» George decided to himself.

After breakfast, he wrote a note to his aunt and went to the post office.

«I'm leaving urgently, wait,» the telegraph operator read. — Is that all? It's 25 cents.

We were only able to get a ticket for a flight leaving after lunch. The wheels of the train were still carrying George towards his fate, and his worried and perplexed parents were already

waiting for him.

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«What happened to him»?! — the mother was at a loss.

George arrived home late in the evening. It was cold, not at all like summer rain. A gusty, sharp wind was blowing. Raising the collar of his raincoat and exposing his hot face to the rain and wind, trying not to fall into the puddles that squelched disgustingly under his feet, he slowly walked through the night city.

«Of course, the conversation with parents will not be easy. Especially with my father, my mother will probably understand me, but my father? — Thoughts got in the way and were confused in his head, «Yes, he will be very dissatisfied with my decision, he will probably take away from me the magnificent bright red jaguar that he gave me in honor of the successful defense of my diploma»...

And suddenly everything fell into place. What does he actually lose by deciding to marry Marie? A magnificent car and several more expensive, but, in general, unnecessary trinkets typical of his circle of people, rich and wealthy people.

«Of course, it would be nice to go to work on a red jaguar,» he thought with regret, «but without Marie, without her wonderful voice, without her sweet eyes, he wouldn't be able to live a day, and I'll somehow earn money for a jaguar,» George decided

with the self-confidence characteristic of youth, «in the end, my diploma project for the electric motor was approved by Professor Carrigan himself and at work, as it was already agreed with my father, he will be fine-tuning it. So I'll work,» George decided calmly and confidently.

The rain was still pouring down in buckets.

«Uh, yeah, I'm completely wet. It won't do. — George raised his hand.

And a few minutes later the bright red light of a taxi was already taking him home.

Literally, not running up, but taking off, up the stairs, he impatiently pressed the bell button.

The mother opened: «He's very excited about something!»

What's wrong with you my boy? — she thought with alarm. — Father has been sleeping for a long time, tomorrow he has difficult business at the company, and you have dinner and go to bed, we'll discuss everything in the morning.

...

«George, and George, it's time to get up,» he heard his mother's voice, get up, you're so sleepy. Your father has been involved in the affairs of the company for a long time, and you are still sleeping.

«Mom, I need to talk to you,» said George.

«First, brush your teeth, then eat your omelette for breakfast, then we'll talk,» she answered with a smile.

«Seriously, mom,» he said.

— Why are your eyes shining so suspiciously, George?!

— Mom, I'm in love.

— I know, George, and in a month you are getting married.

— Not Lucy's mom.

— Who? — The mother even shuddered from surprise.

— Her name is Marie, mom. She sings in a small restaurant.

— Is that so? How long have you known her?

— Exactly one day.

— I hope you didn't have anything to do with her.

— No, mom. Marie is like that, like that,» George's voice was a little hoarse from excitement.

«Son,» the mother said with gentle warmth in her voice, «you are young.» And youth tends to idealize everything. And some singer from a third-rate restaurant may seem like a fairy to you. Believe me, son, years will pass and you will learn to look at life more soberly. In the meantime, let's wash your hands quickly, otherwise the omelette has long since cooled down.

— Mom, I love her! — George said clearly and clearly, — and I want to marry her.

— And she you? — she asked.

— Yes! — For some reason, George quickly and suddenly answered.

«Stubborn like his father,» the mother thought with a sigh, «we should at least go and see this singer.»

«Well,» she said cheerfully, «I've been planning to visit my

sister for a long time, but somehow it never happened, but this evening we'll go, and at the same time we'll see your princess.» Father won't come with us, he has important business at the company, but now let's hurry up and have breakfast.

The two remaining days before meeting Marie passed for George in a kind of fog. He mechanically did all the things, answered questions, and before his eyes stood the lovely appearance of Marie.

Before going to the restaurant, he carefully shaved and exchanged his shabby jeans and colored shirt for his best suit.

— Yes, you are my real dandy! — the mother said with admiration, — but why is the dandy so pale?

«Or is he serious,» she thought with alarm.

It was Saturday. Arriving at the restaurant, George and his mother sat down at the very first table.

— What do you want? — the waiter flew up and respectfully opened the menu in front of them.

Without looking at the menu or the waiter, but tensed up in anticipation of Marie, George randomly pointed his finger at several lines, but George never touched a single dish; he could neither eat nor drink from excitement.

«And how did she bewitch him?» the mother thought with alarm, looking at George.

— Incomparable Margot! — the restaurant director announced in a loud voice.

And George's eyes shone:

«Look, mom,» he said in a whisper, «look, it's Marie.»

Marie came on stage. This time she was not in a simple teenage dress, but in an elegant dress with frills, which surprisingly suited her slender figure. A blush covered her cheeks. But it was not a healthy peasant blush caused by natural food and being in the fresh air, but a feverish flush of excitement. To put it simply, her cheeks were on fire.

«Eh, she's not indifferent to my boy either,» George's mother noted with alarm, «Good God, what will his father say.

Meanwhile, Marie looked around the hall, her eyes were clearly looking for someone. Her eyes and George's met for a moment, and in the depths of them George noticed warm sparkles, it seemed that they were talking, they were shouting: «My beloved, I am yours.» But this lasted only for a moment, so fleeting, so short, that the elderly gentleman drinking coffee at the next table noticed absolutely nothing and complacently applauded Marie in anticipation of a good concert. George's mother didn't notice anything either, although she was watching him closely.

But like an electric spark ran between the lovers, and from that moment on, Marie sang only for George, and George looked only at Marie.

This time she sang surprisingly well. Starting with a simple Neapolitan song and singing it in her sonorous voice, Marie then moved on to operatic arias. Her beautiful, strong voice literally captivated all listeners. And at the end she sang such a complex

part from Cio-Cio-San in her unique voice that even George's mother, who carefully hid her emotions, raised her eyebrows in surprise: «The girl undoubtedly has great vocal abilities,» she thought.

As for George, he did not hide his admiration for Marie, with a look full of love, he caught her every movement, her every sound, and she, flushed and charming, flattered by the attention of the entire hall, and especially her dear George, sang and sang.

Having finished singing, Marie, again casting a quick, grateful glance at George, hurriedly ran off the stage.

With a bouquet of flowers prepared in advance, George knocked on her dressing room. There was no answer. He knocked again and again, and the restaurant director came out at his loud knock. «Miss Haggis was unfortunately very tired, so she went straight to her house after the concert,» he said.

George hurried down the stairs and went to Marie's house. Having gotten pretty lost, he finally found a small house surrounded by green trees.

In response to his persistent knocking, a gray-haired old woman with curls came out.

— Please call Marie! — said George, his voice breaking, either from excitement or from fast walking.

«Marie is not well now,» answered the old woman, looking sternly at George.

«Then please give her this,» said George, taking out a huge bouquet of roses from behind his back, «and this.»

George, taking out a pen, hastily scribbled on a piece of paper: «Marie, I love you very much, get well, I'll come to the restaurant tomorrow, George.»

Without saying anything, the old woman took the bouquet and the note and slammed the gate.

If George had been a little more observant, he would have noticed how, a little later, the second floor window opened, and a lovely young girl blew a kiss after him.

But this is probably the property of all lovers that they are so distracted, or rather, absorbed in the object of their love, that everything else that does not relate to her or him simply escapes their attention.

George was in no hurry to visit his cousin, knowing that he would again have an unpleasant conversation with his mother, and besides, he was overwhelmed with impressions after the concert.

The sun was shining brightly, light white clouds were floating across the sky. George's soul was light and calm.

«I'll wait until evening, mom will probably leave,» he decided. So he wandered around the small cozy town until the last rays of the sun left him, smiling widely with his open white-toothed smile to every passerby.

Contrary to George's expectations, his mother did not leave. She, however, had already gotten ready for the trip and was standing with her things in a hiking suit.

«Son,» she said, «I'm leaving now, so we don't have much time

left.» Of course, Marie sings well, she has rich vocal abilities and, perhaps, over time she will become a good singer, but you are engaged to Lucy.

— Mom! I love her! — George said clearly and clearly.

His mother looked at him searchingly and anxiously.

Taking a short breath, she said: «Get ready to talk to your father.»

They didn't say a word until the station. But if the mother, sighing heavily, was intensely thinking about everything that had happened, then George, smiling serenely, enjoyed the play of clouds in the clear starry sky.

After seeing his mother off, George returned to his cousin. She was already waiting for him and wanted to talk to him. But looking at him sternly and condemningly, she realized that, in general, there was nothing to talk about. George's face shone with such a sincere, such a pure smile, and his whole appearance expressed the state of a truly happy person, the state to which everyone strives and which, alas, happens so rarely that the cousin just waved her hand.

«Maybe he's right,» she thought.

And while George was sleeping serenely, in a sleep that probably only babies sleep, who are just entering this world and do not know its vices, cousins and cousins were quietly talking about something until the morning.

Another person in this cozy provincial town did not sleep either. In a small cozy house, surrounded by green trees, a lovely

young girl was sitting at the table. Soft light fell from the green lampshade onto her thoughtful face with wonderful flowing hair falling onto her shoulders. In front of her stood a huge bouquet of roses, and two notes from George.

George's mother was also awake. Lying in a soft, comfortable compartment, listening to the sound of carriage wheels, she intensely pondered the future fate of her boy.

The gray-haired noble gentleman, one of the co-owners of a reputable electrical engineering company, did not sleep that night either. Tossing and turning heavily from side to side in his luxurious bed, he was intensely thinking about the affairs of his company. They weren't doing well. And George's wedding to Lucienne, whose father owned a 5% stake in the company, could significantly improve his situation.

«Eh, George, George,» he sighed.

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Needless to say, the lovers completely surrendered to their feelings. George went to Marie's concerts every evening, and walked her home every evening.

Sometimes, inhaling the unique aroma of her girlish skin, looking at the delicate curls of Marie's hair on her beautiful white neck, on her shoulders, George felt a wild, bestial desire awakening in him. At that time he wanted to tear the dress on Marie's chest and sink his lips into hers, stroking her elastic hips with his strong masculine hand.

But, looking into the beautiful deep eyes of his beloved, he felt how a wild unbridled beast was turning into a timid lamb, and then this feeling was replaced by another, no less strong — enthusiastic worship of her beauty.

To tell the truth, Marie also had similar feelings for George, but the uncertainty of her position and natural caution restrained her impulses.

Time passed, George's short vacation was coming to an end, it was no longer so hot in the mornings, and the morning dew on the leaves was already scorching with its coldness, and George, who had actually burned all his bridges behind him, still did not dare to propose to Marie.

This was helped by chance, which, as usual, only releases the tight spring of the trigger, cocked by previous circumstances.

In order not to hurt Marie's sensitive, responsive heart, George prudently hid an expensive Parker, a watch worth \$2,000, in a word, all the things that could emphasize their different financial status.

But one day, while making complex calculations for his electric motor, he stayed up late into the night, was very tired, and out of habit, he put the Parker in his shirt's breast pocket. He slept almost until lunchtime. And he quickly washed himself and ran to meet Marie.

Such an expensive thing did not escape her attentive gaze.

— Where did you get this, George? — Marie asked almost in fear, «Where did you get it?» Did you steal it?

«What, dear,» asked the perplexed and alarmed George.

— After all, it probably costs a lot of money! — and Marie pointed to the gold parker treacherously peeking out of George's pocket.

Cursing himself for his forgetfulness, George realized that everything needed to be explained to Marie.

«You see, dear,» he said, annoyed at his mistake, «I have not only a gold Parker, but also a watch worth 2000 dollars, and all sorts of other expensive trinkets.»

Marie listened to him carefully.

— My dad is quite a rich man and sometimes spoils his son with such things.

He chose to remain silent about the jaguar given by his father in honor of the successful defense of his diploma.

«Yes, yes,» Marie said somehow distantly, «I understand everything, dear.»

It was as if a black cat ran between them. Marie was aloofly silent the whole way, and George felt awkward too.

At home, Marie gave vent to her tears. «He loves, he loves me,» she sobbed childishly into the pillow, «but he will never, never marry me.»

George was also in despair, the last drop of fuel added to the fire of his mental suffering was a short telegram: «I know everything. Lucy.»

Just like on the first evening of meeting Marie, he could not sleep. The cold September wind blew, hastily and angrily, tearing

leaves from the trees, the last unharvested apples fell with a dull thud onto the ground that was already beginning to freeze. George was restless in his soul: «After all, I love her, I love her,» he thought, lying in bed, «but how hard it will be for me, because I will lose my father's support.» And the stern, strong-willed face of his father stood before him. «Always remember, son, that you are George Tim, the son of Peter Tim,» he always told him, «and real Irish blood flows in your veins. And the Irish are a stubborn people.»

«And since the Irish are stubborn people,» he thought, as if arguing with his father, «why, in honor of his beloved girl, a girl without whom he cannot live even a day, cannot give up the habits of his circle. After all, you can spend your vacation not in Hawaii, and you can eat scrambled eggs and bacon without using expensive dishes, as long as Marie is nearby.»

And ashamed of the moment of weakness, he thought: «Tomorrow we'll go to the local priest and get married.»

The cold September wind was blowing, but George felt warm and cozy.

The next morning, barely waiting for the service to begin, George ran to church.

«Father,» he said to the priest, «I want to confess.»

The priest silently pointed him to a booth.

Walking into the booth, George saw a window covered with a screen.

— What oppresses you, my son? — he heard a quiet,

insinuating voice.

«I don't even really know myself,» said George thoughtfully, «I'm engaged to one, but I want to get married to the other.» Is this a sin, father? — he asked.

«It depends on which way you look at it, my son,» the priest answered evasively, «is your bride rich?» he asked after a short pause.

«Yes, very much,» answered George.

— What about the second one? — asked the priest

«She has nothing but two old parents and a wonderful voice,» George answered.

— Is your bride beautiful? — asked the priest.

— I guess so.

What is true is true. Lucienne was at that wonderful age when nature generously bestows a girl with its charms. At twenty-two, she looked more like a woman than Marie with her almost girlish curves. And when she slowly walked through the institute's corridors, all the men, including gray-haired professors, stared at her slender, long, beautiful legs.

— Do you love your bride? — he asked again.

«I don't even know,» George answered with a sigh.

— And the second? — asked the priest.

«I can't live a day without her,» George exhaled passionately.

There was silence behind the curtain for a long time. And then the priest quietly and thoughtfully said: «Love, my son, is a great power, it is it that lifts a person from hell to heaven. But the

beautiful flower of love, my son, must be protected and cherished in your heart, otherwise it may dry out prematurely and wither from unnecessary insults and petty suspicions.

The screen window suddenly opened slightly, and George saw before him the simple, tired face of an elderly man.

«Come get married tomorrow,» he said.

Already at the exit from the church, the priest's question caught up with him:

— What's her name?!

— Maria! — George shouted.

«Mary — Aria — I,» echoed loudly in the church walls and froze somewhere high, high under the dome.

Arriving from church, George carefully shaved, put on his formal suit and went to see Marie. And although he tried to walk calmly, his heart was beating faster.

«I wonder why this is so? — George was surprised, — after all, when he proposed to Lucy, or rather, his mother and father forced him to propose, he felt completely calm. Yes, I probably didn't feel anything,» George was amazed at his little discovery, «that's why I wasn't worried.»

Here is a familiar little cozy house. Feeling his heart beat even faster, George hastily pulled the door bell of the treasured door. Marie's mother opened it.

«Miss Haggis is sick,» she said and wanted to close the gate behind her.

Something stirred in George's soul:

But I need to talk to her, definitely talk,» he said with such pain in his voice that the surprised old woman silently let him pass.

Running up to the second floor, George found Marie sitting at the table. The lovely blush had disappeared from her cheeks, and her face looked swollen and unhealthy.

«Yes, she cried, poor thing,» George was amazed, «but nothing, now I will tell her about my decision, and she will understand how much I love her.»

«Marie,» George began in a solemn, almost gloomy voice, «I love you and propose to unite your destiny with mine.» Tomorrow we will get married at the local priest.

— Why do you need this, George? — Marie said with a sad smile, «why would you ruin your career for the sake of some singer.»

«But Marie,» George began passionately, «my career is nothing without you.» And, even working as an ordinary engineer, even without my father's support, I will earn quite a decent amount of money, quite enough to feed both of us. Yes, I come from a rich family. But believe me, both workers and engineers receive quite a decent salary at my father's factory, which is enough not only for food and clothing. Almost everyone has a car. You and I will live in a factory house, this, of course, is not my father's apartment, but you can live in it perfectly, and besides, the rent there will be much lower than in a private apartment. And at the factory there is a real concert hall,

where you can sing your arias, even the Beatles and Elton John performed there,» George said, not without pride.

Lights lit up in Marie's eyes.

«There are a lot of interesting circles in the factory clubhouse,» George continued, «I myself participated in one,» he admitted, «I rode with a group of the same young idiots with noise and noise on my Harley Davidson, but now in the evenings I will only be with you, my dear.» If you want to play sports, then a magnificent gym is at your service, where you can play tennis, volleyball, or do rhythmic gymnastics at any time convenient for you. There is almost no smoking at my father's factory. And although my father says that in this way he cares about the health of the workers, in fact he cares about his wallet,» George said ironically. — A non-smoker lives longer, gets sick less often, works better, is more productive. So, my dear Marie, even without daddy's support we can live quite tolerably,» he said with a cheerful smile. «And in time, Father will forgive us, and then I'll take you for a ride on a magnificent red jaguar.»

Besides,» George finished with a sly smile, «you have a magnificent capital — your beautiful voice.» And who knows, maybe in two or three years they will talk about me something like this: «And this is George Tim, the husband of the famous opera singer Marie Tim.»

Marie's deep, beautiful eyes slowly filled with tears.

— George, I really, really love music, I don't think I can live a day without it. But you know, sometimes it's so difficult for me,

so difficult. True, my old parents help me; they dote on me. But,» she added after a pause. «They don't understand me at all, at all.»

And giving free rein to her tears, she burst into loud sobs.

— You won't leave me, George, your poor little Marie. Won't you leave!?

«Calm down, dear,» he said quietly and soulfully, «you undoubtedly have rich vocal abilities and a wonderful future awaits you.» But even if my little Margot never becomes an opera diva, I will still love her until the end of my days, until my last breath.

Sobs shook her body.

«Calm down, calm down, darling,» George said quietly, carefully stroking her neck and shoulders. — I am with you and will try to be a reliable support for you.

«Please close the curtains tighter, George,» she said simply.

And when he obediently fulfilled her request, she was already lying in bed, her thick silky hair was scattered across the pillow, and her small girlish breasts were touchingly and defenselessly white in the twilight of the room.

«Kiss me, George,» she said.

And George, slowly bending down and looking into her eyes, which suddenly became bottomless, kissed her tenderly and passionately on the lips. «God, how beautiful she is,» he thought.

And two bodies merged into one in a fit of love.

.....

Needless to say, his father, the venerable Peter Tim, one of the co-owners of the reputable electrical engineering company Peter Tim and Co., was not only upset, he was furious, enraged by his son's decision.

«Understand, George,» he said to his son, carefully hiding his irritation, «Lucienne is not bad-looking, educated, and also chaste.»

«And besides, her dad owns 5 percent of the shares of the Peter Tim and Co. company,» George wanted to say, but stopped short. Well, how can he explain to this gray-haired, noble gentleman, who drinks coffee with cream in the morning, an honorary member of the golf club, that he is not marrying a package of shares, but a living person. Yes, Marie does not have such a higher education as Lucy, she is not as well-trained as she is...

— Did you have something to do with her? — asked the father.

«Yes, and I'll marry her,» George answered firmly.

«Mom said that she wants to enter the conservatory and has great vocal abilities,» George's father continued, «how much does studying at the conservatory cost: \$20,000, \$50,000, \$100,000?» Take this money and take it to her now. If you don't want to do this,» he said hastily, noticing the displeasure flashing in George's eyes, «my people will do it.» Trust me, George, I won't deceive you.

The two men's gazes crossed like two swords.

— Don't you dare do this. Do you hear, don't you dare! — George whispered beside himself with rage, — if you do this, you are not my father! «I love her and will marry her,» he said unexpectedly angrily.

— Fool! — Peter Tim thundered, — for the sake of some girl, for the sake of some singer, you sacrifice everything. Understand, you are my only heir and after my death everything could go to you. And now. «You won't set foot in my house until you come to your senses,» he concluded and loudly slammed the door.

The mother is a quiet, neat woman, although she understood George more.

«If you love, son, love,» she said, thoughtfully, watering the flowers. — But your father won't help you, you yourself know how much he expects from your marriage with Lucy. Of course, I won't leave you in trouble. But what can an old gray-haired woman do?

«Mom, but I love her,» said George.

«I understand everything,» said the mother, «it's going to be hard for you in this life, son.» My father is tough and doesn't give up on his goals easily. Besides, his friends won't understand your action.

«There are so many conventions in this world,» George thought with despair.

.....

Their wedding with Marie was very modest. There were only the closest friends, my father was not there, only George's mother was there.

After the wedding, the young couple, as George said, settled in a factory house, no matter how hard he tried, no matter how hard his mother tried to persuade him, Peter Tim was adamant, not only did he take away the brand new jaguar he had given George, he also took away the Harley Davidson given to George. He even wanted to close work on the electric motor project that George was developing, but after a long conversation with the head of the department, he abandoned this idea.

«Understand, Mr. Tim,» he convinced him, «this electric motor is fraught with great potential.» Yes, for now this is just an idea, just a project, we still need to work on it and work on it, but it is based on fundamentally new technical solutions, and if we implement them in metal, we will force our competitors to make room.

With a grudging heart, Tim Sr. agreed with his arguments and was even forced to appoint George as the leader of the group.

Only an expensive watch reminded George of his former well-fed and serene lifestyle. But George did not lose heart. Margot, his lovely Margot, filled their humble home with a wonderful, extraordinary light from her eyes. True, in the evenings she went out to sing; she could not live a day without music.

George drove to work in a not-yet-old Ford, which his mother, after much persuasion, finally managed to get from his father, and after work he would pick up Marie, who sang right there in a small factory choir. And they, cheerful and lively, drove home, sharing their impressions of the past day.

This is how the life of young lovers proceeded. But if you say that it was completely cloudless, it means telling a lie.

Working on the electric motor took a lot of effort and energy from George. Sometimes, especially after unsuccessful tests, when the damned piece of iron did not reach the specified mode, he wanted to throw everything to hell and tear up all these piles of papers and drawings. Then Marie, his lovely Marie, long and patiently persuaded George, gently stroked his head and affectionately told him how good and smart he was.

Sometimes Marie, who was still preparing to enter the conservatory, whose extraordinary perseverance George secretly marveled at, was simply lazy and did not want to study, although she was helped by the choir director, amazed at her extraordinary vocal abilities.

Then George put on her colorful apron, put on his nose old glasses that he had begged from his mother especially for this occasion, took a music book and said in a deliberately stern voice: «Who doesn't want to eat porridge and study?» Marie usually jumped from the sofa, loudly pecked George on the cheek, saying at the same time: «Oh, how I love you George,» and her eyes shone with happiness. After this pleasant procedure,

the young people patiently studied musical notation together. Sometimes, however, the kisses dragged on, and there were more than one or two of them...

But let us forgive them, reader, these little «sins» of youth.

One day George picked up Marie quite early. He looked cheerful and animated.

«And you know, dear,» he said, smiling, «it seems to me that everything will work out for us.» Today, after some technical improvements, the damned piece of hardware finally reached the specified mode and even showed parameters much greater than we expected from it. The head of the bureau, Mr. Cook, said that for such results he would petition the head of the department so that the entire group would be awarded a substantial bonus, and my small technical improvements,» here George smiled slyly, «could even be patented.» Therefore, today is our holiday, and we will celebrate this significant event.

On the way home, George bought some wine and fruit. They didn't invite any of their friends; George's mother said she was busy. And the young people were left alone. Marie sang various opera arias, and George sat, enjoyed her extraordinary, wonderful voice and listened silently.

«But the fact that our electric motor worked is also your merit, Marie,» said George, drunk not so much from the wine as from Marie's beautiful, deep eyes.

— And what is my merit? «Half jokingly, half seriously,» she

asked.

«Yes, the fact is that without such a wonderful wife as you, I would never have completed it,» he said, easily lifted Marie into his arms and spun, spun, spun her around the room.

Behind all the work and troubles, September imperceptibly flashed by, the last warm days of the departing Indian summer flashed by, flew by with its constant silver cobwebs in the air, and cold, rainy October arrived.

One day George came home from work late and unusually tired. That day he didn't even call on Marie. Work on the electric motor seemed to be going well, it was already reaching the specified parameters, but George intuitively felt that he could not give everything that was expected of him.

«But why, why?» — George racked his brain and couldn't find an answer.

So, without coming up with anything, he went to bed. And at night Marie woke him up:

«Darling,» she said, «glittering in the dark with moist eyes full of love, «I wanted to tell you in the evening, but you were so tired and so preoccupied that I was afraid to disturb you, but now I woke up and realized that I wouldn't sleep if I didn't tell you.» «We're going to have a baby, honey,» she said and sighed happily.

— What? — George muttered sleepily.

«Baby, honey,» Marie repeated tenderly.

— Child? — George asked, still recovering from sleep.

«Yes, honey,» Marie answered, «I visited the doctor today, and he said that we will have a child.»

«A child,» George repeated, «A child!» — he shouted. — Child! We're having a baby!

«Hush, darling, you'll wake up the neighbors,» Marie whispered tenderly and sympathetically.

George and Marie did not sleep until morning. Forgetting about the dream, they discussed who it would be a boy or a girl, what stroller to buy him or what kind of undershirts, how they would bathe him with words, everything, all those cute little things associated with this solemn event.

George came to work sleepy, but excited.

— Why are you shining like a copper nickel, George? — one of the group's employees asked him.

«Yes, Marie and I will have a child,» he said. And unable to contain his joy, he smiled widely and openly.

And although he tried in every possible way to force himself to work and even sat down at the oscilloscope screen, all his thoughts, against his will, boiled down to Marie's pregnancy and the birth of a child. In the end, with his cheerful, high spirits, the future young father infected the entire bureau, and everyone, having quit their jobs, began vying with each other to advise him on how to bathe the future baby, how to wrap him. And even the usually dry and strict head of the bureau, Mr. Cook, somehow became kinder and softened:

«Under no circumstances should you feed your baby artificial

formula,» he said, «this will be of little benefit.» It's better to let his mother feed him with her milk. My Elsa didn't have much milk, but she breastfed my two twins exclusively. And look what they have become! — he said proudly and showed a photograph of two tall, red-cheeked boys.

And so the days of George and Mary passed in labor and care, sanctified by the light of love.

She continued to sing and was expecting a child. George was working on his electric motor project.

And overnight everything collapsed.

Chapter 2

MARIE'S ILLNESS AND GEORGE RECEIVES AN OFFER

Once after one of his concerts, Margot, his lovely, restless Margot, looked tired.

This time she didn't tell him anything. She did not share her lively impressions of the past evening, but only quietly and thoughtfully laid her head on his shoulder.

— What's wrong with you, honey? — George asked sympathetically.

«I don't know,» she answered quietly, «I don't know, darling, let's better look at the stars.»

At home, George immediately called a doctor. He arrived half an hour later, examined the thoughtful, saddened Margot for a long time and finally said with a sigh:

Acute pneumonia, and an extremely severe form, in addition, as I understand, your wife is pregnant. And the disease threatens both her and the child. I advise you to send her to the hospital without delay, otherwise complications are possible. «Well, well, don't despair, young man, when you notice George's pale face,» he said.

— Good nutrition, fresh fruit, plus treatment — and your lovely wife will be back on her feet in two weeks.

Then, having written out the prescription, he said goodbye and left.

After quickly calling the nearest hospital, George learned that his wife's stay there for two weeks would cost him approximately \$30,000.

«Nothing special,» George thought with despair, walking around the room in excitement, «treatment in a good hospital costs a lot of money, but where can an ordinary engineer get it?»

Excitedly, he dialed his parents' phone number.

«Mr. Tim is listening,» his father said evenly and clearly.

— Dad, Margot is dying! — George shouted in excitement, — she has acute pneumonia. I beg you, for the love of all that is holy, help!

Something rang in the receiver, and George heard his mother's quiet voice:

— Son, your father is sick, he has troubles at his company. I'll come now.

Twenty minutes later she stood pale and calm on the threshold of George's home, raindrops running down her face or were they tears?

Without undressing, she walked into the kitchen.

— Son, over the thirty years of living with your father, I have saved something, I don't need this money now, but you will need it. Everything will be fine, you give them to me. No, my father and I are not poor people,» with these words she handed George 10,000 dollars.

— Ten thousand dollars, that's great, mom! — George said with shining eyes, — but the doctor said that \$30,000 was needed for hospital treatment.

«Son,» the mother said softly, «I gave you everything I had.» Your father could have given much more, but you know his attitude towards you. However, I will talk to him, but I won't promise you anything yet. Don't worry about fruits and nutrition, I will go to Marie every day. Poor Marie,» with these words, she threw a shawl over her shoulders and left without saying goodbye.

«Thirty thousand dollars, thirty thousand dollars,» George thought feverishly in his head, «just some 30,000 dollars, and Margot's life is saved. Well, they'll give me a thousand dollars for the watch, after all, it's a real Rolex, and I'm good with the old ones. You can get three thousand dollars for your own Ford, which is not yet old. Where can I get another \$16,000?»

«Hello, Mike,» he shouted into the phone, dialing the number of his bosom friend from the university, «help me out, old man.» My old lady is a little sick here,» with these words, he looked at Margot, who was breathing heavily in her sleep, and, suppressing a sudden lump that came to his throat, he continued, «Could you please lend me some unfortunate 16,000 bucks for a couple of months.»

«With pleasure, old man,» rumbled at the other end of the phone. But as luck would have it, I was about to buy a new car, if only you had called me two weeks earlier.

George called one, two, three, but, as usually happens in such

cases, no one had any money. One bought a car, another started renovating a house, the third got into debt himself...

«Well, nothing,» thought George, «I already have 14,000 dollars, I need to get another 16,000 and try to get Margot into the hospital.»

The whole next day was spent in intense troubles. Having run around all the resellers, George sold his expensive watch and car, and after desperate negotiations with the hospital administration, he still managed to find Marie for a week.

He returned home late in the evening and, tired, without even having dinner, fell into bed.

The whole next day was spent in an intense search for money.

The whole second one too.

The whole third one too.

So five days passed, the sixth was ending.

A fine cold rain was falling outside the window. The gloomy autumn day was dying out. The cigarette in George's hands was burning out.

In two days, he will have to pay the remaining \$16,000 for Marie's treatment, otherwise she will simply be thrown out of the hospital. And he was unable to help her in any way.

«So what if she's from a poor family,» George thought bitterly, walking around the room, «so what if she doesn't meet her father's ideas about what a wife should be like for the son of Sir Peter Tim, the venerable, gray-haired head of the family, one of the co-owners of the reputable electrical company Peter Tim and

Co.»

George was in despair.

All hopes for a quick recovery for Marie were dashed.

Suddenly the cruelty that usually came to him in the ring and helped him win came to him. His eyes became hard and dry. «I will go to any lengths to help you, Margot,» he whispered, «and I will achieve this if I were not George Tim.»

The cold, evening silence of the twilight was broken by the sharp ringing of the telephone.

— Hello, George! — rumbled in the receiver, — this is Mike. Listen, old man, I can't help you with money right now, but there's an adventurous project here, and if you're not afraid of risk, you can make a lot of money.

«I'm not afraid of anything, Mike,» George answered with dry eyes.

«Then listen, George,» said Mike, «I know a crazy millionaire here, he's just crazy about archeology, every summer he goes on expeditions and spends a lot of money looking for some ancient bone or fragment of some ancient stone.» I told him about your problem, and he is ready to talk to you. Write down the address George. But before you approach him, call him and say that you are from me. Well, goodbye old man.

The receiver slammed into place and short beeps were heard.

«Mr. Charles Smith,» George read what he had written and dialed the phone number.

«I'm listening,» they responded at the other end of the phone.

«Mr. Charles Smith,» George began to say, his voice breaking with excitement, «I'm from Mike Rozovsky.»

«I understand,» they said at the other end of the phone. -Are you ready to wait?

«No more than three hours,» George answered.

— Okay. Then give us the address, a car will pick you up in two hours.

Exactly two hours later, the bell rang in George's empty apartment.

«Mr. George,» said the neat messenger, «I'm from Mr. Charles Smith, the car is waiting for you.»

Having quickly dressed, George went out.

The fine, boring autumn rain still continued to drizzle, the whole sky was of some indefinite gray color, the houses, passers-by, and trees were gray and monochromatic.

In front of George's driveway stood a huge armored Cadillac with tinted windows. The car gently moved off and, after a long drive, drove up to a huge castle made of dark red granite. He seemed to be floating in this gray rainy fog. «Hey,» George whistled, «this gentleman really doesn't have a lot of money.»

— Mr. George Tim? — said the short, tightly built gentleman. — I'm Charles Smith. «I offer you a deal,» he said immediately and sharply, «you travel through time, yes, yes, don't look at me like that and bring me one thing, and I will pay you a million dollars.» I must tell you right away that this journey is dangerous, the risk is very high,“ he said after a short pause, „so think about

it.

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