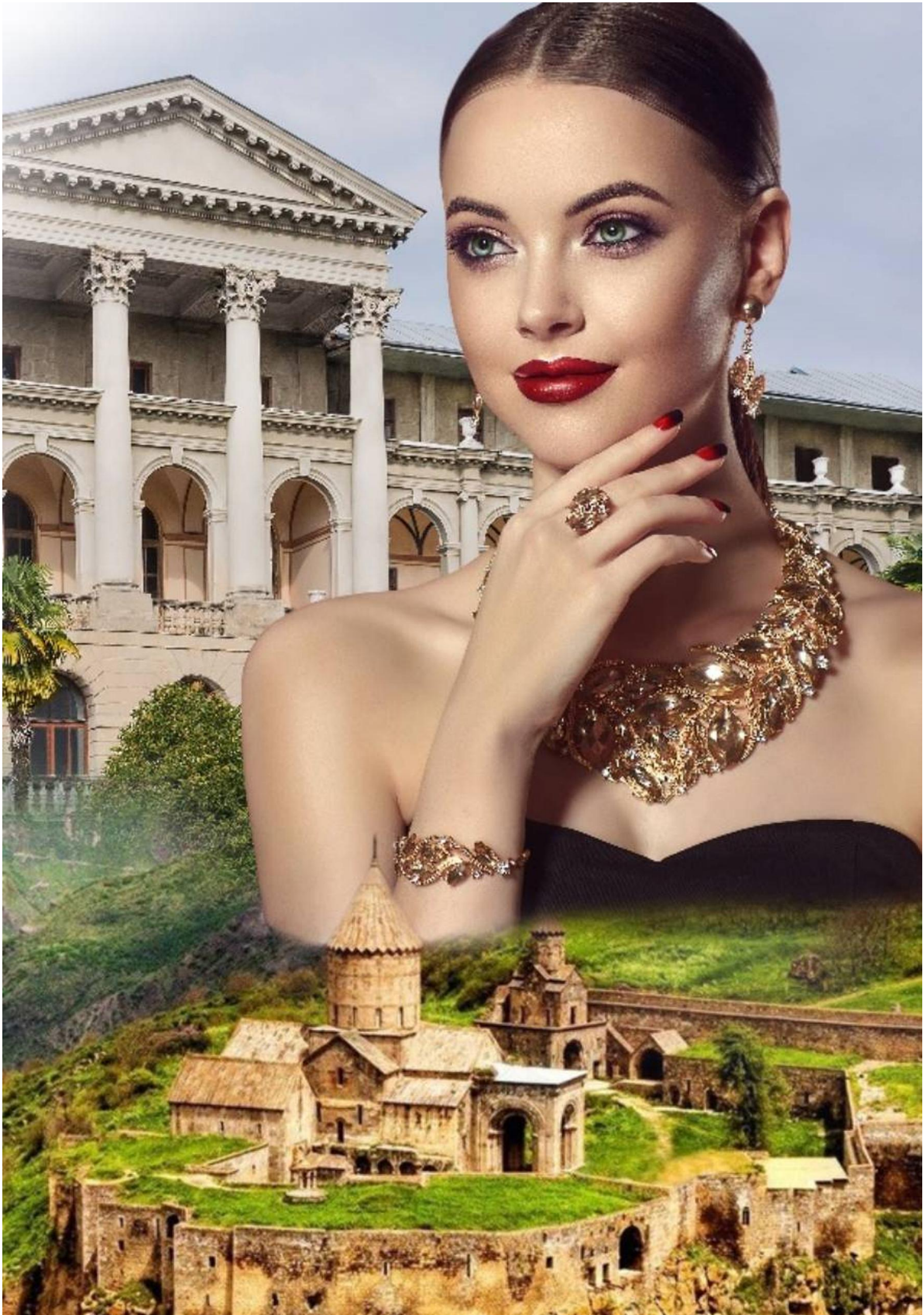

Magda Van

A THORNY PATH TO HAPPINESS

«Автор»
2026

Van M.

A THORNY PATH TO HAPPINESS / M. Van — «Автор», 2026

Family remains the ultimate sanctuary. In this sweeping saga inspired by true events, the dramatic tapestry of the ancient Armanonts dynasty unfurls. Set against the fierce upheavals of the twentieth century, the chronicle of generations weaves into a gripping, relentless narrative.The reader will journey from the unforgiving goldfields of the Klondike and the devastating fires of the 1915 Genocide in Ailur to the sun-drenched orchards of California. The family must endure epic ascents and bitter disillusions, material conquests and staggering moral losses, forging lifes profound truths from the ruins of the past. Yet, an unyielding faith in God and an unbroken fortitude of spirit empower them to rise above adversity.Turn these pages to touch the raw depths of human pain—and discover the boundless grace of True, Devoted, and Pure LOVE. This profound, breathtaking novel will challenge and redefine your very outlook on life.

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Magda Van
A THORNY PATH TO HAPPINESS

Глава 1. Above the Crests of the Family Hills

EPIGRAPH

...From distant cells, from shadowed, secret folds,
I drew the word like water from the deep.
I wrote for those who barely step into this life,
And those whose youth is spent, who now grow wise.
I wrote for those whose earthly race is run,
Who stand before the fatal, final threshold.
For both the righteous and the fallen did I write,
For those who bring relief, and those who weep;
For those who sit in judgment, and the judged;
For those who bend in penance, and the chained by sin.
For souls of virtue and the dark of heart,
For those of pure estate, and the defiled.
For all: the noble-born and the obscure,
The broken slave, the high and mighty prince.
I wrote alike for husbands and for wives,
For those cast down, and those exalted high;
For sovereigns who rule, and the oppressed,
For the abuser, and the deeply wronged,
For those who gave solace, and the comforted.
I wrote alike for humble and for great,
For dwellers of the towns, and untamed mountain clans,
And even for the ultimate supreme,
Who answers only to the judgment of the Lord.
I wrote for souls consumed by vanity, and for the blest,
For holy monks and hermits of the wild.
And may these lines, heavy with my own grief,
Become a sacred lesson for the world.
May he who weeps in bitter, heavy sin
Find comfort inside these holy scrolls.
May every soul turn all my toil and care
Into a blessing for their path ahead...

Grigor Narekatsi, 10th Century
The Book of Lamentations

Chapter 1. Above the Crests of the Family Hills

A relentless torrent of cars surged down the highway toward Santa Barbara, locking boundaries in the suffocating embrace of summer traffic jams. Fleeing the valley's sweltering heat, the travelers

pressed toward the coast, drawn by the raw, clean promise of the Pacific. Many were bound for the Santa Ynez Valley, seeking sanctuary beneath the shade of Lake Cachuma for the weekend. The past few days had been merciless; the sun beat down with a blinding fury, thick air hanging heavy and stagnant, making every breath a chore. Yet just beyond the asphalt, the cloudless vault of the blue sky mirrored perfectly in the sapphire vastness of the ocean, where frothing waves crashed against the long, sloping shore—a rhythmic, lulling murmur that swept away the dust and friction of mundane lives.

Above the highway, cutting through the heat with a muffled, resonant roar, a private jet surged low like a great silver-winged bird, charting its course toward the jagged mountain ridges. Inside the opulent cabin sat the Thomas family: Richard, the visionary tycoon of the gold fields; his wife, Margarita; and their twins, Daniela and David.

The young Thomases had just graduated at the top of their class, securing their places at Harvard University—a triumph that filled the family with profound pride. A brilliant new chapter was unfolding for Daniela and David, who counted the days to their departure with breathless anticipation. To honor their achievement, a grand gala was to be held at the family's mountain estate in the exclusive hills overlooking Santa Barbara.

Richard had recently celebrated his fifty-five-year milestone, yet he carried his age with an effortless grace that defied the silver at his temples. He possessed the immaculate refinement born of true aristocracy and immense wealth. His eyes, intensely blue like the sky above, radiated a genuine, deep-seated warmth. Richard sat in a plush armchair, his gaze anchored on the woman who had held his heart entirely throughout their marriage. He cradled her soft, pale hand in his palms; destiny had blessed them with a rare, enduring devotion that grew richer with time. Margarita was approaching fifty, yet her skin remained flawless, completely untouched by the years, prompting Richard to often whisper, "Time has no power over you, my love."

Margarita would answer with a rich, melodic laugh. Her rich chestnut hair, streaked with silver strands, fell in luxurious waves over her shoulders. Her emerald eyes, shifting with the deeper hues of the sea, were framed by a thick fringe of dark lashes. The delicate oval of her face, her slender, straight nose, and the vivid crimson of her lips formed a portrait of timeless elegance. When she smiled, her perfect teeth caught the light like fine mother-of-pearl. She was the absolute center of Richard’s world, a quiet harbor of happiness after the fierce storms and trials of his earlier years.

The jet climbed higher, tilting toward the peaks. Margarita leaned her head serenely against her husband’s shoulder, while the twins engaged in a low, spirited debate across the aisle. At last, the chime of the stewardess announced their descent. In the distance, nestled securely between the rolling green ridges, their ancestral domain came into view, shielded from the world by a high granite wall and a perimeter of ancient, towering trees.

The aircraft touched down with a feather-light grace, slowing to a gentle halt. Expressing their gratitude to the crew, the family stepped down the airbridge into the embrace of a cooling mountain breeze. In high spirits, they moved to the waiting fleet of white limousines. Leaving the private airfield behind, the cars swept half a mile down the road before pausing at the massive, intricate wrought-iron gates. The guard offered a respectful salute, throwing the gates wide to let the procession pass.

Manicured lawns unfurled on either side, punctuated by vibrant, artfully designed flowerbeds. Along the edges, sprawling thickets of white bougainvillea and violet jacaranda erupted in magnificent, wild blooms. Ahead lay the covered pavilion and a Spanish-style guest villa, its facade of deep emerald glass gleaming like a mythical crystal palace. Set slightly back, commanding the landscape, rose the primary three-story palace—a masterpiece of Baroque white marble. It boasted grand classical columns, intricate gold filigree framing the windows, and a wide, sweeping grand staircase flanked by classical stone vases overflowing with pristine white and pink lilies.

Before the staircase, a monumental fountain came alive. At its heart, a tier of embracing angels supported a gleaming golden basin, sending cascades of water into the sunlight to shatter into a million

diamond shards. Inside the vast grand foyer, a massive crystal chandelier suspended from a dizzying height cast fractured light across the space. Twin marble staircases, draped in rich emerald carpets, swept upward to the galleries, while the grand hall offered an unobstructed view through a semi-oval glass wall opening onto a private, shimmering lake.

Final preparations for the gala were reaching a flawless crescendo. The banquet spaces were dressed in soft rose and gold tones, mirrored walls magnifying the light. Round tables were set with immaculate English porcelain by De Lamerie. A pristine white Steinway grand piano stood poised in the corner, and at the center of the hall lay a circular dance floor framed by an exquisite mosaic of polished marble tiles.

When the evening required, the mirrored walls of the banquet hall glided back on silent tracks, revealing a massive billiards room housing six tournament-grade tables. In the corner, a sleek mahogany bar stood fully stocked, adjacent to a discreet service station where gourmet dishes rose silently from the expansive subterranean kitchens via hidden dumbwaiters. To the left of the main hall, guests could access a refined parlor featuring card tables draped in rich green velvet, tailored for high-stakes preferans. Nearby lay a sanctuary of a smoking room, lined with an exceptional selection of carved pipes, ornate hookahs, and rare, vintage tobaccos, where crystal decanters and tumblers already caught the ambient light.

Beyond the palace's rear facade lay the estate's crowning jewel—a breathtaking natural lake fed by the crystal-clear waters of a rushing mountain stream. On its glassy surface, black and white swans drifted with regal serenity. A delicate white bridge arched over the water, connecting the banks beneath a canopy of fairy-tale blossoms that hung in thick, fragrant garlands.

Further still, ensconced in the quiet isolation of ancient, spreading trees, stood the private sanctuary of Richard and Margarita. A winding stone path transitioned into a magnificent spiral staircase, its wrought railings anchored by the masterfully sculpted figures of two white marble doves, forever captured mid-flight as they soared toward one another. Beyond the steps lay a vast, hidden meadow blanketed with rare velvet roses of extraordinary, deep hues. Before the two-story villa itself, a spectacular symphonic fountain danced in full majesty; through its iridescent, shifting spray, two marble figures emerged—a man holding a woman in an eternal, tender embrace. As the music swelled, underwater lights subtly shifted, changing the hues of their stone garments in perfect harmony with the cadence. This breathtaking masterpiece, capturing the raw essence of the owners' profound love, was the work of a master sculptor commissioned directly from Rome, a triumph worthy of Michelangelo's own chisel.

n this secluded haven, the very air was thick with devotion. The interiors spoke of an uncompromised luxury that transformed reality into an unbroken fairy tale. It was instantly clear that the souls who had brought this breathtaking sanctuary into being possessed not merely immense, staggering wealth, but an artist's rare vision and a pure, untamed spirit.

Глава 2. The Cold Gold of the Klondike

In the fading twilight of late nineteenth-century England, within one of London's bleak, forgotten fringes, lived the family of David Tovmasyan—Armenian refugees uprooted and forced to flee the soils of Egypt. Life in this alien land was an unyielding crucible; David was forced to grasp at any backbreaking labor simply to secure a meager crust of bread. Day after grueling day, their existence was a relentless battle against starvation, yet destiny was preparing an even more merciless blow. David's wife was carrying their child, her strength already spent to the absolute dregs. Having brought a baby boy into the cold world, the exhausted woman drew her final breath and passed away.

Grief and a paralyzing terror for his newborn son nearly shattered the father's spirit. He was trapped in a desperate paradox: he had to work to survive, yet he was entirely alone in nursing a fragile infant. Out of pure, silent mercy, the neighbors intervened. They watched over the small child, who was given the name Tadevos, though the local tongues adapted it to the English style—Teddy. To the astonishment of everyone around, despite the pervasive deprivation, the boy grew resilient, vibrant, and strong.

His entire childhood was forged upon the harsh, unforgiving pavements of London. When Tadevos turned twelve, the thin safety net collapsed entirely—death took his father. Left a complete orphan, the young teenager fought desperately for his place beneath the sun. Defying the heavy hand of fate, he resolved at all costs to stand firm and fulfill a silent, burning dream: to escape the mire of poverty and conquer wealth. Gathering a tight-knit circle of homeless boys around him, Teddy revealed the iron-willed charisma of a natural leader; he fiercely convinced his companions never to sink into the easy degradation of theft, but to build a real, serious enterprise.

Soon, breathtaking news swept across the Atlantic like a sudden tempest—gold had been discovered in the frozen reaches of Alaska, along the wild rivers of the Klondike. Tadevos understood instantly: this was their single, elusive hour of salvation. He ignited his comrades' hearts with the fire of his own ambition. A young, hardened, and single-minded crew began to prepare for the great transit. In those desperate years, steamships departed for the north packed to the absolute breaking point; cabins and deep holds overflowed with bodies, while the canvas tents of fortune seekers were pitched right onto the open decks. Securing a passage seemed a mathematical impossibility, as ticket prices skyrocketed to five hundred pounds. For this ghost of a chance, artisans liquidated their workshops, farmers bartered away their lands for pennies, and factory workers walked away from their machinery. Englishmen, Irishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, and Russians hoarded provisions, purchased heavy gear, and bought precious lessons from weathered prospectors, their voices chanting a single, maddened litany: gold.

Yet, destiny turned a benevolent gaze upon Tadevos. Endowed with a sharp, instinctive wit, he managed to strike a secret bargain with a ship's boatswain: he and three of his closest companions were taken aboard as coal stokers. This dangerous, exhausting labor exempted them from the crushing transit fees and secured their daily rations. In those frantic moments, they believed the bitterest of their trials lay behind them, completely unaware of the true inferno that awaited them in the wilderness.

The voyage proved to be long, brutal, and unmerciful. It dragged them across the storm-battered expanses of the North Atlantic, only to cast them onto the lethal hazards of the Edmonton Trail—an ancient, punishing route once trodden by fur trappers. It wound through the vast Canadian wilderness, pressing north across the Peace and Mackenzie rivers toward the Yukon. Out of the hundreds of thousands enchanted by the siren song of wealth, only a fraction survived this hellish journey. By then, Tadevos had reached his twentieth year. Powerful, stubborn, and profoundly hardened by his street childhood, he pressed forward despite the hollow gnawing of hunger, the bone-chilling frost, and feet rubbed raw to the flesh. But the North showed no quarter to the weak. Two of his companions lost

their resolve, turning back halfway through the wilderness. The third fell gravely ill and perished on the trail. In the border camps, fatal diseases ran rampant, reaping human lives like wheat, and the heavy air of the outposts was poisoned by the sweet, sickening stench of decomposing bodies.

With his meager funds almost entirely exhausted, Tadevos threw himself into any agonizing, brutal labor to prepare for the final, daunting surge over the mountain passes. Securing work with the British Timber Corporation, he felled timber, earning twenty dollars for every cubic meter of raw wood. Sweat poured from his brow in freezing torrents, while local taverns charged extortionate, robber-baron prices for a squalid cot and basic sustenance. Yet, through a miracle of discipline, he managed to hoard every single cent. In the evenings, Teddy would slip into the raucous, smoke-choked saloons where veteran prospectors gathered. Reliable maps of the jagged Canadian and Alaskan wilderness simply did not exist; thus, the young man spent hours sifting through drunken altercations, carefully harvesting invaluable fragments of information regarding secret trails and wealthy creeks. Step by agonizing step, he advanced toward his prize. At long last, he broke through to the Yukon.

He established himself in a raw mining outpost. Late one evening, as he walked back toward his squalid log cabin, Tadevos passed a tavern from which loud, discordant music spilled into the frost. A heavily intoxicated, elderly prospector stumbled through the doors, closely trailed by two predatory young men. Teddy caught a sinister fragment of their muttered exchange:

"Did you see that? The old man paid at the bar with a raw gold nugget from the pouch on his belt. Let's trail him into the dark and break him. He's blind drunk; tomorrow he won’t remember a thing."

Having been raised on the treacherous alleys of London, Tadevos instantly recognized the lethal peril hovering over the old man. Quietly, he dissolved into the shadows behind them. The moment the amber glow from the tavern windows faded into the dark, one of the thieves lunged forward, delivering a crushing blow to the old man's skull. The prospector dropped like a felled tree. But Tadevos was already moving. With lightning speed, he dropped the first attacker with a precise blow and immediately turned to face the second, in whose hand a blade flashed hungrily. Deflecting the strike, Teddy delivered a devastating hook that sent the bandit crashing into the frozen mud. The muggers scrambled to their feet, but catching the steady glint of a revolver and the absolute, lethal resolve in the stranger’s eyes, they chose not to tempt fate and fled into the night. In those wild, untamed territories, being stripped of a weapon was tantamount to a death sentence.

The old man lay unconscious, the frost beneath his head turning crimson with blood. Tadevos hoisted the heavy frame onto his shoulders and carried him back to his cabin. Laying the wounded man upon his solitary bed, he gently cleansed the wounds, while he himself drifted into a fitful sleep sitting upright at the table.

Only toward dawn, when the pale light of the northern sun brushed the rough-hewn log walls, did the old man groan heavily, forcing open eyes clouded with agony. In the fading light of a guttering candle, he stared long and hard into the exhausted face of the youth sitting across from him, before croaking hoarsely:

"Why did you save me, boy?"

"Thieves are devoid of honor," Tadevos replied flatly.

The old man studied him intently, recognizing the rare, untamed nobility in this youth who had not coveted another man's wealth within the walls of a locked cabin. Exhausted, the elder closed his eyes; the trauma to his skull was severe. In the agonizing days that followed, Tadevos nursed him with fierce, unbroken devotion—feeding him water from a spoon and nourishing him with warm broth. Gradually, the prospector regained enough strength to speak, yet it was clear he would never walk again; his vital forces were draining away irretrievably.

A deep, unspoken trust forged between them. The prospector spoke at length of his solitary life and listened intently to the chronicle of Teddy's journey. One evening, he beckoned the youth closer to his pillows, drew forth his sacred leather pouch, and pressed it firmly into Tadevos’s palm:

"I have never known the joy of children. But tonight, with all my heart, I claim you as my son. You are brave, honest, and merciful. Take this. Inside are pure, raw nuggets. You could have stolen them while I lay senseless, but your integrity would not allow you to become a thief. I will not rise from this bed, and gold is of no use in the world beyond."

The old man caught his breath, his voice dropping to a fragile whisper as he revealed his ultimate secret:

"I found a place... a true motherlode. Deep beneath the earth lie massive veins, and upon the gravel banks of the creek, rich deposits of gold sit waiting for their master. But to legally secure this claim, you will need immense funds. Sell these nuggets, register the territory under your name, and what you unearth there will make you a king. Remain an honorable man, and fortune will never abandon you."

Spent by the long exertion, the old man's eyes closed. Tadevos sat stunned by the weight of the revelation, but chose not to disturb the invalid. In the morning, the old man did not wake. Tadevos buried him with deep reverence and dignity, honoring him as he would his own father. Soon after the burial, he journeyed to the specified coordinates—and froze in his tracks, entirely overwhelmed by the sight before him.

An extraordinary spectacle unfolded before his eyes. Along the sharp, winding bends of the creek, embedded directly within the river sand, glistened inexhaustible deposits of gold. Together with nuggets of varied sizes, rare and wondrous minerals and precious gems rested upon the shallows, their absolute clarity rivaling the finest jewels of the world. Teddy, acutely aware of the fierce envy, danger, and grief such unbridled wealth could draw upon a man, exercised absolute caution. He did not boast of his fortune.

Prudently and in total secrecy, using the gold bequeathed to him by the deceased elder, Tadevos officially purchased the immense gold-bearing claim. Until his final breath, he remained profoundly grateful to both his nameless benefactor and to fate itself for this miraculous gift. Life had validated a simple truth: for every noble deed, a man will sooner or later receive an answer from above—if not in earthly prosperity, then in absolute peace of mind.

In the beginning, his solitary weapons in this war for a secure life were merely a pickaxe, a shovel, and a washing pan. Teddy worked without rest. Having conquered everything he had once dreamed of on the squalid streets of London, the hardened, immensely wealthy Tadevos relocated to a major metropolis. There, he met a remarkable young woman, and refusing to postpone his happiness, he married her. Soon, his wife blessed him with twins—a boy and a girl. It was as if fate itself had woven a special, sacred pattern into their birth, bringing absolute joy into Tadevos's home. Yet, having achieved the long-awaited fulfillment of life, Teddy had no intention of remaining in the frozen north forever. He felt the magnetic pull of a young, violently developing America.

Now a highly affluent and respected gentleman, Tadevos once journeyed to the sun-bathed south—to California—and fell completely in love with its golden shores. He acquired vast territories there and laid the foundation stone of the family estate. Gold, it seemed, flowed naturally into the hands of this powerful bloodline. From that moment forward, passed down from generation to generation, gold mining became the core enterprise of their lives. Each new descendant did not merely preserve the fortune, but multiplied the family legacy, investing intellect, unyielding faith, and relentless labor into its growth.

Decades have slipped away since those wild days. The fierce, biting winds of the Yukon have dissolved into the distant past, the ancient surname of Tovmasyan has been reshaped into the elegant American title of Thomas, and the ancient lineage has thoroughly assimilated into the highest echelons of New World society. Yet the memory of where their thorny path to happiness truly began remains forever enshrined within the heart of the family.

Глава 3. Shards of Crystal Happiness

David-Daniel, representing the next generation of the Thomas bloodline, discovered the sanctuary of domestic bliss only as he approached his fortieth year. His chosen one was Angela, a blue-eyed beauty and the sole heiress to an immensely influential Californian banker. For years, their horizon remained cloudless, save for one persistent shadow that lengthened across their union: the cradle in their grand home remained empty. Physicians offered fragile hopes, urging them to guard their patience. At long last, when youth had already slipped away, Angela brought forth a miracle—a long-awaited baby boy whom they named Richard. The parents' joy bordered on the sublime, yet their ecstasy was to be cruelly brief. The mother's fragile health began to dissolve day by day. Neither their staggering wealth nor the most brilliant minds of medicine could anchor her to this world. Left a widower, David-Daniel locked the gates of his heart, refusing to ever admit another woman. Every ounce of his unspent devotion was poured, without reservation, into his son.

The theft of his wife left a raw, unhealing wound within the father's soul. A few years later, hollowed out by grief and unable to endure the crushing gravity of his solitude, he passed away before his time, following his beloved into the quiet world beyond.

The young Richard, now a complete orphan, bore the devastating weight of his parents' deaths with a fractured heart. Cast adrift in a vast, empty world, he initially faltered, his spirit buckling under the shock. Yet the ancestral iron and the deep-seated survival instinct that had preserved his lineage for centuries rose within him, shielding the youth from the path of ruin. Taking the immense weight of the family gold mines onto his shoulders and inheriting the legendary Thomas fortune, Richard revealed a brilliant intellect and a rare, relentless work ethic. By his thirtieth year, he had not merely stabilized the enterprise but had vastly multiplied the grandeur of the family empire.

His expansive endeavors demanded ironclad alliances, and over time, Richard surrounded himself with a tight circle of influential power brokers. Among them, a talented financier named Fred Stevenson commanded a position of singular trust. Their joint ventures were invariably triumphant, yielding millions in profits. Within high society, Stevenson was revered as a man of immaculate honor and unyielding integrity, commanding the absolute trust of the elite. Yet, his private life had been systematically demolished by tragedy. In his youth, Fred had fallen madly in love with a celebrated fashion model who consented to become his wife. But shortly after the birth of their daughter, the volatile beauty abandoned both her nursing child and her devoted husband, fleeing to England with an obscure fortune hunter. She dissolved into the fog of London, never to be heard from again. This brutal betrayal inflicted a profound psychological trauma upon Fred, leaving a jagged scar that would dictate the rest of his days. He never remarried.

One evening, Fred invited Richard Thomas to his estate for an intimate dinner. It was on that fateful night that the young tycoon first laid eyes upon Victoria, the financier's seventeen-year-old daughter. At first glance, she seemed little more than a child—frail, slender, her silhouette possessing an almost translucent grace. Her face, framed by a halo of spun-gold curls, possessed a striking aristocratic pallor, while her immense, arresting blue eyes commanded the entire room. She was not a classical, canonical beauty, but she harbored a rare, elusive charm that defied definition.

Sitting across from Richard, Victoria watched him with a delicate, trembling shyness, seemingly unable to break the spell of his presence. The young magnate felt a foreign chord of tenderness vibrate deep within his chest. He was seized by an inexplicable, overwhelming desire to envelope this vulnerable girl in his arms, to shield her from the cruelties of the world, and to warm her with a gentle word. Yet, being a man of exceptional cultural refinement and immaculate breeding, he masterfully reined in his sudden emotional surge.

Before departing, Richard approached Victoria, and a conversation kindled between them. To his absolute astonishment, beneath the veil of maidenly timidity, he discovered a brilliant, razor-sharp intellect and a flawless sense of humor. Victoria proved to be an exquisite conversationalist, navigating art, global politics, and world events with effortless nuance. Catching the undisguised admiration in her guest's eyes, the girl flushed with a delicate crimson bloom.

Following that evening, the image of the golden-haired Victoria refused to leave Richard's thoughts. At elite galas and exclusive receptions, he sought every elusive opportunity to position himself within her orbit. His closest confidants, noting the profound transformation in the usually detached millionaire, unanimously urged him to seize the hour and present his suit. Victoria's father was a gentleman of the old guard, and the girl herself was deemed the flawless match for his empire.

Before long, Richard invited Victoria to an intimate dinner at one of the city's most exclusive establishments. Bathed in the romantic amber glow of the room and beneath the soft, weeping cadence of the music, he dropped to one knee before her. Opening a velvet case that held a magnificent diamond ring, he looked directly into her luminous eyes and asked, "Victoria, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

The girl radiant with an absolute, unearthly joy, threw herself into his embrace without a fraction of hesitation. Having secured her coveted consent, Richard approached Victoria's father that very evening to request her hand. Fred was profoundly happy, knowing he was surrendering his only daughter into the safest hands the world could offer. In blessing the young couple, he presented Richard with a magnificent gift—a massive block of shares in the leading financial corporation he co-owned. The young tycoon had no need for wealth, yet he could not offend his future father-in-law. He accepted the capital on one absolute condition: that these assets would forever remain under the personal control and sole ownership of Victoria.

A lavish wedding followed shortly after. Within the newlyweds' home, an immaculate harmony, mutual devotion, and profound respect reigned supreme. A year later, their union was consecrated by the arrival of their firstborn—a daughter named Christie. Another year passed, and the universe gifted them a son, Paul. Both infants resembled angels; they inherited their mother's snow-white skin and soft, golden curls. Richard idolized his wife, completely dissolving in his adoration for their children. As the years rolled by, the children grew, entering school and delighting their parents with their gentle dispositions and obedient natures. Despite the crushing demands of his empire, Richard dedicated every spare movement to his family, existing in a state of indescribable happiness.

Everything unfolded flawlessly, until an insidious thread of anxiety began to weave into their quiet harbor. Lately, Richard had grown increasingly alarmed by Victoria's persistent pallor and a subtle, fiercely concealed malaise. She merely offered a soft, reassuring smile, soothing her husband with promises that it was nothing more than ordinary exhaustion and that there was no cause for alarm. Yet Richard, driven by a dark, unshakable premonition, refused to relent. He contacted the family physician and demanded an immediate, exhaustive medical evaluation.

The following day, after sending Christie and Paul to their classes, Victoria drove to the clinic. The physician personally escorted her through the corridors, administering complex diagnostic tests. The moment the procedures concluded, Victoria hurried toward the school to collect her children. She had always fiercely preferred to pilot her own vehicle, flatly rejecting the services of private drivers.

The children chattered noisily and joyfully in the backseat, eagerly trading the day's school gossip. The automobile swept smoothly down the highway when the quiet of the cabin was violently shattered by the sharp ring of her cellular phone. Victoria engaged the speakerphone. From the speakers, the physician's strained, trembling voice emerged:

"Victoria... We need to conduct another, far more detailed examination. Please, return to the clinic tomorrow morning."

"What is it, doctor?" fear instantly pierced her heart like a needle. "Did they find something serious? Do I need to worry?"

The woman's voice fractured, and her heart began to hammer a terrifying, erratic rhythm against her ribs. The physician offered no answer; the line went abruptly, ominously dead with a series of short chimes.

In that exact fraction of a second, a violent vertigo seized Victoria. A searing flash of agony blinded her vision with a thick gray fog, her thoughts tangled into chaos, and her hands momentarily relinquished their grip on the wheel. The heavy vehicle, traveling at high speed, violently lurched to the left—hurling directly into the path of oncoming traffic. A deafening shriek of tearing metal, a horrific impact, the shattering chorus of exploding glass, and an instantaneous, muffled explosion swallowed the world whole. In that catastrophic violence, no one survived. Victoria, Christie, and Paul perished in an instant.

Upon receiving the news, Richard nearly surrendered his sanity. In one horrific movement of time, he had been stripped of both his beloved woman and his angelic children. Following the tragedy, his world plunged into an absolute, dead void. For several years, he felt nothing save for a searing, toxic bitterness and a hollow, crushing ache. He was no longer living; he had mutated into a pale specter, existing aimlessly among the jagged shards of his past. Tortured by a mute despair, he would stare into the empty air for hours, screaming silently into the heavens:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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