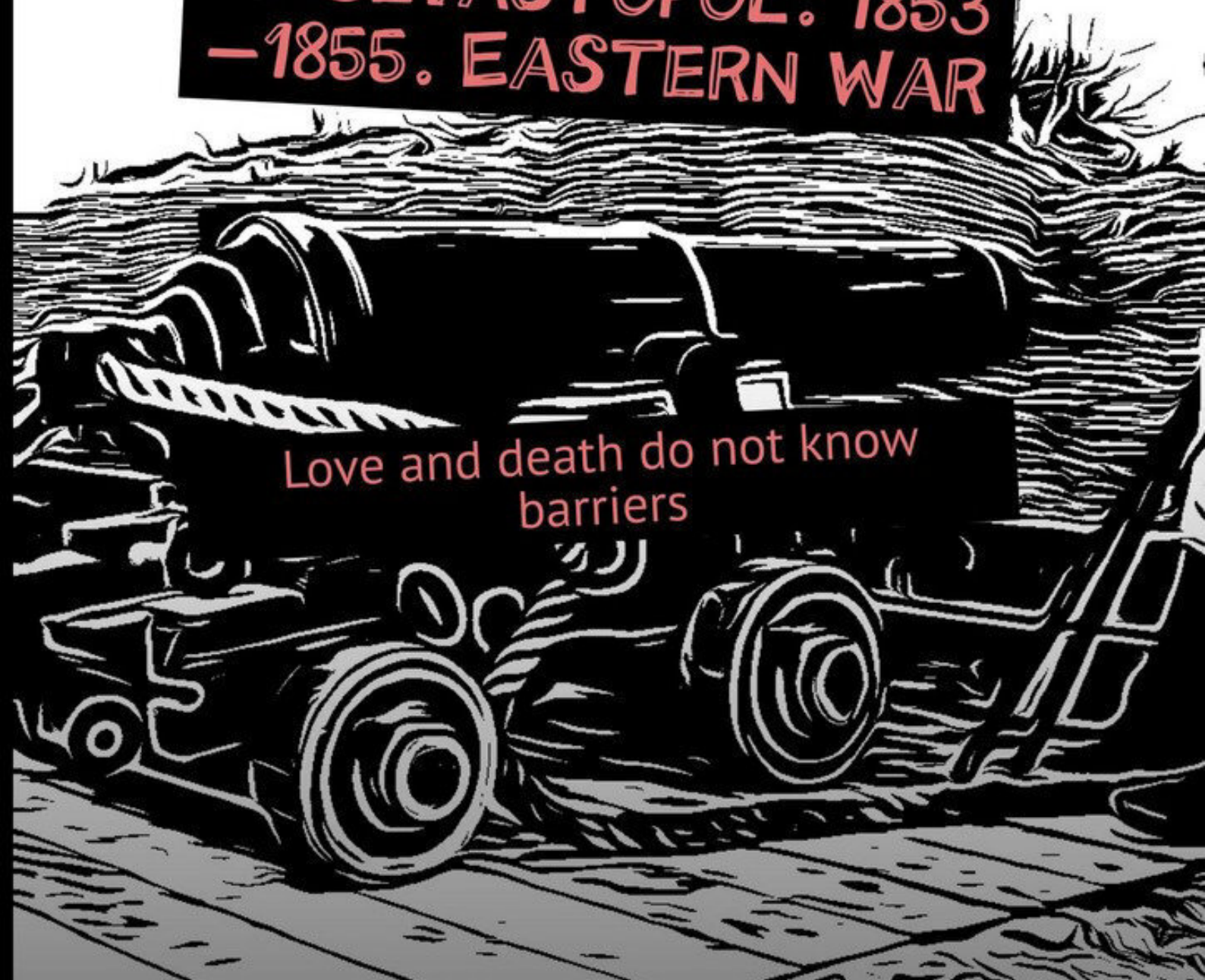


18+

Sergey Solovyov

**MONTH TO YEAR.  
DEFENSE  
OF SEVASTOPOL. 1853  
-1855. EASTERN WAR**

**Love and death do not know  
barriers**



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1853—1855. Eastern War. Love  
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«Издательские решения»

**Solovyov S.**

Month to year. Defense of Sevastopol. 1853—1855. Eastern War. Love and death do not know barriers / S. Solovyov — «Издательские решения»,

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This is a novel about the war of 1853—1856, a terrible test in the fate of Russia. A very young man from the Guards Regiment falls into the crucible of war, where he makes new friends. Even forty-two volunteer doctors from distant America came to the aid of the Russians. The main events of the defense of Sevastopol take place before the eyes of the heroes of the novel.

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## Содержание

Prologue	6
Manor Zalepsky	8
Acquaintance	8
Landowner-breaker	15
Marriage of Michael	18
Cavalier Guard Regiment	19
Service to the sovereign	19
New friends	22
Farewell	31
Yakim in the service	35
A new beginning	37
Peterhof	38
Date night	46
Prize shooting	48
Prize horses	51
Horse racing	53
Life Squadron and Summer Theater	55
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	57

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## Prologue

The barrel of the gun without hesitation followed the leisurely walking roe deer. The finger on the trigger did not tremble, you can see the shooter was with strong nerves. Shot! Second! The animal, shot down by two bullets, fell into the bushes, and the huntsman with a cleaver in his hand nimbly rushed to the prey. The prize was not bad, although not red booty for a hunter.

– Yakim! – the voice of the master rang out, – call the assistants, let's move on!

A quick huntsman, straightened a dapper cartuz with a lacquer visor and famously blew his horn. Then again. Two teenagers, peasant children, helpers came running. The hunter from his wallet gave each two kopecks.

– Thank you master, thank you, – said the guys, and put the carcass on the cart and drove to the estate.

– Let's go further, Yakim. Reload the second gun.

– All right, master.

Next to the hunter, a dog was running on a leather leash, squealing with impatience. The weather was good, early autumn – it's always a great time in the Pskov region. Branches and branches crunched under soft boots, and the hunting outfit, sewn in the latest fashion, was comfortable. Mein Reed's books already found many readers here, and the hunter's clothes were a replica of Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo outfit. A newfangled novelty, a leather holster with a Colt pistol, also stood out on the belt. The hunter sometimes corrected his favorite toy, and a considerable hunting knife on the belt.

Yakim only sighed, looking at the master, and could not resist reproaching:

– What are you, Mikhail Dmitrievich, why do you need a gun? And the knife? Not a lordly business, to finish off and cut prey.

– In vain you are, Yakim. I should be able to do everything myself, I'm not small.

– Yes, your grandfather is dying, Mikhail Petrovich... He does not like this... Even Artamon Grigorievich, your godfather...

– Mamenka will stand up, Sofya Mikhailovna. And Uncle Artamon will probably regret it. Will do, Yakim. Let's move on.

– There are already bearish places, master...

“Let's go quickly, and come back.

– I will reload your gun, otherwise God forbid...

The young hunter quickly walked forward, the dog cheerfully ran ahead, sniffing the bushes. Not far there were thickets of hazel, and their vigilant huntsman wanted to get around, not tempting fate. The guns were loaded, but the unpleasant feeling gnawed at the seasoned forester. Suddenly the master's dog, Red, rushed about, and was already trying to hide between the owner's legs.

– Barin, let's leave, do not anger the forest owner.

But Mikhail only smiled broadly, and went to the bushes with a gun at the ready. The gun was excellent, capsule, good work, and the master, although young, was a skilled hunter. Only his namesake, forest bear, peculiar beast. And then, he attacked very quickly, so young Zalepsky did not even come to his senses how he got a kick with his paw. Red, who pulled the leash, saved him, but still the bear took out the shoulder of the young man with the edge of his claws, tearing his jacket to shreds and wounding the young man in the shoulder. The huntsman jumped up, instantly cocked and Yakim fired from two trunks, knocking down the beast, and finished off the bear with shots from the master's gun, which he quickly lifted from the grass.

Yakim buzzed his horn, calling for help. He himself quickly and tightly bandaged Mikhail, who only looked with regret at the torn leather jacket. The huntsman burned the wound with vodka, applied plantain leaves washed with water and vodka, and rewound the lacerated wound.

“All is well,” Mikhail said, “just don't tell your grandfather.”

The hunter said, smiling faintly, and walked around the dead beast. The bear was huge, and only now the young master assessed the danger.

– Thank you, Yakim... Here, take it – and handed the huntsman a handful of silver.

– Barin, – the servant just sighed, – well, would your Long carbine stick silver to the servant?

– Take it, – the young man said sternly, – and blow your horn! It's time for us to turn home.

Now my grandfather will ask me... Maybe my father came from Moscow, then, you see, everything will work out, – the master sighed heavily, – Go for the horses, Yakim.

Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky sat down on a stump, holding on to an already very sore shoulder.

Somehow I remembered Elizaveta Nikolaevna, the daughter of the landowner Kunitsyn, whose estate bordered on his father's. The first time they met at the ball, which was asked by Dmitry Ivanovich in honor of his sixteen-year-old son.

The young helpers came again, and buzzed when they saw a huge carcass.

– Blimey... – said one, – Matvey! – the young man shouted to the driver, – go help!

– I'm going, – the man shouted, adjusting his cap, – now... Armyak will correct...

Red only growled, sitting at the feet of the owner, and could not calm down. The young man stroked the dog, rattled her neck. Here, the bear was loaded, and the red prey was traveling to the estate on a peasant cart.

The batman, riding, led under the bridle of the master pedigree stallion. It was a huge horse of the Danish breed, bay suit.

– Mikhail Dmitrievich!

– I go, I go, – said the young master.

The hunter, although grimacing in pain, habitually jumped into the saddle of his horse, and both riders trotted lightly along the country, the dog ran after the owner.

– Yakim, – Mikhail began, – we will stand there at the outbuilding. Call Uncle Artamon, he will tie me up. Grandfather if he finds out what happened on the hunt, I am missing.

– I will, master.

– Thanks.

## Manor Zalepsky

### Acquaintance

They rode in silence, and the huntsman looked anxiously at the pale young man, but still sitting firmly in the saddle. Finally, they quickly drove past the yard, and drove into the side gate. Mikhail ran into the bathroom house, and began to quickly take off his jacket and shirt, and began to wash blood from his forearm and chest. This was a long and unpleasant procedure.

But now, he saw through the window quickly going to the pavilion Artamon Grigorievich Nikolaev and Yakim Voinov. The door creaked, and finally the long-awaited doctor came in.

– Hello, Misha, – Nikolaev greeted, – let’s see what happened to you.

– Thanks for coming.

– Father has arrived, is already waiting. Yard boys noticed you that you were covered in blood, came running... Cloak did not throw, head...

– Damn... How is grandfather?

“I went to look at the bear. Angry, but also proud. I don’t even understand what is more. So we went to dinner, as here we will end with your wound. They promise pudding for dessert, – Artamon Grigorievich finished with feeling.

The doctor, albeit already quite middle-aged, but with the right hands, however, now with glasses in a gold frame on the bridge of his nose. He unwound the rag on the wound and set to work. The skin was sewn up, herbs were applied, and clean rags covered the sore spot. Artamon poured balm into the glass and gave it to the young man.

– It will heal in three weeks,” Artamon Grigorievich reassured, “look in the mirror as you did.” Lyubo-expensive, as he tried for himself.

– Thanks.

He trusted the surgeon, but I wanted to look at his work. In the mirror, the wound no longer seemed so terrible, the seams tightened the edges of the cuts from the bear claws. The slightly oozing blood attracted a look, the doctor bandaged the wound, and the young hunter put on a linen shirt and a velvet jacket, fastening it with buttons.

– And pants, master, – noted Yakim, – in suede is completely unnatural.

Zalepsky nodded, and slightly grimacing in pain, changed his hunting pants to cloth pantaloons.

– Let’s go to dinner,” the doctor said, washing his hands in the washbasin, “it’s time to go if you don’t want your father to send for you.”

– Let’s go, – said the cheerful Mikhail, – it seems that his shoulder does not hurt, – and he twisted his hand a little and nodded gratefully to Artamon.

The young man looked in the mirror, checked the sleeve, was afraid that the blood would stain the jacket. The doctor just shook his head, and gathered his tools into a bag and went after the bandaged hero. They quickly walked along the path to the manor house, the doctor removed their supplies, and they went up to the dining room.

The table was already set, and the family was sitting, waiting for the birthday boy. Two grandfathers, father and mother. True, Mikhail did not see the one he expected at the festive table.

– He appeared all the same, – the father strictly remarked to his son, – the hand hurts a lot? – he remarked sympathetically.

– You were asked not to be heroic, – my grandfather, Ivan Ivanovich, said quietly, – you have responsibilities. You have no brothers, you must be careful.

– It’s okay, so, scratch...

– Your father, here, wrote out a camera for duggerotypes. The latest model. They will bring it soon. The gift will be for his birthday, however, a little later, – said another grandfather, slowly starting the roast.

Mikhail Petrovich was old, but cheerful beyond his years. So he was engaged in the grain trade, but looked closely, as if to make it smarter to do with flax too. The land here is inexpensive, so Rusov gradually bought up suitable land for this. And although the matter is not easy, considerable profits were expected. The old man loved, besides commerce, very much the long-awaited grandson, otherwise his son-in-law and daughters had only three daughters, Vera, Nadezhda and Lyubov. But they were already married, and only sometimes came to visit. But the grandfather was educated, and he read magazines, adored all sorts of novelties, and was not indifferent to weapons, especially richly decorated ones.

– Come, Mikhail, here are gifts from me, – and grandfather, smiling enough, put first a heavy wooden box in front of his grandson.

“What’s in there?” the grandson asked, not knowing what to think.

Grandfather lifted the lid triumphantly. Sofya Mikhailovna, mother, only sighed, and turned away... Dmitry Ivanovich, father, also looked without looking up from the curiosity. Inside, on the felt, lay a pistol of a new design, an unfamiliar look. Attention was drawn to a cylindrical convex object, right behind the barrel of a newfangled weapon.

“Why is that?” – the grandson was surprised, reddened with joy, immediately took out a dangerous toy.

“A gun, or rather a Colt revolver. It is called “Sea,” – said Mikhail Petrovich.

– It would be better to paint, but gave an easel, – sighing, Sofya Mikhailovna spoke.

– And I bought a fitting, – Rusov finished stubbornly, – a new invention. With a chamber shutter! – and he pointedly raised his finger up, – As in the guard, the same major Ramzai suggested to Tsar Nikolai Pavlovich. But, this is not at the table, of course to show.

True, the grandfather could not resist, and everything boasted of gifts and the young man picked up a rare contraption. Weighing eleven pounds, the barrel, understandably like a hunting rifle, was not removed from the stock. And there was no mahogany, no rosewood or even oak. A simple Russian birch went to the stock and bed. And the antapki and the belt were present – not for the lordly fun was made. Mikhail Dmitrievich respectfully stroked the nozzle, and was surprised at the charging chamber.

– Not to charge from the muzzle, and you don’t need to wave a hammer, I inserted the charge into the chamber, directed it with a lever, the capsule is all and done! Yakim! Take it to the master in the room, put it in the armory, but close it. You’ll give me the key. Sit down, everything is cold, – he turned to his grandson.

But the young man enthusiastically studied the revolver. I looked at the instructions, realized how it was charging – gunpowder, bullets and wads were placed in the drum, it was crushed by the under-barrel lever. Sensible thing! Six charges at hand!

– Michael! – the mother noticed more strictly, – and rinse your hands.

The son nodded, and washing his hands, wiping them off with a napkin, sat down at the table, moving the dish towards him. The servant poured into a glass of wine, and the roast itself asked for a plate. But Michael sighed, and quietly asked his father:

– I asked Masha to call...

– Yes they go, don’t worry so, will be in half an hour. And they sat down without them – and it’s not the case to be late.

But now, the butler came in and announced loudly:

– Mr. Terentyev Petr Fedorovich with his wife Elizaveta Vasilyevna and daughter Maria Petrovna arrived.

Mikhail jumped up from the table, and took a quick step into the ceremonial canopy. Cloaks and capes were taken by the Zalepsky footman, the servant and maid of the Terentyevs were taken to the people. The Terentyevs were dressed much more modestly than the Zalepskys, but very neatly and well-groomed, this family did not have much land and wealth.

And the younger Zalepsky, smiling, approached Peter Fedorovich.

– Come in, very glad you arrived. And you, Elizaveta Vasilievna, and you, Maria Petrovna.

The young man kissed the ladies' hands like a well-mannered man, and Masha herself sat down in Kniksen. The girl also smiled happily.

– Happy birthday, Mikhail, a gift from us, – and Terentyev gave a bundle in beautiful paper.

– Come on in, please! ‘the youngster suggested.

The footman opened the doors, the guests walked ahead, Mikhail lagged behind, and nodded to Maria. From the table stood the cordial owner of the house, Dmitry Ivanovich, and himself, personally, sat the guests at the dining table.

Two grandfathers did not look very approvingly at those who came, until Sophia whispered in her father's ear. Rusov suddenly smiled, as if he saw a fried ham, and the first turned to Terentyev:

– Petr Fedorovich, here, taste the liqueurs. I put it myself...

– Why?” I will be glad, – the guest agreed.

\*\*\*

Mikhail, or, as Masha, Michelle called him more often, did not know Maria Petrovna for a very long time. More precisely, it all happened by accident, and not at a dinner party or reception, and recently, two years ago. Then the young man was sixteen, he read the written books about the wilds of America, and was simply carried away by the exploits of the Long Carbine, Nathaniel Bumpo. I must say that my grandfather somewhere found him a similar thing, wrote it out of America. Indeed, the gun looked very strange.

And now, this gun, along with a double-barreled nozzle, was sharpened to the saddle of the hefty Thunder, his horse. The hunter was dressed accordingly, in the outfit of the conqueror of the Wild West made of leather and suede.

The companion of the young master was Yakim Voinov, written off from the regiment on indefinite leave and accepted by Zalepsky, the eldest, as a batman for his younger son. Three more former cuirassiers lived in the estate, Ivan Etskov, Fedor Grigoriev and Evgraf Kolychev, all were foresters at work. Well, they kept order. Yakim Warriors was sick, and they thought that consumption was finishing him off. But, life on the estate, and not in a cool barracks, benefited the soldier, and the former cuirassier on cranberries, herbs, after a year fully recovered. So the former guardsman became the guardian of Mikhail, the only son, the hope of the family.

Zalepsky, the youngest, traveled around the forests with the inseparable Yakim, and on the border of the estate, was surprised to meet two girls in simple clothes and baskets. No, one of them was in a better dress, and not in peasant clothes. True, the land of the Terentyevs was already nearby, and the young man who knew about boundary disputes nevertheless asked the usual:

“Whose will you be?” – this Meleager inadvertently uttered a sharp phrase, and even his dog, Red, barked clearly condemning.

The youngest jumped up from the ground, blushing like a rosehip flower, and Mikhail just looked at this girl.

– How dare you? – this nymph answered in a quiet, but deep and pleasant voice, – Ya-Maria Petrovna Terentyeva, daughter of the owner of the estate Pyotr Fedorovich Terentyev!

Yakim shook his head, the young master hurried, and as it seemed to him, did it with some grace.

– Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky, the son of your neighbor, Dmitry Ivanovich Zalepsky, at your service.

Masha, looking around the attractive young man, changed her anger to mercy, gave her a kiss. And on this day, the test of the gun did not take place. Mikhail accompanied Maria Petrovna to their estate, which the peasant children were not slow to notice, and two of them rushed to the wooden wing of the manor's house. The young man was about to sit on his heroic horse, when suddenly he was called out by a man in a dressing gown, the same trousers and a velvet hat with a brush.

– Good afternoon, would you like to have some tea? asked the occupant of the house politely, “probably tired?”

– Good afternoon, – answered Zalepsky, – I will not refuse. Yakim! Look after Thunder, and tie Red!

The youth climbed a wooden porch staircase with carved balusters, with an entrance decorated with wooden columns. The house was made in a bizarre style, a certain mixture of Russian architecture and classicism.

The house was also not too richly decorated from the inside, but in the canopy there was a clock with a pendulum and a beautiful growth mirror. The door to the young man was opened by an old smiling servant, an elderly servant in a cute peasant outfit puts a tray with cups of hot tea on the table. Warm pies, with a blush crust, from the glazed dish filled this hall with indescribable aroma. Mikhail immediately felt hungry, he had been eating for a long time. A woman was sitting at the table, probably Masha's mother, and the girl herself. She hastily stood at the table, followed by her mother, not in a hurry. She was a prominent and beautiful woman, about forty years old.

– This is Mikhail, Mikhail Dmitrievich, – his girlfriend introduced him, – Pyotr Fedorovich, my dad, Elizaveta Vasilievna, my mother.

“Very glad,” the young man bowed and kissed the girl's mother's hand.

– We are very pleased with your visit, – said Terentyev, extending his hand for shaking, – taste what God sent.

Maria sat next to Mikhail, putting a treat on the dish, saying everything:

– Eat, Michelle. It's with meat, try it. With onions and eggs, and berry. Very good.

– A rider shouldn't overeat... And then even Thunder will be hard to wear me.

“I saw your horse. Danish breed? ‘asked the master of the estate, “Handsome! Coming to duty soon?”

– I passed the exams for the gymnasium, externally, Peter Fedorovich. In a year, my father will write to the regiment to accept me as a cadet. My grandfathers are still more engaged in the household, and they serve as a family business.

– Well, who doesn't know Rusov Mikhail Petrovich. A well-known person in the province, reversible and reasonable, – Terentyev nodded.

The porcelain of the mugs placed on the table was the simplest, the cutlery, albeit made of silver, was artless. But it was easy and pleasant here, the Terentyevs looked decent people and excellent interlocutors. They discussed everything – especially such a favorite literature, the landowners wrote out the *Sovremennik* magazine, so they read book novelties. In the house of the Zalepskys, “Russian Disabled” and “Exchange Statements” were honored.

Elizaveta Vasilievna poured tea to the guest every time with an indispensable smile, so the young man could not refuse another cup.

Soon the tea party ended, Michel thanked the cordial owners, and Maria decently saw off the guest, only to the door of the house. However, she managed to give a basket of pies with her, and the young man could not refuse. Yakim received his share, and from his father and mother for pies he received a tough suggestion for this treat. Not to Zalepsky's liking were small and poor neighbors.

But, soon, the young man and the girl began to see each other very often. Forests and meadows became their meeting places. They turned out to be the same age, they were sixteen years old. In total for Michel, and already whole for Maria.

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The Zalepsky family trusted Artamon Nikolaev very much, now a retired doctor of the Cavalier Guard regiment. He settled on the outskirts of Gdov with his wife. in a small house where he lived on retirement and the income of a medical practitioner. It was he who cured the already dying Mikhail Petrovich and Ivan Ivanovich with herbs. Consumption was not afraid of either medicine or doctors, but Artamon drove her away. Now the doctor often sat with the old people, laying out solitaire so beloved by them. And he himself was already quite middle-aged – fifty-nine years old. True, known in the regiment as almost a sorcerer, scared everyone in the house to death, or rather, only Mikhail Petrovich Rusov.

He loved old Rusov solitaire, and adored fortune-telling, even at the time when Artamon first arrived at the estate in Gdov. Then the wife of Mikhail Petrovich, the kindest Iraida Lvovna, was alive. The doctor, seeing the woman, turned pale, and did not hesitate to run to the owner of the estate. The servants could not believe their eyes when they saw how the master doctor was jumping along the corridors and stairs. He flew into the office without a report, and announced to the owner:

– Your wife is dying, you have only three months. If you give the opportunity, I can save your spouse.

– Enough for you, Mr. Nikolaev. Dmitry said that you are a magician, and he was saved from death, such a wound was healed. Yes, my Iraida Lvovna is healthy. She's fine. No, I understand that in the war you cured many, and you are knowledgeable in medical science. But no, it can't be! – and began to lay out the cards again.

– So you cards, more than I believe?

– Cards don't lie...

– I will spread the deck on Iraida Lvovna?

– What? Rusov jumped up.

– As the cards say, so be it?

– Okay, – Mikhail Petrovich answered after a minute's thought.

The doctor rolled up his sleeves, printed out the deck, and began to lay out the cards. In Rusov's eyes it darkened, and he closed them, and again muttered:

– It cannot be... – and leaned back, and mixed up the painted cards on the table.

– I went, I can't wait any longer, – Nikolaev said loudly, – it is necessary to treat immediately...

– I don't believe...

– As you know, – Nikolaev answered and went to the exit.

He quickly left the estate without looking back. Here, on the path, the silhouette of a tall doctor with a cane in his hand, like a black herald, was already visible. Artamon got into the wagon, his old servant slammed the reins, and a light two-wheeled doctor rolled along a dirt road, past the forest to the outskirts of Gdov.

Everything turned out, as Artamon Ilyich warned, old Rusov rushed to the doctor, but he could only now alleviate the suffering of the unfortunate.

It was after the death of Iraida Lvovna, at his request, that his wife and husband and son came to Rusov, and then Ivan Ivanovich Zalepsky. On a large estate, one old man was too lonely. True, Artamon Ilyich often came, checking the course of treatment. And Ivan Ivanovich, I must say, also appeared on time, so Dr. Nikolaev confirmed his fame, and treated both old people. Zalepsky Sr. had a mischievous heart, so his lips even turned blue. But, the most difficult collections of herbs, which the capital's doctors did not believe in, saved the elderly landowner from certain death. Now Dmitry Ivanovich was more engaged in commerce, although Rusov always went into business, helping his son-in-law.

Now the trinity often sat up for cards, laying out solitaire, and like many elderly people, friends were carried away by fortune telling. No, it was not a woman's muttering with candles in front of mirrors, but a man's, real, on the cards.

They remembered that evening forever... They stayed too long, and it was winter, the sun hid quickly. It darkened, in addition, black clouds hung above the ground. Artamon Grigorievich was going home.

– I'll go, my wife will worry, he said, about to bow.

“We'll send Timoshka. Here you spend the night, Artamon Grigorievich, – Rusov ordered, and immediately rang the bell.

Timothy, a middle-aged man with a big beard, in a Russian caftan, bloomers and chrome boots, quickly entered the room.

– Timothy! Do you know Dr. Nikolaev's house?

– How not to know...

– Tell his wife that Artamon Grigorievich stayed overnight at the Zalepskys, tomorrow morning it will be, did you understand?

Timothy bowed and went out, and Rusov turned to Artamon Nikolaev..

– You see, everything is in order. Why should you go in such and such bad weather? Come on, a couple more solitaire, and we drive teas, my pies, I know you love.

– Your tea is noble, Mikhail Petrovich, pies are even better, – the doctor agreed, – who will we guess at?

– I think it's necessary for my grandson, Mishenka...

Ivan Ivanovich frowned, looked at one and the other. Outside the window, yard dogs howled terribly, you can see seeing or sensing something invisible to people. It seemed that candles blinked in the room, heavy curtains slammed from the wind, and here, it was not clear from what, the window window window knocked deafeningly on the frame, almost breaking, so much so that everyone shuddered.

– Timka... – Mikhail Petrovich was angry, – I will ask him... Did not follow the window... It again the locks broke? The wind is strong... What are you doing? – the old man smiled, however, somehow crooked, – Really scared?

Ivan Ivanovich sat with his face white as snow, Artamon Ilyich squeezed his lips into a thread. Rusov, without losing his composure, got up from the chair, quickly walked to the window, closed the window and straightened the curtains. He took another shandal with three candles, lit it, and put it on the table.

– So it will be more visible... Nevertheless, open the cards, Artamon Grigorievich... I ask you!

“Whatever you say... Let's start, – the guest suddenly became serious, taking the inevitable.

He opened a new deck, tearing off the wrapper, and began to quickly lay out cards on the table, clicking sheets, one by one, without stopping for a second. Finally, the deed was done. All three did not look up... Rusov turned pale, as did Zalepsky Sr... Nikolaev lowered his eyes to the floor, and tugged at the cufflinks on his shirt, and quietly said:

– Spoke after all...

– They tell the truth about you, sorcerer... Nothing, Artamon, you're naughty! There is time, we will have time! We will not be left without great-grandchildren, Ivan Ivanovich!

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The dinner party continued, Rusov communicated with Terentyev with pleasure, Sofya Mikhailovna cheerfully discussed the economy with Elizaveta Vasilyevna, Ivan Ivanovich left the table, sat down in a chair and lit his favorite pipe.

– You, dear neighbor, can enter society. Your wastelands will remain with you, sow them in flax, and earn good money even in the first year. Merchants, flax buyers I have acquaintances. In a year or two we will build scallops and spinners, we will go uphill. You have a couple of streams of fast and rivulets on your estate, we will put water engines.

– Masters are needed for such wise things! Do you want a steam engine? Terentyev asked Rusova with a different expression.

– We'll go around the world with this thing. What is the price – and he expressively depicted with a gesture of hands – but to repair how, if anything? No, it's too early. Maybe in ten years you can buy steam, but now – nothing.

And we can handle water engines and mills. So Artamon Ilyich from Vologda, he has acquaintances and faithful people who are knowledgeable in this matter.

– It's a good thing, – Terentyev answered, after thinking a little, – I trust you, let the solicitor prepare the papers, Mikhail Petrovich.

– Here, you see, it's good that the young brought us together, Pyotr Fedorovich!

– Yeah... So soon the daughter of the groom needs to look... 'the guest began.

– It is of course, the young lady will soon be issued, – Rusov supported, – yes, here they are with my grandson, they have known each other for a long time...

“So they are the same age. Mikhail Dmitrievich will go to the service, while the point is yes, he will get married at twenty-five, and maybe even later.

Terentyev looked at the immediately darkened face of the grasping neighbor, and was surprised, however, did not give a look.

– How is Mashenka? – he continued, – It will come out of age...

– Why pull? – Rusov began his speech, – It will not be in the regiment in history to meet, settle down. So, I understand you don't mind, Pyotr Fedorovich? We need to sweeten this matter, otherwise in a year Mikhail needs to appear in the regiment as a cadet.

– So, – Terentyev sighed pretentiously sadly, – it is necessary to ask Maria Petrovna...

– It is of course, – Mikhail Petrovich nodded, looking at Michel and Masha, who spoke happily to each other, – I think that she will not resist her father's will. But at least too much.

– But one thing, serious, Mikhail Petrovich... I ask for help. Our neighbor is mischievous, – the landowner Terentyev became serious.

## Landowner-breaker

On the outskirts of the forest, branches trembled in dense bushes. Birds, doubtfully looked around the fluffy greens, shook their beaks, and sometimes spread their wings, preparing to take off. They suspected to see that there was someone among the branches, but hiding.

In the morning, early Michel went out into the yard, stretching, and rubbing his eyes. It was still early, the pipe was not smoking over the kitchen, which means that the cook Efrosinya had not yet melted the stove. The estate was still asleep, in a sweet dawn shower. He was rushing on the corner, next to the stable, and saw how Ivan Etskov, Fedor Grigoriev and Evgraf Kolychev, were taking horses out of the stable. And take off the guy – the shepherd, Maksimka. It seems to be nothing like that, but each had a gun with his back, and the pistols were holstered at the saddles. And everyone has old sabers on their belts. With a saber on the wolf went?

Michelle quickly ran to get dressed, but Yakim came to the noise. The young man managed to take a double-barreled gun and pistols, a gift from his grandfather.

– Where are you going, master? – asked the batman.

– So I'm going for a walk.

– I'm with you...

– What am I, young, Yakim?

– No, master, but not one thing...

So we left together, and Michel saw three former cuirassiers on the road, trotting towards the Terentyev estate

– Why are they going there?" the young man asked, thinking of the bad.

– Terentyev asked grandfather Rusov to help against the neighbor. The forest is stolen from him.

– We're with them. Yakim, – said young Zalepsky in a stern voice and drove the horse.

But after thinking, I decided not to rush, and stay at a distance so that my father would not complain. The young man mastered hunting excitement. Soon the forest began, vacationers dismounted, and Maximka led the horses. Three walked carefully, examined the clearing with stumps from sawn trees, and hid in the bushes. Yakim was left nearby with horses, and Michelle found shelter among the old trees.

I didn't have to wait long... A dozen carts drove up to the clearing, and there were fifteen men on them. Two had guns in their hands, they sat on stumps, and just talked about something and laughed. They were with saws and axes, and briskly set to work.

– Well, now we will laugh...

But he was ahead of his grandfather's foresters, Ivan Etskov and Fyodor Grigoriev, with guns aimed at men with weapons, came out of the bushes and ran very close.

“Put it on the ground, and do not spoil it,” Ivan ordered loudly.

The man tried to cock the trigger, but Etskov shot into the air, immediately taking out a pistol. The other immediately threw the gun into the grass, the first was thinking about everything.

– Do you want a bullet in the stomach? – Grigoriev asked gloomily, – you won't die right away, you will suffer...

Michel also ran up, and became a little from the side, grabbing a cart horse under the bridle, the owner of which tried to escape from the battlefield. The young man took out his loaded colt.

– Tie your hands, men... – he ordered, – we will go to the Terentyev estate.

– What are you, master... Our master. Apollo Zakharchenko, he will ask yours, “said one of the peasants who threw the gun.

“That's for sure,” another confirmed, “the captain is a police officer, Prokhor Kuzmich, he has teas every day.

– Let's see... – the young master yelled.

Soon the Terentyev people observed a funny picture – carts tied to carts, several bound peasants in carts, ahead of this caravan a master, and a servant, seemingly neighboring. Behind the carts were still those riders, with guns behind their backs and with sabers, and with them a boy on horseback. The guys enthusiastically ran after the creaking wheels, loudly hooting.

The yard man nimbly opened the gate, and the cavalcade ended up in the estate. The master Terentyev Pyotr Fedorovich personally met, Dressed in a homemade cap, a silk robe and indispensable Turkish shoes.

– Caught men – in batogi, scarb – in a manor pantry, – he sentenced.

– Oh, the master, – one of those who were with weapons spoke, – I would not have to regret...

Apollon Sokratovich will not suffer resentment..

Peter Fedorovich sneered unkind, and went closer to the lively adventurer.

– And to this – the whip. Ten strikes.

The serfs of Terentyev drove away the carts, put the horses in the stables, and began to sadly flog the caught. They beat slightly, for the sake of order. But the talking was courted by the blacksmith Silantius under the supervision of Terentyev himself.

Michelle, meanwhile, went to the estate, where Elizaveta Vasilievna fed the dear guest breakfast. Next to the young man sat and joyful Marya Petrovna.

“Thank you, you helped our neighbor’s peasant to cope,” the mistress of the house said, “good fellow, knight.”

– It is more father’s foresters work did, Elizaveta Vasilyevna.

“And thank you father. Yes, you eat, the pies are good, otherwise they will cool down.

Michel was very hungry, but looked more at Masha’s pink cheeks than ruddy pies.

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After lunch, they drove the Poroty thieves from the estate, and in the evening Apollon Sokratovich Zakharchenko himself appeared in person. The butler, or rather, just an old servant, reported the Terentyevs, and entered the modest living room of the house, no, this nobleman burst in.

Mr. Zakharchenko was above average height, his physique was dense, he was dressed up in the hussar uniform of the Leuchtenberg regiment, and judging by his uniform, he rose to the rank of captain. The face was round, decorated with a mustache. But to say that judging by his appearance, this is a vicious person – it was impossible, on the contrary, rather his appearance aroused sympathy.

– Pyotr Fedorovich, dear neighbor! – he began and laughed loudly, as if with joy, – it’s good that you taught my peasants. So they have nothing to steal someone else’s forest. But return the carts, return... It’s not neighborly.

– Apollon Sokratovich, – the owner answered firmly, – let them pay for the stolen goods, but for the offense – I’ll give the carts.

– After all, people of God, it is necessary to forgive them, as the Lord commands, Peter Fedorovich?

– So at the fair everywhere they demand money for their goods, and not for that they give it away.

– People scold what will happen, God forbid, – Zakharchenko added in a quiet voice, but with a green face with anger. – may burn your estate.

– To all God’s will, – Terentyev also answered with anger in his voice, – by their sins they will be rewarded.

– Such a thing, – and Apollon Sokratovich smiled broadly, – I widowed, I want to marry. If I grab your daughter, Marya Petrovna?

– I don’t know what to answer, – Pyotr Fedorovich, who was taken aback, was not found, – it is necessary to ask Mashenka.

“Think of my suggestions. Well, okay, I’ll go, otherwise the business, the farm cannot be left unattended for a long time.

Terentyev did not go to see off the guest, and Elizaveta Vasilievna did not even bring water to the landowner Zakharchenko.

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Michelle sat in the corner, and only listened to the conversation, did not interfere. Not the owner here, but the guest. The young man restrained her when he heard the words about the matchmaking of this robber. But as soon as Zakharchenko came out, the young man stood up impetuously and approached Terentyev, who was sitting in a chair.

– The police officer must report, let him punish the villains.

– He won't be engaged in such trifle. I already applied, but no use. Our police officer is hunting with Zakharchenko, and Apollo regularly loses to him at cards. And I was not the only one to complain – he steals from everyone, the Tartishchevs took the sheep away. Well, your father is afraid – very rich, but influential friends, comrades in the regiment.

– If so, we will guard. Man, judging by the habits, cocky, wants to get even. Here we will grab him.

– It's not for one day, Mikhail Dmitrievich. At once and do not dare to do this.

And for sure, they sat under the bushes, Michelle and their father's foresters, four of them every night for a week on the convenient path of the Terentyev forests, but here...

Michelle had already fallen asleep, and barely heard the rustle of the bushes, and a quiet conversation:

– On both sides we will wait, and we will burn the estate, who will run – those knives. Good everything will go to you, and I have a girl, Mary.

“You'll be lost with her, sir. And how will he tell whom? Do not blow your heads then.

“Don't be cowardly, Leonty. Robbery requires courage. Everything is sweet, but other silk neighbors will be, everyone will be afraid of me.

– Let's go, it's decided... ‘another robber replied.

Michelle grabbed the gun, but Ivan Etskov raised his finger to his mouth, calling for silence, and whispered:

– We'll finish everyone in the clearing at once. Exterminate the robbers! The police officer will free us, and punish us.

“We'd better not...

Fedor Grigoriev and Evgraf Kolychev, taking the guns, moved to the left, and Zalepsky and Ivan Etskov stood on the right. They did not warn, but immediately began to shoot. Michel fired first from one Colt, then from another. Eight bodies remained on the ground. Olin tried to crawl into the bushes, leaving a bloody trail on the grass, almost black at night. But Evgraf cut the wounded throat with the tip of a saber. The young man removed one revolver and took out another. He looked, as bewitched, at the lying dead body of Zakharchenko, into which he fired four bullets.

– Now the master, we will drown them all in the swamp, – said Fedor Grigoriev, who was silent for the time being, – we will take the weapons and money.

– Do, just faster, Michel said, crouching on a fallen tree.

He looked at his hands, which now seemed sticky, as if they were covered in blood. He turned his palms up and down, clenched his hands into fists, and could not calm down. Well, at least they did not shake, and their knees did not bend.

## Marriage of Michael

Mikhail was always a welcome guest with the Terentyevs, however, even Pyotr Fedorovich did not ask about the case with the neighboring landowner, and where he disappeared. The young man denied everything, turned away and did not speak.

– Well, it's in the swamp, – Terentyev said, laughing.

Zalepsky directly distorted from such words, recalling how former soldiers drowned naked corpses in the swamp, and they did not want to drown. Nearby was a fire that scared away mosquitoes, on which the robbers' clothes burned out. All of them were smeared with swamp slurry then, just from head to toe...

So, changing anger to mercy, Rusov seized the bride for his grandson. The young man did not know anything about this yet, and studied the photographic camera. The description was in English, but he knew the language, and already began to carry this box on a tripod, and took a photo of all the household, moreover, their portraits took place in the estate hall. Although, of course, the portraits were small in size – several inches, but were processed by young men according to the latest system. Now Mikhail has prepared an apparatus to make a portrait of Maria Petrovna.

– Do you have such a new thing?" I only read about her in the magazine.

– Grandfather wrote out. That I would walk less in the forests. You'll have to freeze for almost a minute now. So that the picture turns out.

Masha nodded, however, not too hiding pleasure. None of her acquaintances were filmed on a photographic plate. The picture was ready, and Zalepsky was getting ready for himself.

– We must go home, – he made excuses, and quickly got into a heap, putting things there, chasing the horse, went to his estate.

The wagon slipped into the gate, Yakim took the horse under the bridle, and the young man, with a large suitcase, climbed the stairs, where relatives and friends were waiting for him. The mother came forward, for some reason wiping away her tears.

– What happened? Mikhail was a little taken aback.

– We thought, son, marry you,, What is it? The young one needs to live in happiness, not wait for old age.

– So to serve me until I reach the ranks... That would be a good salary. Yes, and young I still...

– She does not give special income to the generals, if not to steal, of course, – my father said judiciously, – I myself know, I served. Are we going to get poorer? We have a decent income, we will manage.

– Yes, I don't want to, – I didn't know what the young man was going to think, – I'm not ready, right word.

– Not anyhow, – Rusov's grandfather shook, – she is both clever and beautiful. The best bride of our province, in beauty, of course.

– Yes, I love another, – blushing, answered Mikhail, – Maria Petrovna Terentyeva, the daughter of our neighbor. She promised me to wait until I got into the captains.

“That's how they grabbed her,” the mother smiled, “that's how it will be better for you.”

– Mamenka, – whispered the son, kissing the woman on the cheek.

So a month later, the wedding was played. The guests were surprised how the Zalepskys decided to intermarry with the Terentyevs, and the only son of Dmitry Ivanovich married so early. But, no one wanted to ask, so as not to quarrel with the hot-tempered owners.

Soon Maria Petrovna was already in a position, having delighted her husband's family more than himself, who was preparing to take the exam for a cadet in the regiment.

## Cavalier Guard Regiment

### Service to the sovereign

Mikhail Dmitrievich, presenting documents, and a letter from the regiment commander, Colonel Bezobrazov, to the duty officer, dismounting, walked along the edge of the parade ground, to the central entrance to the regiment barracks. Here, on foot, in full uniform, tall soldiers in shiny bronze cuirasses and the same helmets practiced perestroika. Wahmister kept order in the ranks.

– And, once! ‘he yelled.

Flutes whistled piercingly, drums beat out the rhythm. And the soldiers pulled their foot, practicing the parade step. The cavalry guards marched simply excellently. Michel once again turned to the statues of Mars and Bellona, mentally asking them for patronage in a new place. The horses were led by Yakim, who now returned to his native regiment as the young master’s clerk. Well, the courtyards in the brick at the gate were waiting with things. Yakim could not carry two suitcases, three guns and a camera at once.

There was a sentry at the entrance who called the unter. The tall Fruntovik, above the rather big Zalepsky by a whole head, looked at the documents and said:

“Come after me.

At the office he was met by an officer on duty, whom the non-commissioned officer famously trumped, and left the escort.

– let me introduce myself. Lieutenant Tomin Grigory Ilyich.

– Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky, should introduce himself to the regiment commander and take a junker exam.

– Come on, the commander of the seventh training squadron is just here. He is also the senior over the cadets of the regiment.

Lieutenant Tomin walked the young man to the table, at which sat the colonel, an impressive and fit officer.

– Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky, – the young man called himself, and handed the documents on attestation to the officer, and his father’s letter.

– Colonel Alexander Alexandrovich Esipov, commander of the seventh squadron, – called the owner of the office.

The colonel studied the attestation for a long time, but without much interest, but immediately revived when he saw a letter from a retired captain.

– Dmitry Ivanovich’s son?

– Exactly, the only one.

– Would they have told me what these papers were for? Well, they arrived without hesitation, only two vacancies of cadets remained. You know that after exams not every cadet becomes a cornet of the regiment? – and he looked strictly at Michel, – I don’t ask about funds, I’ve heard about your family. Our service is not easy, and it is not cheap.

– Of course. I hope to be among the best, and stay in the regiment.

– I will be glad and rely on your efforts. The Wahmister will guide you, settle down, – said the headquarters officer, and again buried himself in circulars.

Near the entrance stood a representative non-commissioned officer, with stripes for twenty-five years of service, in a perfectly fitted uniform and cavalier guard forage cap without a visor. A white single-breasted colet, not a gray tunic for work, was on it, and the instrument white buttons simply shone.

– Vakhmister of the seventh squadron Gorshkov Gavrila Prokhorovich, – the servant introduced himself, – let’s go and show you your room.

Michelle just nodded, and followed the guide. The apartment building of the regiment’s chief officers was slightly smaller than the barracks for soldiers. Vakhmister walked to the rooms assigned to the Junkers.

“That’s where you’ll be lodging. Two rooms – one for you and cadet Replin, the other for your employees. It is forbidden to cook food in the room, the samovar on duty puts every hour, you have an alcohol for coffee. The schedule for junkers is posted at the bottom.

And, the wakhmister left the room, and Zalepsky went into a large room with two beds, a table, two chairs and two cabinets. There was alcohol on the windowsill. The situation was quite simple, but picturesque – on a bed made with a soldier’s cloth blanket, a young man rested, dressed at home, and read a small book. Velvet cap with a brush, the same color jacket with it, velvet dark pants, of course, barefoot. Suede soft Turkish shoes sat next to the bed.

– Let me recommend – Junker Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky.

Lying smiled with a pleasant half smile, put on his shoes and got up.

– Agree, I couldn’t introduce myself without shoes, – he smiled again and got up, – Nikita Georgievich Replin, cadet. You’re on time. In three days, classes will begin, will you have time to sew uniforms?

– Yes, everything was sewn on the estate, – Mikhail smiled, – Yakim, bring suitcases and spread out your uniform.

The batman nimbly laid out the master’s things, and put in the corner a suitcase with a camera, a Ramsay nozzle and a hunting nozzle. I put the box with two revolvers on the chest of drawers.

“Thank you,” Zalepski said.

Nikita was now intrigued to death himself, only a brush of a velvet cap, now hanging on the owner’s forehead, gave out excitement. The future officer tried to restrain himself, did not show the appearance that he was so interested..

– I would be glad if we switched to “you,” – Mikhail turned to a new acquaintance, – at home my name is usually Michelle.

– Excellent, – said Nikita, – it’s easier. My name is Nikita, so call it. You look, avid shooter – two great fittings. And this... – and he pointed to the box – revolvers? I brought mine too. Yes, by the way, my batman is called Prokhor.

– My Yakim, he is one of the former soldiers, – Zalepsky boasted.

Then Replin finally got up and put down his revolver. The model is similar, also Colt, as Michelle immediately saw.

– So how do you like it?

– For accurate shooting better, of course, dueling Belgian. Better barrel treatment. But these, yes. If we go to war.

– Do you think there will be a war, Nikita?

– Napoleon became emperor of France like an uncle. He will want, of course, to shine. Where? – and he spread his hands picturesquely – most likely where the First was torn. That is, he will go to Mother Russia. Where to? Maybe he will try to St. Petersburg, or to the Crimea. Kamchatka, agree, is not solid somehow. Well, if our diplomats have the intelligence to seduce this Napoleon with Constantinople, then we will not fight. Okay. And what is there?

– Camera...

– Yes, you are a brother, and I walked around! With my trotters! Now all the maids of honor are ours!

– Yes, I, you know, Nikita...

– What?

“I’m married.

– What are you? Well, okay, married – not a gate, wait, wait. Where do you have it? I hope not in St. Petersburg?

– In the estate, in Gdov.

– Nothing, do not be sad. Lunch is coming, “he said, glancing at the breget.

Michelle, not wanting to blunder, took out his watch, looked at the time. The young man changed his clothes behind a screen, wearing a military frock coat, decent for the house.

They went to the dining room. Nikita was already in shape, and Michelle is now in uniform. They walked to the officer’s dining room, where there was a separate table for the regiment’s cadets. There were ten cadets in total, and only six should have remained cornets in the regiment.

## New friends

Not quite familiar after the free estate living in a stone huge four-story house. The bat was lit with lanterns, junkers were forbidden to burn candles once again, everyone was afraid of fires. Well, it is in St. Petersburg after the forests of the Pskov region was a little hard. The building was still damp and cold, although the stokers tried with might and main.

City baths went. Once a week, as if on schedule, the attendants carried change of linen behind the bars. In the dressing room, Michelle undressed, and saw with what eyes his friends were looking at him.

“Is that where you are?” Nikita exhaled directly.

– Torn... tiger? -with the look of a connoisseur asked Alexey Tokmakov.

– Just a bear, Michel replied, earning respectful nods from his comrades.

But I didn't have to get bored in the regiment either. In the morning they were taken to the arena, but what is more difficult, the dressage was with regimental horses, not personal ones. The keeper of the regiment lined up his charges, and they went the usual allure for cuirassiers, on a trot. On command, they stopped a step without falling out of order. Everyone here was skillful horsemen, but Golitsyn stood out, and von Rosen was just as good. Tokmakov Alexey also kept well in the saddle, and Nikolai Leskov and Grigory Loparev and Michel's friend Nikita Repnin. Nosov and Kruglov, Bukhvostov, were all good riders.

Bereitor taught not only to control the horse, but to keep the system. rebuild, and do not fall out of rows during rebuilding.

Michel attached a seven-year-old stallion, bay, regimental suit of the regiment. The horse's nickname was Gunpowder, and it was quite suitable for him. He was lively, responded well to orders, fast and sharp.

After classes, they drove into the stables, where Zalepsky dismounted, took Gunpowder to his pen, and went to visit his Thunder. He stroked the horse, fed him crackers, looked at the groom, Ilya. The non-combatant was diligent, and the horses were fine, cleaned out, sleeping in fresh hay. Michel took out the one, and gave it to the servant.

– For your work, look after it properly

“We know the service,” Ilya replied. – don't hesitate

Junker delved into the service, and in turn Zalepsky went to help the regiment duty officer. In the morning, Michelle checked how Yakim prepared the colet, boots, crags. Junker looked in the mirror, looked at his funny while barely growing whiskers and liquid light mustache. Prokhor also engaged in the uniform of his master.

– everything is great. The uniform is in order, – Nikita supported, – soon the divorce, Lieutenant Shulga does not like to wait.

– I'll go...

For the first time, Zalepsky was worried of course. But then the lieutenant came out, nodding at him along the way. Michel followed Grigory Semenovich Shulge. So they are on the square, next to the guardhouse, where the famous money cart stood. She had yesterday's duty officer on the regiment, staff captain Tulev Vasily Ivanovich. The officers saluted each other, the junker froze at attention, waiting for the completion of the ritual.

The lieutenant checked the seals on the wagon, and the non-commissioned officer, the senior guard, reported to him, and the squadrons on duty began to report. Zalepsky remembered everything, imagining how he himself would serve.

Grigory Semenovich went to the barracks, Zalepsky followed, rattling his heels on the stones of the parade ground. The regiment duty officer bypassed the locations of all squadrons, receiving

reports from the duty officers. The daytime was well served, everywhere it was clean and tidy. Shulga approached the soldiers and said hello.

– Hello, brothers! ‘he said quietly.

– Good morning, your nobility! – the soldiers answered together.

The privates looked very strict. Working tunic and ratings, low boots, fodder hats made up the outfit of cavalry guards.

– Remember, junker. It is not customary for a regiment to raise its voice to soldiers, much less beat them. Even the rank and file is personally selected by the sovereign himself, you will understand over time.

Michel tried to remember everything, the instructions of the officers, the laws of the regiment.

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The Junkers themselves were trained as young soldiers. They were only instructed not by Wahmisters, but exclusively by officers of the seventh squadron. Now they went to the arena, to engage in fencing and shooting. He led the cadets to the headquarters classes – captain Savelyev Kirill Mikhailovich. Junior non-commissioned officer Tereshchenko closed the column, with two guns behind him.

Manege left the second squadron of the regiment, which finished dressage. Manege’s soil, a mixture of sawdust and sand, stored prints of hooves and horseshoes of heavy cuirassier horses.

The staff captain placed the young men in a checkerboard pattern, so that every cadet would see him. The officer drew his broadsword, and commanded:

“Bare the blades! Repeat after me! Cover your left cheek! Left if, right cut!

Junkers followed Savelyev’s orders, training lunges, strikes and protection with the cuirassiers’ main weapon. Despite the cold, mid-autumn, everyone turned red, the cadets got hot.

They trained the brush by holding the blade in front of them in an outstretched hand. So, they fenced until the staff captain ordered to stop. But now, the non-commissioned officer brought a table on which he put two guns.

– Well, junkers. These are capsule guns, not nozzles, it is more convenient to load them. Remember the commands for loading. Now the gun is ready to fire. Tereshchenko, hang the target. Well. who is our best shooter? I heard about Zalepsky as a noble hunter. We shoot with you.

Michel went out, took a gun, and stood next to the lieutenant.

– Aim! ‘the officer ordered.

The young man took up the forearm with his left hand, and out of habit checked the capsule.

“Your nobility! Primer!

– Well done, junker, – said Kirill Mikhailovich, – you check everything, a good officer will get out of you. Tereshchenko, capsules!

Unter brought shock – igniting devices to everyone, and now, shots broke out, and gray smoke filled the room. Savelyev, putting a gun at the table, went to the target. Michel was so agitated and kept his gun at his foot.

The lieutenant examined the results of the shooting, and returned, already with a satisfied smile.

– Above all praise, Zalepsky. It was not for nothing that they praised your skill that you are a shooter and a noble hunter. So you will go to the commanders of the flankers.

Michelle smiled rather, but somehow not for very long. Savelyev found a talent case. He appointed him to help train junkers in whole shooting, and then firing pistols.

But most of all, of course, they taught horseback riding, and today the junkers were waiting for the show jumping. The horses were, of course, official.

– Kirill Mikhailovich, why can’t you ride your horses? – asked the lieutenant restless Nikita, – it would be easier.

– Here, junker, it is important that you can handle any horse. Anything can happen in battle. Ask Zalepsky, his father about the company of 1812, I suppose he told everyone. Or Golitsyn and von Rosen.

“Michelle, what did my father say?” The most memorable thing?

Junker remembered his father’s stories, rubbing his forehead over the visor of a copper helmet.

– Fights near Polotsk. The first battle where he was wounded, the autumn assault on the city in the fall by militias...

– So, the man’s city recaptured from the French? Rosen shook.

– Infantry regiments with huntsmen did not manage the French army during the day. The militia took Polotsk by night assault. Seine-Cyr could barely escape. Yes, in Germany, Blucher had half of the army from the Landsturm, – added Michel, – Leipzig... There, the British used missiles for the first time... Kulm, and Fer – Champenoise, of course.

– Does cuirass help with bullets? Repnin asked again.

– He keeps a hundred steps for sure, – Zalepsky assured, – near Fer – Champenoise only one officer was killed, and what was the battle!

– Well, we talked, it’s time to start, – said Savelyev.

Show jumping, all this is newfangled English stuff. The matter was not easy, and everyone managed to fall more than once or twice in the sand, so everyone learned to go through these races well only by the summer, when the regiment went to Summer apartments, to Peterhof.

But the cadets continued their studies, sat in the saddles again, and repeated the lessons of controlling the horse. It’s one thing, nevertheless, it’s free to drive around the fields of your estates, another thing is to move in rows, or learn to jump over obstacles.

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After a difficult day, Michelle wanted to read a little for the night. A lamp with a green lampshade, a book, in an elegant binding, a soothing rustle of pages. But – in his free time, when it was not necessary to memorize “Instructions”... or “Field exercises of cavalry.”

Nikita was equipped to perform feats. His outfit was flawless, but in fact, he could not go at night in a cavalry guard stake? He was not alone in the sortie, Nikolai Leskov and Grigory Loparev were going to go with him. They had to go to Gorokhovaya, visit a tavern, where they really fed them perfectly. Nikita wanted to drag his friends to the Bolshoi Theater, to the actresses, but everyone decided that it was definitely too much. The batman, Prokhor, remained here too.

– Michelle, we went, Repnin said quietly.

– I will try to cover, – Zalepsky honestly promised, – if the duty officer checks if everything is in place.

This time, the turn of Zalepsky and Golitsyn was to remain in the disposition. This kind of thing was done by the chief officers of the regiment. Including there were indispensable trips to the actresses of the Alexandrinsky Theater. In these actions there was also a certain chic of the guards officers, especially the Big Four Preobrazhensky, Kavalergardsky, Konnogvardeisky and Semenovskiy. I must say that these cases corresponded to the spirit of the regiment, as was even believed by the chiefs of the guard regiments. The guard officer must be lych, cocky and not afraid of dangers, and most importantly, that he would be devoted to the sovereign. And if he does not commit extravagances in peacetime, then he is not capable of desperate deeds in war. The loyalty of the cavalry guards was absolute, and everyone knew it. Willingness to fight anyone, anytime – also known. But duels, fights in the regiment were not encouraged, and the guilty were sent without regret to serve in other regiments.

But Michelle was not bored – the library of the regiment was excellent, and he got new French magazines, tried to find something new about the Vincennes Rifle School. Zalepsky tried to track all the fresh innovations in the matter of weapons. Soon, closer to twelve, he went to bed.

The next morning, when climbing, Repnin was in place, cheerful and smiling. He, lying on the bed, took off his velvet cap from his head, smiled broadly, and said hello:

– Good day, Michelle! Well, next time you're with us... Great place, I'll tell you. What a meat hodgepodge... And open up...

– And here cabbage soup is excellent, and porridge.

– Well, you say, – and Nikita jumped out of bed, – however, there is not long left before Christmas. Empress Maria Fedorovna will come to personally congratulate the maids of honor, and he winked at Michel.

“Yes, I'm married, actually.

“So many of them are married. So what? Bring the overcoat! Nikita shouted to the batman.

It was already getting cold, and their regimental commander, Major General Bezobrazov Sergey Dmitrievich, ordered to wear overcoats.

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Things were approaching December, the days were getting shorter, and there was not much time left for service. It was almost impossible to do military work under the light of smoky lights, so life in the regiment really froze at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

There were changes to the regiment. At the construction of the regiment on December 6, 1851, the ladle Bezobrazov introduced a new commander, Colonel Alexander Ivanovich Brevern de la Gardie.

But the holiday was also expected – Christmas. The soldiers checked their uniforms so as not to hit the dirt in front of the empress, the august chief of the regiment.

The location of the regiment was decorated with spruce and spruce branches, and now, it jumped on purpose that the empress's motorcade was on the way. Yes, actually, it is not far to get from the Winter Palace to Shpalernaya Street.

Junkers were behind the officers in the ranks of the seventh squadron. The squadron commander once again examined the slender rows of his cuirassiers, and was pleased with everything.

– Wahmister! – he shouted, – open the windows in the location, very stuffy!

“That's right, Your Excellency! – shouted the non-commissioned officer, and began to execute.

Alexander Alexandrovich once again went around the location, examined all the corners, did not say a word. Colonel Esipov now stood at the head of the squadron, adjusting his hat on his head.

But then Alexandra Fedorovna came up, followed by the division commander Essen, and her maids of honor. Zalepsky tried to look in front of him, but it was impossible to break away from such beauties in beautiful dresses decorated with jewelry.

The colonel approached the empress and reported:

– The seventh squadron of the Cavalier Guard regiment is built, Your Majesty!

– Thank you, Alexander Alexandrovich. Is everything all right, are there many patients?

– No way, there are two in the infirmary, they are recovering, thank God.

– Happy holiday to you, Alexander Alexandrovich, – said the wife of Nikolai Pavlovich, and handed over a basket of gifts, – Happy holiday to you, gentlemen officers! 'she also congratulated the squadron officers, while the ladies-in-waiting presented gifts to each. Her Majesty passed the rows of young cuirassiers.

– Merry Christmas, glorious warriors! 'she congratulated the soldier.

– Merry Christmas, Empress! the guardsmen answered loudly and completely.

The soldiers of the guards regiments, at least the oldest, were considered almost members of the imperial family, and not just nameless soldiers, and the Romanovs treated them accordingly.

Ladies-in-waiting and ministers gave untermen gifts to distribute to soldiers. The empress approached the cadets, and looked at the future officers with a pleasant smile.

– Merry Christmas Junker!

– Merry Christmas, Your Majesty!

– How do you like the service, future officers?

– We are glad to serve the sovereign, Your Majesty! Repnin replied loudly.

– How are you, well done? the empress asked Zalepsky.

“A worthy cause, Your Majesty. That’s my duty. A nobleman must serve!

“Well said, young man. And you will find a good service.

Alexandra Fedorovna went further, the maids of honor stopped at the cadets. One, in a blue silk dress, gave two baskets to Repnin. Nikita, of course, tried to shine in front of the beauty.

– Mademoiselle, let me introduce myself – Nikita Repnin, cavalry guard.

“Yes, I know that,” the maid of honor smiled, “the empress arrived at the Cavalier Guard regiment.

– Really?

– The Horse Guards were also very kind...

– But we are all the best, Mademoiselle... For example, my friend, Michel Zalepsky, is the best shooter in the entire guard.

The girl saw with interest the reddened cadet, who was hardly given not only communication with a socialite, but even just look at this brilliant beauty.

“Yes, your friend is very modest,” and she lifted the fan to her face, “as she blushed...

– So, on the other hand, I went to the bear alone, – the young lady Repnin intrigued, – and for two hundred steps any target from a gun or a pistol.

– The empress liked the young man... If that, here is my card, – and the maid of honor put a piece of cardboard in Michel’s hand, – Olga Pleshcheeva, And Ksenia Lopukhina is waiting for you, young man, – and she nodded at the maid of honor in a purple dress, struggling not to look at Repnin, – So how? Are you really familiar with her?

Repnin’s face became a color, like an officer’s tunic of a cavalry guard, worn only for a guard in the Winter Palace. But, as you can see, Lopukhina was like Repnina, and was not used to retreating. The girl gathered herself, and as if gluing a light smile to her lips, approached the ranks, and making a deliberately kind look, greeted the cadets, not forgetting Golitsyn, von Rosen, Alexei Tokmakov Nikolai Leskov and Grigory Loparev, Nosov and Kruglov, Bukhvostov. Three more girls came up to be kind, so the junkers considered the holiday doubly happy.

Repnin just petrified, and looked only in front of him. Finally, the empress left the location of the squadron, heading to the infirmary.

– Freely! – the command of Colonel Esipov sounded, – disperse! An hour later, a festive lunch in the dining room! The empress favors ordinary people for a pound of meat, and a glass of vodka! Gifts to soldiers – silver will be distributed in silver!

“Everything will work out, Nikita,” Zalepsky tried to talk to his friend.

– Michelle, Ksenia... – he spoke with difficulty.

– Meet, talk. Make peace...

– Listen, Michelle... – Repnin revived, – after all, Olga Pleshcheeva gave you a business card, and she is in great honor with the empress. If Pleshcheeva says a word, then Ksenia will change her anger to mercy.

– Yes, I barely know this maid of honor...

– Nothing, you will see that Colonel Esipov took you on a pencil. Leave in the regiment. But no, so they will determine the adjutants to the first cuirassier division, you will serve all one in the Cavalier Guard regiment, but they will not let you out of St. Petersburg, you will remember my words.

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The New Year passed, and this winter in the capital was not slush. Severe frosts hit, but it was warm in the barracks, and the regimental commander did not freeze the soldier in vain on the street. Junker in the evenings was examined once a week by taverns and tea houses, but they still considered the establishment on Gorokhovaya the best, where the food was simply excellent.

– What will you do, Nikita, when we get cornet epaulettes. It will not be possible to come here? – Alexey Tokmakov urged Repnin.

– So Michel and I go to Dupp...

– For a hodgepodge or open?

– Alexey, your questions always just upset... I will eat at home... I'll write the cook out of the my. I'm not a big fan of turtle soup, unlike Serge Golitsyn.

“And onion soup is incomparable,” Serge added, “in an officer's artel, good dinners are set...

“Everything is better than that of the Horse Guards, where they drink from Thursday to Thursday,” added Mikhail Fridrikhovich von Rosen, “everything is different there, either with envy or with regret, the baron added.

“One thing I don't understand, why didn't you go to the horse guard yourself?” Golitsyn forged the German, “are there yours alone?”

“I don't understand your question,” von Rosen boiled, “do you think I am unworthy to serve in the regiment?”

– Enough, – Zalepsky intervened, – we are all friends, why are we quarreling?

– In the Horse Guard, Michel, their own order... And since 1825, the horse guards look askance at us, – added Serge Golitsyn.

“What is it?”

– They went to Senate Square in marching order, with cuirasses, helmets. Our regiment went out, as if for an ordinary review, only with broadswords, and we were not allowed into business. So they were under suspicion later. Let's see what will happen again in Peterhof between ours and the horse guards. So sometimes it looks funny, just like Dumas in *The Three Musketeers*.

– So in the company of 1812 and in the overseas campaign they covered each other's backs?

– Eh you, Michelle..., That just happened... Some families serve for years in the Cavalier Guards, others in the Horse Guards, and third in the Preobrazhentsy. But you yourself understand, to serve in the infantry...

– But some do not serve at all, like the Demidovs?

– They are not accepted anywhere in good houses, even the wealth of the former kunets did not help. Now the princes of San Donato have become, everyone is laughing here, so they live in Italy.

– But now they usually serve as such – the lieutenant of the guard will receive, and in the civil service, a career to do. You will go out to the officers, you will see enough at the regimental festival. But you are great, – and he patted the junker on the shoulder, – Olga Pleshcheeva herself noted you. It's bad that you are married, otherwise you would have married the bride. Olga Nikolaevna, a young widow, is only eighteen years old, and she loves to arrange the life of young people who she liked. A small circle of pleasant people gathers in her house, and everyone values her society very much.

– I love Maria Petrovna, and we already have a son, Pyotr Mikhailovich.

– All this is strange, do not judge strictly for my words, I do not understand what your father and mother are up to. Many are sent to our regiment to find richer brides for their sons. Well, if you are not Apraksin, not Repnin, not Urusov or Yusupov or Sheremetev.

“Or not Golitsyn,” Zalepsky smiled.

– Also true...

So they sat in this tavern and ate the legendary fish pies, drinking them with beer, as a man entered the tavern, and immediately went to the junker table.

– Good afternoon, gentlemen. A letter for Mr. Zalepsky, into his own hands.

– I am Zalepsky, – the young man called himself and extended his hand

Vestovoy carefully looked at the junker, at his friends, with wide smiles on their faces, and gave a blue envelope sealed with wax.

The inscription on the envelope, in beautiful handwriting, read:

Michel Zalepsky in his own hands

Junker opened the envelope, where on the pink perfumed paper there was a short note:

**I will be glad to see you on Thursday, by all means come. You will be released from the regiment, do not hesitate. You can take your friend with you, he will be glad.**

**Olga Pleshcheeva**

The young man hid the letter in the sleeve of his uniform, tried to make a misunderstood face, but his lips seemed to stretch out in a smile, like a birch sprouting through a stone.

– I bypassed everything, I won everyone, – Nikolay Leskov urged the comrade.

“Go away without fail,” Serge said quietly, “such ladies do not tolerate carelessness.” Sit, entertain society. Such an invitation does not oblige you to anything. People are pleasant there, writers, poets, artists. By itself, and Svitsky, close to the sovereign.

– Have you been there? In the house of Olga Nikolaevna?

– We have a slightly different circle, although it was accepted by Pleshcheyeva. Then we’ll go to the Sheremetevs as we go out to the cornets.

By evening, friends returned to the regiment, remained not far from the end. Nikita slowly undressed, but Sun was also not cheerful. He sat down on the table, lit a candle, and began to pore over the paper, diligently displaying the letters. Finally, he finished, gave the letter to the batman, put twenty kopecks on the cab driver.

“A letter again?”

– Again...

“Come on Thursday with me, let’s walk, after six at noon,” Michel suggested, “one is not so much fun. We go to Gerard’s coffee shop.

– Fit... Thursday is tomorrow?

“Tomorrow we are going!

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The day in the regiment ended early in winter, and Repin and Zalepsky began to dress. Nikita was surprised to see how carefully Yakim prepares the master’s uniform, and Michel himself puts on a colet instead of a vice-uniform. Repnin grinned, dressed also.

“Is it to the coffee shop?”

– We are cavalry guards, Nikita, we must shine. Yakim! pack up, get out! Zalepski shouted.

– Prokhor! – Nikita called the batman, – clean the prick and bring it.

So Repnin also put on a colet, an officer’s scarf, checked the still barely growing whiskers, and was quite pleased with his appearance.

They dressed in overcoats, quickly passed through the entrance gate, trumping the guard. The second guard was surprised, and asked a comrade:

– What released? Let’s sit on the guardhouse...

– According to the note of Colonel Esipov, – and the cuirassier showed a letter written on gray paper.

Another nodded, and adjusted the belt, sheathed in bronze, a copper helmet on his head, and calmly stood next to a friend.

A cozy carriage drove junkers along the snowy streets of St. Petersburg. Nikita tried to see through the window where they were going.

– Michelle, are you sure the cabman made no mistake on the road?

– Nikita, you are in vain worried. He won’t bring it to the Winter Palace.

After a short time, the carriage stopped, and the coachman shouted:

“We’ve arrived!

Repin with Zalepsky and the batman came out of the carriage, Nikita looked around, not understanding where they were.

– At Pleshcheeva’s house.. We are invited.

– However...

– Let’s go, we are expected.

They passed by a footman who opened the door for them, and then escorted the cadets of the cadets, Yakim and Prokhor, to the people’s house. In the canopy, guests took overcoats and hats, and swords too. They stopped at the mirror, waved their shoes from the snow, put themselves in order.

The butler announced them:

– Gentlemen Zalepsky and Repnin!

The front hall of the house was not very large, there were sofas against the walls, on which guests of Olga Nikolaevna, gentlemen and ladies sat. There was a table for playing cards, at which fortune seekers sat. There was also a table for drinks and snacks, where there was a small selection of wines. From time to time, the violin quartet filled the room with quiet, but wonderful music.

The hostess of the house walked towards the guests, in all the brilliance of unsurpassed beauty.

– I am very glad to you Mikhail Dmitrievich and Nikita Andreevich! I’m sure you’ll have a good time.

She took Michel’s hand, Nikita walked nearby, studying the guests and nodding to friends.

– Olga Nikolaevna... said the young man quietly.

– Oh, not otherwise Ksenia Alexandrovna? ‘the hostess nodded, “I am now, Michelle...”

And she rested, like a beautiful butterfly, to a new flower. Maid of honor approached Lopukhina, and they quickly and emotionally, but quietly, spoke for about five minutes. Repnin stood, not taking his eyes off this scene. Finally, the two ladies approached the cadets, both nodding at Xenia.

– Michelle, I want to show you a beautiful picture, – said Pleshcheyeva, smiling, and took the taken young man to another room.

Repin stayed with Lopukhina, but it was obvious that other people nearby were now unnecessarily. Pleshcheeva was not going to let Zalepsky go, and it was true that she showed him a good collection of paintings.

– These are the students of Leonardo da Vinci, 16th century, Italy, – she said, pointing to the canvases, – Here, France, 18th century. Scenes of hunting so beloved by you. This is Watteau, just recently bought.

This, of course, was a repeatedly embellished reality. A motorcade of ladies and gentlemen, dogs, a bright forest.

“Beautiful,” Michelle agreed, trying not to stare at the beautiful woman, although the aroma of her perfume was quite intrusive.

But it was impossible not to watch. The perfect oval of the face, expressive gray eyes, lovely lips, chiseled neck, decorated with a string of pearls.

– Let’s sit down, I’m tired, to be honest, – said the lady.

A footman approached them, with a tray on which stood two glasses of white wine.

– Try it, very good. Michelle, can we go to “you.”

– Of course, Olga.

– Do you read books, novels, poetry?

– To be honest – and he mixed a little, – Fenimore Cooper. This is an American writer, his stories about the forests of America are very fascinating. Of the poets – Pushkin, it is a pity that he died in a duel. Not a good story, and apparently the seconds are to blame.

– Why? – and Olga moved closer.

– Dantes bullet hit shallowly, and Pushkin also, barely a cloth frock struck. Bad joke with gunpowder. I am a great shooter, I am a military man, Everything is visible at first sight. The seconds did not add gunpowder.

“And how well do you shoot?”

– I don’t make a mistake from twenty steps into the card.

“We will be in Peterhof, be sure to show how you shoot,” Olga added, finishing her wine, “do you like it here?”

– Of course, very beautiful.

– Did you like me? – and the woman looked expectantly at the junker – you must say that I am very beautiful, especially my dress. The hostess of the reception needs to say compliments.

“So I’m married.

– So what? ‘she smiled, “I’m glad, Michelle, that you came to see me. What else?

“You’re very beautiful, and I haven’t seen more beautiful women.

– That’s it! – she easily hit him with a fan on the sleeve of the colet – you are cute.

They talked for a long time about something unimportant, but interesting to both, and Michel was very pleased with the company of this woman, and she did not seem unfamiliar to him. The time was already approaching nine in the evening, the orchestra began to play mazurka. Olga looked rather expressively at the young man, and he got up, clicking his heels, bowed and stretched out his hand, inviting him to the dance. Several pairs were already spinning in the center of the hall, and Repnin’s white colet stood out among them, and Lopukhina was his lady. The mazurka did not last long, and now Zalepsky bowed to Plescheeva, thanks to the dance, and Repnin stood nearby, kissing Ksenia’s hand.

– We have to bow out,” Nikita joked, “otherwise our carriage will turn into a pumpkin.”

– Well, then don’t forget your shoe here, junker,” Ksenia joked.

Both beauties smiled, appreciating the joke. Olga Alexandrovna came closer to Michel, and said very quietly, only for him:

– I won’t throw my handkerchief on the floor for you to pick it up. Take it and come when you can.

Zalepsky only mixed, did not say anything, kissed the young lady’s hand, and hurriedly went to the exit, followed by Repnin. They were helped by a footman, and their batman came quickly.

– Yakim, the cabman, Michel said quietly, falling into a hellish reverie.

Repnin was just happy, and without understanding, he looked at his saddened friend.

– Thank you,” Nikita said to his comrade, “I owe the coffin for tonight.” Will you be a friend of the groom? – and pushed him in the shoulder, – Don’t be sad you! Olga Nikolaevna is just glad to you, your society. So treat this.

– Let’s go, – only Zalepsky answered, seeing the cart.

We returned to the regiment during, and calmly passed by the guards.

## Farewell

The beginning of March, and the snow in St. Petersburg has not yet melted. It became more fun, the day grew, and the night decreased. But outside the window it was already dark, and junkers sat in their rooms, drinking tea or reading books and magazines. Zalepsky also became interested in reading poetry, having seen enough of Repnin. He just flipped over the page of Ruslan and Lyudmila, reading the phrase:

– The coffin rests sad”

There was a knock at the door, and Michelle heard Yakim’s words:

– What is it?

– Pass the mail to the master, – said, apparently, the postman, and immediately slammed the door going out.

– Mikhail Dmitrievich, a letter to you. From home, – added, smiling. Yakim.

– Come on faster, – Zalepsky eagerly said, jumping up from the chair, – We already missed, sent a letter again, – he turned to Nikita, – Well, and what...

Suddenly his face seemed to be petrified, he looked at Repnin, then at Yakim.

– Pack your things, leave! – the junker said quickly, corrected his uniform and with a quick step, almost went out running.

Repnin did not understand anything, shrugged his shoulders and looked at his friend’s batman.

– Going, your nobility,” Yakim whispered.

Denshchik quickly collected the master’s things in two suitcases, and finally sat down on a stool.

Fifteen minutes later, Zalepsky returned with a price and a pass, His face was the same white, he examined the room in bewilderment, and whispered quietly:

– I’ll be back soon, in two weeks... Guns will lie here...

– There is no one hunting here, – Repnin tried to joke, and looked inquiringly at his friend, but he did not answer, he just smelled an overcoat, and the batman took the master’s suitcases.

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In a cab, Zalepsky and Yakim quickly reached the post station, where the cadet quickly went to the station keeper. The station was built according to one example – with an office, a stable and a guest house, behind a brick red fence. And the lines were also made of red brick. There was no special dirt, so, a few puddles, only straw and a little manure, but how can it happen that there would be horses, but there would be no manure? There were two drawn carts in the yard, three coachmen lazily discussing something important.

Zalepsky knocked on the door. and only after that entered the room. At the table sat an overweight man, in the uniform of the postal department, in a cap, and checked documents, sometimes making notes in the circular.

– What can I do?” the official asked, immediately seeing the bulges of the cavalry guard regiment.

– Here is the price, – and Michelle handed the stamp paper with the seal of the regiment, – in a state case. And my papers, here, look.

– Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky... Let me introduce myself – Akaki Ilyich Poluektov, an official of the thirteenth rank.

– Very nice.

– Horses will be now, Mikhail Dmitrievich. So to Gdov?

– Exactly.

– In half an hour you leave, – and Akaki Ilyich marked the price tag, and gave out his document.

Kucher gave the wagon, and the travelers moved to Gdov. We drove fast, with five rubles given to their driver. Further, everything was like in a snow-station-paper-truck – road. The roads were dirty, but still, fortunately, the snow did not melt, it was possible to go without unnecessary collisions.

Zalepsky hurried himself, and managed to convince the need for haste and coachmen with the help of blue pieces of paper with pictures. Prayer is not a prayer, but a kind of miracle happened, but only at the behest of the Mint of His Majesty, and not at all at the behest of Providence. We rushed to Gdov in a day and a half. On the road, Michelle did not eat anything, caring only for Yakima. The batman only sighed, watching as the face of the formerly cheerful master turned gray and droopy.

– Yes, you would eat, and then absolutely... Is it so good?

– Everything is fine Yakim... Did you eat? Then go, hire a coachman, get to the estate.

– Now, – said the batman in a sad voice.

Two hours later they were already at the gates of the house, where, seeing those who had arrived, the inhabitants of the estate ran out to meet them.

Michelle woke up already in the arms of her mother, repeating everything:

– How quickly I rushed... Sucked... We waited for you, let's go, say goodbye, otherwise everything is ready in the church...

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Mikhail looked and could not believe that his wife, his dear dear Masha, was lying on the bed and was not breathing... My face turned a little yellow, my eyes sunk... He sat down nearby. put his palm on her hands, which became so cold and stiff...

Nearby stood his grandfathers, the Terentyevs, and the Zalepskys. The son was not there either.

“Where's Petya?”

– He, your son, do not worry with the nurse, – answered the mother, Sofya Mikhailovna, wiping her tears, – everything is fine with Pyotr Mikhailovich...

– How so? asked Michelle, not understanding, what about Masha? Why so?

– Heart... Artamon Grigorievich said that the Lord should have tidied her up, yes, see, regretted, gave us a grandson for joy, – Elizaveta Vasilievna said crying, and Pyotr Fedorovich held his wife by the hand, – Forgive us, Mishenka...

“There is nothing to ask for forgiveness,” the junker replied, hugging both Terentyevs.

– It's time, – said Rusov, – everyone needs to go out.

Four men carried the body to church, and sad relatives followed the coffin. Early spring, Michel could hardly look at it, saw the body brought into the temple, the priest began to read the funeral service. It smelled strongly of incense and wax, the clouds from the censer rose to the arch of the temple, covered with paintings. The image of the Savior from the fresco on the dome sternly and sadly looked at the young widower, and the Mother of God seemed to console him. Words of prayer flowed and flowed, not too reassuring the husband who lost his beloved wife. Nearby, relatives were baptized, holding lighted candles in their hands, and he simply froze, sometimes looking around Masha's wax face.

– You can say goodbye, – said the priest, looking at Michel.

He only frowned, and looked back at his father and mother. Dmitry Ivanovich looked at the coffin, and then the young man approached the dead and kissed her on the forehead, then patched her hands, but did not say anything, he simply could not.

Gloomy ice Rusov came out, and returned with the men, agile and dexterously covering the coffin with a lid, and carried it out of the church. It was not far to go, past the graves with the crosses of the rectors of the church, church elders to the family crypt. A rounded rotunda structure decorated with half columns, with a dome roof. Upholstered in bronze, the door was open, the minister lit the candles of the shandal, and they descended twelve steps down, into deathly silence and dead blackness, only illuminated by brightly burning candles. The place was deserted, and stone shelves for coffins awaited their eternal guests. Only one coffin, like a lonely tree in the desert, occupied the

prepared place. They stood here for a minute, and began to rise hastily, and a church servant like Charon closed the clanging lock of the door to the other World.

A rich table was set at home, but not for a holiday, but for a wake. Women sat in black scarves, Dmitry Ivanovich tied a black scarf on his son's right hand, and sat next to him. There is Mikhail Dmitrievich did not want at all, but for the sake of order, he ate a piece of kutya. I drank without feeling the taste of vodka. Towards evening, he was taken to rest, in the room the mirror was hung with crepe.

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Michelle slept hard, brought her arms and legs together, breathed with difficulty. The night is not easy for him. I fell asleep immediately, but woke up in the morning, and so I lay under the covers. Only closed his eyes and..

Was he afraid of a ghost? No, but it was all so wrong, as if I had seen it in a bad dream. Pinched himself to check, but no, that's for sure, he did not sleep, but so wanted to wake up...

Yakim knocked on the door and looked into the doorway. I took three steps and froze.

– Let's dress, since it's time, – said the widower, sitting on the edge of the bed, – then see off your son.

– All right.

Michelle got dressed and went to the nursery. The batman knocked quietly, and asked:

– Avdotya, can I see you?

– Come on in, I'm done feeding.

The room was bright and clean, there were two cots, a bed for a woman, a table and a closet. On the table were two jugs of water, on a half-copper basin. The nurse was a beautiful and stately woman, with slightly large features, dressed in clean and neat peasant clothes, her hair was removed under a colorful coat.

– Here is your son, Pyotr Mikhailovich – and she put in his hands a baby wrapped in a blanket.

The child was glorious, already smiling, and pulled his hands to his father. Michelle kissed him on the peach cheeks, and sat down on a chair. Pyotr Mikhailovich began to study the shiny buttons of his father's stake, which attracted him so much.

– Barin, you have to go, have breakfast, – reminded the administrative manager.

– Well, said a little amused Zalepsky, passing the child to the nurse.

– Yakim, give me a cat.

The former cuirassier, not thinking to contradict, gave the wallet to the young man.

“That's for your care, Avdotya,” Michel said, putting three pieces of gold on the table.

“Thank you, master,” the woman said.

Michel gathered himself, and now he felt much better. A table was set in the dining room, everyone was already waiting for him. The servant applied porridge, Sofya Mikhailovna indulged in semolina, or the cook did pudding. Homemade bread and butter, there were also hard-boiled eggs.

– Tomorrow we will sing pies, your loved ones, Mishenka, – my mother said three times, trying to attract the attention of her son.

She tried to behave normally, but it was clear that her fingers were shaking, and the woman was hiding them under the shawl. Artamon Grigorievich quickly looked at him, and when Mikhail was distracted, he gestured to his father that everything was fine with the young man, and there was no need to worry.

– How long have you been released from the regiment?” the son's father asked.

– The vacation is given for a month, – he answered, carefully looking into the eyes of the parent.

– Well, good. Just by Easter you will return to St. Petersburg, you have to go back in a week, the roads will become limp. Do not worry about your son, we will look after Peter Mikhailovich. Your business is now serving, in the royal service

Father-in-law and mother-in-law nodded in agreement, as did two grandfathers – Rusov and Zalepsky. Only her mother wept again. Dmitry Ivanovich hugged his wife, whispered in his ear, and she only looked at her son in fright, but calmed down.

Mikhail saw Masha in a dream on the third day after the funeral. And I did not expect, but he shook before going to bed, and fell asleep hard. Marya sat in her favorite chair next to the bed, looked at him for a long time, then got up, and disappeared. And in his head he heard:

“I’m gone. Goodbye.

So they managed for nine days, and the mirrors in the house became open. The Terentyevs now began to live in one of the outbuildings of the estate, not wanting to part with Petya. Only Pyotr Fedorovich Terentyev went to his place once a week, checking the order in the house.

Michelle calmed down a little, a dream returned, and he again began to read his beloved Fenimore Cooper. Everything began to melt, the long-awaited spring began, even the air became different, fresher.

The Zalepsky crew drove Mikhail Dmitrievich to St. Petersburg, and three servants rode with him in order to return the team intact to zealous owners.

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Easter passed, and with them congratulations from the sovereign and the empress. A festive prayer service was held in the church of St. Zacharias and Sergius, which was attended by the august chiefs of the regiment. The service ended, Michael approached the priest of the regiment,

– Father, you know that my wife is dead. I would like to order a commemoration.

– For all God’s will...

– Maria Petrovna was called.

“I will remember God’s servant Mary. It’s good that they lived in marriage, everything is as good as others. Over time, it gets better.

Michel crossed himself on the image, put candles in front of the faces of the saints. How do you understand what is worse and what is better? After all, it was hard to believe that Masha was no longer there. He just shook his head, trying to understand himself and all this around.

In the evening there was again alone in the room, Replin drove off to party with Lopukhina in her palace. The young man read in Pushkin’s thoughtfulness. Two candlesticks dispersed the darkness well, and then a deaf voice rang out:

– Barin, the samovar sang. Tea, maybe?

– What are you frightening, Yakim?

– Out, and brought good rolls, but there is tea sausage.

– Come on, sit next to me, eat. Proshka and Nikita left?

– Exactly, with Nikita Andreevich. They said they would only be in the morning. And Prokhor, – the batman stumbled and looked guiltily, – handed the letters, in blue envelopes, for you...

– Burn it, the youth said sternly.

– It is impossible, not on conscience, Mikhail Dmitrievich. The young lady did not do bad to you, write to her. About the fact that your wife died, the whole regiment knows, and, right and she.

Michelle sighed, and thought he was wrong again. After all, what did Olga do wrong? But he himself felt as if he himself had done something bad, dishonest, it crushed him.

– It is necessary to answer. Paper, ink.

**Olga Nikolaevna**

**Could not answer you for a number of sad circumstances. My wife, Maria Petrovna, died, and I remained a widower. But one thing pleases that the son survived, Peter. I am very obliged to you for your attention, I remain completely at your service.**

**Zalepsky Mikhail Dmitrievich**

– Take the letter, said the junker, sealing the envelope.

## Yakim in the service

With a letter, and twenty kopecks on the cab driver, Yakim Voinov, the batman of Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky, felt quite happy. The service at the young master was quite excellent. He could go back to his village – but what is there to do? Everything is better here, especially when the master entered his native regiment. Yakim quickly acquired a non-combatant uniform, and now again proudly wore a colet at least not white, but gray, with cavalry guard bulges and a permanent hat. And now, he followed to Lopukhina's own house, where he was led not only by the master, but also by his own interest.

Interest was not, but rather was, in the sense of the subject was the servant of Olga Nikolaevna, also a widow, thirty-two years old. Not to say that she was young, but Yakim was forty, so the age is right. Yes, and looked very good-stately, smiling, with a simple character, with a pleasant name – Praskovya.

So Yakim thought about his life, sitting in the carriage of a cab. It was not that fast, the horse was also so-so, but the houses seemed to run past, and the necessary palace was not far away.

– Stop here, – the batman deliberately said loudly, – here is the money, – he added, paying.

Yakim quickly walked along the pavement, and now, already knocked on the gate of the gate of the house.

– Who is it there? – the gatekeeper fumbled, Gavrila.

– Yes, I am, Yakim.

– Well, come in, Yakim Silantievich, – said a friendly voice, and the gate, without creaking, opened.

– Hello, Gavrila Andreevich, – the Warriors greeted.

Both men were to match each other, of great height, but Gavrila was composed of curls, and with a beard like a shovel. The warriors were built and tightened in a cavalry way, held their backs in a military way, did not hunch over, and wore a thick mustache and sideburns.

– They are waiting for you, the lady asks for the third day, is there any news?

– From whom? – made a rustic face Yakim.

– From me, – Gavrila answered a little sharply, – from your master. He dropped off somewhere, and the hostess tortured us with deeds. Come on, go, Elisha will see you off.

The batman only settled down, adjusted his mustache and sideburns, moved his hat to his side, and walked quickly to the black entrance. He rang the bell and was opened by a servant in a rich livery.

– Hello, Yakim Silantievich. The lady asked you to see you off.

– Give me a broom, or something... Boots, you see for yourself...

The warriors put themselves in order, and only then went after Elisha. He brought him to the room, and opened the door.

– Wait here.

The former cuirassier looked around the smart room, with walls painted light green. There was a leather sofa, three chairs, a table, a bureau. There was a pendulum clock in the corner. The guest did not want to sit down, and stood waiting.. Just did not really want to meet with the owner's little dog, who was trying to bite him last time.

The hostess came quickly, dressed in a dark burgundy velvet dress, decorated with a thread of Persian pearls, followed by Praskovya, also in a European outfit, sewn in the French manner.

– Good afternoon, lady, – Yakim said hello but in a soldier's way, did not bow.

However, Pleshcheeva did not pay attention, and eagerly extended her hand behind the letter. Yakim was surprised how quickly the face of an excited woman can change. The lady first blushed, then turned pale, her face blotched, and she brought a lace scarf to her lips. It approached the bureau,

and began to hastily write an answer on its favorite pink paper. Praskovya hastily warmed up the wax with alcohol, sealing an envelope with it, and Pleshcheeva put in her signet ring.

– Thank you Yakim, – said the lady, putting the whole in the hand of the batman, – and in words convey... No, don't. Let him come as best he can. And take care of the letter. Praskovya, – and the lady turned to the maid, – see off, and let Gavrila catch the coachman.

Pleshcheeva left the room with quick steps, and already outside the door, when no one saw her, she heard a frequent knock of heels on the floor, as if someone had run.

– Didn't you go running?

– Olga Nikolaevna only go decorously, – Praskovya stood up for the hostess, – and you don't tell anyone what you see and hear.

– Scientists, we know, – Yakim answered confidently, knocking his hat to the back of his head, – so, Praskovya, I did as you asked... Where is the promised reward?

– What?" I don't understand, and the woman deliberately lowered her eyes.

– How so? said the Warriors, coming closer, and tenderly holding the beloved's hands, and finally kissed.

The woman first broke out, rather pretended to be some resistance. Finally, Yakim let Praskovya out of his arms.

– How will they succeed or not? the maid asked herself.

“It must have worked out for us,” said the Warriors confidently.

– Let's go, spend so that there are no unnecessary conversations, – said the woman, and led the messenger in the corridors of the house.

In the canopy, he put on a fur coat, and led Voinov to the gate, where he stood as if on a clock by the banner, Gavrila.

– Catch him a cab, the lady ordered, – and gave half a dozen.

– You are looking for, – the gate was surprised, – Yakim Silantievich fell into mercy.

“Somehow... – answered without answering the batman, – already got...

I rode back, consider how the barin- canopy of wolf skins covered his legs, the kaurai horse was quite good for itself, and the coachman was almost sober. So on Shpalernaya, to themselves, to the regiment, they dotted quickly, and now, the non-combatant Warriors quickly passed by the guards, to the apartments of the gentlemen of the officers.

## A new beginning

Michel lay on the bed, reading a French magazine. He was dressed not at all according to the charter, and the time was not official, in a white shirt, ratings and boots. Repnin was also on the next bed, reading the *Sovremennik* he was writing. Time was running out, the tea prepared by Prokhor was drunk, the rolls were eaten. Nikita could rest while Lopukhina needed to visit her father's estate, and visits to her lover were temporarily postponed, as were sleepless nights.

– Your nobility, – came Yakim's voice.

Repnin even postponed the magazine, seeing how sharply Zalepsky jumped out of bed.

– Give me the letter, hurry.

– And in words asked to convey..

– Speak up.

– She said that let him come when he could,” the batman said loudly and displeased.

– Thank you, Yakim.

Michelle slowly sat down at the table, and cut the envelope with a penknife. The letter fluttered out of his captivity like a pink butterfly.

**Michelle!**

**We seem to have agreed to refer to each other as “you.” So I hate when you address me like we're strangers and strangers. I learned a long time ago about the death of Maria Petrovna. I grieve with you over your loss, I am very glad that you have a son, and of course you will be a good father to him. I understand that he is now in the care of your parents, so that is good. Here, completely strangers would follow and take care of him. Most of the people in our circle grew up when their fathers were on endless campaigns and wars. When you finally calm down, come, always glad to see you. Next Thursday there will be very few guests, I will wait for you. If not, I will be glad to meet in Peterhof when in June your regiment comes to the Summer Apartments.**

**With sincere hope, Olga**

Zalepsky read the letter and hid it in a box, which he closed with a key. Repnin looked with understanding at the manipulations of a friend, and modestly suggested:

– Guilt?

Michel nodded with a chuckle. A good chilled Hungarian turned out to be by the way, like the shoulder of an old friend in a difficult moment.

“Don't blame yourself, Michelle. Olga is not to blame for anything?”

– I come out, some kind of villain... Only there was a funeral for his wife...

– Wait a little... Our military business – and he drank another glass – who knows what our fate is... And to refuse it is to anger her. You don't want Happiness to turn away from you?

– No... – and a slightly overwhelmed Michel shook his head.

– So it is sinful to reject Fortuna's gifts...

## Peterhof

The long-awaited summer has come, non-combatants collected furshtat carts, stuffing them with the property of the regiment. The patients were left in the city infirmary. Early withdrawal gave way to an early rise. The bugler started collecting, and the soldiers, dressed, received weapons from the captain, and marched in the stable of the regiment. There was a regimental orchestra on the parade ground, but they did not play music, not wanting to disturb the townsfolk.

The illustrious banner was held by a proud standard bearer. A cloth of red color with a white cross, swayed in the wind, and next to it stood the regiment commander with his retinue. Banners were built outside the squadron ranks, but in the third division of the regiment. The time was six o'clock in the morning according to tradition, and the best riders of the empire began to leave through the gates. Three in a row cuirassiers occupied the entire Zakharyevskaya street, followed by rival friends of the Horse Guards. Squadron commanders drove up to Brevern, reporting readiness. Finally, de la Gardie himself reported to the brigade commander, the former commander of the Cavalier Guards, Major General Bezobrazov Sergei Dmitrievich.

Finally, at the signal of the commander, exactly at five o'clock, the cavalry guards moved down the street. The regiment, seeing off friends and relatives, was followed by carriages and crews of St. Petersburg ladies. The most beautiful thousandth horses, thousands of carriages, phaetons, the most charming girls from the best families of St. Petersburg followed the Gardey cuirassier brigade. A kind of escort lined up behind two shelves, but he kept at some distance.

Michel also looked with a smile at such an honorable accompaniment, although out of habit it was still inconvenient to wear a copper helmet with an eagle attached to it. He did not have a cuirass yet, and Yakim on the brick followed with a wagon train. Each officer had with him a small crew for things, and a personal horse was tied to him. On the campaign, of course, they followed on the drill. His Gunpowder was in great shape, cheerful and cheerful, he also had a suitcase and alters on him, but both were empty. Outside the city limits, for about eight hours, a regimental orchestra burst out. Zalepsky kept pulling his head, trying to see the carriages of the imperial family.

– Michelle, what do you want to see? – asked the cheerful Nikita, – really lost something? Or someone?

– Yes, it is not clear...

“The imperial motorcade?” – Reprin guessed, – no, they are already in Peterhof, they are accompanied by the Convoy of his Imperial Majesty, Cossacks.

– I see,” Zalepsky said.

– And Ksenia is probably already there... Great places. Did you get your diggerotype camera?

– Yes, of course. And two guns, revolvers, and so, on trifles.

– I'm not sure about hunting...

After three and a half hours, the regiment reached the village of Ulyanka, the legendary Sheremetyevo house.

– What's here?” not understanding, Michelle asked Nikita.

– Traditions, a great thing... The commander has already sent a letter with news to the count that the regiment will arrive at the post. Sheremetev, as a cordial owner, has already put out a treat for soldiers and officers.

– Count man rich... Zalepski agreed thoughtfully.

– Everything is paid under the contract, but traditions are traditions...

The command came to dismount, the horse breeders arranged horses, and the regiment on foot, proceeded to the tables. Sheremetev himself stood at the officers' desks, waiting for the guests. Zalepsky looked at the beautiful house by the pond, at all these wonderful places.

– Let’s go, – von Rosen intervened in the idyll, – the dinner is getting cold, gentlemen of the cadet.

Indeed, lunch was not bad, with excellent wine. Further, the regiment expected a march to the Red Village, where non-combat regiments were already preparing tents for soldiers, and apartments were prepared for officers in Pavlovskaya Sloboda.

The march continued until the evening, and the regiment went the prescribed forty miles. The regiment was located near the Cavalry Camp, and next to the Horse Guards Regiment.

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The weather was excellent, although it was not easy in the coat, it was hot. The soldiers’ tents and officers’ apartments were not so close to the palace buildings. Maids of honor, so vividly interested in Repnin, were placed in Cavalier houses, not far from the palace.

It is easier for soldiers, they were allowed to swim, but where they could not get into the eyes of the august surname. It was a dam of the League River, or Duderhof Lakes. It happened every Saturday or after strenuous activities. Horses were allowed to graze freely and fed only with grass, and did not bother too much. But, combat training was. In the distance from the palace, before the eyes of the emperor, regimental exercises were carried out.

The entire regiment, in a squadron, turned into three battle lines, occupying almost half a mile of the field. Unfurled banner, headquarters officers on the right flank, and they trotted. Michel looked around enthusiastically, seeing the perfect formation. He only held the horse’s occasion with his left hand, with the crags on. But dressage Gunpowder was just perfect, the horse was used to being in the ranks. No one pulled ahead and did not break the formation, although the regiment shining with copper cuirasses and helmets went on a trot. The roar of hooves, right, was heard a mile away. Finally, the command sounded:

– Broadsword out!

And the huge riders clanked their main weapon. The first rows of squadrons, with peaks, kept the shafts in their hands. Staff captain Tulev gave his horse, and it turned out to be near Zalepsky.

“You will go with the flankers of the squadron.

“That’s right, your nobility,” Michel replied.

The march continued. And Colonel Esipov commanded:

“To the flankers!

And sixteen horsemen, eight from each flank, scattered into the field, and Zalepsky galloped with them, holding on to Unter Gorelov. The arrows repeated the evolution of the regiment, keeping at a distance from the front of two hundred fathoms.

Finally, at the signal raised to the flag, the regiment began to rebuild into a marching column. Their seventh squadron was the last, left-flank. but Zalepsky saw a small retinue of Nikolai Pavlovich. The emperor himself was in a horse guard uniform. on a huge horse, drove around the formation, accompanied by Colonel Brevern. The emperor was also the chief of the guard. Nikolai Pavlovich stopped, and his thunderous voice sounded:

– Hello, well done!

– We wish you good health, Your Majesty! ‘the voice of the regimental privates rang out.

The regimental orchestra began to play again, and the junker heard the muffled conversations of the soldiers:

– The sovereign is satisfied, it means that today an extra pound of beef is waiting...

– Exactly... Maybe there will be beer.

Zalepsky chuckled. and now felt how hot he was. It is still easier for him, Yakim is waiting for him with a fresh shirt and a jug of cold water to wash himself.

Junkers did not enter the regimental officer artel, and ate in the dining room. Moreover, the king gave dinner in honor of the officers of the regiment. Guards were posted at the location, and

the wahmister soldier led to the river to swim. Zalepsky, Golitsyn and Repnin looked at each other, and dressed in fresh linen, went to another, not well-known place for swimming. They took Nikita's brick, where they put simple food, Yakim and Prokhor sat on the goats. Denshchik Golitsyn Fedor remained, he did not find a place.

– Nikita, you are the head... – Serge said happily, – and the place is quiet, and far from the soldiers. And, none of the palace is visible.

– No matter how embarrassment happens, – Michelle was concerned, – otherwise you never know the ladies, and we are negligee...

– So, in the best shape for them, – Repnin laughed, – There is a soap house and a bathhouse next to the stream. And a bathhouse.

Golitsyn only nodded, and the first rushed into the cool water, moving quickly from the shore. He swam perfectly, and Zalepsky could not hit his face in the mud, and also ended up in the river. Immediately it felt better, and body fatigue seemed to have gone, washed off with healing moisture. Repnin swam nearby, not moving far.

– Is everything ready! – shouted Prokhor, – sit down to dine!

– Let's go, Serge said.

Three comrades quickly got out, and stepping wet feet on the ground, avoided sharp branches. Exactly, bread, cheese, sausage were waiting for the future defenders of the fatherland, like a jug of inexpensive wine. Michel hooked himself into a bowl of food, poured wine into a mug. The day, for sure, was not bad. We ate, bathed and ate again. But the jug turned out to be small, and a spare went into business. Michel felt that he was overwhelmed, Serge was unusually cheerful, but still climbed into the water. He raised a whole fountain of spray. Zalepsky turned away for a second, noticing a piece of ham, and looking at the river, he did not see Golitsyn. Repnin, pleased and cheerful, slept on a blanket. the batman was engaged in a wagon.

– Golitsyn! Where are you? cried a frightened Michelle, the joke failed!

Yes, it is clear that it was not a joke, and Zalepsky ran to the river, almost broke his leg on a penny and dived. The hop seemed to have drowned itself, only a nasty tremor appeared in his hands. The young man swam with saplings to the place where he saw Serge, and plunged into the water. He did not swim in the sea, and not too much is visible in the river. On the third dive, I saw something dark, and to the touch, it seemed alive, and dragged it upstairs. Spitting from the water, he dragged Golitsyn's body to the shore.

– Yakim! Prokhor! he shouted, over here!

While he pulled Serge ashore, and threw him on his side, on the grass. Fortunately, the drowned man coughed, and he vomited to the ground, well, even though Zalepsky managed to jump back.

– Damn it, Serge? What were you doing there? – Zalepsky tried to reduce everything to a joke.

– Drowned, – the diver answered, and spread his arms, – already met with mermaids, a little more, would be like Suvorov Jr. he said, poking his head, and fell asleep.

“However,” Michelle could only say, and drank wine, trying to calm down.

– Yakim, – and he quietly added, – you will dress them somehow, and we will go to the location, we must return. And not a word to anyone. And tell Prokhor not to chat what was here.

– How not to understand, the master, – answered the sweeping former soldier, – no one will know anything.

Together they dressed sleeping cornets, Prokhor removed the dishes and the remains of the food, Zalepsky extinguished the fire, and he climbed into the brick, trying to calm down. Repnin and Golitsyn slept nearby. and not particularly worried about what had happened. Yakim turned around with a goat, and only shrugged his shoulders, and adjusted his forage cap.

The batman helped to bring the sleeping and put them on the bed. There were two candles on the table, and Michel decided to read a little before bed. Half an hour passed quickly, and the

young man extinguished the light, and lay down to rest. In the dark, all that remained was to burn the lamp in front of the icons.

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Michel walked through the forest with a gun in his hand, past the bushes of hazel, raspberry. He walked silently, and now, a huge elk passed by him, pointed a gun, but could not shoot. I got a hare – I couldn't shoot either, the fox ran – again a misfire.

The hunter did not understand what was the matter, turned the trigger device, and then an elephant appeared in front of him, seen only in the pictures. There was a noise, a crash, Zalepsky took aim, pulled the trigger, and – a shot!

Michel opened his eyes, climbed on his elbows, leaning on a straw mattress of a bed, and saw Golitsyn looking with surprise at the crashed water jug.

“Sorry,” Serge said quietly, “I'm thirsty...”

– Fu, – exhaled Zalepsky, – I shot an elephant, – And lay down again.

Luckily it was a Sunday and the service gave way to rest. Repnin got up before anyone else, and Prokhor poured on his head, and Nikita laughed rather.

– More, more... Well, Michelle, we had a great rest yesterday...

– Not bad... Yakim, pour on wine wine wine...

– I'm half, – Golitsyn responded.

Serge looked at Zalepsky, frowned, took out his leather suitcase, rummaged there a little, and took out a cypress case.

– It's for you, Michelle, he said, putting the gift on the bed.

– What is it? 'he didn't understand.

– Spyglass. Look into the distance

– You can't do that...

– Michelle, – Golitsyn smiled charmingly, – I am a prince, and I can give. For the fact that I did not join the honorary list of drowned people, like Friedrich Barbarossa, and Suvorov Jr..

– What are you talking about? Nikita did not understand.

– Let's go eat... And then I would look around... – Golitsyn said out of place.

The janitors brought horses, and the cadets on horseback moved to Peterhof, to Tsarskoye Selo.

On a horse ride, the wind blows over the rider, and the day does not seem so hot, but the bright sun shone, so that its rays were strong, and the ladies walking along the road took refuge under white umbrellas. These were the ladies who came with the empress, and the court of his majesty.

The young ladies themselves looked at the prized cavalry guards with smiles, and the young men nodded to the beauties every second. Suddenly, Golitsyn looked ahead, and sent his stallion to Zalepsky's horse.

– Listen, Michelle, then you have to look at the Peterhof fountains, you have not seen them... The most beautiful thing, I'll tell you... And Samson... It is covered with gold leaf, and shines like all gold...

Zalepsky listened, but suddenly realized that Serge seemed to distract him.. He looked, and was just surprised... Olga Nikolaevna Pleshcheeva walked, holding an umbrella in her hand. And all would be fine, but by the arm she held an unfamiliar master in a dark frock coat, top hat and with a cane in her hand. Olga was followed by her maid, Praskovya. They saw Zalepsky, and her eyes were pretty rounded. Pleshcheeva calmly spoke to the stranger, not noticing anything around..

Golitsyn grabbed the reins of Zalepsky's horse, and smiled strained.

– Michelle, let's go to the fountains, he said firmly.

“Why?” We wanted to see Cavalier houses.

Then he finally noticed Praskovya, nodded to her, looked at the lady with some thoughtfulness, grinned wryly, and nodded to the prince.

– Let's go, everyone has their own business here, as you can see.

And he sent his horse trotting, but however carefully, without interfering with the public flanking the path. Zalepsky did not pretend that he was hurt by the fact that Olga Pleshcheeva was not alone.

“She’s not my wife, she’s a lonely beauty and she’s also a widow. He goes with someone, and it’s good, Maybe it will be better,” the junker thought, without delving too much into the details.

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Olga Pleshcheeva shook for a long time in the carriage, watching Paraskovya, the woman was often swayed on the road. You could only take a maid with you, and the groom Semyon, he was also a coachman. and sat on the crew’s goats. No more servants were allowed to take with them, the apartment allotted to her for the summer was small, and Semyon had to live in the stable. Life is not bad in Tsarskoye Selo, and a whole staff of cooks and laundresses served the courtiers and the august family. She took out a braided bottle of water with lemon, poured it into her mug, and drank with pleasure. It got hot, and again took up the fan.

Olga, looking up at the dormant maid, took out a hidden letter from Michel, and happily read it again and again. She cleaned it up, then looked at herself in the mirror, and calmed down.

“Nothing, he will succeed in military service, and I will look after him,” she said to herself, “everything will be fine. And here we will meet, talk. Today – tomorrow their regiment will come to Tsarskoye Selo. He is in good standing, the best shooter in the regiment, and I will talk to the Queen Mother, Alexandra Fedorovna will definitely contribute to Michel getting the officer rank and staying in the Cavalier Guards. But, it will be necessary to look after Lisa Obukhova, so as not to take my dear friend away..”

As soon as Olga remembered her friend, the woman’s fists shrank by themselves. Liza Obukhova was a famous heart breaker, it was believed that she also had a dozen guards officers in her sighers.

The maid sat in the carriage pretending to sleep. She had a good lady, unlucky and caring. Well, she loved to parrot that, they say, she screwed up – so even Semyon did not fight for vodka, and he deserved spanking more than once. And Mikhail Dmitrievich is a handsome and prominent young man, pleasant, so courteous to the young lady. Praskovya saw the passes with the letter of her lady, but this only helped her plans. Voinov’s mustache and whiskers pleased her gaze sometimes, and so, if everything is sweet with the masters, it would be incomparably more often.

Wozok stopped at a wooden house, but built in a classic style. The maid of honor came out, the approaching men unloaded the carriage, and brought things into the apartment. Olga gave the workers a hryvnia, and sat down on the bench. She always liked to live in the summer in Tsarskoye – and not in the estate, in the village, and not in St. Petersburg. Something similar to their estate in Moscow. And the garden is large, and breathes well.

The next day, she appeared at the service, and accompanied Maria Fedorovna, was with her. Now she was walking along the road with a court official, Grudnev Lev Evgenievich. The day was sunny, the woman was hiding behind an umbrella, slowly discussing the life of maids of honor. On the left, along the road, I heard the sound of hooves, not far from them were riding. Pleshcheeva tensed a little, it would be wrong to pay attention to the guards officers. She took an official under the elbow, Lev Evgenievich only smiled knowingly. The bad joke of the guardsmen was known, these forgiveness with a long history and were carried out with extraordinary invention by young aristocrats. True, she heard Praskovya gasping, and saw the backs of three cadets, cavalry guards, jumping to Tsarskoye Selo.

– How awkward everything, – escaped from the woman.

Mr. Grudnev looked at the interlocutor, not understanding what was the matter.

– Not you, Lev Evgenievich, not you... So what are we talking about? Alexandra Fedorovna was very interested in storing the food of the palace, – the conversation continued.

Pleshcheeva held a conversation, writing Grudnev's remarks in a notebook with a lead pencil. Thoughts began to stray, she was angry with the interlocutor and herself. But finally the negotiations ended, and she returned home, where the fast Praskovya put on a samovar and took out snacks.

– Who was? On the road? Why did you dry up? the governess quickly asked.

– Yes so...

– Pashka, enough! – and Plesheeva grabbed her palm on the table, – take me out!

– Yes, the lady, – and she looked up, – Three junkers rode, Golitsyn, Repnin, yes Zalepsky. Golitsyn distracted your friend with everything, but he noticed you, your face was colored as soon as his uniform became, and they galloped on.

– What is it, – and Pleshcheyeva cried from resentment, – and it would be okay really, Grudnev was my gentleman... But things were discussed. But I will not blame him either! I will not write anymore, let him think!

– Exactly, exactly, – Praskovya yielded, seriously frightened by Pleshcheeva's anger, and even more than her tears.

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The junkers left the horses in a horse tie, and walked to the palace to admire the fountains. There was something to see, that's for sure! Cascade of fountains, beautiful statues, as if made of gold.

– In Italy, I only saw this, – Serge said quietly, and Repnin nodded, agreeing, – there is no such thing anymore...

– And in Moscow?

– I visited Sheremetev's estate, but there are no fountains. Let's go to him, he loves to show off a collection of porcelain. It's entertaining there.

Golitsyn went ahead, as a man who was angry more than once or twice, Zalepsky lagged behind, and, as if by chance, Repnin approached him.

– You don't need to despair right away, and think that Olga Nikolaevna is having an affair with others. Perhaps this is just a relative, or an official, – said Nikita, – Ksenia did not say anything about the fact that Pleshcheeva gives anyone signs of attention.

– The answer is not entirely unambiguous, don't you think?

– Sure... Write, what's the matter?

– Perhaps...

After returning to the apartment, Michelle quickly sat down at the table without saying a word, but the observant Yakim brought paper, pen and ink, and the master began to compose a message. Finally, everything was ready, the envelope was sealed, not pink-cheeked and small, but tall and mustachioed, having survived a lot, Cupid carried this letter. Not even on the wings, but on the master's brick.

Our messenger of love rode, culturally, meaningfully. Everyone saw whether a non-combatant was traveling, or a batman on important matters. If so, then a serious person. Tsarskoye Selo was not a courtyard, and soldier guards in booths were not uncommon here, no matter who disturbed the royal family. But now, the cavalier houses reached out, and finally he saw the cherished house behind the white fence.

Out of habit, Yakim pulled up his uniform, settled down, and rang the bell above the door of the house.

– Who's there? 'the beloved voice rang out.

“I am, Yakim. Open it, Praskovya.

The bolt creaked and the oak door opened. Pasha stood in front of him, resting her hands on her sides. Someone looked out behind her, but immediately disappeared, noticing that Yakim saw an observer.

– Good afternoon, I brought a letter for the hostess.

– Give me a letter. Here, wait, – the governess answered gloomily.

– Pour him tea, – the voice of the hostess rang out, – and bring the letter here.

– Thank you lady, long years, – Yakim immediately answered, giving the letter.

The maid took the envelope, quickly returning, and brought the messenger to the dining room.

– Are the boots clean? ‘she asked.

“It’s cleaner than ever. – willingly explained the Warriors, – for nothing that a soldier’s cut, but from the best goat’s tour leather brought from Constantinople itself!

– Healthy to curl. What will you drink?

– So vodka, of course.

– The lady said tea.

– So tea, if only in your society, Praskovya Lukerievna.

The maid went to the hot samovar, poured water puffy with heat from it, then poured it from the teapot. The tea was ready. Thinking, I put a piece of sugar in front of the guest, and tongs, prick sugar.

– However... – trying tea with sugar, the batman was surprised, – sweet, just like you, Praskovya...

“Enough,” she said quietly, “like a master?”

– I was upset that Olga Nikolaevna was walking with me, but Reprin and Golitsyn reassured him. I wrote a letter, I brought it.

– Long years to his friends... Okay, – only the maid answered, and poured herself tea.

So together they drank teas, with half an hour or more. The woman was quite happy to see her gentleman, and he was her.

– Praskovya, let Yakim come in, – the voice of the lady rang out,

– Let’s go... ‘said, standing up, woman

The warriors entered the office, and the bedroom at the same time, Pleshcheeva was sitting in front of him in an armchair, in a simple summer checkered boomaze dress. She was unusually sweet, so Yakim was even happy for the master.

– Yakim, take the letter, here is a box for the master, this is a gift. I saw that he was interested in Peterhof, so on Wednesdays, after six in the afternoon, and on Sunday, after three in the afternoon, I am free from the service of the empress, he can call. Did you understand, do not confuse? she smiled, – this is your work, – and a graceful hand put a chervonets in his palm.

– I will do everything, I will not forget anything. On Wednesday, after six in the afternoon, and on Sunday after three in the afternoon. I won’t forget anything.

“Go then.

– It’s happy to stay – and although he was not in the service, he saluted the military, he knew that women adore it.

Praskovya walked him to the wicket, and looking around that there was no one, she herself kissed Yakim tightly.

“You’re just great with me. See you later.

The soldiers climbed into the brick and slowly rolled into the Pavlovskaya Sloboda, into the officers’ apartments. Praskovya’s kiss warmed the soul, perhaps more than the lady’s chervonets. The road was slightly dusted, although here it was even watered in the heat. The Denshchik dismounted near the stables, put the horse in the Dennik, and taking the parcel, went to the apartments of the cadets. Two, von Rosen and Alexey Tokmakov stood tall, practicing fencing. Lunge, repulsed, lunge-repulsed, walking with his feet, and again a series of blows and repulses. Both were excellent fencers, the cuirassier looked at this action. Finally, sighing, he passed by and went into the apartment of Zalepsky and his friends.

Golitsyn and Reprin placed chess on the board and started the game. Zalepsky read Ershov’s book and was simply subdued by the syllable and plot of “The Little Humpbacked Horse.” On the table in front of him was a jug of cold water, and Michel poured himself into a mug, unable to get drunk.

– Barin? Yakim said, can we talk?

And the Warriors looked expressively at the door from home. Michelle nodded, got out of bed, and threw a frock coat over his shoulders, and put on a cap. He, leaving, nodded to his comrades on the street, and went to the trees surrounding the house.

– What do you say? Zalepsky asked eagerly, what kind of secrets?

– I gave your letter, here is the answer and you a gift... And in words:

“I saw that he was interested in Peterhof, so on Wednesdays, after six at noon, and on Sunday, after three at noon, I am free from the service of the empress, he can call in”

Here, her own words, Mikhail Dmitrievich.

– Pleased, thanks... And that no one heard, it's also good... Here, to you, – and the young man put two rubles in the hand of the batman.

The young man, in a great mood, took the gift and letter and returned to the apartment. Denshchik kept in the palm of his hand two coins presented to him.

– So believe that women are stingy, – said the Warriors to himself, – Especially from the noble... And who loves more than anyone... Well, the master, of course, does not receive a large salary, so for him there is a lot of money for him, well, however, Dmitry Ivanovich also sends his son two hundred rubles a month.

Yakim went about his business, and Zalepsky quickly opened the box, and saw a shirt from a beautiful Dutch thin canvas, and instantly changed clothes. He opened the envelope, began to quickly read the letter on pink paper, and smiled happily.

**Dear Michelle!**

**Glad you're in Peterhof too. I hope I'll see you soon, there are free evenings two days a week, I told your day boy about it. Hope you like my gift.**

**Olga.**

The young man returned to his friends' room, both at once broke away from chess, smiled knowingly, and continued the battle.

– Nikita, I also advise you in St. Petersburg atelier Monsieur Leon Rocher. Beautiful seam, cut above all praise, excellent Dutch canvas.

Mr. Zalepsky, apparently, was imbued with the spirit of aristocracy, and became very sophisticated.

– Serge... Barely said the flashed Zalepsky – this is just a gift from a good friend, my sincere friend.

– Yeah... – only Golitsyn said.

“I owe a great deal to your friend, Michelle. Very, – said Repnin, smiling.

– The week of competitions is coming soon. First shooting, then racing for two versts... The tradition of cavalry guards is not to participate in these races, but we participate.

– I didn't understand???

– Not on combat horses, but on their own, or horses of horse breeders. Many send horses to give them temporarily to the best riders of the Empire. Guards cavalrymen. Well, our races – in the fall, in the Mikhailovsky Manege.

## Date night

The usual service in the regiment ended, and Zalepsky was in a hurry. But, in fact, Yakim prepared everything in the best possible way. Junker thought, took out and put the camera and tripod in the brick.

“For a walk?” Golitsyn inquired, looking at his friend’s preparations.

To be honest, during this time Zalepsky took pictures for everyone, and now daggerotypes flaunted for everyone. True, the pictures needed special care – but everything was done in the best possible way.

– On the views. It’s beautiful nature here, Serge. I would like to take some pictures.

“Of course. But good flowers can be bought very close... Repnin knows. Right, Nikita?”

“It is. Ksenia loves roses and daffodils. Flowers are simple. Moreover, the theater will soon arrive from St. Petersburg, the summer stage. Life will simply begin to beat the key.

– Michelle, and check your choke tomorrow, in two days prize shooting.

– I regularly lubricate and clean myself. Thank you, Serge. It’s time, it’s evening.

Zalepsky quickly went out, adjusted his cap, and instantly settled in the wagon.

– Yakim, flowers.

“I know it’s not far here.

So first Mikhail Dmitrievich drove to the pavilion next to the greenhouses and got an excellent bouquet. Champagne was also with you. The horse walked in steps, but the sprung wagon did not tire, and after fifteen minutes Zalepsky was already knocking on the wicket at home.

– Ah, master, – Praskovya greeted, – they are waiting for you.

Michelle, leaving her cap in the canopy, on a hanger, with a bouquet in her hands, went into the woman’s room. Olga was reading a book, and got up from her chair when she saw the invited guest.

– Olga, very glad to see, – said Zalepsky, – Good afternoon. The weather is excellent, I wanted to offer a walk. And this is for you – and the bouquet was put on the table next to the woman.

– Beautiful, – she answered, and put a gift in a free vase, Maybe better tea? I make great fees – with thyme, mint, lemon balm.

“I won’t say no, but I wanted to give you a present. The newfangled thing is a daggerotype. It seems like a portrait, but through mechanics and physics. It’s just better to do it now, while the lighting allows.

“I don’t mind, curious...” the woman replied uncertainly.

– Now.

Zalepsky quickly went out and brought a box with a device and a tripod. He put the device on the floor and assembled it by screwing the camera to the base. Glass plates were at the ready, and took their place in the device.

– Sit in a chair, bulge your back, – said Michelle, – turn your head a little to the left and lift your chin a little... Here, great... Freeze for a couple of minutes.

The photographer quickly turned the hourglass and looked at Olga. She was very beautiful now. He opened the curtain, the sand measured the time, and the job was done.

“A dark room?” he asked.

The woman raised her eyebrows and nodded at the door, and the junker climbed there to carry out difficult manipulations. Finally, the deed was done, and the portrait of two inches was ready, and Michel proudly presented it to Pleshcheeva.

“It’s a gift. I guarantee, few people have such things.

– Very interesting – and Olga studied herself for a long time – perhaps more interesting than the portrait... but, in gray – black and white colors... Great.

– Just do not put on a bright light...:

– All right.

And Olga put a gift behind the glass of the bookcase. And, smiling, she motioned to sit down next to her on the sofa.

– You know, they will soon open a message with Moscow, in August. Squadrons of Cavalier Guards and Horse Guards will also go to accompany the sovereign. As well as the battalion of Prebrazhentsev and Semenovtsev. Have you been to Moscow? ‘she asked as if by chance.

“I didn’t have to. Near Gdov, he lived on the estate, and studied there privately.

– There is also a railway here.

– Heard... Thunders hard...

– But you can get to St. Petersburg in an hour. And an orchestra often plays in the station pavilion. I started talking, the samovar ripened – she jumped up, adjusted her skirts, and left the room.

A few minutes later Praskovya brought a samovar, then porcelain appliances, and Olga proudly marched with a small porcelain teapot, exuding a divine aroma. As for tea, the hostess did not praise herself at home, rather, she was modest in assessing her abilities.

The maid brought cups of blue porcelain, with gold rims. It was evident that Pleshcheyeva loves home comfort. Finally, she smiled, and poured tea.

– Great aroma,” Michel praised, “and taste as well,” when I tasted it.

– Do you like thyme and mint too?”

– Sofya Mikhailovna, my mother, brews dry raspberries with currant leaf in autumn and winter.

– Yes, in winter such tea warms well. And the taste is great.

Praskovya brought cookies that became fashionable according to English and French customs. Time ran fast and it got dark. Juncker rose from his chair, kissed the lady’s hand.

– I have to go. It’s already uncomfortable to stay. Shooting contests Friday.

– All right. Alexandra Fedorovna, right, will also want to attend, which means that I will be there too. So I wish you success.

Olga escorted the guest, and Praskovya closed the door behind him. Zalepsky went down the steps, Yakim sat on the bench and smoked a pipe.

– Let’s go to the apartments.

– Now.

The Denshchik gave a dipole, and a slightly creaking crew rolled an unusually thoughtful cavalry guard to the place of overnight stay.

## Prize shooting

Thursday, in addition to official duties, was the day of checking weapons. Michel cleared the chamber, checked the percussion mechanism. Everything was in order – both capsules and cast lead bullets. There were no little things here. The junker slept a little anxiously that night.

After breakfast, all the officers and cadets of the regiment who wished to participate arrived at the shooting range. The weather was sunny, albeit with small clouds. The shooters were from all over the guard, but it is clear that these were officer shootings. A flat platform a mile long was covered with wooden logs for safety. For shooters lay bags of wool, put under the knee. Two exercises – standing shooting and shooting from the knee entered the competition. Lying did not shoot. The targets were set one hundred fathoms and two hundred.

Zalepsky looked at the spectators standing slightly to the side and behind the shooters. There were many ladies, and among them Alexandra Fedorovna with maids of honor and Nikolai Pavlovich with his retinue. The chief of the guard explained the rules to the sovereign. Finally, the first six, with their nozzles, on command, began to charge. After the shots, the site was shrouded in smoke, and the messenger ran to remove the targets. Senior officers checked the list, recording the results on a yellow sheet of paper.

Finally, it was Michel's turn. On command, he threw the nozzle at the ready, showed that it was discharged, and quickly walked to the shooting line.

– Charge! Major Life Gamekeeper shouted.

As usual, he freed the chamber with a lever, filled it with gunpowder, put a bullet and wad, and sent the chamber into the barrel and capsule with a lever.

– Shoot without command!

Zalepsky raised the fitting by the forend, put a butt on his shoulder, feeling the usual heaviness. The target is in place, with his number. And not far. He pulled the trigger and fired first. Gunpowder was quickly carried away by the breeze, and now, shots were already pouring nearby. Targets are marked and the next exercise is shooting from the knee. In battle, this is even more important than standing shooting. More precisely... Shot... He left the trigger down and pulled the charging chamber with the lever. An officer from the rangers looked, nodded approvingly, and Zalepsky hung his gun on his shoulder with his barrel up with his right hand. The targets are checked, and the officer announces to the mouthpiece:

– Junker cavalry guards Zalepsky in the next stage!

Michel went to his own, two officers from the regiment nodded approvingly.

– Well done, – admired Repnin, who approached him with a quick step.

– Great, two more stages – and you are among the best guards shooters! The target at the very end will be carried four hundred fathoms. – explained Golitsyn, – so, you look, and you will take the prize.

– What's in there?"

– The first prize is the hunting rifle of the Littich master Croisier, and binoculars and breget. The second place is the gun of master Bofan.

– However...

– The prize in horse racing is a horse from the imperial stables... The thousandth stallion, – sighed Repnin.

– Nothing, Nikita...

– Yes, we have few chances... Hussars will take a prize or life – Cossacks.. If there were only cuirassier races, and this... – and he waved his hand in grief, – In the Mikhailovsky Manezh, a different matter

Michel shook his head, and sadly agreed. The hussars themselves are smaller, and their horses are different. Yes, any hussar will be on his shoulder, and what a weight!

But now, two stages of shooting came, and Zalepsky went among the best to the headmistress. With them was still only an officer from the Preobrazhensky regiment, and the rest were cheerful and smiling life rangers, four young lieutenants. Junker looked at their weapons – and the gamekeepers had chamber fittings, as did he.

– Let's have a young cavalry guard, – one of the lieutenants smiled, and rubbed his shaved hem, – you need to come to us, young man!

– Height is too big! 'joked Michelle.

– In the first company, – a new acquaintance grinned, – Grigory Petrov, at your service, – the officer called himself.

– Get ready! Major shouted

– Mikhail Zalepsky, cadet of the cavalry guards, – the young man quickly called himself, and was already tackling the shutter lever.

Connector is charged. Michel looked at the target, and only sighed. Four hundred fathoms is not a joke... Huntsmen charged Sporo, straight sight, and already the nozzles are ready for shooting.

– Shoot without command!

The first one failed to shoot, it was necessary to be the last... The target was in place, pulled the trigger with his thumb...

– Bang!

“To the leg! Major commanded.

Two minutes to check, everyone was charged, and now, Michelle got down on his left knee, leaning on the bag. Shot first, done. Now – just wait... But this is a troublesome business, and he was very tired.

– They will bring it soon, – he heard the speech of the life huntsman.

– More likely, – agreed junker.

Finally, a major passed with the targets, and smiling asked the cavalry guard:

“Would you like to see us, young man?”

Michel did not have time to answer, only in excitement he corrected his cap. The shooters left the position, and Zalepsky returned to his own.

– how are you? Reprin asked, saw where he got?

– Where is there... Without a spyglass in any way...

– Arrows will build!

On command, the competitors stood in a row, it is clear that Michel was on the right flank. In front was the sovereign himself, towering like a tower, above the officers and generals of the retinue, dressed today in the uniform of a life ranger. And he walked, hiding a contented smile in his sideburns, Major General Brevern de la Gardie. Nikolai looked around the young man, looked at Brevern and the chief of the guard.

– Well shot, cornet. Well done, Zalepsky.

“No way, Your Majesty! – the young man reported, – cadet Kavalergardov.

“That's for sure. Cornet, life squadron, – answered Nikolai Pavlovich, – you shoot great. Appointment – immediately after the summer training camp. Well, if you want, then in the life – huntsman staff captain.

“No way, Your Majesty! I would like to stay in the cavalry guards!

– And now, honestly deserved, – and the emperor's adjutant began to serve a gun in a case, a box of binoculars and another box – you were praised, and for diligence in the service. You see, Brevern, how great you are!

– That's right, Your Majesty! – the general replied.

– Let's go, say hello to the life – rangers, – Nikolai Pavlovich noted, – today they are in sadness...

Alexandra Fedorovna approached, fanning herself, talking with the maids of honor and the officer on duty. Next to her was Pleshcheeva, dressed in an unusually beautiful dress. Zalepsky stretched out into the front, Yakim stood at a distance with gifts from the emperor, with difficulty holding the case of the gun, and everything else.

– You shoot well, cornet, – her majesty praised the winner of the competition, – and from me a gift. Here, take it, – and personally held out a case with a gold chain for the watch, – Exactly, well done, he, Olga Nikolaevna, – and the queen looked at Pleshcheyeva.

– Above all praise, Your Majesty,” said the lady-in-waiting clearly.

Pleshcheeva was holding a scarf with embroidery in her hand, suddenly, out of awkwardness, she dropped this piece of matter. Michelle, with his left hand he picked up a falling batiste, so much so that he did not even have time to touch the ground.

– You dropped... said the young man softly.

– This is for you,” the young lady answered softly, and quickly returned to Alexandra Fyodorovna.

## Prize horses

Yakim went to the shop for wine for the third time. The holiday was unspoken, so the whole regiment knew about it. Junker looked with some envy at Zalepsky's epaulettes. Michel himself was perfectly happy, and even with a glass of good wine in his hand.

– Glad for you, Zalepsky,' Golitsyn repeated a little overwhelmed, 'well, Repnin and I will risk performing at the races. Three horses were sent from the factory. Would you like to join us?

– With you – ready. Although he is not strong in show jumping. Yes, and in races with obstacles too..

– Nothing, Michelle. You are lucky, and we can give the victory to the life – the Cossacks and hussars are out of hand. Regimental authorities are also happy. There are members from the regiment, but not officers. Damn, forgot about you...

– So I won anyway?

– Well, yes, you won the first of the cavalry guards among the guards regiments. You need to go and introduce yourself to the squadron.

– I'll go tomorrow.

– Ride, in all form you will appear to captain Count Nikolai Karlovich Tolya, it will be better. And now, you can have fun! Mikhail Fridrikhovich, is it your fault?

The German, with difficulty opened his eyes, but the glass bravely moved forward, not fearing the consequences.

“I appreciate it, I didn't abandon my comrades.

And Golitsyn circled the whole room with barely seeing eyes. Tokmakov Alexey, Nikolai Leskov and Grigory Loparev lay on the couch. Repnin rode on a chair around the table, as if he was Menshikov, chasing the Swedes near Poltava. True, Zalepsky sat opposite, and also watched Nikita's races.

The next day began with a difficult awakening, then it became easier. On horseback, accompanied by Yakim, Michel reached the officers' apartments of the life squadron.

Zalepsky dismounted, Yakim held a horse under the bridle, cornet, now the cornet approached one of the houses, where the non-combatant, apparently a batman, was preparing a samovar.

– Listen, brother, – the young man began politely, – where is Nikolai Karlovich Tol lodging? I have to introduce myself to the squadron chief.

– Good afternoon, master, – answered the dozen well done, – this is how he lodges here. As you go, the first door is on the left.

– Thanks.

And Michelle walked hard to the house, ran up the stairs, and a little worried, knocked.

– Come in.

– I need Captain Count Tol.

– I'm listening to you, Cornet.

“I must introduce myself, your ladyship. Cornet Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky, assigned to your squadron for further service.

– Glad, you cornet, glad. I expect service from my officers, and not a desire to find a warm place at court, – he began his speech in a very stern voice, – but you have excellent recommendations, and the victory in the competition of shooters was flattering to the entire regiment. Our squadron is special, even for our regiment, a half-platoon accompanies the sovereign every time as part of the retinue, therefore... You will be included in the squadron lists in August, while delving into the service. Simply, – and he shook his head, – the Grand Dukes grew up, and the three lieutenants of the squadron became adjutants. By the way, – and Nikolai Karlovich did absolutely nothing expressing

his face, – Do you know that the squadron in mid-August accompanies the sovereign to Moscow along the St. Petersburg Railway?

– Aware, your ladyship!

– You are a smart young man, Mikhail Dmitrievich, and do not say too much. Commendably, this is very important with us. An order for the regiment will be issued on enrollment and it will be endorsed personally by the sovereign... All the best, and see you!

Zalepsky snapped his heels, saluted, and left the location.

– Good afternoon, – the officer greeted him, their regiment also roots, – already to us? Mr. Zalepsky?

– Good afternoon, the cornet of the Cavalier Guard regiment Mikhail Dmitrievich Zalepsky.

– Evgeny Dmitrievich Kornet Shevkunov, – the new acquaintance called himself, – did you take the shooting prize?

Michel's interlocutor was shorter than him, with brown hair and brown eyes, also in combat uniform. Officers, unlike soldiers, do not had to be only brunettes, height was also important, but basically, the soldiers were much taller than the officers. Brunetov was waiting for the Horse Guards Regiment. Cornet Shevkunov kept growing sideburns and mustaches, but so far they were very small.

“I was surprised myself, to be honest.

– True, they say that you are a great shooter and hunter.

“It's hard at our estate. It's time, sorry, to your seventh squadron.

– See you, Dmitry Mikhailovich! – the cordial Shevkunov said goodbye

– see you soon! There will be many more shows in the summer!

Zalepsky came out, just jumped into the saddle, and stepped, and then trotted into the location.

## Horse racing

Golitsyn walked around many thousands of stallions. like a bear around a tub of honey, and could not come off and choose one of three.

– Michelle, advise, there is no strength...

– And you, Serge, harness them three,” Repnin joked.

– You just don’t have a heart... Oh, how good bay Polyphemus is! The color is very dark, legs, chest...

– You forgot about the eyes, and about the lips too... Nikita did not let up.

– As for this, the theater will come to Tsarskoye Selo... I will walk alone behind the scenes, visit enchanting odalisks. You brothers, this is not allowed, you have ladies of your heart...

– Prince, you distracted from horses, – Zalepsky reminded him.

– You are Michelle, devoid of romanticism.. Okay, let’s make it easier. Pull straws. – said Golitsyn, – here are three straws, I cut them off – and one is the longest, the other is shorter, the third is very short. The longest is Polyphemus, a little shorter is Rentgold, the shortest is Fire. Let Yakim hold straws, I trust him.

– I agree,” Nikita nodded.

– Agreed, agreed Michel.

– Yakim, come!

Denshik put polished boots on the floor, adjusted his hair, smoothing it with a comb, and slowly stood in front of the barn.

– Yes, master?

– You will be the hand of fate today. Turn away from us, and so that straws stick out of your palm. Got that? – said, smiling, Zalepsky.

– Sure as eggs are eggs! nodded the denshik, and turned away.

Golitsyn received Polyphemus, Repnin-Rentgold, and Michel had to burn himself on the Fire.

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The distance was small, but, and I must say, there were many spectators. Guards officers, on beautiful horses attracted many to this action, and especially the ladies, who were the majority, reacted very vividly to the competitors.

So, the signal began! Not that these races would be like Pelops’ competitions for Hippodamia, but he simply squeezed everyone’s excitement in his arms! Previously, Michelle did not try to send the horse to the gallop – now all the horses went so allure! Coney are also gambling creatures, and some have tried to bite someone else’s sedan or his horse!

The wind beat in the face, blowing a hot face, the left hand held the reins, the rider in the saddle was like a cast. He was able to bypass many, but saw that Golitsyn and Repnin were ahead. Go and go! The breed horse beat off the beat with hooves on the ground covered with low grass. He saw that several people fell, colliding on a turn and holding the Fire, bypassing the victims.

And again, go! He was just overwhelmed by the tension of horse racing! His stallion seemed to be on fire, and was a real flame. One thing is bad, the sun now shone in the eyes. There was very little left to the finish line, and now, an obstacle hidden by mowed bushes.

Only then, falling to the ground, he realized that the beam of light had confused him, and at the command of the rider, Fire jumped earlier. Zalepsky ran aside so as not to fall under the hooves of other riders, caught his stallion snoring plaintively, looked at his feet, and sat down again in the saddle. You cannot immediately send a horse to a quarry, and he is far behind.

But here, and the horse racing final. He was met by smiling friends – Serge Golitsyn and Nikita Repnin Michel dismounted, and the cavalry guards hugged him in turn. Nikita examined his uniform, saw traces of greenery on his knees and elbows.

– Nothing, until... Ugh you... Everything will be fine, hands and feet are intact. The sun?

– Exactly. Wrong in distance.

– Here the habit is needed, – Golitsyn noted, inspecting the Fire, – the horse is intact, everything is fine. Repnin, let's go, now they will reward.

Now Zalepsky was a spectator. Horses were held by the reins Yakim, Prokhor and the batman Golitsyn, Fedor. Not all races ended well, two were carried away by orderlies to doctors' tents.

Happy and not so participants surrounded relatives and friends. The young ladies only oohed, listening to stories about the competition. Michel brushed with a denter, tried to clean his uniform, and bent down, seeing only his boots.

– Michelle, what have you lost? 'the gentle voice sounded.

“Not your handkerchief,” Michelle answered Olga who came up.

Dress – Amazon, cream color, went to her unusually, but she was not alone. Nearby stood Ksenia Lopukhina in a similar outfit, only dark blue and a young lady unfamiliar to him in a burgundy dress closed to the throat with a lace collar and a summer hat.

– Ladies, – the young officer greeted, – Cornet of the Cavalier Guard regiment Mikhail Zalepsky!

– Natalya Rtishcheva, – an unfamiliar young lady introduced herself, – do you know my friends?

– undoubtedly.

– Where's Nikita? Lopukhina asked impatiently.

– Awarded. Him and Golitsyna.

– I will come soon, – and Lopukhina hastily left.

Mademoiselle Rtishcheva, however, remained, but stood ten steps away from Michel, not wanting to interfere.

– You still finished racing, you can't win everything, – said, consoling Pleshcheyev.

– As a rider, Golitsyn, of course, is better than me, – the cornet shook his head, – but I am glad that he is the first.

– Repnin's second. Ksenia is just happy. Now the sovereign congratulates them.

“I'm assigned to the Life Squadron,” Michel boasted, “and the epaulettes of the cornet!”

– I'm glad. Here are our friends!

Golitsyn and Repnin approached, holding Lopukhin's hand. Serge approached Zalepsky, nodded Pleshcheeva.

“Madame,” he said, “Michelle, we probably continue to serve together!” We have a label squadron and epaulettes of the regiment's cornets with Repnin!

– Just great! Zalepsky was delighted.

– Sergey Nikolaevich, I wanted to introduce you to Mademoiselle Natalia Ivanovna Rtishcheva, – Olga introduced her friend.

– Very glad, – the ardent horse bowed, – are you fond of horses? – asked Golitsyn Natalia, taking her arm, – let you show my horses?

The couple retired to the leash, Serge enthusiastically told the girl about the exterior of the prize horses, and she generously pretended that she was unusually interested.

## Life Squadron and Summer Theater

Service in the life squadron is not easy and is always associated with the Palace of the Emperor. In turn, a platoon stood out from among the soldiers of the squadron to escort Nikolai Pavlovich. And now Zalepsky followed the staff captain Zhelyabov, and with them was the squadron commander Evsyukov with the junior non-commissioned officer Ivanov. In the squadron, the soldiers were like a selection – tall in the tops, blond barbel on gnei horses. Michel got used to cuirass and hard hat, even in the heat of the former unchanged companions of cuirassier. True, in a round suitcase, the saddle had interchangeable shirts, but it was not always possible to change. I got used to the boots, which were also worn on guard in the palace along with a red uniform.

They walked along the corridor of the palace, in ceremonial vestments, rattling their spurs on the floor, the servants of the palace looked back at the prigozhny officers. Golitsyn smiled, and with one eye pointed to Pleshcheyeva walking past next to the state lady. Olga smiled, not hiding, to Michel, the cornet was only able to see the woman through her eyes.

– Well done, Zalepsky, – whispered Serge, – say something in the evening...

But the senior officer guard led them to the emperor's chambers, saluted with a broadsword, and the change took place. There were four hours of service.

The emperor rose early, and now, past them, the servants brought tables with breakfast for members of Nikolai's family to the chambers. An hour later, couriers passed, and they were met by an officer on duty. Without him, no one could go to the chambers.

Two more hours passed, and an officer came forward, followed by Nikolai Pavlovich himself, and with him Alexandra Fedorovna. Cavalier guards saluted the sovereign with broadswords and took "On guard."

– Well done, – the emperor praised the officers, – you see, Alexandra Fedorovna, those same cornets. One best shooter, and Golitsyn is the best rider.

– Nikolai Pavlovich, Golitsyn – famous horses.

– I am pleased that you are in the regiment, gentlemen, – Nikolai Pavlovich added, and went along the corridor.

A little further, the Tsarevich and his wife joined him from their chambers. An hour later they were replaced, and taken to the officer's dining room. We rested for another three hours, and again the attendant took them to the duty station.

In the evening, maids of honor came out of the chambers, and among them Pleshcheyev. Michel could not come up, even say a word, but Olga quickly pushed the letter into his wide bell of the glove, so that he felt a sharp piece of paper with his palm. But you can't, endure... I barely waited until my comrades changed. He and Golitsyn drank tea, and Michelle quickly ran his eyes through a short note:

We'll meet soon. I missed you.

– Tomorrow and meet, in the evening after the service, – reassured comrade Golitsyn.

"Absolutely, Serge.

Dates were frequent, at least twice a week Yakim brought Michel to Pleshcheeva's apartment.

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But now the squadron received an order to prepare for a march to Tsarskoye Selo Station. On August 14, wagons for horses, gangways, wagons for soldiers and officers were ready at the station. Privates had already been taught to place horses in wagons, and it did not take very long. Nearby loaded and horse guards. Each of the two squadrons required two trains.

Zalepsky never traveled on trains, did not see locomotives. It's a pity, there was no time to examine this curiosity, blowing clouds of black smoke into the sky. He went into the officer's car and sat down.

– Didn't you go to the cast iron before? Repnin asked him. Michelle only shook his head in response. Suddenly the car shook, forward, then backward, the locomotive sounded, and the train started.

“Father wouldn't believe it,” the cornet marveled.

– The road from St. Petersburg to Moscow was built, Nikolai Pavlovich goes to open personally, – said Lieutenant Khlodin, – and we accompany sovereign. And two more battalions, from the Preobrazhensky regiment and from Semenovskiy. Soon we will be in the capital in less than an hour.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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