

TATYANA VIKENTYEVA
Татяна Викентьева

**"STOLEN
IMMORTALITY"**

18+

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Аннотация

The book tells the story of how a Jewish boy, Yasha Levin, and a Russian boy, Sasha Zavidov, met, became friends, grew up together, and fell in love with the same girl. But later, Aleksandr Zavidov stole a scientific discovery from his friend Yakov Levin—one that guaranteed immortality to mankind—and began using it for personal enrichment and world domination. The reader will find out what came of it in the next few books of this series.

TATYANA VIKENTYEVA, Татяна Викентьева "STOLEN IMMORTALITY"



TATYANA VIKENTYEVA
"STOLEN IMMORTALITY"

(novel)

BOOK ONE.

Alexander Zavidov walked along the sidewalk of one of the capital's streets. Five minutes ago, he had gotten out of a luxury Mercedes and ordered his chauffeur to go to the office without him. He wanted to take a walk, breathe some fresh air, and look at people... Alexander walked with a leisurely, measured stride. He walked and thought about his current life. Could he ever have dreamed of the life he was leading now? No, he couldn't! Could he ever have imagined that the whole world would lie at his feet? No, he couldn't! .. But it had happened! ... Lord! How wonderful it had all worked out! .. His soul was not simply joyful! Alexander

felt delight and pleasure incomparable to anything! Had he ever in his life been as boundlessly happy as he was now? No! No! And again no! There had been moments of brief happiness in his life. But he had never been as happy as he was now! After all, now he was basking in happiness! He enjoyed and reveled in it every day, every hour, every minute! And at the same time, he was perfectly aware that his current happiness was eternal! Just as he himself was now eternal!

People were walking towards him—ordinary people. With ordinary faces. With ordinary problems in life. Alexander looked down on them, with a contemptuous smirk. And he thought that all these people were mortal and would die someday. They considered death a natural phenomenon and therefore resigned themselves to it. Yes, resigned themselves to it. After all, they didn't know that one could live forever on Earth. And he,

Alexander knows this. Moreover, he doesn't just know... He put this knowledge into practice, making himself immortal. Now he will live forever. And immortality will make him master of the universe. Humanity will bow before him, honor him, and live by his law! And he, at his own discretion and will, will grant people the priceless treasure he possesses—eternal life! By "grant," Alexander meant "sell." In his view, only the rich and powerful could attain the right to eternal life, and he would thus become their ruler.

Alexander was so consumed by thoughts of his immortality and superiority over others that he didn't notice a group of

ragged, dirty children walking towards him. Only when the children drew level with him and began asking for money did he

Alexander came to his senses, came to his senses, and began to vigorously wave off the little ragamuffins. But it was no use. The children swarmed around him from all sides and

They shouted loudly: "Uncle! Give me money for bread! We're hungry! Give me money, Uncle! Give me! Give me! Give me!" Their voices were unpleasant to Alexander. And their dirty hands, which were reaching for him, and the disgusting smell emanating from their bodies, filled the man with disgust. To quickly get rid of these disgusting children, he decided to give them money. He took his wallet from his pocket, opened it, and pulled out five hundred dollar bills (there were no bills of lesser value in his wallet). Having handed over the money, Alexander quickly began to walk away from the little tramps. But for a long time he heard their screams behind him. The children could not divide the money, they were swearing among themselves, quarreling...

These abandoned children reminded Alexander of his past. A past he didn't want to remember. But one that stubbornly refused to be forgotten. And it kept coming back. Reminded him with excruciating pain, tearing at his soul and darkening the joy of immortality.

Alexander's mind was transported back to his distant childhood. And he clearly saw himself—five-year-old Sasha Zavidov, a poorly dressed village boy, and next to him—his

mother, a thin, gray-eyed woman, exhausted by backbreaking, unwomanly labor. They were walking along the sidewalk of one of the capital's streets. Just as he was now walking. It had been a long, long time ago. Thirty-five years had passed since then. But Alexander remembered everything, down to the last detail. And now he found himself back on that distant day...

"Sasha! Come faster! Do you hear me, son? Hurry up! Otherwise we'll miss the train!" Antonina Yegorovna said to her son, tugging at his hand.

"Mom! But you promised to buy me a car!" Sasha shouted, out of breath from walking so fast.

"I'll buy it! I'll buy it! We'll go to the Detsky Mir store now and buy it! Just hurry up, son! Or we'll miss the train!" the mother replied as she ran, tugging hard on Sasha's arm again.

People walking toward them looked in surprise at Antonina Yegorovna and her five-year-old son. And indeed, there was reason to be surprised! A thin, emaciated, poorly dressed woman, clearly a provincial, carried a heavy, old-fashioned suitcase in one hand and held her son's hand in the other, tugging him along. The couple looked quite incongruous on a city street, especially compared to the other pedestrians, who were well-dressed and respectable. But Antonina Yegorovna, ignoring the sidelong glances of passersby, continued to tug her son's hand. The boy, unaccustomed to walking so quickly, was out of breath and snoring. After a few minutes, he stopped dead in his tracks.

"Mom! I'm tired. Let's rest," Sasha said.

"What's wrong, son? We'll miss the train! Come on! It's almost there! You can see Detsky Mir!" Antonina Yegorovna pointed at the multi-story store standing a hundred meters away and tugged Sasha's hand again. "Come on, son! We'll buy you a car there!"

The boy, seeing the store, hurried off again with his mother. His desire to get the promised toy was stronger than his fatigue.

When Antonina Yegorovna and her son approached the store, it was already sixteen o'clock. Looking at her watch, the mother said to Sasha:

- Well, son. It's already four o'clock in the afternoon. Our train leaves Moscow in fifty minutes. Come to the store quickly. We'll buy you a car and then we'll go to the station.

The boy obediently entered the store. Antonina Yegorovna followed him. Then mother and son went up to the second floor, where the toy department was. Sasha was so amazed that he gasped in amazement! Never had he seen so many different toys! The boy's eyes widened!

-Mom! Mom!- he shouted.- Look how many toys there are here! And how new and beautiful they are!

At that moment, a well-groomed saleswoman in high heels, a beautifully manicured hairdo, and beautifully manicured hands approached Antonina Yegorovna and Sasha. Looking the mother and son up and down, she asked sharply:

-What do you want?

Antonina Yegorovna took Sasha's hand and quietly answered:
-My son and I would like to buy a car.

"A car?" the saleswoman asked again. "Are you sure about that? Our toys are very expensive!" and again she looked the provincial girl and her child up and down.

"I think I have enough money for a car for my son. I promised to buy him one a long time ago," Antonina Yegorovna said timidly.

"Well, then, come with me. I'll show you the section where the cars are." Having said this curtly and casually, the saleswoman turned and walked deeper into the sales area. The mother and son followed her.

A minute later, they were at the right place. And the boy saw a huge variety of cars! There were cars, trucks, and sports cars. All of them were miniature versions of real automobiles and looked very impressive. And for Sasha, they were simply a miracle! After all, he had never seen such toys in his village.

"Well, there you go. Take your pick," said the saleswoman. "We have manual cars, battery-powered cars, and remote-controlled cars..."

"We'd like a simple one," Antonina Yegorovna interrupted her.

"What do you mean, simple?" the saleswoman asked, puzzled.

"Cheaper," Antonina Yegorovna clarified.

"You could have just said so!" the saleswoman muttered irritably and pointed to the far shelf where the smallest cars

stood. "These are the cheapest ones."

"Sasha! Son! Look at these little cars," Antonina Yegorovna suggested to her son, also pointing to the little cars.

"No, Mom! I've already chosen. Look! This car," Sasha said, pointing to the large Mercedes he'd chosen.

The mother looked at the chosen toy, then at the price sign and said softly:

- Son! This car is very expensive. We won't be able to buy it. Look at other cars.

"No! I don't want any other ones! I want this one, Mom! I've already chosen! Look how good it is!" Sasha chattered enthusiastically, showing his mother the toy he liked again and again.

Antonina Yegorovna approached her son and began to persuade him:

- Sasha! Son! The car you chose is very expensive! Mommy won't have enough money to buy it. Please, look at other cars!

-No! I want this one! - the boy stubbornly insisted.

Then the mother approached the little cars and pointed them out to Sasha again:

- Son, look! These cars are good too. Choose one of them!

"No! I want this one! Only this one!" Sasha screamed and grabbed the toy Mercedes with both hands.

"What is he doing? The bully! He's going to break the toy!" the saleswoman screamed, running up to the boy and forcibly pulling him away from the car.

Sasha burst into tears. But he didn't give up the toy, instead clutching it even tighter. Antonina Yegorovna ran to her son and began to calm him down and persuade him to give the toy to the saleswoman. This unpleasant scene lasted for several minutes. The boy's mother tried in vain to persuade him to move away from his beloved toy. Sasha became increasingly capricious, crying and screaming, clutching the car tightly in his hands. The saleswoman scolded Antonina Yegorovna and tried to take the toy Mercedes from the boy.

At this time, a young married couple approached with their son, who was the same age as Sasha.

An intelligent man of Jewish appearance in an expensive suit asked:

-What's going on here?

The saleswoman walked away from the boy and said, pointing at Sasha and his mother:

- Look! They came to buy a car. But they have nothing to pay with. Scammers!

"That's not true!" Antonina Yegorovna began to justify herself with tears in her eyes. "I have money. But my boy chose too expensive a car."

"Who's going to believe you?" the saleswoman screamed, looking angrily at the provincial girl. "Look at yourself! You're a beggar! A ragamuffin! You can't even buy yourself a decent dress, let alone a toy for your child!"

These words made Antonina Yegorovna even more upset and,

barely holding back her sobs, she said:

-Oh, I...You see...I earn very little...

"She doesn't earn enough! She found an excuse!" the saleswoman, filled with hatred for the provincial girl, grew even more furious. "Stop lying! It's obvious you don't work at all! You make a living stealing! So you came here to steal a toy!"

"No! No! How could you even think that? I'm not a thief!" Antonina Yegorovna cried out in despair and burst into tears.

-And who are you? A thief, indeed! And your son is a thief too! That's why he won't even give up the toy! But I'll find a way to deal with you! I'll go and call the police right now!

-What are you talking about? Why call the police? We haven't done anything wrong!

-You're lying! You wanted to steal the toy! Your son still hasn't given it back!

"He'll give it back. Please, don't call the police! We have to go back to our village. Here! We have train tickets." Antonina Yegorovna, with a trembling hand, took the tickets out of her pocket and began to show them to the saleswoman. However, she didn't even look at them.

- I don't care about your tickets! You wanted to steal a toy and you'll pay for it! I'll call the police now and let them deal with you! - Having said this, the saleswoman approached the married couple and turned to the man. - Please, keep an eye on this woman! - She pointed at the provincial girl. - So that she doesn't run away while I call the police. She's a thief! And the

police should deal with her.

The man didn't answer. The saleswoman turned abruptly and went to call the police. Antonina Yegorovna began to sob even harder and shouted after the saleswoman:

-Wait! Wait! Don't call the police! Please! I beg you!

Then, in shock and great confusion, the woman ran up to the couple and began to speak nervously:

-Listen! I'm not a thief! I'm an honest woman! Please, help me and my son! Let us go! We have to go to our village. Here, we have train tickets! - Antonina Yegorovna began to show them with shaking hands. - Don't hand us over to the police! I beg you! We haven't done anything wrong!

Without waiting for a response from the married couple, Antonina Yegorovna, in a fit of madness, ran up to her son and shouted:

- Sasha! Son! Let's get out of here quickly! Run before the police arrive!

A frightened Sasha, finally abandoning the toy, was about to flee with his mother. But Antonina Yegorovna suddenly swayed, clutched her heart, and, managing only to exclaim, "Oh, how sick I feel!", fell to the floor and lost consciousness.

The boy began to cry loudly, leaned over his mother and began to call her:

-Mom! Mommy! What's wrong with you, Mommy? Get up!.. I don't need their car! I only need you! Mommy, get up!

A young married couple ran up to Antonina Yegorovna. The

man shouted at the top of his lungs, "What's wrong?"

- Hey, shop assistants! Don't call the police! Call an ambulance! The woman is sick!

Within a minute, a large crowd had gathered. Mostly, they were shoppers who happened to be nearby and heard the child's screams and cries. But there were also a few salespeople who had come from other departments out of curiosity.

Everyone gathered looked with interest at the unconscious Antonina Yegorovna and heatedly debated whether she would survive. Meanwhile, Sasha continued to cry, sitting on the floor next to his mother, looking at the strangers with a haunted expression.

The ambulance arrived only twenty minutes later. After examining Antonina Yegorovna, the doctors gave her an injection, then placed her on a stretcher and told her they were taking her to the hospital.

Sasha wanted to go with his mother. But the doctors wouldn't allow it, explaining it wasn't allowed. So the boy was left alone. He stood in the middle of the store and cried. Only after Antonina Yegorovna was taken away did someone remember the boy and say:

-What will happen to the boy now? Where should we place him?

Other voices were immediately heard:

-We can place him in an orphanage.

-Yes. He will live there until his mother recovers.

-Is it possible to place the boy in an orphanage?

-Well, why go to an orphanage? A boarding school would be better!

While the strangers were arguing over where to place the boy, a young married couple who had been present during the unpleasant incident with the saleswoman approached Sasha. The man said to Sasha:

- Boy! We can take you in. You can stay with us while your mother is in the hospital. Well, how about it? You don't mind?

Sasha didn't answer. He just looked at the man with fear. Then the man's wife, a fragile and very beautiful woman, turned to Sasha:

- Boy! Don't be afraid! We only wish you the best! We have a son just like you. There he is! Look! - She pointed to a boy standing a little further away. - His name is Yasha. You will meet him and become friends. You will play together. We have lots of toys at home. Well, how about it? Would you like to stay with us until your mother gets better?

Sasha looked at the beautiful woman, then at her son Yasha and quietly answered:

-Yes.

Alexander's reminiscences were interrupted by a sharp ringing sound, like a dog's drawn-out bark. It was his cell phone.

The man took his phone out of his briefcase and looked at the number that had appeared. He realized it was his agent, Arthur,

calling. He said firmly into the receiver:

- Hello, Arthur!.. No. I'm not in the office yet. I'll be there in ten minutes. I'm walking down the street now. I decided to take a walk, get some fresh air... No, I don't think this walk is dangerous. You know that I'm in a new body. No one will recognize me in Moscow... Yes, I'll make it. What time is the Arab sheikh supposed to arrive?.. I see. Everything is fine. I'll make it. Better tell me, did you warn him that everything must be kept in strict confidence?.. Well, great! Will he be with an interpreter?.. Good. Is he also aware of the confidentiality of the deal?.. Well, look! I'm counting on you! If anything happens, you know yourself, I'll find you anywhere!.. Of course, it's not in your interests to betray me. I pay you well, after all. And besides, with me, you are guaranteed immortality!.. Well, okay. Enough about that. I believe you. For now I believe you. Your part of the job is done. I'll do the rest myself... What? How about the money? Today I'll transfer the amount we agreed on to your account... Yes, rest assured. And wait for the next contact. I'll contact you myself. Bye!

Alexander hung up and sighed heavily. It was difficult to return to reality from the world of memories. It felt like his heart was aching. But he knew it was only his imagination. His heart couldn't hurt. After all, it was someone else's. Like the entire body Alexander now occupied. It was his soul that was aching. His soul! Aching and aching from the tormenting memory he had immersed himself in.

Alexander knew that by reliving the past, he became vulnerable, despite his immortality. That's why he was so afraid of these memories and desperately wanted to forget the past forever. But it didn't work. Not yet.

Ten minutes later, Alexander was already in his office. He was met by his secretary, a slender and beautiful woman he had hired a month ago.

"Hello, Alexander Ivanovich! I've already made you some coffee!" the secretary chirped, looking tenderly into her boss's eyes.

"Hello, Lenchka!" Alexander answered and went into his office.

Before closing the door behind him, the man turned and stared at the girl. Beautiful! Very beautiful! A seductive figure and long dark hair. His favorite type of woman. He had chosen his secretary based on this type. He wanted her to remind him of Victoria, the girl he had madly loved his entire life. And so it turned out. Outwardly, Lenchka was similar to Victoria. But inside... That's where there was a huge difference between them! Lenchka was limited and primitive, like most women. The limit of her dreams was a rich husband and a happy family life. And Victoria... Oh, Victoria! She was so smart and so intellectual! She thought so deeply and so broadly! Great things could be accomplished with her! Ah, if only Victoria were by his side now!

Alexander sighed and closed the door behind him. He walked

over to the table.

Everything in his office was new and ultra-modern: the desk, the chair, the office equipment... Alexander spared no expense. He'd been swimming in it lately. He could now buy anything! Airplanes, yachts, villas, cars! Luxurious mansions! Famous paintings! Magnificent jewelry! The most expensive things in the world were within his means! And what's more, he could buy people too! After all, he knew all people were corruptible. But each person has their own price!

Alexander had once dreamed of becoming rich. But now he was more than just rich.

He was an oligarch! And what is an oligarch? He's practically a god on earth. There's little he can't control. With money, he could solve any problem! And Alexander did solve...

There was a timid knock at the door. Then the secretary opened it and, smiling sweetly, said:

- Excuse me, Alexander Ivanovich. I wanted to know: should I bring you some coffee?

"Coffee?" Alexander asked thoughtfully. "No, Lenchka. Not yet. You can bring it later. I have an important meeting today. An Arab sheikh and his translator should be arriving any minute. As soon as they arrive, take them to me."

"Okay, Alexander Ivanovich," the secretary turned on her heels so the boss could see her beautiful, shapely legs. After a brief pause, she swayed her hips sexily and closed the door behind her.

Alexander felt desire. A passionate desire for a woman. He wasn't surprised. After all, his new body matched his real age. He'd chosen this body specifically—the body of a healthy forty-year-old man.

The body of a basketball player. Not a beauty. But not ugly either. Athletically built. With perfectly functioning internal organs.

And now his new body responded most naturally to the beautiful woman. However, Alexander had no intention of giving in to the instincts of his new body. His soul had long been free of passions. Therefore, he could always tame his new flesh. And now he did not fail to do so, turning his thoughts to the topic he had pondered before—wealth. This topic had intrigued him since childhood. He was only five years old when he first began to wonder why some people lived richly and others poorly. This happened during that memorable time when fate had brought the boy into a wealthy Jewish family.

Alexander sat down on a chair, closed his eyes and again plunged into memories...

The young couple who picked up Sasha Zavidov from the Detsky Mir store brought the boy to their country house in the Moscow region.

It was a huge, beautiful house. Three floors, eighteen rooms, a magnificent living room with an expensive fireplace, a large, cozy dining room, three magnificent rooms with musical

instruments, and a fabulous children's room filled with a variety of toys!

Near the house was a summer swimming pool and flowerbeds filled with rare and beautiful flowers. A little further away stood a modern garage for several cars. And even further away lay a fragrant orchard!

When Sasha saw this enormous house, he gasped in amazement! He had never imagined such houses existed! He had never seen such a wonder in his village. The boy was so amazed that he temporarily forgot his grief and examined the house with curiosity. Luckily, no one stopped him!

The young couple was busy with their own affairs. The man left to park the car in the garage. His wife went into the kitchen, entrusting her son Yasha to look after the little guest. However, the Jewish boy had disappeared without ever meeting his Russian peer. So Sasha wandered the house alone, curiously examining every room...

Half an hour later, the boy's interesting activity was interrupted by a woman's melodious voice. She was calling everyone to dinner. Sasha entered the dining room, looked at the dining table, and gasped in amazement again! The table was laden with dishes he'd never seen before! Beautiful vases held fruits he'd never tasted before! The boy was amazed again!

The woman invited them to the table. Sasha sat down. Soon the woman's husband and son arrived. They began the meal.

Sasha ate with incredible speed and greed. He swallowed the

delicious food almost without chewing, filling his mouth with more. No one reprimanded him. The owners merely exchanged glances and looked compassionately at the boy. Their son, Yasha, paid no attention to their gluttonous guest.

When the dinner was over, the man said:

-Boy! We know your name is Sasha. What's your last name?

“Zavidov,” said Sasha, swallowing the last piece of food.

- I see. So your name is Sasha Zavidov. And our last name is Levin. My name is Joseph. And my wife is Sonya. You can call us: Uncle Joseph and Aunt Sonya. - The man paused briefly, and then continued. - And you already know the name of our son. I hope you have become friends with him?

Sasha didn't answer. He just glanced sideways at the Jewish boy.

“Well, why are you silent?” the man continued to interrogate Sasha. “Tell me, have you become friends with Yasha?”

Sasha remained silent again. Then the man turned to his son:

-Yashenka! Son! What's the matter? Haven't you become friends with our guest?

“No, dad,” the Jewish boy answered quietly.

-Why?

-I'm fine alone.

-What do you mean, it's okay to be alone? Sasha is our guest. And you should be polite and friendly with him. Do you understand?

-Yes, dad.

"So why haven't you become friends with him? Sasha will be staying with us until his mother gets better. And you, son, must spend all your time with him: play, go for walks, swim in the pool, ride a bike... Basically, be friends. Will you promise me that?"

"I promise," Yasha answered quietly and looked at Sasha.

"Well, good. Now I'm at peace. You've never lied to me, son," the man said, stroking Yasha's head.

This small gesture of affection from his father made Sasha feel uneasy. He suddenly remembered his father: harsh, rude, perpetually dissatisfied, and constantly drunk. His father had never spoken to him the way Uncle Joseph spoke to his son Yasha! His father had never stroked his head, never cared for him, never shown any interest in his affairs! Sasha remembered only the bad things about his father: how he'd caused scandals, how he'd beaten his mother and him half to death, how he'd thrown them out of the house... The dark thoughts that had overwhelmed Sasha were interrupted by a woman's melodic voice. Aunt Sonya's. She said the boys could go play.

Sasha stood up and followed the Jewish boy. Yasha led him into the children's room. When the boys were alone, they looked at each other meaningfully and were silent for a long time. It was a strange silence. Not childish, but somehow very hostile. It was then, for the first time, that Sasha felt he hated this Jewish boy. But why? For what? He couldn't explain it. The hatred was inside him, subconsciously. After all, he couldn't consciously hate Yasha. There was no reason for it. The boys hadn't met yet,

hadn't had a fight yet...

Yasha was the first to break the silence. He said:

-This is my room. I play here. Do you want to play with me?

"I want to," Sasha answered.

"What games can you play?" the Jewish boy asked.

-To war. To lapta. And also - to family.

- To the family? How so? - Yasha was surprised.

- It's very simple. I play a drunk dad. I come home and start beating everyone up...

- Beat?- Yasha was even more surprised. - But why? My dad never hits us!

"And mine hits," Sasha said sadly and lowered his head.

The boys fell silent again. Each was lost in their own thoughts.

After a while, Yasha asked:

-Do you want me to teach you how to play my games?

"I want to," Sasha answered.

-Well, listen. We're going to play a game called "Living Dead."

"What's it called?" Sasha asked again, surprised.

"Living dead." Here, look! With this gun, you will kill me. And I will come back to life. You will catch me and kill me again. And I will come back to life again. Do you understand?" asked Yasha, handing Sasha the toy gun.

- I don't understand. A dead person can't come back to life.

-That's not true. My dad does just that. He's figuring out how to bring the dead back to life.

“You’re not joking?” Sasha asked.

“No,” Yasha answered firmly and said impatiently, “Well, what? Will you play with me?”

“I will,” Sasha replied. And the boys began to play...

Three weeks passed. Sasha spent them with a Jewish family. It was an interesting and happy time. During this time, he became close friends with the hosts' son, Yasha. The boys played together, slept together, ate together... They became like brothers. And when the time came to part, they were very upset.

Sasha's mother was discharged from the hospital. Uncle Joseph bought train tickets. And then came the day of farewell...

Sasha remembered that day well. Moscow Station. The train. He and his mother were standing by the carriage. Uncle Joseph, Aunt Sonya, and Yasha were seeing them off.

Antonina Yegorovna thanks the young couple for everything they've done for her and Sasha. They, in turn, ask them to remember them and keep in touch: call, write...

Yasha approaches Sasha and asks:

-Do you want to leave?

“No,” Sasha answers.

-So why are you leaving?

- I don't know. Mom says we should go to our village.

-Is it nice in your village?

-No. Bad.

-Then don't leave! Live with us! We'll play together!

-I can't. I have to obey my mother.

The boys hug goodbye. Antonina Yegorovna and Sasha enter the carriage. The train begins to move. Faces flash by on the platform. The wheels clatter. And to the monotonous clatter of the wheels, Sasha recalls every day he lived in a Jewish family. He recalls and ponders why his father and mother, as well as himself, cannot live the way Uncle Joseph, Aunt Sonya, and their son Yasha live? Why don't they have such a huge, beautiful house with a swimming pool? Why don't they eat such delicious food? Why doesn't his mother have such elegant dresses as Aunt Sonya? Why doesn't his father have such expensive and fashionable cars as Uncle Joseph? Why doesn't he have as many expensive and beautiful toys as Yasha? Why? Why? These "whys" torment the boy, preventing him from finding peace. And he feels how a previously unknown and terrible feeling is born in his soul - envy.

A knock on the door brought me back to reality.

"Come in," Alexander said loudly.

The door opened and the secretary, smiling sweetly, chirped:
-Alexander Ivanovich! The Arab sheikh has arrived with his translator.

"Okay. Let them come in. And you, Lenchka, bring us coffee and candy," said Alexander, adopting a businesslike air.

The secretary closed the door slightly. Her words addressed to the visitors,

Alexander heard clearly:

-Please come in. Alexander Ivanovich is waiting for you.

A few minutes later, a very fat man of Eastern appearance entered the office. Behind him, a small, frail young man in glasses, presumably a translator, scurried in.

Alexander suggested sitting down and started the conversation:

- I am pleased to welcome you, Sheikh Rashid, to Moscow. I hope you had a safe journey?

He waited for the young man in glasses to translate his words and continued again:

- May I offer you coffee and sweets? Or perhaps you would like something else? I can send my secretary to the restaurant. It's nearby.

The translator translated quickly. It was clear he was an expert in his field, a first-class specialist. The Arab sheikh nodded in gratitude and replied. From the translator's lips, it sounded like this:

"I'm also pleased to welcome you, Alexander Ivanovich! I arrived in Moscow safely. There were no obstacles along the way. Thank you for the offer of hospitality. I don't want anything. At this point, I wish to begin negotiations on our case as soon as possible."

"Okay. Let's get started," Alexander said, and the translator translated his words.

Now the sheikh spoke. Alexander listened attentively to his speech in Arabic, a language he didn't understand. He sensed that this man would agree to all his conditions, just to get what

he wanted, so interested was he in it.

When the sheikh finished speaking, the translator began to translate:

Dear Alexander Ivanovich! You are aware of our situation. The President of the United Arab Emirates is very ill. He is dying. However, the Supreme Council of Emirs is interested in the current President remaining head of state. He is the guarantor of our country's stability and prosperity. If the current President dies, the opposition will rise again, and our state could be fragmented, while internecine strife within the Emirates will inevitably lead to a new war of conquest by aggressor countries interested in our country's greatest wealth—oil. We want to keep the United Arab Emirates intact and safe. Our strength and power lie in unity. That is why we have turned to you, a unique individual already renowned throughout the world. We are interested in preserving the life of our President. And we are prepared to pay handsomely for this!

After listening to the translator, Alexander said:

Dear Sheikh Rashid! During the preliminary negotiations with the Emir of Abu Dhabi, I set my terms. Are you familiar with them?

When the bespectacled young man translated what Alexander had said, the sheikh nodded vigorously and again delivered a lengthy speech. Translated into Russian, it read as follows:

"Yes, yes, Alexander Ivanovich. I know your conditions. At the moment, they have all been met. We have found a double

of the President—a man of the same age, the same weight, the same height. He and the President are as alike as two peas in a pod. The double is now in Dubai. He has been examined at a top medical clinic. And, despite his advanced age, he has been declared healthy. His organs are functioning perfectly. According to doctors, he could live another twenty to twenty-five years. That suits us. If the current President survives in his double's body for at least ten years, we will be able to find him a worthy successor. Now it's up to you. You need to fly to Dubai and perform the operation.

Alexander replied:

"But we haven't discussed the financial issue yet, esteemed Sheikh Rashid! I'm asking for nine billion dollars for my work."

After translating Alexander's words, the sheikh hesitated for a moment, then quickly resumed speaking Arabic. The bespectacled young man translated:

"That's a lot, dear Alexander Ivanovich! We're forced to ask you to lower the price. Please understand our situation. Currently, the Supreme Council of Emirs only has two billion dollars at its disposal. That's the amount we're offering you."

Alexander winced and said sharply:

"No. I won't agree to that amount! If you don't pay me nine billion dollars, the deal is off. Your President will die. You must understand that I am the only person in the world who can save your President's life. I, and I alone, possess the gift of immortality! I, and I alone, can perform unique operations to

transfer souls into new bodies! Therefore, bargaining with me is inappropriate! You either agree to all my terms, or our deal is off!"

The translator translated. The sheikh remained silent. A few minutes passed, and Alexander said impatiently:

"So, why are you silent, Sheikh Rashid? Decide before it's too late! I think your President's life is worth nine billion dollars."

After Alexander's words were translated, the sheikh finally spoke in his own language. His voice held a hint of frustration and discontent. Alexander felt uncomfortable. But he knew the sheikh had no other choice and would certainly agree to his proposal. So the translation of the sheikh's speech didn't surprise him:

Dear Alexander Ivanovich! You're forcing us to accept your price. We have no other choice. We'll pay you nine billion dollars. But we need time to raise this sum. As I've already said, the Supreme Council of Emirs currently only has two billion dollars. To raise another seven billion dollars, we'll need at least two months.

The translator translated. But Alexander didn't have time to answer the sheikh. The door opened.

and the secretary came in with a tray in her hands.

"Excuse me. I brought you coffee and candy." Lenochka approached the table and gracefully began placing cups of coffee on it.

The Arab sheikh and his translator stared at the secretary.

They seemed to be devouring her with their eyes. Alexander didn't like this and said sharply:

-Bring it and go, without delay! We have a business conversation!

Lenochka looked embarrassed, shrugged, and walked toward the door, swaying her hips and showing off her gorgeous, shapely legs. The sheikh's eyes sparkled. And the bespectacled young man shifted suspiciously in his chair.

The men came to their senses only when the door closed behind the secretary.

Alexander said:

- Dear Sheikh Rashid! May I offer you and your companion coffee and sweets again?

"I'd love to have some coffee," said the bespectacled young man, pulling the cup toward himself. He then translated Alexander's words to the sheikh.

In gratitude, the sheikh nodded again and began to speak in his own language:

"Thank you for the treat, Alexander Ivanovich! But I'd like to continue our conversation. As I already said, we'll need two months to raise seven billion dollars. And our President's health is deteriorating every day! He may not live to see the day we raise the money! Therefore, I must ask you to perform the operation immediately! You will receive two billion dollars from us as an advance payment. We will pay you the rest in two months!"

The bespectacled young man sipped his coffee and translated

the sheikh's speech. And Alexander thought, "I know you, you Eastern sly ones! You're always lying! You're trying to deceive me! But it won't work! I'm smart and cunning too! You won't be able to deceive me!"

Looking into the sheikh's face, Alexander firmly said:

"Dear Sheikh Rashid! I'm sorry to disappoint you! I don't agree to these terms! Your argument that the President could die before you raise the money doesn't interest me. That's your problem! If you want me to carry out the operation immediately, you must pay me four and a half billion dollars as an advance payment, exactly fifty percent of the deal. For the remaining funds, you must guarantee that I will receive it within twenty-four hours of the operation. If you don't agree to the terms I've announced, our deal will not take place!"

The translator translated. The sheikh remained silent again. Five minutes passed, and Alexander said:

"Dear Sheikh! I await your decision! If you agree to my terms, then let's shake hands and seal our agreement with our signatures on this document," he said, showing the contract he had prepared in advance. "If you do not agree to my terms, then let's part peacefully and go about our business. I have no time for idle talk! Decide now!" He looked at his watch, then at the Sheikh, and sat down on a chair.

The bespectacled young man quickly translated Alexander's speech. The sheikh remained silent again. Another five minutes passed. Alexander grew nervous, took out a cigarette, and lit it.

Sheikh Rashid wiped the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief and finally spoke:

"Dear Alexander Ivanovich! We accept all your terms. You will receive four and a half billion dollars as an advance payment. We will pay you the remaining amount within twenty-four hours of your operation. I am ready to sign the contract and shake your hand." The sheikh extended his hand.

Alexander understood everything without translation. He shook the sheikh's hand. When the bespectacled young man had translated the sheikh's entire speech, Alexander took the contract he had prepared, signed it, and handed it to the sheikh to sign. He called the translator over and showed him the document. The young man began quietly translating each clause of the contract to the sheikh, who listened attentively and studied the document. Once this procedure was completed, the sheikh signed the contract and handed it to Alexander. The partners shook hands again.

Alexander said:

Dear Sheikh Rashid! I plan to arrive in Dubai in a week. By then, you must open an account in my name at the Swiss bank Alfa and transfer four and a half billion dollars into it. I hope we've understood each other well and there won't be any incidents. Prepare your President for the operation. He must be mentally prepared for the fact that his life will continue in a new body—the body of his double. And now I won't detain you any longer. Goodbye!

The translator translated. But the sheikh was in no hurry to leave. He spoke again in his own language:

Dear Alexander Ivanovich! I would like to make another request of you. A personal one. The thing is, I have a daughter, Leila. She is already twenty-five years old. But she is still not married. Men don't like Leila because she is very overweight. She weighs two hundred and seventy kilograms. Personally, I don't consider a woman's plumpness a disadvantage. But today's young men think differently. They want slim, graceful women with thin waists! My daughter is very upset that men don't like her. And she can't lose weight. She's tried, but it's no use. She'll lose two kilograms in a week, and then gain another five kilograms in two days. Besides, her obesity is hereditary. Everyone in our family was overweight: both men and women. I, as you can see, am also overweight. But it doesn't bother me. And my beloved daughter suffers so much from excess weight! She has already attempted suicide twice. I can't let her die! I have to save her! There's only one way out: my daughter needs a new body. The body of a slender and beautiful girl. I told Leyla about the possibility of living in another body, and she agreed. She chose the body of the Russian model Svetlana Lazareva. You probably know her. Now she's famous all over the world! So! I ask you to perform the operation to transfer my daughter's soul into the body of the model Svetlana Lazareva. Tell me, how much will it cost? And when can you begin the operation?

The bespectacled young man translated the sheikh's speech.

Alexander was at a loss. After all, he had never expected such a request from the sheikh! After some thought, he said:

Dear Sheikh Rashid! I wouldn't mind helping your daughter find a new body for a fee. But I don't think the body of Russian model Svetlana Lazareva is suitable! After all, you said yourself that she's famous all over the world. Her disappearance won't go unnoticed. They'll start looking for her. And if she's found in Dubai, and your daughter is already living in her body, there'll be a scandal! An international scandal! Can you imagine how this will affect my career? My surgeries will no longer be a secret. They'll become public knowledge worldwide! That won't do for me! So you'll have to find another girl! I advise you to find some poor, beautiful girl from your country. It's better if she doesn't have any relatives! And if she does have relatives, there might be a deal with them. I think for a good price, they'll agree to forget their poor relative forever. Do you understand me?

When the translator had translated, the Arab sheikh began to speak passionately in his own language:

- I understand you, Alexander Ivanovich. But you understand me too! I have only one daughter and twenty-eight sons. Leila is very dear to me! I love her madly and would do anything for her! After all, I always spoiled her and did everything she wanted! Now my daughter is obsessed with the idea of having the body of the Russian model Svetlana Lazareva. And I want to fulfill this wish of hers! Believe me, I will arrange everything so that there will be no scandal. First, Svetlana Lazareva will be kidnapped by

my people. Then the newspapers will write that she was killed. In a month or two, the girl will be forgotten. And you will calmly carry out the operation to transfer my daughter's soul into the body of a model. My daughter will be happy! She will happily marry and live in Dubai. No one will ever look for the Russian model Svetlana Lazareva in the Emirates. Especially now that the newspapers have published materials about her death. I'm asking you, Alexander Ivanovich, to help me! I promise there won't be any scandal! Your operations will remain secret! Plus, I'll pay you well!

The bespectacled youth quickly translated the sheikh's words, but Alexander was in no hurry to respond. He thought, "If I refuse the sheikh now, he'll harbor a grudge. And Easterners are dangerous! They take personal insults very hard and avenge them cruelly!" So Alexander decided to cheat and promise the sheikh that he would fulfill his request. He reasoned, "The main thing now is for the sheikh to be calm and kindly disposed toward him, and then we'll see how things play out. In any case, I can always find a reason not to keep my promise!"

Alexander said:

"Very well, Sheikh Rashid! I agree to your proposal! If you arrange everything so that there is no scandal surrounding the disappearance of the Russian model, I will perform the operation to transfer your daughter's soul into the body of Svetlana Lazareva. The main thing is that everything remains secret! My operations must not become public knowledge to the

entire world unless I myself so desire!

The translator translated Alexander's words, and the sheikh shook his head in satisfaction:

"I understand, Alexander Ivanovich! I understand everything! Thank you. We'll expect you in Dubai in a week. We'll transfer the money to your account on time. We'll prepare a luxury hotel room for you. Well, that's all, I think?" the sheikh spread his hands. "We agreed on the main thing today. We can clarify the details over the phone. Of course, within the bounds of strict confidentiality. Allow me to shake your hand again and wish you all the best!" the sheikh extended his hand.

The bespectacled young man translated. And the sheikh and Alexander shook hands.

Alexander said:

-And I wish you all the best, Sheikh! Have a safe journey home!

The Arab sheikh and the translator left the office, and Alexander sighed deeply. The negotiations had gone well and resulted in a lucrative contract. Now he wanted to relax, relieve stress, and have some fun!

Lenochka involuntarily came to mind. It would be nice to have some fun with her! Alexander was sure she would agree. After all, she had to please her boss. Otherwise, he might fire her! A well-paying job! Which is hard to find even for the most beautiful girl.

Alexander was determined to spend time with Lenochka

and was about to call her, but the phone rang. "Oh, how inopportune!" flashed through his mind. He looked at the number that had appeared. It was Vladimir Zverev, the head of his lab. He had to answer. So Alexander turned on the phone.

-Yes. I'm listening. Speak, Vladimir... What? So, you've already brought the young man to the lab? He's handsome?.. I see. And have you already told Zinovy Izotovitch about this?.. Good. I'll be right there!.. Yes. Wait for me, Vladimir! See you later!

After this call, Alexander's plans changed abruptly. Rest was out of the question! He had to get to the lab immediately!

Alexander quickly left the office, telling his secretary as he went:

- Lenchka! I'm leaving!

"Will you be back today, Alexander Ivanovich?" the secretary's question remained unanswered.

Alexander hurried out of the office and got into the car.

"To the lab. Hurry," he said to the driver.

The car started moving. Streets, houses, shop windows, people flashed by... Alexander stared out the window indifferently.

When we reached the Garden Ring, the driver asked:

-Alexander Ivanovich, can I turn on some music?

"No. Better increase the speed, Tikhon. We need to get to the lab as quickly as possible," Alexander replied.

The driver increased the speed. The streets, houses, shop windows, people flashed by even faster...

Once they left the city and started driving along the highway, Alexander stopped looking out the window. He rested his head on the back of the seat and closed his eyes.

The monotonous hum of the engine lulled him to sleep, and soon Alexander dozed off.

Past events loomed clearly through my drowsiness. Terrible events I so desperately wanted to forget! To erase from my memory forever! But they kept coming back to haunt me, both in reality and in my dreams...

The September days were unusually hot. The sun shone like it was July. The temperature rose to thirty degrees. A real Indian summer! And what a summer! It was wonderful to relax by the river or lake, swim, sunbathe...

However, the adult population of Shatalovka village wasn't happy with the weather. It was harvest time. They were picking onions, potatoes, and carrots... It was difficult to work. People were sweltering in the heat, quickly tired, thirsty, and constantly taking smoke breaks. The work was slow. This greatly irritated the chairman of the Shatalovka state farm. Furthermore, there was another problem: almost all the machine operators were heavy drinkers, often absent from work. Finding a sober machine operator, even for a single day, was no easy task, especially in such hot weather, which made all the workers sluggish and lethargic.

Only the children liked this weather. They didn't want to go

to school. They barely made it through the allotted time in class and then ran outside. There they frolicked, swam, sunbathed, and played various games...

Sasha Zavidov also didn't want to go to school, even though he went there for the first time on September 1st. After two weeks, the boy was completely disillusioned with school life. After all, he had expected something different. Sasha thought school would be interesting. But it turned out...

The unattractive schoolteacher demanded that he learn letters, form syllables, solve problems, and count... Playing with the boys was much more interesting and fun. So after school, Sasha hurried outside. There he would disappear until late in the evening.

Antonina Yegorovna scolded her son, trying to instill in him a love of school. But she couldn't. Moreover, her husband, Stepan Zavidov, didn't encourage his son to show any zeal for learning. On the contrary, he set a bad example. Every day he drank moonshine, cursed, and started fights.

In the village of Shatalovka, Sasha's father was known as a hardened drunk and a poor family man. In short, a worthless person. This reputation was cemented after his marriage to Antonina Yegorovna. But before this marriage, Stepan was a completely different person. The biggest man in the village. Handsome, funny, a joker. The best machine operator on the state farm. The best accordion player in the village. Every girl liked him, without exception. But he liked only one: Natalya,

the youngest daughter of the village carpenter, Yegor Vlasov. He wanted to marry her. The engagement had already taken place, and the wedding day had been set. But suddenly, the bride died. The village doctor concluded that Natalya died from poisoning by poisonous mushrooms. This was strange. The entire Vlasov family picked mushrooms in the forest. Everyone ate them, too. And only Natalya was poisoned. Rumors spread through the village that Natalya had been poisoned by her sister, Antonina, who was secretly in love with Stepan. However, there was no evidence of Antonina's guilt, and the village police officer decided not to open a criminal case. Everyone was told it had been an accident: someone from the Vlasov family had put a fake boletus in a basket instead of a boletus, which then accidentally ended up on Natalya's plate, poisoning her. However, Stepan didn't believe it was an accident and from then on, he glared at Antonina. She, on the other hand, began to court Stepan. Sometimes she'd bring him lunch in the fields, sometimes she'd do his laundry, sometimes she'd drop in late at night to visit...

Six months later, the villagers noticed that Antonina was pregnant. It was shocking news. A scandal was brewing. Yegor Vlasov quickly showed up at Stepan Zavidov's. He demanded that he marry his eldest daughter. Refusing was impossible. After all, everyone in the village knew Antonina was only seeing him. He was forced to marry. And after this marriage, Stepan was like a different person. He became completely different. Sullen, irritable, perpetually dissatisfied. He began drinking heavily.

And when he got drunk, he would start a scene, beat his wife, and shout at the whole village: "My wife is a snake in the grass! She poisoned my own sister! She forced me to marry her! I hate her! I hate her!"

During such scandals, neighbors would come running, tear Antonina Yegorovna from the hands of her cruel husband, and call the police...

But neither the neighbors nor the police could make Stepan change. He continued to drink and cause trouble. Antonina hoped that with the birth of their child, her husband would settle down, become a better, kinder person. But this didn't happen. On the contrary, after the birth of their son, Stepan became even angrier. He now hated not only his wife but also his son. Many found this strange. After all, the child wasn't to blame for anything. However, Stepan believed that everyone was to blame for his ruined life. And he took out his frustration on his wife and son.

Antonina wanted to leave her husband more than once. But there was nowhere to go. No one was waiting for her at home. Her father was against her returning home and forced her to live with Stepan. So she lived with her husband, a drunkard. She worked the equivalent of two. After all, Stepan had been fired from his job when, while very drunk, he crashed a state farm tractor.

He crashed into a tree. From then on, he became a parasite, a freeloader. He lived off his wife. Antonina planted a vegetable garden of about thirty acres, kept a lot of livestock, and also

worked as a milkmaid on the state farm. The hard work left her very tired and looking older than her years. But she never complained to anyone or lamented her fate. She steadfastly endured all the burdens placed on her womanly shoulders and lived with love and hope in her soul. With love for her son Sasha. With hope for his happy future.

Antonina Yegorovna wanted her son to get an education and have a good job. She dreamed of him becoming the chairman of a state farm or an agronomist—in short, a respected man in the village. That's why she prioritized her son's education. She was upset that Sasha didn't enjoy studying, that he happily ran out into the streets instead of to school. She wanted things to be different.

And so, on that memorable September day, Antonina Yegorovna started a conversation about school while feeding Sasha breakfast.

"Son!" she said. "I want you to study well. Knowledge helps a person in life."

"How do they help, Mom?" asked Sasha, chewing a sandwich and washing it down with tea.

- I already explained it to you, son. If you study well, you'll be able to get into college. And after graduating, you'll have a good job.

"Why doesn't our dad have a good job? Was he a bad student?" the boy asked.

"Our dad drinks. That's why he lost his job," Antonina

Yegorovna replied, handing her son a second sandwich. "Here's another sandwich, son. Eat."

Sasha took the sandwich and asked again:

-And how did our dad study?

He was an average student. Not very good. And not very bad. But he didn't get into college. He stayed on the state farm and worked as a machine operator.

- Maybe I should also become a machine operator, like my dad?

- No, son. You should become a state farm chairman or an agronomist. And for that, you need to study hard. Do you understand?

-Mom! Why is being a state farm chairman and an agronomist better than being a machine operator?

- Well, because... - Antonina Yegorovna hesitated for a while, but then found what to answer. - Because the work of the chairman of the state farm and the agronomist is clean and well-paid, and the work of a machine operator is dirty and not very well paid.

- Ah, I get it! - Sasha exclaimed. - You, Mom, want me to be rich!

- Not rich. But well-off. So that you always live well.

-As good as those Jews I visited two years ago?

"Well, there's no point in comparing ourselves to those Jews! We'll never reach their standard of living, son!"

- Why, Mom? Why can't we ever live like Uncle Joseph, Aunt

Sonya, and their son Yasha? Are we worse than them?

- No. Not worse. It's something else, son.

"So what's the matter? Explain it to me, Mom," Sasha insisted.

"It's hard to explain," Antonina Yegorovna said thoughtfully.

"It's just that we are Russians. And they are Jews."

"I don't understand," the boy said. "Why can't Russians live like Jews? If we're no worse than Jews, then why can't we live like them?"

- Let's not talk about Jews, son! Let's talk about you! Tell me, do you understand the importance of studying well?

-Yes, mom.

"I hope I won't have to blush for you, son! I want you to be one of the best students in the class. Promise me you'll try your best to study!"

"I promise," said Sasha and got out from behind the table. "I'm full, Mom. Thank you."

-Well, then, go to school, son. And remember your promise!

-Okay, mom.

Sasha picked up his briefcase and headed for the door. At that moment, the door opened, and a drunk Stepan Nilovich stumbled into the house. Seeing his wife and son, he shouted:

- Ah, who do I see! A snake with its little snake! Where are you going? The snake - to work? And the little snake - to school? Well, then get out of here quickly! I hope your spirit is not here!

"Dad! Why are you arguing again?" Sasha said, looking at his father with fear.

"Son! Don't pay any attention to your dad! He's drunk!" Antonina Yegorovna said, leading Sasha aside.

"What? What are you trying to convince him of, you bitch?" Stepan Nilovich roared, clenching his fists and staggering toward his wife. But he didn't get there. He fell to the floor in the middle of the room.

"Son! Go to school! Hurry!" said Antonina Yegorovna, taking Sasha by the hand and leading him to the door.

-And what about you, Mom?- Sasha asked with fear. - Dad will beat you!

"Don't worry, son! Daddy's going to bed. I'm going to work now. Go to school quickly! Go!" Antonina Yegorovna opened the door for her son.

"Okay, Mom." Sasha obediently left the house and went to school.

When the door closed behind her son, Antonina Yegorovna turned around and saw her husband's face distorted with wild rage and malice.

- Stepan! Go to bed! - said the woman. - You were drinking with your friends all night. You need to get some sleep!

- No! I don't need to get enough sleep! - Stepan said, barely moving his tongue and trying to get up from the floor. - I need you, you scum, to finally tell me the truth!

-What truth? What are you talking about?

-You know it yourself. Tell me, why did you poison your sister Natalia?

"I've told you a hundred times that I'm not to blame for my sister's death! I swear to God, I'm not to blame! It was an accident! Someone in our household picked a false boletus mushroom in the forest and put it in a basket. And then the poisonous mushroom accidentally ended up in Natalya's plate, and she..."

Stepan, finally getting up from the floor, rudely interrupted his wife and shouted:

- Stop telling me about coincidences! I don't believe you! I don't believe you! I know you're lying! You've been lying for eight years! You better confess, or it will get worse!

"Confess to what? Something I didn't do? Understand, Stepan: I could have been in Natalya's place! It was an accident that the poisonous mushroom ended up on her plate and not mine! Is it my fault that Natalya died and not me? Believe me, Stepan: I would never have poisoned my sister! I loved her, after all!"

-Loved? You're lying! You're lying, you scum!- Stepan grew more and more furious, his eyes filled with blood, and his hands clenched into fists. - I know that it was you who killed my beloved Natalya! It was you who drove her from this world! Because you were jealous! You envied her beauty! You envied my love for her! I loved her so much! I adored her so much! And you, bitch, took her away from me! You forced her to marry you! You ruined me! You ruined my life! I hate you! I hate you, you creature!

Stepan ran up to his wife, grabbed her by the throat and began to strangle her.

- No, Stepan! Let go! It hurts! Let go! - Antonina Yegorovna screamed.

"I'll strangle you, you snake! I'll strangle you!" Stepan muttered, squeezing his wife's throat tighter and tighter. "I don't need you! I don't need your little snake! I hate you! I hate you!"

Antonina Yegorovna tried to resist her husband. But their forces were unequal. Stepan violently choked her. Then, mustering her last bit of strength, she screamed:

-Help! Good people, help! My husband is killing me! Please help!

- Ah! You're calling the neighbors, you creature! - Stepan roared. - It won't work! They won't help you this time! Don't hope! This is the end for you! The end! - The man tensed up and squeezed his wife's throat with all his might.

Antonina Yegorovna went silent and limp. Seeing that she was no longer breathing, Stepan let go of her. Her dead body fell to the floor like a sack. And Stepan quietly said:

-That's it! The end. The snake in the grass is dead! Dead.

The man knelt down next to the corpse and froze in that position. He looked at his dead wife with a hateful gaze and repeated as if in a delirium:

-Well, there you go! I've finally got my revenge for you, Natalia! There you go!

A few minutes later, neighbors, having heard Antonina Yegorovna's final cries, arrived running. Seeing the dead woman, they realized something irreparable had happened. They called

the police. The local police officer who arrived arrested Stepan Nilovich and reported the incident to the city prosecutor's office.

The village doctor confirmed that Antonina Yegorovna's death was due to strangulation. He began writing the official report.

One of the compassionate neighbors, Baba Lyuba, went to school to pick up Sasha. When she peeked into the classroom, an arithmetic lesson was in progress. The teacher was working on simple addition problems with the students. Baba Lyuba entered the classroom and timidly addressed the teacher:

-Excuse me. Can I speak to Sasha Zavidov?

"What happened? Why are you barging into the classroom during class and demanding Sasha Zavidov?" the teacher asked sternly.

Baba Lyuba became embarrassed and said quietly:

-Sasha needs to go home urgently.

"Why? What's the matter? Who the hell are you?" the teacher asked even more sternly.

"I'm Sasha's neighbor, Baba Lyuba. Please let the boy out of class!"

-Until you tell me what's wrong, I won't let Sasha go anywhere!

- Oh, how difficult it is to say... - Baba Lyuba hesitated. - Well... In general... You see...

Something bad happened...

"Misfortune? What? Be more specific! What's the matter?"

the teacher insisted.

-Okay, I'll tell you... Now... - Baba Lyuba gathered her strength and uttered the terrible phrase in one breath. - Sasha Zavidov's mother was killed!

When Sasha heard Baba Lyuba's last phrase, he jumped up in great excitement and shouted:

- It's not true! It's not true! I don't believe it! I don't believe you! My mommy is alive!

After that, the boy took off and ran headlong home. Behind him, he could hear the screams of Baba Lyuba and the teacher. But Sasha didn't hear them. He heard nothing. And saw nothing. In a state of extreme shock. He didn't remember how he got home. How he opened the door. How he saw his dead mother. lying on the bed...

Eyewitnesses to the incident reported that the boy quickly burst into the house, ran up to his dead mother, and... and then immediately lost consciousness... He lost consciousness and fell to the floor...

The driver jumped at the sudden shout, turned around, and saw that it was his boss, dozing in the back seat. He lightly touched him with his hand and said loudly:

-Alexander Ivanovich! Wake up! Do you hear? Wake up!

“What happened?” Alexander said fearfully, opening his eyes.

- Nothing. You just dozed off. And then I heard a scream. You must have had a bad dream, and you screamed. So I decided

to wake you up.

"That's right, Tikhon. You did the right thing by waking me up," Alexander said and sighed heavily.

The events of the past stirred his soul once again. They made him shudder with the horror and grief he'd experienced. They darkened his immortality. He needed to calm down and pull himself together. Alexander lit a cigarette and began to look out the window. After a few minutes, he asked:

-Where are we, Tikhon? How long until we get to the lab?

"No. We're almost there. Just fifteen kilometers left," the driver replied and increased speed.

"Okay," said Alexander and began looking out the window again.

A few minutes later, the car did indeed pull up to the laboratory gates. The driver honked the horn, and the gates opened. The car drove inside and stopped.

Alexander got out of the car and headed for the lab door. Just then, the door opened. Laboratory director Vladimir Zverev ran out to greet him.

"Alexander Ivanovich, my dear! You've finally arrived!" he said to the boss.

"Did you do anything without me?" Alexander asked as he walked.

"No, Alexander Ivanovich! What are you saying? We were waiting for you!" Vladimir replied, following his boss.

-Where is the young man?

-We put him in a cell.

-Why? You could have just given him a sleeping pill.

- We tried. But nothing worked. He refuses to drink anything.

He's afraid he'll be poisoned.

-Well, then I should have given an injection.

- We tried that too. But this young man is so angry that he won't let anyone near him. He's already beaten up two of our guards.

-Whom?

-Fat Nikita and little Alfred.

-I see. And where did you find this young man?

-At the casino

"In the casino?" Alexander asked in surprise, walking quickly along the long, narrow corridor.

"Yes. He was playing there," Vladimir answered, barely keeping up with his boss.

-Did you win?

- No. I lost. I lost ten thousand dollars in one evening.

-Wow! Cool! Apparently, he's not just some poor Pinocchio!

Why did you decide to take him?

"Because he's very handsome. Moreover, he has exactly the type of masculine beauty that Zinovy Izotovitch likes. After all, the banker described to us the body he wants. Young, muscular, toned, with refined, aristocratic features. Remember?"

"I remember," said Alexander and entered the office. "Come in, Vladimir. Sit down." He pointed to the chair closest to the

table and sat down himself. "Now tell me in more detail where and how you kidnapped the young man."

"We kidnapped him as he was leaving the casino. Four guys jumped on him, twisted his arms, shoved him into a car, and drove him to the lab."

-There were no witnesses to the kidnapping of the young man?

- No. The kidnapping happened at three in the morning. The street near the casino was quiet and deserted.

-I see. Did the guy have any documents on him?

-There wasn't.

-And what did he say? Did you find out who he is, what his name is, what he does?

"We found out. But I don't know if it's trustworthy. The guy said his name was Eric Barskin. He's twenty years old. He's the son of oil magnate Philip Emmanuilovich Barskin. He doesn't work or go to school.

-Why?

- He said he doesn't want to! But he has more than enough money for entertainment! Daddy spares nothing for him! And he also said that they will look for him. And when they find him, they will kill us all!

-Does he really think they will find him?

- I don't know. In any case, he says his daddy can do anything!

"I see. Now tell me, Vladimir, why do we need to go to all this trouble with his father? After all, I asked you to kidnap a young man like him, one who has no relatives. Especially not rich ones."

-Alexander Ivanovich! I think the guy is lying! He's not the son of an oil tycoon!

-What about the ten thousand dollars he lost at the casino?

- This money isn't his. The security guard at the casino told me so.

-Whose then?

The guard said the young man was a thief and used the stolen money to gamble at the casino. He also said the boy was from an orphanage and had no relatives.

"What the guard said doesn't interest me! You should have checked everything yourself! Personally! Do you understand?"

"I understand," Vladimir lowered his head guiltily. "I'm sorry, Alexander Ivanovich. I made a mistake."

"A mistake!" Alexander exclaimed angrily. "How else will your mistake come back to haunt us? Who knows. Maybe this young man really is the son of an oil magnate. They'll start looking for him. They'll find you and our guys. And then me too..."

-They won't come out! I told you there were no witnesses to the boy's abduction.

-Well, let's hope so. But there's another problem.

-Which?

"Zinovy Izotovitch won't be able to stay in Russia after receiving the body of an oil magnate's son. Otherwise, he'll be found and exposed. Then my secret will be revealed, too. And I don't want that. Do you understand? I don't want my

operations of transferring souls into new bodies to become public knowledge!"

"What should we do, Alexander Ivanovich? Maybe we should find another young man? And let this one go?"

"I don't know... I don't know..." Alexander said thoughtfully. "But you've already told the banker that you've found a suitable young man?"

-Yes. They told him. He's on his way to the lab now. He'll be here any minute.

- I see. Well then, I'll talk to him, and then I'll decide everything. And now, Vladimir, take me to the guy's cell. I want to talk to him.

"Okay. Let's go, Alexander Ivanovich." Vladimir stood up and headed for the door. Alexander followed him. The men walked down the long, narrow corridor again.

"Tell me, Vladimir, did you conduct a comprehensive examination of the young man's internal organs? Did you run any tests?" Alexander asked as they walked.

"No, Alexander Ivanovich. We haven't done anything yet. We haven't had time," Vladimir replied, continuing to walk forward down the corridor.

"What kind of workers are you? You haven't finished yet! You haven't done it yet! Why am I paying you money and saving you from the law? For what?" Alexander lost his temper and started shouting. "For working for me! And how do you work? Badly! Disgusting!" He stopped dead in his tracks and looked sternly at

Vladimir. He, too, stopped and said guiltily:

- Forgive me, Alexander Ivanovich! Forgive me! We will improve! Forgive me!

"You're cunning, Vladimir! Very cunning!" Alexander said, and walked down the corridor again. "Now I understand how you managed to ruin four wives and five children. Misled by your cunning, they let their guard down. That's what ruined them! But I won't let my guard down, know that! And your cunning won't help you! If you don't work hard enough for me, I'll fire you! And then you'll go back to prison, because you have no other choice!"

"Ah, Alexander Ivanovich! Anything but that! I don't want to go back to prison! I'm so grateful to you for getting me out of prison! I'm truly grateful! Believe me, I'm not being dishonest with you! You are my savior! My benefactor! I owe you my freedom! And that's why I will try my best to work for you!" Vladimir said in a soft, ingratiating voice, following his boss down the corridor.

"Okay, Vladimir. I believe you. For now," said Alexander, emphasizing the word "for now."

The corridor ended, and the men began to descend the stairs leading down.

"Tell me, Vladimir, how many people are in our cells now?" asked Alexander.

"Fifteen," Vladimir answered the boss.

-And everything is to order?

-Yes. There are orders for everyone, and you have signed

contracts.

-What is the first planned operation?

The first is to transfer the soul of Aleftina Ermolaevna Korovchenko into the body of her niece, Irina. The operation is scheduled to take place in a week.

"I can't next week. I have to be in Dubai. I have a big contract there. So I'll have to reschedule Korovchenko's surgery. I'll have it a little later."

"This news is unlikely to please Aleftina Ermolaevna. She'll cause a scandal."

-Really?

-Yes. Korovchenko is a bitch by nature. Don't you remember her?

- I remember. It's that fat woman who has diabetes.

-Exactly that one. She paid for the operation a long time ago and can't wait to receive her niece's body.

-And how is her niece feeling? Is she healthy?

-Yes. We conducted a comprehensive examination of her body. Irina is completely healthy and ready for surgery.

"Okay. Then let's do it this way: I'll perform the surgery not later, but earlier than scheduled. Then Korovchenko will be happy and won't make a scene."

"This is a wise decision. Like all your decisions, Alexander Ivanovich."

"You flatter me, Vladimir," said Alexander and stopped near the bars,

which blocked the way. - Well, here we are! - looking into the darkness, he shouted loudly. - Hey, Alfred! Open up!

"Hurry up! Do you hear, Alfred? Our boss has arrived! Open up!" Vladimir shouted after Alexander into the darkness.

Hurried footsteps were heard, and a few seconds later a very short man approached the bars. It was Alfred, a repeat offender, who, like Vladimir, was saved from prison by Alexander.

Little Alfred had been working in the lab for two years. His duties included guarding and feeding the prisoners confined to their cells and assisting with surgeries, performing the work of junior medical staff. And he always performed his duties successfully. But that day, he was extremely unlucky. The new prisoner turned out to be very stubborn and strong. Evidence of his strength was evident under Alfred's eyes in the form of huge bruises. Somewhat embarrassed by his appearance, the guard stammered:

- I'm already here. Hello, Alexander Ivanovich.

- Hello, Alfred. I see you've been decorated quite nicely.

"What am I saying! Nikita's just lying there. The new prisoner broke his ribs!" the guard muttered again, unlocking the bars.

"I see. I see you're completely useless! You, Alfred, are small! And Nikita is too fat! How could you possibly handle a strong young man? The only people you can handle are women!" Alexander said sharply, pushing aside the open grate and heading down the dark corridor. Vladimir and Alfred hurried after him.

After walking about twenty steps, Alexander stopped and

asked:

-Which cell did you assign the new boy to?

"The seventh one on the right," Vladimir answered.

"It's not far from here. I'll show you now, Alexander Ivanovich," Alfred said helpfully, running ahead of his boss to the right camera. "Here it is. This is the camera."

Alexander and Vladimir approached.

"Should I open the cell, Alexander Ivanovich?" asked the guard. "Or should you first look at the young man from the next observation room?"

"Let me think about it," said Alexander. "Is the young man in handcuffs?"

"Yes. We got him handcuffed. Barely. And tied him to the bed. Also barely. The guy's very strong. He must be into sports. It was hard to handle him," Alfred stammered. To which Alexander retorted:

-Who's stopping you from playing sports? Go ahead and do it! I don't need weakling security guards!

"Got it, Alexander Ivanovich. Got it all. We'll do some sports," the guard said obediently and asked again. "So, what have you decided? Should we open the cell?"

-Yes. Open up! - Alexander ordered. - Vladimir will come with me! And you, Alfred, stay outside!

"Okay." The guard opened the lock and let the men into the cell, slamming the door behind them.

Alexander and Vladimir involuntarily closed their eyes. The

powerful spotlight installed in the cell was glaring. It was difficult to adjust, especially after the dark corridor.

Alexander, shielding his eyes with his hand, began to examine the cell. A young man sat on an iron bed in the left corner. His hands were handcuffed, and he was tied to the bed with a thick rope.

The guy looked hostilely at the two men who entered and asked:

-Who are you? What do you want from me?

"You'll find out everything, dear young man. Take your time! I'll ask the questions first," Alexander said calmly, sitting down on a chair standing near the iron bed. "So, let's begin! What's your name?"

-Eric Barskin.

-How old are you?

-Twenty.

-Who are your parents?

-My father is Philip Emmanuilovich Barskin, an oil magnate.

-And mother?

-My mother died two years ago. From exhaustion.

"From exhaustion?" Alexander asked in surprise.

- Yes. She was a top model and tried to maintain her figure.

And at forty, that's hard. So her efforts ended in death.

-I see. So, you live with your father?

- No. I live alone. My father simply sponsors me.

- Do you have a girlfriend?

-Yes. And not just one.

-Will someone be looking for you?

-Yes. My father will be looking for me. And when he finds me, you'll be in trouble!

-Why are you sure that he will find you?

- Because my father is a billionaire. And money can do anything!

-Well, that's a good explanation. Now tell me, are you healthy?

-That's a strange question. Why do you need to know that?

-Please answer the question. And then I'll explain everything to you.

-Okay. I'm healthy.

-Are your internal organs bothering you?

-No.

-Do your liver, kidneys, stomach or heart hurt?

- No. I told you I'm healthy.

-Have you ever abused alcohol?

-No.

-Have you taken drugs?

-No.

The guards told me they barely managed to handle you. You're very strong. Do you exercise?

-Yes. I am.

-Have you been playing at the casino for a long time?

- A year and a half. My friend contributed to my addiction to gambling.

Leonid Durov. If he had been with me last night, you wouldn't have been able to kidnap me. After all, my friend always carries a gun.

-Why wasn't your friend with you last night?

-The girl he's in love with is to blame for this.

-I see. Now tell me, where does your father live?

-Do you need his address?

-Yes.

-Are you going to demand ransom for me? That's why you kidnapped me, right?

- No. Not for that.

-Then why did you kidnap me?

-Will you tell me your father's address?

-No. Not until you tell me why you kidnapped me!

There was a timid knock. Then Alfred opened the cell door and said:

-Excuse me, Alexander Ivanovich! The banker has arrived. What should I do?

"Take the banker to the observation room. Let him look at the young man from there and decide if he likes him," Alexander ordered Alfred.

After this, the guard nodded and closed the door.

"What does this mean?" the guy shouted. "Who am I supposed to like? What are you planning to do with me?"

"Calm down, Eric! No need to be nervous. Everything will be fine," Alexander said firmly.

- Good for whom? For you? Who is this banker? And why should he like me?

- I told you that I would explain everything to you.

- So explain! I want to know immediately why you kidnapped me?

"For now, I can only tell you why we kidnapped you. Because you're young and beautiful. You have a beautiful, muscular body and refined features.

- Ah! I'm starting to guess! You kidnapped me to sell me to a homosexual banker.

- No, my dear young man. No. Your guess is wrong.

-So what's the matter then? Why do you need me?

"I repeat, you will find out everything in due time. And now we are leaving. Let's go, Vladimir!" Alexander stood up from his chair and headed for the cell door. Vladimir -
behind him.

- Wait! Untie me from the bed! And take off my handcuffs! - the guy screamed. - I feel really bad! My arms and legs are really numb!

Alexander stopped, turned to the young man and said cynically:

"You'll have to be patient, Eric! We have to leave you like this. You're very dangerous! One of them beat up two guards! And one of them even had his ribs broken! So don't ask! We won't untie you from the bed or take off your handcuffs!"

"Scoundrels! What right do you have to keep me here? Who

are you? Scoundrels! Bastards! My daddy will find you and finish you off!" the young man screamed furiously.

But Alexander and Vladimir ignored his cries. They calmly left the cell and went to the adjacent observation room. Zinovy Izotovitch Pokhotin, a banker, was already there. He was a hunchbacked, deformed old man with enormous warts on his face and bowed legs. His entire being evoked disgust in those around him. Therefore, people tried to avoid him. The banker's partners, meanwhile, tried to ignore his repulsive appearance, and when concluding contracts and deals, they looked away rather than directly at him.

Zinovy Izotovitch himself was sensitive to his deformity. After all, he always wanted to please women.

Women weren't just a distraction for him. They were the meaning of his life. The banker spent all his money on beautiful women, buying them for an hour, a week, a month... And only after fully enjoying one beauty would he abandon her and move on to another. How many women were there in his life? Dozens? Hundreds? Only he knew. They say he even kept count.

Having lived to the age of sixty-five in his deformed body, the banker wanted to continue his life in the body of a handsome young man. And he was willing to pay a considerable price for it. So, when Alexander's agent contacted him, he eagerly jumped at the chance to inhabit the young man's body. A contract was signed with the banker, for which he paid a million dollars. After describing the young man into whose body he wanted to inhabit,

Zinovy Izotovitch waited for Alexander's men to find such a man. However, the banker proved unusually impatient and called Vladimir Zverev, whom Alexander had tasked with leading the operation to kidnap a suitable young man, almost daily. The old man urged Vladimir to hurry, reminding him that he had long ago paid the contract. So, when Vladimir and his men kidnapped Eric Barskin, he didn't fail to inform the banker. And so the old man arrived at the laboratory.

Alexander extended his hand to Zinovy Izotovitch and said:

-Greetings, dear banker.

- Hello. Hello, Alexander Ivanovich, - the old man said hastily.

- I have already looked at the young man.

-So, how do you like it? Did you like it?

"I really liked him. Young. Handsome. His body suits me. Perform the operation to transfer my soul into his body immediately!"

"Don't rush, Zinovy Izotovitch! It's good that you like the young man. But first, we need to conduct a comprehensive examination of his internal organs. So you won't have any complaints about us later. After all, you're planning on living in this guy's body for years to come. Which means it needs to be absolutely healthy."

"Yes, yes," the banker spoke again. "But I have no doubt that the young man is healthy. Look at him! He's bursting with health! And I'm burning with desire to get his body! And I don't want to wait any longer! I beg you, Alexander Ivanovich, perform the

operation today!"

"Today?" Alexander asked, surprised. "That's impossible, Zinovy Izotovitch! We need time to prepare you and the young man for the operation. Three days, at least."

"I can't wait, Alexander Ivanovich!" the old man chattered. "You must understand my situation! Right now I'm in love with a beauty, and I just can't persuade her to be mine. Do you understand me? Nothing helps: not money, not diamonds, not gold! She doesn't even want to look at me in my ugly body! She says she'd rather love a poor but handsome man! Than a rich but ugly man! Do you understand? As soon as I find myself in the body of this young man, the beauty will no longer be able to resist, and I will possess her! You must help me! And immediately perform the operation to transfer my soul into the body of this young man!"

"But..." Alexander tried to object again.

The banker interrupted him:

- I'll pay you another half a million for the urgency. Do you agree?

Alexander hesitated for a moment, and then said decisively:

-If you want me to perform the operation today, pay me not half a million, but a million!

The banker smiled slyly, winked at Alexander and said:

-Okay. You'll get a million. Now I'll call my partner, and he'll transfer the money to your account within ten minutes. He took out his mobile phone, dialed the number and said into the

receiver. - Viktor Sergeevich! Hello! This is

Zinovy Izotovitch Pokhotin. Please transfer another million dollars from my account to the account of Alexander Ivanovich Zavidov... Yes, of course. I will confirm my signature," he asked, turning to Alexander. "Do you have a computer? I need to confirm my signature."

"Yes," Alexander answered. "In my office."

"Well, that's great! Let's go there!" Zinovy Izotovitch chuckled contentedly and said into the receiver. "Viktor Sergeevich! I'll confirm my signature in a few minutes. Process the transfer." Then he hung up and turned to Alexander again. "Well, what are you standing there for? Let's go to your office!"

"Okay. Let's go," Alexander said, leading the way out of the observation room. Vladimir and Zinovy Izotovitch followed him. Alfred, who was in the hallway, ran up to the chief.

-Alexander Ivanovich! Are you leaving? What should I do now?

"Call the guys, Alfred! Take the boy and take him to the operating room! Warn everyone: we'll begin the operation in a few minutes!" Alexander ordered sternly.

Taken aback by his boss's words, Alfred muttered:

-What operation? We weren't prepared! Who will assist you?

"Vladimir. He'll do just fine without any training. And the orderlies will be Krivoy, Palach, Venik, and Pyanov. Tell them to go to the operating room and wait for me there."

"But Alexander Ivanovich..." Alfred tried to object.

"No buts, Alfred! Follow my orders!" Alexander said, and continued down the corridor. Vladimir and Zinovy Izotovitch hurried after him. The men reached the bars. They were open. So, wasting no time, they moved on. They climbed the stairs and walked down a long, narrow corridor. When they reached the office, they stopped. Alexander said, turning to the banker:

"Zinovy Izotovitch! This is my office. You'll find a computer there. Please go to the office and get on with confirming your signature. Vladimir and I will discuss the details of the upcoming operation in his office."

"Okay," the banker agreed and entered Alexander's office.

Alexander and Vladimir themselves, having walked another ten meters, entered another office.

"Well, Vladimir! We'll have to fulfill the old man's wish and perform the operation today," said Alexander, sitting down at the table.

"So, you've already made up your mind, Alexander Ivanovich? But what about the problems you mentioned? If this guy isn't lying, and he really is Eric Barskin, the oil magnate's son, then they'll start looking for him. And when they find him, and Zinovy Izotovitch is already living in his body, a scandal will break out, and everyone will find out..."

"Nonsense!" Alexander interrupted Vladimir. "We shouldn't worry about that now that we'll get good compensation for the troubles ahead. After all, a million dollars pays for everything, doesn't it?"

"But we haven't examined the young man. Perhaps he's not healthy. And then the banker won't live in his body for very long."

"And that shouldn't concern us! The old man himself didn't want to wait while we examined the boy. He was the one rushing us! So that relieves us of all responsibility!"

-So, you've definitely decided...

-Yes, I've decided. You'll be assisting me, Vladimir.

-Okay. Where shall we begin?

"Everything will proceed as usual. First, we need to render the banker's body inviable so that his soul can leave his body."

-What do you want to use for this? Poison again?

"Yes. That's the easiest and fastest way. Next, we'll need to expel the young man's soul from his body. To do this, we'll bring the young man to clinical death and, when his soul leaves his body, transplant the banker's soul into his. Then, we'll quickly bring the young man's body back to life."

- I see. And where should we put the guy's soul? Back in the test tube?

-Yes. Into the energy tube. There's nowhere else. I don't want to let his soul go!

-And the old man's dead body? Secretly bury it in the forest again?

"Well, of course. I told you, everything's business as usual. No changes. Although..." Alexander paused. "Perhaps a few things should be changed. For example, instead of killing the old man's body, we could transplant the soul of a young man into his. That

would be really funny! A young man's soul trapped in an old man's body! Funny and cynical! Isn't it? Worth a try? What do you think, Vladimir?"

- I don't know, Alexander Ivanovich. It's up to you to decide.

- Of course, me. But I'd like to know your opinion. The opinion of the most cynical and cruel man, who didn't spare his wives and children!

-Ah, Alexander Ivanovich! Please, don't remind me of the past!

"Okay, Vladimir. I've decided. We won't kill the old man's body! We'll bring the banker to clinical death, just like we did with the young man. And then we'll transplant their souls: the young man's soul into the old man's body, and the old man's soul into the young man's body. And immediately we'll bring both the young man's and the old man's bodies back to life. Do you understand?"

- Yes. I understand. But what if Zinovy Izotovitch doesn't agree to us keeping his old body alive, and even transplanting the young man's soul into it?

"We don't need his consent. We won't tell him about it! The banker won't know that the soul of a young man will be living in his body."

-And if they ever meet?

"They won't meet! I don't intend to let the young man go! He will live at the laboratory. I want to observe what happens to the young man's soul, trapped in the old man's body."

-His soul will be tormented and suffer.

"We'll see. Now's not the time to discuss it. I'll go to my office and make sure the banker transfers the money into my account. And you, Vladimir, go to the operating room and get everything ready for the operation."

"Okay," said Vladimir and headed off to carry out his boss's order.

Alexander himself went to his office. On the way, he ran into Alfred running.

"Is that you, Alfred? Where are you running?" Alexander asked.

"Oh, Alexander Ivanovich! I'm completely exhausted!" the guard began to complain. "I can't find Grisha Pyanov anywhere. It's as if he's disappeared into thin air! He's nowhere to be found!"

-And did you look for it in the room where the alcohol is stored?

-No.

- So go there and look. He's probably secretly drinking alcohol there.

-You think?

-Yes.

-Okay. I'll look there. - Alfred headed in the opposite direction.

-Wait, Alfred! - Alexander called out to him. - Have you found all the other guys yet?

-Yes. They're gathered in the operating room. They're waiting for you.

-Did you take the young man to the operating room?

-Delivered.

"Excellent! I'll be there soon. Find Grisha Pyanov and wait for me there," Alexander ordered and headed toward his office.

And Alfred headed in the opposite direction.

Alexander approached the office and listened. It was quiet outside. He opened the door and saw the banker sitting at the computer.

"Zinovy Izotovitch! Have you confirmed your signature?" Alexander asked.

"Yes. Confirmed," the banker replied. "Moreover, the money has already been transferred to your account. You can see for yourself. Take a look!"

Alexander walked up to the computer and looked at the screen.

"Let me check it myself. In my own way," he said to the banker.

-Please check.- Zinovy Izotovitch stood up and stepped aside.

Alexander sat down at the computer and began checking his account. Having completed this operation, he turned to the banker and said:

-That's right. You really did transfer the money to my account.

"I never deceive anyone, Alexander Ivanovich," the banker said, somewhat offended. "Now you must fulfill our agreement

and carry out the operation today."

"Of course, Zinovy Izotovich. I always keep my word, too. Please, let's go to the operating room."

-Let's go.

The operating room was on the second floor of the laboratory. So, having reached the stairs, Alexander and the banker began to climb up to the second floor.

"Oh, I'm so out of breath! It's so hard to climb up!" said Zinovy Izotovich, stopping and holding onto the handrail of the stairs.

Alexander approached the banker, took his hand and began to feel his pulse:

"You have arrhythmia, Zinovy Izotovich. Perhaps you're afraid of the upcoming surgery?"

"No... No. I'm not afraid. Not at all," the banker replied, as if reassuring himself, and continued up the stairs. Alexander followed him.

Having climbed up to the second floor, the old man asked:

-Where to go next?

"This way. Follow me!" Alexander walked quickly down the corridor. The banker could barely keep up with him.

When the men entered the operating room, the Executioner, Krivoy, Venik, Alfred, Pyanov and Vladimir were already there, as well as a bound and gagged young man.

Alexander asked his people, pointing at the young man:

-Why did you put a gag in his mouth?

Vladimir answered. He said:

- Ah, Alexander Ivanovich! This guy was shouting and swearing so much that we couldn't stand it anymore!

"Understood. Place the young man on the operating table and administer anesthesia!" Alexander ordered.

"Okay," Vladimir nodded and turned to the workers. "Did you hear? Take the guy and carry him to the operating table."

The executioner, Krivoy, Venik, and Alfred lifted the young man and carried him to the operating table. Pyanov, barely able to stand, looked on indifferently.

"So, Grisha? Are you drunk yet?" Alexander asked him.

"Absolutely not, Alexander Ivanovich. I'm sober," P'yanov replied, looking his boss in the eye without shame.

- You're lying, Grishka! You're lying! I know you're stealing alcohol and drinking it secretly. Watch out, I'll get you! I'll throw you out to hell! You'll go back to prison!

- Ah, Alexander Ivanovich! Why are you doing this? I don't want to go back to prison! I work for you! And now I'll carry out your orders! What should I do? Tell me!

-Go and get some sleep! I don't need a drunkard here!

"I'm not drunk, Alexander Ivanovich! Not at all! I want to work, not sleep!"

"Vladimir! Get this freak out of here! Hurry!" Alexander ordered, pointing at the uncooperative worker.

Vladimir grabbed Grishka Pyanov by the collar and whispered in his ear:

-Grisha! If you don't leave now, it will be worse for you! Go to your room and get some sleep! Don't disturb us!

P'yanov hesitated for a few minutes, then nodded and left the operating room.

Alexander turned to the banker:

- Zinovy Izotovitch! Please, come to the operating table and lie down on it.

The pale old man, his hands shaking with fear, babbled:

-Are you going to give me...give me anesthesia?

-Yes.

"Isn't it dangerous? Maybe I'll die, and you...you won't have time to perform the operation to transfer my soul into the body of a young man?"

"Don't worry, Zinovy Izotovitch! Everything will be fine!" Alexander said firmly. "Lie down on the operating table."

The banker barely made it to the operating table. His legs began to stumble with fear. The executioner and Crooked Man helped him climb onto the table and lie down.

"Give the banker anesthesia!" Alexander ordered.

Venik and Alfred carried out the order and silently awaited further instructions.

Vladimir turned to the boss:

Alexander Ivanovich! The young man and the old man have fallen asleep. Both are under anesthesia. We await your further instructions.

- Well then, guys! Let's begin! - said Alexander and sighed

deeply. - And may God help us! Or the Devil! It doesn't matter who! As long as he helps! I'll take care of the young man.

And you, Vladimir, are an old man. The Executioner and the Crooked One are helping me. And you, Vladimir, are Broom and Alfred. Get the instruments ready, boys! We're bringing both the young man and the old man to a state of clinical death. And watch out! You're responsible for the people you operate on with your own heads! If you overdo it and they die, then you won't live either!

Having heard the chief's stern order, everyone diligently set to work. The tense minutes of the operation began to flow.

After some time, Vladimir informed his boss:

- That's it, Alexander Ivanovich! The old man is in a state of clinical death.

"Excellent! The young man, too. Now don't miss this moment, boys! We need to capture the souls of the old man and the young man. Take the energy rod and place it on the part of the head where the soul exits the body. Come on, quickly! There's no time to waste here!"

Alexander's order was carried out. The Executioner and Krivoy placed an energy rod on the youth's head, while Alfred and Venik placed one on the old man's.

Vladimir turned to the boss:

-That's it, Alexander Ivanovich. We're ready to capture the soul of the old man and the soul of the young man.

"Good. Now turn on the equipment, guys! And you, Vladimir,

watch the monitor. As soon as the equipment shows that the souls are trapped and in energetic confines, we'll begin the soul transfer: we'll transplant the old man's soul into the young man's body, and the young man's soul into the old man's body.

Tensed minutes passed again. Vladimir stared fixedly at the monitor. After a while, he cried out:

- Yes! The old man's soul has left his body and is trapped in an energy trap!

"And the soul of the young man?" asked Alexander.

"Not yet. His soul hasn't left his body," Vladimir replied, staring intently at the monitor.

"Well, we'll wait," said Alexander and sat down on a chair.

A tense silence reigned. Vladimir stared fixedly at the monitor again. Everyone else stood frozen in stupor. The minutes ticked by. But the young man's soul remained in his body. Alexander began to grow nervous:

"What's the matter, Vladimir? Why won't the young man's soul leave his body? He's clinically dead."

"I don't know, Alexandra Ivanovich," Vladimir shook his head and approached the boss. "Perhaps his soul hopes that his young body will be able to pull through and stay alive?"

"What should we do? The old man's soul has already left his body and is trapped; it needs to be transplanted into the young man's body immediately. I have no idea what to do!"

"Perhaps we should increase the poison dose, Alexander Ivanovich? Would you allow me to give the young man an

additional injection of poison? Then his soul will realize that his body is completely poisoned and will leave it."

"If we increase the poison dose, we risk not being able to revive the young man. Rehabilitation measures are designed only for a specific dose of poisoning."

"Then I don't know what to do," Vladimir said, approaching the monitor again. "Ah! Wait! It seems it has happened! The young man's soul has finally left his body and is trapped in an energy bubble! Yes! The equipment shows it!"

"Wonderful!" Alexander became inspired and said loudly, addressing everyone.

Let's begin the soul transplant! Bring the energy ball with the banker's soul to the young man's head. And bring the energy ball with the young man's soul to the banker's head! And immediately begin the rehabilitation process to bring the old man's body and the young man's body back to life. As soon as the bodies begin to return to life, the souls will enter them themselves! So, get to work, guys!

And once again, tense minutes passed. Everyone present in the operating room was actively engaged in rehabilitation measures to bring the bodies of the old man and the young man back to life.

After some time, Vladimir happily announced:

"That's it, Alexander Ivanovich! The old man's body has been brought back to life! The young man's soul is already taking hold of it!"

"Excellent!" Alexander exclaimed. "The young man's body

has also been brought back to life! And the old man's soul is being implanted within it! Well done, boys! The operation was a success! You will all receive a bonus! Now we need to take our charges to different rooms. They must not see each other when they come to! The Executioner, the Crooked One, the Venik, and Alfred will handle this." Turning to the aforementioned workers, Alexander added. "And don't forget to connect the recovery devices to the bodies of the young man and the old man. After you've done this, you are free to rest. That's all! Follow my orders! And you, Vladimir, come with me to my office." Having said this, Alexander left the operating room.

Vladimir followed him.

A few minutes later the men were already in Alexander's office.

Vladimir said:

-I know that you are very tired, Alexander Ivanovich.

"Yes, I'm tired," Alexander sat down on a chair and winked slyly at Vladimir. "But a million dollars is worth it! Isn't it? We got it, and now it's time to rest. I want to eat well, listen to music, and have fun. That wouldn't hurt you either, Vladimir! Come with me!"

-Where?

- Some place with great food and beautiful girls. You know a lot of places like that in Moscow. Tell me where to go!

-Why do you think I know many such places?

"Well, stop pretending, Vladimir! I know you spend almost

every night hanging out in cafes, bars, and restaurants, picking up girls! You're not indifferent to them, are you? Lust comes first for you!"

- Ah, Alexander Ivanovich! Who told you such things about me?

- Well, why are you embarrassed, Vladimir? Are you embarrassed by your lust? Don't be! I'm no angel myself! I can be, like you, base and lustful! What can you do? Our vices have power over us! So, where are we going? Name a place where I can pick up the most beautiful girls.

-The most beautiful girls are very expensive.

- It's none of your concern! I'm the one paying! Well, tell me!

Where do we need to go?

-To the restaurant "Elite Vacation".

"Well, let's go. We're going to the Elite Leisure Restaurant. Take off your robe and let's go to the car!" Alexander said, immediately removing his own white robe. Vladimir followed suit.

Then the men left the office and walked down the hallway. Alfred was hurrying toward them. Seeing the boss, he addressed him from a distance:

"Alexander Ivanovich! We carried out your order. We placed the old man and the young man in separate rooms. But you didn't say what to do with them once they regain consciousness!"

Having caught up with Alfred, Alexander said:

-When they come to, and that shouldn't happen before

tomorrow, call me! I'll come right away.

-Okay, Alexander Ivanovich. Are you leaving us now?

-Yes. I'm leaving. And Vladimir, too. Tell everyone that the Executioner remains in charge. He will lead you until Vladimir returns. Do you understand?

“Yes,” answered Alfred. “Goodbye, Alexander Ivanovich.”

“Bye!” Alexander said casually and walked further down the corridor.

Vladimir is behind him.

As the men left the laboratory, a car pulled up to the porch. The driver stuck his head out the window and asked:

-Where are we going, Alexander Ivanovich?

“To the Elite Leisure restaurant,” Alexander answered, getting into the Mercedes.

“Where is such a restaurant located?” Tikhon asked.

“He’s in Moscow on Arbat,” Vladimir answered for Alexander, also getting into the car.

- Got it. I'll take you there. - The driver started the car, and it moved off.

They drove along a dirt road at first. Then they turned onto the highway. Looking out the window was dull. Bare trees and car signs. A dull landscape. So Alexander turned his gaze to his companion. Vladimir Zverev had intrigued him from the moment they met. He'd intrigued him as an extraordinary individual, capable of exceptional cruelty and cynicism. And now, Alexander looked at Vladimir and recalled his story.

Vladimir Zverev was born into an intelligent and wealthy family. His father was the chief physician of a Moscow clinic. A first-class specialist who saved dozens of lives, he was respected by both colleagues and patients and received numerous awards for his achievements in medicine. His mother was a renowned actress at the Moscow Art Theater. A beautiful, charming, and highly talented woman, she was adored and worshiped by her fans and lavished with praise by the capital's press. Her performances were always sold out.

Overall, the Zverev family was prosperous in every way. And Vladimir was an only child. A desired and beloved child. A child who was doted upon. A child who was always and completely indulged. A child who was pampered and protected from all the difficulties and sorrows of life.

From childhood, the boy grew up very intelligent and inquisitive. He was interested in both medicine and theater, equally. Volodya attended all the performances in which his mother acted. He also spent a lot of time at the clinic where his father worked. He enjoyed observing doctors and their patients, just as he enjoyed watching actors and audience reactions at the theater.

When Volodya grew up and entered high school, his parents began to think about his future and career. His father insisted that his son enroll in medical school after graduating, arguing that acting was not a man's profession, and that medicine was a

worthy occupation for a man. Volodya and his mother agreed. And so, Vladimir eventually became a medical student.

Having immersed himself in student life, the young man noticed that his classmates were interested in more than just their studies. The boys were interested in girls, and the girls were interested in boys. They flirted with each other, went to parties, and had affairs. Much the same thing had happened in high school. But back then, Volodya hadn't paid any attention to it. But now, he did. Moreover, he himself had developed a curiosity about the opposite sex. And he began to take a closer look at his classmates. However, eighteen-year-old girls held no attraction for him. Finding nothing interesting in them, Volodya thought, "They're just empty, dressed-up dolls. What do guys see in them? Why do they need these flighty girls?" He soon found the answer to this question.

Volodya was invited to a party held at his classmate Sergei Bykov's country house. It was in honor of Sergei Bykov's friend Irochka Zotova's birthday.

The party was filled with young people. Smartly dressed young men and women congratulated the birthday girl and gave her gifts. Volodya also congratulated Irochka on her birthday and presented her with flowers and a gift.

After the congratulations, they moved on to the feast. The young people happily drank strong alcoholic beverages and snacked on vegetable salads, caviar sandwiches, and other delicious food. Only Volodya didn't drink. At first, they looked

at him like a black sheep, and then stopped paying any attention.

The more they drank, the more they loosened up. The guys started telling dirty jokes, and the girls laughed at them. Then someone suggested dancing. They turned on loud music and began dancing wildly. The alcohol they'd consumed increasingly excited the young people, breaking down their psychological barriers and inciting them to committing madness. The girls began to press themselves ever closer to the guys. And the guys finally gave in to their hands, shamelessly groping their classmates in all their attractive feminine parts. Soon, the dancing escalated into an all-out orgy. The girls shed their clothes, revealing their seductive young bodies. And the guys began to passionately caress them, kiss them, and...

Volodya, who hadn't participated in the wild dancing and the orgy that followed, watched the proceedings with the eyes of a sober man. He was stunned by what he saw. After all, when he went to this party, he hadn't even imagined it would end in group sex. At the same time, Volodya watched the proceedings greedily, intently, and didn't want to leave. It seemed as if all this baseness and filth, the animalistic underbelly of human nature, was drawing him in and dragging him into a whirlpool of vice and impurity.

Determined to watch the entire orgy to the end, as if it were a fascinating film, Volodya settled comfortably into his chair. Minutes passed. The boys and girls switched sex partners. And Volodya watched, watched, watched... It was a strange sight. A

sober eighteen-year-old boy watching his drunken peers having group sex in front of him.

After that party, Vladimir Zverev felt something had changed in his life. He could no longer live as before. All his foundations were shaken. All his ideals were debunked. Having come into contact with the harsh reality of life, he was disillusioned. Disillusioned like a homebody who had never known vice before. And yet, at the same time, Volodya was captivated. Captivated by a new, previously unknown realm of pleasure.

An eighteen-year-old boy felt like a man. For the first time in his life! It was a revelation. A passionate desire for a woman's body inspired Vladimir to search for his love object. He began feverishly searching for the woman he wanted to possess. And he found such a woman. He found her...in his mother. His mother was his ideal of femininity, grace, charm, and charisma—everything he sought and failed to find in women his own age.

Elena Sergeevna Zvereva, a beautiful and slender forty-year-old blonde, looked considerably younger than her years. She was graceful and attractive. Her profession as an actress never allowed her to relax. Daily morning exercises, a balanced diet, and a healthy lifestyle preserved her natural beauty and grace. Therefore, in the theater, she continued to play the roles of Juliets, Ophelias, Cordelias, and other young divas.

Volodya fell instantly, madly, and passionately in love with his mother. It was a secret love. A mad love. It drove him to base and vulgar acts. Trying to see his mother naked, he began spying

on her when she was in her bedroom or bathroom. He devoured her with his eyes when she showered, when she changed, when she had sex with his father. In his mother's absence, he caressed and kissed her clothes, took them to his room, and practically worshiped them there. He felt as if his mother's underwear held her warmth and tenderness. However, neither spying on his mother nor her underwear could satisfy Vladimir's intense desire. And this left him suffering and tormented.

Elena Sergeevna, however, remained oblivious to what was happening to her son. Remaining a loving mother, she continued to care for Vladimir, taking an interest in his affairs, his friends, and his studies at medical school. But it never occurred to her that her son would fall in love. Of course, like any mother, she assumed it would happen someday. She even resigned herself to the fact that in the future, her son would leave home and start his own family with a young and beautiful woman. But that future seemed so far away! First, her son had to mature, graduate from medical school, get a good job, and build a career. And only then would he fall in love and get married. Such were Elena Sergeevna's plans.

But Vladimir had entirely different plans. His plans were as follows. He knew that his father sometimes stayed overnight at the clinic. This was very rare. But it did happen. A complex operation or a very serious patient required the presence of the clinic's head physician to resolve vital issues. And then his father would stay overnight at the clinic, having notified his wife

and son in advance of his absence. Vladimir waited for such an occasion. He waited with trepidation and excitement, with passion and frenzy. He decided that on the night his father stayed at the clinic, he would realize his deepest secret desire.

Vladimir had thought everything through, down to the last detail. His plan was to meet his mother at the theater, come home with her, and treat her to a celebratory dinner he'd already prepared. If his mother asked him what the occasion was, he'd lie, something about passing an exam with flying colors or some student celebration. She'd believe him, of course. And they'd have a wonderful dinner together, sharing a glass of champagne. And Vladimir planned to spike the champagne with a large dose of sleeping pills. Not his own glass, of course. But his mother's.

After dinner, Elena Sergeyevna would have fallen asleep and gone to her bedroom. Vladimir, having waited until his mother fell sound asleep, would also go to her bedroom, and there...

Such were Vladimir Zverev's plans. And he eagerly awaited the opportunity to put them into action.

And then such an opportunity presented itself. One afternoon, having come home from medical school, the young man was heating up the lunch his mother had prepared in advance. Suddenly, the phone rang. Vladimir picked up the receiver and heard the long-awaited announcement from his father: he wouldn't be coming home that night, but would be staying overnight at the clinic. The young man's joy knew no bounds! He decided to put his plan into action immediately. He ran to

the store. Bought champagne. Prepared a celebratory dinner. He found a sleeping pill in the medicine cabinet and slipped it into his pants pocket. Then he headed to the theater to meet his mother and take her home.

When Vladimir appeared in the foyer of the Moscow Art Theater, the cloakroom attendant told him the performance wasn't over yet and he could watch the finale. He entered the auditorium and glanced at the stage. It was the final act of "Romeo and Juliet." Elena Sergeyevna played Juliet and was incredibly beautiful in the role. The sight of his mother made Vladimir's heart beat even faster. He felt he couldn't wait any longer: either he would fulfill his desire that night or he would no longer be able to live.

After the performance, the young man went into his mother's dressing room. Elena Sergeyevna was changing at the time and was somewhat embarrassed by her son's arrival. She asked him to wait outside the door. If only she had known that her son couldn't wait any longer! Having fulfilled his mother's request, Vladimir stood outside the dressing room door and thought of only one thing: his burning, passionate, insane, mad desire! It seemed to him that in the whole world there was only one thing: his desire, and if he didn't satisfy it, he would die!

After changing, Elena Sergeyevna left the dressing room. Vladimir took his mother's bag, and they went home together. They took the metro. The train was stuffy and cramped. Vladimir stood next to his mother and felt her body. He was having a hard

time restraining himself! He wanted to hug his mother. Hug her tenderly and passionately. Hug her right there in the train. And then kiss her on the lips, caress her breasts, and...

Vladimir's thoughts were jumbled. His hands were shaking. He was flushed with intense tension. Noticing her son's strange state, Elena Sergeyevna asked what was wrong. Vladimir blamed a headache and begged his mother not to worry.

When they arrived home, the boy told them about the celebratory dinner he'd prepared himself. Elena Sergeyevna asked what the celebratory dinner was celebrating. Vladimir replied that he'd passed his anatomy exam with flying colors and wanted to celebrate. His mother didn't object. She praised her son for his good grades and went into the bathroom to wash her hands. Meanwhile, Vladimir opened the champagne and poured it into the glasses. Then, he placed a large dose of sleeping pills in his mother's glass.

Everything went according to plan. Elena Sergeyevna and Vladimir drank a glass of champagne and had a wonderful dinner. After dinner, the guy suggested watching TV. But his mother refused. She was deeply drowsy and went to her bedroom. From that moment on, Vladimir began counting the seconds. One, two, three, four, five... Fifty-one, fifty-two, fifty-three, fifty-four, fifty-five... His heart was pounding wildly, as if it wanted to burst out of his chest! Cold sweat poured down his face. His legs felt like cotton wool. A shudder ran through his entire body. Despite this, the guy got up and went to his mother's

bedroom.

Elena Sergeyevna was already fast asleep, sedated. Vladimir approached the bed, threw the blanket onto the floor... and... lay down next to his mother. The woman was wearing only a silk nightgown. He pulled down the shoulders of the nightgown and, exposing her lovely breasts, began kissing her passionately. Elena Sergeyevna didn't wake up. Then Vladimir lifted her nightgown and... and took possession of his mother.

It all happened instantly. The boy let out a cry of pleasure and went silent. Elena Sergeyevna woke up, opened her eyes, and... was stunned by what she saw. It was a shock! A terrible shock! She screamed. Screamed in horror and confusion, shame and helplessness, pain and despair! And then she fell silent, in a state of profound shock, unable to speak...

The mother and son were silent for a long time. It was a heavy silence. A terrifying silence.

A lot of time passed when Elena Sergeevna finally said:

-What have you done, Volodya?

- Forgive me, Mom! - the boy screamed. - Forgive me and understand! I love you! I love you as a woman! Do you understand? I want to possess you! I want us to be lovers! If you reject me, I will kill myself!

A heavy silence reigned again. After a while, Elena Sergeyevna said:

- I will forgive you, son! But you must forget about what happened today! We cannot be lovers! It is unnatural. I am your

mother. And I love you as a son, not as a man!

"Then I'd rather die!" Vladimir cried out in despair and rushed out of the bedroom. Elena Sergeevna ran after him, afraid he'd do something stupid.

The boy ran to the kitchen, grabbed a kitchen knife, and was about to plunge it into his heart. However, his mother arrived just in time to prevent the disaster. She grabbed Vladimir by the hand holding the knife and screamed:

- Don't you dare! Do you hear me? Don't you dare! You have to live, son! You have to live!

"Then be mine!" Vladimir said insistently and began to passionately kiss his mother.

Elena Sergeevna didn't resist. She couldn't resist, because she wanted her son to live.

The guy had sex with a woman right there in the kitchen. On the floor. This time, the pleasure lasted longer. And both mother and son enjoyed it...

From that memorable night Elena Sergeevna and Vladimir became lovers and lived

A double life. At first glance, their relationship seemed the same. The mother was loving and caring. And the son was devoted and respectful. This is how the head of the family, Dmitry Ivanovich Zverev, perceived this relationship. He knew nothing about the new, unnatural relationship between his wife and his adult son. And he never would have known. If only... If only an unpleasant incident hadn't happened to him.

One day, Dmitry Ivanovich, on his way to work at the clinic, slipped and fell. As a result of the unfortunate fall, he broke his arm. He had to go to the hospital himself. They put a cast on his arm, gave him a sick leave certificate, and sent him home. Not wanting to worry his wife and son, Dmitry Ivanovich didn't tell them about his injury over the phone. He drove home himself, opened the door, entered the room, and saw... What he saw so shocked him that he was dumbfounded! His beloved wife and his beloved son were having sex right there on the floor of the living room... Their embraces, moans, cries of pleasure, and wild passions—all of it was such a shock that Dmitry Ivanovich couldn't bear it! Clutching his head, he collapsed to the floor.

Doctors later diagnosed a "cerebral infarction," commonly known as a "stroke." Dmitry Ivanovich's entire left side was paralyzed, leaving him bedridden. He also lost the power of speech and went blind in one eye.

Elena Sergeevna cared for her husband. Vladimir also tried his best to ease his father's suffering. Both mother and son felt guilty and were tormented by remorse. But they could no longer change anything. They remained lovers and, despite the grief that had befallen them, were happy together.

Four years passed. Vladimir was already in his fifth year of medical school. He was an excellent student. Having chosen to specialize as a radiologist, he conducted an in-depth study of the effects of X-rays on the human body. He was also interested in cardiovascular diseases. He was interested because he had read

in a book about an unusual method for eliminating undesirable people. This method was used by the intelligence services of many countries. It consisted of injecting a special drug into the person's body, causing death. This death appeared natural and did not raise any suspicions of violent elimination. Doctors confirmed death from heart failure. An autopsy also confirmed this cause, and the expert reached the same conclusion. But in fact, the man had been murdered—murdered in a cunning and unusual way, one in which the killers avoided all prosecution and punishment.

This method of murder intrigued Vladimir because he had long wanted to get rid of his disabled father. He believed his paralyzed father was tormenting him and his mother, stealing their free time, and hindering their happiness.

Elena Sergeyevna truly had a hard time. She was forced to leave the theater and become her husband's caregiver. Every day, she fed and watered Dmitry Ivanovich, treated his bedsores, and washed his clothes. It was extremely difficult. The work of a caregiver took its toll on her strength and health. Elena Sergeyevna even aged and lost her appearance during this time, paying less and less attention to her son. This didn't suit Vladimir. So he decided to get rid of his disabled father. Get rid of him forever.

Having thoroughly studied the aforementioned unusual murder method, the young man decided to take action. And so one day, when his mother had gone to the store, he approached

his father's bedside with a syringe in hand. And, coldly looking into his only seeing eye, he administered the fatal injection. The doctors who arrived pronounced him dead from heart failure. Vladimir rejoiced: it had worked! And it had worked perfectly! Now no one could interfere with his happiness with his mother! However, he was wrong. Very wrong.

The father was buried. Mother and son were left alone. But their former happiness was gone. Elena Sergeyevna found work at the theater again. However, she was no longer offered leading roles. She was forced to settle for supporting roles, sometimes even appearing as an extra. Her fans no longer adored or idolized her. And the capital's press forgot her forever. Elena Sergeyevna was deeply distressed and...began to abuse alcohol. Moreover, she lost interest in her son and preferred to spend time with random drinking buddies. Vladimir was intensely jealous of his mother, stalking her, and tried to cure her of her drinking. But nothing worked. She was spiraling downward. And nothing could save her.

One evening, Elena Sergeyevna returned home drunk. And she wasn't alone. She was with a security guard who worked at the theater. The two drinking buddies finished the first bottle and then had sex. At that moment, Vladimir returned home. Enraged by what he saw, he grabbed the guard and nearly strangled him. He barely restrained himself. After tying the man up, he gave him a lethal injection. A few minutes later, the guard died of heart failure.

Elena Sergeevna, although very drunk, understood everything. She said to her son, pointing at the guard:

-You killed him! Now prison awaits you!

"You're mistaken, Mommy!" Vladimir said calmly. "This man's death is being ruled natural. The doctors have confirmed that he died of heart failure."

"Why are you so sure about this?" asked the mother.

"Because this isn't my first experience. Remember your father! I did the same thing to him!" Vladimir replied.

Elena Sergeevna turned pale and said in a trembling voice:

-What do you mean? Did you really... did you kill my father?

"Yes," Vladimir continued calmly. "I gave him a lethal injection, after which he died. The doctors who arrived pronounced him dead from heart failure."

"Oh my God! My son is a murderer! I gave birth to and raised a murderer! A monster! A monster!" the mother screamed, stunned by the terrible news her son had given her.

- Come on, stop it! Don't be so upset, Mommy! I did all this for you! I saw how you suffered, caring for your paralyzed father. I wanted to end your suffering. I wanted us to be happy! I love you! I love you madly! - Saying this, Vladimir began to passionately hug and kiss his mother. And she broke free from his embrace and screamed loudly:

-Leave me! Leave me! I hate you! I hate you! Don't you dare touch me!

His mother's resistance only increased Vladimir's desire. He

pushed his mother to the floor and immediately took her. When it was over, the boy said:

"I beg you, Mom, don't cheat on me with anyone else! Otherwise, I'll kill all your lovers. If you don't want anyone else to die, stop cheating on me! You must belong only to me! I love you madly, passionately! I love you more than life itself! There's only one happiness for me - to take possession of you every day! I'm going crazy over your body! I enjoy you! I revel in you! I love you so much that I can't even describe my love! I can't put it into words. Do you understand?" As he spoke, Vladimir grew more and more heated. He began to hug and caress Elena Sergeevna again and took possession of her again...

The unfortunate woman, no longer able to resist her son, endured all his actions with clenched teeth. However, her face did not express submission or humility. It reflected a deep hatred for her son.

After Vladimir had enjoyed his mother three times, he hoisted the guard's corpse onto his shoulders and carried it outside. He decided to place the corpse on a park bench, making it look as natural as possible: a man strolling through the park, then sitting down on the bench and drinking some vodka, but his heart just gave out, and bam! He died of heart failure.

When Vladimir left the house with his heavy burden, his mother lay quietly on the bed, her eyes closed. When Vladimir returned home, his mother was gone. She had vanished. Gone from his life forever.

Vladimir searched for his mother for a long time. He searched hospitals, morgues, and brothels. He searched distant relatives and acquaintances. He filed a missing persons report with the police. He hired a private detective. But it was all in vain. The young man never found his mother. And this became a true tragedy for him.

Vladimir was left alone. Completely alone. He was miserable and lonely. He had lost all meaning in life. He fell into a deep depression. He began skipping classes at medical school and abusing alcohol. It's unknown what would have happened to him if not for his classmate, Allochka Gurskaya. It was she who saved Vladimir and brought him back to normal life. Surrounding him with care and attention, Allochka helped him overcome his depression and complete his studies at medical school.

Vladimir's spirit was revived. He wanted to live and work. He found a job as a radiologist at a Moscow hospital. And he got married. To Allochka Gurskaya. He married out of gratitude, realizing that it was to her that he owed his return to life.

At first, everything was going well. Vladimir had a job he enjoyed and a wife to whom he was grateful. Family life saved him from loneliness and distracted him from the sad thoughts of his lost happiness—happiness with his mother.

Allochka Gurskaya loved Vladimir. She had loved him since their first year at medical school. And Vladimir hoped that he would love her too. Eventually. He lived with these hopes for three years. However, his hopes were never fulfilled. Vladimir

didn't love his wife. Intimacy with her brought him no pleasure. He didn't desire Allochka the way he once desired his mother. And when their first child was born, Vladimir hated both his wife and the baby. He caught himself wishing for their deaths. It was blasphemous, savage, and terrible! But Vladimir couldn't help himself. His entire being was permeated with hatred for his unloved wife and unloved child. And so he began to devise a plan to get rid of them—to get rid of them forever. And soon he came up with one.

One day, the little boy became very ill. Doctors diagnosed pneumonia. Vladimir suggested that Allochka have an X-ray of the child's lungs to see how far the illness had progressed and to determine the appropriate treatment. Allochka agreed.

When Vladimir X-rayed his son, he exceeded the radiation dose many times over. He did it deliberately, knowing what would follow. It was murder. A cold-blooded, calculated murder, planned and carried out by Vladimir.

The baby died two weeks later. Doctors confirmed the death as a result of bilateral pneumonia. Allochka suffered greatly from the loss of her child. So it came as no surprise that a month after the baby's death, Allochka died of heart failure.

So Vladimir dealt with his wife and son. He got away with the double murder and went unnoticed. This made Vladimir even more cold-blooded, brazen, and cynical. Alone again, he no longer sank into depression, but began to seek pleasure. He was drawn to nightclubs, bars, and restaurants—places where he

could easily pick up a beautiful woman and have a wonderful time with her.

Vladimir enjoyed the nightlife. Only one thing bothered him: his lack of wealth. A luxurious nightlife required a lot of money. A radiologist's salary, however, was very modest and didn't allow him to spend as much on pleasure as he wanted. So Vladimir faced a new problem: finding money. And he solved it. He did it this way.

At a nightclub, Vladimir met a wealthy forty-year-old woman. Her name was Irina Valeryevna Durova. She was a widow and the mother of two young children. Irina Valeryevna's husband had been a businessman during his lifetime and had amassed a vast fortune.

After his death in a car accident, his wife inherited the fortune.

Irina Valeryevna loved to spend her time idly. She didn't work anywhere. She frequented nightclubs and restaurants, seeking pleasure, and rarely thought about her children. They were raised by a housekeeper and a nanny.

Having met the wealthy widow, Vladimir realized this was his chance to get rich. He did everything he could to please Irina Valeryevna. He was considerate, gallant, and attentive. He gave her flowers and gifts. He invited her to concerts and theaters. And she took the bait. After all, she had never met such a charming young man as Vladimir seemed to her.

The wedding took place three months after they met. The young radiologist and the wealthy widow, having tied the knot,

began living together. Moreover, Vladimir even adopted Irina Valerievna's children.

Their family life was prosperous. The couple lived harmoniously and never argued. Irina Valeryevna loved Vladimir dearly and trusted him implicitly. This was her undoing.

Vladimir set about implementing his wicked plans at the first opportunity. The first opportunity presented itself when Irina Valeryevna's thirteen-year-old son's nose was broken at the boxing class he attended. Vladimir then suggested that the boy's nose be x-rayed at his hospital. His wife agreed.

While taking the X-ray, Vladimir again exceeded the radiation dose many times over. As a result, a year after the X-ray, the boy died of cancer. He was diagnosed with nasal "cancer."

The second opportunity presented itself when Irina Valerievna complained to her husband of chest pains that had begun bothering her after a viral illness. Vladimir suggested his wife have a chest X-ray at his hospital. Irina Valerievna, unsuspecting, agreed to the X-ray as readily as she had with her son. After all, she believed her husband had only the best for her.

Vladimir cold-bloodedly irradiated his wife. He irradiated her so severely that she had no chance of survival. Irina Valeryevna died of breast "cancer" six months after the X-ray.

Vladimir had become the owner of a large fortune, inherited from his wife. All that remained was to complete the final step of the plan: eliminating Irina Valerievna's youngest son, whom

Vladimir had previously adopted.

The seven-year-old boy grew up weak and sickly. So it was no surprise that, grieving the death of his brother and mother, he died of heart failure.

So Vladimir dealt with his second family. And again, he suffered no punishment. Now he was rich and could afford any pleasure. Having become a regular at nightclubs, bars, and restaurants, he bought the most beautiful women and spent time with them at night. And in the morning, he was once again a model doctor and went to work at the hospital.

Years passed. Vladimir turned thirty. And he longed for the warmth and comfort of home. He longed for a loving wife to greet him at home, feed him a delicious dinner, tuck him into a warm bed... He longed for care and attention. So he married again. He married an eighteen-year-old girl, a theater student. She attracted him with her youth, beauty, and charm.

Marina Vetrova was truly very beautiful. A long-legged, slender brunette, she captivated the gaze of many men. She was alluring and captivating.

The girl even got into a theater school thanks to her beauty. After all, there were many men on the admissions committee who immediately wanted to see her among the university's students.

Vladimir met Marina at a restaurant where she worked as a waitress. They hit it off and started dating. Marina was drawn to Vladimir's generosity. She loved how he spared nothing for her,

giving her expensive gifts, buying her jewelry, and taking her to nightclubs and discos. So when Vladimir proposed, she accepted without hesitation.

At first, their marriage was happy. Very happy, even. Vladimir desired his wife. He liked her as a woman. However, as soon as Marina gave birth, she changed dramatically: she gained weight, became flabby, and stopped taking care of herself. And Vladimir lost interest in her. He no longer desired intimacy with his wife. And he again began disappearing to restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. Marina cursed him, demanded money and fulfillment of his marital duties, made scenes, and argued over every little thing. Eventually, Vladimir became so disgusted with her that he decided to get rid of her.

He didn't have to wait long for relief. His well-established system of eliminating unwanted people worked. When his wife fell ill, Vladimir offered to have her have an X-ray at his hospital. Marina agreed. A few months later, she died of blood "cancer." Vladimir did the same with his remaining child. Thus, he dealt with his third family. And again, he suffered no punishment. The radiologist remained above suspicion and continued to live his life as he pleased.

For the next two years, Vladimir lived like this—for his own pleasure. Then the money left to him by his second wife ran out. And then he had to think again about where to get money.

Vladimir decided to open a private X-ray clinic. He expected its clientele to be wealthy and affluent individuals who didn't

want to wait in line for X-rays at public hospitals but were willing to pay for the speed and comfort provided by a radiologist at a private clinic. Moreover, in addition to his primary professional activity, Vladimir planned to engage in another illegal venture: helping his clients get rid of unwanted people. Of course, he wasn't helping them for free. He was offering them for a lot of money. Vladimir believed this was a very good business. He was certain that thousands of people would be willing to pay for the death of their enemies, as long as the death appeared natural and they wouldn't have to bear any responsibility for it.

Having received permission to engage in private medical practice and completed all the necessary formalities, Vladimir opened his own X-ray office in central Moscow.

There were a lot of clients. A lot. Vladimir couldn't cope alone. So he hired a nurse.

Twenty-five-year-old Galina Terekhova worked at the same hospital where Vladimir had previously worked. So, the doctor and nurse had known each other for a long time. Galina was happy to leave the hospital, where she was paid very little, and go to work for Vladimir, who gave her a decent salary. Working together, the doctor and nurse became very close. And soon, they married.

Vladimir was very pleased with his new wife. She was loving and faithful. She also helped him a lot with his work. A year later, his wife gave birth to a daughter. The Zverev family moved from their small Moscow apartment to a huge country house.

Fortunately, Vladimir's means now allowed him to own a huge house, a luxury car, and all the other trappings of a luxurious life.

A radiologist became rich. Very rich. His wife thought Vladimir earned all his income from his legitimate professional activities. However, this was not the case. Vladimir's legitimate work as a radiologist brought in a good income. But it would never have made him very rich. He became rich thanks to his illegal activities, which his wife knew nothing about, and which brought in enormous profits. For large sums of money, Vladimir irradiated people his clients didn't like. And after a while, these unwanted people died from "cancers" of various organs. However, no one suspected Vladimir was to blame. Everything was done at the highest level—no one could find fault!

Vladimir found his potential clients himself. He found them everywhere: on the streets, in the subway, in stores, in cafes... It wasn't difficult. With his keen eye, Vladimir would pick out someone upset or worried in a crowd. He would approach them, get to know them, learn about their problems, and...offer them a solution. Typically, each problem was associated with a specific person. By eliminating that person, the problem itself disappeared.

Vladimir did everything possible to keep his wife from learning of his illegal activities. He let her go home when he was conducting serious negotiations with secret clients, when he was irradiating people he didn't like, when he was making payments and taking ill-gotten gains.

But one day...the unexpected happened. The day began as usual. Vladimir was working with his wife. Various people came in. The couple took X-rays for them. People paid and left. At half past eleven, the phone rang. After speaking with the mystery client,

Vladimir sent his wife home and began to wait.

An hour later, two men entered the office. One was young, the other was older.

The young man introduced his father to Vladimir and asked for an X-ray of his ribs, explaining that his father had slipped and fallen, injuring his ribs. Vladimir asked the older man to go into the adjoining room and undress to the waist. When the older man left, Vladimir and the younger man had a conversation. This conversation was overheard by Vladimir's wife, who had returned to work because she had forgotten her house key in her robe.

Galina didn't mean to eavesdrop. It all happened involuntarily. She was about to open the door and enter her husband's office. But upon hearing the first few words of the conversation, she was taken aback by the unexpectedness and stood transfixed throughout, hanging on every word.

And the conversation went like this: The young man said to Vladimir:

"According to our agreement, Vladimir Dmitrievich, I arranged everything so that my father slipped, fell, and broke several ribs. Now I've brought him to you. And I've brought

the money. Take it!" He held out the envelope with the money. "Here's the entire amount we agreed on. You don't have to count it! That's right! I don't deceive my partners. And I hope you won't deceive me!"

In response, Vladimir said:

"Of course, I won't deceive you! Everything will happen as we agreed. Now I'll irradiate your father, and then he'll die of lung "cancer"!"

"I wish he would die soon!" the young man said cynically. "I can't wait any longer! I'm completely in debt! The sooner my father dies, the sooner I'll inherit our entire business and be able to manage the profits myself."

Do you understand?

"I understand," Vladimir replied. "I understand you perfectly! Don't worry! I'll irradiate your father very strongly, and he'll die very quickly!"

"Excellent! I'm glad we understand each other!" the young man said joyfully, extending his hand to Vladimir to shake.

At that moment, Galina opened the door and entered the office. She said nothing. She couldn't speak. She simply looked. She looked into Vladimir's eyes. And he understood everything. He understood that his wife had overheard the conversation and discovered his secret.

Having pulled himself together, Vladimir said in a calm voice:

- Darling! Have you forgotten something? Why did you come back?

"I came back to find out you're a criminal! Oh my God! It turns out I married a criminal! I lived next door to a murderer! My daughter's father is a cold-blooded killer!" Galina walked up to her husband and, looking at him intently, asked. "Where is the man you're going to irradiate so that he dies?"

"I don't understand what you're talking about, dear," Vladimir answered calmly.

"You don't understand? Really? You're a liar on top of that? A liar and a murderer! However, I won't allow you to commit another murder!" With these words, the woman rushed into the adjoining room.

And Vladimir and his client ran after her.

Seeing an elderly man, stripped to the waist and sitting submissively on the couch, Galina screamed:

-Get out of here! Get out quickly! They want to kill you! Your son and my husband have conspired to kill you! They are going to heavily irradiate you so that in a few months you will die of lung "cancer". Get out of here! Get out quickly!

The elderly man was taken aback by what he heard and didn't move. He looked in surprise at Galina and the men who had come running after her. A tense situation arose, difficult for everyone. Vladimir was the first to find something to say. Turning to the elderly man, he said calmly:

- Excuse me, please. Don't take this woman seriously. She's crazy!

- Am I crazy? How can you say that? - Galina screamed

indignantly, turning to Vladimir. - I'm normal! And you know it very well, husband! I didn't know about your criminal activities! I didn't know you were a murderer! But now I know! I know and I won't let you continue to kill people! - Turning to the older man, Galina said with authority and firmness. - Get dressed! And get out of here! And be careful! Your son wants you dead and will try to kill you at the first opportunity!

-Father! This is not true! - the young man stammered. - Don't listen to this woman! She's lying! She really is crazy!

The elderly man got dressed and left the office. His son ran after him, trying to justify himself and babbling something about a misunderstanding.

Vladimir and Galina were left alone. They were silent for a long time. And this heavy silence did not bode well. Finally, Galina said to her husband:

-I must report your criminal activities to the police.

"No, Galina! Don't do this! I beg you, don't do this!" Vladimir shouted. "I'm your husband! And I love you! Don't ruin our happiness!"

"You're a criminal! A murderer! And I won't cover for you!" Galina said firmly and headed for the exit.

But the woman didn't manage to escape. Vladimir caught up with her, knocked her down, and began strangling her. Within minutes, Galina was dead.

Waiting until dark, Vladimir loaded his wife's dead body into his car and drove it to his country house. At the time, the nanny

and child were home. Vladimir knew they had to be eliminated as well. So he bound the nanny and child and gagged them. Then he doused the house with gasoline and set it on fire.

Vladimir hoped the fire would cover up all traces of the crime and allow him to escape punishment again. That would have been the case, if not for the elderly man he was planning to irradiate under a contract with his son. It was this man who reported to the police what had happened in the private X-ray office the day before the fire. He told the police how Galina had saved his life by revealing the secret of the criminal conspiracy between her husband and his son, and how she had forced him to get dressed and leave the office without performing an X-ray.

Vladimir was quickly apprehended. He offered no resistance. In the temporary detention center, they began beating him severely, demanding that he confess to everything. And he confessed. He confessed to the murder of his wife, Galina Terekhova. He confessed to setting the house on fire, in which his child, nanny, and his wife's body burned to death.

But the beatings didn't stop. The police officers demanded that Vladimir confess to his criminal medical practices. Unable to bear the brutal abuse and the horrific physical pain they inflicted on him, Vladimir confessed to everything. He told of the hundreds of victims he had irradiated for money. He told of the murder of his first wife, Allochka Gurskaya, and the murder of their child. He told of the murder of his second wife, Irina Valeryevna Durova, and the murder of the two children he had

adopted. He told of the murder of his third wife, Marina Vetrova, and the murder of their child. He even told of the murder of his father!

And so... a doctor and radiologist appeared before the court, having killed his disabled father, four wives, five children and hundreds of innocent people who were objectionable to his secret clients.

Vladimir was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was transferred to Magadan and served his sentence there.

By the time Alexander found him, Vladimir had served five years and had given up hope of ever getting out. However, fate had a surprise in store for him. Alexander arranged Vladimir's escape and paid a large sum of money for it. He needed Vladimir. He desperately needed him. After all, Alexander had been searching the country for people with medical training yet devoid of any morality or integrity. Vladimir was precisely that type of person. Alexander thought highly of him, both as a rare scoundrel and as a superb medical specialist. So he appointed him his deputy and placed him in charge of the laboratory.

They were almost the same age, Alexander and Vladimir. They needed each other. They desperately needed each other. They were bound by their work and shared interests. But now, looking at Vladimir and recalling his story, Alexander asked himself: could he trust this man completely? Unfortunately, he couldn't answer that question.

The car pulled up to the Elite Recreation restaurant. Tikhon turned to the chef and said:

- That's it, Alexander Ivanovich. We've arrived. This is the "Elite Vacation" restaurant.

“Okay,” said Alexander, coming out of his reverie and returning to reality. “You’re free, Tikhon! Go home!”

“Maybe I should wait for you?” asked the driver.

- No. Don't. I repeat, you're free to go, Tikhon! Until tomorrow morning. And tomorrow morning I'll call you and tell you where to pick me up. Got it?

- Understood, Alexander Ivanovich. Goodbye! Have a good rest!

Alexander and Vladimir got out of the car and walked into the restaurant. A doorman greeted them at the door, bowed, and said politely:

-Good evening, gentlemen! Entrance to our restaurant costs one hundred dollars.

"Wow!" Alexander whistled. "Now I understand what 'elite vacation' means!" He took a hundred dollars out of his wallet and handed it to the doorman. "Here! Take it, my friend!"

"You have to pay two hundred dollars. There are two of you! A hundred dollars each," the doorman said politely again.

"I see. I hope the vacation will truly be luxurious and won't disappoint us!" As he spoke, Alexander pulled another hundred dollars out of his wallet and handed them to the doorman.

Taking the money, the doorman smiled sweetly and, opening

the restaurant doors, said:

-Please, come in! Enjoy your stay, gentlemen!

Alexander and Vladimir entered the restaurant. Soft music played, creating a lyrical mood. The room was dimly lit and cozy. People were seated at the tables. There weren't many of them. So Alexander immediately recognized Sheikh Rashid and his translator among them. The two of them settled on a table near the stage.

The waiter ran up to Alexander and Vladimir and said politely:

-Good evening, gentlemen! What would you like?

"We want to have an elite vacation," said Alexander, emphasizing the word "elite."

"Well then, please follow me. I'll show you a free table."

With these words, the waiter headed into the back of the room.

Alexander and Vladimir followed him.

"Here, gentlemen! Your table," said the waiter, stopping at the table behind the one where Sheikh Rashid and his translator were sitting. "Please sit down. And tell me what I would like for you."

There was a pause. The waiter stood and waited for the order. Alexander, not understanding this, looked at Vladimir in surprise. Finally, Vladimir said:

-Alexander Ivanovich! We need to place an order!

"Before I order, I'd like to look at the menu and see what they have," Alexander explained.

"We have everything!" the waiter exclaimed. "Any dish! Any cuisine of the world!" And, turning to Vladimir, he added, "You

know it yourself! You've been here many times already!"

"Yes. I know," Vladimir nodded. "But Alexander Ivanovich doesn't know. This is his first time in your restaurant."

"Well, then, I'll explain it to you, Alexander Ivanovich. You see, in our restaurant we don't serve menus," the waiter began patiently and politely, turning to Alexander. "In our restaurant, a customer can order any dish from any cuisine they'd like. And our chefs will prepare it for them!"

"Any dish, really! I don't believe it!" Alexander exclaimed, looking not at the waiter, but at Vladimir. "What do you say, Vladimir? Is he really telling the truth?"

"He's not lying, Alexander Ivanovich," Vladimir confirmed. "You really can order anything you want in this restaurant. I myself ordered a sea turtle dish with exotic fruits."

-Really? So how was it? Did you like it? - asked Alexander.

"I really liked it," Vladimir replied. "The food here is excellent. But the prices are steep!"

"Don't worry about that! I'm the one paying! And I have enough money for any exotic dishes," Alexander reassured Vladimir and turned to the waiter. "Well, my friend! If that's the case, then bring us the same dishes those two people over there ordered!" He gestured toward Sheikh Rashid and his translator, who were sitting in front of him.

The waiter was very surprised and said:

-I didn't understand you.

"Well, what's so hard to understand, my dear? Did those

people place an order for you?" Alexander pointed again at Sheikh Rashid and his translator.

"Yes. We did," the waiter replied.

"Did you bring them the dishes they ordered?" Alexander asked again.

-Yes. I brought it, - answered the waiter.

- So bring us the same dishes! The ones they ordered and received!

-All?

-Yes. Everything.

-Why do you need exactly the dishes that these people ordered?

- Now that's none of your business! Do your job, buddy! And mind your own business!

-Understood. Sorry.- The waiter was very embarrassed and hurried away, saying at last, - Your order will be fulfilled, gentlemen!

When the waiter left, Vladimir timidly asked:

-And you, Alexander Ivanovich, won't tell me either why you ordered exactly the dishes that the people sitting in front of us ordered?

- I'll tell you. Look at these people, Vladimir! Look carefully! One of them is my client.

-Which?

-And what do you think?

-Fat man.

- Correct. You guessed it, Vladimir. The fat man is my client. He's an Arab sheikh. And the other one is his translator. I met with them today, and we signed a lucrative contract. In a week, I'm supposed to be in Dubai and carry out the operation according to this contract.

"I see. It was because of this contract that you decided to carry out the planned operation to transfer Korovchenko's soul into the body of her niece, Irina, ahead of schedule?"

- Yes. True, I wanted to have this planned operation later, after I returned from Dubai. But you said Korovchenko would cause a scandal. So I'll have to do the operation sooner.

-Tell me, Alexander Ivanovich, will you go to Dubai alone or will you take one of our people?

"I haven't decided on that yet. But what I have decided is that I will definitely try all the dishes that Sheikh Rashid and his translator are enjoying right now. Now do you understand, Vladimir, why I made that order?"

-Yes. I understand, Alexander Ivanovich. Will you approach the sheikh and his translator or not?

- I don't know. We're sitting behind them. They can't see us. So I'm not planning on approaching them for now. And then - we'll see. You better tell me, Vladimir, where are the beautiful girls you were talking about? I don't see them here!

-They will appear when the show starts.

-What show?

-Entertaining.

-So when will it start?

Vladimir looked at his watch and said:

-Any minute now.

“What kind of show is this?” Alexander continued to ask.

- Female models will take to the stage and demonstrate luxury clothing for wealthy people.

-Ah! I'm not interested in that at all!

Don't jump to conclusions, Alexander Ivanovich! I think you'll really enjoy the show!

-Why do you think so, Vladimir?

-Because every girl performing in this restaurant is very beautiful and famous as a model not only in our country, but throughout the world!

-Really?

-Yes. The best Russian models perform here.

-Is Svetlana Lazareva among them?

-Yes. Do you know her?

"I'm not familiar. I'm not familiar yet," Alexander said thoughtfully. "But now everything has become clear to me..."

-What do you understand? What are you talking about, Alexander Ivanovich?

"Now it's clear to me why Sheikh Rashid and his translator came to this particular restaurant. They came here because of Svetlana Lazareva."

-Really? Why do they need it?

-Sheikh Rashid wants me to perform an operation to transfer

the soul of his daughter Leila into the body of the model Svetlana Lazareva.

- Is the sheikh's daughter sick? Is she dying?

- No. She's just gotten really fat and weighs two hundred and seventy kilograms.

-Wow! That's a lot!

-Yes. A lot. Because of her fatness, the sheikh's daughter is unpopular with men, and they won't marry her. But she really wants to get married.

-Then let him lose weight!

"She can't. She's tried several times, but she can't. And she suffers greatly from this. She even attempted suicide twice. Sheikh Rashid loves his daughter very much and doesn't want her to die. That's why he decided to help her regain the body of a beautiful, slender woman. Leila chose the body of Russian model Svetlana Lazareva. And that's why the sheikh is now preoccupied with arranging Svetlana Lazareva's kidnapping. That's why he came to this restaurant with a translator.

- So, you agreed to perform the operation to transfer the soul of the sheikh's daughter into the body of Svetlana Lazareva?

"I had to agree. I didn't want to. But Easterners are very dangerous. Refuse their request, and they'll harbor a grudge and start seeking revenge! So, I had to agree. I promised the sheikh that I would perform the operation to transfer his daughter's soul into the body of the model Svetlana Lazareva.

"I see," Vladimir managed to say, just as a bright light flashed

and loud music began to play. "And now the show begins. Look at the stage, Alexander Ivanovich."

First, a man in a black tailcoat came onto the stage and announced:

Dear Sirs! We present to you a most fascinating show. Renowned Russian fashion models will now demonstrate elite clothing for the wealthy. And not only clothing. They will also show you themselves – the most beautiful women, renowned throughout the world! After our show, you can invite your favorite model to your table, and she will spend the evening with you.

"Spend the evening? What does he mean?" Alexander asked Vladimir, pointing at the man in the black tailcoat.

"He means the show will continue at the tables. Typically, male clients invite the models they like to their table and have a good time with them."

-And this, of course, is not free?

- Yes. Like everything else in this world. To get the model you like to spend the evening at your table, you need to pay three hundred dollars. Pay that man in the black tailcoat who announces the show.

-Is he a pimp?

- No. He's a showman. He has to share the money he gets from customers with the owners of this restaurant.

-I see. Everyone has their share.

-This is true.

-And what next? These girls spend the evening with the clients, eating and drinking at their expense. And that's it?

"And then it's by personal agreement with the girls. Usually, the male clients take the girls from here to expensive hotels and continue their fun there."

- So the girls sell themselves?

"I can't say for sure. In any case, each girl names her own price and takes the money from the client herself. And what happens to the money afterwards, I don't know. Perhaps the girls give some of the money to the restaurant owners or the show organizer. Or perhaps they keep it all for themselves."

- I see. A sort of elite prostitution. Well, let's see how it differs from regular prostitution and whether it's worth the money.

- Believe me, Alexander Ivanovich, it justifies.

-Have you already used the services of these models?

Vladimir wanted to answer his boss's question. But at that moment, the lights went out and the music grew even louder. The room where the clients were seated remained in darkness. The stage lit up a few seconds later. Girls began to appear on stage, each more beautiful than the next. They were wearing elegant dresses and expensive jewelry. A man in a black tailcoat announced the first and last names of each model and recounted their performances on prestigious Russian and international catwalks.

Alexander and Vladimir gazed at the girls, mesmerized. And truly, there was something to behold! Slender, graceful, youthful

bodies! Beautiful faces! Fashionable hairstyles! Sultry gazes! The models aroused desire. Passionate desire in every man in the audience. That's what the show was designed for.

"What magnificence of female bodies!" exclaimed Alexander.

"You're right, Alexander Ivanovich!" Vladimir supported his boss. "Indeed,

Magnificent! These girls are like pearls! One more beautiful than the other! It's hard to choose!

At this time, a man in a black tailcoat announced the next model:

-And now I present to you the celebrated model Svetlana Lazareva! Come meet her, gentlemen!

The girl who walked onto the stage wasn't just a pretty girl. She was perfect.

Svetlana Lazareva's classically refined form and aristocratic features set her apart from all other models. She was the epitome of beauty, harmony, and grace. Therefore, when she appeared on stage, all the men gasped in amazement and admiration.

"Oh, how beautiful she is! How beautiful!" Alexander exclaimed. "She has some kind of unearthly, magical beauty. I want to look at her forever! Without looking away for a minute!"

"Yes, you're right, Alexander Ivanovich!" Vladimir echoed his boss. "Svetlana Lazareva is the star of all fashion models. She's the most beautiful of the beautiful!"

A man in a black tailcoat began listing Svetlana Lazareva's

titles, won in various beauty pageants. Then the show's organizer began recounting the model's numerous appearances on prestigious Russian and international catwalks. Meanwhile, Svetlana Lazareva walked around the stage to music, demonstrating both her clothes and herself to clients. She wore a short, thin skirt that revealed almost all of her slender, luscious legs, and an equally thin blouse that revealed her firm, perfectly formed breasts.

As the man in the black tailcoat finished his speech and the music reached its climax, Svetlana Lazareva made two imperceptible hand movements and instantly appeared before the audience in just her bathing suit. No one understood how she had managed to remove her skirt and blouse so quickly and easily. All the men gasped again in amazement and admiration! Then a thunderous storm of applause erupted. Svetlana Lazareva bowed coldly and left the stage.

The show's organizer began announcing the next model. But Alexander and Vladimir didn't hear him. They were still captivated by Svetlana Lazareva's perfect beauty. It was an obsession! Magic, if you will! Only perfect, unearthly beauty could work such a miracle! The men continued to experience feelings of amazement and admiration! They were brought out of this state by the waiter who brought their order.

"Gentlemen! I've brought everything you ordered," he said, and began placing various dishes on the table. Vladimir shuddered, coming to his senses. And Alexander winced in

displeasure. The magic of beauty had vanished. Vanished with the arrival of the waiter. And the men returned to reality once more.

“Thank you,” Alexander said and asked, pointing to the dishes. “Are these the dishes that the people sitting in front of us ordered?”

“Yes,” the waiter answered.

“Well, we’ll be happy to try them,” Alexander stated.

“Bon appétit, gentlemen!” said the waiter and left.

Alexander looked at the dishes brought and said:

-Come on, Vladimir, let's try the dishes that Sheikh Rashid and his translator ordered.

“Go ahead, Alexander Ivanovich,” Vladimir nodded and also looked at the dishes that had been brought.

-But first, let's have a drink.

-I don't mind. Let's have a drink.

- So, what did they bring us here? - Alexander took the decanter brought by the waiter and began to look at its contents.

- I wonder what this is? Vodka?

"Unlikely. Easterners don't like vodka, they like wine," Vladimir said.

-So, this is white wine?

-Probably. We should try. Then we'll find out.

-Yes. Let's taste it. Pour it, Vladimir.

Vladimir poured, and the men drank. They tasted a pleasant, sour taste. They concluded it was wine. Then they began to

sample the unknown dishes.

"What is this?" Alexander asked, eating fried meat stuffed with sweet vegetables with gusto. "It looks like a shashlik with vegetables. But what kind of meat is this shashlik made of?"

-I think from camel meat.

-Yes? Why do you think so, Vladimir?

-Your sheikh is from the East. And in the East, they love camel shashlik.

-I see that you, Vladimir, are an expert in oriental cuisine!

"Oh, come on, Alexander Ivanovich! If I were an expert on Eastern cuisine, I'd tell you the name of this delicious dish and what it's made from," Vladimir said, pointing to the dish he was currently enjoying. "But I can't tell you. I don't know what this dish is or what it's made from. I only know one thing: it's very, very tasty."

"Well, Vladimir, let's not worry about what these dishes are called or what they're made from. Let's just enjoy them!"

- I agree, Alexander Ivanovich! You are right as always!

The men began to enjoy the unfamiliar dishes. Enthralled, they seemed to have forgotten the ongoing show. Meanwhile, various models took to the stage. The show's host continued to announce each girl's first and last name and recount their performances on Russian and international runways.

By the time Alexander and Vladimir had had their fill, the show was already over. A man in a black tailcoat announced the final model:

- And now, gentlemen, before you is the last participant of our show - Olga Kudrina. Please meet her!

A model with long dark hair and a seductive figure walked onto the stage. Upon seeing her, Alexander's expression changed, he jumped up from his seat, and exclaimed:

-Victoria! This is Victoria!

The show's organizer responded to Alexander's inappropriate behavior with the following phrase:

-You're mistaken, sir! This girl's name is Olga. Olga Kudrina. Not Victoria. Please don't interfere with her performance!

Alexander felt embarrassed and sat down. Loud music began to play. To the sound of it, Olga Kudrina began walking around the stage, showing off her clothes and herself to the customers.

- I wasn't mistaken! This is Victoria! Victoria! - Alexander muttered, looking at the girl. - This is her face! Her figure! I wasn't mistaken! This is Victoria!

"But the show's organizer claims that the girl's name is Olga Kudrina," Vladimir told the boss.

"He's lying! This can't be! I can see it's Victoria!" Alexander continued to insist.

"Olga Kudrina and Victoria probably look very similar. It happens. And that's why you, Alexander Ivanovich, were mistaken."

- No! I'm not mistaken! This is Victoria!

-Who is Victoria?

- She... she's my classmate. We went to college together. I

loved her. I loved her very much. And I still love her.

"If she's your classmate, then she must be your age too. She's forty now, like you. And Olga Kudrina looks no more than eighteen. Now do you realize you were mistaken?"

Alexander didn't answer for a long time, thinking about what Vladimir had said. Then he said:

- Yes, Vladimir, you're right. Victoria should be forty now. And this girl is young. I was wrong. The thing is, I remember Victoria as young and beautiful. I don't imagine her as a forty-year-old woman. Do you understand?

"I understand, Alexander Ivanovich. You've achieved immortality and eternal youth. And so you've forgotten that ordinary people age and die. So has your classmate. She's grown old."

- Ah! If Victoria were with me, she would never grow old! I would give her new young bodies! And she would live with me forever!

- Why don't you offer it to her? I think she would agree.

- I don't know where she is. I can't find her. Victoria disappeared. She disappeared twenty years ago. And since then I can't find her!

- I see. I understand you perfectly, Alexander Ivanovich. My mother disappeared too. And I was never able to find her!

The men's conversation was interrupted by the show's organizer. Turning to the customers, he announced:

Gentlemen! Our show is over! Now you can invite the model

you like to your table. It costs three hundred dollars. If you've decided to do this, please come to me!

"Well, Vladimir! Which girls should we invite?" Alexander asked.

"It's up to you, Alexander Ivanovich. You're the one paying, after all!" Vladimir replied.

-And yet tell me: who would you like to see at our table?

-Svetlana Lazareva.

-It's clear.

-And you, Alexander Ivanovich, who would you like to see at our table?

"Olga Kudrina. So, Vladimir, go to the show organizer and tell him we're inviting two girls to our table: Svetlana Lazareva and Olga Kudrina. Here's the money. Take it. It's six hundred dollars." Alexander held out the money.

Vladimir took the money and went to carry out his boss's assignment. And Alexander closed his eyes and imagined Victoria. Young, beautiful. Desirable. He remembered the first time he kissed Victoria. It was winter. They were sledding down the mountain. And then, during one unfortunate descent, the sleigh caught on some snag sticking out from under the snow. And Alexander and Victoria, tumbled out of the sleigh, tumbled down the mountain. When the fall ended, Victoria was lying in the snow, and Alexander on top of her. That's how it happened. This situation embarrassed Victoria. And in Alexander, it aroused a burning passionate desire. He felt like

a man. And he kissed Victoria. Kissed her for the first time. Alexander remembered that sweet kiss forever, and now, many years later, he recalled the first time he kissed Victoria and how he desired her then!

The memories were interrupted by Vladimir's return. He said.

-Alexander Ivanovich! I only managed to invite one girl to our table.

-Which one?

-Olga Kudrina.

-Why weren't you able to invite Svetlana Lazareva?

-She's already been invited.

-Who?

Sheikh Rashid and his translator. They had paid the show's organizer earlier. So he said Svetlana Lazareva would spend the evening with them.

- No! She must spend the evening with us! Do you understand that, Vladimir? Go to the show's organizer right now and offer him more money! Sheikh Rashid and his translator paid three hundred dollars for an evening with Svetlana Lazareva. And you pay five hundred dollars. Go!

Despite his boss's order, Vladimir did not move.

"Well, why are you standing there? Come on, hurry up!" Alexander shouted.

- I can't, Alexander Ivanovich! I only have three hundred dollars. You forgot to give me more money.

-Oh, right! Take it! - Alexander handed Vladimir another two

hundred dollars.

But Vladimir did not take the money.

"Forgive me, Alexander Ivanovich. But it would be better if you went to the show's organizer yourself. He might demand more than five hundred dollars. You'll have to pay him right away. I don't have any money on me."

-I see. Okay. I'll go myself.

Alexander rose from the table and walked toward the man in the black tailcoat. Vladimir sat down at the table and waited for his boss to return.

"Good evening," said Alexander, approaching the show's organizer.

"Good, good," he muttered, counting the money he had taken from other clients. "What would you like?"

-I would like to invite model Svetlana Lazareva to my table.

"Unfortunately, that's not possible," the show's organizer muttered again, continuing to count the money and not looking at Alexander. "She's already been invited. Other clients."

- I know, I know. But I want to offer you more money than they paid.

The man in the black tailcoat finally looked up from his counting of money and stared at Alexander. Then he asked:

-How much will you give?

-Five hundred dollars.

- Not enough! I'm not going to quarrel over five hundred dollars with the customers who came before you and paid three

hundred dollars.

“Okay. I’ll give you a thousand dollars,” said Alexander.

“Not enough. I don't agree,” the show's organizer shook his head.

“One and a half thousand dollars,” Alexander offered.

“No. Not enough,” the man in the black tailcoat continued to refuse.

-One thousand eight hundred.

-Few!

- Two thousand! This is my last price! - Alexander said firmly.

The show's organizer hesitated for a moment. Then, as firmly as Alexander, he said:

"And my final price is three thousand dollars! Either you agree. Or Svetlana Lazareva will spend this evening with other clients."

Alexander was silent for a moment, pondering the greed and cunning of the show's organizer. Then he said, taking money out of his wallet:

-Okay. I agree. Here are three thousand dollars. - He held out the money.

-Well, "That's great!" said the man in the black tailcoat, taking the money and starting to count it. "We've made a good deal!"

"A profitable one—for you, not for me! Instead of three hundred dollars, you got three thousand dollars! Ten times more!" Alexander said irritably.

"You've made the right choice too!" the show's organizer

retorted. "After all, the most beautiful girl on our show will be spending the evening with you, and not with other clients!"

-Yes. For the evening she spent with other clients alone, you would have earned three hundred dollars. And they ripped me off for three thousand dollars!

"You weren't the first! And so you were obligated to pay for the trouble I'd cause with my first clients when I informed them Svetlana Lazareva wouldn't be spending the evening with them and refunded their money."

-Isn't the price for your troubles with your first clients enormous?

"No. Just right! Don't take it personally. Everyone earns their living in their own place – as best they can!" The show's organizer placed the money Alexander had given him into his inside tailcoat pocket and clapped it joyfully. "All the best, sir! I hope you have a pleasant evening!"

"Thank you," Alexander muttered discontentedly. "When will Svetlana Lazareva come?"

- Don't worry! I won't keep you waiting! I'll send the girl to you right away.

"Okay," said Alexander and went to his table.

Olga Kudrina was already sitting at the table with Vladimir. They were chatting animatedly and laughing. When Alexander approached, they became embarrassed and quiet.

"Well, why did you stop laughing?" asked Alexander.

"We... We haven't stopped... We..." Vladimir hesitated, and

then said, turning to the girl and pointing at Alexander. "Olenka! Allow me to introduce you. This is Alexander Ivanovich. My boss."

"Nice to meet you. And you already know my name," Olga said, looking at Alexander.

"Yes. I know." Alexander sat down at the table and continued thoughtfully. "Your name is Olga. And I thought your name was Victoria."

"Why did you decide that?" asked the model.

"Because you look very much like one girl," Alexander answered.

"Is her name Victoria?" Olga asked.

"Yes." Alexander nodded affirmatively.

"Maybe you could tell me about her?" Olga suggested.

"No. I don't want to. It's personal," Alexander refused. "Better you tell me what you were laughing so infectiously about before I arrived."

"Vladimir told me a joke. A very funny one," Olga explained.

"I see. He's a master at telling jokes. And, in general, at making people laugh," said Alexander, looking gloomily at Vladimir.

"What happened, Alexander Ivanovich? Why are you so gloomy? Couldn't come to an agreement with the show's organizer?" Vladimir asked, sensing something was wrong.

"No, Vladimir. We came to an agreement. It's just that the show's organizer turned out to be a scoundrel and a greedy

person. He demanded three thousand dollars for an evening with Svetlana Lazareva."

-Wow!-Vladimir even whistled in surprise. - And you paid?

"I paid," Alexander replied irritably. "I had to pay. The show's organizer said I had to pay for the trouble he'd cause with his first clients when he told them Svetlana Lazareva wouldn't be spending the evening with them."

"I see," Vladimir shook his head sympathetically. "This show organizer really is a scoundrel and a greedy person!" he asked, turning to the girl. "And what do you think, Olenka?"

"I think so too," the model answered quietly and lowered her head.

-Tell me, Olya, how long have you been working on this show?
- asked Alexander.

-Eleven months.

"That's quite a lot. And what prompted you to work on this scoundrel and thieves' show?" Alexander continued to interrogate the girl.

"Sorry. I'd rather not talk about it," the model answered quietly again.

"Well, if you don't want to, then don't! Let's talk about something else!" Alexander looked at the girl unceremoniously. "For example, about you. How old are you, Olya?"

-Nineteen.

-What is your education?

-Secondary special.

-Yes? And what is your specialty?

-Nurse.

- I wonder how a nurse became a model?

"It happened by accident. I needed money, and I..." Olga faltered and blushed.

-Ah! I see! The reason is banal. You needed money, and you decided to sell your beauty.

-I...No...It's not like that at all...-Olga blushed even more and lowered her head.

- How? Tell me! - Alexander insisted.

The girl remained silent. A tense pause ensued. Just then, Svetlana Lazareva approached the table.

"Good evening," she said. "May I join you?"

-Of course. Please, sit down. - Vladimir stood up and politely pulled out a chair for the girl.

"Thank you," the model sat down at the table and turned to the men. "Well, let's get acquainted. My name is Svetlana Lazareva."

"And I'm Vladimir," Vladimir introduced himself to the girl. "And this is my boss, Alexander Ivanovich." He pointed at Alexander.

"Just Alexander," Alexander corrected Vladimir, turning to the girl.

"I understand. You are Vladimir. And you are Alexander." Svetlana Lazareva looked at the men, shifting her gaze from one to the other.

"Well, and Olenka, you know..." Vladimir began. But

Svetlana cut him off abruptly, saying mockingly and cynically:

- I know, I know. We're colleagues. Aren't we, Olenka?

Olga didn't answer. Another tense pause ensued.

"Maybe we should have a drink?" Vladimir asked timidly.

-Yes. Let's drink, - said Alexander. - Vladimir! Pour the wine!

Following his boss's orders, Vladimir began pouring wine into glasses. But suddenly he stopped and exclaimed:

-Alexander Ivanovich! The sheikh and his translator are coming towards us! The sheikh has a furious look on his face! Ah! What's going to happen now?

"Nothing will happen! Calm down, Vladimir!" Alexander said calmly, without even turning in the direction Vladimir and the girls were looking.

Meanwhile, the enraged Sheikh Rashid approached Vladimir, grabbed him by the collar, lifted him from his chair, and punched him in the face. Then he approached Alexander, grabbed him by the collar, lifted him from his chair, and was about to strike him... But, looking at Alexander's face, he suddenly became taken aback, lowered his clenched fist, and... began babbling in his own language. A translator, standing nearby, translated the sheikh's speech:

-Oh, my God! This can't be! Alexander Ivanovich! Is that you? Here? I didn't expect it to be you! I almost hit you! Forgive me! Forgive me!

Alexander interrupted the sheikh's exclamations as follows:

-Dear Sheikh Rashid! Let's step aside and talk.

When the bespectacled young man translated, the sheikh nodded in agreement and walked away from the table. Alexander and the translator followed him.

Alexander started the conversation. He said:

Dear Sheikh Rashid! I understand your feelings! You were planning to spend this evening in the company of model Svetlana Lazareva. And you had every right to do so. You approached the show's organizer first. You paid him three hundred dollars first. So all rights are on your side! You acted fairly. But I did not! I approached the show's organizer after you and outbid him for the evening with Svetlana Lazareva, paying ten times more than you did! Three thousand dollars! Of course, this outraged you! And you wanted to punish the offender! I admit that I acted vilely and deserved punishment. But I ask you to forgive me! After all, we have common business. I know why you need Svetlana Lazareva. And I have no intention of stopping you from kidnapping her! I am simply going to spend this evening with her. I hope you don't mind?

A frail young man wearing glasses translated Alexander's words for the sheikh. However, the sheikh was in no hurry to answer. He was thinking. Alexander asked the translator:

-Have you translated everything?

"Yes," he answered.

-Why is he silent?

-Thinking about your words.

Finally, the sheikh spoke. Alexander could tell from his tone

that he was still dissatisfied. So he wasn't surprised by the translation that came from the young man's lips:

Dear Alexander Ivanovich! I am very surprised by your actions. In the East, such actions are not forgiven! And I would not forgive you! If someone else had been in your place, they would not have left that restaurant on their own two feet. However, you turned out to be the one who offended me. And, as you rightly said, we have common interests. Therefore, I have no choice but to forgive you! But I want to know: why do you need Svetlana Lazareva? What do you want from her? Sex? Or something else?

The translator translated. Alexander replied:

"Dear Sheikh! I won't lie to you. I don't know how this evening with Svetlana Lazareva will end. Will she agree to continue the evening alone with me at the hotel? And will I agree to her price? However, I do know one thing: your interests will not be infringed upon in any way. You want your daughter to continue her life in Svetlana Lazareva's body. And to do that, we need to know if the model is healthy. After all, her work always puts her health at risk. Perhaps the girl has an STD or AIDS. Or she is infertile. Why would your daughter need a sick body? I think you yourself are interested in Svetlana Lazareva's full examination before the operation to transplant your daughter's soul into her body.

When the bespectacled young man translated, the sheikh nodded and quickly began speaking his own language. Then Alexander listened to the translation from Arabic:

"Yes, Alexander Ivanovich. I'm interested in a full examination of Svetlana Lazareva before the operation to transplant my daughter's soul into her body. But I'm not interested in you having sex with a model. Her body will belong to my daughter. And it must be pure and chaste."

Alexander realized the sheikh wouldn't agree to his using Svetlana Lazareva for sexual purposes and decided to play it safe. He said:

"Dear Sheikh Rashid! I respect your wishes. Therefore, I have changed my mind. And I promise you that I will not have intimate relations with Svetlana Lazareva. I will simply examine her in my lab. By the way, that man you punched in the face is my deputy and the head of the lab. In fact, he is my best assistant! And I will probably come to Dubai with him. He will assist me in the operation to transfer the soul of your President into the body of his double.

The translator translated. The sheikh spoke in Arabic again. From his tone, Alexander sensed that the sheikh had softened considerably and was pleased with the promise made to him regarding Svetlana Lazareva. And so it turned out.

When the sheikh finished speaking, the young man with glasses translated his speech:

Dear Alexander Ivanovich! I am pleased that you have changed your mind regarding Svetlana Lazareva. And I am grateful to you for considering my wishes. I offer my apologies to the head of your lab. Please tell him that I am very sorry for

hitting him. I hope he will forgive me. And for you, Alexander Ivanovich, I have the following request: please inform me when you have completed your examination of Svetlana Lazareva. I must know for sure! My men will immediately kidnap the model and take her to Dubai.

After the young man in glasses translated the sheikh's speech, Alexander nodded convincingly and said:

"Okay, Sheikh Rashid! As soon as I finish examining Svetlana Lazareva, I'll let you know right away! So wait for my call!"

The translator translated. Alexander and Sheikh Rashid shook hands and parted ways.

Alexander approached his table. Meanwhile, Olga Kudrina was helping Vladimir stop his nosebleed. She tilted his head back and applied a cold pack of ice, brought by the waiter, to his nose.

"Well, hero! Did you get it badly?" Alexander asked Vladimir, sitting down at the table.

-That's a big fight! Your sheikh really got into it! He punched me right in the face!

Vladimir answered, wincing in pain.

"Oh, never mind! You've got a wonderful nurse, Vladimir. She'll cure you!" Alexander began to encourage his subordinate.

"I hope so," Vladimir said and looked at Olga with gratitude.

"Where did you find the ice?" Alexander asked.

Svetlana Lazareva answered:

The waiter brought ice. At my request.

"Well, that means, Vladimir, you have two saviors: Olga and

Svetlana," Alexander stated.

"Yes. Two, Alexander Ivanovich. And I am grateful to both of them," Vladimir said, wincing in pain again.

"We must drink to our saviors! The wine has already been poured. So please raise your glasses!" Alexander said, raising his glass first.

"Vladimir can't drink! But you and I will drink!" Olga raised her glass.

"Who is this 'we'? Answer for yourself, baby!" Svetlana Lazareva said discontentedly, turning to Olga. "I won't drink!"

-Why, Svetlana? - asked Alexander. - Why don't you want to have a drink with us?

-I don't drink wine.

-What do you drink?

-Cognac. Expensive cognac.

"I see. Let me order you some cognac," Alexander suggested.

"No need! I don't want to yet. And when I do, I'll order it myself!" Svetlana said arrogantly and coldly.

"Well, whatever you wish! Olenka and I will drink some wine!" Alexander raised his glass again.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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