

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration. The upper portion shows a bright, golden dragon with its wings spread, flying through a cloudy sky. Below the dragon, a dark, multi-masted sailing ship is seen from a low angle, struggling against the churning, dark blue-green waves of a stormy sea. The overall atmosphere is one of intense action and fantasy.

Ви Корс

The Mist and the Lightning

Part 10

СОДЕРЖИТ
НЕЦЕНЗУРНУЮ
БРАНЬ

18+

Ви Корс

The Mist and the Lightning. Part 10

«ЛитРес: Самиздат»

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Корс В.

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The next series of the acclaimed series of books. He opened his mouth and, slightly pulling his tongue forward, showed it to Lis. A rod with a metal ball was inserted in the center of the still slightly swollen tongue, and small rings on both sides; now, when the tongue was still swollen, they fit snugly against the edge and even dug into it, but it was clear that it was quite possible to cling something else to them. Содержит нецензурную брань.

Вн Kopc

The Mist and the Lightning. Part 10

Foreword

With a slightly awkward gait, inherent, probably, to many pregnant women, Dony slowly walked along the coast of the calm silver sea, wrapped from above, like a blanket, with a whitish fog. From time to time she bent down to pick up a shell or pebble she liked from the sand. And, when she looked a bit at it, she threw it back into the water with careless ease. Lazy waves barely licked the edge of the shore. But this was not always the case; lumps of seaweed and piles of broken shells thrown ashore reminded of this. Dony picked up a smooth matte pebble, it was green. She stroked its rounded edges and slightly rough surface:

“You were once a shard of glass,” Dony said. “Bright, transparent, with sharp dangerous edges, which could easy injure.”

She smiled a little sadly:

“How the sea rolled over you with its waves! You are no longer a sharp shard. You are now a harmless pebble. Like many others. And only your color reminds of your past.”

And, unlike all her other finds, she didn't throw it away, but put it in her pocket. And she turned towards a house on a high hill.

At home, she put the green stone on the table.

“What is it?” Her husband asked.

“The sea gave me such an unusual stone today. A former shard of glass from a green bottle,” Dony replied. “You will bring me luck, right?” She smiled at the pebble. She opened her notebook:

“So... where did I stop?” She thought for a second. “Yeah...”

And, bending over the notebook, she quickly began to write. The words from under her hand folded into lines. She wrote as if someone was dictating to her, almost without crossing anything out. Page by page.

Chapter one. The rite

“Where is Karina? Where is this bitch?! This fucking creature!!!” Prince Arel shouted like mad. He literally flew into Lis' room, and he could not answer him with a crippled tongue, only rolled his eyes in incomprehension and shook his head.

“I'll kill her! I will kill her! Do you know where she is?”

Lis shook his head negatively and, quickly fingering with two fingers, showed movement.

“Escaped? No such luck! She's at the old woman's! At the witch's, I tell you!”

And seeing the lack of understanding in the eyes of Lis, who because of his swollen tongue could not utter a word, Arel grabbed him by the hand and dragged him along.

“Let's go! Now you will see everything! Now you will understand what she did!”

They burst into the prince's room and saw Nikto sitting on the bed. And Nikto looked at them and past.

“They banished the Demon to save the brother. Now he is worth nothing! Now he's just a piece of meat! He doesn't see anything! He is blind and dumb. Bring the Demon back! Bring back my Demon!!!” Arel shouted, and tears gushed from his eyes. “I will not survive this! I will not survive!” He literally sobbed. “I can't lose him again! I don't need anyone but him! And you,” he turned to Lis, who was standing in some kind of stupor. “You can forget about the crown! Now we will not be able to beat the Reds, and you will not become king!”

Lis looked at him in horror.

“Lis. If my Demon doesn't return, I will commit suicide,” Arel suddenly said very calmly and simply. “I'm warning you. I cannot live without him. Sorry. And I warn you,” he looked at Lis

seriously, as if he had already decided everything. “I warn you: first I will kill Karina, and then I will commit suicide. And maybe at least so I will go to Hell and meet him there!” Unable to control himself, he screamed again, his face was pale, and tears flowed from his eyes.

Lis shook his head with all his might and tried to say something, it turned out badly, and he covered his mouth with his hand, wincing in pain.

“Lis, you will be left alone. You can live here. In my Estate.”

Lis nevertheless pulled himself together and said very slowly, but clearly:

“No. Deal with it.”

“What?! To accept it?” Arel jumped up. “You were almost king over the reds and lost everything! Are you resigned?”

And Lis nodded sadly.

“And now you've lost your second chance! And again because of her! Her father and she are the cause of all troubles!”

And then Karina rushed into the room, with a drawn sword she rushed to Nikto, protecting him:

“Don't touch him!” She shouted to Arel. “Kill the body – and the Demon will never return!”

“Give him back!” He shouted back. “What have you done?! You fucking fool! Have you thought about others?! All ours rest on the power of the Demon! How do we defeat the Reds now?! You ruined everything! You ruined the life of me, Lis, Vil and everyone else!”

“What do they have to do with it?” Asked Karina. She still stood alert, clutching a sword in her hand and not leaving the rack, although she saw that Arel was all in tears and snot and didn't seem to be trying to nail her on the spot.

“Have you been to the old woman's?”

“Yes!”

“Did you exorcise the Demon?”

“Yes.”

“How did it come to your mind? What for?!”

“I was afraid of you! I was afraid that you were going to cut me! Not only can you cut my hair!”

“I don't fucking need you! I wasn't going to do anything to you! Did I do something to you ?! Did I?!”

“No.” Karina lowered her sword.

“Nobody needs you! Nik rather checked me what I would do!”

“And Lis? You're torturing him!”

“Are you protecting Lis? Wow! Do you think he can't cope without you?! Can't stand up for himself?”

Arel turned to Lis:

“Look, Lis, what a protector you have! We offend you, can't you fight back? Legendary Commander of the Reds, Sigmer Death!”

Lis clasped his head in his hands; if his face had not been covered with a white layer of dye, they would have seen his cheeks turn red. He turned away from them, trying not to meet the eyes of either Arel or Karina. Karina also looked away in embarrassment, she felt uncomfortable.

“Lis had a Contract with Nik,” continued Arel, “do you think it was so easy for him to let him damage his tongue?! Nik would have led our people further and made Lis king of the reds!”

“What?!”

“And my Castle? Now everything will collapse without support and guidance for Vil and Talas. And the Lower?! The unclean won't help us anymore! Vil will lose the Castle! Tol will lose the Lower! I will lose everything!!!”

“How would he make Lis the king? Are you out of your mind? And you've already lost the Castle and the Lower!”

But Arel didn't seem to hear her, he rushed around the room in despair, and it was terrible to look at him.

"I wanted to go with him to his world! Do you think he made fun of your brother on purpose? You know nothing! He suffered as much in this body as your brother! He didn't of his own will possessed him. He was ordered! Maybe he was sent here as punishment, I don't know for sure, he didn't want to speak about it, but the fact is that he was unhappy here, I am sure of that! He needed to complete a task, he just tried to perform some actions in our world. And all he wanted was to get out of here as quickly as possible! He has long been fed up with our world and stupid people. Only I gave him joy and helped to free himself. By helping him, I pulled him out of prison in the form of your brother's body! And your brother only interfered with him and spoiled his body, so that people would not take him seriously, so that everyone would consider him a scarred freak. It was difficult for him to complete tasks. He could not complete the tasks, could not leave!"

"But now he has gone into his world," Karina said somehow confusedly.

"He didn't complete the task! Are you a fool? What will they do to him now?! Will they move him into another body – and all over again? Or maybe it is already impossible to fix it? Maybe his task was to make Lis the king in order to finally end the war! You haven't even thought about that? Yes, Karina?"

"Arel..."

"What – Arel?! You thought I was stupid?! Why do you all think I'm stupid? Because I have a beautiful appearance and I don't talk smart about serious things? You thought I didn't know anything about Nik? I knew everything about him, even when you didn't see him at all! You thought he didn't share anything with me? Do you know how many times I saw him almost howl from helplessness? How tired he was, because in this body he was deprived of many of his powers. He didn't complain to anyone. Only to me! And you are such an idiot that you thought I was just fucking with him and that was all, the rest was fucking incomprehensible to me. I understand a lot, and I was, as it were, in your brother's body, too, by the way, he was not completely blind then. Apparently, the eyes were rebuilt gradually. And I was in the Unclean Limit and in the World, which Nik-Demon created there for himself as an outlet. Where he was not as pathetic as he was here. And Lis was there too. And I saw him, and felt his strength and power. He was lovely. And then he had to come back here again and communicate with such idiots as you! And pretend that he was a man, although he didn't give a shit about all this. I could beat him and praise him, he didn't give a damn about either. Only later did he feel a little the joy of this life, of this world with me. He said that only I was holding him and that soon he would do everything and could return. We agreed that I would go with him. And he could leave your brother's body. Only he is blind and dumb. But he himself is to blame for this, there was no need to resist! This is inherit in your family, apparently – not understanding, to go to the trouble. Maybe now he would have been free and would not have been so disfigured."

"I didn't think..."

"Of course you didn't! Have you ever thought of talking to me? Of course not! I'm a "stupid handsome prince". Has it ever occurred to you that you don't know even a hundredth of relationships and ties? You just stupidly took everything and deleted it! And it would be better to ask him to leave his brother's body and ask how you can help? And ask him to return his vision and voice! I'm sure the Demon could do it if he wanted to. But you stupidly drove him out and left your brother crippled. Well done!"

Karina began to cry.

"Go and do everything back! Otherwise I will kill you!"

"I can't!" Sobbed Karina.

"Why?!"

"The old woman is dead!" And Karina fell to her knees and, covering her face with her hands, began to cry.

“How is it – dead?” Arel barely uttered.

“I don’t know! When she performed the ceremony, she said some words. Spell. And then she fell... Maybe her heart could not stand it...”

“Lis, I'm sorry, I'll kill her now,” Arel said, and his face became terrible.

But at this moment Nikto, all this time indifferently, like a doll sitting in the corner, suddenly jerked as if he had been shocked, and everyone turned to him in surprise.

He looked at them and then said:

“It's all right, Arel.”

And the prince rushed to him, embracing him. Karina shied away from him.

“Your happiness that he returned, otherwise I would have killed you!” He threw to her.

“Karina wanted to banish you,” he said to Nikto.

“I know. But they didn't succeed. And never do that again, Karina.”

Karina, sniffing, nodded:

“I'm sorry.”

“Lis,” Arel turned to Lis, still standing as a silent statue. “Take this bitch to the room and lock her there. We'll decide what to do with her later. And now I don't want to see her!”

Lis obediently pulled Karina by the forearm.

Until the morning she cried in the room. Until Arel came for her.

“We talked all night, he is very kind. Go, you can talk to your brother, the Demon left him. He can do this for a while, but he must always return. I begged him to leave for just an hour. I can't take it anymore. He said that when I calmed down and began to trust and not be afraid, he would leave for a longer period. He says that he himself is sick of everything here and that he is still holding on because of me.”

“Later I want to talk to the Demon too,” said Karina, sadly with tears. “Ask him to leave my brother when he leaves. When he finishes all his business here,” Karina tried to wipe away her tears; she looked tortured. “All your tasks. And return his voice and vision.”

“Come on, talk to your idiot. I hate him!”

“But for what?!”

“For making Nik weak.”

“Do you think it's really her brother?” Lis asked, he spoke slowly, but did not lisp at all.

“So what?” Arel didn't understand.

“Maybe he's just making fun of her. Breaks comedy?”

Arel laughed:

“Maybe so. You're already talking, Lis, great!”

“Yes. But it really hurts.”

“And in my opinion, you got out, as always!”

Karina cautiously and embarrassedly entered the prince's room. Nikto, to her surprise, was not sitting on the bed as usual, but just on the floor next to her, with his back against the wall. He lifted his head in response to her steps. And for a second it seemed to her that she was there again, in the prison tower. And Nikto sat the same on the floor in front of her, just not on the dirty straw, and his hand was not twisted, chained to the wall. But he was still shrinking, sick, lonely.

“Gods,” she whispered, taking out the prepared notebook and pencil. “How can I withstand this... Hello.”

He only smiled slightly in return. Very tortured, very crooked. The Demon did it better.

Karina sat down next to him:

“Why are you sitting on the floor?” She tried to make her voice cheerful. “Maybe we can sit on the bed?”

But he literally recoiled from her, and she was frightened.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't think. I didn't think it was so painful for you...”

He extended his left hand, his left hand really worked better. She put their means of communication in his fingers. He quite confidently wrote to her: “Hi Karina.” Then he hesitated a little and added: “Please leave. Go away. Get out of here. Save yourself!”

He wrote and wrote as if trying to convey the meaning to her in different words.

She shook her head, forgetting that he didn't see her:

“No. No, I'm not leaving! Don't worry about me! I will talk to the Demon, I will ask him to leave you when he finishes all his business here. Do you understand? And Arel says that he has not much to do. You are still young. You will recover. I want to ask the Demon to return your eyes and voice. But even if he doesn't, I thought... Dr. Balthazar Nate will be able to repair the ligaments, and the eyes ...”

Nikto shook his head violently and quickly wrote: “He's fooling you! He's fooling you. He fooled you.”

“I understood you. But I want to believe in the best. Please listen to me! Obey me now, don't interfere with him, don't resist, let him do everything that he was ordered to do and leave. It seems to me that it would be better not to disturb him. Don't you understand? Otherwise, he will completely destroy you.”

Nikto smiled wryly again, as if telling her “hah, right away!”, and she was amazed at his courage, he fought the Demon one on one, interfered with him and, it seemed, was not going to give up.

He wrote again: “He deceived you. Run before it's too late.”

“Gods! Why are you so stubborn?! Why can't you come to an agreement when it so happens that you are sharing one body? Yes, I understand you hate him because he possessed you. But he himself told me that the Demon world is full of restrictions and orders. And each Demon follows the instructions of a higher Demon. He was simply ordered. He is as much a slave as you, in a strange body and in a strange world, and... He is not so bad, and sometimes he is very cool, this Demon of yours, and quite fair. Why were we able to make friends with him, but you did not? Let's try together, it will only make everyone better.”

Nikto wrote, “He took your souls. I'm sorry.”

“Why are you so stubborn?!” Karina screamed in despair. “I'm trying to save you!”

Nikto with a sigh ran his hands over his face, hair, pulling them back, and wrote: “What is the date today?”

This question always knocked Karina out of her rut. She was horrified only by the thought that he was living in fits and starts, wasting days, months, and maybe years. Now she understood why he seemed younger to her: probably, if you put everything together, he lived in consciousness not for twenty-five years, but much less.

“How do you feel when he is completely in you?” She asked quietly.

And he shook his head and wrote, “Nothing.”

“Like you fell asleep on Friday and woke up on Monday?”

He turned away, he didn't want to talk about it. I didn't want to listen to her. And she only had an hour. What to do?

She sat in confusion, and her brother also sat with his back against the wall, and was silent. It looked like this was his favorite pastime. Maybe he really was mentally retarded, as Arel said. Arel knew him better than anyone, now she understood it. And now she respected the prince for that. For insight and fearlessness.

“Nik?” She called, finally realizing that he didn't intend to continue the conversation and fell into his favorite stupor. He shuddered, he responded to Nik.

“Nik, he left for only an hour. Do you want a cigarette? Or wine? Feel the taste for yourself.”

He shook his head.

“Maybe... “restorative”?” She asked carefully. And he again shook his head negatively, then he thought about it and wrote: “Water.”

She got up and poured water from a jug, gave it to him, put it in his hand, he took a few sips, and the water ran down his chin. The paralyzed side of his face didn't move. He wiped the water off with his hand. The hand also moved badly.

"Why are you so opposed to him? Do you know something more? About his plans? What else does he have to do here? You know?"

"He spoils the souls of people. Now he is collecting them. He has collected a lot. You gave him a lot of strength."

"Let him collect them! What does it matter to us? Think about yourself!"

"I think. He didn't take mine. I will not obey. I will not submit."

"Then he will just smear you!!!"

"You have already been smeared," her brother Nikto wrote.

"You are crazy! He will make Lis the king of the Reds in this world and, perhaps, he will help me too, so that I become his queen, I will ask him about it, why not? And you... will you continue to interfere with him like a ram?"

Nikto wrote, "Yes."

And Karina, no longer able to stand it, shouted:

"Arel! Lis! Come here!"

She noticed how he tensed as they entered the room, responding instantly to her call. She silently handed them the notebook.

"Hi Karina. Please leave. Go away. Get out of here. Save yourself! He's fooling you! He's fooling you. He fooled you. Run before it's too late. He took your souls. I'm sorry. What's the date today? Nothing. Water. He spoils the souls of people. Now he is collecting them. He has collected a lot. You gave him a lot of strength. I think. He didn't take mine. I will not obey. I will not submit. You have already been smeared. Yes."

"You see what he writes," she complained to them.

"Can I hit him?" Arel said when he finally read what he had written. Lis had read it earlier and turned away.

"No, though," Arel changed his mind. "I'll give him a duel! Hey bro, can you fight?"

Nikto nodded.

"He's blind," said Lis.

"He seems to know how to fight blind," said Karina. "I saw it in prison."

"Then let's go! Where is Nik's sword? Come out into the yard!"

"Let's go," said Karina, slightly pulling her brother's hand, and he got up. Without resisting, he followed her.

They went out into the courtyard, Lis put a sword in his hand, with which Nikto-Demon fought.

"And if he kills you, Arel?" He asked suddenly. Because the blind Nikto took the sword very confidently, as if he himself wanted it.

"Me?!" Arel laughed. "He won't kill me. And I will just make him run a little."

And he began to bypass Nikto, twirling his weapon in his hands. And Nikto was standing. But when Arel lunged to poke him, Karina's brother sharply parried the blow and attacked towards Arel. Arel was a little taken aback, but continued to circle, and for some moments they clashed fiercely and with all their might. Nikto seemed to try to constantly maintain contact with the blade of the enemy's sword, and he also guessed or heard where the blow would come from. And it was creepy. As always, at the last minute he preempted the blow, and Arel only managed to knock him to the ground a couple of times, but Nikto immediately dodged and immediately got up. And he moved very little, trying to always stay in place. He let the enemy get closer, and then tried not to disengage with him with the sword.

“Ah well!” Arel got angry and tried to attack him again. Nikto managed to deflect the blow again. The atmosphere grew more and more tense, and Karina became afraid. Her blind brother didn't let Arel approach and didn't look like a human now, but quite the opposite.

“Lis, I don't like this. Tell them to stop!” Asked Karina.

Unfortunately, Lis now always, leaving the house, hid his jester's makeup under a mask, and Karina didn't see the expression on his face, but she was sure that he also didn't like what was happening.

“Arel, that's enough!” She shouted. “It was a bad idea!”

The prince turned to her cry and received a crushing blow, he fell, and Nikto pressed the blade of the sword to his throat.

“No!” Karina screamed.

And Nikto's hand suddenly trembled, and he literally flew away from Arel, fell backward, as if he had been hit with all his strength in the chest, and then, rising, he shouted:

“Arel, what are you doing?!”

Arel sat down, shaking his disheveled head, pressed his hand to his cut neck, blood ran down his fingers, he raised his eyes to Nikto:

“Damned motherfucker! Which one is the Demon? You look more like a human than he is!”

Nikto ran up to him, hugging him, examining the wound.

“Your brother is cool,” said Lis to Karina and headed towards the house.

And Karina, stunned, stood and looked at the Arel and the Nikto-Demon, who seemed to be more cheerful, kinder and more humane than her brother.

Arel closed his eyes as Nikto put a rag soaked in healing medicine to his throat.

“Fuck! Nik! I don't envy you, how do you live in his body?!”

Nikto laughed:

“It's not that bad. But don't do that anymore. What if my human part kills you?”

“Could he do it? To spite you?”

“He was able to spite me to cut himself like meat, and you – in general, easily!”

“Don't leave like that anymore! Don't let him loose!”

“Are you afraid?” Nikto laughed and, taking a glass, took a few good sips of wine, and Karina noticed that he didn't miss a drop.

“Okay, okay, he just wanted to teach you a lesson. He actually loves you!”

“Really?” Arel asked, and there was doubt in his voice.

“He wouldn't have killed you.”

“Why did you come back then?” Lis said.

“Hasn't an hour passed?”

“No,” Lis shook his head. “He wanted to kill Arel, maybe even out of love, so that you wouldn't get him. He wanted to save him. Like Rosa.”

And he handed Nikto a piece of paper with notes.

Arel squeezed his temples in his hands.

“So, Lis, it was not a comedy?”

“It looks like not,” said Lis seriously.

“Well, so much the worse for him!” Arel got angry.

“And I wanted to ride him on a horse,” Karina said suddenly, and since everyone looked at her as if she were a fool, she fell silent in embarrassment.

“Lis, come to me,” Nikto called. “I want to see how your tongue heals. You started talking quickly. Maybe it's time to get the threads out.”

Lis obediently approached him and opened his mouth.

“I'll take them off in a few days,” Nikto examined his tongue. “And talk less, it's too early, it starts to bleed. Be patient, talkative Lis.”

Lis said nothing dejectedly.

“I want to know what happened in the prison,” Arel said. “Karina, tell me everything. How did you escape?”

Later, Arel and Nikto remained alone in the room.

“It was just the only way to get her to save me. Otherwise she would not have done it!” Nikto explained Karina's rather emotional story, where she outlined in detail their chaotic escape.

“Well, yes, she is kind and saved a person!” Arel grinned. “Weren't you afraid to leave like this and leave the human alone?”

“No, I was not afraid. After all, I am he. This is part of me. From which I have nowhere to get away!”

“He got on your nerves a lot, didn't he?”

“I use his soul, I am here thanks to his soul, to the fact that he is alive.”

“And to the fact that he resists?”

“Well, no, the fact that he resists is bad, this is with what he gets me.”

“It seemed so simple when the witch brought his little body for you, right?”

“Although... Maybe it's better this way, he used to resist very much and cripple himself, but now he doesn't. We have learned to somehow coexist, and, I confess, sometimes... he takes over. But I'm no longer angry, it gives me humanity. It is easier for me in this world from its emotional impulses and throwings. I am almost human and thanks to him I have feelings, and people understand and accept me better. So... what seemed like a hindrance and a mistake before, has become an irreplaceable help in the end. Anyway, I do what I want!” Nikto smiled. “Only with feeling. As a man!”

“And... did he start loving me?” Arel asked in a trembling voice.

“I chose you,” Nikto answered. “And he... fell in love. He loved you all. And through him I too.”

“Why did he love me? After all, I beat him and humiliated him, fucked him.”

“Well, Arel, you yourself didn't notice, but in fact you treated him well. And he saw so few people, spoke little.”

“Did he even see me?”

“Yes. He can see a little with my eyes. If I let him. If I let him, he can say something through me. He can see and feel everything, but just cannot do anything at the same time. I can connect and disconnect with him in any way.”

“It's like sex.”

“Do you want it like that?”

“Yes. You entered my body. I felt it and didn't resist. And you can enter my body and use it, I will only be happy.”

Nikto hugged his prince:

“Meanwhile this is not necessary, I'm used to being blond.” He chuckled. “I am a white half-breed. And you, noble black, I want to see next.”

“But you're not going to leave like this again?” Arel asked, hugging him back, stroking him affectionately, looking into his eyes like a devoted dog. “I don't want it.”

“Arel! You've been with him many times. I have gone many times and left you with him. However, I pumped him with drugs, but...”

“Don't! Don't do it anymore! I'm asking you!”

“Sometimes I need to leave, a part of me remained in my world. I live several lives at once. It is difficult for a human to understand this...”

“I understand. But you may not always leave completely. Leave at least a small part of yourself in order to still control him.”

“I may.”

“Then just do it! And now, now squeeze him out altogether, let him not see, hear nothing and feel nothing!”

And Nikto, putting him on his back, laughed:

“Good. I will punish him for making you so upset.”

“Now I hate your scars too. Now I also see them as your defeat. I hate him! For crippling you! He made you an outcast. I want to see the real you, I want!”

“Everything has its time. If you want, we will tie the body, and I will go out, and you will fuck him and do whatever you want.”

“No. I don't want to fuck him! I don't want anything. He's gone. He doesn't exist. I don't want to see him again, do it!”

“I will try,” Nikto hissed and inserted into the prince.

Later they went downstairs to the living room, to Lis and Karina. And Karina asked Nikto to talk to her in private too. Nikto agreed.

“What do you want to ask me? About your brother again?” Nikto looked pretty calm, he poured himself and her wine.

“No. Will you help me?”

“I remember how you hated me, maddened. You only liked to fuck with me, yes, it attracted you, and you couldn't resist. You love a sex. You like sleeping with different men. You are not one of those women who strive for a family, have children and raise them. You are like a lone she-wolf, a predator, you know how to stand up for yourself and walk in search of adventure.”

“I love Lis. If you take Arel, I want to stay with Lis. And I will be a faithful wife. And give birth to children if I can. Am I doing whatever is necessary? You let Dony go and she made her life well. You told me then: “She did everything that needs to be done.” I didn't understand these words, now I understand. Am I doing whatever it takes?”

“But what about the salvation of your brother?”

“It was probably a stupid idea. Like a lot of stupid ideas and actions before. But I will gladly try to persuade him more. He just lived a little and doesn't understand anything. For him, perhaps, the throne and power, love is an empty phrase. I will explain to him that this is important to us if he wants us to be happy.”

“He loved Rosa.”

“And?”

“And? And sent her away. To the Upper World. In order not to get her.”

“And he wanted to send me too, persuaded me to run, but I am not Rosa. And I am not sixteen years old, but almost thirty, and this is my last chance, and I want a husband, and I want a husband-king. And I want to look my father in the eye with pride so that he understands that I am not at all the wayward idiot he thinks I am. I want to achieve something! What's the use if I leave? To vegetate somewhere in Komra? What should I do there? Praying for the salvation of your soul? Maybe a little later, when I become an old woman and I have absolutely nothing to do. Moreover, I have not done anything terrible! Is what I decided is stupid? Or bad?”

“This is very good,” Nikto smiled.

“Now!” Karina jumped up. “Wait a minute, I'll bring you something.”

She ran out of the room and quickly returned, holding a small box in her hands:

“The courier brought it from the village for my name.”

“What is it?”

“A parcel from my father.”

“And what does he write to you?”

“Nothing. There was money. I gave more than half to this witch for the ceremony. Excuse me.”

“This is your money, Karina, don't report to me.”

“Yes. But here's one more thing, and I'm sure this is for you.”

Karina pushed the box towards him: it contained a ring with a blue stone and a mask.

Nikto seemed to be sincerely happy:

“My mask! Is he giving it back to me?”

“I think yes.”

“And the ring? Is it just me, or does your father want to make up?”

“Yes. He wants peace. And me too. Forgive me.”

“I have nothing to forgive you!”

“For this stupid ceremony. I will do whatever you need. I swear! I will correct my mistakes!”

“You do everything. You are smart. Everything is good,” and Nikto handed her a glass of red wine.

Arel wanted to punish Karina, tie her to a post and whip her with a whip, just as he regularly did with servants. But Nikto ordered not to touch her. For the time being.

Chapter two. News from Vil

Prince Arel looked doubtfully at the plump stack of sheets.

Lis went down into the living room and, seeing the papers in Arel's hands, asked skeptically:

“Has Vil sent a book?”

Arel put aside the message:

“I won't read this,” he said firmly.

“I won't either,” replied Lis. “My tongue has not yet fully healed, and it is difficult for me to speak, let alone read such voluminous texts aloud. Or maybe he's loading you with accounting again? I see there are some numbers.”

“It looks like he sent a full report,” Arel said in confusion.

“That's what happens when one makes a fool pray to the gods!” Lis grinned.

“Here Vil managed to write a whole book, but there is still no news from the idiot Tol!” Arel said indignantly. “He's definitely an idiot!”

“Well, don't you know Tol? He will send his report, I'm sure,” Lis reassured him.

“Come on, I'll try to read it,” volunteered Karina, seeing that none of her friends were eager to do this.

Arel readily thrust a sheaf of sheets into her.

She took the first page:

“Sooo... Arel, well, here he describes on a whole page how happy he is that we are alive and well. And how he loves us all. And... he calls you his big brother!”

“Then don't read it,” Arel said. “Look further.”

Karina began to read. Vil described in detail how he arrived at the Castle that ill-fated day and didn't find anyone in the main hall. How he read Arel's note, how he found the will.

“Pass it,” Arel said quickly. “I don't want to listen to this!”

“And I'm already wondering,” said Lis.

“It's too personal, Lis,” Arel retorted. “It's none of your business.”

Karina dutifully skipped Vil's outpourings on the topic of brotherly love and moved on to the story of how Vil found Enriki unconscious in the room. Vil described what happened in bright colors, and the friends froze, listening to how he injected water into Enriki's vein to dilute the concentration of the poison, how he took him to the doctor and how Enriki survived thanks to Vil's feat and the fact that he was not taken aback at a critical moment.

“And Kors lied to me that Enriki had overdosed,” Arel said quietly.

“I don't think he knew,” Karina tried to protect her father. “Vil writes that Caspar Janti kept everything a secret.”

Then Vil told how he met Zara. And Lis laughed:

“Zara! I remember that stripper whore!”

“Here he writes that they fell in love at first sight,” said Karina. She also remembered Zara, but was not sure what to tell about it.

“I don't want to hear anything about Zara!” Arel said too nervously, according to Karina, and she didn't understand him. She wanted to answer him:

“Yes, Arel, I don't want to hear anything about Zara either.” But she said:

“Arel, you tell me to skip everything. What then is the point of reading? How do we get news from the city? There is a lot about Zara and more...”

Then Vil told how Zara helped him and introduced him to very good people. How Morgan Talas began to help him and how they hold the Castle and Upper. And all the time he noted how great he was and how Arel can be proud of him.

At some point, looking up from reading, Karina looked at her friends and, seeing their bored faces, could not stand it, laughed:

“Arel, there are ten pages of layouts: all regulations, payments, income, expenses and accounting. Should I read?”

Arel, who was sitting with his hand on his cheek, shuddered:

“Eh? Of course not! Let it all go to hell! All this shit!”

Nikto held out his hand:

“Give it here, Karina, I'll figure it out. And I'll write Las what to do next.”

“Will you write it yourself?” Arel asked hopefully.

“Myself. Take it easy.”

“Right here, at the end,” said Karina, and her voice trembled:

“The lies about Enriki's death were revealed, and he, his sister Mily, doctor Caspar Janti and other accomplices were arrested and will be brought to trial. This was done by Leonardo, who now took over as Vitor Kors, and we could not do anything...”

“What?” Arel barely uttered, he put his hand on his throat, as if something prevented him from speaking, and looked questioningly at Nikto.

“Are you sure, Nik, that everything is going according to plan?” He asked carefully and with excitement.

And Nikto smiled torturedly:

“Yes.”

“It was easier to pretend to be a lamb, wasn't it, Nik?” Lis said, looking closely at the upset Nikto. “No expectations from you. And now we've put everything on you. And we are waiting for the results. Don't let us down!”

“Don't be afraid of anything!” Nikto said firmly. “You are just people, and your fear will get you nowhere.”

“Are these the words of a Demon or a human?” Lis asked and smiled as he had not smiled for a long time. And, opening his mouth, showed them the tip of his tongue, which was now bifurcated, like the sting of a snake.

And Nikto turned away.

“Enriki's girl, Agatha, turned out to be alive, she served Caspar Janti in the hospital until his arrest, and later was sent to an orphanage in the “Lower City”. Agatha escaped from the shelter and returned to our Castle. Zara likes her a lot and allowed her to pick up a kitten. The kitty has grown up and has now brought three kittens,” Karina read, but, looking up and seeing the expression on their faces, stopped short.

Nikto had studied Vil's report for a couple of hours and wrote a response to him and Morgan Talas. And Prince Arel was lying on the bed, unable to fall asleep, and now he drank, then smoked, then admired his Nik, then tossed and turned from side to side. Finally, he could not resist:

“Nik?”

“Yes. What? Arel, I'm a little busy, you see. I'll fuck you later. Be patient.”

“I am not talking about that...”

“Come on! And what about then?” Nikto spoke distantly, without taking his eyes off the notes.

“Will you... will you take revenge on Leonardo? He... he... did a lot of harm to me. And Enriki and Mily, and this favorite doctor of yours. So? The one who saved you from death and from whom you studied. Is that so?”

Nikto looked up, looking up from the papers:

“Everyone will get what they deserve,” he said very seriously. “Don't worry, Arel.”

He looked down at the papers again.

And Arel sighed, he lay on the bed and looked at the ceiling. And his face was sad, as if he was remembering or thinking about something bad.

“The devil is perfectly aware of his weakness and impotence. He understands that he has no real power to influence people. That is why he tries to persuade them to cooperate, to assist. Having found a weak point in a person, he tries to influence him in one way or another, and often he succeeds. First of all, the devil wants us to fear him, thinking that he has real power. And if a person falls for this bait, he becomes vulnerable and susceptible to “demonic arrows”, that is, those arrows that the devil and demons shoot into the soul of a person.

Mily looked gratefully at Vil, Zara, Morgan Talas and his friends who stood next to her in the Temple of the Gods.

“How can I thank you?! For saving me from prison and finding laws that made me innocent!”

Vil looked at her with an affectionate smile.

“Mily, don't thank us. Thank our Gods, they saved you!”

“Yes, yes!” Mily warmly supported, folding her hands in a prayer gesture. “I, too, will go to the Temple now, like you, and thank the Gods, and pray to them for the salvation of my precious Enriki!”

She looked with benevolent lust at the preacher, who continued his sermon to the audience.

“The entrance of the devil into the soul of a person is opened, as I said, by magic, witchcraft, drugs, alcoholic addiction. Sexual, mental and other forms of addiction pose a tremendous spiritual danger. We must take care not to be dependent on anything in life, in order to be spiritually and physically as free as possible. A person who controls his mind, his heart, his actions can always resist the devil. The one who turns out to be a slave to some passion or vice becomes unable to repel the onslaught of the devil.”

You may ask: to what extent is the devil able to influence our thought at all? How much does he even know what is happening in our thoughts, in our heart? How competent is he in matters of spiritual life? I have formed the conviction, on the basis of the holy scriptures and my personal observations, that the devil has no direct knowledge of our internal processes. At the same time, being very experienced, he dealt with many people, and worked with each one individually, he uses these skills and recognizes what is going on inside a person by external signs. And looking for the most vulnerable spots. For example, when a person is in pride, it is very easy for the devil to influence him. But the only thing that the devil is capable of is to throw some sinful thought into a person. For example, the thought of even greater power, the crown. And he does this not because the inner world of a person, his heart is open to him, but only focusing on external signs. Having instilled in a person some thoughts, the devil is not able to control what will happen to him next. And if a person knows how to distinguish which thought came from the Gods, and which – from the demons, and reject sinful thoughts at their very appearance, the devil cannot do anything. The devil grows stronger as a sinful or passionate thought enters the human mind. There is a teaching about the gradual, step-by-step penetration of sinful thoughts into the soul of a person. The essence of this teaching is that if a person is on guard of his mind, he can reject this thought, “blow and spit” on it, and the devil will disappear. If a person becomes interested in a thought, begins to consider it, to talk with it, he conquers more and more territories in a person's mind until he embraces his whole nature, soul, heart and body!

“The rich gentlemen are mired in sins, they are allowed everything!” Said Morgan Talas with indignation when they left the Temple of the Gods after the sermon. “Their hearts can't be reached,

only strength will help! It's time to overthrow them all and divide the wealth among ordinary people! To build a new order in the Black City!”

“Are you talking about the revolution?” Vil asked carefully.

“Yes,” Morgan Talas agreed with him. “This is my cherished dream!”

Chapter three. The cat

And life in the Estate of Prince Arel went on as usual. Everything had more or less settled down. The militia peasants moved to a renovated barrack near the stables and started building additional barracks. During this time, they already understood a little about military affairs and learned how to fight more professionally. Now they were not just a village rabble.

Karina tried together with everyone, trained every day. She was instructed to carry out rather general physical training, to teach the simplest techniques and links. Whereas Nikto and Arel trained promising Shrad and several more warriors, giving them more complex techniques. Because of this, Karina was a little offended, and it was still very boring to teach them such simple things.

Since she tried to practically exclude the “restorative” from her life and not take it anymore, it was hard for her. Nikto’s medicine – “Lyric” – helped, but still it was not at all what she needed. Karina began, as they called it, “to withdraw with the help of alcohol”, and fell into a new ambush. She began to drink.

In the morning she was bored to go to train the soldiers, but after drinking a couple of glasses of wine or a glass of something stronger, it became much more fun. Life began to play with new colors. Routine activities and duties no longer seemed so dreary. She even became interested. Boredom disappeared, and enthusiasm appeared. It was no longer a pity for the time spent on a tedious business. She began to train with imagination. She arranged various competitions and contests between the soldiers: whoever pulls up more, pushes up more, runs in full uniform. Nikto and Arel didn’t limit her. They saw that she was cheerful and drunk.

Arel called it “to get hammered”.

“Hey, Karina, have you gotten hammered again?” He laughed.

But they didn’t make comments to her, didn’t limit her in alcohol, allowing her to train in any state. As for the militia themselves, they looked at her as at a goddess, a warrior who had descended from heaven, and didn’t understand at all whether she was sober or not.

Lis asked her a couple of times, displeased, whether it was necessary to deal with the peasants in a short bra-top with a bare belly and short tight-fitting shorts. She didn’t care. By the evening, she was usually already drunk. And when she was so hammered, they didn’t touch her and didn’t take her to their room to fuck.

In this state, she felt calm and relaxed, she was not afraid. Anxiety and fear let go, and Karina laughed carelessly along with everyone, for example, at the fact that Arel couldn’t cut off evenly a piece of bread for herself, to which he snapped that the prince was not obliged to be able to cut bread. Yes, but the prince knew how to cut people very well.

They also laughed at her because she called them “guys”. Karina said:

“Listen, guys...”

And they began to laugh, for some reason they were very amused.

“I won't play cards with you, guys!”

And they were laughing again.

Despite the fact that Nikto seemed to have given her to Arel, the prince didn’t touch her. With this order, which at first seemed to be so cruel, in fact, Nikto did her a favor. Because Lis was spurred on, and Lis was now with her, as if in spite of Arel and in spite of the order. He began to demonstrate that she was his, not the prince’s.

“You are mine, and I don’t care that Nikto gave you to Arel!” He told her arrogantly.

And Karina thought that Nikto helped her. Knowing how ambitious Lis was, Nikto fueled interest in him. Yes, in a terrible, rude and harsh way, but Nikto knew them and knew how to handle them. And now Lis was jealous that they had given her to Arel, and he wanted her. He fell for this ruse.

Karina practically moved into his room. Although the room was very small and most of it was occupied by a huge uncomfortable closet with all kinds of old stuff. But now Karina was living with Lis, and they spent all the nights together. Lis, as it were, appropriated her, and Karina was happy about it. Although from time to time he yelled at her “fucking scum” and all the stuff like that, and a couple of times, dragging her drunk body into the room, beat the shit out of her. Once at that moment Karina sobered up a little from pain, and therefore remembered how Lis yelled at her and hit her. And the second time, it was only from the new bruises and blood spots on her body that she realized that Lis had beaten her a little in the evening. But he didn’t hit her in the face and didn’t say anything in the morning, he hugged her as usual, caressed and fucked her. And in the morning her conscience began to torment her, a feeling of guilt gnawed at her that she got drunk again. Therefore, she tried to be gentle and careful with Lis. However, not for long, because she again took alcohol to alleviate her physical and moral condition. She was hungover. But Lis definitely loved her, it was somehow visible, and everything between them, on the whole, was not bad and was beginning to improve.

His tongue healed in a couple of weeks, and the dye on his face faded noticeably. However, she was already used to his painted appearance, accustomed to the discordant tinkling of bells in his ears when he fucked her. She really loved him very much! And she was a little offended that in the hierarchy designated by Nikto, Lis occupied only the last place after Nikto himself and his beloved prince. She liked to sleep with him, everything was similar to what happened in the past when they were together and she was his captive. In bed, he didn’t emanate that kind of demonic energy that flowed from Nikto, and he was not as uninhibited, unpredictable and dangerous as Arel. Sex with him was kind of... human, or something. Usual. But it was not bad at all. He never fucked her in the ass, generally rarely put her on all fours, mostly either he was on top or she was on top of him. And then Lis groaned, bending towards her, closed his eyes, coming, and she controlled everything, and she liked it. Smiling, he told her that there were flashes in his eyes for some time after he came. They felt good together.

Nikto didn’t punish Lis anymore, he didn’t force him to paint his face again. They split into pairs: Nikto – Arel, Lis – Karina. And somehow quite calmly they existed in this regime. It was difficult, but things were moving forward.

Arel stood on the back porch of his Estate, and Shrad and Karina were downstairs on the training ground. Arel handed out to Shrad some instructions, asked something. Karina listened inattentively, half-heartedly, with curiosity she looked at the big fat black-and-white cat that lived in the Estate and constantly climbed near the outbuildings. Now he sat down right under the feet of the prince. And Karina waited with bated breath for Arel to take a step forward and stumble over the cat. And the cat didn’t even think about the danger that threatened him, he raised his hind leg and began to slowly and thoroughly lick himself. Karina was literally bursting with laughter, and she was also a little sorry for the stupid cat. Finally, Arel really began to descend from the porch, without looking at his feet, stumbled over the cat, and... and nothing happened. Arel looked at his feet in confusion, and the cat slowly walked away. And he didn't even get a kick! Arel approached them, his face completely calm. Did he even notice the cat?! Maybe not, but he definitely noticed the fact that Karina, smiling, was looking at him. He raised his eyebrows a little in surprise and then smiled back at her. And his smile was really something cool!

He walked over and took her hand and led her towards the barn. And Karina went. And she went with him into the barn like a pretty one, and bent down the way he bent her businesslikely on some kind of workbench, feeling his strong arms, his confident movements. He leaned on her from behind and at some point almost lay down, his long hair tickling her ear and cheek. The workbench staggered, Karina wanted to moan loudly under Arel, but she was afraid that they would hear her

in the yard. And then she still couldn't resist and groaned, because she even more wanted him to understand how good she felt and as if to thank him. Arel, coming, groaned too, she went crazy from such sincere direct groans. The prince was very strange, he loved guys, but he also enjoyed women. He could take pleasure and give it in any interaction. And now he fucked her with pleasure, apparently, understanding for himself her smile in that way. It was like it was an invitation, and he accepted it. And Karina didn't want it to end. She then despised him, then pitied him, then adored him, and it was not clear how to combine all this. And now, he dominated her much more than when he used force. Then Karina resisted inside and was angry. And now she was simply angry with herself – for being a whore, for being wet under the prince, and for betraying Lis. Arel let her go and, zipping up his fly, left as if nothing had happened. And she, all in languor, suddenly decided to conduct a stupid experiment. Apparently, what she had drunk in the morning already affected her actions.

Karina took the cat (he absolutely didn't resist) and went with him to Lis' room. Lis was counting something, bending over some report, he turned his head when she entered, and... immediately saw the cat.

And he, to her surprise, laughed and said:

“Well, why the hell did you bring him?”

“Just for no reason,” she replied, not knowing what to say.

Karina put the cat on the floor, he went up to Lis and began to sniff his boots. Lis, reaching out his hand, stroked his head, scratched behind his ear.

He stood up, collecting the papers:

“I have plenty to do.”

“What about the cat?”

“You can leave him here if you want.”

Lis left the room. He drew attention to the cat and even stroked him, but Karina thought that she didn't regret at all that Lis had left now. And nothing happened between them, she didn't want him.

Continuing her research, Karina again took the cat in her arms and went into the room to Nikto. Nikto, fully assembled, lay on the bed. Was he sleeping? There was a sharp, specific smell of chemistry in the room, and Karina realized that Nikto had switched from the “restorative” to very heavy drugs, which she was terrified of and which she had never taken at all. He raised his head and, narrowing his eyes strongly, looked at her (apparently, the room was too light for him). Karina was at a loss, she put the cat right on the bed, and Nikto noticed him right away and didn't drive him away either, but stroked him. The cat purred.

“He's good, isn't he?” Karina asked; in fact, she didn't care anymore. She thought about the creepy stimulants he was using.

“Do you know what beautiful cats I have in the limit?” Nikto said. “And a bunch of other beautiful animals. I'll show you when we get there.”

Karina took the cat in her arms:

“Forgive me for interrupting you, have a rest”.

“No, it's ok. I have to work.” He shook his head. “Are Arel and Lis already downstairs?”

“Yes. And I have just finished training with the peasants. And Lis made an estimate.”

“Okay.”

Nikto got up, and they left with Karina. Now on his chest was always a mask that their father had given him back. And out on the street, Nikto always put it on. Moreover, in the narrow slits for the eyes, through which, in Karina's opinion, it was already impossible to see normally, he additionally inserted black glass, probably so the bright southern sun blinded his converted eyes less.

They returned to the backyard and Karina put the cat on the porch. He raised his paw and began to lick himself. Arel and Lis approached them. And she and Nikto began to discuss some economic issues, Karina didn't listen to them. She thought that she was horny and wanted a man who was the

only one of all three to shit on a cat, and he didn't even notice him. And she also thought she was stupid and worthy to be fucked in the barn.

Chapter four. News from Tol

They gathered at a common table, although no one wanted this. Lis was distracted from the construction of the barracks and was clearly nervous, because he had a lot of things to do on the construction. Arel looked exhausted, and they knew that Nikto tormented him every night until dawn, and during the day, Arel also did a lot of things, taking care of the servants and soldiers from the Estate and nearby villages. Karina was amazed at his endurance, he was really chosen, not like other people, not a single ordinary person could bear the Demon's "love", and the prince endured and did routine things during the day: watched the servants and peasants, trained the militia soldiers. Now she respected him. Because she felt completely exhausted herself; the presence of Nikto, who every day developed more and more active activity, literally sucked her out, and this despite the fact that, fortunately, he hardly touched her. He didn't tug her with constant reports and questions, like he did with Lis, much less mocked her as he did with the prince. Otherwise, she would have simply died, so it seemed to her. But Arel was alive, he was haggard, and bruises appeared on his face, but he walked, sat and was still thinking about solving some endless economic issues. Now Karina understood that being a master and having soldiers, servants and slaves under his command was not at all easy, and it was boring and daily work. But Arel seemed to have been trained to do this, trained to watch and deal with them; of course, he often went too far, using his whip on every occasion, and more often, as it seemed to Karina, for no reason at all. But he worked, took it for granted and did not shirk. And he was not so bad, the discipline was iron. And he didn't complain either. And she respected him more and more every day.

Now he was sincerely delighted with the letter from Tol. Probably, yet, unlike Karina, the prince believed that everything was in order with them and he was living a good life, maybe because he didn't know another.

"Finally! He has given a birth to a report. The very last! Even Kors has already noted, and Tol, as always, is fucking slow!"

"Not the last, my Ver has not arrived yet," said Nikto.

"And the soldiers?" Arel started at once. "Does he have soldiers behind?"

Nikto nodded.

"Yes. And more will come."

"We will win! We will win!" Arel didn't hide his joy.

"Are they unclean?" Lis asked.

"Half-breeds, unclean, everyone I have, Lis. You know, only you are my people."

"What's the difference, Lis! They are soldiers! This is power!!!"

"Absolutely none," agreed Lis with the prince. "I'm glad about it too."

"You will have an army! Your army, Lis!" Arel said. "Right, Nik?"

Nikto nodded.

"Yes," he smiled at Lis.

And he was embarrassed:

"Okay, Arel, let's open the envelope."

Arel opened the envelope and took out a small cardboard with a colored picture painted on it.

They froze. Arel twirled the cardboard rectangle in his hands.

"Tol sent a greeting card?" With some surprise, he asked a little dumbfounded.

"Fucking shit..." Lis drawled. "He's hopeless. It's good that there are Borgan and Coal, otherwise I would have worried about Lower."

Arel turned the card over and read:

“Hi everyone! You, prince, red-haired half-breed (I have forgiven you, Lis), Karina (I dream to drink with her again) and Nikto.”

Hearing that Tol dreamed of drinking with her, Karina blushed, she hoped that he had forgotten that shameful evening.

“We are great!” continued to read Arel in syllables. “And I invite you to the wedding, I will marry Lila. Come, my dear friends!”

And then the date of the wedding was indicated.

That was all. Arel tossed the message away from him.

“Is he mad? He's getting married! Again, Tol, damn him! We need soldiers! Get your ass up and come here with the army! What an idiot! What a moron?!” Arel clasped his head in his hands.

Lis took the discarded postcard and read it too. He saw nothing new there, turned it over in confusion, and suddenly his face stretched out:

“Arel! This is our street. Exactly, Rat Dead End, where we somehow lost fifty soldiers, remember?”

“Come on?” Arel didn't believe. “I remember very well, but...”

He began to examine the drawing too:

“Now this place is unrecognizable. Is it a fountain?”

Arel passed the message on. Karina saw that the picture depicted beautiful tall houses, all in patterns and decorations, painted in light pastel colors: pink, yellow, blue. The trees were green. There was a fountain. Smartly dressed people were walking around. It was written in gold lettering at the top: “Congratulations! We wish you happiness!” And at the bottom, smaller – the name of the street.

“It looks like Upper,” said Karina in surprise. “These postcards with the beautiful streets of the Upper Town are sold at fairs and bookstores.”

“This is our Rat Dead End,” Arel said. “It's on postcards now too.”

“No, Arel, this is no longer Rat Dead End,” said Lis, grinning. “Read the street name. Now it is Asa street.”

And his grin came out bitter.

“What does it mean?” Karina didn't understand. And jealousy sounded in her voice. “Why was the street named after her?!”

Lis was silent, and Karina turned to Arel:

“What for does Tol forgive him?”

Arel nodded towards Lis:

“Let him tell you.”

“Do you have any pretensions to me now?” Lis said defiantly, he tensed, and his face became angry.

“What are you saying,” Arel said indifferently. “Nobody gives a shit.”

Lis looked at Nikto.

And Nikto smiled at him, he held a postcard in his hands and looked at the smart Lower. And he smiled.

“Let's write to Tol, let him take as many soldiers as possible and come here for a honeymoon. It will be an unforgettable honeymoon trip, he will love it!” Nikto said.

“I'll write a letter to my father,” Karina suddenly interrupted their blissful state. “I will explain the situation and ask to help you. To send everyone who stayed with him too.”

Arel looked at her in surprise:

“But...”

“I want to contribute to the common cause. Arel, is this a common cause? I'm on the team, right? And I sit and do nothing!”

“Karina! For the fact that you didn’t give up Lis at the trial and pulled Nik out of the cell, for this I will be grateful to you for the rest of my life!” Arel said quite sincerely, and she felt very good from these words.

“This is Nik...” She hesitated. “It was he who taught me not to give up and bring things to the end.”

Karina thought that even if Lis did something to Asa (and it looked like it was), she didn’t care about it. Surely this aggressive and arrogant creature itself asked for it. And yet, when they were alone in the room, she could not resist and asked:

“So what happened to Asa?”

And Lis looked at her, straight in the eyes, without a shadow of embarrassment or remorse, and answered with a challenge:

“I killed her.”

“Oh! Wow! But why?”

“She talked too much shit.”

“Yes, that's for sure. Well, since Tol has forgiven you, it means that he himself understands that Asa provoked you.”

“Yes. And so it was. She provoked me. I wouldn't do that now. I was just... at that moment acting under the influence of emotion.” Some unspoken bitterness was reflected on his face, and he stubbornly shook his head so sharply that the bells tinkled. “And this bitch... she laughed at me, she brought me out.”

He ran his hands over his face as if tired, and smoothed his hair.

“Dumb unclean! She messed up the banks of the river?” Karina said, repeating Arel’s expression. The prince spoke like this when one of his servants did not follow the order well. “There she goes! How did you kill her?”

“With a knife. In the chest.”

Karina came up, hugging him, embracing him:

“Let her go to hell! You did everything right.”

Lis hugged her too.

“Just, you know,” he said very frankly, “I felt so offended. Tol told everyone how you asked him about me. And how he told you about the fact that they humiliated me, put a shameful strip with bells on my face. I realized that you know about it. Imagined how you made fun of me with Tol.”

“Fun?! I was shocked by his story! It didn't make me laugh at all.”

“And they laughed. And Asa laughed. I asked them to stop, but they continued. I asked twice in an amicable way. I said, “Tol, tell her to shut up.” But he laughed and said: “She will do what she wants!”

Karina felt cold inside, because she knew, knew and felt that this conversation with Tol would sooner or later emerge and not end with good. She knew and still asked him about Lis. She shouldn't have asked about Lis! And she is indirectly to blame for Asa’s death.”

“Forgive me, please,” she whispered. “You always suffer because of me.”

She involuntarily squeezed his crippled right hand. Squeezing, she brought it to her face, pressing against her cheek. She began to kiss her fingers. He didn’t take it away.

“Why did they cut off your finger?”

Lis easily pulled his hand without the little finger out of her palm, looked indifferently at the crippled hand.

“I failed the whole military operation when you left me and ran away. I was tried. Military tribunal. Sentence.”

Karina cried:

“You will never forgive me!”

“Fuck, I have forgiven you long ago! A was a fool myself.” He smiled. “I shouldn't have fallen in love with you so much and then suffered so much.”

“I was not happy even for a minute when I ran away, I realized that I had made a terrible mistake and I couldn't forget you! I love you!”

“I know. You didn't love me, you loved the commander of the Reds, Sigmer. And now I'm a slave, a jerk for fun.”

“Are you really a fool?! You are the most beautiful in the world, I love you, I love you and will never stop loving you. You are not nothing! You are the smartest and the best!”

“Of course,” Lis shook his head.

“Do you think I love you because Nik promotes you and promised to make you king?”

“No.”

“I loved you when I knew nothing about it. I loved it anyway! I don't care if you are a commander or a slave.”

She stroked his bright hair, smoothing out unruly wavy strands. He was very handsome, in fact, with beautiful features, and the remnants of the dye hid a thin scar from the shameful strip under the eyes and on the bridge of the nose. He didn't pull away, and she pressed closer and closer to him, she was seized by such tenderness for him, such love. Karina approached him and gently blew into his ear. He shuddered, closing his ear, and then abruptly grabbed her, knocking her over onto her back, pressing, hanging from above, catching her lips. She hugged him with all her passion. They felt very good together.

Chapter five. The arrival of Verniy

The noise in the street, in the courtyard, was getting stronger. Lis looked up from plans to build barracks.

“What's that there late at night?”

“This is my loyal khabir,” Nikto said slowly, as if listening, and his face lit up. “My Ver!” he jumped up, hurrying to the exit, and friends rushed after him.

A truly pompous action appeared to their gaze: an army was crawling up the hill where the mansion stood, like a dense black snake, led by his unclean Verniy, as always completely closed from the eyes of people by leather clothes and a helmet in the form of a dog's head. The peasants, the militias, all the slaves and residents of the Estate also fled. And they looked at this army with indescribable horror and delight.

Nikto roused himself:

“My horse!” He went to meet the army as fast as the limp would allow. And the horse – the Unclean Power – which was being led without a rider, tied, growled, flaring its nostrils, danced, snorting, a large shiver ran through its body. Verniy quickly untied him, allowing him to gallop forward. And the horse rushed to Nikto standing in the middle of the road. At a trot he ran up to the owner, stopping, enduring waves of trembling and excitement, gently touched his black muzzle to the outstretched hand, burying his nose in his palm. Nikto pressed his hand to his face, and then, no longer tormenting, because standing now so calmly for this unclean horse was simply an unbearable ordeal, Nikto jumped on him, and the horse, sensing the rider, his master, danced under him, stunning neighing, from which peasant children and girls screeched in fright. They looked with their eyes from a bowl at how the Son of the Devil pranks on his horse, smiling, and his scar in the gloom was like a black stripe.

Nikto drove up to the porch, looking down happily at the stunned friends.

“Does anyone want?” He stretched out his hand towards them, as if inviting to join, the horse continued to dance under him.

“You are mad!” Lis shouted to him. “Get off already! What a show is it?”

But Nikto just laughed in response, and suddenly, striking the steep black sides with all his might, he reared up and, seeing how the servants rushed to the door, involuntarily closing their heads, and dashed in different directions Lis, Karina and Arel, he shouted on unclear some team, the horse galloped down the hill along the marching soldiers, carts and following the host of curious peasants from other villages. The unclear warriors, seeing Nikto galloping towards them, raised their arms with weapons and began to sharply and abruptly raise and lower their swords, shouting a greeting to their white-haired master, and their cry was like a rockfall, sharp and booming.

“I’m not sure if it was worth placing the Unclean right in the house,” Lis said doubtfully, pouring wine for everyone. “We managed to build enough barracks, and they have tents.”

“This is the command staff,” Nikto objected, “my colonels cannot live in barracks with soldiers, these are noble Unclean. They are very cool commanders, Lis. And they came here for you!”

“All right,” Lis humbly raised the goblet. “For your soldiers, Nik!”

“For our soldiers, Lis!” Nikto corrected him. “For good luck!”

They clinked glasses happily, drinking sweet fresh wine from the Arel vineyards.

From the courtyard, the sounds of musical instruments were heard, there, right under the open sky, tables were laid and the newly arrived soldiers were already feasting with might and main and getting to know the local militias and peasant women.

“Will you go to them?” Arel asked Nikto with a little jealousy in his voice.

“No, I wasn't going to. But if you want, we can go and have some fun.”

“We clearly miss Tol,” Lis laughed, “and Vil, these lovers of folk holidays.”

“Well, yes,” Nikto said. “I actually still need to resolve many issues with Ver.”

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