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Аннотация

Former prima ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya, who lived to be 100 years old in her Parisian home, shares her memories with a reporter from America. After her death, fatal events begin to occur with those whom she told about the location of the hidden treasures, and only the reporter manages to avoid the temptation to find these treasures, for which fate treats him mercifully.

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– Do you think it's right to torture an old woman?

Don't be afraid, Robert. She is alive. During the interview, he definitely will not die.

Robert, who was accustomed to the medical cynicism of his doctor friend, nevertheless exclaimed:

– She's almost 100 years old!

– So what? She'll catch a cold at our funeral. Ballerinas get sick a little. Life in motion is the key to health.

What's the point of sharing her past?

– Nu this, my friend, already your problems. Here you have to show your talent as a journalist. My business is to bring you together, well, then let your ingenuity work.

Robert shuddered, anticipating a difficult journalistic job. Marek sensed his friend's concern.

– You're not very shy. Recently, in addition to other ailments, she began to experience such phenomena typical of eldership as memories of long-forgotten events. Kshesinskaya may not remember what she ate during yesterday's breakfast, but she will accurately describe what Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich gave her for Easter 1905. Yes Yes! Do not be surprised. This is very characteristic of the senile brain, and you should take advantage

of it.

– Shall we take my assistant? She will keep records.

– It's not a very good idea.

– In what sense?

– In the most direct. Matilda cannot stand the presence of girls of increased cuteness. Your assistant is a pretty chick, isn't she?

– Well, she has such a disadvantage.

– And certainly not an old woman?

– Years that way 23.

– You see now.

– But I need someone to write accurately.

– You'll get by with nothing. Remember – Kshesinskaya living history of Russian ballet, autocracy, revolution and emigration – in short, the primary source of everything that has happened in Russia over the past 100 years. She is the personification of an entire era. There is enough information in it for 10 reports.

They drove up to a luxurious house located on one of the central streets of Paris.

– Wow! – Robert raised his eyebrows, getting out of the car, – and the prima of the royal court in Paris was not in poverty at all. You told me that until recently she gave ballet lessons to rich Russian offspring. Why did she do this being a wealthy woman?

– For the soul, probably, – Marek answered evasively and added already quietly, – or maybe for averting eyes. Okay let's go to the house. I will introduce you to the person closest to Kshesinskaya.

– With Madame Josephine? I've heard about her. Listen, then I have a question. How, then, does Kshesinskaya endure Josephine next to her? After all, she certainly is not old and by no means a fearful person.

– Good question. Well, firstly, Zhozya is her close relative, whom she has known since childhood, and secondly, an effect is triggered, which is called “mirror nostalgia” in psychology.

– Don't be silly, explain plainly.

– Well, this is when a person already in old age is looking for his young likeness in someone else.

– Are you saying that Matilda sees herself in Josephine in her younger years?

– Well, sort of. And this is close to the truth. Josya really reminds her of those glorious years in everything, when the men of the imperial family, including the heir to the throne, swore love to her.

Dr. Marek politely let Robert go ahead.

The interior decoration of the house is quite consistent with its external appearance. Luxury was felt in everything: expensive floor carpets, golden stucco on the ceilings, artsy porcelain vases everywhere, figurines along the stairs, picturesque paintings on the walls – all this indicated that the hostess of the house was not in poverty at all, but, on the contrary, spared no expense to live in luxury and splendor.

From the second floor, down the stairs, Josephine herself descended to them – an elegantly dressed, well-groomed woman

of about forty, with a penetrating look of a sly fox.

– Welcome, Robert! I heard a lot of flattering things about you and not only from Marek.

– Nice to hear about it, ma'am.

– You are a well-known person in wide journalistic circles both in America and in Europe. Robert Jackson Jr. is the successor to the work of his grandfather Robert Jackson Sr., a renowned journalist.

The three of them sat down on easy chairs by the fireplace, and the servants began to serve drinks and refreshments.

– I have prepared Matilda for today's conversation. Its main condition is no recording device. I mean the tape recorder, she hates it. God forbid you poke her in the face with a microphone.

– I wanted to involve my assistant for the record, but Marek was categorically against it.

Marek is right. Your young assistant would have affected her worse than a tape recorder with a microphone.

– You're scaring me. Is Madame Kshesinskaya really so withdrawn that I won't be able to arrange a sincere conversation with her?

– Why so pessimistic? Your respectable appearance and professional skill will play the right role, and it will open up to you. After all, at one time your grandfather managed to talk to the Russian Emperor Alexander III himself.

– Do you know how this interview ended?

– Yes, the emperor died by the end of it. But don't worry,

Mali's health won't let you down. If she lived to be a hundred years old, then the interview with you will somehow survive too.

For many years, this incident with the Russian Tsar hung like a sword of Damocles over the reputation of the Jackson publishing house. However, the glory of Robert Jackson, Sr., as an interviewer of the Russian emperor, did not fade because of this accident.

– I have this question. In what language will our communication with Mrs. Kshesinskaya be? Robert asked.

– For her, Polish and Russian are native, but of course she will communicate with you in French, but I warn you – her French is different from Parisian. It is a salon, it was used by the Russian nobility in St. Petersburg.

Robert shook his head placatingly.

– Well, if there are no more questions, gentlemen, then I will order the servants to roll out the carriage with our ward here into the living room, closer to the fireplace.

Soon a carriage with a thin, withered old woman drove into the room. Having managed to live up to the 70s of the twentieth century, Kshesinskaya saw and talked live with the great Tchaikovsky, the legendary Petipa, the father of the heir to the throne, Emperor Alexander III, visited the bed of the last Russian tsar, his brother and uncle, survived two of the bloodiest wars of mankind and now as a living history appeared before those who had not yet managed to live even a third of her life path.

Despite her advanced age, she looked alive. A lot of wrinkles on the face, sagging skin on the neck and senile hands could not spoil the impression that small penetrating eyes and neatly styled hair, woven at the back of the head into a narrow long pigtail, made.

The old age of the woman was also hidden by skillfully applied cosmetics, which did not disfigure her face at all. But Kshesinskaya did not like to smile. The reason for this was the crooked bite of her teeth from a young age. The dentistry of those and subsequent years could not cope with this task, and therefore in all the photographs the ballet prima was captured with her mouth closed, without a dazzling Hollywood smile.

As evidence that her body was still agile and not completely decrepit, Kshesinskaya independently moved from the stroller to one of the armchairs by the fireplace.

Those in the living room watched with satisfaction how stubbornly the former prima of the Tsar's ballet, full of life, stubbornly resists the inexorable years.

Catching a look of delight on herself, Kshesinskaya spoke first, modifying the famous phrase of Mark Twain in her own way.

– As you can see, the rumors about my commemoration are greatly exaggerated.

Marek smiled sourly, but Josephine decided not to give vent to her ward's cynicism and said:

– Mala! Let me introduce you right away to our guest today,

North American Review correspondent Robert Jackson.

Kshesinskaya's attention immediately switched to the stranger. She pierced Robert with the eyes of a woman who is obliged to evaluate the merits and demerits of any man.

Robert was embarrassed by the literally exposing the soul and body of the inspection, and he lowered his head.

“And I knew your grandfather, Robert,” Kshesinskaya said, fully enjoying her inexhaustible magic to rule over men, “This talented reporter at one time managed to talk our king in such a way that at the end of the interview he literally stretched out his legs.

Matilda burst out laughing with that universal female laughter, which means genuine joy and sarcasm at the same time, which made Robert even more embarrassed and lost his reporter's gift.

The cunning Josephine, a kind of connoisseur of Matilda's spiritual fibers, decided to smooth the situation.

– The interview has nothing to do with it, Malya. The tsar just overdid it with vodka that day. The man showed off in front of the American guest. The servant then reported that the two of them emptied several bottles of white, only occasionally biting caviar.

Kshesinskaya's face changed, expressing complete disagreement.

– And you're talking to me? I, who personally witnessed how our tsar at the table emptied liters of vodka at a peasant pace, occasionally sniffing with pickles, and after that he went to the

stable and unbent the horseshoes with one stroke. Our king was still that drunkard. In this case, he could plug any groom from his stable into the belt. No, my dear, it was not a trifling dose of alcohol that brought down the king that day.

Dr. Marek nodded in the affirmative, confirming, as a doctor, what he had said.

– And what? – asked out of a state of stupor Robert.

Kshesinskaya looked slyly at the emboldened American and said:

– Pour this American for the courage of my favorite cognac. Let's see what he can do.

– Maybe a glass of champagne? Josephine was concerned.

– Not! Today I will drink cognac with this young man, ”Kshesinskaya said in a tone that did not require objection, and signaled to the servants.

Everyone was poured a velvety drink with a golden-chocolate tint into wide glasses.

Matilda twisted the glass, sniffed its walls for a long time and drank in small sips, eating sweets and fruits, after which she ordered to repeat the procedure.

– Well, what killed the king? the reporter didn't hesitate.

Matilda glanced at the people present, then carefully looked at Robert and said meaningfully:

– Conscience!

So saying, she gestured for the servants to refill their glasses.

– Is that enough for today? Josephine hesitated.

– Yes, Madame Matilda, large doses of alcohol will only harm you. Do you want me to add work? Dr. Marek added demagogically.

Kshesinskaya looked at them ironically.

– Do you want to extend my longevity with your ostentatious care and other medical porn? I advise you not to disgrace yourself in front of our guest from America.

Kshesinskaya repeated the gesture, and the servants obediently obeyed her.

– On that day, your grandfather arrived in the Crimea early in the morning by train from St. Petersburg, – Matilda began to recall, – and already at noon they had the most intimate conversations with the king. So sincere that the tsar managed to tell about how he instructed me to seduce Tchaikovsky.

Hearing this, everyone raised their heads in surprise.

– Mala! – Josephine said, without having time to bite off a piece of Italian cake from amazement, – but you don't compose by any chance?

– Jose! Would I start writing in anticipation of the second hundred of my life?

Everyone looked at each other.

– I see that you do not want to hear the details? Well, whatever you want. I won't tell you anything more.

Kshesinskaya got up from her chair, went to the piano and began to lightly play melodies from Chopin's nocturnes.

– We really want to, – Robert was alarmed, – please continue.

We are listening to you carefully. So the tsar persuaded you to seduce the composer Tchaikovsky. How could he convince you and what reason did he have for this?

– Very simple. He promised me all the title roles in the upcoming ballet season. How could I refuse such a gift?

– Well, for what purpose did he go for it?

Matilda stopped playing the piano for a moment and looked at her audience with a smile.

– Our cunning king wished to kill two birds with one stone at once. Firstly, to defame me to Niky and separate us, and secondly, he really hoped that after my hugs and charms, Tchaikovsky would get a taste and take the path of normal relations with the female sex.

The audience looked at each other in shock.

– Why are you so surprised? The whole empire knew about my love affair with Niky, and there were always bad rumors about Tchaikovsky's strange behavior.

Kshesinskaya finished playing Chopin and began to type the notes of the well-known "Chizhik-Pyzhik".

Do you remember this crazy song? Pyotr Ilyich composed it when he put on the black and yellow uniform of the law school, which was located on the Fontanka.

– And what, they drank vodka in this school? Josephine chuckled.

Kshesinskaya laughed ironically.

– You can immediately see Zhozya that you were born in

the era of Marxism-Leninism. Then on the Fontanka, in the basement, the tavern was where the future lawyers would go. True, Tchaikovsky hardly drank vodka, but the song about the fawn-fawn took root there.

– Well, who is to blame that you, Malya, were born in the time of Tsar Pea and remember the Old Testament details? – Josephine said with mock resentment, provoking Kshesinskaya to more significant memories.

– I remember a lot of things, – the former prima said meaningfully.

– Okay, we are well aware of your intimate relationship with members of the royal family. Better tell about how you seduced Tchaikovsky?

– Very simple. Early in the morning I went to the maestro's apartment and immediately applied the most reliable method.

– Which?

– Women's cry, turning into hysterics. Works flawlessly on men.

Yes, but you need a good reason to cry. Tchaikovsky himself could not offend you so much as to bring you to hysteria.

– Of course not.

– Well, what caused you to cry?

– Not what, but who. Petipa. Marius Ivanovich Petipa. This paddling pool always pursued me, found fault, deliberately did not put me in the first roles. Especially when the heir to the throne himself was sitting in the imperial box with his mother,

the queen.

– Why did he do it? Was he really that mad at you?

– Not at all. On the contrary, he was delighted with me.

– So why?

– At the instigation of the Empress. This German hag in every possible way prevented our love with the heir. Remind me Robert, I'll tell you someday what tricks I had to go to in defiance of the maestro to go on stage and please Nicky with my presence.

– This juicy story I myself will tell Robert. Better continue the story about the seduction of Tchaikovsky.

– So. With a load of resentment against Petipa, I showed up at Tchaikovsky's house.

– And you managed to seduce him? Robert asked.

– Hell no. As soon as I rushed to his chest with a cry, the bedroom door opened and from there came out in underpants the mustachioed Joseph Kotek, or as my Kotik affectionately called him.

– Well, what happened next?

– And then nothing. As soon as the half-naked Kotek appeared, I immediately realized that I had nothing to do here. I got dressed and left quickly.

Kshesinskaya stopped playing music and moved back to her chair.

– And you told the king about all this?

– Of course!

– And what was his reaction?

And he wasn't particularly surprised. He knew about it, but now he has received reliable evidence.

– Which soon killed Tchaikovsky.

Robert's words seemed to hang in the air. Matilda was the first to break the silence.

– You're right. After this incident, the tsar's entourage did not have to convince him to give tacit consent so that the court of honor sentenced the composer to suicide.

– Is the official version of Tchaikovsky's death from cholera a fiction?

– Of course it's a hoax. Where has it been seen that a person who died of cholera was buried in an open coffin, which was carried throughout St. Petersburg, accompanied by a huge crowd of citizens, some of whom kissed the deceased? Tchaikovsky was sentenced to suicide. The main instigator and inspirer of the court of honor was the head of the imperial stable, Count Stenbock-Fermor. Although our king did not like to ride, he was a frequent visitor to the stable, admired the handsome horses, caressed and fed them with carrots from his hands. Stenbock had an old grudge against Tchaikovsky. Allegedly, while studying law, he molested his nephew.

– Was it true?

– It was hard to say whether it was true or slander now, but the supreme equerry managed to convince the tsar to arrange a trial for Tchaikovsky. Arsenic was poured into a glass of water, and either he had to drink it or be dishonored. Tchaikovsky chose

the first.

Everyone fell silent under the impression of what was said. Matilda was a living eyewitness of those events and there was no reason not to believe her.

– It turns out that Tsar Alexander was involved in the death of a genius? the American asked.

–It turns out so, and for this his conscience tormented him until the end of his life,– Kshesinskaya summed up.

– Okay! – Josephine decided to return the conversation to the previous topic, – you failed to seduce Tchaikovsky and you and Niky continued to commit adultery.

Kshesinskaya's face at the word "adultery" distorted a grimace.

– Adultery is a mortal sin. And we loved each other, and passionately and selflessly.

– So much so that Princess Alex became the chosen one of the heir? – quipped Josephine.

Matilda's face was even more distorted by the surging negative emotions, which made Dr. Marek tense.

–She climbed into our bed,– Kshesinskaya literally hissed with anger and repeated the same thing in Polish, adding the savory word “whore” to the sentence.

– She went down the aisle with the heir and was later crowned, – Josephine continued to sting.

Matilda turned sharply to Marek.

– I'm tired and want to sleep! Order to take me to the

bedroom.

Matilda left in a carriage, accompanied by a doctor. After some time, Marek returned.

– Jose! I asked you a thousand times, don't talk about this topic, don't provoke her to have a heart attack. You're creating extra trouble for me.

– And what? Am I telling lies? Solid historical facts.

– Your historical facts one day will bring her to the grave.

– Isn't that what you want?

The doctor blushed indignantly.

– Maybe this is your secret desire?

– It seems that you know the contents of her will? – answered Josephine, – I would not be surprised if your name appears there more often than mine. You are her personal doctor.

– Yes, personal. If it wasn't for me, she would have gone to the kingdom of heaven long ago.

Why are you arguing in vain? Robert intervened.

– Marek, didn't you tell our guest the real reason for his visit?

– Interview the former mistress of the last Russian tsar, –

Robert answered for the doctor.

Josephine with the words – "I must dedicate you to something" – took Robert by the hand and led him to the exit to the garden.

Marek followed them.

– You understand Robert. Kshesinskaya, in addition to real estate, has wealth in the form of a variety of jewelry. During the

years of her fame, she managed to collect such an amount of gold and other precious items that the Count of Monte Cristo could only dream of.

– Are you sure about that?

Josephine looked ironically at Robert.

– Malya had more lovers than the stars in the sky and everyone gave her jewelry. After the heir to the throne, his brother, uncle and other great princes took turns in her bed. Most of all, she was bestowed by the tsar's brother Sergei Mikhailovich. During the war, he was in charge of procurement for the army and appropriated huge sums of money from the treasury. Needless to say, most of them were spent on gifts to Male. He bought her vast land, a house on the Cote d'Azur of France, built her a chic mansion in the center of St. Petersburg. Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich was captured and shot by the Bolsheviks, and the mansion was confiscated.

– Correctly! And from the balcony of my house, Lenin spoke with fiery speeches.

Everyone turned around and saw Kshesinskaya, who rolled out in a wheelchair straight into the garden.

– I got sick of sleeping and here I am again with you and ready to continue the conversation with Robert. Only, I beg you, let's go back to the house, to the fireplace. It's cold here.

Everyone obediently returned to the house and Matilda continued:

– Lenin's office was in my bedroom, and in the nursery, where

my son Vova lived, was his reception room.

– Apparently the leader of the Bolsheviks liked the aura of your bedroom? Robert asked with a grin.

– At first, I myself sympathized with Lenin and his campaign, but when I realized that this whole revolution was turning into a barnyard from Orwell's book, I sued the Bolsheviks and, to my amazement, the then Provisional Government Court ruled to return my property.

– And you were able to evict Lenin himself from there?

Do I look like such an idiot? I acted differently. Having changed into a Bolshevik dress, I came to my house.

– You dared to go where the crowds of armed people were rampaging? Robert was surprised.

– Malya! I hear about it for the first time! Josephine, in her turn, was surprised.

– So listen to me. The Bolsheviks rummaged everything there. They were well aware of my wealth and zealously sought it. They broke open the floors, ransacked the walls, but found nothing.

– And no one recognized you and did not suspect anything?

– Nobody. The house was a terrible mess. Everyone was darting somewhere, hurrying, pushing. In short, they were not up to me. Out of curiosity, I went into Vova's nursery and asked a woman dressed in a man's dress, with a cigarette in her mouth, with a red scarf on her head:

– Who owns this space?

– To the working people, – was her answer.

– Where are the previous owners? – I did not let up.

The woman looked at me angrily and threw back:

– We shot them.

– Mala! You could be identified and really shot! Josephine was horrified.

– Could, I do not argue. But what was the point? They have already robbed my house and turned it into a revolutionary platform.

– Would they start torturing you to find out where you hid the jewelry?

Kshesinskaya began to giggle softly.

– You're having fun, but I'm scared of your memories.

– I have laid out a small fraction of my jewelry throughout the house in visible and hidden places. These freaks immediately seized them and were satisfied, thinking that this was all I had.

Matilda's giggle turned into a sarcastic laugh, which made those present feel embarrassed.

– So, you managed to save the main part and take it out? Josephine asked directly.

Kshesinskaya looked at her with a smile.

– Josiah, dear! Then all our lives were in mortal danger. We realized this in time and thank God we survived. The most valuable thing is life, everything else is nothing before it. Do you disagree with me?

– That's right, – Josephine agreed with annoyance, having not received an answer to the question that tormented her.

Suddenly Kshesinskaya turned to Robert and said in a stern voice, minting every word.

– It was she who killed Nicky!

– Who do you mean, Malya? Josephine asked confused.

A grimace of hatred was displayed on the face of the former prima ballerina of the royal court.

– That German whore!

– Do you mean Princess Alex?

– This witch is not worthy to be called by her name.

But Nicky really was in love with her.

– Any witch can enchant a man, especially if this witch is of German blood.

There was a silence, during which everyone thought about his own.

Robert came to his senses first.

– So you think that it was the queen who caused the death of the royal family?

She and only she. The Germans did everything to destroy our empire. They did not stint on any expenses, generously paid Lenin, sent him to Russia in a closed carriage on time, staged a seizure of power, and their German whore persuaded Nicky to stay in the country engulfed in flames, knowing in advance what fate awaits them. She ruined the entire royal family, she ruined the great empire.

Everyone froze at these words, but Robert, with professional persistence, continued to develop a topic that was so interesting

to him.

“But after ruining the royal family, she ruined both herself and her children.

– This once again proves her essence as a witch. What difference does it make to her to burn at the stake with her brood or to die from a Bolshevik bullet? They don't even have a grave. A pile of bones probably lies in some kind of pit. The same fate was with everyone whom the inquisitors burned at the stake.

– You say terrible things, Madame Matilda! And how do you prove that if you were in Alex's place, you could save the king from reprisal, not to mention saving the empire?

“Rest assured, I would not allow the tsar to be shot as a criminal. I would take him away from that hell into which Lenin and the Bolsheviks turned Russia.

– But where? The English king George, the king's cousin, first invited him to England, but then changed his mind, – said Robert.

– You will not believe it, but it was Alex's mother who persuaded her brother Georg to refuse Nicky.

– It can't be! exclaimed Robert.

“I have documentary evidence,” Kshesinskaya answered with a deadpan tone.

– Mala! – Josephine intervened, – did mother Alex arrange so that her daughter and grandchildren remained to perish in Russia?

– Yes it is. That she and her mother are both identical German

witches. They are capable of everything. All the royal courts of Europe have always envied the prosperity of Russia and, if possible, wished to destroy it. But if I were next to Nicky, I could take him out and save him, and it remains to be seen how the wheel of history would turn if there was a living Russian tsar in exile.

– So you knew how it was then possible to leave Russia without hindrance?

– Of course I knew. Not only to leave by yourself, but also how to take out the property.

Those present looked at each other meaningfully. It seemed to them that the moment of truth had arrived.

– You're not hungry? Let's have lunch, – Kshesinskaya suddenly changed the topic of conversation, – today I would eat fresh truffles.

– And from meat?

– From meat, I would prefer lamb in French.

Everyone sat down at the beautifully set dining table.

– Well, Robert? Did you manage to remember all the information that I told you? You didn't write anything down. So forget everything.

I hope I don't forget. But with your permission, I will come here tomorrow with an assistant and she will write everything down.

Matilda stopped chewing and a piece of lamb got stuck in her mouth. Marek looked reproachfully at Robert.

– The presence of a young stranger is not desirable. Let's do it. You listen to everything, and then you dictate to her separately from memory. Deal?

– Deal. In that case, I will leave you so as not to forget what I heard and have time to write it down.

Kshesinskaya did not want to part with Robert so soon.

– What is the name of your secretary? Did I correctly notice that she is not only your assistant in reporting, but also a partner in the field of escort services?

Robert was embarrassed and silent. Josephine intervened in a conversation on a spicy topic.

– Mala! Why do you measure all women with your yardstick?

– What is the name of your assistant, Robert? Kshesinskaya continued imperturbably.

– Monica.

– She is American?

– Yes, and her parents were also born in America.

Where are her ancestors from?

– From Ireland.

– It's good to be from Ireland. The main thing is that they are not from Germany.

– Mrs Matilda. Do you understand what's the matter? Tomorrow is her birthday and I wouldn't want to leave her alone in the hotel.

Matilda's face brightened and a kind smile appeared on her lips.

– Well, since such a thing, bring her here tomorrow. Our chef will prepare Irish stew especially for her.

Robert breathed a sigh of relief.

– Now, forgive me, old woman. I really want to go to bed. Good night everybody!

Congratulations, Robert! You have achieved great success, – said Josephine, when the servants drove Matilda far into the bedrooms.

– Do you mean tomorrow's invitation of my assistant?

– Not only. Today we finally learned that her jewelry was taken out of Russia.

“Yes, but where does she keep them then?” Marek intervened.

We'll find out about that tomorrow. Robert, you must use all your reporter talent, coupled with masculine charm.

– Do what you want, but get this information tomorrow, – picked up the doctor.

– Wait. I know who can do it,” Josephine said.

– Who?

– Your assistant Monika.

– But how? Do you think that Matilda will tell the most secret to a completely unfamiliar person?

– Exactly! All of us, especially me and Marek, she was rather tired of it. And Monica, a new, fresh character in her fading life, and it is very possible that she will tell her exactly.

“And you are a connoisseur of psychology,” Robert complimented Josephine.

– I just know Malya like the back of my hand. Tomorrow we will celebrate Monica's name day and let Malya drink too much.

– Jose! Do you want to destroy her?

– Vice versa. Bring it to the desired condition, find out where the wealth is, and then ...

– What then?

– Then, the doctor is your concern.

Marek looked reproachfully at Josephine.

– OK! Don't look at me like a soldier looks at a louse. I was joking, – Josephine said with irony and added already referring to Robert, – you know, here in France, many annoying old women divorced in families. Not as colorful as our Malya, but senile and causing a lot of trouble. So, some of them, with the consent of the household, of course, family doctors, under the pretext of treatment, are quietly sent to the next world.

– Is that possible? Robert asked Marek.

He shook his head affirmatively.

–Perhaps in another way, – Josephine said instead of the doctor, – and our Marek knows perfectly well how it is done.

But he never will! – in the hearts exclaimed the doctor.

Josephine smiled ironically.

– He will do it, the time will come.

– Stop Jose!

– And there is nothing to do. You treat an old woman, inject her with heart medications, and at the right moment you spray a larger dose. That's all. And no court . honey . testing won't prove

anything.

Marek's face became dark as a cloud at these words. Robert realized that a "thunderstorm" was coming and hurriedly got up from his seat.

– Well guys! I really have to go. I'm going to write down what I heard before I forget anything.

Monica met him in a nightgown, with sleepy eyes.

– Come on, my girl, wake up. Grab a pen and get to work.

Monica rubbed her eyes and obediently sat down at the table.

Robert began to dictate from memory and the lines fit neatly on paper. Robert looked at the assistant, who sat obediently with her back to him. Her head, neatly trimmed under a square, caused a surge of tenderness in Robert. He quietly approached her from behind and put his hands on her shoulders.

The clock outside struck midnight. Robert's hands moved to the girl's delicate neck and began to lightly stroke her. Beneath the thin skin, he felt the quickening of her carotid arteries. It was worth squeezing your fingers for a couple of minutes and death would be inevitable.

How fragile human life is, Robert thought, still under the impression of what he had just heard. Monica's head turned in his direction and their eyes met.

The clock has struck midnight, which means a new day has begun.

Monica dropped her pen and gently rubbed her cheek against

his palm.

– Happy birthday, my girl!

The nightmare woke Robert up and he jumped out of bed screaming. Fortunately, Monica did not wake up and continued to sleep deeply, rather tired after strong male hugs.

Outside, a thunderstorm roared and lightning flashed, drawing ugly patterns on the walls of the room.

Robert calmed down and again stretched out along the assistant's compact body.

It must have been such a terrible nightmare! Josephine, disguised as a Bolshevik, was aiming a pistol at him. It was clear that such a terrible dream was the result of recently heard stories.

Robert decided that for rainbow dreams he needed positive emotions, so he slipped his hand under Monica's nightgown. Feeling the nipple of her elastic girlish breast, he finally calmed down and slept in this position until the morning.

He was awakened by the sound of Monica's hair dryer.

– Whoever invents a silent hair dryer will definitely be awarded the Nobel Prize, – grumbled Robert and put his head under the pillow.

However, Monica continued to dry her hair unperturbed.

– Female indifference – inherent in all the women in the world. Whether it's a reporter's assistant or a toothless midwife from a wild tribe of pygmies.

With these words, Robert got out of bed. Monica, well-groomed and ready for the celebrations, stood in front of him.

– Will I be bored alone again today? – doomedly asked she.

– No, my dear! Today you are invited to your own name day in the house of the prima ballerina of the Russian Tsar, – Robert solemnly announced.

Kshesinskaya at first literally bored the eyes of the young guest. Monica leaned closer and closer to Robert in embarrassment.

– So you are that Irish girl whose birthday is today?

The mentoring tone of Matilda confused the poor thing even more. The secular lioness, the prima ballerina, in whose arms the royal persons trembled, who had countless men in bed and rolled up with this luggage to the centennial milestone, had a magical effect on the fragile girl with a chiseled Irish nose.

Kshesinskaya felt this and reveled in her superiority. Slipping out of the power of the bored Josephine, Matilda was amused by the fact that her old age took precedence over Monica's youth.

Having had enough of this and appeased by the prettiness of the guest, Kshesinskaya decided to loosen up and loudly announced:

– I have a present for you. And very worthy too.

So saying, she drove off to her bedroom and returned from there holding a pendant with a huge sparkling diamond stone in her hands.

– Robert, take this and put it around her pretty neck.

Robert couldn't move at first, in amazement, but then he

took the gift and began to put it on. A magnificent pendant sparkled brightly on the girl's neck. The purest diamond began to diligently refract white light into all the colors of the rainbow, exposing its new owner in a rainbow halo.

Exclamations of congratulations and enthusiasm were heard around, thereby embarrassing the birthday girl, and finally driving her into the paint.

Most of all, Kshesinskaya admired the effect of her gift. She immediately remembered the memory of the moment when this pendant was dressed around her young neck.

–She never gave me such a luxurious gift,– Josephine said through her teeth, with a forced smile on her face.

Boundless female envy. A woman always has something to envy of another woman, whether it be her own sister or her closest friend. For this reason, in nature there is no such thing as a strong female friendship.

At that moment, Josephine herself was the embodiment of female envy. She literally burned through the eyes of the fragile Monica. In this look there was a terrible mix of boundless envy, hatred and a momentary desire to destroy the newly-minted competitor, and it turned out that they intended to protect Monica from Kshesinskaya, but in fact she came under fire from Josephine.

Robert, realizing the delicate position of his companion, gently hugged her and kissed her diamond neck.

– But that's not all, – Kshesinskaya did not let up and added, –

there are also earrings in the kit.

So saying, she put diamond earrings on the birthday girl's ears. However, it turned out that Monica's earlobes had not yet been pierced.

–Yes, she's still a virgin,– Josephine said with irony, or with a mockery, – her ears are not full of holes yet.

The resulting embarrassment decided to straighten out Kshesinskaya.

– But nothing. This is quite fixable. Don't worry girl. Tomorrow you will go to this address and everything will be arranged for you in the best. For now, hide the earrings. Put it on when there are holes in your ears.

– To the health of the birthday girl!– Robert declared enthusiastically.

The call was unanimously accepted.

–Well, now she definitely won't get sick,– Josephine hissed caustically.

– To the health of our virtue, Madame Kshesinskaya, – continued Robert.

A routine interview, through the efforts of the former prima, turned into a real birthday celebration. Matilda felt this and sincerely rejoiced.

Now she had a new fun – Monica. Having dined on excellent Irish stew, they began to have dessert and wine glasses of cognac appeared on the table. Everyone drank, without exception.

Josephine, despite Marek's displeasure, freely allowed the

servants to pour Kshesinskaya. But Matilda did not take her eyes off Monica. She endlessly whispered something in the guest's ear. Josephine watched them jealously. Finally, she was rather tired of it and she decided to defuse the situation with a spicy anecdote.

– And let me tell you how one day Matilda was able to break Petipa's ban in a very original way and, to the delight of the heir, flutter onto the stage.

– Well, why do you want to spoil the holiday of this innocent person with your depraved story? – Matilda protested.

–And you often tell it yourself, – Josephine insisted, who really wanted to annoy both Kshesinskaya and Monica.

–Listen. There was a premiere of a new interpretation of the ballet "Swan Lake" after the death of Tchaikovsky. The Mariinsky Theater was full of spectators. In the royal box sat the august family with the heir to Nika, who immediately felt sad when he realized that Kshesinskaya would not perform. It was clear that the premiere would not succeed without our Mali. However, Petipa was adamant and then Matilda went to the trick. Backstage, she lowered her leggings from her partner, who in a minute was supposed to jump onto the stage and throw the soloist up. Then an ersatz blowjob was filigree produced, as a result of which, during the support, the partner, of course, buckled his legs and he dropped the soloist onto the stage with a roar. Petipa had no choice but to release on stage instead of the injured ballerina Kshesinskaya. Nicky's heir rejoiced with happiness, not

even suspecting at what cost he got such a spectacle.

Everyone except Matilda was delighted with the story. The latter seemed to have missed the story.

At the peak of drunken fun, Josephine could not stand it and asked what she so stubbornly kept in the depths of her soul.

– Well, since today Malya decided to start giving away her jewelry, isn't it time for her to tell about the whereabouts of the others? After all, the hour is not even, and she will take this secret with her forever.

This was said bluntly, straight on the forehead, without any hint, and this time it was impossible for Kshesinskaya to escape the answer.

Matilda paused and said:

– Yes, I am really rich and this wealth allowed me to live with dignity until old age. Everything that remains after me I have documented with a notary and everyone will receive according to their merits. But first I want to read to you these lines from the Bible.

She opened the holy book in the place already prepared and began to read in the ominous voice of the vestal, which made those present immediately uncomfortable.

–Your gold and silver have corroded, and their rust will be a testimony against you and will eat your flesh like fire: you have stored up treasures for yourselves in the last days.

After reading these lines, Kshesinskaya slammed the Bible

shut and silently drove off to her bedroom.

Robert had already gone to bed, but Monica still could not stop looking at Kshesinskaya's gift. It was embarrassing for her to do this at a party, and there was no suitable mirror, but now in the hotel room she was left to herself and looked at her diamond image for a long time.

Having seen enough of the pendant, she put the earrings to her ears and admired them for a long time.

“How primitive women are. How easy it is to replace their spiritual world with material goods.”

With such thoughts, Robert, tired of waiting for his partner, disappointedly turned on his side and fell asleep.

The first thing he saw when he woke up was the same Monica admiring herself in front of the mirror. The diamond pendant presented the day before hung around her neck, but now, along with the pendant, the included earrings flaunted on her ears. Monica managed to go early in the morning to the address indicated by Kshesinskaya and pierce her ears.

Unaware that a pair of male eyes loaded with morning lust were watching her, she took off her nightgown and twirled around in her panties, admiring her own body and the jewelry she had been given. From this, Robert's unsatisfied flesh, which had been fairly refreshed during the night, began to inflame.

A woman admiring herself in front of a mirror is a dangerous phenomenon. Moreover, it doesn't matter who she is: a socialite

or a gray mouse, a beauty or a fearful person, it doesn't matter at all. Everyone is equal in front of the mirror, because they are subjected to the same magical process – self-affirmation and self-praise.

In Pushkin's famous fairy tale, the stepmother looks in the mirror and says, “Tell the mirror, tell the whole truth. Who in the world is sweeter, more beautiful and whiter than everyone? And the stupid mirror agrees with her – "you are more beautiful, no doubt."

In this fairy tale one to one, as in ordinary life.

Despite the fact that the mirror reflects the real appearance, women see only what they want to see – their beauty! And it doesn't matter if there is one or not, the process of self-affirmation works wonders.

"But I'm just beautiful!" – this is the main conclusion that they come to, standing in front of a mirror.

And God forbid, if a husband, friend, partner or just a male is hanging around. A woman who has asserted herself in the mirror looks at him with contempt and says:

“Well, is this nonentity worthy of me?”

Just such a process was now taking place with the naked Monika standing in front of the mirror in all its glory.

Meanwhile, Robert cautiously approached from behind and pressed his whole body, grabbed her elastic breasts.

– Carefully! You will break the chain of the pendant! -Monica yelled indignantly.

– To hell with the pendant. You are beautiful even without diamonds! – answered Robert and began to kiss her on the neck.

This time, Monica grabbed her ears, and Robert realized that the wounds from the puncture would not allow him to continue the morning sex.

Monica's eyes changed. After talking with Kshesinskaya and under the influence of her gifts, there was no trace left of the former cute gray mouse. Now standing in front of Robert was a young woman who already knew the value of her charm.

Bad news in the big city spreads slowly but inexorably. All day, Robert and Monica, without leaving their Paris hotel room, being under the fresh impressions of communicating with Kshesinskaya, wrote an extensive article, and when they went out to go to dinner, they were overtaken by the news of her death.

– She died last night. Asleep with a happy smile and did not wake up, – Marek reported to Robert.

He looked reproachfully at the doctor.

–Did you prick her with something?

–Well, as usual, – Marek replied, looking away.

There were a lot of people at Kshesinskaya's funeral, mostly representatives of the Russian emigration of the first wave. They talked about her talent, about the outgoing old era.

Josephine and Marek stood with mournful faces, and if the doctor sometimes expressed true sadness, then a spark of joy slipped in Josephine's eyes.

After the death of Kshesinskaya, Robert realized that his

reportage was becoming even more relevant, and he and Monika began to draw it up faster.

But two days after the funeral of Matilda, another terrible news spread around the city. During the night, Dr. Marek died suddenly of a heart attack. Robert was friendly with him and went straight to the police station to find out the details. Here, as a journalist, he was provided with detailed information.

Dr. Marek never complained about his heart. However, on that day, he and Josephine made love, and so intensely that at the peak of pleasure the doctor's heart could not stand it and froze forever.

The police let Robert read the conclusion of the forensic expert – no signs of violent death and poisoning were found. The conclusion was unequivocal – heart failure.

It is very possible that during sex- games, blindfolding her partner, she injected him at the peak of pleasure with an exorbitant dose of a heart drug that the doctor always had at hand.

Only Robert came to terms with the death of Marek, as the next day he read in the morning newspapers: on the Paris-Nice highway, a well-known emigrant in Polish circles, Josephine Kshesinskaya, died in a car accident. The probable cause of the accident is a malfunction of the car's braking system.

This news has already alarmed Robert in earnest. Campaigners are dying one by one, as if they are being pursued by evil fate. And now, for some reason, the brakes of Josephine's car failed, when for some reason she rushed to Nice. But just

a week ago they gathered in Kshesinskaya's house and, not suspecting anything, had fun talking and talking.

At another time, Robert would have launched an immediate journalistic investigation into these strange deaths, but now he was not up to it. Now his intuition told him that his life was in danger.

With such gloomy thoughts, Robert returned to the hotel and in his hearts threw the newspaper on the bed, where Monica still lay asleep.

– Of the entire campaign, only you and I remained. We need to urgently leave this city, – said Robert.

But Monica didn't seem to agree with that decision. The expression of disappointment on her face spoke of it.

– Something is wrong?– Robert was surprised.

At that moment there was a knock on the door and a messenger boy entered the room.

– Parcel for Mademoiselle Monica.

– From whom?

– It's all there.

Robert gave the messenger a tip, and Monica immediately began to open the package.

– Perfume Dior! – the girl exclaimed, – this is from him.

– From whom?

– From that guy I met when I went to an ear piercing salon.

Robert looked at his companion in surprise.

So that's it! Has she already got a boyfriend? However, she

quickly learned the lessons of Madame Kshesinskaya.

– He made an appointment for me today at the Maxim restaurant, on Royal Street.

Robert looked at Monica in amazement.

– Okay, you admire the gift, and I'll go to the post office and at the same time book tickets for tomorrow's flight. We're leaving, you understand? So finish all your personal business today.

From the post office, Robert sent the finished report by air mail to America so that the article would be printed in the magazine before he returned.

– Mr Jackson! Please stay a minute longer, – said the postal worker, – we have a letter for you.

– Letter? From whom?

– From Mrs. Matilda Kshesinskaya.

Robert was taken aback. Did he get a letter from the other world? He quickly opened the envelope. It really was from Kshesinskaya.

"Dear Robert! If you are reading these letter, then you are the only survivor of our entire campaign ..."

What does "only" mean? Robert whispered and went cold.

"Monica"! – Like lightning flashed through his mind.

Without reading the letter to the end, Robert rushed towards the hotel. Even from a distance, he was horrified to notice a crowd of people just under the windows of their room, which was located on the third floor. There was a huge pool of blood on the sidewalk.

Robert looked up, saw the wide open window of their room and understood everything. He leaned forward, but the cordon policeman stopped him.

– Where is she?

–The body has already been taken away, monsieur,– the policeman replied.

Robert ran upstairs. In the room, the police were doing their job.

An investigator approached him.

– Did you live here together?

–Yes, we are business partners.

– Often quarreled?

– Absolutely. Vice versa. We had more than just business relationships.

– I understand. Are you familiar with this bottle?

The investigator showed an empty vial from the parcel received.

–Yes, we got it an hour ago.

– From whom?

– I do not know. A messenger brought it to us.

– It is written here – from Matilda Kshesinskaya. Was the bottle full when you received it?

– Yes. Was full and closed.

A policeman approached them and gave the investigator a note. He began to read it in his mind.

– Here you go. Something is clearing up, – the investigator

concluded and handed the note to Robert.

"Dear Monica. After my death, I want you to get that part of the wealth that I did not have time to use. To find out about his whereabouts, please drink the contents of this vial and immediately a guess will flash in your mind. I wish you good luck, your Madame Kshesinskaya.

– In the vial, most likely there was some kind of strong hallucinogen that made the girl jump out of the window.

Robert clutched his head in horror.

With what deceit and ruthlessness Kshesinskaya destroyed those who coveted her wealth. Terrible creature! She managed to take out her jewels from the flames of the Russian revolution, but there were so many of them that in her hundred-year life, she did not have time to spend them. But she also did not allow the survivors to take advantage of it. A sort of dog in the manger is a typical manifestation of female sabotage. And stupid Monica, blindly believing in the infallibility of Matilda, immediately drank the liquid sent.

Suddenly Robert remembered that he had an unread letter in his pocket.

He immediately took it out.

"I'm sorry, Robert, but you didn't have time to save her. I knew – Monica would drink this potion. Your girlfriend had all the makings to turn over time into an insatiable greedy witch and become a source of trouble for you. This is familiar to me. Zhozya, who grew up before my eyes, as soon as she found out

that the will was finalized, she immediately persuaded Marek to end me. I bequeathed my Parisian house to both of them equally. But she did not want to share with the doctor and killed him with the same injection that he dealt with me. She must have killed him during the sexual pleasures. How well I know you all. I can see right through, even from beyond. And the stupid police officers never guessed that I had ordered the brakes of Josie's Peugeot to be destroyed, in which she rushed to Nice. Do you know why? Yes, because before I died, I said where the jewels are. Yes, dear Robert, I buried them in the courtyard of my house in Nice, which is now an orphanage. In the corner of the garden, I made Nika's grave. He doesn't have a grave. Here is what I did the best I could. And under it she buried her jewels. Now Nike has a grave and whoever wants to stir it up will suffer my punishment, because, as it is said in the Bible, gold will eat his flesh».

That evening, Robert sat down ahead of time at a table by the window in the Maxim restaurant. He didn't feel hungry. Curiosity and a burning desire to get drunk brought him here. He wanted to see the guy that Monica had a date with. Why did he need it? Monica is dead, which means it's pointless to be jealous, but Robert was interested in seeing who she preferred.

The fact that she was his assistant, companion and shared shelter and bed on trips did not mean at all that he was her chosen one of the heart, his knight on a white horse. Undoubtedly, in her dreams there was someone else with whom she would be close not by the nature of her professional activity, but by the call

of her heart, and it was this chosen one that Robert wanted to see today. The intrigue was evident and not a single man would remain indifferent to her.

However, the evening was drawing to a close, but the alleged gentleman did not appear. Guys with bouquets of flowers appeared at the restaurant window at different times, but their objects of love soon joined them in the form of smartly dressed pretty girls, but the one who made the appointment for Monica did not appear.

Robert wanted to leave, but then a snub-nosed boy appeared outside the window with a bouquet of flowers. Unlike today's hippie-style youth, this was a neatly trimmed guy, with a clean-shaven face.

Robert looked at his watch. It was the ninth hour and the boy had already begun to get nervous, looking around endlessly. So he is Monica's chosen one, a young, still fragile man, probably a novice jewelry store manager, coveted a girl with luxurious jewelry. Probably a lot of such rich girls came to their salon, but it was Monica who answered him with a smile and agreed to the proposed date.

And take the guy and invite her to the most expensive restaurant in Paris. Well, just like that! If you want to immediately turn the head of the girl you like with expensive diamond jewelry, then you need to act intensely and dazzling from the very beginning.

Robert emptied his whiskey and told the waiter to invite this

guy to his table.

At first the guy was surprised at the invitation, he refused, but then he went into the restaurant and sat down opposite Robert.

– Are you waiting for Monica?

– How do you know? Who are you?

He got excited and started looking around.

– Calm down, I won't hurt you. What is your name?

Robert's calm tone had a favorable effect on the guy.

– My name is Pierre. Do you know where Monica is?

– Pierre, Monica won't come.

– Why won't he come? How do you know? Who are you to her?

– Calm down Pierre. I am her boss. Today she was forced to fly back to America. So let's have a drink and wish her a soft landing.

Robert returned to the hotel pretty tipsy. Pierre was in the best condition and supported his drinking companion.

– Could you give me her address?

– Did you really like her?

– Highly.

– Tell me honestly, not because of the diamond trinkets?

– Not at all. She has a pure naive look.

– Good. I will give your address and if she likes you, she will definitely write. Everything. Now leave.

They approached the door of the hotel and the porter

intercepted the guest from the hands of Pierre.

– Farewell, Pierre!

The morning train sped Robert to Nice. After yesterday's booze, he sat sullenly in the compartment and consoled himself with soda. His head was terribly cracking and very sick, and his mouth tasted like horse dung.

Yesterday they went over the whiskey, but they talked sincerely and he liked Pierre. Open minded guy. To be honest – a great match for Monica. It's just that she's gone, but he didn't tell Pierre about this yesterday and did the right thing. May he live with unquenchable hope and love in his heart.

It was already late in the evening when the train arrived in Nice. Robert immediately went to the hotel and fell asleep.

–There's a tombstone over there in that far corner. You can go there, monsieur, – said the porter of the orphanage, pointing Robert into the depths of the garden.

It was a bright sunny day and the orphans were playing merrily in the fresh air. At the sight of Robert, they began to look at him warily, and the most daring even approached closer, showing open curiosity.

– Don't be offended, monsieur. Any stranger who comes here is a potential parent for them. Such is the orphan's lot – to live with the eternal hope that they will be found.

Robert looked with pity at the destitute children and went deep into the garden.

"Niky from loving Malya" – was hollowed out on a stone slab, and below was the coat of arms of the Russian Empire – a double-headed eagle.

It was impossible to find a more charitable place than an orphanage for remembrance of an innocent person who died. Nicholas II himself was popularly called "bloody" and there were good reasons for that. During the celebrations on the occasion of his coronation on Khodynka field, one and a half thousand people died in a terrible stampede and the same number were maimed, and 130 civilians died during the execution of demonstrators during "Bloody Sunday". However, with his blood and the blood of his family, he atoned for past sins, and Kshesinskaya could not endure the fact that he had not yet been honored with the burial of this. As a result, this symbolic place arose.

The slab itself bore little resemblance to a tombstone. But one way or another, according to Kshesinskaya's letter, it was here that her jewels were located.

For Robert, the moment of truth was coming. Until that moment, he was a simple layman, surrounded by orphans, admiring the memorial plate of the last Russian tsar. But unlike the others, he knew what was under it and now it's up to him to decide whether to get the contents or not.

"It's someone else's, it's not mine," Robert said to himself.

He turned decisively and headed for the exit.

He had already reached the gate, when a red-haired girl of

seven years old with a face covered with freckles came close to him and murmured:

– Uncle, you didn't come for me by any chance? If behind me, then why are you alone?

– Who else do you want me to be with?

– With my mom.

Robert's heart sank.

– What's your name baby?

– Rosie.

It was only then that he noticed that the girl was missing her right hand and almost half of her forearm. The orphan, in addition to everything, was also disabled from birth.

The shelter was located right on the famous Promenade des Anglais in Nice and, having gone out of the gate, Robert stopped to admire the seascape. Then he remembered lines from the Bible, as well as Kshesinskaya's warning not to disturb the king's grave, even if it was symbolic.

“That's right! I'm doing the right thing. It is impossible for the sake of gold to disturb the memory of the innocent deceased.

A florist stood at the gates of the orphanage. Robert went up to her, bought a large bouquet and returned again to the yard of the orphanage. The girl Rosie was still standing in the same place.

– Went. Help me with flowers.

He took her good hand and they returned to the gravestone.

– Come on, lay out the flowers neatly here.

Rosie began carefully to arrange the bouquet. Her flawed hand

worked on a par with a healthy one just as skillfully and actively.

– Leave one flower for yourself.

– Thank you.

Together they returned to the exit.

– Well, let's say goodbye, Rosie.

– Uncle! Will you still bring flowers here?

– Why are you asking this?

– Next time you come, bring my mom. Do you promise?

Robert's heart overflowed with surging feelings.

–I promise,– he answered involuntarily.

– Then wait for me, I'll be right back.

Rosie ran into the house and returned with a piece of paper folded into four.

– What it is?

– This letter is for my mother. Give it to her as soon as you meet, – Rosie said and handed Robert a letter.

– Don't forget?

– Of course not.

Robert quickly withdrew, barely hiding the tears welling up in his eyes.

The southern sun of France beat down mercilessly and he sat down at a table in a street cafe. The waiter brought him cold water and a cup of coffee.

Robert opened the girl's letter, written in a small child's hand, and began to read.

“Dear, beloved mother! Please take me away from here. I have grown up and the hand does not interfere with me anymore. An uncle doctor came to us and said that when I grow up, he will make an artificial hand for me and it will be no worse than a real one. So if you don’t come for me because of her, it’s very vain. Loving you always your daughter Rosie.

Most likely, the letter was written in advance and carefully kept for a convenient occasion. It is very possible that other children in the orphanage had similar letters.

"I swear to you, I will find your mother and come back for you," he said to himself.

Without knowing it, he swore that it was practically impossible, because Robert had no idea who Rosie's parents were.

– Do you want something else, monsieur?– the waiter asked him.

– No, no, thanks.

Robert got up and walked towards the hotel, but then changed his mind and turned towards the post office. It was necessary to call America, and a telephone conversation from the post office was several times cheaper than from a hotel.

After the conversation, the postal worker called out to him again.

– Mr Jackson! There is a letter here for you.

Robert was surprised.

– Letter from whom?

– From Matilda Kshesinskaya.

– Again they write to me from the other world, – the journalist muttered and immediately began to open the envelope.

"Dear Robert. If you got to the post office in Nice, then you got to Nika's grave, but I guess you did not dare to disturb her otherwise you would have called America from the hotel and would not have gone to the post office in order to save money. You did the right thing, because I will tell you a secret – there are no jewels there and never have been. It was my bluff. I spent all my fortune on myself. Yes, there was a lot of it, but I lived a long life and during this time I managed to squander everything. Yes, I am a terrible swindler and my countless suitors knew about it. But here's what's interesting – the more I spent their offerings, the more generous they became. But for your prudence you should be rewarded. Go back to Paris immediately, find that jewelry store where I sent Monica to get her ears pierced and ask for documents for it. Let it be known to you that it belonged to me, but now you own it. I wrote in your name. Goodbye Robert. I hope we never see each other again."

It was difficult to imagine the state of Robert. He went to the post office of the city of Nice as a simple American reporter, and left from there as the owner of a jewelry store. He did not even dream of such a twist of fate.

And then Robert remembered Monica's diamond necklace and earrings. Where are they now? After all, it is obvious that the mortuary worker removed them from her, and what he did with

them next is a big question. We must urgently return to Paris.

Robert rushed to the hotel, packed his things and took the first flight to the capital of France. From the airport, he went straight to the jewelry store, which by right of owner belonged to him.

The first person to meet him was Pierre.

– Mr Jackson! How nice of you to come.

– Dear Pierre! From today I am your new...

– I found her. Can you imagine, she's here in Paris, at St. Patrick's Hospital.

– WHO???

– My Monica!

Robert's jaw literally dropped in surprise.

– Why did you then say that she went to America? It's not hard to guess though – you just didn't want me to see her in that state.

Robert stood stock-still in surprise, unable to even move.

– It turns out that Monica fell from the third floor and nearly died. But God was pleased that she survived and that I found her.

Pierre said this with such enthusiasm of an ardent lover that there was not even a shadow of doubt about the sincerity of his feelings.

Yes, indeed, heaven wanted Monica to stay alive, if only for the sake of this wonderful Parisian boy. Together they immediately rushed to the hospital and found her saved and smiling. The diamond pendant and earrings presented to her on the eve of Kshesinskaya were already showing off on her as amulets.

And then Robert remembered that on that fateful day he had not even bothered to look at Monica's body, even if it was dead. But a fall from the third floor is not necessarily fatal. That evening he got drunk to the point of stupefaction, and in the morning he rushed to Nice for the alleged treasures of Kshesinskaya. Did the glitter of gold cloud his mind so much that he completely forgot about his faithful companion?

But unlike him, Pierre, following the call of his heart, found his beloved, and this was their main difference.

– Monica! I am guilty before you, – only Robert could say in justification.

Already on the first night after sailing from French Brest, a wave of depression swept over Robert from loneliness. He was used to having Monica around during the day and especially at night, and although they were not in any official relationship, this did not prevent her from being his integral companion.

Robert remembered with what a happy smile Monica saw him off on a long voyage. How they joyfully waved after him with Pierre. There was not a shadow of sadness on the face of his assistant. But she remained forever in a foreign country, away from friends and relatives. This was due to the presence of true love that broke out between Monica and Pierre, and Robert could only envy.

With the first rays of the sun, he went out on the deck of the ship and decided, having taken up graphomania, to dispel the night depression.

“Dear Madame Kshesinskaya! I am a reporter for the weekly North American Review, Robert Jackson, writing this message to you on the deck of the ship «New World», on which I am returning from France to America. I deliberately did not fly by plane and chose a sea trip. There are good reasons for this, which I will now explain. In life, I am most afraid of two things: ugly women and flying on airplanes. I try my best to avoid these two things. But I will not prevaricate – this time I preferred a sea voyage also because I decided to comprehend alone a lot that happened to me lately, and not without your participation.

Let it be known to you that Monica survived and stayed in Paris. Yes, don't be surprised. Whether you like it or not, she survived all the deaths out of spite and thanks to the love she found in Paris. It was with her that you acted too cruelly. If Marek and Josephine deserved punishment, then Monica should not have died, and therefore the arbiters of fate in heaven intervened in time and did not allow this. On the contrary, they gave her love.

Surprisingly, it was you who contributed to her love. In that jewelry store where you sent her to pierce her ears, she met a nice guy named Pierre, and they fell in love at first sight. I will not hide – until the moment Monica, at your instigation, fell out of the window of the third floor, she began to have all the signs of rebirth towards female greed, vanity and the subsequent fall into sin. But as they say in the Russian proverb – there would be no happiness, but misfortune helped. Monica after this tragedy returned to her previous state. Well, I had no choice but to leave

the jewelry salon that you transferred to me as the property to young lovers, but on the condition that they would always patronize an orphanage in the city of Nice.

I have no regrets about what I did. The only thing I regret now is that I lost such a partner, companion and assistant as Monica, although I understand that with me she could not find the happiness that she found with Pierre. But there is also consolation. Having lost Monica, I have the opportunity to regain my own, my own happiness».

After writing the last line, Robert became thoughtful. How does he intend to bring the letter to the addressee? After all, Kshesinskaya has long been in the next world, which means that someone is needed to take her there. Does that someone have to be him? Well, I do not. After all, he had just finished the letter on a life-affirming note. Then, the question is why did he write these lines, if no one will read them?

“All the same, you, sir, although a capable scribbler, are a complete graphomaniac,” Robert thought to himself with a grin.

He looked at the bright sunny sky, at the azure waves overboard, at the seagulls noisily accompanying the ship, and realized that life is so beautiful that no paper depression could drive him to suicide in order to convey this stupid letter to a hundred-year old woman.

Yes, he does not know how to swim and, like an ax, he will immediately go to the bottom, but this does not mean that he will take and leave this whole magnificent world full of love and joy

and become food for fish.

At this time, a young lady appeared on deck with a parasol. She was wearing a long white dress. A high hairstyle, exposing a delicate neck and a nose honed in the Irish manner, immediately attracted the attention of a failed drowned man.

Before the eyes of an American, a typical oil painting arose: the vast expanse of the sea, azure waves, a white ship, on the deck of which a young charming woman dressed in white walks around with a colorful umbrella.

For the first time in his life, Robert regretted that he was not, in addition to the master of the pen, also the master of the brush. As the great Pushkin would say, such a woman cannot be described in fairy tales, nor described with a pen.

“So it was God's will that I did not remain alone for long,” he rejoiced.

Robert's legs themselves went towards the lady sparkling with all the colors of life. The first thing that caught Robert's eye was her stately posture.

– Are you bored? – he asked.

– There is some. And you?– she asked, pointing to Robert's writing.

– Very much, – he answered, tearing Kshesinskaya's letter into small pieces.

In the next moment, the surging wind carried away the remnants of the message to the deceased, either to the depths of the sea, or to the next world, leaving the idyll of the newly-made

couple alone.

– Let me introduce myself! Robert Jackson, journalist from New York.

– Very nice Helen Vertinskaya – ballet soloist. Invited to tour at Carnegie Hall.

So that's where such a posture and a body like a string come from. Wow, again a ballerina and again a prima. Robert noticed expensive jewelry on Helen – and there is a similarity, the presence of rich admirers is obvious – he thought.

– Did I surprise you? -Helen asked, sensing Robert's confusion.

– No no. On the contrary, they rejoiced. I was lucky enough to have time to interview in Paris the former prima ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya herself.

– Oh, how interesting! Let's go to the salon and you tell me everything in detail about this over a cup of coffee. Although I was born in France, my roots, like those of Kshesinskaya, are from Russian emigration.

The cabin of the ship was cozy and warm. Journalist Robert was, by definition, an excellent storyteller, and Helen was an attentive listener, plus – there is a commonality of interests and mutual topics.

Outwardly, Robert liked Helen, but Kshesinskaya reeked of her: ballet fame, rich fans, expensive gifts, and this repelled the journalist.

Robert told Helen in detail about the events of recent days,

without concealing details about the life of a ballerina and the origin of her jewelry.

– Robert! You probably think that I am the same as Matilda?

– Why do you think so?

– It's written on your face, – Helen said with a smile, – I'm wearing family jewels, I'm not spoiled by fame and admirers either. So drive away old Kshesinskaya from consciousness. It interferes with our communication.

– Tell me then about your personal life.

Helen's face immediately became serious.

– It's a long story, Robert. I'll tell you sometime in closer communication.

The ship continued to cross the Atlantic inexorably and the nautical miles rushed after the time that Robert and Helen whiled away, continuing to communicate and talk sweetly, which made their relationship warmer and sympathy gradually increased. In the evenings, they were smartly dressed in the salon and drank various drinks to the relaxing music of the pianist.

– Let's drink something strong today – suggested Robert.

– For example?

– Good cognac.

– You can't get rid of Kshesinskaya's lifestyle in any way?

– Matilda has nothing to do with it, dear Helen. I have always loved cognac. Would you prefer whiskey and soda?

– No. If you drink equally, then preferably the same drink.

Together they emptied a good bottle, having a bite of sweets,

which is why their cheerful, carefree conversation was sometimes interrupted by laughter.

–Now is the time to share the personal,– Robert reminded him.

Ellen immediately became sad.

– You don't want to, you don't have to.

– Well, why not, but how could it be without it. But it needs more intimacy. Who do you think will have a wider cabin?

– I don't think they are different.

– Well, then let's go to mine. I need a familiar environment.

– Let's go, but first we'll have one more drink.

– I don't mind, but this time I propose to brotherhood?

– Great idea!

After a fair portion of cognac, the mutual kiss on the lips turned out to be more than frank and long.

– And it's nice to kiss you.

– Mutually.

Despite the lights being off, the cabin was not dimmed in any way. The reason for this was the bright external illumination of the ship, which made it look as elegant as a Christmas tree from afar.

– We'll have to undress in the light. Does not it confuse you?

– Not a bit.

– Then I'm the first to take a shower.

Helen pulled off her dress and a small bra showed her compact chest, which was not needed in the ballerina's dance.

Then she rolled down her pantyhose for a long time and scrupulously, demonstrating strong muscular legs. Pear-shaped calves descending to the feet, protruding knees and the whole mass of hips rushing upwards, turning into massive breathtaking buttocks, which are the main driven force of ballet dance.

Robert, who for the first time beheld such a muscular splendor of the female body, stood as if betrothed. Helen, on the other hand, fully enjoyed the impression that she made with the power of her nakedness.

- Before I sober up, let's take a shower together.
- Yes, there are places on half of my priests.
- And we'll put them together, if you don't mind.

After warming up in the shower, they proceeded to full-fledged intercourse already on the bed.

Robert, who had previously had a long abstinence, gave free rein to his flesh and very soon found himself at the very top of male satisfaction.

Unlike him, Helen perceived their joint act more sportily, with less emotion.

“Something is wrong with these ballerinas,” thought Robert, leaning back, “do they have little experience? If Kshesinskaya was such a roach in bed, then one wonders with what fright royal people pick up to her?”

- You promised to tell about your personal.
- And what is there to tell. Solid disappointments.
- Just share them.

– I somehow had the misfortune of being married to my impresario, but only he was addicted to heroin. In short, I did not have time to leave him, as he flew from him. I had to give birth. But heroin left its mark and I gave birth to a daughter with a defect, without one arm. In addition, I had a postpartum complication – severe bleeding, and my uterus was removed. That's how it is.

– What happened to the girl? – Robert immediately asked.

–She died while I was in intensive care.

Robert considered. Probably a coincidence. How many girls are born with defects. He felt sorry for Ellen. So much grief befell her. Can from moreover and became without interesting in bed?

The last day of sailing has arrived.

– We sail for New York tomorrow morning. Today is our farewell party.

– Yeah. My tour of Carnegie Hall begins tomorrow.

– I will come to your show.

– Of course. You look and write an article in a magazine.

– Great idea. Now I have become a narrow specialist in ballet.

– At the same time and on ballerinas.

– Well, since we are approaching America, let's get drunk today in the insole of whiskey?

– Great idea.

Viskey did not act like cognac quickly and surely, so they was order another bottle.

– I want you Robert! Lets go to the cabin.

But Robert was in no hurry. His face became serious and concentrated. The drunk dose of alcohol immediately disappeared.

– What is the date of birth of your daughter?

– Why are you need this?

– It's very important, name it.

Helen named the year, month, day.

– Now remember the place where you gave birth. Let me guess. Maybe the city of Nice?

– I didn't quite guess. I gave birth in Marseille. Not too far from Nice. So why are you asking these questions?

Robert immediately sobered up.

– I know where your daughter is.

Now it was Helen's turn to sober up. The hops seemed to have been taken from her by hand.

She died right after giving birth.

And then Robert told her all about the girl Rosie.

For a minute Helen sat absolutely motionless and looked at one point in the middle of the ocean.

– What hand did she have with a defect? Right or left?

– Right.

Tears glistened in her eyes.

– So my daughter is alive and she was hidden in Nice?

– Yes, I have a letter from her to you.

Ellen's eyes widened in surprise.

– Letter? Which? Well, show me!

– Do not trust?

– Not! I won't believe until I see it.

The alcohol is completely gone from them. Helen sat sober as glass and continued to stare into the ocean without blinking.

Show me her letter! she suddenly shouted, and everyone in the salon turned in their direction.

Ellen, calm down. Now I will bring it to you.

Robert got up and walked towards the cabins, looking around uneasily at Helen, who was sitting with a distracted look. He returned very soon, holding in his hand a four-fold leaf from Rosie.

Helen was not in the cabin.

Robert ran out on deck in alarm. She wasn't here either. He ran across the stern to the other side and did it in time – Helen had already thrown one leg and was about to throw herself into the water. Robert knew that she, like him, could not swim, and therefore would have drowned at once.

– Helen! Don't do this, I beg you, – Robert shouted with all his might.

But Helen seemed not to listen to anyone and continued to climb.

Robert made a couple of jumps and found himself next to her. Ellen fell on his shoulder, weeping.

– I'm a useless mother. What right do I have to live?

– You must live. Your daughter is waiting for you. She writes about it in a letter.

– My parents deceived me for seven years. My daughter was alive all this time.

– Do not judge strictly. Your parents didn't want you to raise a defective daughter.

Robert was able to carefully unhook Helen from the railing.

– Where is the letter?

– Here it is. Let's go to the cabin, I'll let you read it.

Helen began to read Rosie's letter and began to sob uncontrollably.

–My heart is about to break into pieces!

The news of her daughter languishing in an orphanage and the stress after reading a heartbreaking letter caused her a strong psycho-emotional push.

Suddenly Helen bit her lips in a passionate kiss. Without wasting time on the shower, they began to rip off each other's clothes. Helen was unrecognizable. From a faceless partner in bed, she turned into a furious fury who reveled in every moment of sexual pleasure. All the power of her muscular body participated in intercourse. Her spectacular hips and buttocks began to tremble, causing even her small breasts to bounce with every push.

Overnight, she turned into a spectacular woman, a loving mother and an ardent lover, and Robert was ready to fall in love with such a person without limit.

– Robert! You are the first man who gave me true satisfaction. I beg you never leave me.

It was said sincerely, from the heart, and it was more than a declaration of love.

– Now we have one task for the two of us – to find and return Rosie,– Robert replied.

Early in the morning, the ship sailed past the Statue of Liberty and safely arrived at the port of New York.

Quickly completing all entry formalities, they drove to the international airport to fly to Paris.

– Are you sure you want to go back?

– Yes.

– What about touring? And Carnegie Hall?

– To hell with all of it. I only have Rosie on my mind right now.

Already getting on the plane, Helen suddenly remembered:

– Robert! But do you still have a lot of things to do here?

– I have one thing to do now. Bring you to Rosie. I promised her this a long time ago, and it was for this purpose that she wrote you a letter.

– Thank you dear for everything.

After 8 hours, they boarded a plane to Nice and ran like crazy through the gates of the orphanage.

–And Rosie isn't here,– the porter startled them.

– How is it not?

Helen nearly fainted.

– Very simple. Just yesterday, a young couple took her away.

– What were their names?

– The young man's name was Pierre.

– Ellen, don't be discouraged. I know where she is. Let's go back to Paris.

Robert and Helen flew into the jewelry store like a bullet. Pierre and Monica were serving customers, while Rosie sat on a chair and dangled her legs. She turned and saw first Robert, then Helen. Rosie jumped up from her chair and rushed to Helen with a cry of "Mother". Her defective hand, along with a healthy one, tightly hugged her mother.

– My dear girl! Now no one will ever be able to separate us, – Helen sobbed.

Many years have passed since then. In the courtyard of an orphanage in Nice, a pretty, richly dressed woman with a prosthesis on her right arm is often seen. She first gives gifts to the kids, and then she goes to the memorial tombstone and carefully lines it with flowers.

– Madam! – the gatekeeper asked her every time, – did you know this Niky and Malya well ?

And every time the question hung in the air without an answer.