

MIKHAIL BULGAKOV

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA



■ RUSSIAN MODERN PROSE ■

Russian Modern Prose

Mikhail Bulgakov

**The Master and Margarita /
Мастер и Маргарита. Книга для
чтения на английском языке**

«КАРО»

1937

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Bulgakov M. A.

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Предлагаем вниманию читателей знаменитый роман советского писателя Михаила Булгакова «Мастер и Маргарита». Роман, написанный в течение одного из самых мрачных десятилетий двадцатого века, отражает сложную историческую эпоху и настроения советского общества тех времен. Бог и дьявол, добро и зло, творчество и гибель – в романе множество сюжетных линий, противоречивых героев, поступки которых неоднозначны и вызывают у читателя и грусть, и смех, и желание открывать роман и окунаться в его мистику и волшебство снова и снова. Представляем полный текст романа в переводе с русского на английский язык Хью Аплина.

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Михаил Булгаков
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Part One

1. Never Talk to Strangers

At the hour of the hot spring sunset at Patriarch's Ponds two citizens appeared. The first of them – some forty years old and dressed in a nice grey summer suit – was short, well fed and bald; he carried his respectable pork-pie hat¹ in his hand, and had a neatly shaved face adorned by spectacles of supernatural proportions in black horn frames. The second – a broad-shouldered, gingery, shock-headed young man with a checked cloth cap cocked towards the back of his head – was wearing a cowboy shirt, crumpled white trousers and black soft shoes.

The first was none other than Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, the editor of a thick literary journal and chairman of the board of one of Moscow's biggest literary associations, known in abbreviation as MASSOLIT^{2,3} while his young companion was the poet Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyrev, who wrote under the pseudonym Bezdomny.⁴

Entering the shade of the lime trees that were just becoming green, the writers first and foremost hurried towards a colourfully painted little booth with the inscription "Beer and Minerals".

Yes, the first strange thing about that terrible May evening should be noted. Not just by the booth, but along the entire tree-lined avenue running parallel to Malaya Bronnaya Street, not a single person was about. At that hour, when people no longer even seemed to have the strength to breathe, when the sun, having heated Moscow up to an unbearable degree, was toppling in a dry mist somewhere down beyond the Garden Ring Road, nobody had come along here under the lime trees, nobody had sat down on a bench: the avenue was empty.

"Narzan,⁵ please," requested Berlioz.

"There's no Narzan," replied the woman in the booth, and for some reason took umbrage⁶.

"Is there beer?" enquired Bezdomny in a hoarse voice⁷.

"They'll be bringing beer towards evening," the woman replied.

"What is there, then?" asked Berlioz.

"Apricot squash – only it's warm," said the woman.

"Well, come on, come on, come on!"

The apricot squash produced an abundant yellow foam, and there was a sudden smell of the hairdresser's in the air. Having quenched their thirst⁸, the writers immediately started hiccuping; they settled up, and seated themselves on a bench with their faces to the pond and their backs to Bronnaya.

At this point the second strange thing occurred, concerning Berlioz alone. He suddenly stopped hiccuping; his heart gave a thump⁹ and disappeared somewhere for a moment, then returned, but with a blunt needle lodged in it. Moreover, Berlioz was seized by terror – groundless, but so powerful that he felt the urge to flee from Patriarch's Ponds at once without a backward glance.

¹ pork-pie hat – шляпа с круглой плоской тульёй, шляпа-"пирожок"

² MASSOLIT: The organization is an invention of Bulgakov's. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

³ MASSOLIT – Массолит – вымышленное объединение литераторов

⁴ Bezdomny: The poet's pseudonym, reminiscent of those of Maxim Gorky ("bitter"), Demyan Bedny ("poor") and others, means "homeless". (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁵ Narzan: Sparkling mineral water. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁶ to take umbrage – обижаться

⁷ in a hoarse voice – хриплым, осипшим голосом

⁸ to quench one's thirst – утолять жажду

⁹ heart gave a thump – сердце встрепенулось

Berlioz glanced back in anguish, unable to understand what had frightened him. He turned pale, mopped his brow with his handkerchief and thought: “What is the matter with me? This has never happened before... my heart’s playing up... I’m overtired. Maybe it’s time to let everything go to the devil and be off to Kislovodsk...”

And then the sultry air thickened before him, and out of this air was woven a transparent citizen of very strange appearance. On his little head a jockey’s peaked cap, a little checked jacket – tight, and airy too. a citizen almost seven feet tall, but narrow in the shoulders, unbelievably thin, and a physiognomy, I beg you to note, that was mocking¹⁰.

Berlioz’s life had been shaped in such a way that he was not used to extraordinary phenomena. Turning still paler, he opened his eyes wide and thought in confusion: “It can’t be!”

But, alas, it could, and the lanky citizen you could see through swayed to both left and right in front of him without touching the ground.

At this point Berlioz was horror-stricken¹¹ to such a degree that he closed his eyes. And when he opened them, he saw that everything was over, the mirage had dissolved, the one in checks had vanished, and at the same time the blunt needle had dropped out of his heart.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” exclaimed the editor. “You know, Ivan, I almost had a seizure¹² just now because of the heat! There was even something like a hallucination...” He tried to grin, but alarm was still dancing in his eyes, and his hands were trembling. However, he gradually calmed down, fanned himself with his handkerchief and, saying quite brightly, “Well, and so.” he renewed the speech that had been interrupted by the drinking of the apricot squash.

This speech, as was learnt subsequently, was about Jesus Christ. The thing was, the editor had commissioned a long antireligious poem from the poet for the next issue of his journal. Ivan Nikolayevich had written this poem, in a very short time too, but unfortunately had not satisfied the editor with it at all. Bezdomny had outlined the main character of his poem – Jesus, that is – in very dark colours, yet nonetheless, in the editor’s opinion, the whole poem needed to be written all over again. And so now the editor was giving the poet something in the way of a lecture on Jesus, with the aim of underlining the poet’s basic error.

It is hard to say what precisely had let Ivan Nikolayevich down¹³ – whether it had been the graphic power of his talent, or his utter unfamiliarity with the question on which he was writing – but his Jesus had come out as just a living Jesus who had once existed: only, true, a Jesus furnished with all the negative features possible.

And Berlioz wanted to demonstrate to the poet that the main thing was not what Jesus was like, whether he was good or bad, but that this Jesus, as a person, had not existed in the world at all, and that all the stories about him were simply inventions, the most commonplace myth.

It must be noted that the editor was a well-read man, and pointed very skilfully in his speech to the ancient historians – for example, to the celebrated Philo of Alexandria¹⁴ and to the brilliantly educated Flavius Josephus,¹⁶ who had never said a word about the existence of Jesus. Displaying sound erudition¹⁸, Mikhail Alexandrovich also informed the poet, incidentally, that the passage in

¹⁰ mocking physiognomy – глумливая физиономия

¹¹ horror-stricken – охваченный ужасом

¹² to have a seizure – получить удар

¹³ to let somebody down – подвести к.-л.

¹⁴ *Philo of Alexandria*: a philosopher and religious thinker (c.25 bc-50 ad). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁵ Philo of Alexandria – Филон Александрийский, философ и религиозный мыслитель

¹⁶ *Flavius Josephus*: Roman historian (37 ad-after 100). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁷ Flavius Josephus – Иосиф Флавий, еврейский историк и военачальник

¹⁸ sound erudition – блестящая эрудиция

book fifteen, chapter forty-four of the celebrated *Annales* of Tacitus,¹⁹²⁰ where the execution of Jesus is spoken of, is nothing other than a later forged interpolation.

The poet, to whom everything being imparted by the editor was news, listened to Mikhail Alexandrovich attentively with his lively green eyes fixed upon him, and only hiccuping occasionally, cursing in a whisper the apricot squash.

"There isn't a single eastern religion," said Berlioz, "in which, as a rule, a chaste virgin doesn't give birth to a god. And without inventing anything new, in exactly the same way, the Christians created their Jesus, who in reality never actually lived. And it's on that the main emphasis needs to be put..."

Berlioz's high tenor resounded in the deserted avenue, and the deeper Mikhail Alexandrovich clambered into the thickets²¹ into which only a very educated man can clamber without the risk of coming a cropper, the more and more interesting and useful were the things the poet learnt about the Egyptian Osiris, the most merciful god and son of heaven and earth,²²²³ and about the Phoenician god Tammuz,²⁴²⁵ and about Marduk,²⁶²⁷ and even about the lesser-known stern god Huitzilopochtli,²⁸ who was at one time much revered by the Aztecs in Mexico.²⁹

And it was at precisely the moment when Mikhail Alexandrovich was telling the poet about how the Aztecs used to make a figurine of Huitzilopochtli from dough that the first person appeared in the avenue.

Subsequently – when, frankly speaking, it was already too late – various organizations presented their reports with a description of this person. A comparison of the reports cannot help but cause amazement. Thus in the first of them it is said that this person was small in stature³⁰, had gold teeth and limped on his right leg. In the second the person was enormous in stature³¹, had platinum crowns and limped on his left leg. The third states laconically that the person had no distinguishing features.

It has to be acknowledged that not one of those reports is of any use whatsoever.

First of all: the person described did not limp on either leg, and was neither small nor enormous in stature, but simply tall. As far as his teeth are concerned, on the left side he had platinum crowns, and on the right gold ones. He wore an expensive grey suit and foreign shoes the same colour as the suit. He had his grey beret cocked jauntily over one ear, and under his arm he carried a walking stick with a black handle in the shape of a poodle's head. To look at, he was about forty plus. Mouth a bit crooked. Clean-shaven. Dark-haired. The right eye black, the left for some reason green. Eyebrows black, but one higher than the other. In short – a foreigner.

After passing the bench on which the editor and the poet were located, the foreigner cast a sidelong glance at them, stopped, and suddenly sat down on the next bench, two steps away from the friends.

"German..." thought Berlioz.

¹⁹ the celebrated *Annales* of Tacitus: The chronicle *Annales* by Gaius Cornelius Tacitus (c.55-c.120) deals with Roman history of the years 14–68. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²⁰ *Annales* of Tacitus – «Анналы», последнее и самое крупное сочинение древнеримского историка Публия Корнелия Тацита

²¹ to clamber into the thickets – лезть в дебри

²² *Osiris... and earth*: The Egyptian god of death, life and fertility. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²³ Osiris – Осирис, бог смерти в египетской мифологии

²⁴ *Tammuz*: The Mesopotamian god of fertility. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²⁵ Tammuz – Таммуз, бог плодородия в др. Месопотамии

²⁶ *Marduk*: The most important god in the Babylonian pantheon. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²⁷ Marduk – центральное божество вавилонского пантеона, главный бог города Вавилона

²⁸ Huitzilopochtli – Вицлипуцли, бог войны у древних Ацтеков

²⁹ *Huitzilopochtli... Aztecs in Mexico*: The Aztec sun and war god. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

³⁰ small in stature – маленького роста

³¹ enormous in stature – высоченного роста

"English..." thought Bezdomny. "And look at that – he's not too hot to be wearing gloves."

But the foreigner cast his eye over the square of tall buildings bordering the pond, and it became apparent that he was seeing this place for the first time, and that it had grabbed his interest.

He arrested his gaze on the top storeys, in whose window panes there were dazzling reflections of the broken sunlight that was leaving Mikhail Alexandrovich for ever, then he moved it down to where the window panes had started darkening, as they do towards evening; he grinned condescendingly about something, screwed up his eyes, put his hands on the handle of the walking stick and placed his chin on his hands.

"Ivan," said Berlioz, "your depiction of, for example, the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, was very good and satirical, but the real point is that a whole series of sons of god had already been born before Jesus – like, let's say, the Phoenician Adonis, the Phrygian Attis, the Persian Mithras. To put it briefly, not one of them was ever born and none of them existed, including Jesus too, and it's essential that, instead of depicting the birth or, let's suppose, the visit of the Magi, you should depict the absurd rumours about that visit. Otherwise, according to your narrative, it turns out that he was actually born!"

At this point Bezdomny made an attempt to stop the hiccups that had him in agony and held his breath, and as a result he emitted a louder and more agonizing hiccup, and at that same moment Berlioz interrupted his speech, because the foreigner suddenly rose and headed towards the writers.

They looked at him in surprise.

"Excuse me, please," he began on coming up, with a foreign accent, but without garbling the words, "if I permit myself, without being acquainted... but the topic of your learned conversation is so interesting that."

Here he politely removed his beret, and nothing remained for the friends but to half-stand and exchange bows³².

"No, more likely French..." thought Berlioz.

"Polish?..." thought Bezdomny.

It is essential to add that from his very first words the foreigner made an abominable impression on the poet, yet was found by Berlioz rather to be pleasant – that is, not exactly pleasant, but. how can one put it. interesting, perhaps.

"May I take a seat?" asked the foreigner politely, and the friends, involuntarily somehow, moved apart; the foreigner settled in neatly between them and immediately entered the conversation.

"If I heard correctly, you were so good as to say there was never any Jesus on earth?" asked the foreigner, turning his green left eye towards Berlioz.

"Yes, you heard correctly," replied Berlioz courteously, "that is precisely what I was saying."

"Ah, how interesting!" exclaimed the foreigner.

"But what the devil does he want?" thought Bezdomny, and frowned.

"And were you in agreement with your companion?" enquired the stranger, turning to the right towards Bezdomny.

"The full hundred per cent!" confirmed the latter, who loved to express himself in a mannered and ornate fashion.

"Astonishing!" exclaimed the uninvited interlocutor and, looking around furtively for some reason and lowering his deep voice, he said: "Forgive my persistence, but my understanding was that, apart from anything else, you don't believe in God either?" He made frightened eyes and added: "I swear I won't tell anyone."

"No, we don't believe in God," replied Berlioz, with a faint smile at the fright of the foreign tourist, "but it can be spoken about completely freely."

³² to exchange bows – раскланиваться

The foreigner reclined against the back of the bench and asked, even emitting a little squeal of curiosity³³:

“Are you atheists?”

“Yes, we’re atheists,” replied Berlioz, smiling, while Bezdomny thought angrily: “This foreign goose is being a real nuisance!”

“Oh, how charming!” the amazing foreigner cried, and he began twisting his head, looking first at one man of letters, then at the other.

“In our country atheism surprises no one,” said Berlioz with diplomatic politeness. “The majority of our population ceased consciously and long ago to believe in fairy tales about God.”

At this point the foreigner wheeled out the following trick: he stood up and shook the astonished editor’s hand, at the same time pronouncing these words:

“Permit me to thank you from the bottom of my heart!”

“And what is it you’re thanking him for?” enquired Bezdomny, blinking.

“For a very important piece of information, which is extremely interesting to me as a traveller,” the eccentric foreigner elucidated, raising a finger most meaningfully.

Evidently the important piece of information really had made a powerful impression on the traveller, because he looked round in alarm at the buildings, as though afraid of seeing an atheist at every window.

“No, he’s not English...” thought Berlioz, while Bezdomny thought: “Wherever did he get so good at speaking Russian, that’s what I wonder!” and frowned again.

“But permit me to ask you,” began the foreign guest after an anxious hesitation, “what’s to be done about the proofs of God’s existence, of which there are, as is well known, exactly five?”

“Alas!” replied Berlioz with regret. “Not one of those proofs is worth a thing, and mankind gave them up as a bad job long ago. You must agree, after all, that in the sphere of reason there can be no proof of the existence of God.”

“Bravo!” exclaimed the foreigner. “Bravo! You’ve repeated in its entirety that restless old man Immanuel’s idea on that score.³⁴ But here’s a curious thing: he completely demolished all five proofs, and then, as though in mockery of himself, constructed his own sixth proof!”

“Kant’s proof,” objected the educated editor with a thin smile, “is also unconvincing.³⁵ And not for nothing did Schiller³⁶³⁷ say that the Kantian arguments on the question could satisfy only slaves, while Strauss³⁸³⁹ simply laughed at that proof.”

Berlioz spoke, yet at the same time he was thinking: “But all the same, who on earth is he? And why is it he speaks Russian so well?”

“This Kant should be taken and sent to Solovki⁴⁰ for two or three years for such proofs!” Ivan Nikolayevich blurted out⁴¹ quite unexpectedly.

“Ivan!” whispered Berlioz, embarrassed.

³³ a squeal of curiosity – возглас любопытства

³⁴ Immanuel’s idea – ссылка на философа Иммануила Канта, его анализ традиционной аргументации существования Бога и им же приведенное новое доказательство

³⁵ *Immanuel’s idea, also unconvincing*: a reference to the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), his analyses of the traditional arguments for the existence of God and his own attempt at a new one. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

³⁶ *Schiller*: The German poet and dramatist Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

³⁷ Schiller – Фридрих фон Шиллер, немецкий поэт и драматург

³⁸ *Strauss*: The German theologian David Strauss (180874). In his major work, *The Life of Jesus*, he made the pioneering step of taking a historical approach to Christ’s existence. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

³⁹ Strauss – Давид Штраус, немецкий теолог

⁴⁰ *Solovki*: The popular name for the prison camp established at the Solovetsky Monastery on an island in the White Sea. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁴¹ to blur out – сболтнуть, «ляпнуть»

But not only did the proposal to send Kant to Solovki not shock the foreigner, it even sent him into raptures⁴².

"Precisely, precisely," he cried, and a twinkle appeared in his green left eye, which was turned towards Berlioz, "that's the very place for him! I said to him then over breakfast, you know: 'As you please, Professor, but you've come up with something incoherent! It may indeed be clever, but it's dreadfully unintelligible. They're going to make fun of⁴³ you.'"

Berlioz opened his eyes wide. "Over breakfast... to Kant?... What nonsense is this he's talking?" he thought.

"But," the foreigner continued, with no embarrassment at Berlioz's astonishment and turning to the poet, "sending him to Solovki is impossible for the reason that he's already been in parts considerably more distant than Solovki for over a hundred years, and there's no possible way of extracting him from there, I can assure you!"

"That's a pity!" responded the quarrelsome poet.

"I think it's a pity too," confirmed the stranger, with a twinkle in his eye⁴⁴, and continued: "But this is the question that's troubling me: if there's no God, then who, one wonders, is directing human life and all order on earth in general?"

"Man himself is directing it," Bezdomny hastened to reply angrily to this, to be honest, not very clear question.

"I'm sorry," responded the stranger mildly. "In order to be directing things, it is necessary, for all that, to have a definite plan for a certain, at least reasonably respectable, period of time. Permit me to ask you then, how can man be directing things, if he not only lacks the capacity to draw up any sort of plan for even a laughably short period of time – well, let's say, for a thousand years or so – but cannot even vouch for his own tomorrow? And indeed," here the stranger turned to Berlioz, "imagine that you, for example, start directing things, managing both other people and yourself – generally, so to speak, getting a taste for it – and suddenly you have... heh... heh... a lung sarcoma." The foreigner smiled sweetly, as if the idea of a lung sarcoma gave him pleasure – "yes, a sarcoma," narrowing his eyes like a cat, he repeated the sonorous word, "and there's an end to your directing! No one's fate, apart from your own, interests you any more. Your family begin lying to you. Sensing something wrong, you rush to learned doctors, then to charlatans, and sometimes to fortune-tellers too. Like the first and the second, so the third too is completely pointless: you realize it yourself. And it all ends tragically: the man who just recently supposed he was directing something turns out suddenly to be lying motionless in a wooden box, and those around him, realizing there's no more use whatsoever in the man lying there, burn him up in a stove. But it could be even worse: a man will have just decided to take a trip to Kislovodsk," here the foreigner screwed his eyes up at Berlioz, "a trifling matter⁴⁵, it would have seemed, but he can't accomplish even that, since for some unknown reason he'll suddenly go and slip and fall under a tram! Surely you won't say it was he that directed himself that way? Isn't it more correct to think that someone else completely dealt with him directly?" Here the stranger laughed a strange little laugh.

Berlioz had listened with great attention to the unpleasant story of the sarcoma and the tram, and some alarming ideas had started to torment him. "He isn't a foreigner... he isn't a foreigner..." he thought, "he's an extremely strange type. but permit me, who on earth is he?..."

"You want to smoke, I see?" the stranger unexpectedly addressed Bezdomny. "What kind do you prefer?"

"You have various kinds, do you?" the poet, who was out of cigarettes, asked gloomily.

⁴² to send somebody into raptures – приводить к.-л. в восторг

⁴³ to make fun of – высмеивать

⁴⁴ with a twinkle in one's eye – сверкнув глазом

⁴⁵ a trifling matter – пустяковое дело

“Which do you prefer?” the stranger repeated.

“Well, *Our Brand*” Bezdomny replied bad-temperedly.⁴⁶

The stranger immediately took a cigarette case out of his pocket and offered it to Bezdomny.

“*Our Brand*.”

Both the editor and the poet were shocked not so much by the fact that it was specifically *Our Brand* that were in the cigarette case, as by the cigarette case itself. It was of huge proportions, of pure gold, and, as it was being opened, a diamond triangle on its lid flashed blue and white fire.

At this point the writers had differing thoughts. Berlioz: “No, a foreigner!” and Bezdomny: “Well, the devil take it, eh!..”

The poet and the owner of the cigarette case lit up, while the non-smoking Berlioz refused.

“I shall have to counter him thus,” decided Berlioz. “Yes, man is mortal, and nobody is arguing against that. But the point is that...”

However, he had not had time to voice these words before the foreigner began:

“Yes, man is mortal, but that would still be just a minor problem. The bad thing is that he’s sometimes suddenly mortal, and that’s the whole point! And he can’t possibly say what he’s going to be doing the same evening.”

“An absurd sort of formulation of the question,” considered Berlioz, and retorted:

“Well, there really is some exaggeration here. This evening is known to me more or less exactly. It goes without saying that, if on Bronnaya a brick should fall on my head.”

“Without rhyme or reason⁴⁷, a brick,” the stranger interrupted edifyingly, “will never fall on anybody’s head. And in particular, I can assure you, a brick doesn’t threaten you, not under any circumstances. You’re going to die a different death.”

“Perhaps you know what one precisely?” enquired Berlioz with completely natural irony, getting drawn⁴⁸ into a really absurd sort of conversation. “And you’ll tell me?”

“Willingly,” responded the stranger. He sized Berlioz up, as though intending to make him a suit, muttered under his breath something like: “One, two. Mercury’s in the second house. the Moon’s gone. six – misfortune. the evening – seven...” and announced loudly and joyfully: “You’re going to have your head cut off!”

Bezdomny goggled with wild, angry eyes at the free-and-easy⁴⁹ stranger, while Berlioz asked with a crooked grin:

“By whom, precisely? Enemies? Interventionists?”

“No,” replied his interlocutor, “by a Russian woman in the Communist League of Youth.”

“Hm...” mumbled Berlioz, irritated by the stranger’s little joke. “Well, excuse me, but that’s hardly likely.”

“I beg you to excuse me too,” replied the foreigner, “but it’s so. Yes, I’d like to ask you what you’re going to be doing this evening, if it’s not a secret?”

“There’s no secret. In a moment I’m going to pop into my apartment on Sadovaya, and then at ten o’clock in the evening a meeting will be taking place at MASSOLIT, and I’m going to chair it.”

“No, that can’t possibly be,” objected the foreigner firmly.

“And why’s that?”

“Because,” the foreigner replied, and looked with narrowed eyes into the sky, where, with a presentiment of the cool of the evening, black birds were flying in noiseless lines, “Annushka has already bought the sunflower oil – and not only bought it, but even spilt it too. So the meeting won’t take place.”

⁴⁶ *Our Brand* – «Наша Марка» (название сигарет)

⁴⁷ without rhyme or reason – ни с того ни с сего

⁴⁸ to get drawn – вовлекаясь

⁴⁹ free-and-easy – развязный

At this point, quite understandably, silence fell beneath the lime trees.

"Forgive me," began Berlioz after a pause, casting glances at the foreigner who was talking such rubbish, "what has sunflower oil got to do with it... and who's this Annushka?"

"This is what sunflower oil has got to do with it," began Bezdomny suddenly, evidently having decided to declare war on their uninvited interlocutor. "Have you, Citizen, ever happened to be in a clinic for the mentally ill?"

"Ivan!" exclaimed Mikhail Alexandrovich quietly.

But the foreigner was not in the least offended, and gave an extremely cheerful laugh.

"I have, I have, and more than once!" he exclaimed, laughing, but without taking his unlaughing eye off the poet. "Where haven't I been! It's just a pity I didn't find the time to ask the professor what schizophrenia was. So do find it out from him for yourself, Ivan Nikolayevich!"

"How do you know my name?"

"Come, come, Ivan Nikolayevich, who doesn't know you?" Here the foreigner pulled the previous day's issue of *The Literary Gazette* from his pocket, and Ivan Nikolayevich saw his own image right on the front page, and beneath it his very own verse. But the proof of his fame and popularity, that just the day before had gladdened the poet, on this occasion did not gladden him in the least.

"Excuse me," he said, and his face darkened, "can you wait for just a moment? I want to have a quick word with my comrade."

"Oh, with pleasure!" exclaimed the stranger. "It's so nice here under the lime trees, and, happily, I'm not hurrying off anywhere."

"You know what, Misha," began the poet in a whisper, pulling Berlioz aside⁵⁰, "he's no foreign tourist, but a spy. He's a Russian émigré who's made his way back over here. Ask for his papers, otherwise he'll be off..."

"Do you think so?" Berlioz whispered anxiously, while thinking to himself: "He's right, of course..."

"Believe you me" – the poet's voice became hoarse in his ear – "he's pretending to be a bit of an idiot so as to pump us about⁵¹ something. You hear the way he speaks Russian" – the poet was casting sidelong glances as he talked, looking to see that the stranger did not make a run for it – "come on, we'll detain him, or else he'll be off."

And the poet drew Berlioz back towards the bench by the arm.

The stranger was not sitting, but standing beside it, holding in his hands some sort of booklet with a dark-grey binding, a thick envelope made of good-quality paper and a visiting card.

"Excuse me for forgetting in the heat of our argument to introduce myself to you. Here's my card, my passport and my invitation to come to Moscow for a consultation," said the stranger weightily, giving both men of letters a piercing look.

They became embarrassed. "The devil, he heard it all..." thought Berlioz, and indicated with a polite gesture that there was no need for papers to be shown. While the foreigner was thrusting them at the editor, the poet managed to make out on the card, printed in foreign letters, the word "Professor" and the initial letter of the surname – "W".

"Pleased to meet you," the editor was meanwhile mumbling in embarrassment, and the foreigner put the papers away into his pocket.

Relations thus restored, all three sat down once more on the bench.

"You've been invited here in the capacity of a consultant, Professor?" asked Berlioz.

"Yes, as a consultant."

"Are you German?" enquired Bezdomny.

⁵⁰ to pull aside – оттаскивать в сторону

⁵¹ to pump about – выспрашивать

“Me?” the Professor queried, and suddenly became pensive. “Yes, if you like, I’m German...” he said.

“Your Russian’s brilliant,” remarked Bezdomny.

“Oh, I’m a polyglot in general and know a very large number of languages,” replied the Professor.

“And what do you specialize in?” enquired Berlioz.

“I’m a specialist in black magic.”

“Well, there you are!” Mikhail Alexandrovich had a sudden thought. “And.” – he faltered – “and you were invited here to use that specialization?” he asked.

“Yes, that’s what I was invited for,” confirmed the Professor, and elucidated: “Here in the State Library they found some original manuscripts of a tenth-century practitioner of black magic, Gerbert of Aurillac.⁵²⁵³ And so I’m required to decipher them. I’m the only specialist in the world.”

“Aha! You’re a historian?” asked Berlioz with respect and great relief.

“I am a historian,” the scholar confirmed, and added without reference to anything in particular: “There’s going to be an interesting bit of history at Patriarch’s Ponds this evening!”

And again both the editor and the poet were extremely surprised, but the Professor beckoned both of them close to him and, when they had leant towards him, he whispered:

“Bear it in mind that Jesus did exist.”

“You see, Professor,” responded Berlioz with a forced smile, “we respect your great knowledge, but on that question we ourselves adhere to a different point of view.”

“But you don’t need any points of view,” replied the strange Professor. “Simply he existed, and that’s all there is to it.”

“But some sort of proof is required,” began Berlioz.

“No proofs are required,” replied the Professor, and he began to speak in a low voice, his accent for some reason disappearing: “Everything’s quite simple: in a white cloak with a blood-red lining, with the shuffling gait of a cavalryman, early in the morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan...”⁵⁴

⁵² *Gerbert of Aurillac*: Otherwise known as Pope Sylvester II (938-1003). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁵³ Gerbert of Aurillac – папа Сильвестр II

⁵⁴ *Nisan*: The Jewish month which lasts for twenty days at the end of March and the beginning of April, with the seven days of the Feast of the Passover beginning on the 14th. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

2. Pontius Pilate

In a white cloak with a blood-red lining, with the shuffling gait of a cavalryman, early in the morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, into the covered colonnade between the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great⁵⁵ emerged the Procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate.⁵⁶

More than anything else on earth the Procurator hated the smell of attar of roses, and everything now betokened a bad day ahead, for that smell had been haunting the Procurator since dawn. It seemed to the Procurator that the smell of roses was being emitted by the cypresses and palms in the garden, and that mingling with the smell of his escort's leather accoutrements and sweat was that accursed waft of roses. From the wings at the rear of the palace that quartered the Twelfth Lightning Legion's First Cohort, which had come to Yershalaim⁵⁷ with the Procurator, a puff of smoke carried across the upper court of the garden into the colonnade, and mingling with this rather acrid smoke, which testified to the fact that the cooks in the centuries had started preparing dinner, was still that same heavy odour of roses.

"O gods, gods, why do you punish me?. No, there's no doubt, this is it, it again, the invincible, terrible sickness... hemicrania, when half my head is aching. there are no remedies for it, no salvation whatsoever. I'll try keeping my head still."

On the mosaic floor by the fountain an armchair had already been prepared, and the Procurator sat down in it without looking at anyone and reached a hand out to one side. Into that hand his secretary deferentially placed a piece of parchment. Unable to refrain from a grimace of pain, the Procurator took a cursory sidelong look through what was written, returned the parchment to the secretary and said with difficulty:

"The man under investigation is from Galilee, is he? Was the case sent to the Tetrarch?"

"Yes, Procurator," replied the secretary.

"And he did what?"

"He refused to give a decision on the case⁵⁸ and sent the Sanhedrin's death sentence for your ratification," explained the secretary.

The procurator pulled at his cheek and said quietly:

"Bring the accused here."

And immediately two legionaries led a man of about twenty-seven from the garden court and onto the balcony under the columns, and stood him in front of the Procurator's armchair. This man was dressed in an old and ragged light-blue chiton. His head was partly covered by a white cloth with a band around the forehead, and his hands were bound behind his back. Under his left eye the man had a large bruise, and in the corner of his mouth there was the dried blood of a cut. The new arrival looked at the Procurator with uneasy curiosity.

The latter was silent for a while, then asked quietly in Aramaic:

"So it was you inciting the people to demolish the Temple of Yershalaim?"

While speaking, the Procurator sat like stone, and only his lips moved a tiny bit as he pronounced the words. The Procurator was like stone because he was afraid of shaking his head, which was on fire with hellish pain⁵⁹.

The man with his hands bound edged forward a little and began to speak:

"Good man! Believe me..."

⁵⁵ *Herod the Great*: Herod (74-4 bc) was king of Judaea from 40 bc until his death. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁵⁶ *Pontius Pilate*: Pilate was Procurator of Judaea from 26 to 36 ad. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁵⁷ *Yershalaim*: An alternative transliteration for "Jerusalem" from the Hebrew. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁵⁸ to give a decision on the case – дать заключение по делу

⁵⁹ hellish pain – адская боль

But the Procurator, immobile as before and without raising his voice in the least, interrupted him right away:

“Is it me you’re calling a good man? You’re mistaken. Everyone in Yershalaim whispers that I’m a savage monster, and it’s absolutely true.” And in the same monotone he added: “Centurion Rat-Catcher to me.”

It seemed to everyone that the balcony grew darker when the centurion of the first century, Marcus, nicknamed the RatCatcher, appeared before the Procurator. The Rat-Catcher was a head taller than the tallest of the legion’s rank-and-file soldiers, and so broad in the shoulders that he completely blotted out⁶⁰ the as yet low sun.

The Procurator addressed the centurion in Latin:

“The criminal calls me ‘a good man’. Take him away for a minute, explain to him how I should be spoken to. But don’t mutilate him.”

And all except for the motionless Procurator let their eyes follow Marcus the Rat-Catcher, who had waved his arm at the man under arrest, indicating that the latter should follow him.

The eyes of all generally followed the Rat-Catcher wherever he appeared because of his height, and also, for those who were seeing him for the first time, because of the fact that the centurion’s face was disfigured: his nose had once been broken by a blow from a Germanic cudgel.

Marcus’s heavy boots pounded across the mosaic, the bound man followed him noiselessly; complete silence fell in the colonnade, and the doves in the garden court by the balcony could be heard cooing, while the water too sang an intricate, pleasant song in the fountain.

The Procurator felt like getting up, putting his temple under the jet of water and freezing like that. But he knew this would not help him either.

Leading the prisoner out from under the columns into the garden, the Rat-Catcher took the whip from the hands of a legionary who was standing by the pedestal of a bronze statue and, with a gentle swing, struck the prisoner across the shoulders. The centurion’s movement was insouciant and easy, but the bound man instantly collapsed to the ground as though his legs had been chopped from under him; he choked on the air, the colour drained from his face, and his eyes became senseless.

Easily, with just his left hand, Marcus tugged the fallen man up⁶¹ into the air like an empty sack, set him on his feet and began in a nasal voice, mispronouncing the Aramaic words:

“Call the Roman Procurator ‘Hegemon’.⁶² No other words. Stand to attention. Do you understand me, or do I hit you?”

The prisoner staggered, but controlled himself; the colour returned; he took breath and answered hoarsely:

“I understand you. Don’t beat me.”

A minute later he was standing before the Procurator once more.

There was the sound of a flat, sick voice.

“Name?”

“Mine?” the prisoner responded hastily, his entire being expressing his readiness to answer sensibly and not provoke any more anger.

In a low voice the Procurator said:

“I know mine. Don’t pretend to be more stupid than you are. Yours.”

“Yeshua,”⁶³ the prisoner replied hurriedly.

“Do you have another name?”

⁶⁰ to blot out – затемнять, отбрасывать тень

⁶¹ to tug up – поднять рывком

⁶² *Hegemon*: “Leader” (Greek). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁶³ *Yeshua*: “The Lord is salvation” (Aramaic). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

“Ha-Nozri.”⁶⁴

“Your place of birth?”

“The town of Gamala,” replied the prisoner, indicating with his head that over there, somewhere far away to his right, in the north, lay the town of Gamala.

“What are you by blood?”

“I don’t know exactly,” replied the prisoner animatedly. “I don’t remember my parents. I was told my father was a Syrian...”

“Where is your permanent home?”

“I don’t have any permanent place to live,” replied the prisoner shyly. “I travel from town to town.”

“That can be expressed more briefly, in a word – a vagrant,” said the Procurator, and asked: “Do you have relatives?”

“There’s no one. I’m alone in the world.”

“Are you literate?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know any language other than Aramaic?”

“I do. Greek.”

A swollen eyelid was raised, an eye clouded with suffering stared at the prisoner. The other eye remained closed.

Pilate began speaking in Greek:

“So it was you meaning to demolish the building of the Temple and calling on the people to do it.”

At this point the prisoner again became animated; his eyes ceased to express fright, and he began speaking in Greek:

“I, goo...” – at this point there was a flash of horror in the prisoner’s eyes at having almost said the wrong thing – “I, Hegemon, have never in my life meant to demolish the building of the Temple and have not incited anyone to commit this senseless act.”

Surprise expressed itself on the face of the secretary, who was hunched over⁶⁵ a low table, recording the testimony. He raised his head, but immediately bent it down again towards the parchment.

“A host of people of various kinds throngs to this city for the feast. Among them there may be magi, astrologers, soothsayers and murderers,” said the Procurator in a monotone, “and liars may be found too. You, for example, are a liar. It’s clearly recorded: inciting to demolish the Temple. Such is people’s testimony.”

“These good people,” the prisoner began, then hastily added “Hegemon” and continued: “learnt nothing and muddled up⁶⁶ all I said. In general, I’m beginning to worry that this muddle will continue for a very long time. And all because he records what I say incorrectly.”

Silence fell. By now both painful eyes were looking hard at the prisoner.

“I repeat to you, but for the last time, stop pretending to be mad, you villain,” pronounced Pilate in a gentle monotone. “Not a lot of what you’ve said is recorded, but what is recorded is enough to hang you.”

“No, no, Hegemon,” said the prisoner, his whole body tensing up⁶⁷ in his desire to convince, “he goes around, there’s this man that goes around with goatskin parchment and writes incessantly. But once I took a glance at the parchment and I was horrified. I’d said absolutely nothing of what

⁶⁴ *Ha-Nozri*: “From Nazareth” (Aramaic). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁶⁵ to hunch over – склоняться

⁶⁶ to muddle up – напутать

⁶⁷ to tense up – напрягаться

was recorded there. I begged him: for God's sake, won't you burn your parchment? But he tore it out of my hands and ran away."

"Who is this?" Pilate asked with distaste, and put his hand up to his temple.

"Levi Matthew," explained the prisoner willingly. "He was a tax collector, and I first met him in the street in Bethphage, where the corner of the fig orchard sticks out, and I got into conversation with him. His initial attitude towards me was hostile, and he even insulted me – that is, he thought he was insulting me by calling me a dog." Here the prisoner grinned. "I personally see nothing bad about the animal to make me take offence at the word..."

The secretary stopped recording and cast a surreptitious look of surprise⁶⁸ – not at the prisoner, but at the Procurator.

"However, after listening to me he began to soften," continued Yeshua, "finally threw the money down on the road and said he would come travelling with me."

Pilate grinned with one cheek, baring his yellow teeth, and said, turning the whole of his trunk towards the secretary:

"Oh, city of Yershalaim! The things you hear in it! A tax collector, do you hear, throwing the money onto the road!"

Not knowing how to reply to this, the secretary deemed it necessary to duplicate Pilate's smile.

"And he said that henceforth money was hateful to him," Yeshua said, explaining Levi Matthew's strange actions, and added: "And since then he's become my travelling companion."

With his teeth still bared, the Procurator glanced at the prisoner, then at the sun, which was rising steadily over the equestrian statues of the hippodrome lying far below to the right, and suddenly, in a nauseating sort of anguish, he thought of how it would be simplest of all to banish this strange villain from the balcony by pronouncing just the two words: "Hang him" – to banish the escort too, leave the colonnade for the interior of the palace, order the room to be darkened, drop onto a couch, demand some cold water, summon the dog, Banga, in a plaintive voice⁶⁹ and complain to him about the hemispheres. And a sudden thought of poison flashed seductively through the Procurator's aching head.

He looked at the prisoner with lacklustre eyes and was silent for a while, agonizing as he tried to remember why, in the full blaze of Yershalaim's pitiless morning sun, a prisoner with a face disfigured by blows was standing before him, and what other totally unnecessary questions he would have to ask.

"Levi Matthew?" the sick man asked in a hoarse voice, and closed his eyes.

"Yes, Levi Matthew," came the high-pitched, tormenting voice.

"But what were you saying, after all, to the crowd at the bazaar about the Temple?"

The voice of the man answering seemed to stab into Pilate's brow; it was inexpressibly agonizing, and that voice said:

"I was saying, Hegemon, that the temple of the old faith would collapse and a new temple of truth would be created. I put it like that so it would be clearer."

"And why were you, you vagrant, stirring up⁷⁰ the people at the bazaar, telling them about truth, of which you have no conception? What is truth?"

And at this point the Procurator thought: "O my gods! I'm asking him about something unnecessary during the trial. My mind isn't serving me any more..." And again he had a vision of a goblet of dark liquid. "Give me poison, poison."

And once more he heard the voice:

"The truth first and foremost is that your head aches, and aches so badly that you're faint-heartedly contemplating death. Not only do you not have the strength to talk to me, you find it hard

⁶⁸ to cast a surreptitious look of surprise – бросить удивленный взгляд

⁶⁹ in a plaintive voice – жалобным голосом

⁷⁰ to stir up – путать народ

even to look at me. And now I'm your involuntary torturer⁷¹, which grieves me. You can't even think about anything, and you dream only of the arrival of your dog, evidently the only creature you feel affection for. But your torment will come to an end in a moment: your headache will go."

The secretary stared goggle-eyed at the prisoner and stopped in mid-word.

Pilate raised his martyr's eyes to the prisoner and saw that the sun was already quite high above the hippodrome, that a ray had stolen into the colonnade and was creeping towards Yeshua's worn-down sandals, and that he was trying to stay out of the sun.

At this point the Procurator rose from his armchair, gripped his head in his hands, and on his yellowish, clean-shaven face an expression of horror appeared. But he immediately suppressed it by will-power⁷² and lowered himself back into the armchair.

The prisoner, meanwhile, was continuing with his speech, yet the secretary was recording nothing more, and merely stretching his neck out like a goose, trying not to let slip a single word.

"There you are, it's all over," said the prisoner, casting benevolent glances at Pilate, "and I'm extremely pleased about that. I'd advise you, Hegemon, to leave the palace for a time and take a walk somewhere in the surrounding area – well, perhaps in the gardens on the Mount of Olives. The storm will begin" – the prisoner turned around and narrowed his eyes at the sun – "later on, towards evening. The walk would do you a lot of good, and I'd accompany you with pleasure. Certain new ideas have occurred to me that you might, I think, find interesting, and I'd willingly share them with you, particularly as you give the impression of being a very intelligent man."

The secretary turned deathly pale⁷³ and dropped his scroll on the floor.

"The trouble is," continued the bound man, whom nobody was stopping, "you're too self-contained, and you've utterly lost your faith in people. I mean, you must agree, you really shouldn't make a dog the sole object of your affection. Your life is a poor one, Hegemon," and at this point the speaker permitted himself a smile.

The secretary was thinking about only one thing now: should he believe his own ears or not? He had to believe them. Then he tried to imagine in precisely⁷⁴ what whimsical form the anger of the hot-tempered Procurator would express itself at this unheard-of impertinence from the prisoner. And this the secretary was unable to imagine, although he knew the Procurator well.

At that moment there rang out the cracked, rather hoarse voice of the Procurator, who said in Latin:

"Untie his hands."

One of the legionaries in the escort struck his spear on the ground, handed it to another one, went forward and took the ropes off the prisoner. The secretary picked up the scroll and decided not to record anything for the time being, nor to be surprised at anything.

"Confess: are you a great doctor?" Pilate asked quietly in Greek.

"No, Procurator, I'm not a doctor," replied the prisoner, rubbing a twisted and swollen purple wrist in delight.

From under his brows Pilate's eyes bored sternly into the prisoner, and those eyes were no longer lacklustre; the sparks that everyone knew had appeared in them.

"I didn't ask you," said Pilate, "perhaps you know Latin too?"

"Yes, I do," replied the prisoner.

Colour appeared in Pilate's yellowish cheeks, and he asked in Latin:

"How did you happen to know I wanted to call my dog?"

⁷¹ involuntary torturer – невольный мучитель

⁷² to suppress by will-power – подавить усилием воли

⁷³ to turn deathly pale – смертельно побледнеть

⁷⁴ to imagine in precisely – детально вообразить

"It's very simple," the prisoner replied in Latin, "you were moving your hand through the air" – and the prisoner repeated Pilate's gesture – "as though you wanted to stroke something, and your lips..."

"Yes," said Pilate.

They were silent for a moment. Pilate asked a question in Greek:

"And so are you a doctor?"

"No, no," replied the prisoner animatedly, "believe me, I'm not a doctor."

"Well, all right. If you want to keep it a secret, do so. It has no direct bearing on the case. So you claim you didn't call on anyone to demolish, or set fire to, or in any other way destroy the Temple?"

"I repeat: I haven't called upon anyone, Hegemon, to perform such acts. What, do I seem feeble-minded?"

"Oh no, you don't seem at all feeble-minded," the Procurator replied quietly, and smiled a fearsome sort of smile⁷⁵, "so swear, then, that it didn't happen."

"What do you want me to swear on?" asked the unbound man, who was now very animated.

"Well, on your life, perhaps," replied the Procurator. "It's the very time to swear on it, since it hangs by a thread – be aware of that."

"And do you think it was you that hung it up, Hegemon?" asked the prisoner. "If so, you're very much mistaken."

Pilate started and replied through his teeth:

"I can cut the thread."

"And you're mistaken about that too," retorted the prisoner, smiling brightly and using his hand to shield himself from the sun. "You must agree that it's quite certain the thread can be cut only by the one who hung it up?"

"Right, right," said Pilate, smiling, "now I have no doubt that the idle layabouts in Yershalaim followed on your heels. I don't know who hung your tongue in place, but they certainly hung a quick one. Incidentally, tell me: is it true you entered Yershalaim through the Susim Gate, riding on an ass and accompanied by a crowd of plebs, who were shouting out greetings to you as though to some kind of prophet?" – here the Procurator indicated the scroll of parchment.

The prisoner looked at the Procurator in bewilderment.

"I don't even have an ass, Hegemon," he said. "I did, indeed, come into Yershalaim through the Susim Gate, but on foot, accompanied by Levi Matthew alone, and nobody shouted anything at me, since nobody in Yershalaim knew me then."

"Do you know these people," Pilate continued, without taking his eyes off the prisoner, "a certain Dismas, a second man... Gestas, and a third. Bar-rabban?"⁷⁶

"I don't know these good people," replied the prisoner.

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"And now tell me why it is you use the words 'good people' all the time? You call everyone that, do you?"

"Everyone," replied the prisoner. "There are no evil people in the world."

"First I've heard of it," said Pilate with a grin, "but perhaps I don't know enough about life!.. No need to record any further," he addressed the secretary, although the latter had been recording nothing anyway, then continued saying to the prisoner: "Did you read about it in some Greek book or other?"

"No, I came to this conclusion with my own mind."

⁷⁵ a fearsome sort of smile – страшная улыбка; улыбка, не предвещающая ничего хорошего

⁷⁶ *Dismas. Gestas. Bar-rabban*: Dismas and Gestas are the apocryphal names given to the two thieves crucified alongside Jesus. Bar-rabban is a lesser-known variant of the name Barabbas. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

“And is that what you preach?”

“Yes.”

“And so, for example, centurion Marcus – he’s nicknamed the Rat-Catcher – is he good?”

“Yes,” replied the prisoner. “He’s an unhappy man, it’s true. Since good people disfigured him, he’s become cruel and callous. I wonder who it was that mutilated him?”

“I can readily tell you that,” responded Pilate, “for I was a witness to it. Good people were falling upon him like dogs on a bear. Teutons had hold of his neck, his arms, his legs. An infantry manipule had walked into a trap, and if the cavalry turm which I was commanding hadn’t hacked its way in from the flank – then you, philosopher, would not have had occasion to converse with the Rat-Catcher. It was at the Battle of Idistavizo,⁷⁷ in the Valley of the Virgins.”

“If I could have a talk with him,” said the prisoner dreamily all of a sudden, “I’m sure he’d change dramatically.”

“I imagine,” responded Pilate, “you’d bring the legate of the legion little joy if you took it into your head to talk with any of his officers or soldiers. It isn’t going to happen, however, luckily for everyone, and I’ll be the first to see to that.”

At that moment a swallow flew speedily into the colonnade, circled beneath the gold ceiling, descended, almost caught its sharp wing on the face of a bronze statue in a niche and disappeared behind the capital of a column. Perhaps it was thinking of making a nest there.

In the duration of its flight, a formulation had taken shape in the now lucid and lightened head of the Procurator. It was this: the Hegemon has heard the case of the vagrant philosopher Yeshua, also known as Ha-Nozri, and failed to find *corpus delicti*⁷⁸. In particular, he has failed to find the slightest link between the actions of Yeshua and the disturbances that have recently taken place in Yershalaim. The vagrant philosopher has turned out to be mentally ill. Consequently, the Procurator does not confirm the death sentence pronounced on Ha-Nozri by the Lesser Sanhedrin. But in view of the fact that Ha-Nozri’s mad utopian speeches could be the cause of unrest in Yershalaim, the Procurator is removing Yeshua from Yershalaim and will subject him to imprisonment in Caesarea Strato on the Mediterranean Sea – that is, in the very place where the Procurator’s residence is.

It only remained to dictate this to the secretary.

The swallow’s wings crackled just above the Hegemon’s head, the bird sped towards the bowl of the fountain and flew out to freedom. The Procurator raised his eyes to the prisoner and saw there was a column of dust suddenly ablaze beside him.

“Is that all there is about him?” Pilate asked the secretary.

“Unfortunately not,” the secretary replied unexpectedly, and handed Pilate another piece of parchment.

“What else is there?” asked Pilate, and frowned.

After reading what had been handed him, he changed countenance⁷⁹ still more. It may have been that dark blood had flooded into his neck and face, or something else may have happened, but his skin lost its yellow tinge, grew brown, and his eyes seemed to sink.

And again it was probably the fault of the blood which had flooded into his temples and begun pounding inside them, only something happened to the Procurator’s vision. And so it seemed to him that the prisoner’s head had floated off somewhere, and another had appeared in its place. On this bald head sat a sparsely toothed golden crown⁸⁰. On the forehead was a round sore that was eating away at the skin and was smeared with ointment. A sunken, toothless mouth with a wilful, drooping lower lip. It seemed to Pilate that the pink columns of the balcony and the roofs of Yershalaim down below

⁷⁷ *Battle of Idistavizo*: The battle was fought between the Romans and German tribes on the right bank of the Weser in 16 ad. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁷⁸ *corpus delicti* – (лат.) состав преступления

⁷⁹ to change countenance – измениться в лице

⁸⁰ sparsely toothed golden crown – золотая корона с редкими зубцами

in the distance, beyond the garden, had disappeared, and everything around them was submerged in the dense, dense verdure of the gardens of Capreae. Something strange had happened to his hearing too – trumpets seemed to be sounding in the distance, low and threatening, and a nasal voice could be heard quite distinctly, haughtily drawling out the words: “The law of lese-majesty...”

His thoughts raced – brief, incoherent and extraordinary. “He’s done for⁸¹!” Then: “We’re done for!” And among them was an utterly absurd one about some sort of immortality, and immortality for some reason provoked unbearable anguish.

Pilate tensed, drove the vision out, returned his gaze to the balcony, and before him again were the eyes of the prisoner.

“Listen, Ha-Nozri,” the Procurator began, giving Yeshua a strange sort of look: the Procurator’s face was threatening, but the eyes were alarmed. “Have you ever said anything about the Great Caesar? Answer! Have you? Or... have you... not?” Pilate drew out the word “not” rather more than one ought to at a trial, and sent to Yeshua in his gaze a particular thought which he seemed to want to suggest to the prisoner.

“Telling the truth is easy and pleasant,” remarked the prisoner.

“I don’t need to know,” responded Pilate in a choked, angry voice⁸², “if you find telling the truth pleasant or unpleasant. But you will have to tell it. When speaking, though, weigh every word, if you don’t want not only inevitable, but also agonizing death.”

No one knows what had happened to the Procurator of Judaea, but he allowed himself to raise a hand, as though shielding himself from a ray of sunlight, and behind that hand, as behind a shield, to send the prisoner a look with some sort of hint in it.

“And so,” he said, “answer: do you know a certain Judas of Kiriath, and what precisely did you say to him, if you did say anything, about Caesar?”

“It was like this,” the prisoner willingly began recounting. “In the evening the day before yesterday I met a young man outside the Temple who gave his name as Judas from the town of Kiriath. He invited me to his home in the Lower Town and gave me hospitality.”

“A good man?” asked Pilate, and a devilish light glinted in his eyes.

“A very good and inquisitive man,” the prisoner confirmed. “He showed the greatest interest in my ideas, received me most cordially...”

“Lit the lamps...”⁸³ said Pilate through gritted teeth in the same tone as the prisoner, and his eyes were glimmering as he did so.

“Yes,” continued Yeshua, a little surprised at how well informed the Procurator was, “he asked me to set out my opinion on the power of the state. He was extremely interested in that question.”

“And so what did you say?” asked Pilate. “Or are you going to reply that you’ve forgotten what you said?” But there was already a hopelessness in Pilate’s tone.

“Among other things,” the prisoner recounted, “I said that any sort of power is coercion of the people, and that the time will come when there will be no power, neither of the caesars, nor of any other sort of authority. Man will move on to the kingdom of truth and justice, where no kind of power will be needed at all.”

“And after that?”

“There was nothing after that,” said the prisoner. “At that point people ran in, started tying me up and led me off to prison.”

The secretary was rapidly scribbling the words down on the parchment⁸⁴, trying not to miss a single one.

⁸¹ to be done for – погибать

⁸² in a choked, angry voice – глухим, злым голосом

⁸³ *Lit the lamps*: Jewish law apparently required that two candles were lit to establish that hidden witnesses were able to see the accused properly. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁸⁴ to scribble the words down on the parchment – вычерчивать слова на пергаменте

“There has never been in all the world – is not and never shall be – a greater and finer power for the people than the power of the Emperor Tiberius!”⁸⁵ waxed Pilate’s cracked and sick voice.

For some reason, the Procurator was looking with hatred at the secretary and the escort.

“And it is not for you, you mad criminal, to deliberate about it!” At this point Pilate exclaimed: “Dismiss the escort from the balcony!” and, turning to the secretary, added: “Leave me alone with the criminal; it’s a matter of state⁸⁶ here.”

The escort lifted their spears and, with their metal-shod *caligae*⁸⁷ pounding rhythmically, they walked from the balcony into the garden, and the secretary followed them.

The silence on the balcony was for some time broken only by the song of the water in the fountain. Pilate could see the disc of water swelling at the top of the pipe, its edges breaking off⁸⁹ and dropping down in little streams⁹⁰.

The prisoner was the first to speak:

“I can see that something bad has happened because of my talking with that young man from Kiriath. I have a premonition, Hegemon, that he will suffer some misfortune, and I feel very sorry for him.”

“I think,” replied the Procurator with a strange grin, “there is someone else in the world you ought to feel more sorry for than Judas of Kiriath, and who will have a much worse time of it than Judas! And so, Marcus the Rat-Catcher, a cold and confirmed butcher; the people who, as I can see” – the Procurator indicated Yeshua’s disfigured face – “beat you for your sermons; the villains Dismas and Gestas, who, with their gang, killed four soldiers; and finally the filthy traitor Judas – they’re all good people?”

“Yes,” replied the prisoner.

“And the kingdom of truth will come?”

“It will, Hegemon,” replied Yeshua with conviction.

“It will never come!” Pilate suddenly shouted in such a terrible voice that Yeshua staggered backwards⁹¹. Thus, many years before in the Valley of the Virgins, Pilate had shouted to his horsemen the words: “Cut them down! Cut them down. Rat-Catcher the giant’s been caught!” Once more he raised his voice, cracked by commands, yelling out the words so they could be heard in the garden: “Criminal! Criminal! Criminal!”

And then, lowering his voice, he asked:

“Yeshua Ha-Nozri, do you believe in any gods?”

“There’s just one God,” replied Yeshua. “I believe in Him.”

“Then pray to him! Pray as hard as you can! Stills.” – at this point Pilate’s voice sank – “it won’t help. You have no wife?” asked Pilate, mournfully somehow⁹², and not understanding what was happening to him.

“No, there’s just me.”

“Hateful city...” the Procurator suddenly muttered for some reason, then flexed his shoulders as if he were cold and rubbed his hands as though washing them. “If you’d been murdered before your meeting with Judas of Kiriath, truly, it would have been better.”

“You could release me, though, Hegemon,” the prisoner unexpectedly requested, and his voice became uneasy. “I can see they want to kill me.”

⁸⁵ *Emperor Tiberius*: Tiberius Claudius Nero (42 bc-37 ad), second Emperor of Rome from 14 ad. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁸⁶ a matter of state – государственное дело

⁸⁷ *caligae* – калиги

⁸⁸ *caligae*: The Latin term for the boots worn by Roman soldiers. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁸⁹ to break off – ломаться

⁹⁰ to drop down in little streams – стекать тонкими струйками

⁹¹ to stagger backwards – отшатнуться

⁹² mournfully somehow – как-то тоскливо

A spasm distorted Pilate's face; he turned the inflamed, red-veined whites of his eyes to Yeshua and said:

"Do you suppose, you unfortunate man, that the Roman Procurator is going to release someone who has said what you have said? O gods, gods! Or do you think I'm prepared to take your place? I don't share your ideas! And listen to me: if from this moment on you utter so much as a word, start talking to anyone, beware of me! I repeat to you: beware!"

"Hegemon..."

"Silence!" exclaimed Pilate, and his furious gaze followed the swallow that had again fluttered onto the balcony. "Come here!" shouted Pilate.

And when the secretary and the escort had returned to their places, Pilate announced that he was ratifying the death sentence pronounced at the meeting of the Lesser Sanhedrin on the criminal Yeshua Ha-Nozri, and the secretary recorded what Pilate said.

A minute later Marcus the Rat-Catcher stood before the Procurator. The Procurator ordered him to hand the criminal over to the Chief of the Secret Service, and at the same time to convey to him the Procurator's order that Yeshua Ha-Nozri be kept apart from the other condemned men, and also that the Secret Service detachment be forbidden, on pain of severe punishment, to converse with Yeshua about anything whatsoever, or to reply to any of his questions.

At a sign from Marcus, the escort closed up around Yeshua and led him from the balcony.

Next in front of the Procurator appeared a handsome man with a blond beard and eagle's feathers in the crest of his helmet, with gold lions' faces glittering on his chest and gold studs on his sword belt, wearing triple-soled boots, laced to the knees, and with a crimson cloak thrown over his left shoulder. This was the legate in command of the legion.

The Procurator asked where the Sebastian Cohort was now. The legate reported that its men were forming a cordon on the square in front of the hippodrome where the criminals' sentences would be announced to the people.

Then the Procurator gave orders for the legate to detail two centuries from the Roman Cohort. One of them, under the command of the Rat-Catcher, was to escort the criminals, the carts with the instruments of execution and the executioners when they departed for Bald Mountain⁹³,⁹⁴ and when they arrived there, was to form the upper cordon. The other one was to be sent to Bald Mountain straight away, and was to begin cordoning it off⁹⁵ immediately. To this same end – that is, to guard the mount – the Procurator asked the legate to send an auxiliary cavalry regiment, the Syrian *ala*⁹⁶.⁹⁷

When the legate had left the balcony, the Procurator ordered the secretary to invite the President of the Sanhedrin, two of its members and the chief of Yershalaim's Temple guard to the palace, but added as he did so that he would like things arranged in such a way that he could speak with the President in advance⁹⁸ and in private before the conference with all of these people.

The Procurator's order was carried out⁹⁹ quickly and precisely, and the sun, which was scorching Yershalaim with an extraordinary sort of frenzy¹⁰⁰ during these days, had not yet had time to approach its highest point when, on the upper terrace of the garden by the two white-marble lions guarding the steps, the Procurator and the Acting President of the Sanhedrin, the High Priest of Judaea, Joseph Caipha, met.

⁹³ Bald Mountain – Голгофа

⁹⁴ *Bald Mountain*: Known in the Gospels as Golgotha. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁹⁵ to cordon off – вводить оцепление

⁹⁶ *ala* – ала, сирийский кавалерийский полк

⁹⁷ *ala*: a division of allied horsemen providing flanking cover for a legion in battle, from the Latin word for "wing". (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

⁹⁸ to speak in advance – говорить заранее

⁹⁹ to carry out the order – выполнять приказ

¹⁰⁰ an extraordinary sort of frenzy – с необыкновенной яростью

It was quiet in the garden. But, having emerged from under¹⁰¹the colonnade into the garden's sun-drenched upper courtyard with its palm trees on monstrous elephantine legs, whence there opened up before the Procurator the whole of the Yershalaim he hated, with its suspension bridges, forts and, most importantly, the block of marble that beggared all description with the golden dragon's scales instead of a roof – the Temple of Yershalaim – the Procurator detected with his sharp hearing, far off and down below, where a stone wall separated the lower terraces of the palace garden from the city square, a low rumbling, above which at times there would soar up, faint and shrill, what could have been either groans or cries.

The Procurator realized that there in the square an innumerable crowd of Yershalaim's inhabitants had already gathered, stirred up by the recent disturbances, and that this crowd was awaiting with impatience the pronouncement of the sentence, and that shouting in its midst were restless water-sellers.

The Procurator began by inviting the High Priest onto the balcony to take shelter from the pitiless heat, but Caipha apologized politely and explained that he could not do that on the eve of the feast. Pilate threw a hood over his slightly balding head and began a conversation. This conversation was conducted in Greek.

Pilate said that he had heard the case of Yeshua Ha-Nozri and had ratified the death sentence¹⁰².

Thus, sentenced to execution, which was to be carried out that day, were three villains: Dismas, Gestas and Bar-rabban – and, in addition, this Yeshua Ha-Nozri. The first two, who had taken it into their heads to incite the people to revolt against Caesar, had been taken by force by the Roman authorities and were in the domain of the Procurator, and consequently they would not be under discussion here. But the latter two, Bar-rabban and Ha-Nozri, had been seized by the local authorities and condemned by the Sanhedrin. In accordance with the law and in accordance with custom, one of these two criminals would have to be set free¹⁰³ in honour of the great Feast of the Passover which was starting that day.

And so the Procurator wished to know which of the two criminals the Sanhedrin intended to free: Bar-rabban or Ha-Nozri?

Caipha inclined his head to indicate that the question was clear to him and replied:

“The Sanhedrin requests the release of Bar-rabban.”

The Procurator knew very well the High Priest would reply to him in precisely this way, but his task was to show that such a reply elicited his astonishment.

Pilate did just that with great artistry. The brows on his haughty face rose, and the Procurator looked in surprise straight into the High Priest's eyes.

“I confess, that reply has amazed me,” began the Procurator gently. “I'm afraid there may be a misunderstanding here.”

Pilate explained himself. The Roman authorities were not encroaching in any way on the rights of the local spiritual authorities, the High Priest was well aware of that, but in this instance an obvious mistake was being made. And the Roman authorities did, of course, have an interest in the correction of that mistake.

In truth: the crimes of Bar-rabban and Ha-Nozri were quite incomparable in gravity. If the latter, an obvious madman, was guilty of the utterance of absurd speeches which had stirred up the people in Yershalaim and several other places, the former was much more significantly burdened. Not only had he permitted himself direct calls to revolt¹⁰⁴, but he had also killed a guard during attempts to capture him. Bar-rabban was incomparably more dangerous than Ha-Nozri.

¹⁰¹ from under – из-за

¹⁰² to ratify the death sentence – вынести смертный приговор

¹⁰³ to set free – отпускать на свободу

¹⁰⁴ direct call to revolt – прямой призыв к мятежу

On the strength of all he had set out, the Procurator requested that the High Priest review the decision and leave at liberty the less harmful of the two condemned men – and that, without doubt, was Ha-Nozri. And so?...

Caipha said in a quiet but firm voice that the Sanhedrin had familiarized itself carefully with the case and was reporting for the second time that it intended to free Bar-rabban.

"What? Even after my pleading? The pleading of the man in whose person speaks the power of Rome? High Priest, repeat it a third time."

"And for the third time I report that we are freeing Bar-rabban," said Caipha quietly.

It was all over, and there was nothing more to talk about. Ha-Nozri was going away for ever, and there was no one to cure the Procurator's terrible, vicious pains; there was no remedy for them but death. But this was not the thought that struck Pilate now. It was still that same incomprehensible anguish which had already visited him on the balcony that was permeating his entire being. He immediately tried to explain it, and the explanation was a strange one: the Procurator had the vague feeling there was something he had not finished saying to the condemned man, something he had not finished hearing.

Pilate banished this thought, and it flew away in an instant, just as it had come. It flew away, but the anguish remained unexplained, for it could not possibly be explained by the other brief thought that came in a flash, like lightning, but that was extinguished straight away: "Immortality... immortality has come..." Whose immortality had come? That the Procurator did not understand, but the thought of this mysterious immortality made him turn cold in the full blaze of the sun.

"Very well," said Pilate, "so be it."

At this point he looked around, took in at a glance the world that was visible to him, and was amazed at the change that had taken place. The bush laden with roses had vanished, the cypresses that fringed the upper terrace had vanished, as had the pomegranate tree, and the white statue in the verdure, and the verdure itself. In place of it all, some sort of dense crimson mush began floating around, seaweed began to sway about in it and then moved off somewhere, and Pilate himself moved off with it too. Now he was being borne away, smothered and scorched by¹⁰⁵ the most terrible rage – the rage of impotence¹⁰⁶.

"I feel stifled¹⁰⁷," said Pilate, "I feel stifled!"

With a cold, moist hand he ripped the clasp from the neckband of his cloak, and the clasp fell onto the sand.

"It's close today, there's a thunderstorm somewhere," responded Caipha, not taking his eyes from the flushed face of the Procurator and foreseeing all the trials and tribulations yet to come. "Oh, what a terrible month Nisan is this year!"

"No," said Pilate, "it's not because it's close, I've started feeling stifled with you, Caipha." And, narrowing his eyes, Pilate smiled and added: "Take care of yourself, High Priest."

The High Priest's dark eyes flashed, and he expressed surprise on his face no worse than the Procurator had done earlier.

"What am I hearing, Procurator?" replied Caipha proudly and calmly. "Are you threatening me after a judgement that has been pronounced and ratified by you yourself? Is this possible? We are accustomed to the Roman Procurator choosing his words before saying anything. Could anyone have heard us, Hegemon?"

Pilate looked at the High Priest with lifeless eyes and, baring his teeth, gave a semblance of a smile¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁵ to be smothered and scorched by – удушая и обжигая

¹⁰⁶ the rage of impotence – гнев бессилия

¹⁰⁷ I feel stifled – Тесно мне

¹⁰⁸ a semblance of a smile – подобие улыбки

"Come, come, High Priest! Who can possibly hear us now, here? Do you think I'm like the wandering young simpleton who's being executed today? Am I a boy, Caipha? I know what I'm saying, and where I'm saying it. The garden is cordoned off, the palace is cordoned off, so that a mouse couldn't get through a single crack! Not just a mouse, either, even that – what's his name. from the town of Kiriath – couldn't get through. Incidentally, do you know such a man, High Priest? Yes... if such a man got in here, he'd feel bitterly sorry for himself – you'll believe me on that score¹⁰⁹, of course? So be aware then, that you, High Priest, will get no peace from now on! Neither you, nor your people," and Pilate pointed into the distance to the right, to where the Temple was glowing on high. "It's I that am telling you this – Pontius Pilate, the horseman of the Golden Lance¹¹⁰!"¹¹¹

"I know, I know!" black-bearded Caipha replied fearlessly, and his eyes flashed. He raised his arm up towards the sky and continued: "The Judaic people know you hate them with a fierce hatred and will cause them many sufferings, but you will not destroy them completely! God will protect them! And all-powerful Caesar will hear – he will hear and will shield us from Pilate the destroyer!"

"Oh no!" exclaimed Pilate, and with every word he was finding things easier and easier: there was no need to pretend any more, there was no need to pick his words. "You've complained about me to Caesar too much, and now my hour has come, Caipha! Now word will fly from me – and not to the Governor in Antioch, and not to Rome, but direct to Capreae, to the Emperor himself – word of how in Yershalaim you shelter notorious rebels from death! And it won't be water from Solomon's Pond, as I wanted, for your benefit, that I'll be treating Yershalaim to then! No, not water! Remember how, because of you, I had to remove the shields with the Emperor's monograms from the walls, relocate the troops – I had to come here myself, see, to take a look at what was going on! Remember my word: you'll see not just one cohort here in Yershalaim, High Priest, no! – the entire Fulminata legion is going to advance right up to the walls of the city; the Arab cavalry is going to come up, and then you're going to hear bitter crying and moaning. Then you'll remember this Bar-rabban that was saved and you'll regret you sent the philosopher with his message of peace to his death!"

The High Priest's face was covered in blotches¹¹²; his eyes were burning. He, like the Procurator, bared his teeth in a smile and replied:

"Do you yourself believe what you're saying now, Procurator? No, you don't! It wasn't peace, not peace that this seducer of the people brought to us here in Yershalaim – and you, horseman, understand that very well. You wanted to release him so he would stir up the people, ridicule the faith and deliver the people up to Roman swords! But I, the High Priest of Judaea, while I yet live, will not yield the faith up to profanation and will protect the people! Do you hear, Pilate?" and here Caipha raised his hand menacingly: "Listen carefully, Procurator!"

Caipha fell silent, and again the Procurator heard what sounded like the roar of the sea, rolling up to the very walls of Herod the Great's garden.¹¹³ This roar rose up from below to the feet and into the face of the Procurator. And behind his back, there, beyond the wings of the palace, could be heard disquieting trumpet signals, the heavy crunch of hundreds of feet, the clanking of iron – here the Procurator realized that the Roman infantry was already setting out in accordance with his order, hastening to the final parade before the deaths of the terrified rebels and villains.

"Do you hear, Procurator?" the High Priest repeated quietly. "Are you really going to try and tell me that all that" – the High Priest raised both arms, and the dark hood fell from his head – "was provoked by the pitiful villain Bar-rabban?"

¹⁰⁹ to on that score – учитывая это

¹¹⁰ Pontius Pilate, the horseman of the Golden Lance – Пилат Понтийский, Всадник Золотое Копье

¹¹¹ *horseman of the Golden Lance*: This refers to an equestrian order of the Roman nobility, below only the Senate in its importance. By Pilate's time, many members of the order filled administrative posts. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹¹² to be covered in blotches – быть покрытым пятнами

¹¹³ Herod the Great – Ирод Великий, царь Иудеи

The Procurator wiped his damp, cold forehead with the back of his wrist and looked down at the ground; then, screwing his eyes up at the sky, saw that the burning hot sphere was almost directly above his head and that Caipha's shadow had shrunk away completely by the lion's tail, and quietly and indifferently he said:

"It's getting towards midday. We got carried away with our conversation, but in the mean time we do need to carry on."

Having apologized to the High Priest in refined phrases, he asked him to take a seat on a bench in the shade of a magnolia and wait while he summoned the remaining people required for a final brief conference and gave one more order concerning the execution.

Caipha bowed politely, placing his hand upon his heart, and remained in the garden while Pilate returned to the balcony. There he ordered the waiting secretary to invite into the garden the legate of the legion, the tribune of the cohort, and also the two members of the Sanhedrin and the commander of the Temple guard, who were awaiting a summons on the lower terrace of the garden in a circular pavilion with a fountain. To this Pilate added that he would himself be coming out into the garden straight away too, then he withdrew into the interior of the palace.

While the secretary was convening the conference¹¹⁴, the Procurator had a meeting in a room obscured from the sun by dark blinds with some sort of man whose face was half covered by a hood, though the rays of the sun could not possibly have troubled him inside the room. This meeting was extremely brief. The Procurator said a few quiet words to the man, after which the latter withdrew, while Pilate went through the colonnade into the garden.

There, in the presence of all those he had wished to see, the Procurator solemnly and drily confirmed that he was ratifying Yeshua Ha-Nozri's death sentence, and he enquired officially of the members of the Sanhedrin as to which of the prisoners they would like to let live. On receiving the reply that it was Bar-rabban, the Procurator said:

"Very well," and ordered the secretary to enter it in the minutes straight away, squeezed in his hand the clasp that the secretary had picked up from the sand and said solemnly: "It's time!"

At this point all those present moved off down the broad marble steps between walls of roses giving off a heavy scent, descending lower and lower towards the palace wall, towards the gates leading out into a large, smoothly paved square, at the end of which could be seen the columns and statues of Yershalaim's stadium.

As soon as the group had emerged from the garden into the square and gone up onto the extensive stone platform that dominated it, Pilate, looking around through narrowed eyelids, assessed the situation. The space he had just crossed – that is, the space between the palace wall and the platform – was empty, whereas in front of him Pilate could no longer see the square: it had been devoured by the crowd, which would have flooded both onto the platform itself and into the cleared space if a triple row of Sebastian's soldiers to Pilate's left hand and soldiers of the Ituraean Auxiliary Cohort to the right had not held it back.

And so Pilate went up onto the platform, squeezing the unnecessary clasp mechanically in his fist and squinting. The Procurator was squinting not because the sun was stinging his eyes, no! For some reason he did not want to see the group of condemned men who, as he knew very well, would be led up after him onto the platform in just a moment.

As soon as the white cloak with the crimson lining rose up on high on the stone cliff at the edge of the human sea, a wave of sound struck the unseeing Pilate's ears: "Ha-a-a..." It began softly, rising somewhere in the distance near the hippodrome, then became thunderous and, after being sustained for several seconds, began to abate. "They've seen me," thought the Procurator. Before the wave reached its lowest point, it unexpectedly began to develop again, and as it rolled, it rose higher than the first one, and on the second wave, just as the foam rages on a roller at sea, there raged a

¹¹⁴ to convey the conference – собирать совещание

whistling and the individual moans of women, discernible through the thunder. “They’ve led them onto the platform...” thought Pilate, “and the moans are because a number of women were crushed when the crowd surged forward.”

He waited for a time, aware that no power could make the crowd fall quiet until it had exhaled all that had accumulated within it and fallen silent itself.

And when that moment came, the Procurator threw up his right arm, and the last sounds were expelled from the crowd.

Then Pilate gathered as much of the hot air as he could into his chest and shouted, and his cracked voice carried over thousands of heads:

“In the name of the Emperor Caesar!”

At this point his ears were struck several times by an abrupt iron cry – in the cohorts, tossing up their spears and insignia, the soldiers had cried out fearsomely:

“Hail, Caesar!”

Pilate threw back his head and turned it straight towards the sun. A green fire flared up beneath his eyelids, which made his brain ignite, and above the crowd flew hoarse Aramaic words:

“Four criminals, arrested in Yershalaim for murders, incitement to revolt¹¹⁵ and assault on the laws and faith¹¹⁶, are sentenced to a shameful punishment – hanging on posts! And this punishment will now be carried out on Bald Mountain! The names of the criminals are Dismas, Gestas, Bar-rabban and Ha-Nozri. Here they are before you!”

Pilate pointed to the right, not seeing any of the criminals, but knowing they were there, in the place they were required to be.

The crowd answered with a long hum, as though of surprise or relief. And when it had died away, Pilate continued:

“But only three of them will be executed, for, in accordance with the law and custom, in honour of the Feast of the Passover, one of the condemned men, chosen by the Lesser Sanhedrin and with the ratification of the Roman authorities, is to have his contemptible life restored to him by the magnanimous Emperor Caesar!”

Pilate shouted out the words, and at the same time listened to the way the humming was replaced by a great silence. Now not a sigh, not a rustling reached his ears, and there even came a moment when it seemed to Pilate that absolutely everything around him had vanished. The city he hated had died, and just he alone stood, scorched by the vertical rays, his face digging into the sky. Pilate continued to hold the silence, and then began shouting out:

“The name of the man who will now be released to freedom before you is...”

He paused once again, delaying the name, checking that he had said everything, because he knew the dead city would rise again after the lucky man’s name had been uttered, and no further words would be able to be heard.

“Is that all?” Pilate whispered to himself soundlessly. “It is. The name!”

And, rolling the letter “r” over the silent city, he cried:

“Bar-rabban!”

At this point it seemed to him that the sun, with a ringing sound, burst above him and flooded his ears with fire. In that fire raged a roaring, screams, moans, chuckling and whistling.

Pilate turned and set off back along the platform towards the steps, looking at nothing but the multicoloured blocks of the flooring beneath his feet, so as not to stumble. He knew that now, behind his back, bronze coins and dates were falling like hail onto the platform, people in the howling crowd were climbing onto shoulders, crushing one another, to see a miracle with their own eyes – a man who had already been in the hands of death tearing free of those hands! To see the legionaries taking

¹¹⁵ incitement to revolt – подстрекательства к мятежу

¹¹⁶ assault on the laws and faith – оскорбление законов и веры

the ropes off him, involuntarily causing him burning pain in arms dislocated during interrogation, to see him frowning and gasping, but all the same smiling a senseless, mad smile.

He knew that at this very same time the escort was already leading the three with their hands bound towards the side steps to take them out onto the road leading to the west, out of the city towards Bald Mountain. Only when he found himself behind the platform, in its rear, did Pilate open his eyes, knowing that now he was out of danger – no longer could he see the condemned men.

Mingled with the moaning of the crowd, which was beginning to fall quiet, were the readily discernible, piercing cries of the public criers, repeating, some in Aramaic, others in Greek, everything the Procurator had shouted from the platform. The staccato clatter of approaching horses' hoofs reached his ears too, and a trumpet trumpeting something briefly and merrily. In reply to these sounds, from the roofs of the houses on the street leading out from the bazaar into the square of the hippodrome came the piercing whistling of little boys and cries of "look out!"

The solitary soldier standing in the cleared space of the square with a standard in his hand waved it in alarm, and then the Procurator, the legate of the legion, the secretary and the escort stopped.

The cavalry *ala*, working up ever more of a canter¹¹⁷, flew out into the square to cut across one side of it, passing the throng of people by, and to gallop by the shortest route, down a lane beside a stone wall with a vine creeping over it, to Bald Mountain.

On drawing level with Pilate, the fast-trotting commander of the *ala*, a Syrian as small as a boy and as dark as a mulatto, shouted something shrilly and drew his sword out from its scabbard. The wild, black, lathered horse shied and reared up on its hind legs. Thrusting the sword into its scabbard, the commander struck the horse across the neck with a lash, straightened it up, and rode into the lane, moving into a gallop. After him in a cloud of dust flew the horsemen in rows of three; the ends of their light bamboo lances began to bounce, and past the Procurator sped faces that seemed especially swarthy under their white turbans, and with cheerfully bared, gleaming teeth.

Raising the dust to the sky, the *ala* burst into the lane, and last to ride past Pilate was a soldier with a trumpet that blazed in the sun behind his back.

Shielding himself from the dust with his hand, and with a discontented frown on his face, Pilate moved onwards, heading for the gates of the palace garden, and the legate, the secretary and the escort moved off after him.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

¹¹⁷ to work up ever more of a canter – «забирать» больше рыси, наращивать шаг и скорость в скачке на лошади

3. The Seventh Proof

Yes, it was about ten o'clock in the morning, illustrious Ivan Nikolayevich," said the Professor. The poet passed his hand across his face like a man who has just come to, and saw that it was evening at Patriarch's.

The water in the pond had blackened, and a light skiff was already sliding across it, and the splashing of an oar and the giggles of some citizeness in the skiff could be heard. People had appeared on the benches in the avenues, but again, on each of the three sides of the square apart from the one where our interlocutors were.

It was as if the sky above Moscow had faded, and the full moon could be seen perfectly distinctly on high, not yet golden, but white. Breathing had become much easier, and the voices beneath the lime trees now sounded softer, suited to the evening.

"How on earth did I fail to notice he'd managed to spin an entire story?" thought Bezdomny in amazement. "I mean, it's already evening now! Yet perhaps it wasn't even him telling it, simply I fell asleep and dreamt it all?"

But it must be supposed that it was, after all, the Professor who had been telling it, otherwise it would have to be allowed that Berlioz had had the same dream too, because the latter, peering attentively into the foreigner's face, said:

"Your story is extremely interesting, Professor, although it doesn't coincide at all with the stories in the Gospels¹¹⁸."

"Pardon me," responded the Professor with a condescending smile, "but you of all people ought to know that absolutely nothing of what is written in the Gospels ever actually happened, and if we start referring to the Gospels as a historical source¹¹⁹..." Again he smiled, and Berlioz was taken aback¹²⁰, because he had been saying word for word the same thing to Bezdomny while walking along Bronnaya towards Patriarch's Ponds.

"That is so," replied Berlioz, "but I'm afraid no one can confirm that what you've told us actually happened either."

"Oh no! One can confirm it!" responded the Professor with extreme confidence, beginning to speak in broken Russian, and in an unexpectedly mysterious way he beckoned the two friends a little closer towards him.

They leant in towards him from both sides, and he said, but now without any accent (which, the devil knows why, was forever coming and going):

"The fact is..." – here the Professor looked around fearfully and began speaking in a whisper – "I was personally present during it all. I was on Pontius Pilate's balcony, and in the garden when he was talking with Caipha, and on the platform – only secretly, incognito, so to speak, so I beg you – not a word to anyone, and in absolute confidence!. Ssh!"

Silence fell, and Berlioz turned pale.

"How. how long have you been in Moscow?" he asked in a faltering voice¹²¹.

"I've only just this moment arrived in Moscow," replied the Professor, perplexed, and only at this point did the friends think to look properly into his eyes, and they satisfied themselves that the left, the green one, was completely mad, while the right one was empty, black and dead.

"And there's everything explained for you!" thought Berlioz in confusion. "There's an insane German come here, or else he's just gone barmy at Patriarch's. There's a thing!"

¹¹⁸ the stories in the Gospels – Евангельские рассказы

¹¹⁹ to refer to the Gospels as a historical source – ссылаться на Евангелие как на исторический источник

¹²⁰ to be taken aback – быть захваченным врасплох

¹²¹ in a faltering voice – дрогнувшим голосом

Yes, everything was, indeed, explained: the very strange breakfast with the late philosopher, Kant, and the ridiculous talk about sunflower oil and Annushka, and the predictions about his head being chopped off, and all the rest – the Professor was insane.

Berlioz immediately grasped what was to be done. Reclining against the back of the bench, he started winking at¹²² Bezdomny behind the Professor's back – as if to say, don't contradict him – but the bewildered poet failed to understand these signals.

"Yes, yes, yes," said Berlioz excitedly. "Actually, it's all possible!. Perfectly possible, even – Pontius Pilate, the balcony and so forth. And are you here alone or with your wife?"

'Alone, alone, I'm always alone," replied the Professor bitterly.

"But where are your things, Professor?" asked Berlioz, fishing. "At the Metropole? Where have you put up?"

"Me? Nowhere," replied the crazy German, with his green eye wandering mournfully and wildly over Patriarch's Ponds.

"How's that? But. where are you going to be staying?"

"In your apartment," the madman suddenly replied in an overfamiliar tone, and gave a wink.

"I. I'm delighted," mumbled Berlioz, "but truly, you'll find my place inconvenient. And there are wonderful rooms at the Metropole – it's a first-class hotel..."

"And is there no Devil either?" the sick man cheerfully enquired all of a sudden of Ivan Nikolayevich.

"The Devil too."

"Don't contradict him!" Berlioz whispered with his lips alone as he slumped down¹²³ behind the Professor's back, grimacing.

"There is no Devil!" Ivan Nikolayevich exclaimed something unnecessary, bewildered by all this nonsense. "What a pain! Just stop behaving like a madman!"

At this point the madman burst into such laughter that a sparrow flitted out from the lime tree above the heads of the seated men.

"Well, now that is positively interesting," said the Professor, shaking with laughter. "What is it with you? Whatever you try, nothing exists!" He suddenly stopped chuckling and, as is quite understandable in a case of mental illness, after the laughter he went to the other extreme – became irritated and cried out sternly: "So, there really isn't one, then?"

"Relax, relax, relax, Professor," muttered Berlioz, fearful of agitating the sick man, "you sit here for a minute with Comrade Bezdomny, and I'll just run down to the corner, make a telephone call, and then we'll see you to wherever you like. After all, you don't know the city..."

Berlioz's plan has to be acknowledged as the correct one: he needed to run to the nearest public telephone and inform the Foreigners' Bureau of the fact that there was a visiting consultant from abroad sitting at Patriarch's Ponds in an obvious state of madness. So it was essential to take measures, or else the result would be some kind of unpleasant nonsense.

"Make a telephone call? Well, all right, make a call," the sick man consented sadly, then suddenly made a passionate request: "But I implore you in farewell, do at least believe that the Devil exists! I really don't ask anything greater of you. Bear in mind that for this there exists the seventh proof, and the most reliable one, too! And it will now be put before you."

"Very well, very well," said Berlioz in a tone of feigned friendliness¹²⁴; and, with a wink to the disconcerted poet, who did not at all fancy the idea of guarding the mad German, he headed for the exit from Patriarch's on the corner of Bronnaya and Yermolayevsky Lane.

But the Professor immediately seemed to feel better and brighten up.

¹²² to wink at – заговорщицки подмигивать

¹²³ to slump down – падать, обрушиваться

¹²⁴ in a tone of feigned friendliness – фальшиво-ласковым тоном

“Mikhail Alexandrovich!” he cried in Berlioz’s wake¹²⁵.

The latter gave a start, turned, but calmed himself with the thought that his name and patronymic were also known to the Professor from some newspaper or other. But the Professor called out, cupping his hands into a megaphone:

“Would you like me to give instructions for a telegram to be sent to your uncle in Kiev now?”

And again Berlioz was flabbergasted. “How on earth does the madman know of the existence of my uncle in Kiev? After all, there’s nothing said about that in any newspapers, that’s for sure. Aha, perhaps Bezdomny’s right? And what if those documents are false? Oh, what a queer sort... Phone, phone! Phone at once! He’ll soon be sorted out!”

And, listening to nothing more, Berlioz ran on.

Here, at the very exit to Bronnaya, rising from a bench to meet the editor was that exact same citizen who, back then in the sunlight, had issued from the heavy, sultry air. Only now he was no longer airy, but ordinary, fleshly, and in the beginnings of the twilight Berlioz distinctly made out that his little moustache was like chicken feathers, his eyes were small, ironic and half drunk, and his trousers were checked, and pulled up to such an extent that his dirty white socks could be seen.

Mikhail Alexandrovich was simply staggered, but comforted himself with the thought that this was a silly coincidence, and that anyway there was no time to reflect upon it now.

“Looking for the turnstile, Citizen?” enquired the character in checks in a cracked tenor. “Right this way! You’ll come out just where you need to be. How about the price of a quarter of a litre for the directions. for an ex-precentor. to set himself to rights¹²⁶!” Bending low, the fellow swept off his jockey’s cap.

Berlioz did not bother listening to the cadging pseudo-precentor, but ran up to the turnstile and took hold of it with his hand. Having turned it, he was already about to take a step onto the rails when red and white lights sprayed into his face: in the glass box the inscription “Beware of the tram!” lit up.

And the tram did come rushing up straight away, turning on the newly laid line from Yermolayevsky into Bronnaya. Having rounded the bend and come out onto the straight, it suddenly lit up with electricity inside, howled and picked up speed.

The cautious Berlioz, although he was safe where he was standing, decided to go back behind the turnpike; he changed the position of his hand on the revolving part and took a step backwards. And immediately his hand abruptly slipped and came away; his foot, as though on ice, travelled uncontrollably across the cobbles sloping down¹²⁷ towards the rails; the other foot flew up into the air, and Berlioz was thrown out onto the rails.

Trying to catch hold of something¹²⁸, Berlioz fell onto his back, striking his head a light blow on the cobbles, and he had time to see, high up – but whether to the right or to the left he could no longer comprehend – the gilt moon. He had time to turn onto his side, at the same instant drawing his legs up with a violent movement towards his stomach, and, having turned, he made out the face of the female tram driver – completely white with horror and hurtling towards him with unstoppable power – and her scarlet armband. Berlioz did not cry out, but around him the entire street began screaming in despairing women’s voices. The driver tugged at the electric brake; the nose of the carriage went down onto the ground, and then, an instant afterwards, bounced up¹²⁹, and with a crashing and a ringing the panes flew out of the windows. At this point someone in Berlioz’s brain cried out despairingly: “Surely not?” One more time, and for the last time, there was a glimpse of the moon, but already it was falling to pieces, and then it became dark.

¹²⁵ in one’s wake – вслед

¹²⁶ to set to rights – прийти в порядок, поправиться

¹²⁷ to slop down – скользить

¹²⁸ to catch hold of something – ухватиться за ч.-л.

¹²⁹ to bounce up – подпрыгивать

The tram covered Berlioz, and a round, dark object was thrown out under the railings of Patriarch's avenue onto the cobbled, sloping verge¹³⁰. Rolling down off the slope, it started bouncing along the cobblestones of Bronnaya.

It was Berlioz's severed head.

¹³⁰ a sloping verge – откос

4. The Pursuit

The women's hysterical cries had died away; police whistles had finished their drilling, one ambulance had taken the headless body and the severed head to the morgue, another had taken away the beautiful driver, wounded by splinters of glass; yardmen in white aprons had cleared up the splinters of glass and scattered sand on the puddles of blood; but Ivan Nikolayevich remained there on a bench, just as he had fallen onto it without ever having reached the turnstile.

He had tried to get up several times, but his legs would not obey – Bezdomny had suffered something in the nature of paralysis.

The poet had rushed off¹³¹ towards the turnstile as soon as he had heard the first shriek, and had seen the head bouncing on the roadway. This had made him lose his senses to such a degree that, falling onto a bench, he had bitten his hand and drawn blood. He had, of course, forgotten about the mad German and was trying to understand just one thing: how it could possibly be that he had just been there, talking with Berlioz, and a minute later... the head...

Agitated people were running along the avenue past the poet, exclaiming something, but Ivan Nikolayevich did not take their words in¹³².

However, two women unexpectedly bumped into each other beside him, and one of them, sharp-nosed and bare-headed, shouted to the other woman right in the poet's ear:

"Annushka, our Annushka! From Sadovaya! It's her doing! She bought some sunflower oil at the grocer's, and she went and smashed a litre bottle on the revolving bit of the turnstile! Made a mess all over her skirt. She was really cursing, she was! And he must have slipped, poor thing, and gone over onto the rails."

Of everything that the woman shouted out, one word took a hold on Ivan Nikolayevich's deranged mind¹³³: "Annushka..."

"Annushka... Annushka?" mumbled the poet, gazing around uneasily. "Permit me, permit me."

To the word "Annushka" became attached the words "sunflower oil", and then for some reason "Pontius Pilate". The poet rejected Pilate and began linking together a chain, beginning with the word "Annushka". And that chain linked up very quickly, and led at once to the mad Professor.

I'm sorry! I mean, he said the meeting wouldn't take place because Annushka had spilt the oil. And, if you'd be so kind, it would not take place! And that's not all: didn't he say straight out that a woman would cut off Berlioz's head?! Yes, yes, yes! And the driver was, after all, a woman! What on earth is all this? Eh?

Not even a grain of doubt remained that the mysterious consultant had definitely known in advance the whole picture of Berlioz's terrible death. At this point two thoughts penetrated the poet's brain. The first: "He's far from mad! That's all nonsense!" And the second: "Did he perhaps arrange it all himself?!"

But permit me to ask how?!

"Oh no! That we shall find out!"

Making a great effort with himself, Ivan Nikolayevich rose from the bench and rushed back to where he had been talking with the Professor. And it turned out that, fortunately, the latter had not yet left.

On Bronnaya the street lamps had already lit up, and above Patriarch's the golden moon was shining, and in the always deceptive moonlight it seemed to Ivan Nikolayevich that the man was standing there holding not a cane under his arm, but a rapier.

¹³¹ to rush off – броситься бежать, поспешить

¹³² to take words in – воспринимать слова

¹³³ a deranged mind – расстроенный мозг

The retired precentor-cum-trickster was sitting in the very spot where Ivan Nikolayevich had himself just recently been sitting. Now the precentor fastened onto his nose an obviously unnecessary pince-nez, which had one lens missing completely and the other cracked. This made the citizen in checks even more repulsive than he had been when showing Berlioz the way to the rails.

With his heart turning cold, Ivan approached the Professor and, looking into his face, satisfied himself that there were not, and had not been, any signs of madness in that face at all.

“Confess, who are you?” asked Ivan in a muffled voice¹³⁴.

The foreigner knitted his brows, gave a look as if he were seeing the poet for the first time and replied with hostility:

“No understand... no speak Russian...”

“The gentleman doesn’t understand!” the precentor chimed in from the bench, though nobody had actually asked him to explain the foreigner’s words.

“Stop pretending!” Ivan said sternly, and felt a chill in the pit of his stomach. “You were speaking excellent Russian just now. You’re not a German or a professor! You’re a murderer and a spy! Your papers!” Ivan cried fiercely.

The enigmatic Professor twisted in disgust a mouth that was twisted enough already and shrugged his shoulders.

“Citizen!” the loathsome precentor butted in¹³⁵ again. “What are you doing, disturbing a foreign tourist? You’ll be called to account most severely for this!” And the suspicious Professor pulled a haughty face, turned and started to walk away from Ivan.

Ivan sensed he was losing his self-control. Gasping for breath, he turned to the precentor:

“Hey, Citizen, help me detain a criminal! It’s your duty to do it!”

The precentor became extremely animated, leapt up¹³⁶ and started yelling:

“What criminal? Where is he? A foreign criminal?” The precentor’s little eyes began to sparkle. “This one? If he’s a criminal, then one’s first duty should be to shout ‘Help!’ Otherwise he’ll get away. Come on, let’s do it together! Both at once!” And here the precentor spread his jaws wide open.

The bewildered Ivan obeyed the joker of a precentor and shouted “Help!” but the precentor had duped him and did not shout anything.

Ivan’s lone, hoarse cry brought no good results. Two young women of some sort shied away from him, and he heard the word “Drunk!”

“Ah, so you’re in league with him?” shouted Ivan, flying into a rage. “What are you doing, making fun of me? Let me pass!”

Ivan threw himself to the right, and the precentor... went to the right as well! Ivan. to the left, and that swine went the same way too!

“Are you getting under my feet deliberately?” cried Ivan, going wild. “I’ll put you in the hands of the police too!”

Ivan made an attempt to grab the good-for-nothing¹³⁷ by the sleeve, but missed and caught hold of precisely nothing. The precentor had vanished into thin air.

Ivan gasped, looked into the distance and caught sight of the hateful stranger. He was already at the exit into Patriarch’s Lane – and, moreover, was not alone. The more than dubious precentor had managed to join him. But there was more: the third figure in the group turned out to be a tomcat that had appeared from out of the blue, huge as a hog, black as soot or as a rook, and with the dashing whiskers of a cavalryman. The trio moved out into Patriarch’s Lane with the cat setting off on its hind legs.

¹³⁴ in a muffled voice – глухим голосом

¹³⁵ to butt in – вступать в разговор

¹³⁶ to leap up – резко вскакивать

¹³⁷ the good-for-nothing – негодяй

Ivan hurried after the villains and immediately realized it would be very hard to catch up with¹³⁸ them.

In an instant the trio had slipped down the lane and come out on Spiridonovka. However much Ivan increased his pace, the distance between him and his quarry did not decrease in the slightest. And the poet had not managed to collect himself before, after quiet Spiridonovka, he found himself at the Nikitsky Gates, where his situation worsened. Now there was already a crush. Ivan hurtled into¹³⁹ one of the passers-by and was sworn at. And what is more, here the gang of villains decided to employ that favourite trick of bandits – going off in different directions.

With great agility, while on the move, the precentor darted into a bus speeding towards Arbat Square and slipped away¹⁴⁰. Having lost one of his quarry, Ivan concentrated his attention on the cat, and saw this strange cat go up to the footboard of an “A” tram that was standing at a stop, impertinently move a woman aside – she let out a yelp – catch hold of the handrail and even make an attempt to force a ten-copeck piece on the conductress through the window, which was open on account of the heat.

Ivan was so struck by the behaviour of the cat that he froze in immobility¹⁴¹ by a grocer’s shop on a corner, and here he was struck for a second time, but much more forcefully, by the behaviour of the conductress. As soon as she caught sight of the cat clambering onto the tram, she shouted with an anger that even made her shake:

“No cats! Cats aren’t allowed! Shoo! Get off, or I’ll call the police!”

Neither the conductress nor the passengers were struck by the real essence of the matter: not the fact that a cat was clambering onto a tram, which would not have been so bad, but the fact that he was intending to pay!

The cat turned out to be not only a solvent, but also a disciplined beast. At the very first cry from the conductress he ceased his advance, took himself off the footboard and alighted at a stop, rubbing his whiskers with the ten-copeck piece. But no sooner had the conductress tugged at the cord and the tram moved off than the cat behaved like anyone who is expelled from a tram, but who does after all need to get somewhere. Letting all three cars go past him, the cat leapt up¹⁴² onto the rear bumper of the last one, latched his paw onto some kind of hose that was protruding from the side and rode off¹⁴³, thus saving his ten-copeck piece.

In concerning himself with the vile cat, Ivan had almost lost the most important of the three – the Professor. But fortunately, the latter had not managed to slip away. Ivan caught sight of a grey beret in the dense mass at the top of Bolshaya Nikitskaya or Herzen Street. In the twinkling of an eye Ivan was there himself. However, he had no success. The poet increased his pace, and was even beginning to jog, bumping into passers-by, but not by a centimetre did he get closer to the Professor.

However upset Ivan might have been, still he was struck by the supernatural speed at which the pursuit was taking place. Not twenty seconds had passed after leaving the Nikitsky Gates before Ivan Nikolayevich was already blinded by the lights on Arbat Square. A few seconds more, and here was some dark lane with sloping pavements where Ivan Nikolayevich went crashing down and injured his knee. Again a well-lit main road – Kropotkin Street – then a side street, then Ostozhenka and another side street – cheerless, ugly and poorly lit. And it was here that Ivan Nikolayevich finally lost the man he so needed. The Professor had vanished.

¹³⁸ to catch up with – догонять

¹³⁹ to hurtle into – врезаться

¹⁴⁰ to slip away – убегать, смываться

¹⁴¹ to freeze in immobility – застыть на месте

¹⁴² to leap up – вскакивать

¹⁴³ to ride off – уезжать

Ivan Nikolayevich grew troubled, but not for long, because he suddenly realized the Professor was absolutely certain to be found in house number 13 and in apartment 47 for sure.

Bursting in through the doorway, Ivan Nikolayevich flew up to the first floor, found the apartment straight away and impatiently rang the bell. He did not have long to wait: some little girl of five or so opened the door to Ivan and, without asking the caller anything, immediately went away somewhere.

In the huge hallway – neglected in the extreme and weakly lit by a tiny little carbon lamp beneath a high ceiling, black with dirt – there was a bicycle without tyres hanging on the wall, a huge iron-bound coffer and, on the shelf above the coat rack, a winter hat with its long earflaps hanging down over the edge. Behind one of the doors a booming male voice in a radio set was shouting something angrily in verse.

Ivan Nikolayevich was not in the least disconcerted in the unfamiliar setting and headed straight into the corridor, reasoning thus: "He's hiding in the bathroom, of course." The corridor was dark. After banging against the walls for a bit, Ivan saw a weak little strip of light below a door, groped for the handle and tugged on it gently. The catch came away, and Ivan did indeed find himself in the bathroom, and he thought how lucky he had been.

However, he had not been quite as lucky as he might have wished! Ivan was hit by a wave of moist warmth, and, by the light of the coals smouldering in the geyser, he made out the large washtubs hanging on the wall and the bath, covered in ugly black spots because of the chipped enamel. And so, in this bath stood a naked citizeness, covered in soap and with a loofah in her hands. She squinted myopically at Ivan bursting in and, evidently mistaking him for another in the hellish light, said quietly and cheerily:

"Kiryushka! Stop messing around¹⁴⁴! What are you doing – are you out of your mind?... Fyodor Ivanovich will be back at any moment. Get out of here this minute!" and she waved the loofah at Ivan.

There was an evident misunderstanding, and Ivan Nikolayevich was, of course, to blame for¹⁴⁵ it. But he did not mean to acknowledge it and, with the reproachful exclamation: "You wanton woman!" he for some reason found himself straight away in the kitchen. There was nobody in it, and mute on the cooker in the semi-darkness stood about a dozen extinguished Primus stoves. The one moonbeam that had filtered through the dusty window – a window unwiped for years – threw a meagre light on the corner where, cobwebbed and covered in dust, there hung a forgotten icon; poking out from behind its case were the ends of two wedding candles^{146, 147}. Beneath the large icon hung a small paper one, stuck up with a pin.

Nobody knows what idea took possession of Ivan at this point, but before running out to the back entrance, he appropriated one of those candles, and also the little paper icon. Together with these objects he abandoned the unknown apartment, muttering something and embarrassed at the thought of what he had just been through in the bathroom, involuntarily trying to guess who this brazen Kiryushka might be, and whether the offensive hat with the earflaps belonged to him.

In the deserted, cheerless lane the poet gazed around, looking for the fugitive, but he was nowhere about. Then Ivan said firmly to himself:

"But of course, he's on the Moscow River! Onwards!"

It would quite likely have been the right thing to ask Ivan Nikolayevich why he supposed the Professor was specifically on the Moscow River and not in some other place elsewhere. But the trouble is that there was no one to ask him. The loathsome lane was completely empty.

¹⁴⁴ to mess around – трепаться

¹⁴⁵ to blame for – винить, обвинять

¹⁴⁶ wedding candles – венчальные свечи

¹⁴⁷ *wedding candles*: a traditional part of the Orthodox marriage ceremony, during which they are held by the bride and groom.
(Комментарий И. Беспалова)

In the very shortest time Ivan Nikolayevich could be seen on the granite steps of the amphitheatre of the Moscow River.

Having removed his clothes, Ivan entrusted them to some pleasant bearded man who was smoking a roll-up beside a torn white *tolstovka*¹⁴⁸ and unlaced worn-down ankle boots. After waving his arms around to cool down, Ivan did a swallow dive into the water. The water was so cold it took his breath away, and it even flashed through his mind that he would quite likely not succeed in coming to the surface. However, he did succeed in doing so, and, blowing and snorting, with eyes round from horror, Ivan Nikolayevich began to swim about in the black water, smelling of oil, between the broken zigzags of the street lights on the banks.

When the wet Ivan danced up the steps to the spot where his clothing had remained under the protection of the bearded man, it transpired that not only had the former been carried off, but the latter had too – the bearded man himself, that is. On the precise spot where there had been a heap of clothing, there remained a pair of striped long johns, a torn *tolstovka*, a candle, an icon and a box of matches. Shaking his fist in impotent fury at someone in the distance, Ivan robed himself in what had been left.

At this point he began to be troubled by two considerations: the first was that the MASSOLIT identity card with which he never parted had disappeared, and the second was: would he succeed in getting across Moscow unhindered looking like this? Wearing long johns, after all... True, it was nobody's business, but all the same, he hoped there would be no kind of gripe or hold-up.

Ivan tore the buttons off the long johns where they fastened at the ankle, reckoning that, looking like that, they would perhaps pass for summer trousers, and, gathering up the icon, candle and matches, he moved off, saying to himself:

“To Griboyedov! Beyond all doubt, he's there.”

The city was already living its evening life. Trucks flew by in clouds of dust with their chains clanking, and on their open platforms, sprawling on sacks with their bellies up, lay men of some sort. All the windows were open. In each of those windows burned a light beneath an orange lampshade, and, bursting out from all the windows, from all the doors, from all the gateways, from the roofs and attics, from the basements and courtyards, was the hoarse roar of the polonaise from the opera *Eugene Onegin*.¹⁴⁹

Ivan Nikolayevich's misgivings fully justified themselves: passers-by took notice of him and laughed and turned their heads. As a consequence of this, he took the decision to forsake the major streets and steal along little side streets, where people were not so importunate, where there was less chance they would pester a barefooted man, vexing him with questions about his long johns, which stubbornly declined to resemble trousers.

Ivan did just that, and plunged into the secretive network of the Arbat's lanes, and began stealing along by the sides of walls, casting fearful sidelong glances, constantly looking around, hiding at times in doorways and avoiding crossroads with traffic lights and the magnificent doors of embassy mansions.

And during the whole of his difficult journey he was for some reason inexpressibly tormented by the ubiquitous orchestra, to the accompaniment of which a ponderous bass sang of his love for Tatyana.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ *tolstovka*: a traditional Russian shirt. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁴⁹ *Eugene Onegin*: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-93) wrote this opera, first performed in 1879, which was based on the novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* (1825-32) by Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁵⁰ *Tatyana*: Tatyana Larina, the heroine of *Eugene Onegin*. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

5. There Were Goings-on at Griboyedov

The old cream-coloured two-storey house was situated on the Boulevard Ring in the depths of a sorry-looking garden, separated from the pavement of the ring by fretted cast-iron railings. The small open area in front of the house was asphalted, and there, in the wintertime, a snowdrift with a spade in it towered up¹⁵¹, while in the summertime it turned into the most magnificent section of a summer restaurant beneath a canvas awning.

The house was called The Griboyedov House on the grounds that at one time it had ostensibly been owned by the writer's auntie, Alexandra Sergeyevna Griboyedova.¹⁵² Well, did she or didn't she own it? – we don't know for sure. If memory serves, Griboyedov never even seems to have had any such house-owning auntie... However, that is what the house was called. And what is more, one mendacious Muscovite used to tell how, allegedly, there on the first floor, in the circular columned hall, the renowned writer used to read extracts from *The Misfortune of Wit*¹⁵³¹⁵⁴ to that same auntie as she lounged on a sofa. But then the devil knows – perhaps he did, it's not important!

But what is important is that this house was owned at the present time by that same MASSOLIT, at the head of which stood the unfortunate Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, until his appearance at Patriarch's Ponds.

Following the example of the members of MASSOLIT, nobody called the house "The Griboyedov House": everyone simply said "Griboyedov": "I was hanging about for two hours at Griboyedov yesterday." – "Well, and?" – "I got myself a month in Yalta." – "Good for you!" Or: "Go and talk to Berlioz, he's seeing people between four and five today at Griboyedov." and so on.

MASSOLIT had settled into Griboyedov so well that nothing better or cosier could be imagined. Anyone going into Griboyedov involuntarily became acquainted first of all with the notices of various sports clubs, and with group and also individual photographs of members of MASSOLIT, hanging (the photographs) all over the walls of the staircase leading to the first floor.

On the doors of the very first room on that upper floor could be seen the large inscription: "Fishing and Dacha Section", and there too was a picture of a crucian caught on the end of a rod.

On the doors of room No. 2 was written something not entirely comprehensible: "One-day writing trip. Apply to M. V. Podlozhnaya".

The next door bore the brief but this time completely incomprehensible inscription "Perelygino".¹⁵⁵ Then Griboyedov's chance visitor would start to be dazzled by the inscriptions abounding on the auntie's walnut doors: "Registration for Waiting List for Paper at Poklyovkina's", "Cashier's Office. Sketch-writers' Personal Accounts"...

Cutting through the longest queue, which had already started downstairs in the doorman's room, one could see the inscription on the door people were trying to force their way into at every moment: "Housing Question"¹⁵⁶.

Beyond the Housing Question there opened up a splendid poster on which was depicted a crag, and along its crest rode a horseman in a Caucasian cloak with a rifle over his shoulders. A little lower down were palm trees and a balcony, and on the balcony sat a young man with a little tuft of hair,

¹⁵¹ to tower up – возвышаться

¹⁵² *The house was called... Griboyedova*: a reference to the writer Alexander Sergeyevich Griboyedov (1795–1829), a playwright and poet whom Bulgakov was known to admire. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁵³ *The Misfortune of Wit* – «Горе от ума», комедия в стихах А. С. Грибоедова

¹⁵⁴ *The Misfortune of Wit*: Also translated as *Woe from Wit* and *The Woes of Wit*, this verse satire, first published in 1825, was Griboyedov's masterpiece. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁵⁵ *Perelygino*: The area outside Moscow where there was a concentration of dachas for writers in Soviet times is called Peredelkino. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁵⁶ Housing Question – квартирный вопрос

gazing upwards with ever such lively eyes, and holding a fountain pen in his hand. The caption: “Fully inclusive writing holidays from two weeks (short story-novella) to one year (novel, trilogy). Yalta, Suuk-Su, Borovoye, Tsikhidziry, Makhindzhaury, Leningrad (Winter Palace)”. At this door there was also a queue, but not an excessive one: of about a hundred and fifty people.

Further on there followed, obeying the fanciful twists and ups and downs of the Griboyedov House, “MASSOLIT Board”, “Cashiers’ Offices Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5”, “Editorial Board”, “MASSOLIT Chairman”, “Billiards Room”, various ancillary organizations and, finally, that very hall with the colonnade where the auntie had enjoyed her brilliant nephew’s comedy.

Any visitor who got into Griboyedov – if, of course, he wasn’t a complete dimwit – grasped at once how good a life those lucky members of MASSOLIT enjoyed, and sullen envy would immediately begin to torture him. And immediately he would address words of bitter reproach to the Heavens for their having failed to endow him at birth with literary talent, without which, naturally, there was no point even dreaming of securing a MASSOLIT membership card – brown, smelling of expensive leather and with a broad gold border – a card known to the whole of Moscow.

Who will say anything in defence of envy? It is a rotten category of feeling, but all the same, one must put oneself in the visitor’s shoes too. After all, what he saw on the upper floor was not everything – was still far from everything. The entire lower floor of auntie’s house was occupied by the restaurant, and what a restaurant! It was rightly considered the best in Moscow. And not only because it was accommodated in two large halls with vaulted ceilings, decorated with lilac horses with Assyrian manes, not only because on each table there stood a lamp covered with a shawl, not only because it could not be penetrated by the first person you came across in the street, but also because Griboyedov could beat any restaurant in Moscow at will with the quality of its provisions, and because those provisions were served at the most reasonable, by no means burdensome prices.

Thus there is nothing surprising in a conversation such as this, for example, which was once heard by the author of these most truthful lines beside the cast-iron railings of Griboyedov:

“Where are you dining today, Amvrosy?”

“What a question! Here of course, dear Foka! Archibald Archibaldovich whispered to me today that there’s going to be portions of pikeperch *au naturel*¹⁵⁷. The work of a virtuoso!”

“You really know how to live, Amvrosy!” sighed Foka, emaciated, run-down and with a carbuncle on his neck, in reply to the rosy-lipped giant, the golden-haired, plump-cheeked poet Amvrosy.

“I don’t have any particular know-how,” Amvrosy objected, “just an ordinary desire to live like a human being. What you mean to say, Foka, is that you can come across pikeperch at the Coliseum too. But at the Coliseum a portion of pikeperch costs thirteen roubles fifteen copecks, whereas here it’s five fifty! Apart from that, at the Coliseum the pikeperch is three days old, and apart from that, you have no guarantee either that at The Coliseum you won’t get a bunch of grapes in the face from the first young man that comes bursting in from Teatralny Passage. No, I’m categorically against the Coliseum!” the gourmet Amvrosy thundered for the whole boulevard to hear. “Don’t try and persuade me, Foka!”

“I’m not trying to persuade you, Amvrosy,” squealed Foka. “We can have dinner at home.”

“Your humble servant,” trumpeted Amvrosy. “I can imagine your wife attempting to construct portions of pikeperch *au naturel* in a little saucepan in the communal kitchen at home. Tee-hee-hee!.. *Au revoir*!”¹⁵⁸, Foka!” And, humming away, Amvrosy headed towards the veranda beneath the awning.

Oh-ho-ho... Yes, it was so, it was so! Long-time residents of Moscow remember the renowned Griboyedov! Never mind boiled portions of pikeperch! That’s cheap stuff, dear Amvrosy! What about the sterlet, sterlet in a silver saucepan, pieces of sterlet interlaid with crayfish necks and fresh caviar?

¹⁵⁷ *au naturel* – (фр.) в натуральном виде, без приправ

¹⁵⁸ *Au revoir* – (фр.) До свидания

What about eggs *en cocotte*¹⁵⁹ with champignon purée in little bowls? And did you like the little fillets of thrush? With truffles? The quail Genoese style? Nine roubles fifty! And the jazz band, and the polite service! And in July, when the whole family is at the dacha and urgent literary matters are keeping you in town – on the veranda, in the shade of the climbing vine, a patch of gold on the cleanest of tablecloths, is a bowl of soup *printanier*¹⁶⁰? Remember, Amvrosy? But why ask! I can see by your lips you remember. Never mind your white salmon, your pikeperch! What about the snipe, the great snipe, the common snipe, the woodcock according to season, the quail, the sandpipers? The Narzan that fizzed in your throat?! But that's enough: you're being distracted, Reader! Follow me!.

At half-past ten on the evening when Berlioz was killed at Patriarch's, only one upstairs room in Griboyedov was lit, and in it languished the twelve writers who had gathered for their meeting and were waiting for Mikhail Alexandrovich.

Those sitting on the chairs, and on the tables, and even on the two window sills in MASSOLIT's boardroom were suffering dreadfully from the stifling heat. Not a single breath of fresh air was penetrating through the open windows. Moscow was emitting the heat accumulated in the asphalt during the course of the day, and it was clear that the night would bring no relief. There was a smell of onions from the basement of auntie's house where the restaurant's kitchen was at work, and everyone wanted a drink – everyone was on edge¹⁶¹ and getting angry.

The belletrist Beskudnikov – a quiet, respectably dressed man with attentive and at the same time elusive eyes – took out his watch. The hand was crawling towards eleven. Beskudnikov tapped the face with his finger and showed it to his neighbour, the poet Dvubratsky, who was sitting on a table, and out of boredom swinging his feet, shod in yellow rubber-soled shoes.

“Really,” grumbled Dvubratsky.

“The guy probably got stuck on the Klyazma,” responded the rich voice of Nastasya Lukinishna Nepremenova, a Moscow merchant's orphan who had become a writer composing maritime battle stories under the pseudonym “Navigator George”.

“Forgive me!” the author of popular sketches Zagrivov began boldly. “I'd be happy to be drinking some tea on a balcony myself just now, instead of stewing in here. The meeting was arranged for ten, wasn't it?”

“It's nice on the Klyazma now,” Navigator George egged the company on, knowing that the literary dacha village of Pereyginovo on the River Klyazma was a shared sore point. “The nightingales are probably already singing. My work always goes better out of town somehow, especially in the spring.”

“I'm in my third year of paying in money to send my wife and her Basedow's disease¹⁶²¹⁶³ to that paradise, but there doesn't seem to be anything visible on the horizon,” said the novelist Ieronym Poprikhin with venom and bitterness.

“It's just a matter of who gets lucky,” droned the critic Ababkov from the window sill.

Navigator George's little eyes lit up with joy, and, softening her contralto, she said:

“You mustn't be envious, Comrades. There are only twenty-two dachas, and there are only seven more being built, and there are three thousand of us in MASSOLIT”

“Three thousand one hundred and eleven,” someone put in from the corner.

“Well, you see,” continued the Navigator, “what's to be done? It's natural that the dachas were given to the most talented among us...”

“The generals!” the scriptwriter Glukharev butted into the squabble bluntly.

¹⁵⁹ *en cocotte* – (фр.) яйца-кокотт

¹⁶⁰ *printanier* – (фр.) суп-прентаньер

¹⁶¹ to be on edge – быть на пределе, нервничать

¹⁶² Basedow's disease – Базедова болезнь

¹⁶³ *Basedow's disease*: a thyroid disorder also known as Graves's disease. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

Beskudnikov left the room with an artificial yawn.

“Alone in five rooms in Perelygino,” said Glukharev in his wake.

“Lavrovich is alone in six,” cried Deniskin, “and the dining room’s panelled in oak.”

“Oh, that isn’t the point at the moment,” droned Ababkov, “the point is that it’s half-past eleven.”

A din started up – something akin to a revolt was brewing. They began ringing the hateful Perelygino, got through to the wrong dacha, to Lavrovich, learnt that Lavrovich had gone off to the river, and were thoroughly put out by that. Off the tops of their heads they rang the Commission for Belles-Lettres¹⁶⁴ plus the extension 930, and, of course, found nobody there.

“He could have telephoned!” cried Deniskin, Glukharev and Kvant.

Ah, they cried unjustly: Mikhail Alexandrovich could not have telephoned anywhere. Far, far from Griboyedov, in a huge hall lit by thousand-candle bulbs, on three zinc tables there lay what had until only recently been Mikhail Alexandrovich.

On the first was his naked body, covered in dried blood, with a broken arm and a crushed ribcage, on the second was his head, with the front teeth knocked out and with dulled, open eyes, unperturbed by the extremely harsh light, and on the third was a heap of stiffened rags.

Alongside the decapitated man stood a professor of forensic medicine, a pathological anatomist and his prosecutor, representatives of the investigation team, and Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz’s deputy at MASSOLIT, the writer Zheldybin, summoned by telephone away from his sick wife.

A car had called for Zheldybin and, as a first priority, he had been taken, along with the investigators (this was around midnight) to the dead man’s apartment, where the sealing of his papers had been carried out, and only then had they all come to the morgue.

And now the men standing beside the remains of the deceased were conferring as to what would be better: to sew the severed head back onto the neck or to display the body in the Griboyedov hall with the dead man simply covered with a black cloth right up to the chin?

No, Mikhail Alexandrovich could not have telephoned anywhere, and Deniskin, Glukharev, Kvant and Beskudnikov were quite wrong to be shouting and indignant. At exactly midnight all twelve writers left the upper floor and went down to the restaurant. Here again they spoke ill of Mikhail Alexandrovich to themselves: all the tables on the veranda turned out, naturally, to be already occupied, and they had to stay and have dinner in those beautiful but stuffy halls.

And at exactly midnight in the first of those halls something crashed, rang out, rained down, began jumping. And straight away a thin male voice shouted out recklessly to the music: “Hallelujah!”¹⁶⁵ It was the renowned Griboyedov jazz band striking up. Faces covered in perspiration seemed to light up; the horses drawn on the ceiling appeared to come to life; there seemed to be added light in the lamps; and suddenly, as though they had broken loose, both halls began to dance, and after them the veranda began to dance as well.

Glukharev began to dance with the poetess Tamara Polumesyats, Kvant began to dance, Zhukopov the novelist began to dance with some film actress in a yellow dress. Dragoonsky and Cherdakchy were dancing, little Deniskin was dancing with the gigantic Navigator George, the beautiful architect Semyeikina-Gall was dancing in the tight grasp of a stranger in white canvas trousers. The regulars and invited guests were dancing, Muscovites and visitors, the writer Johann from Kronstadt, some Vitya Kuftik or other from Rostov, a director, apparently, with a purple rash completely covering his cheek, the most eminent representatives of the poetry subsection of MASSOLIT – that is, Pavianov, Bogokhulsky, Sladky, Shpichkin and Adelphina Buzdyak – were dancing, young men of unknown profession with crew cuts and padded shoulders were dancing, some very elderly man with a beard in which a little bit of spring onion had become lodged was dancing,

¹⁶⁴ Commission for Belles-Lettres – Комиссия изящной словесности

¹⁶⁵ *Hallelujah*: a foxtrot by Vincent Youmans (1898–1946), published in Leningrad in 1928. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

and dancing with him was a sickly young girl, being eaten up by anaemia, in a crumpled little orange silk dress.

Bathed in sweat, waiters carried misted mugs of beer above their heads, shouting hoarsely and with hatred: “Sorry, Citizen!” Somewhere through a megaphone a voice commanded: “Karsky kebab, one! Venison, two! Imperial chitterlings!” The thin voice was no longer singing, but howling “Hallelujah!” The crashing of the golden cymbals in the jazz band at times drowned out the crashing of the crockery which the dishwashers slid down a sloping surface into the kitchen. In a word, hell.

And at midnight there was a vision in hell. Onto the veranda emerged a handsome black-eyed man in tails with a dagger of a beard who cast a regal gaze over his domains. It was said, it was said by mystics, that there was a time when the handsome man had not worn tails, but had been girdled with a broad leather belt, from which had protruded the butts of pistols, and his hair, black as a raven’s wing, had been tied with scarlet silk, and under his command a brig had sailed the Caribbean beneath a funereal black flag bearing a skull.

But no, no! The seductive mystics lie: there are no Caribbean Seas on earth, and desperate filibusters do not sail them, and a corvette does not give chase, and cannon smoke does not spread above the waves. There is nothing, and never was there anything either! There is, look, a sorry lime tree, there is a cast-iron railing and, beyond it, the boulevard... And the ice is melting in a bowl, and at the next table someone’s bloodshot, bull-like eyes can be seen, and it’s terrible, terrible. O gods, my gods, give me poison, poison!

And suddenly at a table a word flew up: “Berlioz!” Suddenly the jazz band went to pieces and fell quiet, as though somebody had thumped it with their fist. “What, what, what, what?!” – “Berlioz!!!” And people started leaping up, started crying out.

Yes, a wave of grief surged up at the fearful news about Mikhail Alexandrovich. Someone was making a fuss, shouting that it was essential, at once, here and now, right on the spot, to compose some collective telegram and send it off immediately.

But what telegram, we’ll ask, and where to? And why should it be sent? Indeed, where to? And what good is any sort of telegram at all to the man whose flattened-out occiput¹⁶⁶ is now squeezed in the prosecutor’s rubber hands, whose neck is now being pricked by the curved needles of the professor? He’s dead, and no telegram is any good to him. It’s all over, we won’t burden the telegraph office any more.

Yes, he’s dead, dead. But us, we’re alive, you know!¹⁶⁷

Yes, a wave of grief surged up, but it held, held and started to abate, and someone had already returned to his table, and – at first stealthily, but then quite openly – had drunk some vodka and had taken a bite to eat. Indeed, chicken cutlets *de volaille*¹⁶⁸ weren’t to go to waste, were they? How can we help Mikhail Alexandrovich? By staying hungry? But us, you know, we’re alive!

Naturally, the piano was locked, the jazz band dispersed, a number of journalists left for their offices to write obituaries. It became known that Zheldybin had arrived from the morgue. He settled himself in the dead man’s office upstairs, and straight away the rumour spread that it would be him replacing Berlioz. Zheldybin summoned all twelve members of the board from the restaurant, and, at a meeting begun immediately in Berlioz’s office, they got down to a discussion of the pressing questions of the decoration of Griboyedov’s columned hall, of the transportation of the body to that hall from the morgue, of opening it to visitors, and of other things connected with the regrettable event.

¹⁶⁶ flattened-out occiput – расплющенный затылок

¹⁶⁷ *we’re alive, you know*: An allusion to the response of colleagues to the death of Ivan Ilyich in the 1887 story of that name by Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁶⁸ *de volaille* – (фр.) котлета из птицы

But the restaurant began living its usual nocturnal life, and would have lived it until closing time – that is, until four o'clock in the morning – had there not occurred something really completely out of the ordinary that startled the restaurant's guests much more than the news of Berlioz's death.

The first to become agitated were the cab drivers in attendance at the gates of the Griboyedov House. One of them was heard to shout out, half-rising on his box:

“Cor! Just look at that!”

Following which, from out of the blue, a little light flared up by the cast-iron railings and began approaching the veranda. Those sitting at the tables began half-rising and peering, and saw that proceeding towards the restaurant together with the little light was a white apparition. When it got right up to the trellis, it was as if everyone became ossified at the tables, with pieces of sterlet on their forks and their eyes popping out. The doorman, who had at that moment come out through the doors of the restaurant's cloakroom into the yard for a smoke, stamped out his cigarette and made to move towards the apparition with the obvious aim of barring its access to the restaurant, but for some reason failed to do so and stopped, smiling rather foolishly.

And the apparition, passing through an opening in the trellis, stepped unimpeded onto the veranda. At that point everyone saw it was no apparition at all, but Ivan Nikolayevich Bezdomny, the very well-known poet.

He was barefooted, in a ripped, off-white *tolstovka*, fastened onto the breast of which with a safety pin was a paper icon with a faded image of an unknown saint, and he was wearing striped white long johns. In his hand Ivan Nikolayevich was carrying a lighted wedding candle. Ivan Nikolayevich's right cheek was covered in fresh scratches. It is difficult even to measure the depth of the silence that had come over the veranda. One of the waiters was seen to have beer flowing onto the floor from a mug that had tipped sideways.

The poet raised the candle above his head and said loudly:

“Hi, mates!” after which he glanced underneath the nearest table and exclaimed despondently: “No, he's not here!”

Two voices were heard. A bass said pitilessly:

“A clear-cut case. Delirium tremens¹⁶⁹.”

And the second, female and frightened, uttered the words:

“How on earth did the police let him walk the streets looking like that?”

Ivan Nikolayevich heard this and responded:

“Twice they tried to detain me, in Skatertny and here on Bronnaya, but I hopped over a fence and, see, scratched my cheek!” At this point Ivan Nikolayevich raised the candle and exclaimed: “Brothers in literature!” (His hoarsened voice strengthened and became fervent.) “Listen to me, everyone! He has appeared! You must catch him straight away, or else he will bring about indescribable calamities!”

“What? What? What did he say? Who's appeared?” came a rush of voices from all sides.

“A consultant!” replied Ivan. “And this consultant has just killed Misha Berlioz at Patriarch's.”

Here the people from the hall indoors poured onto the veranda. The crowd moved closer around Ivan's light.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry, be more precise,” a quiet and polite voice was heard right by Ivan Nikolayevich's ear. “Say what it is you mean, ‘killed’? Who killed him?”

“A foreign consultant, a professor and spy,” responded Ivan, looking round.

“And what is his name?” came the quiet question in his ear.

“That's just it, the name!” cried Ivan in anguish. “If only I knew the name! I didn't see the name on the visiting card properly... I can only remember the first letter, W, the name begins with a W! Whatever is that name beginning with a W?” Ivan asked of himself, clutching his forehead with his

¹⁶⁹ Delirium tremens – белая горячка

hand, and suddenly began muttering: “W, w, w. Wa... Wo. Washner? Wagner? Weiner? Wegner? Winter?” The hair on Ivan’s head started shifting with the effort.

“Wulf?” some woman shouted out compassionately.

Ivan got angry.

“Idiot!” he shouted, his eyes searching for the woman. “What’s Wulf got to do with it? Wulf’s not to blame for anything! Wo, what. No! I won’t remember like this! But I’ll tell you what, Citizens, ring the police straight away so they send out five motorcycles with machine guns to catch the Professor. And don’t forget to say there are two others with him: some lanky one in checks. a cracked pince-nez. and a fat black cat! And in the mean time I’ll search Griboyedov. I sense he’s here!”

Ivan lapsed into agitation, pushed those surrounding him away, began waving the candle about, spilling the wax over himself, and looking under the tables. At this point the words: “Get a doctor!” were heard, and somebody’s kindly, fleshy face, cleanshaven and well fed, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, appeared before Ivan.

“Comrade Bezdomny,” this face began in a gala voice, “calm down! You’re upset by the death of our beloved Mikhail Alexandrovich... no, simply Misha Berlioz. We all understand it perfectly. You need a rest. Some comrades will see you to bed now, and you’ll doze off¹⁷⁰.”

“Do you understand,” Ivan interrupted, baring his teeth, “that the Professor must be caught? And you come pestering me with your stupid remarks! Cretin!”

“Comrade Bezdomny, pardon me,” the face replied, flushing, backing away, and already repenting getting mixed up in the matter¹⁷¹.

“No, someone else, maybe, but you I won’t pardon,” said Ivan Nikolayevich with quiet hatred.

A spasm distorted his face; he quickly moved the candle from his right hand to his left, swung his arm out wide and struck the sympathetic face on the ear.

At this point it occurred to people to throw themselves upon Ivan – and they did. The candle went out, and a pair of spectacles, flying off a face, were instantly trampled upon¹⁷². Ivan emitted a terrifying war whoop – audible, to the excitement of all, even on the boulevard – and started to defend himself. The crockery falling from the tables began ringing, women began shouting.

While the waiters were tying the poet up with towels, a conversation was going on in the cloakroom between the commander of the brig and the doorman.

“Did you see he was in his underpants?” the pirate asked coldly.

“But after all, Archibald Archibaldovich,” replied the doorman in cowardly fashion, “how on earth can I not let them in if they’re members of MASSOLIT?”

“Did you see he was in his underpants?” repeated the pirate.

“For pity’s sake, Archibald Archibaldovich,” said the doorman, turning purple, “what ever can I do? I understand for myself there are ladies sitting on the veranda...”

“The ladies have nothing to do with it: it’s all one to the ladies,” replied the pirate, literally scorching the doorman with his eyes, “but it’s not all one to the police! A man in his underwear can proceed through the streets of Moscow only in one instance: if he’s going under police escort, and only to one place – the police station! And you, if you’re a doorman, ought to know that when you see such a man, you ought to begin whistling without a moment’s delay. Can you hear? Can you hear what’s happening on the veranda?”

At this point the doorman, beside himself, caught the sounds of some sort of rumbling, the crashing of crockery and women’s cries coming from the veranda.

“Well, and what am I to do with you for this?” the filibuster asked.

¹⁷⁰ to doze off – впасть в забытие

¹⁷¹ to get mixed up in the matter – впутываться в дело

¹⁷² to trample upon – растаптывать; попира́ть

The skin on the doorman's face assumed a typhoid hue, and his eyes were benumbed. He imagined that the black hair, now combed into a parting, had been covered in fiery silk. The dicky and tails¹⁷³ had disappeared, and, tucked into a belt, the handle of a pistol had appeared. The doorman pictured himself hanged from the foretop yardarm. With his own eyes he saw his own tongue poking out and his lifeless head fallen onto his shoulder, and he even heard the splashing of the waves over the ship's side. The doorman's knees sagged. But here the filibuster took pity on him and extinguished his sharp gaze.

"Watch out, Nikolai! This is the last time. We don't need such doormen in the restaurant at any price. Go and get a job as a watchman in a church." Having said this, the commander gave precise, clear, rapid commands: "Pantelei from the pantry. Policeman. Charge sheet. Vehicle. Psychiatric hospital." And added: "Whistle!"

A quarter of an hour later an extremely astonished audience, not only in the restaurant, but on the boulevard itself as well, and in the windows of the houses looking out onto the garden of the restaurant, saw Pantelei, the doorman, a policeman, a waiter and the poet Ryukhin carrying out of Griboyedov's gates a young man swaddled like a doll¹⁷⁴ who, in floods of tears, was spitting, attempting to hit specifically Ryukhin, and shouting for the entire boulevard to hear:

"Bastard!.. Bastard!"

The driver of a goods vehicle with an angry face was starting up his engine. Alongside, a cab driver was geeing up his horse, hitting it across the crupper with his lilac reins and shouting:

"Come and use the racehorse! I've taken people to the mental hospital before!"

All around the crowd was buzzing, discussing the unprecedented occurrence. In short, there was a vile, foul, seductive, swinish, scandalous scene, which ended only when the truck carried off from the gates of Griboyedov the unfortunate Ivan Nikolayevich, the policeman, Pantelei and Ryukhin.

¹⁷³ the dicky and tails – пластрон и полы фрака

¹⁷⁴ swaddled like a doll – спеленутый, как кукла

6. Schizophrenia, Just as Had Been Said

When a man with a little pointed beard, robed in a white coat, came out into the waiting room of the renowned psychiatric clinic recently completed on a river bank outside Moscow, it was half-past one in the morning. Three hospital orderlies had their eyes glued to Ivan Nikolayevich, who was sitting on a couch. Here too was the extremely agitated poet Ryukhin. The towels with which Ivan Nikolayevich had been bound lay in a heap on the same couch. Ivan Nikolayevich's hands and feet were free.

On seeing the man who had come in, Ryukhin paled, gave a cough and said timidly¹⁷⁵:

"Hello, Doctor."

The doctor bowed to Ryukhin, yet, while bowing, looked not at him, but at Ivan Nikolayevich. The latter sat completely motionless with an angry face, with knitted brows, and did not even stir at the entrance of the doctor.

"Here, Doctor," began Ryukhin, for some reason in a mysterious whisper, glancing round fearfully at Ivan Nikolayevich, "is the well-known poet Ivan Bezdomny... and you see... we're afraid it might be delirium tremens."

"Has he been drinking heavily?" asked the doctor through his teeth.

"No, he used to have a drink, but not so much that."

"Has he been trying to catch cockroaches, rats, little devils or scurrying dogs?"

"No," replied Ryukhin with a start, "I saw him yesterday and this morning. He was perfectly well..."

"And why is he wearing long johns? Did you take him from his bed?"

"He came to the restaurant looking like that, Doctor..."

"Aha, aha," said the doctor, highly satisfied, "and why the cuts? Has he been fighting with anyone?"

"He fell off a fence, and then in the restaurant he hit someone. and then someone else too."

"Right, right, right," said the doctor and, turning to Ivan, added: "Hello!"

"Hi there, wrecker!" replied Ivan, maliciously and loudly.

Ryukhin was so embarrassed that he did not dare raise his eyes to the polite doctor. But the latter was not in the least offended, and with his customary deft gesture he took off his spectacles; lifting the tail of his coat, he put them away in the back pocket of his trousers, and then he asked Ivan:

"How old are you?"

"Honestly, you can all leave me alone and go to the devil!" Ivan cried rudely, and turned away.

"Why ever are you getting angry? Have I said anything unpleasant to you?"

"I'm twenty-three," Ivan began excitedly, "and I shall be putting in a complaint about you all. And about you especially, you worm!" he addressed himself to Ryukhin individually.

"And what is it you want to complain about¹⁷⁶?"

"The fact that I, a healthy man, was seized and dragged here to the madhouse by force!" replied Ivan in fury.

Here Ryukhin peered closely at Ivan and turned cold: there was definitely no madness in his eyes. From being lacklustre, as they had been at Griboyedov, they had turned into the former clear ones.

"Good gracious!" thought Ryukhin in fright. "Is he actually sane? What nonsense this is! Why ever, indeed, did we drag him here? He's sane, sane, only his face is all scratched..."

¹⁷⁵ to say timidly – робко сказать

¹⁷⁶ to complain about – жаловаться на ч.-л.

“You are not,” began the doctor calmly, sitting down on a white stool with a shiny leg, “in the madhouse, but in a clinic, where nobody will think of detaining you if there is no need for it.”

Ivan Nikolayevich gave him a mistrustful sidelong look, but muttered nevertheless:

“The Lord be praised! One sane man has at last come to light among the idiots, the foremost of whom is that talentless dunderhead Sashka!”

“Who’s this talentless Sashka?” enquired the doctor.

“There he is, Ryukhin!” Ivan replied, and jabbed a dirty finger in Ryukhin’s direction.

The latter flared up¹⁷⁷ in indignation.

“That’s what he gives me instead of a thank you!” he thought bitterly. “For my having shown some concern for him! He really is a scumbag!”

“A typical petty kulak in his psychology,” began Ivan Nikolayevich, who was evidently impatient to denounce Ryukhin, “and a petty kulak, what’s more, carefully disguising himself as a proletarian. Look at his dreary physiognomy and compare it with that sonorous verse he composed for the first of the month! Hee-hee-hee... ‘Soar up!’ and ‘Soar forth!’... but you take a look inside him – what’s he thinking there. it’ll make you gasp!” And Ivan Nikolayevich broke into sinister laughter.

Ryukhin was breathing heavily, was red, and was thinking of only one thing – that he had warmed a snake at his breast, that he had shown concern for someone who had turned out to be, when tested, a spiteful enemy. And the main thing was, nothing could be done about it either: you couldn’t trade insults with a madman, could you?!

“And why precisely have you been delivered to us?” asked the doctor, after attentively hearing out Bezdomny’s denunciations.

“The devil take them, the stupid oafs! Seized me, tied me up with rags of some sort and dragged me out here in a truck!”

“Permit me to ask you why you arrived at the restaurant in just your underwear?”

“There’s nothing surprising in that,” replied Ivan. “I went to the Moscow River to bathe, and well, I had my clobber nicked, and this trash was left! I couldn’t go around Moscow naked, could I? I put on what there was, because I was hurrying to Griboyedov’s restaurant.”

The doctor looked enquiringly at Ryukhin, and the latter mumbled sullenly:

“That’s what the restaurant’s called.”

“Aha,” said the doctor, “and why were you hurrying so? Some business meeting or other?”

“I’m trying to catch a consultant,” Ivan Nikolayevich replied, and looked around anxiously.

“What consultant?”

“Do you know Berlioz?” asked Ivan meaningfully.

“That’s... the composer?”¹⁷⁸

Ivan became upset.

“What composer? Ah yes. Of course not! The composer just shares Misha Berlioz’s name.”

Ryukhin did not want to say anything, but he had to explain:

“Berlioz, the secretary of MASSOLIT, was run over by a tram this evening at Patriarch’s.”

“Don’t make things up¹⁷⁹ – you don’t know anything!” Ivan grew angry with Ryukhin. “It was me, not you, that was there when it happened! He deliberately set him up to go under the tram!”

“Pushed him?”

“What’s ‘pushed’ got to do with it?” exclaimed Ivan, getting angry at the general slow-wittedness. “Someone like that doesn’t even need to push! He can get up to such tricks, just you watch out! He knew in advance that Berlioz was going to go under the tram!”

¹⁷⁷ to flare up – вспыхнуть

¹⁷⁸ the composer: Hector Berlioz (1803-69), among whose works are several that are thematically connected with *The Master and Margarita*, notably *The Damnation of Faust* (1846). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁷⁹ to make things up – врать; перевира́ть факты

“And did anyone other than you see this consultant?” “That’s precisely the trouble: it was only Berlioz and me.” “Right. And what measures did you take to catch this murderer?” Here the doctor turned and threw a glance at a woman in a white coat sitting to one side at a desk. She pulled out a sheet of paper and began filling in the empty spaces in its columns.

“Here’s what measures. I picked up a candle in the kitchen...”

“This one here?” asked the doctor, indicating the broken candle lying beside an icon on the desk in front of the woman.

“That very one, and.”

“And why the icon?”

“Well, yes, the icon.” Ivan blushed, “it was the icon that frightened them more than anything” – and he again jabbed his finger in Ryukhin’s direction – “but the thing is that he, the consultant, he, let’s talk plainly. he’s in cahoots with¹⁸⁰ unclean spirits. and it won’t be so simple to catch him.”

The orderlies stood to attention for some reason and did not take their eyes off Ivan.

“Yes,” continued Ivan, “he’s in cahoots! That’s an incontrovertible fact¹⁸¹. He’s spoken personally with Pontius Pilate. And there’s no reason to look at me like that! I’m telling the truth! He saw everything – the balcony, the palms. In short, he was with Pontius Pilate, I can vouch for it¹⁸².”

“Well then, well then.”

“Well, and so I pinned the icon on my chest and ran off...”

Suddenly at this point a clock struck twice.

“Oho-ho!” exclaimed Ivan, and rose from the couch. “Two o’clock, and I’m wasting time with you! I’m sorry, where’s the telephone?”

“Let him get to the telephone,” the doctor commanded the orderlies.

Ivan grasped the receiver, and at the same time the woman quietly asked Ryukhin:

“Is he married?”

“Single,” replied Ryukhin fearfully.

“A union member?”

“Yes.”

“Is that the police?” Ivan shouted into the receiver. “Is that the police? Comrade duty officer, make arrangements immediately for five motorcycles with machine guns to be sent out to capture a foreign consultant. What? Come and pick me up, I’ll go with you myself... It’s the poet Bezdomny speaking from the madhouse... What’s your address?” Bezdomny asked the doctor in a whisper, covering the receiver with his palm, and then he again shouted into the receiver: “Are you listening? Hello!. Disgraceful!” Ivan suddenly wailed, and he flung the receiver against the wall. Then he turned to the doctor, reached out his hand to him, said drily “Goodbye” and prepared to leave.

“Pardon me, and where is it you mean to go?” began the doctor, peering into Ivan’s eyes. “In the middle of the night, in your underwear. You don’t feel well, stay here with us!”

“Now let me pass,” said Ivan to the orderlies, who had closed ranks by the doors. “Will you let me go or not?” cried the poet in a terrible voice.

Ryukhin started trembling, but the woman pressed a button in the desk, and a shiny little box and a sealed ampoule sprang out onto its glass surface.

“So that’s the way it is?!” pronounced Ivan, looking around with a wild, trapped air. “Well, all right then! Farewell!” and he flung himself head first into the curtain over the window.

There was quite a heavy crash, but the glass behind the curtain did not so much as crack, and a moment later Ivan Nikolayevich began struggling in the arms of the orderlies. He wheezed, tried to bite them, shouted:

¹⁸⁰ to be in cahoots with – водиться, знаться с к.-л.

¹⁸¹ an incontrovertible fact – неоспоримый факт

¹⁸² to vouch for something – ручаться

“So that’s the sort of glass you’ve got yourselves!.. Let me go!.. Let me go!”

A syringe gleamed in the doctor’s hands; with a single yank the woman ripped the tattered sleeve of the *tolstovka* apart and seized hold of the arm with unfeminine strength. There was a sudden smell of ether – Ivan weakened in the arms of four people, and the dextrous doctor made use of that moment to sink the needle into Ivan’s arm. They held on to Ivan for a few more seconds and then lowered him onto the couch.

“Bandits!” Ivan cried, and leapt up from the couch, but he was set upon again. As soon as he was released, he made to leap up again, but this time he sat back down by himself. He was silent for a while, looking around in a wild sort of way, then unexpectedly yawned, then smiled maliciously.

“Locked me up¹⁸³ after all,” he said, then yawned once more, unexpectedly lay down, put his head on a cushion and his fist under his cheek, like a child, and began mumbling in a now sleepy voice, without malice: “Well, jolly good too. and you’ll pay for everything yourselves. I’ve warned you, now it’s up to you!. What I’m most interested in now is Pontius Pilate. Pilate.” – here he closed his eyes.

“Bath, private room 117, and set a guard on him,” the doctor ordered, putting on his spectacles. At this point Ryukhin again gave a start: the white doors opened noiselessly, into sight beyond them came a corridor lit by blue night lights. A bed on rubber wheels rolled in from the corridor, and the now quiet Ivan was transferred onto it; he rode into the corridor, and the doors closed up behind him.

“Doctor,” asked the shaken Ryukhin in a whisper, “he really is ill, then?”

“Oh yes,” replied the doctor.

“And what is it that’s wrong with him?” asked Ryukhin timidly.

The tired doctor looked at Ryukhin and answered limply:

“Motive and vocal excitement... delirious interpretations... evidently a complex case. Schizophrenia, one must assume. And add to that alcoholism.”

Ryukhin understood nothing of the doctor’s words, except that Ivan Nikolayevich was clearly in quite a bad way; he sighed and asked:

“And what was that he kept on saying about some consultant?”

“He probably saw somebody his disturbed imagination found striking. Or perhaps he’s been hallucinating.”

A few minutes later the truck was carrying Ryukhin away to Moscow. It was getting light, and the light of the street lamps that had not yet been extinguished on the highway was unnecessary now and unpleasant. The driver was angry about the night having been lost; he sped the vehicle on for all he was worth, and it skidded on the bends¹⁸⁴.

And now the forest had fallen away, been left somewhere behind, and the river had gone off to the side somewhere, and all kinds of different things came hurrying along to meet the truck: fences of some kind with sentry boxes and palettes of firewood, great high poles and masts of some sort with threaded coils on the masts, piles of ballast, earth covered with the lines of channels – in short, there was the sense that here it was at any moment, Moscow, right here, around this bend, and in a minute it would be upon you and envelop you.

Ryukhin was shaken and tossed about; the stump of some sort on which he was sitting was continually trying to slide out from under him. The restaurant’s towels, thrown in by the policeman and Pantelei, who had left earlier by trolleybus, shifted all over the truck. Ryukhin started to try and gather them together, but for some reason maliciously hissing: “Oh, they can go to the devil! Really, what am I fiddling around for like an idiot?” – he kicked them away and stopped looking at them.

The mood of the man as he rode was terrible. It was becoming clear that the visit to the mental asylum had left the most painful mark upon him. Ryukhin tried to understand what was tormenting him. The corridor with the blue lights that had stuck in his mind? The thought that there was no worse

¹⁸³ to lock somebody up – заточить, закрыть

¹⁸⁴ to skid on the bends – заносить на поворотах

misfortune in the world than the loss of one's reason? Yes, yes, that too, of course. Yet that was just a general thought, after all. But there was something else. Whatever was it? The insult, that's what. Yes, yes, the insulting words thrown right in his face by Bezdomny. And the trouble was not that they were insulting, but that there was truth in them.

The poet no longer looked from side to side, but, staring at the dirty, shaking floor, began muttering something, whining, gnawing away at himself.

Yes, the poetry... He was thirty-two. What, indeed, lay in the future? In the future too he would compose a few poems a year. Into old age? Yes, into old age. And what would those poems bring him? Fame? "What nonsense! Don't deceive yourself, at least. Fame will never come to someone who composes bad poetry. Why is it bad? It was true, true, what he said!" Ryukhin addressed himself pitilessly. "I don't believe in a thing of what I write!"

Poisoned by the explosion of neurasthenia, the poet lurched, and the floor beneath him stopped shaking. Ryukhin raised his head and saw that he had already been in Moscow for a long time and, in addition, that the dawn was over Moscow, that the cloud was lit up from beneath with gold, that his truck was at a standstill, held up in a column of other vehicles at the turn onto a boulevard, and that ever so close to him stood a metal man on a pedestal,¹⁸⁵ his head slightly inclined, looking dispassionately at the boulevard.

Some strange thoughts surged into the head of the sick poet. "There's an example of real luck..." At this point Ryukhin stood up straight on the back of the truck and raised his hand, for some reason attacking the cast-iron man who was harming no one. "Whatever step he took in life, whatever happened to him, everything was to his advantage, everything worked towards his fame! But what did he do? I don't get it. Is there something special about those words: 'Stormy darkness'?¹⁸⁶ I don't understand! He was lucky, lucky!" Ryukhin suddenly concluded venomously, and felt that the truck beneath him had stirred. "That White Guard¹⁸⁷ – he shot, he shot at him, smashed his hip to pieces and guaranteed his immortality."¹⁸⁸

The column moved off. In no more than two minutes the poet, who was quite unwell and had even aged, was stepping onto Griboyedov's veranda. It had already emptied. A party of some sort was finishing its drinks in a corner, and in its midst the familiar master of ceremonies was bustling about¹⁸⁹ in his embroidered Asian skullcap¹⁹⁰ and with a glass of Abrau¹⁹¹ in his hand.

Ryukhin, laden with towels, was greeted cordially by Archibald Archibaldovich and immediately relieved of the accursed rags. Had Ryukhin not been so tormented at the clinic and on the truck, he would probably have taken pleasure in recounting how everything had been at the hospital and in embellishing the account with invented details. But now he had other things on his mind, and no matter how unobservant Ryukhin was, now, after the torture in the truck, he scrutinized the pirate acutely for the first time and realized that, though he might ask questions about Bezdomny and even exclaim "oh dear me!", he was in actual fact completely indifferent to Bezdomny's fate and did not pity him in the least. "Good for him too! Quite right too!" thought Ryukhin with cynical, selfdestructive malice, and, cutting his account of schizophrenia short, he asked:

¹⁸⁵ *metal man on a pedestal*: The monument to Alexander Pushkin by A. M. Opekushin (1838–1923), officially unveiled in 1880. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁸⁶ *Stormy darkness*: The opening words of Pushkin's poem of 1825 'A Winter's Evening'. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁸⁷ *White Guard* – белогвардеец

¹⁸⁸ *White Guard... immortality*: Pushkin died following a duel in January 1837 with Georges d'Anthès (1812–95), whose social position as the adopted son of an ambassador made him the pre-revolutionary equivalent of an anti-Bolshevik White Guard. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

¹⁸⁹ to bustle about – суетиться

¹⁹⁰ *Asian skullcap* – тюрбетейка

¹⁹¹ *Abrau*: Abrau Durso is a North Caucasian sparkling wine. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

“Archibald Archibaldovich, could I have a drop of vodka?” The pirate pulled a sympathetic face and whispered:

“I understand... this very minute...” and waved to a waiter.

A quarter of an hour later, Ryukhin was sitting in total solitude, hunched over some fish and drinking one glass after another, understanding and admitting that it was no longer possible to rectify anything in his life: it was possible only to forget.

The poet had used up his night while others had feasted, and now he understood that it could not be returned to him. He only had to raise his head from the lamp up to the sky to realize that the night was irrevocably lost. The waiters were hurrying, tearing the tablecloths from the tables. The tomcats darting up and down beside the veranda had the look of morning. Inexorably the day was falling upon the poet.

7. A Bad Apartment

If next morning someone had said this to Styopa Likhodeyev: “Styopa! You’ll be shot if you don’t get up this very minute!” – Styopa would have replied in a languid, scarcely audible voice: “Shoot me, do with me what you will, but I shan’t get up.”

It seemed to him that he couldn’t open his eyes, let alone get up, because he only had to do so for lightning to flash and his head to be smashed to pieces at once. Inside that head a heavy bell was booming, brown spots with fiery green rims were swimming by between his eyeballs and his closed eyelids, and to crown it all, he felt nauseous, and it seemed, moreover, that this nausea was linked with the sounds of some importunate gramophone.

Styopa tried to call something to mind¹⁹², but there was only one thing that would come: that yesterday, there was no knowing where, he had apparently been standing with a napkin in his hand and trying to kiss some lady or other, while promising her that next day, and precisely at noon, he would pay her a visit. The lady had been declining this, saying: “No, no, I shan’t be at home!” – but Styopa had stubbornly insisted on having it his way¹⁹³: “Well, I shall just go and turn up!”

Styopa had absolutely no idea who the lady had been, or what time it was now, or what day of what month – and worst of all, he could not understand where he was. He attempted to elucidate this last point at least, and to do so he unstuck the glued-up lids of his left eye. In the semi-darkness there was something shining dimly. Styopa finally recognized a cheval glass, and realized he was lying on his back on his bed – that is, on the former jeweller’s wife’s bed – in his bedroom. At this point he received such a blow on the head that he closed his eye and began groaning.

Let us explain ourselves: Styopa Likhodeyev, the Director of the Variety Theatre, had come round in the morning at home, in the very apartment he had shared with the late Berlioz, in a large six-storey building shaped like the letter *pokoi*¹⁹⁴ on Sadovaya Street.

It should be said that this apartment – No. 50 – had already long enjoyed if not a bad, then in any event a strange reputation. Just two years before, its owner had been the widow of the jeweller De Fougeré. Anna Franzevna de Fougeré, a respectable and very businesslike fifty-year-old lady, had rented out three of her five rooms to lodgers: one whose name seems to have been Belomut and another with a name that has been lost.

And then, two years before, inexplicable things had started happening in the apartment: people had begun disappearing from this apartment without trace.

One day, on a holiday, a policeman appeared at the apartment, summoned the second lodger (whose name has been lost) into the entrance hall and said that the latter was requested to drop into the police station for a moment to sign for something. The lodger asked Anfisa, Anna Franzevna’s devoted and longtime maid, to say, in the event of anybody phoning him, that he would be back in ten minutes, and off he went with the correctly behaved policeman in white gloves. But not only did he not come back in ten minutes, he never came back at all. Most surprising of all is the fact that the policeman evidently disappeared along with him as well.

The pious – or to put it more candidly, the superstitious – Anfisa came straight out and declared to Anna Franzevna, who was most upset, that it was witchcraft, and that she knew very well who had stolen away both the lodger and the policeman – only, with night approaching, she did not want to say.

Well, and witchcraft, as is well known, only has to start, and then you simply can’t stop it with anything. That second lodger disappeared, if memory serves, on the Monday, and on the Wednesday

¹⁹² to call something to mind – вызывать в памяти

¹⁹³ to have it one’s way – настаивать

¹⁹⁴ *pokoi*: This refers to the letter that in Russian script looks like this: П. *Pokoi* can also mean “peace, quiet”. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

Belomut vanished into thin air – but under different circumstances, it is true. A car stopped by for him in the morning as usual, to take him to work, and it did take him away, but it brought nobody back, and it came back itself no more.

The grief and horror of Madame Belomut beggar description. But, alas, both the one and the other were short-lived. That same night, returning with Anfisa from the dacha, to which she had for some reason hurriedly gone away, Anna Franzevna found Citizeness Belomut no longer at the apartment. But that is not all: the doors of both the rooms which had been occupied by the Belomuts proved to have been sealed!

Somehow two days passed. And on the third day, Anna Franzevna, who had been suffering from insomnia all this time, went off to the dacha hurriedly once again... Does it need to be said that she did not come back?!

Anfisa, remaining on her own, cried and cried to her heart's content and went to bed after one o'clock in the morning. What happened to her afterwards is unknown, but the tenants in other apartments told how some sort of knocking was allegedly to be heard all through the night in No. 50, and the electric light was allegedly burning in the windows till morning. In the morning it became clear that Anfisa was not there either!

For a long time all sorts of legends were told in the building about those who had disappeared and about the apartment with a curse on it, such as, for example, that the dried-up and pious Anfisa had allegedly carried twenty-five large diamonds belonging to Anna Franzevna in a little chamois-leather pouch on her withered breast. And that there allegedly came to light of their own accord, in the firewood shed at that same dacha to which Anna Franzevna had been hurriedly going, some incalculable treasures in the form of those same diamonds, and also gold currency of tsarist coinage. And more of the same sort of thing. Well, what we don't know, we can't vouch for.

Whatever the case, the apartment stood empty and sealed for only a week, and then it was moved into by the late Berlioz and his wife and that same Styopa, also with his wife. It is perfectly natural that no sooner did they find themselves in the accursed apartment than the-devil-knows-what¹⁹⁵ began happening to them too. Namely, in the course of a single month both wives disappeared – but these two not without trace. Of Berlioz's wife it was said she had allegedly been seen in Kharkov with some ballet-master, while Styopa's wife is supposed to have come to light on Bozhedomka, where, as gossip had it, the Director of the Variety, exploiting his innumerable acquaintances, had contrived to procure a room for her, on the one condition that she should not show her face on Sadovaya Street...

And so Styopa began groaning. He wanted to call the maid, Grunya, and demand some pyramidon of her, but managed to grasp, after all, that this was stupid, that Grunya, of course, did not have any pyramidon.¹⁹⁶ He tried to call Berlioz to his assistance, twice groaned out: "Misha. Misha..." – but, as you can understand for yourselves, received no reply. The most complete silence reigned in the apartment.

Upon moving his toes, Styopa guessed he was lying in his socks, and he passed a shaky hand over his hip to decide whether or not he was wearing trousers, but could not decide. Finally, seeing that he was abandoned and alone, that there was no one to help him, he decided to get up, whatever the inhuman effort it cost.

Styopa unstuck his gummed-up eyelids and saw he was reflected in the cheval glass in the guise of a man with his hair poking out in all directions, with a swollen physiognomy covered in black stubble, with puffy eyes, and wearing a dirty shirt with a collar and a tie, long johns and socks.

That was how he saw himself in the cheval glass, but beside the mirror he saw a stranger, dressed in black and in a black beret.

¹⁹⁵ the-devil-knows-what – черт-те что

¹⁹⁶ pyramidon: a pain-reliever like aspirin. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

Styopa sat up on the bed and, as best he could, opened his bloodshot eyes wide at the stranger. The silence was broken by this stranger pronouncing in a low, heavy voice and with a foreign accent the following words:

“Good day, dearest Stepan Bogdanovich!”

There was a pause, after which, having made the most terrible effort with himself, Styopa said:

“What do you want?” and was himself amazed, not recognizing his own voice. The word “what” he had pronounced in a treble, “do you” in a bass, while “want” had not come out at all.

The stranger grinned amicably¹⁹⁷, took out a big gold watch with a diamond triangle on the case, let it ring eleven times and said:

“Eleven! And exactly an hour that I’ve been awaiting your awakening, for you gave me an appointment to be at your home at ten. And here I am!”

Styopa fumbled for his trousers on the chair beside the bed and whispered:

“Excuse me...” He put them on and asked hoarsely: “Tell me, please, your name?”

Talking was difficult for him. At every word someone was sticking a needle into his brain, causing hellish pain.

“What? You’ve forgotten my name as well?” here the stranger smiled.

“Forgive me,” wheezed Styopa, feeling that his hangover was favouring him with a new symptom: it seemed to him that the floor beside the bed had gone away somewhere and that this very minute he would fly head first to the Devil in the netherworld.

“Dear Stepan Bogdanovich,” began the visitor, smiling shrewdly, “no pyramidon is going to help you. Follow the wise old rule – take the hair of the dog. The only thing that will return you to life is two shots of vodka with something hot and spicy to eat.”

Styopa was a cunning man and, however ill he may have been, he grasped that, seeing as he had been caught like this, he had to admit everything.

“To be frank¹⁹⁸,” he began, scarcely in control of his tongue, “yesterday I had a little...”

“Not a word more!” the caller replied, and moved aside on the armchair.

With his eyes popping out, Styopa saw that on a little table a tray had been prepared, on which there were slices of white bread, a dish of pressed caviar, a plate of pickled boletuses, something in a little saucepan and, finally, vodka in the jeweller’s wife’s voluminous carafe¹⁹⁹. Styopa was particularly struck by the fact that the carafe was covered in condensation from the cold. That was understandable, though – it was standing in a slop basin packed with ice. It had all been laid out, in short, neatly and capably.

The stranger did not let Styopa’s astonishment develop to an unhealthy degree, and deftly poured him a half-shot of vodka.

“What about you?” squeaked Styopa.

“With pleasure!”

Styopa brought the glass up to his lips with a jerky hand, while the stranger swallowed the contents of his glass in a single breath. Munching a bit of caviar, Styopa squeezed out of himself the words:

“But what about you. something to eat with it?”

“My thanks, I never have anything to eat with it,” the stranger replied, and poured a second glass each. The saucepan was uncovered – it proved to²⁰⁰ hold sausages in tomato sauce.

And now the damned greenery in front of his eyes melted away, words began to be pronounced properly, and, most importantly, Styopa remembered one or two things. Namely, that yesterday’s

¹⁹⁷ to grin amicably – дружелюбно усмехаться

¹⁹⁸ to be frank – по правде говоря

¹⁹⁹ voluminous carafe – графин большого объема

²⁰⁰ to prove to do something – оказываться

doings had been at Skhodnya, at the dacha of Khustov, the sketch-writer, where this Khustov had taken Styopa in a taxicab. Even the way they had hired this taxicab near the Metropole came to mind: there had been some actor or something of the kind there too at the time... with a gramophone in a little suitcase. Yes, yes, yes, it had been at the dacha! And also, he seemed to recall, that gramophone had made the dogs howl. It was just the lady Styopa had wanted to kiss that remained unclarified. the devil knew who she was. she worked in radio, he thought, but maybe not.

The previous day was thus gradually being cleared up²⁰¹, but Styopa was now much more interested in the present one and, in particular, in the stranger's appearance in his bedroom, and with vodka and food to go with it, what's more. It wouldn't be a bad thing to clarify that.

"Well then, I hope you've remembered my name now?"

But Styopa only smiled bashfully and spread his hands.

"Well, really! I sense you were drinking port after the vodka! For pity's sake, how can you possibly do that!"

"I'd like to request that this should remain just between us," said Styopa in an ingratiating tone.

"Oh, of course, of course! But it goes without saying that I can't vouch for Khustov."

"So you know Khustov, then?"

"I caught a glimpse of that individual in your office yesterday, but one cursory glance at his face is sufficient to realize that he's a bastard, a troublemaker, a time-server and a toady."

"Quite correct!" thought Styopa, amazed at such a true, accurate and concise definition of Khustov.

Yes, the previous day was being pieced together, but even so, uneasiness was not abandoning the Director of the Variety. The thing was that in that previous day there yawned an absolutely enormous black hole. Now this here stranger in the beret, say whatever you like, Styopa had definitely not seen him in his office yesterday.

"Woland,²⁰² Professor of Black Magic," the caller said weightily, seeing Styopa's difficulties, and he recounted everything in order.

Yesterday afternoon he had arrived in Moscow from abroad, and had immediately presented himself to Styopa and proposed his temporary engagement at the Variety. Styopa had rung the Moscow District Spectacles Commission²⁰³ and submitted the question for approval (Styopa blenched and began blinking), had signed a contract with Professor Woland for seven shows (Styopa opened his mouth), had arranged that Woland should call on him to specify the details further at ten o'clock in the morning today... And so here Woland was. On arrival he had been met by the maid, Grunya, who had explained that she had only just arrived herself, that she was non-resident, that Berlioz was not at home, and that if the caller wished to see Stepan Bogdanovich, then he should go through into the bedroom himself. Stepan Bogdanovich was sleeping so soundly, she would not take it upon herself to wake him. Seeing the condition Stepan Bogdanovich was in, the artiste had sent Grunya to the nearest grocer's for the vodka and the food, to the chemist's for the ice, and.

"Allow me to settle up²⁰⁴ with you," the crushed Styopa whimpered, and began searching for his wallet.

"Oh, what nonsense!" exclaimed the touring artiste, and would hear no more of it.

And so the vodka and the food became clear, but all the same Styopa was a sad sight to see; he certainly could not remember anything about a contract, and had not seen this Woland on the previous day for the life of him. Yes, Khustov there had been, but Woland there had not.

"Permit me to take a look at the contract," Styopa requested quietly.

²⁰¹ to clear up gradually – постепенно проясняться

²⁰² *Woland*: Bulgakov may have taken this name from a demon's name (Woland) in *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²⁰³ **Moscow District Spectacles Commission** – Московская областная зрелищная комиссия

²⁰⁴ to settle up – рассчитываться

“Certainly, certainly...”

Styopa glanced at the document and went numb. Everything was in place. Firstly, Styopa’s devil-may-care²⁰⁵ signature in his own writing! A slanting inscription to the side in the hand of the Financial Director, Rimsky, with permission to pay out ten thousand roubles to the artiste Woland against the thirty-five thousand roubles due to him for seven performances. What is more, here too was Woland’s signature to the effect that he had already received the ten thousand!

“What on earth is this?” thought the unhappy Styopa, and his head began to spin. Is this the start of ominous memory lapses²⁰⁶?! But it goes without saying that after the contract had been produced, further expressions of surprise would have been simply improper. Styopa asked permission of his guest to absent himself for a moment, and just as he was, in his socks, he ran to the telephone in the hall. On the way he shouted in the direction of the kitchen:

“Grunya!”

But no one responded. At this point he glanced at the door of Berlioz’s study, which was next to the hall, and at this point he became, as they say, rooted to the spot. On the door handle he could make out the most enormous wax seal on a string.²⁰⁷ “Hello!” somebody roared inside Styopa’s head. “That’s all I need!” And at this point Styopa’s thoughts started running along what was now a double track, but, as is always the way during a catastrophe, in just the one direction and, all in all, the devil knows where. It is difficult even to convey the muddle inside Styopa’s head. There was this devilish business with the black beret, the cold vodka and the incredible contract – and now, to add to all that, if you please, a seal on the door! That is to say, tell anyone you like that Berlioz had done something wrong, and he wouldn’t believe it – honest to God, he would not believe it! And yet the seal, there it is! Yes, sir. Yes indeed...

And at this point there began to stir in Styopa’s brain some most unpleasant little thoughts about an article which, as ill luck would have it, he had recently forced upon Mikhail Alexandrovich to be printed in his journal. An idiotic article too, between ourselves! Pointless, and the money wasn’t much.

Following immediately upon the recollection of the article, the recollection came flying in of some dubious conversation that had taken place, as he recalled, on the twenty-fourth of April, in the evening, right here, in the dining room, while Styopa had been having dinner with Mikhail Alexandrovich. That is to say, of course, in the full sense of the word this conversation could not have been called dubious (Styopa would not have entered into such a conversation), but it had been a conversation on some needless subject. They could perfectly freely not have embarked upon it²⁰⁸ at all, Citizens. Before the seal, there is no doubt, that conversation could have been considered utterly trifling, but now, after the seal.

“Oh, Berlioz, Berlioz!” it came boiling up in Styopa’s head. “I just can’t believe it!”

But this was not the occasion to spend a long time grieving, and Styopa dialled the office number of the Variety’s Financial Director, Rimsky. Styopa’s position was a ticklish one: firstly, the foreigner might be offended by Styopa checking up on him after the contract had been shown, and talking to the Financial Director was extremely difficult too. After all, you really wouldn’t just ask him like this: “Tell me, did I draw up a contract with a Professor of Black Magic for thirty-five thousand roubles yesterday?” It wouldn’t do to ask like that!

“Yes!” Rimsky’s abrupt, unpleasant voice was heard in the receiver.

²⁰⁵ devil-may-care – залихватский, размашистый

²⁰⁶ memory lapses – провалы в памяти

²⁰⁷ *On the door handle, wax seal on a string*: This usually meant that someone had been arrested and their possessions had been sealed for further investigation. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²⁰⁸ to embark upon something – затевать разговор о ч.-л.

“Hello, Grigory Danilovich,” Styopa began quietly, “it’s Likhodeyev. Why I’m ringing is... hm. hm. I’ve got this. er... artiste Woland here with me. The thing is. I wanted to ask how things were with regard to this evening?”

“Ah, the black magician?” Rimsky responded in the receiver.

“The playbills will be here at any moment.”

“Aha,” said Styopa in a weak voice, “see you, then...”

“Will you be here soon?” asked Rimsky.

“In half an hour,” Styopa replied and, hanging up, squeezed his hot head in his hands. Oh, what a nasty business this was developing into! Whatever was the matter with his memory, Citizens? Eh?

However, it was awkward to linger in the hall any longer, and Styopa drew up a plan on the spot: use all possible means to conceal his unbelievable forgetfulness, and now, first and foremost, slyly enquire of the foreigner what he was actually intending to do in his show at the Variety, the theatre entrusted to Styopa.

At this point Styopa turned away from the telephone, and in the mirror located in the hall, which the lazy Grunya had not wiped for a long time, he distinctly saw a strange sort of character – lanky as a lath and wearing a pincenez (ah, if only Ivan Nikolayevich had been there! He would have recognized this character straight away!) But his reflection was there, and then immediately vanished. In alarm, Styopa looked a little deeper into the hall, and he was rocked for a second time, for there in the mirror the most strapping black cat passed by, then vanished too.

Styopa’s heart missed a beat; he reeled.

“What on earth is going on?” he thought. “I’m not losing my mind, am I? Where are these reflections coming from?” He looked into the hall and cried out in fright:

“Grunya! What’s this cat we’ve got wandering around²⁰⁹? Where’s it from? And someone else too?!”

“Don’t worry, Stepan Bogdanovich,” answered a voice, only not Grunya’s, but the guest’s from the bedroom. “The cat is mine. Don’t fret. And Grunya’s not here, I sent her off to Voronezh. She was complaining that you’d not given her any leave for a long time now.”

These words were so unexpected and absurd that Styopa decided he had misheard. In utter confusion he trotted to the bedroom and froze on the threshold. His hair stirred, and on his forehead there appeared a sprinkling of tiny drops of sweat.

The guest was no longer alone in the bedroom, but in company. In the second armchair sat that same fellow who had been seen dimly in the hall. Now he was clearly visible: a feathery moustache, one lens of the pince-nez gleaming and the other lens missing. But there proved to be even worse things in the bedroom: on the jeweller’s wife’s pouffe there lounged in a free-and-easy pose a third figure – namely, a black cat of awesome dimensions with a shot glass of vodka in one paw and a fork, on which he had managed to spear a pickled mushroom, in the other.

The light, weak in the bedroom as it was, began to fade completely in Styopa’s eyes. “So it turns out that this is how you go mad!” he thought, and grabbed hold of the doorpost.

“I see you’re a little surprised, dearest Stepan Bogdanovich?” enquired Woland of Styopa, whose teeth were chattering. “And yet there’s nothing to be surprised about. This is my retinue.”

At this point the cat drank the vodka, and Styopa’s hand slipped down the doorpost.

“And the retinue needs room,” continued Woland, “so there’s one too many of us here in the apartment. And it seems to me that the one too many... is specifically you!”

“Them, them!” the lanky one in checks began bleating like a goat, talking about Styopa in the plural. “Generally they’ve been acting like dreadful pigs of late. Drinking heavily, using their position

²⁰⁹ to wander around – шляться

to form liaisons with women, doing damn all – well, they can't actually do anything, because they don't understand a thing about what they're charged to do. Pulling the wool over their superiors' eyes²¹⁰!”

“He misuses an official car!” the cat snitched on him, chewing a mushroom.

And at this point there was a fourth and final appearance in the apartment, while Styopa, who had by now slipped down completely onto the floor, was scratching at the doorpost with a weakened hand.

Straight from the mirror of the cheval glass there emerged a small but unusually broad-shouldered man with a bowler hat on his head and, sticking out of his mouth, a fang, which disfigured a physiognomy that was already of unprecedented loathsomeness. And with fiery red hair besides.

“I,” this newcomer entered into the conversation, “don't understand at all how he came to be a director” – the red-headed man's voice became more and more nasal – “he's as much a director as I'm an archbishop!”

“You're nothing like an archbishop, Azazello,” remarked the cat, putting some sausages on his plate.

“That's what I'm saying,” said the red-headed man nasally and, turning to Woland, he added deferentially: “Will you allow us, Messire,²¹¹ to damn well chuck him out of Moscow²¹³?”

“Shoo!” the cat suddenly roared, with his fur standing on end.

And then the bedroom began spinning around Styopa, and he struck his head on the doorpost, and, as he lost consciousness, he thought: “I'm dying...”

But he did not die. Opening his eyes a little, he saw himself sitting on something made of stone. There was something making a noise all around him. When he opened his eyes up properly, he realized it was the sea making the noise and – even more than that – the waves were rising and falling right at his feet; in short, he was sitting at the very end of a mole; above him was the glittering blue sky and, behind, a white town in the mountains.

Not knowing how people behave in such situations, Styopa rose on shaky legs and set off down the mole towards the shore.

On the mole stood some man or other, smoking and spitting into the sea. He looked at Styopa wild-eyed, and stopped spitting.

Then Styopa came out with the following trick: he knelt down before the unknown smoker and uttered:

“Tell me, I beg you, what town is this?”

“Well, really!” said the heartless smoker.

“I'm not drunk,” replied Styopa hoarsely, “something's happened to me. I'm ill. Where am I? What town is it?”

“Well, it's Yalta.”

Styopa sighed quietly, toppled onto his side and struck his head on the warm stone of the mole. Consciousness left him.

²¹⁰ to pull the wool over one's eyes – втирать очки

²¹¹ *Messire*: “Sir” (French). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²¹² *Messire* – (*фр.*) Сэр, мессир

²¹³ to damn well chuck somebody out of – выкинуть ко всем чертям

8. The Duel between Professor and Poet

Just at the time when consciousness left Styopa in Yalta – that is, at about eleven thirty in the morning – it returned to Ivan Nikolayevich Bezdomny, who woke after a deep and prolonged sleep. It took him some time to grasp how it was he had ended up in an unknown room with white walls, with an astonishing bedside table made of some sort of bright metal and with a white blind, behind which he could sense the sun.

Ivan gave his head a shake, satisfied himself it did not ache, and remembered he was in a clinic. This thought pulled along with it the memory of Berlioz's death, but today it did not elicit any great shock in Ivan. After a good night's sleep, Ivan Nikolayevich had become a little calmer and begun thinking more clearly. Having lain motionless for some time in the cleanest of soft and comfortable sprung beds, Ivan saw a call button next to him. Out of a habit of touching objects needlessly, he pressed it. He expected some sort of ringing to follow the pressing of the button, or someone to arrive, but what happened was something else entirely.

At the foot of Ivan's bed, a matt cylinder on which was written "Drink" lit up. After standing still for some time, the cylinder began to turn until the inscription "Nurse" appeared. It goes without saying that the ingenious cylinder amazed Ivan. The inscription "Nurse" was replaced by the inscription "Call doctor".

"Hm," said Ivan, not knowing what to do next with this cylinder. But at this point by chance he had some luck: Ivan pressed the button a second time on the words "Medical attendant". The cylinder gave a quiet ring in response, it stopped, the light went out, and into the room came a plump, nice-looking woman in a clean white coat who said to Ivan:

"Good morning!"

Ivan did not reply, for he considered this greeting inappropriate in the circumstances. Indeed, they had confined a healthy man in a clinic, and were pretending, what's more, that that was the way things ought to be!

But in the mean time, without losing her good-humoured expression, the woman, with the aid of a single touch of a button, had drawn up the blind, and sunlight poured into the room through a light and wide-meshed grille that reached right down to the floor. Beyond the grille was revealed a balcony; beyond that was the bank of a winding river, and on its other bank... a cheerful pine wood.

"Come and take a bath," the woman invited him, and under her hands an inner wall opened up, behind which there proved to be a bathing area and a splendidly equipped lavatory.

Although he had decided not to talk to the woman, Ivan could not restrain himself and, seeing a broad stream of water gushing from a shining tap into a bath, he said with irony:

"Just look at that! Like in the Metropole!"

"Oh no," replied the woman with pride, "much better. Such equipment isn't to be found anywhere, not even abroad. Scientists and doctors come here specially to see our clinic. We have foreign tourists here every day."

At the words "foreign tourists" the consultant of the previous day immediately came to Ivan's mind. Ivan became gloomy, and looking out from under his brows he said:

"Foreign tourists. How you all adore foreign tourists! Yet you come across all sorts among them, you know. I met just such a one yesterday, for example, and it was really something to see!"

And he was on the point of telling²¹⁴ her about Pontius Pilate, but he contained himself, realizing these stories were nothing to this woman, and she could not help him anyway.

²¹⁴ to be on the point of doing something – начать было что-то делать

The washed Ivan Nikolayevich was straight away given absolutely everything a man requires after a bath: an ironed vest, long johns, socks. But that was not the end of it; opening the door of a little cupboard, the woman pointed inside it and asked:

“What would you like to put on – a dressing gown or pyjamas?”

Assigned to his new quarters by force, Ivan all but wrung his hands at the woman’s familiarity, and jabbed a finger in silence at the crimson flannelette pyjamas.

After this, Ivan Nikolayevich was led along an empty and soundless corridor and brought into a consulting room of the most enormous dimensions. Having decided to treat everything there was in this wonderfully equipped building with irony, there and then Ivan mentally christened the consulting room “the factory kitchen”.

And with good reason. Here stood cupboards and glass cabinets with shining nickel-plated instruments. There were chairs of extraordinarily complex construction, bulbous lamps with radiant shades, a multitude of phials and gas burners, and electric wires, and appliances that were completely unknown to anyone.

Three people set to work on Ivan in the consulting room – two women and one man, all wearing white. First and foremost they led Ivan away into a corner behind a table, with the clear aim of finding something out from him.

Ivan started thinking the situation over. Before him were three paths. The first was extremely tempting: to launch himself at these lamps and intricate bits and pieces and smash up the whole damned lot of them, and thus express his protest at being detained for no reason. But today’s Ivan already differed significantly from the Ivan of the day before, and the first path seemed to him dubious: who knows, they might be confirmed in the notion that he was a violent madman. The first path Ivan therefore renounced. There was a second: to begin at once the narrative about the consultant and Pontius Pilate. However, the experience of the previous day showed that this tale was not believed, or was somehow understood in a distorted way. Ivan therefore rejected that path too, deciding to choose the third: to retreat into proud silence.

He did not manage to realize this completely, being obliged to reply, like it or not – albeit both sparingly and gloomily – to a whole series of questions. And Ivan was asked about absolutely everything regarding his past life, right down to when and how he had been ill with scarlet fever some fifteen years before. When a whole page had been covered in writing down what Ivan had said, it was turned over, and a woman in white moved on to questions about Ivan’s relatives. A long-drawn-out sort of²¹⁵ procedure began: who had died, when and of what, did they drink, did they have venereal disease, and everything of that kind. In conclusion they asked him to tell them about the occurrence of the previous day at Patriarch’s Ponds, but they were very unexact, and were not surprised by the information about Pontius Pilate.

At this point the woman gave Ivan up to the man, and the latter set about him in a different way, no longer asking questions about anything. He took Ivan’s body temperature, measured his pulse and looked into Ivan’s eyes while shining some sort of lamp into them. Then the second woman came to help the man, and they pricked something, but not painfully, into Ivan’s back, they drew signs of some sort on the skin of his chest with the handle of a hammer, they hit him on the knees with hammers, which made Ivan’s legs jerk, they pricked his finger and took blood from it, they pricked him in the bend of his elbow, they put rubber bracelets of some kind on his arms...

Ivan merely grinned bitterly to himself and reflected on how stupidly and strangely it had all turned out. Just think! He had wanted to warn everyone of the danger threatened by the unknown consultant, had meant to catch him, but all he had achieved was ending up in some mysterious consulting room for the purpose of recounting all sorts of rubbish about Uncle Fyodor in Vologda being a binge-drinker. Insufferably stupid!

²¹⁵ a long-drawn-out sort of – канитель

Finally they let Ivan go. He was accompanied back to his room, where he was given a cup of coffee, two soft-boiled eggs and some white bread and butter.

Having eaten and drunk all he had been offered, Ivan decided to wait for someone of seniority in this establishment, and then to secure from this person of seniority both some attention for himself and justice.

And his wait for this person came to an end, very soon after his breakfast too. The door of Ivan's room opened unexpectedly, and in came a host of people in white coats. Ahead of them all walked a man of about forty-five, carefully shaved like an actor, with pleasant but very piercing eyes and polite manners. His entire retinue was rendering him signs of attention and respect, and his entrance therefore had a very ceremonial effect. "Like Pontius Pilate!" it occurred to Ivan.

Yes, this was undoubtedly the senior man. He sat down on a stool, while everyone else remained standing.

"Dr Stravinsky," the man who had sat down introduced himself to Ivan, and gave him an amicable look.

"Here, Alexander Nikolayevich," said someone with a neat little beard in a low voice, and handed the senior man Ivan's sheet of paper, completely covered in writing.

"They've cobbled together a whole case²¹⁶!" thought Ivan. And the senior man ran his practised eyes over the sheet, muttered: "Aha, aha..." and exchanged a few phrases in a little-known language with his entourage.

'And he speaks in Latin, like Pilate.' thought Ivan sadly. Just then one word made him start, and it was the word "schizophrenia" – already uttered, alas, on the previous day by the accursed foreigner at Patriarch's Ponds, and repeated here today by Professor Stravinsky.

"And he knew that too!" thought Ivan in alarm.

The senior man had evidently made it a rule to agree with everything and be pleased at everything his entourage might say to him, and to express this with the words "super, super."

"Super!" said Stravinsky, returning the sheet to somebody, and he turned to Ivan: "You're a poet?"

"I am," Ivan replied gloomily, and for the first time suddenly felt an inexplicable kind of revulsion for poetry, and what came to mind straight away of his own verse seemed for some reason unpleasant.

Wrinkling up his face, he in his turn asked Stravinsky:

"Are you a professor?"

To this Stravinsky inclined his head with obliging courtesy.

"And are you the senior man here?" continued Ivan.

Stravinsky bowed to this too.

"I need to talk to you," said Ivan Nikolayevich meaningfully.

"That's what I'm here for," Stravinsky responded.

"The thing is this," began Ivan, sensing that his moment had come, "they've dressed me up as a madman and no one wants to listen to me!"

"Oh no, we'll hear you out very attentively," said Stravinsky seriously and reassuringly, "and on no account will we allow you to be dressed up as a madman."

"Well, listen then: yesterday evening at Patriarch's Ponds I met a mysterious person, possibly a foreigner, who knew in advance about Berlioz's death and had personally seen Pontius Pilate."

The retinue listened to the poet in silence and without stirring.

"Pilate? Pilate, that's the one who was alive at the time of Jesus Christ?" asked Stravinsky, squinting at Ivan.

"The very same."

²¹⁶ to cobble a case – «сшить» дело

“Aha,” said Stravinsky, “and this Berlioz died under a tram?”

“And he was the very one that was killed by a tram in front of me yesterday at Patriarch’s; what’s more, this same enigmatic citizen...”

“Pontius Pilate’s acquaintance?” asked Stravinsky, who was evidently notable for his great insight.

“Precisely,” Ivan confirmed, studying Stravinsky. “So he’d said in advance that Annushka had spilt the sunflower oil. And he did slip on exactly that spot! How do you like that?” enquired Ivan meaningfully, hoping to create a great effect with his words.

But that effect did not ensue, and Stravinsky very simply asked the next question:

“And who’s this Annushka, then?”

This question rather upset Ivan, and he pulled a face.

“Annushka is of no importance whatsoever,” he said fretfully, “the devil knows who she is. Simply some idiot from Sadovaya. The important thing is that he knew in advance – do you understand? – in advance, about the sunflower oil! Do you understand me?”

“I understand perfectly,” replied Stravinsky seriously and, touching the poet’s knee, he added: “Don’t get agitated, carry on.”

“I shall,” said Ivan, trying to hit the same note as Stravinsky, and already aware from bitter experience that calmness alone would help him. “And so this terrible character – and he’s lying about being a consultant – possesses some sort of extraordinary power. For example, you chase after²¹⁷ him, but there’s no chance of catching up with him. And there’s another pair with him, and they’re fine ones too, but in their own ways: some lanky man in broken glasses and, on top of that, a tomcat of unbelievable size that can ride on a tram all by itself. On top of that” – uninterrupted, Ivan spoke with ever greater ardour and conviction – “he personally was on Pontius Pilate’s balcony, there’s no doubt whatsoever of that. I mean, what on earth is going on? Eh? He needs to be arrested immediately, otherwise he’ll bring about indescribable calamities.”

“And so what you’re doing is trying to have him arrested? Have I understood you correctly?” asked Stravinsky.

“He’s clever,” thought Ivan, “you’ve got to admit that uncommonly clever people do turn up among intellectuals too. It can’t be denied,” and he replied:

“Quite correctly! And how could I fail to try, just think for yourself! And in the mean time they’ve detained me here by force; they poke a lamp in my eye, give me a bath, ask me lots of things about Uncle Fedya!... And he’s long gone from the world! I demand to be released immediately!”

“Well then, super, super!” Stravinsky responded. “So everything’s been cleared up. Indeed, what point is there in detaining a healthy man in the clinic? Very well. I’ll discharge you from here straight away if you’ll tell me you’re sane. Not prove it, but just tell me. And so, are you sane?”

At this point complete silence fell, and the fat woman who had looked after Ivan in the morning gazed reverentially at the Professor, while Ivan thought once again: “Positively clever.”

He liked the Professor’s proposition very much, but before answering, he thought long and hard, wrinkling his brow, and finally said firmly:

“I am sane.”

“Well, that’s super then,” exclaimed Stravinsky in relief, “and if that’s the case, let’s do some logical reasoning. Let’s take the day you spent yesterday” – here he turned and was immediately handed Ivan’s sheet of paper. “In the search for the stranger who introduced himself to you as an acquaintance of Pontius Pilate you yesterday performed the following actions” – here Stravinsky began unfolding his long fingers, looking now at the paper, now at Ivan – “you hung an icon on your chest. Yes?”

“Yes,” Ivan agreed gloomily.

²¹⁷ to chase after somebody – гнаться за к.-л.

“You fell off a fence, injured your face. Right? Turned up at a restaurant with a lighted candle in your hand in nothing but your underwear, and in the restaurant you hit someone. You were brought here tied up. Finding yourself here, you telephoned the police and asked them to send machine guns. Then you made an attempt to throw yourself out of a window. Right? Is it possible, one asks, acting in this way, to catch or arrest anyone? And if you are a sane person, you will yourself reply: certainly not. You wish to leave here? Please do. But permit me to ask you: where you will head for?”

“A police station, of course,” replied Ivan, no longer so firmly, and becoming a little confused under the Professor’s gaze.

“Directly from here?”

“Aha.”

“And you won’t drop by your apartment²¹⁸?” Stravinsky asked quickly.

“There’s no time to drop by now! While I’m going round apartments, he’ll slip away!”

“Right. And what will you say first of all at the police station?”

“About Pontius Pilate,” replied Ivan Nikolayevich, and a murky haze clouded his eyes.

“Well, that’s super then!” exclaimed Stravinsky, quite won over, and, turning to the man with the little beard, he ordered: “Fyodor Vasilyevich, please discharge Citizen Bezdomny into town. But keep this room unoccupied, and there’s no need to change the bedclothes. Citizen Bezdomny will be back here in two hours’ time. Well, then,” he addressed the poet, “I shan’t wish you success, because I don’t believe in that success one iota. See you soon!” And he got up, and his retinue stirred.

“On what grounds will I be back here?” asked Ivan in alarm.

As if he had been expecting the question, Stravinsky sat down immediately and began:

“On the grounds that as soon as you appear at a police station in your long johns and say you’ve met a man who personally knew Pontius Pilate, you’ll be brought here instantly, and again you’ll find yourself in this very same room.”

“What have long johns got to do with it?” asked Ivan, looking around in dismay.

“It’s mainly Pontius Pilate. But it’s the long johns too. After all, we’ll take the institution’s linen off you and issue you with your own attire. And you were delivered to us wearing long johns. And in the mean time you weren’t intending to stop by at your apartment at all, although I even dropped you a hint about it. Next will come Pilate... and that’s your lot!”

At this point something strange happened to Ivan Nikolayevich. It was as if his will had broken, and he felt that he was weak, that he needed advice.

“So what’s to be done?” he asked, only this time timidly.

“Well, that’s super then!” responded Stravinsky. “That’s a most reasonable question. Now I’ll tell you what’s actually happened to you. Yesterday somebody very much frightened and upset you with a story about Pontius Pilate and with some other things. And then, over-fretful and overstrained, you went around town talking about Pontius Pilate. It’s perfectly natural that you’re taken for a madman. Your salvation now lies in one thing alone – complete peace. And it’s absolutely essential you remain here.”

“But he must be caught!” exclaimed Ivan, now imploringly.

“Very well, but why run around yourself? Set out on paper all your suspicions and accusations against this man. Nothing could be simpler than to send your statement on to where it needs to go – and if, as you suppose, we’re dealing with a criminal, it will all be cleared up very soon. But just one condition: don’t strain your head, and try not to think about Pontius Pilate too much. People can go around telling all sorts of stories! But you don’t have to believe everything!”

“Got it!” declared Ivan decisively. “Please issue me with a pen and paper.”

“Issue paper and a short pencil,” Stravinsky ordered the fat woman, but to Ivan he said: “Only, I don’t advise you to write today.”

²¹⁸ to drop by apartment – зайти к себе

“No, no, today, it’s got to be today,” Ivan cried anxiously.

“Well, all right. Only don’t strain your brain. If it doesn’t come out right today, it will tomorrow.”

“He’ll get away!”

“Oh no,” retorted Stravinsky confidently, “he won’t get away anywhere, I guarantee it. And remember that here you’ll be helped by every means, but without that help nothing will come out right for you. Do you hear me?” Stravinsky asked meaningfully all of a sudden²¹⁹, and seized both of Ivan Nikolayevich’s hands. Taking them in his own and staring straight into Ivan’s eyes, for a long time he repeated: “You’ll be helped here... do you hear me?... You’ll be helped here... You’ll get relief. It’s quiet here, everything’s peaceful. You’ll be helped here.”

Ivan Nikolayevich unexpectedly yawned, his facial expression softened.

“Yes, yes,” he said quietly.

“Well, that’s super then!” Stravinsky concluded the conversation in his customary way and rose. “Goodbye!” he shook Ivan’s hand and, already on his way out, turned to the man with the little beard and said: “Yes, and try oxygen... and baths.”

A few moments later neither Stravinsky nor his retinue was in front of Ivan. Beyond the grille at the window, in the midday sun, the joyous and vernal wood stood out vividly on the far bank, while a little closer there glistened the river.

²¹⁹ all of a sudden – внезапно

9. Korovyev's Tricks

Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, Chairman of the Housing Association of No. 302 *bis* on Sadovaya Street in Moscow – where the late Berlioz had been resident – had been having the most dreadfully busy time, starting from the previous night, between Wednesday and Thursday.

At midnight, as we already know, the commission of which Zheldybin was a part came to the building, summoned Nikanor Ivanovich, informed him of Berlioz's death, and set off with him for apartment No. 50.

There the sealing of the dead man's manuscripts and property was carried out. Neither Grunya, the maid, who lived out, nor the frivolous Stepan Bogdanovich was in the apartment at that time. The commission announced to Nikanor Ivanovich that it would take the dead man's manuscripts away for sorting, that his living space – that is, three rooms (the jeweller's wife's former study, living room and dining room) – was to pass into the hands of the Housing Association and that his property was subject to storage in the space referred to pending the announcement of the heirs.

The news of Berlioz's death spread throughout the entire building with a sort of supernatural speed, and from seven o'clock in the morning of the Thursday people began ringing Bosoi on the telephone and then also appearing in person with statements containing claims to the dead man's living space. And in the course of two hours Nikanor Ivanovich received thirty-two such statements.

In them were included entreaties, threats, slanders, denunciations, promises to carry out refurbishment at people's own expense, references to unbearably crowded conditions and the impossibility of living in the same apartment as villains. Among other things, there was a description, stunning in its artistic power, of the theft of some ravioli, which had been stuffed directly into a jacket pocket, in apartment No. 31, two vows to commit suicide and one confession to a secret pregnancy.

People called Nikanor Ivanovich out into the hallway of his apartment, took him by the sleeve, whispered things to him, winked and promised not to remain in his debt²²⁰.

This torment continued until just after midday, when Nikanor Ivanovich simply fled from his apartment to the House Committee's office by the gates, but when he saw they were lying in wait for him there too, he ran away from there as well. Having somehow beaten off those who followed on his heels across the asphalted courtyard, Nikanor Ivanovich gave them the slip in entrance No. 6 and went up to the fourth floor, which was where this damned apartment No. 50 was located.

After recovering his breath²²¹ on the landing, the corpulent Nikanor Ivanovich rang the bell, but nobody opened the door to him. He rang again and then again, and started grumbling and quietly cursing. But even then nobody opened up. Nikanor Ivanovich's patience cracked, and, taking from his pocket a bunch of duplicate keys that belonged to the House Committee, he opened the door with his masterful hand and went in.

"Hey, housemaid!" shouted Nikanor Ivanovich in the semidarkness of the hallway. "What's your name? Grunya, is it? Are you here?"

No one responded.

Nikanor Ivanovich then got a folding measuring rod from his briefcase, after that freed the study door from its seal, and took a stride into the study. Take a stride he certainly did, but he stopped in astonishment in the doorway and even gave a start.

At the dead man's desk sat a stranger – a skinny, lanky citizen in a little checked jacket, a jockey's cap and a pince-nez... well, in short, him.

"Who would you be, Citizen?" asked Nikanor Ivanovich in fright.

²²⁰ to remain in debt – оставаться в долгу

²²¹ to recover breath – перевести дух

“Well I never! Nikanor Ivanovich!” yelled the unexpected citizen in a jangling tenor, and, leaping up, he greeted the Chairman with a forcible and sudden handshake. This greeting did not gladden Nikanor Ivanovich in the slightest.

“I’m sorry,” he began suspiciously, “who would you be? Are you someone official?”

“Oh dear, Nikanor Ivanovich!” exclaimed the stranger earnestly. “What is someone official or someone unofficial? It all depends on the point of view you look at the matter from. It’s all variable and conditional, Nikanor Ivanovich. Today I’m someone unofficial, but tomorrow, lo and behold²²², I’m official! And sometimes it’s the other way round, and how!”

This disquisition did not satisfy the Chairman of the House Committee in the slightest. Being by nature a suspicious man generally, he concluded that the citizen expatiating before him was actually someone unofficial, and quite likely had no business being there.

“Just who would you be? What’s your name?” asked the Chairman more and more sternly, and he even began advancing on the stranger.

“My name,” responded the citizen, quite undismayed by the sternness, “is, well, let’s say Korovyev. Would you like a bite to eat, Nikanor Ivanovich? No standing on ceremony! Eh?”

“I’m sorry,” began the now indignant Nikanor Ivanovich, “what talk can there be of food!” (It must be admitted, unpleasant as it might be, that Nikanor Ivanovich was by nature somewhat on the rude side.) “Sitting in a dead man’s rooms isn’t allowed! What are you doing here?”

“Won’t you take a seat, Nikanor Ivanovich?” yelled the citizen, completely unabashed, and began fussing around, offering the Chairman an armchair.

In an absolute fury, Nikanor Ivanovich refused the armchair and shrieked:

“Just who are you?”

“I am acting, don’t you know, as interpreter to a foreign personage who has his residence in this Kpartment,” said the man who had called himself Korovyev by way of introduction, and he clicked the heel of his unpolished, ginger-coloured boot.

Nikanor Ivanovich let his jaw drop²²³. The presence in this apartment of some sort of foreigner, with an interpreter besides, was the most complete surprise for him, and he demanded explanations.

The interpreter explained willingly. The foreign artiste, Mr Woland, had been kindly invited by the Director of the Variety, Stepan Bogdanovich Likhodeyev, to spend the period of his engagement, approximately a week, in his apartment, about which he had already written to Nikanor Ivanovich the day before, with a request to arrange temporary registration for the foreigner while Likhodeyev himself went away to Yalta.

“He hasn’t written anything to me,” said the Chairman in amazement.

“You have a rummage-around in your briefcase, Nikanor Ivanovich,” Korovyev suggested sweetly.

Shrugging his shoulders, Nikanor Ivanovich opened his briefcase and inside it discovered Likhodeyev’s letter.

“How can I possibly have forgotten about it?” mumbled Nikanor Ivanovich, gazing obtusely at the opened envelope.

“These things happen, these things happen, Nikanor Ivanovich!” Korovyev began jabbering. “Absent-mindedness, absent-mindedness and exhaustion, and high blood pressure, Nikanor Ivanovich, dear friend of ours! I’m dreadfully absentminded myself. I’ll tell you a few facts from my life story over a glass sometime – you’ll die laughing!”

“And when is Likhodeyev going to Yalta?”

²²² lo and behold – глядишь; Глядь!

²²³ to let jaw drop – открыть рот

“He’s already gone, he’s gone!” cried the interpreter. “He’s already on his way, you know! He’s already the devil knows where!” and here the interpreter began waving his arms about like the sails of a windmill²²⁴.

Nikanor Ivanovich declared it was essential for him to see the foreigner in person, but to this he got a refusal from the interpreter: quite impossible. Busy. Training the cat.

“The cat I can show you, if you wish,” offered Korovyev.

Nikanor Ivanovich refused this in his turn, but the interpreter immediately put to the Chairman an unexpected, yet extremely interesting proposal.

In view of the fact that Mr Woland did not wish to stay in a hotel at any price, and was accustomed to expansive living, would the House Committee not let to him for a week, for the duration of Woland’s engagement in Moscow, the whole of the apartment – that is, the rooms of the dead man too?

“After all, it doesn’t matter to him, the dead man,” whispered Korovyev hoarsely. “This apartment, you must agree, Nikanor Ivanovich, is no use²²⁵ to him now.”

Nikanor Ivanovich objected, in something of a quandary²²⁶, that, well, foreigners were supposed to stay at the Metropole, and certainly not in private apartments...

“I’m telling you, he’s as capricious as the devil knows what!” began Korovyev in a whisper. “He just doesn’t want to! He doesn’t like hotels! I’ve had them up to here, these foreign tourists!” Korovyev complained intimately, jabbing a finger at his sinewy neck. “Can you believe it, they’ve worn me out! They come here. and they’ll either do a load of spying, like the worst sons of bitches, or else they’ll get you down with their caprices: this isn’t right, and that isn’t right! But for your Association, Nikanor Ivanovich, it’ll be entirely beneficial and obviously profitable. And the money won’t hold him back²²⁷.” Korovyev looked around, and then whispered in the Chairman’s ear: “A millionaire!”

There was clear, practical sense in the interpreter’s proposal; the proposal was very sound, but there was something amazingly unsound in the way the interpreter spoke and in his clothing, and in that loathsome, utterly useless pince-nez. As a consequence of this, there was some vague thing tormenting the Chairman’s soul, yet he nonetheless decided to accept the proposal. The fact of the matter is that the Housing Association was, alas, very much in deficit. Oil for the central heating needed to be laid in before the autumn, and where the money was to come from was unclear. But with the foreign tourist’s money they could quite likely manage.

Still, the businesslike and cautious Nikanor Ivanovich declared that first of all he would have to tie things up²²⁸ with the Foreign Tourist Office.

“I understand!” exclaimed Korovyev. “It’s got to be tied up! Without fail! Here’s the telephone, Nikanor Ivanovich, you tie things up straight away! And regarding the money, don’t be shy,” he added in a whisper, drawing the Chairman towards the telephone in the hall, “who on earth are you to take from, if not him? If you could see what a villa he has in Nice! When you go abroad next summer, make a special trip to take a look – you’ll be amazed!”

The business with the Foreign Tourist Office was settled over²²⁹ the telephone with an extraordinary speed that staggered the Chairman. It turned out that they already knew there of Mr Woland’s intention to stay in Likhodeyev’s private apartment, and had not the slightest objection to it.

“Well, marvellous!” yelled Korovyev.

²²⁴ the sails of a windmill – мельничные крылья

²²⁵ be no use – ни к чему; бесполезный

²²⁶ in something of a quandary – в некотором недоумении

²²⁷ to hold somebody back – сдерживать к.-л.

²²⁸ to tie things up – увязать вопрос

²²⁹ to settle over the business – уладить дело

Somewhat battered by his jabbering, the Chairman declared that the Housing Association agreed to let apartment No. 50 to the artiste Woland for a week for a payment of... Nikanor Ivanovich stumbled a little and said:

“For five hundred roubles a day.”

At this point Korovyev stunned the Chairman conclusively. With a furtive wink in the direction of the bedroom, from where the soft jumping of a heavy cat could be heard, he croaked:

“So, over a week, that works out as three and a half thousand?”

Nikanor Ivanovich thought he would add on: “Well, that’s quite an appetite you have there, Nikanor Ivanovich!” but Korovyev said something else entirely:

“What sort of sum is that? Ask for five, he’ll give it.”

Smirking in bewilderment, Nikanor Ivanovich himself failed to notice how he came to be at the dead man’s desk, where Korovyev, with the greatest speed and dexterity, drew up two copies of a contract. After that he flew into the bedroom with it and returned, whereupon both copies proved already to have been signed with a flourish by the foreigner. The Chairman too signed the contract. Here Korovyev asked for a receipt for five...

“In full, in full, Nikanor Ivanovich!.. Thousand roubles...” And with the words, unsuitable somehow for a serious matter, “*Eins, zwei, drei!*”²³⁰²³¹ he laid out five wads of nice new banknotes for the Chairman.

Counting took place, interspersed with Korovyev’s little jokes and silly remarks, such as “cash loves to be counted”²³², “your own eye’s the best spy”²³³ and others of a similar kind.

When he had finished counting the money, the Chairman received the foreigner’s passport from Korovyev for the temporary registration, put it, and the contract, and the money away in his briefcase, and, somehow unable to restrain himself, asked bashfully for a complimentary ticket.

“Why of course!” roared Korovyev. “How many do you want, Nikanor Ivanovich, twelve, fifteen?”

The stunned Chairman explained that he only needed a couple of tickets, for himself and Pelageya Antonovna, his wife.

Korovyev immediately whipped out a notepad and dashed off²³⁴ a complimentary pass for two persons in the front row for Nikanor Ivanovich. And with his left hand the interpreter deftly thrust this pass upon Nikanor Ivanovich, while with his right he placed in the Chairman’s other hand a thick wad that made a crackling noise. Casting a look at it, Nikanor Ivanovich blushed deeply and began pushing it away.

“That’s not appropriate...” he mumbled.

“I simply won’t hear of it,” Korovyev started whispering right in his ear. “It’s not appropriate here, but it is among foreigners. You’ll offend him, Nikanor Ivanovich, and that’s awkward. You took the trouble”²³⁵...

“It’s strictly prohibited,” whispered the Chairman very, very quietly, and he looked behind him.

“And where are the witnesses?” Korovyev whispered in the other ear. “I’m asking you, where are they? What’s the matter?”

It was then, as the Chairman subsequently maintained, that a miracle took place: the wad crawled into his briefcase all by itself. And next, somehow weak and even worn out, the Chairman found himself on the stairs. A whirlwind of thoughts was raging in his head. There, spinning around,

²³⁰ “*Eins, zwei, drei!*” – (нем.) «Раз, два, три!»

²³¹ *Eins, zwei, drei*: “One, two, three” (German). (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

²³² cash loves to be counted – деньги счет любят

²³³ your own eye’s the best spy – (разг.) «свой глазок-смотрок»

²³⁴ to dash off – выписывать

²³⁵ to take the trouble – хлопотать, трудиться

were that villa in Nice and the trained cat, and the thought that there had indeed been no witnesses, and that Pelageya Antonovna would be pleased about the complimentary tickets. They were incoherent thoughts, but, all in all, pleasant ones. And nevertheless, from time to time, somewhere in the very depths of his soul some sort of needle would prick the Chairman. This was the needle of disquiet. Apart from that, right there on the stairs the Chairman was struck, as if by a seizure, by the thought: “But how on earth did the interpreter get into the study if there was a seal on the doors?! And how had he, Nikanor Ivanovich, not asked about it?” For some time the Chairman gazed like a lost sheep at the steps of the staircase, but then he decided to give it up as a bad job and not torment himself with such a complicated question.

As soon as the Chairman had left the apartment, a low voice was heard from the bedroom:

“I didn’t like that Nikanor Ivanovich. He’s a rogue and a cheat²³⁶. Can something be done so he doesn’t come here again?”

“Messire, you only have to give the order!” Korovyev responded from somewhere, only not in a jangling, but in a very clear and sonorous voice.

And straight away the accursed interpreter turned up in the hall, dialled a number there and began speaking for some reason very piteously into the receiver:

“Hello! I consider it my duty to inform you that the Chairman of our Housing Association at No. 302 *bis* on Sadovaya, Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi, is speculating in foreign currency.²³⁷ At the present moment in his apartment, No. 35, there’s four hundred dollars wrapped in newspaper in the ventilation pipe in the lavatory. This is Timofei Kvastsov speaking, a tenant from apartment No. 11 of the aforesaid building. But I conjure you to keep my name a secret. I fear the revenge of the aforementioned Chairman.”

And he hung up, the villain!

What happened thereafter in apartment No. 50 is unknown, but what happened at Nikanor Ivanovich’s is known. Locking himself in his lavatory, he pulled the wad thrust upon him by the interpreter from his briefcase and checked that there were four hundred roubles in it. Nikanor Ivanovich wrapped this wad in a scrap of newspaper and stuck it into the ventilation passage.

Five minutes later the Chairman was sitting at the table in his little dining room. His wife brought in from the kitchen a neatly sliced herring, liberally sprinkled with spring onion. Nikanor Ivanovich poured out a wineglassful of vodka, drank it, poured out a second, drank it, caught up three pieces of herring on his fork... and just then there was a ring. But Pelageya Antonovna brought in a steaming saucepan, from a single glance at which it could immediately be guessed that inside, at the heart of the fiery borsch, was to be found the thing than which there is nothing more delicious in the world – a marrowbone.

Swallowing his saliva, Nikanor Ivanovich started growling like a dog:

“The devil take you! They don’t let you have a bite to eat. Don’t let anyone in – I’m out, out. Regarding the apartment, tell them to stop hanging around. There’ll be a meeting in a week.”

His wife ran into the hall, while Nikanor Ivanovich, with a serving spoon, dragged *it*, the bone, now cracked along its length, out of the fire-spitting lake. And at that moment into the dining room came two citizens, and with them Pelageya Antonovna, for some reason very pale. One glance at the citizens, and Nikanor Ivanovich turned white as well and stood up.

“Where’s the loo?” asked the first man, concerned, and wearing a traditional white Russian shirt.

Something made a bang on the dining table (Nikanor Ivanovich had dropped the spoon onto the oilcloth).

“Here, here,” Pelageya Antonovna replied rapidly.

²³⁶ a rogue and a cheat – выжиг и плут

²³⁷ *speculating in foreign currency*: Speculating in foreign currency was illegal under Soviet law. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

And the callers immediately headed for the corridor.

“But what’s the matter?” Nikanor Ivanovich asked quietly, following after the callers. “There can’t be anything untoward in our apartment. And your papers. I’m sorry...”

Without stopping, the first man showed Nikanor Ivanovich his papers, while at that same moment the second proved to be standing on a stool in the lavatory with his arm stuck into the ventilation passage. Nikanor Ivanovich’s eyes grew dim. The newspaper was removed, but in the wad there turned out to be not roubles, but some unknown currency, blue or green, and with pictures of some old man. Nikanor Ivanovich made it all out only vaguely, however, as he had spots of some sort swimming before his eyes.

“Dollars in the ventilation,” the first man said pensively, and asked Nikanor Ivanovich gently and politely: “Your little package?”

“No!” replied Nikanor Ivanovich in a terrible voice. “Planted by enemies!”

“It happens,” he, the first one, agreed, and, once again gently, he added: “Well then, you must hand in the rest.”

“I haven’t got any! I haven’t, I swear to God, I’ve never had them in my hands!” the Chairman exclaimed despairingly.

He rushed to the chest of drawers, pulled out a drawer with a crash, and from it his briefcase, exclaiming incoherently as he did so:

“Here’s the contract... that snake of an interpreter planted them... Korovyev. in the pince-nez!”

He opened the briefcase, looked into it, stuck his hand into it, turned blue in the face and dropped the briefcase into the borsch. There was nothing in the briefcase: not Styopa’s letter, nor the contract, nor the foreigner’s passport, nor the money, nor the complimentary tickets. In short, nothing except a folding measuring rod.

“Comrades!” cried the Chairman in a frenzy. “Arrest them! We’ve got unclean spirits in our building!”

And then at that point Pelageya Antonovna imagined who knows what; she clasped her hands together and exclaimed:

“Confess, Ivanych! You’ll get a reduction!”

With bloodshot eyes, Nikanor Ivanovich brought his fists up above his wife’s head, wheezing:

“Ooh, you damned fool!”

At this point he grew weak and dropped onto a chair, evidently deciding to submit to the inevitable²³⁸.

At the same time, on the staircase landing, Timofei Kondratyevich Kvastsov was pressing first his ear, then his eye to the keyhole of the door of the Chairman’s apartment, racked with curiosity.

Five minutes later, the residents of the building who were in the courtyard saw the Chairman, accompanied by two other persons, proceeding straight towards the gates of the building. They said Nikanor Ivanovich looked awful, that he was staggering like a drunken man as he passed by and was muttering something.

And another hour later, an unknown citizen came to apartment No. 11, at the very time when Timofei Kondratyevich was panting with pleasure as he told some other residents how the Chairman had been swept away; he beckoned with his finger for Timofei Kondratyevich to come out of the kitchen into the hall, said something to him, and together they disappeared.

²³⁸ to submit to the inevitable – покориться неизбежному

10. News from Yalta

At the time misfortune overtook Nikanor Ivanovich, in the office of the Financial Director of the Variety, Rimsky, not far from No. 302 *bis* and on that same Sadovaya Street, there were two men: Rimsky himself, and the Variety's manager, Varenuksa.

The large office on the first floor of the theatre looked out onto Sadovaya from two windows, and from another – right behind the back of the Financial Director, who was sitting at the desk – onto The Variety's summer garden, where there were refreshment bars, a shooting gallery and an open-air stage. The office's furnishing, besides the desk, consisted of a bundle of old playbills hanging on the wall, a small table with a carafe of water, four armchairs and a stand in a corner on which there stood an ancient dust-covered model of some revue. Well, and it goes without saying that, apart from all that, there was in the office a battered, peeling, fireproof safe of small size, to Rimsky's lefthand side, next to the desk.

Rimsky, sitting at the desk, had been in a bad frame of mind since first thing in the morning, while Varenuksa, in contrast, had been very animated and active in an especially restless sort of way. Yet at the same time there had been no outlet for his energy.

Varenuksa was now hiding in the Financial Director's office from the people seeking complimentary tickets, who made his life a misery, particularly on days when the programme changed. And today was just such a day.

As soon as the telephone started ringing, Varenuksa would pick up the receiver and lie into it: "Who? Varenuksa? He's not here. He's left the theatre."

"Will you please ring Likhodeyev again," said Rimsky irritably.

"But he isn't at home. I sent Karpov earlier. There's nobody at the apartment."

"The devil knows what's going on," hissed Rimsky, clicking away on the adding machine.

The door opened, and an usher dragged in a thick bundle of newly printed additional playbills. On the green sheets, in large red letters, was printed:

TODAY AND EVERY DAY
AT THE VARIETY THEATRE
AN ADDITION TO THE PROGRAMME
PROFESSOR WOLAND
PERFORMANCES OF BLACK MAGIC
WITH ITS COMPLETE EXPOSURE

Stepping back from the playbill he had thrown over the model, Varenuksa admired it for a moment and ordered the usher to have all copies pasted up immediately.

"It's good, garish," remarked Varenuksa after the usher's departure.

"Well, I find this undertaking displeasing in the extreme," grumbled Rimsky, casting malicious looks at the playbill through horn-rimmed spectacles, "and in general I'm surprised he's been allowed to put it on!"

"No, Grigory Danilovich, you can't say that: it's a very shrewd move. The whole point here is the exposure."

"I don't know, I don't know, there's no point here at all, and he'll always go thinking up something of the sort! He could at least have shown us this magician. You, have you seen him? Where he dug him up from the devil only knows!"

It transpired that Varenuksa, just like Rimsky, had not seen the magician. The day before, Styopa had come running ("like a madman" in Rimsky's expression) to the Financial Director with

a draft agreement already written, had ordered him there and then to copy it out and to issue the money. And this magician had cleared off²³⁹, and nobody had seen him except Styopa himself.

Rimsky took out his watch, saw that it said five past two, and flew into an absolute fury. Really! Likhodeyev had rung at about eleven o'clock, said he would be arriving in half an hour, and not only had he not arrived, he had also vanished from his apartment!

"My work's being held up²⁴⁰!" Rimsky was now growling, jabbing his finger at a heap of unsigned papers.

"He hasn't fallen under a tram, like Berlioz, has he?" said Vareukha, holding up to his ear a receiver in which could be heard ringing tones, rich, prolonged and completely hopeless.

"That would be a good thing, actually..." said Rimsky, scarcely audibly through his teeth.

At that very moment a woman came into the office wearing a uniform jacket, peaked cap, a black skirt and soft shoes. From a small bag on her belt the woman took a little white square and a notebook and asked:

"Who's Variety? Super-lightning for you. Signature."

Vareukha dashed off some sort of squiggle in the woman's notebook and, as soon as the door had slammed behind her, he opened up the little square.

Having read the telegram, he blinked his eyes a bit and passed the little square to Rimsky.

Printed in the telegram was the following: "Yalta. Moscow. Variety. Today half eleven appeared CID nightshirted trousered bootless mental brunet claimed Likhodeyev Director Variety. Lightning-wire Yalta CID whereabouts Director Likhodeyev."

"Well I never!" exclaimed Rimsky, and added: "Another surprise!"

"A False Dmitry,"²⁴¹ Vareukha said, and began speaking into the mouthpiece of the telephone: "Telegraph Office? The Variety's account. Take a super-lightning. Are you listening?. "Yalta CID. Director Likhodeyev Moscow. Financial Director Rimsky'."

Regardless of the communication about the impostor in Yalta, Vareukha once more set about hunting for Styopa on the telephone anywhere and everywhere, and naturally could find him nowhere.

At the precise time when Vareukha, holding the receiver in his hand, was pondering over where else he might phone, that same woman who had brought the first lightning telegram came in and handed Vareukha a new little envelope. Opening it hurriedly, Vareukha read through what was printed on it and then whistled.

"What else?" asked Rimsky with a nervous jerk.

Vareukha handed him the telegram in silence, and the Financial Director saw in it the words: "Implore believe. Cast Yalta by hypnosis Woland. Lightning-wire CID confirmation identity. Likhodeyev".

Rimsky and Vareukha reread the telegram with their heads touching, and when they had reread it, they stared at one another in silence.

"Citizens!" the woman suddenly grew angry. "Sign for it, and then you can be silent for as long as you like! It's lightning telegrams I'm delivering, you know."

Without taking his eyes off the telegram, Vareukha dashed off a wonky signature in the notebook and the woman disappeared.

"But you were talking to him on the telephone just after eleven?" began the manager in complete bewilderment.

²³⁹ to clear off – смываться, убираться

²⁴⁰ to hold up a work – дело задерживается, дело стоит

²⁴¹ *a False Dmitry*: Grigory Otrepyev became the figurehead for the opposition to the rule of Boris Godunov in 1604, when he claimed to be Dmitry, a son of Ivan the Terrible believed to have died in 1591. He was hailed as tsar after Godunov's death in 1605, but was deposed and killed the following year. (Комментарий И. Беспалова)

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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