

The Witch of Šatrija

SENAME COURTS

Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichnis¹
Goethe

As the red sunsets fade, the silver eyes of white roses² look at me through the window...
And I pick a single white rose, and press my hot forehead to the blossom... My mother! Do not your hands - white, loving, fragrant and soft - caress me so lovingly?
Aren't these your precious little hands? The ring has turned to tears...
And the silver eyes keep looking out the window. And waves of their scent weave an old golden dream.

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Beyond the forests, beyond the rivers, between the ravines and the hills, there is an old wooden manor house. Not tall, but long and wide, with a large porch, with white masts, full of affectionate corners, cosy and warm, a faithful host to all our joys and sorrows in its shelter. Before him is a large sleepy pond with mysterious depths, gilded in the evenings by the moon and the stars, and a garden that is singing, breathing, dreaming.

The garden lovingly clasps the pond and the palace to its broad chest - its faithful friend - and whispers to them some unfinished tales, some mysterious cases, some long, eternal greed. And then they listen, silent and thoughtful.

There is a small peninsula in the garden, jutting out into the pond, covered with spiral flowering bushes, and covered in flowers. On its shore grows a willow tree, the trunk of which, apparently cut off the other day, has put out three new trunks and formed a sort of armchair, where one can sit very comfortably reclining. Kana kados found that corner with her mother. Mamata cut my letter on one of the vertebrae and said:

- This is your armchair now, Irusia. And when you sit here, remember your mother, and only good and beautiful thoughts

¹ *All that time burns away -
Symbol alone.*

These are the two lines at the end of Johann Wolfgang Goethe's "Faust", the "Mystical Chorus".

² *Rose* - in Christian symbolism, most often associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary, sometimes referred to as the rose without thorns. The white rose represents chastity.

"In cultural emblematics, the rose is associated with perfection, fullness. The rose is associated with the heart, love. The white rose contrasts with the red. This contrast is felt in the sentence as a contrast of colours (red sunsets - white roses). Red is alive, but dying, white is beyond, but living" (Daujotyte V. *Three Sentences*, Kaunas, 1997, p. 46).

"In Šatrija Ragana's work, especially in *The Old Manor*, the rose and roses are images rooted in the depths of the world-view. But the distinctness of individuality and separateness is also determined by representations of the common (the white world-view). The *rose is in* more than one case the *world tree*, bringing forth and *hiding the* greatest mystery of the human world, the soul. (Secrecy and mystery are essential markers of Šatrija Ragana's worldview.) Mamatė's walking from one rose to another, as if talking to it and at the same time talking to her children, especially her little daughter, is an introduction to the secret world, to the "language of roses", as if leading to the other side. [...] The parallel between the rose and the noble-spirited, beautiful and

sad woman frees the poetic (metaphorical, mythical) possibilities of language, encourages us to open up to the forgotten, repressed powers of language" (Daujotyte V. *Phenomenology of Literature. Contours of the Problem*, Vilnius, 2003, pp. 200-201).

may I come into your head.

This spring, I'm often sitting in a willow armchair as I'm preparing a present for my mother's birthday. In the winter, I learnt to embroider and I wanted to donate the first fruits of my labour to her. I bought the necessary material with my own money, and now, hiding in the armchair, so that my mother won't see me, I am sewing a tablecloth for the cupboard by her bed. I chose this gift, and no other, after thinking deeply about everything. In the evening, I thought, when my mother wants to blow out the candle, her last glimpse will fall on my tablecloth, and she will fall asleep thinking about me... And in the morning, the first thing she looks at is the clock on the dresser... And here she will have to remember me again.

Birds sing and chirp above my head; far away, on the other side of the pond, a stork squawks; at my feet, a grove of teardrop blues the sky, watching their own image in the mirror of the pond. A sweet smell, like honey, tickles my nose, but I ignore it and still sew as diligently as possible. It makes me feel so sweet and happy to think how happy my mother will be when she sees my work. And I look with pride at my work - poor and flawed, really, but very beautiful in my eyes. And then I remember my mother's wish that, as I sit here, only good thoughts should enter my mind, and I think that there can be no better thought than that of how to bring joy to my mother.

– Irusia!

I shuddered when I heard my mother's voice. After quickly putting my work together, I hid it behind the bushes and ran.

When I entered the path from the alley, I saw a mammoth at the other end of it. She was walking in front of me, leading my little brother by the hand. She was not wearing a hat, just a white umbrella to cover her head from the sun. As she walked like that, completely bathed in sunlight, the light, bluish-grey garment that encircled her beautiful, flabby frame was like a sunlit cloud. The crown of thick cassocks on her head was blackened in the shadow of the umbrella, and her pale face looked out sadly and lovingly from beneath her eyebrows with the black, large eyes like the wings of swallows. Little Jonel beside her, with his white string that had recently replaced the yuppies and his big hat, looked like a fairy elf crawling out of the bushes.

– I am, Mother! - I cried as I ran up and hugged her waist.

And she said, stroking my face with her little hand:

– Were you sitting in your armchair, Irusia? And what were you doing there?

A slight smile crossed her lips, and I wondered if she had guessed something. Without waiting for my answer, she said:

– Let's go and see if our roses have bloomed yet.

We went first to what I call my roses - two old, tall - as tall as my mother's - shrubs, planted by who knows who and when. They were black and full of white buds, but we hadn't found a single flower yet.

– Your grandparents are getting more and more decrepit," said my mother. - We're going to mine.

After crossing the bridge, we found ourselves on the other side of the garden. There, on the bank of a high pond, was a small patch of ground, full of young rose bushes, recently planted by my mother herself. All of them had beautiful, large flowers, as white as snow, with leaves as soft as silk and as white as snow, and barely reddened in the middle. And underneath that redness, the soul of the rose seemed to be hiding.

Mamatè walked from one flower bed to another, touching the roses with her slender fingers and bending down to draw their wonderful scent.

– You know, Irute, that loving smell is the language of roses. And in that language it tells of beauties such as human eyes have never seen, of voices such as human ears have never heard, and of happiness such as human hearts have never experienced.

And I thought that people do experience a lot of happiness. Here are the lovely, fragrant roses, here is dear Mummy and dear brother, there is a beautiful tablecloth across the pond, and soon it will be Mummy's birthday, and there will be lots of guests, and there will be cream, and it is so beautiful everywhere, and the sun shines and warms up so well.

– 'Mamate,' I said, 'my heart is very happy. It's so beautiful everywhere, those roses are blooming so well!

Mamatè was no longer looking at the roses, but somewhere far away, through the dark pine trees at the end of the garden, as if searching for the beauty that human eyes have never seen. When she heard my words, it was as if

turning to look away from those distances and looking at me, she smiled sadly and said:

– Short-lived roses, Irute!

And shaking her head, as if to shake off sad thoughts, she began to pick roses and put them in bouquet.

– Let's take the booklet³ to my dad," he said.

After picking out the perfect rose, I stood up and pinned it on my mother's forehead in a cassia wreath and drank it so that it looked like a silver star on her black hair. And suddenly I saw that there was a similarity between the white roses and Mamata...

And I said:

– Mamate, roses are like you.

– What, Irute?

– "They are so loving and so sad, just like you.

* * *

My father was sitting on the porch, and in front of him stood two of our neighbouring farmers, with their hats in their hands, chatting animatedly. Papa smelled the roses and pinned one to the lapel of his white jacket, and said to Mamma:

– It's good of you to come, Marinia. You're just in time for court. Spudis and Rimeika even came to me. You'll help me convict the black man.

Spuddy walked up to his mother and kissed her hand and said:

– Poonitel, his beloved, for there must be justice in the world.

– Staying where you are will not. The only problem is that you want that justice to be yours," Rimeika replied, kissing her mother's hand in turn.

– If you both talk, the lady won't understand," said Daddy. – 'Spudi, you tell me first.

– I'll tell you, my boy, the real story, as it were. In fact, I have already guessed that my bees are promising to spit, and for several days now, I have been looking at you like a hat on a halo. We are still waiting to be enslaved: whether it is me, you, or the children who are in the picture. Yesterday, in fact, we all went out for a barley delivery. I say my Igniukou:

"Igنيuk," I say, "you, vakali, add the bees, build a wise wundens, take the dill, and as soon as it starts to spit, sprinkle the good ones and we'll have them here, and in the meantime, you'll dousi mun žinios atbiegjs". We are transporting them, the same ones, the same ones, it is not far away, I have brought the wagon, it is worth it, and here you and Domici are digging – only suddenly Domici says: 'Papunelli,' he says, 'veiziek, bene biteles lek'. I saw it – sure enough: it was just a cherry tree. 'Vo Jergutel,' says my mother, 'our bees will have already swarmed! And that Igنيuk, the beast, is not going to be happy!' What are you going to do here, you fool? You can't get along, you can't get along, you can't get along, you can't get along, you can't get along, you can't get along. We are just standing here wondering where they will stay. We can just see, turn around and look at the maple tree where you put the nesting box. I have fallen asleep. Well, I thought, there is no need to hurry, I already know where they are, I have seen them with my own eyes. Vo munuoji i saka:

"Daddy and the chickens in that Rimeik! As soon as you put the nesting box in, the bees are already in it. But you, Juzeli,' they say, 'go to the other one now, because you don't want to be beaten.' 'After all, you're a Catholic, you're not Jewish,' I say. Now, that's right, I'm going to the soup kitchen, I'm no longer a hatter. Well, that's the real bee in our bonnet. I also bumped into Ignis: "Oh, you, you pijmenc bastard," I said, "who needs a bee!" – "Yes," he says, "I've only had a bee. I ate my drinks quickly, I didn't take a nap, I went to Rimeik. "Tie it up," I say, "and let the bees fly into your nest." "I haven't seen it," I say. 'I went to take a picture,' I say. We went away. Bee, bee, bee around the nesting box. 'Well, that's what it's going to be now,' I say, 'I want to get my bees back.'

"Where not! – says. – Muna is a hatchling, muna is a bee. How do you know it's yours? It does not defend itself." – 'I'm not defending myself,' I say, 'but I know you are, because I have seen with my own eyes that you are lying here. "After all,

³ *Bouquet* - bouquet.

says, "yours or not yours, I don't care, my nesting box is a nest, my bee is a bee". And don't. 'Then,' I say, 'I would go to the poona, let us sit down. Kijno here now, tasgaties, pravybi and kap here now vedum będzie. I have seen with my own eyes that it is a bit of a muna...

– OK," Dad interrupted, "you've said it all. Now, Rimeika, what are you going to say?"

– Who am I kidding, poodle," said Rimeika. - I say: 'As the hatchling, so is the bee. That's something we already know.

– Lest we should know that you have taken it in, let it be yours, but now, you see, for I have seen it with my own eyes, and I have come to see it at once.

– It is! you are waiting to see if maybe it wasn't yours. In the end, whether it is yours or not, it is yours. So why would people build these nesting boxes to keep the bees out? Because I am already here stuoruoious⁴, struggling, uploading, waiting for the bees to be unlocked - the bees are unlocked - and now they are saying: open up, muna! And don't you wait! I have no stump, no drop of honey left. Munuoji says: "Put the nest in the maple tree, maybe it will be our nest. Veiziek, Spudis kijk kijk honey prikuop'. I made the nest and vowed: if the Poondzijvs have bees, I will light a wax candle on the sacred Untuona altuoriou next autumn. I put a bee in the Utarnik, and yesterday, I shrugged my shoulders, and the bee was already swarming. The pontiff has already taken his vow by magic - but he says: give me the bee! Tell me, my lord, how can I know that Poondzijvs himself has given it to me?"

Mamatę said with a smile:

– After all, there is a custom: if a swarm swarms into someone's nest and the owner of the swarm appears, that person must be friends with that person. Do the same for me.

– No, why should I now, this time, give him half the honey, that tat muna bitis! - said Spudis, apparently very unhappy with his mother's utterance.

– Poonitel, why should I renounce half my honey to spare the bees for my sacred Untuonc? - said Rimeika with exasperation. - After all, Unc already has bees, but I don't.

– As you wish," said the mother again, "I cannot judge otherwise. You must be friends, and that is enough.

– Still, the unc will not be pleased with those bits," replied Spudis angrily.

– I know how to defend my own bees," replied a flushed Rimeika.

– Don't be scared, I know the way to shit. I won't be if shit doesn't come back to bite you in the ass.

– Douk after shit! You see, the fight here will be fair.

And they both started crowing like roosters, getting ready to jump on each other.

– Men, for such nonsense... - said the mother

timidly. And Daddy, already annoyed, said sharply:

– Like tat! Go to court. At least then you will be wise gaspadors. You will be ten times as sorry as that swarm costs. Oh, you fools, you fools! For your greed, the judges should be treated like children fighting over a small toy: deprived of it altogether, so that neither one nor the other can have it.

– Rather let there be no chase, lest an unjust muna bee befall," said Spudis.

– But you are empty! You've already annoyed me with your greed," said my father, "and I will do just the opposite. Let Rimeika keep the swarm he caught - he had none - and I'll give you another, Spudi. Today, just today, my one hive hatched.

– You must be laughing," said Spuddy, scratching the back of his head.

– Je, I'm joking with such idiots now! Go to the garden, and there, by the apiary, in the mist, you will find a swarm and a swarm. Take it and carry it. And don't scold me any more. This is my judgment. Do you agree now?"

Rimeika was the first to smile and walk up to his dad, kissing his hand and saying:

– Where you won't meet, poodle! I didn't want to open the bees, and I'm not angry. What are you arguing about now that we've both had a spat.

And Spudis responded:

⁴ *Storotis* - to make an effort.

– You know, it's true. Diekou, my boy. I wish I'd brought my own bits. Let it be to Dijvui unt honour, let the bee be untimely.

After saying goodbye, they both left. And immediately their words came to us:

– Well, Rimeika," said Spudis, "I'm not the one who's going to catch the spittle next summer. You will see what truth you will proclaim here.

– Well, it's a matter of going to the poo to blow us away," Rimeika replied.

Mamatè, laughing out loud, said:

– You are the ideal judge, Ludwig. I love your witty way of saying it. It is just a pity, however, that I could not get them both to do the right thing and to do it in accordance with tradition.

– You see, Marinia, it's easier to come up with a witty phrase than to get a chum to come clean.

* * *

– Take Nika, Irute, and bring her some presents," she said, handing over a basket full of everything. I jumped off the ground for joy.

– Can I listen to a story, Mother?

– Available, for one.

– But if it's short, it's two, isn't it, Mother?

– What can you do with a bag of fairy tales," laughed my mother. - Let there be two.

Going to Grandma's - how lovely! Not only because she tells beautiful stories, but also because everything there is so strange, so unseen, so different from what is around me. It seems to me that when I go there I enter a fairyland. My grandmother lives in an old brick house, which used to be a brasserie, in a small room with one deeply recessed window, with small, sun-painted balls. The walls of the room are lined with newspapers, the asla is cleanly swept, and evergreen ajera scattered. It must be from the roses and the bundles of herbs hanging on the floorboards that the whole room is full of some kind of loving, special smell. It just smells like a fairy tale. When I walk in there and this strange atmosphere washes over me, it always seems to me that I am no longer listening to a fairy tale, but am 'making one'. It seems that all the things in my grandmother's room are thinking something, know something that is hidden from the others; that each one of them has a life of its own, full of mysteries. There's an old, hard bed on the border, with a high bedspread and a mottled bedspread; there's a table by the window, and above it a group of little birds moving in the wind through the window. The birds are cunningly made of empty eggs, have wings and tails of speckled and golden paper, and hang on long threads. In the very middle is the largest goose egg, like the mother of the whole bunch, with smaller ones all around, and two quite tiny ones in between, probably dove eggs. Then a large green chest, decorated with variegated flowers and stars - the most beautiful piece of furniture in a grandmother's parlour. It has always seemed to me that that chest must contain some wonderful things, unseen and unheard of, as in a fairy tale. I asked once, without being asked, what my grandmother was hiding in it. But she said, "The few scraps she had, she gave to her daughters, and now there is almost nothing left. And smiling, she opens the chest to show me all her riches. The chest was empty, however, with none of the beauties I had dreamed of. The most beautiful of all the things there was a white muslin hat, beautifully made as a gift for my mother's grandmother; covered with paper, it stood in one corner of the chest, together with a jiccan apron and an ancient kiklik for a burial. In the corner of the hut there was a large green kokle stove, and the grandmother always sits at the stove spinning. Very cleanly dressed, with a white headband around her head, tall, thin, dry-faced, with large classical features, she looks like a serious and cruel Roman matron⁵. But an affectionate smile, showing teeth as healthy and white as a young maiden's, softens that cruelty. With her unhealthy legs, she is unable to do outdoor work and spins even in summer, on warm days, when she sets up a wheel on the window sill of her little room, amongst the rowan trees. She comes to us once a year, on Holy Saturday, and, sitting on a low stool in the kitchen, between pots full of sour cream, she spins cassini. I love to watch her, after she has made

⁵ *Roman matron* - in ancient Rome, an honourable married woman, mother of a family.

the pot between her knees, turning it here, heating it here, cooling it here, adding it here, taking it away here - all with the seriousness and dignity of a solemn ceremony. Since I eat kastinis once a year, at Easter time, and always spun by my grandmother, it seems to me that this is not an ordinary meal, but some kind of sacred food that only one grandmother can provide.

After handing over the waiting bags and listening to my grandmother's thanks, I ask:

– Why don't you ever come to us yourself, granny?

– Go, go, go, pupil, who am I to bother the pooches! What good are munis, you poor bastard? Not to paint, not to talk. That the poor go to the rich, so they will be ruled by what they ask for. I do not wish to flatter the poets to their faces, lest they should forget that I am willing to receive as much as possible. Take care of Dijvi! And I have too much of everything I have from them, all that I am able to give.

– Isn't it boring to be so alone all the time? You just sit and sit by that stove," said Nika.

– Here, little one! Poor Dijv in the garbie, where you gather a few beans. You won't hear anything more than: this one will do it, that one will do it, this one will do it, this one will do it. What do I need this for? Why am I going to annoy Dijva with my lichfish at the end of my life?

– That's not what you're talking about, Granny.

– It's not worth it for me to pay. Now, you, little bean, though you are little, you can read the muokas, the kningas, and you can sing the shmuot. And you, poor bean, who grew up in a bastard, who has never seen the world, what will you say? We are just chattering away, and that is enough. So I'd rather be the one to do it.

– But isn't it sad to be alone, Bobbi?

– Well, in old age, one is no longer friendly. Whether you want to be old or not, you have to be old. Now you see that I did: I had parents, a husband, and three children - what is it all about? A child's cowgirl builds a nest of her own, and I don't care about her anymore, you old man, you old man, you close your eyes. Dijva will. A poodle can do nothing wrong. Maybe it is good that you have to spend a century in a vijná: you reflect on all the things you have done to yourself, you remember your whole life, you regret your sins. Vo del sadness - nie biškj nie biskj un sad. I am spinning to myself, talking about the feasts, drinking the yarns and shrugging my shoulders. And after all, I have not lived long, but if I forget everything, then, after all, everybody will throw you away - kap vijna dijnele. And where, ruodos, does that munna go for life?

– Were you young first, too, Bobbi? - Nika asks. Nika laughed.

– I was there, bud. And I was not only young, but I was small - here I am now. I grew up tall, strong. I was the first worker in the whole manor. To go out, I lead my husband and I to weed rye with a rye weeder - that's all we do. Now Kaziuks has to go to the market to piaun, so that the two rye eaters have to go to the market. It is already on the straight and narrow. Umžina rest, which ones to take, which ones to fake. That is why we loved the old poona, and now Cassius loves our poona.

But I wasn't very interested in the biography of my grandmother.

– Tell me a story, Grandma! - I interrupted.

– Will you not be upset that I will be late?

– No, no! Mamaté allowed me to listen - one if it's a long story, two if it's a short one.

– I will say a long winded one.

– Bobby, if only it had scary scary scary scary scary! The scarier it is to listen to, the cuter it is.

We sat down on a bench, next to the circle, and the grandmother, still spinning, started to tell us. And a hut full of the most terrible monsters came: fire-eyed kites, and howler monkeys, and crafty kippers, and fairy fairies, and dead unbaptised children, and spirits suffering their punishment in the creaking trees. A shiver went down my spine. I knew that in the evening I would not only not go into the dark room, but that I would be afraid to peep through the open door of the dark room when I was sitting in the lighted room, lest some ghost of those fairy tales should sometimes crawl out of the darkness. Nevertheless, I listened greedily. It seemed to me that Granny herself was the good fairy, and that all those kites and masks were in her service. When she had finished, I asked her:

– Have you seen a kite, Bobby?

- No, puppies. The man in the nabašninkas says he sees it, but it doesn't flow.
- How good it would be to have a kite bring you money.

– Keep Dijvi safe! Where did I put them? After all, I am fed and clothed and have a warm hut. Unless it's to buy museli for the dukkha. But I will say that whoever has little to give, let him ask for little. Maluonesnes anam tiste vijnas miseles, where I buy every year, without collecting a ruble. It is not necessary to deal with a kite, bean. Those pins are really good, where you have acquired them with your care and labour.

* * *

On bright summer days, my mother started to make me a blanket. Leaning on her loom, she drew stars and circles with chalk, and then sewed with care, her white hands glowing. Sitting next to her, I read aloud "From the Memoirs of a Young Orphan". When I reached the part where the poor girl describes how her mother died, my heart clenched with pain and my eyes filled with tears. After I had finished the book, I cuddled up to my mother, crying.

My mother reassured me that, although she was sorry for the orphan, there was no need to cry like that.

But I was no longer crying for that orphan. The thought struck me that if that orphan's mother had died so young, leaving a little daughter behind, then my mother could die too. And not only can, but must, if not now, then some day. After all, all people die, after all, I keep hearing that one person has died, and then another.

– Mummy, what if you die like that orphan's mother?

– Where do you get these ideas, Irusia? You can see that I am quite healthy.

– Yes, maybe not now, but you will still die one day when I grow up.

– Of course. Everyone must die. It's a terrible thing, my child, but there's nothing you can do.

– But I don't want you to die, Mother," I said with a whimper. - Never, not when I grow up! I will feel sorry for you when I grow up big, too. I will ask God to let me die before you, and before Daddy, and before Nick, and before Jonel.

It is as if an abyss has opened under my feet and I must fall into it, because there is no other way. Yes, everyone dies. Daddy's parents are gone, Mummy's mother is gone - and my parents will be gone, but I will stay. Terror and pain tore at my little heart, tears flowed from my eyes, wetting my mother's clothes.

Then my mother, having given up her work, sat me on her lap and began to soothe me. She told me that I had already studied the catechism and that I should remember that only the human body is darkened, but the soul is undead; and that, having abandoned her weak, sleepy body, she was on her way to God on the starry path. And if she has been good, God will lead her to his paradise gardens, where she shall see such beauties as no one on earth has seen or will see, no matter how far she has travelled, and shall hear such fine music as no one on earth has heard.

– Isn't it more beautiful than both you and Mr Jonavičius? - I asked, crying.

– Of course, Irute. If the best performers in the world came together to play all sorts of instruments, their music wouldn't be as great as the one in God's gardens. But souls walk around listening to those magical melodies, meeting their loved ones who have died before, and waiting for those who still remain on earth.

– Will our souls, Mother, be like us? Will we be able to know each other?

– How will the loving soul not know the beloved soul? After all, the soul will not always be separated, because you know that it will then be reunited with the body.

– How good, Mother! They say that souls cannot be touched, that they are like gases, distracted and dying. And I want you to be all there, just as you are now, Mother, so that I can snuggle up and kiss those white hands, and have your eyes looking at me, and that is all.

– That's right, Irusia.

– I think, mamma, that there must be books in there too, lots and lots of them, beautiful, red, full of lovely pictures?

– Whatever is available, whatever one desires.

- And will souls always be together in God's gardens? Will they never have to separate from there?
- Never. So you see, there is no need to cry so much and fear death. When that painful hour comes, you will know that we will be separated only for a brief hour.
- Are you sure, Mother?
- Indeed, Irute. You just have to be good to be accepted by God into His gardens.

I had completely calmed down. My thoughts turned away from the horrible pictures of death and wandered to a place as beautiful as anywhere on earth, more beautiful than Switzerland, where I had read that there were blue lakes and white mountains. But in the evening, when we sang the potions aloud, I added in a low voice: "Lord God, grant that I may die before Mamma, Papa, Nick and Jonel".

"Better to wait for them there than to stay here without them," I decided.

Lying down in the cot, the thought of death came up again from somewhere in the depths of my soul. It was amazing to me that I had not treasured my mother so much, spending so much time without her every day. And who knows how long we will have to be together. And I decided that I would not separate from her as much as I could.

* * *

In the morning, I started to carry out my resolution, following my mother everywhere like a little tail: my mother to the kitchen and I to the kitchen; my mother to the garden and I to the garden. Sick people came asking for help. Until now, I had no claim to watch Mamathe heal, but today, how could I separate from her, even for an hour? And I asked her to let me stay there too.

A woman entered first, led by a girl of a dozen or so years old, wearing a low headscarf over her eyes.

– I have brought my girl, sir," he said, "perhaps you can get some seals. I do not know what to do with those eyes myself.

He took off his scarf, and the girl's terrible eyes appeared. Her eyelids were swollen like balls and red, and her eyes, red as blood, barely peeked out.

– What happened to her? - asked her mother.

– Let the gentleman, who is always complaining with his eyes, bring the grazing cow in the evening and say: 'Mummy, my eyes are stinging'. They would be a little red, and nothing more. "Tat", she says, "it is a worm; rek", she says, "anus nutruchyti, anij iesti out of the eyes of the girl, je ne neygydysi. Rec, - she says, - to boil the taboos and wash the eyes, and to add more of the same to the passport'. I did so. I washed it once - so that it would sting, so that it would not go anywhere, and so that it would bleat. I'm with Jasaitienis. Cioceli,' I say, 'the leg is sore, and the girl is crying. 'That's good,' they say, 'that's good,' they say, 'that's good. I still wash. And at night I took some thickener. Tomorrow I will see - oh, you, Dijvulel, the most loving! That eyes are puffy, that blushes, here, now. Muni and get well. Where I am now, I think to myself, where I am now, that I am not a ponyteller. Maybe you'll do some fleece.

Mamatè put her hands back without listening.

– For God's sake," he cried, "why do you listen to all kinds of bullshit! You have to have some sense of your own! Now the girl may remain blind for ever. Why didn't you at least wash her? Can you keep your eyes so dirty?

Mamadé was cleaning, washing those poor "hardened" eyes.

– I am sorry that you cannot wash with water. They say the rest will not see," said the woman, a little frightened.

Mamat began to explain the hygiene rules.

– Do you see anything, little one? - asked the girl when she had finished washing.

– Kap par mist.

– You seem to be from Kerbedlauke?

– New, my lord, from Kerbedlaukis, Mažeikieni.

– Listen, Mažeikiene. I'm not going to treat the girl, I'm not a doctor. There are no jokes with eyes.

Take your daughter to the doctor in the morning. Tell her you'll take her in the morning. I'll send you on purpose to ask. Dazzle

a virgin, and shall be a beggar for ever.

– God save you from such misfortunes. You must listen to the beavers. I am going, my lord, I am going in the morning.

Then came another woman, also with a girl, but much shorter than the other one, with a pretty, but pale face and big blue eyes. Her whole bottom was covered with scabs, nasty, wet, blistered, and it was nauseating to look at. Her sparse, yellowish hair, which had been reduced to a trifle from the front, was braided into two thin ribbons, a veritable mouse tail.

– First things first, my little one," said her mother, examining her head and caressing the girl's face, "we need to cut her hair. After all, you won't comb it anymore, and if you cut it, it will heal faster...

When the girl heard this, she suddenly escaped from her mother's caressing arms and, grabbing her mouse tails with both hands, she burrowed into the room and started crying.

– I don't want a haircut! - she said with a giggle. - Muna kasas! Muna kasas!

– Shut up, Wuoniki, you shameless! - shouted the angry mother. - And you're going to poop right in her ears!

The girl went silent and, after releasing her "cash", clenched both fists in her eyes. Her mother smiled and went to her and, stroking her face again, said:

– Listen, Onele, what's the point in getting such cash? Look how thin they are, the jackets⁶, like cords. What beauty! And when I have cut your hair and cured your head, you will see what kind of cassocks will grow. Just like mine, look!

And Mamadé leaned over, showing her hair.

Onel took her fist away from one eye, then from the other, glanced cross-eyed at her mother once, then again, widened her eyes and, reaching out her hand, touched her mother's pancreas with one finger.

– Will there now be haircuts? - asked her mother.

– Dousu...

She took a large pair of scissors, and immediately the cassava fell to the ground. Onel's blue eyes teared up again, but the poor woman sat still, and you could see that she was trying as hard as she could to control the pain in her heart. She just kept looking at her mother's coffers, as if in that sight she was drawing strength to bear her misery.

The head of Pagala was shaved, washed and smeared, and a few sweets were put into Onelè's hand.

– Chew on it on your way home, so you won't be so sad when you remember the unfortunate pancreases.

* * *

The days of the cross are here, and once again, as every year, I go with my mother to our little hill. There are a few oak trees and three crosses growing on it, and it is so beautiful to look far away in all directions. After she has slept off the fire, our family, the mares and other people from the neighbourhood who did not get to go to church in the morning begin to gather. The women go, carrying and leading the children with their noses wiped clean, deliberately for this ceremony. All dressed in their going-away clothes, the children in exactly the same clothes as their parents. Little girls with long, ground-length, wide skirts, which flow down their legs, with short bras and little skeletons tied under their chins. The boys also wear long trousers and jackets, each with a skeleton around their necks, neatly folded and fastened with a shiny button. It seems that these are not children, but grown-up, funny dwarf people. However, in the depths of my soul, I envy the little girls, because sometimes I long to have a long robe like the mammoths. With one hand clutching at their mother's skirts and the other finger in their mouths, the children stare at us, their blue eyes widening, as their mothers talk to their mammoth. Climbing up the hill with difficulty on her sickly legs, the grandmother and the children of Kazimierz Gaspador, our beloved playmates, nicknamed Sparrows by their father because of their surname of Sparrowlinski, also come. Finally, Domeikienė and her children and her husband come in. The man carries the smaller one, and she carries the larger one - dressed up, graceful, beautiful, cheerful. She is the first beauty of the whole neighbourhood. Only trouble is, she's also the

first lazy one. Everybody knows that she spends half the day lying in bed, and the other half mending her feet, basting from

⁶ *Striugas* - jacket.

revenge to revenge, and that all the work is done by a man and a hired girl. As a result, the children are neglected and worn out, the hut is in disarray and the farm is empty. But Domeikis loves his beautiful wife so much that he is all right. He works like two men, never says a bad word to her, just tries his best to please her. When she gets a slight headache, he immediately runs to his mother for medicine. And when he kisses his mother's hand, he says, laughing that the illness is probably due to the long time he has been lying there:

– Kad, poniteli, ana so delicate!

The father, exasperated, shames him:

– Aren't you ashamed, Domeiki! Everyone is laughing at you. Take the belt and give it a couple of strokes across, and you will see that all the diseases will fly away like lightning, and that pretty one of yours will start working like the others. What are you waiting for?

Domeikis says nothing to this advice, but goes home as quickly as possible.

But Domeikienė is very suitable for me, mostly because she is beautiful, but also because she is so cheerful and affectionate. As soon as I see her at my mother's, I run to see her. When she comes to see her mother on business, she tries not to get in her father's way, because her father never misses her without scolding her hard. And Mamadė also likes to look at her beautiful face, talk to her affectionately and gently remind her of the responsibilities of a mother and wife. But these words bounce off her like peas off a wall. She doesn't even feel guilty, she says, working as hard as her health allows and laughing merrily to herself, as always.

Taking off his hat, Casimir kneels before the cross, followed by everyone. And Casimir, in his strong voice, draws out the Litany of All Saints.

"Pray for us!" - answers the squeaky voices of women, the thin voices of children and the hornet-like chatter of men, and together they float down in a tide into the green fields and the variegated meadows. It is so pleasant, so beautiful to pray outdoors, in the roar of the old oaks! God seems to hear us better here. It seems that the baby Jesus is walking through the flower-filled meadows, just like the picture that hangs by my bedside: barefoot, with a white shirt, light curly hair and big wise eyes like those of Nika, with his arms spread wide, as if he wanted to hold the whole world close to his heart. I know: he was not breaking a broken cane, he was not putting out a light bulb that was beginning to fail. And they nailed him to the cross. They pierced his loving hands and his nimble feet, always in a hurry to do good, with terrible, big nails. Here I see him hanging before me on a big, black cross. What a terrible cross! You only have to prick your little finger with a needle, and it hurts terribly... The pain makes my heart sink, and tears roll from my eyes. I wipe them away quickly, so that no one can see. Then I remember what my mother told me, that every bad deed is a nail we hammer into the holy body of the Lord Jesus. And, overcome with fear and pain, I vow with all my soul to always be polite at all times.

And it suddenly occurs to me, when I was a little girl, beating my chest at the end of the poteras, I used to say: *God be gracious to me*⁷. I smile pityingly at my childishness, knowing now that even if I were really the most polite of polite, it is not nice to boast, neither to people nor to Mr God.

After the litany, we sing "God our Saviour", then the supplications, and then the pagan Casimir commands us to chant five potions to the most holy wounds of the Lord Jesus. As we fall silent, another choir echoes from the tops of the oaks, and somewhere in the distance, the Maypole begins to scream at the top of its lungs. Accompanied by this accompaniment, we finish our prayers and we all disperse, hurrying off to work. Only Domeikienė is in no hurry and walks slowly, chatting with her mother, who is helping her grandmother down the hill. All the way, Mummy walks with Baba, and Sparrow and I run and run all the way home.

* * *

Ever lower, ever lower, let⁸ draw its grey veil over a land immersed in the goodness of colour and sound. An old palace wraps itself in a secret shroud and begins to dream, full of jasmine scents and melodies,

⁷ God have mercy on me, my courtesy (*Polish*).

⁸ *Dusk* - dusk.

emanating from one corner of it. There's a mammoth music playing. Sitting in the cavity of a large sofa, I listen, watching the mammoth's hands, glowing white doves in the grey of the drawing, run quickly across the keys. Nika sits next to me with the squeaker that her carrier made - a simple, flat board cut in the shape of a squeaker, with threads wrapped around the swivel sticks for strings. Ah, those swivel sticks! Just like in a real skripka. Tucking his skripka under his chin, Nika plays, pulling the strings with a smich - a hinge bent in an arc and tied with thread. The voice of the skripka resembles the grating of a mosquito. But now it is not heard at all. Nika is strumming, trying to adapt to Mamathe's music: when Mamathe makes a rare call, he moves his fingers lightly on the "strings" and rarely pulls the smichis, and when the fast passages begin to burst out from under Mamathe's hands, his fingers are moving quickly, and the smichis is jumping.

How well, how well Mamaté plays! She'll say something sad and tears will roll down her eyes and her heart will ache. If she plays something happy, you feel like dancing and laughing. And how she loves music - she forgets everything when she plays. Not long ago, when Daddy wasn't home and nobody interrupted, Mamaddy played and played e n d l e s s l y . After dark, I lit the candles on the piano, and she began to play from the sheet music until the candles ran out and the dawn came through the windows. Nika and her squeaker were snoozing at one end of the sofa, I at the other. Mamat woke us up and took us to bed.

– Why didn't you tell me, little children, that it was so late? - she told us, worried and upset. - Why didn't you go to bed yourself?

– We wanted you to call longer, it was nice," I replied.

– We still wanted to listen," added Nika.

What a pleasant night we had that night! Never before, it seems, has my mother kissed us so sincerely, covered us so carefully, spoken to us with such affectionate words.

But rarely can a mother enjoy music like this. Usually someone interrupts her as soon as she starts playing. Either the hostess demands a disposition⁹ , or the chambermaid needs to ask something, or Daddy comes in and distracts Mamaté with some farm issues. But once - through me - Mamma was able to sit longer at the piano. I am pleased to remember that. She was playing, and through the window I saw Daddy hurrying into the house. I had a feeling that he would come to my mother and interrupt the music. Although it was very difficult to dare, I ran in front of him and kissed his hand and said:

– Daddy, let Mommy still play! She has just started. Mamadé loves it so much...

Daddy looked me in the eye in surprise, stroked my tentacle and went to his room, and Mummy called for another hour, without disturbing anyone. Then I couldn't bear not to brag about what I had done.

– Never do that again, Irusia, never," said Mamat. - If you love me, you must help me in my duties, not hinder me.

It's not always possible to do what pleases you, my mother says. But I would like my mother to always be happy and good. And it pains me if it is not. I know it hurts her too. I can see the resentment and dependence that then flashes across her face for the first hour. But the flicker is gone in an instant, and quite calmly and lovingly, as usual, after the piano has been struck, she goes where she is required.

Schumann's mysterious "Warum"¹⁰ and Mozart's luscious minuet have already rung out, and Chopin's long nocturnes are now coming one after another. Oh, how sad those nocturnes are! Oh, how sad the jasmine smells! Like a wreath on someone's grave. Oh, how terrible it is that everyone will die!

I kissed Nika's velvety head and quietly went to the piano, wishing I could be closer to my mother. She paused just as she finished the nocturne and sat in thought.

– 'Mamate,' I said, 'why do you always play 'Warum' at the beginning?

– Because the soul is full, full of questions... Questions that have no answer.

– What questions, Mother?

⁹ *Disposition* - someone's will, power, authority, right to manage, govern.

¹⁰ "*Warum (Why)* is a piano piece by the German composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856), from the cycle of "Fantasy Pieces" (Op. 12), composed in 1837.

– Why is longing the essence of the human soul? Why does a man, having lost what he had been chasing, say in despair: no, that is not it! Why do flowers bloom in the soul of man, the fragrance of which no one relishes? Why is death the end of all things? Why *in this world does death sweep away everything, and robak się łęgnie i w bujnym kwiecie?*¹¹

The last question struck a chord in my soul and I wanted to give my mother an answer.

– You said yourself, Mother, that death leads us to happiness.

– Oh yes, Irusia, it's true...

Mamathe's fingers touched the keys again and began to weave some sad, sad melody, and in time with it Mamathe began to sing in a half-voice, as if reciting:

The soul is still restless... She longs for the wide land, for her the true homeland haunts her day and night.

Ah, the image of the beautiful here is faint, faded, the echo of the tones here is weak, false.

*Thus a drop of water, separated from its native sea, whether it murmurs like a stream or cries like a sex, is restless, and, driven by longing, keeps on running, rushing back to his blue, boundless homeland.*¹²

Nika, hearing his mother singing, dropped his squeaker on the sofa and came to the piano. From the whole elegy, he apparently understood that Mamathe longs and yearns for something she doesn't have here. And when the last sad chords had died away, he said:

– Mummy, when I grow up and earn a lot of money, I will take you far abroad, and we will go across the seas to Paris, to St Petersburg to listen to those orchestras where many many many musicians play a b o u t a hundred different instruments.

Mamaté shook her head, as if shaking off some thoughts, and said with a smile:

– To listen to those magical symphonies with orchestras and famous artists? OK, Nika, we'll go. Oh, how the soul longs sometimes...

– You'll take me too, won't you, Nika? - I asked.

– Of course. We will all go.

– But it's not just music we'll be listening to, Nika," said her mother, "we'll also be visiting those wonderful galleries where the famous paintings are.

– And that beautiful Madonna¹³, mamate, on the bottom of the coals?

– The Madonna... be sure, be sure... and Jacond¹⁴ with a secret smile... Yes, I'd like to see all that once.

– You'll see, Mum, when we go.

– But we'll definitely go to Switzerland too, Nika. There are white mountains and blue lakes. Mountains that let the sun into looking out and so high up from the earth's cliffs...

My dad walks into the salon.

– What are you talking about? - he asked.

– How will we get around Europe when Nika is grown up and earning a lot of money?", replied my mother.

– And you, Daddy, will come with us, all of you," said Nika.

– Maybe I won't be able to walk anymore when I'm old," laughed my father.

– No, Dad! Soon I'll grow up, soon I'll learn everything, soon I'll earn a lot of money and soon

¹¹ *In this world, death sweeps away everything, and Wormwood lies down in a beautiful flower* (Polish).

¹² A fragment of the famous poem "Maria" (1825) by the Polish Romantic poet Antoni Malczewski (Malczewski) (1793-1826), based on an authentic tragic fact and a significant influence on Polish Romanticism.

¹³ The work in question is probably Raffaello's (1483-1520) Madonna of Sykes (1513-1514).

¹⁴ Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) famous painting The Gioconda (or Mona Lisa, c.1503).

We'll go," said Nika fervently.

– Okay, okay, Nika," said Daddy, stroking his head, and turning to Mummy, he added: "I've learnt some nice things today about our cook, how she... Ursula. It turns out that she is a vagilca.

– How? Did you catch it? - Mamat asked anxiously.

– I didn't catch it myself, but Kazimieras did. Last night he heard the dogs barking a lot, got up and went to see. And he saw Ursula walking with a cup and a bundle. The cup was full of milk, and the bundle contained small bits of meat. Of course, he says, it was cut from the portions. Asked by Casimir where she went at night, she said that she went to her mother's house because she had no time during the day and that she got the milk and the meat from the lady.

– I did not give her any milk or meat. She didn't ask for any.

– Of course they are lying. Apparently, they steal meat from the portions, and make up the milk from what they get to whiten the soup. Or maybe she steals it while she's milking.

– Maybe. Recently, she went to milk the cows that were grazing in the barn. An hour later, I went there too. I saw Ursula walking away with a full milch instead of going straight home. I thought she was pouring milk into a container hidden in the notrels¹⁵.

– Of course it was. So what? You could have caught her by the arm.

– No, I couldn't... It's a terrible thing to catch someone by the arm.

– You know, Marinia, I thought you didn't catch it. But this tenderness of yours seems strange to me. If you don't care about your possessions, you should care about the decency of your servants. After all, by allowing them to steal, you are demoralising your family. Gentleness is a fine thing, but first of all a man must do his duty well, and if he must, he can.

– No! Not everything is possible. One can only passively endure everything... everything... but to act against one's own nature is sometimes impossible. Finally, maybe, I think, she wants to take a drop of milk to her mother for once.

– Stolen? No, really, Marinia, it seems to me that if you had caught her by the arm and she had told you to let it go, that it was more convenient for her to take it to the icebox, you would have believed it. It is a pity that all those qualities of yours are very harmful to the lady of the house and the mistress.

– I know I'm a bad hostess," my mother said sadly.

– You should realise for once that they don't appreciate or value your tenderness. Not only do they not, but they misinterpret it. You say nothing, which means you see nothing, you perceive nothing, you think nothing, and you can be tricked and used at will.

– It could very well be. But I'm not here for them to cherish me... I can't do otherwise... Walking briskly through the salon, Daddy spoke loudly:

– No, that won't work. This is pedagogy. And pedagogy cannot do without discipline, without punishment. A pedagogy based on gentleness alone is the dream of idealists. Of course, I recognise that there are some very delicate children who need to be treated with very delicate pedagogical measures - take our children. But a poor person is a child who is extremely insensitive, a horrible fat man. The only way to do anything with him is to make him afraid, to let him know that I will punish him for what he has done, and if necessary, to tease him with¹⁶ the last words and, in the end, even to slap him on the ear.

– Forgive me, Ludwig, I won't lie, I won't even give you an earful," said her mother and wanted to leave the salon. But Daddy stopped her.

– Wait, I need to finish Ursula's question, anyway.

– What will you do with it? - asked her mother.

– I wanted to expel it immediately from the beginning. It's a shame to think that such a hunch¹⁷ is sitting at home. But now I think maybe it will be better to remove the evil in a less violent way. Now is the time of the year, everyone will realise that she has left for a r e a s o n , and no one will take her. What will she do in her mother's house? So

¹⁵ *Notrelia* is a nettle-like plant.

¹⁶ *Dablyti* - barti.

¹⁷ *Kručis* is a thief.

We'll change it: let her get back to work, and replace her with Marcelè, who really wanted to be a chef. By going to the fields, Ursula will no longer have any opportunity to steal. Although, to be honest, the abomination should be instantly banished, not regretted.

– How well you have thought of it, Ludwig," said my mother in a more cheerful voice, "Just tell Casimir about the catch. Let no one know why the change happened.

– Don't put feelings into them that they don't have. Their shame is buried very deeply, and you can't get rid of it. But, of course, there is no need to flaunt it. Now come to my office, and I will call her right away, and we will finish this thing.

– Do I really need to be there? - asked her mother tentatively.

– What a question! - "It seems that the women's ministry is your department, and you must take care of it and manage it. And secondly, you have seen for yourself her suspicious work.

Mamatè went after her father, but after an hour Uršulè came out of the office crying.

* * *

Mamatè loves the sun and warmth. She says that it is so foggy and cold in our country that every ray of sunshine and warmth should be enjoyed. So on a warm, sunny day in May we go to the ravine.

We walk between the green-silver walls of recently emerged rye. Young men, they stand modest, straight, grave, like regiments of God's lads, preparing to faithfully do the Lord's appointed work. Only some of them will not grow up, the mischievous ones, look, they'll take and slap you in the face. But so affectionately that, if you gently take them with your fingers, you can't help pressing your lips to their velvety heads... Then we enter a high meadow. In the distance, on the horizon, Shatria loomed like a giant mound, and nearer were the smaller mountains, where giants used to sit and light each other's pipes.

– Mamma, how unfortunate that we didn't live before there were giants and other extraordinary things.

Now everyone is the same.

– Right, Irute. It's all so simple, simple... No more giants...

We hadn't visited the ravine for a long time, so when we stood on the bank of the ravine, we all shouted in unison:

– Oh, how beautiful!

The other section, high and steep, is all overgrown with trees and bushes. All kinds of trees that exist in Lithuania gathered there, and, intermingled, their branches intertwined, they wove a curtain of clear, young colours. At its green bottom, white birch trunks shine in the sun like marble columns of an opening behind which a secret lives.

This is quite different from the one on which we stand. On its sloping sides, the trees are not so much clustered together, but stand farther apart, enjoying what lies beneath their feet. And at their feet is a carpet of the most beautiful variegated colours: here the emerald green of the convalescents, with the whitened bells of the snowdrop-like blossoms here and there, below the red and yellow dots of the hyacinths, and below that, the gold of the fawn irises. A small stream gently sniffs at the bottom of the ravine. Somewhere in the depths, a sleeping nightingale will occasionally chirp a trill and then immediately fall silent again. Above the flowers, like living flowers, butterflies of many colours flutter. Hundreds of birds chirp in the bushes and trees, which, like the flowers, rule the roost. The air is filled with flowers. It seems to be an enchanted, happy country, ruled by a good sorceress, the same one who cares for the poor, orphans who have been hurt by their stepmother, and who loves the polite and obedient children. She is the queen of all the birds, the birds of prey, the trees and the flowers, and she is the one who gives the orders, and everything is just waiting for her beckoning. Perhaps this bird, at her bidding, flies nine seas and nine mountains away to fetch a golden apple from the tree of life for the healing of some dying mother; perhaps this old oak is about to be commanded to open up and pour out a pile of golden money for a poor, barefoot orphan. And she herself must be here somewhere. Maybe, bending over the stream, she is scooping up the cold, crystalline water with this purple bell; maybe she is visiting her own kingdom, walking light-footed on

the carpet of flowers, without trampling on a single blossom - in a blue robe and a cloak of golden hair -
as

in the storybook.

My father says that I am ashamed to believe in fairy tales because I am not so little anymore. There may be nothing in the big world anymore, but here, in the magical land of the ravine, there is probably still a fairy tale.

– You know, Nika, it seems to me that the Good Witch must live in this ravine," I said quietly, shyly.

– And it seems to me," he replied, uttering my deeply hidden hope. – And that we should meet her here today, Irute?

– How I wish! But it is only in fairy tales, and no one has ever met a living person," I said sadly.

– How do you know it isn't? After all, we don't know all people. After all, many people have never seen a snake crawl out of the wall, but the pastor has," said Nika passionately.

– True.

– I would love to meet her, but I would also be afraid... You know, because of the incident the day before yesterday.

– Which one?

– And how I broke the window.

The window was like this. The day before yesterday, when my mother and I were in the dining room, we heard a rattling sound, and one of the window panes flew out, with a stone in it. No culprit was to be seen. Soon everyone was gathered for dinner, but there was no Nicola. They sent to look for him. Anne found him in the garden, hiding behind a tree, and told him to go home at once. We look, and Nika comes in, very frightened, and says, with his eyes closed (presumably to we would not "read" him as lying; for I told him the other day that he could immediately be understood as lying, because it was written in front of his eyes):

– Or me? Or am I?

– Who or you? – Dad asked, not knowing.

– And did I break that window! – replied Nika in a crying voice.

We laughed and Nika, with tears in his eyes, confessed that he had thrown a pebble and accidentally fallen into a rut.

– Do you think the good witch would be angry with you for that window? – I asked. – You accidentally blew it out.

– No, not for cheating, but for lying," Nika said sadly.

– Well, it probably wouldn't be angry, because you confessed right away.

Talking like this, we picked the convalescents and took them to my mother, who, sitting under the linden tree, placed them in beautiful bouquets, drawing their wonderful scent, stroking their snowy bells to her lips and enjoying their fabulous beauty.

– It seems to me that my ears are also good with convalescents," she said. – It seems to me that I hear a silent melody from them, a melody that is extremely delicate.

– Do they sing, Mamate? – Jonel asked.

And Nika, bending down in his mother's lap, put his ear to the bouquets and listened, looking up with his big, elongated, black eyes, which looked even blacker next to the white convalescents.

– I hear you, Mother! As if someone were plucking silent voices on thin strings.

– My dear little thin string! – said his mother and kissed those eyes of his, and also some unearthly flowers.

– You know, little children: flowers are the smile of joy on the earth, because God created it and destined it for great things. When you look at it, the human soul begins to smile. And from that smile, like ice from the sun, all that is evil and ugly in the soul disappears.

– When I want to do something ugly, I know what I'll do," I said. – I'll look at the flowers and laugh, and the anger will melt away. Yes, Mother?

– Probably, Irute.

– And what to do in winter when there are no flowers? – Nika asked.

– Then you need to remember them well," said my mother.

After we had put the bouquets together, Mamat went with us to walk around the ravine.

Just beyond the convalescents lived a group of Hyacinths. Below the reds, the funny flowers, the

cross,

short, fat, like good, self-satisfied housewives with a farm full of everything. Above, the yellow ones, the dreamers of the nation: taller and leaner, with soft, pale yellow heads and a loving smell - as if they were not the countrymen of the red-furred mistresses. Even lower down, the taffy stood in groups, their strange golden heads held high.

- Look," said my mother, "what strange flowers those toffees are! They seem to be pushing upwards, as far away from the ground as possible. Look how their golden eyes look sadly up to the sky, yearning.

After descending to the bottom of the ravine, we walked along the stream. Surrounded by green walls on all sides, we were now in the heart of this special world, completely separate from the rest of the world and having nothing to do with it. It has its own rules, quite different from the boring world. Everything is possible here, as it happens in fairy tales. So we went in search of the good sorceress. We looked behind the trees, into the thicket of bushes. A few frogs jumped scared out from under our feet, birds looked curiously at the holes, chirping anxiously, a squirrel watched from a tree branch, its bushy tail tucked up and its wet feet close to its chest - but the fairy was nowhere to be seen.

- She is not at home today. After being told to pack the blue-winged silkworms into a wagon made of convolvulus, she left for somewhere. Maybe to Mount Shatria - to see the wide world," said her mother.

- Or maybe there is, but they just don't want to show us because we're not poor orphans, but we have such a good mother," said Nika.

It was a shame to leave that beautiful ravine. We wanted to stay another hour and another hour. But in the end we had to go home. Now we took a different route through a second ravine - gloomy, eerie, with walls so steep that the sun hardly ever shone there. Old, twisted bushes grew there, and thinning willows showed the blackened interior. No wonder there was a summer house of the devil, who used to hide in the clearing for the winter. As we walked past, we speculated where the black lord of that dark ravine might be lurking. Not anywhere else, but in that old, withered willow tree.

- Why look for the devil in the ravine, children? - said Mamat smiling. - Often he is very close to you. You know, when...

- When we do something evil... But that we don't see it then.

- So we feel it," said my mother.

When we entered the road, we saw my father coming towards us.

- Come home soon. Someone is waiting for you there," he said.

We started to speculate who. But it didn't happen. It was not until we got close to the house that our curiosity was appeased: on the porch sat Šmulka with his crom.

And how can you guess? After all, back in the autumn, Šmulka came and said goodbye to us, saying that as soon as he had finished selling his crore, he was going to London to his children. They have been inviting him for a long time, and he will be better off there than here alone, like that sparrow, left alone on the roof. From that time on we did not see Šmulka during the whole of the winter and spring, and we assumed that he had left. And now Smurf was sitting on the porch, next to the cromo, tired, wiping his sweaty forehead and breathing heavily, thin, old, with a long, black, black, rust-coloured coat on his cromo-covered back. His face, dry and pale, with its grey beard and the grey curls that have worn away on his cheeks, is extremely sad, as if permanently worn out. Such must have been the faces of those Jews who sang, "We sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept..."¹⁸

Šmulka travelled through all three districts of Samogitia, from manor to manor, visiting villages along the way, he knew the inhabitants of all the manors, who was of what kind, who was related to whom, he carried greetings and sometimes letters. He would always be rested when he arrived and would ask for a drop of vodka. After drinking a small glass - always just one - and snacking on a bite of sugar, he would gain strength and energy and start to teach the Krom. When Mamata came home, she immediately brought him the things he needed on a plate herself. Shmulka stood up, put on his hat, drank the vodka, then took off his hat and started chewing the sugar.

- Let Mrs Pondzijvs pay. Shmulka has been gone so long, and the lady does not forget what Shmulka needs.

¹⁸ Excerpt from the Psalm "Songs of the Exiles": *'By the rivers of Babylon we sat there weeping (Psalm 137:1).*

When asked where he came from, or whether he had gone to London, he said:

– I go, I stay in London all winter, and I come back in the spring.

– Why? Didn't the children love you? - observed my mother.

– I'll tell you. The child is well loved, given good food, bought clothes for me. How do they live there, oh dear, oh dear! Like a real lady. But I could not be there. As soon as I arrived in London, I found that they had put a black eye in my head. That roar, that bang, that liarms - oh my! The black eye kept going round and round, and I thought it was going to crush him. I couldn't sleep a night, I couldn't rest a day. And yet I couldn't be through that smoke. Factory and factory, and everybody's smoking, and you can't see anything but the smoke. When the smoke started to blow, there was nothing to breathe with. I didn't want to go anywhere, I thought he was going to strangle him. I suffered all winter, and in the spring I said to the Vakelas: 'Vakelia,' I said, 'are you here for your own good? You are living, you are not in any trouble, you are not needed by the munis - let the muni go back to die, I will walk with the cromel again'. 'Daddy,' they say, 'if you don't want to, you can go back and earn your own money there. Mas will buy you a billiard. And so the Smurf comes back, and the Smurf walks with the cromel again.

– And it wasn't painful to leave your children behind? Don't you miss them now? After all, you don't have a single loved one here," said my mother.

– Well, what will happen without it? I know, it's long. But I have already said: I know that it is good for you there, I do not add anything to it, whether I am there or not; it is my job to find grommets. And finally, I will tell you.

The little dog leaned close to his mother and said quietly:

– Old people don't ask the young.

– When I come back here," said Šmulka again in a simple voice, "I come back to life immediately. No more black head, no one is pressing. When I go with my crommel, I look up at the sky - blue, beautiful; I look up at the pijvas - green and speckled; there is no smoke anywhere, it is beautiful and cheerful everywhere.

– Poor Shmuel," said the mother pityingly, stroking the Jew's greenish robe. - I was so glad you were with the children, and now you're all alone again with your cromo.

– And for the masters to say a word, it's only honey that will help their hearts.

– There will be honey," laughed my mother. - Do you have a jar?

His father teased Šmulka that, being such a Samogitian patriot, he had to be baptised. He was an upright Jew and could not believe in all the nonsense of the Talmud and wait for another messiah.

– Well, I'm in the field. I thought that if the Messiah had already come, Christians would not eat each other.

– Not with the same appetite as the Jews," laughed my father.

And he kept teasing me that he was going to force it. And perhaps Šmulka would agree if he bought half a cromel after each lesson.

– Where to translate? I know that ponc and tap will buy from Šmulka. Ponc is a real ponc and a doud to make money for a shameless Jew.

As he spoke, Šmulka was teaching a cromel that was not even remotely comparable to the rich, fragrant Hungarian cromes, full of wonderful, varied objects, beautifully arranged on clean sheets of cardboard. The whole of Šmulka's crommel was a few flat wooden boxes stacked on top of each other and stuffed into a plain black bag. The goods were always plain, with the occasional prettier item thrown in by accident. As I looked at that poor little cromel, I remembered the Hungarians, and pity gripped my heart.

– If I had a lot of money," I said to Nika, "I would buy Šmulka a Crome like the Hungarian one.

– And I'll take the horse so he doesn't have to carry it," said Nika.

My father, as always, bought lots of things. Nika chose a paper cutter with her own money. And in the evening, without anyone seeing, he gave it to me, saying:

– To remember me when I die in war.

And tears glistened in his big black eyes, like drops of ink on the dark velvet of widows.

– Nika, you will not die! If you do, I will," I said, and my tears fell on the blade.

– You know that all knights perish. That's the way it

should be. It is beautiful. I know that Nika will be a knight, but I don't want her to die.

So sad when he, with his black eyes raised, says in his cockney voice those lines about the knight

saying goodbye.

*The eldest sister brings out the horse, the
youngest puts in the walnut saddle,
And the youngest one is slipping through the gate...¹⁹*

It's just a pity, says Nika, that he doesn't have three sisters. But no matter, I'll do it alone.

– But I won't let you, Nika!

– What are you talking about? No sister of a knight did that! How can great deeds be denied!

– Whoever wants to be a knight has to prepare for it in advance. When you are little, you have to save others and govern yourself," my mother often says.

And Nika is already preparing. She recently came home with a big blue pampas²⁰ on her forehead. When asked what happened to him, he answers briefly, with his eyes closed:

– I got caught in a fence.

The same day, my mother and I go to the stables.

– For this reason, Mr Jonelis shuddered violently. Praise be to God that you have not fallen into his eye," says Joseph, the coachman.

– Where? - my mother and I both wondered.

– After all, I saw it myself. He will go around the station, and he will take the potsherds, and he will take the sticks. Suddenly, Jonel, I don't know why he would be angry, would hit Nikou on the head with a stick. "*Janek, what are you doing!*"²¹ He puts his hand to his forehead, leans against the bar, and groans. Vo Jonel immediately, having dropped the stick, that he will attack the other, that he will kiss him. And be thou as valiant to me as the greater Poonaitis.

I'm going to see Nick.

– Nika, you will definitely be a knight! I know about that pampas of yours...

– What do you know? I got caught in a fence," says Nick with his eyes closed.

Another time, Joseph is riding, cooling the horses, and Nika and Joseph Sparrow are sitting in the brig. Joseph went into the river and tripped over a stone, and the barge overturned. It was not deep, and Nika, after a quick swim, stood upright, while the smaller Joseph began to sink. But there was a knight with him for a reason. He seized his friend and dragged him to the shore until Joseph came to the rescue.

A knight needs knightly robes, my father decided. And he brought Nika a beautiful ulon uniform: dark blue with a blue chest and collar, with silver buttons and epaulets. And a tall blue²² helmet with a big white crest, shiny shoes with pentacles and a sword. Nika is dressed up and walks gravely around the rooms, jingling his pentacles and looking in all the mirrors, like some warlord of the dwarf country. He walked, walked and suddenly perished. No one saw where he went. They served him lunch and he was gone. Anne went to the family room to look for him - no sign of him, to the stables - no sign of him, to the Sparrows - they said he was there, but he left immediately. His fur coat is hanging in the hall. And it is windy outside.

We started to worry. Fortunately, that worry did not last long. The vicar's butler came, saying that Reverend Nicky had come to the rectory in one of his general's uniforms and that the priest had sent for Nicky's fur coats for fear of letting the child go out in the blizzard without a warm garment. It was not long before Nika arrived with the priest. The knight knew that he could not escape from the harlot, so he entered the room, groaning²³ so that not a peep was heard. In spite of the priest's intercession, the father cruelly

¹⁹ The eldest sister leads the horse, the younger sister puts on the brown saddle. And the youngest opens the gate...

It may be part of a Lithuanian folk song translated into Polish.

²⁰ *Pampas* - tuber.

²¹ Janek, what are you doing! (Polish).

²² A *kiver* is an ancient tall military hat.

²³ *Stvainytis* - to be ashamed of, ashamed of.

and sentenced him to sit in his room all day tomorrow, lest God should punish him more severely and make him lie still. Nika's concerns were instantly allayed: sitting for a day is not such a disaster, especially in winter. But when his mother anxiously told him to take his medicine so that he wouldn't get sick, and sadly asked him why he had served her so much worry, the knight frowned²⁴ so much that he said he wasn't worthy of being a knight. And in the end Mamathe still got to comfort him. To take his mind off the crime, she asked him to tell her how impressed he was in the town. The sparrows couldn't utter a word of amazement, they just stared at him, and everyone in town showed him off to everyone else, and the little Jews ran after him, shouting "*Oto zej! Oto zej!*"²⁵ And the parson himself ordered him to go about his parlour, looking and admiring him on every side.

Jonelis and I looked at him in the same spirit. And despite all his guilt and anxiety, the thought that he had crossed the whole town alone, without fear of the cold or the Jews, raised him even higher in our eyes.

I'm dreaming a dream, knight. Already you have grown out of your ululating clothes, already you are about to take your first step into the world. Already there awaits you, knight, work and hardship unknown at home. And chivalrously you are preparing for battle. On a small piece of paper you write the following document in large, crooked letters:

A perpetual card.

*I am going to secondary school and, although I do not know what, I will not accept the provocation. And I will try to be a comfort to everybody, but most of all to Papa and Mama.*²⁶

The dream continues. The knight is already in the world, and here at home we are missing him and waiting joyfully for him to arrive for Christmas. On that merry day, Jonel's soul is so full of happiness that he takes up his quill and an old, battered convertible²⁷ and tries to pour out his feelings, because he doesn't like to write.

*Nika arrives and Janek is happy and waiting. He was sitting at his desk in his shirt, writing these words...*²⁸

And the precious cards, yellowed with age.

* * *

Sitting on the porch, we all read the newspapers that have just arrived. Only Jonel doesn't care about them yet. And after looking at the drawings in "*Przyjacieli Dzieci*"²⁹, he went close to the sand with his dagger.

– Oh, the pastor! - says Dad. - He comes in after reading the newspapers. Apparently, he will have made some new policy combination.

At the other end of the long courtyard, two men appeared. One thick, bald, like a big, wide triangle, the other as skinny as a black stick.

– Let's go and meet them," says Nika.

After dropping the newspaper, we run past each other. We rush not so much to the pastor as to the young priest. We like the parish priest, too, because his slowness and his original telling of interesting anecdotes make us laugh, but the priest has our hearts set on him, especially since he bought us the goat we have long wanted.

²⁴ *To collapse* is to be sad.

²⁵ At least! At least! (*Yiddish*)

²⁶ Eternal leaf.

I'm going to the gymnasium and, I don't know what, I won't accept Orthodoxy. And I will try to be a comfort to everyone, especially to my father and my mother (*in Polish*).

²⁷ *Convert* - envelope.

²⁸ Nika arrives, and Janek is happy and waiting. He was sitting at his desk, wearing a single shirt, writing these words... (*Polish*).

²⁹ "Children's Friend" (*Polish*).

– What does a goat do? - asks the priest.

– Healthy and cheerful as a radish," replies Nika.

– 'You are raising a prodigal, a prodigal, a prodigal,' says the pastor. - 'To raise a sheep, you would have wool, but now what?

– But it gives us a lot of joy," says Nika.

– It is not the joy that is to be seen, but the benefits, the benefits.

– But we love him so much," I replied.

– And you don't have to love idlers, you don't, you don't.

But these virtuous teachings do not diminish the love of the goat in our hearts. Taking the priest by the hand, we took him to the stable to visit him.

When we returned, we found the pastor sitting on the porch, discussing politics with his dad.

– *Bismark something, something, something*³⁰," said the pastor slowly in his monotone, nasal voice, "And we won't know how the Germans will come and attack us one day.

– And he'll get the boot," said Dad.

– Well, well, God knows who will give to whom. Russia is a giant with feet of clay. Only the feet can be waved

– and the giant will turn, turn.

– If we didn't have a neighbour like the Germans, we could enjoy it. But now there is nothing to be happy about, because we are in the *gutter*³¹ .

And my father started saying that under the Germans it would be even worse, because they would harden us immediately. The pastor thought the opposite, because the Germans were more cultured than the Russian Mongols. Then he began to think about what would happen in the event of war, who would help whom.

– Of course Russia will fall at some point," Dad said. - Nothing in the world lasts forever. And we may yet be destined to play a role again among the European powers. What a pity we won't, eh, Pastor?

– We won't wait, we won't wait," replied the pastor.

– But just no union with the Poles, God forbid! I would be the first to oppose it, as Katkevičius did the other day³² . They have infected us enough with their disorder and dragged us together into perdition. The best thing for us would be to join with the Belarusians, because their way of doing things is similar to the Lithuanians. And those Koroniazians³³ - what unsympathetic people! Their pomposity, their desire to preside over everything is simply intolerable. And the bliaga ?³⁴

– True, true. *Terrible blaggers, terrible blaggers*³⁵ .

– And how strange: yes, we seem to have bent, but what a difference of character has remained until now. You come into contact with a Crown Jew and immediately you feel that he is as alien to you as a German or a Frenchman.

– *A my sobie nie damy w kaszę w dmuchać, nie damy, proszę pana*³⁶ , as that, you know, crown prince's representative used to say.

– How so! They must be the masters everywhere, and we are their lackeys, the *chudopachołki*³⁷ . How do they portray us in literature? Every Lithuanian is a *poczcwiwy dureń*³⁸ . And as it should be, their most famous men - such as Mickiewicz, Kosciuszko, Kraševski³⁹ and others - are all Lithuanians and Belarusians. And all those their dear ones

³⁰ Bismarck is spending, spending something (*Polish*).

³¹ A phraseologism "from wolf to bear" (*Polish*).

³² *Katkevičius* - Jonas Jeronimas Chodkevičius (c.1525-1579), a prominent politician and statesman of the GDL, actively defended the interests of Lithuania during the Union of Lublin.

³³ *Koroniaz* is a term formerly used to describe Poles who lived in the territory of ethnographic Poland. Since the 14th century, the *Corona* (*crown*) has been the name given to the Polish state ruled by the king (*Corona Regni Poloniae*). After the Union of Lublin, *Corona* referred to ethnographic Poland, distinguishing it from Lithuania, which formed another part of the Lithuanian-Polish state.

³⁴ *Błaga* (*Polish*) - bragging, eye-rolling.

³⁵ *Terrible nobodies, terrible nobodies* (*Polish*).

³⁶ *And we will not be led around by the nose, we will not be led around by the nose* (*Polish*).

³⁷ The lowest servants (*Polish*).

³⁸ An honest fool (*Polish*).

³⁹ The poet Adam Mickiewicz came from the Lithuanian Rimvydas-Mickiewicz family; the leader of the 1794 uprising, Tadas Kosciuszko, was born in Belarus; and the writer Joseph Ignacy Kraševski was from Grodno, lived in Lithuania for a long time and wrote extensively about Lithuania.

Yagélions⁴⁰ who are they? Are they Poles?

My father was fired up because he disliked coronas so much. And the pastor took out his snuffbox, sniffed the snuff, and wiped his nose with a big blue handkerchief with white windows. Then, getting comfortable in his chair, he went on with his political combinations. Very fat and obese, with a large, round, red face with two shrugs, from which good, grey eyes looked out, he seemed ever content with himself and the world. He was dressed in a well-worn tabokina sutana, with a loose watch-string on his chest, and a straw hat on his head, of which he often said, with great satisfaction, that he had bought it for 20 kopecks and had worn it for ten years, and that, as he would wear it for another five, it would not cost him two kopecks a year.

– So what are the political horoscopes, Pastor? - the priest asked. The pastor looked at him pityingly.

– *What politics!*⁴¹ Politics is not in your head, not in your head.

– What's on my mind, pastor?

– How to spend the money as quickly as possible, how to spend the money. And after all, I keep saying: *Szanuj grosz! Szanuj grosz!*⁴² I do nothing, and that is enough, I do nothing. Well, as you rely on it, so you sleep.

– And it's good that he's not attached to a p i t t a n c e ,” Dad replied. - "Why should he steal when he has neither wife nor children?

– And I have no wife and no children, and look at the expenses: one to teach, another to prepare a dowry, a third to raise a wedding, a third to raise a wedding.

– Free will, pastors," laughed my father. - You could have left them alone.

– How can you not take care of the orphans, the troublesome ones, where they would have disappeared, where they would have disappeared.

We wondered if there was anything in the world that could move a pastor. One autumn evening, he came to us on his most beautiful horse, a black one. Joseph unhesitatingly parked it in the carriage together with the team. When the pastor told him to hand over the horse, Joseph came in, very upset, and said that neither the horse nor the cart was there, and that someone must have stolen it. Now the pastor would be really upset, we thought. But we were wrong. Without even a twitch in his armchair, he said, as slowly as ever:

– Stolen! So how am I going to get back home through this mess?

So we all moved, feeling sorry for the handsome black man. Father took the lantern and went into the stable himself. And all the while the pastor, sitting as quietly as possible in his armchair, watched the courage of the thief. Soon the father came in, shouting from afar:

– Pastors, there is a thief and a black man!

And he told me that when he did not find the derailed crawler tracks, he searched in the carriage and found a horse that had entered the bog.

Just as the pastor did not show sadness before, he does not show joy now. He just laughed and said:

– There's your thief! There's your thief.

Meanwhile, a brickyard pulled up, and Mr Narmantas got out.

– Pastor, have you ridden your bike yet⁴³ ? - asked. - I came to see it.

Everyone started smiling because the story of the bicycle was very funny. Recently, my dad bought a bicycle with three spokes for Nika. The pastor liked it very much and decided that he could use one too. Riding a bicycle is such a pleasant and healthy exercise. Without listening to his father, who warned him that it would be no use, he immediately made a bicycle out of wood and gave it to our blacksmith to be stitched. But the bicycle came out very heavy, barely able to turn, and it was still tipping on its side. The pastor told us to throw it away and did not like to talk about it. So there was no answer to Mr Narmanto's question.

But Mr Narmant did not stop and said again:

⁴⁰ *The Jagielonians* are the descendants of Jogailaitis, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania.

⁴¹ *What politics! (Polish).*

⁴² *Save a penny! Save a penny! (Polish).*

⁴³ Bicycle (*rus.*) - dviratis.

– I came to see the bike on purpose, pastors.
– You won't see, you won't see," the pastor now replied.
– For what? Is it nice to hide your invention so jealously? It is Christian to allow others to use it too.
– Failed, failed.
– I gave the pastor a good proverb a long time ago," said my father. - 'Let him work a fourth turn to keep it from boiling over, saddle up the horse, and sit down and let him ride, with his feet on the pedals.

My mother came to ask for tea, and when she heard my father's words, she said:

– Shut up, pastor, and get angry for once, so those gentlemen will stop teasing you.
– OK, OK. I'll be angry when you teach me.

Adding sugar to his tea, the pastor said for the umpteenth time:

– I drink without sugar at home and with sugar, with sugar, in my house.
– For the love of God, pastors! - exclaimed Mr Narmantas. - If you do, at least don't say it out loud. Well, how will you come to see you now that you have become so stingy? I don't like tea without sugar.

– I don't regret it, I don't regret it, but I can do without sugar and s u g a r myself," said the pastor, taking a small object out of his mouth and putting it on the table.

This is news. This is the first time we have seen it. So we widen our eyes and wonder what is here.

– Ha, ha, h a ! - laughs the pastor, seeing our curiosity. You see, my front tooth broke off and I have trouble speaking, so I took out my July tooth and put it in. And I take it out when I eat, because I'm afraid of swallowing, I'm afraid of swallowing.

Politics was out of the question, and he started talking about the economy. Father asked Mr Narmant if he had finished sowing.

– Not finished, not finished," said the pastor. - There is no need to ask.

– How are you so informed, Pastor? - Mr Narmantas asked. - Why couldn't I finish?

– That's why," replied the pastor, putting his pipe-bent hand to his lips and beginning to sing in recitative, continuing the last word of each verse:

Tru-tu-tu, I have no bread-u-u-
u, Ti-liau, ti-liau, the bread is
far away, Ti-li, ti-li, the bread is
far away-i-i!

The last "i" was pronounced in a long, thin, funny voice.

Mr Narmantas and the pastor are always teasing each other. They are both old friends, and have been for about 30 years since the pastor came here. He says that when they were young, they used to play cards with other neighbours. But once the pastor lost twenty-five roubles, and from that day on he never played cards again.

– You are talking about nothing, and you don't even know that it is not hunting time," replied Mr Narmantas. - Besides, I don't think it would hurt you to patrol with me yourself. You don't move enough, and that is not healthy. We'll be in company again, like the other time, remember, pastors?

The pastor remained silent, but Mr Narmantas continued to ask:

– Do you remember, pastor, how once, on our way to Šiauliai, we stopped to go for a walk in Balnugarė, and, as if on purpose, God brought Bilevičius at once? And instead of resting for a couple of hours, we sat all night at the green table?

– It was, it was," said the pastor, waving his hand, as if to shake off the memories of his youthful foolishness as q u i c k l y as possible.

– And do you remember how we used to pour cognac into tea to boost our energy?

– It was, it was," replied the pastor, waving his hand again.

– And do you remember that beautiful little blue-eyed girl who served us, how you loved her?

Suddenly the pastor stirred violently in his chair and, pounding his fist on the table, shouted: *'Łżesz, gałganie! You're lying, you're lying!*⁴⁴

When the pastor burst out so unexpectedly, Mr Narmantas fell silent. The others were silent too. Rados was very uncomfortable. But then the pastor himself broke the silence, having calmed down completely:

– Amazing things happen in the world, amazing things. If I hadn't seen it myself, I wouldn't believe it, I wouldn't believe it.

I already knew what these things were. The pastor had told them so many times and always in the same words and with the same intonation, as if they were some memorised lines. But it suits Nika and me terribly well, especially as these things are, in fact, extremely extraordinary. The pastor always does that: whenever a language doesn't suit him, he starts saying something else.

– What are these things, pastors? - asked my mother.

– It was a long time ago, when I was still a kamendorium in Josvainiai. I once went to visit the Burbs. We were all sitting at the table, eating dinner - a gentleman, a lady, a teacher, two ladies and me. Just suddenly we look - a snake, a snake, is coming out of one corner of the room, and it's jumping in the air, writhing in the air, and it's going straight onto the table, straight onto the table. From that fright we *jęzik w gębie zapomnieliśmy*⁴⁵. We all just moved away from the table a little bit, so that the snake wouldn't get behind our noses, so that it wouldn't get in our way. After it had passed through the whole room, it slithered into another corner and disappeared. For another hour we were silent as mutes. Then we asked each other: "Did you see? - I saw. - And did you see it? - I saw." Everybody saw. Everybody saw.

– Don't be fooled, parson," said Father, "you have read that joke or dreamed that dream and you imagined you saw for yourself. I know you are not fooling anyone, but you are not fooling yourself here.

– I haven't read it, I haven't read it. Am I a little child! I say that I have seen it myself, I have seen it.

The pastor has not only seen that one snake, but also a kite, and I am looking forward to hearing about that second amazing thing. But we all leave the table, and the pastor immediately goes home.

– You will now work in the green field, in the green field," he says. - And I haven't read the newspapers properly yet.

But Mr Narmant couldn't stay any longer today either. Mamatė was glad not to have to sit by the wisteria. But that joy was short-lived, because when Mr Narmant left, Mr Kazlauskis, the gamekeeper of the neighbouring estate, a simple partner in the whistle, arrived immediately. Mamatė hates cards, but since papa likes to gamble, and *z dziadkiem*⁴⁶ doesn't like to gamble, she sat at the table in the absence of a fourth partner. I know that it is a commitment, and even a difficult one, because Daddy, a good gambler himself, is very impatient. Most of it, of course, goes to Mummy, and a good deal to Mr Kaslauski.

– *You're a phoney!*⁴⁷ - shouts my father. - How can you not answer⁴⁸, if there's a renovation⁴⁹! *Catch up with the man, don't play chicken!*⁵⁰

Mr Kazlauskis, phlegm incarnate, is not the least bit agitated, biting his tongue in his Belarusian-Polish jargon:

– *No, sir, I play well, sir.*⁵¹

Since the priest is the best gambler and his father avoids him, he suffers the least. He does nothing but laugh at all the shouting.

Sometimes, very rarely, when Daddy is called too much, Mummy says, after putting the cards on the table:

– Aren't you being too annoying, Ludwig? You're unnecessarily getting on my nerves. Better not to gamble.

⁴⁴ You lie, you wicked! You lie, wicked! (Polish).

⁴⁵ We bite the bullet (Polish).

⁴⁶ Without one partner (Polish, gamblers' slang).

⁴⁷ You're a gambler for nothing! (Polish).

⁴⁸ Atutować (*Polish*) - to cut with a goat.

⁴⁹ Renons (*Polish*) is a generic term for gamblers.

⁵⁰ You're a man, not a chicken! (*Polish*).

⁵¹ No, Tamsta, I'm a good gambler, Tamsta (*Polish*).

And goes to his room.

Gambling is interrupted. Mr Kazlauskis sits as calmly as possible in his seat, puffing on a cigar.

The priest runs around the room, dancing.

– How can I, Mr Ludwig, how can I! Lady Mary devotes herself to us, and you torture her so. Truly, her patience is holy.

Dad doesn't say anything, just sits at the table, nervously shuffling his cards. About a quarter of an hour later, he goes to Mamathe's room and soon brings Mamathe back and puts her in her seat. The chicken goes on. The priest is laughing happily again, and Daddy doesn't shout too much that evening.

* * *

It's the second day since we haven't seen a ray of sunshine. The scarves of grey, thick clouds have separated us from it. The longed-for earth is drowning in tears and shivering from the cold, without being caressed. Even the birds are silent, only the chickadees chirp pitifully on the windowsills. Something sad. It seems that the sun will never shine again, that grey, dull curtain will never open again. But Mummy is happy, saying that the rain was very much needed and that after it everything will start to grow and bloom. Papa is not home. Because of the rain, Mother did not even take us to church. Around half past midnight she went to the family room to read, tell stories and fiddle with her notebooks. Then she let the family dance and let us watch. Munkus and Zykas came in with a skripka and a double-bass and, sitting on the border, began to strum the strings with the smiles. The dancers are following the Prussian, and Nika and I, not content to watch, go along with them. Holding up long scales like swords, we walk, slowly at first, from one end of the room to the other, and as we pass each other, we rattle the sticks against the sticks and sing:

*Prusa, Prusa,
your brown
moustache.*

Then the musicians start to play faster, and we pair up and spin around singing:

*Prussian and Prussian
dancing, Skirts hiked up.*

After the Prussian, we dance the Blasingale, holding with one hand the end of the slipper, which rises and falls - like a swallow in a flight. Then the dancers go on to other dances, but we return to our own end with Mamata.

Although it's not yet late in the evening, the rooms are already immersed in the shade. It's cool and damp. Mamat tells me and Nika to fetch firewood from the kitchen and build a fire in the fireplace. I can see that she is amused.

– 'Mummy is cheerful today,' I said.

– Cheerful, Irusia.

– And why?

– Because my pupils are willing to learn, my family is dancing, it is raining and I am reading a beautiful, beautiful book.

The flame's nimble flames dance on the dry sticks, the sticks squeal merrily. The breeze has retreated into the recesses of the room, and it is warm and cosy. How happy it is to sit by the fireplace with Mamma, snuggled in her dear lap! Let the wind moan, let the wind moan, let the rain fall outside the windows - we are as warm and cosy as swallows in a nest, where the wind doesn't blow and the rain doesn't pour.

– Now the fairy tale must come, little children," says Mummy.

– Oh yes, Mother. I would like to hear more about the Hungarian Star⁵², and maybe the same. I love Saint Elisabeth so much, please.

But Nika opposes.

– No! Mamathe hasn't finished telling us how Mr Parsifal⁵³ discovered the Holy Grail. I really want to know, because I'm going to be a knight and I'm going to search for the Holy Grail.

– It's all about knights and knights," I say sadly. - And what about me? I'm a virgin after all...

– You will be the lady of the knight's heart, Irusia," my mother comforts me. - You will inspire him to find the Holy Grail faster.

– That I want to find it myself, Mother," I say, almost crying.

– You can find it without being a knight. And Saint Elisabeth found the Holy Grail.

– You didn't tell me, Mother.

– I'll tell you when you're bigger. For now, listen to Parsifal. And in her melodious voice, Mamata began:

– And Parsifal the knight took Monsalvat. And Monsalvat's palace stood on a high hill. All of white marble, white as new fallen snow, the heads of its five towers golden. Above the golden-headed towers, in the blue sky, a huge seven-coloured rainbow arch...

There was a crash in the yard.

– See if Daddy's home," said Mummy.

We ran to the window. But a strange man drove up from the porch⁵⁴. Soon Mr Jonavicius came in with his cello in a big black sheath.

– Could there be anything more pleasant than a pleasant guest in such a dargana? - said Mamata in greeting. - What good fortune teller inspired you to visit us today?

– The lengthening sun...

Mamaté looked at Mr Jonavičius as if surprised, but immediately lowered her eyes and said:

– It's a pity Ludwig is not home. And I don't expect him back today because of the weather.

– Driving further and in an uncovered breeze can get you soaked through," said Mr Jonavičius.

Then, sitting with Nika in her simple sofa cavity, we listened to music. Mr Jonavičius's long white fingers ran quickly over the strings, and the cello wept, moaned and complained like a living thing. There were notes on the pulpit in front of Mr Jonavičius, but he did not look at them at all. His beautiful blue eyes were always fixed on Mamata. Occasionally he shook his dark, softly curly hair and blinked his eyes, as if resting from looking. But the next moment he opened his eyes, he was looking at Mamathe again.

We are not yet very familiar with Mr Jonavičius, as he has recently travelled from somewhere abroad to his mansion. Everybody says he is very learned and artistic. One of his mothers can accompany him here, so he sometimes comes to us with a cello.

He not only plays, but also sings. At Mamaté's request, he sits down at the piano and, accompanying himself, sings:

*A half-naked angel flew across the sky...*⁵⁵

Mamathe listens, gazing into the distance.

*And long into the dawn she was
full of wishful thinking.*

⁵² *Star of Hungary* - Elizabeth, Landgrave of Thuringia (1207-1231), daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary. She spent her life caring for the poor and the sick. Saint (1235), patron saint of Thuringia and Hesse, still popular in Germany.

⁵³ *Perseivius*, or *Parsifal*, a Knight of the Round Table and an active seeker of the Holy Grail. This is a common theme in medieval chivalric literature (see more: Chrétien de Troyes, *Persevalis, or a story about the Grail*, Vilnius, 2003).

⁵⁴ A *coach* is an ancient lightweight four-wheeled carriage with a reclining top.

⁵⁵ *An angel flew in the sky at night...* (rus. - J. Degutyte trans.).

*And the sounds of the heavens could
not be replaced by the songs of the
earth.*⁵⁶

– *I zvukov niebies zamienit nie mogli ješli skučnyje piesni ziemi,*" repeated the mother in a half-voice.

– I sang what always comes to my lips when I see you.

– Why?

– For you too are full of ardent desire, and the sounds of heaven are incessant to you, and the dull songs of the earth cannot keep them away.

– Oh yes! Boring, boring are the songs of the earth," said my mother. But immediately they blushed, as if shy of something, and fell silent.

The music kept playing in my ears, preventing me from falling asleep immediately after lying down. How good it is that Mr Jonavičius has come to our country, I thought. At least Mamaté can listen to beautiful music and has someone to call. I love Mr Jonavičius because I always want the best, the nicest, the funniest for my mother.

When Mummy came to tuck me in for the night, I said:

– And I like Mr Jonavičius best of all. He plays and sings so well, and is so handsome and so polite.

– But now we should sleep, not think about Mr Jonavičius, Irusia," said my mother, smiling cheerfully, and after giving me a big kiss and a hug, she left.

I wake up and I can't sleep anymore. The room is warm and I want to. Waves of silver light pour through the moons of the shutters, falling in white dots on the floor. The clock in the dining room strikes twelve. I glance at Mamathe's bed, and it seems to me that Mamathe is not there. I look up and see that it is really empty, untouched. Where is Mamat? Probably walking in the pond: it is such a beautiful moon. But why so long?

Maybe she's very sad... Or maybe even tears roll down her beloved cheeks, like the tears that roll down her cheeks in church on Sunday... That's how my mother's tears smell...

Suddenly, the idea of going to her flashed through my mind. Scary... at night, in so many dark rooms, with everyone sleeping. But the urge keeps growing - long, fearful ones: maybe something bad has happened to Mamata? Maybe she fell into the pond after slipping? Faster, faster to her!

I jumped out of bed, put on a shirt and walked barefoot. I'm scared beyond words, but I'm trying to calm down. First I yawn, and then I think that it is after midnight and the rooster will have crowed, so the reign of the scarecrows is over. The most important thing is to go slowly, because as soon as I start to run, I know from experience, it will immediately appear that someone is chasing me and has already abducted me. Here is the dining room happily out. And the parlour, the worst of all rooms. I step trembling over the threshold. It's bright in here, but it's even worse, because in that pale light every object takes on some strange shape. The darker corners seem to be full of some kind of creatures. I don't look to the sides, I just look straight ahead at the floor, and I keep getting this endless urge to run. But I control myself. It's not so scary in the suburbs anymore. When I come down the porch stairs, I see a pale man walking in the vestibule, and I r u n to him.

My mother sighed and softly cooed as I ran up to her.

– It's me, Mom! I've missed you so much... I thought it was a disaster... Don't be angry, Mother! I'll never again...

– You scared me, Irusia. And how can I be angry with you, my dear child! But don't do that again. Children should sleep at night, not run around.

– I thought you were very upset, Mother.

⁵⁶ *And she is sad in the world for a
long time, and full of a strange
longing,*

*And the song of the vault was waiting for you,
And the song of the earth is strange (Rus. - J. Degutyte trans.).*

– I am not upset. I feel happiness inexpressible, joy unending. Earth and heaven are already one. On such a night, eternity touches the human soul with its wing. How sad it can be on such a night! Look!

I looked up at the dark sky, glittering with stars and the moon, then at the earth, plunged in a silver twilight. How beautiful! On that magical night, everything is a miracle. Every object lives, thinks and feels, revealing its soul. The old house becomes an enchanted palace of white marble columns, the sleepy pond a secret depth burning with golden sparks, the dark fir trees nuns, the humble handmaidens of the lord. How silent! I can hear the flowers sending their fragrant sighs to the stars, and the stars biting the flowers. I hear the whispering wings of the angels descending to earth in the silver moonbeams. And above all these wonders, the nightingale's song - the greatest wonder of all - rises in a mighty wave, without disturbing the silence, up, up, up to the moon and the stars.

– How beautiful, Mother!

– What a pity to leave those wonders behind and go to a dark, thirsty room. Hurry up, Irusia, you need to sleep, and you might freeze barefoot.

– But when I grow up, I won't go to bed early on such beautiful nights.

– Maybe you will be happier, Irusia, and have a soul that dreams with you...

* * *

At lunchtime my father said he was going to the meadows and that we should bring him half an evening there.

How do I get to the midnight hour here? Every few minutes we run to ask our mother if it's not time, and if we are so intrigued that she tells us to read, we won't get there.

– Just something very funny, Irusia. Today the sun is laughing, the whole earth is laughing, let's join in that joyful chorus.

And my mother picked up a short story from *Przyjacieli*⁵⁷ about "Rooster Shallop and the Scarecrow". The three of us piled into a big red armchair: me in the middle, my brothers on the sides. Mamma looked at us and said with a smile:

– They look like white birds in a red nest.

The story was so funny that I barely finished reading it, laughing all the time, with my brothers' approval. Even Mummy started laughing, not only with her lips, but also with those always sad eyes. And we didn't really notice how it was dinnertime. Mamaté, in order to feed all the workers, had made a large number of rolls of bread with honey, which she handed to Anne to carry. She took a cup of sour milk, we took the rest of the things we needed, and off we went.

It was a hot, sunny day, with a gentle breeze blowing in from the west for hours, cooling my hot face. In the clear blue sky, only here and there were translucent, strange clouds, like the feathers of some unseen giant bird. White clovers smelled sweet, blooming in heaps on both sides of the path, and above them swarms of bees buzzed merrily. Swallows, like black arrows, twittered in the air, happily crossing themselves. Even higher up, somewhere in the blue space, the wind chimes of the sky rang like sky bells. Everything was merry, happy, happy, happy, alive. Crowds of people were moving about in the wide meadows, like a giant striped carpet of green on the banks of the Venta. A gaspador, sitting high up on a rake, was pulling skeins into bales, followed by a pusher pulled by two horses, pushing the bales into large piles, which the men and women piled into heaps. The silent meadows were now full of movement and sounds. The teeth of the rake chattered, the pusher chirped, the shouts of the boys urging the horses on, the laughter rang out. The rakes glittered like gold in the sun, the shirts turned white, the skirts of many colours. The smell of hay was so strong it was intoxicating.

In the distance, we saw my dad's jacket whitening by the hummock and went straight there.

⁵⁷ Probably a shortening of "Przyjacieli Dzieci".

We were succeeded by the ladies of the manor with half a dinner for the family. When the Gaspador saw them, he stopped his horse and got down from his high seat. Immediately everyone stopped working and began to disperse. The orderlies⁵⁸ sat down in pairs, while the bachelors, maidens and a few mercenaries formed a larger group. That group, while they were eating sour milk with a delicious chutney, were so in such a mood that their loud laughter was heard too loud. So the ordinaries sat silent. Some of the children brought something in cups, others pulled out of the hay t h e s t r a w t h e y had brought with them when they came back from lunch.

– What do I see," said my mother, looking at the groups, "and there is Domeikiene.

– Apparently, she got tired of going to bed, so she came here looking for entertainment," replied her father.

After the workers had eaten and started raking again, I ran to see Domeikiene, followed by Nika. She was raking with a whimper.

– You hear how cheerful Domeikiene is, having eaten dry bread and drunk a lot of vundinel," said one woman.

– Dry as it may be, it's yours," Domeikienè replied with a smile.

– They eat dry bread, but that's all," the other replied. - "Before the drink, the cot, and after the drink, they go not far from the cot.

The beans mocked her, but Domeikienè said nothing; she continued to grumble to herself, as if she hadn't heard anything. But Domeikis came near and said:

– Vo what's working for you? You don't do that job. Enjoy being such workers yourselves.

– What's the matter with you, Domeiki," said the boy. - Don't you see that they are jealous? They would like to go to the dijnas themselves, that's why.

– To want to, so we would dribble, perhaps the very thing that is in our minds? - said one.

– Well, just try it! To be petted by a man, to have your nose blown at work.

I was glad that the bobos got who was mocking Domeikiene. She's so nice, she doesn't get angry at all, she just hums and smiles. How b e a u t i f u l she is! And her pretty face, not s u n b u r n t at all, and her straight nose, and her eyes like a wasp, with long black lashes, and her eyebrows, thin as two black velvet cords, all amazing and beautiful. She is even more beautiful without a hat on her head. The golden cassock around her h e a d , the glittering buttons, the beads of gold and silver hanging from her neck, all shimmering as if someone were throwing handfuls of sparks on her.

– Hail, Domeikiene! - I said as I came closer.

– Hello, ma'am and madam," she replied, throwing the rake and scooping Nick up in her arms. The boy felt immensely insulted.

– Let me in! - he shouted, trying to get out. - I'm not so small to be carried in arms anymore! Let go!

– Kiss him, I'll let you," Domeikienè laughs.

– I don't like kissing bobos! - said Nika, and ran a few steps away. Everyone started laughing and he said:

– She may be a bimbo, but she is very beautiful.

– I'll kiss you, Domeikiene! - I said, and as I ran over, I kissed that face that suited me so well.

When my father found out, he scolded me. He said that it was very indecent to run to the workers to kiss them, especially with a woman like Dimeikienè, who annoyed everyone with her laziness.

– But it's so beautiful... - I answered timidly.

– So what? It's not her doing - and I don't want it to happen to me again. Mamaté was silent.

As we were rolling around in the hay, Mummy said to Daddy:

– I would like to go now. The children can still stay with Anne.

– Why so soon? - Dad asked in an exasperated voice. "Are you rushing to see a sick person who didn't make it before lunch? What could be the matter?"

⁵⁸ *Ordinary* - a person who receives an ordinarate, the salary of a stable hand.

– If you're interested, I can tell you. I want to go to the sick Baniene and persuade her to go to the doctor tomorrow. The poor thing may die without any help. I want to go quickly, so that Banys won't say it's too late and he won't be able to get ready until tomorrow.

– A major disaster, one less or more cham. If you pay the doctor yourself, maybe they will go.

– Banys can pay himself. But how often would I need to - and how painful that I can't.

– Well, sometimes you know how to find sources... I'm just surprised that you care so little for children. Mamathe blushed.

– If I find sources, as you say, they are the ones from which I have the right to draw.

– And a man has the right to demand: primo, that you talk to him, seco, that you spend an hour together instead of worrying all day about your cripples, your sick and your hunchbacks. You haven't had a good look at how well the work with the rake and the pusher is going yet.

– I saw. Very good. I wish it wasn't Baniene. Besides, to look at working people like that for a long time, without doing anything myself, is kind of shy. You're different, you supervise the work. And who am I?

– And you'd rather dream, walking alone somewhere... Surely you shouldn't have married a farmer... Or perhaps not at all.

And after leaving Anne and me, my mother left.

* * *

Look, someone's coming! - I shouted, looking at the road through the garden fence.

– Do you know who? It's Levanarda! - shouts Nika cheerfully.

– Levanard! Let's run in front!

And, slipping through the gap we know, we run in front of the incoming one. What joy! With the exception of Uncle Cassius, there is no more affectionate guest than Levanard. He tells us such beautiful stories, he is so interested in our affairs, he knows how to talk to us. As we approach, Levanard stops his heart, Sakalel, and the three of us climb into his cart, sitting beside him and on the chest with the saints. After a very cordial greeting, a lively conversation begins. Levanarda says he is on his way from St. Peter's. He misses us immensely, and Sakalélis misses us, because he himself has come from Varniai to join us. And we tell him all sorts of news: that we have got a little dog called Murza, that Sierotka has brought a beautiful foal, that Jonelis has got long shoes with bunnies, that Joseph the coachman has caught a ferret. There is no time to talk for long, because we immediately reach the stable, and here begins the horse-hooking scene, which is always very good for us. Levannard gets out of the carriage and yawns, thanking God for his happy arrival, then thanks the horse for bringing him. He kisses his velvety nostrils, strokes his forehead, slaps his neck, wipes him, cleans him, never stops talking to him.

– My dear Sakhalé muna, my dearest beloved, I am glad to see you safe and sound. I have tied your feet together with my feet, and I am in love with you. We have travelled far, Sakaléli, but we have come to Užgiri, to my good friends. If a child loves a birdhouse, if a poodle loves a birdhouse, if a poodle loves a brave eagle. Unc spares you nothing, gives you green clover and golden oats. Thou shalt rest and be nourished.

The falcon listens, ears erect, and turns his head towards his master, and so looks on, as if he understood every word as clearly as possible.

Then Levanarda pulls a present from her pocket: three wooden spoons, each with a different embellishment. It's as if someone had told him what would delight us the most - to eat with wooden spoons as a family, that was our dream. And immediately we start to go to lunch, carrying our spoons.

In the afternoon, as the whole family gathers for the feast, Levanarda shows the saints. Although he has sold a lot on his travels, there is still much to see. There is St. Vincent, wearing a golden arnotum, holding a cross in his left hand and a devil in his right hand. The devil is as black as coal, curled up, apparently in fear and pain, with white eyes and a tongue as red as blood.

There is St. There is St George, sitting on a white horse, wearing a green, quilted cap and yellow trousers, stabbing with a long spear a terrible red dragon. And beside him, terrified, with her arms folded, stands a queen in blue robes, with a golden crown on her head. There are sadly frowning little spires, crowned with thorns, and many others. The beauty of the spectators is indescribable, especially St. John. St Vincent, and Joseph the charioteer buys it because just the other day in a dream someone told him to build a chapel. One of the boys has vowed to nail a pestle to an old oak tree by the roadside and is choosing the most suitable one. I'm fine with the pestles, but I don't want to go to St. Peter's. I am afraid to look at St Vincent lest I see that long face in a corner of the room after dark.

After showing the saints, Levannard also pulled books: short, lukewarm canticles, beautifully made prayer books, and other books. And for these goods, one other buyer is found. I, too, have a great desire to buy canticles, so that I can, when they are unveiled, be able to sing the hymns sung by my family on winter evenings like a grown-up girl. The conversation between the angel and the devil, in which the devil addresses the angel in a thick and cruel voice, is particularly suitable for me:

*Arrows, cannons, bullets, grenades,
thunder, lightning, smithereens, and
clouds upon thee!*

And the angel answers him thinly and gently:

*Not so terrible is the infernal
torment, as the loving hand of
God...⁵⁹*

But canticles are expensive and I don't have that kind of capital. I will buy the Children's Book at⁶⁰ and then read from it to my brothers and the Sparrows about Winnie the Liar and the Buzzard.

After loading back his goods, Levanarda starts telling his family. He speaks of the incidents of the history and lives of the saints, of what he has read in other books and of what he has learned and invented in his own inexperienced life, applying it all so beautifully, so smoothly to human life, and telling us how everyone should live. His eloquence flows like water, and his listeners listen, with their eyes fixed on his lips, and whisper to each other:

– No, and I can't tell you how to do it without being a priest!

Levanarda also gets a lot to tell us. We sit him on a couch in the dining room or on a bench in the aisle while he's running around, and ask him to follow the stories as we sit next to him. And Levanarda follows new ones, different ones, and can never repeat the old ones.

– Who taught you so many fairy tales? - we wonder.

– The swift wing is crowded with munions, the dark woods in the sky, drenched with golden stars,
– he replies.

We show Levanardo our farm, our toys, and take him to our house, to the stork's nest, at the end of the garden, where large waxwings grow. These are the grapes that "Mr Stork" brought us as a gift from Africa. Levanarda eats the grapes, revels in their deliciousness as if he were a child. And that suits us very well.

Mamatè treats Levanard, but he doesn't eat much.

– Why should I eat so much that I don't work hard," he says.

His best meal is tea and cake, and his mother always provides him with that treat. After he has had his tea, the cook comes to ask him to join her for dinner, for which she has cooked some delicious porridge.

– Dieku, dieku, bean," he says, laughing, "I'm going to eat the porridge now that I've had my fill of the watermelon. You know that you cannot unt pooh-pooh a man.

⁵⁹ Religious hymns "On the barney of the devil with the guardian angel..." excerpt. It is printed in all editions of Motiejus

Valančius' "Giesmė knyga, vai kantička".

⁶⁰ "Children's Book" by M. Valančius (1868).

Dad likes to tease this one sometimes. When Levanard arrives, he always asks him why he doesn't marry, that it's about time, he's already gone, then nobody will want him anymore. And he sends him virgins, praising their beauty and goodness. Levannard laughs, saying that all the virgins are beautiful and good to him and he loves them all, so he cannot choose one. And once, without laughing, he said seriously, "I will never be happy. Mata, my dear, a man is meant for one life and another for another. Mun zhenatvi is not meant for me. From the side of the vijnua, my work is dangerous, but as I myself am not afraid of danger, I am dedicated to it and I work for it. But as soon as I have a child of my own, a child that I will be very attached to, I will immediately be anxious about my own nakedness. I have a good idea. But I'm not just about that. On the other hand, that man's body will grow taller and taller. You know, the stuonc of monasticism is also holy - after all, Jesus Christ himself was at the wedding in Canoe of Galilee - but it is still, I think, closer to the animals. But I, though I am a poor man's man, will not be mocked, nevertheless, as I mourn for my saints, I contemplate their lives, and I want to draw closer and closer to them.

After a two-day stay, Levanarda goes home to her "mother". We accompany him to the forest and greet him warmly, asking him to come back as soon as possible.

* * *

What a joy! My mother and I came to Kalnėni. There is no place in the world more pleasant than Kalnėni. There is a bachelor, Uncle Kazė, Mrs Zuzana, Mrs Francisška, Mrs Verusia - all of them are so beloved. It's just a pity that my grandmother is long gone. The one we love the most is the cheerful, handsome, kind uncle. We call him "sweet uncle" because he never comes to us without bringing sweets. Our sophisticated Uncle Kazė is the ideal of perfection. He tries to entertain us in every possible way to make sure that we have a good time in Kalnėni. We faint with the catch of the spirit when Uncle Kazi, calling his favourite vizier⁶¹, named Karo, into the middle of the room, says, raising his finger:

– *The dog died!*⁶²

They lie straight on the floor and don't cross themselves. Dead, that's enough. And his uncle comes up and waves his hand at his muzzle.

– *The wasp came to the wasp burrow, bzz... bzz...*⁶³

– *Przyleciała sroka do psiego oka*⁶⁴, - and the uncle tickles Kara's eye. Karo opens his eyes tentatively and then closes them again.

– *A crow comes, knock, knock!*⁶⁵ - the uncle rattles the dog's side.

A crow at his tail and a fly at his ear, Karo still lies as if he were cold.

– *The wolf has arrived!*⁶⁶ - shouts his uncle sharply, and Karo, jumping up suddenly, starts barking terribly.

And when my uncle sits down at the piano, he sits on the mat next to me and starts singing. His favourite waltz is "*Nevozvratnoe vremia*"⁶⁷. With his head up, he pulls it higher and lower in an extremely sensual way. Mamat runs out of the salon, her ears plugged, and we drink like at a concert.

Zuzana pampers us like a real grandmother. Several times a day she takes us to the so-called ⁶⁸, to a pleasant little room that seems to us to be some kind of enchanted corner, reminiscent of that fairy-tale hut with its honeycomb walls, chocolate roof and sugar windows. From the many drawers and boxes of the "aptečka", Susan draws all sorts of delicacies as if from a cornucopia of horns, and treats us to such a feast that we

⁶¹ A vizsla is a hunting dog used to retrieve shot birds from the water.

⁶² The dog has gone mad! (*polish*).

⁶³ A wasp flew right up to the dog's nose (*Polish*).

⁶⁴ A magpie flew near the dog's eye (*Polish*).

⁶⁵ The raven has flown, knock, knock! (*Polish*).

⁶⁶ The wolf is barking! (*Polish*).

⁶⁷ "Unrecoverable Times" (*Russian*).

⁶⁸ Pharmacy (*Polish*).

sometimes Mummy comes and gets to chase us out of the enchanted hut, fearing that her frequent visits will end sadly for us.

She comes to take us to the gardens, where from spring to autumn she spends her days trampling among the hedges. She used to be the mistress here, like Zuzana is now, but as she got older, she was put in charge of looking after the gardens, so that she would have something to do. She tends her gardens with care and jealousy. Whoever criticises them insults her, better let him insult her. She is old, but still robust and agile, short, stocky, with a face like a red apple that has been scrunched up, and from which her grey eyes are always smiling.

After handing us each a basket, Mrs Francisca leads us to the cucumbers first. Carefully peeling back the leaves, we find beautiful, glossy cucumbers smeared with dark green gloss⁶⁹.

– Look well, children," says Mrs Francisca. - They are clever creatures. They know how to hide so well that you can't see them.

Alongside the cucumbers, here and there, yellowish-green, funny, plump watermelons have even rolled out into the aisle. You can't walk past them without stroking them affectionately.

– Ah, the lazy! They are only good for sunbathing," Francisca scolds the watermelons.

Then we go to some extraordinary sugar peas, grown by Miss Francisca for her mother, and help her pick the big, thick pods. The smell of dill and flowering poppies tickles our noses. Francisca is succeeded by Ešerys, a haired, shaggy-nosed herd dog, so well-bred that he never sets foot in the hedgehog.

The second favourite, a large, grey cat, usually lies purring on the high, generously made bed of Miss Francisca in her room. It is a very pleasant room: sunny, clean, white-walled; red balsamines, golden violets and green Jerome bloom on the windows; bags of seeds hang on the walls; others are still drying, scattered on the table. Brotherly love reigns between Gray and Escher, but it does not prevent them from being jealous of each other's love. As soon as Mrs Francisca begins to caress Escher, Pilkshi instantly jumps from the bed onto her shoulder, and keeps liming until he, too, has to be caressed. And when she occasionally speaks to the cat and strokes it, look, the dog has already put his paws on her knees or on her shoulders and is nuzzling his muzzle against her face. So she has no choice but to stroke the two favourites together.

These expressions of love are very suitable for Miss Francisca, and she laughs happily. She is always cheerful, and even more cheerful when she sees us, because she loves us as much as Pilksis and Escher. She gets angry when someone trespasses on her gardens, or when her uncle wants to introduce some necessary amendment to those gardens. She does not like any amendments and complains to her uncle's mother, terribly indignant, because 'it has always been like this and everything, and now I wonder how it will turn out'.

We run to see Mrs Francis several times ourselves, and we also go to visit her once more with my mother. She is already waiting for us, having heated up her little samovar⁷⁰, and immediately treats us to tea and confiture⁷¹. As we sip, she tells us funny anecdotes from times gone by. But what we like most is to hear about how little Mamat was.

– Wait a minute, children," says Sr Francisca, "I'll tell you what happened when Mummy was just a baby. Bocelli was still young then, and your mother had just been born. One day, Mr Šemeta and a few other gentlemen come to Kalnèni. When they saw how happy Bochel was to have a child, they thought of a joke. The grandmother, who was unwell, was lying in bed at the time. The other guests are talking to the bachelor in the parlour, while Mr Shemeta is fixing up the whole thing. He demanded a large diaper from me, a nappy, and I delivered it all, and look what's going to happen here. He smeared the little bastard, made him look like a child from a distance, then wrapped him in a nappy like a child and bribed the nanny to bring the little lady when he told her to bring the child instead of the little bastard. What have they been up to, I think to myself, and I can't help being curious,

⁶⁹ Lakier (*Polish*) - varnish.

⁷⁰ Samovar - kettle.

⁷¹ For the confiture, jam.

I stand at the door and look. Mr Shemeta, back in the salon, started saying he wanted to see the boss's daughter. And the boss immediately tells me to bring the baby into the parlour. Immediately the nanny comes, carrying the child. The gentlemen stop and congratulate the bachelors on having such a beautiful daughter, and Mr Shemeta takes the child from the nurse and swings her in his arms.

– Careful, careful, don't get lost! - shouts the frightened dude. With those words, Mr Šemeta just shhhh! and let the wounded sacker fall to the ground. The boy would jump and cry out in a voice that was not his own: *Jesus Marja! zabili mi dziecko!*⁷² and, clutching his head and still shouting, he ran to his room and shut himself in. The nanny and I were laughing, not holding back, and the guests, also laughing, went after the little man. But they had their work cut out for them before they could convince us that it was a joke. At first, Bocchel didn't want to touch them, and kept shouting and calling them "bastards". It was only when he saw the sow with his own eyes that he came to his senses.

Do you think he was angry for such hurtful jokes? Not at all. Kissed all the guests out of joy that it was not true.

Oh, how we laugh that the bastard didn't distinguish between a sow and a mother!

– Poor, poor father," my mother wails, but she laughs too.

Mrs Francis is still talking while we are having tea. Finally, she finishes:

– You got married for nothing, for nothing, Marinèle. I always said, "Unless you marry a prince, you can't. If you had been at home, things would have been different. Now, between you and me, there is much to be said about our household...

– There is no perfection in this world, Franucieczka," replies Mamat.

– If my mother wasn't married, we wouldn't be here, and Mrs Francis would have no one to treat and wait for

– Aha! - Nika replies.

– See how clever you are, Nika! True, I wouldn't have such precious, lovely guests. I wouldn't have any presents to give anyone," and Francesca takes a medalist's heart, a knight on horseback and a rooster decorated with a coloured chandelier from the chest of drawers and gives them to us. As many times as we come to Kalnėni, she always gives us something.

But this time, I don't owe you one. I brought a tablecloth of my own making for Ms Francisca, warm hands for Ms Verusija⁷³, and a cushion for needles for Ms Zuzana. The crosses go in all directions, the stitches are crooked, the stitches are uneven, the fingerprints are blackened here and there, but all three of us feel that there are no other pieces as beautiful as these in the world. They carry them across the length and breadth of Kalnėni, showing them to everyone, admiring them themselves and demanding that others admire and admire my miraculous talent.

Not at all like Mr Francis is Ms Verusia. She is thin and pale, in poor health, half-blind, and, although much younger than Mrs Francis, she is almost incapable of doing anything. She can only crochet, which is why the cords in her shriveled hands are forever flickering and the fishing line is hanging⁷⁴. Her eye disease is slowly advancing, and the terrible spectre of blindness is already standing by her side. Maybe that is why the poor girl is always so sad and sensitive. When she says hello to us, she cries with joy at seeing us again; when she says goodbye, she cries with heartache at the thought that she may never see us again. She cannot buy us presents because she has no money saved up. But neither does she ever leave without a gift. With trembling, pale hands, she pulls out the drawer of her old chest of drawers, takes out the little things she has picked out of her own possessions and gives them to everyone. For me, some brooches, ribbons, necklaces, sometimes nice scraps for dolls' clothes, for the boys, pictures, boxes. Her old chest of drawers is always empty. But it is impossible not to accept it, because it gives her the greatest joy to distribute.

The dark, sad room of Miss Verusha is not, of course, pleasant for us, and we try to get out of there as quickly as possible. The bright and cheerful little room of Miss Francisca, with Grey and Escher, attracts us more. So Mamma tries to be with Miss Verusia as much as possible. Every day, when she is pregnant, Mrs Verusia is able to say the rosary. If there are no guests, Mamatė never misses going to pray together.

⁷² Jesus Mary! killed my child! (*polish*)

⁷³ *Armband* - a knitted cuff worn on the wrist.

⁷⁴ *A sock is a sock or stocking.*

In those quiet evening hours, my still-small head sometimes thinks how poor Miss Verusia is, how terrible it will be for her to go completely blind. Her love comes to mind, her efforts to bring us joy. I am scared. My soul swells with gratitude and pity. I run to Miss Susan, ask her to lend me a rosary and, entering Miss Verusha's room in silence, I begin to pray together. "Thy will be done! Thy will be done!" - says the old woman in a voice filled with tears, and I know very well that at this hour she is thinking about her eyes and offering them to Christ. But I do not believe that the will of the good God would be so terrible as to blind the poor old woman. After every pother, I add from the bottom of my heart, "God forbid that Miss Verusia should go blind!" The familiar words "Ask, and it shall be given to you"⁷⁵ come to mind, and the fact that Mrs Verusia is so good that God has nothing to punish her for, and that she has neither a beloved mother nor a little daughter who loves her as much as I love my mother - would God take away her eyes? No, the good God will not do that.

There is only one person in Kalnèni who does not flatter us or try to please us. He is a bochel. He is not angry with us, he does not restrict us, he just does not take care of us. In the morning we kiss his hand for a very long day, then we thank him for breakfast, then for lunch, in the evenings - for a very long night; occasionally he tells us to say a poem, sometimes he gives us a book - that's all. In spite of this, we love the bachelors too, mostly for making us laugh. We like to watch him, after breakfast, in his Turkish shlafrok⁷⁶, tall, stocky, clean-shaven, with black greying hair in a ponytail, a deep wrinkle between his eyebrows, walking around the large salon of the Kalnèni, saying the morning potheri. A prayer book is placed on each window, and he prays from each one in turn. He prays in a half-voice, for hours completely silent, for hours saying some of the words out loud, always walking, only occasionally kneeling for a short hour, facing the side where the church is.

Prayers last a long time; when they are over, lunch is not far away. Then the bachelors quickly go to their room to burp. He likes to wear clean and tasteful clothes. He wears a white collar, a starched chest, a long jacket, and a stole. Thus dressed, with a stick in one hand and a magnifying glass in the other, he goes to inspect the farm. The beginning and the end of that viewing is the stable. Bochel is very fond of horses and has beautiful ones. When he enters the stable, he goes to each of the stables⁷⁷, - but not too close, so that the horse doesn't get stuck - he looks through the glass, reads the horses. If all the stalls are occupied, he speaks to the coachman in satisfaction.

- Are all the horses healthy, John?

- Hello, sir, like a radish.

- This is good, good, little soul, shake, do not be sorry, lest you be hurt.

But if a seat appears empty, especially where the favourite Bebecha is standing, the bocelli asks the coachman in exasperation:

- Kame Bebecha?

- Out in the blue, sir.

- To the blue, to the blue... Always to the blackness. They'll take my best mare.

Even though the mill is right there, behind the barn, he walks from the stable to the garden, talking to himself in a loud voice about how Kazè doesn't save his horses and what kind of farm it is. But by the time he gets halfway across the large courtyard, the bad breath is gone and his face is serene. If he is transporting hay, he stops the wagon when he comes to the barn and meets it.

- Wait, my soul. I need to see if the hay is dry.

When the carriage stops, he sticks his stick in the hay and, turning it, says:

- Dry, dry, good. Carry on, you little prick.

Then they go into the garden and walk until the butler comes running and announces that lunch is on the table.

In the afternoon, he goes to his bedroom to lie down for an hour. That room is next to the dining room, and the door is open, so we don't go in yet, but we sit and listen. The funny part is about to start

⁷⁵ The Gospel according to Matthew (*Mt 7:7*).

⁷⁶ A *smock* is a dressing gown.

⁷⁷ A *pen* is a fenced-off area in a barn where animals are kept.

thing: a bocelli will start singing a few words in recitative. They always mean something that stuck in his heart that day. "What are you going to sing today?" - we think. And immediately we hear:

– *Danilovich ga-gal-gan, Danilo-o-vich ga-gal-gan, Danilovich ga-gal-ga-a-niu-u-ki-i!*⁷⁸

I have a good idea why Bochel chose those words today. At lunch, Uncle Kazè told us that one of our more distant uncles, Danilovich, had sold a horse with unhealthy legs for good money. Bočelis was very indignant, which is why he sings like that now. Since the tribesmen often give Bochel a chance to be angry, the song is often repeated.

And yesterday was different. At breakfast, my uncle remarked that Jonelis looked a lot like his uncle. At first, it seemed that he wasn't interested, but then, when we were playing in the backyard, he stopped to "look at the farm" and started looking at Jonel through the glass.

– Yes, yes, nice boy, nice. Similar to me, similar. *But fat, oh, h o ! Fat!*⁷⁹ - said to himself.

And after lying down in the afternoon, he started singing:

– *Fat hare, it's good for the cabbage!*⁸⁰

The snoozing bastard sits up late into the night, buried in his books. But he is often disturbed. A butler comes and announces that a man has come on business. Then the butler, frowning, goes to the credenza⁸¹ room, grumbling all the way to the door that he is never allowed to read, and, entering, asks most affectionately:

– What do you say, my soul?

One wants boards for the grain, another for rye seed, another has run out of bread. Bochel listens patiently to their long speeches, gives the order to satisfy them all, and returns to his books.

Bochel has a whole bunch of books. He is very intelligent, knows everything, remembers everything. And what's even funnier is that he's also like a small child, even smaller than me. Nobody could fool me as much as he was recently fooled by his father. My dad came to us with three horses. When he left, he told me to leave one horse in the stable. As he sat down in the carriage, he looked at the horses and said:

– *Strange thing!*⁸² It seems to me that I came with a trio.

And so he drove home, convinced that the third horse had got away from him. Or like last year with Ataman. While Uncle Kazei was driving with Ataman, the most beautiful horse, the horse got sick. His uncle left him with a vet in Telšiai, and in order to prevent him from getting unnecessarily ill⁸³, he told him to replace him with an ordinary working horse with the same colour hair in the stable. Ataman stayed in Telšiai for two weeks, during which time he went to the stable every day and did not notice the deception.

Anything can be persuaded from Bochel. That sometimes, when he is away from us, his father wants to keep him longer, after telling him to shoe horses, he says:

– I wouldn't advise going today. There will be a storm.

– A storm, you say? - asks the boy, and anxiously walks from one window to the next, then into the yard to look at the sky. And even though there is not a single cloud in the sky, he is already afraid and waiting for the storm. Then he calls the coachman and asks his opinion about the ride.

– It's scary to drive, madam," says the coachman, having been lectured by his father. - There will be thunder and clouds.

Bocelli stays. This story is sometimes repeated over several days in a row. And the funny thing is that when the storm doesn't come, the little boy has no claim on either his father or the carrier. The father explains to him that the storm has passed by, but the little fellow is quite satisfied with that and believes again the next day.

⁷⁸ Danilovich the wicked, Danilovich the wicked, Danilovich the wicked! (*Polish*).

⁷⁹ But the rubuil, ho, ho! Rubuilis! (*polish*.)

⁸⁰ Rubuil bunny for cabbage! (*polish*).

⁸¹ *Kredens* (*Polish*) - a buffet, a restaurant.

⁸² Strange thing! (*polish*).

⁸³ To be irritated (*Polish*) - jaudintis, erzintis.

And when a bachelor is angry, it is necessary to tear jokes. This morning after breakfast, Michael, the butler, while tidying up his office, threw out a bottle of ink and poured it over a book. It was a terrible blow to Bochel, because every book is sacred to him.

– *The whole book is useless!*⁸⁴ – shouted the bastard and, with a fierce twist of his forehead, repeating the words over and over again, ran to the bedroom, closed the door and, without stopping his fast pacing, scolded Michal for about ten minutes. Then he fell silent and went out into the dining room, completely calm.

The first person I met here was exactly Michael. Without saying a word to him, the bachelor had already gone on his way, but Mykolas came up and kissed his hand and said:

– Thank you, madam, I did not do it by accident.

– I know, I know, sweetheart. Be more careful next time," said the boss, and went to see if the book was badly damaged. As we were finishing our lunch, the boss told me to recite. I had just learned the introduction to Pan Tadeusz⁸⁵, so I started: *Litwo, ojczyzno moja! You are like a healthy...*⁸⁶ and, without once stumbling, I said a few dozen lines. Bochel liked it very much. After praising me, he called me into his office and gave me a small, quarter-sized, old, greenish book.

– Here's a brief history of Lithuania. Just right for you. Look, respect it, when I come to you, I will always control how it looks. Learn from it with dedication, I will examine you, you will have to answer to me without error. Everyone must know the history of his country.

I kissed the guy's hand and when I opened the leaflet, I saw the word "Kukuvoitis". I laughed.

– What a funny name Kukuvoitis! – I wondered.

Bochel wrinkled his forehead.

– What's so funny? Only a fool finds everything funny. A wise and honest person should speak and think about his ancestors with the utmost respect. If you laugh, I will be forced to take the book away.

– I'm not laughing, dude... I'm just, from the beginning... – rightly ashamed.

The booklet seemed to me now to be some kind of sacred thing. With the greatest reverence, I wrapped it with paper and put it in our wallet⁸⁷, thinking that when I returned home I would immediately start learning about my famous ancestors.

Bochel is extremely fond of sweets. But he never buys it himself. He is treated to one or two, but when his mother puts a box in his room when he is staying with us, as if by accident, he almost empties it in a day. He doesn't like to eat sweets in front of other people, but even when he eats, he pretends not to see. You really cannot help laughing when you see what he does sometimes. Occasionally, when the table is ready for dinner but there is no samovar and the dining room is empty, he walks around the table by himself, with his hands folded behind his back and his eyes fixed pointedly on the sugar bowl that is on the table. After walking around a few times, he comes backwards to the table and reaches his hand into the sugar bowl with his eyes closed. He catches a piece of sugar and hurriedly puts it in his mouth and, opening his eyes, walks again until he has swallowed it. Then he repeats the same scene again until Michael enters with the samovar.

After saying the rosary with Verusia, Mamathee goes to the salon, bathed in sunset gold, and sits behind the piano. At the first chords, the bachelor comes in and slides into the big armchair in the corner of the salon; my uncle and I run in and take a seat together on the sofa; silently, like a shadow, Mrs Verusia slides in and sits on the chair right by the door, with her pale hands clasped in her dark robe. Mamathe is playing Beethoven's Eighth Sonata, a favourite piece of his. It seems to me that it is not just us, but everything in the salon that is listening to this wonderful music: the old, heavy furniture, the huge spiky agaves⁸⁸, and the row of portraits on the walls. Some are fading in the twilight, others look alive in the last reflections of the last fading sunset. Here is the cheerful smile of the handsome black-eyed, tall-eyed prodigy who gave me

⁸⁴ The whole book is nothing! (*Polish*).

⁸⁵ "Mr Thaddeus" (*in Polish*).

⁸⁶ *Motherland Lithuania, better than health!* (*Polish* - translated by V. Mykolaitis-Putin). The first line of Adam Mickiewicz's poem "Ponas Tadas".

⁸⁷ *Valiza* - suitcase.

⁸⁸ *Agave* is an indoor ornamental plant grown in warm countries.

so appropriate! How perfectly blushing is the coutouche under the diamond buttons⁸⁹ ! And there, at the door, the terrible little green-robed bastard nods her high, strangely cropped head. I have always been afraid of her and now I squint my eyes in fright.

The last deep chords of the sonata have already died, and their echoes are still echoing in the large salon. For an hour we are all silent. Then the bachelor says:

– Now sing, children.

We approach the piano and, with the help of my mother and uncle, we sing:

*From above the forest, from
above the butterflies, To the
valley of the gopher
The crack has gone down.
He's calling for the
children...⁹⁰*

In her cubbyhole, Mrs Verusia is quietly cooing and wiping her tears. The song captures the wound in her heart, reminding her of the bridegroom. The gentlemen took him away to fight *for his homeland*⁹¹ - and he never came back. Strong, young and beloved, he fell in the forest under a pine tree with his chest shot through. But that was so long ago, and the dear boy's person has been left so blue, that the memory no longer scratches the wound, but only smells of some kind of joyful resignation.

– Not bad, not bad, - praises the bachelor, - pure vowels. Now '*Tam na błoniu*'.

*There on the blossom shines a
flower on the bellows, a lancer
stands on the picket line,
And the girl, like a raspberry,
carries a basket of roses.⁹²*

The bachelors himself sings that song and when we finish he tells us to sing "Birute".

– On the edge of the lagoon, in Palanga... - We pull with our thin vowels, again with the support of the bocelli.

Bočelis likes to speak Samogitian and never speaks any other language to his servants. He has in his library books signed by Bishop Valančiauskis, a friend of his, and he often goes to the "Samogitian Diocese"⁹³ and says:

– *Ancient language. Rich language*⁹⁴ . To be younger, I would study it in depth, starting with Sanskrit.

Meanwhile, the cabin is plunging deeper into darkness. Instead of portraits, the white walls are blackened by large squares, and it seems that all those poor people have gone to bed. Only at the piano, where a white charcoal barrel seems to want to come out of its frame. I love that beautiful lady with the blonde hair and the long, sad, black eyes - just like Mamathe's and Nika's. Her pretty lips are unhappy with something - as if she is disappointed, as if everything here is a boring earthly song for her, just like for Mamata. It seems that she will soon open her lips and say, like Mamata, but in English: *Ach, na tym świecie śmierć wszystko zmiecie...*

⁸⁹ *Kuntuš* - a jacket worn by nobles in the times of the GDL.

⁹⁰ *From beyond the forest,
from the skies of the valley
wide,
The black crow has landed,
calling the children... (Polish).*

⁹¹ For the Fatherland (Polish).

⁹² *Flowers are blooming,
the meadow is covered,
there stands a lancer at his*

post,
And the maiden like a
berry carries a basket of
roses (Polish).

⁹³ M. Valančius' work "The Diocese of Samogitia" (1848).

⁹⁴ An ancient language. A rich language (*Polish*).

And her name, like her mother's, is Mery. When I look at her, I often wonder: how could poor Mery do this? That fine gentleman came to her in a red suit with a red couturier, glittering with diamonds, and she left everything behind and went with him to a distant, unknown country. Perhaps that is why her black eyes became so sad and her graceful lips so bitter afterwards? As night falls, she leaves her frame, takes her beloved brother, covered in armour, whose portrait she took with her on her journey to Samogitius, and walks with him through the salon, listening to his tales of his overseas homeland, and enjoying the sounds of his native language. Then she goes to the hall, where her mahogany dowry chest stands, and, opening it without a key, takes her silver-lined prayer book with its pages yellowed with age and returns to the salon to pray. It seems to me that one day that book will disappear from the chest. And sometimes I ask my mother to look at it. But when we open the top of the heavy chest, we always find it in its place.

Mamatè is still playing something. The cabin is getting darker. I feel uncomfortable, drawn to the bright, cheerful room. I find the Highlander's salon eerie even in the daytime. So I'm very happy when Michael appears in the doorway and announces:

– Tea is served.

* * *

We go to Paulina's wedding, to the rectory. Mamatè will be the maid of honour, I will be the bridesmaid. Even Nika has been invited by Paulina to join the brothers, and he must be seated in the back. Mummy and Daddy didn't want us to go, because it was best for the children in the cottage, but they agreed to it at Pauline's request. And we don't know how to be happy ourselves. Only Nika regretted that they did not wear hats in the church and that he could not wear his fine kiver and stole. But Daddy says that the kiver can be held very nicely in the hand, and he showed us how. My mother told me to put on the most beautiful dress - white with red velvet peas - and she dressed herself with her blue silk dress, which suited her so well.

Daddy's not coming. Either a wedding *comme il faut*⁹⁵, he says, or a pure 'peizan'⁹⁶, and the kind of society that will be there is too irritating for the nerves.

The wedding did not start in the evening, as is common in our country, but on the day of the wedding itself, because the bride did not want the masculine ceremonies of the evening of the wedding. Both her and the groom's families were noblemen, so the wedding had to be gentlemanly. For this reason, the wedding was not to take place in the morning, as with the men, but in the evening.

When we arrived, we found the parsonage already full of guests. At one end of the parlour sat a group of young men. It was the young man and his companions. They were all well dressed, with long black jackets, except for one in an official's uniform, who turned out to be the postmaster and had come as a matchmaker. I was most interested in which of them was the young one. Of course, the most handsome. And after looking at all of them, I decided that it was none other than that blond guy with the long chin, the forehead worn down, and the golden penny. But how disappointed I felt when the pastor, after having put my mother in the canapé, began to recommend those gentlemen to her! The young man turned out to be the ugliest of them all, so ugly that I couldn't understand how Miss Pauline could take such a man. Short, stocky, unemotional, with a red, as if peeled, face, sparse pink whiskers and round, owl-like, yellowish eyes.

– I recommend the younger one," the pastor said with a laugh. - As you can see, *no Apollo and no gunpowder will invent*⁹⁷.

This recommendation did not impress the young man in the least. He too will laugh merrily.

– Mother, how am I going to marry such a coward? - I said in my mother's ear, as the young man stepped back.

⁹⁵ As required (*French*).

⁹⁶ Paysan (*French*) means "villager".

⁹⁷ Not Apollo and not Apollo will not think, will not think (*Polish*).

The blonde man with the penny turned out to be the younger brother, a pharmacist. There was a second pharmacist, and a roadmaster - all cousins of the young man. ⁹⁸Each of them kissed his mother's hand and said, "*Pleased to meet you*," and went back to his corner.

The ladies were very well dressed. They had artificial flowers in their hair and on their chests, rings and bracelets on their hands, earrings in their ears, necklaces and buttons around their necks. One of them, who had come from Riga, had a fan in her hand.

The bride was not in the salon, she was still sitting up, and her mother-in-law had to help her. She went to her room, led by the bride's two sisters, and I ran after her. Miss Pauline, in her white tailed dress, was sitting in front of the mirror, waiting for her veil to be pinned on.

- What, my lady, is my young man very handsome? - she asked her mother.

- Prettiness isn't everything," said my mother.

- *Give peace!*⁹⁹ That he can't even speak nicely. *As that one said: neither from the head, nor from speech, nor to dance, nor to rosary*¹⁰⁰.

- So why are you following him, Pauline?

- Here! Dumb is dumb, but *clever is smart*¹⁰¹. *He doesn't drink, he doesn't play cards and he is rich.*

- "There's nothing to say about wealth," my sister replied.

- Tokj dvarą tur paėmęs nuo grafo ant rendos, *a szek jeszcze i savoja ma niemata fortuna*¹⁰². Mudvi nė ena nie viena nieštėom so Married, for such a bagočiaus.

- *I can tell you the best thing*, - said the other woman, - *because Pawlinka and I went to see*¹⁰³. *Sixty cows standing in the barns, and what cows! Udders like udders. Steely horses, two hundred hides, like the sun*¹⁰⁴. And in the grain barn, and in the bedding barn, and in the meat barn, full of all kinds of good things. *That beautiful room, all lined with spires*¹⁰⁵.

A catch of the spirit was reflected in her big face.

- *Toż to to*, - said the younger one, - *I have done a good job, I have gone round all the conti. Just, it seems, eat, drink and be merciful*¹⁰⁶. And do you think there are cakes here? *Z ciotko czesami i bardzo popstrykamisia. Wiedomo, ona tu pani. Czesami so heart-breaking that God save me. I'm all out of milk.*¹⁰⁷.

- There, you will have no lady on your head, no mother, no sister, no brother - nothing.

A lady herself," said the first sister.

- But there's not one groom in the world," said my mother. - You'd get one you'd like.

- *Listen!*¹⁰⁸ What will you get there! After all, a lot of pirsha, but what of it? *Za mužiko eiti neniū; uż bajoro, co już zupełnie zmieszkwasy sia, znów nie chcem*¹⁰⁹; imk znów taka, kur netur žemės - *posag wypuści i rob, co nie robiwszy*¹¹⁰.

- God forbid! - said the second sister. - For my Rhodes is both handsome and learned, and from a distance it was not possible to look at everything well, and I liked it, so I went. And what of it? I threw in my share, we settled down, now we're just miserable, and that's enough. What's in it for me now? You can neither pay your debts with it, nor eat your food.

⁹⁸ Pleased to meet you (*in Polish*).

⁹⁹ Enough is enough! (*Polish*).

¹⁰⁰ As the saying goes: neither at the shoulder nor at the guest (*Polish*).

¹⁰¹ But a shrewd farmer (*Polish*).

¹⁰² And he has a lot of property of his own.

¹⁰³ I can tell you the best, because Paulinka and I were riding in a jvang (*Polish: "jarg"*).

¹⁰⁴ Like a milk hair (*Polish*).

¹⁰⁵ And the beauty of the rooms, all upholstered (*Polish*).

¹⁰⁶ So we had a good look around, we went round all the corners. It seems all you can do is eat, drink and be merry (*Polish*).

¹⁰⁷ My aunt and I sometimes get into big fights. Of course, she's the lady here. Sometimes she chokes my heart so much, God forbid. I am *fed* up with it.

¹⁰⁸ Listen! (*Polish slang*).

¹⁰⁹ Which is already completely settled, I don't want to do it again (*Polish*).

¹¹⁰ They will let you go, and what will you do afterwards (*Polish: "to be made poor"*).

– *But such a hadki, such a hadki... When you think that you are going to marry such a monster, it makes your heart angry*¹¹¹, - tarè jaunoji.

– *And you don't think about his awfulness, but about his pocket*¹¹².

– Get used to it, don't be afraid! *Believe me, Pawlinka*¹¹³. You can get used to the beautiful and you can get used to the ugly. *Potem wszystko równo - mąż do mąż*¹¹⁴.

– And better still, a fool with no mind of his own will listen to you. *As you tell him, so he will do, because it is evident that he is endlessly in love with sia*¹¹⁵.

– *Well, and familja nie byjaka, nie do what przystaków enter, all learned people. The native brother is an apothecary, the unborn one is an apothecary, the second one is a priest, the sister married to the head of the tent*¹¹⁶.

– *It is. You're going to go and quite*¹¹⁷. And if you ever have to cry, you will have someone to wipe your tears with. For a bald man, it's a problem, but when you have it in your pocket, it's easy to bear.

*As there are creeps, so there are servants*¹¹⁸.

– You know, Pauline," said her mother, "I don't want to be your mother-in-law any more. Maybe one of your sisters would marry me. I don't want to take part in such a profanation of the sacrament. You swear to love and to be faithful, but you abhor it and go only for its wealth.

Miss Pauline jumped up from her seat.

– God forbid! Little lady, you would disgrace me for ever! Don't be afraid, little lady, I will be good to him myself. He shall be dressed, and washed, and fed. What will he want? I will keep it short, as such a one should. He will not be sorry if he listens to me," she said, kissing her mother's hands.

– Pauline," said her mother, "it is better to walk away from the altar than to nail yourself to an unloved person for life.

The sisters even clapped their hands.

– Miss, what are you talking about! The guests have arrived, lunch is ready, *everything is prepared!*¹¹⁹ - That would be *scandalous! Dosić, dosiść! Ruin the whole wedding!*¹²⁰

– No, miss, I won't. *You'll get used to it. And because you - you're sick and tired*¹²¹.

Mamaté didn't say anything more. She wore the white velvet wrinkles, she wore the batiste flower crown, but she was looking somewhere out of the way, out of everything around her, as if her soul had drifted a hundred miles away from all those talking women and all those weddings.

Soon, Pauline's toilet was finished. The young lady's light dress did not go well with Pauline's heavy frame and her reddish complexion with its chunky features. She looked much prettier in her plain homespun clothes than she did in that pretentious outfit with the badly cut tail, which dragged ridiculously behind like a mop. We went into the salon, and I and a second bridesmaid, also a little girl, began to pin white cockerels with myrtle branches on all the gentlemen. Ruth was thrown out of the wedding ceremony by Miss Paulina so that there would be no *prostaks*¹²². The only exception was for the little wreath of runes that her mother had put between the folds of her veil, without which the wedding would not have been real, it seems. As they were about to tie the knot, the young man came up. His red face was suffused with infinite joy and indescribable self-satisfaction.

– *And those two bastards are gonna nail me?*¹²³ - He asked.

¹¹¹ But so ugly, so ugly... When you think that you are marrying such a coward, it makes your heart angry.

¹¹² And you don't think about his ugliness, but about his pocket.

¹¹³ Believe in me, Paulinka (*Polish*).

¹¹⁴ Then it's still the same - a man, and that's enough (*Polish*).

¹¹⁵ Whatever you tell him to do, he'll do it, because it's obvious that he's madly in love (*Polish*).

¹¹⁶ Well, and not just any family, I won't be among the poor, but people who have been taught. My brother is a pharmacist, my cousin is a pharmacist, my other cousin is a priest, and my sister is married to the stationmaster (*Polish*).

¹¹⁷ So. You'll be a lady, that's all.

¹¹⁸ "If you have money, you will have friends".

¹¹⁹ Everything is ready! (*Polish*).

¹²⁰ Scandal! Enough, enough! Break up all the weddings! (*Polish slang*).

¹²¹ I'll get used to it. Because I will be a lady, and that's enough.

¹²² As with the poor (*Polish*).

¹²³ Will you pin it for me too? (*Polish*).

And when it was pinned, he kept looking at the cockatiel with his owl's eyes, as if he had received the most precious order. Meanwhile, it was getting wet, and it was time to go to church. The sisters and aunts had fallen upon the pastor to bless the young ones, for the young one had no parents. The pastor shook his head, said he didn't like sentimental ceremonies, but agreed anyway. He pulled up the carpet, and the young people knelt before the pastor, who, after he had kissed them black, said to Pauline:

– You are no longer a child, no longer a child. You're an adult. You know what you are doing. Nobody forced you, nobody forced you. You sleep as you please.

A lightning bolt of fear and pain passed over the young woman's face as she bowed to the pastor's hand, and a few tears rolled down her white gloves.

Making sure her wedding was a proper one, Paulina set the whole ceremony herself. She had just had a recent wedding of a lady of the manor, so she had an example to follow. When they leave the house, everyone lines up with the ceremony: the bride and groom go first, then the bridesmaids, then the groom and the matchmaker, and then the others, always in pairs. We pass through the churchyard, which smells of resets and phlox, and enter the church, which is alight with lights. Tall poles, wrapped in greenery and surrounded by lights, stand at the nave. It is full of onlookers. All this, apparently, is very suitable for the young lady. She is concerned that everything should be as the ceremonial orders, conducts and manages. She takes the long-haired pharmacist under one arm and Nick under the other and walks down the aisle. We, the bridesmaids, lead the youngest to follow them. All the others are also strictly lined up. Nika holds his feet high, ringing his pentacles and holding his quiver beautifully, as his father taught him. I am terribly embarrassed, ashamed to be leading such an ugly young man, and I want the procession to end as soon as possible. Finally we stand before the altar and the priest sings "Veni, Creator"¹²⁴. The people are so grain on the Croats that they seem to be about to break. Pauline, having taken off her right glove, throws it behind her on the bridesmaids; each one tries to catch her, for she who catches her will marry first. All the time the young man smiles sweetly. The young woman turns white, and her outstretched hand trembles. The young man speaks the words of the oath loudly, with shame, while the young woman murmurs in a low, indistinct voice.

At the end of the wedding, the organist plays the march, and we go home, reunited again. A cavalier comes running into the churchyard and says:

– *Please do not overdo it, they will be waiting for*¹²⁵.

And immediately a dozen shots broke the sleepy silence.

We were greeted by an orchestra on the porch - three Jewish men with a squeak, a clarinet and a double bass, and an aunt of the young people was waiting for us in the hall with bread and salt.

As we were about to go to lunch, Mr Jonavičius arrived. Greeting him, my mother said:

– It's good that you came for once. The young lady was so eagerly waiting for you.

– Oh happiness! And the young one is not going to fight me? Mamathe laughed.

– I had work to do at home and couldn't get there early, and the young lady invited me so sincerely that if I hadn't come at all I would have been rude. Besides, I like to admire such native genre views from time to time. Besides... It's not interesting here.

– Or maybe it's just the most interesting? - said my mother.

– Or maybe that's just the interesting thing... What's most interesting is usually hidden.

The young people sat at the back of the table, decorated with a large cake with the letters of the two of them written in coloured lucre, followed by the ladies and gentlemen. The other side of the table was reserved for the gentlemen. But Mr Jonavičius protested against this arrangement and chose a place among the ladies. As that place was almost opposite me and my mother, we were able to enjoy his performance. When he sat down at the table, Mr Jonavicius suddenly began to differ neither in manner nor in speech from the rest of the company, and he teased the ladies in such a noble manner that they seemed extremely pleased with their neighbour.

– *You are sticking your nose in, like a nettle among roses, and you are leading us to anger*¹²⁶, - said one.

¹²⁴ "Come, Creator" (*Latin*).

¹²⁵ Please don't be scared - I'll shoot (*Polish slang*).

– *But that's why nettle is far more valuable than rose*, - replied Mr Jonavičius, - *it's a good medicine, and it's also good for hens to carry, and it's possible to weave cloth, like linen*¹²⁷ .

– *Dositch, dositch!* - the panels laughed. - *Pan jestasz fokusnik, i wieńcej nic*¹²⁸ .

At the table was a butler who had been brought for the occasion - a tall, lean, shaven-faced man, carved as if with a quick carving out of wood, wearing black robes and white crocheted gloves, who walked gravely, shuffling with his boots on, and, as he served up the food, said to each individual in a monotonous, grim voice: *Za pozwoleniem!*¹²⁹ As he repeated these words while exchanging plates and pouring beer and wine, some dull insect spider seemed to be circling the room. Prunce, the vicar's butler, always not too dull, was now completely stunned by the unattainable butler-like perfection of his colleague.

One of the bride's cousins, visiting from Riga, tried to treat her guests in high style.

– *Can you have some more soup? Are you in the wish list?*¹³⁰

– *No, dzienkuja, jestem nie w życzeniu*¹³¹ , - replied the guests without giving up.

But what made me laugh the most were the young people. The young man kept wanting to sit closer to his wife, and she kept pulling at

aside. Her eyes flashed with anger, and she said, softly but firmly:

– *They ask you to sit like a man, because they will get up and go*¹³² .

The young man instantly moved to the left.

– *Don't bend if you don't want to. Don't be angry, Pawlinka...*¹³³

When Liokai gives the young woman some food and she refuses to take it, the young man asks, smiling sweetly:

– *Put it down for me, Pawlinka, I want*¹³⁴ .

– *No, I'm moving on, comedy without money! Isn't it a small child, doesn't it need a nanny!*¹³⁵

– *But if you put youani down, it will smell better*¹³⁶ .

– *They ask you to calm down and remember that they are not sitting on a rude merry-go-round!*¹³⁷

But the most amazing thing is that the young man, despite all the affectionate feelings his wife expresses, still smiles happily and eats like three men.

The pastor does not sit at the table; he walks around, entertaining and talking to the guests.

– *Eat, eat, eat, don't regret it, there's enough for everyone. My beans cooked a lot. When will you be drunk if not at the wedding? Glory to God, the last one, the last one!*

– *Mr. Chief,*" he says, approaching the postmaster with a bottle in his hand, *"you are a Russian chevalier, and a Russian chevalier is a liubit vipit*¹³⁸ .

– *Why not? You can always have a drink. Piej, da dielo rozumiej*¹³⁹ .

– *Well, it's the only one*¹⁴⁰ .

And the pastor laughs, wiping his sweaty face with a blue handkerchief.

¹²⁶ You, sir, have mingled among us like a nettle among roses, and you are angry (*Polish slang*).

¹²⁷ And yet, a nettle is worth much more than a rose. It is good for medicine, for chickens to eat, and for weaving cloth, like flax.

¹²⁸ Enough, enough! [...] You are a prankster, sir, and that's all (*Polish*).

¹²⁹ With your permission! (*polk.*).

¹³⁰ Could you have some more soup, madam? And sir, will you excuse me? (*Polish*).

¹³¹ No, thank you, I'm not flattering (*Polish*).

¹³² Please sit like a human being, because I will get up and walk away (*Polish*).

¹³³ There will be no more if you don't want to. Don't be angry, Pauline... (*Polish*).

¹³⁴ Put it on me, Paulina, I want it.

¹³⁵ I'm not saying, comedy without money! Isn't it just a small child, or don't you need a babysitter! (*Polish*).

¹³⁶ But when you put a prayer, it will be tastier (*Polish*).

¹³⁷ Please calm down and remember that you are not sitting at a wedding of Chams! (*Polish slang*).

¹³⁸ You're Russian, and Russians like to drink (*Russian*).

¹³⁹ Drink, but don't throw up (*Russian*).

¹⁴⁰ Let's throw away a mouthful (*Russian*).

– Wait a minute, I'll tell you about the *wimp under the poison*. I was a branch priest in Paezheri at the time, and there is an Orthodox church there. And there was a Pope then, Father Akindin, Father Akindin. He was a good man, only one misfortune - he loved the bottle, he loved the bottle. And the matushka was extremely angry, he was afraid of her like fire. When he got drunk, she used to get in his way everywhere, and even his beard would get much scratched, scratched. He was afraid to drink at home, poor fellow. As soon as he felt like it, he came to me.

*Well, father, how to get a gorlo to you, you know. At home, you know, it's not good...*¹⁴¹

*Well, Father Akindin, God be with you, please see*¹⁴². Just don't drink too much, because, you see, it's not polite to drink in a parsonage like in an inn.

*But you are the one who is in danger, Dad, not the one who is in trouble!*¹⁴³ - Popeye shouts, beating his chest. - *Ja tolko vniemliu po jedynoj*¹⁴⁴.

"Look. One of these days, your matushka will come back angry, and I'll be angry again."

*"Don't laugh*¹⁴⁵, " he says. - Where will I go? Not at home, or to the inn? *San nie pozvoliajet, san svoj uvažaju!*"¹⁴⁶

I never gave him vodka, he brought it with him. He would go into the back room - there was a back room where nobody came in - and there he would just *vniemliet, vniemliet*. I would go out here and there, say the potions, and go for a walk - and my father would be stretched out, either in bed or sometimes on the floor. Then I take Dzidoriuk - I had a butler - and we put the poor man to bed. Only in the morning, after he had slept, would he come home.

This Dzidorius was a cunning child, he never betrayed his father Akindino. Liub Matushka will send to ask if there is a shoebox.

"No," he says, "it was there, but it's gone".

The guests started laughing along with the pastor himself, but the headmaster was not laughing.

– Yes, it happens. And not just for shoes," he said. - Drinkers are often very good people.

– And Father Akindin was a good man, a good man. There is only one thing, one fault," the pastor replied, and went on to call the other guests.

– Eat up, pharmacists, take more, don't be proud. Get a bit better, because you have become extremely weak, you piggish¹⁴⁷ spinners. And then no lady will want you, as you are such spirits. I will give you good advice on which one to choose. *Primo* - not pointy-nosed, *sekundo* - not skinny, *tercio* - not deep, not deep¹⁴⁸.

– You don't ask much of a pastor," the cavaliers laugh.

– Because those little spiky things are very angry, very angry.

– *It's just that I've taken sia, like the parish priest you advise!*¹⁴⁹ - the young man answered suddenly in a voice as if he had invented something unexpected and important.

Meanwhile, Mr Jonavičius, having kneaded three lumps of bread and placed them on the table, asked his cheerful neighbour:

– *What do you wish for these knobs?*

– *For this one: let her walk all evening around me. And for this one: may she never cry. And for the former: that she should run out into the yard after her shirt.*

– *A pharmacist with glasses will be walking in front of Mr Agata.*

– *Not bad. But that's why it's wrong...*

– *No need to cry for the groom.*

¹⁴¹ Well, Dad, I'm here to, you know, clear my throat. It's not comfortable at home, you know... (*Russian*).

¹⁴² Well, well, Father Akindin, God has not seen, rinse (*Russian*).

¹⁴³ I swear, father, I won't get drunk! (*Russian*).

¹⁴⁴ I'll just throw my mouth out (*Russian*).

¹⁴⁵ Don't you dare (*Russian*).

¹⁴⁶ The loom does not allow it, I respect my loom! (*rus.*).

¹⁴⁷ Pigulka (*Polish*) - pill.

¹⁴⁸ Unplucked (*Polish*).

¹⁴⁹ I took the one the pastor recommended! (*Polish*).

- *It's like once good wishes for weddings*¹⁵⁰ .
- *And after the shirt, you'll get yourself an Agatha.*
- *Oh, how badly I said that! It must be the fire that's showing you.*¹⁵¹

In the afternoon, the dancing began. As the master of ceremonies told the bride and groom to go first, the postmaster, wearing white gloves, bowed before Mamathe and began to waltz. Mamathe danced beautifully, and Mr Postmaster was also very agile, so that first waltz was really lovely to watch. After the ceremony, Mamaté stopped dancing because there were enough ladies. Mr Jonavičius, after dancing with the bride, sat down next to Mamathe.

- *Ugh! What a shame! As soon as you've got a glowing*¹⁵² .

Mamaté barely contained her laughter.

– I did not know that you had another talent, and not just any talent. You made me laugh so much throughout the lunch that even the heavy feeling caused by the wedding was hidden somewhere deep down.

– If so, I am lucky to have that talent.

– What came into your head to play a nobleman?

– Maybe I wanted to distract you from your sad mood, or maybe I wanted to dive headfirst into my native genre. But enough of this rambling. It's too much of a "boring earth song"...

More couples are being wheeled around the salon each time. Mr Jonavičius, however reluctantly, had to dance, often being picked up by the ladies for the figures. When all three of the pastor's nieces came out to dance at once, the parlour floor began to vibrate. The lean and pale apothecaries were sweating as they twirled their dancers. The young man, of course, wanted to dance with his wife, but Pawlinka strictly ordered him not to dare to marry her, because she did not want to make a fool of herself; and he himself had better not get up on the jokes, and shame her, and, not being able to dance, to sit quietly in a cave.

But the young man must have had his own convictions, because, having received good advice, he disobeyed it and, without the slightest upset, took a lady out dancing. My God! It was so funny and so unprecedented that Nika and I, sitting in the corner, burst out laughing. Without listening to the music at all, without any tact, he jumped upwards, heavy as an unpainted log, and only spun on his axis, because he finished dancing at most a step from where he started. The funny thing was that he seemed to have firmly believed that he was no worse than the others, and perhaps better. The unfortunate dancer herself did not know what to do, and turned red with shame. And he let her go and went to marry another. But the unfortunate one had more to satiate our eyes with his grace: both the lady did not go, and a barrier stood on the other side. The young woman, all on fire, ran to the apothecaries, demanding that they stop her brother at once. The lawyers back home had already told him not to dance, but what could you do if he didn't listen.

– Now please order it again, strictly, and if he doesn't obey, I'll show him! - he said.

What words the pharmacists used to speak to their persistent brother is unknown, but it is enough to say that they were successful. He no longer jumps. He was running around the room, always looking at his Pavlina, and sometimes he even dared to come and ask:

– *Can you sit next to them?*

– *There you go! I don't disagree with anyone to sit*¹⁵³ .

¹⁵⁰ What does Miss Agota wish for those clumps?

– Tam: let them follow me all evening. And for this: so that I never have to cry. And to the third: that I should run out in a single shirt the courtyard.

– A bespectacled Mr Pharmacist will follow Miss Agatha.

– Not too bad. But still not hit...

– The younger person will not have to cry.

– It's just a good wish at a wedding.

¹⁵¹ - And for the singletshirt, it will be up to Lady Agata herself to run.

– Wow, how badly I sounded! It's probably either a ghost or a fire.

¹⁵² Oh! What a hard roll! Like a mill (*Polish*).

¹⁵³ Could I sit next to you?

– This is for you! I don't *forbid* anyone to sit down.

But he, happy, didn't have time to sit down when she was already dancing, and sat down at the other end of the room when she had finished. Then he went around again, and went up to one of the others and asked:

– *You don't think my wife's a milksop? Just that twerp.*¹⁵⁴ .

There were two ladies and me sitting in a small canapé. A young man comes up and says:

– *Are you going to let me in? -Yes.*¹⁵⁵

– There's no more room," said one panel.

– *Enough is enough. It gets even better*¹⁵⁶ .

Afraid that he would go back on his word, I jumped up from the sofa and ran to my mother.

Senior nobles talk about farm worries. That this year *there is not enough rye, there is nothing to feed the animals*¹⁵⁷ ; another complained that *ugor jeszcze nie skartany*¹⁵⁸ ; another told how he sowed the purest rye, and when it grew up it turned into arable land, and so it often happened that rye turned into arable land. Another complained that her family did not want to work, but needed a lot of work, that *teraz już nie tak, jak bywało że bendzi*¹⁵⁹ . Others sat down to gamble. Their own women, among whom sat their mother, told them about their feminine affairs.

– *I'm in dire need of a good weaver*¹⁶⁰ , - said one. - I want to weave towels. I need to make a dowry for my daughter.

– And isn't your little daughter crying herself? - asked her mother.

– *Why should she do such a peasant's job that she is trained for anything else? She will endlessly learn your various jobs. Temburkui sioi toi, kviėtkas krasas padirba. Be darbo nesėdi. That she has decorated the tent, it's nice to see*¹⁶¹ . Tinklinės firankos¹⁶² ant oknaų, palmos ant kumodos, pod lempa takie padę¹⁶³ padirbo iš vlučkų - visokios kvietkos ir kanarkos¹⁶⁴ , jak tik tik živvos.

At the other end of the saloon, a tollway official praised the life of the tollway workers to the ladies.

– *Living in a flat is simply paradise*¹⁶⁵ . Chief, assistant, telegraphists, drivers - you can't count them all – there's no shortage of company, and it's great fun. Every Sunday we get together with someone. Then there's dancing. You choose the ladies. *Koniecznie, yra yra ir darbo, ale to robota czysta.* And on some days, when you get tired of writing, you go to the buffet. *There are two interesting girls there - you'll chat with them.* You want to go to Liepaja for free, you want to go to Dvinsk - you go to Dvinsk. *If now you have to live in the country again, you will live for a week*¹⁶⁶ .

– It would be good to marry a woman," said one lady.

– *Ah, zał, że ja już zarenczony*¹⁶⁷ ," said Mr. Yellowknife, giving her an extremely sensual look.

– *Zarenczyni - pajenczyni*¹⁶⁸ ," added another.

Then Mr. Gelzkel began to tease the ladies about why they didn't go dancing with everyone. When he saw the pastor approaching, he said:

¹⁵⁴ Isn't it true how beautiful my wife is? Just a little bit of a pickle.

¹⁵⁵ Would you accept me in the middle? (Polish).

¹⁵⁶ We will squeeze, and that will be enough. It will be even more fun.

¹⁵⁷ Not enough fodder, nothing to feed the animals (Polish: *żarg.*).

¹⁵⁸ The fallow is not yet ploughed (Polish).

¹⁵⁹ It's not like it used to be.

¹⁶⁰ I would need a good weaver terribly.

¹⁶¹ And why should she have to do such a manly job when she has learned to do something else? She is extremely well trained in various menial tasks. With a bow [...]. That she has decorated the secluded room is lovely to see.

¹⁶² *Firanca* - window curtain.

¹⁶³ *Pallet* - tray, base.

¹⁶⁴ *Canary* - canary.

¹⁶⁵ Living by the station is a paradise (Polish)

¹⁶⁶ Of course [...]. But it's clean work. [...]. There are two interesting ladies there - you chat with them. [...] If I had to live in the country again now, I would lose my life in a week.

¹⁶⁷ Ah, I'm sorry I've already blossomed (Polish).

¹⁶⁸ A spider's web (Polish: *spiderweb*).

– *Proborszcz, they are asking for the work to be dissolved here. I, here the ladies are dressing up, that they are being rude with the bachelors*¹⁶⁹ .

The ladies started making excuses.

– *E, proborszczu, please don't listen! It's all a maiden's hocus-pocus. They ask to give a good work and a finished work*¹⁷⁰ .

– What are you talking about when you have nothing to do! - shouted the young man's cousin, who came running up. - The music is playing and they are not dancing. When will you dance if not at the wedding?

*Dance drunk, dance not drunk,
Dance the girl caught!*¹⁷¹

– sang, and grabbed one of the ladies by the arm and pulled her to dance. But she caught herself, and said:

– *Excuse me, isn't there a greater hypocrisy than knowing*¹⁷² .

The pastor was in constant motion: from the dining room to his bedroom, where some of the guests were sitting, and from there to the salon. There he watched the dancers, talked to one another, and then moved on again, waving his hand and murmuring:

– *Glory to God, the last one! Glory to God, the last!*¹⁷³

In between dances, we played games involving my mother and me. A cup, over which the ladies for the cavaliers and the cavaliers for the ladies carved heavily with the jujitsu, and when they met in flight, they plundered each other's arms, in order to be the first to reach the empty chair when they had arrested their opponent. But no one, however hard he was beaten, felt offended; on the contrary, the harder he was beaten, the merrier he was.

Then judge the phantoms. Of course, the first thing to do was to ask for the shoulders to be put in the hammers.

– *Bake, bake, they're asking for cums!*

– *And whom did God give?*

– *Daughter.*

– *What about names?*

– *Agata.*¹⁷⁴

Miss Agota walked along, repeating the same words again.

One boy was assigned by his mother to sing. Pana Telesfora, the owner of the fanto, was proud of the smallness, and began to ask for someone to join her, because *nikomu nie wtórujonc, jaka to śpiewania*¹⁷⁵ - and, after one lady had undertaken to help her, she sang in a pure and disgusting voice, only too high:

*Black fields unploughed,
There walked Juliana...*¹⁷⁶

Everyone liked the song so much that they asked for more. And Ms Telesfora sang:

¹⁶⁹ Klebone, please resolve this matter. I am here to reprimand the ladies for being rude to the cavaliers.

¹⁷⁰ Et, pastor, please don't listen. It's all the whims of the ladies. Please give a good scolding, and that's the end of the matter (*Polish slang*).

¹⁷¹ *Dance after drinking, dance after not drinking,
Dance the little girl raggedy!* (*Polish*).

¹⁷² I'm sorry, isn't this more familiar than familiarity allows (*Polish*).

¹⁷³ Thank God, the last one! Thank God, the last one! (*Polish*)

¹⁷⁴ - Pećiau, pećiau, I invite you to the hammers!

– And what has God given?

– Daughter.

– What about the name?

– Agota (*Polish*).

¹⁷⁵ Without anyone's approval, what is singing here (*Polish*).

¹⁷⁶ Nearby black fields - Juliana's
paths... (*Polish slang*).

*A nightingale sings in this grove,
A damula weeps in the Danube.*¹⁷⁷

- And don't you know any Samogitian songs? - asked my mother.
 - *Where I do not know how to do it*, Mr Telesfora replied. - *But chto can sing peasant songs*¹⁷⁸ .
 - Not everything is ugly that's manly," said my mother.
 - And my mother won't let me sing in Samogitian," replied Ms Agota, "You have a governess, she says, so learn to sing in Polish so that you have something to sing, *w gościna pojechwszy*¹⁷⁹ .
 - *Easy for you! So many texts you have transcribed from the governess*¹⁸⁰ .
- Meanwhile, the phantoms continued, and one lady decided:
- *Let him say the texts*¹⁸¹ .
- Fantas was a golden-haired pharmacist. He stood by the shoulder and, with a toss of his head, flicked back the hair on his forehead and recited:

*We were born Lithuanian,
we must be Lithuanian, we
were born with this honour,
we must not let it perish.*¹⁸²

Suddenly, the Lithuanian verses caught everyone's attention. From another room, the pastor, who had been listening for a long time, came in. The apothecary's affectionate voice sounded clear and sensual, and the verses seemed melodious and beautiful...

*We were born Lithuanian, we
want to be Lithuanian... -*

concluded the reciter.

There was a murmur in the audience. Everyone wanted to express their impression.

- You see, how well it can be put together in Semitic!
- *Here you go! - the younger woman is angry. - Having come from Moscow, he speaks the words of a peasant at a peasant's wedding*¹⁸³ .
- "We were born Lithuanians", said an old nobleman. - *Sprawiedliwia says*¹⁸⁴ . I remember that my parents used to speak Samogitian among themselves. Only us children would be spoken to in Polish with one other Polish word and taught our potheri in Polish. And then, when I went to Kolainiai to study, it was only in Polish. There, *liuob, panie dzieju*¹⁸⁵ , you can't speak Samogitian. It's "chłop! chłop!"¹⁸⁶ And when I came home, I didn't want to be a Chłop, and I spoke only Polish to my parents, panie dzieju.
- *Wake up, wake up*¹⁸⁷ , agreed another old man.

¹⁷⁷ *The nightingale sings in the forest, the maiden cries in the Danube (Polish).*

¹⁷⁸ Where we won't pay. [...] Anyone can sing manly songs.

¹⁷⁹ After a visit (Polish).

¹⁸⁰ Good for you! You have written down so many poems from the governess.

¹⁸¹ Let them recite (Polish).

¹⁸² Jurgis Zauerwein vs. "Lietuvninkai mes esame narodę" (We are born Lithuanians), first verse.

¹⁸³ Here's to you! [...] He came from Moscow, and he says Samogitian verses, like at a wedding of a man (*in Polish*).

¹⁸⁴ That's right (Polish).

¹⁸⁵ Dear Sir (Polish).

¹⁸⁶ Man! Man! (Polish).

¹⁸⁷ Right, right (Polish).

– Of course," replied the highway official, "everyone wants to go up, not down. *Na to jest progres. Naokoło żywołków chodzone, to jeszcze siak tak można obejść si z taką prostą mową, no do czystej roboty ona nie podchodzi*¹⁸⁸.

– It is a poor progress based on the contempt and rejection of one's own language," said my mother. And Mr Jonavičius added:

– But that the last word in that progress is precisely the rebirth of enslaved and despised peoples. Here, in no time at all, we have the rise of the Slavic peoples, the rise of the Flemings and others.

– That's different, that's different," replied the pastor. – How can you get up here, that even the press is being challenged, challenged.

– The more persecuted an idea is, the more precious it is, and the deeper it takes root in the human heart," said Mr Jonavičius.

– And yet, not a single Dvarponis speaks Samogitian. *Bo prosta, prosta mowa, wiadomo chłopska*¹⁸⁹, – a noblewoman replied.

– The Czechs also considered their language to be masculine," said the long-haired pharmacist, "and spoke German. But they had the sense to shed their German coat and were reborn. God willing, we shall have it.

– *Should not the noble and the gentleman speak to each other in a humble manner?* – said another lady. – *To what for and this nobility?*¹⁹⁰

– And Mr Paškevičia¹⁹¹ of Barzdžiai, may he rest in peace, I was barely a theatre-goer, I was still a little boy, *panie dzieju*, as he spoke Samogitian, and even wrote on his Baubel: 'Here, the next time, the heathens were reaping a goat, and now lives Dionizas Poška'.

I liked the lines. Everyone will laugh.

– And Bishop Valančiauskis has written many books in Semitic.

– *Because he himself was from the peasants, from the peasants*¹⁹², – said the pastor.

The conversation was interrupted by a young woman reminding the guests that they had to play because they would be bored. Only my mother and Mr Jonavičius were still talking with the pharmacist about the Lithuanian circle in Moscow. Nika was already asleep in the priest's room, and I, although still awake, was very sleepy. So immediately after dinner we went home.

* * *

After a wedding that was so much fun, sad hours soon followed. One day, my mother told me that we were going to visit Kazelle, who was sick. She had been ill for several weeks and we felt very sorry for our playmate.

Excited to see her, we picked up a few little things from our toys to give her a present and went.

The goat was lying with her head held high, her blonde hair streaked like a halo. She was not very wrinkled, just pale. When she saw us, she smiled, but in a strange, sad way.

– Oh, Mistress, and Irute, and Nika, and Jonelis... – said in a low voice.

When we brought her presents, we thought she would be very happy to receive them, just as when she was healthy she enjoyed every little thing, and we had already admired her happiness beforehand. But she looked coldly at all the toys when she thanked us, and only the¹⁹³ pigeon, brought by Nika, which she patted a couple of times with her flabby little fingers, but which she put away at once.

– Are you better today, Kazele? – asked her mother.

¹⁸⁸ Of course [...] That's what progress is for. You can still get by with such bad language when you are walking about the cattle, but it is not suitable for clean work.

¹⁸⁹ Because plain talk is, of course, masculine (*Polish*).

¹⁹⁰ Will both gentlemen and nobles speak Samogitian to each other? [...] Then why the nobility? (*Polish*)

¹⁹¹ *Paškevičia* – Lithuanian poet and historian Dionizas Poška (1757-1830), who lived in the manor of Bardžiai (now Bijotai). Burzdžiai is a distorted name of the poet's birthplace.

¹⁹² Because he himself was descended from men, from men (*Polish*).

¹⁹³ *Tektura* (*Polish*) – cardboard.

– Better. No one will hurt you.
– You see. Maybe soon you'll be better.
– I won't. I know I will die.
– Why do you think so, Kazel? You say you are healthier.
– Tap. I know. But I am not afraid to die. Mun bobuti said to take the child to the dung when it dies. And I, when I die, I go to the dungu. Vo dungu tap good, tap good. There are so many anoles... Dijvulis so gers.

– Don't you regret leaving us, Kozel? - Kazimieriene asked.
– What's the big deal? You came here for the munis. I am going out to meet you. And as the lady will come, and Nika, I will meet you. I am not afraid to die. I want to go to Dijvule.

We were not very impressed by her words; it seemed to us that she was just talking to herself and would not die or anything. Nothing hurts, nothing moves, nothing talks, how will she die? But Mamma broke down, and tears glistened in her eyes. When we got home, I asked her:

– Are you sure that Kazelle will die, Mother?
– Maybe... The disease is severe.
My heart felt as if someone had squeezed it hard.
– No, Mamate! She will not die! After all, we have prayed so much for her health. I will now plead even more fervently with Mr God.

– God does not always listen to us, Irusia. He knows best what we need and what we don't need.
– But how can it be necessary for Casella to die, Mother? - I asked in a tearful voice.
– I don't know, Irusia, I don't know. But if he dies, it had to be done.

No, no! Don't! Oh, my God, don't! I prayed fervently for her to be healed this morning. But a few days later, Casimir came to tell me that Kazel was dead.

Nothing helped: not the doctor's carriage, not Mamat's concern that his orders be obeyed, not our prayers. When I sat down in the cavity, I began to cry. Suddenly, I heard Kazelle's shrill laughter like a silver bell, and her bright little head sparkled, surrounded by thin golden ribbons... I will never, ever hear or see her again. How is that? After all, Casella has not yet finished building her little house in the garden! N e v e r , never, never... We will never play with her in her house again. Oh, why does God need something that is so painful!

And the tears flowed more and more from my eyes. Nika came up to me with eyes full of tears and said:

– Why are you crying so much, Irusia? After all, the Goat is in heaven.
– But isn't she sad without her mother? And I am so sad that she will no longer be with us.
– It was necessary, Irusia," Nika replied calmly. Mamatè was preparing Kazele's harness.

– You know, Irusia, your tarliatan yuppies would be the best for Kazele.
That beautiful yuppie, in white tarlatan with red velvet peas, was the prettiest and my favourite out of my entire wardrobe. I felt sorry for Casella, but I also felt sorry for that jupelle.

– Mom, this is my most beautiful yuppie...
– That's exactly why, Irusia. Would you like to cover Casella with your ugliest clothes? She needs to be beautifully adorned for that great, joyful celebration when her soul went to the "good Dijvul".

But that it was so hard to part with the most beautiful garment. And Mummy went on talking:
– Think, Irusia, what was more pleasant for you afterwards. If you don't give up your yuppie, you will wear it several times, and you will have to throw it to the poor. If you give it back, you will have a lasting memory that you did not spare what was most beautiful to you for your friend. The loveliest thing for a man is not to remember the hours in which he amused himself and adorned himself, but the hours in which he thought of himself.

– I'll give you the yuppies, Mother... I am not sorry anymore.
My mother kissed me very hard. Together we took the yuppie out of the wardrobe, I looked at it one

last time and handed it to Anne to take to Kazele.

– What about me? - Nika asks sadly, "I'd give up my ulon uniform if the boy were dead.

– It's best that no one dies," I say, wiping my eyes.

It was very sad all day. I had no desire to play, but I was reading my "Przyjacieli" in the sofa cavity. But I also looked at the books today with a heavy heart, thinking bitterly that only in them do all sorts of miracles happen: the terminally ill get better, even the dead come back to life, with the water of life splashing. But in reality, Casella is dead, and no one will raise her again. And immediately they will put her in a dark pit and bury her in the ground. Oh, how terrible!

In the evening, my mother and I went to see Casella one last time. She was lying on the white table, beautifully dressed with my cap, with a crown of tartan on her golden head, with a picture in her white paper hands. It is the first time in my life that I have seen a Nabashnin, but I am not afraid. The goat looks the same to me as it did a few days ago, only now she is asleep, smiling so sweetly, as if she were dreaming some kind of happy dream.

We say the potheri, then Mamatè scatters the autumn flowers we brought on the white yuppeie.

Several women, including a grandmother, are singing at the table in the witch's house; Kazimieriene is sobbing on the bed, and the children are sitting on the stove in a heap, silent and scared.

When Mamatè approaches Kazimieriene, she caresses her head affectionately, and Kazimieriene, who is in tears, starts crying loudly. A grandmother approaches her.

– Mata, my lord, Fr Kazeli made us. After all, it is the same that should be put to death and deceived, not the munij, the old buoba, the aniai.

Tears roll down her wrinkled cheeks like beans.

– Who can think God's ways, my grandmother," says my mother.

– Newsflash, newsflash, poonitel. It is not for our feeble heads to carry it out. It is our will. But it's a pity, you see, that it was so good. I wish it had grown up to please both Dijvul and the people. And if you have come to the manor, you should bring the man a little bit of sugar.

– And Dijvou needs good children," said one grandmother.

– Therefore the deaths of those who died were also a gift, my lord. The old woman says she will die and die and die. In the heart of the matter, these two are themselves going to the other, and they say: 'Buobuteli, as soon as I begin to die, light a candle, I want to go to Dijvule in a beautiful way'. - 'I will light it,' I say, 'for you, my dear'. - "Do you have it right here? - I say. - Bring it." I took the candle. "And do you have a match? Maybe you won't be able to eat them." "There are," I said, "everything is there. Paskou saka:

"Buobuteli, give me a munij Dijvo mulek". After taking a kiss, he knocks his feet and hands and lays down next to it. In bed, the dog is quiet for half an hour, not speaking. Paskou viel says: "Where's Dijvulis, my dear?" I handed Dijva a mule, started to kiss him, only to see his eyes standing up, standing on a pillar. I went to call the others, thinking I was dying. I lit a candle. But no, the eyes started moving again. And the wire kisses the mole. Only the bees are still, and there is no more Goat. And I won't tell you. The candle goes out, and that's enough.

Meanwhile, I keep looking at Kazelle. I can see her blue nails and blue lips now. And that strange blueness, and that inhuman pallor, and immobility, are beginning to seem terrible to me. Here is a fly landing on her envelope. How terrible that the envelope has not even moved... I feel that this is no longer Kazel, no longer the one I loved so much, the one I laughed and played with, the one whose head I stroked and kissed so many times. It is something completely alien and scary, something I would not stay alone with for any amount of money, something I would not touch for any amount of money. And at last such terror took me in its claws that I rushed to my mother, trembling, my eyes full of tears:

– Mamate, let's go home! I was, I was!

When she came out, she said:

– I've kept you there too long, children. But I couldn't stop Granny from talking. And Nika added seriously:

– And I was scared of Casella, but I didn't look long. And you should have done so.

We haven't returned home yet, but we went for a walk. I kept clinging to my mother, terrified.

– What a terrible thing a dead person is, Mother!

– Terrible, Irusia. It's the same and not the same. The same precious drawings, the only ones in the whole world - and strange, distant, no longer the same... Breezy, cold and unfeeling. *Ah na tym świecie śmierć wszystko wymiecie...* - she began to hum.

– Do you remember, children, how you used to grow worms in summer? - said Mummy, after a moment's silence. - How did the butterflies roll out of the dolls? The dolls were empty, dead, and you threw them outside, and the beautiful butterflies flew away. A doll is a human body, and a butterfly is a soul. When it hatches out of its puppet, it flies to its

"Dijvulis". You know how different butterflies are. So are human souls. Some are beautiful, brilliant, others are grey, disgusting.

– I know, said Nika, that the souls of good people are beautiful, like that butterfly, remember, Mummy, where it was so colourful, so beautiful, like a rainbow, and it had such golden spots?

– And one was so grey, as if it were dirty. These are not good souls, I said.

– Yes, children. Every beautiful thought, every good deed, every act of self-restraint, is a golden rainbow on the wings of your souls.

– Mom, was it one golden feather that grew on the wings of Irusia's soul today when she gave her most beautiful garment to Kazele? - Nika asked.

– A beautiful golden feather grew up, because Irusia did not spare what was dear to her," said her mother.

And I was so happy to hear those words, and it seems that I would have given up all my other belongings, too, just to have as many of those golden feathers as I could to grow on the wings of my soul.

In the morning, my mother and I were in church, because she said we had to serve Kazele for the last time. She was lying closed in a blue rake, covered with roses. I looked tremblingly at the awful box. How cramped, how eager and dark it was! She couldn't possibly turn over on her side, she must lie upright... Oh no! She will never turn over, she is just an empty doll. The goat is far away. It's spacious, bright and cheerful there.

Then they took the doll to the grave, put it in a terribly deep hole and covered it with earth. And Mummy threw a handful, and told us to.

– That Casel may rest in peace until the archangel's trumpet awakens her," said her mother.

– A goat doll, Mother.

-Yes, Irusia, doll...

And it was no longer scary to me that she was so depressed. I was sad all day long, and I kept walking after my mother. And in the evening Mr Jonavičius came. As soon as he began to pluck the strings with his smichim, I was so sad that I ran to the children's room, where there was no music. But after an hour, I returned to the salon to listen.

After Mr Jonavičius left, my father said:

– For once, Mr Musician was tired. He could have done it earlier. Mamaté looked at Daddy with big eyes, and her lips quivered painfully.

– Isn't this beautiful music suitable for Dad? - I said, very surprised. - And I'm so happy to listen, so happy...

– Maybe one day you'll realise that not everything is meant to be pleasant," he said and went to his room.

NOTES BY MAMATE

There are, after all, people in the world who know how to adapt to circumstances so well that, whatever tasks fate presents them with, they do the best they can. Envidable people. But I am not one of them... I am not a good hostess... I know. To be rich, my housekeeping would be enough. But we have debts. To be able to pay them off, I would have to be able to make a profit out of every little thing, and I would have to be vigilant to make sure that not a single crumb goes to waste. And I can't do that, I can't!

I often think to myself, why didn't fate tell me to live in the city? I may have a meagre income for

myself - I am not a slave to any of my habits, and I know how to give up many, many things - but I am not

I wouldn't need to be constantly worried and watched to see if my property is being wasted, if everyone is working as hard as I need, without having to be constantly urged, watched, driven, counted.

Ludwig says that I don't know how to manage servants, that I do what they have to do. It is true. I know very well that it is true. A hundred times I have been more helpless working myself than I have been in the hands of others, a hundred times I have been more helpless not eating myself than I have been counting the morsels of others. God, how hard and hard it all is for me!

It's been a few years since I decided not to read for a few days (except newspapers, of course). It is only in the evenings, when I lie down, that I allow myself to indulge in this kind of reverence. And that is really "my" hour.

I love reading. Just as my body craves air, my soul craves beauty, demands art. But of all its branches, there is only one that is available to me now - literature. So, as the bee takes honey from the blossom, so I suck the good from it. I will be intoxicated by the spells of poetry, I will live with its heroes, and I will forget everything, everything...

Why not say here, where I am talking to myself, the reason for that decision? I have noticed that Ludwig used to be unhappy when he found me reading. God forbid, he never said it, but I saw it.

I don't think that my reading was detrimental to the farm at all. I used to read when I had time to spare. But I cannot do something that is unpleasant to another, to someone close to me, if it is only for my own admiration or material gain. *Bear one another's burdens*¹⁹⁴.

Mr Jonavičius is a truly artistic player. I'm afraid I'm not accompanying him well enough. But he says he has never got on with anyone as well as with me. I look forward to those evenings of our music as the greatest good. After all, I don't hear good music anywhere else.

In addition to music, he also provides me with books from his extensive library. I have music, I have literature - what more could I want?

No, I don't always renounce my desires just because they concern me. Sometimes I am weak in the affairs of others.

Yesterday I would have stayed in the meadow, although I should have gone to Baniene as soon as possible. Only the words about my daydreaming made me so angry that I immediately backed away. And if I hadn't been offended myself, I wouldn't have gone immediately, the doctor wouldn't have come today, and tomorrow it would probably have been too late.

How can you not "get along" with the sick, how can you not be concerned that there is such darkness everywhere, such ignorance of the simplest things?

How can I, who know more about the minority, not teach, show, advise? To live only for my husband and children? I cannot. They are dear to me, but I feel that if I lived so selfishly, I would really be hurting my children, not now, trying to bring even a speck of benefit to others.

I know that Louis does not really think that "it doesn't matter whether it is one less or one more cham". How many times has he given his horses to the doctor to take away, and yet he just sighs.

Maybe it's true what Ludwig says, that it would have been best for me to be unmarried...

It seems to me that the true vocation was the one I wanted to choose the next time, that of a Sister of Mercy. Then I would have been satisfied, because I would have been totally committed to the goal. But my parents did not want to hear about it; to separate from me for life would have been too hard a blow for them. I was also held back by the fact that we do not have the Order of the Shari'ah¹⁹⁵ - I would have been sent elsewhere to work, and I was so eager to help my own people, who had no one to help them. I always felt so sorry for them. So what good did it do me to stay? My work is half done, thousands of threads bind me...

What do these words of Louis about the springs mean? How does he know?

How unpleasant it is to hide something as if I were doing something evil! And frankly I can't: Ludwig will call, and it will have to be the way he wants.

"To dream alone..." Is it my fault, Ludwig, that we don't dream together!

¹⁹⁴ From the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians: *bear one another's burdens* (Gal 6:2).

¹⁹⁵ *The Order of the Shari'ah* - a missionary congregation founded in the 17th century by St. Vincent de Paul. It is part of the Order of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in the 17th century by St. Vincent de Paul. Its main purpose is charity.

Liudvikas was in Šiauliai, and as always, he brought a lot of unnecessary things. How to reconcile here? He asks his wife to throw herself headlong into the farm so that it will yield a few dozen roubles more, but when he leaves he spends the few dozen unnecessarily? I explain this by an instinctive search for balance. A spendthrift like him should have a miserly wife, a housewife who knows how to make a profit out of every item. Such a wife would have counterbalanced him a little. He feels this and wants to have such a wife in me. But what can you do, there is no material in me at all for such a housewife.

I can't, I can't.

One thing I can do: reduce¹⁹⁶ to the minimum of my own costs - which I do.

It is amazing how man demands the outpouring of his soul. I never pour out my soul to anyone. I am shy to show my pains, I am shy to talk about what is sacred and precious, which is at the bottom of my soul. It would be so shy to show the wounds of my body, as the beggars do during the indulgences.

It is true that sometimes I open my soul to my children, and then I am dismayed that they cannot yet understand everything. But children are me.

But sometimes there is a strong urge to unload even a small part of what has accumulated there in the soul. Then I take up my pen and write those pages. It is a conversation with myself.

Beautiful nights now, moonlight. I love these nights. I like to sit on the porch steps and look out over the pond. A long long golden road straight on, endlessly. And along that road my soul goes. It casts off this world of fragile and unstable forms, this world of fading shadows, and goes, thirsty for eternity, where the roses do not grow old and cease to blossom, where the hawk does not scratch the nest of the sparrowhawk, where the thunder does not crush the trees nor the hornets... She goes there, to the homeland of beauty, of which the world's greatest geniuses have only caught a faint shadow and a faint echo.

I know it is all there, and I know that I will one day claim it, and I know that I will one day hear it. My soul walks the golden path, gazing into my visions, - and the length of those silent, warm, silver nights...

And death fascinates me...

I have surprisingly realistic dreams. Sometimes I am in them for a long time. They are as real as real life, and so intertwined with it, that sometimes I cannot tell for sure whether I have heard and seen something in my waking life or in a dream. Today I am all enthralled by that most wonderful dream I had last night.

In a wide emerald meadow, on a low hill, festooned with flowers, Christ stood. His long robe was of some wonderful, unearthly fabric: it was like those pearly clouds behind which the sun hides on summer days, piercing them with its rays. It did not resemble any painting, but I knew it at once. It was as if it were illuminated by an interior sun, and so miraculously beautiful that human language has no words to express its beauty. Swarms of colourful butterflies flitted around it. And without ceasing they landed one by one on his outstretched left palm, and he - with an indescribable smile on his divine lips - with the white, luminous fingers of his right hand, lightly, gently stroked the insect's wings. And in the

blink of an eye, the butterfly transformed into a little bird with the same transparent, multi-coloured wings as the butterfly. With a magical voice, it sang and flew upwards, shimmering against the sun and glowing like a precious stone. And in its place another butterfly would immediately land. I stood by the

little hill with my children, my eyes fixed on God's presence. And I remember thinking that I had not known until now whether there was happiness, the catching of the spirit, goodness, because all those feelings, which I had called by those names until now, were like a painted bird before the living ones

before what I now felt,

from the palm of the Lord's hand.

¹⁹⁶ Reduce - to reduce, simplify.

But behold, Christ turned his face in our direction, looked at me, then at my children, and smiled.

- Lord! - I cried out and fell on my knees with all the children. I felt I was dying of happiness... and woke up.

Tears of joy came out of my eyes, my heart was filled with happiness. May I see Christ's glance upon me, may I see his divine smile, and may I see it for a long time to come. It is so easy for me now, and joyful and good.

And I think to myself now: what is the difference between a dream and reality? People often live the adventures of a dream as intensely as those of real life. One day I dreamt that my mother had died. The painful impression of that dream lingered long in my memory, and when the dreadful hour came, it seemed to me that I was living her for a second time. Is it intended that the dream passes quickly but the reality remains? After all, it is only an illusion. And in reality there is only the present. What has passed away is already a dream.

That sometimes I remember my infancy and youth, all the time I spent with my parents, all the people I lived with, all the incidents that will never come back - I always have the impression that it was just a dream. Gone, lost, distracted without a trace. And I know that in the realm of spirit, as in the realm of matter, nothing perishes. It has left a trace in my soul - but a dream also leaves a trace there.

It's been seven years since I said goodbye to my mother. And I often ask myself: did I really have such a dear, dearest person? Did I really lay my tired head on her loving lap, and her sweet, reviving hands caressed me? Was it all real? My mother is gone, gone like a dream.

Everything here on earth is a dream, and reality is not here. The hour of eternal sleep is the hour of awakening.

There are some dreams in which all the persons are very vague, seen as if through a fog, as if they were covered by some kind of shell. It seems to me that in this life we are all so personal. Deep down our souls are enclosed in the breeze of matter, governed by the law of gravity. And rolling in the dust of the earth, those poor breeches, jostling with each other, and jostling, and hurting each other badly. And how often, how often, in the dissonances, struggles and misunderstandings of life, one cannot know the soul! How difficult it is to feel it through that fog of matter, and how often we make mistakes in our desire to understand it!

But when we awaken, when we shed the heavy mantle of matter, when the spiritualized matter is no longer a heavy stone sheath but a light winged garment, pierced by the rays of the spirit, as the white clouds that pass through the sun on clear summer days are pierced by the rays of the sun, then there will be an awakening, when the soul will come together with the soul, and will come to an understanding, and will have compassion for one another.

O Christ, who caressed the tiny butterflies so lovingly and looked at us with such an inexpressible, divine smile, give all of us who are awake even the smallest and most distant corner of your kingdom!

There was a Levanarda with a new transport. Real trouble books: so small, thin and flimsy. The cry of a strangled child, the scream of a chased beast. Small to look at and not too interesting to read. Why do they beat my heart harder? How precious is everything that is abused, oppressed, persecuted! How indescribably sorry I am for everything that is disappearing! O sad sight of a dying nation! A nation that was once great, that sang so many beautiful songs, that weaved so many fanciful tales, that lived a glorious history, that had heroes such as the defenders of Pilėnai, and women such as Gražina, and rulers of genius such as Vytautas.

Under pressure from the Russians, despised by her own sons... The coals are blindfolded to extinguish them. But in the coals that seem to have been extinguished, sometimes a spark - an invisible spark - will be seen somewhere. Sometimes it revives the coals, burns the vessel and starts a fire. Is that spark perhaps in the little book? I look at them and think of all those who worked on them, from those who wrote them while hiding from the power of the firefighters, to Levanarde, who carries them across the wall on black autumn nights, 'God be praised'. And growing inside me

eternal rebellion. That's how to commit to an idea, to serve it all my life - then I would be at peace with myself. I envy Levanarda...

Despite all the Polish clothes, Lithuanian is my soul. There is the melancholy of those fields of fields, the serenity of those summer sunsets, the sadness of the autumn winds and the tranquillity of those dark forests. It is made of that country, bound by thousands of threads to its mother.

The root of my being is deeply rooted in the blood-soaked earth of my forefathers, and in their language it speaks to me. Slovacki could not reproach me, as Šemeta:

*You do not hear the voice of your ancestors in
the elements, you do not hear the voice of the
idol humming in Lithuanian.*

¹⁹⁷Or maybe it is also me, too, who is inspired *by the love* that is so scarce around me.

I bought all the books one by one. I will give them away to whomever I can. Besides, Ludwig also chose a few and gave them to me.

I am always very happy when I get Levanarda. This is no ordinary person. There is a lot of grass to go through before you get a ring like that. Just looking at him, you can see that he is an individual. He is tall, thin, with the shaven face of an ascetic, the pronounced profile of a Roman, and deep-set eyes that would seem cruel were it not for the frequent smile that often blossoms on his stern lips - naive, childlike, and immediately revealing of his Balinese soul.

He once told the story of his life. Briefly, without empty words, without exaggerating¹⁹⁸.

"I was a young boy of about nineteen years old in Paprusius, with my own poona for an ounce of purmony. There is still serfdom, you, puoniteli, don't remember those days. It was a hard time. Where the poon drinks, that's half the trouble, but even for the good man, with all his will, it was hard to control his anger. I have always had a merciful heart, but I still have to feel sorry for all the oppressed. And yet I could read books without end. As soon as I began to read, I bought a book of St. Augustine and began to read whenever I could. And after reading all the books, you will be confused. And so, without thinking, I have learned to see that this serfdom is not the will of God, but only the inventions of men and the will of God. Once in a while, a beloved horse throws up and gets sick. Someone has accused me of being a monster. But that was w r o n g , I have never beaten any animal. I am a slippery, upright, and unbeaten man. Kap matá pripouli prie munis, laba angry, and cry:

– If here! - she says, conjuring up horrible masochistic snakes, I can't tell. - Why are you beating his horse?

Mun's shlout has fallen out of hand.

– I don't hit, my boy," I say, "it's not right.

– Ah, so you're still lying! - I say, and tug on my ear.

I felt a big rush, I saw blood dripping from the bottom, and immediately the muna ruka moved up and the troops rushed back.

What could have been more, I no longer know. And if it had been to beat the poulíss munis, I felt that I would not have descended. Maybe Unc would have killed him, maybe I would have killed them. But in the Puondzivs guard we both were in such terrible trouble. I came to the station. It was very good for the Poons, and the Poons were hard to listen to. No more of this world, no more of this world - dijev, douk judum eternal brightness! Into the run, into the run, you rush to the poona, grab the beetroot and shout:

– *Dear Jasiec, enough, enough! Leave him, leave him!*¹⁹⁹ Those words are still ringing in my ears.

¹⁹⁷ *You don't hear the old people calling anymore,*

The sea is no longer roaring for you in Lithuanian (in Polish - translated by Albinas Žukauskas).

Fragments of a poem "To Franciszek Szemiotha" by the Polish poet Juliusz Słowacki. The second fragment has been slightly modified. Original: *Duchy twe jednak wodzą się na pasku i niańczą...*

The spirits lead by the leash and educate (*Polish*).

¹⁹⁸ Exaggerate (*Polish*) - to increase, exaggerate.

The two of them walked for an hour and left. And I crawled into my cell, wiped my bloody mouth and threw myself on the bed. My head was endlessly stinging. I lie there and think about what is going to happen to me now. Whether the man will be hanged or slaughtered. But I will not spare you. I thought: what will happen, what will not happen, but I still dared to cross myself and decided that it was not right to go through Dijva's order. I did not think about it myself, but I did not think around it.

But there is nothing. He took me to another job so that I would not meet him. A few days later, when the time for the statue of the acrots had just come, the poonc gave the muni to the acrots.

I will not tell you, I will not tell you. With all the hardships, there is still some strange longing in the crown. So you must be long in your own land, my dear boy, so long that I do not wake up, am no longer in a hurry, do not run around, do not hang myself, or do not get angry. I might have put an end to myself, but I was afraid to destroy my soul. And the time of his service has brought us great happiness - the abolition of serfdom. It also shortens the time for masquerading, and it is already dawn to die in sin.

Fifth, take the muni to the Caucasus. Once you have taken it, the butterfly sees it and accepts it. And at the beginning it is still as it were; it shall bear a little, and it shall recover. But since they have arrested him, I no longer leave the infirmary, I am no longer like a frog. I shall lie awake all night and vomit like that baby. Death is the same, vo če nie priestel, nie mamunelis - ničnieka. I did not think of the many Dijva poses that unc ved muni pri savis.

For the jobless, I'd rather read. I was already exhausted and masked from reading. And there was a man who was a drunkard, a man who drank endlessly - let Poondzivs repay him for everything - and he didn't have to give me any books. I lie down and read for days, and I think about everything. And without thinking with my poor little head, I have made it up: Poondzivs makes Aduoma and Ijva happy and happy. And when Anudum has been destroyed, Poonjivs takes away all their goodness, and makes them miserable, and decides that the people should make their own prout and their own way of life, and make the world a ruoy. When all the people leave the duori, and keep the commandments of Dijva, and do good, so that no one has to work too hard, it will be a ruoy. As I read all the books, I have come to think with my own little mind that this is what the world will do. The old and wild mushrooms were a bit wild - what a miserable life it was for them, as you can see now! But now all the machinery, all the machines, all the irons, are running - even in the sea - but it is not over yet. And now that the little man's mouth is rising, there will be more to come. Then they will invent such machines, so that people will no longer have to do such hard work. No more thunderstorms, no more thunderstorms, no more fires, no more fire - maybe they will invent unburnable caverns - no more diseases. For how many doctors there are now! They make such retorts that it is frightening to listen to them. The old woman is not from Tuolla. On the other hand, the next time the people will no longer have to worry about the fact that they will start to do more and more of Dijva's bidding. As time goes on, the people will no longer be so frightened - for you, my lord, I know better than you do, having learned the doctrines, as I have learned them from books. No more black slaves in America, no more serfdom here, I hear that they are no longer beating the fruit - things are going better. And I will say, my lord, that all the people will start to live in a completely new way, that the poultry will swear, that the wolves will lie down like lambs, and that this will be the end of the world. That is to say, it will fall into ruin. And then the Lord Jesus Christ will come and, having made all men alive, will destroy the last affliction, death. And the kingdom shall begin, which no ear hath heard, nor eye seen.

As I smoked all this, I realised that it is not only the duty of the husband to be a duor himself, but also to teach and exhort others, so that they may receive the same as quickly as possible. And I thought to myself: if the Poondzivs would allow me to be healed and go to my own land, I would already be living according to their understanding. And the dijvulis of all things allows him. And now that he is better, he lets him go. And what a miracle, when I came home, I lay down for a little while, tired from the journey, and now I have recovered completely - every two years I have to take back a few of those diseases. But I was no longer able to work hard. What shall I do now to fulfil the pryderm of those who have been sealed by Dijva as much as possible? From an early age, you have been and will continue to be a friend of the children. So I started working on the saints,

¹⁹⁹ Jasiukai, dear, enough, enough! Leave him, leave him.

spoons, bells and to take them to the indulgences. To be tortured, I would have gone to the priests. A priest is the best person to do those. Vo muna tas galiejims, zinuoma, menks tiera, neziejus nie joke muoksla, nie nie nie anything. But the others don't even moo. Dijvas munij lijpe, which I have, to share with others. And I started to torture the children as well. As soon as Tilžė started publishing Samogitian kningas, I immediately felt that it was my job. And I started to go to Prussia. Tudu apatu tap excellent with each other, each other support. I take my own saints to the indulgences, and that is enough. I have sold the uriadninkou, which is an interesting place. Vo kits tavuors taps so deeply, that unc doesn't even sniff.

And now, I pray you, what more happiness for him? I will bring books, spread them in all the pine trees - and then, ruoduos, I will push the monkeys to that final ruoyus."

I really like talking to Levanarda. He has his own opinion on everything. He reads all the Lithuanian books that come out, and he rethinks and rethinks everything. If he had been trained, he would probably have been a famous philosopher. Or maybe a great scrapbooker. Because, despite the technicality, there is something in his statues that spiritualizes them, that reminds us of the primitive.

And its crystallinity. A true "man of God". If it weren't for his "mother", he would hardly have anything to eat, because he handles money like a child. The little mother immediately takes from him all the money she receives for the statuettes and books, feeds him and burps him. In fact, he doesn't get much for the books, because he gives half of it away for nothing. What if that little mother dies before him? He will not marry, because his philosophy does not allow it. If he ever loses his mother, I would like him to come and live with us. There would be room. I would take care of him like a mother.

I asked him to carve me a dagger. This is my favourite "work of art". Nowhere is the Lithuanian soul more fully manifested than in that melancholy, thoughtful Christ, who writes so patiently and seriously. My stroke was very successful for Levanarda. There is real artistry in that tilt of the head, in that bow of the head. I knew that he would not take money for his work, and I took off his long, wide neckcloth. How happy I was to see how much he liked that gift.

Every time I say goodbye to him, I think that maybe we won't have to say hello anymore. After all, at any hour, all kinds of gendarmes and policemen could put their iron claw on him. And who knows how long the fated man will be able to evade them as happily as he has done so far.

I gave him the money from the bracelet. Soon he will give it to the right place. I will be glad to have contributed a little to this holy work. What more can I do? Ah, Levanarde tells the truth. How one's own nest interferes with the work of "God on honour"!

Ludwig's words about the sources suggest that he is guessing what happened to my bracelet. Kana kados asked me why I don't take it. I replied that it was broken. Why, why did I lie! After all, it is my thing and I have the right to do whatever I want with it. There is no strength to openly and courageously defend those rights, and that is enough. I'm afraid Ludwig will be angry, he'll say something... And like a weasel, afraid of being beaten up, I fall into the bucket of evasions and lies.

There is perhaps no more ridiculous class in the world than our petty nobility. They are not a whit above the peasants in the culture of mind and heart, and, full of pretension, they look with the utmost contempt on the

"chamus". God, how they speak Polish! If you want to study Lithuanian style, you should listen to their Polish. How they made me laugh yesterday at the wedding in the rectory. But, to be honest, it is laughter through tears. I feel sorry for them. I feel sorry for all funny people. Why are our nobles so funny? Mainly because they speak Polish. Let them drop that caricature of the Polish language, let them speak Samogitian, and they will immediately lose at least half of their comicality. But what is their fault for following the gentlemen? After all, everyone tries to take an example from someone who, in his opinion, stands above him.

A pharmacist from Moscow was at the wedding. He recited Lithuanian patriotic poems, and I heard him speaking Lithuanian with a friend, so I got interested in him and spoke to him. He told me that there was a group of Lithuanian patriots in Moscow. How nice! I remember Jokai's excellent²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ *Mór Jókai* (1825-1904) was a Hungarian writer. He celebrated the past, participated in the liberation of the Hungarian nation from the Turks

short stories about the Hungarian revival. Why can't Lithuania be reborn too? Why shouldn't the anomalous situation of the nobility renouncing their own language and adopting a foreign one end for once? After all, it ended in Hungary, it ended in the Czechs.

Although I was brought up in Polish, I love the Lithuanian language. It's so old, so mouldy with the mould of the ages, so lovely. In its sounds, I seem to hear the rustling of sacred forests, to smell the scent of sacred herbs burnt to the gods in the eternal fire. I love songs full of poetry, tears, longing. It seems to me that no nation has such tender, spiritual folk songs as we do. It seems to me that Polish is only the mother tongue. It is good, it is pleasant, but it is still a company. It is the best thing a person knows, you get used to it, you become attached to it, you even fall in love with it, but the memory of an old mother abandoned in a dark corner makes your heart flutter more. There is some secret thread that binds a child's heart to his mother, however forgotten, however despised.

No matter how many times I read Kraševski's *Litwa* or *The Priest*²⁰¹, or *Valenroda*²⁰², or *Vitol's Lament*, I am always sad and sad, as if someone I love had died.

But in others, those threads have long since been cut. Here we were at the *Tarvydas*'. In the evening, the family started singing in the garden, congratulating Mr. But those shameful songs of woe only caused disgust and contempt in the aristocratic sons and daughters-in-law of the *Tarvydas*. *L'Asie! Barbarie!*²⁰³ - they said to each other.

To live in Moscow, I would join that group. But here, in a corner, without any contact with the wider world, what is one to do? Just go, see that the pigs are well fed, that the girls don't steal the milk - that's all!

I would like at least my children to contribute to Lithuania's rebirth - all those precious little heads of mine, all those little souls of mine.

*We were born Lithuanian, we
must be Lithuanian...*

I firmly believe that a person can then be of real use to his homeland if he has grown out of the culture of his nation. The riches of foreign cultures, which he gathers from everywhere, must fall like grain on his own soil. That is why I try to make sure that my children hear, know and sing as much as possible of our Samogitian songs, tales and stories. It seems to me that if a person does not absorb all this as a child, he will always be like a foreigner.

I have read what I have written here on *kana kados* that I would join the circle of Lithuanian patriots if I lived in Moscow. Yes, if that would be in accordance with Ludwig's will. I am not at all saying that he would not agree - it is very possible that he would - but I am saying that I am not able to carry out my will. Perhaps that is why I hate despotism so much, and why I am afraid that instinctively I feel I have no power of resistance.

If someone were to ask me which is the worst word in the human language, I would say: slave.

"You have been bought with a price, do not be slaves of men"²⁰⁴.

"Beauty is the reflection of the infinite. It is a sense of God."

Infinity is reflected in beauty, which is why it captures the soul. For just as a flower strains to catch just one ray of sunlight, without which it cannot live, so our soul, in this

oppression. One of the novels on this theme, "O ziem vis dėlto rotkasi" (1872-1873), was freely translated into Lithuanian by Antanas Kriščiukaitis-Aišbė and titled "Pajudinkime, vyrai, žemę!" (1892).

²⁰¹ Józef Ignac Kraszewski (1812-1887), a Polish writer and historian, wrote many works on Lithuanian themes. The 2-volume work "Litwa" ("Lithuania", 1847-1850) describes the ethnic and spiritual culture of old Lithuania. The historical short story "The Priest" uses a tale about the heroic defence of the Pilėnai Mountains. The poem "The Lamentation of Vitol" (the first part of the "Anafiel" trilogy) contains a number of tales and legends from Lithuanian mythology.

²⁰² "Valenrod" is the abbreviated title of A. Mickiewicz's poem "Conrad Valenrod".

²⁰³ *Asia! Barbarians!* (French).

²⁰⁴ From the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 1 (1 Cor 7:23) - You who were bought with a price, do not become slaves of men.

in a world of imperfections, desperate to catch even a tiny spark of the absolute, which she senses, which she longs for and without which she cannot exist.

Kazel died... I feel so sorry for my goddaughter! I dreamed of teaching her, and I did not know that death was already standing by her side.

"Your eyes are on me, and I will be gone in a moment. As the clouds pass away and disappear, so he who goes down to the grave will neither go out nor return to his home... Behold, now I will sleep in ashes, and if you look for me in the morning, I will be no more. I said to the rotten ones, 'You are my father, my mother, and my sister'; to the worms, 'The grave is my home, and I have made my bed in the darkness...' ²⁰⁵

So many centuries have passed since those words were spoken, so many great changes have taken place in life, and they are still alive today, the most painful pain of the heart. For many things have changed, but the most important thing has remained - death. I often think: if mankind, going forward, were to perfect all the conditions of life and human relations so much that it would find paradise on earth - what if death remained? What good is paradise if I can stop loving people every hour? What good is goodness, beauty, truth, if the end of all things is rottenness, nothingness, non-existence? What good is paradise if I myself will be gone the day after tomorrow like that soap bubble? If I am, I will not be? How to live with such a belief? Because it is also a belief, only the opposite. Since our senses do not give us evidence that the spirit exists without the body, we believe it perishes with it. What a nightmare this life is! To know that every beat of your heart is a step into the nothingness and rottenness in which your intellect, your will, your feelings will perish. And there is no power in the world to stop those steps. If so, it is well said in those words which I find so stammering that it is better to be a living dog than a dead lion.

How sorry I am for people who believe like that! There are none more unhappy than them. For, however mountains of misfortune may weigh down a man, if he believes that they will all tip the scales somewhere, and that this earthly life of his is but one moment of his existence, then he cannot be finally, without hope, unhappy. One thing I know: that if I did not believe that it was only a moment, I would never agree to languish like this every hour for years, to run so fast into nothingness, but I would immediately cut the thread of that meaningless life.

But I know, I know, that "what you sow will not be reaped unless it dies first. Death is swallowed up in thought.

Where is your fate, O myrtle? Where, O mortal, is thy motive?" ²⁰⁶

How I love those old old words, still spoken, I think, by Euripides ²⁰⁷ :

*Who knows whether our life is not death,
Death or life?*

It really, really is. I feel it with every fiber of my being.

Nothing makes me so sad, so happy and so happy in my heart as those humble signatures on the tombs in the catacombs. *Stephane, vivis! Vivis, Priscilla!* ²⁰⁸ Could there be a greater happiness than to be able to say those cheerful words. As many times as I think of my mother, I always end with them. *Vivis, mater!* ²⁰⁹ And you, Casella, are alive!

²⁰⁵ From the Old Testament, the Book of Job (Job 7:7-8; 7:21; 17:13-14) - The eye that beholds me shall see me no more; thine eye shall seek me, and I shall be no more. As a cloud slowly floats away and disappears, so the one who goes down to Sheol never returns. [...] For soon I shall lie in the dust, and you will seek me, and I shall be no more. [...] If I am to make Sheol my dwelling place, if I am to make my bed in the darkness, if I am to say to the pit, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'You are my mother!' 'My sister!'

²⁰⁶ From the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 1 (1 Corinthians 15:36, 54-55) - What you sow does not come to life unless it dies first. [...] Victory has destroyed death! Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?

²⁰⁷ Euripides (c. 485 BC - 406 BC) was an ancient Greek playwright who had a profound impact on world literature. He was the first to reveal the inner world of man, to create new types of tragedy, and to apply rhetoric and disputation to drama. His artistically polished thoughts became sentences quoted by later writers.

²⁰⁸ "Stepan, you are alive!" "You are alive, Priscila!" (Latin).

²⁰⁹ You are alive, mother! (*Latin*).

I dreamt of my mother again. What will happen to me?

I had a dream a few days ago - Kazel died. And now what will happen?

What a magical land of dreams! A mysterious, invisible world. It's been a few years now that I've been seeing those prophetic dreams. At first, when my mother died, I used to dream of her every night, but now I only dream of her before some grief, worry or disaster. The greater the heartache, the more lovingly she caresses me. How wonderful, how wonderful! And the heart looks into that unseeable country, and the heart knows why and how. The heart knows that the bonds of love are not broken by death, that the soul, freed from the laws of space and time, seizes the present and the future - and that when matter dies and the powers of the soul work unconsciously in the depths of the soul - it comes down from the terrestrial realms, loving and caring.

Then, in a few days, I feel her lips, the most precious lips in the world, on my lips, I see her eyes full of concern for me, I hear her voice, the only voice in the whole world. And before the certainty that we shall meet no longer in a dream, no longer in the half-dream of this life, but really, awake - the sorrows, the worries and the misfortunes of which she is the harbinger fade and lighten.

What do those cruel words of Ludwig about Mr Jonavičius mean? Jealousy?

If so, it should have been shoved into the farthest corner of the soul and locked with nine keys, not shown to me, a mother of three.

What a good thing that beautiful music is to me! After all, I hear nothing else, nothing else...

Oh, I know why Mum came to see me yesterday! How sad, Mummy, how sad! "Not everything that is pleasant can be done..." I not only know that, Ludwig, but I know how to do it.

"The eye is not filled with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing"²¹⁰.

Today the children and I took an autumn flower wreath to the grave of Ludwig's parents and a bouquet of asters to Kazele. I placed a second bouquet for the old Jakšt'. Nobody takes care of his grave.

I like to walk through cemeteries. Nowhere else is there such a deep peace that grips my soul as here, in the place of tears. The impermanence of all earthly things, the eternal fact that everything is just decaying shapes and fading shadows, stands so vividly before my eyes. How foolish and ridiculous it is to throw oneself headlong into the vanishing shadows and the vanishing forms! How foolish and ridiculous to put one's heart into that which has the grain of death in it, to grasp the vanishing shadows!

Hopes dashed, ideas shattered, words unspoken, cups unsipped, songs unsung... Rot, dust, ashes... And each handful of dust under each mound - a whole world in itself, the only one that never was and never will be. And above them, flowers bloom and smell, birds chirp and chirp, and old pine trees, like caring nurses, watch over those who sleep in their bosom, singing a cradle song. Flowers, birds, pine trees that are here today and gone tomorrow. And I, who walk here and think about all this, will not be here tomorrow either.

And here I am, ashes and dust, walking among ashes and dust, feeling within me the eternal and the infinite; feeling within me the power, infinite and impassable, which will someday reassemble all the atoms scattered around the world in the same form, the eternal one, the only one, the only one, that never was and never will be.

Where does this sense of eternity come from in me, in ashes and dust among ashes and dust?

"Unless a grain of wheat dies, it will not bear fruit..."²¹¹

And the great Seer comes with her mystical, ardent²¹² eyes, her pale face and her secret smile on her pomegranate-red lips, and with her white, translucent, long-fingered hands silently taking our hand, she leads us behind the magical curtain where the secret sits. How sometimes one longs to reach the secret sooner!

Oh no! death is no big deal. It is laughter hiding behind tears, joy behind snot, the blossom of a balm flower under withered leaves.

²¹⁰ From the Old Testament, the Book of Kohelet (*Ecc* 1:8) - *The eye sees and is not satiated, the ear hears and is not filled.*

²¹¹ From the New Testament, the Gospel according to John (*Jn* 12:24) - *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it will remain alone.*

Autumn. The yellow leaves whisper underfoot; here and there the spell of resets still lingers; for hours the damsons breathe their mystical scent. But these are mere specks of autumn scent at the bottom of the dying leaves. A thread of spider webs hangs on each stem. Melancholy seems to sit in the far corner of the cemetery and, covering the sacred field with her broad silver veil, she softly plays the autumn symphony. Of fallen leaves, of wilted flowers, of moaning winds, of drizzling rain on black nights, of scarves of grey mists, of red bunches of dogwoods hanging sadly on naked branches.

At one grave, a woman was bent over, sprouting winter flowers, occasionally lamenting aloud. I walked up to her and, sitting down on a stone, spoke to her. Weeping, she began to tell me about the illness and death of her husband, who was lying in that grave, and about her own miserable condition.

The poor thing talked and talked, and I looked at her hands - black, ugly, spindly, with thick, crooked fingers and ugly, wounded nails that had never seen a brush - and wondered how much work they had been given to do before they went from the soft hands of a baby to such unaesthetic claws. And I thought how little these people have left from the cup of life's goodness. Nothing, nothing more than work and work for the black daily morsel of bread, starting from a very young age, when a child has to get up at dawn to herd the animals, or to drag a child not much shorter than oneself through the long days, all the way to the grave. Work is the sweetest refreshment and amusement, if it is not too long and if it gives time for the growth of the other forces of the human spirit, and the curse pronounced by a wrathful God on the first man in that terrible hour. When our eternal spirit has gathered the atoms scattered over the world back into their old form, what will be the ugly hands of misery? And what will they look like - white, pampered - if they have never fraternally touched the black and blistered and never mercifully wiped the sweaty brow of labour?

Karusia writes on²¹³ that, taking advantage of the beautiful autumn, the blacks are coming to us for a few weeks.

Boleś wants to go hunting, and she misses us and loves the beautiful autumn of the countryside.

I need to be patient now, with all my strength. Lamentations will begin, pitying Ludwig for having such a lousy wife. Such small, pointed needles, wrapped in soft silks of sweet words.

It all goes away - that's the thought that helps me most to bear all the unpleasantness of life. Whose soul has that thought as a leitmotif, he no longer enjoys hours of happiness. What of them, that they too shall pass away? And can they really be enjoyed if the leitmotif does not stop sounding?

* * *

Our old manor was very excited: ciocia Karusia wrote to say that she would be coming together with uncle Bolesis. They are preparing rooms for them, knotting and dusting everywhere, and in the garden they are once again grafting²¹⁴ the already overgrown paths. Nikodemas, the cook, who has been deliberately invited for this purpose, arrives. Mummy didn't want to, saying that our cook is good at her craft too and it would be an unnecessary expense, but Daddy insists that Uncle Boles is so Greek and so skilled in the culinary arts that no cook would please him. Moreover, he wants guests to be welcomed *nec pins ultra*²¹⁵. And, as always, what Daddy wanted happened. Dad hired a panaccini for the duration of the guests' stay. Because our house has no shutters from the inside, and uncle and ciocia are terrified of thieves. In Vilnius, they are guarded in all sorts of ways. I still remember how, when I was staying with my parents two years ago, every evening the servants used to make shutters from the inside with iron bars, and put a few chairs on top of each other in front of the windows, and a plate on top of the chairs, so that if a thief broke in, the chairs would fall down and the plates would wake up everyone faster. I remember one

²¹³ *Cocia Karusia is the prototype of Pečkauskaitė's father's sister Pranciška Turčinskienė. She is ridiculed for being anti-democratic, proud of being Polish and hostile to the Lithuanian national movement.*

²¹⁴ *Gracować (Polish) - to scrape.*

²¹⁵ *Unrivalled (Lot.).*

In the evening, while my uncle and father were away, Mr Tarvydas arrived. The door was already locked and bolted. Mr Tarvydas knocked for a long time, and Ciocia kept refusing to open it, fearing he was a thief. When the guest did not stop knocking, the ciocia herself went to the door. "Don't you know me by my voice?" - Mr Tarvydas shouted outside the door. "The voice can be fitted," replies the ciocia. Then she began to ask him his own name, the names of all his children, the names of his parents and his own family - and when she got some real answers, she finally told him to let her in. The same is true when my uncle is at home.

My mother and I decorate our rooms with the last autumn flowers, and my father, walking everywhere, constantly reminds my mother to make everything beautiful, because Karusia has aristocratic taste and will immediately tell her that we have a *paraphernalia*²¹⁶. And to us children, our father strictly ordered us to behave as politely and quietly as possible, to sit at the table as nicely as possible and, God forbid, not to use any manners learned from the Sparrows, because Ciocia Karusia demands a lot of the children, and she notices every little thing. Uncle Bolesław is not a very silent man, and he has no children of his own, and he doesn't bring them with him, so we have to be as quiet as mice and not get under his feet.

Father's words caused anxiety in our souls. But it quickly disappeared, overshadowed by the joyful hope that the Mother of God would bring us a beautiful and abundant gift, as she did on another occasion, because she is very generous and bountiful.

When we went to greet the guests in the morning, Black and his parents were sitting in the dining room drinking coffee. As soon as we entered the room, some little creature ran in front of us and started barking violently, with a voice that was as thin and pointed as a needle. We were at least a little frightened, but then the soft voice of the ciocia rang out:

- I chew! fe, disgusting! Shut up right now! Go on. Don't be afraid, children, he doesn't bite.

We have seen for ourselves that there is nothing to fear. It was a pretty little poodle with white shiny hair, a red collar, and little rattles sewn on. In spite of his small size, he was a cause of great consequence, for he attracted our attention to himself and turned it away from the guests. I - older and more serious - thought that my interest in the puppy should be postponed until later. But both boys were quite determined to get to know Louis first. It was fortunate that my mother, noticing this, put them on the right track in time; otherwise they might have perished forever in the eyes of Ciocia Karusia. In the meantime, the danger had been removed, and we approached the ciocia, who kissed us very warmly.

Ciocia Karusia was all bright and shiny. She had a light grey shiny silk robe, lots of light curls on her head, a very white face, sparkling diamonds in her ears, and small, white, fluffy hands like a bun, also glittering with rings. Sleek, overdressed, elegant, with eyes that were wide open, she looked young, and no one would say that at her age she could have been Mamathe's mother. After saying hello to Ciocia, we kissed her uncle's hand and he kissed the air above our heads. Ciocia began to look at us through the long-eyed binoculars that hung on her gold chain and wondered how we had grown up so much, and how we were like this and like that.

- And you, little children, would probably not recognise me. It's been three years since we saw each other. I'm getting old.

- No, Ciocia hasn't aged a bit," I said. - I remember very well.

And little Jonel responded.

- Ciocia is still very young.

- I'm still very young," Ciocia laughed cheerfully, "Well, who's younger, Janeczek, my uncle or me? Jonel looked at Ciocia, then at his uncle, who had turned very pale and bald, and said:

- Of course it's ciocia.

From that hour on, Jonel became Ciocia's favourite, because she is not afraid of anything like growing old and always wants to look younger than her uncle, who is a few years older than her.

My uncle was not impressed by the statement. He sat back and drank his coffee and pastries.

- *Your brother's*²¹⁷ gold medal for baked goods," he said, "melts in your mouth.

²¹⁶ Parish flavour (*Polish*).

²¹⁷ To my brother (*polish*).

– I'm so glad you like it. It's just a pity that the cook didn't deserve the medal, but I did," said my mother.

– Don't you do your own cooking, Marynieczo? - Ciocia asked.

– If it's absolutely necessary, I do it, of course.

– In my opinion," said Ciocia as she drank her coffee, "every wife must love the kitchen. It is one of the most important means of pleasing her husband, of proving that she cares for him, which, after all, is our first duty and our first goal. Boles always likes what I put my hand to. And I am proud and happy about that.

– Oh, Karusiu, you are an ideal wife, and you know that ideals are few and far between," said Mamathee.

Looking at Ciocia, I thought that she was really the ideal wife. She took care of her husband relentlessly: greasing the butcherbrodes, picking out the best roasts - all my uncle had to do was to put them in his mouth and chew them himself.

After coffee, my uncle and my father went for a walk, and when Ciocia called us to their rooms, they gave us our waiting bags, which, in their abundance and beauty, announced our wildest dreams. After the gifts had been presented, the Ciocia warned us not to boast too much and not to rejoice in the uncle's hearing, because he did not like to waste money. I already knew from the elders' speeches that my uncle was miserly and that the ciocia used various tricks to get money from him and sometimes even took money from his drawer herself, taking advantage of the fact that my uncle did not know the number of the money.

So, with the warning from Ciocia, we immediately took everything to our room, and there was only one thing to do: to share the joy and the gifts with the Sparrows.

But Uncle Boles also brought us a present: an empty cigar box for each of us, which Ciocia had added sweets to without him seeing.

Now the days are very different. Every evening, if there are no guests, my uncle and uncle pray together and they want us to be part of that prayer. The prayers are held before the Blessed Sacrament of Lourdes. The picture of the Virgin of Lourdes, which the Ciocia brought and immediately ordered to be hung in one of the rooms he had designated for himself, together with the ever-burning lamp. Once seated, the Ciocia and the uncle begin with evening prayers, which the Ciocia reads aloud, then kneel and say the poteras.

– *Three paces to Our Lady of Czestochowa*²¹⁸, - asks aunt.

– *Three Paciernes to Our Lady of Dawn*²¹⁹.

– *Five Paths to Our Lady of Lourdes*²²⁰.

If the ciocia has some important business with God, the novena is added to the poteras. Thus, as the time of departure approaches, we say the novena for a happy journey. As we whisper "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" to each other, it seems to me that there are several Our Lady's, and that each one plays to me as in the paintings. I shudder at the Czestochowa woman, so terrible does she look to me with her dark face, marked with two black lines. Dawn Gate - it suits me because it is so peaceful and sweet. But above them all, Lourdes is the most beautiful, the youngest, with a fine white robe, a blue ribbon, and apparently the most powerful, because most of the offerings are made to her, and a lamp is lit in front of her image. If it were not for that lamp, those long prayers would be boring. Her red chalice shines like some heavenly flower in the edge of the room, blossoming out of love for God and the fervent prayers sent to him. It seems to me that that lamp, hanging high in the decks, is a mediator between us, kneeling on the ground, and God, who with his mother, angels and saints, lives above the clouds, in the gardens of his paradise.

Ciocia also brings variety to these poteras, often interrupting them:

– Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death... Bolecek, are you cold? Maybe cover yourself with a blanket?

– Our Father, who art in heaven... Nika, why are you spinning like that? You must behave like a saint when you are doing the service. - Now and always... Amen... Iruś, my dear, let Zuzu in, he must want to come in already.

²¹⁸ Three Potpourri to Our Lady of Czestochowa (*Polish*).

²¹⁹ Three potsherds to Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn (*Polish*).

²²⁰ Five pilgrimages to Our Lady of Lourdes (*Polish*).

Ciocia does not like to go to church. Church hymns are bad for her nerves, reminiscent of a funeral. And she does not like anything that reminds her of death, she wants to be always young and live forever. She never attends funerals and cannot look at a grave. So my uncle never misses a day without going to church, and sometimes he likes to walk for a day. And every time, Ciocia makes sure he doesn't go out alone. So Mamma always goes along, glad for the chance to be in church, where she likes to pray even more on some days than on others. How funny that Ciocia is so sick of her uncle! In Vilnius, when her uncle goes to the city, she sends her faithful maid to follow him, unseen by her uncle. As if the uncle were a small child, not a big, grey man. Perhaps loving her uncle as much as a mother loves her child, Ciocia forgets that the child has a moustache and is already old.

Ciocia Karusia is a long time sleeper and likes us to say good morning while she is still in bed. So the three of us go and sit for an hour while Ciocia drinks coffee and talks to us. It is wonderful for us, because until now we thought that sick people were in bed, but we know that you should not be surprised by a voice. After we leave, Ciocia is on her knees and, wearing a nice wetsuit²²¹, she walks around the house. She is happy to reminisce about the old days when she used to come here as a young girl. She comes into our rooms, and sometimes into the kitchen, noticing everything, taking an interest in everything, and when she finds dust or other mess, she coos heavily. Sometimes she goes with her mother to look around her mother's farm - chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigs. She is delighted with the fat cockerels, and the beauty of the long-legged turkeys, and says she misses them all, because living in the city, it is so nice to live in the countryside and grow them all. Mamaté said nothing.

– But you, Marynieccko, I see that you have a very cold attitude towards your farm," says Ciocia.

– In fact, I wouldn't want to be without it at all. And why is all this being grown, fed, cared for? Spit. It is extremely unpleasant. It is better not to see, care for or own all those creatures.

– Oh, what sentimentalism, Marynie! *You don't think about it*²²². That is the way it is and that is the way it should be. You cannot be a good housewife without taking care of the birds and pigs - that is where most of the profit is now.

Then Ciocia takes a long nap, comes out even whiter, more white,²²³, perfumed, elegant - and goes into the garden for an hour's stroll through the whispering avenues of yellowed leaves. Since Uncle Boleś likes to go for longer walks and goes out into the fields or the woods with his father every day, also before lunch, he is accompanied by his mother and us. This is a terribly heavy duty for us, because the Ciocia is always giving sermons, which is indescribably boring. Nika usually hides so much during this time that he is nowhere to be found. Generally speaking, Nika often annoys the Ciocia and stops a little bit of her grace every day. He is always doing something wrong: he is restless during potlucks, he runs away from the Ciocia, he doesn't want to talk, or he will say a phrase he has learned from the sparrows. I keep on the same level anyway, because I try to customise the Ciociai, even though I am bored.

Our guests also like to go for rides. In our carriage²²⁴, driven by four of our beautiful black horses, sit Ciocia and my uncle, the two of us on the front seat, and the third next to Dad, who is always the coachman, wanting to encourage Ciocia to go. Because Ciocia is very scared to ride, but she is calmer with Dad. Ciocia says that these coachmen can never be trusted, they can sometimes deliberately drive into a ditch or let the horses run wildly or do something else. But even when her father was driving, Ciocia was still afraid. Every time the carriage tilted slightly to one side, Ciocia would shout in a thin voice and grab her uncle's arm. The uncle is annoyed and angry, and the two begin to fight. I find this very amusing and am constantly reminded of what our coachman said about the Ciocia:

– That fine cap is just a bottle of arielka unstoppered. And beware lest you spill it.

Driving suits us much better than walking in the alleys. There is no time to think about sermons in Ciociai because of the fear of "spillage" and the fact that there is a bar with an uncle the whole way. Also, in front of the Ciocia and

²²¹ A smock is a dressing gown.

²²² It's not something to think about (Polish).

²²³ To curl - to curl, braid (hair).

²²⁴ A coach is such a carriage.

each of us sits two-thirds of the way to our uncle's house, and for the rest of the time we go to our dad's house - and there it's a real paradise, a paradise that is not darkened by anything.

* * *

Since the main purpose of the uncle's visit is to hunt, my father tries to organise the most grandiose and the loudest one, the one that my uncle likes: many hunters, many dogs, a loud and boisterous crowd, a delicious breakfast, and everyone sitting in simple wheels lined with mottled carpets, singing hunting songs as they go, and then someone bringing lunch to the forest, with traditional bigos²²⁵.

The whole day before the hunt, our guests talked about it. Ciocia lamented how hard it was to have a husband who hunted. Although she loves hunting because it is such a chivalrous and beautiful pastime, it always costs her a lot of nerves. In such a big hunt with so many hunters, how easily an accident could happen.

– *Dear Ludeczek*²²⁶, " she said to her father, "all my hope is in you. You have such a heart of gold, you won't let go

Yeah.

At first my father calmed her down, but then, out of patience, he said:

– If we talk about the danger, it is not your husband from others, but others from your husband, because,

Aiming at the rabbit in front, it can sometimes hit the hunter behind. You always like to joke," said Ciocia, as if indignant.

My uncle had been diligently preparing for the hunt all day. He brought his rifle in a beautiful scabbard and asked Dad to put it away.

He will expect his dad to do it much more than him, as he is not yet familiar with the new system. Why put yourself unnecessarily at risk? The rifle is supposed to be unloaded²²⁷, but who knows? Caution never hurts. Therefore, when Dad was not doing his homework, Uncle did not sit too close.

The rifle is a new, state-of-the-art, cartridge rifle, so beautiful that Daddy was admiring it, and Nika's eyes sparkled at the sight of it. Uncle, it seems, is also afraid of working with cartridges and doesn't know how. He says a pistol might go off or something else might happen. His father fitted everything, and his uncle just watched, sitting not too close.

I had already assumed that my uncle's fear of guns was a thing not to be talked about, but Nika, without realising it, said:

– If my uncle is so scared of the gun, how will he go hunting tomorrow? The uncle's cheeks, always red, flushed even redder, and he said:

– First of all, polite children don't dare to ask stupid questions of their elders. And in general, it's best when children sit in their own room.

My father immediately told us to go to the children's room. We felt insulted by my uncle and talked for a long time about how shameful it was for such a big gentleman to be afraid of a gun.

– I'm not afraid of guns now," said Nika, "even though I'm still small, and when I grow up I'm going to Africa to hunt lions and tigers.

– And I'll be a coachman," said Jonelis.

* * *

²²⁵ *Bigos* is a dish of cabbage and finely chopped meat.

²²⁶ *Witness dear* (*Polish*).

²²⁷ Unloaded.

I was woken up early in the morning by a humming noise. Mamata was no longer in bed. I immediately woke up Nick, who also wanted to see the hunters leave, quickly dressed and ran out.

Many gentlemen in hunting clothes were sitting on the porch and in the study, talking animatedly and loudly, looking at my uncle's rifle. In the courtyard, silver with dew, stood the packed carriages with high seats covered with mottled carpets. Our butler, Kaziukas, who was also the shooter, and a few other strangers, with rifles on their shoulders and trumpets shining like ear trumpets, were holding a pack of grey hounds, barking and howling with the joy of going hunting. They were all ready to go, and were bored, waiting for their uncle, who had not yet emerged from his room. In the dining room, Mamathe was preparing the table, which was laden with plenty. In the kitchen, Nicodemus was fussing, cursing the fact that he had *overstayed his breakfast*²²⁸. The father of Pagala, no longer reluctant, asked the guests into the dining room, and he went to his uncle. While the guests were seated, the hunter appeared, lingering.

He was dressed like a hunter I saw in a fashion magazine the other day. He was wearing a pair of lace-up boots, a greenish suit with beautiful horn buttons, a corner of a hunting handkerchief decorated with elk heads sticking out of a side pocket, and a silver-plated horn hanging down the side. In his hand were hunting gloves and a greenish hat with an eagle's feather.

– You will kindly excuse my tardiness," he said in greeting, "for me, a city man, who is not used to getting up with the sun. Besides, although I am a great lover of hunting, I seldom hunt, and the hunting toilet wastes a great deal of my time.

The hunters rushed to convince them that it was not too late. And Uncle Alexander, running his eyes over Uncle Bolesi's elegant suit, said:

– My only fear is this: whether our uncultured Samogitian bunnies will be able to appreciate your toilet, Bolesi, and, instead of being amazed by it, whether they will behave in a truly Samogitian way, illustrating a well-known Samogitian proverb.

– Which proverb? - Uncle Boles asked. "I don't know many Samogitian proverbs.

– And one that much more vividly means the same thing as the French gentle *je m'en fiche*²²⁹.

Some of the guests laughed, others were curious to know what the proverb was. Uncle Boles was the most vocal.

– *Ciekawy jestem*²³⁰, not because I am interested in Samogitian proverbs, but because I want to know what their bunnies are going to illustrate for me,' he said, thundering his bifaces.

– Why are you not interested? - Uncle Alexander asked. - After all, proverbs are the wisdom of nations.

– Yes. But since some peoples' wisdom is still in nappies, it's a waste of time to get to know it better.

This was interrupted by my father asking me to hurry up because it was time to go. In silence, after finishing their breakfast, everyone went to get on their bikes. Uncle Boles carefully took his rifle.

– Are you sure you've taken out the cartridges, Ludwig?

– Probably," replied Dad.

The uncle closed his eyes and suddenly, as if determined to do some terrible and unpleasant thing, put the gun on his shoulder.

"Just like me, when I'm bathing, I force myself to dive into the cold water," I thought, looking at the Uncle.

Uncle Boles got on the most beautifully repaired wheels, insisting that Daddy should sit there too.

– *Accidents walk on people*²³¹. Who can know? It's getting calmer and calmer that you'll be there with your cold blood and endless courage.

²²⁸ A cool breakfast (*Polish slang*).

²²⁹ I don't give a damn (*French*).

²³⁰ I'd like to know (*Polish*).

²³¹ Disaster doesn't waste (*Polish*).

The shooters blew their horns, happy that the boring wait was over, barked even harder and twirled their bracelets - and the whole company went through the gates. Soon we heard my father's voice singing:

*The hare sits under the copper, under the
copper, And the hunters don't know, don't
know about him.*

And then the whole choir thundered:

*They let the dogs loose
in the field, they
shouted and barked,
there was a cat! There
was a cat!²³²*

In the open window of her room stood Ciocia Karusia, with a halo of papillotes²³³, looking like a sybil²³⁴ in her white morning dress - and with her white, fluffy hand, like a bandit, she beckoned to the commuters.

* * *

We all take lunch to the hunters in a wagon, because Ciocia doesn't drive any other kind of vehicle. Then follow the wheels with lunch, dishes, maids and Nikodemus. The cook goes to heat the bigos in the woods, which is only really tasty when hot.

It's autumn, but the day is clear and warm. With a sad smile, nature recalls the days of youth and happiness past, shrugging off the curious and cheeky eyes with a silver cloak of spider webs. No sound disturbs those melancholy dreams. Light white clouds float silently in the pale sky, grey fields are silent and empty, yellow leaves fall silently from the trees, sheep graze silently in the meadow. In one place a ploughman ploughs the soil, and the shining earth is blackened by a mourning band on a silver mantle.

But soon the silence of nature is shattered by voices coming from the forest. They are hounds. The whole chorus of dog voices, from the squeaky discords to the thick basses, is howling a rhythmic, fragile song. To the accompaniment of this, occasional shots ring out, echoing in a long echo at the other end of the forest.

We arrived at a lovely forest square on a hill, where we had agreed to eat lunch. The maids were putting away dishes, carpets and other things. Nikodemus is preparing the kitchen, grumbling that such a hunt is nothing; when he is still a half-child and still studying in Rietavas, it is at least a past hunt. Mr Kukorius²³⁵ and the three kukchiks²³⁶ went to the forest themselves.

After picking up the baskets, we go fishing with my mum and ciocia until the hunters gather. The hill drops sharply down here, and a small crystalline stream gurgles up the hillside, as if following the forest's mysterious tale of some pure, clear, crystalline thing like itself. In the undergrowth, on the silver and emerald moss, mushroom heads turn white, yellow and red.

²³² *The hare squats under the
hedgehog, under the hedgehog, And
the hunters know nothing, hear
nothing.*

*The loudspeakers were
suddenly lifted up, and a*

*shouting, a shouting, a
shouting was raised,
Because of the cat! For the cat! (polish).*

²³³ *Papiloty (Polish) - hair curlers.*

²³⁴ *Sibilé - sen. Sybil - a fortune teller in Greece and Rome.*

²³⁵ *Kukorius is a cook.*

²³⁶ *Kukčikas - assistant cook.*

Ciocia doesn't like to bend over, so when she sees a shrike through the binoculars, she shouts at us to uproot it and puts it in her hand in a basket. When we find one, we look around for more, knowing that the Mushroom Colonel doesn't like to live in seclusion, and we are happy to find more and more members of the family.

– Here I found my mother! - exclaims Nika.

– And I have a son! - replies Jonelis.

But when we found a beautiful Rubuil's shrike in one place, we searched in vain for more.

– Let's not look," said Jonelis seriously, "I see that this bastard was a cavalier.

Meanwhile, the dog barking went on. Suddenly one shot, then a second, tore through the silence of the forest like lightning through the darkness.

Ciocia Karusia shuddered and grabbed her mother's hand.

– Ah, Marynie, what a terrible shot! I feel something wrong. God save my dear husband!

Mamaté reassured me, but Ciocia didn't want to mushroom anymore, and we went back to the square.

The dogs gossiped for another minute and fell silent. One disc jockey, a second, then a bass, then a baritone, and the concert was over.

But the second began. The merry, triumphant tones of the trumpet sounded. The oboe was picked up by another trumpet, and a third, and a fourth. One closer to the can, one further away. The trumpets' slogans sounded beautifully, full of life and power. They seemed to be the gods of the forest, the lords of the woods, calling each other to a feast at which the green-haired dryads²³⁷ would pour golden mead into their silver goblets. At last they too are silent. Soon we heard talking and laughing, and the hunters appeared in the square. Uncle Bolesław walked in the foreground - alive and well, despite the misgivings of Ciocia Karusia, and not only healthy, but yet so radiant with joy that I immediately realised he was the lucky one of today. Ciocia Karusia walked over to him gently, holding out her hands.

– I see you still alive and well, *dear Bolesław*! Oh, how I was afraid! That last shot was so terrible...

– You're always exuberant, Karusia," said the uncle, kissing Ciocia's hand. - What is there to be afraid of? It's true that the shot was terrible, but not for me, only for the poor doe that fell. You can congratulate me: I have shot a fine goat, and I am still king of the hunt.

– That's the way it should be. *To ci się przecież należy*²³⁸. Congratulations and I am proud of my husband.

As his uncle and his daughter were expressing their feelings, at the other end of the square Uncle Alexander was talking to his father.

– Tell me, Ludwig, what is this mystification? I cannot believe that the shot to the heart of the doe came from the hand of Bolesław. Here's a piece of yours, admit it.

– What a stunt," laughs Dad. - Bolesław has been shot, that's enough.

– It is true that there is also the occasional blind chicken. But there were two shots, I heard clearly.

– I shot too, but missed.

– Speak up! I'm as sure that you missed as I am that Bolesław missed, and right in the heart.

– But please, Alexander, don't show your disbelief. Let him have his satisfaction. Can't you see how happy and proud he is?

– I see and die laughing. OK, I'll pretend to believe it. But in return, you have to tell it like it really was.

– It was like this. You know, I was standing a few steps away from him. I was looking at a goat walking. I signal Bolesław to shoot and I shoot myself straight in the heart. I thought I was going to shoot once with him, but it turned out that my shot was about half a second earlier. I found his cartridge in a tree a few steps away from the doe.

– Comedy! And he didn't hear you shoot at all?

– He wasn't even dreaming. After all, when he shoots, he closes his eyes and is so scared that he can't see or hear anything. I had a good idea of who shot the roe deer, but I also understood that one should *keep one's tongue behind one's teeth*²³⁹.

²³⁷ *Dryads* are forest nymphs in Greek and Roman mythology who were born with, lived in and died with trees.

²³⁸ You deserve it (*Polish*).

²³⁹ To keep the tongue bitten (*Polish*).

Soon after, the shooters brought the supposed trophy of the uncle. A beautiful, large roe deer with long, spindly legs, fine, forked horns and a graceful, wise head was lying on the green moss. A small wound on her yellowish chest was blackened by a snake. That light body, which half an hour before had trembled with life, swift as the wind, agile and graceful, now lay heavy and motionless as a block of rock. My heart ached, and I thought: "How good it is that I am not a boy, at least I shall never kill such a beautiful, innocent creature". And when, on closer inspection, Nika and I saw the blood on the end of the doe's snout, I felt so sorry that I felt tears in my eyes.

– You know, Irusia, I will never hunt," said Nika quietly.

All the hunters went to see the roe deer, and my uncle proudly pointed out the extraordinary beauty and size of the deer. Ciocia Karusia looked at the trophy through her binoculars, saying that she would make a rug out of the deer's fur and hang the horns, beautifully trimmed.

– The horns will hang in my study," said the uncle, "but the coat must decorate your room and keep mentioning that *you have a husband who is a zucha*²⁴⁰ .

The maid was carrying a steaming bigos, which gave off a pleasant smell for hungry hunters. After silence, everyone began to eat their lunch. Only the fire crackled. Nikodemas was spinning around one with a large boiling spoon, and the archers were warming up the bigos, which Mamatè had served them too. Nicodemus did not care about that lunch, because cooking for the servants would, in his opinion, be an infinite humiliation of the dignity of the cook, w h i c h no one would have forced him to do.

After satisfying his hunger, Uncle Alexander said:

– Until now, I thought that everything was boring and familiar in that old land of ours. But from this day on, I agree with old Shakespeare that there are things in the world that philosophers have not dreamed of.

– What has influenced your opinion so much? - someone asked.

– An accurate shot by my brother-in-law Boleslov.

– And I also agree with someone who said that some people's irony makes themselves ridiculous if the reason for the irony is so clear to everyone," Uncle Bolesł replied.

– What do you think is the reason for this? - Uncle Alexander asked.

– Envy! - Uncle Bolesł replied proudly.

Uncle Alexander, a keen marksman, even jumped up and down and might not have been able to bear not to reveal the secret, h a d his father not jokingly interjected himself into the conversation and diverted it in the other direction.

– But you, Mr Boleslov, did you fire two shots together? - someone said. - We heard two shots soon after each other.

– Why do I shoot two together? Whoever has a first shot like that one - here Uncle Bolesł made a nice gesture and stretched out his hand to the side where the doe was lying - doesn't need a second.

– I fired the second shot," said my father. - *Well done to Boles*²⁴¹ .

The hunters looked at each other and fell silent.

But nothing could dampen the spirits of Uncle Bolesius, who had risen to such a height that he called me in the a f t e r n o o n and, giving me twenty kopeks, said:

– Buy sweets for yourself and your brothers as you drive through town.

After eating, the hunters immediately went back to the forest. Ciocia Karusia again bade a sad farewell to her uncle and, as he moved away, she again drew a cross in the air with her white, pudgy hand.

When we stopped to buy sweets at the shop on the way home, Ciocia Karusia added more money from her own pocket to make more and tastier sweets. When I entered the shop, I met Mr Kazlauskas' daughters. As they were good acquaintances of mine, as they sometimes came to play with their father, we kissed cordially. As we drove on, Ciocia asked:

– Who were the tiedvi girls with which kisses?

– Mr Kazlauskis's daughter," I replied.

²⁴⁰ To have a brave husband (*Polish*).

²⁴¹ In honour of Bolesio (*Polish*).

– Who is this Mr Kazlauskis?

– The steward of Zelvi Manor, I said.

– Ah, that forester! - said Ciocia with contempt and, after a moment's silence, said to her mother:

– Don't hold it against me, Marynie, to meddle in things that are not your own, but since you see no need to point out to your daughter her misconduct, I feel obliged to do so.

Mamat looked at me and Ciocia in surprise. And I, not knowing what I had done wrong, got scared and looked up.

– First of all, there is no kissing in shops, on the streets or in public places in general. Haven't you ever heard that from your mother?

– There was no need or opportunity yet," my mother answered for me. - There is still time for her to learn the world code.

– Second, kissing is only done with equals. Have you thought about who you are and who they are? You are Mrs Daugirdaitė, whose grandmother is her father's real mother - *pani z panów*²⁴², and she is the daughter of someone called Kazlauskaite, the foreman's daughter, a man of such a lowly constitution. Who knows whether he is a nobleman.

A smile flashed across my mother's lips, and my fright melted away.

– Imagine, Karusieczka, I didn't bother. But probably a nobleman, because I remember once he sent Ludwik a letter with a lacquer stamp with a coat of arms on it.

Ciocia Karusia pouted her lips contemptuously.

– *Et, if a nobleman, then a grey-haired*²⁴³. What a *confidencia*²⁴⁴ with such people!

– You see, Karusieczko, neither I nor my children look at a person with that look. I try to instil in my children that a man's worth does not come from his origins, but from his integrity.

– So. I know your democratic principles. Let me tell you, Marynie, that you are generally too democratic in your parenting. For example, the frequent playing with the Gaspador's children, the sitting down on winter evenings with the family and singing - *do something similar!*²⁴⁵ What results! The children's Polish accents are sometimes just *horrible*²⁴⁶. Sometimes they even use whole Samogitian words, sometimes their manners are not suitable for Daugirds, sometimes, instead of singing Polish songs - there are so many beautiful ones, after all, I sent them to you - they hum Samogitian shepherd songs.

– And I'm happy because it's very important to me that my children are real people of their own land," said my mother.

Ciocia blushed because she disliked it terribly when someone dared to disagree with her opinion. And she continued speaking in an exasperated voice:

– Such strange views you have, Marynie, that I don't even understand them. What do you mean by "true people of their own land"? It hurts me very, very much. What would our mother, *Mrs z panów*, say when she sees that her son's children are growing up to be some kind of chlopomaniacs. I would like the children of my dearest brother, whom I love so much, to be brought up better. He himself, poor fellow, so preoccupied with the farm and with his own affairs, one might say, carrying the whole burden of the farm on his shoulders, has no time to attend to them. After all, it is not his job. That is what a mother is for. It is her duty to bring up her children in such a way that they become worthy representatives of their own family.

Mamaté remained silent, looking off into the distance. Ciocia Karusia was silent too, and sat with her lips strangely pursed.

Anger rose up in my heart at my mother's ciocia. The sweets I was holding in my hands suddenly became unpleasant and I decided not to eat any of them.

* * *

²⁴² Noble Lady (*Polish*).

²⁴³ Et, if a nobleman, a small one (*Polish*).

²⁴⁴ Konfidencja (*Polish*) - familiarity.

²⁴⁵ What is it like! (*polish*).

²⁴⁶ Terrible (*French*).

In the evening, I'm in an old house. Rooms full of guests. Some of the gentlemen are playing cards in the study, others are sitting with the ladies in the parlour, where the elders are huddled around a large sofa. Ciocia Karusia looks even younger in her big diamond earrings, scattering handfuls of sparks, and her purple satin dress. I love to look at pretty, dressed-up ladies. But today, one in particular caught my eye - the one with the black velvet robe trimmed with white fluff. What luxuriant hair like flax, eyes like violets, a face as white and transparent as porcelain, lips like a child! I don't often see her, because she lives far away and only occasionally comes to visit her mother, her scientific friend. I know that she was married, but her husband was so unkind and rude that she soon returned to her mother. I look at her and think what a terrible person her husband must be not to love such an amazing lady. And I picture him like Bluebeard, the dad in my storybook.

- You've charmed my Irusia, Broncio," my mother said to her, looking at me. - You see how she looked at you, like a painting.

She looked at me and called me to her.

- Is it true, Irusia, what your mother says? I

lowered my eyes shyly and said nothing.

- Why do you look at me like that?

- Because you are lovely to look at, because you are terribly beautiful," I said, no longer able to control my spirit. She laughed, talked to me and invited me to come and see her and her mother.

- That a mother doesn't go where there are no children. Because what would I do there?

- But with me, you'll have something to work with - you'll be looking at me," she laughs.

- And maybe my mother will make an exception for an exceptional person," I said seriously.

The guests sitting nearby started laughing. She kissed me, and I happily returned to my cubbyhole, wishing for one thing: to sit like her, walk like her, talk like her.

Uncle Alexandrine, a vivacious, pointy-haired blonde, sitting next to Ciocia Karusia, boasted about her hostessing.

- I was barely out of the house before I had no hope of enjoying your lovely company. I have work to do. In my opinion, we have had enough of this gentlemanly generosity and nonchalance²⁴⁷. If we want to survive, we have to learn to make a profit out of every single thing. That is why I have set up a dry confiture factory, a real factory. There is so much fruit this year, and it is so cheap, that it just hurts my heart to sell it for nothing. So I thought of another way of doing business. Out comes the early confiture. I have a lot of orders. I have a few girls pegging²⁴⁸ apples and pears all day long. That's all they do. And I have to supervise the cooking myself, because nobody else can do that. I'll have a good profit, you'll see.

- You are just made to be a hostess," observed Ciocia Karusia. - Happy Alexander to have found such a treasure. But it doesn't happen to everyone," she added more quietly, sighing.

- You must have seen, Karusieczko," said Uncle Alexandrine again, "Cvierčakevičienė's new book on baked goods? It's a real treasure for a hostess. I've already tried out many of the recipes

- You know how I like culinary art - *everything perfect, Aleksander was delighted*²⁴⁹.

- Have mercy, dear ladies! - Mrs. Gužauskienė, a gentle, affectionate lady, prayed with folded hands.

- The farm - oh, *c'est un conte pour dormir debout!*²⁵⁰ It's been there for me ever since! - and Mrs Gužauskienė ran her white finger across her neck. - Let us resolve not to talk about the farm tonight, nor about the husband, nor about the children, nor about all those everyday bores. Let us talk about art, literature, love, politics - oh, there are so many beautiful things in the world!

The ladies laughed and said they were willing to accept her idea. Only Uncle Alexandrine and Ciocia Karusia were very indignant. And Ciocia Karusia said:

²⁴⁷ Nonszalancja (*Polish*) - to despise, to look down upon.

²⁴⁸ *Knife* - to shave.

²⁴⁹ Everything is great, Alexander was delighted (*in Polish*).

²⁵⁰ It's a bore of bores! (*French*).

- Bored with what is our first duty? Forgive me, but I find that statement too frivolous.
- Like tat! Let's try to be frivolous for an hour, following our gentlemen husbands, who are frivolously struggling in the green field now, and who don't think about their duties," laughed Mrs Gužauskienė.
- So, first of all, I propose to forget Mrs Cvierčakevičienė with all her respectable works and talk about more frivolous writers," said Mr Jonavičius.
- When you put on clothes, you don't ironize like that. When men get married, let them see what a good hostess is.

Before that they don't care much about these things, and then they'll be sorry, but it's too late," said Ciocia Karusia.

– You will see," said Mrs Bronislava, "when you get dressed, you will give your wife all of Mrs Tsvierčakevičienė's letters, beautifully dressed, for the first anniversary of your marriage.

– And I will be happy when I have a successful roast," added Mr Jonavičius, "But before that happens, I am happy with more frivolous things, which is why I have come up with the idea of a musical.

– You may joke, but the fact remains that neither a writer nor a musician is ever a good mother or mistress," said Ciocia Carusia.

No one has replied. Mr Jonavičius liked the idea very much, and all the ladies began to ask for the mastermind himself to do it. But he said he wanted to listen first and asked his mother to call. After the mamathe, several ladies agreed to sit down at the piano, and then Mr. Jonavičius played his cello. But the most beautiful thing was when Mrs Bronislava started singing. I didn't know whether to admire her beauty or her voice. At first she sang in Italian, and I didn't understand a single word, but then she sang: "*Gdybym ja była słońcem na niebie*"²⁵¹, I thought she was already a sun, so sweet, so cheerful, so golden.

At the end of the concert, Mr Jonavičius said:

– Now, by resolution of the honourable ladies, we are going to talk about music. Have you noticed this strange fact that, while the ladies are almost all playing, and sometimes sacrificing a good deal of time to music, the ladies forget it altogether?

– It's hard not to notice. After all, we are the strange facts ourselves," laughed one lady.

– We'll do a survey right away," added the second.

– All the ladies here - without exception - are playing, and the ladies - some of them may have forgotten their notes, except for Maria and Bronislava.

– I can't even be counted," said Mrs Bronislava, "my marriage was too short.

– True. This is just one of our bunch.

– Mrs Caroline, the preacher of the cult of the husband, may accuse us of not doing our duty as wives, of forgetting music instead of pleasing our husbands with it," said Mrs Tarvydienė laughing. - Too much music is unhealthy, but a little, for a husband...

– I am of the opinion, as I have always been, that a wife should try to make her husband happy in every possible way," replied Ciocia Karusia, seriously and proudly.

– *Oh, if only that would make them happy!*²⁵² - exclaimed Mrs Gužauskienė. - Alas! what makes them happy are delicious lunches, a fun hunt, an interesting preference, a *nap in the afternoon*²⁵³, but music?!

The ladies started to laugh.

– So the fact is established," said Mr Jonavičius, "Now you will explain what the reason is. This is an interesting question of psychology.

– The reason is very clear: new responsibilities, lack of time," replied one of the ladies.

– This reason is not relevant. You are not so overburdened with work that you could not, with good intentions, find an hour to do it," said Mr Jonavičius.

²⁵¹ "*If I were a sun in the sky*" (in Polish). It is the song 'Troškimas' ('Desire') ('Życzenie') by the Polish Romantic poet Stefan Witwicki (1802-1847), who was friends with Chopin and Mickiewicz. The music was composed by Chopin.

²⁵² Oh, if only that would make them happy! (polish).

²⁵³ Pope's sleep (Polish).

– In my opinion," said Mrs Tarvydienė, "the most important reason is the prose of a woman's life, in which all artistic-poetic aspirations sink.

– Oh yes. That's right," the voices replied. And Mrs Gužauskienė said:

– But I think otherwise. And instead of flying in abstractions, I will land on concrete ground. That will convince you more. I've always loved music and I used to play a lot with my parents. When I got married, I played at first, too. But my husband, who used to enjoy listening to my music, has cooled down. Sometimes, when I received some new music, I would ask him to listen to it. "I'm so tired now, wait, t h e n ." That "then" never came. So, without asking for anything, without getting a n y response, I started playing less and less, and soon I stopped playing altogether. Here we have the main reason. It is not in us, but in our "heads and masters".

– Why do you hurl such slanders at us? - said a gentleman, coming from the study. - I, who have long since worn the yoke of womanhood, always listen with the greatest admiration to the playing of Lady Mary.

– Because she is not your wife," said Mrs Gužauskienė.

– It seems to me that all these reasons come together little by little, and let the one who really, deeply loves music and cannot live without it, resist them," said Mamatė.

– Having heard your opinions, I will state mine," said Mr Jonavičius, "Music is for women.

– I'm not talking about the exceptions - one of the many means to the real goal is to get married. Once the goal is achieved, it disappears, no longer needed.

The ladies were moved.

– Your opinion has no value because it cannot be impartial. After all, you are a well-known and notorious anti-feminist.

The ladies got the worst of it.

– What audacity to say such things openly!

– I do have the courage to look you straight in the eye," Mr Jonavičius defended.

But the ladies attacked him in full force, like wasps, stinging him with the depths of their wriggling tongues.

Dėdienė Aleksandrienė has hardly left the side of Ciocia Karusia. They talked about the farm, her husband and the children and seemed to be very happy with each other.

– I don't like your famous Mr Jonavicius at all," said Ciocia Karusia to her uncle, pouting her lips.

– Caution! Some people might be uncomfortable with that opinion," said Uncle Alexandrine, smiling mysteriously.

– Where? Where? - Ciocia asked curiously.

– It seems that today Mrs Caroline's grace has turned away from you, Marynia," said Mrs Bronislava to her mother, who had come to the dining room together.

– Yes. *En face*²⁵⁴ I hardly ever see her, but today she's gone all the way because of one of the scariest scary adventures ever.

And Mummy told me what happened on the way back from the forest.

– But Mrs Alexandrine seems to be at the zenith of grace," said Mrs Bronislava laughing.

– Always yes. She and I are like two s c a l e s : as one goes up, the other goes down. But mine is always higher - alas!

– Of course, you are so empty in front of her fullness," said Mrs Bronislava and kissed her mother.

Uncle Bolesław comes into the salon from time to time, having retired from playing cards, and sits down next to Mrs Bronislava, talking to her all the time.

Each time, Ciocia looks angrily in that direction and chews her lip impatiently - a sign that she doesn't like something. When Mrs Bronislava starts laughing, Ciocia stops and, taking Uncle Alexandrine's hand, says:

²⁵⁴ From the front (*French*).

– Let's take a walk for an hour, we've been sitting for too long. - And he goes to the end of the salon where Mrs Bronislava and Uncle Bolesław are sitting.

And when he goes back to the canapé, he says to his uncle:

– *Actually, divorcees should not be accepted in good company. It is always demoralising*²⁵⁵.

– I completely agree with you, Karusieczek, and I realise that this offends your high principles. But what can you do - dignity is declining.

Meanwhile, my mother walked into the salon, mingled with a group of ladies and said:

– I have had an idea for a long time. I have decided to set it out today, taking advantage of this meeting. I am addressing the ladies specifically. One, because you have more time to spare, and two, because you are recently graduated, you may have more sympathy for those who are being denied the path to the light. First of all, they are blocked for the children of our workers. So my thought is this: would it not be a good idea to set up a small circle whose members would take it upon themselves to teach these children?

The first to respond in a joyful voice was the young lady Milvydaitė:

– That would be very, very good! I'll join that circle right away. I feel so sorry for those children who are not taught. There was a group of ladies in our pension - and I belonged to it - who decided to be useful to society and educate the people.

But the other panels took Mamata's offer very differently.

– It is a task beyond our power. We just need to remember who these children are: the dirty, unshaven, half-haired...

– And that time is not too much to spare. It's guests, it's visitors, and I'll be going to Warsaw for the whole carnival.

Mamatė tried to break down all those barriers. She said that everything could be reconciled, that the children could be taught to be clean, that there were some very talented ones among them, that when the carnival left, the children would be able to rest because *lepiej rydz niż nic*²⁵⁶. But all this was not believed because there was no good will.

Meanwhile, the whole salon took an interest in the conversation and began to express their opinions.

– Do you think they will appreciate it? - asked Uncle Alexandrine. - Illusions! When they see that the masters are good to them, they will slumber even more at work and steal even more.

– *To coś pachnie chłopomanją*²⁵⁷, ' said Mr Konarski, putting up his lower lip, like Count Č., whom he had followed with everything.

– It's only Christianity that makes me think of Christianity," my mother replied, "because the Catechism already tells us to teach the ignorant.

– I won't say that young ladies would benefit greatly from a male children's society. They themselves will not feel how they will acquire various traits that are not suitable for a salon," said Mrs Konarskienė.

– And where to teach them? It's dangerous to let them into the living room, because they might leave something unhealthy behind.

– And take something.

– You are always talking about minor things," said Mr Jonavičius, "It is all easily fixed. One part of the unpleasantness can be eliminated, another can be reduced. What matters here is the principle: whether it is necessary to educate the people or not. If it is necessary, then it is necessary to make some sacrifices; if not, why not?

Opinions were mixed. Some said that, of course, religion, reading and writing should be taught, and that higher education was dangerous for the people, because if everyone left it, there would be no one left to do manual work. Others thought that writing was harmful to the people, because the girls, once they had learnt it, would immediately begin to write letters to the bridegrooms, and the men would forge the signatures of²⁵⁸ bills. Still others saw great danger even in reading.

– Once you have taught the people to read," said Mr Gužasuskis, "will you force them to read only prayer books and the lives of saints? And if someone will impose something else? Do you think there will be n o t h i n g ? Maybe even

²⁵⁵ In fact, divorced women should not be admitted to a virtuous society. It is demoralising (*Polish*).

²⁵⁶ "Better a sparrow in the hand than a moose in the forest" (*Polish*).

²⁵⁷ It almost smacks of chlopomania (*Polish*).

²⁵⁸ Fałszować (*Polish*) - to falsify, to falsify.

You don't know, but I've already heard that a Samogitian newspaper has started in Tilžė. All its contributors, of course, come from the people, so, like two and four together, they will begin to write against the Lords and Poles. Mark my word.

– To say, according to you, that one should not teach reading because one can read bad books is like saying that one should not teach a child to speak because one can lie and swear. Reading is the same language, just one step above. For me, having lived in England and Belgium, that question has long been settled and finished,' said Mr Jonavičius.

– How strange, said my mother. - A lady has just recited "*Przed sądem*"²⁵⁹. Such beautiful lines! After all, they end with the words: "*Pójdź, dziecię, ja cię uczyć kaćę!*"²⁶⁰ Tamstos gėritės Konopnickiene, but how purely Platonic that feeling is! You do not even want to try to put those ideas into practice.

– And if it were the Polish people here, that would be quite, quite different! - exclaimed one lady. - But their language is so masculine and uncultured.

– In Polish," said the other, "I would certainly try. But how can you teach Polish here, when they don't understand anything?

– Like tat. The hardest thing is the language issue. It's terribly difficult to start teaching Polish, it's a lot of work, and the result is zero. You can't teach them to speak properly, but you can't teach them to speak Polish, but you can teach them to speak Polish with that horrible slurring of the words, and you can't teach them to run to the end of the world.

– Moreover, it seems to me that it is a moral duty to teach a child in his or her mother tongue. Otherwise we would be no different from the Russians," said my mother.

– Ah, *Marynia*, think about what you are saying!²⁶¹ - hissed the indignant Aunt Karusia. - That's the language of enemies, and here of brothers.

– They can learn their brothers' language later, but first they have to learn their own," said Mamata.

It turned out that the language issue is really complicated, as several ladies, who have just returned from their "pensions" in Warsaw and Riga, find it difficult to communicate in Samogitian. In short, Mamata's idea did not work. The whole circle consisted of one lady, Milvydaitė.

– Cheers, *Mrs Marynia*, cheers!²⁶² - No one will better appreciate the beauty of your idea than I, who have worked so hard to abolish serfdom. But it is very difficult to carry out that excellent idea. You know how cruelly the government persecutes private teaching.

– Why should the authorities know? - said my mother. - After all, everything can be done in secret. I myself have been teaching a little bit for how many years, and so far no one has found out.

– A lucky accident, nothing more. But it could be different. Any servant angry can denounce²⁶³.

– OK, let's say it can happen," said my mother. - But what code of morals says that fear of one's own skin keeps one out of office?

– This is not about your coat. It is about remembering the injustice that will be done to the whole nation. Every disloyalty on the part of us landlords will give the government the opportunity to heap new repressions on us. And the more we, the forehead of the nation, are oppressed, the more the whole nation will suffer. At this hour there is nothing but loyalty, loyalty and loyalty again. The 63rd year was the ring of our souls, but it has shown that we will achieve nothing along this path.

– If we are loyal, loyal and loyal again, could it not be that sometimes a ridiculous incident would occur whereby the favours thus earned would no longer be given? - said Mr Jonavičius.

²⁵⁹ "In court" (*Polish*).

²⁶⁰ "Come, child, I will have you taught!" (*Polish*). A poem by the Polish writer Maria Konopnicka (1842-1910) depicts the trial of an uneducated child. During the trial, the judge realises that this child should not be punished but educated. Konopnicka's work was popular among Lithuanian writers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

²⁶¹ Oh, Mary, think about what you say! (*Polish*).

²⁶² Congratulations, Maria, congratulations! (*Polish*).

²⁶³ Denuncjować (*Polish*) - to complain.

– Mr Casimir is always pessimistic," replied Mr Tarvydas impatiently. - Those graces, according to you, are already in the air. *They are already on the tops of*²⁶⁴. So, dear Mrs Maryniu²⁶⁵, - I am allowed to call you that because you may be my granddaughter - the whole idea shows Tamsta's heart of gold and her willingness to make sacrifices - the most beautiful blossoms of a woman's soul, but a man's mind has to veto it. Let us wait. You do not know what I know.

No one said anything. Mr Tarvydas did not like counter-arguments, especially when it came to politics. His sons were in high places in St Petersburg, and he said he knew best from his own sources. And anyway, there was not much to contradict him, because he was the eldest of all the landlords in the area, had fled to Paris during the First Polish War, and there he had been educated in higher education, and had made the acquaintance of Mickiewicz and other famous people.

– Now maybe the ladies will dance, so as not to be bored and to make the dinner look more delicious," said Mamata and started to play the waltz.

The ladies were delighted and immediately started to squirm. Mr Jonavičius, pulling his chair closer to the piano, was talking to his mother.

– I've heard nice things about you," said my mother, "that you are anti-feminist.

– Rather than judge, I dare to ask: after all the talk about your idea, are you a big fan of feminists?

– But that doesn't mean there is anything to respect the other half of humanity for.

– True. But it is particularly painful for me that it is so difficult to find in that first half the complement and crown of my soul.

– God willing, you'll find it again...

Mr Jonavičius leaned closer and said quietly:

– And if I've already found it and I can't get to it...?

Mamathe blushed, lowered her eyes to the keys and finished the waltz with strong chords.

– Contredans please!

Mamatè started to ring the counter-tune. Mr Jonavičius remained silent, playing with his "breloki" and occasionally throwing a glance at Mamatè, while she looked at her hands. Then she said, still without raising her eyes:

– It is very unfortunate to say what I have to say now. I am very uncomfortable... But you won't get angry, will you? I have so much to do now that I won't be able to accompany you often. Someday... rarely... Aren't you angry?

Mr Jonavičius's handsome face turns white.

– No. I listen to the pronunciation and I fill in...

While waiting for dinner, all the gamblers gathered in the saloon. Uncle Boles, beaming, announced to Cioccia Karusia that today he was not only the king of hunting, but also the king of gambling, because he had won from everyone.

– *What about you, poor Lude?*²⁶⁶ - asked his father.

– Why is he embarrassed? - Dad was surprised. - And I won: Boles won the preference and I won the chicken.

– *But he has lost a far more important game*²⁶⁷, - said Aunt Karusia mercifully.

– Which one? Why do you speak so cryptically? You know I like clarity in everything.

– I'll explain another time," Ciocia sighed.

It was a bit of a bad day for Cioccia Karusia: someone was always ruining her mood. But the worst thing happened on the way to dinner: Uncle Boles shook hands with Mrs Bronislava.

– *But, Bolesius, it is proper to shake the shoulder of one of the older ladies!*²⁶⁸ - said his aunt, coming up to him.

²⁶⁴ They are already being felt in high spheres (*polk.*).

²⁶⁵ Dear Mrs Mary (*Polish*).

²⁶⁶ And what about you, poor Lude? (*Polish*).

²⁶⁷ But you lost a much more important gamble (*Polish*).

²⁶⁸ But, Boles, you should offer a favour to an older lady first! (*Polish*).

– *It hadn't occurred to me. Zresztq²⁶⁹* , I am very pleased with the one I am leading," replied the uncle, and, without noticing anything, he led his lady into the dining-room and sat down beside her. Lady Bronislava's childish lips laughed jeeringly²⁷⁰ . She glanced at her mother and nodded her graceful little head.

At dinner, Mr Tarvydas, who never misses an opportunity to speak, gave a speech. He speaks smoothly and gracefully, but everyone laughs at these speeches because he always praises himself, his sons and his hosts.

– *Once again, the last wajdelota speaks to you, dear and respected neighbours²⁷¹* . Another time, every feast of Vytautas used to end with the song of the old Vaidila. True to tradition, the last Vaidila raises his trembling voice at each of your feasts.

After that introduction, the speaker turned to the rare and beloved guests of Gediminas Castle. He said that he was under the illusion that time had gone backwards and that this was a wedding feast at which he was speaking to the newlyweds at the same table. And when he turns to the same side now as he did then, he is even more certain that those handful of years did not happen at all. For behold, there is a young lady sitting in the same place - true, *without her first curtains, but with a blush on her face and a glow in her eyes²⁷²* . Then, after praising his aunt as the best wife in the world and his uncle as the best husband, he concluded by wishing that the same love would always blossom between the two of them, and that it would always appear to them that their wedding feast had only been yesterday.

The gentleman praised his father as he walked by, because his father often dared to contradict him. So he threw a whole bag of compliments at his mother and called her *matka ludu²⁷³* . And no one could have felt so much compassion for his mother and bowed down to her like he did. For in Russia it was the Samogitians who first came up with the idea of abolishing serfdom, and in Samogitia it was the county of Telšiai, and in Telšiai it was he and Prince Oginski²⁷⁴ . There is no need to remind you how he worked in the commission, everyone still remembers that.

And at the other end of the table, guests whispered:

– You see, folk-pleaser! And they give the ordinariate in a lozenge.

– An old comedian!

Meanwhile, Mr Tarvydas somehow came back to the Parisian times and told how he and Mickiewicz had once been to a ball at the Duchess Czartoriskiene's²⁷⁵ , and how Mickiewicz had then taken him to his flat and he had slept in the same bed with him. And how, when he was short of space, he said to Mickiewicz:

– *Adasiu, come on²⁷⁶* .

Finally, after complimenting the ladies and calling them "haunts" - to which one of the young men murmured, "We'll be Kęstutis" - Mr Tarvydas concluded his speech.

– 'It's surprising,' said Uncle Alexander to his neighbour, 'how he didn't go to Rima to see Pius this time.

IX!

– And Pius IX said, Is this Tarvydas, who has sons in Petersburg? - Daddy will laugh.

It seems to me that the most fun at the table was had by Mrs Bronislava and Uncle Bolesis. Uncle, it seems, had nothing saw and heard no one else but his lady, and she kept laughing, talking and occasionally looking at her mother with laughing eyes. Ciocia Karusia was casting glances in both their directions, and it was evident that she was catching their words with her ears. After dinner, Mrs Bronislava was taken by Uncle Bolesio to the salon, and they immediately returned to the dining room to see Mamathe, laughing.

– Isn't that enough, Broncio? - said her mother. - It's so unpleasant to deepen someone's heart, even in jest.

²⁶⁹ It didn't occur to me. Finally... (*Polish*).

²⁷⁰ *Jeibing* - the one who is mischievous.

²⁷¹ Once again, the last moaning moan speaks to you, dear and respected neighbours (*in Polish*).

²⁷² Without a maiden crown, but with girlishly dry cheeks and girlishly shining eyes (*Polish*).

²⁷³ *Mother of the People* (*Polish*).

²⁷⁴ *Duke Oginski* - probably Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis (1765-1833), political figure and composer. After the uprising of 1794, he went to Italy and later lived in France and Turkey.

²⁷⁵ *Duchess Czartoriskiené* - Maria Ona Czartoriskiené, Duchess of Württemberg (1768-1854), lived in Paris from 1847; she wrote a short story and several short stories.

²⁷⁶ Adamuk, move over (*Polish*).

- Not at all for me! It's for all the needles they use to poke you," said Mrs Bronislava.
- How good it is that everything in the world passes away," said my mother again, "and that Mr Tarvydas' speech has passed away.

I was sitting on the coals. Oh, Bronia, how boring are the songs of the earth!

* * *

The next day, Uncle Bolesław was tired and didn't go for a walk before lunch, while Ciocia, instead of walking in the garden, walked with her father in the parlour, quietly saying something. I was tidying up the toy chest in the hall when I heard my father's voice, suddenly irritated:

- I believe that when you love me, you say that. But I don't want to hear it from you either, and I would ask you never to touch that subject.

In the afternoon, Ciocia and her uncle, with Zhuzhu and the maid, went to Uncle Alexander's, accompanied by her dad. It was late in the evening when Daddy returned. Walking briskly around the room, Daddy said:

- It's just hard to imagine how Bolesław and Karusia were received there. As you enter the courtyard, a triumphal gate is raised, like a bishop's, and the porch is covered with wreaths. *Cały dom nastrojony na najwyższy ton*²⁷⁷, Karusia dives in joy like a kidney in grease, Bolesław's stature is also indescribable. Alexandrine, the epitome of affection, the epitome of devotion to her guests, seems to immediately take her heart out of her chest and put it under their feet. Alexander is a little reserved. But, one must admit, she has a special talent for pleasing whomever she wants. You're definitely overshadowed. It's a pity, a great pity. That you didn't realise that this could happen. Not so much for us, but for our children.

Mamate's eyes twinkled.

- Children will be treated as God wills. I will not buy a future for my children at that price.

- It's a pity that you always exaggerate everything. Hitting a woman much older than you, your husband's loving sister, a man of old-fashioned views, seems to you to be some kind of terrible transgression of the code of decency. Whatever you want to call it, it is Don Quixote-ish. Turning your eyes away from some of the funny sides, customising as much as you can, that is the only way you should go.

- That's right," she replied, her lips quivering. - My misfortune is that I don't have the instinct of all creatures to conform to their surroundings, and on the other hand, I don't have the strength to bend them as I wish.

With that, Mamate left. Dad walked around the room for another hour, then took the newspapers and went to his bedroom.

I ran into the salon and looked out of the window and saw my mother walking in the yard. It was time for us to go to bed, so I ran to her to say good night. When I kissed both her hands and she leaned over to kiss me, I saw two droplets glistening in her eyebrows. I put both my arms around her neck and kissed the glistening drops and said:

- I don't love Ciocia, Mother, no matter how many gifts she gives me! I just love you, love you...

- You have to love everyone, Iruśka, everyone," she said, smiling sadly, "Go to sleep. I will be back soon.

And he went into the garden, and I went home. I didn't know clearly why my mother was crying, but I felt that everyone was to blame and I didn't love everyone. I went to my father - he was in bed reading the newspapers - kissed his hand coldly and, with a sigh in my heart, I went to talk poetry with my brothers and went to bed.

NOTES BY MAMATE

I feel like I've been stabbed with a thousand needles... Maybe during those days, when our guests are visiting the Alexanders, my wounds will heal a little, and then I will suffer being pricked again. That it was not the needles of Karusia, and that it was not Ludwig's irritation because of my inability to firmly

acquire Karusia's grace,

²⁷⁷ The mood is upbeat in all the houses (*polk.*).

it would be great fun for me to entertain those guests. After all, it's not every day that you meet such original people. Sometimes it's very hard not to laugh.

Unfortunately, some of the originality is not without foundation, such as Karusia's guarding her husband... Oh, what an unpleasant thing has happened to me! One day I had to go to the garden arbour for something. I open the door and there are Boleś and Domeikienė! I was so surprised and so shy that I can no longer remember what I was doing, I think I said *sorry*²⁷⁸ and ran back in a flash.

Soon Boleś, meeting me alone, said, with much less self-confidence than ever:

– *I'm counting on your sister-in-law's discretion...*²⁷⁹

– I saw nothing, heard nothing! - I interrupted, so ashamed and embarrassed to talk about it. I wonder how he had no shame in recalling that incident. Did he think I would tell anyone?!

Then I went and locked the arbour. Now I will certainly have nowhere else to dedicate my *rendez-vous*. Poor Karusia! I forgive her all the needles and pity her with all my heart. I knew that Boleś loved the fairer sex, but I thought he had a more ideal way of expressing that feeling. Disgusting! After all, I know perfectly well from theory that it happens, but when you get to face the real thing, you don't want to believe your eyes and you ask yourself, wondering: is it really real?

And how did they know where they met? After all, Boleś doesn't seem to go anywhere by himself? It is not without reason that Ludwik dislikes Domeikienė. And for me now her beauty will always be obscured by the altar.

Fortunately, our guests won't be staying with us for long.

It seems to me that I have touched the most disgusting frog - and I can still feel that touch on my fingers. How hard it is, once you know people, not to hate them! We need to keep thinking about our weaknesses and how they would have manifested themselves under different conditions, and if they don't manifest themselves, how little we have to do with them.

It seems to me that the secret of contentment with life is theathematised in this way: one does not have to demand too much from life. Children should be taught from an early age that life is not some kind of happiness-giving institution, but a hard, tedious service. If it does give occasional brief hours of happiness, it is its grace, not its duty. If a man looks at life in this way, he does not run headlong after that happiness, he does not strain all his strength just to catch it desperately, he does not scream and cry when he does not find it, but enjoys every bright hour as a gift above the programme.

I had a nice guest - my grandfather Lukoš. He came to help me with my money - all his capital, a few roubles, wrapped in a red scrounger. He collected it, praying "for the souls", and dedicated it to himself for burial.

I love talking to him. Peace floods into my soul like reading a wise book.

How many times have I heard people complaining about our people from all sides: how treacherous, ungrateful and thieving they are. Of course, all this is paid for by our *people, the pious*²⁸⁰. But are the "gentlemen" not? And how else, only on a larger scale. I often ask myself: what kind of educated person must one be to have the right to accuse one's neighbour, who has not received any education, of wickedness?

One thing I do know is that these poor people have discovered the truth in their relationship with God. Their relationship with God is that of a loving child with the best parent. If the father punishes, if the father oppresses, they know that he does it in love, for their benefit, and they humbly kiss that punishing hand. And the others, the so-called intelligentsia, before God are slaves before their master. Slaves who always feel wronged,

²⁷⁸ I'm sorry (*in Polish*).

²⁷⁹ I trust in the discretion of the lady's brother... (*polish*).

²⁸⁰ God-fearing wives (*Polish*).

innocently tortured and continually confronted by the master: "I have done nothing wrong, I have no serious sins on my conscience, what is God pressing me for? Why is everything not the way I want it?" And my grandfather Lukosius - he is not the only one, there are many of them around - here he is in his ninetieth decade, he had three daughters and two sons, all of whom died before they were old; he had a beautiful life, he was a prosperous farmer - someone took that life away from him in an unjust way. Now he has a dilapidated campfire at the end of the town, at the bottom of the hill, and a garden plot. There are only two pipes in the whole hut, because a neighbour recently broke all the windows when he was drunk. When he went out, the thief took the last headboard and blanket. And the old man lives alone like a finger; all his company is a hen that I got and a cat that wandered in from somewhere. People bring him this and that, and he prays 'for souls'. Who knows, he seems to be unhappy with his fate. But I have not heard a single word of complaint from his lips. Neither against the people who wronged him, nor against God who allowed it and took all his loved ones away from him. Silent tears roll down his wrinkled face as he tells of the death of his beloved daughter Marcelle.

"When the poor man felt that he was no longer good, he began to say disparaging things, and that it was too bad. You appoint everything, the smallest thing. It was a great skepet, pluonc, three roubles for the muokiets, a lijpi to open Strazdauskiene, and another lungout in his own pot. There was a large gathering of people, but they all left. I left the vijns alone in the louboutin, as he says. Anna, poor dear, is getting weaker. I bent down and looked. "Papunel, what are you doing in the muni?" - I say. "Marcelle," I say, "are you dying?" - "No," she says, "when I am about to die, I will tell you. You will read the sweetest litany of the name of Jesus. Now go and read it." I took the book and prayed that he would say so. Only suddenly capt munij per runk. "Papunel, I'm dying already, read the litany". Well, what are you going to do now? Nothing. I'm looking for a lung. A little girl in her garden with no clothes. I ran out of the door, called out, knelt down at the door, and began to read the Litany. Immediately Mažrimieni came running, and the others came too. But I am not dead yet. The bruoli are still being knocked down, the munij runk is being knocked down, and they keep saying, "Do not forsake the little one, do not forsake the little one!" And he stays a little longer. And then I read the litany again and again. But I have only just said those words: 'I am a meek and lowly heart' - Marcel did not stay.

Marcel was married for two years to Proncis, Paskou for one year to Casimir, and the others all left. For three years, three years, three years, three years, three years and no more. May it be the will of the most holy Dijva. When I sometimes remember them all, whether at night you sleeplessly watch, or sleeplessly sleep, then I begin to grope my heart, when you say that. But then I begin to smile:

*The mother-in-law stands
weeping, And sees her Son
nailed to the cross.²⁸¹*

Immediately remove the bulge from the heart. Who am I here, a poor beetle, who says that I am willing to live in hatred of the Lord Dijvas himself and of the most holy Muotinelli, who is in suffering. Only to die and to die and to die in the name of the Lord Dijvou. I have left Vijnc, old man, for nothing, but I will not starve or die because of it. There are good people, I have a lot of shelter. Thank you, Puonou Dijvou, for all the blessings!"

Grandpa likes to talk. During the days he is alone in his hut, with only his "little hands"; he rarely goes out, because his legs are weak and because he is deaf, not many people want to talk to him. Therefore, when he receives me or comes here, he talks and talks.

Sometimes I get a laugh. Today my grandfather boasted that he had a cold.

- But I don't want to listen. It's the direction you should be thinking about, not the marriage. That I will not marry, for I have been, as you say, nineteen years, and I am now, you see, married! If I had wished, I would have gotten a pinkias.

A deaf man, barely able to walk, but with a plot of land, who is not the bridegroom?

²⁸¹ Religious hymns "A mother stands weeping..." first verse. In M. Valančius' "Kantičky", this hymn belongs to the cycle "On the Passion of Jesus". It is also found in earlier hymnbooks of the 18th century.

The human soul is a wonderful enigma. Who could be more profligate than Ludwig, it seems, and yet he gets irritated when he sees me giving something to the tired. He has a good heart and gives himself to those who need it and those who do not, so why? In my opinion, the reason is the same: he wants to find in his wife those qualities which he himself lacks, and yet to raise them to the highest potency. Then there would have been a balance, and what one would have spoiled the other would have repaired.

Well said Karusia, I am really a lousy wife to Ludwig, because I don't try to fix what he messes up. I just try to give in a way that Ludwig cannot see. I despise myself for hours for this, and sometimes it seems to me that this is the only way to get along with each other: to avoid irritation and to do what my conscience tells me. I know nothing. I know so much that I don't know how to resist openly and I give in to my nature here, like the nature of a magpie, which, when faced with the smallest obstacle, crawls as fast as possible into its bucket and, if it does anything, it hides itself deeply.

The whole world is shrouded in grey fog today, and I am in an autumn mood. Maple Avenue is carpeted with a golden carpet of dead leaves, with purple dots here and there, like drops of blood from a wounded heart. Longing penetrates all the corners of the soul. I long for everything: for the sunny summer days that have already sunk into eternity, for the dead leaves, for the flowers that have bloomed, for the clouds that have drifted into the unknown distance, for the birds that have flown into the heavens...

*Longing walks slowly
through the misty
fields and through
the sad forest on a
grey autumn day.
The trees are all in
tears... Tears fall from the
branches, heavy on
mother earth. Ah! you
will not find a grain of
sand here who has not
walked these fields
another time, who has
not wept here, as my
Longing has.
Longing walks slowly with
silent, sopping steps.
But the sad, dreamy eyes
shoot an arrow into the
distance, rushing through
the grey fog, rushing
through the weeping
forest into the far blue
yonder. But, after
searching the whole earth,
they find nothing to
sate them, nothing to
silence them.*

*And the heavy cross presses
down so hard, and the feet are
streaming with blood.*

*Then, spreading his wings,
Longing rises up from the earth.
The cross is like a feather, the
bloody legs no longer hurt.
Flying higher, higher, higher.*

*Through the golden stars,
through the sun's divine eye,
still higher. On those stars, look
for other, more fiery ones,
on the eternal sun, he
searches for the Sun of
Suns...*

* * *

Our guests were going to stay with Uncle Alexander for a week. Therefore, we were surprised when, on the evening of the fifth day, a carriage arrived, with Aunt Karusia, Uncle Boleś, Zhuzhu and a maid in it.

– You didn't expect to see us so soon. You see, we missed you and came sooner," said Ciocia.

– Well said Karusia," added the uncle, "we miss you. In fact, in spite of everything, you are the best.

After Ciocia had changed her clothes and sat down on the sofa with her work in hand, the talk of a feast at Uncle Alexander's began. Ciocia began to marvel at how extraordinary she was, what an ideal wife, an ideal hostess, how orderly everything was, how every little thing was in order. What an education for the children! And one cannot be blamed for wanting anything. She has not heard a single word of Samogitian from them during the whole time, but she speaks French quite fluently.

Here the uncle interrupted the ciocia.

– Why exaggerate, Karusia? It's better to keep quiet about the children. Let them talk all day long in Samogitian, but don't be as downhearted as their eldest son. Just a nasty boy! Imagine, he sneaked into my room, opened my nesaser, threw everything away and broke one of my nail guns. You know, my beautiful, expensive, ivory nail guns. Unheard of insolence! I demanded that they give him the whips. Otherwise, what will he grow up to be? But I doubt whether that has happened, because from all appearances he is a mother's pet. It's a good thing I saw him leave my room, they would have said it wasn't his job. A fine specimen growing up, there is nothing to say!

– Now you're exaggerating, Bolesius," said Ciocia, "What are you going to do? A very lively boy. But on the whole, everything there is very, very *comme il faut*.

– What can we do, because Alexander - perhaps also because of the liveliness of his manner - sometimes says things that he would not like to say. Of course, I am not doing anything here, but merely stating the fact that Alexander is far from the affectionate and generous nature of Ludwig. And Alexandrine, with all her²⁸² gentility, is not as gentle as Ludwig. That is why I came back sooner.

– Yes. Alexander's tongue is sometimes a little too pointed," said Ciocia, "But Alexandrine's features smooth out all the bumps. Oh, that in this world the feminine is usually so strangely united and so rarely harmonious! - Ciocia sighed deeply.

A cheerful smile crept under Dad's blond moustache.

* * *

God, God, what a thunderstorm was hanging over my head and how lucky I was that it did not fall on me. It was my mother's loving hand that swept it away from me.

In the afternoon, when everyone was sitting in the salon, Ciocia called me and said:

– Since my idea concerns you, listen to me. Then he continued:

²⁸² *Taigoti* - to try to please, to do good.

– Irusia is a big girl, she's already turned eight, and it's time for her to get some proper training. That is why Bolesius and I, in order to make the difficult task of bringing up children easier for you, have decided to take her in with us. Boles, with his heart of gold, willingly agreed. I am extremely concerned that my close relatives receive a proper upbringing and education, so we will educate Irusia with the utmost care. She will have a French bona, the best teachers, music lessons. And anyway, we will treat her like a real daughter. And if she tries to be good and obedient, we will not only give her an education, but we will provide for her future in other ways.

– Irusia seems to be a serious and polite girl," said Uncle Boles, "so I hope she will not cause us any trouble and will know how to appreciate what we do to her.

Suddenly it seemed to me that someone was pushing me into a terrible, black pit. I grabbed my mother's hand and whispered to her:

– You won't give me away, Mother, you won't!

And my eyes filled with tears. Meanwhile, my father said:

– I am so overwhelmed by your kindness that I cannot find the words to express my gratitude. Your idea is so unexpected. Of course, it would be painful for us to part with Irusia, but it is for her benefit. I know that she will be at home with you. Irusia, thank your uncle and your daughter.

I didn't move from my seat. Tears were already rolling down my face.

– Thank you, Irusia," said her mother softly. – Ciocia and your uncle want you to be happy. I went to Ciocia first.

– Why are you crying, Irusia? – she asked. – Don't you want to come with us?

– I feel sorry for my mother... and everyone...

Tears welled up so profusely that I ran out of the cabin as fast as I could without even thanking my uncle.

Nika was drawing in the children's room.

– Nika, Nika! I will be taken to Vilnius by ciocia... I will always live with them... I'll leave you all behind," I said with a whimper.

– I'm not going, Irusia, don't be afraid! Daddy and Mummy won't let you go," said Nika, scared.

– Dad has already allowed...

– This is something that my mother won't allow.

– But it's always the way Daddy wants it. I don't want to, Nika! I will die without you! And you know how ciocia is always scolding, and uncle is so nervous...

Nika thought for an hour.

– Don't cry, Irusia. I know what we will do. When Ciocia and Uncle leave, you will hide somewhere. You know the best place? At my grandmother's. They won't look there. And if they come, you'll crawl behind the green stove. Don't cry!

But I wasn't comforted by that advice. Only Nika can think that, and I already know that if Mum and Dad tell me to go, I will. So I cried when I sat down in the cubby. Nika stopped drawing and sat worried. An hour later, my mother came in, and, caressing me, said:

– Don't cry, Irusia, I'm not going. You will study right here until you grow up big.

– Are you sure you won't give me away, Mother? – I asked with enlightened eyes, hugging my mother. My dad walks into the room.

– You have done well, Irusia, as if you were no older than Jonel. Ciocia is doing you such a great favour, and you are to run away and run away at once. Beautiful! Do you at least realise what a disgrace you have brought upon us?

I stood scared, upset again, cuddling my mother.

– And your behaviour, Marynia, I can't call childish either. After all, we will not be able to give her such an education. After all, I love her very much, and it would be extremely painful for me to part with her, b u t it is necessary to sacrifice our selfishness for the good of the children.

– Oh, Ludwig, how can you suspect me of being selfish here! True, it would be a terrible blow to me, but I would change my mind if Irusia's happiness required it. But they will distort the soul of our child! Don't you understand that? What will she become, growing up in such an atmosphere? No, no, never! Better that she should not have that high

education, nor a future that provides for them, but they have what is most precious. After all, it is always the way you want it, Louis, but this time I will defend my rights with all my might.

I've never seen a mother so excited. Always so calm, she now spoke sharply and sternly; her always pale face was now flushed.

– You're as exaggerated as ever, and that makes you untalkative. Calm down first, and then we'll talk," Dad said and left.

But this time, it was just what Mamadé wanted. I don't know how she convinced Daddy, what she said to Ciocia, I just stayed at home.

But I lost the grace of Ciocia altogether, and she never spoke to me again during those last days. Only after looking at me cruelly several times, she said:

– You will regret it one day, but it will be too late.

For Mamata, Ciocia was as cold as ice. And Uncle Boles was the same as ever, and you couldn't tell if he was angry or not.

* * *

It's autumn already - wet, muddy, grey. The rain rattles the reels, the wind rattles the shutters and howls down the chimney, thick shrouds of cloud hang in the sky. Today my uncle and ciocia have already left, and my father with them, to see them both off to Vilnius. The same horses will bring our teacher tomorrow. Even though the weather is nasty, we are having fun today. We feel like birds let out of a cage: we can run around all the rooms again, we no longer have to huddle in the corners of our rooms for days for fear of annoying our guests; we no longer have to be afraid of every movement, of not being in the right place, of being lectured by the ciocia and of being reproached with being seen in the company we like to keep often. Nika and Jonel immediately began to make use of this freedom: they gathered a quartet of horses in the middle of the saloon, piled up a high carriage made of chairs, and, sitting down with long whips, they set off, driving their runaway horses with loud voices. The maids are tidying up the rooms occupied by the ciocia and the uncle, and preparing the room for the teacher, while I am happily assisting. My mother and I bring a couple of beautiful herbs, hang a rug on the wall, and lay a tablecloth on the table. I would like this teacher to be nice and good to us, and I'm looking forward to it, because a friend of Mamata's who recommended her to us wrote that she is good and loves children.

And Mummy is happy today.

– You know, Irute," he said to me, "sometimes it's good that everything in the world passes.

Lunch was very happy and enjoyable, because, in the opinion of my mother and us, it was necessary to take a deep breath after being confined for so long.

Meanwhile, the drizzle stopped and the sun shone. So after eating, and carrying our packed bags, we all went for a walk.

In the alleys, the mottled, light, whispering leaves have turned into a wet and heavy mass of dirty colour; in the murky fields, among the stubble, the last flowers of autumn, the sad purple flowers, tremble here and there.

It's a sad world - but we're happy: it's been so long since we've walked with Mummy. So we've been going everywhere: to Grandpa Lukošiai's, to Topilė's, to Bobutė's, until the basket was empty.

On her return, her mother says:

– And I know what else you would like to have, and I want to give you that joy. Raise the bar and invite the Sparrows.

And it was a very grand feast, because there were all kinds of delicious things left over from the guests. After the meal, we danced with the Sparrows, with Mummy playing. After dark, and after our guests had left, Mamatė began to sing the Autumn Song, and we, crouched at her feet, listened.

The last sounds will be resolved now,

*The last birds have said goodbye to us...*²⁸³ -

The loving voice of Mamata floated by. Then, painful, tearful, complaining:

*Only my longing is eternal. Eternal is the
longing I have in my soul... Oh, how soon!
Oh, how soon!*²⁸⁴

The last low tone died, like the dying moan of a wounded heart.

- I am most sorry *that the last of the birds* have already said *goodbye to us*,' said Nika.
- Just as the birds are gone, so it's silent and empty everywhere now," I said.
- And all the nests are so sad and empty," Jonelis added.
- 'Anything is a pity, little children, anything,' said my mother.
- You know, Mummy, what I was thinking," said Nika, "We're sitting here, huddled in a pile next to you, j u s t like little birds in a nest.
- And also three, as in that nest in the waxworks²⁸⁵ .
- That's right, Nika," said my mother. - You are my most precious birds, and how good we are together! These are our happiest times - mine and yours. But the time will come - time flies so fast! - and you will fly away from your nest... and the nest will be empty...
- Where are we going, Mother?
- Every man for himself. Learn, then work for yourself and others.
- And we'll be back again, Mother.
- Yes, but we won't live the way we do now. The nest will remain empty and sad. And only Daddy and me
- with an old bird - we will be saddened. And when you've gone, you won't find either of us... Or maybe an autumn tornado will destroy the nest itself one black night... I wish I could stop that heartless time sometimes, little children, so that I could keep you as little birds for longer, and keep you sad for longer.
- Don't you want us to grow up, Mother?
- Of course I want to! I want to and I don't want to. You will be the same, but not the same. And your loving eyes that I kiss now will be the s a m e , but they will not look the same, and your silky hair will not flutter so softly in my fingers.
- Mummy, why did you say that when we return to the nest, we might not find you or Daddy? - Nika asked.
- For old birds go out where no one comes back from. Into the bosom of their parents. That's right, little children. Ah, but there is another way...
- Suddenly, at the other end of the room, someone rapped loudly on the window. Mamaté flinched, we all jumped up from our seats and ran to watch. Outside the window, the night was black, and nothing could be seen or heard.
- Who was here? Who w a s here? - asked her mother anxiously. I saw a look of f r i g h t i n her eyes. Maybe it was fate rattling, like in Beethoven's Symphony of Destiny?
- And, sitting back down at the piano, Mamata began to play that beautiful symphony. But she didn't know much by heart, so when she broke off, she began to weave some extremely sad melody and sing a recitative:

Oh, how my heart is afraid! It trembles like a bird, O Lord,

²⁸³ *The last sounds have died down,
The last birds have flown... (polish).* ²⁸⁴ *Only
my longing remains, for ever and ever, I feel
an eternal longing in my soul...
Oh, how soon already!
Oh, how soon already! (polish).*

²⁸⁵ *Waxworts - currants.*

*with the black curtain of the future hanging over her, the unfortunate one.
Who's hiding behind it? What fierce frighteners are on the alert
to attack me, the one who passes through that veil?
The terrible heads are already rising, the spiked heads are already stretching out their paws,
White teeth already gleaming, already ringing, already
chattering with their anger... Oh, those claws are sleeping in
my heart - a bird is shivering;
Oh, my paws will clasp me hard in their cold embrace!
And there is no power for me to stop, and no power
for me to escape.
Every second brings me closer to their terrible embrace. Cold
sweat moistens my forehead, my heart stops beating...
Soften the embrace of those iron cowards, O Lord!*

My mother sang so sadly, and I had the familiar feeling that everyone was going to die and I would be alone. I felt terrible, and I said to my mother:
– Mamate, let's get out of here by the light.

Mamatè closed the piano, and we went into the dining room, where a lamp was burning cheerfully above the table, a samovar was humming pleasantly on the table, and Nika and Jonelis were looking at some pictures while sitting on the table.

* * *

And it's gone and gone and gone... And you, O my mother, have gone, who flew out of the nest into the dais. But before that, the little birds flew away²⁸⁶.

And the nest was torn apart by a tornado...

* * *

*Now you are all together again -
nesting where no one else is nesting.
Hear, mother, the miraculous harmony,
which you will try to catch here in a
distorted tone, and see the beauty, more
beautiful than anything else, than the
lakes of the Alps, than the works of
artists,
that you have not seen here.
And I am the last bird of our nest, the only
one who has stayed here so long,
I fly to you, Mother, on and on and on... Soon
the body of the doll-doll will be heavy, the
soul - the golden butterfly - will fly to your
nest. I believe: one day again, your soft
hands, scented like roses, will caress my face,
and your sad eyes will smile happily at me.
When the long lips have fallen to those dear
hands, as Thomas did when he touched the Lord's
wounds, I will cry out, crying out in triumph: 'My
mother!*

Šatrijos Ragana, *Writings*, vol. 1: *Viktutė, Vincas Stonis, Sename dvare*, Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2006, pp. 237-423, 448-454.

²⁸⁶ Her mother died in 1915. Her brothers died in 1900, Steponas in 1900 and Vincas in 1910.