М.А. Булгаков

МАСТЕР И МАРГАРИТА. НЕХОРОШАЯ КВАРТИРА (I, 7)

Если бы в следующее утро Степе Лиходееву сказали бы так: «Степа! Тебя расстреляют, если ты сию минуту не встанешь!» – Степа ответил бы томным, чуть слышным голосом: «Расстреливайте, делайте со мною, что хотите, но я не встану».

Не то что встать, – ему казалось, что он не может открыть глаз, потому что, если он только это сделает, сверкнет молния и голову его тут же разнесет на куски. В этой голове гудел тяжелый колокол, между глазными яблоками и закрытыми веками проплывали коричневые пятна с огненно-зеленым ободком, и в довершение всего тошнило, причем казалось, что тошнота эта связана со звуками какого-то назойливого патефона.

Степа старался что-то припомнить, но припоминалось только одно – что, кажется, вчера и неизвестно где он стоял с салфеткой в руке и пытался поцеловать какую-то даму, причем обещал ей, что на другой день, и ровно в полдень, придет к ней в гости. Дама от этого отказывалась, говоря: «Нет, нет, меня не будет дома!» – а Степа упорно настаивал на своем: «А я вот возьму да и приду!»

Но какая это была дама, ни который сейчас час, ни какое число, ни какого месяца – Степа решительно не знал и, что хуже всего, не мог понять, где он находится. Он постарался выяснить хотя бы последнее и для этого разлепил слипшиеся

M. Bulgakov

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA THE HAUNTED FLAT (I,7)

Перевод М. Гленни

If next day someone had said to Stepa Likhodeyev 'Stepa! If you don't get up this minute you're going to be shot,' he would have replied in a faint, languid voice: 'All right, shoot me. Do what you like to me, but I'm not getting up!'

The worst of it was that he could not open his eyes, because when he did so there would be a flash of lightning and his head would shiver to fragments. A great bell was tolling in his head, brown spots with livid green edges were swimming around somewhere between his eyeballs and his closed lids. To cap it all he felt sick and the nausea was somehow connected with the sound of a gramophone.

Stepa tried to remember what had happened, but could only recall one thing — yesterday, somewhere. God knows where, he had been holding a table napkin and trying to kiss a woman, promising her that he would come and visit her tomorrow at the stroke of noon. She had refused, saying 'No, no, I won't be at home,' but Stepa had insisted 'I don't care – I'll come anyway!'

Stepa had now completely forgotten who that woman had been, what the time was, what day of what month it was, and worst of all he had no idea where he was. In an effort to find out, he unstuck his gummed-up left eyelid. Something glimmered in the semi-darkness.

M. Bulgakov

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA. A NAUGHTY APARTMENT (I, 7)

Перевод Р. Пивера и Л. Волохонской

If Styopa Likhodeev had been told the next morning: 'Styopa! You'll be shot if you don't get up this minute!' – Styopa would have replied in a languid, barely audible voice: 'Shoot me, do what you like with me, I won't get up.'

Not only not to get up, it seemed to him that he could not open his eyes, because if he were to do so, there would be a flash of lightning, and his head would at once be blown to pieces. A heavy bell was booming in that head, brown spots rimmed with fiery green floated between his eyeballs and his closed eyelids, and to crown it all he was nauseous, this nausea, as it seemed to him, being connected with the sounds of some importunate gramophone.

Styopa tried to recall something, but only one thing would get recalled – that yesterday, apparently, and in some unknown place, he had stood with a napkin in his hand and tried to kiss some lady, promising her that the next day, and exactly at noon, he would come to visit her. The lady had declined, saying: 'No, no, I won't be home!', but Styopa had stubbornly insisted: 'And I'll just up and come anyway!'

Who the lady was, and what time it was now, what day, of what month, Styopa decidedly did not know, and, worst of all, he could not figure out where he was. He attempted to learn this last at least, and to that end unstuck the stuck-together lids of his left eye.

веки левого глаза. В полутьме что-то тускло отсвечивало.

Степа наконец узнал трюмо и понял, что он лежит навзничь у себя на кровати, то есть на бывшей ювелиршиной кровати, в спальне. Тут ему так ударило в голову, что он закрыл глаз и застонал.

Объяснимся: Степа Лиходеев, директор театра Варьете, очнулся утром у себя в той самой квартире, которую он занимал пополам с покойным Берлиозом, в большом шестиэтажном доме, покоем расположенном на Садовой улице.

Надо сказать, что квартира эта – N 50 – давно уже пользовалась если не плохой, то, во всяком случае, странной репутацией. Еще два года тому назад владелицей ее была вдова ювелира де Фужере. Анна Францевна де Фужере, пятидесятилетняя почтенная и очень деловая дама, три комнаты из пяти сдавала жильцам: одному, фамилия которого была, кажется, Беломут, и другому – с утраченной фамилией.

И вот два года тому назад начались в квартире необъяснимые происшествия: из этой квартиры люди начали бесследно исчезать. Однажды в выходной день явился в квартиру милиционер, вызвал в переднюю второго жильца (фамилия которого утратилась) и сказал, что того просят на минутку зайти в отделение милиции в чем-то расписаться. Жилец приказал Анфисе, преданной и давней домашней работнице Анны Францевны, сказать, в случае если ему будут звонить, что он вернется через десять минут, и ушел вместе с корректным милиционером в белых перчатках. Но не вернулся он не только через десять минут, а вообще никогда не вернулся. Удивительнее всего то, что, очевидно, с ним вместе исчез и милиционер.

At last Stepa recognised it as a mirror. He was lying cross-wise on the bed in his own bedroom. Then something hit him on the head and he closed his eyes and groaned.

Stepa Likhodeyev, manager of the Variety Theatre, had woken up that morning in the flat that he shared with Berlioz in a big six-storey block of flats on Sadovaya Street.

This flat – No. 50 – had a strange reputation. Two years before, it had been owned by the widow of a jeweller called de Fougere, Anna Frantzevna, a respectable and very business-like lady of fifty, who let three of her five rooms to lodgers. One of them was, it seems, called Belomut; the other's name has been lost.

Two years ago odd things began happening in that apartment – people started to vanish from it without trace. One Monday afternoon a policeman called, invited the second lodger (the one whose name is no longer known) into the hall and asked him to come along to the police station for a minute or two to sign a document. The lodger told Anfisa, Anna Frantzevna's devoted servant of many years, to say that if anybody rang him up he would be back in ten minutes. He then went out accompanied by the courteous policeman in white gloves. But he not only failed to come back in ten minutes; he never came back at all. Odder still, the policeman appeared to have vanished with him.

Anfisa, a devout and frankly rather a superstitious woman, informed the distraught Anna Frantsevna that it was witchcraft, that she knew perfectly well who had enticed away the lodger and the policeman, only she dared not pronounce the name at night-time.

Witchcraft once started, as we all know, is virtually unstoppable. The anonymous lodger disappeared, you will remember, on a Monday; the

Something gleamed dully in the semi-darkness. Styopa finally recognized the pier-glass and realized that he was lying on his back in his own bed – that is, the jeweller's wife's former bed – in the bedroom. Here he felt such a throbbing in his head that he closed his eyes and moaned.

Let us explain: Styopa Likhodeev, director of the Variety Theatre, had come to his senses that morning at home, in the very apartment which he shared with the late Berlioz, in a big, six-storeyed, U-shaped building on Sadovaya Street.

It must be said that this apartment – no.50 – had long had, if not a bad, at least a strange reputation. Two years ago it had still belonged to the widow of the jeweller de Fougeray. Anna Frantsevna de Fougeray, a respectable and very practical fifty-year-old woman, let out three of the five rooms to lodgers: one whose last name was apparently Belomut, and another with a lost last name.

And then two years ago inexplicable events began to occur in this apartment: people began to disappear from this apartment without a trace.

Once, on a day off, a policeman came to the apartment, called the second lodger (the one whose last name got lost) out to the front hall, and said he was invited to come to the police station for a minute to put his signature to something. The lodger told Anfisa, Anna Frantsevna's long-time and devoted housekeeper, to say, in case he received any telephone calls, that he would be back in ten minutes, and left together with the proper, white-gloved policeman. He not only did not come back in ten minutes, but never came back at all. The most surprising thing was that the policeman evidently vanished along with him.

The pious, or, to speak more frankly, superstitious Anfisa declared outright to the very upset Anna

Набожная, а откровеннее сказать – суеверная, Анфиса так напрямик и заявила очень расстроенной Анне Францевне, что это колдовство и что она прекрасно знает, кто утащил и жильца и милиционера, только к ночи не хочет говорить. Ну, а колдовству, как известно, стоит только начаться, а там уж его ничем не остановишь. Второй жилец исчез, помнится, в понедельник, а в среду как сквозь землю провалился Беломут, но, правда, при других обстоятельствах. Утром за ним заехала, как обычно, машина, чтобы отвезти его на службу, и отвезла, но назад никого не привезла и сама больше не вернулась.

Горе и ужас мадам Беломут не поддаются описанию. Но, увы, и то и другое было непродолжительно. В ту же ночь, вернувшись с Анфисой с дачи, на которую Анна Францевна почему-то спешно поехала, она не застала уже гражданки Беломут в квартире. Но этого мало: двери обеих комнат, которые занимали супруги Беломут, оказались запечатанными.

Два дня прошли кое-как. На третий же день страдавшая все это время бессонницей Анна Францевна опять-таки спешно уехала на дачу... Нужно ли говорить, что она не вернулась!

Оставшаяся одна Анфиса, наплакавшись вволю, легла спать во втором часу ночи. Что с ней было дальше, неизвестно, но рассказывали жильцы других квартир, что будто бы в N 50-м всю ночь слышались какие-то стуки и будто бы до утра в окнах горел электрический свет. Утром выяснилось, что и Анфисы нет!

Об исчезнувших и о проклятой квартире долго в доме рассказывали всякие легенды, вроде того, например, что эта сухая и набожная Анфиса будто бы носила на своей иссохшей груди в замшевом

following Wednesday Belomut, too, vanished from the face of the earth, although admittedly in different circumstances. He was fetched as usual in the morning by the car which took him to work, but it never brought him back and never called again.

Words cannot describe the pain and distress which this caused to madame Belomut, but alas for her, she was not fated to endure even this unhappy state for long. On returning from her dacha that evening, whither she had hastily gone with Anfisa, Anna Frantzevna found no trace of madame Belomut in the flat and what was more, the doors of both rooms occupied by the Belomuts had been sealed.

Two days of uncertainty and insomnia passed for Anna Frantzevna; on the third day she made another hasty visit to her dacha from whence, it need hardly be said, she never returned.

Anfisa, left alone, cried her eyes out and finally went to bed at two-o'clock in the morning. Nobody knows what happened to her after that, but tenants of the neighbouring flat described having heard knocking coming from No. 50 and having seen lights burning in the windows all night. By morning Anfisa too was gone.

Legends of all kinds about the mysterious flat and its vanishing lodgers circulated in the building for some time. According to one of them the devout and spinstery Anfisa used to carry twenty-five large diamonds, belonging to Anna Frantzevna, in a chamois-leather bag between her withered breasts. It was said, too, that among other things a priceless treasure consisting of those same diamonds and a hoard of tsarist gold coins were somehow found in the coal-shed behind Anna Frantzevna’s dacha. Lacking proof, of course, we shall never know how true these rumours were.

Frantsevna that it was sorcery and that she knew perfectly well who had stolen both the lodger and the policeman, only she did not wish to talk about it towards night-time.

Well, but with sorcery, as everyone knows, once it starts, there's no stopping it. The second lodger is remembered to have disappeared on a Monday, and that Wednesday Belomut seemed to drop from sight, though, true, under different circumstances. In the morning a car came, as usual, to take him to work, and it did take him to work, but it did not bring anyone back or come again itself.

Madame Belomut's grief and horror defied description. But, alas, neither the one nor the other continued for long. That same night, on returning with Anfisa from her dacha, which Anna Frantsevna had hurried off to for some reason, she did not find the wife of citizen Belomut in the apartment. And not only that: the doors of the two rooms occupied by the Belomut couple turned out to be sealed.

Two days passed somehow. On the third day, Anna Frantsevna, who had suffered all the while from insomnia, again left hurriedly for her dacha... Needless to say, she never came back!

Left alone, Anfisa, having wept her fill, went to sleep past one o'clock in the morning. What happened to her after that is not known, but lodgers in other apartments told of hearing some sort of knocking all night in no.50 and of seeing electric light burning in the windows till morning.

In the morning it turned out that there was also no Anfisa!

For a long time all sorts of legends were repeated in the house about these disappearances and about the accursed apartment, such as, for instance, 'that this dry and pious little Anfisa had supposedly carried on her

мешочке двадцать пять крупных бриллиантов, принадлежащих Анне Францевне. Что будто бы в дровяном сарае на той самой даче, куда спешно ездила Анна Францевна, обнаружились сами собой какие-то несметные сокровища в виде тех же бриллиантов, а также золотых денег царской чеканки... И прочее в этом же роде. Ну, чего не знаем, за то не ручаемся.

Как бы то ни было, квартира простояла пустой и запечатанной только неделю, а затем в нее вселились – покойный Берлиоз с супругой и этот самый Степа тоже с супругой. Совершенно естественно, что, как только они попали в окаянную квартиру, и у них началось черт знает что. Именно, в течение одного месяца пропали обе супруги. Но эти не бесследно. Про супругу Берлиоза рассказывали, что будто бы ее видели в Харькове с каким-то балетмейстером, а супруга Степы якобы обнаружилась на Божедомке, где, как болтали, директор Варьете, используя свои бесчисленные знакомства, ухитрился добыть ей комнату, но с одним условием, чтобы духу ее не было на Садовой улице...

Итак, Степа застонал. Он хотел позвать домработницу Груню и потребовать у нее пирамидону, но все-таки сумел сообразить, что это глупости... Что никакого пирамидону у Груни, конечно, нету. Пытался позвать на помощь Берлиоза, дважды простонал: "Миша... Миша...", но, как сами понимаете, ответа не получил. В квартире стояла полнейшая тишина.

Пошевелив пальцами ног, Степа догадался, что лежит в носках, трясущейся рукою провел по бедру, чтобы определить, в брюках он или нет, и не определил.

However, the flat only remained empty for a week before Berlioz and his wife and Stepa and his wife moved into it. Naturally as soon as they took possession of the haunted flat the oddest things started happening to them too. Within a single month both wives had disappeared, although not without trace.

Rumour had it that Berlioz's wife had been seen in Kharkov with a ballet-master, whilst Stepa's wife had apparently found her way to an orphanage where, the story went, the manager of the Variety had used his connections to get her a room on condition that she never showed her face in Sadovaya Street again. . . .

So Stepa groaned. He wanted to call his maid, Grunya, and ask her for an aspirin but he was conscious enough to realise that it would be useless because Grunya most probably had no aspirin. He tried to call for Berlioz's help and twice moaned 'Misha . . . Misha . . .', but as you will have guessed, there was no reply. There was complete silence in the flat.

Wriggling his toes, Stepa deduced that he was lying in his socks. He ran a trembling hand down his hip to test whether he had his trousers on or not and found that he had not.

At last, realising that he was alone and abandoned, that there was nobody to help him, he decided to get up, whatever superhuman effort it might cost him.

Stepa prised open his eyelids and saw himself reflected in the long mirror in the shape of a man whose hair stuck out in all directions, with a puffy, stubble-grown face, with watery eyes and wearing a dirty shirt, a collar, tie, underpants and socks.

As he looked at himself in the mirror, he also noticed standing beside it a strange man dressed in a black suit and a black beret.

Stepa sat up on the bed and did his best to focus his bloodshot eyes on the stranger. The silence was

dried-up breast, in a suede bag, twenty-five big diamonds belonging to Anna Frantsevna. That in the woodshed of that very dacha to which Anna Frantsevna had gone so hurriedly, there supposedly turned up, of themselves, some inestimable treasures in the form of those same diamonds, plus some gold coins of tsarist minting... And so on, in the same vein. Well, what we don't know, we can't vouch for.

However it may have been, the apartment stood empty and sealed for only a week. Then the late Berlioz moved in with his wife, and this same Styopa, also with his wife. It was perfectly natural that, as soon as they got into the malignant apartment, devil knows what started happening with them as well! Namely, within the space of a month both wives vanished. But these two not without a trace. Of Berlioz's wife it was told that she had supposedly been seen in Kharkov with some ballet-master, while Styopa's wife allegedly turned up on Bozhedomka Street, where wagging tongues said the director of the Variety, using his innumerable acquaintances, had contrived to get her a room, but on the one condition that she never show her face on Sadovaya...

And so, Styopa moaned. He wanted to call the housekeeper Grunya and ask her for aspirin, but was still able to realize that it was foolish, and that Grunya, of course, had no aspirin. He tried to call Berlioz for help, groaned twice: 'Misha... Misha...', but, as you will understand, received no reply. The apartment was perfectly silent.

Moving his toes, Styopa realized that he was lying there in his socks, passed his trembling hand down his hip to determine whether he had his trousers on or not, but failed. Finally, seeing that he was abandoned and alone, and there was no one to help him, he decided to get up, however inhuman the effort it cost him.

Наконец, видя, что он брошен и одинок, что некому ему помочь, решил подняться, каких бы нечеловеческих усилий это ни стоило.

Степа разлепил склеенные веки и увидел, что отражается в трюмо в виде человека с торчащими в разные стороны волосами, с опухшей, покрытою черной щетиною физиономией, с заплывшими глазами, в грязной сорочке с воротником и галстуком, в кальсонах и в носках.

Таким он увидел себя в трюмо, а рядом с зеркалом увидел неизвестного человека, одетого в черное и в черном берете.

Степа сел на кровать и сколько мог вытаращил налитые кровью глаза на неизвестного.

Молчание нарушил этот неизвестный, произнеся низким, тяжелым голосом и с иностранным акцентом следующие слова:

– Добрый день, симпатичнейший Степан Богданович!

Произошла пауза, после которой, сделав над собой страшнейшее усилие, Степа выговорил:

– Что вам угодно? – и сам поразился, не узнав своего голоса. Слово «что» он произнес дискантом, «вам» – басом, а «угодно» у него совсем не вышло.

Незнакомец дружелюбно усмехнулся, вынул большие золотые часы с алмазным треугольником на крышке, позвонил одиннадцать раз и сказал:

– Одиннадцать! И ровно час, как я дожидаюсь вашего пробуждения, ибо вы назначили мне быть у вас в десять. Вот и я!

Степа нащупал на стуле рядом с кроватью брюки, шепнул:

– Извините... – надел их и хрипло спросил: – Скажите, пожалуйста, вашу фамилию?

broken by the unknown visitor, who said gravely, in a low voice with a foreign accent:

'Good morning, my dear Stepan Bogdanovich!'

There was a pause. Pulling himself together with fearful effort Stepa said:

‘What do you want?' He did not recognise his own voice. He had spoken the word 'what' in a treble, 'do you' in a bass and 'want' had simply not emerged at all.

The stranger gave an amiable smile, pulled out a large gold watch with a diamond triangle on the cover, listened to it strike eleven times and said:

'Eleven. I have been waiting exactly an hour for you to wake up. You gave me an appointment to see you at your flat at ten so here I am!'

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

'Excuse me. . . .' He put on his trousers and asked hoarsely:

'Please tell me – who are you? '

He found talking difficult, as with every word someone stuck a needle into his brain, causing him infernal agony.

'What! Have you forgotten my name too?‘ The stranger smiled.

'Sorry . . .' said Stepa huskily. He could feel his hangover developing a new symptom: the floor beside his bed seemed to be on the move and any moment now he was liable to take a dive head first down into hell.

'My dear Stepan Bogdanovich,' said the visitor with a shrewd smile. 'Aspirin will do you no good. Follow a wise old rule – the hair of the dog. The only thing that will bring you back to life is two measures of vodka with something sharp and peppery to eat.'

Styopa unstuck his glued eyelids and saw himself reflected in the pier-glass as a man with hair sticking out in all directions, with a bloated physiognomy covered with black stubble, with puffy eyes, a dirty shirt, collar and necktie, in drawers and socks.

So he saw himself in the pier-glass, and next to the mirror he saw an unknown man, dressed in black and wearing a black beret.

Styopa sat up in bed and goggled his bloodshot eyes as well as he could at the unknown man. The silence was broken by this unknown man, who said in a low, heavy voice, and with a foreign accent, the following words:

'Good morning, my most sympathetic Stepan Bogdanovich!'

There was a pause, after which, making a most terrible strain on himself, Styopa uttered:

"What can I do for you?' – and was amazed, not recognizing his own voice. He spoke the word 'what' in a treble, 'can I' in a bass, and his 'do for you' did not come off at all.

The stranger smiled amicably, took out a big gold watch with a diamond triangle on the lid, rang eleven times, and said:

'Eleven. And for exactly an hour I've been waiting for you to wake up, since you made an appointment for me to come to your place at ten. Here am!'

Styopa felt for his trousers on the chair beside his bed, whispered:

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

He had difficulty speaking. At each word, someone stuck a needle into his brain, causing infernal pain.

'What! You've forgotten my name, too?' Here the unknown man smiled.

Говорить ему было трудно. При каждом слове кто-то втыкал ему иголку в мозг, причиняя адскую боль. – Как? Вы и фамилию мою забыли? – тут неизвестный улыбнулся. – Простите... – прохрипел Степа, чувствуя, что похмелье дарит его новым симптомом: ему показалось, что пол возле кровати ушел куда-то и что сию минуту он головой вниз полетит к чертовой матери в преисподнюю. – Дорогой Степан Богданович, – заговорил посетитель, проницательно улыбаясь, – никакой пирамидон вам не поможет. Следуйте старому мудрому правилу, – лечить подобное подобным. Единственно, что вернет вас к жизни, это две стопки водки с острой и горячей закуской. Степа был хитрым человеком и, как ни был болен, сообразил, что раз уж его застали в таком виде, нужно признаваться во всем. – Откровенно сказать... – начал он, еле ворочая языком, – вчера я немножко... – Ни слова больше! – ответил визитер и отъехал с креслом в сторону. Степа, тараща глаза, увидел, что на маленьком столике сервирован поднос, на коем имеется нарезанный белый хлеб, паюсная икра в вазочке, белые маринованные грибы на тарелочке, что-то в кастрюльке и, наконец, водка в объемистом ювелиршином графинчике. Особенно поразило Степу то, что графин запотел от холода. Впрочем, это было понятно – он помещался в полоскательнице, набитой льдом. Накрыто, словом, было чисто, умело. Незнакомец не дал Степиному изумлению развиться до степени болезненной и ловко налил ему полстопки водки.	Ill though Stepa was he had enough sense to realise that since he had been found in this state he had better tell all. 'Frankly . . .' he began, scarcely able to move his tongue, ' I did have a bit too . . .' 'Say no more!' interrupted the visitor and pushed the armchair to one side. Stepa's eyes bulged. There on a little table was a tray, laid with slices of white bread and butter, pressed caviare in a glass bowl, pickled mushrooms on a saucer, something in a little saucepan and finally vodka in one of the jeweller's ornate decanters. The decanter was so chilled that it was wet with condensation from standing in a finger-bowl full of cracked ice. The stranger cut Stepa's astonishment short by deftly pouring him out half a glass of vodka. 'What about you? ' croaked Stepa. 'With pleasure! ' With a shaking hand Stepa raised the glass to his lips and the mysterious guest swallowed his at one gulp. As he munched his caviare Stepa was able to squeeze out the words: 'Won't you have a bite to eat too? ' 'Thank you, but I never eat when I'm drinking,' replied the stranger, pouring out a second round. He lifted the lid of the saucepan. It contained little frankfurters in tomato sauce. Slowly the awful green blobs in front of his eyes dissolved, words started to form and most important of all Stepa's memory began to come back. That was it – he had been at Khustov's dacha at Skhodna and Khustov had driven Stepa out there by taxi. He even remembered hailing the taxi outside the Metropole. There had been another man with them – an actor ... or was he an actor? . . . anyhow he had a	`Forgive me...' Styopa croaked, feeling that his hangover had presented him with a new symptom: it seemed to him that the floor beside his bed went away, and that at any moment he would go flying down to the devil's dam in the nether world. `My dear Stepan Bogdanovich,' the visitor said, with a perspicacious smile, 'no aspirin will help you. Follow the wise old rule – cure like with like. The only thing that will bring you back to life is two glasses of vodka with something pickled and hot to go with it.' Styopa was a shrewd man and, sick as he was, realized that since he had been found in this state, he would have to confess everything. `Frankly speaking,' he began, his tongue barely moving, 'yesterday I got a bit...' 'Not a word more!' the visitor answered and drew aside with his chair. Styopa, rolling his eyes, saw that a tray had been set on a small table, on which tray there were sliced white bread, pressed caviar in a little bowl, pickled mushrooms on a dish, something in a saucepan, and, finally, vodka in a roomy decanter belonging to the jeweller's wife. What struck Styopa especially was that the decanter was frosty with cold. This, however, was understandable: it was sitting in a bowl packed with ice. In short, the service was neat, efficient. The stranger did not allow Styopa's amazement to develop to a morbid degree, but deftly poured him half a glass of vodka. 'And you?' Styopa squeaked. 'With pleasure!' His hand twitching, Styopa brought the glass to his lips, while the stranger swallowed the contents of his glass at one gulp. Chewing a lump of caviar, Styopa squeezed out of himself the words:

– А вы? – пискнул Степа.

– С удовольствием!

Прыгающей рукой поднес Степа стопку к устам, а незнакомец одним духом проглотил содержимое своей стопки. Прожевывая кусок икры, Степа выдавил из себя слова:

– А вы что же... закусить?

– Благодарствуйте, я не закусываю никогда, – ответил незнакомец и налил по второй. Открыли кастрюлю – в ней оказались сосиски в томате.

И вот проклятая зелень перед глазами растаяла, стали выговариваться слова, и, главное, Степа кое-что припомнил. Именно, что дело вчера было на Сходне, на даче у автора скетчей Хустова, куда этот Хустов и возил Степу в таксомоторе. Припомнилось даже, как нанимали этот таксомотор у «Метрополя», был еще при этом какой-то актер не актер... с патефоном в чемоданчике. Да, да, да, это было на даче! Еще, помнится, выли собаки от этого патефона. Вот только дама, которую Степа хотел поцеловать, осталась неразъясненной... черт ее знает, кто она... кажется, в радио служит, а может быть, и нет.

Вчерашний день, таким образом, помаленьку высветлялся, но Степу сейчас гораздо более интересовал день сегодняшний и, в частности, появление в спальне неизвестного, да еще с закуской и водкой. Вот что недурно было бы разъяснить!

– Ну, что же, теперь, я надеюсь, вы вспомнили мою фамилию? Но Степа только стыдливо улыбнулся и развел руками.

– Однако! Я чувствую, что после водки вы пили портвейн! Помилуйте, да разве это можно делать!

– Я хочу вас попросить, чтоб это осталось между нами, – заискивающе сказал Степа.

portable gramophone. Yes, yes, they had all gone to the dacha! And the dogs, he remembered, had started howling when they played the gramophone. Only the woman Stepa had tried to kiss remained a complete blank . . . who the hell was she? . . . Didn't she work for the radio? Or perhaps she didn't. . . .

Gradually the previous day came back into focus, but Stepa was much more interested in today and in particular in this odd stranger who had materialised in his bedroom complete with snacks and vodka. If only someone would explain it all!

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

Stepa could only grin sheepishly and spread his hands.

'Well, really! I suspect you drank port on top of vodka last night. What a way to behave!'

'Please keep this to yourself,' said Stepa imploringly.

'Oh, of course, of course! But naturally I can't vouch for Khustov.'

'Do you know Khustov? '

'I saw that individual for a moment or two in your office yesterday, but one cursory glance at his face was enough to convince me that he was a scheming, quarrelsome, sycophantic swine.'

'He's absolutely right! ' thought Stepa, amazed at such a truthful, precise and succinct description of Khustov.

The ruins of yesterday were piecing themselves together now, but the manager of the Variety still felt vaguely anxious. There was still a gaping black void in his memory. He had absolutely no recollection of having seen this stranger in his office the day before.

'Woland, professor of black magic,' said the visitor gravely, and seeing Stepa was still in difficulties he described their meeting in detail.

'And you... a bite of something?'

`Much obliged, but I never snack,' the stranger replied and poured seconds. The saucepan was opened and found to contain frankfurters in tomato sauce.

And then the accursed green haze before his eyes dissolved, the words began to come out clearly, and, above all, Styopa remembered a thing or two.

Namely, that it had taken place yesterday in Skhodnya, at the dacha of the sketch-writer Khustov, to which this same Khustov had taken Styopa in a taxi. There was even a memory of having hired this taxi by the Metropol, and there was also some actor, or not an actor... with a gramophone in a little suitcase. Yes, yes, yes, it was at the dacha! The dogs, he remembered, had howled from this gramophone. Only the lady Styopa had wanted to kiss remained unexplained... devil knows who she was... maybe she was in radio, maybe not...

The previous day was thus coming gradually into focus, but right now Styopa was much more interested in today's day and, particularly, in the appearance in his bedroom of a stranger, and with hors d'oeuvres and vodka to boot. It would be nice to explain that!

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

But Styopa only smiled bashfully and spread his arms.

'Really! I get the feeling that you followed the vodka with port wine! Good heavens, it simply isn't done!'

'I beg you to keep it between us,' Styopa said fawningly.

'Oh, of course, of course! But as for Khustov, needless to say, I can't vouch for him.'

'So you know Khustov?'

"Yesterday, in your office, I saw this individuum briefly, but it only takes a fleeting glance at his face to

– О, конечно, конечно! Но за Хустова я, само собой разумеется, не ручаюсь. – А вы разве знаете Хустова? – Вчера в кабинете у вас видел этого индивидуума мельком, но достаточно одного беглого взгляда на его лицо, чтобы понять, что он – сволочь, склочник, приспособленец и подхалим. «Совершенно верно!» – подумал Степа, пораженный таким верным, точным и кратким определением Хустова. Да, вчерашний день лепился из кусочков, но все-таки тревога не покидала директора Варьете. Дело в том, что в этом вчерашнем дне зияла преогромная черная дыра. Вот этого самого незнакомца в берете, воля ваша, Степа в своем кабинете вчера никак не видал. – Профессор черной магии Воланд, – веско сказал визитер, видя Степины затруднения, и рассказал все по порядку.		understand that he is a bastard, a squabbler, a trimmer and a toady.' `Perfectly true!' thought Styopa, struck by such a true, precise and succinct definition of Khustov. Yes, the previous day was piecing itself together, but, even so, anxiety would not take leave of the director of the Variety. The thing was that a huge black hole yawned in this previous day. Say what you will, Styopa simply had not seen this stranger in the beret in his office yesterday. 'Professor of black magic Woland,' the visitor said weightily, seeing Styopa's difficulty, and he recounted everything in order.