

The Khufu's crocodile feeding. ^{/1/}

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Comments look up at the back
MG & NL

Igor has bellowed and than, still in his sleep, has muttered some unarticulated polysyllabic words. He several times pulled his chin, as if pulling out his jaw from boorish dentist, and after only that has awoken. He was silently looking at fog outside his car window for a while. And then he said, "Jeez!"

"What's wrong?" asked Aleksey Ivanovich from the driver seat.

"I had such a dream now! We got contrary line, ran into truck and all three of us perished instantly. But we had immediately forgotten about it and went further. And now this fog all around – by the way, in a dream it was also here – it is actually not a fog, but sort of clouds... Or I even don't know. On the whole, there's another world already. And the most important, in the end I surely know that is a dream but there is no way I can wake up as if something holds me there..."

"Pip on your tongue" ^{/2/} concluded Aleksey Ivanovich. Igor wiped sweat droplets appeared on his forehead by sleeve.

"Really", he told, "it is not clear, whence the fog from. Here is the south of France, after all. Such thing should not be here."

"All things in the world interchanged places now" ^{/3/} Aleksey Ivanovich answered. "Here is a fog, in America - frosts. But in the Magadan ^{/4/} area the sun burns down, as a kiss of Tina Kandelaki ^{/5/}."

"By the way", Tanyusha ^{/6/} could not bear at a back sit, "about a kiss of Tina Kandelaki. If you'll speed up through the fog, it's really possible to get squelch."

Aleksey Ivanovich sighed and did slow down a bit.

"It would be so nice to get on time everywhere, to do simultaneously incompatible things", ^{/7/} he said, "like to show you Prestidigitator and be back in time of the soccer starting."

"And why do you speak this way – not conjurer, but prestidigitator?" Igor asked.

"Because to articulate aloud such word is already a trick", answered Aleksey Ivanovich. "By and large, it's the interesting term. This is old way to name experts on card miracles in France. It means in French 'dexterous fingers'. Does it, Tanyush?"

"About it", told Tanyusha, "if we translate it literally – 'smartfingerman'." Aleksey Ivanovich had laughed.

"'Smartfingermen' have remained on the native land" ^{/8/}, he answered. "While we are in free, so to say, world, let's address to it - out of respect for this fact – as 'prestidigitator'."

"Aleksey Ivanovich, do not speed up", Tanyusha asked once again. "The fog, indeed. Igor has even dreamed the nightmare. What if the cow will show up on road suddenly?"

"What cow?" asked Aleksey Ivanovich. "More likely, the transvestite from "Hara Krishna"." ^{/9/}

But nevertheless he went a bit slower.

"Why do you have such interest in conjurers?" asked Igor.

"Destiny", Aleksey Ivanovich answered. "In fact, I work not all my life as oligarch. At your age I worked in one economic research institute ^{/10/}. Did you hear about the unbearable lightness of being ^{/11/}? Here was really it and very much it. To go through it, Soviet man ^{/12/} had to have a hobby. Someone solved crosswords, someone collected labels from match boxes, and I studied how to do conjuring tricks here. I was sharpened sufficiently well in this matter. If life would turn otherwise, I could now stand somewhere on Arbat ^{/13/} and make something like this prestidigitator."

"It is written in newspapers about you that you do make the same" ^{/14/}, joked Igor. Aleksey Ivanovich smiled and pushed the brakes. Car stopped.

"We have arrived", he said. "Here is belfry. He stands about six hundred feet from it."

"This is strange", said Tanyusha when all they came out the car, "conjurer is in place like this. It percepts like there

are no passers-by here. Maybe, they do appear later?"

"Probably", Aleksey Ivanovich said, "they come from the town. But he takes the spot beforehand. Let's go."

Tanyusha asked after three hundred feet, "And why it was impossible to draw up the car?"

"Our car is much provocative", told Aleksey Ivanovich. "And the scandalous range of inequality deforms relations between people. When Harun al-Rashid was walking in Baghdad, he changed to beggar clothes and was therefore in the course of all events. And if he went on in his gold palanquin, he then had seen nothing of real life, except for a big ass of going ahead eunuch. After all, kids, when will you else walk in a fog like that? Cool, ah. It's total 3D disorientation."

"A bit", Igor agreed.

"Do we take exactly right way?" asked Tanyusha. "Well, I don't see anybody."

Aleksey Ivanovich had peered into the space and said, "There he is. At the same spot. Igor, you are sharp-eyed - do you see red cap?"

"Red-and-yellow", Igor corrected after several steps. "This is not a cap, but red peak less cap with the yellow pompon. It is like for seaman. It looks like he sleeps on feet, upright. Like a horse... Does he speak only French?"

"He is deaf-mute", answered Aleksey Ivanovich. "What is his nationality, I do not know."

"How then we can convey with him?"

Aleksey Ivanovich shook his shoulders, "By gestures."

"Aha, here I see now", Tanyusha said. "Well that... I hate to say but at first glance my heart isn't burned by the ray of sympathy."

"I did not promise this", answered Aleksey Ivanovich. "For such services address to a cupid with a blowtorch... Now we go quietly. Otherwise we could wake him up."

It is true, the conjurer has chosen a strange spot – waste plot covered by asphalt in very center of which stood up the ancient street lamp; it's survived more than one reconstruction of the surrounding space.

The asphalt of waste plot has been marked for the parking. There were shopping center, gas station and several restaurants somewhere nearby, judging by the signs; here it could be crowded at other times. But now there were no cars, and asphalt waste land looked mysteriously, even horrifying - it seemed the conjurer stood by the post driven into the pole, and there was no life for many hundred feet all around.

Indeed, he slept leaning his back against the lamp. His face was not visible: having enveloped himself with hands to keep as much warmth as possible, he hid a chin in the lifted collar yellow-red petit military-dressed jacket, similar to dress uniform of some shameful army, which has never in the history reached a battlefield.

The large case on bicycle wheels in which the conjurer carried the requisite stood next to him. Case was dark-blue with the bright gold stars. The small street organ was build within it - the curve handle stuck out its side, polished by palm up to shine; the different-caliber tubes were covered with board faced to spectators. Above organ short rod erected as antenna with a ring at the end. It looked like the bird may be sat in that ring to draw out fortune tickets.

"Parrot had croaked away", stated Tanyusha. These words caught the whole sense of seen so precisely, that all three have laughed. The conjurer had been awaking by their laughter.

At the moment he saw people in front of him, he has shuddered, raised hands and pulled down head-gear to cover his face. It has appeared as not seaman cap, but rolled elastic cap, which has turned in the special mask with the holes for the eyes and the mouth - only extremely gobbledygook, because of cranberry color with large yellow pompon dangled on the top back of it. The conjurer did it so quickly, that no one has had time to see his face plainly.

"It seems to be the first trick", Tanyusha told. "What is his mask for? – is he a gangster, or what?"

"This is just in case we won't like his show", responded Aleksey Ivanovich. "Then no one could see how he reddens."

The conjurer has smoothed out mask on his face; gripped the handle of the street organ and rapidly started twirl it.

The air has been filling with hoarse music. Strange enough, it was not the variation on a theme of the dog waltz which is usually played by street organs, but an unfamiliar march - solemn and even though ominous. So ominous and solemn, that it sounded inappropriate.

Probably, the conjurer tried to amuse listeners by contrast in-between his tool foolishness and gloomy magnitude of music, but he did not succeed. On the contrary, Aleksey Ivanovich has even shivered – morning air seemed became suddenly such cold. His fellows felt the same, and smiles were wiped off their faces... But the conjurer apparently did not get the impression his music produced - his mouth and eyes affably smiled in mask holes.

After finally letting go the handle of street organ he bowed and placed on the dark-blue-in-the-stars case empty popcorn paper cup where the pair coins tinkled. The cup was such enormous that could be seen as first apt joke today.

“What a faith in the human generosity”, said Tanyusha. “Oh well.” She turned to the conjurer and pronounced a long French sentence accompanying words with vigorous gesticulation.

If the conjurer has understood its meaning, he didn’t show it at all. He put his hand behind his back, made there some short movement – as if he scratched – and stretched out to Tanyusha whence known taken bouquet of paper flowers. Flowers were pleasant blue color, in tone to his case, but entirely plain, cut out of paper without special art and even diligence. Tanyusha has smiled, but did not take them.

“As *forget-me-nots*” ^{/15/}, – Igor told.

“Aha”, – agreed Aleksey Ivanovich. “They are named so because they grow *not behind a booth*” ^{/15/} but somewhere else.”

Tanyusha laughed – and was laughing maybe a bit longer than would be enjoyable for Aleksey Ivanovich.

The conjurer has several times shaken flowers as if offering her to take the bouquet, but she disagreeably shook her head. The conjurer shrugged shoulders and threw bouquet aside.

“He will be offended”, Igor had worn.

“How would I know, from what he makes them”, replayed Tanyusha. “May be, he impregnates them with some poison chemistry to make go in a sleeve or where else he hides them.”

The conjurer has again thrust hand behind his back and offered her another bouquet of flowers, very tiny - there were some chamomiles, pale-violet small crosses and pair of crumpled bells. Flowers were a little bit wilt, but the real ones. Tanyusha once again refused to take them, and the second bouquet flew after the first one.

The conjurer has pensively scratched his chin. Then glass ball in size of coin appeared in his fingers. He had tossed it up on a palm to convince spectators that there is nothing but a ball. He had tight a fist, and then unclenched – and two balls appeared on a palm. He had again pressed them into a fist, twisted it in front of himself, blown at it, unclenched, and there became three balls on his palm now.

Igor clapped few times.

“How does he do it?” Tanyusha had whispered.

“He palms”, answered Aleksey Ivanovich.

“What does ‘palms’ mean?”

“Here it is ‘smart finger motions’. He has all three balls in his hand from the very beginning, they are clamped behind fingers. He just holds his hand in some special way. I could do it too, only not for glass balls, but for porolon ones; they could be squeezed into each other. It is more difficult in the manner he does. But in general this trick is simple enough.”

The conjurer bowed grandly. Then he has thrust a hand into case gap and took out cup and two silk scarves. One scarf was black color, another motley rainbow. The conjurer had thrown motley scarf into a cup, then covered its opening with a black scarf, shown spectators black silk tightly stretched above it, and suddenly he has somehow dragged a motley scarf directly through black one.

Aleksey Ivanovich had begun to smile. “This one I also know”, he said. “I never could, in truth, make it myself with a scarf, but I understand a principle. In general, he palms again. He has two multi-colored scarves. Also there is a disk made from black cardboard. When he shows us the stretched black scarf above a glass, we actually see this black disk. And the second colored scarf lies between this disk and a black scarf, are you with me? Here it is difficult to palm because one of colored scarves should be hidden behind the folded little and ring fingers...”

Having thrown a cup and scarves back into the case, the conjurer once again bowed and pointed to his popcorn cup.

“How about something more complex?” asked Aleksey Ivanovich.

“He is the deaf-mute”, reminded Igor. “I doubt he could read our lips. Tanya, tell him, we want something more complicated, okay?”

Tanyusha said a few long French sentences. She has irreproachable pronunciation with no slightest trace of Russian accent. But conjurer only politely shrugged shoulders.

“May be, explain him by gestures?” Igor proposed.

“And how?” asked Aleksey Ivanovich.

“I’ll try now”, Tanyusha responded.

She pulled out in front of herself a fist with the protruded upward middle finger and slowly turned this finger downward, as if infinitely cruel caesar ^{/16/}, which dooms to death a gladiator who has fallen on arena, simultaneously sends finger to the plebs roaring on tribunes. Conjurer shuddered and pulled his head into shoulders.

“Well, why did you do this way?” asked Aleksey Ivanovich. “The creative man has been offended by you...”

“Let him try his best”, Tanyusha answered, knitted her brow, raised hand overhead and her palm made several circular movements, as if it pushed a hanging above head bulb toward her.

Aleksey Ivanovich recalled whence this gesture is. Several days ago they all together on his yacht watched the colored chronicle of the Second World War, in which the English king George was welcoming the crowd of pre-war New York in such way. Aleksey Ivanovich had also paid attention to this strange motion of fingers which absolutely does not look like mausoleum Russian hands waving ^{/17/}. Gesture was extremely refined and ideally ‘the highest class’ fitted for translation into language of deaf-mutes.

Seems it reached the conjurer that the guests require something more intricate. He looked again at the flowers lying on asphalt aside of a case. For few seconds he stayed deep in thoughtful mood – and then determined. He thrust his hand into the case and took out folded several times sheet of yellowish paper, opened it and showed spectators.

It was the old poster with sketch and inscription. There was the jet-black hair man in turban with feather on the sketch whose hands were extended to the soaring in air citizen-woman ^{/18/} wrapped in something like muslin curtain. The gaped mouth of huge crocodile reddened under her. The font and the faded paints testified, that the poster is not just old, but very old – the conjurer probably would gain more money, if he handed it over to secondhand bookseller instead of using it as a requisite.

“What’s written there, Tan’?” asked Aleksey Ivanovich.

“Feeding of Khufu’s crocodile”, translated Tanyusha.

“Is Khufu a name of the crocodile?” ^{/19/}

“No. Khufu is a name of Pharaoh.”

“Does Pharaoh Khufu feed the crocodile?” asked Igor. “Or Pharaoh Khufu is fed to the crocodile?”

Tanyusha had laughed. “No”, she told. “If follow the sentence structure, the crocodile belongs to Pharaoh Khufu and unstated person feeds this crocodile. And with what it has been fed, in my opinion, is clear.”

The conjurer had folded a poster on half and tore it. Then had folded halves twice and tore them once more. Then he repeated it again and again until the poster has turned to absolutely tiny scraps. Then he has compressed scraps in a fist, has waved above it other hand and has suddenly unfolded before viewers the same poster –fully crumpled, but the intact.

Igor had clapped.

“This I also know how”, said Aleksey Ivanovich. “He has actually two identical posters. One is pleated and hidden in the special small pocket, stuck on the first one. He tears the first poster to this pocket size, and then he takes out of pocket the second one. After that he unnoticeably hides scraps into the pocket...”

But conjurer, it seemed, showed this number only as the priming. After thrusting hand into his case, he took out old-fashion cassette tape recorder and pressed the button. The loud hissings and the crackles (record was seemed made from the phonograph record) were to be heard, through which a male voice started talking. The voice sounded inexpressively and dull, but words could be made out.

“Well, Tanyok”, said Aleksey Ivanovich.

Tanyusha shut her eyes and began to translate swiftly, trying to speak quietly in order not to drown record. From time to time the conjurer interrupted tape recorder for short time to allow her to finish, as if breaking the text in paragraphs:

The history of trick named ‘Feeding of Khufu’s crocodile’ as mysterious as this trick itself ^{/20/}. Among all magicians of Ancient Egypt nobody was such honorable, as great Dzhedi, who lived at Pharaoh Khufu’s time. He revived dead people, redirected the rivers, caused eclipses and created freakish animals – lions with eagle wings and horses with legs of spiders. He showed to Pharaoh the pictures of other worlds, which shocked by greatness and beauty. It was said Dzhedi could connect the present to the past and to the future, changing a natural course of things. The stories about his miracles had been written on three obelisks – no one did receive such honor before. Pharaoh took Dzhedi nearer him and display much kindness, but afterwards suddenly told to execute him.

All evidences of genuine acts of Dzhedi had been destroyed or changed, and memory about them was erased. Pharaoh ordered to tear down the obelisks telling about his miracles, and replaced them with fake confirmation that Dzhedi was the fair fool, capable perhaps to amuse the bazaar day crowd. Something alike was performed by Pharaoh Ramses the Second with inscriptions about his predecessors many centuries later, and it is quite possible, that he was inspired by example of Khufu.

The report on the event which forced Pharaoh to execute Dzhedi had been written on one only papyrus buried together with Pharaoh. Khufu's pyramid had been plundered in immemorial times, and Dzhedi's papyrus disappeared. Whether it was retained up to now and where it is now, it is not known. But some people claim that history described by it is known to them.

Here is a true narration of this story, as they said. Pharaoh's wife committed unknown crime and was exposed. Dzhedi was ordered to think up the great and terrible execution for her. Dzhedi hung up her in air before Pharaoh and his confidants' eyes, and then she had been eaten by the gigantic crocodile created by the magician with aid of sorcery.

Pharaoh had wished to see, what this crocodile in reality is. And Dzhedi showed him a small wooden figurine measuring child's palm. Pharaoh seeing it had suspected that his wife had not been actually eaten by the crocodile; she had been instead transferred by sorcery in some other place. He commanded magician to reveal the secret of his art.

Dzhedi said, "The secret is simple. If a lamp is lighted up in room and in front of it are placed figures of people and animals, their shadows fall on a wall. If a figure close to lamp, its shadow is big. If it is far from lamp, its shadow is small. Moving figures to a lamp and away, one could change the mutual sizes of shadows on a wall. Things and beings on the earth possess mutual properties comparatively each others exactly the same way.

Moving them before my magic lamp, I force beings and subjects to perform something unusual and strange. I do small equal big one and big equal small one. Since all shadows are equal among themselves, I dominate over the world of subjects through the world of shadows. But people never comprehend at what precise moment I show them the principal trick."

Pharaoh asked Dzhedi what did serve him as a magic lamp. Dzhedi answered, that it was his own mind. Pharaoh asked what would be the walls on which shadows appeared. Dzhedi answered, the walls were minds of other people. Pharaoh asked, if it meant that Dzhedi was a god. Dzhedi answered positively. Then Pharaoh wished to know Dzhedi's place in hierarchy of gods.

Dzhedi answered, that he was the highest of all gods, because all gods and people were simply shadows reflected by him. Then Pharaoh wished to learn, why the world was created. Dzhedi explained that he liked to show cheerful tricks and needed spectators, and the creation did not have any other purpose and sense.

Pharaoh asked, whether Dzhedi judged dead. Dzhedi answered, that words 'law court' were too gloomy, and as a matter of fact that was one of his tricks too, which everyone actually saw in his own way. Then Pharaoh asked why man should suffer in his life so much, if he had been created to watch merry tricks.

Dzhedi answered, that human arrogance founded tricks of creator of little interest and began to manifest more curiosity in things which had been created just as decoration. It offended the god, and since then he had begun to show man only such tricks which grasp his attention fully and completely.

Pharaoh had demanded a great miracle to proof these words. He had commanded Dzhedi to create another Universe or at least one more god. Dzhedi answered, that he could not bring into already created world such beings which will change its nature but he could change relations and correspondences in every way and also influence them one through another.

Pharaoh suspected the contradiction in these answers and ordered to execute Dzhedi for sacrilege. But nothing good turned out it – the execution transmuted to a sequence of mocking tricks the most humiliating of which was chopped off head talking disrespectfully of Pharaoh and his relatives. Pharaoh ordered to boil the head in vinegar, but even it did not help.

When Pharaoh came to see how execution goes, Dzhedi's head declared, "I could curse Pharaohs' generations forever for such conduct. But I will limit myself to a trick. What would you say, the great Pharaoh, about ruler who directs all resources of his state to build a pyramid which is bigger than usual in hundred and even thousand times?" Pharaoh told, "Such ruler would be lunatic, it is clear for anyone.

A pyramid is dwelling of a shadow. It doesn't matter for shadow, what size of its house is because, as you had correctly told, shadow of big one is the same size as shadow of small one. My pyramid by now is under construction, and it is the same size as tombs of wise rulers of olden days". Dzhedi answered, "Learn now, Khufu, that your pyramid will be greatest of the buildings in Egypt, but you will be just a shadow of your pyramid!"

Pharaoh told, "Certainly, the pain demented you, the conjurer. Your words are madness, they make no sense". Dzhedi answered, "It is very simple to make sense of that I speak. Things and events have face and seamy sides. They can be separated from each other. For everyone you will be Pharaoh who rests in Great Pyramid. But actually you will work on its construction as much time, as one needs to erect the greatest building in history.

And if you will shirk work, you will be punished as severely as you're torturing me now. Only ruins will be left of the country over which you dominate now, your funeral chamber will be plundered, and even your pyramid will turn to shabby mountain of stone blocks – and still you will build it alone, day after day, a century after a century and a millennium after millennium, and you even will not recall you was someone else before..." Khufu asked, "How can it be such way?" Dzhedi's head laughed and answered, "Here you are to find out this yourself... Count it as my last trick! »

The head had told it and disappeared from a caldron where it was cooking. And soon Pharaoh's servants informed him, that the body of the magician disappeared too... This is the end of the story written on Khufu's papyrus. Nobody knows what did happen to Dzhedi. Many centuries after little kids have been frightened by a legend that he is still wandering in the world, feeding disobedient children to his magic crocodile.

But Khufu's pyramid known also as pyramid of Cheops actually became the greatest in history – its height almost five hundred feet. Till now people from all over the world come to look at this amazing creation of human hands reminding us about the genius of the ancient man and about cruel tyranny under which oppression his life was passing.

The trick 'Feeding of Khufu's crocodile' which picturing the magic disappearance of Pharaoh's wife since then was in a repertoire of the best magicians of the world...

As soon as record ended, tape recorder clicked and stopped. For a few seconds Tanyusha also became silent - like the machine gun which ate up ammunition belt all to the end.

"Well, you give", told Aleksey Ivanovich approvingly.

"I can work as simultaneous interpreter", smiled Tanyusha. "Translators called this 'booth level'".

"Why booth?"

"Simultaneous interpreters sit in the booth."

"You have *forget-me-not* ^{/21/} level", said Aleksey Ivanovich.

This time Tanyusha laughed exactly as long as it was necessary. "Female instinct is great thing", thought Aleksey Ivanovich and sighed lightly.

"Come to think of it", Igor said, "everyone speaks: this fool Khufu had been building all his life his enormous pyramid, and what for? While by the way it was the wisest investment in mankind history. All these lunar modules which we were riveting trough the sixties nothing left even rusts, though not much time has passed. But the pyramid of Cheops feeds all Egypt till now. And will feed another thousand years. Here I see that government thought about people!"

"Wait-a-sec", said Aleksey Ivanovich. "It seems he is going to show this Egyptian miracle..."

The conjurer has indeed begun to prepare for a new trick. He has taken out a slick box with the image of large-boob-white-toothed blond from his case, opened it and got the curtailed inflatable woman – a crude oil-cloth version from sex-shop.

"Yak, what muck", said Tanyusha.

The conjurer had thrown aside empty box, began to inflate woman by some gas from a black hose which end he stretched out from his case – apparently he had there a small gas tank.

"A theme of the inflatable woman", Igor said, "we know, we know. It is a metaphor of internal emptiness and unspiritual of the modern human."

Aleksey Ivanovich hemmed.

"Do you not agree?" asked Igor.

"I do not know", Aleksey Ivanovich answered. "About emptiness I agree, and what is considering the lack of spirituality... She is yet pneumatic."

Tanyusha this time has not laughed – probably simply has not understood that it's a joke.

“‘Pnevma’ means soul in Greek”, Aleksey Ivanovich explained. “Another is interesting here. For some reason there is always a pneumatic woman, never a man. If it is a metaphor, the meaning of it is more likely that the woman by the nature extremely flexible being, which the man fills with the content. Not physiological way only in direct, but figuratively also. Here was Chekhov’s such story «Poprygun'ia»...”^{/22/}

“Enough about this muck”, Tanyusha interfered. “Didn’t this story hook you? The one which was on the tape recorder?”

“In my opinion, it was interesting”, said Igor. “In any case, it was more interesting than that he does now. Something really wonderful was felt, didn’t it?”

Aleksey Ivanovich shrugged shoulders.

“Miracles are done from the person whom they are shown to”, he said. “And the more he saw them, the less room is left for the new ones. Within you, kids, miracles still are. All mine ones were shown to me in the nineties of the last century. During mortgaging auctions^{/23/} to be absolutely exact. And the new ones are not expected any more. It is as in tailor-shop – tailoring from customer’s material. But there is not so much material we have.”

“Well then”, Igor said, “it is ought to watch, that there are the miracles of high quality only with us. Here is like with you.”

Aleksey Ivanovich grinned.

“Watch”, he answered.

The conjurer was still preparing for number. He put inflated doll on the ground in front of his cart and ordered spectators by gestures to go further on. When they had obeyed, he thrust hands in his case; he was fumbling for long time looking concerned and at last took out disposable sticks for sushi in paper packing. He separated them thrust one back in packing and thrown back in a case.

“It is so right”, told Tanyusha, “the magic wand should be disposable, as a syringe. Rowling failed to take it into account. After bad miracles it will be disgustingly to make good one, and vice versa.”

“Well, if we will be reasoning by this way, then...” Igor had not finished speaking and laughed.

“What ‘then’?” asked Tanyusha.

“Nothing”, Igor answered. “The men have their secrets. No more chat, a trick will be now.”

The conjurer had indeed finished the preparations and several times clapped, demanding attention. Having achieved it, he took out the tape from the tape recorder, turned it and again pressed on ‘play’. Eastern-like music has played similar to music in cartoon films about the Ali-Baba.

The conjurer solemnly bowed to spectators, come nearer to the pneumatic woman, several times went around it in a circle, squatted before it to haunches and stroked, as if calming before a dangerous trick. Then he stretched hands above it, holding a disposable magic wand in one hand, and began to rise slowly, representing an extreme pressure of all forces. The pneumatic woman detached off the ground and floated upwards, as if drawn by the passes of his hands.

“Damn, he pulls well”, Aleksey Ivanovich said in a whisper, “smoothly. Do you understand why he sent us away?”

“Why?” - asked Tanyusha.

“He, when squatted to haunches, hitched to the doll two thin fishing lines. But now, when he waves his hands, he winds them around the hands. That why it rises...”

When pneumatic woman rose to the height of his arms, conjurer made several especially intricate passes and began to move slowly aside from the lamp. Pneumatic woman, however, remained to hang on the spot.

“Get it?” Aleksey Ivanovich whispered. “He reattached it to the fishing line, which was suspended to this lantern earlier. It is thin as spider web. And he placed us especially so that it would not be visible to us.”

“Lord”, Tanyusha sighed. “What a whack! Was it necessary for such nonsense to tell a story about Pharaoh?”

“Wait”, Igor told, “may be this is not all yet.”

The conjurer turned to spectators and by gesture invited them to approach a floating doll.

“Aha”, told Aleksey Ivanovich, “here now there will be an exposure of black magic. Let’s go and see then.”

All three directed to a doll.

The unexpectedness happened, when up to a doll remains six to nine feet. The conjurer suddenly rose his stick, pointed it to a doll, and the deafening clap was to be heard. Probably, this doll had been filled with some combustible gas – blue flash sparkled, and the broken off oil-cloth pieces had rejected far aside. Spectators had been singed by close heat.

At the following moment the idiotic laughter written down on the tape recorder had rung out, and the head of plush crocodile with sad plastic eyes which for some reason had cat's pupils sprung from a requisite box.

The conjurer seemed very happy with himself – sticking in spectators the magic wand, he shuddered in spasms of mute laughter which was plausibly enough sounded by the tape recorder lying on a box.

“The cretin”, has told Tanyusha.

“Really, – agreed Aleksey Ivanovich, taking off glasses and examining them closely, “it is already a little too much... Good, security had not been taken with us; otherwise the conjurer would not survive this moment. Igor, there is something dark blue on your cheek.”

“I got the scrap of this aunt”, Igor answered. “Any way, for such thing someone’s eye could be blackened.”

The conjurer exactly put forward popcorn’s cup.

“He even wants money, doesn’t he?” Igor had amazed.

“Be not got”, Aleksey Ivanovich told. “It would be better to give something to him.”

Tanyusha shook her head in denial, “For the caddishness we will be pay still!”

“How many requisite he had spent”, Aleksey Ivanovich sighed. “He needs to live too actually.”

“The life is a survival of the strongest”, Tanyusha cut off. “Other conjurer will come on his place and will show people tricks better.”

“Let’s go out of here”, Igor told gloomy, touching his cheek. “Otherwise that place for other conjurer can be freed before put.”

“Well, if you go you go”, Aleksey Ivanovich agreed.

All three turned and wandered away. But they did not have time to make even three steps as street organ began again hoarse play behind them. Aleksey Ivanovich looked back.

“Wait-a-sec”, he said. “It seems he wants something else.”

The conjurer came off his decorated by stars organ and headed to spectators. Having come closer to Aleksey Ivanovich, the conjurer took Aleksey Ivanovich’s right hand on which he wears wrist watches in recent years, and knocked with a finger on their dial.

“What’s that? Does he want the watches for performance?” asked Igor.

In conjurer’s hand appeared small black sack. He showed it Alexey Ivanovich, and then had again poked his finger in the wrist watches.

“No”, Aleksey Ivanovich answered. “He wishes to show a trick.”

“With your watches?”

“Well”, smiled Aleksey Ivanovich undoing belt. “I know this trick too.”

He has handed the watches to the conjurer.

“Don’t you afraid?” asked Tanyusha. “They are awfully expensive.”

“No”, Aleksey Ivanovich told. “Here look. He puts them in the sack. Do you see? Goes to his box...”

The conjurer had really put Aleksey Ivanovich’s watches in black sack and went to the box on wheels. On the spot, he lifted the sack above his head and waved it in the different sides, as if showing to invisible crowd. Then he took a hammer from a box and showed it to the same imaginary public. After that he threw the sack with watches under the feet, squatted and several times with a feeling struck it by its tool.

“Oh”, Tanyusha exclaimed. “He... He broke them!”

Aleksey Ivanovich laughed.

“A good sound, isn’t it? He, when he went to the box, had unnoticeably substituted a sack. He had the second the same, and there were the broken watches in it. That way the sound would be convincing. Such characteristic crunch from which everything inside is compressed – did you hear? Now he will show us a hill of gears and glass pieces... Here. And then again he will change the sack and give back my watches.”

The conjurer did precisely that Aleksey Ivanovich predicted - he overturned the sack and poured out the splinters of the broken watches on the ground.

“And now he will collect all back”, continued Aleksey Ivanovich, “see? He put into the sack. Now he will make passes... In... And then he will bring the sack to me. And the watches will be the whole, because they are in other sack which he now will unnoticeably take out.”

Igor smirked distrustfully.

“What is it”, he told, “the dark blue belt from crocodile leather had been stored? Just in case of this meeting?”

The smile slipped down from Aleksey Ivanovich’s face.

“Dark-blue belt?” he asked again.

“As yours”, Igor told.

The conjurer already approached Aleksey Ivanovich and handed him the sack. Aleksey Ivanovich took it and shook out contents to the palm.

These were his watches. The same one, which he before gave to conjurer. Only broken and flattened by

several impacts of hammer.

“What I was talking about!” said Igor.

Aleksey Ivanovich had looked at his watches, then on the conjurer, and his face had reddened rough spots as though at it some skin illness like depriving has very quickly developed. The conjurer guilty made a helpless gesture and inclined a head sideways, but by trembling tips of his mouth in the cut of mask it was clear, that he hardly constrains laughter. Aleksey Ivanovich could not bear it.

“Igor”, he told, “you are the karateka at us. Hey, fucked that guy up, get him jacked in the face very well. Only do not kill.”

But conjurer already understood that the danger threatens him - and with the extraordinary promptness he broke into a run along the road. Igor pursued him until Aleksey Ivanovich who had come to his senses yelled, “Igor, halt! Spit! It will be too pricy to you!”

As soon as pursuit ceased, conjurer stopped. Having literally executed the request of Aleksey Ivanovich, Igor spat on the road, turned and went back.

“Box”, Aleksey Ivanovich shouted and pointed to the box with a requisite.

But Igor himself already guessed the same. Having approached to the carriage, he struck it a heavy blow by foot and overturned it. From the open hatchway on asphalt the ropes fell down, balls from ping-pong, card boot trees, some pasteboard disks and other difficult to understand objects, most beautiful of which was glossy green cylinder with the dashingly bent fields. All this was pitilessly trampled, and then Igor started the box itself.

The conjurer pretended that he does not worry at all about his requisite. Hopping on a place, he feigned ignorance – turned to spectators his back, bent and threshed himself by palm on the buttocks stuck out; then he started to stick furiously the magic wand to their side or else uplifted upward his hands, as if calling on their heads celestial army. It looked ridiculously enough, and if not a boorish trick with watches, he certainly would earn money for some months forward.

“Igor^{/24/}”, Aleksey Ivanovich called, “enough.”

After the case had been destroyed and finally became useless, Igor returned to Alexey Ivanovich and Tanyusha.

“We out of here”, Aleksey Ivanovich gloomy told. “We are just asking for troubles. What if some pederast run pre-election race here... You know this proverb – has *got into a mess*^{/25/}.”

“It is a saying”, corrected Tanyusha.

All three turned and went away – to the same fog, whence not so long ago they appeared.

Igor could not calm down and looked back every few steps. For a while the conjurer in a red-yellow mask was still visible – he danced a like and waved his stick as before. He had gone out of sight afterwards. Igor for some reason began to see in the motion of fog clubs which did not think to dissipate a sort of sabotage too.

“Why do you look back?” Tanyusha asked. “Are you afraid, he will overtake and beat you?”

“Aha”, Igor told. “That is exactly what I am afraid of. Is it still far?”

“Somewhere like here”, Aleksey Ivanovich told. “Damn, I feel, we’ll be late.”

“No, not here”, Tanyusha has told. “We went to that direction longer. We have to go three hundred feet or so.”

“We may really be late”, Aleksey Ivanovich has repeated anxiously, and all three walked faster.

In few seconds Aleksey Ivanovich suddenly experienced a strange feeling. Something similar happens, if during walk to blink and go in arisen on a place of the familiar world blackness: first steps on the imprinted in memory picture are given without effort, and then there is an uncertainty which with each new step accrues and forces to open eyes at last. Just now it was difficult to open eyes because they have been wide opened. Aleksey Ivanovich all of a sudden understood, that can make no more steps, and stopped. “To what now side?” He thought. “Something is wrong, had been forgotten. I must to ask them, they remember correctly.”

“Hey”, he has called, “Are we going right way?”

“I have just thought so too”, Igor has answered. “I even do not know. We could unnoticeably turn around one hundred eighty.”

“We will be late for sure”, told Aleksey Ivanovich.

“It is no need to say so”, Tanyusha begged. “You will hex indeed.”

She did not have time to finish speaking, as the distant sad hooter was to be heard, similar to the sound of pipe or horn. Aleksey Ivanovich shuddered.

“Here”, Tanyusha whispered. “You hexed.”

“Let’s blow out of here”, Igor sacredly exhaled; and all three had rushed to a fog, no more deliberating, there they go or not.

It turned out it was there - three wooden wheelbarrows, filled with fine crushed stone, appeared from the fog in the same place where they threw them, on the border of the stony earth and the outgoing for the sandy embankment road. But it was nevertheless late to hurry - tearing up the brain and killing hope, two more times horn had sung.

“We are late”, someone had exhaled; and all three, having torn off heavy wheelbarrows from the ground, rolled them on road trying to move the badly rubbed legs as fast as possible and to not think about that infinitely terrible waits them for being late if the guard will notice them.

Being late was considered as runaway. And those who tried to run from construction side of Great Pyramid threw in the square pond dug next to construction on the personal order of the chief of works. The pond was small and muddy, but its inhabitant was enormous and in its own way beautiful. It had short legs, powerful jaws and a long tail. The top its gray-brown body was covered with numbers of bone plates, and from below, on a fatty belly, its skin was almost yellow.

Priests called it sacred crocodile Khufu. /26/

COMMENTS:

ВИКТОР ПЕЛЕВИН



«P5» by Victor Pelevin.

The absolutely new novel of Victor Pelevin “P5: Farewell songs of the political pygmies of Pindostan” (There are 5 words in Russian, each one begins with P) is realized in May 2008.

The new book by Victor Pelevin “P5” contains five works: “The hall of singing caryatids”, “The crocodile Khufu feeding”, “Nekroment”, “The Friedman’s space”, “Assassin”. It seems that in spite of the name narration is conducted not about the policy, but Pelevin is famous for his figuration. And this fact forces to search for entirely another sense in the text... According to the publishers this book is dedicated to contemporary reality and it very accurately reflects it.

1/ Second story: ‘Éîðîëäíëà êðîëüäëëà Ôóóó’ - The crocodile Khufu feeding

May be the correct translation of this story name is “**Grammatically Is Not Understandable**” because the name of this novel is not literally translatable from Russian.

It is assembled by 3 words – ‘feeding’, ‘crocodile’ and ‘Khufu’.

It is grammatically designed having at least 4 distinguished meaning or more in Russian.

The Feeding of Crocodile Named Khufu;

The Crocodile Feeding with Khufu;

The Crocodile Feeding By Khufu;

The Khufu’s Crocodile Feeding etc.

2/ *Pip on your tongue* – literal translation, that’s actually a spell “curse that tongue of yours!”

3/ *All things in the world interchanged places now* – this phrase is introduction into the world of creator’s and conjuring tricks.

4/ Magadan - city in Siberia, which name is related with *deadly frost and GULAG*, author drops a hint – it is a hell and torture for Soviet Union, therefore Russian (language) collective consciousness and unconsciousness.

5/ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tina_Kandelaki, it’s said the Accident in Nice, France was happened because of her kiss.

6/ Tanya, Tanyusha, Tan’ (ta:n’), Tanyok - the common way to make the names shorter and longer in Russian conversations. Tatyana (meaning – “organizer, lady, nominated”) is her full name.

Igor (meaning – ‘warrior archer’) is full name, and Aleksey Ivanovich calls him ‘Igoryok’.

Aleksey Ivanovich – in Russian a man named Aleksey (meaning - “defender, protector”) with a father named Ivan (meaning – “God is gracious”) would be known as Aleksey Ivanovich or ‘Aleksey, son of Ivan’ (*Ivanovich* being a patronymic). Patronymic is a component of a personal name based on the name of one’s father and used usually to show respect or to address elderly.

7/ *It would be so nice to get on time everywhere, to do simultaneously incompatible things* – Russian “*Īōñōî õî÷-ãñÿ è ðúáéó ñúãñòü, è, òàè ñêàçàòü, ïðèýòü ó÷-ãñðèá â êóèüòóðíé ïðîððàìà*” is broken idiom literally sounds “It’s wanted to be eating a small fish and seating on a penis” with using taboo term, and “small fish” means the same penis in this expression. Aleksey Ivanovich literally says “*It’s just wanted to be eating a small fish and to participating in some cultural event*”. He may be tries somehow *to tell and not to tell* (conjuring trick) something and you may see as he likes to use words from argot nearby offensive area.

8/ *‘Smartfingermen’ have remained on the native land* - no one believes that new Russian oligarchs had got money by clean way.

9/ *transvestite from “Hara Krishna”* - Aleksey Ivanovich’s speaking demonstrates no tolerability to anything beyond his understanding.

10/ Economic Research Institute – there were state employment only in USSR. There was state Economy only in USSR. Therefore state research of state economy could make performance only of research because of conflict of interests - so employees could do nothing (conjuring trick).

11/ *...unbearable lightness of being* - The Unbearable Lightness of Being (Czech: *Nesnesitelná lehkost byti*, Russian: *Nevynosimaya lehkost bytiya*) is a novel written by Milan Kundera, the story of main characters is finished when they perish in the fog.

12/ *Soviet man (Homo sovieticus)* - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Soviet_man

13/ The Arbat is once an old bohemian street of Moscow. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arbat>

14/ *“It is written in newspapers about you that you do make the same”* – no one believes that new Russian oligarchs had got money by clean way.

15/ *“forget-me-not”* (name of flower) sounds in Russian [nye-zah-bootkah], the homonym “nye-zah-bootkoy” means “*not behind a booth*”; ‘forget-me-not’ [nye-zah-boodkah] and ‘not behind a booth’ [nye-zah-boodkoy] sound in Russian alike; the writer and his characters play words.

16/ *caesar* - with no upper case first letter usually means ‘any one of Rome emperor’ (the age of caesars) similar Russian ‘tsar’. The word ‘tsar’ actually descends from word ‘caesar’, both of them have same meaning as ‘pharaoh’ or ‘man’ (*be in charge of*).

17/ *‘mausoleum Russian hands waving’* – it is the every holyday ritual, since Stalin had governed Russia whole Russian government has been welcoming Russian people from platform at Lenin’s mausoleum (Lenin’s Tomb - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenin_Mausoleum).

18/ *Citizen-woman* – ‘citizen-man/citizen-woman’ were common used to appeal and address to somebody unfamiliar or in official way for example in the court, or in the jail, or in GULAG, where to say ‘tovarishch’ (comrade) was not allowed; now it sounds too much official and practically ironical

19/ See #1

20/ See ancient Egyptian legend ‘wax crocodile’ in “The Tales from the Westcar Papyrus” http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/westcar_papyrus.htm or in “An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Literature” by E.A. Wallis Budge <http://books.google.com/>

21/ See #13

22/ «Poprygun'ia» - [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Grasshopper_\(Chekhov\)](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Grasshopper_(Chekhov)) This final scene of the story is the weeping of main character when her husband passed away. The marriage was too bored for her and interchanged (*taken hint*) into dismal grief and widowhood.

23/ mortgaging auctions – the case in the middle of 90-s when Russian state property was spread out to several “smartfingermen”. It’s said because of drunken President Boris Yeltsin’s decision. The prices were cheap like

at 'Black Friday'. One only of the main winners of those mortgaging auctions Mikhail Borisovich Khodorkovsky was found guilty of fraud and sentenced to nine years in prison (still sometimes is named GULAG – one more *taken hint*), but for reason with no a word about those conjuring tricks, it's known because of his personal relationship with President Putin (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Khodorkovsky).

24/ See #4

25/*to get* into a mess* – literally in Russian always was '*to get* as rooster in pluck*' or '*to get* as rooster into a sauerkraut soup*' and sounded [kuur-v-oshchip] or [kuur-vo-shchi]. Here is used very new edition of this saying [kuur-v-shchahvel'] '*rooster with sorrel*' because of *Courchevel's* ski area in the French Alps (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courchevel>) where Russian "smartfingerman" Prokhorov (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Prokhorov) played his party, and the party was spoiled by police (<http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/markets/europe/article1292203.ece> or <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16583351/>). This scandal story became the sample or may be even the symbol of new Russian elite's life for many Russian people.

26/ *sacred crocodile Khufu* - see #1

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