



Apple tree, apple, and Lenchka

A woman's fate is always winding. Like narrow paths leading to the foot of Mount Elbrus. A woman's disposition resembles a mountain stream, its waters crystal clear, allowing you to see every grain of sand at the bottom without a telescope. It sounds like a bowstring, drowning out the songs of birds and the chirping of cicadas, as it slowly erodes the sharp rocks of the rapids, enveloping them in its pristine purity.

And tomorrow the stones will soften, round up, like a beer belly of a Zhigulevsky fan by the age of 60. And that's it – you can roll them from top to bottom.

I've long noticed – for every woman, and for every man, the first step of love is the top of Mount Elbrus. Has anyone ever had anything like this before?

This stratovolcano stands at 5,500 meters above sea level, oblivious to the fact that it is the highest peak in Russia and Europe, silently observing the people below.

The first word is «Love,» followed by the long-awaited «Yes,» a whirlwind of emotions, and the illusion of being in heaven.

Old people who have lived together for 60-70 years no longer care about exotic passions or (not) presented with a bouquet every other day.

They overcame all the mountain streams, stayed on the steep cliffs and, I dare say, many young people just envy them. For them, love is a strong autumn wind – it blew harder and scattered the leaves of happiness. Even if you tie them to the branches with a string, you still can't hold them....

* * *

The craziest story of the female branch of a family was told to me on a train that took me from the capital to my home.

A female passenger with large, sad eyes, sensing that I was a grateful listener, told me her entire story. From herself to the seventh generation.

The story was unnaturally complicated, touching, and fantastical, and it sometimes made my eyes water.

I will summarize it briefly.

About a century and a half before we met, her great-grandmother fell head over heels in love with a dashing hussar lieutenant. He was as slender as Apollo, as sparkling as a champagne flute, and as intoxicating as the scent of a summer garden on a July night.

She followed him like a dog, from ball to ball, and when they danced, her breath was taken away and her legs went weak.

The only drawback was that he was married, and his wife was expecting their first child.

Could a girl in love refuse to play this game?

She had three options, all of which were terrible.

The first was to end her suffering in a deep pool.

The second was to leave her hometown and try to forget him.

The third was to seek help from the dark forces. However, at the same time, people in the Northern Palmyra were reading Gogol's «Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka,» and the young people believed that turning to evil would be punished.

The first option was not suitable for the girl – she simply did not have the courage to take this desperate and irrevocable step.

The second option was even less suitable – there was no geographical location on the planet where she could extinguish this all-consuming and burning fire of passion. Even in the face of mortal danger, surrounded by wild animals, she would never give up her beloved.

There was only one way left: to find someone who could use a love potion to make him forget everything and give himself to the woman who couldn't live without him.

Once the claw is stuck, the whole bird is lost.



But at the time, he didn't think about it.
Sometimes, people are more quick to do evil than good...

* * *

The journey to the "black old woman" was filled with fog and a haze in his eyes.
She had trouble following the conversation, and her grandmother's mumbling was incomprehensible.

And then the mistress pierced her with her coal-black eyes and cried out in a girl's voice:

– Do you agree to the price that is offered to you?

– Yes, my father is rich, and I will bring you all the money and gold that you ask for...

The old woman laughed!

– I don't need your money and gold, I will ask for something else.

All the women in your family, starting with you, will be cursed.

To the seventh generation.

And when they start to believe that happiness is in their hands, this precious vessel will break.

Each of you is destined to marry a military man, but you won't be together for long.

Each of you will give birth to a girl, and everything will start all over again.

This will continue until the seventh generation!

– I agree,» – the girl whispered faintly in a state of «neither alive nor dead. «What do I care about my second, third, fifth, seventh generation»?

I want to be happy today!

And for the rest of my life...

– Even if I have to look at the torments and tears of those closest to me?

– Even then...

* * *

– Stop, – I stopped, – I have two questions: which generation do you belong to, and how could you marry a military man, knowing that this could be avoided?

«I am the sixth generation, my daughter is the seventh. That is what I am most concerned about.

Will she suffer the same fate as I? Or will this curse end with her?»

«I do not have a crystal ball, I cannot see into the future. Do you want me to intervene in the curse, cut the thread of history, and free you from your burden?»

Perhaps I could come up with something, who knows?"

But then the conductor came into the compartment and told my companion, «Your station is in a quarter of an hour. Get ready.»

While the young woman was putting her slippers in her travel bag, I ventured to ask another question:

– Tell me, how did you manage to marry a military man, knowing this chain?

– It was a foolish decision, – she replied. – I met an interesting young man at a dance, and we dated for a short time before getting married three months later.

It was only at the wedding that I almost fainted when he arrived in uniform. His "bright order on his chest" and several medals clearly made it clear that he was a courageous, responsible man, accustomed to stand up for himself. Not a husband, but gold. But a military one. And it was too late to retreat....

We broke up with him three weeks later – he was going on another business trip to a place where it was hot. But during that time, I managed to get pregnant, and then, nine months later, I gave birth to a daughter. And my husband never came back to me. Only his order, which miraculously survived. No matter how hard I tried to get married, I couldn't.

* * *

The train slowed down noticeably. The lights of her hometown appeared outside the windows. She rushed up to me, pressed her cold lips lightly against my unshaven cheek, then opened the compartment door and asked:



– Don't see me off. It will be an extra blow for my mother. And my daughter won't understand...

I sat there for a while in a state of mild shock.

Should I believe this story?

Should I not?

I still hadn't made up my mind.

And I thought that everyone who has come across such a difficult story should choose the right answer to these questions...

* * *

This was just a prologue. The main story is yet to come.

Now I'm being more cautious and won't go into details about where, when, and under what circumstances I came across this story. I'll just say that it was and still is a part of my life. All I have to do is change the names...

* * *

... Taisia saw her husband off at the train station. For the past three days, she had washed her face only with tears.

They had been married for two weeks, and today the young wife saw him off to the front.

Taisia had not received a single letter, even though she had been married for only a few weeks.

At first, she sometimes ran into her mother-in-law (they weren't particularly close, as her son had married someone she didn't want as her daughter-in-law), and she always asked the same question:

– Are you pregnant? Will you have a baby?

At first, Taya would just shrug and say, "I don't know yet."

But one day, she surprised her husband's mother by saying,

– I think I am...

* * *

She was more eager for letters from her husband than for the birth of a child.

Sima-Serafima, as her mother-in-law was called, became more affectionate and welcoming with each passing day. Perhaps all that would remain of her son was the child his daughter-in-law was carrying.

As time passed, there was no news from Andrey.

Winter came after autumn, and then the streams began to break through the large snow blankets, allowing the first flowers to breathe.

One day, Taya was going to fetch water from the well, but she slipped on the path, which had been frozen by the night frost, and fell near the well, hitting her head painfully against the log cabin.

Serafima was busy with her chores when a neighbor's boy came running to her:

«Your Taya has died at the well...»

He blurted out the news and ran to Matryona, Taya's mother, to tell her the sad news.

Sima dropped everything and rushed to the well.

His neighbor, Grandfather Timofey, was already fussing over him.

He laid the young woman on the path, lifted her head slightly, and unwrapped her scarf so that she could breathe more easily.

«Oh, my God,» the mother-in-law wailed. «What a terrible thing to happen!»

«Don't cry,» the grandfather reassured her. «Your Taika is alive. She'll be fine soon.»

«God bless Taika! Is the baby all right?»

«She shouldn't have. If she'd fallen on her stomach instead of her back, there'd be no doubt about it...»

Taisia, who had regained consciousness, was taken to the district hospital on a sled. There, she gave birth to a baby girl named Masha.

* * *

However, if the baby was born and only demanded its mother's breast in the first few days, it was easy to deceive it.



The doctors found a closed traumatic brain injury in Taya, and it wasn't even a fever from childbirth - the battle for her mother's life was long and difficult.

As a result, Taya spent several days absorbing the milk of another mother, as Agripina, a strong woman like Ilya Muromets, gave birth to her third child. She not only breastfed her son but also several other sons and daughters of the regiment.

Doctors were surprised: the fat content of her milk was not inferior to that of a rabbit – 15-18%, which is several times higher than that of cow's milk...

And even though the babies from such milk often stained their diapers, Grushka's main mission was accomplished – none of her "pets" died from hunger...

* * *

But after that, the attitude in the village towards Taika was ambiguous.

Moreover, on the day when she almost «killed herself,» there was a rumor that she had been «kicked» very hard.

Her mother, worried about her daughter and the unborn baby, did not survive the night.

She never woke up.

She left all the care for her daughter and granddaughter to Andrey's mother.

* * *

After Taisia's return, the chairman of the collective farm took a quick look at her from head to toe. With great sadness, he said:

«She's not a worker. I can't think of a place to put her.

She can't carry bags. If she goes to the farm, the cow will hit her. If she goes to weed the fields, she'll fall halfway through, and who will save her?»

The chairman was a smart man who had fought in the First Cavalry Army.

He said firmly:

– To the library!

That's the only place where you can keep weak-willed young ladies...

* * *

And the pike was thrown into the water.

Tayechka barely paid attention to her daughter, and when she was tired, she didn't come to see Sima-Serafima at all.

However, her inner world was bursting at the seams.

Valiant men, like the noble knight Ivanhoe, and romantic Robin Hoods who robbed the rich and gave everything to the poor, settled in her forever.

There were also first-class scoundrels who had no trouble offending a poor woman, but then Taya desperately licked her finger and turned the pages hard, hoping that evil would be punished. This «goat» would definitely choke on a sea cucumber, eat raw fugu fish, and, after all, there were plenty of poisonous mushrooms in the forest, just by confusing the real with the false.

Her world was filled with colors like a kaleidoscope.

Sometimes, suitors came to propose to her. However, they were all short and uncultured.

She rejected them all with the same words:

– Everything is fine with you, but as soon as you start asking: «Chavo, chavo, it turns your soul inside out, like when you vomit...»

The guy spat, whispered so that she wouldn't hear.: «Crazy...» and he left without slurping...

* * *

Masha grew up without her mother's supervision. She was a bit of a prickly, headstrong girl, and she had her own opinion on everything. No amount of persuasion could change her mind.

Especially not for Taya.

Sometimes she would berate herself for leaving her daughter to fend for herself.

She would argue with Sima-Serafima, saying, «You've spoiled that girl, Mother.»



But by old age, she had become very heavy, and she had difficulty moving around the house, but she still clashed with Taya.

«Why are you so smart, and why didn't you raise her yourself? Did you rely on your grandmother?» Then they would fall silent and take a break.

«You don't understand, you silly girl,» Sima-Serafima would sigh in resignation. «She's the only light in my life.» The memory of her son...

«I have the same memory,» Taisiya wanted to say, but she knew better than to argue with her mother-in-law.

And it's true.

She, Taya, God willing, will still see her grandchildren. And Andrey's mother is unlikely to live to see her great-grandchildren.

* * *

And Masha, of course, got into trouble. After eighth grade, she informed her mother and grandmother:

– I have nothing to do in your village. Am I going to die as a cattle breeder? Or am I going to be a chicken farmer?

I'm going to the city, and no one can keep me here...

If only I could find the guy who seduced the girl from the right path!

But where can I find him now?!

Less than a year later, Masha brought a bundle, unwrapped it, and it turned out to be a baby girl.

– Ma, I'd like you to meet my daughter. I'll stay for a day or two, then I'll return to the city to start my own life.

– What's her name? – was all her mother asked.

«Call her whatever you want,» Masha laughed. «She hasn't been registered as a servant of God yet. Just let me know what the girl's name is.»

And the little girl turned out to be a troublemaker. They say that she was a thorn in everyone's side. She hadn't listened to anyone since she was in kindergarten.

But Taika, as they say, had a stubborn streak.

Unlike her kind great-grandmother, Sima-Serafima, who passed away before Lena's first baby tooth, it seemed that Taika's grandmother was not as kind. She tried to control every step of her granddaughter and didn't tolerate any stubbornness.

The corner of the room was never empty, and for the slightest misbehavior, Lenchka was sent there faster than an airplane.

But strangely enough, the level of resistance increased with each «visit to the corner.»

Lenchka tested her grandmother a thousand times a day, and when all arguments were exhausted, she threatened: «When my mother comes, she'll give you a hard time and show you how to mistreat a child!»

But time passed, and her mother never arrived.

From the sparse messages, Taya knew that Masha's first marriage had failed, followed by her second. Third. In short, she had been married five times, and always for love...

However, God had not given her any children other than Lenchka...

And thank God for that! Otherwise, the librarian would have gone mad...

* * *

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Of course not.

Her life was not much different from a soldier's barracks.

Tayechka was a stickler for rules, and she set up a strict daily routine, so before school started, Lenchka had to do all her exercises without washing her face or eyes, and she had to do them on the count of one, two, three, and four. Fortunately, her grandmother didn't make her do 25 push-ups for every mistake.

In three years, as the satirist said, the girl's arms had become like her legs. Not only her classmates, but also older kids, were afraid of her at school. Everyone knew that it would be more expensive to provoke Lenka, because she wouldn't hesitate to strike back.?

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In the eighth grade, Taechka noticed that her granddaughter was going through a romantic period. The walls of her room were suddenly covered with photographs of sex symbols of world cinema and pop culture. Starting from Alain Delon and ending with John Lennon.

«Take off that shit,– Grandma demanded.

– And why? Don't you like them?

– I don't care – don't drink water from your face. Aren't there enough of us?

«So now I'm supposed to hang Pavka Korchagin and Pavlik Morozov on the wall,» the granddaughter said sarcastically. «I won't do that. They may be ideologically correct, but...»

It's great that she was able to stop herself in time.

Not everyone can do that. It starts with small things, but in the heat of the moment, they say things that make you want to throw out the saints.

«Do you understand what could happen?» You surround yourself with photos of handsome and successful people. There are only a few of them, and your paths are unlikely to cross. But you'll take this inflated standard and start choosing your life partner based on it.

And you won't find them. They live within a five-thousand-kilometer radius of you.

But the tractor driver Borya, the cattleman Vasya, and the foreman Vanya are a thousand times more beautiful on the inside, and they won't be able to compete with your idols. The foreigners have a smile and know how to present themselves!

Have you thought about that?

– Oh, Grandmother, you're so boring! They're just stable hands and blacksmiths. They're not the ones for whom the berries grew...

I'll only give myself to someone who deserves me...

«Please don't make me angry, Lenchka. What can you offer them? An imperial title? A royal crown? A bag of money so they don't run away from you at the first opportunity? You can't even make dumplings...»

These arguments usually ended in mutual insults.

But then, suddenly, the sky opened up!

* * *

Out of the blue, her daughter-mother came to visit – Masha herself.

The crowning achievement of her dream was to take care of an 80-year-old man.

The happy or unhappy grandfather (who can say now?) who had no children or grandchildren, went to the divine halls, and bequeathed his two-room apartment in the million-plus city to Masha.



Six months have already passed, and she has entered her rightful inheritance.

One room was intended, in fact, for the grieving and inconsolable widow, so that she could light candles in front of the photograph of her “grandfather” and pray for his better fate.

And in the second room, so be it, Taya and Lenochka would live.

Of course, the daughter was jumping up and down, happy to be out of her misery.

But Taya was reluctant:

«What are we going to do in this anthill? The house must be multi-storey. Who knows each other there?»

«Don't be silly, Mom!» Masha said in a voice that brooked no argument. «Who's going to look after Lenochka? Don't count on me, I only come home at night. And even then, not always.»

– Lenka will take care of herself – she's not a little girl.

– But if you don't come, I won't come to you again! You know me...

Die, either sitting or lying down...

* * *

A big city is a big temptation.

Taechka explored the district market and numerous supermarkets. Some stores offered pension discounts. And even if she had to walk an extra 500 meters, she was always happy about two things: first, that she had saved money on the bus, and second, that she had saved four rubles on a bottle of yogurt.

She didn't drink the yogurt, but if she wanted to lose weight, she could consume three or four bottles in one sitting.

After graduating from high school, her granddaughter was unable to enroll in any university. But I wasn't too upset about it - I'll always have time to work, and I really want to live for myself...

One day, when Masha was absent as usual, and Taya ran off to get another four-ruble discount, Lenochka disappeared altogether.

At first, Grandmother didn't pay much attention to it, but after Masha returned and found a short note, she let out a steam locomotive whistle.

The note read:

«Don't look for me. I've gone on an Arctic expedition.»

It's clear that the expedition was just a lie.

She's getting married to someone.

Masha rushed to her mother: «Look at your upbringing!»

Taechka fought back: «You should take part in it too.»

Mom drank valerian, and her daughter drank cognac.

They didn't talk for three days.

On the fourth day, they realized that life goes on...

* * *

Slowly, everything settled down.

They got used to it.

At first, they missed Lenochka, but then it was like they had moved a wardrobe and forgotten about it.

But one day, as they were drinking their morning tea, the sound of a key in the lock told them that someone was trying to get in.

«God, take my soul!» the old woman whispered with dead lips.

Masha was more practical. She ran to the pantry and returned with an axe, which she usually used to cut off the tips of the pig's hooves so that they could fit in the pot for making jellied meat.

The door opened.

Lena stood on the threshold, holding a bundle with a crying baby.

«Here's a little something for you!» she said cheerfully. – Please be welcome!

Returning home!

– Lord, if you didn’t hear me, give me back my soul, – Taya was delighted.
– Again in the pram, – Masha couldn’t help herself. – It seems that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.
What’s the baby’s name?
«Call it whatever you want,» Lenchka waved her hand in a regal gesture. «I’m going to sleep. I’m as tired as a flea on an elephant.»
Lena’s great-grandmother and grandmother unwrapped the bundle.
When they saw the shriveled appendage, the grandmother crossed herself.
«Thank God, it’s a boy!» It seems that this feminine chaos is a thing of the past.

Bionote:



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