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GENNADIY LOGINOV

*Lady
with a Veil*

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Lady with a Veil

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Аннотация

НЕЗАКОННОЕ ПОТРЕБЛЕНИЕ НАРКОТИЧЕСКИХ СРЕДСТВ, ПСИХОТРОПНЫХ ВЕЩЕСТВ, ИХ АНАЛОГОВ ПРИЧИНЯЕТ ВРЕД ЗДОРОВЬЮ, ИХ НЕЗАКОННЫЙ ОБОРОТ ЗАПРЕЩЕН И ВЛЕЧЕТ УСТАНОВЛЕННУЮ ЗАКОНОДАТЕЛЬСТВОМ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬ. Not every artist has an opportunity to meet the Muse. Our hero was lucky, and he found his true inspiration and unprecedented success. But where is the truth – inside the creator, in his feelings and affection, or in the outside world? The young painter must find his own answer to this question

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Lady with a Veil

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Lady with a Veil

He noticed her immediately. The only woman in a typically masculine place, she stood out and arrested sights like a fragrant rose towering over a dunghill. On the one hand, the presence of a lady, and, furthermore, alone, and, furthermore, in such a place, and, furthermore, at this late hour, and, furthermore, dressed in clothes, which, along with her manner, gave away her noble origin, should at least cause him confusion mixed with wariness. But the frantic cry of the heart is often so powerful that it drowns out the sly whisper of the mind.

Well, she was here and let her; it was not the reasons that matter, but the prospects. That's how the man could formulate his thoughts at the moment when he saw her (or something like this plus sentimental husk). And he was not even alarmed that none of those present glanced in her direction. Such a woman was supposed to win hearts and turn heads. But instead, the rare visitors of the Artist's Shelter Pub sat in tight circles, smoked, drank, and, without being shy by the presence of the noble lady, had their vulgar conversations, relating mainly to topics that were fairly mundane.

Such an unusual name for the provincial barrel house had a quite simple explanation. Once it was an art gallery, and its owner decided to lure the visitors through drinking in a desperate attempt to instil a love of the beautiful in the popular masses. As

a result, the facility naturally turned from a gallery with alcohol into a pub with paintings and became a favourite place for the local Bohemians, as well as a peculiar hangout for alcoholics with a creative psyche.

Here, as in any ordinary gin mill, it was possible to buy diluted booze, cheap and harsh, like the prose of existence, but there were also tangible differences. The owner had an extensive collection of rare and aged alcohol, which he principally did not agree to pour for just anyone, but he could easily present it as a reward in one of two cases. The visitor had to give the pub a work of art as a gift according to the tastes of the owner (and the easiest way to do so was to write a poem, since drawing a picture, for example, always took time and materials, while even a not completely sober mind was able to compose an impromptu something that tugged at heartstrings). Another option was to prove to the owner an extensive level of knowledge in the field of art, answering one of his many questions. The visitor could be asked who was the author of (which was one of the most famous operas by Antonio Salieri), who painted (Rembrandt), on what events of famous writers' lives were initially based the novel by Alexandre Dumas, and then the opera by Giuseppe Verdi adapted from the novel; and so on and so forth. *The Cave of Trophonius Danaë The Lady of the Camellias*
film La traviata

Anyway, mostly men hung around in this place, and women either occasionally came and went away with their companions,

or were whores looking for a job opportunity.

The mysterious unknown lady could not in any way belong to the first and, all the more, to the second category, judging by her appearance and absence of a companion. As if feeling the visitor's gaze, she turned her head, slowly and gracefully, like a black swan. Her face, noble and young, seemed beautiful even under the curtain of a dark veil.

The woman was sitting alone and did not take her assessing glance away from the recently appeared artist, as if she expected the young man to take the initiative, he decided not to miss his opportunity and went to her table with a determined gait. Outwardly, he looked restrained and completely impassive, but his heart was beating a tap dance in his chest. The man was silent, as was the woman, but she kept her curious eyes on him, after what felt like an eternity, he came to his senses and finally asked: "Would you mind if I join you?"

Several people at the tables next to him cast surprised looks but immediately lost interest, returning to the interrupted discussions about their intercourse, the current state of affairs in the country and the sexual preferences of the authorities responsible for all this.

Meanwhile, the lady behind the veil did not react to the question at all, so after waiting for some time and interpreting silence as a sign of consent, the artist took a vacant seat opposite to her and called the waiter.

"I hope you don't mind if I buy you a glass of wine?"

trying to make the silent interlocutor talk, the man asked with hope in his voice. Silence, again. Naturally, it would be just inappropriate in the presence of the lady to order something similar to the booze that the regulars sitting at the neighbouring tables poured down into their stomachs without a twinge of conscience. But, on the other hand, the lady herself chose to visit this place. However, it would be definitely a good idea to offer her a good drink and at the same time make a pleasant impression with his erudition. Therefore, the artist asked the waiter who kept him waiting for a while to contact the owner for a question. Leisurely rubbing a mug with the edge of his apron, the owner tilted his head, quietly crunched his stiff neck, and asked loudly without interrupting the process:

“Who painted ?” *The Arnolfini Portrait*

“Jan van Eyck,” having heard an easy question, the artist calmed down and answered correctly. The pub owner set the cleaned mug aside, then retired to his cellar and soon returned, putting a bottle covered with a noble touch of mold on the counter. The waiter uncorked the wine hastily, grabbed a glass and, breaking a short distance, put the bottle on the table in front of the today quiz winner.

“Could you bring another glass?” the artist delicately hinted. Internally, he marvelled at the stupid tactlessness of the server, but he didn’t want to make an ugly scene sitting by the lady.

Slightly surprised, the waiter shrugged and brought a second glass swiftly. Leaving it on the table, he hurried away, and

the artist gallantly poured the expensive wine into the glasses, offering one for the lady. She acknowledged him with a look but did not touch her glass.

“I apologize in advance for my possible indelicacy, but still I cannot help but ask you a question: what is such a charming woman like you doing in a place like this?” the artist continued, leaving no hope of starting a talk with the stranger. The men at the neighbouring tables interrupted the conversations, and some of them even whispered something to their companions, looking askance at him. Even the owner of the establishment – the man with a sagging moustache – raised his face from the bills and gave a puzzled look in the direction of the table where the artist sat with his young charmer. But the painter was too keen on his unexpected date to pay attention to such a reaction, which, at least, should have seemed very strange to him.

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