**Vitaly Dudko**

**FATA-MORGANA**

**Play**

**Translated from Russian by Troshenko Maria**

**Original title: *ФАТА -МОРГАНА***

**Vitaly Dudko**

**FATA MORGANA**

**Scenes from urban life**

**Absurd comedy**

*In the theater program, along with the title of the short stories, it is desirable to quote the epigraph of Ishikawa Takuboku (1885-1912).*

**The first novella**

**Pregnancy and childbirth**

Snuggling up to my shoulder,

Among the snows

She was standing at night…

How warm

Her hand was!

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**Wife**

**Husband**

**Doctor**

**Two ward men**

**Wife**. I will obey you.

**Husband**. Do you want to have the last word?

**Wife**. I don't want to, I don't, I don't. I let you have it. Do something, please, try.

**Husband**. I’m doing.

**Wife**. Seven years have passed in vain. I don't want have the last word. I will never poison the baby again.

**Husband**. You’ve recovered. It's been a while.

**Wife**. Will he get through with his head? It’s too narrow after all…

**Husband**. If he wants to live, he will jump out. The narrowness is feigned… If the need arises, it will expand…

**Wife**. My heart stopped beating. Does your heart stop beating?

**Husband**. He'll pop out like a cannonball. He was delayed and exhausted.

**Wife**. What if he suffocates? First his head will appear, then his neck…

**Husband**. You have to push with all your might, then he will pop out. He won't suffocate.

**Wife**. If the legs first, then it's really bad.

**Husband**. Is he an idiot? Legs first... Is he a stupid blockhead? No light, No tenderness. He’s locked up. He can't be mischievous. He can’t pull the girls' pigtails.

**Wife**. Girls don’t have pigtails anymore. That was long time ago. A girl with pigtails looks very unusual now. (*Pause.)* It’s nonsense. First, you’re in the darkness, then in the world. Still there – already here. Still there – already here. Are we doing the second boy?

**Husband**. The second girl... absolutely.

**Wife**. You're obedient. When it comes to kids... I'm so glad. (*Pause*.)

Will you read "Thumbelina"?

**Husband**. “Thumbelina”? He is “the Constant Tin Soldier”.

**Wife**. Will you enroll him in a sports school?

**Husband**. Of course.

**Wife**. And in a swimming pool?

**Husband**. In a swimming pool too.

**Wife**. And in a chess club?

**Husband**. A chess club, sure.

**Wife**. What's your category?

**Husband**. It’s the first.

**Wife**. You're not even a master candidate?

**Husband**. I didn't manage it.

**Wife**. I married you and didn't know it. Mysterious pieces: bishop, knight, rook. The king and prince.

**Husband**. Queen.

**Wife**. The king is a blockhead, and the queen knocks the opponent forward, backward, obliquely. An amazing piece. The horse is strange, moves intricately. It was as if its legs had been broken. And what is a pawn worth? Especially the one who wants to be a queen. Chess is more than a thousand years old. You are one of them, their admitted ones. I admire you. You're not a pawn. No, you're a pawn who's about to become a father. This is much more important than being a queen.

**Husband**. Before she got married, she was a laconic prude, and today she is a boiling geyser.

**Wife**. You’re smart. That's right – I’m a geyser. (Quietly.) I'm terrified… I’m scared…

**Husband**. There is nothing to be scared of. I'm with you.

**Wife**. Today is a special day. I'm close…

**Husband**. Do you have the first category too?

**Wife**. Female category. If I had known you weren't a chess master, I wouldn't have married you for anything.

**Husband**. Don't dream about chess. It’s time to see a therapist.

**Wife**. With pleasure. If you take me by my arm.

**Husband**. Seven years were in vain…

**Wife**. He’s pushing, so impatient. (*Pause*.) The fidget is pushing and rustling again. It’s a boy.

I did an ultrasound. Am I going to have a son? My son?

**Husband**. Our son.

**Wife**. Right. You tried hard too.

**Husband**. Do you think I'm punch-drunk? I know. The nurse informed me to please me.

**Wife**. Do you love me?

**Husband**. You shouldn’t ask! Can't you see? (He nods at her belly.)

**Wife**. Oh, yes, I forgot. You used to kiss me from morning to evening…

**Husband**. Do you need kisses or something else?

**Wife**. Kisses won't hurt me. (***Husband*** *strokes her on the head, kisses her on the cheek*.) Strange kisses. The first kisses in eight months.

**Husband**. In nine.

**Wife**. I was checking your memory. Will we be together for a long time?

**Husband**. Always.

**Wife**. Always?.. (*Sobs*.) I'm happy. Will we be in tune?

**Husband**. Always.

**Wife**. Stop saying “always, always” … May Lenka come?

**Husband**. I’m okay with it. She’s your best friend. Since you were kids.

**Wife**. I’m suffering, struggling…

**Husband**. What nonsense are you talking! You were a shy girl who turned into an insatiable rabbit.

**Wife**. This is natural after childbirth. I'm thinking about your health.

**Husband**. There was no childbirth so far. Are you going to powder your nose?

**Wife**. I don't want to. I wanted it yesterday. May I touch?..

**Husband**. You’re the epitome of a rabbit.

**Wife**. Everything can happen during childbirth. Even death.

**Husband**. Stop stirring up trouble.

**Wife**. I'll disappear and I won't touch it.

**Husband**. Stop it. Are you a serious mother or a loose-minded one?

**Wife**. Caress me.

**Husband**. I’ve been caressing you for nine months.

**Wife**. It's true. And now you refuse. The most crucial moment.

**Husband**. Are you playing tricks?

**Wife**. Give me a hug… I didn't expect you to give in, I thought you'd go into a rage. You are submissive, kind-hearted. May I touch your heart? I'll take it out and put it in place.

**Husband**. I'm not Danko.

**Wife**. I'm calm, worry-free. Even the smart one. I’m on the threshold. I am now the center of the universe. I love words. They form amazing phrases easily and incoherently/ Phrases are beautiful, they envelop you, sink into your memory. I want a lot of amazing phrases. And individual words. They are also beautiful. Will you give up your words? You know them, don't you? And I will listen. Sometimes the words scare me, I'm afraid to hear the wrong ones that I expect. Words rule over a person. They surround it from all sides, become obsolete, then revive and acquire a new meaning. It seems that in the beginning was a word, then it suddenly disappeared. It disappeared for a long time, it was forgotten about, as if it had never existed. The language and people started up, remembered the forgotten word, rejoiced at its return. "Mama" is

a tender, trembling word.

*She puts her head on his lap, sobs, smiles.*

I'm thinking about your health.

**Husband**. I'm in great shape. Should I do squats?

**Wife**. Well, do it. (*Does squats*.)

**Husband**. Push-ups?

**Wife**. How much?

**Husband**. Seven times. (*Does seven push-ups from the floor*.)

I see it now. I want to have something delicious. I don't want any sweets. The refrigerator is full of food: we have fresh cabbage soup, dumplings, squid, butter, milk, cheese.

**Husband**. I’ve bought pickles.

**Wife**. Yes, I'll eat a cucumber. Well done. You take care of your wife.

**Husband**. When I fell in love…

**Wife**. Don't stop! Don't stop! Speak.

When I fell in love head over heels, you were naive, shy. Skinny. But compliant…

**Wife**. Speak.

**Husband**. Should I call my mom? They both love you.

**Wife**. I love them too. And you. Amazing. My mother loves her son-in-law more than her own daughter.

**Husband**. Should I call?

**Wife**. No. You're right there. I’ve made a list; we will study it after birth. Stroller, toys, crib, diapers, bed linen for newborns in the crib, bathing accessories, pacifiers, walkers, playpen and other small things. It’s too early. Mom remembers that watermelon used to cost five kopecks a kilogram. The family used to sit down at the table and ate a sugar watermelon. Why did you come back late yesterday?

**Husband**. I called you every half an hour to calm you. Andrey and I had to do an urgent project. I did my part and rushed to you.

**Wife**. You smelled like beer.

**Husband**. My boss treated me to a bottle to thank me.

**Wife**. Was Lenka there?

**Husband**. She was not.

**Wife**. Was she in her short skirt?

**Husband**. No skirt.

**Wife**. No skirt?

**Husband**. No skirt at all. No Lenka, no skirt.

**Wife**. Was she sitting next to you or to Andrey?

**Husband**. Lenka wasn’t there.

**Wife**. Did you have informal communication? Did you get under her skirt?

**Husband**. What new could I see there?

**Wife**. The true truth. Although some singers move around the city without underwear. Neglecting the harmful consequences. High fashion. How much beer did you drink?

**Husband**. Two glasses.

**Wife**. Are you drunk?

**Husband**. Not really.

**Wife**. You’re good. Did you drink wine afterwards?

**Husband**. The wine quickly ran out.

**Wife**. Did Lenka drink wine or vodka?

**Husband**. I didn't see it, I was sitting far away from her.

**Wife**. Who went to see her off?

**Husband**. New guys.

**Wife**. Did she call you? You can expect everything from her.

**Husband**. She didn’t. Think about something else.

**Wife**. Quite informal?

**Husband**. I rushed here.

**Wife**. She was slurping beer too. Was there a roach?

**Husband**. No Lenka, no skirt, no roach. I’ve rushed here. I called every half an hour.

**Wife**. I believe it now. Do you visit her every day?

**Husband**. I took a vacation.

**Wife**. Pregnant women seem to be capricious, they whine all the time. And they demand something sweet or salty. I am moderate and supportive. Am I really supportive?

**Husband**. There is nowhere else.

**Wife**. Let me smell some melissa.

*Husband brings a bunch of melissa. Wife inhales the fragrance.*

**Wife**. Thanks. I feel relieved. Take me to a cool dark place. A firefly will appear soon, it's a joy in the house. He looks like you. Huge round eyes. He'll cry and calm down. He looks at me curiously. The first sounds. I'd like to see him soon. Do you like pregnant women?

**Husband**. They're the only thing I like.

**Wife**. You were stealing glances at me in the clinic. I noticed it... I was chasing a fly. The fly was terribly annoying. Now I'm too slow, but my arms are quick. I stunned a fly, it hid, then took off. Last thing we need is flies. I had a dream. Pythagoras is standing next to our bed. He is tiredly talking about his favorite theorem: the square hypotenuses of a rectilinear triangle are equal to the sum of the squares of the legs.

**Husband**. The Pythagorean theorem is something important.

**Wife**. You know, he’s standing next to me and talking. The square of the hypotenuse equals... But I don't mind. If it does, I’m okay with it. It’s proven by centuries of human and mathematical practice... I don't mind, why does he bother me? Hypotenuse! Nice word. It lulls my soul. I can repeat it all the time. Hypotenuse…

**Husband**. Pregnant women love this word.

**Wife**. You know, wherever a right triangle happens, the hypotenuse and its square appear right there. He’s been standing for many nights here. I didn't bother you for nothing, but Pythagoras won’t disappear. Looks like he's not going to. He’s standing right next to me... champing at the bit. How to frighten him off our bed?

**Husband**. Maybe he likes only pregnant women? Have a friendly chat with him. Put it baldly: "Your theorem is breathtaking. You’re an outstanding mathematician and thinker. Do me a favor and move on. I'm about to give birth. Your theorem is a balm for humanity." Will he buy on this? It's easy to negotiate with the great ones.

**Wife**. Will it work?

**Husband**. Great humans appreciate a kind word.

**Wife**. However, he is an impudent man. He sees that husband and wife are sleeping, tired after a hard day. He could have left quietly.

**Husband**. No-o-ope, a kind word is necessary. They disappear after hearing it. The great ones are deprived during their lifetime. They want after to hear a kind posthumous word at least.

**Wife**. Dear, go away. You are not welcomed here. You're embarrassing my husband. And the husband embarrasses the wife. How to drive him away? A guy and a girl sleep together just for fun. What's good here? If they do it for the sake of pregnancy, it's great. Will the baby call me mom?

**Husband**. He’ll call me dad.

**Wife**. I’m turning into a mom right now. At first I was a girl, a woman, a wife, finally I will be a mother: a new state, a new meaning. A new human. Thanks to you.

**Husband**. You are talking a lot, you can jinx it.

**Wife**. Do something. You're standing like a dummy.

**Husband**. I'm doing the most important thing. I'm thinking.

**Wife**. Are you able to think?

**Husband**. I'm thinking about good things. About the inevitable.

**Wife**. I will assign you the rank of master of sports. I have a little problem… I'm leaking here… Call an ambulance. The things I’ve prepared are in the bag. My bathrobe, nightgown, socks. Washed, ironed, no germs. Hurry, hurry! I can't wait for you when I need you. The child is already getting out from me. Call an ambulance, right now.

*Husband runs out, returns with the help: Doctor, two ward men with a stretcher.*

**Wife**. Where did the ambulance come from?

**Husband**. This is a private ambulance. I have a contract with them. I paid them, they were waiting in the car.

**Wife**. Why today?

**Husband**. I made an order.

**Wife**. What do you mean?

**Husband**. An order for the afternoon. I was sure that the delivery was today.

**Wife**. What do you mean you were sure?

**Husband**. Intuition.

**Wife**. That's what you are like. Where did you get money?

**Husband**. I saved them for childbirth.

**Wife**. Is there any reserve left?

**Husband**. Yes. Doctors won't take much.

**Wife**. And you didn’t tell me… And words surround us.

**Doctor**. Let's do it calmly, slowly.

**Wife**. He's already getting out.

**Doctor**. What were you waiting for? Did you do an enema?

**Wife**. What did you come up with? (*to Husband*.) I bit my tongue on the left side.

**Doctor**. Chew on the right side.

**Wife**. It hurts. While I'm giving birth, screw the third light bulb into the chandelier. Call Lenka…

**Doctor**. Save instructions for later.

**Wife**. Buy eggs with two yolks.

**Husband**. Take two eggs and get two yolks.

**Wife**. It's not the same thing. Once I bought eggs with two yolks. May I be lucky again. Look for the eggs in our stores, ask around. There are high prices for cucumbers on the market, although it's summer. Don't throw away a broken vacuum cleaner, it will come in handy.

**Husband**. I'll wait for you.

**Wife**. The trash can is almost full. I can’t feel the smell, you’d better to take out the trash. I have scissors for fish now. I'm cutting off the fins. Now I process the fish faster. Feed the pigeons at the entrance. They are brazen, shameless beggars. They're cooing right on my shoes. The crow is back. It drives away the pigeons. The crow sat down on the curb and looked at me for a long time. She probably didn't recognize me with my bump.

**Doctor**. Will you give birth or instructions?

**Wife**. I want to give birth and instructions at the same time. (*She shouts*.) I'm scared. Do you love me?

**Doctor**. Calm down. Everyone loves you.

**Wife**. I don't need everyone.

**Doctor**. Get on the stretcher.

**Wife**. Besides the fly, a wasp flew in. The wasp’s been buzzing all day. I didn't catch it. It will sting you. You'll have allergies. You'll be covered in spots. Chase after the wasp. When you were little and vacationing with your mom in Anapa, you sat on a wasp. You had a terrible allergy. You were barely revived.

**Doctor**. What a fussy woman in labor. Think about your son.

**Wife**. All I think about is him.

**Doctor** (*lifts the robe, looks in*.) Indeed, the head is seen. (*To Ward men*.) We take her out. We're not in a hurry. Calm down, don't panic. Our obstetricians are experienced specialists. They also gave birth. You must follow my commands. The husband must walk next to us, hold his wife's hand. I'm on the other side. I'm holding your hand too. (*They hide behind the scenes.)*

*Silence.*

*A demanding, persistent newborn cry is heard.*

**The second novella**

**Sports duels**

Sea sponge, absorbing water,

Is getting heavier gradually,

That's how the feeling of heaviness

Grows in my soul.

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**Commentator, good fellow**

**Ring-girl**

**Three cheerleaders**

*Sports arena.*

*The excited voice of* ***Commentator*** *is heard.*

The Mexican dribbled into the penalty area, hit the ball from a prime scoring area and immediately fell down exhausted. A doctor ran out onto the field with a syringe in his hand. He deftly injected a powerful aphrodisiac, the emboldened forward again led the race of scorers. A shorty crawled between the goalkeeper's legs. In the second half, he has a completely different head, it's cast iron. The ball split in two. There was a ball - there was no ball, and the head is still on the shoulders. Amazing brainiac. He's putting pressure. The speed in seventy years is not the same, but he manages it well. He’s a cagey old bird. Will he be able to block the entire center alone? He sneaked up behind. It's always like this: he's looming behind you, no matter how many times you look back. Now it is desirable to strengthen the control of the ball. Another kick with a ricochet. A miracle without rules: he ran backwards, now jogging back and forth. His full name is Timote-Jose-Antonio-Poco-Toko Fernandez. For brevity, we will call him Timoshka, bald Timoshka*.* Our enfant terrible is screwed up. He loves to sit on the cooler. He’s the oldest player, and he knows: he'll get lucky at the opponent's gate. He got his shorts dirty. I wonder what kind of washing powder his wife will wash them with. The sun shines annoyingly in the eyes. Only in his eyes. And the wind is blowing. The left midfielder bit the referee and the goalkeeper of the opponents. Rabies vaccinations are on the way. As stated by the mother of the biter, this happened to him as a child. He often bit the neighbors. Once he bit a policeman.

The team carefully prepared for the match. Attacks are developing rapidly; the opponents don’t have time to intercept the ball on pre-prepared areas. They lack speed! Other football players run, after all. We defend poorly and play inexpressively. Timoshka decided to suppress the main firing point of the opponent. He smothered his own voice. The club fans held their breath. The hair on their heads stood on end. He trotted, picked up speed and fell. He falls at the first opportunity. The nickname stuck to him forever – he's the falling evil. The midfielders who have moved here are developing unprecedented activity. From the corner of the penalty area, he launched the ball into the goal and hit the post. The barbell is always in the wrong place! The level of tension is over the top. The main thing is not to lose control of the match. We cherished the foreign coach so much. It's a waste of money. We reverently fulfilled his whims. The fee was raised endlessly. Now we demand satisfaction! And then he says: the team is incurable. Why did he undertake to cure? It’s a real squalor! Well, now it’s time to kick a penalty! A real execution. He managed to grab a seven-room apartment. The players are trying, but it's not a team game. The little dog is running around the field. The gatekeeper's pug, I mean, the goalkeeper’s, sorry. The dog on the field is a distraction. After the final whistle, a mass brawl will begin. The police will tear the poor pug to pieces. What a fun! By the way, the goalkeeper was allowed to play in a crimson jacket today.

***Commentator*** *suddenly jumps out of the booth, jumps to the ramp, almost falls on the audience; clasping his hands above his head in a joyful greeting, he waves fervently to someone, he is also waved from the audience with the same greeting.*

Do you remember this*? (humming):*

When I hear a robin’s voice,

I will remember the forgotten dates,

A birch bridge with three perches

Over a quiet river without a name.

I ask you to sing softly to me

When everything looks pink

How dear to me is the birch land

In the crimson dawn.

How dear to me is the birch land

In the crimson dawn.

And this?

*Three beautiful* ***girls*** *come down from the podium to the ramp, singing "Crimson Bell":*

Through a half-dream

I hear a crimson bell,

These are the messengers of the dawn,

Bells are ringing in the grass.

It is in the midst of the Russian plains

The clusters of mountain ash have flared up,

And something touched my soul.

In the wilderness I love.

Crimson bell at dawn,

Tell my sweet land,

That I've been in love with her since childhood,

Like I love this crimson bell.

*The* ***girls*** *run away victoriously.*

***Commentator*** *returns to the booth, continues the report.*

The pace of the battle is high. A change of positions is during the whole round. No one has the full advantage. Mixed martial arts is for a long time and relentlessly. Both were tired. The applicant is breathing heavily. The champion increases the pace. The fight is on autopilot.Triangular capture, now the throw will follow. Fighting on equal terms. A wonderful interpretation. An elbow strike, now a straight leg to the chin. Left hook. Blow after blow, knee after knee. Such blows make me enjoy the beautiful more and more. I want to tell you a lot. History will put everything in its place. He assessed the situation several times, superbly blocked the attack with his shoulder, struck a right side kick and again a jab. The uppercut is lightning fast. Take advantage of life and create something. The audience is waiting. A blow to the eardrums. No one is sleeping. Finally, he hit the liver. It howled, shriveled, shattered into shreds. We were looking forward to such a liver. The world is no good without good people. And the brow arch? Dissected brow arch? Scarlet blood is gushing. A sign of good taste. Finally! It has happened! Life was a success.

***Ring-girl*** *in a mini-swimsuit walks with an information plate on which a huge number 3 is displayed.*

They kindly hit each other in the face. In good order. They flutter like butterflies. The so-called Muhammad Ali. The ballet of a tiny shabby theater. No, they're not gladiators. They think about money, they nurse and coddle themselves. People were saying: favorite, favorite, crazy physical abilities, straight punch. Where's the man fight? (*Enthusiastically*.) The third boxer jumps out of the blue and attacks X and Y. Let's call him Z. What an effect! Is effect spelt with a double "f"? Or with three?.. I categorically oppose the doubling of consonants. Does it affect the pronunciation or the meaning? "Carroll" - two "r" and two "l". Carroll is the famous Carroll! Or "hippopotamus", for example. Thick-skinned, clumsy, dirty. Why does it need three "p's"? This can’t be simplified! What a marvelous show! Awesome story. It is impossible to understand anything. By the way, the judge's mother suffers from multiple sclerosis. We'll get back to the mother a little later. A girl in a bikini announcing the rounds, or a ring-girl. Her fresh hair removal is visible. The unbalanced naughty spectator could not stand the erotic mockery, climbed into the arena and tried to see the epilation. The judge, a former heavyweight, hit the viewer between the eyes. He’s hitting him slowly and steadily. The spectator's face shrank, his bones cracked and flew apart. The spectator is being revived. A medical helicopter was called for him. The helicopter's main propeller has stalled. It hovered *over the sports complex on the second propeller. (Commentator looks at the ceiling.)* No, the helicopter has several additional propellers. The doctor deftly descends the ladder. Finally, he reached the spectator. He’s bringing him round. The weather is amazing! It was drizzling in the morning. Now, when the beating of the inquisitive spectator began, the sky brightened and sparkled. It's a pity you don't have a color TV. You can’t enjoy the scarlet liquid color, that is, the blood. The favorite hides uppercuts he makes a serious bet on. At first, the brazen opponent did not look like a sacrificial ram. Although he is shaken mentally and physically, like a man hit on the head by a heavy barrier.A precise blow, and it seems that his legs were pulled out. He fell down, then clung to the ropes, trying to get up. The favorite knee hits the jaw - unfortunately it is intact. It is very strong. Referee Riccardo Maniaco stopped the fight in time. There's nothing more to wait for.

*The* ***commentator*** *jumps out of the booth again, climbs on stilts, and walks briskly around the stage.*

No one sees that I'm on stilts. It's a pity you don't have a color screen. You're stupid. Didn't you recognize me? This is me – Anton Bizarreston. (*He continues to comment, walking on stilts.)* We have the most honest banks in the world. Only half of them are laundering offices. Here are the factors contributing to the capitalism construction: private ownership of the means of production, private ownership of land, free movement of capital, export growth, competitiveness, innovation, improvement of management systems and many other issues. There is no short answer. I'll tell you the rest at the next match.

*He disappears on stilts behind the scenes.*

**The third novella**

**Diplomatic rout**

A fun time has passed

When I liked to knock

On someone's door

And they would run out to meet me.

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

Solemn **diplomats**, there are many of them

*The living picture.*

*Men in tuxedos, tailcoats, uniforms.*

*The women are even more refined, all wearing heavy expensive jewelry.*

*Mysterious meaningful smiles –as if they say - I already know the ins and outs, but I won't tell you. Slender backs, moderate cleavage, evoking playful diplomatic thoughts. As if the accidental dropping of diplomatic handkerchiefs, the hasty and seemingly imperceptible lifting of them by obliging gentlemen, whose rank is not lower than an adviser. Determining the monetary value of their foreign colleagues and their value as eventual informants. The ladies are strict, arrogant, they dream of the next promotion of their spouses, but at the same time they are jokingly playful and mocking. Every gesture is supervised, every tilt of the head is under control. Most diplomats speak good English, they also know French, German or Spanish. Rare African dialects and dialects are heard. The increase in the price of buckwheat does not bother anyone. They walk with a dance step around the hall to the music of Georgiy Sviridov to the Pushkin’s story "The Blizzard". "Only we know the whole truth, we won't tell you – it's top secret": winks, mutual bows, thoughtful glances at the sky, friendly smiles, not too strong hugs, pats on the left shoulder, with a mysterious squint of the eyes, not a word out loud so as not to blurt something out, God forbid. They don't even dare to talk about the weather enough. They only skate round a fascinating topic – global climate change…*

*The atmosphere of mystery, dedication, delight.*

*The diplomatic rout goes on as usual.*

**The fourth novella**

**Tourist trip**

I read a letter from an Aging spinster this morning,

The Younger sister.

I don't know myself, but it seemed to me that I read

The love message between the lines.

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**Tour operator**

**Tourist**

**Tourist**. It was so crowded there.

**Operator.** Where? Have you admired a duck with ducklings on the lake?

**Tourist**. I have.

**Operator.** How many ducklings were there?

**Tourist**. Nine.

**Operator.** Did they swim beautifully, purposefully, one after the other, without overtaking their little sister?

**Tourist**. Well, ... it was beautiful.

**Operator.** A duckling costs ten euros. Ninety in total. And a duck… *(Looks at the ceiling, counts*.) Let's make a discount on the mother duck. Let's say ten. A total of one hundred euros.

**Tourist**. A duck and ducklings swim in the open, they are independent and free of charge birds.

**Operator.** We’ll discuss the birds that were flying over you later. Birds are a clause of the agreement. Have you read it?

**Tourist**. I have.

**Operator.** There is a clause on birds. You've forgotten it. But you have to pay. They sailed in a chain, prudently. Who taught them? Genetics.

**Tourist**. How much for genetics?

**Operator.** One hundred as well.

**Tourist**. A little further away the ducks with the kids were other ducks, there were countless of them. In nature, on the lake surface, free birds.

**Operator.** We are chatting about those that you admired. If you take into account the immeasurable number of ducks with kids, you will ruin your husband.

**Tourist**. I have my own money.

**Operator.** Do you or your husband have more money?

**Tourist**. My husband, of course. He is thrifty, but not stingy. He gives money to me, if I need it.

**Operator.** Have you been married long?

**Tourist**. For eighteen years.

**Operator.** Is he indifferent to other girls? Does he behave himself?

**Tourist**. Are we talking about my husband or the duck?

**Operator.** First about the duck, then about your husband. Are you still interested in your husband?

**Tourist**. What interest are you talking about?

**Tour operator** About the physical one.

**Tourist**. Why do you think I’ve lost it?

**Tour operator** Eighteen years marriage…

**Tourist**. My interest is only deepening. Let's talk about ducklings.

**Operator.** So, he behaves himself. He mended his way!

**Tourist**. Who are you talking about?

**Operator.** You know who is it. Did he molest you hourly?

**Tourist**. What does "molest" mean?

**Operator.** He was persistent with you. Invigorating mountain air, lamb kebab, red wine…

**Tourist**. I invigorated him myself.

**Operator.** You were horny… Mountain air… What do you feel when a man... starts it?

**Tourist**. Are you crazy?

**Operator.** Yes, I'm asking... I’m interested…

**Tourist**. You are a spoilt girl.

**Operator.** No more than you. I want to compare…

**Tourist**. I feel an exorbitant pleasantness in my body…

**Operator** You see... You're calling me names… We are totally insane. We think only about him. How's he doing there? Is he comfortable…?

**Tourist**. Stop it, you’re crazy.

**Operator.** Stop talking: smart ... crazy… You know I’m smart. Do you remember the first romantic date?

**Tourist**. Sure! I was dressed up, cheerful, inspired, it was the eighth grade.

**Operator.** And what about kisses?

**Tourist**. Stop vulgarizing! Kisses on a first date? Don't you have a man?

**Operator.** I used to have him.

**Tourist**. Where does the surplus of men come from?

**Operator.** Did you walk on the footbridges?

**Tourist**. What footbridges?

**Operator.** On the lake shore there is an embankment lined with century-old wooden beams. The tree has turned black with time. It heats up in the sun and has a sedative effect. You took off your shoes and walked barefoot. You have received a treatment procedure that was not included in the original estimate. You have walked on fifty beams. Two thousand euros.

**Tourist**. I can't walk barefoot along the wooden embankment?

**Operator.** Of course, you can’t. It’s an extra service.

**Tourist**. You should have warned me. It's hard to call it an embankment. There were wooden slats, thin crossbars, but I didn't see any beams.

**Operator.** When you climbed the ladder, did you hold on to the balusters and railing?

**Tourist**. Balusters? I don't know this word.

**Operator.** Read some fiction. Did you get a splinter in your leg?

**Tourist**. Stop worrying about my physical nature. No splinters, no shortness of breath. I felt great. By the way, how much does it cost to pull out a splinter?

**Operator.** It’s a commercial secret. Did your husband get a splinter? After all, he was lying without swimming trunks...

***Tourist*** *looks attentively at* ***operator****.*

**Tourist**. Your vocabulary is pretty large. You know the word "balusters". Did you graduate from the Philological Faculty of Moscow State University?

**Tour operator** (*happily*). Brilliant foresight. It is the Faculty of Philology.

**Tourist**. Faculty, faculty. Brains are focused only on making money. You're already old.

**Operator.** Not older than you.

**Tourist**. I'm a month younger.

**Operator.** There is nothing to brag about. When you’re middle-aged, every day matters.

**Tourist**. Middle-aged? What are you talking about? I have a long time to live before I'm forty.

**Operator.** A man gets up at six in the morning, performs the usual physiological function, jumps into the car, goes to the pool, swims for an hour with his fellows, has breakfast at work with them, at nine he’s in his office. He looks around. He still loves lamb *en brochette*?

**Tourist**. Who are you talking about?

**Operator.** You know who. Have you reformatted a man? He likes beer, let him drink it. He loves football, let him watch it. You'd better join him. Especially when he watches boxing. Or listens to the music. A man is a special substance. It's fascinating to adapt to your loved one. He is the supreme being. No wonder the main Gods are men. No one suggested it in time.

***Tour operator*** *puts his hand on Tourist's hand, stroking it.* ***Tourist*** *does not remove her hand, and they stare intently into each other's eyes.*

**Operator.** It's hard to live in this world. Everything is not as it should be. Everything is wrong and to my detriment. It's too late to fix it.

**Tourist**. Do you have high expectations? Absolutely unreal. And stop trying to get into my soul. We weren't friends.

**Operator.** I'm not sure. Money, money. Like in Ostrovsky's plays.

**Tourist**. Do you even know Ostrovsky? Oh, yes, you graduated from the Faculty of Philology.

**Operator.** It was very difficult. I am an expert, supposedly an expert on ancient manuscripts. You were an excellent student. Studying was easy for you. The boys were running after you.

**Tourist**. Don't get distracted. We're talking to the point.

**Operator.** Money again?

**Tourist**. Have you calmed down? (*Tourist removes her hand*.) Let's finish talking about ducklings and lambs, let's get back to the point.

**Operator.** I'm all ears.

**Tourist**. The company has issued an additional invoice for two thousand euros, I'm trying to understand why.

**Operator.** What about the deterioration of the international situation?

**Tourist**. How much the deterioration cost?

**Operator.** Six hundred euros. Is the sunset wonderful?

**Tourist**. Sunset is sunset. It's always wonderful.

**Operator** Did you admire it? Did you want to make a feat?

**Tourist**. I did.

**Operator** (*she moves her hand in the air, as if she were seeing off the sunset*). The sun was setting slowly. As it has been for thousands of years. Were there any rays? They melted steadily, expediently. The sun is a clever cookie: it disappears, disappears, finally it disappeared. Is it nice to watch?

**Tourist**. How much do you value eye-pleasing?

**Operator.** Let's say... four hundred euros. Are the acoustics great?

**Tourist**. Acoustics must be paid too?

**Operator.** You shouted over the lake towards the mountains? The mountain ranges responded to you.

**Tourist**. Yes, I did.

**Operator.** No one forced you to yell, but you shouted. There is no shouting in the agreement. Echo will cost you... seven hundred euros.

**Tourist**. Is there a tariff schedule?

**Operator.** I can drop... ten euros. Did you halloo longingly, feverishly?

**Tourist**. Traditionally, as always.

**Operator.** I was informed that you were hallooing feverishly. The mountains were shaking. Did thoughts gladden you during your hallooing?

**Tourist**. Yes, they did.

**Operator.** You must pay for thoughts and hallooing. And for the acoustics. Did you like the mountains?

**Tourist**. They were amazing.

**Operator.** What are your impressions?

**Tourist**. Superficial.

**Operator.** Superficial is not good.

**Tourist**. I am a grateful tourist.

**Operator.** Let's look for an exalted word. And I am a magnanimous Operator. I hardly lie. I’m open-hearted. We're both magnanimous. But I'm a little bit more. The supermodel showed off her breasts at the stadium. She took off a bra made of vintage fabric and elephant tusks. We are also able to demonstrate any part of the body. We are complex-free. But who will write about it? We are civically-minded. Would you like me to show you? (*Puts her hands on her breasts.)*

**Tourist**. Calm down. You’d better show it to a man.

**Operator.** To a man? A lovely idea. Will he appreciate it?

**Tourist**. That's what they live for.

**Operator.** He will be excited? Pleased?

**Tourist**. He will be drunk with passion.

**Operator.** The question is, where to find a man?.. (*Judiciously, thoughtfully*.) We can live without him. It’s much calmer. They only cause confusion. As soon as a wimp appears, stress increases dramatically.

**Tourist**. You need your head examined.

**Operator.** This is useless. I’m overburdened.

**Tourist**. Chuck your glamorous magazines.

**Operator.** Did you get stronger after your vacation?

**Tourist**. I did.

**Operator.** And your husband?

**Tourist**. What about my husband?

**Operator.** Did he get stronger too?

**Tourist**. Stop it. I came here not to discuss my husband, but to understand where the excess amount came from.

**Operator.** I'm asking without any secret intention.

**Tourist**. You have only obvious intentions. A curious nose is immediately visible.

**Operator** (*takes a mirror, admires herself*). It’s not at all curious, it’s ordinary, even elegant. By the way, you also have to pay for getting stronger. I'll make a small discount. The spirit got stronger; the sexual sphere got stronger.

**Tourist**. Are you doing it again?

**Operator.** Do you remember when you copied my tests?

**Tourist**. Not true. I accidentally looked into your notebook a few times.

**Operator.** Accidentally, accidentally… Has your husband's sexual sphere also got stronger?

**Tourist**. Stop saying vulgarities. It’s enough for today.

**Operator.** You used to share your thoughts.

**Tourist**. I was stupid.

**Operator.** Are you smart now?

**Tourist**. The pool is tiny, like this scene, shallow, waist-deep.

**Operator.** But you won't drown. You feel the bottom. Spring water, it’s crystal.

Was there a sprig of dill on the plate? And an olive? When you jumped off the asphalt sidewalk onto the wooden embankment, did they give you a hand?

**Tourist**. Someone did.

**Operator.** These seconds are remembered for a lifetime. Giving a hand costs seventy euros. I'll check the price list just in case.

**Tourist**. Now I will remember this for the rest of my life. Isn't giving a hand included in the tour price?

**Operator.** Why so? The tour is a one thing, and a hand is another. Our favor to the customer. Was the handshake soft but masculine?

**Tourist**. I think it was masculine, but firm.

**Operator.** The doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences. He’s been giving his hand for ten years. This is enough for buying food.

**Tourist**. Did he solve the tricky theorem?

**Operator.** It’s only him who can do it. They wanted to remove this position, then they changed their mind. Tourists began to fall on the footbridges, crumbling their bones. Do you sometimes dream of becoming a little girl again? Remember girlish movements, childishness. You want to carried gently in someone’s arms. Fool around with your loved one. He likes it too. Messing with you. He's messing around. The wife gives in, sticks. He is rejoicing, he’s at the peak of bliss. (*Sobs*.) He is triumphant, at the peak of bliss. The husband strokes, kisses, soft, desirable lips, admires his wife. The wife gets horny, all at the mercy of her beloved husband. Both are on the rise, both love each other.

*They stare at each other.*

You can throw away the extra bill. Calm down. It’s a joke, a practical joke. You were a viper, and you remained one. You're always unhappy. One day I opened up with you. The groom is stolen. The three-storey house is built. You change expensive cars all the time. An apartment in Portugal, on the seashore. Gold, fur coats, vouchers. This is catastrophically not enough.

**Tourist**. Stop being jealous.

**Operator.** I failed to buy a thesis. I really wanted to be a PhD in law. It seemed that everything was off to a good start, but it all came to nothing. The academic council was incorruptible. And my son honestly defended his PhD!

**Tourist** (*stupefied*). Your son? Where did you get your son from?

**Operator.** Do you know where children come from? All from the same place!

**Tourist**. You're a liar! You don't have a husband. You don't have any son. I would have known that. (*Crying*.) Envy is tearing me… You're lying... you don't have a son! Where did you get your son from? So many years. I would know... (*shouts*.) And where is my son? Where is he?

**The fifth novella**

**Medical examination**

Oh, how sad you are,

Lifeless sand!

Barely squeeze and rustle you in my hand,

You're falling between my fingers.

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**Patient.**

**Doctors (*women, in white robs*)**

**Chairman of the Medical and Labor Expert Commission**

**Chief Physician.**

**Head of the department (*a woman*)**

*Ophthalmologist's* office. Doctors, patients.

**Ophthalmologist**. Are the limbs getting cold?

**Patient**. What limbs?

**Ophthalmologist**. The tip of your nose. Auricles.

**Patient**. No, they don't get cold.

**Ophthalmologist**. Is the friend getting cold?

**Patient**. Whose friend?

**Ophthalmologist**. Yours.

**Patient**. No. It’s steadily warm.

**Ophthalmologist**. It's good. Show me.

*He moves closer to the doctor, stretches his neck, shows his eyes.*

**Ophthalmologist**. I don’t need it.

**Patient**. But what do you need?

**Ophthalmologist**. The limbs you show to the other women.

**Patient**. Are you an ophthalmologist, an optometrist?

**Ophthalmologist**. In our polyclinic there is the cross-qualification: a urologist deals with lungs, a gastroenterologist deals with nervous diseases, an otolaryngologist treats the skeleton. Everyone starts from this place. (*She nods her head at the man's groin area*.) Stop messing around. I'm a doctor, and the doctor needs to be shown. What can a man show? Come behind the screen.

*He goes behind the screen. Ophthalmologist takes out a mirror, preens herself: she paints her lips, fixes her hair and also goes behind the screen. A long enigmatic silence. They both return to the table.*

**Ophthalmologist** (*thoughtfully*). The right eye is minus one, the left eye is zero eight. The signs of incipient cataract. You came to our clinic during an unfavorable season. We employ only women. In autumn, as a rule, they want to see. That's why everyone is on edge. We gossip only about It. From morning to evening. The main idea is how to tame it faster. Quite sound thoughts are being expressed. Take care of your spine.

**Patient**. I will.

**Ophthalmologist**. And take care of the posterior wall of the myocardium.

**Patient**. Sure thing.

**Ophthalmologist**. Look for junk DNA in your body.

**Patient**. Certainly. How much do I owe you?

**Ophthalmologist**. As much as you can.

**Patient**. I'm afraid to overdo it.

**Ophthalmologist**. Don't be afraid. We'll get along.

*The office of the Chief Physician.*

*The chief doctor and Patient behind the screen. Hospital nurse is the office.*

**Chief Physician**. (*dictates to the nurse being behind the screen*). The Pistul is of the correct shape, reactive, easily takes the desired shape. Stubborn, persistent.

**Hospital nurse**. May I take a look?

**Chief Physician**. Are you an adult?

**Hospital nurse**. I'll be eighteen in a month.

**Chief Physician**. It's a little early.

**Hospital nurse**. Just one look.

**Chief Physician**. Read textbooks. There are explanations to the pictures there.

**Hospital nurse**. Pictures? I want to see it in the flesh.

**Chief Physician**. It's a little early for seeing in the flesh.

**Hospital nurse**. I have a medical college under my belt.

**Chief Physician**. Didn't they show you?

**Hospital nurse**. No, they said it was too early.

**Chief Physician**. I'm saying the same thing.

**Hospital nurse**. Through the door crack.

**Chief Physician**. I’m tired of you… Through the crack, you have one second.

*She looks through the crack and jumps away.*

**Hospital nurse.** (*thoughtfully leans her head on her shoulder*). What's so special about that? I've seen a lot in my life, it’s no worse and no better. It’s standard. But they shouted: a wonderful crocodile, a rare specimen.

*Consultation of the Medical and Labor Expert Commission. Chairman, doctors, patient.*

**Chairman**. Where are we going?

**Patient**. To Mauritius.

**Chairman**. What is it?

**Patient**. It’s an island in the ocean.

**Chairman**. How do you get there?

**Patient**. By plane.

**Chairman**. Would you like to take the train?

**Patient**. There is water and ocean all around.

**Chairman**. That's right. (*Reads medical records.)* High blood pressure... strabismus... curvature of the nasal septum... the initial stage of Parkinson's disease... gout ... overflowing bladder syndrome…

**Commission Member** *(squeals*). Mauritius? You must be hospitalized right now.

**Patient**. I paid my money.

**Chairman**. He looks sturdy. Any complaints? (*Without waiting for an answer*.) No complaints. Money is a weighty argument. How much?

**Patient**. I've been saving up for several years.

**Chairman**. A decent amount of time. Mauritius is a tropical and jungle zone. So, we vaccinate you: against yellow fever, cholera, tetanus, and you must undergo a check-up immediately after returning. Take antimalarial medications with you, start taking them two weeks before the trip and within two weeks after returning. They will tell you at the Vaccination center. Take your usual medications.

I'm handing you over to the internist. I’ll be back soon. (*Leaves*.)

**Internist** (*by phone*). Is Edik awake? Heaviness in the head, dope? Even brine doesn't help? Well, well…

*She takes out a mirror, preens herself, in a dissatisfied voice.*

What’s troubling you?

**Patient**. Pain in the right hypochondrium, belching, hiccups.

**Internist**. Do you periodically feel sad, depressed?

**Patient**. No, I don’t.

**Internist**. But I do.

**Patient**. I'm incredibly sociable.

**Internist** And the feeling of elation? Breath of the sea…

**Patient**. Sometimes I feel it.

**Internist** Are you feeling ill now?

**Patient**. I feel good now. I'm full of energy.

**Internist**. When it comes to health, haste is unnecessary. Thoughtful answers are more appropriate. The sickest are the people who think they are healthy.

**Patient**. Now I'm happy. But in my right hypochondrium…

**Internist**. Take your time. Take a short pause and mentally scroll through the pages of your life. Then the final answer. Do you feel at the moment the trembling of the limbs, the whirlwinds in the head?

**Patient**. Thank God, no.

**Internist**. How do you fall asleep? Are there any problems with sleep?

**Patient**. No problems.

**Internist**. Stop saying no and no! A rare man has no diseases. Only a man with shifted thinking is able to insist that there are no problems with any organ.

**Hospital nurse.** *(prompts*). I kept my interest in life.

**Internist**. Come on, come on. I need more details here.

**Hospital nurse**. He demonstrates a positive attitude to the outside world.

**Internist**. Do you demonstrate?

**Patient**. I do.

**Internist**. Some more details here. Do you have a disordered imagination?

**Patient**. No, it's fully functional.

**Internist**. (*delighted).* You are saying that you are a normal person. If you’re normal, then you must have diseases. Let's look together, maybe we'll find them. Do you have any problems with dysfunction sometimes?

**Patient**. Always.

**Internist**. Now your answer is correct. Let's take a closer look at the case. Step behind the screen.

*He goes behind one of the two screens.*

Hey, patient, where are you going? Ask first, then go. And now you’re in a hurry. Go behind the other screen.

*Both are hiding behind a partition. Silence. They come out humbly.*

**Patient**. Why did you wink?

**Internist**. To whom?

**Patient**. To me.

**Internist**. When?

**Patient**. Behind the partition.

**Internist**. I can't wink. That's how my eyes work. Have you been to a neuropsychiatrist?

**Patient**. Not yet.

**Internist** I strongly recommend seeing him.

**Patient**. Why did you wink?

**Internist**. When?

**Patient**. You might have not winked but squinted.

**Internist**. What eye?

**Patient**. Both of them.

*Head of the department enters.*

**Head of the department**. Patients are running around today. They don’t want to stay at home. If you get sick, stay in bed. There's nothing for us to do here? The sighted and the walking patients are the most persistent. We have to explain how to take the medicine, then they require the use of disposable syringes. Everyone tries to find out whether to take pills before or after a meal. How can I know? Does it matter? All the pills will mix inside you... The men are meticulous and unrepresentative. Tieless, unshaven. Women boycott lace underwear. I mixed up the medications: instead of cordial, I prescribed gastronomic ones. Nothing happened to him. He’s lively and energetic.

**Internist** (*dismissively*). A new patient. He says he’s healthy.

**Head of the department** Where is he going?

**Internist** To Mauritius as well.

**Head of the department** Mauritius... Seychelles… Madagascar... they don’t want to stay at home.

*They exchange meaningful glances.*

Is he in perfect health?

**Internist.** He thinks so.

**Head of the department.** We met healthy people. At first, he looks like a strong man, and then he dies. (*To Patient.)* What’s troubling you?

**Patient**. Nothing at all.

**Head of the department**. How come? Are you an alien and don't feel a human pain?

**Patient**. I'm an Earthman. But when something troubles me, I feel it. I'm susceptible to pain.

**Head of the department**. We know who these healthy people are. (*Unexpectedly, turning to Internist*.) I bought a gas stove with electric ignition. It has a complex connection system. It requires grounding, zero cable, otherwise there will be an explosion, you won’t come out alive. I invited a specialist. (*Brightening up, rejoicing in her inner thoughts.*) He is refined, well-mannered. He loves French literature and cuisine. Associate professor, now he’s between jobs. He moonlights as a gasman. He read a chapter from his research. I liked it, it's in my main occupation.

*Patient listens to this tirade, freely and half–naked walks around the office, throws up his hands, as if inwardly agreeing or, on the contrary, putting forward counterarguments, but somehow takes a passive part in the conversation. He even sniffed both ladies but they paid no attention.*

**Internist.** Patients are strange nowadays. Sometimes they complain of a heartache, then for no reason at all they lament about the stomach. And then there is utter nonsense. Blurred symptoms... You can’t understand what a patient is being treated for.

**Head of the department.** Everyone is fastidious and arrogant. Yes, patients are different now.

**Internist** Doubtful.

**Head of the department.** Okay, keep figuring it out. (*Leaves.)*

**Internist**. What’s troubling you?

**Patient**. Pain in the right hypochondrium, belching, hiccups, nasal congestion.

**Internist** Does the neck turn in both directions?

**Patient**. It does.

**Internist**. Aren’t the cervical vertebrae weakened?

**Patient**. As strong as in my better days.

**Internist.** It’s good.

**Patient**. Preliminary for now.

**Internist.** (*making notes in the medical record*). Now I see the whole picture. In the beginning there were doubts, now it is clear. I’ll take you up on it.

**Patient**. It hurts badly on the right.

**Internist.** Don't pay attention. Dyskinesia of the biliary tract. Pain in the right hypochondrium, belching of air, hiccups, nasal congestion. Of course, you need treatment. But how to avoid side effects? From the cardiovascular system: peripheral edema, bradycardia, tachycardia, tinnitus, fainting, hypotension and hypertension. Side effects from the gastrointestinal tract: nausea, diarrhea, gastritis, intestinal colic, abdominal pain. Side effects from the central nervous system: lethargy, dizziness, headache, weakness, depression, drowsiness, confusion. Now about the diet. First, what you can’t have: sugar, honey, jam; sweet fruits: banana, grapes, dried apricots, raisins, prunes, mayonnaise, sour cream, cream; bratwurst, sausages, lard, canned food, pasta, cereals, potatoes, corn, legumes, bread. What’s recommended: vegetables, except potatoes, all greens. Start the meal with a salad: cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, radishes, turnips, celery, lettuce, zucchini, eggplants. It is better to fry without oil, in a dish with a non-stick coating. Meat and fish should preferably be consumed low-fat varieties: beef, veal, game, chicken without skin. We need to be treated. But God knows how it will turn out in reality. There is a sad end ahead.

*Cardiologist*’s office. *Doctors, patient*

**Cardiologist**. Tell me everything. Open your heart.

**Patient**. What?

**Cardiologist**. Not what, but with whom.

**Patient**. With whom?

**Cardiologist**. With a girlfriend. With your girlfriend. You approach the bed cautiously, on tiptoe. She's lying there... then what?

**Patient**. Not what, but with whom.

**Cardiologist**. Yes, with your girlfriend.

*He leans over to Doctor, whispers in her ear.*

**Cardiologist** (*enthusiastically*). Really?

*He bends down again and whispers.*

**Cardiologist** (*shocked*). Is it possible?

***Cardiologist*** *bends down to Patient's ear, whispers passionately. We hear their dialogue over the loudspeaker.*

**Cardiologist**. They wrote a lot of nasty things about you here. Don't listen to them. You are a young man in the prime of life. Your mind is clear and strong. You have a lot of plans. Your device is obedient, takes the right position in time. It’s been described already. This is the most important thing. I won't even stare at it… The mobility of your eyeball is impaired. Take care of your eyeballs. Do you know my illnesses? I'm sitting silently. Otherwise I’ll be fired. Do you want me to tell you?

**Patient** (*in Doctor’s ear*). I do badly.

**Cardiologist**. My throat hurts. The pulse is rare, up to forty-two or forty-four beats. I don't dare to implant a pacemaker. Will you count my pulse?

**Patient** (*in her ear*). Sure, I will.

***Doctor*** *stretches out his hand, takes the patient's hand, puts his fingers on her wrist, puts a watch in front of him. He counts, raises his head in surprise.*

**Cardiologist** (*answering his silent question*). Some medications help me, when I put them under the tongue and dissolve. My eyesight deteriorated. Joints are cracking. Wanna hear it?

**Patient** (*in her ear*). I’d love to.

***Cardiologist*** *gets up, makes circular movements with the pelvis, a loud crunch is heard in the knees. She starts* *rubbing the fingers of both hands, makes a lock out of them – a crunch is also heard.*

**Patient** (*worried).* Can I help?

**Cardiologist**. Probably you can. I invite you to my place for a cup of coffee... for a full examination. I bought rose wine and groceries. (*She gives him a piece of paper*.) My address. Now let's talk about parasites. There are many of them, more than two thousand. There will be a struggle. I'm sure we'll beat them. Stop thinking about black holes, focus on parasites. We’ll meet up tonight. Let's fight together. The sick and the healthy will move heaven and earth together. Great power.

**Patient**. And who is sick?

**Cardiologist.** Well, it's me. Abstractly, it's me. Can I give you an advice?

**Patient**. I will try to evaluate it.

**Cardiologist**. Run away from here. You are a noble knight. You are strong and beautiful. You are ready to conquer the whole world. But you're stuck in the middle of nowhere. It's time for you to get out.

**Patient**. Just listen to me, this is the main thing.

**Cardiologist**. Word of honor. I forgot the diagnosis: widespread osteochondrosis of the spine with radicular syndrome at the lumbosacral level.

**Patient**. Do you have a husband?

**Cardiologist**. I don’t.

**Patient**. A boyfriend?

**Cardiologist**. There is no boyfriend either.

**Patient**. I will think about your case.

**Cardiologist**. The time is blessed.

**Patient**. Thanks.

**Cardiologist**. It is limited.

**Patient**. I understand.

**Cardiologist** (*in a heartfelt voice*). For some reason, my soul hurts.

**Patient**. What are you being treated with?

**Cardiologist**. Only with the music! Wanna listen?

**Patient**. Of course.

***Cardiologist*** *approaches a huge cabinet, which turned out to be completely empty, except for a small radio. She takes it out of the closet, puts it on the table, presses a button, Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" sounds.*

*Hospital staff and patients slowly enter the office. There are many of them.*

*Everyone listens to music.*

***Doctors*** *talk enthusiastically, take handkerchiefs out of their pockets, wave them after* ***Patient*** *who is leaving*:

An extraordinary patient! An amazing patient! He doesn’t whine or moan. So many sores – but he hasn't lost his optimism. Come in, we will be glad and happy. It’s a field day. (*Wiping away tears with a handkerchief*.) There is no short answer. We'll examine all his organs.

**The sixth novella**

**Entrance**

Sad, I climbed the hill.

And I see flocks of birds pecking

Red thorn berries.

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**Factory director**

**HR manager**

**Guard**

***Director.*** *appears at the entrance, casually nods to the Guard. and tries to pass through the turnstile with a quick step.*

**Guard** (*presses the lever blocking the turnstile in his booth*). Your ID card, please.

**Director** (*surprised*). Don't you recognize me?

**Guard**. It doesn't matter. Show me your ID card.

**Director.** I am the Director.

**Guard**. I’m glad. Please show me the document.

**Director.** Are you kidding?

**Guard**. By no means.

**Director** (*irritated*). Then let me go.

**Guard**. With great pleasure. When you show your documents.

**Director.** Are you newbie?

**Guard**. No, I’m oldie.

**Director.** What is your last name?

**Guard**. It’s Titarenko, just like yours. And please step aside. Do not interfere with the workers starting their production duties.

***Director*** *steps aside.*

*Workers pass through the turnstile and show their ID cards. They look with surprise at* ***Director*** *who loiters at the entrance.*

**Director.** What happened to you today?

**Guard**. There's nothing wrong with me. The rules are written for everyone. It is necessary to comply with them. (*He points to the poster: "Present your ID card disclosed separately*.")

**Director.** I am the head of the company.

**Guard**. One does not exclude the other.

**Director.** I am part of the Ministry's nomenclature.

**Guard**. Well there you are, the director should always have a ministerial piece of paper certifying his social status. I'm not asking too much. Only what is required by the Internal Regulations.

**Director.** Are you kidding me?

**Guard**. No. I follow the rules established by the Director.

**Director** (*sincerely delighted*). I am your Director!

**Guard** (*pretending to squint shortsightedly into Director’s face*). You can't tell by your look.

**Director.** What’s wrong with my look?

**Guard**. I mean your appearance. Proof is required. Written one. I don't want to break the rules.

**Director.** What can we do?

**Guard**. Search for your ID card. In your pockets. Maybe the card is there.

**Director.** I left it at home.

**Guard**. Go home. I'll wait. The shift ends at six.

**Director.** I'm not going home.

**Guard**. Your ID card is signed by the Minister?

**Director.** Yes, by the Minister.

**Guard**. Moreover, you should have it with you. Maybe you didn't spend the night at home? Maybe you don't want the whole factory to know where you spend the night?

**Director** (*overreacting*). It’s none of your business!

**Guard**. Of course. My job is to keep outsiders out of the factory. We have a regime enterprise; we produce sulfuric acid.

**Director.** I know it without you. I know what we produce.

**Guard**. I'm on duty, you're bothering me. Step aside. (*Several workers passed through the turnstile again*.)

**Director.** I'm going to fire you today... For disrupting my workday. Call the HR manager.

**Guard**. Call him yourself. Internal phones are on the wall, next to the phone.

***Director*** *nervously dialed three digits, muttered something into the phone. A few seconds later* ***HR manager*** *appears in the entrance hall, out of breath, with a pale face.*

**HR manager** (*To* ***Director****, excitedly*). What happened?

**Director.** He won't let me in, as you can see.

**HR manager** (*trying to figure it out*). Where doesn't he let you in?

**Director.** To the territory of the factory.

**HR manager**. Whom he doesn’t let go there?

**Director.** Me.

**HR manager** (*clueless*). What's he doing?

**Director.** He’s requiring my ID card.

**HR manager**. Are the others allowed to go?

**Director.** They are.

**HR manager**. And you?

**Director.** I’m not allowed to go. He won't let me in without an ID card.

**HR manager**. Let me think... Did he recognize you?

**Director.** I guess he did.

**HR manager**. Was he respectful to you?

**Director.** No, he wasn’t.

**HR manager**. Now I'm starting to understand... Did he forget you are the boss?

**Director.** The devil knows what he did. He used to let me in, yesterday too. The workers are walking by, giggling.

**HR manager**. The picture is complete. We are taking measures. The patience limit has expired.

*He goes to Guard’s booth confidently, fixing his unblinking gaze on Guard.*

Titarenko, have you had something trippy?

**Guard**. No, I had fried eggs with lard for breakfast. Very tasty.

**HR manager**. Where did you buy lard?

**Guard**. On the market.

**HR manager**. There was no lard there the other day.

**Guard**. Life is full of surprises.

**HR manager**. Is lard delicious?

**Guard** (*lighting up*). Of course! A young woman brought it from Belopolye.

**HR manager**. Homemade lard? Did they cut the pig with their own hands?

**Guard**. Otherwise, of course! Her man and cut. The pig was fed up to almost three hundredweight.

**HR manager**. And you believed it?! Three hundred kilograms! With meat streaks?

**Guard**. Thick, pink, with meat streaks. Beautiful and delicious. It smells like burnt straw. From Belopolye lard is always delicious, I know for sure.

**HR manager**. There was no homemade sausage?

**Guard**. There was. I bought sausages. And black pudding, too.

**HR manager**. Where is their counter at the market?

**Guard**. First you go through the dairy pavilion – milk, sour cream, honey, and you get into the sausage pavilion. I ate a piece of sausage right at the market. In the sausage department, look for the first scales on the left. She weighs the lard generously. Not a greedy young woman.

**HR manager**. I'll go there at lunch.

**Guard**. A car on wheels? I didn't see it at the entrance.

**HR manager**. The machine is in working condition. Now I'll call my nephew to bring the wheelbarrow. (*Pause*.) Why are you bothering him?

**Guard**. And I didn't like him at school. He's a city jerk. An underachiever. The man decided to become a philosopher. He did not understand the differences between the categories of quantity and quality. The concept of a quantitative indicator is very vague: it must be distinguishable from the category of quantity as such and is widespread enough to fix the presence of a certain quality to an indefinite extent. Then the man encroached on chemistry. (*Getting excited*.) Moreover, the problem is fascinating – the essence of the chemical bond.

(***HR manager*** *listens with interest to* ***Guard****.)* Who is combined with whom... Here is a human’s fault too. I'm not even talking about water. Two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom combined – we got water. Pure water is a universal substance, the essence of all living things. It is elementary, like two plus one. I messed up the white light's head. The second oxygen atom came from somewhere. New measurements of electron scattering, and the "mystery of the proton radius" that arose a few years ago is becoming more mysterious. I call it – that I should live to see that things! (*Looking thoughtfully into space.)* Do you go to the toilet at night?

**HR manager**. At night? No, I don't go.

**Guard** (*also thoughtfully*). It is advisable to go there. Unnecessary thoughts will not get into your head.

**HR manager**. Unnecessary? About the reconstruction of society?

**Guard**. I am far from the generalizations. I mean only chemistry. Grants... Compounds of ions and cations... I mean only chemical thoughts. And anyway, stay away from it. There is a tiny step from chemistry to alchemy. The Boyle-Marriott laws won't do any good. Astronomy is a quite a different story! You watch an asteroid and predict its trajectory in the universe. And whether it will fly side by side or far from the Earth – who knows. Have you ever wondered why chemical laws have a double surname? Boyle combined with Marriott... that's the whole point! No one wants to take responsibility for chemical manifestations alone! Therefore, people find a partner-accomplice.

***Director*** *tries to eavesdrop on the conversation of employees.*

**Director.** Hey, what are you whispering about? Let me in, now.

**Guard**. We are talking about our business. About what is painful for us. About water, about chemistry.

**Director.** What chemistry? I am the chemical Director.

**Guard**. Director, Director… We don’t mind some chemistry.

**Director.** Don’t overdo it, chemists.

**HR manager**. We’re chatting. About lard, too.

**Director.** Pink? With streaks? Baked?

**HR manager**. Yes, with streaks.

**Director.** Take me with you.

**The seventh novella**

**Glamour turning into flashmob**

All people

Go in the same direction.

And I look, standing

Away from them,

On the side of the road.

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**Moderator**

**Participants of the flashmob**: **old men, old women, men, women, boys, girls, children, babies in strollers**

**Independent passer-by**

*A backwater street. Dead silence. Nothing happens in the world.*

*Suddenly* ***Moderator*** *jumps out and screams heart-rendingly.*

**Moderator** (*frantically*). Discounts by category. A highly profitable ready-made business. Global brands. Only with us: everything and now. Collections of past seasons. Franchises. Welcome aboard. Permanent promotions in the discount store. Specify the minimum prices. Author's models. Irresistible. There is a large size for women. An insane amount. Comfortable and stable from world manufacturers. A huge assortment. Fashionable styles. Luxury available to people of good will. High service. Free shipping. Public offer. Casting models. Certified distributors guarantee the authenticity of the product. It's worth it. The latest novelties. The stock is constantly replenished. Star shopping. The hen pecked the seeds one by one and ruined the whole yard. The fragrance of happiness. We did it! The plate is broken, even if you glue it together, it won't ring. Lumber has risen in price again. The milk turned sour. Boa constrictor and rabbit became friends. All lay load on the willing horse. You will be called when you are needed. It is important to keep the balance. We use only stamp paper. Who is too hot to trot? We don't have much time, but a lot of work. Job openings. Contacts. Advantages. Limited edition. Saturated shades. A new palette. Anniversary collection. No harmful substances. Various effects and iridescence of color. With notes of bergamot, magnolia and lavender. A tool with new textures and an expanded spectrum of action. Waterfalls. Klondike. The cherry on the cake. I can't take my eyes off.

**Independent passerby**. What is he advertising?

**Girl**. I don’t understand. Something is lengthening, something is shortening.

**Independent passerby**. And what is lengthening?

**Girl**. Not what you think about.

**Independent passerby**. How do you know what I think about? I've lived a long life. (*Sobs*.) I am a leading designer, developer of space systems. I can't understand what they're talking about here. Where are the waterfalls and Klondike here?

**Old woman**. Where should we go to?

**Moderator**. Straight, right, then left. Hurry up, there's not much time. The right decision. Thirty percent discount for the first ten who came running.

**Old woman**. What about thirty-five?

**Moderator**. Easy-peasy. Hurry, the main thing is to get there in time.

**Girl**. Forty percent is possible?

**Moderator**. Possible.

**Old woman**. Can I get it for free?

**Moderator**. You can! The main thing is to be there in time. Life is fleeting.

**Independent passerby**. Fleeting, why?

**Moderator**. The right question! There is no other life. Straight, right, then left. Run in small dashes, on command. The big one is seen from a distance. Your call is very important to us. The first callers will receive an unforgettable gift. Don't miss it! Great choice! Favorable prices! Exclusive! In casual style! Enjoy your shopping. Easier said than done. I give the information for what it may be worth. Feel the difference. Positive mood. Positive signals. We work according to the actual weather. I suggest wearing a bell in your nose. Let's not build illusions. Unpredictable consequences. Is there an answer to the questions? The devil is always in the details. Do you play checkers on the boulevard? Luck burst like a soap bubble. Pudding bag is empty. Rake is in the same place. Song is ordered. Current trends. Catalog of bestsellers. Classics of the genre. A diverse assortment. Medical tests, various tests. We just opened! We work around the clock. Hurry up, the number of seats is limited! Don't miss it. East or West, home is best. Self–preservation instinct is basic. "And we plowed the land," said the fly, sitting on the neck of the ox. There is a hype here. And scientific progress? It doesn't grow on trees Another sinkhole? So that no one thinks life is all beer and skittles? There are no ideals. There are distorted types all around. Do pretty well for yourself. We also wore a tailcoat. Our socket is permanently plugged in. You can't unscramble eggs. As you name the yacht, so it will sail. It’ll be an easy victory. You can't do without putty and painting. The rolling stone gathers no moss. Tastes differ. Is it worth getting into a mess? There are so many Pandora's boxes. It is difficult to find a way out of the maze. We were passionate reformers as well. Let's walk in circles. And take a rake. Who's throwing firewood? I turn what I want. In case of an unfavorable development of events. The sooner the better. The water is dark in the clouds. Men can promise a lot, so what? Memorandum of intent. We are supporters of the natural course of things. It is allowed, what is not prohibited. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. Stuff today and starve tomorrow. It was a good start. Dreams come true. How many logs were floated down the river? Everyone thinks of himself as a boss. I can't see a thing. These are my thoughts.

**Independent passerby**. Vague thoughts. You should change them radically.

**Moderator**. Radically? Why?

**Independent passerby**. To get rid of them quickly.

**Moderator**. But these thoughts are mine.

**Independent passerby**. That’s the reason to do it quicker. What are they yelling about? Is the seal placed on the right or on the left? Blue or red? And if the letters are not printed? Does the seal cover the signature?

**Moderator**. Partially, but the signature should be visible and decrypted. Gather your thoughts, calm your nerves, pull yourself together. Call your friends, acquaintances, classmates. They should be ready. A kaleidoscope of emotions. Believe in yourself. Spiritual purity. Revelation. It is very cool. Creative, subjective, objective, perfectionism. You have a wonderful future. I found it out. The heavens are protesting. I found out. Luxury prizes. Life gave you a rare chance. Cultivate goodness. Our path is winding. We have what we have. You can't hide the truth. There is no way back. There are different versions. It's hard to disagree with this. Wall on wall. Very important person. A consensus has been reached. The round trip will be paid for. Are you in your prime or past your prime? Who is the main customer? Opinions divided. Any psychiatrist eventually goes crazy. Any investigator turns into a criminal. Go ahead. Motivation ends. We cultivate joy. We drive rats out of our attic. We reap the benefits. Mysterious rumors. A skeptical smile. And we were there. We've been through it. I'm mediocre too. The epicenter of intellectualism. We give a lot of original ideas to those who want to effectively cultivate their land, surround themselves with beauty and abundance and enjoy their work. A tip for a housewife: when a man begins to cycle… We have collected the most effective instructions from specialists. You start your business, and you need:

- Practical recommendations for attracting customers,

- Scientific developments on effective advertising,

- New ideas for business development!

- New ideas for business development!

THIS way! Valuable information and secret techniques. The effect of the color scheme on a person. Methods of the classics of the theory and practice of advertising. Remove the raisins from the bun. He that will thrive must rise at five. The hidden potential of rebranding. The boomerang is not coming back. Gradation of psychological shock. Objectivity means there is no conflict of interest and negative impact on the organization's activities. Impartiality is characterized by the following aspects: independence, neutrality, honesty, equanimity, absence of bias. How to get the consumer to advertise the purchased product. Intensive action serum. Prevents aging. Instantly restores the skin shine. Energizes. A magic remedy for all problems. Magical effect. Top class. Do you wash your hands before lunch? And before dinner? Charming interiors, jewelry, small dogs. Little hedgehogs, little turtles. A beautiful life awaits you. Until the very end. The end is not coming soon. We'll push it back. We'll endure a day and last a night. I caught a dead bug. I don't see any trouble. The best offers. Hits of the season. A noble Prince Charming. New daring fragrances. Golden dreams. Scent of a woman. Eastern bliss. Fireplace trends of the season. Boudoir covenants from Marfusha. Sensual motives. Hire a hubby for an hour. A wide range. Summer collection. And they can do it more than for an hour. Energetic leisure at any time of the year. Anticipation of the VIP party. It-girls hit the red carpet. It-girls are dangerous. Ginger, jasmine, sandalwood, peppermint, strawberry, peach, cilantro, seaweed, blueberries, camellia oil, nutmeg, coconut, cinnamon, chocolate, celery, vanilla, passion fruit, eucalyptus, almonds… Extraordinary ornaments. The main trend of the season. Sensual notes dominate. Spreads her legs. I can't take my eyes off. Our cause is just and we will win. Zero point zero. It's a backstabbing move. It can't be better, but it can't be worse. High society. Beau Monde. The powerful of this world. The elixir of youth. Sky’s the limit. Let the whole world wait. Don't miss it! Wide choice! Here and now. There are contraindications. Consult a specialist before use. Not completely lost. There is a chance. The people love you. You can't chop wood with a penknife. We are alive, we want everything. A man is a grain of sand when he meets elements. It is necessary to change the style of behavior. How to insure against people? What is the strength of a weak person? Only a woman can understand. Favorable prices! Exclusive! Positive! Constructive! Do you want a cudgel in the back? Fellow citizens, we opened! A new model of the bidet. A deaf man heard, a blind man saw a lame man running. Have you visited the exhibition "The small collective farm mechanization"? (*Addressing Girl*) By the way, about the neckline. There are fake-pictorial variants of it: the flaps of a dress or blouse open at the right moment. Nipples are for show. You just need to pull the secret string. A girl seems to be shy but looks like showing her bare breasts. Only for advanced girls! Life will show who will lie with whom. There is no short answer. Shall we play dominoes? Have a nice life.

*A crowd of motley audience silently runs onto the stage: old men, old women, men, women, boys, girls, children, babies in strollers.*

*They froze in various hypnotic poses.*

**Independent passerby**. Who's the last in the queue? *(No one answers.*) Why do I have to keep asking? What a surprise! What a scandal! Is it really hard to answer. I've been chasing you all day and I don’t get a word in response. People are nice, pleasant, educated, but they don't want to help. Who's the last one? Silence again. Wonderful audience. They have money. They have real estate. And accounts in several banks. Maybe I should skip the queue? (*He hands the basket to the Saleswoman*.) A little of everything, otherwise they are silent. They look harassed. Kolupaev is right. Frozen figures don't make sense. I’m terribly anxious and sick at heart. There's a huge day ahead, I want to hide in a corner. The world seems gray and empty. Prospects are still in the air. A person who has returned from vacation needs a vacation most of all. It’s so cozy in a castle by the sea. Quiet surf, water horizon; seagulls and other animals are everywhere. I'm entering a new world. I'm on edge. The dog that trots about finds a bone. It’s unlikely that the rain will reach the ground. All the steam goes into the whistle. I wonder how the small godwit determines the altitude and direction of flight. New Zealand is a long way from us. Is a godwit guided by the Earth's magnetic field? And what am I guided by? Wind gusts up to twenty meters per second. Thunderstorms are possible. The banquet continues. Material disappointment. What are you looking for under the lantern? The law of Universal Happiness? Take care of your toothbrush. We go out on the high road. Let's check the clock. Justification in favor of the poor. The point of view is unified. Who breaks the rules of the game? An insult to taste. Every action generates a reaction. With great faith in the future. Collapse. Kolupaev is right. Nothing changes. Indignation turns into rage. The historical perspective is doomed. People are sailing in the same boat. While we are alive, we will reason. The badger digs holes in the ground with a large number of exits. The elephant mistakenly copulated with a tiny turtle. There are not enough spices in the soup. Mister, who is the last in the queue? (*No* *one answers.)* I rummage in the young man's pocket. (*He reaches into the pocket of the young man standing next to him. He takes out his wallet. He looks inside, puts it in his pocket*.) I found some change. I’m intrigued, thinking about upskirting. (*He puts his hand under the skirt of the nearest girl, freezes for a second, takes out his hand*.) Amazing! The exhibits are in place, as usual. Tired of idols! I'm going to plant flowers. There's nothing prettier.

(*Optional insertion*.)

*He plants flowers in a flower bed. Sings a song written by Shainsky and Yushin*,

"*Herbs, herbs, herbs."*

The month scattered its glitters

Over the meadows,

Slender birches,

Slender birches

whisper something to the lime trees.

Chorus:

Herbs, herbs, herbs did not find the season

To bend under the silver dew.

And so gentle melodies, for some reason,

My lonely heart always knew.

I 'm going to a date

On a moonlit road,

I’m talking to myself,

I’m talking to myself,

I'm in the quiet mode.

Chorus.

I will come to my dear,

I’m silent like a monk,

And from her kiss,

And from her kiss,

I feel like I'm drunk.

Chorus.

(*End of optional insertion.)*

**The eighth novella**

**Business negotiations**

I got off at the final station. It’s light from the snow…

I'm going to the distant town

With quiet steps.

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**First negotiator**

**Second negotiator**

*Both negotiators sit at the table, they are a little similar to each other.*

*They smile contentedly.*

**First.** We finally met.

**Second**. There were so many obstacles.

**First.** We’ve overcome them.

**Second**. Shall we proceed? The problem seems trivial, but in fact, it’s extremely complex.

**First.** Yeah. The trickiest.

**Second**. In any case, it should be settled.

**First.** I didn’t doubt it. The exchange of letters and emails is very useful.

**Second**. You're right. It was possible to coordinate the agenda and develop codes.

**First.** We’ll live by these codes for the coming years.

**Second**. My secretariat has been working hard for days and nights, prescribing solutions acceptable to you.

**First.** We appreciate your efforts. That’s why we agreed to contact with you. Shall we begin?

**Second**. With great pleasure.

**First.** The parties defend their positions, their profit. Do you know how to put drops in the eyes? First, put a drop into the conjunctival sac, then lie back and have a rest. Then the second drug in the same way.

**Second**. It seems that we are standing still, but no: if you look back in twenty or thirty years around, there is progress.

**First.** That's for sure.

**Second**. Not always, however, successful.

**First.** We’re getting used to it.

**Second**. Habit is a big deal. Does it suck in the pit of your stomach?

**First.** Let's check the clock.

**Second**. Let's not bring up the bad things.

**First.** Let’s consider the whole range of fundamental issues.

**Second**. I suggest that at the first stage we focus on the critical ones.

**First.** Right. Critical, then imperative. Imperative ones cause the greatest agitation. And then the fundamental ones. Or first the fundamental ones?

**Second**. I quite agree. Fundamental. Let's rummage, dig around, get to the bottom of it. If we agree on the black or white color of the chessboard, it will be a breakthrough.

**First.** No one interferes. In silence, in prudence. Away from the din of civilization. Sober-minded. Let's look into the background of the issue, into its background.

**Second**. Mystery lurks everywhere. For some it is a mystery, but for others it is their daily bread. It is then opened, then slammed shut.

**First.** As to me, I don't like secrets. we’ll be nailed for revealing a secret. I prefer known problems. Shall we get down to the business?

**Second**. I see interesting approaches to many issues. And the road along the coast? For rolling slowly and admiring the water surface.

**First.** Approaches make you excited.

**Second**. It is important to follow the rules. And to develop an updated methodology.

**First.** If you stick to the agenda, it will be OK.

**Second**. It starts at nine o'clock. Closing time is six p.m. Lunch break from one to four.

**First.** In the evening we have a cultural program. Theaters, music concerts, museums.

**Second**. Museums are open during the day.

**First.** Then let’s find time for visiting museums in the daytime program.

**Second**. Critical, imperative and fundamental questions can wait, there is no need to hurry.

**First.** Regulations are the basis of being. Birth, growing up, nursery, kindergarten, school, university, marriage, children, work, career, aging, death. Periods according to the regulations. You can’t escape, it has always been like that.

**Second**. Do you want me to tell you the innermost?

**First.** Of course.

**Second**. I dreamed about our meeting. When did you drop by the kerosene shop?

**First.** I haven't been there for thirty years. There are rumors that kerosene has risen in price.

**Second**. I'll check it out. And a boot polish is not the same.

**First.** From the point of view of real life, ordinary complexes, phobias…

**Second**. I dreamed about our meeting. I imagined how you woke up in the morning. You are cheerful and lively. You move into the marble bathroom. You shave carefully, looking at yourself in the mirror, anticipating our rendezvous. You think about me. Light breakfast. Two ecological eggs sizzle in fried bacon. Your spouse is right next to you in the kitchen, she knows what you like to eat. He kisses you on the forehead. She's wearing an elegant housecoat. Sometimes the housecoat opens, but you are not excited anymore. She is also indifferent. The desire is gone. She turns on the TV, the latest news. Somewhere... there are wars, fires are raging, floods are flooding, volcanoes are erupting, shooting, shooting. It doesn't bother us. We are in our own world. The wife tires your shoelaces. You don’t feel comfortable when you bend down because of sciatica. She kisses you on the forehead again. Your Mercedes is waiting in the underground parking.

**First.** We studied together in the third grade! You were in love with Svetka Tkacheva. You were... forward-minded already. You kissed her once. And you got caught by me. It seemed more like she kissed you. No one knows who kissed first, it’s still a mystery. So many years have passed, and enigma does not give rest. I can't sleep. (*Dreamily*.) Yes... there was a time... The third grade... we were about ten years old... Where was it gone to?

**Second**. And where is Svetka?

**First.** What is Svetka?

**Second**. Tkacheva?

**First.** The girl I was mauling? Her breasts have just started to grow… You got caught. You can’t forget it? A dark narrow staircase to the geography room, ... It creaked!.. The tree has dried up. That's where it happened. But I couldn’t see who kissed first. After so many years I cherish these memories. While we have a break, I'll tell you a story about my neighbor. She was aged and ill. There was a postwoman who delivered the pension. She came regularly at ten a.m. The neighbor’s daughter signed the pension roll, because the postwoman knew: the sick pensioner lies in the next room. The last time the postwoman came later, around twelve, and for some reason wanted to look at the old woman. But the old woman died at eleven o'clock a.m. The postwoman categorically refused to give a pension. So, if the postwoman had come at ten o'clock as usual, the poor family would have received a miserable pension. The arguments had no effect. "I’m not entitled to give money to a deceased pensioner!"

**Second**. We should not lose hope. Giraffes drink water alternately. While some of them are drinking, the others are watching. I wish people behaved this way.

**First.** When you were walking towards me down the corridor… Your eyes have warmed up, even moistened. Rocket launch. The infinite universe.

**Second**. Imagine, his pineal gland has grown incredibly. The one that is located between the hemispheres of the brain. You know, he made a mess of the pineal gland.

**First.** Who asked him?

**Second**. That's the point! No one asked. It’s his gland and he does what he wants.

**First.** He’s self-taught.

**Second**. No one asks you. Sit and be quiet.

**First.** Don’t touch the gland. They'll figure it out without you.

**Second**. There’s a bunch of other glands. Have fun with them.

**First.** Why are there so many of them?

**Second**. To break the monotony. For a change, like the British say. One gland gets infected, the others are spare. Sometimes I want to learn Italian.

**First.** You can’t say that we are losers. We're excellent.

**Second**. And the flight of fancy? Where is the flight?

**First.** The main thing is to enjoy life. There are dummies and scoundrels around, only you and I know it. And do not give up, that’s the most important thing. Search and find. We will overcome the life problems. Even if someone near us is in despair, we will be stronger. Believe in yourself and enjoy the new day.

**Second**. We're on the right way.

**First.** We’ll never turn off it. I can’t say the situation is simple. Competitive selections are now in an active phase, we will soon begin to summarize and conclude investment contracts. I invite companies interested in the introduction of modern technologies and the production of competitive products to take part in tenders.

**Second**. It's nice to thank the performers. Choosing the finalists was a difficult task! Your work has not been in vain. We see what you mean. Let's analyze the extraordinary creations in detail. And let’s think how to re-evaluate our own experience through the lens of your ideas. If you look at the projects presented globally, you clearly see the development vectors being set. Bouts of inspiration inflame the body and soul. Who baked the pie?

**First.** In the last month, a record increase in production volumes has been recorded. This is one of the evidences of the recovery, which is proceeding at a faster pace. The last year decrease was due to the implementation of large investment projects. When they are completed, the situation will change. Many industries have demonstrated good growth, enterprises have actively invested in their development. Excellent coordinators helm the projects. They give instructions on the implementation of the standardization policy, including planning the development of standardization documents.

**Second**. They provide methodological guidance for the activities of technical committees.

**First.** They conduct analytical and scientific research in the field of standardization and conformity assessment.

**Second**. They form the infrastructure of quality management and implementation of management systems. They carry out an economic analysis of the activities of subordinate enterprises. I like your core strength. Negative demarches have been eliminated. Now I can admit: I had doubts. What can happen? In the end, it turned out as it should.

**First.** Well, well. Shall we proceed?

**The ninth novella**

**Master class**

Oh yes, I believe

That a new tomorrow will come!

There is not a grain of untruth in my words,

And yet...

Ishikawa Takuboku

Actors

**TV mechanic**

**Woman**

**Woman.** Pensions and wages were cut for people, and the level medicine deteriorated. We're going to die so fast. A person has a cough, has Cheyne-Stokes breathing. Where should he go? People used to go to the clinic. Even the weather was canceled. Fifteen billion years… Is it a lot or a little? We are always expanding somewhere… When will this outrage stop? The tendency to cancel everything. People gonna go crazy. The water from the tap is red and black.

**Mechanic** (*looks at the old TV set*). What happened?

**Woman.** Vicissitudes hurt my nerves. And nervousness torments my body.

**Mechanic** (*looks at the TV*). What happened to it?

**Woman** (*excitedly*). The TV is down. I don't understand why. Firstly, the antenna doesn’t work well. The antenna is awful. There is a musical theater in the courtyard, because of it everything is ringing all the time. Mezzo-soprano, baritone, bass sound. Voices affect the TV. The sun heats it up. I cover the TV with a patterned handkerchief. The initial situation: the TV would turn on for a few seconds and turned off. Then it stopped turning on. Antenna system is useless. I don't understand why.

**Mechanic** (*turns the TV back wall to himself, takes out a soldering iron, tin, tweezers, magnifying glass from the bag; unscrews the wall*). The TVs just break down.

**Woman.** It doesn’t happen much. More often they break down due to influencing factors. There are plenty of factors. Atmospheric pressure drops, magnetic storms, starbursts. Outside the window is a musical theater, the sounds of trumpets, violins, percussion.

**Mechanic.** Is there a ballet too?

**Woman.** Of course, there is a ballet.

**Mechanic**. Every technique fails. Cars, planes, televisions. Internal stresses accumulate. And here's the breakdown. Over time, this is perceived as a lot of baloney.

**Woman.** Solar flares, storms.

**Mechanic** (*stops repairing the screen*). You infect everybody with your anxiety. I'm worried. Even my chin is shaking.

**Woman.** Why?

**Mechanic.** When I'm worried, my chin shakes. We live in a troubled world. Incidents occur chronically. You can’t predict them. And be sure to spit.

**Woman.** Over the left or right shoulder?

**Mechanic**. In front of you. Like football players. Especially at the World Championships. One day a graceful kitty jumped out on the field and urinated on the ball. The fans in the stands shyly turned away not to embarrass the kitty. The players of both teams had a smoke break near their gates. The changes are fleeting and unexpected. You think of something, and it falls apart. It would seem that factors are pacified: natural elements, people's mores. Come on! They’re getting worse. Sometimes joy overwhelms. I don't see the reason. Who knows the true cause of things? You’re cheerful and later you’re depressed. Does this happen to you?

**Woman.** Not only that. Two light bulbs, 60 and 75 watts, burned out at the same time. In the kitchen, the faucet is clogged... the entrance lock is broken... the intercom is clogged… The heating battery is leaking... the elevator is shaking, it's about to crash… The household requires a lot of rags. Wool, silk, synthetic. We are just on the threshold of life, but there are already so many problems. Did you donate blood?

**Mechanic.** Was it ordered? You can’t do that without an order. There is no answer to many questions. There is an idea to fix the breakdowns of the world. Put everything together: medical, automobile, airplane, weather problems, and solve them at one fell swoop. Only I can implement the idea. Do you mind my reading a soothing poem? I'm partly a psychologist, a calmer of women's souls.

*He takes a little book out of his pocket, reads Korney Chukovsky's "Confusion*".

Kittens meowed: "We are tired of meowing!

Piglets’ grunting is

More wowing!"

A bear opened the door

And began to roar:

Сock-a-doodle-do!

And the foxes took matches,

To the blue sea they’re marching.

And set the sea on fire.

The sea is burning with flames,

A whale exclaims:

"Hey, firefighters, look out!

And help me out!"

For a long, long time the crocodile put out the sea

With pies, pancakes and dried peas.

The animals chaffed!

They sang and laughed,

Clapped their ears,

Forgot their fears.

**Woman.** Tell me, are you a great doctor?

**Mechanic.** Probably, I am... my wife left to correct her eyebrows. What is eyebrow correction?

**Woman.** Well... it's too complicated. What about mashed potatoes?

**Mechanic.** What's wrong with it?

**Woman.** Should I wrap mashed potatoes in a warm sweater? I whipped up mashed potatoes from high-yielding veggies. Tubers contain a lot of nutrients.

**Mechanic.** Are you a gardener?

**Woman.** No, I'm curious. I see pieces of finely chopped fried onions in the mashed potatoes. The butter is national. It looks delicious.

**Mechanic.** Why do you want to wrap up the mashed potatoes?

**Woman.** To keep it warm until dinner.

**Mechanic.** Can’t you reheat the dish on a low heat?

**Woman.** On a low, why?

**Mechanic.** To avoid burning.

**Woman.** I like the crispy crust of burnt mashed potatoes.

**Mechanic.** Then heat the mashed potatoes on a medium heat. And the crust will form, and it will not burn completely. Is it Vologodskoye butter?

**Woman.** It’s very tasty. Fatty, solid, natural. An intricate recipe. To wrap up or not to wrap up? Are you hungry?

**Mechanic.** No, thanks. You’d better wrap it up.

**Woman.** Then there will be no crust.

**Mechanic.** You convinced me. Leave it as it is. There is a term in French – Telle Quelle. Means "as it is". No modifications. What's your name?

**Woman.** Isolda-Angelica-Carolina.

*Mechanic drops the tool.*

**Mechanic**. You are incredibly mysterious.

**Woman.** I'm all authentic. I'm in search of reality.

**Mechanic.** Can I call you "Isolda-Angelica" for short?

**Woman.** As you wish.

**Mechanic**. I didn't think I'd be lucky. Lost hope. The noble Isolda-Angelica. Do you want me to fix the other appliances? I'm shocked. Usually I’m calm. I had no idea... why did I ask your name? Better wrap up your mashed potatoes. Is there any butter left?

**Woman.** Are you hungry?

**Mechanic.** No, I'm confused.

**Woman.** Men don't give themselves away in the presence of a woman… They hide feelings. Are you interested in me?

**Mechanic.** What a rare coincidence… I've been waiting and hoping for so much…

**Woman.** What happened, tell me? Do you want some mashed potatoes? I'm on edge too… I'm worried…

**Mechanic.** Ask me what my name is?

**Woman.** Ask you?

**Mechanic.** Yes. Just ask.

**Woman.** What is your name?

**Mechanic.** Romuald-Aristarchus-Theodor.

**Woman.** (*shocked*). I can’t believe it!

**Mechanic.** Things happen.

**Woman.** And in short?

**Mechanic.** Do me a favor.

**Woman.** Will Aristarchus-Theodor do? Or shorter? Theo?

**Mechanic.** Too vulgar.

**Woman.** Sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you. I am sincerely grateful.

**Mechanic.** Is it worth it?

**Woman.** You appreciated my difficult situation with the name. You didn't ask useless questions.

**Mechanic.** Three names are a bit much, but two are just right.

**Woman.** You quickly realized this. Some have been learning this for years. Dear Aristarchus-Theodor, are you an incredibly intelligent?

**Mechanic.** Almost every time. It was given to me by Nature. You’re great too. You instantly realized that it was better to use two names. You are a polymath, you have a broad outlook on life. Dear Isolda-Angelica, you are absolutely extraordinary.

**Woman.** Almost every time.

**Mechanic.** Your romanticism conquers me.

**Woman.** I am a snail, deprived of my house. I'm a romantic snail.

**Mechanic.** I can see it at a glance. I need a Philips screwdriver. Will you excuse me for a minute?

**Woman.** I’ll be waiting for you.

***Mechanic*** *quickly leaves, soon he returns with a bouquet of flowers, a bottle of white wine and a head of cheese.* ***Woman*** *happily claps her hands.*

**Woman.** These are my favorite flowers. This is my favorite wine. This is my favorite cheese. Can I sit next to you?

**Mechanic.** I’d be happy.

*Woman sits down next to Mechanic.*

*The actors of all nine novellas take the stage. The choir performs a joyful optimistic song.*

(*One of the possible variants is Bulat Okudzhava's song "Wish to my Friends*"):

Let's exclaim and admire each other.

High-sounding words should not be bother.

Let's exchange pleasant stuff– after all, these are all happy moments of love.

Friends, I want to grieve and cry with you out loud,

Cry together, then apart, and being in the crowd

There’s no need to attach importance to detraction,

Sad moments are side by side with our affection.

Let's try to understand each other’s every word,

And all past mistakes will be understood and heard.

Let's support our friend even when they’re wrong,

especially since life does not last too long.

*The audience is standing singing along.*

Tableau