

*The time has come to break things off with Ivan. He has been an enjoyable plaything, but he grows increasingly insistent that we should marry. He believes himself irresistible, that I am in love and therefore stupid, but I play the game far better than he realizes. To think that I would give over not just my fortune, but dominion over my lands, over my very life, to him? The very idea sickens me. I intend to rule this domain myself, unchallenged, as Valetia Fidatov, the first of our line, did.*

*The servants tell me that he has been roaming the manor at night, looking in the library for clues to where the vault might be hidden. Such foolishness. My father was*

*no fool, and neither is his daughter. There is no vault because my ancestors stand eternal guard over our treasure. Only the crest of our founder and the accession gift of the greatest scion of our family, my father's grandfather, who rebuilt the family fortune, can open the way and disable the wards. Well, the second-greatest scion of our family, after me, of course.*

*Ivan was never going to get what he wanted, but he is still going to be upset when I end our dalliance. I shall tell him tonight and send him on his way quietly. I don't want him to make a scene at my party next week, and besides, perhaps there will be a new suitor or two to consider...*